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The Strategy of Interpreting the *Daodejing* through Confucianism in Park Se-dang's *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*

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Abstract: This research study examines Park Se-dang's *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*, which was the first complete exegesis of the *Daodejing* (DDJ) in Korea. This study investigates the theoretical strategies that Park used to interpret the DDJ from a Neo-Confucian perspective and also examines the logical missteps that Park took to force a unity between Neo-Confucianism and Daoism. The core method for interpreting the DDJ that Park utilized in his attempt to assert the compatibility of Neo-Confucianism and Daoism can be summarized as "interpreting Daoism through Neo-Confucian theory". This research study breaks down Park's strategy for reinterpreting the DDJ, dividing Park's argumentation into four parts: (1.) clarifying the historical hereticalization of the DDJ; (2.) identifying the ethics and treasured virtues of Confucianism and Daoism; (3.) the study of the cosmologies of Confucianism and Daoism; and (4.) interpreting Daoist moral ethics through Neo-Confucian cosmological theory. Park Se-dang's strategy for forcing unity between Neo-Confucianism and Daoism had its limits. Among other things, Park attempted but failed to narrow the gap between Confucian and Daoist ethics and cosmology by converting the concept of "heaven" in the DDJ into a humanized heaven. Eventually, even though Park's strategy failed, his work inspired other *Silhak* scholars of Joseon up to the 19th century and had a clear impact on the many subsequent reinterpretations of the DDJ.

Keywords: Park Se-dang; *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*; *Silhak*; *ti* 體; *yong* 用; *you* 有; *wu* 無



Citation: Seo-Reich, Heejung. 2023. The Strategy of Interpreting the *Daodejing* through Confucianism in Park Se-dang's *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*. *Religions* 14: 1550. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14121550>

Academic Editor: Misha Tadd

Received: 28 November 2023

Revised: 10 December 2023

Accepted: 12 December 2023

Published: 18 December 2023



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1. Introduction

This paper aims to clarify the strategy of "using Neo-Confucianism to interpret Daoism" (以儒釋道), which was the main purpose behind Park Se-dang's 朴世堂 *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*, the first complete explanatory commentary of the *Daodejing* 道德經 (below DDJ) written in Joseon Korea. The commentary serves as a treatise that focuses on the relationship between the concepts *ti* 體 and *yong* 用 and *you* 有 and *wu* 無.

Park Se-dang's commentary on the DDJ reflects the awareness of social problems and the criticism that the author, who was a scholar of *Silhak* 實學 (Practical Learning), provided during the 17th century, and the ideas of social reform that followed. To date, a total of five moral commentaries exist in complete form in Korea, all of which were written during the period from the emergence to the flourishing of *Silhak* during the middle to late Joseon dynasty. The earliest existing commentary on the DDJ by a Korean author is *Sun-eon* 醇言 by Yi I 李珥 (1536–1584), but it is not comprehensive since Yi only wrote about a few selected chapters that corresponded to his views. For Park Se-dang, Yi's attempt to interpret the DDJ not only provided the decisive impetus to begin the complete exegesis of the DDJ, but it also motivated him to write a fully annotated, first complete edition of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子—*Namhwagyeong Juhaesanbo* 南華經注解刪補, the first of its kind in Korea—by suggesting the possible ideological conformity of Confucianism and Daoism.

Not soon after Park Se-dang completed his commentaries on the DDJ and *Zhuangzi*, several other DDJ exegeses that were handed down were compiled in the 18th century, these included the following:

- *Dodeokjigwi* 道德指歸 by Seo Myeong-eung 徐命應 (1716–1787);
- *Chowondamno* 椒園談老 by Lee Chung-ik 李忠翊 (1744–1816);

- *Jeongno* 訂老 by Hong Seokju 洪奭周 (1774–1842);
- *Nojajiryak* 老子指略 by Sin Jak 申綽 (1760–1828).

The large number of commentaries that were compiled after *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* show that the work had a clear influence on the philosophical development of Daoism in the Joseon dynasty. Of the five existing DDJ exegeses, aside from *Sun-eon*, all of the other four—listed above—were completed by *Silhak* scholars during the Joseon dynasty. This pattern suggests that the appearance of DDJ exegeses during the Joseon period is closely related to the emergence of *Silhak*.

Silhak, as the name of this school already suggests, began to take shape in the early 17th century with the intention of finding methods to solve practical problems, and became very popular between the early 18th century and the mid-19th century.¹ The fact that *Silhak* scholars established “actuality” as their academic principle must be understood as a reaction to the negative effects of Neo-Confucianism, the political ideology of the Joseon dynasty. While Neo-Confucian thought developed to its highest level over the course of the 16th century, the theory became increasingly metaphysical and lost its applicability to practical problems. Applied to real situations, Neo-Confucian theory failed to correctly assess problems or develop and provide workable solutions, which, in turn, led to more vehement criticism. In addition to the awareness of this issue among Korean scholars, external factors like the change in diplomatic relations following the dynastic transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty in China, as well as the adoption of practically oriented teachings such as *Seohak* (Western Learning)², played a crucial role.

Silhak, as pursued by Park Se-dang, aimed to strengthen the nation through practical studies, including farming and business, beyond the traditional academic methods of *Traditional Confucian exegetics* (*gyeonghak* 經學). According to a study by Yoon Sa-soon, an expert on Korean *Silhak*, the methodology pursued by the Joseon *Silhak* scholars can be largely summarized as “the spirit of broad scholarship (*bakhak* 博學)”³, “the search for empiricism and practicability”, and *Gojeunghak* 考證學 (Evidential Learning) (Yun 2008, p. 74). The term broad scholarship refers to the academic methodology pursued by scholars during the pre-Qin era, including interrogation (*simmun* 審問), contemplation (*simsa* 深思), and discernment (*myeongbyeon* 明辨). The “search for empiricism and practicability” alludes to the spirit in which the original Confucian scholars analyzed real-world problems and attempted to find workable solutions. Evidential Learning refers to the method of finding proof in older texts, which was popular in the Qing dynasty.⁴ What all three approaches mentioned above have in common is that they searched for their own methods in ancient ways of thinking, including the original Confucianism of the pre-Qin era, and in this way attempted to evade the theoretical limitations of the Neo-Confucianism prevalent in the Joseon period, although they did not attack it directly (Seo-Reich 2022, pp. 3–4).

While pursuing broad scholarship, which was neglected by Neo-Confucian scholars, *Silhak* scholars in the 16th century had the possibility to establish the DDJ as an object of research, which had been hitherto impossible since it was deemed a non-Confucian theory and thus classified as a heretical book⁵. However, in the second half of the 18th century, attempts to unify Neo-Confucianism and Daoism decreased significantly, while attempts to reinterpret the DDJ from other viewpoints, such as the original Confucianism or *Sang-suhak* 象數學 (numerology), increased. To explain this dynamic, most research thus far has focused on external factors like the acceptance and dissemination of foreign knowledge and theories, such as the Yangming school, Evidential Learning, or Western Learning, which were mostly introduced in Joseon during the 19th century (Saemio Kim 2011, pp. 11–27). This study hypothesizes that in addition to the external determinants, internal factors, namely the theoretical shortcomings of Park Se-dang’s approach to force a fusion of Neo-Confucianism and Daoism in the 17th century, also played an equally important—if not the decisive—role. Since Park’s method of interpreting Daoism through Confucian thought had reached its theoretical limit, it was inevitable that new attempts such as interpreting the DDJ based on numerology⁶, criticizing Neo-Confucianism⁷, or returning to original Confucian thought⁸ would be made.

To substantiate this hypothesis, we must first expose the logical deficiencies of the theoretical attempt to unify Confucianism and Daoism employed in Park's DDJ commentaries. Therefore, this study will expose the theoretical contradictions in the annotations of the *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* and discuss them by analyzing the relationship of the concepts of *ti* 體 and *yong* 用 as well as *you* 有 and *wu* 無, which are the four core concepts of Park's DDJ interpretation. Park's understanding of the relationship between them clarifies the way in which he, as a *Silhak* scholar, tried to complete Yi I's endeavor of interpreting Daoism through Confucianism.⁹ At the same time, the problems he posed to the *Silhak* scholars of his time might help to explain why several interpretations of the heretical DDJ could suddenly appear in the following 18th and 19th centuries.

2. Hereticalization of the *Daodejing* in the 16th and 17th Centuries

Since the DDJ was first introduced to Goguryeo in the 7th century¹⁰, it has maintained its vitality in Korean thought. The *Bojangbongrojo* 寶藏奉老條 chapter of the *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事, volume 3, states that people from Goguryeo were competing to study and adhere to the teachings of the *Wudoumi* 五斗米 sect—also known as Celestial Masters Sect (*Tianshi Dao* 天師道)—suggesting a high probability that the DDJ scriptures were circulated by this movement. As one of the three major sects of Daoism, the Celestial Masters Sect was concerned with ways to maintain health and extend lifespan (S.-b. Park 2019, p. 73), and there is a high probability that the DDJ at that time was read as a religious text rather than as a text for academic or political purposes. Afterward, the DDJ was only briefly mentioned in the 8th volume of the *Goryeosa Jeoryo* 高麗史節要 when the author discusses the *bogwongwan* 福源觀, i.e., the institution for training Daoists during the Goryeo dynasty. Therefore, it should be understood that it was not until the Joseon dynasty that the DDJ actually became an object of discussion in Korea.

Then how could it happen that the DDJ began to attract the attention of Yi I and other Neo-Confucian scholars through the mid-to-late Joseon dynasty? To answer this question, it must first be clarified why the DDJ could not be academically discussed prior to the middle of the Joseon dynasty. After Goryeo adopted the Song dynasty's Neo-Confucian thought, the latter steadily evolved into the dominant political ideology, turning Joseon effectively into a Neo-Confucian kingdom. For example, as the ethical items (*tiaomu* 條目) and guiding principles (*gangling* 綱領)¹¹ discussed in Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) *The Great Learning* became established as actual political norms, Neo-Confucianism was able to become the political ideology for both family centered kinship communities and state-centered social communities. The Four Books, i.e., *Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of Mean*, reflect Zhu Xi's perspective, which continues the academic lineage of Zhou Lianxi 周濂溪, Cheng Mingdao 程明道, and Cheng Yichuan 程伊川, occupied the central position in the national education system. Eventually, this led to the hereticalization of all other schools except Neo-Confucianism.

The reasons why Daoism, along with Buddhism, were branded as heretical ways of thinking and completely banned from the public discourse lie in the writings on Neo-Confucianism, which during the Joseon dynasty were read and interpreted in a dogmatic way. Zhu Xi declares, "the *jing* 精 (fineness) and *cu* 粗 (coarseness) of things are unified, there are no two origins" (Zhu 2023g, no. 95)¹². In contrast, he explains, that "Buddha referred to heaven and earth as *huanwang* 幻妄 (illusion), which means there is nothing at all (*quanwu* 全無)" (Zhu 2023d, no. 126). According to Zhu Xi, *huanwang* is a state of nothingness, in which phenomenon and noumenon (thing-in-itself) are separated. A similar view is expressed in volume 95 of *Zhuziyulei*.

Nowadays, people only see the absence of *xing* 形 (image) or *zhao* 兆 (sign), and say it is empty (空蕩蕩) [...] For example, since Buddhists only discuss *kong* 空 (emptiness), and Laozi only discusses *wu* 無 (nothingness), it is impossible to know whether there is an actual *li* 理 in the *Dao*. (Zhu 2023g, no. 95)

Here Zhu Xi criticizes the impossibility of finding *li* in the Buddhist concept of *kong* and Laozi's concept of *wu*. And he concludes that "the *Dao* of which Buddha and Laozi

speak is empty (空虛) and lonesome (寂寞)” (Zhu 2023a, no. 38). This, in turn, would lead to an empty discourse that not only fails to solve real-world problems, but even risks to become an instrument of deception. Zhu Xi refers to *The Great Learning* to explicate the purpose of study that consists of “manifesting one’s bright virtue” (明明德) and “loving the people” (親民)—a purpose fundamentally different from the *Dao* of Laozi and Buddha, which he considers to be kindred spirits (*lafo* 老佛), as well as Guan Zhong 管仲 and his disciple Wang Tong 王通, all of which he considered heretics (Zhu 2023e, no. 17).

For scholars in the early and middle Joseon period, when the ideas of Zhu Xi had become the central tenet of scholarship and political ideology, there was no need to bring Buddhist and Daoist thought, already considered heretical, back to the center of their studies. Since the Neo-Confucianists regarded the DDJ as heresy, its contents were hardly ever discussed in academic literature. Nonetheless, Toegye Yi Hwang 退溪李滉 (1501–1570), who established the academic foundation of Joseon Neo-Confucianism, left a brief mention of Laozi and Zhuangzi.

One human body has both *li* 理 (reason) and *qi* 氣 (energy). *Li* is highly valued, while *qi* is of little value. However, *li* is non-interference (*wuwei* 無為), while *qi* has desires. Thus, those who put *li* into practice, already foster their *qi* in the process. This is what a sage (聖賢) is. If you focus only on nourishing *qi* (*yangqi* 養氣), you will surely hurt your *xing* 性 (nature). This is what Laozi and Zhuangzi are. (H. Yi 1915, p. 90)

Yi Hwang criticized that because the Lao and Zhuang put more emphasis on *qi*, this could lead to the destruction of *li*, and cautioned against it. Although he was aware of both thinkers, he only mentioned them in order to completely dismiss them as heresy.

Regarding Buddhism, Yi Hwang only had to say, “Just like a person that wades through the water drowns in it while testing its depth and shallowness, a person who encounters heresy will drown in it before he realizes it. That’s why I do not look at Buddhist scriptures” (H. Yi 1958, p. 42). This shows that he wanted to stay away from texts considered heretical. On the other hand, Yi I, who adopted Yi Hwang’s theory of the duality of *li* and *qi*, did not completely reject heresy.¹³ Discussing Buddhism, he posed the question, “Mencius says that ‘people are born good (性善)’, and praises Yao 堯 and Shun 舜. How is this any different from ‘the heart itself is Buddha (即心即佛)’?” (I. Yi 1990, pp. 20–21). This quote shows that Yi I thought it conceivable to find true statements in Buddhist scriptures as well. Furthermore, Yi I defines his position as follows: “There are many things said by Laozi in the DDJ, but ‘non-interference (*wuwei* 無為)’ and ‘being without desires (*wuyu* 無慾)’ are concepts close to *li*. Therefore, even for a gentleman (君子), there is something to be taken from it” (I. Yi 1990, p. 62).

This is quite an unconventional view considering the political situation in the 16th century.¹⁴ Yi I was the author of the *Suneon* 醇言, the first commentary on the DDJ in Korea, which was discovered only after his death. His disciples subsequently maintained a strict silence about it and even withheld it in the *Yulgokjeonseo* 栗谷全書, a collection of Yi I’s collected works.¹⁵ Furthermore, Yi I’s rather unbiased view of heretical topics can be understood as the main reason why he was able to write a text like the *Suneon*. Yi I quotes Sima Qian, “Those who study Laozi defeat Confucianism, and those who study Confucianism also defeat Laozi” (I. Yi 1990, p. 62), to illustrate the conflict between these two ideas. At the same time, he adds, “Initially, the study of Lao and Zhuang did not reach this point, however, the small difference that appeared in the original source must increase the more it flows down” (I. Yi 1990, p. 63).¹⁶ This can be understood as a reevaluation of Laozi, suggesting that the damage was caused by later interpretations, but not as a problem of the original thought of Laozi himself.¹⁷ This perspective is by and large shared by Park Se-dang.

The attempts to interpret the DDJ from a Confucian perspective have already begun during the Southern Song period. Lin Xiyi’s 林希逸 (1193–1271) *Laozi Yanzhai Kouyi* 老子鬳齋口義¹⁸ is a representative example. Lin Xiyi’s commentary on the DDJ had a considerable influence in East Asian countries: Park Se-dang¹⁹ in the Korean Joseon dynasty

and Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657)²⁰ in the Japanese Edo period who were both active in the 17th century cited a large part of Lin Xiyi's commentary. In addition, Park Se-dang actively accepted Yi I's view, expressed in *Suneon*, "The purpose of this book [the DDJ] is clearly beneficial to scholars. Therefore, it should not be neglected just because it is not a scripture of a sage" (I. Yi 2011, pp. 124–25). Park further reveals his willingness to advance the unification of Confucianism and Daoism by attempting to interpret the ideas of Laozi in a Confucian manner throughout the DDJ. In the following section, I will examine the theoretical strategy Park Se-dang used to try to achieve this interpretation of the DDJ from a Confucian perspective.

3. The Purpose, Strategy, and Limitations of Park's *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*

Park Se-dang's *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* took Chen Shen's 陳深 *Laizi Pinjie* 老子品節 as its main point of reference but also referred to the following works:

- Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 *Laozi Yanzhai Kouyi* 老子鬳齋口義;
- Su Zhe's 蘇轍 *Laozi Jie* 老子解;
- Dong Sijing's 董思靖 *Daodezhenjing Jijie* 道德真經集解;
- Wang Bi's 王弼 *Laozi Zhu* 老子注;
- Jiao Hong's 焦竑 *Laozi Yi* 老子翼.

Among these other works, Lin Xiyi's annotations in *Laozi Yanzhai Kouyi* are the most widely featured commentary in the *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*.²¹ This is partly because of the widespread popularity of Lin's *Laozi Yanzhai Kouyi* in 17th-century Joseon society, but at the same time also shows that Park was particularly observant of Lin's perspectives.²² This article focuses on the relationships between *ti*, *yong*, *you*, and *wu*, as applied in *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*.

3.1. The Ethical Ground: "to Cultivate Oneself and Govern Others" (修己治人)

The first and most important step that Yi I took in the 16th century to free the DDJ from accusations of heresy was to prove that Laozi's thought did not deviate from Confucian thought.²³ In the preface to *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*, Park also took this approach, assigning the purpose of his annotation of the DDJ to reveal the principles of a unified philosophical system shared between Confucianism and Daoism.

While he [Laozi] lived in seclusion, he wrote a book to define the *Dao* that he upheld and to reveal its meaning. Although Laozi's *Dao* didn't conform to the method of the [Confucian] sages (聖人). Nevertheless, Laozi's intention was still to "cultivate oneself and govern others" (修己治人). Even though Laozi's words are brief, the message is profound. For this reason, the numerous illustrations of the *Dao* [in DDJ] are valued and have been used throughout antiquity, up through the Han Dynasty. The ruling class such as kings performed 'polite and wordless edification,' while their subordinates practiced 'clean and quiet politics.' But, during the Jin dynasty, some scholars with great ambitions but who behaved recklessly, spread falsehoods and deceived an era. [...] In the case of Lin Xiyi's annotations for example, they're all wrong, not one of them is right. (S.-d. Park 2013, pp. 71–72)

In the above passage, Park noted that, although Laozi could hardly be regarded as a Confucian sage having lived in seclusion and absent from politics, Laozi did, however, embody the Confucian intention of cultivating oneself and governing others. In other words, according to Park, both Confucianism and Daoism have at their core a shared pursuit for the accomplished temperament of sages.²⁴ This argument contradicts Lin Xiyi's view that Laozi's "words are too immoderate to have an impact on the Confucian sages" (Lin 2010, p. 5). Lin Xiyi believed that Laozi's image of the sage differed from the Confucian ideal in terms of its ethical orientation, and argued that, "because what Laozi said is too volitional, it's close to heresy" (Lin 2010, p. 4). Park criticized Lin's arguments, and even went so far as to say that "they're all wrong, not one of them is right". In essence, this is Park's re-

fusal to participate in hereticalizing Daoism, which was pervasive in Joseon society. This purpose is clearly expressed in the preface of the *Shinju Dodeokgyeong*.

Park Se-dang also makes the case for destigmatizing the DDJ. First, Park Se-dang implies that, for both Confucius and Laozi, “cultivating oneself and governing others” was the ultimate goal of their studies, and then takes this assertion as the basis for the compatibility of Confucianism and Daoism. Park argues that the movement to hereticalize DDJ was actually more connected to the ambiguous language used in the DDJ rather than the philosophical system it established. And, in terms of that philosophical system, there was indeed, Park argued, a strong ethical code for political affairs, with concrete recommendations such as “polite and wordless edification” and “clean and quiet politics”. According to Park, misinterpretation of the DDJ occurred after the Han dynasty because of the implicit and often ambiguous nature of the language used in the text. These misinterpretations eventually became so commonplace that scholars forgot the core goal of the manuscript. Park further argued that the hereticalization of the DDJ was the result of Weijin metaphysicians whom he describes as having great ambitions but reckless behavior. This is in part a criticism directed at commentaries that are based on Wang Bi’s commentary of the DDJ. For context, of the DDJ commentaries that circulated widely through 17th-century Korean society, there were mainly two schools of commentaries²⁵: commentaries from the post-Song dynasty and Ming dynasty Neo-Confucian thought, represented by Su Zhe 蘇轍 and Wu Cheng 吳澄, and commentaries from the pre-Song dynasty perspective of the Weijin metaphysicians, represented by Wang Bi. Park criticized the latter.

Wang Bi interpreted the relationship between *Dao* (道, the Way) and *ming* (名, the name), which is discussed in Chapter 1 of the DDJ, as an issue of separation between “existence” and “language” (B. Wang 2011, p. 1). Lin Xiyi argued that “since the *Dao* generally doesn’t tolerate language, as soon as the *Dao* is expressed in language, the *Dao* is violated” (Lin 2010, p. 1). In other words, Lin argued that *Dao* only exists as *changdao* 常道 (the constant *Dao*, eternal or persistent Way), but not as *ming*, i.e., *Dao* as a language. However, Park Se-dang understands *Dao* and *ming* as they are presented in the first chapter of DDJ, not as distinct and separate relations of reality and the various phenomena within reality, but rather in terms of the following framework: “the *Dao* refers to the ontological noumenon (*ti* 體), and *ming* refers to the function (*yong* 用)” (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 77). That is to say, “because *Dao* has *ming* as its function, and *ming* has *Dao* as its body; thus, neither the ontological noumenon nor the function can be eliminated” (S.-d. Park 2013, pp. 77–78).

However, even if it is safe to assume that the hereticalization of the DDJ was the result of problematic interpretations proposed in part by Weijin-era metaphysicians, there are some other potential problems with Park’s argument. Core to Park’s central argument is that both Daoists and Confucians shared the primary aim of becoming a sage, as a point of completion for their ethical development. However, one passage from chapter 18 of the DDJ appears to call into question this very argument. This passage appears to carry strong anti-Confucian sentiment.

With the disappearance of the great *Dao*, benevolence and righteousness emerged.
Once wisdom emerged, there also came with it great deception.

Only when parents fail to be in harmony do filial children and loving parents emerge. And only when the country falls to chaos do officials with strong allegiance to the sovereign show their loyalties. (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 117)²⁶

The virtues of benevolence and righteousness, filial piety, love and compassion, and loyalty or allegiance to the sovereign that appear in the above passage are all virtues that are revered in Confucianism. It is likely that Laozi mentioned these virtues as a means to address the Confucian teachings of the day. According to chapter 18 of the DDJ, filial piety was proposed as a solution for families that were divided, and allegiance to the sovereign was discussed precisely because the state was in crisis. In other words, it appears that Laozi did not propose the virtues of Confucianism as a means toward good governance, but rather as remedies to the problems that occur in the absence of the *Dao*. In other words,

the virtues of Confucian thinkers and those of Laozi were not actually aligned. Aware of this issue, Park wrote the below passage:

Loyal subjects prove their loyalty to their sovereign when the nation is in chaos. Thus, the fault lies with the chaos, not with the officials. Filial piety and love are discovered when there's tension in the family. Thus, the fault lies in the tension, and not in filial piety or love. After the disappearance of the great *Dao*, people learned of benevolence and righteousness. The fault lies in the disappearance of the *Dao*, and not with benevolence or righteousness. In this regard, Laozi deserves a critical evaluation that he did not properly understand the essence [of the *Dao*]. (S.-d. Park 2013, pp. 117–18)

In short, Park argues that loyal subjects are not only loyal during times of turmoil, but rather their loyalty is revealed in such times. Similarly, filial piety and benevolence are not the result of a lack of unity in the family but are merely revealed through temporary disorder or tension within the family. Park agrees with Laozi insofar that the *Dao* is absent first before people discover the virtues of Confucianism. However, Park Se-dang explains Laozi's point of view in terms of chronology, saying that people gradually realized the virtue of Confucianism after the disappearance of the *Dao*. But Laozi misinterpreted this temporal relationship as a causal relationship and concluded that "virtue came into the world through the disappearance of the *Dao*". In Park's view, the state would be governed well if all people tried to become loyal subjects, and then those who share flesh and blood would have no choice but to seek unity and harmony with one another. Eventually, Park concludes, "if one tries to practice benevolence and righteousness, the great *Dao* is realized, and this is the reason why the sages value benevolence and righteousness".

No matter whether Laozi misunderstood the sequence of events as causal in nature or he was simply lamenting the state of the world at his time and expressing it in an ironic way, Park's initial argument has its limitations. Even though Park's explanation might help to narrow the gap between the virtues of Confucian and Daoist thought, his explanation still failed to explain the connection on a more fundamental basis. In fact, narrowing the gap between Confucian virtues and Daoist ethics was the first issue that Park Se-dang attempted to resolve in his attempt to integrate Confucian and Daoist philosophy. Park worked to overcome these limitations by supplying the justification at the cosmological level.

3.2. The Cosmological Level: "Ti and Yong Have the Same Source" (體用一源)

According to Park Se-dang, the biggest problem with Wang Bi's interpretation of chapter 1 of the DDJ is that *Dao* and *ming* are established as tangible and intangible objects. As Lin Xiyi pointed out, at the moment when *Dao* is expressed in language, *ming* 名 (the name) is established as the "second meaning" (二義), which is separated from the original substance of *Dao*. However, Park opposed Lin's interpretation by integrating *Dao* and *ming* in the following ways:

The *Dao* refers to *ti* 體 or the ontological body, and the *ming* or name refers to the *yong* 用 or functional use. *Dao* has *ming* as its function, and *ming* has *Dao* as its body, but neither the body nor the function can be eliminated. Therefore, if *Dao* becomes *Dao* by itself, it isn't the so-called "constant *Dao*" or eternal way (*changdao* 常道), because there's no function to establish itself as the body or *ti* [of *Dao*]. Further, if the name or *ming* becomes a name or *ming* by itself, it is not the so-called "constant *ming*" (*changming* 常名), because there's no *ti* to act by itself. (S.-d. Park 2013, pp. 77–78)

Park Se-dang approaches *Dao* as *ti* and *ming* as *yong*. Based on this premise, *ti* can be exposed as a phenomenon using the function of *ming*, and *ming* has its own fundamental substance, which is *Dao*. Therefore, *Dao* and *ming* are not independent entities but rather are entities that are interdependent upon each other, specifically as "constant *Dao*" and "constant *ming*", respectively. Park further develops his argument by linking the concepts

of “constant *wu*” (*changwu* 常無) and “constant *you*” (*changyou* 常有), as well as *li* 理 and *xian* 象.

When Laozi uses the term “constant *wu*”, he’s actually referring to the *ti* together with the concept of the “constant *Dao*” and the “nameless” (*wuming* 無名). From this angle, Laozi attempted to understand the mysterious *li* 理 (reason, principle, or natural law) that encompasses all the other phenomena (*xian* 象). Furthermore, the “constant *you*” discussed in this text refers to the *yong* together with the “constant *ming*” and “having name” (*youming* 有名). From this, it can be seen that all the phenomena that manifest themselves in the world “have their origin in the same one principle” (根源一理). (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 78)

In the above quote, Park Se-dang analyzes the concept of the “constant *Dao*” in the first chapter of the DDJ as things that are on the level of the *ti*. He also analyzed the concepts of the “constant *wu*” and the “nameless”, as well as the concept of the “constant *ming*” as things on the level of the *yong* along with the concepts of the “constant *you*” and the “the named”. According to Park, if the former is something that follows *li*, then the latter becomes a *xian* (phenomenon) through which *li* is revealed. However, since the *xian* already embraces *li*, thus, these two are eventually “rooted in one *li*” (根源一理). Park’s proposed cosmological system is a direct application of the Neo-Confucianist perspective of “*ti* and *yong* originated from one source” (體用一源), which was prevalent during the Song and Ming dynasties. For this reason, Park quoted the following passage in his commentary and used it as a basis for his argumentation.

Li means that the *yong* is inherent in *ti*, this is the so-called “one root” (一源). Additionally, *xian* means that “subtleness” (微) has no choice but to be included in “conspicuousness” (顯). This is so-called “gaplessness” (無間). (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 79)

The concepts of “subtleness” and *li* or “conspicuousness” and *xian* that Park discusses here correspond to Cheng Yi-chuan’s 程伊川 theory of *ti* and *yong*, which states that *ti* and *yong* originated from one source and that there is no gap between subtleness and conspicuousness (體用一源, 顯微無間) (Cheng 2019, p. 27). The term “gapless” or “gaplessness” in Cheng’s writings refers to the relationship between *li* and *xian*, where the *li*, or the natural principle or reason for things, serves as the *ti* or ontological body that contains the *yong* or function of a thing to be revealed as *xian* or an object or incident within reality. Zhu Xi understood that Cheng Yi-chuan’s conception of *li* existed first in time and that *xian* originated from *li*, therefore emerging after *li*. Therefore, it is difficult to argue that *li* and *xian* in Zhu Xi’s view are completely the same, but they also cannot be divided because they all originate from the same source. The following is Zhu Xi’s commentary on the concept that “*ti* and *yong* originated from one”.

“*Ti* and *yong* originated from one” means that, although there are no traces of *ti* (“the ontological body”), there is already *yong* (“function”) in the middle of *ti*; and “there is no gap between *wei* and *xian*” means that *wei* (“subtleness”) is in the middle of the *xian* (“appearance or conspicuousness”). That is, even when heaven and earth do not yet exist, all things on earth are already prepared for it, that is why “there is already *yong* in the middle of the *ti*”; when heaven and earth are already established, there *li* is already present, that is why “*wei* is in the middle of the *xian*”. (Zhu 2023f, no. 67)

In summary, when viewed from the perspective of the passage of time, even when *ti* or the ontological body has no shape, it already exists from before the creation of all things in nature. A similar view can also be found in Zhu Xi’s *Taiji Tujie* 太極圖解 (Taiji diagram). In it, Zhu Xi explains the relationship between *ti* and *yong* as follows: “When one discusses *li* (the natural principle or order of things), *ti* (the ontological body) always precedes *yong* (the function). And, when one discusses *ti*, generally speaking, the *li* of *yong* already has taken place within the *ti*. This is the reason why they originated from one single origin”.

In other words, Zhu Xi argues that *ti* and *yong* both originate from *li*, while recognizing that *ti* and *yong* emerged sequentially.

However, since *ti* here leaves no vestige, it is impossible for it to be recognized as itself; hence, we can only recognize it when *ti* appears outside. The reason why *ti*, which originally is not exposed on the outside, can be revealed on the outside is that *yong* is already contained in *ti* and because there is an invisible subtleness (*wei*) in the phenomenon (*xian*) that is revealed on the outside. Zhu Xi also interpreted *xian*—appearance, conspicuousness, or the external phenomenon—and *wei*—subtleness, which is present inside of *xian*—as the relationship between *wu* 物 (things) and *li*. Zhu Xi explains this idea in the following quote from *Taiji Tujie*: “If I explain ‘there’s no gap between subtleness and conspicuousness’ by means of a very prominent *xiang* 象, it can be said that there’s nothing that doesn’t have *li* involved in every affair and everything” (J. Li 2020, p. 2537). In other words, all phenomena whether objects or incidents can be understood as a recognizable *xiang*. However, *li* is already implied in all possible kinds of *xiang* without exception. Zhu Xi defined the meaning of what is implied in the outward phenomenon, that is, the relationship between *xian* and *wei*, through “gaplessness” (*wujian* 無間).

In contrast to this, Joseon Neo-Confucian scholars at the time applied *li* and *qi* 氣 as the absolute criteria for analyzing various phenomena when it came to understanding the relationship between *Dao* and *ming*. Considering this point, it is of notable significance that Park is applying Zhu Xi’s theory of “*ti* and *yong* originated from one” for the interpretation of the DDJ. This is because, through this method, the discussions about the relationship between *Dao* and *ming* could avoid the dichotomy of *li* and *qi*. At the same time, however, they did not deviate from the theoretical norms of Neo-Confucianism and eventually provided the possibility for an inclusive interpretation of the DDJ. Zhu Xi also summarized the concepts of *ti* and *yong* in the following way: “In terms of a metaphysical object, *chongmo* (沖漠, emptiness and tranquility) is *ti*, and when *chongmo* manifests itself in material objects, that becomes *yong*. In terms of a physical object, things also become *ti*, and the *li* of *ti* that gets revealed is *yong*” (Zhu 2023b, no. 48). In short, metaphysical objects come to existence earlier than physical objects because—although they are the noumenon of things, which itself is unrecognizable—they are already embedded in every physical object and affair as a reason (*li*). In other words, a physical object is a metaphysical object that appears as a *xiang*. This is nothing more than something that the *li* of *ti* revealed through *yong*, thus both metaphysical things and physical things both originate from the same source.

Notably, the theory of *ti* and *yong*, which Park applied as the basic perspective to annotate the DDJ is different from Wang Bi’s understanding (Jo 1997, p. 193). There are some lines in Wang Bi’s commentary for chapter 38 of the DDJ that show how Wang Bi understood the concepts of *ti* and *yong*: “Although the myriad things are noble, it is with nothingness that they function [because one must comply with nature and do nothing in order to demonstrate one’s virtues]” (萬物雖貴以無爲用). Since Wang Bi’s concept of *yong* refers to the action of *wu* (nothingness), thus, when seen from Zhu Xi’s perspective, Wang Bi’s concept of *yong* contradicts the concept of *you* 有 as a meaning of actual generative action. Following this, Wang Bi said, “they cannot reject nothingness in order to be *ti*” (不能捨無以爲體也). However, from Zhu Xi’s perspective, this understanding is also contradictory in that an invisible entity also abandons nothingness (Jo 1997, pp. 193–94). This shows that, although Wang Bi utilized the concepts of *ti* and *yong* in the process of interpreting the interaction of *Dao* and its use earlier, his understanding of *ti* and *yong* is completely different from Zhu Xi’s understanding. In addition, the conception of *ti* and *yong* in Wang’s commentaries on the *Book of Change* also take on a similar meaning to those present in his commentary on the DDJ. In Wang’s *Book of Change Notes* (*Zhouyi Zhu* 周易注), *ti* is used to signify the physical object itself existing in reality, and *yong* means the use of the physical objects. In other words, for Wang Bi, *ti* is established as a physical object in the form of a substance, and it also can be *you* in that it actually exists. Conversely, *yong* is established as a metaphysical object in the form of use or function, and at the same time, it also can be *wu* (nothingness).

In the preface of *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*, Park speaks about Weijin metaphysicians as Jin 晉 period scholars who have much ambition but behave frivolously, relying on empty discourse and endless colloquy. This shows that he was aware of the difference between the perspectives of Wang Bi and Zhu Xi. At the same time, this can also be understood as Park Se-dang's will to approach and understand the DDJ rather through Zhu Xi's idea of *ti* and *yong* than through Wang Bi's concepts. In the structure of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, the concepts such as *Dao* and *de* 德 (virtue), *you* and *wu*, *ti* and *yong*, *li* and *xiang*, and *wei* and *xian* correspond to each other, and Park structurally deduced those corresponding concepts from Zhu Xi's thought to interpret the relationship between *Dao* and *ming*.

3.3. The Dilemma: Daoist Ethics Established through Neo-Confucian Cosmology

Park Se-dang not only tried to prove the compatibility of Neo-Confucianism and Daoism by suspending the dichotomy between the Neo-Confucian "theory of *li* and *qi*" (理氣論) and Wang Bi's conception of *ti* and *yong*, but Park also took Zhu Xi's theory of "*ti* and *yong* originated from one" as the underlying principle behind his commentary of the DDJ. If it were proven that Neo-Confucianism and Daoism share the same ethical orientation (more specifically, the "sage"), while both at the same time follow the same principle that "*ti* and *yong* originated from one", then the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi would no longer be heretical books contradicting Neo-Confucian philosophy. But rather, they would be scriptures that only differed from it in terms of their language or methodology. In that case, the Neo-Confucian interpretation of the DDJ might be an ideological strategy to overcome the exclusivity of Neo-Confucianism and the resulting phenomenon of regime fragmentation.²⁷

Even if Zhu Xi's principle "*ti* and *yong* originated from one" is applied to the interpretation of the DDJ, there are difficulties that cannot be solved by the concepts of *ti* and *yong* alone because Zhu Xi understood the concept of *yong* in Buddhism from a dualistic perspective and separated it from *ti*. Thus, when Zhu Xi discussed Buddhism, he had no choice but to come to the following conclusions: "Buddhism is empty, but Confucianism is substantial; Buddhism is dualistic, but Confucianism is monistic. Buddhism doesn't value the principles of the world and doesn't understand them" (Zhu 2023d, no. 126). The *yong* that Zhu Xi is discussing here is an illusion that is separated from *ti*, and becomes a "nothingness" that does not actually exist. From that, Zhu Xi inferred, "since Buddha said that all things in heaven and earth are vain (幻妄), the four big artificial combinations (四大假合)²⁸ became nothingness (無)". In other words, Zhu Xi thought that Buddhism discusses illusionary things that are not real, which meant that the most prominent concept of "nothingness" would not have any real effect. Therefore, Buddhism cannot reach the ultimate purpose of study, as discussed in *The Great Learning*. These purposes included manifesting "one's bright virtue" and "loving the people".²⁹ In short, the concept of "nothingness" in Buddhism deviates from the principle of "*ti* and *yong* originated from one" because it suggests that "there can be *ti* (an ontology or existence) without *yong* (function)" (有體而無用).

Zhu Xi's perspectives on Buddhism apply similarly to the teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Zhu Xi often named Laozi in the same breath as Buddha when discussing heresy. The following passage from *Chuanxilu* (傳習錄, Instructions for practical living) is such an example: "Since the Buddha only talks about 'emptiness' (空) and Laozi only speaks about 'nothingness' (無), it is hard to know where reason or *li* 理 exists [within their system of metaphysics]" (Zhu 2023g). According to Zhu Xi, both the Buddhist concept of "emptiness" and Laozi's concept of "nothingness" have in common that there is no place for *li* within these conceptions because they are both objectively non-existent. Here, the concept of *li* is already separated from *yong*, which can also be defined as the illusion of physical objects in reality. Zhu Xi then continues: "If something happens right in front of someone that has no shape and no sign (兆) yet still exists, it only can be called 'empty' (空蕩蕩). Thus, even if there's no sign of movement in a state [because it has not yet manifested itself], the people don't know that everything is already prepared for movement"

(Zhu 2023g). Here, the *ti* of an object already implies the possibilities of the phenomenon, so all things actually exist in an unseparated form of *ti* and *yong*, or “*shiyou*” 實有 (real existence). In short, the *ti* that Zhu Xi is referring to has the same fundamental meaning as *li*; it is unrecognizable and, therefore, recognized as “nothingness”. However, because this *ti* contains the possibility of “*ti* and *yong* originated from one”, it also already contains *yong* even before its point of emergence; thus, it is not separated from *yong*, and because *yong* becomes recognizable once it emerges as a phenomenon, *ti* and *yong* can be defined as *shiyou*, or real existence.

The interpretation of the concepts of *you* and *wu* in the DDJ according to Zhu Xi’s theory of “*ti* and *yong* originated from one” carries the risk of ultimately considering all things and affairs just as illusions. Therefore, for the purpose of merging Confucianism and Daoism, even though Park embraced the ethical view of the sage and the cosmology of “*ti* and *yong* originated from one” from Neo-Confucianism as the two main principles of his DDJ commentary, he did not fully adopt the logical structure of Zhu Xi’s thought when it came to the issue of *you* and *wu*. At the same time, Park also did not accept Wang Bi’s “theory of respecting nothingness” (尊無論), which was widely accepted at the time. If Park adopted the notion that “nothingness is the fundamental base of everything” (以無爲本) as Wang Bi asserted in his commentary of chapter 40 of the DDJ, then “Although the myriad things are noble, it is with nothingness that they function, thus, they cannot reject nothingness in order to be *ti*” (B. Wang 2011, pp. 113–14). Wang Bi contradicts Zhu Xi’s claim that *wu* existed before *you*. More importantly, Wang Bi thought that, even if *ti* existed, it could not be established without *wu*, which meant that *ti* and *yong* are separated. This view completely deviates from Zhu Xi’s original conception that “*ti* and *yong* originated from one”. For this reason, Park explicitly stated in the preface to his DDJ commentary that the heresy of the DDJ began with the theories advocating respect for “nothingness” by the many scholars of Weijin metaphysics, headed by Wang Bi.

In short, Park Se-dang aimed at building an understanding of where the concepts of *you* and *wu* in the DDJ actually both easily mapped to and directly corresponded with Zhu Xi’s idea of “*ti* and *yong* originated from one”. To demonstrate that Zhu Xi’s understanding of *you* or *wu* was different from the perspective adopted in the DDJ, Park Se-dang provided in-depth commentary on the contents of chapter 21 of the DDJ. Below are the contents of this chapter.

DDJ chapter 21 (Figure 1) concedes that since *Dao* is ambiguous and dark, *Dao* is difficult to recognize, but there are *xiang* and actual *wu* in it. Park described the characteristics of the unrecognizable *Dao* as “mysterious” (妙), emphasizing that even though it is difficult to perceive, there clearly is *li* in all things. In DDJ chapter 14, *Dao* is also described with the term *huhuang* 惚恍, which is similar to the two aspects of the *Dao* described above: *huang* 惚 (muddled) and *hu* 恍 (blurred). Park Se-dang explained these terms in the following way: “Symptoms without symptoms and figureless figures resemble so-called metaphysical objects. The term *huhuang* means indefinite or indistinct. The *Dao* is described as such because it seems both to exist and not to exist” (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 108). In other words, although it appears that *Dao* does not exist in its form, *Dao* does exist as a metaphysical object. A similar observation can be found in Park’s commentary for chapter 21 of the DDJ, where *Dao* is also defined as a metaphysical object that is both “the utmost empty and the utmost substantial” (至虛而至實). *Dao* is empty when considered from the perspective of cognitive content, but it is real when considered from the perspective of its functional action; therefore, it is not nothingness in the absolute sense.

As a thing the Way is	道之爲物，
Shadowy, indistinct.	惟恍惟惚。
Indistinct and Shadowy,	惚兮恍兮，
Yet within it is an image;	其中有象，
Shadowy and indistinct,	恍兮惚兮，
Yet within it is a substance.	其中有物。
Dim and dark,	窈兮冥兮，
Yet within it is an essence.	其中有精。
This essence is quite genuine	其精甚真，
And within it is something that can be tested.	其中有信。
From the present back to antiquity	自古及今，
Its name never deserted it.	其名不去，
It serves as a means for inspecting the fathers of the multitude.	以閱衆甫。

All phrases following the line “as a thing the Way [*Dao*] is” (道之爲物) recount that the mysteries of *Dao* are incognizable, but that its *li* seems to be everywhere and depends on the existence of things. This is metaphysical because it is at the same time both extremely empty (虛) and extremely full. It also has the meaning that Zhou Lianxi 周濂溪 described: “It is the supreme ultimate because it is no ultimate (無極而太極) [.....] The reason why the name *Dao* has not disappeared since ancient times is because it has been handed down through various sages”.

Figure 1. *Daodejing* chapter 21 (excerpt) and Park Se-dang’s commentary. (Lau 1962, p. 26; H.-s. Kim 2013, pp. 124–25).

In contrast, Zhu Xi interpreted *Dao* much differently. Based on the same passage in the *Daodejing*, Zhu Xi interpreted *wu* 物 and *jing* 精 as being in the unrecognizable state of *huhuang* 恍惚. His commentary is as follows.

The distinction between Confucianism and Buddha only lies in the dispute about *xu* 虛 (emptiness) and *shi* 實 (substance). Laozi said: “Shadowy and indistinct, yet within it is *wu* 物 (a thing or object). Dim and dark, yet within it is *jing* 精 (essence)”. Thus, the substance and essence here are *xu*. (Zhu 2023c)

In other words, according to Zhu Xi, the *Dao* discussed in chapter 21 of the DDJ is affiliated with the category of *xu* 虛 or emptiness because it is impossible to perceive the mysterious modality of *Dao*. In contrast to this, Park Se-dang interprets *jing* 精 (essence) here as being the combination of both *li* 理 (reason or order) and *wu* 物 (a thing or object), as physical things in reality. This perspective eventually leads Park to the conclusion that *li* exists in any and all objects. As for the specific sentences “Shadowy and indistinct, yet within it is *wu*. Dim and dark, yet within it is *jing*”, Park explains that *wu* 物 is bound to fall into a contradictory relationship between the unrecognizable “nothingness” (*wu* 無) and the “physical substance” (*you* 有). This contradiction he then attempts to resolve by explaining *wu* 物 through the *yi*-principle (易理).

For example, in the conclusion of Park’s commentary for chapter 21 of DDJ, he explicitly notes: “Zhou Lianxi said that the infinite ultimate (*wuji* 無極) is the supreme ultimate (太極)”, which shows that Park tried to explain both the problematic relationships between *you* and *wu* and *ti* and *yong* using the *yi*-principle (易理) from the *Essay of the Taiji Diagram* (太極圖說). In his annotation to chapter 14 of the DDJ, Park supplements the original description of *Dao* as “seeming to exist but not to exist” (若存若亡) with the description “The *ti* of *Dao* is inherently empty” (道體本虛) (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 108). Through Park Se-dang’s annotation below, we can see that he understood *xu* differently than Zhu Xi, who considered *xu* to mean that nothing existed at all.

The *ti* of *Dao* is essentially *xu* 虛 (empty). But what we see, hear, and touch, what we consider as one, and that what we think it is not light, nor dark, or endlessly

extending, everything is close to “*youwu*” 有物 (things with shape) but eventually returns to “*wuwu*” 無物 (things without shape). Signs without signs and shapeless shapes resemble so-called metaphysical objects. *Huhuang* 惚恍 means indefinite or indistinct. The *Dao* is described as such because it seems both to exist and not to exist. (H.-s. Kim 2013, p. 108)

In the paragraph above, Park Se-dang describes the state of *xu* in detail. He writes that *xu* forms the shape of objects auditorily, visually, tactilely, or by obscure senses. In addition, he mentions the “endlessly extending” (*shengsheng* 繩繩) shapes without limits, which evade a clear grasp by humans. Park insists that the objects perceived in this way eventually return to a “shapeless state” (*wuwu* 無物). A similar sentence is found in chapter 40 of DDJ: “The ‘return’ (*fan* 返) is the movement of the *Dao*, and the weakness is the ‘function’ (*yong* 用) of the *Dao*”. Based on the implications of “return” that are revealed in the sentence “returning to its root is quietude” in chapter 16 of DDJ, the content of chapter 40 can be interpreted as “The movement of *Dao* occurs in quietude, and it can become stronger after it has been weakened” (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 171). Chapter 40 of the DDJ states, “All things on the earth are born from *you*, and *you* is born from *wu*”. Unlike Wang Bi’s interpretation of *you* and *wu*, Park understands these concepts in a spatial and temporal sense: “Movement comes from quietude or inactivity (*jing* 靜), and strength comes from weakness”³⁰. Park’s idea, which is mentioned in the annotations to chapters 14 and 21, that the *ti* of *you* and *wu* is a metaphysical object, has the same meaning as “the metaphysical realm is called ‘the Way’ (*Dao*) and the physical realm is called ‘the vessel’ (*qi* 器)” (Zhu 2019, p. 242). There are “objects with shapes” and “objects without shape” that fill the universe. Park distinguishes here whether the objects are physical (connected to *qi* 氣) and thus can be recognized with the five senses, or metaphysical (connected to *Dao*) and cannot be perceived. Based on the above logic, Park’s understanding of the relationship between *you* and *wu* can be depicted in the following way.

Figure 2 shows that the way that Park Se-dang distinguishes *you* and *wu* is based on both the substance or physical status as well as the function of an object. This radically departs the way that Zhu Xi or Wang Bi distinguished *you* and *wu*. Both Zhu Xi and Wang Bi distinguished *you* and *wu* according to their cognitive status. Whereas, unlike Zhu and Wang who identified *you* and *wu* as well as *xu* and *shi* as individual separate states, Park interprets *you* and *wu* based on the premise that “*ti* and *yong* originated from one source” as a unified, singular body. Park Se-dang’s method for distinguishing “*ti* and *yong* originated from one” additionally incorporates concepts from the *yi*-principle from *The Essay of Taiji Diagram*. In particular, Park’s interpretation is ultimately in line with Zhu Xi’s perspective on the *yi*-principle that “[the metaphysical] is shapeless but with *li*” (無形而有理) (Zhu 2023g). Naturally, the interpretation of the DDJ from this perspective does not deviate significantly from the Neo-Confucian theory.

Park’s understanding of the relationship between both *you* and *wu* and *xu* and *shi*, which led him to the conclusion that *Dao* was compatible with Confucian ethics, however, involved two additional problems. First is the question of how to resolve the contradictions between the concepts of *you* and *wu* as revealed in the DDJ interpretation through the theory of “*ti* and *yong* originated from one source”. Second, is the question of how to explain the ethical justification of actions through the cosmological system discussed above. If the decisive basis for “*ti* and *yong* originated from one” has the same ethical goal as “to cultivate oneself and govern others”, then the key question is how can ethical issues be explained through a cosmological system consisting of *yi* and *yong* as well as *you* and *wu*. However, despite these questions, one thing that is clear is that Park Se-dang’s will to bridge together different systems of ethics and cosmology, as demonstrated in his DDJ commentaries, inherits the Neo-Confucian philosophical traditions of great philosophers through the Song and Ming dynasties. Park’s attempt was not only to connect the values and beliefs of Confucianism and Daoism but also to connect heaven with the people of feudal society to elevate the ethics of the day to an even more superior moral plane (Z. Li 2008, pp. 77–105).

How Wu 無 Corresponds to You 有		
Criteria for distinguishing <i>you</i> and <i>wu</i>	<i>ti</i> 體 (ontological body) of <i>Dao</i> 道	<i>ming</i> 名 (name) <i>yong</i> 用 (application)
Cognitive status	<i>xu</i> 虛 (emptiness)	<i>shi</i> 實 (substance)
Physical status	<i>jing</i> 靜 (inactivity) <i>wei</i> 微 (subtleness)	<i>dong</i> 動 (activity) <i>xian</i> 顯 (conspicuousness)
	<i>ruo</i> 弱 (weakness)	<i>qiang</i> 強 (strength)

Figure 2. Park Se-dang’s understanding of *you* and *wu*.

4. The Strategy of Integrating Daoist Ethics and Confucian Cosmology and Its Theoretical Limitations

In the first passage of chapter 42 of the DDJ, the birth of all things is described in the following way: “The Way [*Dao*] begets one, one begets two, two begets three, and three begets the myriad creatures. The myriad creatures carry on their backs the *yin* and embrace in their arms the *yang* and are the blending of the generative forces (*chongqi* 沖氣) of the two” (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 49). Below is Park’s commentary on this paragraph, which allows us to confirm both his cosmological and ethical perspectives at the same time.

“One” here refers to the supreme ultimate (*taiji* 太極). Laozi said that “the way begets one” because he took nothingness as the foundation (*zong* 宗). “Two” refers to *yin* and *yang* (*liangyi* 兩儀), and “three” refers to the “three powers” (*sancan* 三才). “Three begets the myriad creatures” means that three extreme poles are established and all things on earth emanate from them. The sentence “the myriad creatures carry on their backs the *yin* and embrace in their arms the *yang*” means that because all things have received the two *qi* of *yin* and *yang*, upon emerging they hold the energy of *yin* and *yang* on their back and in their heart so that they don’t separate. *Chongqi* (*ji* 沖氣) here is “empty *qi*”. There is nothing in all creation that is not in harmony with this “empty *qi*”. Therefore, everything on earth can coexist without doing harm to each other, and can maintain itself for a long time. (S.-d. Park 2013, pp. 176–77)

The first thing to note here is that Park Se-dang considers “one” to be the supreme ultimate or *taiji*. However, logically speaking, since “one” originated from the *Dao*, the *Dao* as Park understood it cannot be *taiji* or the *Dao* itself. Therefore, it must be the case that the *Dao* that Park is referring to above is actually referring to the “function (*yong*)” of *Dao*.³¹ Park Se-dang first mentions the existence of *wu* before the process of creating “one” from the *Dao* because he interpreted *wu* as “empty *qi*”—a type of medium shared by the *Dao* and everything that exists—and not merely as “nothingness” in a physical or spatiotemporal sense. That is, the *Dao* as the identity of *taiji* forms *yin* and *yang*, and while *Dao* holds *li* in harmony, all things are formed. Park also sought to define *Dao* in the commentary of the “A Great Master” chapter of *Zhuangzi*, stating that “the so-called *Dao* contains one *yin* and one *yang*” (一陰一陽所以道) (S.-d. Park 2012, pp. 446–47). In addition, Park commented on the concept of *chang* 常 in chapter 16 of the DDJ. Park wrote: “*Chang* 常 refers to a permanent reason. When *yin* and *yang* open and close, are active one time and inactive another time, this itself is the continuous reason” (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 113). The concepts of *yin* and *yang* here define the *li* of *Dao* that do not change along with the actual movements of inactivity (*jing* 靜) or activity (*dong* 動). Park’s understanding of the principle of creation of everything is not only consistent with the specific cosmology of the universe (太極陰陽論) as described in the Great Commentary (*Xici* 繫辭) chapter of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) but also generally conforms with “*li* of *taiji*” (太極之理). Park Se-dang linked human behavior to the principles depicted in the hexagrams of *sun* 損 and *yi* 益 in the *Book of*

Change, and added, “I will regard the ancients’ words regarding *sunyi* (損益) as the most important teaching” (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 178).

Then, where does the postulation that human behavior should follow cosmological discipline come from? From the perspective of Neo-Confucianism, the *li* of *taiji* is established not only as an ontological and cosmological discipline but also as a justification for human behavior. However, the concept of heaven presented in the DDJ has no other meaning than the manifestation of nature that originated from *Dao*, without a humanized or subjective conception of heaven. For this reason, Park, noticing the gap between ethics and cosmology in this concept of heaven (*tian* 天), tried to integrate them. For example, in chapter 61 of the DDJ, he interprets the relationship between great and small states by linking them to human character attitudes toward heaven, such as “willingness to follow Heaven” (樂天) or “fearing Heaven” (畏天). Park explains *Dao* by indirectly referring to the concept of the mandate of heaven (*tianming* 天命) in the expression “receiving one’s destiny from heaven” (受命於天) in his annotation of chapter 16 of the DDJ (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 113). However, according to Lee Jong-seong’s research, there is no place where the concept of the mandate of heaven is referred to directly in either the *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* or the *Namhwagyeong Juhaesanbo* (Lee 2017, p. 176).

There is a fundamental difference between Laozi’s and Confucius’ understanding of heaven, so even though Park interpreted heaven from the Confucian perspective, he failed to find the unifying characteristics between them. The concepts of *di* 帝 (the lord or heavenly emperor) and *Dao* appear together in chapter 4 of the DDJ: “I don’t know whose son it [the *Dao*] is. It seems to have preceded *di* 帝 [the lord]” (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 8). Park interpreted *di* here simply as a synonym for heaven (*tian* 天), lacking human characteristics. This was necessary because it is only possible to avoid the logical error that *Dao* preceded God if the humanized *tian* is reverted to *tian* in the objective sense. This also shows that Park Se-dang was clearly aware of the difference between the concepts of *tian* in Daoism and Confucianism. Furthermore, Park interpreted *wuwei* 無爲 (inaction), which refers to refraining from manipulative behavior, as an action consistent with the ethical virtues of Neo-Confucianism. Park’s notes in chapter 48 of the DDJ: “Laozian thought lets everyone reverse their mistakes to preserve the natural state of things, but doesn’t dare to press things to happen, for the *Dao* exists in *wuwei* 無爲 (inaction) and *wushi* 無事 (being free from affairs). This is why it’s precious to lose it every day” (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 189). *Wuwei* here does not mean avoiding the manipulative behavior to comply with nature that Laozi aimed for, but the learning method of negation and self-control that is discussed in chapter 15 of *Analects*: “Is not *Shun* (舜) the one who governed effectively by inaction (*wuwei* 無爲)?” (Ni 2017, p. 354).

Park Se-dang’s attempt to interpret the DDJ through Confucianism has its limitations. Park tried to define the common ethics between Confucianism and Daoism and supported this understanding through an integrated cosmology. However, Park’s interpretations sometimes deviated from the original intention of Laozian thought. Yet, at the same time, the depth of Park Se-dang’s willingness to achieve a system that showed the compatibility of Confucianism and Daoism helped take the commentary on Daoist thought throughout the Korean peninsula to new heights and inspired others to venture into other reinterpretations and integrated thought.

5. Conclusions

This research study aimed to analyze and critically examine the theoretical strategies used in, and the purpose of, Park Se-dang’s *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*, which was the first complete commentary of the DDJ in Korea. This study also appraised the implications and academic influence of Park’s thoughts in the history of Joseon philosophy.

Sinju Dodeokgyeong is one of the five extant works of DDJ commentary in Korea. This work was compiled and written after Yi I’s *Suneon*, which was a compilation of commentaries to selected chapters of the DDJ. The 17th century—the time when the *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* was written—was for Korea a period of much internal and external political turmoil.

Events like the Manchu invasion of Korea in 1636 (丙子胡亂) and intensifying factionalism within the Joseon government destabilized the livelihoods of many on the peninsula and caused many to doubt Neo-Confucian rhetoric and beliefs. During this time, Park Se-dang, the author of the *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*, had developed a critical view of Neo-Confucianism and the academic dogmatism revolving around it. This eventually led to his reorientation toward studying the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi. The *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* reflects Park's concern for solving practical problems that eventually led him to explore the DDJ, which under the ruling Neo-Confucian ideology, had long been excluded as a heretical text.

This study on Park Se-dang's *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* was motivated by the interesting turn of events in Korean history that surround the text. Soon after Park Se-dang's *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*, there was a sudden emergence of three other DDJ commentaries. Up to now, a number of research studies have found a cause for this change in regional factors, such as the influx of new knowledge from the Qing dynasty and Western Learning and from various political and social factors on the peninsula. This study attempts to shed light on the logical errors of Park's approach to coercing unity between Neo-Confucianism and Daoism and seeks to establish it as an equally fundamental but thus far neglected cause.

Park's strategy to interpret the DDJ with the objective of demonstrating compatibility between Confucianism and Daoism can be summarized as "interpreting Daoism through Confucian theory". This study examined this strategy in four steps: (1.) Park's clarification on the historical hereticalization of the DDJ, which Park then used as a starting point from where he began to interpret Daoist thought through Confucian theory; (2.) Park defined the ethics and virtues of Confucian and Daoist thought; (3.) Park examined the cosmological systems of Confucianism and Daoism; and (4.) Park interpreted Daoist moral ethics through Neo-Confucian cosmology. The first of these steps is detailed meticulously in the introduction of the *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*. Following Park's reasoning, Laozi and Confucius shared the same scholarly goal when examined within the flow of the history of thought, but the DDJ had been misunderstood. This is because Weijin metaphysicians misinterpreted Laozi's intentions in a metaphysical and extremely abstract fashion. Park's explanation that Laozi's thoughts in the DDJ have subsequently been misrepresented can be taken as Park's strategy of proving that the discussions on DDJ are legitimate.

The subsequent steps were largely carried out through argumentation on the ethical and cosmological levels. First, Park Se-dang attempted to show that Laozi's and Zhuangzi's thoughts were not heresy, but rather scriptures with a language and methodology that differed from Confucian texts. Park went about this by showing that Confucianism and Daoism not only had the same ethical orientation but at the same time also abided by the same cosmological principles. For this purpose, Park first argued that both Confucianism and Daoism aim to reach the ultimate goal of "cultivating oneself and governing others" as well as an awareness for solving practical problems. Next, in an attempt at reinterpretation on the cosmological level, Park interpreted the DDJ through the relationship between *ti* and *yong* from Zhu Xi's theory and attempted to merge the two concepts. One issue of contention was whether the relationships between the concept of *dao* and *ming* as well as *you* and *wu* could be understood as dualistic in nature similar to *xu* and *shi* in Zhu Xi's writings or *you* and *wu* in Wang Bi's writings. Park needed to overcome these issues to negate the premise of Zhu Xi's criticisms of Daoism and Buddhism. These issues became the core of Park's strategy for a cosmological reinterpretation of Daoist thought. To this end, Park interpreted the relationship between *you* and *wu* in DDJ through the principle that "the infinite ultimate is the supreme ultimate" in the *Essay on the Taiji diagram*, proving that the concepts of *you* and *wu* correspond to Zhu Xi's standpoint of "the *Dao* is shapeless but there is *li*". Finally, Park Se-dang attempted to reduce the gap between ethics and cosmology; this strategy is in accordance with the procedure of Neo-Confucian scholarship throughout both the Song and Ming dynasties. Ultimately this was an attempt to raise the position of an ethical subject up to the position of transcendental ethics by connecting heaven and people. However, unlike in Confucianism, the concept of heaven introduced

in the DDJ text has no other meaning than that of a natural manifestation of the *Dao*, as opposed to a more personified or subjective form of heaven. In other words, Park Se-dang attempted to narrow the gap between ethics and cosmology by converting the concept of “heaven” in DDJ into a humanized heaven. However, using Park Se-dang’s strategy based on Confucian cosmology to prove the legitimacy of human behavior that Laozi mentioned in DDJ had its limits. Not only is Park’s method of interpretation highly arbitrary, but it also is not convincing because it deviates from the original intent of the DDJ.

Ultimately, Park’s attempt to achieve complete integration between Confucianism and Daoism by interpreting the DDJ using the theoretical structure of Confucianism failed. However, in the 18th century, Joseon *Silhak* scholars who had also strived for viable solutions to unifying the two systems of thought were greatly influenced by the work of Park Se-dang. That is, Park’s legacy is that he considered a new frontier of philosophical thought by reducing the scourge of scholarly heterodoxy around Daoism in Korea to resolve practical issues of the time. After Park, much work in supplementing and modifying the limitations of Park Se-dang’s interpretive strategy continued into the 19th century, being the focus of many Joseon *Silhak* scholars. In other words, Park’s writings laid the foundation for a revitalization and reinterpretation of Daoist thought in Korea.

Funding: This research was funded by the National Humanities and Social Science Fund of the Ministry of Education in China (中國教育部人文社科研究項目) grant number 20YJC720001.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Acknowledgments: I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Paul van Els (Leiden University, Institute for Area Studies) for his great support in the research activities at Leiden University to complete this research project, and to Isaac Huben for the final proofreading of this article.

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

Notes

- ¹ Sungsan Cho describes three types of approaches that nineteenth-century Korean scholars used to address ideological conflicts: (1.) achieving development through improved adaptive Neo-Confucian learning; (2.) critical and confrontational Neo-Confucianism; and (3.) overcoming Neo-Confucian thought through religious mentality (Cho 2016, pp. 119–21).
- ² Teresa Hyun defined *Silhak* as follows: “The *Silhak* movement [occurring from the seventeenth to nineteenth century] comprised a group of Korean Neo-Confucianist scholars who attempted to go beyond the abstract metaphysical approaches of neo-Confucianism in order to find practical solutions to the agricultural, economic and social problems facing Korea” (Hyun 1997, p. 283).
- ³ According to Kim Seonhee’s research, “books and knowledge imported from China spurred the rise of broad scholarship and a growing interest in branches of practical knowledge” (Seonhee Kim 2023, pp. 53–80).
- ⁴ The rise of evidential learning in eighteenth-century Qing China had a far-reaching influence in shaping intellectual development in modern China and East Asia (Q. E. Wang 2008, pp. 489–519).
- ⁵ Jong-Chun Park (J.-c. Park 2016) discusses the Confucian anti-heresy discourses in late Joseon in more detail (pp. 113–43).
- ⁶ Seo Myeong-eung organizes the notes of his DDJ commentary *Dodeokjigwi* 道德指歸 according to the same conceptual structure that he used in his numerological work *Bomanjae Chongseo* 保晚齋叢書: the four images (*sixiang* 四象), the riverside scene (*hetu* 河圖), the polar regions (*zhonggong* 中宮), *yin* and *yang* (陰陽), hexagrams (*liuyao* 六爻), as well as measurements of time such as the 12 months, 60 weeks, and a cycle of 60 years (H. Kim 2004, p. 31). Moreover, Seo Myeong-eung describes the concept of *taiji* (the supreme ultimate) in the *Daodejing* through its connection to the human body, which is distinct from earlier Joseon dynasty *Daodejing* commentaries (Y.-g. Kim 2006, pp. 156–58).
- ⁷ Lee Chung-ik’s *Chowondamno* 椒園談老 and the DDJ annotation *Dok Noja Ochik* 讀老子五則 (Reading the Five Principles of Laozi) written by his teacher Lee Gwangryeo can be regarded as the typical examples. Kim Hyeongseok explained that although in *Chowondamno* Lee considers that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism can communicate with each other in a most basic way, he gives priority to Laozi and Zhuangzi, followed by Confucianism and Buddhism (H.-s. Kim 2019, pp. 207–29). For a more

specific analysis, see H.-s. Kim (2013, pp. 200–3). The ideological correlation between Lee Chung-ik and Lee Gwangryeo is described in H. Kim (2020a, pp. 275–302).

Hong Seokju argued in *Jeongro* 訂老 that the contents of DDJ were consistent with the words of Confucius. Because the discussions on *jian* 謙 and *zheng* 爭 in the DDJ were concerned with the question of how to avoid the coming of war in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States eras, Hong argued that the DDJ was a “book of benevolence” (T.-y. Kim 2017, p. 176).

Jo Minhwan researched how Joseon scholars integrated Confucian with Daoist theory (Jo 2005, p. 139).

The process of accepting DDJ on the Korean Peninsula was discussed in more detail in Seo-Reich (2022, pp. 999–1000).

Zhu Xi defined three guiding principles and eight ethical items as the purposes and approaches of Confucian learning in *The Great Learning*. The three guiding principles mentioned in the first verse of *The Great Learning* are “displaying enlightened virtue” (*mingmingde* 明明德), “loving the people” (*qinmin* 親民), and “the utmost goodness” (*zhiyu zhishan* 止於至善). The eight ethical items are “external cultivation of morality”, namely “to investigate things” (*gewu* 格物), “to attain knowledge” (*zhizhi* 致知), “to make intentions” (*chengyi* 誠意), “to rectify the mind” (*zhengxin* 正心), “to cultivate the self” (*xiushen* 修身), “to regulate the household” (*qijia* 齊家), “to bring good order to the state” (*zhiguo* 治國), and “to bring peace to all under Heaven” (*pingtianxia* 平天下). The above conceptual language and translations follow Johnston and Ping (2012).

The quotation from *Zhuziyulei* 朱子語類 [Sayings of Zhu] in this paper is based on the collection publicly registered in the “National Archives of Japan Digital Archive” (www.digital.archives.go.jp, accessed on 30 October 2023) and has been translated directly by the author referring to different annotations. Thus, this paper only made a citation note about the quoted volume of *Zhuziyulei* and refers to the public domain addresses of the original source (Zhu 2023g).

For more information about the differences in Yi Hwang’s and Yi I’s perspectives on heresy, see Jo (2009, pp. 48–49).

Kim Hakmok, the modern Korean translator of *Suneon*, insists that Yi I was able to interpret the DDJ, a heretic book in Joseon, because he was confident that he could interpret it from the perspective of Neo-Confucian logic as needed (H. Kim 2002, p. 298).

According to Geum Jangtae’s research, *Suneon* first appeared in an anthology of Yi I’s works in 1611, and some records show that *Suneon* was published in some select editions of *Inner Works*, *Outer Works*, and *Additional Works*. However, it is now difficult to find any book that actually contains *Suneon*, and even after Yi I’s death, any discussion on *Suneon* was avoided even among his successors (Geum 2005, p. 172).

Furthermore, Yi I thought that “to empty one’s mind” in the DDJ could be a methodology to correct a wrong disposition (*qizhi* 氣質) (H. Kim 2020b, pp. 106–7).

The following research provides various information on the background and writing process of *Suneon*: Yoon (2021, pp. 69–113).

Lin Xiyi’s *Laozi Yanzhai Kouyi* was completed in the 13th century and brought to Korea and Japan from the early 15th century on, and it gained huge popularity during the Edo period (H.-s. Kim 2010, pp. 257–68).

Kim Hakmok analyzed the commentaries cited or mentioned in *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*. This analysis shows that Lin Xiyi’s commentary was most often cited, namely in chapters 3, 5, 6, 19, 21, 27, 28, 46, 49, 68, 69, and 70. This shows that Park was paying special attention to Lin Xiyi’s point of view (S.-d. Park 2013, p. 37).

Hayashi Razan was a pioneer of Japanese Neo-Confucianism. He stayed at Kennin-ji Temple (建仁寺) between 1595 and 1597, where he studied Laozi’s and Zhuangzi’s thought based on Lin Xiyi’s commentaries. Hayashi Razan accepted Lin Xiyi’s viewpoint, about which he said: “Even though I dwelled upon old commentaries of DDJ, nothing is as clear as *Kouyi* 口義” (Ou 2001, pp. 275–78).

Following Lin Xiyi, Park quotes Zhu Xi the second most in *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*. Considering the magnitude of Zhu Xi’s influence at the time, it is worth noting that Lin Xiyi was cited even more than him. For a detailed study concerning the source of *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* commentaries, see H. Kim (2000, pp. 102–6).

For more information about the academic background and basic standpoint of Park Se-dang, see Han (2010, pp. 268–70).

Yi I rejected the common misconception that the DDJ only discussed *qi* 氣 and suggested the possibility that it could be interpreted through the concept of *li* in relation to *qi* as well (Jo 2010, p. 282).

Shin Jinsik explains how Park tried to identify new principles in order to steer political groups away from sources other than Zhu Xi’s doctrines (Shin 2009, p. 89).

Aside from the annotations by Weijin metaphysicians or Neo-Confucians discussed in this article, there were also commentaries from a Buddhist perspective like Shi Deqing 釋德清 that also circulated among the DDJ commentaries in Joseon society during the 17th century. Because these commentaries had limited influence on related intellectual discussion during the Joseon dynasty, they are not discussed in detail in this article.

Park did not clarify the source, but concluded the comment with a stance almost the same as in the *Zhuji Pinjie* 諸子品節: “This chapter is written by Laozi during the decline of the Zhou state when he was worried about reality, nostalgic of days gone by, and resentful of the world”. Here, Park Se-dang argues that it was an ironic expression left behind by Laozi in anger at the reality of the loss of benevolence and righteousness in an unrestrained world, not for the purpose of criticizing the virtues of Confucianism. This demonstrates that Park finds an explanation for Laozi’s standpoint that tries to minimize the ethical differences between the Confucians and Laozi.

- 27 Four aspects defined the division of the Joseon government and the construction of Korean *Silhak*: first, the relationship between the *Dao* and the Instrument in traditional Confucian scholarship; second, institution and civilization, as expressed in the phrases of “administration and practical usage” and “profitable usage benefiting the people”; third, growing interest in the historical importance of Jeong Yakyong’s scholarship; and fourth, consistent interest in the value of practicality (Noh 2023, pp. 277–310).
- 28 The big artificial combination here refers to earth, water, fire, and wind, which make up all things in heaven and Earth. According to Zhu Xi’s understanding, they mix and grow according to the karmic theory of Buddhism.
- 29 The translation of terms from *Great Learning* is based on James Legge’s translation, which was partly changed according to the author’s understanding, see Legge (1960, p. 356).
- 30 Wang Bi interpreted this as “Everything in the world is made of *you*, and the beginning of *you* is based on nothing, thus, to complete *you*, [everything] must return to nothing” (B. Wang 2011, pp. 113–14).
- 31 For arguments supporting this opinion, see the “Sinju Dodeokgyeong-e Natanan Park Se-dang-ui Sasang [Park Se-dang’s Thought in Sinju Dodeokgyeong]” chapter in S.-d. Park (2013, pp. 271–305). On the other hand, Park Se-dang interpreted *Dao* as working according to the *li* in his annotations on the *Tiandi* chapter of *Zhuangzi* in his commentary book *Namhwagyeong JuHae Sanbo* (Annotation and Edition of *Nanhuaqing*).

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