


## Article

# Chastity as a Virtue

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes two philosophers' views on chastity as a virtue, comparing Song Siyeol, a Korean neo-Confucian philosopher of the east, and David Hume, a Scottish philosopher. Despite the importance in and impact on women's lives, chastity has been understated in religio-philosophical fields. The two philosophers' understandings and arguments differ in significant ways and yet share important common aspects. Analyzing the views of Song and Hume helps us better understand and approach the issue of women's chastity, not only as a historical phenomenon but also in the contemporary world, more fully and deeply. The analysis will provide an alternative way to re-appropriate the concept of chastity as a virtue.

**Keywords:** chastity; Song Siyeol; David Hume; virtue; gender; Korean neo-Confucianism

## 1. Introduction

Chastity, understood as a commitment or disposition to remain innocent of extramarital sexual intercourse, has been considered a virtue among human beings for a long time, not only in traditional societies but in contemporary societies as well.<sup>1</sup> The value of chastity has been recognized since very early times and regardless of geographical location; it was an important virtue in ancient Greece and China, for example. This duty of chastity remains widespread in contemporary societies, which, in general, take monogamy as the moral standard regarding intimate human relationships. In a number of countries, the violation of chastity is recognized as unlawful and has consequences within the penal system.<sup>2</sup> The virtue of chastity, however, has been discussed one-sidedly and almost always as "female" chastity.

Some influential philosophers have paid attention to the issue of chastity. In this essay, I will analyze chastity as a virtue as it was understood by the Korean neo-Confucian philosopher Song Siyeol 宋時烈 (1607–1689) and Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776). Song and Hume both lived in the period spanning the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and left substantial writings about women's chastity. Both philosophers considered women's chastity as a moral virtue and vigorously defended its importance. Their views represent their particular times and cultures but most of what they argue persists in and informs contemporary Korean and Western societies. Their understandings and arguments differ in significant ways and yet share important common aspects. Analyzing the views of Song and Hume helps us better understand and approach the issue of women's chastity, not only as a historical phenomenon but also in the contemporary world, more fully and deeply.

<sup>1</sup> There are other, interesting conceptions of chastity as well; for example, chastity can and has been understood as abstinence from all sexual activity. In such a sense it can and has been applied to certain men, for example celibate priests, as well as women. In this essay, though, we are interested in chastity primarily in regard to marriage.

<sup>2</sup> For example, adultery was outlawed since 1953 in South Korea as a means to protect the legal rights of married women. It made South Korea one of the few non-Muslim countries to regard marital infidelity as a criminal act. The law was rescinded by the Constitutional Court in 2015.

After analyzing their views, I will attempt to find a new way to re-appropriate concepts and ideas in the writings of Song and Hume from a feminist perspective and show that by rethinking chastity we can discover that it has important implications for our lives today. My analysis will also provide a preliminary sketch of an alternative way to conceptualize the general distinction between natural and artificial virtues.

## 2. Chastity in the Chinese Classics

The Confucian concept of chastity can be traced back to the Chinese Classics. The concept was born and justified as a means to control a wife's sexuality in order to protect the purity of a patrilineage. The concept evolved and took on various meanings throughout the course of history. Sometimes the primary focus was about how many times a woman can marry; over time, the concept of chastity developed into a more abstract virtue for all women.<sup>3</sup>

Chastity is represented in Classical Chinese by the term *zhenjie* 貞節. In the *Book of Changes*, *zhen* 貞 was used to denote a general personal quality of "firm correctness or perseverance". Although the term was used for everyone, it also had specific, gendered connotations. "Firm correctness or perseverance in a wife brings good fortune; she is to follow with an unchanged heart-mind to the end of her life. A husband determines what is right; for him to follow [like a wife] brings misfortune".<sup>4</sup> When associated with women, the character *zhen* had two primary meanings: Women understand and maintain their proper position, which is in the inner quarters, and women maintain a long marital relationship by maintaining their docility, another womanly virtue. The hexagrams of *Jiaren* (家人 Family) and *Heng* (恆 Long-lastingness) present good examples of how *zhen* is gendered. The hexagram *Jiaren* (家人) reads:

It is advantageous for women to maintain firm correctness and perseverance. The *Tuan* commentary says: In *jiaren* (family), the proper place for the woman is inside [the family home], and the proper place for the man is outside [the family home]. When both man and woman are in their proper places, this is the great appropriateness (*yi* 義) of Heaven (*tian* 天) and earth (*di* 地).<sup>5</sup>

Although it had a range of different meanings in early texts, the character *zhen* itself was gender neutral in the sense that it was not inherently connected to sexuality. However, *zhen* took a new turn in the early Han dynasty. Han texts began to emphasize women's sexuality. The *Book of Rites*, a collection of writings compiled in the early part of the first century B.C.E. from various late Zhou, Qin, and Han Dynasties sources, explicitly forbade women's remarriage. This marked a dramatic departure from the earlier ideal of seeking to make a spousal union last a long time. This new obligation required a wife to remain faithful to her husband to the end of her life, even after he dies. Remaining chaste throughout one's lifetime became the new standard of wifely virtue. "*Zhen*" now became explicitly connected to women and their sexuality. A woman who remarried was judged to be "not firmly correct (*buzhen* 不貞)."<sup>6</sup>

In the works of Liu Xiang (劉向, 79–8 B.C.E.), a Confucian scholar of the Han Dynasty, the terms *jie* 節 and *zhenjie* 貞節 appear extensively. The *Ancient Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Gu Lie nü zhuan* 古列女傳) distinguished *zhen* from *jie*. In this work, the chapters "The Chaste and Compliant (*zhenshun* 貞順)" and "The Principled and Righteous (*jiye* 節義)" present exemplary women who are commended for various virtuous deeds. The former chapter introduced women who did not remarry

<sup>3</sup> For the detailed discussion of the concept of chastity and its related concepts, and how ancient and Confucian views originated, see (Lee 2005), especially chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> See the hexagram *Heng* 恆 in the *Book of Changes*. English translation is adopted from (Wang 2003, p. 41).

<sup>5</sup> See the hexagram *Jiaren* 家人 in the *Book of Changes*. English translation is adopted from (Wang 2003, p. 41).

<sup>6</sup> The First Emperor of Qin said, "If a woman has a child, but gets remarried, [that is] betraying [her] dead husband and not firmly correct (*buzhen*)."<sup>6</sup> See *Shi ji* 史記 6.34a (Sima n.d.).

after their husbands died or who remained faithful to one man, while the latter included women who showed loyalty to various relationships, such as those with cousins, neighbors, step-children, or rulers. In general, *zhen* is more concerned with women's sexual fidelity, while *jie* emphasizes woman's social duties. And so, in combination, *zhen* and *jie* concern a wife's fidelity to her husband as well as her primary social responsibilities. In the *Garden of Persuasions* (*Shuo Yuan* 說苑),<sup>7</sup> *zhenjie* appears as a single word that is specifically related to women and indicates a wife's chastity, which included not only exclusive sexual fidelity to her husband while he is alive but also not remarrying even after her husband's death. By the Han Dynasty, women's chastity came to imply that a wife owes a complete, life-long duty of fidelity to her husband, and that very duty is a duty she has toward and within society (Lee 2005, p. 181).

The meaning of chastity took another turn after the Song Dynasty (960–1279). The neo-Confucian philosopher Cheng Yi (程頤, 1033–1107) is famous for saying, "Starving to death is a very minor matter; losing one's integrity (*shejie* 失節) is a matter of the gravest importance," suggesting that it was better for an impoverished widow to die of starvation than to betray her husband by remarrying.<sup>8</sup> Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200) reiterated Cheng Yi's comment by including this saying in the *Reflections on Things at Hand* (*Jinsi lu* 近思錄)<sup>9</sup> and the *Elementary Learning* (*Xiaoxue* 小學).<sup>10</sup> In his explanation of the hexagram Gou 姤, Zhu Xi said, "If one *yin* meets five *yang*, a woman's virtue is not firmly correct and [her] boldness and strength (壯) are excessive. If [a man] takes her as his mate, it will be harmful!"<sup>11</sup> In this passage, the "meeting" of *yin* and *yang* is interpreted as sexual intercourse. If a woman has sexual relationships with more than one partner, she is too bold and strong to be a wife. In other words, women's sexual desire was considered "*buzhen*"; moreover, the ideal of "firm correctness or perseverance" was applied to all women, including girls, not only wives.

Throughout the course of Chinese history, the virtue of chastity was almost exclusively applied only to women; it was a gender-specific concept. A chaste woman (*zhennu* 貞女) was a wife who knew her proper position in her husband's family and who made the relationship long-lasting with her ductile nature.<sup>12</sup> A wife's sexual fidelity was highlighted, sometimes explicitly and at other times indirectly, and extended beyond the death of her husband. Her chastity and fidelity was a social as well as personal duty because it was regarded as the necessary means to secure a stable family, which, in turn, was thought necessary for maintaining the political stability of a country. Through the Qin and Han as well as the Song and Ming Dynasties, female chastity as a virtue was highly conceptualized and prevailed, and then it was theorized and applied more strictly.<sup>13</sup>

The sense and importance of female chastity originated from the rise of patrilineal consciousness, at least as found in the written documents of social elites. From the beginning of the Eastern Zhou, the ideal of widow chastity began to be exalted by some moralists. This way of thinking gained popularity during the Han period among the new elites who found that patrilineal morality was a useful way to guard their patrilineal inheritances (Hinsch 2011, pp. 44–45). In other words, "the exchange of women," or to be accurate, the commodification of women's sexuality and reproductive capacity,<sup>14</sup> gave rise to women's chastity as a social value.

<sup>7</sup> *Shuo yuan* 說苑3.11a (Liu n.d.).

<sup>8</sup> *Er Cheng yishu* 二程遺書22B:5b (Cheng n.d.). The English translation is adopted from (Ebrey 1993, p. 199).

<sup>9</sup> *Jinsi lu* 近思錄6.5b (Zhu and Lü n.d.).

<sup>10</sup> *Xiaoxue ji zhu* 小學集注 5.22b (Zhu and Chen n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> *Yuanben Zhouyi benyi* 原本周易本義 2.11b (Zhu n.d.).

<sup>12</sup> Ann Pang-White argues that the Song neo-Confucian scholars, such as Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi, thought that men also have a duty to be chaste and faithful to their spouses (Pang-White 2014, pp. 438, 451). Although it is true that they endorsed the view, they did not think a violation of chastity so morally bad for men as for women. In this sense, chastity is very much a "gendered" virtue, insofar as its moral importance varies according to gender. I further discuss this gendered aspect in the latter part of this paper.

<sup>13</sup> Liu Jihua 劉紀華, "Funü fengsu gao 婦女風俗考" in *Zhongguo funü shi lunji* 中國婦女史論集 1994. Cited in (Lee 2005, 466n50).

<sup>14</sup> Gerda Lerner corrects Levi-Strauss's concept of "the exchange of women", arguing that "it is women's sexuality and reproductive capacity which is so treated. The distinction is important. Women never became "things", nor were they so perceived" (Lerner 1986, p. 213).

This way of thinking may well have led thinkers to espouse the patrilineal morality and valorize and embellish the value of chastity. Moreover, some women not only internalized this expression of female virtue but also actively practiced the ideal of rejecting remarriage. In extreme cases, women killed themselves in order to avoid forced remarriage, thereby controlling their own fates and obtaining a guaranteed honor and recognition by becoming “martyr(s) to female virtue” (Hinsch 2011, p. 48). Female rejection of remarriage, as a way to maintain the newly evolved conception of chastity, was a requirement for respectability, a virtue.

### 3. Song Siyeol: Chastity as an Ethical Issue

Neo-Confucian philosophers of Joseon Korea (1392–1910), a dynasty that explicitly adopted Confucianism as its ideological foundation, embraced the Chinese neo-Confucian view on women’s chastity, represented primarily as a ban on women’s remarriage. Joseon neo-Confucians attributed the fall of the previous, Goryeo (918–1392), dynasty to its moral corruption. One of the important manifestations of this purported corruption was the sexual disorder of the Goryeo and especially the disorder caused by women. Joseon neo-Confucians attempted to correct this moral chaos by applying the ban on women’s remarriage. The early Joseon legislators dedicated great effort to diminish and restrict the social status of all sons of remarried women, regardless of their father. For example, the *National Code* barred the offspring of remarried women from civil and military office (Deuchler 1992, p. 72). Debates over the ban on remarriage, however, did not end easily and continued throughout the seventeenth century.

Song Siyeol (宋時烈, 1607–1689) was a philosopher and politician, and a faithful follower of Zhu Xi’s orthodox neo-Confucian teachings. He was not only influential during his time but also throughout the later Joseon period. His views contributed to shaping the Korean orthodox interpretation of this contentious issue. Due to his significant position both among scholars and officials, he was a part of the discussion and debate on the ban of women’s remarriage.

Song understood women’s remarriage as intimately connected to male family members’ virtue. When he expressed his disagreement with a legal ban on women’s remarriage, he was harshly criticized for promoting licentious deeds; his loyalty as a subject was scrutinized and he was held in suspicion by his colleagues in court.<sup>15</sup> Song Siyeol justified his opposition to the ban with several related arguments. First, sexuality is a natural part of being human. Therefore, it is natural for most people to follow their desires. Second, the sages did not forbid women’s remarriage. To the contrary, they established distinctive mourning garments for remarried mothers and stepfathers. Third, we should not forget to show sympathy for the unfortunate (among them orphans and widows) and for the parents of widows. Fourth, given that it was justified in terms of loyalty, the ban was hypocritical in singling women out for a lack of fidelity. For if the ban against remarriage is based on the virtue of loyalty and there is a strong analogy between the loyalty of a (male) subject and his lord on the one hand and the loyalty of a (female) wife toward her husband on the other, why are men not penalized for serving successive lords while women are penalized for marrying more than once? Lastly, the ban has given rise to too many false accusations of infidelity, which has had a deleterious effect on society.<sup>16</sup>

Song Siyeol recognized that the issue of remarriage has a link to basic human nature (in regard to things like sexuality, survival, and concerns for children) and also believed that it entailed negative social consequences (in regard to things like the control of unruly passions and the maintenance of patrilineal). But, he argued, the desired channeling and managing of natural inclinations could not be achieved through coercion. A socially sanctioned, legally enforced ban would not work; the desired

<sup>15</sup> *Songja daejeon* 宋子大全 13.36a-b (Song 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Once the ban on women’s remarriage was officially discussed, Confucians began to scrutinize each other’s family histories, often purely for political purposes. Not all cases that arose from such heightened scrutiny were based on sound evidence. See, for example, the issue referenced in footnote 15, in which Song Siyeol’s moral and political integrity were unfairly questioned simply for endorsing the ban. I have analyzed his ban on women’s remarriage in detail in my other work.

results could only be attained and sustained by effecting an internal transformation of character. This internal transformation would result in women not remarrying, but this desired outcome would be produced from women choosing not to remarry based on their cultivated “natural disposition”—an idea I shall explain below. Song pointed to his ancestress, Lady Ryu, as an ideal model of chastity and symbol of women’s virtue. He praised her, saying, “[Her] nature was like the will of an incorruptible man, [thereby she] remained chaste till her death.”<sup>17</sup> He further explained that “[W]ithout any restraint of law or circumstances, [she] did not follow the custom, [but was able to make] her correct and persevering mind (*zhenxin* 真心) brighter and inborn heart-mind firmer.”<sup>18</sup> Song argued that Lady Ryu’s deed was possible not because of external forces and coercion—legally mandated and enforced prohibitions; rather, it was the spontaneous manifestation of her moral nature.

When Song Siyeol claimed that her action was “natural” and “spontaneous”, he was appealing to a set of background beliefs shared by almost all neo-Confucians. First, she, like all human beings, was born with a pure and perfect fundamental nature and a natural disposition toward goodness, which, in this case, was described in terms of possessing a correct and persevering mind. At the same time, this natural disposition needed to be preserved and nurtured. Nurturing requires following a moral example, a teacher, who will “lead them with excellence and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves.”<sup>19</sup> A great moral teacher can even move people toward the good through the influence of personal example and virtue and through ritual practice, without them even realizing that they are improving.<sup>20</sup> Drawing upon this commonly shared set of ideas, Song argued that women’s moral transformation is an effect that to a significant extent is brought about through the moral influence of males (family members), that “moved [them] toward the good without them even realizing they are improving”.

Song Siyeol’s discussion of women’s remarriage clearly reveals the interconnection and interplay between nature and nurture. Human beings have two seemingly contrasting dispositions. On the one hand, they possess a natural tendency to fulfill their desires; this is natural and not a negative thing at all per se. As a result, we should not punish people for following their nature and fulfilling their desires, as long as they proceed to do so in the right ways and to the proper extent. Nevertheless, human beings are also born with the sprouts or beginnings of goodness. By nurturing these nascent tendencies, they can draw closer to sagehood. Rightness (義) is a prominent quality of moral sages, and for women rightness is manifested in refraining from remarrying.

This line of argument naturally might lead one to question why chastity was unequally applied to women and not equally to both men and women. If it is a spousal virtue constituted by both nature and nurture, why is it not equivalently obligatory for men as well as women? In Confucianism, at least in its theory, a heterosexual couple consists of one male and one female. It seems that wife and husband clearly owe each other mutual loyalty, and neither should remarry. Another related question was provided by Jeong Jedu 鄭齊斗 (1649–1736),<sup>21</sup> the foremost figure in the Yangming (陽明) school of Korea<sup>22</sup> and a contemporary of Song Siyeol. Jeong posed the following question: if chastity is a

<sup>17</sup> *Dongchundang jip* 同春堂集 16.11b (Song 2013). Dongchundang 同春堂 Song Jun’gil (宋浚吉 1606–72) was a cousin of Song Siyeol. They worked together on the project to receive a special honor for their ancestress. For the details of the process and meaning, see (Gim 2004).

<sup>18</sup> *Songja daejeon* 201.1a–2b (Song 2013).

<sup>19</sup> *Analects* 2.3 (He and King 1999, p. 16); Cf. (Ames and Rosemont 1998, p. 76).

<sup>20</sup> *Lunyu jizhu* 論語集注 4.8a–b. (Zhu n.d.).

<sup>21</sup> Jeong Jedu is the foremost important figure of Yangming School in Korea. Before he immersed himself in Yangming learning, he studied under Pak Sech’ae (朴世采 1631–95), one of the Westerners (Sŏin 西人), but later became the head of the Young Doctrine (Sorŏn 小論) faction, opposed Song Siyeol, who was a head of the Old Doctrine (Norŏn 老論) faction. Jeong exchanged six letters with Song Siyeol.

<sup>22</sup> The Yangming School refers to the school of philosophy based on the thought of the Ming dynasty philosopher, Wang Shouren (王守仁 1472–1529; style name Yangming 陽明). The Yangming School is commonly known for their emphasis on the cultivation of one’s individual heart-mind (*xin* 心), and less on the mastery of the kind of objective knowledge highlighted by the orthodox Zhu Xi School. In Korea, the Yangming School was often considered as a form of heretical learning in contrast to “right learning (正學)” of Zhu Xi’s orthodox teaching. In the late Joseon period, Jeong Jedu followed a



wifely virtue, then in cases where a woman is no longer the wife of a man, does she still owe him the duty of loyalty? In answering Jeong's query, despite his call for men to be chaste as well, Song made clear just how strongly he understood chastity as a distinctively "womanly" virtue. Song insisted that even after a marriage ended, a woman must remain chaste and must not remarry. That way she accords with "heavenly principle and earthly rightness (天經地義)."<sup>23</sup> In Jeong Jedu's thought, the spousal relation is based on a kind of mutual agreement and both parties owe the same duty toward one another. Song Siyeol dismissed this view and instead focused on women's duty and nature. He distinguished what was the ritually proper behavior from what was morally obligatory. After a marriage union is dissolved, a woman's "not wearing mourning garments for her previous in-laws" follows the practical circumstances (實), but "not remarrying" is a moral obligation in accordance with the "unchanging pattern-principle" (不易之理). Based on his understanding of neo-Confucian philosophy, Song Siyeol concluded that chastity was not only a "wifely" virtue (婦德) but also a "womanly" virtue (女德). In this way, acting appropriately (in response to practical circumstances) is connected to Heavenly pattern-principle.

#### 4. Hume: Chastity as an Artificial Virtue

Hume defined a marriage, the union of female and male, as "an engagement entered into by mutual consent, and has for its end the propagation of the species." (Hume 1987, p. 181) In principle, Hume believed in monogamy and was against divorce, which was the "European practice with regard to marriage" of his time (Hume 1987, p. 190). In "Of Polygamy and Divorces," Hume criticized polygamy and voluntary divorce. He argued that there are "three unanswerable objections against divorce: children's suffering (at the hands of their step-mothers), undermining the base of marriage, which is "friendship," and the danger posed to marriage when the union is not "entire and total" (Hume 1987, pp. 189–90). From this essay, it seems that for Hume the strict prohibition of sexual intercourse outside of marriage applies to both wife and husband.

However, another of Hume's essays, "Of Chastity and Modesty", reveals that chastity actually meant the "disinclination toward non-marital sexual relations in women and girls" (Cohon 2008, p. 163). It is natural for both women and men to have a strong temptation to infidelity. According to Hume, however, the temptation is much stronger in women and a restraint should be imposed on women "in order to counter-balance so strong a temptation . . . to infidelity". However, a strong motivation to fidelity alone would not be sufficient nor would be the defamation associated with infidelity, because women especially are "apt to over-look remote motives in favor of any present temptation" (Hume 1896, p. 571).

Moreover, women hold the key to social stability, which in turn rests upon stable and healthy families. In order to establish and sustain such families, it is crucial for men to be able to believe that their offspring "are really their own" so that they will "labour for the maintenance and education of their children" (Hume 1896, p. 571). The length and feebleness of human infancy also makes it important that the union of male and female lasts for a considerable period of time (Hume 1896, p. 570). In order to secure a man's consanguineous connection to the children from his union with a woman, the woman must be chaste. Her passion for infidelity must be restrained to keep the union. Hume suggests teaching females with ductile minds about chastity in their infancy and presenting this as a general rule that must be followed. Once this general rule is established, it will be extended and applied to women who have passed their child-bearing age in order to secure its constancy and strength.

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tradition of the Ganghwa Island scholars who were devoted to the teaching of Wang Yangming in Korea. Later scholars attribute the development of the Yangming School in Korea to Jeong Jedu. See (Chung 1995, p. 34) and (Grayson 2002, p. 134).

<sup>23</sup> That is to say, her act is in accordance with Heaven's law and earth's principle, therefore natural and unchangeable. See *Songja daejeon* 39.29b-30b (Song 2013).

Hume presents female chastity as an example of an artificial virtue in contrast to what he calls natural virtue. According to Hume, natural virtues, such as benevolence, are character traits that are not socially invented but are expressions of human nature. These traits are solely a consequence of how things are in the world. Actions manifesting natural virtues directly benefit someone “every time” they are performed. On the other hand, artificial virtues are socially invented. The goodness of such traits depends on inculcated social practices. Actions manifesting artificial virtues may not benefit anyone when performed on a given occasion; however, they contribute in a systematic way to practices that are greatly beneficial to all. “The artificial virtues are both conventional and emotional prostheses that remedy our natural defects” (Cohon 2008, p. 233).

The artificial virtues are genuine traits of character and dispositions to feel certain motivating passions. They are also genuine virtues because we approve these traits on considering them from the common point of view. Natural virtues alone are not enough to provide solutions for certain social problems because of deficiencies in the natural sentiments of human beings. Human beings, therefore, invent new emotional dispositions that yield a more enduring solution. Female chastity does not arise spontaneously out of human nature; as noted above, it is opposed to natural human inclinations; but people come to approve of it based on learning, practice, and custom. A given chaste act may not benefit anyone directly, and deprive those involved of genuine pleasure, but chastity as a policy contributes to the benefit of all in general. Chastity presents a prime example of an artificial virtue.<sup>24</sup>

Contemporary philosophers have raised questions about Hume’s accounts of chastity as an artificial virtue concerning his assumptions, unequal application (double standard), etc. For example, among his dubious assumptions is the claim that men will only love, provide for, and work to raise children if they know the children are their biological offspring. This would mean that adopted children are never loved, provided for, or nurtured, which is simply false. Hume seems here to underestimate the degree to which natural affection for one’s kin is transferable and flexible in its application.

As noted above, Hume also highlighted the necessity of chastity for women because they purportedly are inclined to a stronger temptation for infidelity.<sup>25</sup> He assumes women’s nature is more inclined to infidelity, while silently being much more generous and forgiving toward men. It is only females who must “cultivate the counter-to-nature virtue of chastity” (Baier 1979, p. 141). It seems that Hume declares that proper education of women necessarily follows from the features of women’s bodies (Hough 2000, p. 220). The adequacy of Hume’s assumptions about the possibility of distinguishing natural from artificial lives has been questioned (Herdt 2000, p. 300), as has his particular account of chastity. Annette Baier rightly points out that Hume’s account of the demand for female chastity depends on his psychological, epistemological, and “anatomical” premises concerning the natural uncertainty of paternity, an assumption of patriarchy and patrilineality, and an appeal to a double standard (Baier 1979, pp. 7–8).

Summing up some of the primary weaknesses of Hume’s account, Nancy E. Snow articulates four reasons why Hume’s discussion of chastity is oppressive for women. First, the virtue of chastity does not apply to both genders. Second, women are assumed to be more susceptible to sexual desires, and thereby inferior in their ability to resist a temptation to extramarital relationship. Third, his assumptions attribute weakness to men, who are unable or unwilling to support their non-biological

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<sup>24</sup> There is a debate whether chastity is a typical artificial virtue. Annette Baier argues that Hume’s account of chastity shows that it is a “highly atypical artificial...because it conflicts with natural tendencies, and is not shown to be ‘absolutely necessary’” (Baier 1979, p. 17). Ann Levey agrees with Baier that chastity in Hume is atypical because “the self-interest that explains the existence of the convention is, at least in part, the interest of those who do not bear the burden of the virtuous behavior.” But Levey argues that chastity is still “thoroughly typical both in being based on a non-natural motive and in that the moral approbation attached to them arises from the recognition of the practice as generally beneficial to society” (Levey 1997, p. 225).

<sup>25</sup> One of Hume’s major presuppositions was based on what he took to be biological necessary: that unlike women, men could not know for sure whether their children are their own. However, contemporary technology allows men to find this out rather easily. This is an important aspect, but less relevant for my argument against his view, so I do not pursue it in this work.

children, and implied flaws in women, who are not only prone to marital infidelity but also lie about paternity issues. Lastly, social interest is narrowly determined by the need to ensure the patrilineal bloodlines in patriarchal society (Snow 2002, p. 41).

## 5. Hume and Song: Chastity as a Female Virtue

The analysis provided above of Song Siyeol and David Hume's views on chastity as a virtue reveals their implicit gender-biased assumptions. On the one hand, their philosophies provide us with new insights about chastity as a virtue. On the other hand, their gaze was not only that of philosophers, but also of men. Gaze or sight is often about control. As John Berger notes, "*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (Berger et al. 1973, p. 47; emphasis in the original). Their views could not be innocent of their "subjectivity or of power, primarily because sight is not a neutral position" (Farwell 2012, p. 36). These two male philosophers are surveyors of women and their sight and gaze are based on their perceptions. Their male sight influenced their assumptions about women's chastity as a virtue.

Feminist perspectives can be used to debunk the two philosophers' illusion that their concepts of virtue are applied without implications of gender. If an artificial virtue is an account of how "free, unsubordinated, uncoerced individuals" can develop,<sup>26</sup> chastity, as described by Hume and Song, would not be a virtue that one would ever develop. Approval of their respective views about female chastity is based upon their being accommodations to practical circumstances or beneficial artifices, but in the end the accommodations or artifices served to perpetuate the practice of chastity based on unproven and quite dubious assumptions of male philosophers in a patriarchal society and were designed to secure a patriline.

Yet, even at a theoretical level, there are several points that should not be disregarded and can be of value in efforts aimed at constructing contemporary feminist conceptions of chastity as a virtue. Both David Hume and Song Siyeol were not aligned with the popular ideas of their contemporaries, and this holds genuine liberating potential. Hume dismissed the naturalism that was typical of his contemporaries, such as Melville and Rousseau, who believed that chastity comes directly from following some providential order (Berry 2003). He cut the connection between female chastity and some normative metaphysical order and instead argued that female chastity is an invented, "artificial" virtue that benefits society in general. He believed that human beings could recognize the benefits and would agree that it was good to educate women in ways that would establish and maintain the value of this virtue. Song Siyeol also opposed the then dominant belief that women's chastity depends on and is derived directly from some innate inner goodness within human nature. He dismissed the attempt to naturalize the justification of chastity in such a way and the attempt to enforce it through legal coercion grounded on any such account. Song Siyeol did not believe that female chastity is a universal principle that can be discovered by an examination of human nature, at least not directly. As all virtues are already in our nature, as all neo-Confucians believe, chastity has a root in human nature, but it comes a lot less naturally; chastity requires much more social conditioning and the reshaping of one's dispositions than other virtues. Hume and Song argued that female chastity is not a natural or universal principle, but a moral ideal that can be attained only through education and nurture, both of which require a substantial amount of time. As such, chastity is an acquired virtue and one that takes considerable effort to cultivate.

Nevertheless, Hume and Song both failed to provide anything close to an adequate account of male chastity. In addition, at least partially, the reason for this was their unconscious patriarchal and patrilineal point of view, which perceived the purpose of a stable marriage as orderly procreation and proper child rearing. Their concern for children was not *for the sake of the children* themselves or for society at large but for the benefit and from the perspective of fathers, patriarchy, and patrilineage. Had

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<sup>26</sup> (Cohon 2008, p. 165).



they really wanted to protect children produced in a marriage and benefit society at large, they should have equally highlighted the need for a husband's fidelity. In fact, there was virtually no ideal of a "faithful" husband developed in either of their religio-philosophical traditions. Even though "faithful" husbands were at times discussed, "the 'faithful' husband (*pistos*) was not the one who linked the state of marriage to the renunciation of all sexual pleasure enjoyed with someone else; it was the husband who steadfastly maintained the privileges to which the wife was entitled by marriage" (Foucault 1990, pp. 163–64). Hume and Song were not exceptional in this regard.

## 6. Chastity a New Spousal Virtue

Despite the weaknesses of Hume and Song Siyeol's discussions of chastity as a virtue, their views still yield useful tools for feminist philosophers who are interested in virtue and women today. In general, both philosophers share a similar view on marriage and women. Their views on gender reflect the gender consciousness not only of their times but patriarchal societies in general. They articulated such a general point of view by the values and language that are rooted in their respective philosophies. Recognizing this allows us to capture the points where their philosophizing went wrong and the places where their claims prove unsubstantiated or contradictory.

Hume's categorization of chastity as an artificial virtue provides a very helpful and powerful way to block attempts to justify certain value claims by appealing to normative conceptions of nature. Chastity for women (or men) lacks any clear and direct natural foundation; it is not a universal value or virtue in that sense. Nevertheless, the reasoning behind Hume's conception of the artificial virtue "chastity" does appeal to natural facts, which seems to undermine the bright line he attempts to draw between artificial and natural virtues. Song Siyeol's views also and more explicitly undermine any hard and fast distinction between artificial and natural virtues. Since, as he argued, chastity is crafted from both natural and artificial sources, it clearly demonstrates the interconnection between the natural and artificial aspects of women's chastity.

An analysis of chastity in Hume and Song reveals that the natural/artificial distinction is not as clear-cut as at least Hume seems to suggest. At least, these two philosophers show us a new way to approach virtue. A virtue must be something we can develop and so in some sense we must have the capacity for it by nature. However, there are some natural inclinations that are easily recruited and shaped into virtues while other virtues do not have a direct or powerful source in our nature or, what is different, they are strongly opposed to bad natural dispositions that we do have, such as infidelity. Neo-Confucians believe that fundamentally all virtues can be found in the nature (*li* 理), but some of our natural inclinations are more directly and strongly related to virtue (i.e., the four sprouts; *siduan* 四端).<sup>27</sup> There is no sprout of sexual fidelity and it conflicts with other strong desires (some of which support good moral ends). It is more artificial in the sense that it is more difficult to develop and make strong and reliable.

Contemporary philosophers of ethics might question the validity and value of any account of chastity as a virtue. But clearly it can help us discern and analyze a number of important issues and questions that have arisen in and confront our age: among these are sexuality, marriage, and a husband's chastity. Sexuality has become more important for a married couple since paternity and procreation no longer are the sole or primary concerns or reasons for a heterosexual couple to get married. Many who enter into and sustain marriages take sexual pleasure between a couple to be important regardless of whether pregnancy and childbirth occur or are even an aim. On the other hand, due to the development of a variety of ways to engage in sexual activity, including intercourse without becoming pregnant, having an extramarital relationship has become easier and freer of consequences. These changes have brought changes in the meaning of marriage and chastity. If a wife loves another man, but does not engage in a sexual relationship with him, is she still chaste or not? If she loves and

<sup>27</sup> Mencius 2A6 (Zhao and Sun 1999, pp. 112–13).

engages in sexual activity with another man who is not her husband, but with no intention of having children with anyone other than her husband, is there a sense in which she remains chaste?

Re-evaluating and re-appropriating the philosophical approaches of David Hume and Song Siyeol provides us with a good starting point. These two philosophers of the West and East made a strong case for regarding chastity as necessary for stable families and proper child-rearing. Reading their works, many modern readers will agree with their views or perhaps something close to their views. Even their critics among feminist virtue ethicists tend to focus on the injustice of their double standard and the distortions introduced by the embedded male-centeredness of their accounts of chastity and not on chastity itself. Perhaps the value of chastity still has not expired but remains and calls out for attention, reflection, and further analysis.

However, the new virtue of chastity must be informed by modern science and scholarship more generally, and especially by feminist and gender studies. The feminist critiques of sexuality have gone through a series of rich debates and developments throughout the first and second waves of the feminist movement. The topics of freedom and love and “the detraditionalization processes . . . [that] transformed the institutions of marriage, the family, and gender” were scrutinized (Mottier 2008, p. 53).<sup>28</sup> Modern technological developments have uncoupled sexual intercourse and reproduction and contemporary feminist critiques have revealed how paternalistic and patrilineal concerns have supported the virtue of chastity and related traditional values.

Now it is possible, at least at a theoretical level, to imagine and pursue ideals of chastity detached from reproduction and patrilineal concerns. The free practice of female sexuality is now possible, though not guaranteed, without the prospect of reproduction, which has given women full control of their bodies. These advances in practice and conception have changed the purpose of the union of two people as spouses. The primary purpose of a marriage is no longer “to secure the services in the ancestral shrine [nor] to secure the continuance of the descendant line.”<sup>29</sup> A marriage is “an engagement entered into by mutual consent,” but not necessarily one that “has for its end the propagation of the species.” A woman also has the ability to choose a worthy man to whom she commits herself, as well as a right to stop and switch to another if the chosen spouse turns out to be unworthy.<sup>30</sup> Another Confucian virtue, rightness (*yi* 義), which was advocated by Jeong Jedu, the Korean neo-Confucian philosopher and a contemporary of Song Siyeol mentioned above, now becomes the main focus of a spousal relationship. As Jeong emphasized, rightness is the core of a spousal relationship as well as of the lord–minister relationship. These two relationships are non-blood-bound and require reciprocity. They “can only be continued when one receives proper recognition and treatment” (Wang 2018, p. 129).

Confucian teachings regarding the equal application of chastity to both spouses can and should be fully realized. It should not be forgotten that Cheng Yi also said that “For a man with a rank, it is ritually inappropriate to remarry . . . once mated, both husband and wife should keep their promise.”<sup>31</sup> Song also acceded to this claim and stressed that remarriage is not allowed for men either, even for the son of Heaven or a feudal lord.<sup>32</sup> When disconnected from the spiritual, ritualistic, and economic basis rooted in patriarchy and patrilineality, Confucian conceptions of the spousal relationship and its characteristics directly speak to both members of a couple.

In other words, marriage is conceived of as a union between two people with equal moral and intellectual ability and rights who consent to commit themselves to a long-lasting relationship that includes happiness and pleasure, as well as moral development. Confucian marriage is a kind of earth-bound friendship—not transcendental or purely ideal—an everyday moral relationship that

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed introduction of feminist critiques on sexuality, see (Mottier 2008).

<sup>29</sup> The “Hun Yi” chapter in the *Book of Rites*. The English translation is adapted from (James 1885, p. 428).

<sup>30</sup> This is a paraphrase of Martin W. Huang on masculine loyalty, which is “characterized by his ability to choose a worthy lord to serve, as well as his right to switch to another if the chosen lord turns out to be unworthy” (Huang 2006, p. 6).

<sup>31</sup> (Cheng and Cheng 2004, v.1, p. 303).

<sup>32</sup> *Songja daejeon* 5.13b (Song 2013).

mortals can elect to enter into and undertake. Lisa L. Rosenlee proposes a feminist imagination of a new spousal relationship, a hybrid conceptual paradigm, which is based on elements from both the western and Confucian traditions, and defines this new spousal relationship as follows:

Spouses should be *you* 友 and their blessed, perpetual union is a testament of their mutual commitment to walking in the same path of moral perfection in which each cuts and polishes the moral sense of the other so that they might both become something greater than they once were and their ascendancy to the way of moral goodness is the result of their perpetual friendship bond. (Rosenlee 2015, p. 198)

An exceptional characteristic of this relationship is that it includes *eros* or sexual interchange. Sexuality binds two people at the most intimate level, probably closer even than that of parent–child, but surely the closest relationship that non-blood related human beings can have. This new spousal relationship is a mixture of friendship and erotic attachment, “The erotic attachment is the beginning of a long-lasting friendship; without that intense erotic desire first drawing two souls together and merging them into one unitive love, non-lover *philia* remains hollow, lacking that awe-inspiring divine madness shown in erotic friendship (*Phaedr.* 256a7ff).”<sup>33</sup>

Monogamous possessiveness, jealousy, and sexual guilt about extramarital sex seem to remain in the minds of many contemporary people. A stronger sense of freedom and mutual respect does not necessarily exclude the senses of possessiveness and exclusiveness in spousal relationship. It seems quite plausible to claim that in order to nurture an intimate relationship with another person, one must carefully cultivate a spousal virtue of what traditional Confucians called “differentiation (*bie* 別).” However, in its modern form, differentiation is no longer conceived in terms of different gender-defined duties but instead is appropriated as an acknowledgement of a natural limit on the number of people one can authentically love. One must differentiate among people and single out a particular individual as one’s exclusive partner. This exclusivity gives the relationship special meaning and added value.

Love is about being part of another’s life and working for and seeing their success and happiness as part of one’s own. It seems extremely difficult, if not impossible, to imagine having such a relationship with more than a very few people. On at least one plausible conception of what it is to be a spouse or significant other, even greater selectiveness, attention, and concern are required. The philosophical traditions we have explored recognized the value of such exclusivity for oneself, for one’s partner, for potential children, and for society at large. But even today, the intimacy and depth of spousal relationship seems to differentiate it from other human relationships, and its distinctiveness appears to include a commitment to avoid infidelity. Shorn of its implausible and often patriarchal underpinnings, chastity still retains its value as a spousal virtue.

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<sup>33</sup> Cited in (Rosenlee 2015, p. 186).

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