

Eco-consciousness in *Poongsoo*

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It is generally agreed that the practice of the Korean geomancy (*poongsoo* 風水) is anti-environmental and anthropocentric per se. However, the Korean *poongsoo* theory and its practice could be an alternative way of respecting land and harmonizing with all beings on it, rather than destroying it by promoting its homocentric use value. In this paper, thus, I would like to survey the Korean *poongsoo* theory in a different angle so as to suggest that it could be a traditional Korean thought eco-friendly enough. In doing so, I will differentiate the Korean *poongsoo* from the Chinese *fengshei*. Especially, I am going to focus on a unique Korean *poongsoo* that was launched by a Korean Buddhist monk *Dosun* who activated *bibo* (裨補) *poongsoo* (complementary *poongsoo*) the late Three Kingdoms Period through the Korea Dynasty. To testify that the traditional Korean *poongsoo* is a pro-environmental world view, I will attempt to identify that the *poongsoo* theory has something significant in common with Deep Ecology, which obviously takes an eco-friendly position in the Western Hemisphere.

If we accept the geomantic hypothesis that a *myeungdang* (明堂) ground meeting auspicious *poongsoo* conditions procures worldly luck and blessedness to a human, it is aptly said that the thought of *poongsoo* is anti-ecological as well as anti-social. However, the term of *myeungdang* is not an absolute but comparative concept because *gi* itself is a comparative concept. In other words, the *gi* of a certain ground corresponds to a certain person, but it might not responds to the *gi* (氣) of anybody else. Thus, a *poongsoo* scholar of Korea Chang-Jo Choi once said that what matters in *poongsoo* is not whether a ground is good or bad but whether it is a right site to a certain person or not (*Tears of the Earth, Hope of the Earth* 16). There is no perfect *myeungdang*. Every place has weak points and strong elements in terms of *poongsoo* conditions. It is said that an auspicious place to one person could be an ominous site to another, and vice versa.

Furthermore, the Korean geomancy stands out because it includes the thought of *bibo* (裨補). *Bibo* means that humans intentionally manage the land by complementing weak spots or oppressing places (厭勝) charged with excessively strong *gi*. The Korean *poongsoo* presupposes that there is no perfect *myeungdang* (風水無全美). Thus, it supposedly allows human interference in nature. As a mediator, humans complement or control the land.

Then, what rationale entails the concept of *bibo* in the East Asian metaphysics? To

East Asians, nature is not a completed being but a never-ending process of becoming. The human being is also in the state of becoming through his or her interaction with nature. This way of thinking leads to humans' active participation in nature's forming and becoming. Won-Suk Choi explains this thought by using a neological term, "cooperative complement between human and earth"(地人相補)(73). Choi claims that the human being is entitled to complement or control nature by adding anthropocentric changes to it just as nature influences humans. According to *The Book Of Change*, "the king completes *tao* through cutting it and manages his people by promoting appropriateness"(后以 財成天地之道 補相天地之宜 以左右民), and its annotator Jooja(朱子) interprets this statement; "completing *tao* through cutting it means controlling excessiveness(財成以制其過) and promoting appropriateness means complementing insufficiency"(補相以補其不及)(Re-cited from Won-Suk Choi 73). This classical comment well-justifies the very thought of *bibo* that humans can complement weak and insufficient grounds and control the excessively strong *gi* of some places.

Naess suggests the 8 platforms of deep ecology. It is noticeable that these 8 points are on the same track with the position of Korean geomancy in the ultimate sense. Now, I would like to compare both of them.

To sum up Naess' points 1, 2 and 3, because non-human life forms including inorganic beings have their own worth, humans should accept this fact and should not hurt or reduce their ecological richness and diversity. Naess' intrinsic value of non-human nature is no less than the *gi* hypothesis of *poongsoo*. As Chang-Jo Choi also points out, *gi* is the fundamental concept backing up the *poongsoo* theory(*Land Logic, Human Logic* 221). The existence of *gi* presupposes that all forms of non-human nature are alive as organic entities, which implies each of non-human beings has its own inherent life value. Accordingly, human beings should be very attentive when they face non-human forms such as mountains, rivers, trees, rabbits or mice. There is an instructive old saying in *poongsoo*, "when you handle the land, take your best care as if the fox walks in the extremely attentive way"(Choi, *LLHL* 229). One essential instruction of *poongsoo* is that humans should not interfere the way of nature and must conform to it.

Naess' points 4, 5, 6 and 8 concern positive activities of humans, which will supposedly redraw the anti-ecological culture. Deep ecology hails positive human efforts to change our environmentally deteriorating society into an eco-friendly world. Although deep ecologists suggest that humans conform to nature, they admit that only humans have an obligation as well as capability to make intentional efforts in order to change the eco-destructive world because only they cause the ecological problems. Thus, deep ecologists are positive in participating in a variety of activities which would

draw various kinds of systematic change in society.

In a sense, the Korean geomancy, especially *bibo poongsoo* is more positive than deep ecology in implementing intentional changes. The innumerable traces of *bibo* which are discovered all over the country, such as *bibo* woods and trees, man-made water pools, stone pagodas, standing stones, Buddha images and many others well-exemplifies how positively the Korean *poongsoo* culture promotes human participation in complementing or controlling non-human nature. However, *bibo poongsoo* never accepts ecological destruction in practicing *bibo*. Any mountain or forest is not destroyed or endangered when a person attempt to complement any insufficient point or oppresses any excessive *gi*. S/he utilizes natural elements like trees or stones. Therefore, it is aptly said that the true Korean *poongsoo* culture is pro-environmental. It encourages not only systematic changes such as diverse policy-redrawings or economic and technological controls but it also positively provokes the substantial interference of humans toward a harmony between humans and nature, such as complement *bibo* or control *bibo*.

As Choi Chang-Jo suggests, along with the Principle of *Gi* Correspondence(同氣感應) mentioned before, *Guemnanggyeung*(錦囊經) provides the most commanding belief to the thought that an ancestor blesses his or her descendent after death. It implies that the ancestor's bone charged with the *gi* of a place strengthens the *gi* of his or her descendent. And through the auspicious *gi*, the descendent is blessed with worldly power and fortune(Choi, TEHE 325). Not only humans are governed by the Principle of *Gi* Correspondence, but all of the other non-human beings are also influenced by the *gi*, as implied in the anecdotes that "a bell responds when a mountain collapses and a chestnut in the room buds off when a chestnut tree blooms outside in spring". However, Choi problematizes such a belief by taking a variety of counter statements of the 19th century's Korean pragmatists like Dae-Yong Hong, Ik Lee or Je-Ga Bark. For instance, Ik-Lee once said, "will the chestnut in the room bud or not in spring if anyone destroys all roots and branches of the chestnut tree outside?" Bark also ridicules the belief, saying "there are a king, his or her servants, and common people even in the countries cultured with water-burial, cremation, bird-burial(birds eat up the body of the dead) or tree burial"(the body is gradually rotten on the branches of a tree)(Recited from Chang-jo Choi, TEHE 327-8).

The Naess' 7th point concerns the essential view of life. It differentiates bigness from greatness, preferring the latter to the former. The deep ecologist's hypothesis of Self-realization also puts emphasis on the intertwined destiny of humans and nature. As the commanding deep ecologist Bill Devall says "deep ecology is emerging as a way of developing a new balance and harmony between individuals, communities and all of

Nature"(7), the Korean geomancy goes toward a peaceful harmony between humans and nature as well. In its true sense, seeking *myeungdang* is not a human-centered culture but rather a non-anthropocentric practice of following the way of nature. Thus, it is aptly enough said that the true *poongsoo* promotes the 'greatness' of life.

Certainly, there is an anthropocentric and eco-destructive aspect in the burial *poongsoo*. However, this anthropocentric practice of *poongsoo* is a distorted version of the true Korean geomancy. Because the burial *poongsoo* is influenced by Confucianism, it supposedly provokes descendents to fulfill their filial piety even after their parents die by seeking good burial grounds. The true purpose of practicing the burial *poongsoo* is not the descendent's blessedness but the fulfillment of his or her filial duty. And in the burial *poongsoo* or the residential *poongsoo*, the fundamental world-view is desiring a peaceful harmony between humans and nature. Whereas the Westerners deteriorate the ecosystem for their convenience and then attempt to deal with environmental issues mainly relying on their science and technology as shown in the scientific knowledge of BOD or COD, the East Asians try to minimize eco-destruction by harmonizing human desire with Nature's way. In other words, the East resists to the fundamental cause of environmental deterioration while the West tends to revive the damaged environment after destroying it. The way to the harmony is to act as if nature matters. *Myeungdang* is the very spot where humans can minimize energy-consumption because of its warm winter and cool summer. Just as in deep ecology, *poongsoo* urges us to minimize human interference with the non-human world. By practicing *bibo*, the Korean *poongsoo* even positively complements insufficient spots. Also, the Korean geomentality deserves a serious attention exactly in issuing a variety of policies that will affect "basic economic, technological, and ideological structures".