

## **The Thought of Lee Kang-So**

East Asian countries have been swept away by modern civilization which had rapidly developed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution in Europe since the 19th countries. Unfortunately, their all own traditions are collapsed. There were countless traditions to be simply improved among them, but many scholars have claimed that good ones were so much more. Looking deep into the West that took away our traditions will become a profound recognition framework to understand my art, so I now develop my explanations.

Philosopher Rene Descartes (1590-1650) argues that cognitive subject is important than the outer world. Also, his statement 'I think therefore I am' is one of the greatest statements in the history of philosophy and everyone knows it. Within Western thinking, 'self' always comes first and 'outer world' is in doubt. On the other hand, 'outer world' is considered as perfect and complete one in the Eastern traditions. Since I, or self is easily influenced by external factors, it has required people's self-discipline to pursue human nature. The West believed that reason is the only chief source to be trusted. Therefore, the outer world could be fabricated and Natural Science was inevitably born in the West. In our tradition, however, the outer world is already pure and clean. Therefore, Moral Metaphysics could be developed to throw off our greed or desire and follow our own human nature.

Rationalism in modern science, which was developed by Isaac Newton (1642-1727), laid out the mechanistic vision of the universe. In his view, outer world is controlled by mathematical equations. Rational philosophy and a worldview formed by Descartes and Newton have quickly spread out over four centuries and required humans to have new ways of thinking. The period is called 'Modernity'. We have also come to agree with their arguments related to logical and rational thinking. The base of Modernity is to isolate inner self called a 'subject' from outside itself called an 'object'. Such isolation method is believed to prove by rational analysis from our daily life to ambiguous boundaries. The world here is viewed through like a clockwork machine and this is a unique mechanistic worldview appeared in modern times. It may be convenient, but it is something to deeply think it over whether we can consider it to be a truth itself. In any case, such thinking has rapidly become customary for East Asian and has been

deeply impressed on their minds. The view that sees the world has eventually outperformed the human brain and separated three-dimensional space and one-dimensional time. Does 3+1-dimensional space exist in the universe? The attitude to consider the space and time separately has ingrained in us. It is an analysis of space-time in a mathematic way. Let's think about the word 'universe (宇宙)' in Chinese. It consists of two characters, one representing 'space' and the other, 'time'. However, the two characters cannot be simply divided. Therefore, space and time cannot be separated. The time now is the current time where I am. In other words, only the four-dimensional space-time enables all things work and people communicate each other.

Nonetheless, East Asian custom has naturally followed the Western thinking patterns. They had no choice but to submit because natural science became so powerful. All other cultures have followed the same path of development as in Western culture. Although natural science in Western attempts to be a pure theory or an intellectual desire, when it is applied to a real life, it turns out to be a war weapon or an ideological weapon. We should never lag behind in the real world, so we chased after Western ideals. Let me get to the point, the Art. I admit that, in the realm of art as well, there were no examples that the third world outperformed the Western art. However, the field of art is a form of temptation or a product of mind, so do not forget that there are no objective criteria exist in it. Art is not associated with positivism but human's ultimate values. It is unreasonable to choose a better one between the Eastern art and Western art. From this point, we kept making mistakes.

Many things changed radically throughout the twentieth century, getting entangled with traditional customs of modern times and new thinking of contemporary times. While transforming from modern science to contemporary science, its good intentions at first have faded away. Although humans who have lived by rules of the world needed to shift to a new way of thinking, they are still stuck in the old idea of conquering nature. Think about ruined nature or ecological collapses? How about destroyed humanity itself? Are people happier than before? Even if people believe that humans are happy and better off, are people more ethical than before? If so, can we say that people are reflective or introspective?

It was 1907 when Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) painted 'Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.).' Around the same time, in 1905, Albert Einstein (1879-1955) proposed the theory of

special relativity. In that theory, it is scientifically proven that space and time cannot be separated from each other. Also, in 1915, he published his theory of general relativity. In it, he determined that massive objects cause a distortion in space-time, which is felt as gravity. It is a difficult scientific theory and hard to understand, but it did prove the fact that time is objective and in fact Newton's principle of simultaneity is wrong.

In 1913, Niels Bohr (1885-1962) proposed a new model for the atom, developing quantum mechanics and formulated micro science. Werner Karl Heisenberg (1901-1976), following in Bohr's footsteps, discovered a way to formulate quantum mechanics and proposed his 'Uncertainty Principle'. It says that we cannot measure the position of the particle due to its wavy nature. Imagine there is someone. If you analyze, the person's body are tissues or cell samples. If you keep looking further, it is composed of molecules. If further analyzed, molecules are groups of atoms. Again, atoms are made of smaller particles. If you looked further into it, a particle become a wave. The wave, however, cannot be defined objectively and measured its position. In fact, when you observe an atom, it grasps your intention and hides or changes its position. Modern physics proved the fact that substances read people's mind.

Bell's Theorem, first proved by John Stewart Bell (1928–1990) in 1964. "A universe is simply one that exists apart from our consciousness and an event here cannot instantaneously affect an event somewhere else." (*Fritjof Capra (1982). The Turning Point. Pumyang*)

Amid countless excellent experiments, Australia's National Science Agency at last said "We proved that at the moment when we realize the existence of the universe, the universe will appear." on 27 May 2017. In other worlds, the universe is stateless before the moment we realize it. I am just amazed to learn that how the ultimate experiment in modern physics fits well with the principle of 'Golden Mean' or 'Chungyong (中庸)', Consciousness-Only Buddhism and the thoughts of Lao-tzu and Chuan-tzu.

Each creature has a different point of view and different senses. Likewise, we humans feel different emotions depending on experiences of seeing the world. At the micro level, all things including creatures are only being creation and extinction of particles and waves, or opening and closing of energy points. That's what the Book of Changes

says ‘closing (翕)’ and ‘opening (闢).’ The universe recognized by extremely limited senses of creatures will be various, and it is in the same vein that the moon is only one but the moon reflected by the river will be countless and all different shapes.

Think about the universe at the macro-level. We still do not know what lies beyond the bounds of the universe. Also, think about the concept of parallel universes. We do not see what other universes exist. At the micro-level as well, we do not know what exists outside the universe from the view of Superstring theory or Membrane theory. In that theory, the universe is in eleven dimensions but it is in the transcendent realm of our recognition. We only see 3-space dimensions and 1-time dimension in modern times. It means we will only understand the universe within the framework of space-time equation. Only after Einstein’s theory, we just learned about 4(space-time) +1(meta recognition) dimensions. Moreover, only a few people in the world fully understand his theory.

Around BC 5th century, a Greek philosopher, Plato (BC 427 -BC 347) said the sight of our world was mere shadows of the ideas. He claimed that knowledge only gained through recollection of ideas, even our soul has some knowledge before birth. It is one of the best-known theory called ‘Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.’ Also, Sunyata or emptiness (空), a core belief in Buddhism, of Siddhartha (BC 563? –BC 43?) and Lao-tzu’s Tao or way (道) principle are the result from insights derived from wisdom and disciplines. I believe that their foresight guides us to the transcendent stage outside of the universe.

In particular, ‘emptiness (空)’ and ‘way (道)’ guided by Siddhartha and Lao-tzu are indeed certain fields of energy, not nothing (無) nor something (有). It means such realization beyond description is exactly a new level, moving towards so-called meta-recognition. Although artificial intelligence outperforms humans in the field of analyzing with large amounts of information, its process follows the time change. On the other hand, humans are recognition machines that go beyond space and time of the past, present, and even into the future. Therefore, humans, at an unmatched level with artificial intelligence, alternate itself, think and reason.

The period when many wise men including Plato, Siddhartha and Lao-tzu attained

enlightenment organically and relationally is called the First Age of Wisdom. The time when the greatest scientific genius such as Descartes and Newton appeared in the modern time is called the Second Age of Wisdom. The era when popular figures of modern physics such as Einstein, Bohr, and Bell newly opened the door to a new field is called the Third Age of Wisdom. We can fully understand why this kind of classifying way is needed. The universe including us is organically related to each other and is retained repeating creation and extinction. The evidences of modern science that says our universe is an illusion, in fact, claims that we need to establish a new paradigm, shifting from modern ways of thinking. That's why philosophers of science call this era 'Paradigm Shift of Civilization.'

In this era of transition, humans can still preserve and refer to an organic thinking and its legacy of five dimensions realized at the first age of wisdom. In particular, since the ideas of Gong (emptiness, 空) and Do (way, 道) will be very helpful, East Asian thought can be reviewed again and may even become the root that forms a new paradigm for human. These thoughts were not separately argued in a dogmatic manner like religion. These were true thoughts created even before the first age of wisdom, harmonized with each other and then developed together.

While all things are constantly changing and repeating the creation after its extinction, if all these things are just only empty waves, then our life might be emptiness itself. However, life lessons and thoughts tell us that we have to be optimistic and help others live a better life. That's because when we pursue good things and help each other, the universe itself will be filled with joy. Let's now go back to my country.

South Korea where I live had relatively less variations in terms of ethnic groups. At the same time, we have clearly developed East Asia's spirituality and continued its tradition. In recent times, even if our material conditions are significantly left behind the West, we have kept our wise tradition.

There is a term called Shamanism, which is an ancient tradition in short. Throughout the ritual, Shaman, a spiritual guide, delivers the intent and message of supernatural worlds to humans. Shamanism from ancient times is still maintained as a form of folk belief. In addition, foreign ideas such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have penetrated respectively and influenced each other.

Confucius (or Kongzi, 551 BC. -479 BC.) is the most significant philosopher in the first age of wisdom. He taught an ethical concept called In (仁), which is to behave like a real human being and encouraged people to live in harmony. Mencius (or Mengzi, BC.372? - BC.289?) who followed Confucius described the four buddings of virtue (In, Yi, Ye, and Ji) that distinguish human beings from animals. Zhu Xi (1130 -1200), long after Mencius, developed a theory of basic human propensities and compiled the so-called Neo-Confucian. He maintained that all things are brought into being by the union of two universal aspects of Qi (氣) and Li (理).

You can gain a glimpse of the example of Confucianism and Buddhism that blended into each other and reflected in our daily lives through ‘the Way of the Hwarang (花郎道, an elite warrior group of male youth instituted around 576 of Silla Dynasty).’ The members used to enjoy nature, train body and mind, perform ritual services, and compose music. Hwarang practiced Pungryu, a notion of becoming one with nature and Confucian principle Jeongmyeong (正名, rectification of names). In addition, they respected Buddha’s notion of loving life. Their amazing view of the world contributed to unifying the three kingdoms.

Goryeo (or Koryo) Dynasty adopted Buddhism as a national policy and the belief helped protect the dynasty from invasions from China and Mongol. Buddhism dominated our society by the fourteen century, but Neo-Confucianism had come to dominated after Jeong Mong-ju (鄭夢周 1337-1392) and Jeong Do-jeon (鄭道傳, 1342-1398) adopted Neo-Confucianism as a state ideology. They tried to establish an idealistic Confucian society together with Buddhism and Taoism, and its influence still remains on our society.

Toehy Yi Hwang (退溪 李滉, 1501-1570) is one of the most prominent scholars of East Asia region. With the decline of Zhu xi’s Neo-Confucianism, the doctrines of Wang Yangming became mainstream in China. Amid this change, Yi Hwang kept the tradition and rather, developed in a creative way. Neo-Confucianism flowered with in Joseon Dynasty. Yi Hwang advocated the Li (principle)-centered

theory known as 'Juriron (主理論)' based on Zhu xi's thought 'Li-Qi Dualism (理氣二元論)'. Whereas, Yulgok Yi I (栗谷 李珥, 1536~1584), one of the two most prominent Korean Confucian scholars of the Joseon Dynasty completed the Qi (vital force)-centered theory known as Jugiron (主氣論). Dasan, Jeong Yak-yong (茶山 丁若鏞, 1762 -1836) saved the country during the national crisis. He set out vast reform programs for governing the country according to Confucian ideals. With such a long journey, Neo-Confucianism is organically associated with universe and has been seeking ways in which humans can live in harmony with all creatures. At the same time, the theory encouraged the practice of Confucian values and tried to realize ethical idealism through self-discipline.

Now let's get into the contemporary era beyond the modern age. The alternative way to exceed paradigm shift in the West will be, as mentioned above, appeared in a flash as we learn the lessons from wise men in East Asia and appreciate the values of a long tradition. During the process, we can establish a new five-dimension consciousness frame. As I pursue tradition and future, I reflect on the realm of Art once again.

Contemporary art in Korea usually follows the same track. Most artists learned about modern western art from an early age and have grown by adopting different style of art including realism, impressionism, fauvism, cubism, surrealism, abstract, abstract expressionism, and pop art. I was also unable to escape from that swamp. Such efforts of my anguish ended in vain because the western education had failed to fulfill the traditional factors embedded in my mind and heart.

Fortunately, a new western art that forms like 'Events' or 'Happenings' occurred in the 1960 showed me new possibilities and hope. Like this instant, coincidence and process aspect was, not in the art area though, existed traditionally from ancient times to daily life in East Asia.

That is Pungryu-do (the way of wind and flow). Yoosang Goksoo (流上曲水) might be an example. This is one of Shilla cultures and it is said that Silla Kings would make a stone water way and float their wine glasses on the water, and they would recite poems before their glasses floated up to them. Music also naturally came with it. Another

example is Orchid Pavilion Gathering (蘭亭宴會) of Wang Xizhi (王羲之, 307 - 365), a master of all forms of Chinese calligraphy. It can be considered as the original form of events and relics of evidence still remain including Poseokjeong Pavillion (鮑石亭, probably built in the seventh century) of Korea and Senganen Garden of Japan, where the festival is still held.

Hwarangdo (花郎徒) was a group of people practicing moral principles, enjoying music and visiting natural beauty like famous mountains or large rivers. Although its form has changed, Pungryu-do (風流道) still exists. Drinking gatherings with music and poems were still popular in modern times, and Namsadang nori (男寺黨, professional performance troupes) carried on the legacy. For me, I am accustomed to the new genre of art 'events' that I met later because my grandparents used to enjoy writing and reading poetry, in spite of not being a drinker.

So, even though my works in the early 1970s like 'Reed', 'Bar in a Gallery (Extinction)' and 'The Chicken Performance' were considered unfamiliar, the genre called 'events' were something comfortable and natural to me. I am thrilled to taking chances and exploring ways.

At the time, I had a question. The question was, is it possible to clearly figure out and distinguish everyday life from the first-person, second-person and third person? In fact, it is impossible and we can't help but rely on instant memories during everyday life. Even the memories collected are, in fact, uncertain. I also realized that understanding consciousness at each time is so limited. After all, the universe is not the kind of that we can fully understand. Also, something that is simply impossible, in fact, exists. We just do not know.

So, I decided to verify traditional two-dimensional forms and three-dimensional artworks from the beginning. It was 1975. Artworks from the time have been performed until now, about 40 years later. That is to think about my job, as a part of my body, and my life from oriental wisdom and truth of innovative modern physics.

Canvas or paper on two-dimensional space, and three-dimensional artworks are not simple targets or material for me. They are existing along with me as particles and



waves at one time, laying out before me as an energy repeating creation and extinction at an unimaginable speed. I always remind myself of this belief. Therefore, the conditions shown from such artworks are not simply expressed the world I am facing. The way to interact with each other as restrained myself, real myself that everyone has is the fruit of hard work seeking for answers to something. Real myself means more underlying human, not as an Ego. We all have 'original nature (bonyeonjiseong, 本然之性)' and 'physical nature (gijiljiseong, 氣質之性)'. Bonyeonjiseong is the will of Heaven, public mind, and the mind of the way. That is real myself. Gijiljiseong is related to greed, private mind and the mind of man. The study to preserve the will of Heaven and to be cautious about the mind of man is a key to wisdom. This is duty what the King of Liao dynasty delivered to the King of Sun dynasty and also the foundation of mind studying that Yi Hwang strived for.

Taking a further look at the meaning of Neo-Confucianism, Sadan is indeed true-self among Sadan Chiljeong (四端七情, Four Buddings and Seven Emotions). Sadan or Four Buddings is human nature that is inherently good. The first belief is that the feeling of commiseration is the beginning of humanity. The second belief is that the feeling of shame and dislike is the beginning of righteousness. The third belief is that the feeling of compliance and deference is the beginning of propriety. The fourth belief is that the feeling of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom. Sadan (四端) is at the zenith of Confucius and Mencius' thoughts. However, Chiljeong (七情) are all the emotions from human mind including Joy (Hyu, 喜), Anger (No, 怒), Sorrow (Ae, 愛), Fear (Gu, 懼), Love (Ae, 愛), Hate (O, 惡), and Desire (Yok, 欲). Ego shows these feelings. Yi Hwang considered Sadan the realm of Li (principle), and Chiljeong considered the realm of Qi (matter). To live a decent life, Sadan (In, Yi, Ye and Ji) should be pursued and harmonized with all things and all people. I brace myself up for achieving the idea.

Western art came along the road acknowledging Chiljeong (七情), while the main point of East Asian traditional art is fundamentally different. We are not appreciating

Chiljeong of the artist in the artwork, but rather we are keenly aware of personality and dignity derived from long trainings and hard efforts. That's why I become more inspired by so called 'a good object (神品)' among paintings or calligraphy. The inspiration is really true because I directly connect with great artists' personalities. Perhaps, a core value called meta-recognition as mentioned above will be dissolved in their artworks.

The conditions shown from my artworks are not revealing Chiljeong (七情). It is my willing to expose more fundamental level. It is more like Sadan (四端). Also, it is the process that forms dignity to live a decent life. I hope such desperation will interact with all people who see my art. I never gave up that hope. I am not sure whether comparing my work with Sadan or In (仁), Yi (義), Ye (禮) and Ji (智) is appropriate or not at this point. However, if my audience and I experience the stage of meta-recognition amid my long artworks, even if it is short, it will be one of the ultimate experiences. I wish the experience will always be shared together.

This simple wish will be at all times, even in my two-dimensional area, three-dimensional area, and even in photographic artworks.

The painting brush on the two-dimensional space exposes an instant activity with no intention. The verifying of the activity is related to the number of strokes in a character. On the contrary to this, there are simple images. The images are artificial and intentional. At this moment, its space of the canvas can be changed into an ocean of the images with no rules. However, I refuse to the techniques of conceptual painting. My art is not conceptual art from the West. I am more interested in whether my works can kindly guide my viewers to the world of meta-recognition. To do that, it requires constant working and trainings of everyday life without interruption. I am just willing to follow this requirement.

The same goes for my works related to clods since the 80's. I take certain amounts of handful soil clods, throw up in the air and see the results. So, it is not related to fabricating or manipulating to show so-called Chiljeong (七情). I just throw it, concentrating my whole mind and accepting expected or unexpected result. The result with different patterns depending on mind, body, soil, and environment. I am given

fresh energy after long practicing of throwing. I hope that this energy will share with all people.

I've already tried to video projects in 1977 and had several exhibitions about it. So, media art is not new to me. However, it was just in the early 2000s when I was into considering 'still photographs' as a new project. I found out later that the world by a camera is a whole different story compared to looking at the world with five senses. I wanted to see the special world that a camera shows. That's why I am trying to attempt a photography project. There is a world that either people or other creatures cannot see. It is lucky that we can see the world through machines. It is amazing that we can see another metrics and the world using optical instruments. The essential purpose of photography is not simply taking a picture or capturing the target. Instead, it is more like dialectic description. In the description, the essence of soul can be seen. Or, we can experience the infinite world depending on circumstance. In the hope of showing that point of view, I am exploring the possibilities of photographs.

For me, this world is full of mysteries. At the same time, it is so complicated and dreadful that I cannot pull myself together. The element of all things does not disappear, even if it ends its life. It means it repeats birth and death of unknown consequences of the universe. The causes and consequences of creation and extinction will lay out to the universe in the distance. And yet, there is one principle we need to choose ultimately. That is to live a decent life with dignity.

I will continue to live a decent life throughout my work.

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