

The Aborted Confucian Reformation in Korea's Incipient Modernization: The Case of Tasan, Chǒng Yag-yong*

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I. Introduction

If Korea, by any measure, qualifies as a miracle worker insofar as her recent economic performance is concerned, the phenomenon is sufficiently interesting to call for some good explanations. One of the familiar arguments advanced of late has been that it must be due to her cultural tradition, particularly the Confucian heritage. This revelation apparently has its source in the fact that all the East Asian countries, ranging from Japan to Singapore, that have managed to achieve unprecedented rapid economic growth in the past few decades share a common cultural background in Confucianism. I should remind the reader, however, that there has been a curious turnabout over the years in the intellectual disposition toward this very same traditional element and its role in modernization in this region. Before these countries suffering from chronic poverty and backwardness, manifested any sign of economic modernization, the villain easily blamed for the miserable lack of development used to be none other than their Confucian tradition. Now that they have accomplished something rather unexpected of societies with such a cultural heritage, the nasty stare has suddenly turned into a cozy smile.

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Perhaps, the simple fact is that we have been tapping on different parts of the elephant without realizing its hugeness and complexity. It may be time that we had a bit more sober look at the plausible linkage between Confucianism as a traditional element in these societies and their experience of modernization. Thus far, it seems, the existing studies are still wanting in their methodological rigor and their theories are tentative and loose. Earlier, I have suggested that certain sociopsychological traits, associated with the traditional element of Confucian nature in Korea, were indeed utilized in the process of mobilization and organization needed to pursue the goal of economic growth in the recent decades. It was also argued that this type of contribution made by the apparently "Confucian" elements was possible only in interaction with other historically significant factors at work in the given time frame (Kim 1985).

What is suggested here is that one should take a more balanced approach. That is, to bolster the analysis of the possible connection between Confucianism and modernization in this region, a modified theoretical framework is needed. The existing mainstream theories of modernization-development, such as the early functionalist-evolutionary school, the Weberian school, and the World System-Dependency school, all are biased in their own ways. But I would like to introduce my own theory of modernization at this point (Kim 1977, 1985).

In a nutshell, this theory conceptualizes modernization as an historical process originated in Western Europe around the turn of the 16th century, which proceeded to expand throughout the globe. To this extent, the earlier version of the functionalist conception has been basically adopted. Nonetheless, their unilinear evolutionary views assuming convergent trends, couched in Western ethnocentric terms, are not satisfactory. Thus, a revised definition of the term is suggested: modernization is a dialectical change consisting of twin processes of international acculturation emanated from the 16th century West that permeated the world, on the one hand, and indigenous adaptive changes brought about by each society affected by the tide of worldwide acculturation, on the other (Kim 1985, p. 63).

The emphasis here is placed on the dialectical and global nature of the process. Due to an inherently expansionist orientation of the early modernizers of the West, embedded in their capitalist basis and their Christian institutional culture, modernization has taken on an imperialistic characteristic, creating a system of world stratification among nations. The capitalist West with technological, eco-

conomic, and military advantages forms the metropolitan center or core with much of the rest of the world hanging in the periphery and a few select countries, such as the Soviet Union and Japan, becoming semi-core, semi-peripheral countries in the early 20th century world. Because of this uneven position in the world stratification system, the core exerts a one-sided influence upon the periphery through such mechanisms as dominance in the world market and demonstration effect in the cultural spheres. This is the gist of the world systems and dependency argument. Nevertheless, it should be emphatically noted that no matter how "tilted" the acculturation may be, each society does attempt to make adaptive efforts with indigenously available resources and with those borrowed from the outside, striving to improve its relative position in the world stratification system. This is a new dimension to the theoretical interpretation of the history of modernization, which enables us to avoid any dogmatic bias often found in the Marxist-Leninist interpretations. It also helps us to grasp how certain convergent and divergent consequences are possible in the process of modernization. Historical reality tells us that through such indigenous adaptive efforts, nations of the periphery achieved varying degrees of success in responding to the challenge of international acculturation.

This relative success in modernization now depends upon the dialectical interaction among different forces in each society in the face of the surge from the outside. The basic social classes, various interest constellations, and sociocultural groupings would compete for power and exert divergent influences. But modernization, especially in the late-comer societies, usually is carried out by some elite. In this connection, it has been argued that the modernizing elite tends to emerge from the displaced lesser elite echelon of the society (Hagen 1962; Lee Man-Gap 1986). While the forces that push for innovations of some fundamental measure may originate from such alienated elite groups, they are not always the successful modernizing elite who actually get to implement their ideas.

It is in this context that the principle of political selectivity becomes most useful to help understand the dynamics of modernization (Kim 1981, 1985).¹ Viewed from this perspective, both the converg-

¹ What I have suggested in this principle is that 1) the role of human agents in the unfolding of social change should be accorded due emphasis and 2) political decisions made by the dynamic interplay of social forces in the given historical context influence, if not determine, the nature, direction, speed, and substance of important social changes of the day.

ing and diverging consequences of modernization may be readily comprehended. The continued process of international acculturation and indigenous adaptive change are altering and shaping the sociocultural forms of each society at different points of time.

The issue of the Confucian tradition and modernization in East Asia, I believe, also needs be considered in this theoretical framework. Recently, however, we have been witnessing a resurgence of the Weberian interpretation of the experience of this region.² Although Confucianism is not the exact equivalent of the Protestant Ethic in East Asia according to this approach, it still has provided the cultural soil for the emergence of capitalism unique to this region. But one is only to be reminded that it was Weber himself who saw Confucianism in China as a nonpositive factor as far as the potential for development of modern rational capitalism of the Western brand is concerned (Weber 1951). Caution has already been sounded that too simplistic a treatment of the issue is quite misleading (Berger 1986). What we usually find in this type of approach is to search for a list of sociopsychological traits, values, attitudes, and behavioral dispositions from whatever is dominant in the cultural tradition, say, Confucianism in this case, and match them with whatever is considered the most salient of the type of economic activity of individuals and economic performance of a nation deemed rational in terms of modernization. More often than not, however, the selective affinity between these two lists of elements is arbitrary and narrowly biased.

To begin with, the diversity of cultural traditions, even confined to religious aspects, is enormous. Even if one limits the analysis to Confucian tradition, its flavor and shade are as variable as they may be between different religious-ideological traditions. Furthermore, once the lists of the traditional elements and the salient economic traits are juxtaposed, one is most likely to find them not necessarily congruent; instead, many of the components may contradict one another or have nothing to do with each other. In short, it requires a careful historical examination to gain a realistic and methodologically sound understanding of how such cultural factors may work in a nation's effort to achieve desired economic growth, taking into account a whole gamut of intricately interacting structural-institutional mechanisms of social change. This is what I have suggested by

² Bellah (1968) started this earlier but more recent works in the line include: Hofheinz and Calder (1982); MacFarquhar (1980); and Morishima (1982). Also see Berger (1986).

way of the theoretical introduction above, and this is what I intend to illustrate by a case study that follows.

The setting is the late 18th and early 19th century Korea. The central actor is a Confucian scholar named Chŏng Yag-yong or Tasan(1762-1836). Tasan is his pen name, meaning camellia hill, taken after the place where he spent much of his exiled life. Instead of dealing with the popularized version of Confucianism as a traditional element in Korea's modernization, I am going to demonstrate that Confucianism as a philosophical and sociopolitical idea system can not only advance innovative ideas very much in line with what may be regarded as "modern" in the context of the worldwide modernization that I have characterized above, but also it can, in fact, become a prime force for modernization, if political selectivity works in favor of such an innovative system of ideas. In the case of Chŏng Tasan, he and his predecessors, contemporaries, and even some of his posterity of like mind, had attempted what may be called the great Confucian Reformation, as a response to the challenge of the changing times. He was the grand synthesizer of this intellectual movement usually known as *Sirhak*, the School of Practical Learning, in Korean Confucianism. Had his reform ideas been adopted by the ruling political elite of this period and implemented by the state, Korea's modernization might have treaded a different path than it has since the latter part of the 19th century. Here, we have a mixed bag of the role played by Confucianism. On the one hand, the version of reformed Confucianism, provided by a man like Tasan, could have saved the country from the complete collapse experienced subsequently. On the other hand, it was another version of Confucianism, which suppressed such a reform movement for political reasons, that led the country into tragic demise.

Since his work is so voluminous and his thoughts so complex, it is impossible to deal with every aspect of his ideas in a work of this nature. I shall therefore highlight his life and ideas within the limit of the theoretical framework presented earlier. This will be followed by a brief discussion of his relevance to the present and future of Korea's modernization in connection with Confucianism.

II. Chŏng Tasan's Life and Work

During his relatively long life (by the standard of his days), Chŏng Yag-yong faced early triumphs and subsequent years of lone-

ly exile, while the socioeconomic fields of the Yi Dynasty (Chosŏn: 1392–1910) experienced tremendous flux and significant transformations.³ Successive invasions and wars waged by neighboring barbarians (the Manchus and the Japanese) around the turn of the 17th century left extraordinary imprints on the society. Political conflicts ensued, the traditional class system began to crumble gradually, the institutions of landownership and taxation were in disarray, and corruption of the local magistrates and the high-ranking officials in the central government, mostly controlled by powerful factions, became rampant. While the overall economy grew because of certain significant agricultural innovations and increased industrial and commercial activities, such growth only polarized the class structure, intensifying frustrations on the part of the poor peasants. Also growing was the pain of status disparity among the fallen *yangban* (gentry) groups, such as those ousted from officialdom or exiled due to factional conflicts, those who voluntarily decided to stay away from government posts out of disillusionment, and those who were illegitimate offsprings of *yangban* alienated by discrimination and social prejudice. Some of these excluded aristocrats and middle-class intellectuals formed a potential source for innovative leadership, and in fact, some of the leaders of peasant revolts that occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries came from that very source.

Ideologically, the Chosŏn Dynasty from its inception at the end of the 14th century officially adopted the Chu Hsi line of Neo-Confucianism as the orthodox state ideology and standard statecraft. By the middle of the 16th century, Korean Neo-Confucianism peaked in its theoretical systematization original to Korean scholarship with the presence of the two intellectual pillars in T'oegye (Yi Hwang, 1501–1570) and Yulgok (Yi I, 1526–1584). Scholarly debates became active and efforts to implement a truly Confucian moral order on the sociopolitical system already initiated in the previous century were vigorously exerted. Since, however, such academic controversies among Confucianists and their followers were closely linked to the political struggle for the claim to orthodoxy and government appointments, which were becoming more competitive over

³ The works referred to for a brief general historical background of Tasan's lifetime are Lee Ki-baik (1984) and Pyŏn (1986). For the life of Tasan, the followings have been relied upon: Han Yŏng-u (1971); Henderson (1957); Hong I-sŏp (1959); Academy of Sciences (1962); and Choi Ik-han (1955).

the years, the lofty ideals and metaphysical theories gradually came to be polluted by political interpretations and maneuvers.

By the end of the 18th century, as the degeneration of Neo-Confucianism had reached a point where theoretical discourses became almost hollow and meaningless, Confucian scholarship now completely turned into a means for either preparation for civil examinations or for a weapon to contend for power. Those who had to compete for power within the government needed to resort to the claim to orthodoxy, while those who were alienated from participation in the government not only maintained their livelihood but also bred their own factions through the private academies established by the leaders of the cliques. Already in the 17th century, there were nearly three hundred such private academies in the country. These academies not only played educational and political roles but also had certain economic privileges. While they possessed large agricultural estates and slaves to work them, they were exempt from taxation and corvée labor. Thereby, they too became sources of economic disorder and were politically abused by the influential local literati clans.

As the society was undergoing these transformations on the surface and smoldering fires were constantly burning beneath the surface, the wind from the far West was slowly blowing in the direction of the relatively isolated Korean peninsula. The incipient exposure to "Western learning" (*sōhak*), by which Catholicism was referred to in those days, came in the early 17th century through European Jesuit missionaries stationed in Ming China. As the name, Western learning, indicates, it was first received primarily as a strain of thought to be studied out of intellectual curiosity. But the very first batch of intellectuals who eagerly sought to grasp the significance of this new school of thought from the remote West and who became seriously interested in investigating and adopting some of its elements happened to be those Confucian scholars who came to be identified as *Sirhak-pa* or the Practical Learning School. In their own way, they were very much concerned about the practical problems of their days and advocated various reforms. But they were also largely of the fallen *yangban* or the displaced elite faction. Towards the late 18th century, Catholicism now came to be accepted as a religion and began to spread among the general populace as well as the practical-minded Confucian *yangban* groups. These *yangban* converts were mainly of the Southerners (*Namin*) clique, most of whom were out of active government service for a long period of time due to their repeated defeats in the political arena. It was one

of these families that gave birth to Chŏng Tasan.

The introduction of Catholicism meant much more than simply an infiltration of an alien religion from the West. With it came all sorts of material and information related to Western science and technology developed up to the late 18th century. Western technology had already started filtering into Korea in 1631 when a Korean envoy returning from an official mission to Ming China brought back a musket, telescope, alarm clock, world map, and books on astronomy and Western customs. Subsequently, various kinds of books and artifacts had been brought in from Ch'ing China through Catholic missionaries or by visitors from Korea. Among those who made the initial move to read the books and examine the artifacts and who eventually advocated adoption of such technical knowledge for the practical purpose of improving the social and economic life of the Korean people were none other than the *Sirhak* scholars and Catholic converts. In a way, Catholicism, Western ideas and technology, and internal political dynamics all were closely interlinked in this period.

Catholicism as a religion, therefore, would severely be persecuted in the 19th century. It not only came to be viewed by the Neo-Confucians in power, who apparently realized the extent of its popularity as demonstrated in the rapid spread of the religion among the people, as a threat to its orthodoxy, but it also became a victim of the deep-rooted political conflict involving Confucian factions. The prominent members of the new converts happened to come disproportionately from the *Namin* faction, and some of Chŏng Tasan's close friends and relatives, including two of his own brothers, were either executed or exiled during the anti-Western learning campaign waged by his enemies in the government.

Chŏng Tasan was born into a *yangban* family of the *Namin* lineage of both political and intellectual nature. His father once served as an outstanding magistrate, but resigning his post he returned home the same year in which Tasan was born. Although his family belonged to the *Namin* group, Tasan's father was recruited on and off for government service because it was during the reign of King Yŏngjo (1724-1776) who proclaimed and practised the policy of impartiality. When Tasan was 15 years old, his father was recalled to serve in the capital and they moved to Seoul. The next year, still in his teens, Tasan was exposed to the writings of one of the leading scholars of the Practical Learning School Yi Ik (Sŏng-ho, 1682-1765). Fascinated by the writings, he began to discuss them

with Sǒng-ho's own disciples and followers. Because his father then moved from one local post to another around the country, Tasan spent much of his youth traveling in different parts of the country as well. At the age of 23, he was introduced to Western learning through a relative of the family, and he began to develop an interest in Catholicism and Western science and technology.

Although he passed the preliminary civil examinations earlier, his official career started in 1789, during the reign of king Chǒngjo (1777-1800), when he made the examinations with great honor. The king was said to have been very impressed by Tasan's brilliant interpretations of Confucian classics. Initially, he was appointed to a minor position which could not have caused any jealousy even among his opponents in the other factions. But King Chǒngjo soon took Tasan into his confidence for counsel and service. In due course, he moved up and down, and in and out of government posts, as the king and Tasan cautiously attempted to find a way to avoid any confrontation with, or inflammation of the sentiments of, the opponents. He served in various offices of the central government, such as the Confucian Academy, the Office of Chinese Classics, the Military Board, the King's Secretariat as Vice Chief Secretary, the Board of Punishments, and the Office of Censorship. In semi-exile and in the king's confidence, he served in local governments as well. Once, he was dispatched by the king himself as his secret inspector to investigate the conditions of life in certain localities and to examine the local governance by the appointed magistrates and petty officials of local origin. He was once jailed and twice exiled; the last time in 1801 when he was 40 cost him 18 years of his prime. In fact, his career ended in 1800 when King Chǒngjo, his protector, passed away unexpectedly.

It was mainly because of his family's connection with the *Namin* faction, his exposure to and interest in Catholicism again, by and large, through his familial and personal relations, and his vigorous pursuit of practical learning, which entailed critical ideas against the Chu Hsi Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, that brought his downfall. King Chǒngjo's special favor and confidence in him also aroused envy among his enemies. Furthermore, during his tenure as a clan-destine royal inspector touring a provincial area, he found a specific magistrate corrupt and inept. Tasan's report which accused the man of wrongdoings caused him to lose his job and made him a personal enemy. Eventually, this magistrate would strike back in a crucial moment to stop Tasan from ever making a comeback to officialdom.

Outstanding among his accomplishments during his official career were not only the excellent interpretations of Confucian classics, but also several works and projects that had direct relevance to practical administrative and reform policies of a technical nature. For example, in his very first year of government service, Tasan distinguished himself by submitting a design for the pontoon-bridge over the Han River skirting the capital city of Seoul. When he was 31 years old, serving in the Office of Chinese Classics, he submitted to the monarch a design and master plan for the construction of the fortifications at Hwasŏng (Suwŏn, today). It is reported that by devising a crane-like pulley mechanism, he helped the government save about forty percent in the construction expense, for which he was plushly rewarded by the king. This fortification, with its wall and gate, still exists for posterity to admire and pay homage to his achievement, in Suwŏn City outside Seoul. Toward the end of his career, he also compiled a medical text called the *Comprehensive Treatise on Smallpox* (*Makwa hoet'ong*) in which references were made to numerous Chinese writings on the subject and which presented a rather full discussion of the symptoms and treatment of this widespread disease. In addition, he presented to the king a number of programs dealing with a variety of subjects including agriculture, geography, law, and other classical commentaries to help the monarch improve his rulership.

The bulk of his scholarly work, however, was produced during his exile. The sheer volume of his written works is such that virtually no author in Korea, certainly none of his stature in the past or present, could rival his productivity. By one estimate, "his collected works, set in modern Chinese type, occupy well over thirteen thousand pages" (Kalton 1982, p. 3). According to one of the most comprehensive publications of his work to date, actually compiled in the 1930s, his works consist of 76 separate volumes (*ch'aek*), 154 fascicles (*kwon*), and thousands of pieces of articles, chapters, essays, and poems.⁴

It is difficult to realize the magnitude of these figures because they are not the same as the publications of today. But to give an idea of the approximate size of his works, one could cite one of his monumental works on local administration reforms, *Mongmin simsŏ* (*A True Guide to the Governing the People*). In the complete works compiled in the 1930s, this particular book takes up 7 volumes and

⁴ Based on the information provided by Hong I-sŏp (1959, pp. 255-9).

14 fascicles. This work was translated into Korean and published between 1978 and 1985 in a series of six volumes with a total of 2582 pages in modern Korean and Chinese type set. This includes of course the translation, the original in Chinese, footnotes, and indexes.

Of the total 154 fascicles, more than half, 76 fascicles, are devoted to Confucian classics, including the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Book of Changes*, the *Poetry Classic*, and the *Classics of History*, and studies of ritual and music. The three major works on politics, law, and administration namely, *Mongmin simsö*, *Kyöngse yup'yo* (the *Recommendations for the Management of State Affairs*), and *Hümhüm sinsö* (A *New Book on the Prudent Administration of Criminal Justice*), take up 39 fascicles. Twenty-five fascicles contain over 24 hundred poems, 370 some essays and articles dealing with a whole range of topics related to agriculture, medicine, military affairs, personnel management, canal and waterways management, salt business, coins and monetary systems, land tenure systems, music, technology, population, and much more, and some 280 miscellaneous materials including letters and epitaphs. In addition, there are four fascicles on historical geography, four on water management, and 6 on smallpox.

This brief sketch already shows his versatility and energy. "But it is not the volume alone that is impressive," says one American scholar (Kalton 1982, p. 3), "for his work is marked by a consistently high level of comprehensiveness and careful scholarship, sophisticated and critical methodology, and an originality that is the product of deep reflection and independence of judgment." That is not all. Another American observer had this to say: "Not in fecundity alone but in the quality, incisiveness, and modernity of his thought Tasan is outstanding and is probably to be accounted the most commanding and original thinker in Korea's intellectual history" (Henderson 1957, p. 383).

III. Chöng Tasan's Attempt at the Confucian Reformation

One useful way of examining Tasan's thoughts and views is to take a dialectical approach. Any idea-knowledge system is a product of the times, and yet the creative ingredient of the individual scholar, especially with such an ingenious intellectual as Tasan, is never to be treated lightly. The greater the tension of dialectics between

the challenge of the times and the response of the individual, the greater is the possibility that the output will be unusually critical and original. Such, I surmise, was the nature of Chŏng Tasan's scholarship. Since, however, his scholarly work embraces so many diverse fields of interest, it is necessary to treat them in separate categories and to see how they form a coherent system. In each category of idea systems then, the most salient elements that he had to confront for his own theories and viewpoints will be examined.

A. Philosophical Thoughts

No matter how novel, critical, or radical many of his ideas for practical reforms in the sociopolitical and economic spheres may have been, Tasan basically was a Confucian thinker. He himself declared that "Through the study of the Six Classics and the Four Books, I have endeavored to cultivate myself; the one Recommendation and the two Books I have written are for the sake of the world under heaven and the state; thereby, I have fulfilled all the requirements from the beginning to the end" (from Epitaph written for himself, Lee Ūrho 1985, p. 117)⁵.

It is claimed that most of the studies he published on the Confucian classics were completed before he embarked on works dealing with practical issues, and therefore he was a true or pure Confucian before he was a scholar of practical concerns which he analyzed and for which he suggested remedies as a Confucian. One may not want to exaggerate this point, but it is reasonable to assume that his self-image and self-identity lay in being a faithful Confucian. This is so in spite of his extensive exposure to Catholicism, an adherence to which he later denounced himself, thus causing the still unresolved debate among scholars about his position with respect to Catholicism. The key questions from a philosophical vantage point are what kind of Confucianist was he and what kind did he aspired to become.

Perhaps, first and foremost, we should characterize him as a champion of the Confucian Reformation in his own time. This has a double-edged meaning: He indeed was anxious to "reform" society through practical programs formulated on the basis of solid studies, but he was more than a mere reformer for he also declared war

⁵ "From the beginning to the end" here is the translation of *ponmal* (*pen-mo*, in Chinese: hereafter both Korean and Chinese sounds will be provided for certain terms in parentheses). It means the foundation and branch, or the stem and branch.

against the prevalent Confucian orthodoxy to reform Confucianism itself from within, from the heart of it. This desire apparently stemmed from his critical consciousness of the abhorrent conditions in which he found his society and of which Confucian orthodoxy was a primary cause. The immediate target was Neo-Confucianism of the Chu Hsi line, and in spite of the fact that he himself studied and discussed Neo-Confucian works and often expressed his admiration for the great academic accomplishments and even some genuine interest in practical concerns in the times of Chu Hsi, Yi T'oegye, and Yi Yulgok, Tasan's indictment against Neo-Confucian scholarship was severe and forceful.

His criticism was waged mainly on two planes. First, in the practical realm, he accused Neo-Confucianism of its utter impracticality and unproductiveness with respect to day-to-day affairs of the state and the livelihood of the people. For instance, referring to the central concepts of this school, *ï*(*li*, principle) and *ki* (*ch'i*, material force) and other closely related ones, Tasan jeered that they were so ambiguous and difficult to understand that one could render almost any kind of interpretation without necessarily making an error and that they only caused prolonged and useless debates among scholars and bureaucrats who had more important and urgent things to look after. He was more seriously offended by the political complications raised by the often destructive factional conflicts. In a dialectical opposition to this kind of "empty" and corrupt Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, he developed a version of Confucianism which would not only purify it but also would make it practical in purpose, critical in spirit, and "empirical" in methodology.

Second, on a more philosophical and theoretical level, the task of purifying confucianism required a critical re-examination and dialectical overcoming of not just Sung-Choson Neo-Confucianism but also the Han Learning and T'ang Confucianism tainted by Buddhist and Taoist influences, as well as some elements of Ming and Ch'ing interpretations. In doing so, he incorporated some ideas of the Wang Yang-ming line of Neo-Confucianism and the methodology of the Ch'ing School of Han Learning that emphasized a critical and empirical approach to the study of classics. Interestingly, in this effort to reform Confucianism from the foundation, Tasan claimed "the repossession or reconstruction of the Way" (*tot'ong, tao-t'ung*) all the way back to Confucius himself and beyond, pretty much in the same manner as the leading Sung-Ming Neo-Confucianists had done before him (de Bary 1983). Thus, some argue that Tasan's

Confucianism is what is called *Susahak*, after the names of the two rivers where Confucius is said to have established his school (Kalton 1981, p. 4; Lee Ūrho 1966, 1985), although this position is still being debated (Yun Sasun 1985).⁶

At any rate, Tasan's aim was to restore the pristine or pure Confucianism of the original masters, and he epitomized this notion of original teachings in ten Chinese characters: "The Way of Confucius is nothing but Self-Cultivation and Governance of the People."⁷ In contrast, Chu Hsi's understanding of the teachings (*kyo*, *chiao*) of Confucianism, as expressed in his preface to the *Great Learning*, inserted two additional components to it: "It is the Way of Thorough Investigation of Li, Rectification of Mind, Cultivation of Self, and Governance of the People." The two elements, thorough investigation of *li* and rectification of mind, which Tasan claimed were already included in self-cultivation, happened to form the crucial thrust in the Sung Neo-Confucian philosophy which emphasized principle and mind. They, in a way, represented the pivotal concept (*li*) and the methodology and practice involving the mind. Tasan attempted to make it simpler by eliminating or incorporating them in his pragmatic Confucian Reformation. From this vantage point, Tasan now departed sharply from Neo-Confucian philosophy in several important ways. We shall only introduce the key ideas here.

What he saw as the most urgent in this Confucian Reformation was to shed the highly speculative garb of the cosmological-metaphysical side of Neo-Confucianism as much as possible to restore the practical character of the original Confucianism, on the one hand, and to strip off the superstitious occult element of popularized Confucianism, on the other. This philosophical program was to be manifested in several of his central ideas concerning the universe, human nature, and ethics.

Fundamental to his philosophical *Aufheben vis-a-vis* Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism was the possibility to decompose the immanentistic, holistic, anthropocosmological vision inherent in the doctrine that "principle is one but its manifestations are many" (Chan 1973, p. 615) and the idea that "the many are [ultimately] one, and the one

⁶ While some consider him a scholar of *Susahak* (*chu-szu-hsueh*) therefore, a true Confucian (Kalton 1981, p. 4), this position being strongly held by Lee Ūrho (1966, 1985), others do not necessarily agree with him (Han U-gŭn *et al.* 1985).

⁷ These ten letters are *Kongja chi to sugi ch'iin ii* (*K'ung-tzu-chih-taohsiu-chi-chi-jen erh-i*).

is actually differentiated into the many" (Chan 1973, p. 460). While maintaining the original idea of primitive Confucianism that sought the state of man becoming one with Heaven, Tسان now boldly set out to separate the "three powers" (*samjae, san-ts'ai*) of heaven, earth, and man. First, he redefined the meaning of heaven by distinguishing between the natural heaven "that is the vast vault of the sky and has a form" (Kalton 1981, p. 24) and the spiritual ruler of Heaven, *shang-ti* (*sangje*). Calling this ruler "Heaven" was just like calling the ruler (*wang*) of "state" (*kuk, kuo* or *kuk-ga, kuo-chia*). This spiritual heaven, the Lord on High, was accorded the status of the Creator, the Most Reverend Only Being, the Almighty or Omnipotent, the Ruler of all the Kings and Governors of the world under heaven, the Mandate of Heaven providing the nature of man, and a parent-like being nourishing and caring for the people.⁸

Because of this notion of Heaven as the divine ruler, many inferred that Tسان must have been influenced by Catholicism. This may be so, but there was no need to mention his Catholic conviction in this particular guise. The concept of a personal god already existed in the pre-Confucian classics such as the *Book of Documents* or the *Poetry Classic*.⁹ What is more important here is that Tسان broke away from the monistic view of Neo-Confucian cosmology where heaven and earth, the Way, the Great (Supreme) Ultimate, the Great Ultimate of Non-Being (the Great Void), are in essence the same and reducible to *li* the Universal Principle. Heaven as the natural sky is placed in the same realm as earth, representing nature, and heaven as the spiritual ruler is juxtaposed with both nature and man. When he referred to *li*, he spoke of nothing more, or less, than the original meaning of the term as the texture of jade, or simply as the principle of things as natural "laws," of government and law. This now opened up the possibility of dissociating man from nature too, as we shall examine shortly.

In critically reviewing the cosmological ideas contained in the *Book of Changes* and Chou Tun-i's diagram of the Great Ultimate, Tسان reduced the concepts of *yin* and *yang* and the *Five Elements* to mere symbolic representations of natural phenomena. As conceived by the ancients prior to the Master himself, *yang* meant sunshine and *yin*, shadow or the hidden sun. The Five Elements of

⁸ Lee Ŭrho (1966) discusses extensively the concept of Heaven held by Tسان citing the original texts.

⁹ See, for example, Schwartz (1985) and Fung (1983).

metal, wood, water, fire, and earth (in the sense of soil) were none other than just material found in nature like any other observable thing. In this interpretation, we find the grand cosmological scheme of Confucian metaphysics established since the Han dynasty crumbling at the foundation. In traditional East Asian Thought that mainly stemmed from the *Book of Changes* and that later was philosophically represented by the Neo-Confucians, the two material forces of *yin* and *yang* and the Five Elements were considered to be the cosmic forces producing and reproducing the myriad of things, each pair of them also producing and overcoming each other in the process. *Yin* and *yang* and the Five Elements were also associated with the rotation of seasons, and in the same breath of reasoning, even linked to the historical circulation of dynastic turnovers.

The dissociation of man from the universe of nature and the heavenly master was sought in the same spirit. Within the theoretical framework of Neo-Confucian conceptions of human nature, there are two opposing views. One assigns special moral character to human nature, following Mencius, and assumes that the five constant virtues of humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness are unique to human beings. The other faithfully interprets the pivotal Neo-Confucian statement that "nature is principle" and the doctrine that "principle is one but its manifestations are many." In this sense, then, there is no fundamental difference between the nature of man and the other myriad of things. Tasan rejected both arguments. He first presented the view that human beings are different from other animals and things. He acknowledged the transcending position of humans above the things, enjoying and utilizing them. He argued that the nature of man is only the nature of man, and nature of dogs and cows is only that of animals. He even suggested a three-pronged grading system delineating plants, animals, and humans, according to differential elements of their respective nature. Trees and grasses have only life with no inclination to group collectively; beasts and birds have not only life but also cling together; human nature embraces both life and collective living, plus spirit and goodness. In other words, while he viewed nature as something in the psychobiological sphere, he still acknowledged the moral element in human nature, distinct from other beings.¹⁰

¹⁰ Another way of classifying the living beings, according to Tasan, is as follows: "Grasses and trees have life but no perception; birds and beasts have life and perceptions but no spirit and soul; humans have life, perceptions, and the mysterious spiritual consciousness and its functions" (Kim Han-sik 1979, p. 134).

Nonetheless, he departed from the Neo-Confucian position that moral nature, like the five constant virtues, is innate in human nature as manifestations of the universal *li* as if the Heaven above has furnished the grains of these virtues. These virtues are not mysterious principles inside the mind, but they emerge from humans who actually practice them in everyday life. In short, human nature consists of two elements: moral righteousness and psychobiological dispositions. Still, there are issues to be resolved. What is the nature of this dual characteristic of human nature? How does one account for the the question of humans' being both good and evil? Or, are humans inherently good because of the moral element or bad because of the biological tendencies?

Tasan resolved these questions by introducing the concept of "mind" into the picture, in addition to a new definition of human "nature." As far as human nature is concerned, the term nature simply means "inclinations," "dispositions," or literally "appetites (*kiho*).¹ It is a combination of spiritually acknowledged tendencies toward morally righteous actions and tendencies of the bodily form that followed biological impulses. Mind, on the other hand, is the capacity for humans to act correctly, if they desire to do so. The term *sim* (*hsin*) standing for mind has three meanings, according to Tasan. The first refers to the physiological heart, the second, to emotions, and the third and most important, to the conscious awareness of one's own behavior. This is the spiritual mind, enabling man to act morally right.

Insofar as human nature is concerned, therefore, man always possesses two opposing tendencies that go together. He said in his *Essence of Mencius* (Kalton 1981, p. 29).

If he is offered food and it is not right [to accept it], then he will want to accept it and at the same time desire not to accept it. If maintaining his humanity involves hardship, he will want to avoid it and at the same time wish not to avoid it. The wishing to accept and wishing to avoid are the desires of his physical aspect; the wishing not to accept and not to avoid come from his moral aspect.

He referred to this internal conflict between the moral nature and physical nature inside the mind as "battles" and admonished to exert oneself diligently so that one may see the moral self conquer the biological self so that one may come closer to the Way. His conception of human nature, thus, is a dialectical, dynamic one. Also to be noted is the view that the moral side of human nature is endowed by

the mandate of Heaven and therefore one should seek the Heavenly mandate in the moral side of human nature.

Still, it is the capacity of the mind to will either to do good or evil. This power of mind, he called the autonomous power with which only humans are endowed. Man can make himself do either, while animals cannot help but act as they do. It is in this context that we find Tasan's fundamental humanism or "people-centered" philosophy which lays the ground for his sociopolitical and economic theories and reform ideas. The mind's capability to make deliberations and choices as conceived by Tasan is one of the most original of any Confucian thinkers' conceptions, "as the concept of freedom emerges as the central and distinctive characteristic of man" (Kalton 1981: p. 29).¹¹ Indeed, terms like "self-mastering power" or "autonomous power" (*chajujigwŏn*, *tzu-chu-chih-chuan*), "to make one's own decisions according to one's own opinions" (*chajak-i-chajujang*, *tzu-tso-i-tzu-chu-chang*), and "opinions from oneself" (*chujang yuki*, *chu-chang yu-chi*) are quite new in Tasan, as Confucian concepts.

As a bridge to the following sections, let me briefly return to Tasan's conception of true Confucianism. It was mentioned that he defined it as the Way of self-cultivation and governance of men. For a scholar of practical learning with pragmatic concerns utmost in his mind, one may mistakenly judge that the governance of men would overshadow the part of self-cultivation. This is a likely tendency since the cultivation of the person was a central concern for most Neo-Confucians while the question of the practical application of principles to day-to-day affairs of government came to be the preoccupation of most practical learning scholars. For Chŏng Tasan, however, those two were not to be separated or not to be assigned differing importance. This position is not only reflected in the relative amount of written works he devoted to each, but also is rooted in his understanding of the principle of governance of men through self-cultivation.

In his reviews and commentaries on the *Great Learning* and the

¹¹ Even if one finds in Neo-Confucianism a vocabulary of "individualism" in such terms as "taking it upon oneself" or "bearing the responsibility oneself" (*tzu-jen*), "getting or finding the way oneself, and feeling self-contented" (*tzu-te*), or self-deception (*tzu-ch'ŭ*) or self-satisfaction (*tzu-ch'ien*) both implying that the source of value lies within the self and the immediate, affective, visceral response to things is the authentic one (de Bary 1983, pp. 44-8), it is hard to find a systematic theory of human nature in which mind is accorded the active capacity to deliberate and choose.

Doctrine of the Mean he emphatically maintained that "sincerity" (*sŏng, ch'eng*) is the foundation of all other conducts of rectification of mind, self-cultivation, regulation of the family, and bringing order to the state and the world under heaven. He scratched the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge from this list as irrelevant to the context, for the practical conduct involved in the family, state, and world affairs is determined by the extent to which one investigates and acts with the utmost sincerity, not the investigation and extension of knowledge as such. One definitely should study sincerely and seriously with methodological rigor, but the kind of investigation and extension of knowledge advocated by the Neo-Confucians into the universal principle of all things is not only impossible, even for a figure like the Sage King Yao, but also one cannot be burdened with such an endeavor while in fact the more important thing is to do one's best with utmost sincerity. By emphasizing sincerity, Tasan linked his image of man as a responsible autonomous being and his practical orientation to the improvement of life for the people by those who are in the position to govern them.

Finally, going back to the three powers of heaven, earth, and man, we have observed that Chŏng Tasan separated man from nature and placed him in a new relationship with a heavenly ruler. By dissociating man from nature and granting autonomy to man, he now opened the way for the objective study and aggressive utilization of nature. This, some believe, was a move toward "scientific" development in the Western sense. Regardless of its Western connections, it certainly was reflected in his views on technology, economics, and other research activities in various social and natural science fields. As for the introduction of a heavenly ruler, it provided him a "religious" ground to legitimate man's moral autonomy and responsibility. With the naturalistic, immanentist world view of Neo-Confucianism, where no such divine basis for human moral inclinations and responsibility existed, crumbling before his eyes, he must have needed some solid foundation to build his theory of human nature and moral order. Some claim that this move on his part was a step backward in view of the Western development in which secularization was the dominant trend of modernization. Nevertheless, one should look upon Tasan's effort in the context of a very secular culture of Korean society.

B. Sociopolitical Theories

How then does his view of human nature translate into sociopolitical theories? In dealing with Tasan's ideas on sociopolitical order, it is useful to treat them on two different yet related levels: the more abstract theoretical ideas and the more pragmatic reform programs. By doing so, one must be able to establish a coherent linkage from the general Confucian theories through abstract sociopolitical theories to practical reform ideas.¹²

In separating the Way of man (*indo, jen-tao*) from the principle of nature and in distinguishing between the mind of the Way (*to sim, tao-hsin*) and the mind of man (*insim, jen-hsin*), Tasan has identified the source of the Way in Heaven as the master above. Therefore, to respect and observe the mandate of Heaven is to practice the Way of man. Manifested in practical performance (*tökö, te*) out of the correct, righteous mind, the main thrust of the Way of man is epitomized in the three virtues of "filial piety, respect for elders or brotherly love, and parental love or compassion" (*hyo-che-cha, hsiao-ti-tz'u*). When such virtues of the basic human relations reach the utmost level of goodness, they all boil down to one central virtue of all human relations, that is, "humanity" or "humaneness" (*in, jen*) which of course is the key concept in the teachings of Confucius himself.

Tasan's interpretations of humanity, however, add some new dimensions to the original meaning. He stressed two elements: that it is always a mutual, reciprocal virtue between pairs of persons in social relations and that it is none other than "love" for men without regard to one's social status. When the basic virtues of filial piety, brotherly respect, or parental compassion are mentioned, Tasan pointed out, they usually would emphasize one-sided demonstration of virtues in the hierarchical order. But Tasan maintained that the true manifestation of humane love is not to be imposed upon one side of the paired hierarchy of any nature; it is to be reciprocal. By the same token, humanity is to be extended to all persons of any position in society, whether the literati or commoner. By this line of argument, Tasan seemed to lay the stepping stone to a vision of society where the authoritarian hierarchical order has different

¹² Unless otherwise noted, the works referred to for the discussion of this section are: Han U-gün *et al.* (1985); Han Yöng-u (1971); Hong I-söp (1959); and Kim Han-sik (1979).

connotations and where the place of the individual person in that order may need modifications.

The way to achieve actualization of this humanity as the central virtue, according to Tasan, is through what is known in Confucian tradition as "being watchful over oneself and being prudent even in solitude" (*sindok, shen-tu*). While earlier Confucians, especially Neo-Confucianists, also stressed this self-prudence as the way of the superior man, their cautious thought and behavior having been conceived against the backdrop of the vast abstract impersonal universe, Tasan's prudence was in front of the Heavenly ruler, a personal god. This is because the moral nature of man comes from Heaven. As we are going to see right now, this notion of heavenly mandate has important ramifications for his political thinking.

Now, let us proceed with his famous "theory" of the origin of rulership. In an essay on the "Origin of Magistrate (literally Shepherd, meaning Ruler)," Tasan gave a rather succinct account of how the system of rulership emerged in the beginning, as follows (Kim Han-sik 1979, p. 301-2; Park Ch'ung sök 1983, p. 348):

In the beginning, there were only people (*min*). How could a ruler exist! People used to live in natural collectivities. Some got into squabbles with neighbors, but no solution was in sight. There was an old man who spoke well of fairness and came to handle the incident correctly. Neighbors from all four directions admiringly succumbed to his judgment and installed him all respectfully to the position of village head, they called.... Likewise, governors of all four directions installed one of them to become their leader and called him emperor-king. The root of emperor-king originated from village chief. The ruler exists for the people.

In the same stroke of vividness, Tasan wrote in his article "On King T'ang" (Han Yöng-u 1971, p. 33; Kim Han-sik 1979, p. 302):

How was the king born? Did he descend from Heaven like the rain? Did he gush forth from beneath the earth like a spring? No. Installed by five households, a man becomes the chief of a *lin*; installed by five *lins* a man becomes the chief of a *hyön*. Nominated jointly by these chiefs of a *hyön*, a lord is born. It is the king who is chosen by these lords. Therefore, it can be said that the king is appointed by the will of the people.... Therefore, if the five households do not like the chief of their *lin*, they hold a conference and elect a new chief...if the lords do not like their king, they hold a conference and elect a new king.... How can it be called a chastisement of the king?

In traditional Confucianism, the idea of government for the sake of the people (*wimin*, *wei-min*) is prominent. But this is based on the assumption that the ruler rules over the people and the basis of sovereignty or legitimacy, which may be judged by the degree to which his rule is beneficial to the people, still lies in the mandate of Heaven, some mysterious providence, not the people themselves. Tasan departed from this position drastically by placing the root of the legitimacy of rulership in the choice of the people, both in the origin of rulership and in the mechanism of replacement of a ruler, unfit, inept, or morally wrong, who harms rather than benefits the people. Because of this line of reasoning, some later observer in the thirties likened, perhaps a bit overzealously, his ideas to those of Rousseau's social contract.

It should be hastily noted at this juncture, however, that this theory of the origin of rulership is tampered by Tasan's insistence on the role of the Heavenly ruler (*sangje*) in the process. He did say that all the kings and magistrates under the heaven are subjects of the Heavenly ruler, and the matter of selecting and installing the emperor (the son of Heaven, *ch'önja*, *tien-tzu*, as was so called in China) lies only in Heaven's mind (Kim Han-sik 1979, p. 301). But this should be now interpreted from the vantage point of his theory of human nature. We noted earlier that the moral side of man's nature is endowed from Heaven and further that the autonomous consciousness to make decisions is part of man's mind not found in other animals. It has also been mentioned that to follow the nature (of man) is to follow the Way (of Heaven) or the mandate of Heaven. Viewed in this framework, the idea that political legitimacy of a ruler lies in the people and in the mind of Heaven makes perfect sense.

Similar thoughts are found in Tasan's legal theories.¹³ The standard by which the ruler governs the behavior of officials and the people and maintains order in society is ordinarily called law. According to Tasan's interpretations, the sage kings of ancient times ruled the state and guided the people by *li*, the virtue of propriety or decorum (*ye* also means rites and rituals). As the virtue of propriety declined over time, a new concept of law (*pöp*, *fa*) emerged. The standards that are at once valid in view of the principle of Heaven and congruent with the feelings of the people are

¹³ I have heavily relied on Pak Pyöng-ho (1985) for the discussion of Tasan's legal theories.

called *li*. But those which make the people fearful by threat, sorrowful by pressure, so that they may not dare breach the rules out of anxiety, are called law. This is not the way to rule the state nor to lead men. For him, therefore, laws of the country should coincide with the moral virtue of propriety, in line with the view of Duke of Chou who identified his Six Laws with the title of *Chou-li* (the *Standards of Propriety of Chou*). In other words, laws are outward practical rules of conduct based on the moral virtue of propriety which provides guidelines for such regulations, as conceived by the pristine Confucianism.

Enactment of laws, therefore, is to be solidly grounded on the mandate of Heaven and the feelings of the people, on the one hand, and their implementation is to be carried out so as not to harm the people but to bring mercy and benefit to them. A principle of "laws for the sake of the people" (*wimin, wei-min*) is clearly espoused, even though he acknowledged that the one who makes laws according to the will of Heaven and the needs of the people still is the king. This calls for "prudence and mercy" as the cornerstone of criminal justice. If the written laws are too strict, the official who enforces them should be able to bend them as long as such an act insures prevention of harm to the people. If they are too loose, one should enforce them strictly to bring benefit to the people. In this, Tسان departed sharply from the tradition of unalterability of the sacred canons of royal ancestors, which allows only minor changes in the wordings of laws in view of the changing times. He argued that the basis for the constancy of the basic laws lies in their clarity, detail, and rigor, so that neither the whims of the changing ages nor the infinite greed of rulers may interfere in the process of criminal justice. For the benefit of the people, however, laws may be changed and rules may be bent.

In the general context of Tسان's "people-centered" (*minbon, min-pen*) theories, we also find an element of an egalitarian view of social order. For instance, even the emperor, as the son of Heaven, becomes an ordinary person once he leaves the throne. Laws are public instruments, equally applicable to the ruler who has the power to make them and shared by all under heaven. Lamenting that it has become so difficult to locate really qualified personnel to serve in the government for a long time now, he advocated the abolition of any discrimination in the process of recruitment, based on social status, legitimacy of birth, political faction, local origin, kinship connections, and the like. In fact, his view of equality stretches back

to a more fundamental issue of the educatability of the common people. Denying the traditional view of certain orthodox Neo-Confucianists that there are status differences in the capability to learn and achieve enlightenment, Tasan referred back to Confucius himself for his position that "there is no class in education," or to the belief held by Mencius that "all humans can become Yao and Shun."

On the basis of these arguments, Tasan may be justified in his "functional" conceptions of the role of rulership. While rulership, say, in the form of monarchy, is not denied, its significance is now understood in terms of its sociopolitical functions rather than some transcendently scared legitimacy. The functions that the ruler is expected to perform include maintenance of order, fair distribution of wealth for the sake of the people who actually produce the wealth, and effective personnel and budget management for a strong and rich state. Viewed in this functional framework, it is natural and rational that the ruler should seek advice and counsel from anyone, who is, regardless of the person's social status, equipped with qualifications and knowledge required of such a role. For no one person, even the sage, has infinite ability and wisdom.

In spite of such apparently "democratic" ideals expressed in his theories, indeed quite radical in his days, Chông Tasan still was a faithful Confucian. He did not propose a form of government one might find in a republic, headed by a leader selected by the people through some process of general elections, with due separation of power by three branches of government, and the like. His vision of political reforms primarily consisted of administrative-legal changes, with a view to restoring the Confucian ideal of "government by virtue." The more or less rational and "modern" elements of such reforms, however, may be found in the instrumental aspect. For example, he would propose administrative reforms by way of reorganizing government apparatus, and in doing so, he would draw upon all sorts of available historical and empirical material to support his position.

In the area of politics and law, Tasan has left three vast volumes, the *Recommendations for the Management of State Affairs*, which was not completed, the *True Guide to Governing the People*, and the *New Book on the Prudent Administration of Criminal Justice*. The first two also cover economic reforms. In the *Recommendations*, he laid down the foundation of the state government grounded in the uncontaminated Confucian idea of the ancient periods, upon which basis it then suggests reforms in the central government. The *True Guide*

and the *New Book* specifically deal with reforms in the administration of government and legal matters on the local level. As such, the former is the grand master plan for the whole society upon which basis the other two are built and are subordinate plans delving into specifics of the more down to earth matters. To that extent, the former is more theoretical in nature in that it takes its frame of reference from the ideals of ancient Confucian governance and basically touches upon the foundation of a virtuous government. The other two, in contrast, contain more realistic measures of reform not only on the local level but also on the current conditions of life among the peasantry in the countryside. In fact, these two works, especially the *True Guide*, extensively, rely upon empirically-historical material so much that even today's historians can draw upon them for their study of the times of Chǒng Tasan and his predecessors in Korea.

In the introductory part of the *Recommendations*, for example, Tasan lamentingly said (Kim Yǒng-ho 1983, p. 339):

Considering these [problems accumulated over the centuries] calmly and carefully, not a bit of even little things have been found untouched by disease. If we do not cure them now, things will never become better before they have destroyed the country as a whole. How could loyal subjects and men of patriotic fervor merely stand by and watch them with folded arms!

He was determined to suggest necessary remedies for the problems of the day. On the level of the national government, some fundamental reorganization of administrative offices was envisioned, the main purpose of which was to restore the power of the monarch, thereby the people, through programs insuring adequate revenues for the state. Since the misery of the people and the decline in the state revenues, according to his own analysis, were caused by the incredible disarray in the source of wealth, namely, agriculture and landownership, and in the rampant corruption in the mechanism of generating revenues, i.e., taxation systems, he attacked these ills by a grand scheme of government reorganization and guidelines for proper conduct of officials.

Primarily in the *True Guide* and to a lesser extent in the *New Book* which concentrates on criminal justice, he provided the *raison d'être* of officialdom in terms of its obligation to work for the benefit of the people. In the *Recommendations*, he proposed rationalization of government in the sense that it does entail meticulously

worked out concrete proposals for trimming the administrative apparatus in general, rearrangement of certain government bureaus in light of their actual functions, personnel management on the basis of competence without regard to the social origin, and the like.

In addition, of course, these works contain all kinds of suggestions concerning how productivity in the economy is to be raised and how the taxation systems should be reformed and rationalized, in order to help increase the revenue and improve the livelihood of the people. Some of these ideas will be discussed in connection with his economic theories and reforms. What is to be reminded at this point is that with all these genuinely "modern" ingredients of his programs for innovation, Tasan's basic orientation as a faithful Confucian Reformationist remains intact. It is repeatedly emphasized in his insistence on the principle of government by virtue, which is particularly stressed in his plea to the local magistrates, by cultivating oneself diligently to become a good governor truly interested in the welfare of the people.

His Confucian root is also manifested in his basic frame of mind in formulating programs of practical nature. For example, he referred all the way back to the ancient canon of laws, the *Standards of Propriety of Chou* (*Chou-li*), for its six realms of government as the framework of his own reorganization measures. The six are heaven, earth, spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Under the realms of heaven, he laid out the plan for rearranging the status system of administrative offices throughout the country and for the evaluation system of officials. The branch of earth handles the financial aspect of government in which he included the relevant portions of land-ownership and taxation systems. Personnel recruitment and management are the tasks of spring sections, while summer parts have to do with defense and military affairs. He did not complete the other two in the *Recommendations* in order to move on to the more urgent task of working on the *True Guide*. But the legal matters come under autumn, and industry and technology are covered in the winter branches.

C. Economic Reforms¹⁴

Even though we are discussing administrative and economic re-

¹⁴ Except for the specifically mentioned works, the following have been the main sources of my discussion in the section of economic reforms: Han Yŏng-u (1971); Hong I-sŏp (1959); Kang Man-gil (1985); Kim Han-sik (1979); Kim Kwang-jin (1962); Pak

forms separately as if they are clearly distinguishable, they are, in the case of Tasan's works, closely intermeshed in the huge scheme of the overall sociopolitical and economic changes he envisioned. He was in fact tackling the whole of the political economy of Chosŏn Korea in his days. The programs of reform he suggested are not merely measures of institutional change in each sphere; they are deeply rooted in the Confucian moral undertones, and hence the concrete proposals also touch upon the moral conduct of humans involved in the respective institutional or societal sectors.

Despite such an integrated approach, one can still discern pieces and portions of his works that are primarily concerned with economic reforms. In quantity alone, his works that touch upon mainly economic problems happen to occupy the largest bulk. This is understandable in view of his central objective, that is, to help improve the wealth of the nation, conceived always in the dual goals of enhancing agricultural productivity and income for the people and increasing revenue for the state.

Throughout his proposed economic reforms, it is clear that he envisaged a system of the political economy in which the wealth of the nation should be restored to the rightful owners or the real producers, namely, the state or the king representing it, and the people, particularly the peasantry. This not only reflects the dreadful conditions of life in Korea in his days, of which he made careful analysis. It also jibes with his political theories and his vision of a good society. Because the sources of the economic ills he found rested in the concentration of resources in the hands of a limited number of powerful families and clans among the literati bureaucrats or a few of the largest commercial interests, which were accompanied by wide spread embezzlement of resources by officials and public or private intermediaries linking the influentials in the capital and the provinces, he had to tackle them at the foundation in seeking innovations in the institutional system. Thus, it is translated into practical programs in connection with the land system, commercial development, and to a lesser extent industrial growth.

Foremost in his perception of economic problems was the completely distorted land system. While there were signs of potentially significant commercial and industrial growth already under way, the foundation of the national economy still was agriculture, and unlike some of the scholars of practical learning, who tended to tilt toward

emphasizing more vigorous commercial-industrial development, Chông Tasan clung fast to the idea of agriculture as the cornerstone of the national economy. Thus, he endeavored to formulate a rather radical program of land reform and agricultural economic system in his late thirties. Later in life, he shifted his position to a more realistic plan consistent with tradition. But his economic reforms were centered around the land system because it had been turned into complete shambles, thus hurting the entire economy. Agricultural productivity was damaged also by enormous disarrangements in the tax management and the granary administration. Entangled with the corrosion in the tax system were the disorder in the institutions of *corvée* labor, military service, and population registry or vital statistics. These in turn were largely due to the prevalent corruption of the depraved officials and their collaborators. The level of incentives for greater agricultural productivity could not be expected to rise, and the conditions of the peasantry which constituted the majority of the population were indeed frightful. The land reform and accompanying tax reform were essential for any decent change in the conditions.

The central ingredients of his land reform programs may be summarized in the following manner:

First, as a basis for rational land reform, he suggested a nationwide land survey. One of the elementary causes of corruption and disarray in the land tax system was a lack of accurate records of arable land and its quality. To help correct this ill, therefore, he proposed various methods and techniques of land survey and record keeping to be used by the local magistrates.

Second, he advocated the principle that those who actually till the land should own the land. He suggested this as a fundamental remedy for the rampant injustice caused by the widespread absentee landownership accompanied by the amassing of large-scale land holdings by the influential and exploitative owner-tenant relationship and rents. On the basis of this principle, he rejected other systems either in practice or proposed by other reform-minded scholars. They included the scheme of equal distribution of land according to the size of household, that of setting upper or lower limits to land holdings, and the so-called "well-field" (*chôngjôn, ching-t'ien*) system. The well-field system originated from ancient China and according to this, all land was to be divided into large squares, each subdivided into nine smaller squares. In principle, each of the eight outlying squares of these nine was to be cultivated by one family for

its own use and the yield of the ninth in the center cultivated in common by the eight families was to be used by the state. Tasan himself altered his position later and resorted to this system, but originally he rejected it as unfit for the current conditions.

Third, the ideal system he initially proposed is called the *yŏjŏn-pŏp* (*lu-t'ien-fa*), a form of cooperative farming by village units. Under this system, there is to be no private ownership of land. In the tradition of the ancient land system, all the land was the possession of the king who would allocate the land to the farming families of each village unit called *yŏ*. About thirty families comprising one such unit would collectively farm the land and the product would be distributed to the member families according to their contribution in labor, after one tenth of it was paid to the state for tax and some salary was paid to the village chief who was elected by the members for the management of cooperative agriculture. The principle of no land allotted to those who did not actually work the land was strictly to be enforced in this system. Thus, those literati members who served in the government and who engaged in teaching of useful matters may be compensated for their work other than farming, and the merchants and handicraftsmen could earn their livelihood by selling or exchanging the goods they produced.

This village cooperative farming system entailed other advantages. It provided an incentive scheme not available in other systems in that people would tend to migrate to other villages on the basis of their comparison of the relative yields of different units all around the country with a view to improving their own lot. Thus, agricultural productivity in general may be raised. Moreover, Tasan saw this system also from the military perspective. Considering the dislocations in the military conscription and taxation mechanisms, he thought this type of village organization as a form of military unit would not only eliminate all the ills involved in the taxation system related to military service, but also bolster the defense capability of the nation as a whole.

Some North Korean scholars claimed that this was indeed a great revolutionary socialist idea of agriculture in its embryo form already advocated in the late 18th century Korea.¹⁵ Although it does embrace certain socialistic elements in it, this idea of Tasan was really based on his Confucian theory of government for the sake of the people and on his empirical observation of the actual practices

¹⁵ See, for instance, Choi Ik-han (1955) and Kim Kwang-jin (1962).

of cooperative farming quite prevalent in Korean society for a long time. But he also realized later in his life that this system was too radical to be practiced in reality, and he shifted to the idea of well-field farming.

Closely linked to the land system was that of taxation. The various practices of unjust taxation, embezzlement of funds by the local tax collectors and tribute men acting as intermediaries between the central and local government agencies, evasion of taxes through false records or claiming of large acreages of uncultivated land, and the impractical calculation of tax due to the unrealistic land classification system were so pervasive that both government and peasantry were bled.

As measures to correct these ills, Tasan took pains to propose a whole variety of tax reform programs. Above all, he urged the farmers to increase the arable land area by reclamation and other efforts. In the area of commerce, handicraft industry, and mining, too, he saw potential sources of increasing revenue. While he was interested in enlarging the basis for taxation, he never failed to consider justice. For example, in the case of land tax, provided that private landownership was allowed to a certain extent, he argued that it was the landowner who was responsible for tax, not the tenant farmer who toiled to till the land and had to pay a high rent on it. He also advocated the policy of reducing taxes in times of natural disaster. But most of all, his plea to tax officials for honesty was almost pathetically poignant. Such was the extent of moral decay in the society. In fact, he strongly believed that the real reform in the tax system was not to be accomplished by mere changes in the institutional mechanisms and legal codes, but by the fundamental reformation of the tax officials.

Here again, we find an extremely rational and practical reformer in the person of Chŏng Tasan eventually resorting to the need for moral cleansing of human individuals, in line with the Confucian idea of government by virtue through self-cultivation. And yet, there is a significant twist in the direction of practical learning or pragmatism even in this morally oriented reformation of Confucian guise. His norm of self-cultivation is not mere abstract meditation or rectification of mind, as would be stressed by the Neo-Confucian orthodox line. It is to be manifested in the everyday conduct of the person, as a form of practice of self-cultivation, and this centers around the very much economic type of behavior, such as economy, frugality, and thrift, on the part of officials, especially the local

magistrates who have to deal with the people directly and the problems of management of taxation and other related matters concerning the welfare of the people and the wealth of the state. Economy, frugality, and thrift as principles of economic behavior of officials are important beyond their economic significance, for they are considered necessary conditions for attaining and maintaining the integrity or uprightness of government officials. To quote him directly from the *True Guide to the Governing the People*, for instance, he had this to say (Hong I-söp 1959, p. 199):

The root of loving the people rests in economy and frugality; the root of economy and frugality lies in the thrifty life; after one leads a thrifty life can one be upright; after one maintains integrity can one be compassionate. Therefore, thrift is the foremost responsibility of the magistrate or the governor of the people.

As a form of the official's integrity, he stressed his ability to separate the public and private interests in administration of government affairs. What is remarkable in this whole line of reasoning is that Tasan found a very important linkage between a set of mundane economic behavior envisaged to be necessary to insure the security of national finance and the welfare of the people and the moral significance of such behavior deeply rooted in the Confucian ideal of government. By the same token, Tasan admonished the people, particularly those with wealth and power, to cut their spending on luxury items such as silk. This has to do with the larger issue of national wealth and of preserving finite natural resources such as gold and silver, which are constantly shipped out to China in exchange for luxury commodities such as silk. In short, the guiding principle of tax reform in Tasan was "to bring no harm to the people below, and to avoid loss in the state treasury above," which in turn was circumscribed by the Confucian ideal of good government where the officials lead a thrifty life and maintain integrity through self-cultivation.

When it comes to his thoughts on commercial activities, Tasan seemed to hold a cautious position in which, while he rejected the old attitude toward commerce as an unrespectable occupation recognizing a need for encouraging commercial activities for revenue purposes, he was adamant against the policy of monopolizing commerce. This is due to his emphasis on agriculture. He sought to expand small-scale commercial activities by local merchants with their root in agriculture and suggested them to engage in farming for commer-

cial crops. His objection to the monopolized commerce by a handful of influential merchants with powerful political connections was based on his own observations of the abuses and corruptions of these large-scale merchants, disrupting the economic order of the nation, which was already in shambles. It also reflected his ideal vision of a just society where the resources are equitably distributed, as manifested in his proposal for the village cooperative farming system. Realizing the advantage of commerce in increasing the source of revenue, he encouraged nationwide market systems where any entrepreneurial person with commercial ability would be able to make money and pay due taxes. He proposed measures related to the elimination of mechanisms by which local officials could embezzle the state revenue by taking bribes and exploiting merchants or farmers engaged in commercial farming.

As for mining policies, Tasan argued basically for the nationalization of mining of major minerals such as gold, silver, copper, and iron ore. The main objective of this line of policy was to help the national treasury, for he saw that private mining monopolized by large merchants and influential families had contributed little toward the state revenue. But theoretically, such an idea is congruent with the notion of collective farming on the nationalized land as proposed in his village cooperative system. Nationalization measures, of course, did not include any items that are of immediate use to the everyday life of the people, such as salt, tea, alcoholic beverage, etc. Also to be noted is that he included in his administrative reorganization scheme a proposal to establish an office in charge of mining.

Proposals for the establishment of new government bureaus were made with respect to technological development and industrial policies, too. He strongly advocated introduction of new techniques not only from China but even from Japan. The new bureaus in the central government to look over these matters would include one handling the importation of new technologies from the outside, one dealing with matters of shipbuilding and management of marine affairs and taxation related to them, and one exclusively dealing with all kinds of wheels needed for diverse uses. He justified the creation of new bureaus by arguing that, even though some said that Korea is too poor to have any more government offices newly created, he believed that it is necessary precisely because our national economy is weak. In connection with this and other matters relevant to economic growth, Tasan was very critical of other scholar-bureaucrats

who may be well versed in *li-ch'i* and other Neo-Confucian theories but totally ignorant of, indifferent to, and even disrespectful of technical and commercial development.

Tasan's views on technology are more than practical ideas useful for the improvement of material conditions of life. They have a philosophical root in his theory of human nature and in his conception of history. As has been examined briefly, he separated humans from nature and distinguished man from animals. One crucial criterion by which man is different from animal is that man can have techniques and is able to develop technology. While he expressed some doubt about the evolutionary or progressive advancement of human moral perfection historically, much in line with the cyclical conception of history dominantly held by Confucians, he was very optimistic about the evolutionary development of technology. This view, he stated in his essay on "Techniques and Crafts," as follows (Han Yǒng-u 1971, p. 32):

The more our agricultural techniques are developed, the more we shall be able to produce in the same acres and the greater productivity we shall achieve even with the mobilization of little labor.... The higher our spinning and weaving techniques are elevated, the larger quantity of yarn we shall produce even with little raw material, and the more beautiful cloth we shall weave even with the utilization of labor for a short duration.... The development of our military techniques will make our soldiers more courageous in offense, defense, transportation, and constructing encampments, and also make them more invincible to danger.... The development of our handicraft techniques will make our houses, utensils, castles, ships, and vessels more solid and convenient. If we truly learn excellent techniques and encourage their utilization, our country will become rich, our armed forces stronger, the living of our people will be improved, and their health will be promoted.

*D. Tasan's Scholarship*¹⁶

If many of his ideas in substance are amazingly rational and radical by the criteria of his own times and even by today's standards in some cases, the very nature of his scholarship is also found to be rather extraordinary for a traditional Confucian man of letters. When authors today attempt to characterize him as a "modern" intellectual, therefore, they tend to emphasize the following as his

¹⁶ For Tasan's scholarship, refer to works in note 14 and Ch'ŏn Kwan-u (1977) for the academic orientation of the Practical Learning School in general.

outstanding tendencies as a scholar:

First of all, his critical orientation should be mentioned. He was critical of the predominant philosophical theories and political concerns of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, of the current system of government for its corruption, ineptitude, and other irregularities, and of the officials and the elite class for their immoral, selfish behavior. This critical mind was at once a manifestation of his rational (hence "modern") orientation and his Confucian (hence "traditional") idealism.

Second, his approach to issues and problems was very much in line with what may be termed "scientific" in the following sense: He investigated facts through careful observations, analyzed causes and sources of problems with logical scrutiny, argued in an experimental mode of reasoning, and presented evidence to support his position. The material he used ranged from Confucian classics, available documents, opinions and records of others, his own experiences many of which he even recorded in hundreds of poems.

Third, on the basis of scientific analysis, he hardly failed to propose some solutions to and remedies for problems he tackled. His scholarship was indeed practical learning intended for pragmatic purposes, always couched in the ideal of Confucian "sincerity" (*sŏng, ch'eng*).

Fourth, the debate on whether or not or to what extent Tasan was influenced by Western thoughts, Catholicism inclusive, is not over yet. This is partly due to the general lack of his own reference to any significant documents of Western origin. It is surmised, however, that shocked by the severe persecution of relatives and friends for their Catholic affiliation, he may have deliberately avoided making any explicit reference to Western documents or ideas in his writings nor to his departure from Catholicism. Nevertheless, this influence cannot be denied. Above all, he was exposed quite early in life to the writings of scholars of Practical Learning and became convinced of its superiority. His ideas are quite consistent in many respect with those of his predecessors or contemporaries belonging to this school of thought, which no doubt was under the direct or indirect influence of Western learning that seeped into Korea through China. Moreover, while he was still in the close entourage of King Chŏngjo, it is reported, he was given the liberty to study all the books and materials brought in from China, which had been kept classified for fear of contaminating the thought of the officials and the people. All of these were on some aspects of Western culture,

religion, and life.

It seems, therefore, reasonable to assume that he was indeed exposed to as much of Western ideas as were available those days, perhaps much more than any other single individual. The moot question still is how much of what kind of influence he came under. This question may be important to investigate further because then we will have some clear clue to the degree of modernity to which he was exposed. But more importantly, it will provide us with a reference criterion against which we now should be able to determine what kind of Confucianist he was. His Confucian background definitely looms large. But he was also a radical Reformationist from the prevalent Confucian point of view. The question whether this Reformation had anything to do with the Western influence should be an intriguing one to pursue.

IV. Implications for Modernization in Korea

Within less than one generation after Chǒng Tasan's death, Korea came under constant pressure from the imperial powers from the West, North, and South to open the hermit kingdom and engage in trade with them. After a series of incidents involving military action between the modern ships from the outside and Korean defenders, Chosŏn authorities finally succumbed to the pressure and began signing treaties with them. Despite some reforms attempted by the new king's father who came to control the government as his son, Kojong, assumed the throne at the tender age of twelve in 1864, the tide from the outside was too strong for the already crumbling monarchy to withstand the surge. Korea became a battle ground for imperial control by China, Japan, and Russia, and finally fell to Japan who gained an upper hand in the peninsula in 1910.

Chǒng Tasan's brilliant proposals for fundamental reform not only in government but also in other spheres of society were never actually adopted in his lifetime nor after his death. To this extent, his "modernization" programs were mere plans on paper, not materialized in history. Interestingly enough, however, Chǒng Tasan has been repeatedly invoked, revived, or reappraised in the history of the actual unfolding of modernization in Korea since the late 19th century. Lately, even he has emerged as a figure of hero for the nation as a whole and the sesquicentennial of his death in 1986 marked a new era for resurgence of serious intellectual research

into his life and thought.

In his own preface to the *True Guide to Governing the People* (*Mongminsimsö*), he confessed that "I call this a book of mind-and-heart (*simsö*, *hsinshu*) because even if I had the mind-and-heart to govern the people, I am in no position to be able to practice it" (Chöng Yag-yong 1978, p. 10). There are reports that some conscientious magistrates later copied this book and kept it on their desk for reference, but nothing is known as to how extensive this practice used to be. In 1883, King Kojong apparently ordered his cabinet to copy the entire work of Tasan, and he referred to them in carrying out his duties. He is said to have expressed his sorrow over the misfortune of having no subjects of Tasan's stature. Other than these, very few disciples of his kept on studying and disseminating his ideas and no systematic application of his proposals were attempted. One hundred years had to pass after his death before a movement was waged to revive his study and to publish in modern type his complete works. It is ironic that Tasan himself left a letter in which he sadly reassured himself that he shall wait for one hundred years for the publication of his works.¹⁷

As a matter of fact, one hundred years had to pass before a full-fledged program of studying Tasan and embarking on the publication of his complete works was reinitiated. It was started in 1935 one year before Tasan's centennial after his death. In the face of new cultural policies by the colonial authorities attempting to integrate the Korean people into the cultural sphere of Japan, a group of nationalistic intellectuals bent on reviving Korean studies waged a cultural war against the colonial encroachment. The central figure, the hero, of this movement was none other than Chöng Tasan himself. They organized a series of seminars on his life and thoughts, published articles in magazines and newspapers, and started the publication of his complete works, which took about five years to complete in seventy-six volumes as indicated earlier. It was by these intellectuals that Tasan came to be identified as the leading scholar of practical learning in Korea, as the first "modern" thinker, even exalted to the status as a counterpart of Rousseau and other Western Enlightenment thinkers, and a great nationalist scholar of the Confucian regime.

This marked a turning point in the history of Tasan study in

¹⁷ In his last years, he lamented to one of his friends that it is sad to have no one with whom to read his works, and in his own epitaph he pleaded that if Heaven does not accept his wishes all his works may be burned to ashes (Kim Yöng-ho 1983, p. 330).

Korea. Up to this period, Ch'ŏng Tasan had been looked upon as a source of inspiration and national pride by the modernizing elites and leading intellectuals in their efforts to raise the national consciousness and to help build a strong nation. With the blooming of Korean studies under the colonial rule, in which Tasan was elevated to the center of the stage, the way was opened for more serious research on him. He still was a hero for the nationalists but his significance has shifted to that of admiration and study. Times have changed and his ideas have lost immediate relevance to the needs of the days. The flourishing of academic research on Tasan, however, had to wait another full generation. The war in the Pacific in the forties, confusion after liberation, and devastation of the war in the Korean peninsula in the fifties, stood in the way.¹⁸

Beginning in the late 1950s, professional academicians started to do research on Tasan, and as the nation has accomplished something in the order of a miracle in the economic sphere, both quantity and quality of scholarly work on Tasan have improved drastically in the seventies. Owing to the space limitation, only statistical figures are summarized in the table form below.¹⁹

¹⁸ Works consulted for this section are: Ch'ŏn Kwan-u (1977); Kim Yŏng-ho (1975, 1977); and Han U-gŭn *et al.* (1985).

¹⁹ These figures have been compiled from a list of works on Tasan and presented in the table below:

WORKS ON CH'ŒNG TASAN BY YEAR, FORM OF PUBLICATION, AND BY SUBJECTS.

	(Decade)						Total	(%)
	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s		
(Subject fields)								
Philosophy	—	—	3	12	24	10	49	(21.6)
General	14	—	3	8	15	4	44	(19.4)
Literature	—	—	—	3	21	8	32	(14.1)
Economics	3	—	1	5	16	4	29	(12.8)
Political Science	—	—	2	1	16	4	23	(10.1)
Natural Science	1	—	—	4	5	1	11	(4.8)
History	1	—	—	3	1	1	6	(2.6)
Translation etc.	—	1	—	6	20	6	33	(14.5)
(Publication form)								
Academic article	1	—	3	18	68	15	105	(46.2)
Chapter in book	2	—	4	14	26	10	56	(24.7)
Single volume	1	1	2	6	18	10	38	(16.7)
Magazine, newspaper	15	—	—	2	1	1	19	(8.4)
Anthology	—	—	—	2	1	2	5	(2.2)
Degree thesis	—	—	—	—	4	—	4	(1.8)
Total	19	1	9	42	118	38	227	(100.0)
(%)	(8.3)	(0.4)	(4.0)	(18.5)	(52.0)	(16.7)	(99.9)	

The boom in Tasan study since the seventies has certain other implications in the present context. Even if there is little evidence that the modernizing elite of the 1960s represented by the military junta led by President Park Chung-Hee and the technocrats, who carried out the task of rapid economic growth, actually resorted to an historical figure like Chŏng Tasan in search of their inspiration for modernization, it was the time when Korea has made significant strides in the economic sphere that historical heroes including Tasan came to be rediscovered. But the significance of Tasan and other scholars of practical learning is much greater for their apparent relevance to the national goals of achieving prosperity. That we already had pioneers of modernization in the likes of Chŏng Tasan in our modern history reassures our current success and bolsters national pride.

To many of the intellectuals, however, there are much subtler kinds of sentiments underlying their enthusiasm for Tasan's rediscovery. The fact that he had to suffer persecution politically, thus losing any real opportunity to realize his dreams of materializing the blueprint for national prosperity, touches the chords of the critical mind of these intellectuals who are watching the unfolding of political processes in their country with a feeling of dismay.

There are still some disagreements among the experts on whether or not Chŏng Tasan should be or could be considered a "modern" thinker-scholar. Opinions vary with regard to the meaning of modern, in the first place. Beyond that, experts have not been able to make up their minds on the extent of modernity in his thoughts and programs. Some are cautious in arguing that he came very close to being a modern thinker with all the ingredients of modernity scattered here and there in his ideas and reform measures but may not be classified as fully modern. Others contend that although still unsystematic and inconsistent in many aspects, Tasan should be considered as a modern scholar or at least a pioneering modern thinker.²⁰

The ingredients of modernity in his thoughts most often singled out by these experts include his critical mind, nationalistic perspective, positive and empirical scientific scholarship, pragmatic interests in practical issues, belief in technological development, "democratic" theories, and so on. Different scholars emphasize the

²⁰ Refer to works such as Ch'ŏn Kwan-u (1977); Kim Yŏng-ho (1975); and Han U-gŭng *et al.* (1985).

differential importance of any one or combination of these items, obviously according to their own purview. I would like to argue, however, that as far as modernization is concerned, whether one likes it or not, one should find the frame of reference, initially at least, in the worldwide process of modernization that was under way in Tasan's times, and then locate the indigenous adaptive effort on the part of Tasan as a Confucian scholar of the 18th-19th century Korea. In this sense, the task of identifying the source and nature of Western influence on Tasan's thoughts is very important.

In this closing section, I shall offer very tentative observations in this connection. First, as to the critical mind, I have already touched upon the subject. I would only like to point out a distinctive feature of his criticism that had certain tendencies entailing scientific attitude blended with a strong sense of national independence. In refuting the anthropocosmological, immanentist image of the universe of the Neo-Confucian world view, Tasan relied upon the available astronomical knowledge imported from the West through China, and he recognized that the earth is round and revolves on its own axis. He then extended this scientific knowledge to the realm of geopolitics in asserting that China is not the only "center" country in the world because depending on one's standpoint any country can be regarded as a center country. Implied in this line of reasoning are serious ideological challenges *vis-a-vis* China on two levels. Politically, Korea's national independence from the traditional tributary relationship is urged. Culturally, the blind worship of Chinese Confucianism, particularly Neo-Confucianism, is under attack. There is another twist in the case of Korea's relationship with China. Since Ch'ing Dynasty was ruled by "barbarians" (the Manchus), many Neo-Confucian officials were still loyal to the true China of Ming and they refused to pay tribute to Ch'ing prohibiting importation of any new techniques from Ch'ing China. Tasan, along with other scholars of practical learning, made it plain that this was ridiculous and that they should "learn" whatever new knowledge was useful to national prosperity not only from the barbarians in the north but also from those in the south, i.e., Japan. The idea of plurality of nations and autonomy of each nation in the international relations must be a modern ingredient.

His pragmatism is another crucial element of the modernity of Tasan's thoughts and scholarship. It contained not only the components of practical interests in improving the conditions of life through certain realistic programs dealing with administration, eco-

nomy, technology, and what have you, but also was embedded in his positive-empirical orientation in studying phenomena of interest. Practicality had been claimed by Neo-Confucians and their predecessors dating back to Confucius. Rigorous study had been stressed by the Confucians of Han Learning and the Ch'ing School of Han Learning. But their practicality was largely confined to self-cultivation, and even in the cases where actual reform programs were attempted, their "scientific" ground was mostly missing. The methodological rigor and search for evidence in the earlier Confucian schools were primarily meant for textual studies of the classics. Tasan's pragmatism, in contrast, was directed to practical measures for national development and grounded on empirical evidence he gathered either personally or through documentations. That he recorded much of his observations in the form of poetry is quite unique. His recognition of the crucial importance of technology for national development cannot be lightly dismissed if one desires to find truly modern components in his thoughts.

It becomes much less clear to what extent one could define him to be modern when it comes to the question of his political theories, relative to democratic ideas. Even though they were rudimentary in nature, his theories of the origin of rulership and the picture of how rulers were selected and replaced must be taken to represent democratic ideals by any standard. When he suggested that all *yangban* should be engaged in some productive occupation and earn their own livelihood in commerce, industry, or farming, in the first place, or in government service or in technical education, he was indeed proposing an egalitarian image of society where people ought to be differentiated only by their occupational functions. And yet, two problems emerge in his political thoughts. It is not clear how much of these are "Western" in origin as Tasan formulated them. Moreover, Tasan never advanced a concrete proposal for a republican form of government or even a constitutional monarchy as an alternative to what already was in existence. It is in this context that we find in Ch'ong Tasan a "traditional" Confucian thinker. While he theoretically reasoned that a ruler should be replaced by the will of the people, he never advocated revolution. In fact, he was keenly concerned about the growing potential for peasant uprisings and even proposed measures of defense against such insurgent military actions. This was his way of indigenous adaptation to the changing world situation.

In short, therefore, I would assume that Ch'ong Tasan was a mod-

ernizing elite in a very embryonic stage of modernization of Korea around the turn of the 19th century. That his programs of modernization were not implemented was not certainly his fault. The ruling elite of his days was not prepared for such forms of adaptation in the face of slowly encroaching international acculturation from the West. His was in a sense an epitomatic case of the tragic story of incipient modernization in Korea.

I have mentioned that Tasan was a Confucian Reformationist. He advocated and suggested reforms in society at large in the practical realm of life, and he can also be considered a Confucian scholar who made some bold departures from the orthodox Neo-Confucianism and in the process he, like any faithful Confucian, claimed the repossession of the legitimacy by resorting to the Master himself and beyond. Based on this Confucian Reformation, he now was able to propose practical reforms in the mundane world. Nevertheless, one should not overlook that Tasan tightly held on to the very Confucian ideal of government for the sake of the people by virtuous self-cultivation on the part of the ruler and governors, and he was never able to implement his reform programs. Thus, his Confucian Reformation was an aborted one.

In closing, I should like to make the following observations with respect to today's relevance of Chŏng Tasan as a Confucian Reformationist and pragmatist. The Korean people have demonstrated how pragmatic they can be when needed to be and when the conditions are ripe. Whether or not this pragmatism came from the Confucian tradition is a matter one may want to pursue in a different context. It is clear, though, that Confucianism, particularly of the sort represented by Tasan and his colleagues in the School of Practical Learning in Korea were genuinely pragmatic. One may claim this tradition as a source of contemporary pragmatism in Korea. What seems to need greater attention today, however, is the "moral" side of Tasan's Confucian Reformation. The very reason why he was not able to realize his dreams in his days has to do with the moral nature of the ruling elite of the time. No matter what type of government, with all the complex bureaucratic organization and pluralistic forms of society, is installed, this moral principle of good government, so strenuously urged by Tasan as a Confucian, is more than pertinent. It is actually because of this element that Chŏng Tasan still is a hero to many intellectuals genuinely concerned about the future of our republic and the nation as a whole, even at this juncture of history.

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(Note)

The works cited here in this bibliography are mostly secondary materials, which comprise only a small portion of the published works on Tasan which numbered over two hundred as shown in the table of note 19 above. But Tasan's original texts and translations have also been consulted occasionally when some uncertainties have arisen as to the translation or interpretation. His overall collected works is called *Yōyudang chōnsō*, meaning the collected works of the man of the Hall of Hesitations, another pen name he gave himself after the study where he taught and studied after he resigned from the court. This was compiled and published in the 1930s between 1934 and 1937, and reproduced in photocopy in 1970. This consists of 76 volumes in modern Chinese type, as has been indicated earlier.

Recently, some of his major works have been translated into Korean for wider dissemination. Of these, *Mongminsimsō* (the *True Guide to Governing the People*) has been translated by a group of scholars over a period of eight years between 1978 and 1985, published by *Ch'angjak kwa Pip'yōngsa* in 6 volumes in Seoul. *Kyōngse yup'yo* (the *Recommendations for the Management of State Affairs*) has been translated and published in four volumes in the seventies by the Association for Promotion of National Culture. Other minor works have also been translated but will not be mentioned here.

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