Concept of Ki according to the Korean scripture, *Sam Il Shin Go*

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Abstract: One of the three old Korean scriptures, *Sam Il Shin Go*, contains well defined concept of Ki. *Sam Il Shin Go* means the teachings of God on Three and One. Its origin goes back to more than thousands of years. This scripture describes on the nature and origins of human beings and all other materials. According to this scripture, there are two kinds of Ki, i.e., One Ki[{気} and Ki[{氣}]. The self-organization of One Ki results in a dynamic state of the interaction of three elements, Mind[{心}], Ki[{氣}], Body[{身}]. In this paper, the difference in concept and properties between One Ki and Ki has been discussed including the nature of the self-organization of One Ki.

Keywords: Ki, One Ki, Sam Il Shin Go.

Introduction

The concept of Ki is known to be an essential point of oriental philosophy, however, there are so many different interpretations on Ki depending on the literatures. *Sam Il Shin Go*, one of the three old Korean scriptures which goes back to thousands of years, describes systematically on the concept of Ki. It is a very short scripture and actually it is composed with only 366 Chinese characters. One of the most unique and characteristic point on the concept of Ki according to this scripture is the differentiation of One Ki[{気}] and Ki[{氣}].

*Sam Il Shin Go* means God's teaching on the three and one. In which one and three indicates One Ki and three elements, including Ki, respectively. To understand clearly, the relation between One and Three should be discussed first in detail. Actually, this is one of the most important and essence idea of Korean traditional philosophy.  

1 According to *Sam Il Shin Go*, one means One God[{神}] and also at the same time One Ki[{気}]. This is the origin of everything including human beings. One Ki is in a non-polar state[{無極}]. One Ki creates everything in universe through self-organization. By this self organization, One Ki differentiates into three elements, namely, R{理}, Ki[{氣}], Ki[{極}]. These are equivalent to Mind[{心}], Ki[{氣}], Body[{身}], respectively. These three elements are known as three-polar state[{太極}]. For the nature of these three elements, it has been described as "it is three but it can not be divided into three". To use a metaphor, it corresponds to a computer in operational state through interaction of software, electricity, and hardware. We know that these three elements are necessary for the operation of a computer. However, these three elements cannot be divided into three when in operation. Software, electricity, and hardware are corresponding to the mind, Ki, body, respectively. This is the relationship between One and Three.

This relationship between One and Three connotes that everything can exist because of the flow of Ki. If the flow of Ki terminates, it will disappear. In other words, everything including inanimate objects is in a state of alive in the point of view of Ki flow. When water in a lake is calm, it is in a state of non-polarity, One. It becomes three-polar state when the wind blows on the surface of water and waves appear on the surface. This is the real appearance of everything in universe. One and Three are somewhat like head and tail of a coin.

At first glance, Body may be understood as a kind of permanent and unchangeable object such as computer hardware. According to the Sam Il Shin Go, Body exists between Mind and Ki. Everything including material objects cannot exist or appear in this universe without Mind and Ki. In other words, Ri[理] and Ki[気]. Following this concept, it can be said that the body itself is in a state of dynamic movement that continuously regenerates itself through the flow of Ki. Everything in the universe is in a state of dynamic movement and alive.

2. One Ki and Ki

One Ki is the foundation and also the nature of everything. It is in a state of non-polarity and hence it does not have any characters. It is a kind of flat cloth without any movement. When the wind blows, this cloth begins to sway and there appears a wave on the cloth. This is the real shape of everything. The wind that causes the appearance of wave is Ki. In this sense, Ki may be interpreted as vital energy. In this dynamic universe, Ki is everywhere and its nature is One Ki. The relationship between One Ki and Ki can be expressed as below.

three-polar state[太極]→[用]
One Ki [一氣] ⇔ Rи[理], Ki[氣], Ki[機].
[體]<→ non-polar state[無極]

The three elements cannot be divided into three when it is in dynamic state as was mentioned. This means that those three elements exist together always and interact every time. This indicates that Ki is a kind of energy with information. Ki flows following the information in which Ri is contained. This information, Mind or Ri, decides the characters of Ki and hence its direction of influence. This is the difference between energy and Ki. Ki is a kind of energy with a quality. Energy in modern Physics has characters of potential only, i.e., it is a kind of energy with quantity only. Because of this character of Ki, a reversible process is possible for Ki that has been demonstrated by many Ki practitioners.

These two elements, Mind and Ki decide the state of Body. In other words, the state of body, i.e., health depends on the Mind and Ki. Based on the Sam Il Shin Go, the quality of Ki can be expressed as "clear" or "turbid". Clear Ki can be interpreted as a light in phase such as laser light or a wind blowing in one direction continuously, i.e., laminar flow. Turbid Ki can be described as a light from a bulb that is not in phase or a wind in turbulent flow. Clear Ki is a Ki in phase and turbid Ki is a Ki out of phase. From this explanation, we can find again that Ki is a kind of energy with quality. Because of this character of Ki, interpretation of the effect of Ki by five elements, i.e., wood, fire, soil, metal, and water, is possible.

It is also said that life depends on Ki. If Ki is clear, the life will be long and vice versa. Happiness or disaster depends on the Mind. By the state of Mind and Ki, the condition of Body is decided and it can be either healthy or unhealthy. Those three elements, Mind, Ki, and Body appear as feeling[感], breathing[息], and touching[觸], respectively.

3. Conclusion

One Ki is a kind of absolute concept and Ki is a kind of relative concept. One Ki is the nature of
everything and primitive matter with which everything appears. Ki is a kind of wave appears on the texture of One Ki. It contains information in itself as a form of Mind. By the combination of Mind and Ki, Body appears. Body is an alive existence and this concept applies to all of the creatures. Ki, a kind of vital energy with information, decides life of everything. If Ki does not flow, the object will disappear. On the other hand, if it flows very well, the Body will be very healthy. This is one of the reasons for exercising discipline. As the flow rate of Ki is high, the body is in a good health state. This can be interpreted as the source of homeostasis that is directly related with immunology. In one word, Ki is a kind of energy with quality, clear or turbid. Confusion on the concept of Ki mainly has been aroused by the mixed use of Ki for both One Ki and Ki. One Ki is a primitive matter[體] and Ki is a cause of operation or motion[用].

Reference

(International Society of Life Information Science, 2004)

1) Yuk Hae Jong Kyung Sa Bu Hap Pyun, 1-45, Chungjoo, Onnoori, 1948 [in Korean]