Originally, East Asian intellectuals focused their attention on the philosophy of the Confucian Classics, rarely commenting on their literary aspects. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, there were three exegetical works that proposed a different approach to the *Mengzi*. *Maengja ch’aŭi* (Notes on the meanings of the *Mengzi*) written by Wi Paekkyu (1727–1798), a Chosŏn scholar, *Mengzi lunwen* written by Niu Yunzhen (1706–1758) from China, and *Doku Mōshi* written by Hirose Tansō (1782–1856) in Japan. These exegeses approached the *Mengzi* through its literary style, and commented on many literary points: rhetorical strategy, grammar, and wording. In this article, these exegetical works are referred to as “rhetorical commentaries” since they emphasized rhetoric to a much greater extent than previous commentaries.

The purpose of this article is to show how the rhetorical commentaries are different from ordinary or standard commentaries, such as the works of Zhu Xi and Jiao Xun, but also to point out some differences among the three rhetorical commentaries. In addition, this study evaluates the significance of the appearance in East Asia of rhetorical commentaries in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. This will be done by placing them in the context of...
relevant historical events and changes in literati culture from the middle ages to the early-modern period of East Asia. Thus, this article will be a first step towards an understanding of rhetorically oriented exegeses in East Asia and the relationship between these commentaries, their historical change and their intellectual history.

Keywords: East Asia, the Confucian Classics, rhetorical commentaries, Mengzi, exegesis

“The Confucian Classics are the eternal truth.” – Liu Xie
“Reading this chapter of the Analects resembles reading fiction or unofficial histories.” – Li Zhi

During the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, there were exegetical works that proposed a novel approach to the Mengzi, but they have yet to be examined in detail by recent scholarship. These works approached the Classics through their literary style and mainly commented on the literary aspects of the Classics, focusing on rhetoric, syntax, aesthetic elements, and the mood of the text. In the Chosŏn dynasty of Korea, it was the Maengja ch’aŭi 孟子箚義 (Notes on the meanings of the Mengzi) by Wi Paekkyu 魏伯珪 (1727–1798)¹ that shed light on the stylistic features of the Mengzi.

Exegetical works that focus on rhetorical style also exist in China and Japan. Dong Hongli (1997) has evaluated the Mengzi lunwen 孟子論文 (A literary analysis of the Mengzi) written by Niu Yunzhen 牛運震 (1706–1758)² as a rhetorical commentary representative of the Qing dynasty, praising it for its preciseness.³ Tanaka (1993) shows that the Doku Mōshi 讀孟 予 (Reading the Mengzi) written by Hirose Tansō 廣瀨淡窓 (1782–1856)⁴ devotes considerable attention to rhetoric.⁵ These three works are the primary focus of this study, and hereafter

¹ For the biography of Wi Paekkyu, see Kim Sŏkhoe, Chonjae Wi Paekkyu munhak yŏn’gu (A study of Chonjae Wi Paekkyu’s literary works) (Seoul: Ihoe munwasa, 1995), 27–63; Wi Paekkyu, Chonjae chŏnsŏ (Completed works of Chonjae), vol. 1 (Seoul: Kyŏng’in ch’ulp’ansa, 1974), 1–4; and Yi Haejun, “Chonjae Wi Paekkyu ŭi sahoe kaesŏllon” (Chonjae Wi Paekkyu’s meliorism), (Master thesis, Seoul taehakkyo, 1979), 6–30.
² For the biography of Niu Yunzhen, see Dong Hongli, Mengzi yanjiu (Studies of the Mengzi) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), 321; Hou Jiangbo, “Niu Yunzhen xueshu yuanyuan kaoshu” (An analytical description of Niu Yunzhen’s academic origin), Dezhou xueyan xuebao 30 (2014): 7; Im Chong’uk, Chungguk yŏktae inmyŏng sajŏn (Biographical dictionary of China through the ages) (Ihoe munhwasa, 2010), 1215–1216; Jing Dongyan, “Niu Yunzhen zhuanlue” (A biographical sketch of Niu Yunzhen) (Master thesis, Lanzhou daxue, 2007); and Yan Shiju, “Niu Yunzhen he tade xuezu sishuang ji chubanye” (Niu Yunzhen’s academic thought and his contribution to the publishing business), Sandong tushuguan jikan 3 (2000): 53–54.
³ For the biography of Niu Yunzhen, see Dong Hongli, Mengzi yanjiu (Studies of the Mengzi) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), 321; Hou Jiangbo, “Niu Yunzhen xueshu yuanyuan kaoshu” (An analytical description of Niu Yunzhen’s academic origin), Dezhou xueyan xuebao 30 (2014): 7; Im Chong’uk, Chungguk yŏktae inmyŏng sajŏn (Biographical dictionary of China through the ages) (Ihoe munhwasa, 2010), 1215–1216; Jing Dongyan, “Niu Yunzhen zhuanlue” (A biographical sketch of Niu Yunzhen) (Master thesis, Lanzhou daxue, 2007); and Yan Shiju, “Niu Yunzhen he tade xuezu sishuang ji chubanye” (Niu Yunzhen’s academic thought and his contribution to the publishing business), Sandong tushuguan jikan 3 (2000): 53–54.
the term “rhetorical commentary” will be employed to refer to them. In this article the word “rhetoric” refers to stylistic means used for the purpose of both embellishment and persuasion.

So far, researchers have paid scant attention to rhetorical commentaries. This is because rhetoric has been thought to be of secondary importance in exegesis. Focus has instead been on the dominant commentaries that aimed to demonstrate the philosophical meanings of the texts. In other words, no significant work thus far has been devoted to the problems—characteristics, differences, and significances—of the type of commentary that the three works under consideration represent.

The emergence of rhetorical commentary was an innovation in that the three intellectuals studied here regarded the Mengzi not just as a text for moral cultivation, but also as a model

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6 There is no fixed term for this type of commentary. The terms “literary commentary” or “stylistic commentary” might be considered as alternatives, but the term “rhetorical commentary” is to be preferred. First, the term “literary commentary” is confusing in that it has a broader meaning than the term “rhetorical commentary,” since it includes commentaries on literature. Second, the term “stylistic commentary” is too narrow, given the fact that it does not include the sense of rhetoric as an instrument of persuasion.

7 The English word *rhetoric* derives from ancient Greek and is defined in various ways. Lu (1998; 2) writes that the term is most commonly defined as the artistic use of oral and written expressions. Lipson and Binkley (2004; 9), on the other hand, note that Aristoteles’ definition of rhetoric—which focuses on persuasion—is also widely accepted in scholarship. In a similar vein, Denecke (2010) and Li (2007) examine the rhetorical strategies of classical Chinese texts focusing on their persuasive skills.

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for learning rhetorical devices and grammar usage. Moreover, it should be noted that these commentaries were also all written in a period when crucial changes occurred in the history of East Asia. These innovative commentaries signify a change in thought among contemporary intellectuals and the emergence of a new wave of intellectual history. For these reasons, the emergence of rhetorical commentary is significant.

The purpose of this article is to scrutinize how these rhetorical commentaries differ from ordinary or standard commentaries, while also paying attention to possible differences between the three East-Asian countries. In this way, an attempt will be made to evaluate the meaning of the appearance of rhetorical commentaries in the pre-modern period in East Asia.

Changes in Perspective:
Reading the Mengzi as a Compositional Model

Until the sixteenth century, the fundamental methodology for interpreting the Classics was based on personal interpretation. Neo-Confucianism, which interprets the Classics from a moral and philosophical perspective, was the main mode of academic interpretation. However, after the three countries underwent certain crucial historical events—for instance, the replacement of the Ming dynasty by the Qing—East Asian intellectuals felt that Neo-Confucianism was limited with respect to solving contemporary social problems. Owing to this, new academic trends emerged in those countries: to borrow an expression from Benjamin Elman (2001), this was “the period in which empirical verification procedures” became important.

The main methodology of these new academic trends required that proof would support assertions to a greater extent than it had in the past; that is, intellectuals looked for objective evidence when they interpreted the Classics. The rhetorical commentaries appeared as an extension of this new trend, and the objective evidence was to be found in the “fundamental features of texts” wenyi 文義. Regarding wenyi, it is useful to refer to Wi Paekkyu’s remarks:

But readers today do not comprehend the fundamental features of texts (wenyi 文義) they read; all they do is recite the pronunciations and definitions of the words. But without comprehending the texts they read, how can they possibly grasp the principle of morally proper conduct (yili 義理)? Wanting to address the obscuration of the day, I first explain the fundamental features of texts so that readers can enjoy their flavor and delight in exploring them.

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9 It is true that several important Neo-Confucians, such as Zhu Xi, also mentioned the literary aspects of the Mengzi. However, the three intellectuals studied here paid attention to the literary aspects of the Mengzi to a much greater extent.

10 See Benjamin A. Elman, From Philosophy to Philology (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2001), 80.

In this way, Wi no longer assumes that the text speaks for itself, but sees the text as something that potentially stands between its moral significance (the implied message of the text) and the reader. Thus the text first and foremost needs clarification at the level of language.

The word *wenyi*, which also appears in Niu Yunzhen and Hirose Tansō’s commentaries, has several meanings in classical Chinese. However, in the passage above, *wenyi* refers to the “fundamental features of texts,” and the text is regarded as a literary construct. Reading the Classics, these writers therefore made efforts to understand the texts through their literary characteristics. The purpose of the three rhetorical commentaries was to understand rhetorical devices and grammar usage in words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and sections. As a result, they were able to decipher the original meanings (C. *benyi*, K. *ponũi*, J. *hongi* 本義) of the Classics and simultaneously improve their understanding of writing as a skill.

Understanding the original intentions of a text was a general goal that most intellectuals pursued because their ultimate aim was to get at the truth in the Classics. A secondary goal, which the three rhetorical commentaries pursued, was “improving writing skills.” Generally speaking, improving one’s compositional skill was an explicit ideal for many hundreds of years in the Sinographic Cosmopolis. How to do this was a topic of debate. Writers like Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101, the *cizhangjia* 詞章家) argued that the practice of writing well can be achieved through practice itself. By contrast, Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and others (the *daoxuejia* 道學家) believed that achieving a high level of morality was the best way to increase writing skills. Also, they thought that the aim of literature was to transmit the Dao (*wenyi zaidao* 文以載道) and only a morally informed style could be truly beautiful; some extremists, like Cheng Yi, even argued that honing compositional skills is harmful to achieving the Dao (*zuowen haidao* 作文害道).

Wi Paekkyu, Niu Yunzhen and Hirose Tansō shared the moral concerns of their fellow Confucians who were advocates of the Dao 道. Yet compared to the others, they differed in the attention they gave to the literary devices used to convey the moral message: the three commented on the literary aspects of the *Mengzi* to a greater extent, while many advocates

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12 The *Mengzi lunwen* and the *Doku Mōshi* have no preface. Yet, in the preface of the *Shiji pingzhu* (Notes and comments on the *Record of the Great Historian*) one of his collected works, Zhang Yushu 張玉樹 (1671–1741), an official in the Qing dynasty expresses approval of Niu Yunzhen’s writing and then notes that Niu Yunzhen obtains *wenyi* 文義, opining that this is the reason why he is able to convey Sima Qian’s thoughts and attitude to the world. In addition, Inoue (1925) says in the preface of the *Hirose zenshū* (Completed works of Hirose) that Hirose Tansō does not passively accept other intellectuals’ ideas, but tries to maintain neutrality between Zhu Xi and Ogyū Sorai and has independent ideas about the Classics. See Hirose Tansō, *Hirose zenshū* (Completed works of Hirose) (Oita: Hitagun kyōikukai, 1925–1927), 2–3; and Niu Yunzhen, *Shiji pingzhu* (Notes and comments on the *Record of the Great Historian*) (Xian: Sanqin chubanshe, 2001), 19–20.

13 Van Zoeren translates yi 意 as “intention” and yii 義 as “significance.” However, he points out that *wenyi* 文義 should be translated as literal meaning rather than as literal significance because of its historical and etymologic origins and its functions. He also says that “Yii, significance, on the other hand, was used to refer to the meanings that words had in and of themselves apart from their contexts or the intentions of their authors.” See Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 105–201.


of the Dao mainly furnished annotations on the philosophical aspects of the Mengzi. A significant difference is also that while discussing high morality, Wi, Niu and Hirose all focused on the skill of writing. For instance, Wi Paekkyu argued that the act of writing helps people to achieve the Dao.\(^{16}\) This argument suggests that a person good at composition could become a man of virtue. Moreover, he also emphasized reading various kinds of poetry and prose to prove to improve compositional skills.\(^{17}\)

In the age of our three authors, improving writing skills was a practical goal and was also related to the civil examinations or (in the case of Edo Japan) the composition of formal writings.\(^{18}\) Not only were the Confucian Classics the standard subject matter for the civil service examinations, but skillful writing was also a core factor in passing the examinations. Wi Paekkyu, Niu Yunzhen, and Hirose Tansō claimed that if intellectuals deeply savored and fully understood the writing style of the canon, their writing skills would improve.\(^{19}\) Wi discussed this in the Maengja ch’aŭi, commenting on ŭiŭi疑義 (literally, “doubts concerning the correct understanding”) which was one of the subjects of the civil examinations in the Chosŏn dynasty. In China Li Changran (2011) noted that rhetorical commentaries and baguwen八股文 (the so-called “eight-legged civil examination essay”) had a close relationship.\(^{21}\)

The three authors studied here regarded the Mengzi not just as a tool for moral cultivation, but also as a work of literature useful for learning rhetorical devices and grammatical usage. Improving writing skills had always been one of the goals of interpreting and studying the Classics, but the balance shifted to a certain degree from moral cultivation to honing one’s compositional skills, signaling a change in attitude. This may have been related to a perceived decline in the standard of the applicants for the civil examinations (in Chosŏn Korea and Qing China). Or it could have been related to the increased focus on guwen古文 (writing in the ancient style), which was practiced in order to recover the original meanings of the Classics and to follow the ancient compositional style.

18 For more details on the civil service examinations, see Benjamin A. Elman, “Political, Social, and Cultural Re-production via Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China,” Journal of Asian Studies 50 (1991): 7–28.
19 "悦豢於讀書, 研賾經訓, 体得义理, 布知精粗一理, 体用双全, 始悟经传乃爲科文之宗祖, 而聖賢本意, 未必禁人不當貴也. 故重節以文章科文爲言,” in “Sasŏ ch’aŭi pal,” in Chonjae chip, vol. 10. 2:2a; “篇中, 鉤勒頓挫, 千迴百轉, 重波疊浪而後, 归宿於此, 有綱領, 有血脈, 有過峽, 有筋節, 總在不使一直筆, 又不使一呆筆, 閱者熟得於此, 其於行文之道, 思過半矣,” in Mengzi lunwen, 1:10ab; “戰國之文, 長於楚儷, 可以爲法,” in Doku Mōshi, 5.
20 ŭiŭi疑義 was a subject in the civil examinations in the Chosŏn dynasty which tested the examinee’s logical thinking and Confucian knowledge. The goal of this subject was to interpret a passage from the Classics and then establish a philosophical theory. For detailed information, refer to Sejong taewang kinyŏm saophoe and Han’guk kojŏn yongŏ sajŏn (Dictionary of terms in Korean classics) (Seoul: Sejong taewang kinyŏm saophoe, 2001), 152.
21 Li Changran, Qingdai Mengzi xueshi dagang (Outline of the history of Mengzi studies in the Qing dynasty) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011), 191.
Characteristics of Rhetorical Commentaries

Two Main Characteristics of Rhetorical Commentaries

In East Asian societies, the Classics were thought to embody eternal truths that transcended time and space. They were treated as a paramount and intellectuals devoted their time to understanding them, focusing on their philosophical, political, and economic contents. In doing so, the art of verbal expression in the Classics was relatively disregarded, if not ignored.

Nonetheless, when interpreting the *Mengzi* Wi Paekkyu, Niu Yunzhen, and Hirose Tansō mainly paid attention to its rhetoric and stylistic features. They approached the *Mengzi* through its literary style, which figures such as Zhu Xi had done only to a small extent, and then analyzed diction, sentence usage, structure of sections, etc., or examined the rhetoric with regard to embellishment and persuasion.

There are two main characteristics of rhetorical commentaries. The first characteristic is that they voice explicit admiration of the art of verbal expression.


“The word *qi* 契 in *qiguaren* 契寡人 (abandoned me) may inspire pity, or affection. Three words, *gusuoyuan* 固所願 (the thing that is sincerely wished-for), stimulate the people’s tears. The word *ran* 然 of *yueran* 日然 is apt.”

Niu Yunzhen, *Mengzi lunwen* (commenting on *Mengzi* 4B7 and 4B8):

“The diction of the word *yang* 養 [here] is good…” “Bright and energetic.”

Hirose Tansō, *Doku Mōshi* (commenting about *Mengzi* 1A7):

“Mencius’ verbal expression is like riding a swift horse downhill. This chapter is highly delightful. It is hard to express how adroit the diction and sentences are.”

These three authors admire the excellence of Mencius’ verbal expression and evaluate him as the foremost authority among traditional stylists. Evaluative expressions they use—such as “stimulate people’s tears,” “good,” “highly delightful”—also reveal the emotional impact of

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25 The *Mengzi* was regarded as a model for improving writing skills, but traditional East Asian intellectuals admired other models too. Generally, they admired Sima Qian (d. 1486) or Su Xun (1009–1066) as the best stylist. Yet, Wi Paekkyu ranked Mencius’ literary talent as supreme, Niu Yunzhen evaluated Mencius’ description as comparable to Zuq Quiming (fl. 502–422 BCE) and Sima Qian, and Hirose Tansō evaluated Mencius’ rhetorical metaphors as the best among traditional stylists. For detailed expression, see “一章之內, 起結分明, 此是後來文章家祖宗. 大凡孟子 一書, 章範軒管領, 總密緊切, 中藏無限造化, 亦文章家大雄妙絕者也,” in *Maengja ch’aŭi*, in *Chonjae chip*, vol. 9. 1: 3a; “孟子敍事, 清折有味, 淡宕得神, 左氏以後, 太史公以前, 另樣絕佳手筆,” in *Mengzi lunwen*, 4:16a; “兩譬皆明快, 譬喩之巧, 莫如孟子,” in *Doku Mōshi*, 9.
the Classics on the readers.

Throughout their commentaries, the writers articulate the importance of rhetoric in the sense of both embellishment and persuasion in the *Mengzi*. Their commentaries on *Mengzi* 1A1 are a case in point. At the beginning and the end of the section, the same sentence “Why must your Majesty use that word ‘profit’?” 何必曰利? is repeated. The writers comment as follows:

Wi Paekkyu:
“At the beginning of this paragraph, Mencius referred to the use of profit by the King. At the end, he referred to benevolence and rightfulness based on what was said before, and suddenly dismissed the King’s opinion, saying ‘Why must Your Majesty use that word profit?’ The tone of speaking (kouqi 口氣) is outstanding and refreshing; it surprises the reader.”

Niu Yunzhen:
“He repeats the same sentence and finishes the chapter. The structure of this chapter is excellent and optimal. All of a sudden, it just comes back around. The momentum of the writing (wenshi 文勢) paces up and down, and then soars.”

In accordance with Wi and Niu, Hirose Tansō also opines:
“Mencius writes the first sentence of this chapter at the end again. There is a correspondence in this.”

These passages reveal that all three commentaries mention the repetition of a sentence and evaluate the emotional impact of the repetition. Descriptions of rhetorical devices referring to the art of verbal expression—such as rhythm, repetition, parallelism and antithesis—appear throughout the remaining pages of these three commentaries. In contrast, the commentaries of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and Jiao Xun 焦貞 (1763–1820) mostly pivot around philosophical, political, and economic content, only occasionally addressing the rhetoric.

**Five Features of Rhetorical Commentaries Compared with Prior Exegetical Works**

Are these rhetorical commentaries without precedent, appearing *ex nihilo*? Before embarking upon this discussion, it is necessary to summarize the origins of rhetorical commentaries. When it comes to the case of China, we have to go back to the Han dynasty to examine the

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27 “起頭因王言而先舉利, 結尾因己言而先舉仁義, 仍以何必利翻蹴了。口氣英爽, 令人悚悟,” in *Mengya b’laśli*, in *Chonjja chip*, vol. 9. 1:3a.
28 “倒轉作結, 妙極斬截。突然轉關, 突然收住, 文勢盤旋飛動,” in *Mengzi lunwen*. 1:1b.
29 “倒用前句, 吺應有法,” in *Doku Mōshi*, 2.
first references to literary aspects of the Classics. *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 written by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (d. 104) is regarded as the first. *Mengzi changju* 孟子章句 written by Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201) also noted the rhetoric of the *Mengzi*. Yet such comments appear rarely, as these works pay greater attention to political philosophy.

The literary approach to the Classics started in earnest among Buddhist monks in the Wei-Jin-Nan-Bei-Chao period. Later, Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) started to take note of the superiority of the *Mengzi*’s rhetoric; however briefly. Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi 在 the Song dynasty placed ultimate importance on moral cultivation and philosophy, so discussion of the literary points of the *Mengzi* were rare.

Attention to the rhetoric of the *Mengzi* emerged again with the *Su ping Mengzi* 蘇評孟子 in the Ming dynasty. It was mostly studied by the left wing of the Wang Yangming school from the late Ming.\(^{31}\) The representative commentaries are Li Zhi’s 李贄 (1527–1602) *Sishu ping* 四書評 and Yang Qiyuan’s 楊起元 (1547–1599) *Sishu yan* 四書眼. These commentaries, which also included Buddhist terms,\(^{33}\) were regarded as the culmination of critical study of the Classics by the left wing; however, their critical momentum was not sustained, for they were viewed as too iconoclastic at that time. Rhetorical commentaries on the *Mengzi* reappeared from the middle of the Qing dynasty and evinced all the characteristics of a full rhetorical commentary.\(^{34}\) The most representative is *Mengzi lunwen* 蘇評孟子 written by Niu Yunzhen.

In Korean Neo-Confucianism, early Chosŏn dynasty intellectuals focused on understanding Zhu Xi’s philosophical commentary more than on the Classics themselves. However, in the middle of the Chosŏn dynasty Kim Ch’anghyŏp 金昌協 (1651–1708) and others, so-called guwenjia 古文家 (K. komunga; followers of the style of plain writing characteristic of the pre-Han period), started paying attention to the literary aspects of the Classics and devoting their efforts to analyzing the syntax of literary prose in order to hone their writing skills.\(^{35}\) Wi Paekkyu’s *Maengja ch’aŭi* 義理之言 followed.

After the introduction of Neo-Confucianism in Japan, the Kobunji school 古文辭派 emerged. Kobunji school supporters drew attention to the stylistic features of the Classics

\(^{31}\) See Li Changran, 191.

\(^{32}\) Due especially to his remark that “The Classics are just a historical text,” Li Zhi 李贄 is well known for his critical study of the Classics. According to the study of Yi (2008), characteristics of the *Sishu ping* 四書評 are the harmonious philosophical discussion of Confucianism and Buddhism (rufuhuitong 儒彿會通) and comments on the emotional impact of the text. He also sheds light on the art of verbal expression of the original texts of the Classics and desacralizes Confucius and the canonical texts. For detailed discussion, see Yi Yŏngho, “Yi T’ago ŭi nonŏhak kwa myŏngmal saeroun kyŏnghak ŭi tŭngjang” (Li Zhuowu’s study on the *Analects* and the emergence of a new study of the Confucian Classics in the late Ming dynasty), *Chŏngsin munwa yŏn’gu* 31 (2008): 301–326.


\(^{33}\) For instance, Li Zhi employed the Buddhist word daicabai 大慈大悲 ("great mercy and compassion"), when commenting on the *Analects*. See, Li Zhi. *Sishu ping* (Evaluating the Four Books) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 276.

\(^{34}\) For more details see Li Changran, 325.

\(^{35}\) For detailed discussions, see Song Hyŏkki, *Chosŏn hugi banmun sanmun ŭi iron kwa pip’yŏng* (Theory and criticism of late–Chosŏn sinographic prose) (Seoul: Wŏrin, 2007), 240.
and tried to understand the differences between what they referred to as *guwen* 古文 (J. *kobun*; texts from older sources cited in the Classics) and *jinwen* 今文 (J. *kinbun*; the texts written by the author). They criticized Zhu Xi’s commentary via the literary style of the Classics. The representative scholar of the Kobunji school was Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728). Hirose Tansō was a member of the Ogyū Sorai school, but some scholars in the present have suggested that he held independent views on the study of the Classics.

The critical studies of the Classics by the Wang Yangming school and Kobunji school of the Ogyū Sorai school showed similarities insofar as they specifically dedicated commentary to literary points in the Classics. However, there are also several differences compared to rhetorical commentaries. The critical studies of the Classics presented a harmonious view of Confucianism and Buddhism, *rufuhuitong* 儒彿會通, in contrast to the rhetorical commentary did not. In the same vein, the Kobunji school did not note the emotional impact of the text, unlike the rhetorical commentaries. I show these differences in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rhetorical Commentary</th>
<th>Kobunji School (only <em>Rongo chō</em>)</th>
<th>Left Wing of Wang Yangming School (only <em>Sishu ping</em>)</th>
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<td>Evaluation of the Emotional Impact of the Text</td>
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<td>Art of Verbal Expression</td>
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<td>Desacralization of Confucius and the Classics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criticism of Zhu Xi’s Commentary</td>
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<td>Distinction between <em>guwen</em> and <em>jinwen</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmonization of Confucianism and Buddhism</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Similarities and Differences between the Three Groups

36 The terms *guwen* and *jinwen* have several meanings. When discussing literary style, *guwen* means the style of plain writing characteristic of the pre-Han period that was advocated in the Tang as opposed to *jinwen*, which is the style of a writing that began to emerge in the Han. When disputing which versions of the Classics were genuine, the ones written in pre-Qin script were considered to be *guwen* while the ones written in Han style were considered to be *jinwen*. On the other hand, the Japanese Kobunji school tried to figure out the stylistic differences between cited texts and texts written by the author, when interpreting the Classics. Thus, when the Kobunji school examined the literary style of the Classics, *guwen* refers to cited texts and *jinwen* means the texts written by the author. It differs from canon to canon, but generally speaking, when a Japanese commentator of the Kobunji school annotated the *Mengzi*, *guwen* refers to Chinese texts from before the Warring States period, while *jinwen* refers to later Chinese texts dating back to the Warring States period. For details, see Maruyama Masao, *Nihon seiji shisōshi kenkyū* (Studies in the intellectual history of Tokugawa Japan) (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1958), 78–80; Koyasu Nobukuni, ed., *Nihon shisōshi jiten* (Dictionary of Japanese intellectual history) (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2001), 196; and Yoshikawa Kōjirō, *Jinsai, Sorai, Norinaga* (Three classical philologists of mid-Tokugawa Japan) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2001), 172–174.
In Table 1, △ signifies that the feature is indefinite or that the Maengja ch’aŭi, Mengzi lunwen, and Doku mōshi do not agree on the six categories described in the left wing of this table. These three rhetorical commentaries, for instance, do not strongly criticize Zhu Xi’s commentary, either. They deliver both positive and critical attitudes toward Zhu’s commentary, which reveals that they take a balanced view of Zhu Xi.

Mainly based on the exposition above, the characteristics of a rhetorical commentary can be defined as follows: ① they evaluate the emotional impact of the text, ② they comment on the art of verbal expression—especially rhetoric for the purpose of both embellishment and persuasion, ③ from beginning to end they include both (1) and (2) in the commentary to a great extent, ④ they do not add any references regarding the fundamental features of the texts, but treat (1) and (2) in a well-unified and well-organized manner, and ⑤ they bear no relation to Buddhism.

**Differences Between the Three Rhetorical Commentaries**

**Focus on Different Rhetorical Elements**

There are three elements in classical Chinese literary analysis: yufa 語法—grammar, diction, syntax, and structure; qishi 氣勢—strength, accent, or mood; and yi 意—author’s intention. By and large, intellectuals used the terms yufa, qishi, and yi when analyzing rhetorical aspects of texts.

Yufa, to take the first example, is a structuring element: Fa 法, ciling 諄令, and biyu 比喻 are other equivalent expressions for yufa. Qishi is an aesthetic element and represents the mood of the text: qi 氣, wenshi 文勢, kouqi 口氣, ciqi 辭氣, yushi 語勢, wenqi 文氣, and yiyang 抑揚 are also equivalent to qishi. Yi is the intention, emotion, and/or perception of the author. All these features seem to be atomized, but act symbiotically to constitute the overall style of a text.

As mentioned, the three rhetorical commentaries show similarities in investigating the art of verbal expression. A careful reading of the commentaries, however, unveils that each one emphasizes different elements of rhetoric. To demonstrate this fact, a comparison of the commentaries of Mengzi 1A7 is useful, because Wi, Niu, and Hirose all reveal a particular interest in this section.

First of all, Wi Paekkyu concentrates more on the author’s yi, intention, through yufa and qishi, than the other two authors. Wi in the fragment below comments in detail on the way Mencius communicates his intention:

What King [Xuan] of Qi needed to do was simply to extend the benevolence (ren 仁) that our heart-minds innately possess. Earlier, Mencius followed up by asking, “How is it…?” 何與? to move the King to question thoroughly [his purported inability to act benevolently toward his people]; he then talks about extending benevolence (tuiren 推仁). Since nothing is closer to benevolence than revering one’s family members and loving
one’s children, he could not but use this as a way to guide the king to understanding. Mencius could have chosen many other metaphors about relative ease or difficulty to complement that of “holding a mountain under one’s arm and leaping over the sea,” but his choice of “bowing to an elder” (or “breaking kindling for an elder”) is truly a surprise. The level of reverence needed in order to easily bow to an elder is something that our heart-minds innately possess… After saying “[I] treat [my] elders as elders should be treated [in order to extend this to the elders of others]” and “[I] treat [my] young as the young should be treated [in order to extend this to the young of others]” he goes on to say that “[King Wen’s] example affected his wife” to fully illustrate how he was able to enlighten those near to him, and yet the root of bringing peace and order [to the entire world] is nothing more than this.

This is Wi Paekkyu’s response to the following lines of Mengzi 1A7: “Now, here is kindness sufficient to reach animals, and no benefits are extended from it to the people. How is this?… Now, your kindness is sufficient to reach animals, and no benefits are extended from it to reach the people. How is this?”

Niu Yunzhen interprets the qishi of this passage, and Hirose Tansō has no comment on this passage at all. Meanwhile, Wi Paekkyu interprets its qishi along with other various types of rhetoric—such as questioning, illustrative examples, rhetorical metaphors, and quotations—and insists that the rhetorical devices that Mencius uses in this paragraph indicate his intention to explain to the King the notions of inherent benevolence (ren 仁) and familial affection (qinqin 親親). It should be noted that the notions of inherent benevolence and familial affection as discussed by Wi had been elaborated by Neo-Confucian thinkers.

Second, Niu Yunzhen puts special emphasis on both “qishi” and “the emotional impact of the text.” While Wi Paekkyu makes remarks on the emotional impact of qishi six times and Hirose Tansō only once, Niu Yunzhen comments on this topic fourteen times. With this in mind, it is necessary to take a closer look at Niu Yunzhen’s comments on Mengzi 1A7:

The description is simple and clean… Three phrases come back three times. Rhetoric and the art of verbal expression are turning round and round, and resemble clouds fluttering and turning in the spring wind… His writing seems to sparkle and shine. Mencius’ intention becomes clear in this passage. The word “也” is presented twice in the same passage. I cannot describe how conscious and cheerful these words make me feel… One phrase is repeated continuously, therefore [the qishi] is suddenly dropped and sighs for a long time… Very cool and delightful… The outspoken comment (changyan

37 “齊王所當爲，只是推吾心固有之仁而已，上文連說‘何與’，使王十分喫疑，將説與‘推仁’。而仁莫近於敬親愛子，則不可不以老老幼幼，爲自牖之約。凡事物可與挾山超海，輕重對擧者，不啻多矣，而必以爲長者折枝爲言，誠是意外也。盖爲長折枝之易，是吾心固有之敬也… 旣言‘老老幼幼’，又繼以刑妻，窒切己曉人。而治平之本，元不外此，” in Maengja ch’aui, in Chonjae chip, vol. 9. 1:8b
39 “疾擒陡喝篇，警策處，” in Mengzi lunwen, 1:7a; “復一筆呼應收轉甚緊，” in Mengzi lunwen, 1:8a.
畅言) renders an extremely freewheeling mood… The former passage is magnificent and candid, but he suddenly uses a powerful expression in this passage. The literary grace and affection are extremely alluring.40

Lastly, Hirose Tansō interpreted the *Mengzi* while paying particular attention to “yuфа.” In his comments to 1A7 he refers to yufa the most, mentioning it six times, but qishi the least (just once).41 Hence, our examination thus far leads to the conclusion that Hirose’s comments are associated more with structural aspects of the text. His comments on yufa in 1A7 are as follows:

若無罪: Mencius fathoms the cow’s mind through his own mind. Therefore, the usage of the word “ruo 若” has significant meaning.42
見牛: A single phrase, simple and exquisite.43
吾力: The writings from the Warring States period excel in rhetorical metaphors and can serve as a good model for skillful writing.44
語人曰: When asking a question, he includes these three characters—“yurenyue 語人曰.” This is extremely startling. What he says to the King in the former passage is also a rhetorical metaphor whereby he changes topic.45
殆有甚焉: He accepts the King’s strange question and takes one step forwards to answer. It astonishes the listener.46

Seen from the evidence above, Hirose Tansō praises Mencius’ rhetorical metaphors and explains how these metaphors function in the chapter. Furthermore, he describes the aesthetic effects created through structural aspects of the text.

When compared with one another, the three intellectuals differ in the weight they put on particular kinds of rhetoric. Niu Yunzhen can comment about qishi and the emotional impact of the text because Li Zhi’s *Sishu ping* existed as a precursor. On the other hand, Wi Paekkyu asserts that Mencius used various rhetorical devices in order to express his intention—enlightening the King regarding inherent benevolence, ren, and familial affection, qinqin. These two notions, as we have seen, had been elaborated upon in Neo-Confucianism. This fact reveals that the study of the Classics in the Chosŏn dynasty was not able to free
itself from the Neo-Confucian framework. Lastly, Hirose Tansō’s *Doku Mōshi* shows a stronger stress on *yufa* (presumably because he is influenced by the Kobunji school). These differences between the three countries, resulting from each country’s different historical and cultural background, succinctly demonstrate that their efforts in trying to escape from Neo-Confucianism differed in intensity.

**Assimilation of Different Literary Genres**

One characteristic of rhetorical commentaries is that the borders between commentaries on the Classics and commentaries on literature had begun to break down. However, a careful examination of the three commentaries from each country reveals that each in some ways approaches the *Mengzi* in a style that may be considered typical for criticism of a different literary genre—Wi approached the text as prose, Niu sometimes as if it were fiction, and Hirose as poetry.

First, Wi Paekkyu pays attention to the organization of the texts, such as the structure of chapters, the structure of paragraphs, the structure of sentences, and the structure of phrases. Some examples are detailed below:

1. The great work of Mencius is the illumination of rightfulness and profit; hence, the sentence 何必曰利, 亦有仁義, “Why must Your Majesty use that word ‘profit? What I am provided with are counsels to benevolence and rightousness, and these are my only topics” 48 became the first chapter of the *Mengzi*. 49
2. The chapter about King Hui of Liang 梁惠王 is the first chapter of the *Mengzi*; hence, the opening is about having an audience with King Hui of Liang, while the ending is about the impossibility of obtaining an audience with Duke Ping of Lu 魯平公. How could this [ordering] of the text be devoid of profound significance? The two sinographs “天也” ([My not finding in the prince of Lu a ruler who would confide in me, and put my counsels into practice,) is from Heaven] 50 serve as a critical clue. 51
3. The intention of the *Mengzi*’s opening and ending and the intention of the *Analects* opening and ending have the same goal. The last chapter of the *Analects* is “Xiangyuan 鄉愿” (Village Worthies). Can this be without significance?... Mencius constantly condemns Yang Zhu 楊朱 and Mo Di 墨翟 throughout his life; hence, it is fitting that the last chapter of the *Mengzi* refers to Yang Zhu and Mo Di. (i.e. 7A26) 52

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49 “明義利救戰國, 子輿之大功。故以‘何必利有仁義’，為孟書首章，” in *Maengja ch’a’i*, in *Chonjae chip*, vol. 9. 1:3b.
51 “是為書之首卷，與論語首末，大體一揆也。是以命書曰：‘鄉愿’章為終，亦豈無意乎... 孟子專以闢楊墨為事，則當以楊墨終之，” in *Maengja ch’a’i*, in *Chonjae chip*, vol. 9. 1:41a.
52 “孟子首末所記，與論語首末，大體一揆也。是以末章之上，以‘鄉愿’章為終，亦豈無意乎... 孟子專以闢楊墨為事，則當以楊墨終之，” in *Maengja ch’a’i*, in *Chonjae chip*, vol. 9. 1:41b.
Wi Paekkyu admires the structure of Mengzi’s paragraphs and chapters and, by extension, claims that the structure must be intentional. This fact also reveals his penchant for analyzing the author’s intention through *yufa* and *qishi*. This reflected the fact that the Chosŏn dynasty’s circle of literati had its own unique culture and traditions devoted specifically to the analysis of prose.\(^{53}\)

Second, Niu Yunzhen uses “*pingdian* 評點” as a tool for editing (See Figure 1). *Pingdian* means “punctuate (點) and annotate (評),” and was a tool used by intellectuals to evaluate fictional narratives written in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Given that *pingdian* is an unusual way of editing the Classics, there is no evidence of *pingdian* in rhetorical commentaries from either Chosŏn Korea or Edo Japan.\(^{54}\) By contrast, annotators in China employed *pingdian* as a tool of convenience for commenting on the Classics ever since the Ming dynasty,\(^{55}\) and then elucidated how to improve one’s writing skills.\(^{56}\)

Lastly, interpreting the rhetoric of the *Mengzi*, Hirose Tansō considered *yayun* 押韻 or rhyming. It is generally understood today that rhyme is a technique used in poetry, but it was often utilized in other genres in the Pre-Qin and Han periods.\(^{57}\) Hirose Tansō made the following commentary about the phrase “*laozhi laizhi* 勞之來之 in *Mengzi* 3A4:

> The next four phrases (after “*laozhi laizhi* 勞之來之) are the language of the ancient books. Each phrase consists of a basic rhyme (*chuyun* 礦韻)\(^{58}\) and the word “*lai* 來” is *rusheng* 入聲, or entering tone. There are plenty of these examples in the *Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經). Zhu Xi’s note that “*lai* is *qusheng* 去聲, the falling tone, is incorrect.”\(^{59}\)

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54 The left wing of the Wang Yangming school and the rhetorical commentaries of the Qing dynasty also utilized *pingdian* 評點 as an editing tool. Thus, it can be said that *pingdian* is a Chinese editing style for commentaries. For detailed information, see Li Changran, *Qingdai Mengzi xueshi dagang* (Outline of the history of Mengzi studies in the Qing dynasty) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011), 191–194.

55 Chow mentioned that *pingdian* was broadly used in the commentaries on the Classics in the Ming dynasty and that this phenomenon was caused by the civil service examinations and commercial publishing. For detailed information, see Kaiving Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 189–240; Kaiving Chow, “Writing for Success: Printing, Examinations, and Intellectual Change in Late Ming China,” *Late Imperial China 17* (1996): 120–157.


58 The translation is tentative; the meaning of this term is uncertain.

59 “以下四句，皆古書之語，蓋句句押韻，入聲。詩中多例，朱注以為去聲，誤矣,” in *Doku Mōshi*, 10.
“The next four phrases” mentioned above are, respectively:

勞之來之 Encourage them; lead them on
匡之直之 rectify them; straighten them
輔之翼之 help them; give them wings
使自得之 thus causing them to become possessors of themselves.
又從而振德之 Then follow this up by stimulating them, and conferring benefits on them.

Hirose Tansō criticizes Zhu’s interpretation and offers yunjiao 韻脚 as evidence in interpreting this sentence.60 Yunjiao is a rhyming word that ends a verse. The last words of each passage, lai 來 (L: Chinese ancient pronunciation, guyun 古韻), zhi 直 (di’ét), yi 翼 (āi’ét), de 得 (dě’ét), and de 德 (dě’ét),61 functions as yunjiao. If these words are yunjiao, the next word “zhi 之” has no meaning and therefore functions as a xüci 虚词 (empty function word) rather than as a pronoun.62 Accordingly, he supposes that the word lai is rusheng, not qusheng, and that “laozhi laizhi” should be interpreted as “Encourage them; lead them on.” This interpretation clearly shows that he borrows the notion of rhyme from poetry to better understand the Classics and then sort out Zhu Xi’s incorrect interpretations.

In conclusion, each country’s rhetorical commentary maintained a particular relation to a different literary genre—prose, fiction, and poetry.63 It is possible that this difference was affected by the traditions of the literary circles and/or individual interests of the annotators in each country. That is, each country’s literary circle had its own unique culture and traditions devoted to a specific literary genre—Chosŏn to prose, Qing to fiction, and Edo to poetry, and that this was reflected in their rhetorical commentaries. Surprisingly, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, prose prevailed in the Chosŏn dynasty; fictional narratives prevailed in the Qing dynasty; and poetics prevailed in the Edo period.

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60 Zhu Xi interprets “laozhi laizhi” 劳之来之 as “Encourage the person who is laborious; Lead the person who comes from afar.” 劳者来之, 来者来之. Zhu thinks that the word “lai 來” is qusheng, falling tone, and indicates that the word “zhi 之” is a pronoun indexing a person who comes from afar.

61 The guyun 古韻 of lai 來 is “laishebingzhiyun 來聲之韻 (lai’s initial and zhi’s final).” Guo Xiliang, Hanzi guyin shouce (Handbook of ancient pronunciations of Chinese characters) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2010), 126; the guyun of zhi 直 is “dizhebingzhiyun 定聲之韻 (dī’s initial and zhi’s final).” See Guo Xiliang, 49. The guyun of yi 翼’s is “yishengzhiyun 余聲之韻 (yi’s initial and zhi’s final).” See Guo Xiliang, 65. The guyun of de 德 and de 得 is “duanshebingzhiyun 郡聲之韻 (duan’s initial and zhi’s final).” See Guo Xiliang, 22.

62 For an example, see Kong Yingda, Mashi zhengyi 毛詩正義 (Correct meaning of the Maoshī [Odes]), in Shisanjing zhushu 十三經注疏 (Thirteen Classics) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 29.

63 Interestingly, this exegetical method—analyzing rhetoric—was not limited to interpreting the Mengzi. This commentary style was extended to other Classics and to history books; interpreting the Historical Records (Shiji 史記) and the Eighteen Histories in Brief (Shiba shilue 十八史略), Wi Paekkyu paid attention to the structural organization of these texts; and interpreting the Odes (Shijing 詩經) and the Historical Records, Niu Yunzhen employed pingdian. A detailed analysis and comparison of these four texts is a task for future research.

For more details, see “Yojŏn sŏl” 奈良探 (View on the chapter Cannon of Yao), “Ugong sŏl” 烏共探 (View on the chapter Tribute of Yu), “Saryak sŏl” 史略 (View on the Eighteen Short Historical Stories), and “Paegichŏn sŏl” 伯夷傳 (View on the Biography of Bo Yi) in Chonjae chip, vol. 11, and the Shiji pingzhu 史記評注 (Notes and comments on the Record of the Great Historian) and the Shizhi 詩志 (Record of the Odes) written by Niu Yunzhen.
Significance Of The Emergence Of Rhetorical Commentaries

What is the significance of the emergence of rhetorical commentaries? They illustrate how the borders between commentaries on the Classics and commentaries on literature had begun to break down. This is a byproduct of how East Asian intellectuals who felt limited by Neo-Confucianism of the eighteenth century searched for alternative social ideologies. At this point, East Asian intellectuals avidly looked for ways to overcome the difficulties facing their societies.

In addition, the emergence of the commentaries also represents the increased freedom of the contemporary reader. The three authors under consideration worshiped sages such as Confucius and Mencius, but there was a difference in their attitude toward the Classics. Their rhetorical commentaries and their evaluations of the emotional impact of the texts show evidence that they approached the texts in a new, freer manner, which allowed them to discuss aspects that thus far had been largely neglected. Taking a more unfettered view of the text, they enlarged the scope of interpretation of the Classics.

Secondly, the results of this study reinforce our understanding of intellectuals as literary and pragmatic figures. East Asian intellectuals were mainly regarded as men of virtue who should devote themselves to both moral cultivation and to the public good during their entire lifetime. The concept of the intellectual as a predominantly literary person had been disregarded over time. Yet literature had an inseparable relationship to their lives: poetry was still taken very seriously and served not only as their main hobby, but as secondary study material for the civil examinations. Writing ability was the main criterion for succeeding in the civil examinations; hence, reading and studying literature were essential. In this respect, the rhetorical commentaries clearly recognized that the Classics could be a practical tool for improving one’s writing skills. Thus, these three commentaries are meaningful given that they show the transformation of the intellectuals’ thoughts and attitudes, all of which had become more pragmatically oriented than in the past.

Thirdly, this study contributes to an understanding of the dynamics of the Confucian tradition in East Asia. Although Confucianism originated from China, it has been subjected to diverse interpretations by many intellectuals from different times and countries in East Asia. That is, East Asian intellectuals did not passively accept the teachings of the Classics; rather, while internalizing the Classics, they continuously re-created them. As a result, the interpretations are myriad even though the Classics remain the same.

Lastly, this study points to the potential of East Asian studies of the Classics. One of the reasons why rhetorical commentaries have not received intensive academic attention is that they are relatively few in number, particularly when individual countries are considered, and that they are quite different in nature from the majority of the commentaries. However, when one expands the scope of investigation from one country to East Asia as a region, rhetorical commentaries can be viewed as an exegetical tradition. This expansion helps us investigate

the distinct features of rhetorical commentaries in comparison to other exegetical traditions such as the philosophical tradition and the philological tradition. Additionally, the defining characteristics of each country’s style of rhetorical commentary also become more distinct when compared with those of other countries.65

65 Clearly, further study on this topic is required. First, there were other rhetorical commentaries in the Qing dynasty and in the Edo and Meiji periods that could not be included in this study. Secondly, each country’s circle of literati had its own unique culture and traditions, and this was reflected in the rhetorical commentaries written in each country; an aspect that I have been unable to pay sufficient attention. Further research is needed to gain a fuller picture of these different commentary traditions. First within individual countries and then through a comparatively study of different East Asian nations.
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