
Dis-assembling Traditions: Deconstructing Tasan via

Matteo Ricci

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Abstract

Chŏng Yagyong 丁若鏞 (1762–1836), commonly known by the penname Tasan 茶山, was infamous for his involvement in the early Catholic Church, which was formed by his close friends and his brothers. This Church was responsible for its self-evangelisation based on the ideas found in Matteo Ricci's Tianzhu shiyi 天主實義 (*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*). The effects of this very controversial aspect of his life, and the influence of this precarious context—fraught with danger, narrowly escaping execution and exiled for 18 years—has been under-valued. This paper highlights the effects of such a context on Tasan's ideas by engaging with “deconstruction”, drawing on the ideas of Jacques Derrida. I outline how Tasan embroidered Ricci's deconstructive strategies into the deepest fabric of his own deconstruction of “original” Confucianism, or his dis-assembling of traditions. The paper uncovers Christian traces silhouetted in Tasan's theistic commentaries, leading him towards a Post-Confucian conceptualisation of humanity (仁) vis-à-vis a personal, monotheistic, creator God.

Introduction

In *Korea: A Religious History*, James Grayson outlines the development of the Catholic Church in Korea, noting its unique indigenous development without foreign missionaries.¹ This paper focuses on one of the earliest converts from this period, Tasan 茶山 Chŏng Yagyong 丁若鏞 (1762–1836), generally considered one of Korea's greatest thinkers. Tasan is more often than not described as an avatar of *Sirhak* 實學 or ‘practical learning’, a sobriquet that focuses solely on aspects of his writings (and other philosophers' writings from the late Chosŏn dynasty) relating to politics, agriculture and so on.² However, most of Tasan's

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¹J. H. Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History* (London, 2002), pp. 140–146.

²The term *Sirhak* was not used to describe the writings of those scholars during their lifetimes and there was no such group who assembled themselves under this umbrella term. It was applied during Korea's colonial period (1910–1945), coloured by nationalist re-readings of only certain ideas in certain texts, and as in the case of Tasan, ignored the vast majority of his writings which did not correspond with this anachronistic label. For my discussion on *Sirhak* in relation to Tasan's writings, see: “Tasan-e taehan maengnak-jök ihae: sirhak-esŏ sangje-kaji” 다산에 대한 맥락적 이해: 실학에서 상제까지 (Contextualising Tasan: From *Sirhak* to *Sangje*), translated by Lee Suna in, *서구학문의 유입과 동아시아지성의 변모* (Cultural Transfer and the Collapse of Traditional East Asian Scholarship), (Seoul, 2012), pp. 83–106. For another recent study on Tasan's artificial transmogrification into a *sirhak* scholar during the 1930s as a reaction to the intellectual violence of Japanese imperialism, see: Choe Chaemok,

writings are actually commentaries on Confucian texts.³ Furthermore, he himself was not involved in the implementation of any new political or agricultural policies, which became, only much later, labelled as “Sirhak”. In fact, his works were only collected and published for the first time between 1934 and 1938, to celebrate the first centenary of his death, coinciding with Korea’s reaction against Japanese cultural imperialism. During his own life time Tasan was considered radical, someone associated with heterodox ideas: a member of the early Catholic Church in Korea. The early adherents to Catholicism in Korea were heavily influenced by *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), the work of the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). This paper investigates the influence of Matteo Ricci’s text on Tasan, as well as Tasan’s religio-historical context. Examining the influence and context allows us to uncover some of the religious effects on his texts, especially the re-conceptualisation of *Shangdi* 上帝, the Confucian “Lord on High”, as a personal monotheistic creator God.

The paper engages with Jacques Derrida’s “deconstruction”, which questions how texts and traditions are structured, shaped and transmitted. Derrida’s colleague, and a great contributor to deconstruction, Jean-Luc Nancy, explains that deconstruction:

[...] means to take apart, to *disassemble*, to loosen the assembled structure in order to give some play to the possibility from which it emerged but which, qua assembled structure, it hides.⁴ (emphasis added).

I draw upon the idea of “dis-assembling” to highlight the “positive” goal within any deconstruction: to take apart rigid structures, and to reassemble them differently, opening ideas and traditions up to “other” possibilities. This is particularly relevant in my discussion of Tasan’s work, especially as this paper uncovers strands of Christian thought interwoven within Confucian commentaries. I show that these ideas were shaped by the context in which the texts were written. Derrida writes that, “There is nothing outside context”, and that this “outside” penetrates the text, just as it does the writer.⁵ A salient feature of deconstructive readings is retracing how philosophical traditions have been constructed and focuses on re-examining their “origin”.⁶ This article shows that Matteo Ricci and Tasan both used strategies that deconstructed the force of traditions and questioned constructions imposed on their times. It also highlights how Tasan, a Korean philosopher, engaged intellectually as a great critical thinker with the Western ideas of Ricci. My approach leads us back to the origin of the Korean encounter with Christianity: Matteo Ricci and his Christo-Confucian catechism.

1930 nyōndae chosōnhak undong-gwa ‘sirhakcha Chōng Tasan’ūi chaebalgryōn’ (1930년대 조선학 운동과 ‘실학자 정다산’의 재발견), *Tasan-gwa hyōndae*, vol. 4, no. 5 (2012), pp. 69–101.

³Yi Hidok, “Tasan’s Monumental Work”, *Korea Journal*, vol. 12, no. 10 (1962), pp. 34–35; Lee Eul-ho, “Dasan’s View of Man”, in *Korean Philosophy: Its Tradition and Modern Transformation* (Seoul, 2004), pp. 337–356.

⁴J. L. Nancy, *Dis-enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, translated by M.B. Smith (New York, 2007), p. 148. This paper uses the term “dis-assemble” to highlight the role of de-construction to take something apart, but then to put it back together in a different way, showing other possibilities within seemingly hermetic traditions, bringing together Derrida and Nancy’s important contributions.

⁵J. Derrida, “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion”, translated by Samuel Weber, in *Limited Inc.* (Illinois, 1988), p. 136.

⁶J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978), p. 295; J. L. Nancy, 1992. “Elliptical Sense”, in *Derrida: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, 1992), p. 37.

Matteo Ricci: Dis-assembling Neo-Confucianism

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) had synthesised the metaphysical development of the Neo-Confucianist Song dynasty 宋朝 philosophers, in particular the ideas of Cheng Hao 程灝 (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107). It was Zhu who had compiled the *Four Books of Confucianism*.⁷ His commentaries on those texts were considered the official ones that were prescribed for the civil service exams in China from 1313 until the start of the twentieth century. It could be argued that Zhu Xi directed the trajectory of Confucian thought in China, and that his own biases influenced how future generations understood and analysed the ideas of Confucius and Mencius.⁸ Matteo Ricci began to understand this as he accommodated his dress, language and ideas to those of the Confucian mandarins who became his friends and who encouraged him to turn away from Buddhism and its robes, which he had first donned in China to blend in as unobtrusively as possible in the new culture he soon adopted as his own.⁹

Matteo Ricci became known to all in the Middle-Kingdom (right down to the present) by the Chinese name of Li Madou 利瑪竇, a testimony to his importance, largely due to his ability to engage intellectually with the Confucian scholars of his day in their own language. *Tianzhu shiyi*, Ricci's *Magnus Opus* first published in 1603, illustrates Ricci's genius – arguing in Chinese to the Chinese about the origins of their own traditions. It reflects the complicated intellectual context Ricci, the missionary, was thrust into. Ricci's text was written for Confucians, not Christians, but his goal was to lead Confucians towards Christianity. Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* attempts to deconstruct Neo-Confucianism and to complement it with Christian ideas: to disassemble it and then reassemble it differently. This was accomplished by identifying traces of God in Confucian texts. Ricci directed his readers attention away from the *Four Books* 四書, compiled by Zhu, to the original *Five Classics* 五經 of Confucianism, to rediscover *Shangdi* 上帝 (the Sovereign on High) and open him up to different possibilities.

Ricci suggested that the terms used to describe the “same” God are simply “different” in “Other” traditions.¹⁰ Hence, “He who is called the Lord of Heaven [*Tianzhu* 天主] in my humble Country *is* He who is called *Shangdi* in Chinese”.¹¹ This enunciates what Derrida calls *différance*, an idea intrinsic to deconstruction. The full meaning of an idea or the deconstruction of an idea is never present in any one word. A word is constantly “deferring” to “different” words, which combine traces of their “sameness”.¹² This also echoes deconstruction's “passion” for the origin, and permitted Ricci to weave theistic strands from his own tradition into a Confucian discourse, which he presents as a dialogue

⁷The *Four Books*: the *Lunyu* 論語 (The Analects), the *Daxue* 大學 (Great Learning), the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean), and the *Mengzi* 孟子 (The Mencius).

⁸J. K. Fairbank and M. Goldman, *China, A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 97–98. For an overview of the importance of Zhu Xi's thought, see: Wing-tsit Chan, *Chu Hsi and his Thought*, (Hong Kong, 1987). Note: Zhu Xi is written as Chu Hsi in the Wade-Gilles transliteration system.

⁹J. Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: a Conflict of Cultures* (New York, 1986), p. 15.

¹⁰The *Five Classics*: the *Yi jing* 易經 (Book of Changes), the *Shujing* 書經 (Book of Documents), the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Poetry), the *Liji* 禮記 (Records of Rites), and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals).

¹¹M. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shi-i)*, Chinese-English edition (St. Louis, 1985), para. 103. Ricci's text is written in a series of paragraphs and so this paper indicates the exact paragraph referenced.

¹²J. Derrida, *Positions*, translated by Alan Bass (London, 1981), p. 98, note 3.

between a Chinese scholar and a Western scholar – between the East and the West, between Confucianism and Christianity.

Ricci repeatedly weaves the concept of a creator God into his text, as this idea clearly distinguishes Christianity from Buddhism and Daoism, as well as the metaphysical underpinnings of Neo-Confucianism, especially its idea of the Supreme Ultimate 太極 (C. *Taiji*, K. *t'aegük*) and *Principle* 理 (C. *li*, K. *i*) that were considered to be behind the “spontaneous arising” of all things, which had already been influenced by Buddhism and Daoism.¹³ Ricci asserts that the Confucian *Shangdi* is “the origin of the universe” [乾坤之原] and therefore, “the root of all creation” [造化之宗], or “the first [original] Father [原父]”.¹⁴ It is this anthropomorphic re-conceptualisation of *Shangdi* that then allows Ricci to undermine Neo-Confucian metaphysics, as well as Buddhist “voidness” 空 and Daoist “nothingness” 無 throughout the text. It also introduces a theological aperture that will be filled by Christian supplementation.¹⁵ Ricci retraces the “impurity” of Neo-Confucianism, noting that the earlier Confucian Classics did not discuss the Supreme Ultimate, an idea central to Neo-Confucianism, hence it had been adopted from another tradition that was subsequently criticised as heterodox.¹⁶ Ricci is highlighting that orthodoxy itself has been supplemented with heterodox ideas – something he himself is hoping to do. Ricci was overturning orthodoxy, charging Zhu Xi with imbedding impurities from other traditions into the fundamental make-up of Confucianism. But as Steven Shakespeare notes, “Tradition exists because meaning is not pure”, while Derrida argues that, “traditionality is not orthodoxy”.¹⁷

Ricci is then arguing that *Shangdi* carries with it traces of *Tianzhu* (and vice versa) which also shows us that Ricci’s own view of Christianity had been transformed from his original Latin “orthodox” understanding. Ricci returns to teachings from the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Book of History*, and reiterates that, “it is quite clear [...] that the Sovereign on High and the Lord of Heaven are different only in name”.¹⁸ The “return” to uncover the “original” *Shangdi* can be identified by Ricci’s emphasis on the *Book of Odes*, which he quotes several times to illustrate how the ancients revered and feared *Shangdi*, but also to establish that, in his opinion, they “served” him, much like Yahweh in the *Old Testament*. This is an important move by Ricci as it advances his position to criticise Zhu Xi for having re-interpreted the word “Sovereign” (帝) as “Heaven” (天),

¹³For example, the Neo-Daoist, Guo Xiang 郭象 (d.312), had argued that things “spontaneously produce themselves”. See: Wing-tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey, 1973), pp. 328–329. Joseph Ung-Tai Kim refers to this theme in Neo-Confucianism and Daoism as “auto-émanation”. See: J. Kim, *L'Expérience Religieuse Coréenne dans la Première Annonce du Message Chrétien* (Seoul, 1990), p. 118. Aristotle rejected the idea of “spontaneous generation” in *De Anima* (*On the Soul*). See: Aristotle, *De Anima* (*On The Soul*), translated by Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London, 1986).

¹⁴M. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Par. 3 and 13.

¹⁵The idea of the “supplement” is also important to deconstruction and is also related to *différance*. Derrida writes that, “what is supplementary is in reality *différance*”, see: *Speech and Phenomenon and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, translated by David Allison, Derrida (Illinois, 1973) p. 88. J.L Nancy later suggests that *différance* introduces the “supplementary characteristic” that “belongs without belonging”, in *Dis-enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, p. 111.

¹⁶M. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, par. 78–79.

¹⁷S. Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology* (London, 2009), p. 98; J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978), p. 74.

¹⁸M. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, par. 104–108.

which he also equated with *Principle* 理.¹⁹ Such an interpretation had serious theological consequences. Ricci is arguing that nowhere in the *Classics* can we find the “Supreme Ultimate” (or *Principle*) being served by man, and how Heaven signified a “figure of speech” to describe the formlessness of the Lord of Heaven, who – if he should be served – is a personal God, a point this paper revisits in Tasan’s writings.²⁰ In addition, Ricci quotes from “the announcement of Tang” in the *Book of History* 書經: “The great Sovereign on High has conferred even on the inferior people a moral sense.”²¹ Here, Ricci has disengaged morality from the onto-cosmological realm of Neo-Confucian metaphysics and supplements *Shangdi* himself, with a *différente* self – Jesus – who Ricci insisted “was really the Lord of Heaven”.²² His teachings are described as superior to those of all other sages, and so “the canonical writings of former times were *supplemented*”.²³

Ricci reinterprets the most important Confucian concept of humanity 仁 (C. *ren*, K. *in*) as follows: “Love the Lord of Heaven [. . .] and love others [愛人] as yourself,” obviously based on the words of Jesus in the *New Testament* (Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28).²⁴ It is this complete externalisation of “humanity” that gestures beyond the morality of Confucianism, drawing on the teachings of Jesus, towards what I call Post-Confucianism, traces of which are to be found in Ricci’s text. For example, he emphasises that “Bestowed on others, it [humanity] grows even more luxuriant”.²⁵ Of course, Confucius in *The Analects* (15:23) stressed that it is what we do not do to others that distinguishes oneself. Ricci does not describe the Crucifixion or the Resurrection: for his Confucian readers it is initially this practical moral transformation that is presented in terms of a superior form of self-cultivation 修己 (C. *Xiuji*, K. *sugi*), which should lead a Confucian towards sagehood. In Ricci’s Post-Confucian realm of moral perfection, sagehood is redirected towards God, who can be referred to as *Shangdi* and/or *Tianzhu*.

We can summarise Ricci’s de-constructive strategy as follows:

- 1) The representation of *Shangdi* as *Tianzhu*, a monotheistic creator God,
- 2) *who* replaces Neo-Confucian metaphysical concepts,
- 3) which he criticises as impurities imported from Buddhism and Daoism,
- 4) while morality should be supplemented with the “practical” teachings of Jesus, thereby linking morality with God.

This now allows us to understand what ideas the early Catholics in Korea, especially Tasan, were reacting to as they converted to Christianity via Ricci’s text.

Conversion, Blood and Terror

The earliest group of Korean intellectuals who converted to Catholicism were all Neo-Confucian scholars from the elite *yangban* (aristocratic) class, many of them related by blood

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, par. 109–110.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, par. 78.

²¹ *Ibid.*, par. 108.

²² *Ibid.*, par. 581.

²³ *Ibid.*, par. 589.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, par. 468.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 452.

or marriage. Yi Sünghun 李承薰 (1756–1801) and Yi Pyök 李檠 (1754–1786) are considered the two most important figures of this fledgling Church, which chose to keep a close-knit community, understanding from its inception the clandestine nature of its religious activities. Two events forced this early church into total secrecy, threatening its very existence. First, the discovery of secret prayer meetings of several *yangban* scholars, including Tasan and his brothers, in the house of the *chungin* (middle-class) Kim Pömu 金範禹 (?–1786), led to the arrest of all the participants. While the *yangban* escaped harsh punishment, Kim Pömu was not as fortunate. He died, after being exiled, from the wounds inflicted through torture, becoming the first Catholic martyr in Korea.²⁶ Catholicism was then proscribed by law, and the following year the importation of western books was also prohibited. Nevertheless, Tasan continued to be involved with the Church, clearly breaking the law. The second event, known as the Chinsan Incident, occurred when Yun Chich'ung's mother died in 1791.²⁷ Adhering to the guidelines received from the Church authority in Beijing, Yun and his cousin Kwön Sang'yön 權尙然 (?–1791), whom Yun had converted, refused to hold the “legal” Confucian ancestor memorial rites, which were banned and considered idolatrous by the Catholic Church, and in fact, burned the memorial tablets, generating a great scandal.²⁸ Soon, both Yun and his cousin were arrested and after torture, beheaded. Their heads were left exposed for several days to deter others from joining the religion, and obviously forcing others to withdraw, at least publicly, through fear of a similar fate. Tasan, like many others, renounced the religion *after* witnessing relations and friends brutally executed. One by one the original members of the Church were tortured, exiled, or executed.²⁹

Though Tasan had distanced himself from the Catholics, many were not convinced that he had truly renounced the religion, which explains the recurring attacks and allegations against him. Tasan writes, that by the autumn of 1795, he was demoted, sent away from the capital and a position close to the King, to the remote town of Kümjōng'yök. At the same time, Yi Sünghun was banished to Yesan (both in Ch'ungch'ōng Province).³⁰ In 1797, Tasan openly criticised Catholicism in a letter to the King. In it he suggests that he had only superficially understood Catholicism, that having just glanced at the texts, he had misunderstood its ideas,

²⁶Also present was Yun Chich'ung 尹持忠 (1759–1791), a cousin of Tasan's from the countryside. In fact, (the *chungin*) Kim Pömu had converted (the *yangban*) Yun Chich'ung after loaning him a copy of Matteo Ricci's text.

²⁷Chinsan refers to a place in North Chōlla province: this also shows how Catholic ideas had spread to this region, far from the capital.

²⁸The rites controversy had a long history in China leading to a papal ban in 1742 by Pope Benedict XIV, who issued the *Bull Ex Quo Singulari*, forbidding ancestor memorial rites and the use of *Tian* or *Shangdi* to refer to God, insisting on the usage of *Tianzhu*. For a discussion on the rites controversy, see: Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, (Taipei, 1966), pp. 131–152.

²⁹See: C. Dallet, *Histoire de l'Église en Corée* (Paris, 1874), vol. i, pp. 25–60; J. Ri, *Confucius et Jésus Christ: La première théologie chrétienne en Corée d'après l'oeuvre de Yi Piek Lettre Confucéen 1754–1786* (Paris, 1979); Kim Sijun (ed.), *Pyökwipyön 關衛編* (Writings Against Heterodoxy) (Seoul, 1987), pp. 108–138; Cho Kwang, *Chosōn h'ugi Ch'ōnjugyosa yōn'gu* 조선 후기 천주교사 연구 (A Study of Late-Chosōn's Catholic Church History), (Seoul, 1988), pp. 197–209; J. Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History*, pp. 142–143; Ch'oe Chegūn, *The Origin of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea* (Seoul, 2006), pp. 93–94. When we think of Catholics tortured from this period, we should be mindful that often this happened over several months, and that women and teenagers were tortured as well as men. For a further discussion of the brutality, See: P.E. Roux, “The Great Ming Code and the Repression of Catholics in Chosōn Korea”, *Acta Koreana*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2012), pp. 73–106.

³⁰Tasan, “*Chach'an myojimyōng* 自撰墓誌銘 (Self-Written Epitaph)”, in *Tasan-ŭi kyōnghak segye* 茶山の 經學世界 (Paju, 2003), pp. 93–94.

becoming “tangled up in promises of life after death”.³¹ Furthermore, Tasan also suggests that he had considered these ideas (written by western missionaries) to be merely another form of Confucianism. Tasan’s self-deprecating account of his ability to understand texts contrasts greatly with his reputation as an outstanding scholar who had impressed the king, who had come first in royal exams, and who had been promoted much faster than his seniors.³² More significant, though, is that promises of life after death could never have been confused with any form of Confucianism by any credible Confucian scholar. On the contrary, Confucians had always criticised such ideas and associated them with Buddhism. Another scholar from this time, Pak Chiwŏn 朴趾源 (1737–1805), criticised Catholicism and Matteo Ricci in his famous *Yŏlha Ilgi* 熱河日記 (*Yŏlha Journal*), focusing his critique on Heaven and Hell and the similarity to Buddhism – not Confucianism.³³ In addition, earlier scholars from the same *Namin* intellectual lineage as Tasan had all criticised Catholicism as something that was very different from, and therefore dangerous to, Confucianism. But again, they all noted its similarities with Buddhism concerning heaven and hell.³⁴

Tasan was far from unclear about Catholicism. He had been a practising Catholic, baptised (into a new Christian faith), attended masses, and participated in the “pseudo ecclesiastical hierarchy” of the early Church in Korea, which had been legally banned by Confucian law.³⁵ Not only was he reading and studying Catholic texts, he was preaching their message, repeatedly trying to convert other scholars, and as testified by fellow *Namin*, Yi Kigyŏng, constantly talking about Ricci’s text.³⁶ Tasan’s letter, often presented as evidence of a

³¹Tasan, *Tasan nonsŏl sŏnchip* 茶山論說選集 (Selected Discourses of Tasan) (Seoul, 1996), pp. 463–466.

³²*Ibid.*

³³See: *Database of Korean Classics (DBKC)*: 燕巖集, 燕巖集卷之十四○別集, 熱河日記. 鶴汀筆談 (*hokchŏng pildam*). This online database includes the original texts with scanned original manuscripts too. Available at: <http://db.itkc.or.kr/index.jsp?bizName=MM> (accessed on 08.08.2013).

³⁴The Chosŏn dynasty was plagued by rival factions. Two discussed in this paper are the *Namin* (Southern faction) and their bitter rivals at court, the *Noron* (Old Learning Faction). *Namin* scholars such as Yi Ik 李穡 (1682–1763), and his disciples Sin Hudam 愼後聃 (1702–1761) and An Chŏngbok 安鼎福 (1712–1783), rejected Ricci’s interpretation of *Shangdi* as a creator God and the idea of Jesus as his incarnation. For their criticisms of Ricci’s text, see: Kim Sijun (ed.), *Pyŏkwipyŏn*. For a short discussion on their Neo-Confucian critique of Catholicism, see: Kim Shin-ja, *The Philosophical Thought of Tasan Chŏng* (Frankfurt, 2010), pp. 92–102.

³⁵See: Kim Okhŭi, *Le rôle de Yi Pyŏk dans l’Introduction et la Diffusion du Catholicisme en Corée* (Paris, 1977), pp. 140–141. Ch’oe Chegŭn, *The Origin of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea*, pp. 38–39. In addition, An Chŏngbok, (mentioned in note 33) described the rituals performed by Catholics, including Baptism, the choice of new Baptism names and the use of holy water (聖水; K. *sŏngsu*), as well as confessions – he also notes that these ideas stem from Matteo Ricci. To read An’s original discussion on the early practices of Catholics in his text *Ch’ŏnhak mundap* 天學問答 [Questions and Answers on Heavenly Learning], see: Kim Sijun (ed.), *Pyŏkwipyŏn*, p. 483.

³⁶*Important Note*: See Yi Kigyŏng’s original account in the *Pyŏkwipyŏn*, p. 446. Baker also discusses the issue of Tasan wanting to discuss Ricci’s text with Yi Kigyŏng, and mentions another book Tasan encouraged him to read, which he calls the *Shengshih ch’u jao*, and which he translates as “*Teachings of the Church in Everyday Language*”. Don Baker does not provide the Chinese characters, and confirmation is difficult. He attributes this text to Fr. Joseph de Maille. See: Baker, *Confucians Confront Catholicism in Eighteenth Century Korea*, p. 313. The author’s full name is Fr. Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla (1669–1748), whose Chinese name was Feng Bingzheng. There is also a problem with the title given by Baker, but the problem seems widespread in the Korean sources. In both the *Pyŏkwipyŏn* (p. 446) (discussed above) and the official *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄 (The veritable records of the Chosŏn dynasty) (Seoul, 1955–1958), the Chinese characters are incorrect. According to The Ricci Institute Library and the Chinese Christian Texts Database, De Mailla’s text was the *Shengshi churao* 盛世芻蕘 (Grass Cutter in a Prosperous Age). The main issue is that the first character, 盛, has been replaced in the Korean sources by the homophone 聖, which would have been commonly associated with Catholic religious teachings in Chosŏn. For example, Yi Pyŏk’s catechism was the *Sŏnggyo yoji* 聖教要旨 (The Essence of the Divine Doctrine), and other texts by De Mailla and other Chinese Christians often use the character 聖. For the entry in the *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok*, see: *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄, *Chŏngjo sillok*

withdrawal from a Church he himself had helped to evangelise, can also illustrate that he was clearly bluffing, feigning stupidity, and deliberately misrepresenting his important role within the Church, in an attempt to stay alive, and possibly, to save others. Tasan is clever to omit such details in what can be described as a superficial recantation. It further highlights how Tasan's authorial control had been compromised by his context – a context of fear and terror. Therefore, we must conclude that Tasan was forced to misrepresent the truth in order to appease the king, whose own reputation would have been impugned for having a practising Catholic in the midst of his Confucian court.

In 1799 Ch'ae Chegong 蔡濟恭 (1720–1799), third State Councillor and an influential *Namin* figure at court, died. The following year the monarch, king Chǒngjo 正祖 (r.1776–1800) took ill and also died. Until then Tasan had survived as both Ch'ae Chegong and the King had been lenient towards the Catholics. Soon Tasan, his oldest friends and his brothers would enter into one of the most tumultuous periods of the entire Chosŏn dynasty, where those associated with Catholicism in any form lived in danger.³⁷ Threatened by the growing Catholic religion, the government, armed with the political support of the Queen Dowager, began an extensive persecution of Catholics all over the country with the aim of eradicating Catholicism. Hundreds were arrested, and initially they were given a *choice* to renounce the religion, or die. Such coercive apostasies, where psychological and physical torture was used, can hardly be considered as evidence of a profound change in beliefs.³⁸ Tasan describes this political persecution that again had little to do with religious concerns in *Chǒnghŏn myojimyŏng* 貞軒墓誌銘, (Memorial to Chǒng hŏn):

After King Chǒngjo passed away, the situation in the political circles of Chosŏn changed suddenly. The [*Noron*] faction who gained power in the court pursued the Catholics day and night with a list of names of people to be killed. This was six years after the Chinese missionary Zhou Wen-mu from Suzhou (蘇州) came in secret to spread the religion. The religion spread like seeping water, or like a wildfire, among men and women, higher and lower, as people gathered in places from Seoul to the rural countryside, with several hundred people gathering and studying the doctrines.³⁹

(1791 (Chǒngjo 15).11.13 kimyo: 正祖 33卷, 15年 (1791 辛亥, 11月 13日 (甲申)). An online version is available at: <http://sillok.history.go.kr/main/main.jsp> (accessed on 12.01.2013). The online version has the original Classical Chinese which carries the mistaken character 聖. There is also a modern Korean translation. In the translation, where the Chinese characters for this text are given, two characters are incorrect (first and third), not just the first one: 聖世蕝蕝. In this instance, the third character has also been replaced by an incorrect homophone. De Mailla's information may be found on two databases: 1) The Ricci Institute Library Online Catalog, available at: <http://riccilibrary.usfca.edu/view.aspx?catalogID=14531> and 2) The Chinese Christian Texts Database (CCT-Database) available at: <http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/info/eng/OE.sinologie/CCT/>

³⁷Yu Hongyŏl, *Han'guk Ch'ŏnjungyo yŏksa* 한국천주교 역사 (A History of Korea's Catholic Church) (Seoul, 1990), p. 59; Ch'oe Chegŭn, *The Origin of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea*, p. 118.

³⁸See: Ch'oe Sŏgu. "Korean Catholicism Yesterday and Today", in *The Founding of the Catholic Tradition in Korea* (Mississauga, 1996), pp. 141–160; Ch'oe Chegŭn, *The Origin of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea*, p. 121; A. Finch., "The Pursuit of Martyrdom in the Catholic Church in Korea before 1866", *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 60, no. 1 (2009), p. 99.

³⁹See DBKC: 興猶堂全書, 第一集詩文集第十五卷○文集, 墓誌銘, 貞軒墓誌銘. Tasan describes this information as secretive, yet he knew all the details, especially the very secret meetings with the Chinese priest and Catholic activities in the countryside, all of which took place after the infamous letter, discussed above, where Tasan had "apparently" disassociated himself from the Catholics. By 1801, when serious persecutions broke out, the Catholic Church had a membership of about 10,000 men, women and children, among them people from all walks of life. This was actually a significant number, as Ricci, during a similar number of years of missionary work

Before long, Tasan, his brothers Yakchong and Yakchŏn, Yi Sŭnghun, and other *Namin* leaders were all arrested, imprisoned and tortured. Yi Sŭnghun, who had previously apostatised, yet who clearly continued to practice, was executed along with Chŏng Yakchong on the same day.⁴⁰ Initially Tasan was exiled to Changgi in Kyŏngsang Province, while his brother, Yakchŏn, was exiled to Sinjido in South Chŏlla Province.⁴¹ During the winter of 1801, a letter (known as the Silk Letter 帛書 Paeksŏ) written by Hwang Sayŏng 黃嗣永 (1775–1801) had fallen into the hands of the enemies of the Church. He was a close disciple of Tasan's executed brother Chŏng Yakchong, and was also married to the daughter of Tasan's eldest half-brother Chŏng Yakhyŏn. Hwang's letter had been intended for the Bishop in Beijing, written as a desperate plea for help amidst the evolving persecution of Catholics. Hwang had specifically mentioned Tasan (or Chŏng Yagyong as he was known then) along with Yi Sŭnghun, describing how they had publicly renounced the religion to escape death, but how inwardly they held on to it.⁴² In addition, he revealed how, due to fear, many Christians had to stay hidden to assure that the religion was not fully exterminated.⁴³ Hwang, at just twenty-six years old, was executed in a most brutal manner, known as *nŭngji ch'ŏch'am* 陵遲處斬: one's hands and feet were cut off, as well as one's head. Again, witnessing such inhumane barbarity would have been enough to make many hide their Catholic belief. Indeed, Ch'oe Sŏgu describes Tasan as "outwardly Confucian, but inwardly Christian".⁴⁴

As a result of the "Silk Letter" incident, Tasan and his brother were called back from exile and imprisoned again to face renewed charges against them (Tasan, 2003, 115).⁴⁵ Don Baker describes how Tasan "denounced Catholic teachings [and] informed on former friends" but, it is important to emphasize that this happened only after he had been arrested with other Catholics and tortured—he had *not* come forward to inform of his own volition hoping to eradicate the Catholics or Catholicism.⁴⁶ Several hundred people were executed, with several hundred more exiled, undoubtedly an inspiration to many to hide their beliefs. Tasan and his brother Yakchŏn both managed to escape death again, along with the hundreds

in China, noted that there were about 2,000 converts. For a discussion on the growth of the Catholic Church in Korea during this period, see: Cho Kwang, *Chosŏn h'ugi Ch'ŏnjyugyosa yŏn'gu*, pp. 20–31.

⁴⁰Ch'oe Chegŭn, *The Origin of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea*, pp. 119–124.

⁴¹For Tasan's own account of these events, see: Tasan, "Chach'an myojimyŏng", pp. 112–114.

⁴²To read Hwang Sayŏng's letter, see: Yŏ Chinch'ŏn (ed.) *Hwang sayŏng paeksŏ-wa ibon* 黃嗣永 帛書와 異本 (Hwang Sayŏng's Silk Letter and Alternative Version) (Seoul, 2003).

⁴³Such a strategy is reminiscent of the hidden "Kakure Kirishitans" 隠れキリシタン of Japan who were publicly Buddhist, yet secretly Christian, for almost two hundred years. In 1640 the Christian Suppression Office (Kirishitan Shūmon Aratame Yaku) was formed and the persecution of all Christians systematically began. The cruelty of the persecutions, including burning at the stake, beheading, or sawing off limbs, was used to, "force the most steadfast Christians to recant", see: R. H. Drummond, (1971), *A History of Christianity in Japan*, (Grand Rapids, 1971), pp. 100–101. Therefore, apostasy assured a release from prison, but also functioned as a deterrent from joining the religion, as well as driving others underground. In fact, many families and their descendants went into hiding, only re-emerging in the nineteenth century, becoming known as the Kakure Kirishitans, or hidden Christians, mainly in Kyūshū. For an overview on the Kakure Kirishitans, see: A. M. Harrington, *Japan's Hidden Christians* (Chicago, 1993).

⁴⁴Ch'oe Sŏgu (1993), "Tasan sŏhak-e kwanhan nonŭi," 茶山 西學에 관한 논의 (A Discussion on Tasan's view of Western Learning), in *Tasan Chŏng Yagyong-ŭi sŏhak sasang* 茶山 丁若鏞의 西學思想 (Tasan Chŏng Yagyong's ideas on Western Learning), (Seoul, 1993), p. 47.

⁴⁵Tasan, "Chach'an myojimyŏng", p. 115.

⁴⁶D. Baker, 2004. "Tasan Between Catholicism and Confucianism: A decade under suspicion, 1791–1801", *Tasanhak*, no. 5 (2004), pp. 55–86.

of others who were exiled and coerced away from the religion with threat of execution. Tasan was banished to Kangjin, while his brother was sent to Hŭksan Island, both places in the southern part of Chŏlla Province. They would never meet again. The persecutions of 1801 were followed by further widespread persecutions in 1815 (The Ŭrhae Persecution) and again in 1827 (The Chŏnghae Persecution).⁴⁷ The facts are that: Catholicism was outlawed, banned and completely illegal, as were all references to it and its texts, which were all supposedly collected and destroyed. Tasan was not at liberty to write openly about Catholic ideas—the executions of his brother and many friends had made that danger very clear. However, for Tasan, like Ricci, being a Christian would not have meant a rejection of “original” Confucianism and Kŭm Changdae insists that “Catholic Doctrine not only provided a bridge to a new understanding of the universe, it also became a spring-board for the development of his [Tasan’s] Neo-Confucianism”.⁴⁸

Returning to the Origin: Uncovering *Shangdi*.

Many scholars reject the stance that Tasan completely and whole-heartedly withdrew from Catholicism, in consideration of the extenuating violence of his real-life circumstances. Ch’oe Sŏgu (1993, 79–80) argues that politico-historical *force majeure* pushed Tasan to incorporate Christian ideas indirectly into his texts.⁴⁹ James B. Palais even considers Tasan’s apparently political *Sirhak* texts, as “Chastened no doubt, by his [Tasan] close escape from execution” and so opens up his texts to other possible interpretations.⁵⁰ Kŭm Changdae writes that, “in some ways the severe suppression of the Catholic faith during that era and the life-threatening situation may have forced Tasan to lead a double life in which he outwardly had to hide his religious belief”.⁵¹ Park Seongnae (2004, p. 347) also draws attention to the possibility of “double-meanings” in Tasan’s writings, and more significantly, that he may have “camouflaged” his real views by embedding them in the authority of the much earlier Confucian classics.⁵² Seen in this light, Tasan’s interest in “original” Confucianism, often called *Susahak* 洙泗學, may have been merely a ploy to detract from his religious affiliation with Catholicism – a ploy that worked to a large degree.⁵³ Kim Shin-ja notes that *susahak* signified a return to the “original theory of Confucius”.⁵⁴ However, Tasan’s commentaries are full of references to “The Sovereign on High”, *Shangdi*, despite the fact that *The Analects* never mention this term a single time. This term was of great importance to the early Catholics in Korea, who, having read Ricci’s text, considered *Shangdi* to be God.

⁴⁷ See: J. Grayson, *Korea: A Religious history*, pp. 143–146.

⁴⁸ Kŭm Changdae, *Confucianism and Korean Thoughts* (Seoul, 2000), p. 189.

⁴⁹ Ch’oe Sŏgu, “A Discussion on Tasan’s view of Western Learning”, pp. 79–80.

⁵⁰ J. B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Washington D.C., 1996), p. 757.

⁵¹ Kŭm Changdae, *Confucianism and Korean Thoughts* (Seoul, 2000), pp. 201–202.

⁵² Park Seong-rae, “Western Science and Silhak Scholars,” in *Korean History: Discovery of its Characteristics and Developments* (Seoul, 2004), p. 347.

⁵³ *Susa* (洙泗) refers to the two rivers of Confucius’ hometown, while *Susahak* (洙泗學) was the title given to Tasan’s study of “original” Confucianism.

⁵⁴ Kim Shin-ja, *The Philosophical Thought of Tasan Chŏng*, pp. 92–102.

In contrast, Don Baker has repeatedly argued that Tasan withdrew from Catholicism because philosophically he could not reconcile it with Confucianism.⁵⁵ Baker's argument, however, does not explain the deeply theistic ideas in Tasan's commentaries on a Confucian tradition that was *not* theistic.⁵⁶ Baker (emphasis added) concludes that "The God Chŏng Tasan *believed* in was not the Christian God. Tasan called God the ruler of the cosmos, not the creator [. . .] His God was solely a moral force. That was what made him a Confucian God".⁵⁷ Of course, the point Matteo Ricci had clearly articulated, as discussed above, was that different religions or traditions have *different* names for the *same* God – as do the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. More importantly, "belief" is not an issue for Confucianism, rather, it is a salient feature of Christianity.⁵⁸ Donald S. Lopez, Jr., writes in his essay "Belief", that "Christians have also described what came to be known as the 'world religions' from the perspective of belief".⁵⁹ Korean Neo-Confucians, however, were not discussing a god as a moral force, or a "belief" in a singular god, rather, they had been particularly interested in the metaphysical issues surrounding *Principle* (C. *li*, K. *i*) and *Material force* (C. *qi*, K. *ki*). Korean Neo-Confucians also focused on rites to inculcate patterns of behaviour. Again, the most important rites of the Chosŏn dynasty were not related to god, or an external moral force: they were the capping, marriage, mourning and ancestor memorial rites. The rites, based on the *Zhuxi jiali* 朱熹家禮 (Zhu Xi's Family Rites), were designed to instil a sense of communal or social morality, both synchronically and diachronically, and that is why they were enforced by law.⁶⁰ Socially, the hierarchical Five Relationships 五倫 (C. *wulun*, K. *oryun*) as well as the Three Bonds 三綱 (C. *sangang*, K. *samgang*) that further organised a Confucian society through duty in hierarchical relationships, make no reference at all to God.⁶¹ In addition, if God were solely "a moral force", it would

⁵⁵D. Baker, *Confucians Confront Catholicism in Eighteenth Century Korea*. (Michigan, 1983b); "Tasan and His Brothers: How Religion Divided a Korean Confucian Family", in *Perspectives on Korea* (Sydney, 1998), pp. 172–197; "Tasan Between Catholicism and Confucianism: A decade under suspicion, 1791–1801", pp. 55–86.

⁵⁶David Chung writes in *Syncretism: The religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea* (New York, 2001), p. 142, "Some seriously doubt that Confucianism has ever been a religion." Kŭm Changdae explains that Confucianism was more concerned with morality, and that only towards the end of the nineteenth century was there a Confucian religious movement that sought to modernise Confucianism to compete with the growing spiritual influence of Christianity. See: Kŭm Changdae, *Confucianism and Korean Thoughts*, pp. 205–208.

⁵⁷Baker repeats this same point in several papers: See: D. Baker, "Neo-Confucians Confront Theism", *The Journal of the Institute for East Asian Studies Sogang University*, No. 2 (1983a) p. 174 (this title is important as it too indicates how Neo-Confucians were *not* theists); *Confucians Confront Catholicism in Eighteenth Century Korea*, pp. 331–332; "Foreword: Saints, Sages and the Novelist's Art", pp. vii–xx in preface to Han Musuk's novel, *Encounter* (Berkeley, 1992), p. xix; "A Different Thread: Heterodoxy, and Catholicism in a Confucian World", in *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), p. 216.

⁵⁸This is evident from the Nicene Creed, the profession of faith, which revolves around "Credo".

⁵⁹D. S. Lopez, Jr. "Belief" in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), p. 21.

⁶⁰See: Martina Deuchler (1992), *The Confucian Transformation of Korea* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 110–111. Michel de Certeau has discussed the contractual nature of belief, where for Christians, for example, belief is an "expectational practice": they expect something after this life. Applied to Confucians, one could talk about the contractual nature of "ritual". In this sense it is more of a contract in legal terms as one was required by law to fulfil the rites prescribed by the state, and if one did not, one could be punished, which is exactly what happened to Catholics in Korea who did not *perform* ancestor memorial rites. See: M de Certeau, "What We Do When We Believe", in *On Signs* (Baltimore, 1985), pp. 183–185.

⁶¹Ricci's own journal discusses the "cinque correlazione," and relations in China, considering them in terms of "obedientia," obedience and duty. See: M. Ricci, *Opere Storiche: I Commentari Della Cina*, vol. i, (Macerata, 1911), p. 91.

then not be “theistic”, it would at best reflect some form of pantheism, again, more akin to Neo-Confucian *Principle*.

The God one encounters in Tasan’s writings is a personal, monotheistic, creator deity, quite different to the one that Baker argues Tasan *believed* in. In any case, Tasan was carefully dis-assembling Confucian texts, not Christian ones: that was illegal. This important point is usually overlooked by researchers who use the “lack” of obvious Christian motifs and terms, such as *Tianzhu* (*Ch’önju* in Korean), to validate their assumption that Tasan had totally rejected the religion. Kim Shin-ja acknowledges that “Tasan did not clearly mention Catholicism in his works. One recognises, however, in many places that he held the view of Catholicism in his theory”.⁶² I would further add that these terms make their mark on Tasan’s text by their absence. Geoffrey Bennington highlights that, “the place of a certain signifier can be silhouetted in a text without figuring in it explicitly” and “the local absence of such and such a signifier [...] would not disturb the reading”.⁶³ In Tasan’s writings, controlled by his precarious circumstances, we find traces of Christian ideas that remain silhouetted despite their apparent absence. Indeed, Christian ideas are recurrent in Tasan’s continual usage of Matteo Ricci’s ideas which are woven into his “theistic” commentaries, yet never referenced, again reflecting fear.

Tasan’s “dis-assembling” of Neo-Confucianism and revision of the earlier Confucian texts soon starts to resemble the strategy of Matteo Ricci. In the *Chungyong kangüibo*⁶⁴ 中庸講義補 [Supplement to Lectures on the *Doctrine of the Mean*], Tasan queries the link between the “Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate” 太極之圖 (C. *Taiji zhitu*, K. *T’aegükto*) and original Confucian ideas, noting that, “it was written over a thousand years after Zisi [the grandson of Confucius]”.⁶⁵ In another text, *Maengja yöüi* (孟子要義) [The Essentials of *The Mencius*], Tasan notes that “the circle in this diagram which represents the Supreme Ultimate does not appear anywhere in the [Five] Classics of ancient Confucianism”.⁶⁶ Both these texts were written around 1814 and both “dis-assemble” the Neo-Confucian substructure of Song Confucianism. Mark Setton points out how Tasan “challenged the authority of Song Confucianism”,⁶⁷ but so too did Ricci in the text Tasan had repeatedly read, studied and loaned to others – it was not something original to Tasan’s writings. Tasan also rejected the primary role of the most fundamental Neo-Confucian concept central to Zhu Xi metaphysics, *Principle*, which has no sense of perception or personality.⁶⁸ Tasan rejected an impersonal force guiding the universe and has relegated *Principle* to the level of an “attribute,” a sort of law of nature, not a “substance”.⁶⁹ However, this explanation of *Principle* as an attribute clearly reflects the influence of Scholastic philosophy and was

⁶² Kim Shin-ja, *The Philosophical Thought of Tasan Chông*, p. 143.

⁶³ G. Bennington and J. Derrida, *Jacques Derrida: Derridabase*, (Chicago, 1991), p. 97.

⁶⁴ As we are now looking at Tasan’s texts in a Korean context I will give the Korean transliteration of the Chinese characters to respect the context.

⁶⁵ See: DBKC, 興猶堂全書, 第二集經集第四卷○中庸講義補, 中庸講義補, 惟天下至聖節

⁶⁶ Tasan, *Maengja yöüi* 孟子要義 (The Essentials of *The Mencius*) (Seoul, 1994), p. 569.

⁶⁷ M. Setton, *Chông Yagyong: Korea’s Challenge to Orthodox Neo-Confucianism* (New York, 1997), p73. See: M. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, par. 78–80.

⁶⁸ Kim Yöngil, *Chông Yagyong-üi sangje sasang* 丁若鏞의上帝思想 (Chông Yagyong’s Thought on *Sangje*) (Seoul, 2003), p. 128.

⁶⁹ Yoo Taegun, “Metaphysical Grounds of Tasan’s Thought,” *Korea Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1(1994), p. 10

outlined by Ricci and was critical to his *dis-assemblage*.⁷⁰ Tasan, like Ricci, had de-stabilised the Neo-Confucian universe and would have to counter this unbalance with something different.

Who is God?

It is *Shangdi*, pronounced *Sangje* in Korean, who re-stabilises Tasan's re-conceptualised ontotheological-cosmology, disentangling it from *Principle*, the Supreme Ultimate, yin and yang, as well as the five elements. It is *Sangje* who makes Tasan's theistic commentaries theistic, because it is a God who created mankind and all things, yet who remains beyond them. Tasan's *Ch'unch'u kojing* 春秋考徵 [Evidential Analysis of the *Spring and Summer Annals*], written circa 1812, describes *Sangje* as follows:

Who is *Sangje*? *Sangje* is a being that creates [造化; K. *chohwa*], governs [宰制; K. *chaeje*] and sustains [安養; K. *anyang*] heaven, earth, spirits, humans and all things, but also transcends them.⁷¹

Tasan presents God as the creator, using the term for creation 造化 (K. *chohwa*) repeatedly used by Matteo Ricci to describe God, *Shangdi*, *Tianzhu*, as a creator. This term is also highlighted in the modern Korean translation of Ricci's text, as it supplements the original Confucian *Shangdi*, who was never considered a creator.⁷² Therefore, Tasan's idea of a "creator" God has been cross-fertilised by Christian belief, not by Confucian ritual. In addition, Tasan's description reflects the ideas he had preached to others—in an attempt to convert them to Catholicism—not a new form of Confucianism.

In the *Sangsŏ kohun* 尙書古訓 (Ancient Instructions of the *Classic of History*) written in 1834, not long before Tasan died, he wrote (emphasis added):

The "original" *Sangje* is sometimes called Royal Heavenly *Sangje* [皇天上帝] or Great Heavenly *Sangje* [昊天上帝], but is sometimes shortened to Royal Heaven [昊天] or Great Heaven [昊天] [...] *There is only One Sangje and not two*. It is so noble [尊] and has no counterpart [匹].⁷³

Again *différance* is at play via the multiple traces of the "origin" which has been obfuscated by the different trajectories of different traditions, caught up by the instability of naming, which always defers to other names. God, too, then is caught up in the play of *différance*, and though it may be described using many terms, there can only be one "original" *Sangje*

⁷⁰To read Matteo Ricci's Scholastic discussion of substance and attribute, See: M. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, par. 83–84.

⁷¹This original quote can be found on the DBKC, available at: 興猶堂全書, 第二集經集第三十六卷○春秋考徵 > 凶禮. I quote it here in its original as it is highly significant: 上帝者何。是於天地神人之外。造化天地神人萬物之類。而宰制安養之者也。 This quote echoes the full title of Ricci's first chapter in the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*: "A Discussion on the creation of Heaven, Earth, and all things by the Lord of Heaven and on the way he governs and sustains them". Kim Shin Ja in *The Philosophical Thought of Tasan Chŏng*, p. 151, and Yoo Taegun in "Metaphysical Grounds of Tasan's Thought," p. 14, also discusses this quote, highlighting how it represented a creator God who was transcendent. Again this illustrates how *Sangje* was much more than "solely" a moral force. Also, note here that *Sangje* is described as *who*, not *what*. Kim Yŏngil in *Chŏng Yagyong-ŭi sangje sasang*, p. 121, translates this phrase into Korean using *nugu* (누구), meaning "who", underscoring the definite anthropomorphic nature of this deity.

⁷²M. Ricci, *Ch'ŏnju sinŭi* 천주설의 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), Korean-Chinese edition, (Seoul, 1999), p. 34.

⁷³See: DBKC, 興猶堂全書, 第二集經集第二十七卷○尙書古訓, 尙書古訓, 君爽

– just as Ricci (par. 3) reinforced and emphasised that the *same* singular “Lord” is known in *different* plural ways.

Jonathan Chamberlain in *Chinese Gods* notes that *Shangdi* [*Sangje*] in the Chinese tradition was, “a shadowy, rarely-referred-to figure,” who was, “divorced from the affairs of men”.⁷⁴ In *Maengja yōüi*, Tasan quotes five excerpts from the *Book of Odes* to illustrate the personal relationship between *Sangje* and man, a strategy used by Matteo Ricci (par. 105).⁷⁵ Tasan, like Ricci, uses the odes for the exact same purpose, to show that *Sangje* has a relationship with man. However, Tasan has incorporated them into his commentary on Mencius’s text, a text which places little importance on *Sangje*, an idea it barely refers to at all. In fact, Tasan weaves *Sangje* into a discussion on the first section on *Chinsim* 盡心 (*Mencius* 13:1) which never refers to *Sangje*. Tasan re-orientates his commentary and reassembles his tradition to make *Sangje* a focal point. For Tasan, this possibility comes from understanding God’s relation with mankind, that he is their ruler and observes them from on high. He describes *Sangje* as “the ruler of Heaven,” 天之主宰爲上帝, or in other words, *Tianzhu* 天主, another name for God – a Christian possibility for a Post-Confucian theology.⁷⁶

The concept of *Sangje* supplements Tasan’s commentaries on the *Four Books*, which represents an anachronistic approach. Confucius, as mentioned above, never used the term *Sangje* once in *The Analects*. The term appears once in the *Great Learning*, and again, only once, in the *Doctrine of the Mean*.⁷⁷ The term has only three mentions in *The Mencius*, by far the longest of the *Four Books*, yet it has a prominent “supplementary” role in Tasan’s *Maengja yōüi*, positively engaging with the “Other” un-covered trajectory that Matteo Ricci dis-enclosed.⁷⁸ In fact, Chamberlain rightly notes that Confucius had advised to keep ideas concerning the spirit-world, “at a distance”.⁷⁹ Actually, it was this very teaching, explicit in Confucius (*The Analects* 11:11), that permitted Matteo Ricci to “supplement” Confucianism with Post-Confucian theological teachings on God, drawn from the Catholic tradition, something we now witness in Tasan who draws God into his world, close to humanity.

Kim Yōngil notes this aspect of Tasan’s concept of *humanity* as a virtue that is practiced, noting that “loving others” depends on virtuous humanistic (仁) practice.⁸⁰ Ricci argued this very point, and so for example, righteousness can only exist after “righteous behaviour”.⁸¹ Tasan, too, emphasises that virtues can only be called so “after they have been put into action”, through free will.⁸² This approach to moral cultivation is a salient feature of Christianity, expressed though *caritas*, preached by Jesus himself, and highlighted in the early Catholic texts written by Yi Pyōk, Tasan’s early mentor, and in the Catholic texts written by Tasan’s

⁷⁴J. Chamberlain, *Chinese Gods* (Malaysia, 1987), p. 108.

⁷⁵Tasan quotes Odes No. 236, 255, 258, 254 and 266. See: Tasan, *Maengja yōüi*, p. 570. In fact, one of these excerpts comes from Ode no. 236 – one of the same odes Ricci cited from too.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 569.

⁷⁷J. Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. i., translation with original Chinese text (Marston Gate, 2005), pp. 375 and 404.

⁷⁸D. Hinton (trans.), *Mencius* (Washington, D.C., 1999), pp. 25, 127, 149.

⁷⁹J. Chamberlain, *Chinese Gods*, p. vii.

⁸⁰Kim Yōngil, *Chōng Yagyong-üi sangje sasang*, p. 111.

⁸¹M. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, par. 438.

⁸²Tasan, *Maengja yōüi*, pp. 484–485.

own brothers.⁸³ This exemplifies the Golden Rule in the Gospels (Matt. 7:12), “Do to others what you would like them to do to you”, suggesting that how one treated others, was how one treated God, and so serving God, meant serving others, which also posited a new trajectory for self-cultivation and sagehood. This idea could not contrast anymore starkly with the passivity of the Confucian Golden Rule from *The Analects*: “Do not do unto others what you do not want them to do to you”.⁸⁴ Again, Tasan’s morality is Post-Confucian and supplemented by Christian motifs that he clearly knew. Song Young-bae underlines how Tasan’s morality is “similar to the philosophical configuration of *Tianzhu shiyi*”, which also rejects Neo-Confucian metaphysics.⁸⁵

Earlier we outlined the four stages of Matteo Ricci’s de-construction. In Tasan’s work one can also identify a four-fold strategy:

- 1) The representation of *Shangdi/Sangje* as a monotheistic creator God
- 2) *who* replaces Neo-Confucian metaphysical concepts,
- 3) which he criticises as impurities imported from Buddhism and Daoism,
- 4) while supplementing morality with the “practical” teachings, which echo those of Jesus, thereby linking morality with God.

Jesus hovers as an absent signifier inside Tasan’s texts. His teachings have been silhouetted via a supplementation of Confucian *humanity* and the centrality of *Sangje* in this post-Confucian, moral guiding discourse. This, too, reflects Derrida’s idea of a deconstructive strategy where:

[...] the movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible or effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures.⁸⁶

Conclusion

In this paper I have highlighted the important socio-religious effects of Tasan’s context, a context of fear, which restrained his authorial control. This violent context proscribed any open discussion of Christianity, which explains why Tasan is careful to silhouette Christian teachings under the simulacrum of “original” Confucianism. His strategy of creating silhouettes explains why he is scrupulous never to mention Jesus, or use the Catholic term for God, seemingly following similar advice to that of Wittgenstein, “What we cannot talk about, we must consign to silence”.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, I have identified Christian ideas that were closely aligned with Matteo Ricci’s, who emphasized a “return” to the

⁸³For an analysis of the early Catholic texts written by Yi Pyök and Tasan’s brothers, see my article in a theme issue on Korean Catholicism in *Acta Koreana*: “Deconstructing Hegemony: Catholic Texts in Chosön’s Neo-Confucian Context” in *Acta Koreana*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2012), pp. 15–42. These texts focus on the importance of worshipping God and the importance of putting the teachings of Jesus into actual practice. The earliest hymn attributed to Yi Pyök is called *Ch’önju konggyöng-ga* 천주공경가 (Hymn in Adoration of God). They hover between using the Confucian term *Shangdi* (K. *Sangje*), and the Riccian term, *Tianzhu* (K. *Ch’önju*).

⁸⁴Wing-tsit Chan (trans.) *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 44. This contrast has also been highlighted above in relation to Ricci’s discussion on humanity.

⁸⁵Song Young-bae, “A Comparative Study of the Paradigms between Tasan’s Philosophy and Matteo Ricci’s *Tianzhu shiyi*” *Korea Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2001), pp. 57–99.

⁸⁶J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 24.

⁸⁷Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Proposition 7.

origin of Confucianism in order to dis-assemble the trajectory Zhu Xi had redirected it along, towards *Principle* and the Supreme Ultimate. This paper also illustrates how Tasan's own letter (1797), which suggested he had totally left the Church, was untruthful and downplayed his own knowledge of the Catholic faith, a faith he had from the onset, before any execution, practiced *in secret* with other Catholics, while attempting to convert other Confucians. His recantation was clearly an attempt to save his career and his life.

His career was over, but he managed to escape execution only to be exiled from 1801–1818. Towards the very end of this lengthy exile, Tasan wrote *Mongmin simsō* 牧民心書, usually described as a *sirhak* text.⁸⁸ In it he severely criticises Buddhism, Shamanism, as well as other superstitious ideas that “lead the people astray”. However, he never mentions Catholicism.⁸⁹ In *Chach'an myojimyōng* (Self-written epitaph) (1822), he describes the Confucians persecuting the Catholics as “evil” 惡人 (K. *ag'in*), and is neutral about Catholics.⁹⁰ Tasan's writings do not reflect those of someone who had withdrawn from Catholicism with paroxysms of rage, viewing it as a threat to the king, the state, or the individual. His withdrawal was a necessary move by a pawn in a much larger violent political chess game. Tasan could easily have written texts that were critical of Catholicism throughout his life; in fact, it would have been expected from him if he had whole-heartedly, not just publicly, rejected the religion. It would have been expected from him if he had aligned himself with other Neo-Confucians who saw the banning of the ancestral memorial rite as tantamount to heresy. He did not. Of course, Matteo Ricci, a Roman Catholic, had seen nothing contradictory in the memorial rites, viewing them as obligatory civil practices. A Confucian scholar during the Chosŏn period, especially one close to the king, was legally and socially obliged to perform these rites, but “performing” such rites does not preclude belief in a universal God. In fact, Tasan describes *Sangje* as “the original ancestor of all things” (萬物之祖) in *Ch'unch'u kojŏng*, rendering ancestor memorial rites all the more important as they related one's ancestors directly to God, which may reflect Tasan's unique position on the matter.⁹¹ It is also crucial to underscore that most of the attacks lambasting Catholics had been on social and political grounds: they were not “religious” or “theological”.

Maybe Tasan and Ricci were both men ahead of their times, who, as great intercultural thinkers, moved between traditions and ideas, rather than following one hermetic interpretation of them. Tasan's texts reflect a cross-fertilisation *vis-à-vis* Christianity via Matteo Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi*, which already embodied Ricci's own cross-fertilisation, germinated by his own encounter with Confucianism. Tasan's concept of a “creator” God and of a “practiced” humanity gesture towards the God and the externalised and active love found in Ricci's text, and in the early Catholic writings of Yi Pyōk and Tasan's brothers,

⁸⁸As per note 89, this text is often translated as a book on “Governing the People”, despite the fact that the title uses the characters 牧民, meaning “shepherding the people”, highlighting that Tasan considers the role of the government is to “serve” the people.

⁸⁹See: Byonghyon Choi, *Admonitions on Governing the People*, a translation of *Mongmin simsō* (Berkeley, 2010), *Book iv*, pp. 818–823. For Tasan's original text, see: *DBKC*: 與猶堂全書, 第五集政法集第二十六卷○牧民心書, 刑典六條, 除害.

⁹⁰Tasan, *Chach'an myojimyōng*, p. 78.

⁹¹Tasan, *Ch'unch'u kojŏng*, See: *DBKC*: 與猶堂全書, 第二集經集第三十三卷○春秋考徵, 吉禮, 郊四.

which had been discreetly dis-assembled into the multi-layered textual fabric of Tazan's own Post-Confucian deconstruction. k.cawley@ucc.ie

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