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The Philosophical Thought of Tasan Chǒng (review)

Don Baker

Journal of Korean Religions, Volume 3, Number 2, October, 2012, pp.
191-194 (Review)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jkr.2012.0024>



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The most frequent role is really that of donor and patron, so that it is not surprising that Cho and Park both isolated women's economic means and self-sufficiency as the single most important reason for the enduring presence and eventual flourishing of female monasticism in Korean Buddhist history.

Collected together, this set of solidly researched essays provides a sound introduction to the study of women in Korean Buddhism. They exemplify ways in which modern scholarship could overcome the problematic dearth of primary records that has stunted the study of Korean Buddhist women for a long time. In this regard, the essays by Puggioni, Jorgenson, and Jung are particularly important as they model how non-traditional accounts of religion, like epigraphy, legal records, non-Buddhist chronicles, and popular literature can yield important glimpses and insights into women practitioners whose lives and contributions are often omitted from traditional accounts of Buddhist history. Admittedly, the volume gives uneven attention to its subjects, and the majority of the essays are about nuns rather than laywomen. Moreover, it would have been ideal to have a final chapter on contemporary Buddhist women to wrap up the volume chronologically. But these are minor quibbles intended more as suggested directions for future research. This collection of essays will also be a welcome addition in the classroom for the study of Korean Buddhism and Korean society, as well as for courses on women and religion.

Shi Zhiru

Associate Professor of Buddhist Studies and Chinese Religions

Department of Religious Studies

Pomona College

The Philosophical Thought of Tasan Chŏng. By Shin-Ja Kim, translated from the German by Tobias J. Körtner in cooperation with Jordan Nyenyembe, New York: Peter Lang, 2010, xxviii + 383 p.

Outside of Korea, Korean Confucian thought is a much neglected field. There have been a few scholarly articles and monographs in English on T'oegye Yi Hwang (1501–70) and Yugok Yi I (1536–84) but very little has been published

on other important Korean Confucian writers. Even though Tasan Chŏng Yagyong (1762–1836) is usually considered the third most important Confucian writer in all Korean history, up to now only one slender monograph (Mark Setton's *Chŏng Yagyong: Korea's Challenge to Orthodox Neo-Confucianism*) and a few articles have introduced his ideas to the Western world.

Shin-Ja Kim has stepped in to fill that gap. First in German and now in English translation, she has provided a comprehensive introduction to Tasan's writings. She opens with an overview of the history of Neo-Confucianism in Korea and of *Sirhak* ("Practical Learning"), which she describes as a reaction against, rather than an outgrowth of, Neo-Confucianism. She also devotes a chapter to Korean Confucian criticisms of Catholicism. She then introduces Tasan, beginning with two chapters in which she focuses on how his views of the material world and the invisible realm (the realm of *li*, *ki*, and *Sangje*) were influenced by what he learned from Catholic publications. She also devotes a chapter to Tasan's understanding of human nature and virtue, which, she points out, also reveals some Catholic influence. However, she follows that with an entire chapter on "the incompatibility of Catholicism with Tasan's philosophy." She concludes that, though there is no denying that Tasan was inspired by Catholic writings in his redefinition of some core Confucian concepts, in his heart he remained a Confucian. His belief in the importance of ritual displays of filial piety was too strong for him to renounce his Confucian heritage for a religion that prohibited such rituals.

In her final three chapters, Kim pushes aside all discussion of Catholic elements in Tasan's thought and instead focuses on how he, as a sincere Confucian, proposed to create a more just government and society. Drawing on his manual for district magistrates (*Mongminsimsŏ*), his plans for a reform of central government administration (*Kyŏngseyup'yo*), and his handbook of forensic medicine (*Hŭmhŭmsimsŏ*), she argues that he wanted Korea to have a paternalistic government, one that resembled the ideal government of ancient China and was based on a respect for the fundamental equality of all human beings.

Unlike most Korean-language studies of Tasan by one author, Kim looks at both sides of Tasan's philosophy, his concern for both personal morality (*sugi*) and political reform (*ch'ii*n). Such a thorough survey of what Tasan

wrote is useful, especially for those who have not had the time, or lack the linguistic ability, to wade through the massive amount of scholarship on Tasan's philosophical and political thought that Korean scholars have produced over the last forty years. However, the book's wide scope left her little room for any insights into why he thought the way he did. For example, she offers no explanation as to why Tasan incorporated Catholic concepts into what was otherwise a Confucian philosophy. This work is more descriptive than analytical. Moreover, rather than a work of original scholarship, it is primarily a summary of previous scholarship, as though it were written for those wanting an introductory survey of Tasan's writings.

In addition, there are some contradictions in the way Kim presents Tasan's ideas. First, she says at one point that he remained a Catholic inwardly even after he had publicly renounced Catholicism (pp. 130–32). However, later she writes, "After his apostasy, however, he returned to his original Confucian point of view" (p. 234) and that "it was not possible for Tasan as a Catholic to write about ancestral rites in detail" (p. 250), though, as she points out, in his later years he wrote several books on Confucian mourning rituals.

Similarly, she insists that Tasan focused on the "realization of the equality of humans" (p. 302) but also admits that he wrote in the *Mongminsimsŏ* that a social hierarchy was necessary to maintain an orderly society (p. 303–04). In an equally confusing contradiction, she writes as though Tasan believed in democracy (p. 57) while noting later that "he rather considered a monarchy based on virtue and morality as the ideal political form" (p. 269).

These contradictions are more apparent in her descriptions of Tasan's philosophy than in Tasan's writings themselves. A more nuanced account of Tasan's philosophy would have told readers, for example, that Tasan incorporated into his Confucian philosophy only those Catholic ideas he thought would help him become a better Confucian. He did that both while and after he was an active Catholic. It is therefore not accurate to say "he returned to his original Confucian point of view." Even after he severed his youthful ties with Catholicism (she says this was in 1795, though Tasan himself says it was in 1791), he continued to use terminology and concepts he had encountered while reading Catholic books to support his criticism of the Neo-Confucian interpretation of the Confucian Classics and reinforce his call for a return to

what he considered original Confucianism. In other words, he remained a Confucian, but one who continued to utilize Catholic concepts when they suited his Confucian purposes.

A more nuanced presentation of Tasan's political writings would have pointed out that Tasan did not believe in democracy, in the sense of a representative government, but instead believed in a responsible government, one that took seriously its paternalistic obligation to promote the Confucian goal of the common good. Nor did he believe in social equality, in the sense of everyone having the same rights and obligations. Instead, he believed that Korea should be more like China, and allow men who were talented to rise to the top of the social hierarchy regardless of family background.

Despite her sometimes contradictory statements, which could confuse some readers, Kim has nonetheless given the Western world a comprehensive overview of the philosophy of one of pre-modern Korea's most original thinkers. She deserves our gratitude for increasing awareness outside of Korea of one of the greatest minds that country has ever produced.

Don Baker

*Professor, Department of Asian Studies
University of British Columbia*

Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea. By Timothy S. Lee, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010, xvi, 228 p.

From 1885 to the present, Christianity has shown extraordinary growth as one of the most influential religions in South Korea. It was rapidly indigenized and transformed through its encounter with Korean culture. Because of the unparalleled success of Christianity and its influence upon Korean society, especially in contrast with other religions, there are numerous theories concerning the nature and causes of its extraordinary growth. Throughout this book, Timothy S. Lee brings a new perspective to this issue and gives special attention to the role of evangelical Protestantism, providing critical and in-depth