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# Introducing Christian Spirituality to Joseon Korea—Three Responses from Confucian Scholars

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**Abstract:** When the books written by Jesuit missionaries were introduced to Joseon Korea via China during the 18th century, Joseon Confucian scholars were drawn to not only western science and technologies but also to theological ideas centered on Christian spirituality. Among many foreign conceptions, the most alien were the following three: immortality of the soul; eternal life in heaven or in hell after death; and finally, the resurrection of the body. There had been three responses from all levels of society: refutation, recognition, and reconciliation. First, Shin Hudam (1702–1761) wrote a book, *Disputation on Western Learning*, to dispute the above three doctrines as being most unreasonable and contradictory. Meanwhile, Jeong Yag-Jong (1760–1801) found that the doctrines were the true path to the salvation of human suffering and wrote the first catechistic book in vernacular Korean in the way that appealed to common people with Confucian backgrounds. Finally, Jeong Yag-Yong (1762–1836) was extremely careful, neither embracing nor rejecting, yet suggested alternative ways to address the core Christian theological problems without crossing the boundaries of Confucianism. All three were active dedicated responses to Christian spirituality and genuine Christian-Confucian dialogues, which also reflected common concerns and attitudes toward a new religion in Korean society.

**Keywords:** spirituality; Confucianism; Joseon Korea; Western Learning; Shin Hudam; Jeong Yag-Jong; Tasan Jeong Yag-Yong

## 1. Introduction

It was around the early 18th century when Jesuit missionaries' first books on Western Learning (kr. *Seohak*) began to spread among Joseon intellectuals. (cf. [Cho 2006](#)). Like Chinese intellectuals a century ago, they found western sciences, such as astronomy, geography, Euclidian geometry, and medicine as particularly interesting and practical. Such a good initial impression made their other arguments on so-called 'Western Learning' (kr. *Seohak*), to which the Jesuits referred as 'Celestial Learning' (*Cheonhak*), sound persuasive and credible. Sungho Yi Ik (1681–1763, Sungho hereafter), for example, claimed that Catholics were different from Buddhists since they were not immersed in quietude and detachment but actively bringing new astronomical and geometrical discoveries to people that would help improve people's lives ([S. Kim 2012](#), pp. 46–47).

Sungho was one of the open-minded scholars who scrutinized their long-held neo-Confucian worldview and at the same time eagerly searched for a new perspective that could replace it. According to his analysis, the main conception of Western Learning can be divided into two: one is the brain that is the foundation of life and memory; the other is the spiritual soul (kr. *yeong-hon*, Lat. *anima rationalis*) that is unique to humans. He found these notions not exactly like the Confucian theory of mind and nature, but confessed that he could not find them entirely wrong ([Shin 2014](#), pp. 41–43). In the traditional neo-Confucian worldview, it is the heart *sim* that plays the central role of controlling other body organs, including feelings and reasons. Humans are different from animals not because they have an individual, immortal soul, or because they have a rational brain, but because only humans

are endowed with *sim* comprised with pure and clear material energy *ki* that manages and acts on the inner moral principles given to all humans and animals.

Sungho's active reception of Western Learning and the Catholic idea of human spirituality (c.f. [Berthrong 2003](#)) brought about diverse viewpoints among his disciples that led to fierce disputes. Politically, Sungho belonged to the Southern faction that was slowly and steadily declining in power. The search for new ideologies that could effectively transform the established regime was especially intense among Southerners, and Western Learning was at the frontline of the possible 'new' paradigm. As a result, Sungho's disciples debated over human nature and the spiritual soul for decades.

Previous scholars described how Sungho School was divided into two factions: pro-Catholics and anti-Catholics, left and right, young and old (cf. [K.-J. Song 2000](#); [Keum 2001](#)). The problem was, there was a third group of scholars who wrote letters and books in the style that had been heavily influenced by Catholic concepts, yet never openly supported Catholicism. They were caught at the middle and unidentified, and later scholars classified them as 'hidden Catholics with Confucian masks' or 'original Confucians embracing the Western paradigm' (cf. [Baker 2002, 2013, 2015](#); [Baek 2007](#); [Cawley 2014](#), [S. Kim 2012](#)).

In this article, I will show that the Sungho School scholars, who were most active and serious among Joseon academics in studying Western Learning and their doctrines on human spirituality, responded in three distinct ways. One was the refutation mainly led by Shin Hudam (1702–1761) who repudiated that Western Learning was fundamentally a heresy *idan* such as Buddhism, which saw humans not as moral beings but selfish, self-interested animals. The other response was the total recognition and respect from Jeong Yag-jong (1762–1801, baptismal name Augustinos, Jeong A. hereafter) and other followers who later converted into Catholic and devoted their lives writing the first catechistic works in vernacular Korean. The last careful response was that of a reconciliation proposed by Jeong Yag-yong (1764–1836, penname Tasan or Sa-am, Tasan hereafter) who weaved the Catholic perspective into the Confucian background, i.e., accepting the Catholic line of reasoning without crossing the boundaries of Confucianism. I shall compare and contrast the three viewpoints by focusing on the main issues of human spirituality: the issue of the immortality of the soul, eternal life in Heaven and Hell, and the resurrection of the body.

## 2. Refutation of Catholicism

Although the refutation of Catholicism was not limited to the Sungho School scholars, it did begin within the Sungho School, and then spread outward ([Keum 2001](#), pp. 1–25). It is noteworthy to analyze how the first criticism toward Catholic spirituality went on since it provided the blueprint of refutation on Catholicism that what followed generally addressed the same problems and repeated the same criticisms.

As Sungho took an active interest in Western Learning and found it useful and reconcilable with the traditional Confucian values, Shin Hudam, who was a colleague-disciple of Sungho, spent a considerable time studying and scrutinizing the famous books written Jesuits including *Lingyan lishao* (靈言蠡勺; A Humble Attempt to Discuss on the Soul, cf. [Sambiasi 1965](#)) and *Tianzhu shiyi* (天主實義, The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven, cf. [Ricci 1985](#)). He came up with the conclusion that they are not only illogical and self-contradictory, but also unethical and deluding people by stimulating their selfish desires.

Shin's first criticism toward the Western Learning was on the special character of the human spirit-soul (靈魂 *yeong-hon*). He found absurd the idea that the spiritual souls of humans, unlike sensitive souls of animals or vegetative souls of plants, are self-subsisting and immortal. He wrote:

In my opinion, this [Westerner] is saying that human souls are independent substances since it is self-subsisting and does not depend on other things. However, when a human is born, a body is formed and then the ethereal force (*ki*) is attached to it. ( . . . ) When a human dies, the remaining body (*baek*魄) deteriorates and soul (*hon*魂) attached to it also dissipates along it; hence, the soul cannot exist alone. ( . . . ) Zhu Xi wrote that the "so-called 'soul returns

to Heaven' means the ethereal force (*ki*) is dissipating." In conclusion, the soul depends its existence on the bodily form, and as the bodily form degenerates, it also disperses and returns to nothingness. How can a soul be an independently existing entity! (Shin 2014, pp. 91–92)

Shin's criticism reflects the traditional Confucian viewpoints on life-and-death. *Hon* (soul) and *baek* (remaining body) are a pairing term designating the human mind and body after death. Upon death, *hon* leaves the *baek* like smoke in the air, slowly dissipating into the void. Right after the death, just as the *baek* (remaining body) is still intact and unharmed, the *hon* is also undispersed and can return to the nearby area upon calling. That is why there exists a mourning ritual called *cho-hon* (招魂inviting the soul, calling of the soul to return to earth), but it still entails that the soul can never return to the body and eventually dissipate into the air. Shin argues again:

Westerners speak that only the human soul (*anima*), different from vegetative or sensitive souls, is immortal; however, it is not so. Within one human body, only one soul is attached to it; it grows because of this soul, and it senses because of this soul. ( . . . ) The human spiritual soul depends on the human body, just like vegetative and sensitive souls depends on plants and animals. How can a spiritual soul exist alone? How can it be immortal as the vegetative and sensitive souls perish? The western authors try to argue for the immortality of the spiritual soul, but the three souls cannot be divided. As a result, they attempt to argue for the immortality of the *human* soul, and the human soul's vegetative and sensitive *anima* are different from that of plants and animals. These lame justifications just reveal the ambiguities and loopholes. (pp. 95–96)

Shin disputes that the Jesuits' arguments are ambiguous and illogical: they say in one place that the three souls are indivisible, and in another place that one soul remains after two disappear. Apart from the seeming contradictions, there are other reasons why Shin was vehemently opposed to the idea of an immortal soul.

In a neo-Confucian worldview, a human soul is called the *sim* (mind) during one's lifetime: when one is dead, the *sim* departs from the body and becomes *hon*. *Sim* is responsible for all the inner—rational, moral, and aesthetical—reactions toward outside stimulus. Within each mind, there is an innate moral nature *seong* (性), bestowed upon birth by Heaven, which is the origin and the standard of good and proper reactions to the outer world. *Seong* is, in other words, the absolute moral principle embedded within everyone, shared by all living things. To sum, in neo-Confucianism, what is eternal and everlasting is our common nature, not our individual mind; what is transient and temporary is our individual mind and body (cf. S.-Y. Chung 2018). In this schema, we need to control and cultivate our individual and private mind, which is tied to our physical body and its corporeal needs, in order to realize the shared interest of humanity, in particular, and all the living things, in general. If one regarded the 'individual' soul as absolute and immortal, it would mean that the private became more important than the public, and singular interest might come before the common benefit.

Shin further disapproves of the immortality of the individual soul in connection to the Catholic idea of Heaven and Hell.

They say that the vegetative and sensitive souls are no longer in use after death. How can these souls be immortal? If they are no longer use and only the spiritual soul is in use. How is it possible for these three to be one and indivisible while living, and suddenly become two and partly useful after death? If the vegetative and sensitive souls are no longer in use, it would be just the same as no longer existing. Hence, even if there is a heavenly pleasure, the soul cannot recognize it; even if there is a pain in Hell, the soul cannot feel it. Then should a human seek to go to Heaven? (p. 96)

According to Shin's analysis, without bodily sensation, the pleasure and pain of Heaven and Hell described by the Catholics do not hold. Their claims are not merely incongruous; what is the worst

about their promise of the afterlife is that the very idea of Heaven and Hell reflects the self-regarding, benefit-seeking way of living, which is far from the Confucian ideal. He claimed:

In my opinion, the entire reason for discussing the nature of *anima* is merely to gain merit after death. The entire theory is based on selfish interest. (pp. 100–101)

The notion of Heaven and Hell was not new to Confucians. For example, Buddhists also claimed that the spirits lasted even after death and that they were sent to various degrees of heaven and hell according to their merits and demerits (p. 89). Shin warns that it is characteristic of all the heresies (*idan*) to lure people by provoking their fundamental desire for life and fear of death (pp. 88–89). Daoism entices people with alchemies and strange practices for longevity; Hindu-Buddhism entices and threatens people with the next life and rebirth. On the contrary, Confucianism focuses on the present world. An ideal Confucian person, *junzi*, does a good action because it is good in itself; it is not because it will bring him or her any further benefits. Confucius urged, “When seeing the benefit, one must think about whether it is righteous: when seeing danger, one must risk one’s own life” (*Analects* 14.12) (Confucius 1979). Mencius also ascertained that all humane persons would be alarmed and rush to save a baby about to fall into a well not because of others’ praise or condemnation, not because of further benefit, but because it is part of our nature (*The Book of Mencius* 2A.6) (Mencius 1970). Shin regards that if the motivation behind any good action is to go to Heaven after death, then it is not out of one’s spontaneous and genuine heart-mind.

Further, if people believed in the eternal life after death and started to see this present life as transient, then they would not put as much effort in everyday familial and social duties in this world.

The way the ideal Confucian person follows does not deviate from everyday actions. Near at hand, the ideal person serves his parents; far out, he serves the Lord. In a large scale, he rules the state and establishes the law and systems; on a smaller scale, he meets, talks, and interacts with people. All of these are everyday actions and the Way does not exist apart from them. What sages taught was only this Way, and what disciples must learn is also this Way. If the western scholars argue that all the worldly actions are futile and only the eternal existence up in the Heaven is worth seeking, then sons would not care to serve their parents and the officials would not tend to serve their lords. ( . . . ) People become interested only in the genuine fortune up in the Heaven. It destroys the humane relationships and belittles the Way; it instills the habit of seeking profits only for oneself. How can one not loathe it deeply! (p. 85)

Confucians value this world here and now and it is the only way to bridging this life and the beyond, the limited and the infinite, the temporal, and the eternal. Confucianism holds that humanity can achieve perfection and live up to heavenly principles, by fulfilling their ‘mission’ in this world—that is, their ethical and moral duties, conscientiously exercised in the form of social and political action (Yao 2000, p. 46).

One may still ask whether there is no notion of retributive justice in Confucianism. In fact, there is a widely quoted passage ‘rewarding the good and punishing the wicked’ (福善禍淫) in an ancient Confucian text (*The Book of Documents*, Announcement of Tang 3). Shin, however, contends that it bears a completely different meaning:

There is a saying “rewarding the good and punishing the wicked” in our Confucian Classics. However, it only refers to *li*, the universal principle of the world. Humans and the Way of Heaven are on in this principle, and this principle is good in itself. The good people go along with this principle and naturally invoke blessings; the wicked go against this principle and bring misfortunes onto themselves. It is how the principle works. How can the Lord of Heaven judge one by one and mete out fortunes every time? So-called rewards and the punishments are just ways the virtuous and the vicious are treated in this world. How can they be compared with the [Catholic] belief in Heaven and Hell? (pp. 86–87)

This stance of Shin shows the typical Confucianism humanism that seeks sacredness in an ordinary life-principle. It is fundamentally secular, this-worldly in emphasis, yet appealing to transcendent values embodied in the concept of ‘heaven’ (Rule 1986, p. 31).

After Shin, Confucian scholars of Joseon Korea criticized in the similar vein the notion of the immortal individual soul and that of Heaven and Hell. Ahn Jeong-bok (1712–1791), for example, wrote a script called *A Conversation on Catholicism*, to refute the prevailing theories on the Celestial Learning. He also criticized that Catholic doctrines “focused on a world after this one and tantalized people with promises of Heaven if they did good and threatened people with Hell if they did evil. (. . . ) Jesus encouraged people to focus on what they thought would benefit them in the most personal way” (Baker 2017, p. 127). It was far from the Confucian way of promoting moral behavior, i.e., fostering a common concern for what is best for everyone. People should simply continue to do what is right, and not pay the slightest attention to the possibility of some reward in the next life for what they do in this life (p. 127). In the eye of a Confucian scholar, as a result, the more one emphasized the rewards of the afterlife, Heavenly pleasures, and even the resurrections of the body that Jesus promised, the further one would be away from the moral commitment in this world and a genuine sense of self-cultivation.

### 3. Recognition of Catholicism

After the novel concepts of Christian spirituality—the immortality of the soul, afterlife in Heaven, and Hell and resurrections of the body—were introduced with quite a resistance, they slowly moved the heart of some Joseon people (cf. Cho 2002; 2006). Not only the commoners and middle-class merchants who were illiterate in Chinese scripts, but also elite scholars who had been deeply engrossed in the Confucian value system. Among the first scholars who opened their mind to this foreign doctrines the family of Jeong Yag-jong Augustinos (Jeong A. hereafter) is worthy of note. The brothers of Jeong A., including Jeong Yag-jeon (1758–1816) and Tasan Jeong Yag-yong, were the first members of a study group to read Jesuit texts that Joseon scholars referred to as Western Learning. Jeong A. was last to join the group but soon completely immersed himself in the Catholic ideas and doctrines. He became the first to write a catechistic work in vernacular Korean called *Jugyo Yoji* (The Essentials of the Lord’s Teaching), which made him a patristic theologian of the early Korean Church (cf. S.-J. Song 2002; D.-H. Chung 2003). Even after Jeong A.’s brothers distanced themselves from Catholicism and Western Learning as it came into conflict with the state’s regulation of rituals, Jeong A. remained loyal to the faith and suffered martyrdom in a religious trial in 1801 (Y.-J. Jeong 2012, p. 15).<sup>1</sup> In this section, I shall delineate how a Confucian scholar like Jeong A. came to recognize the Christian notion of spirituality and discuss his arguments, with an implicit comparison to Shin’s refutation before, which persuaded many people with the traditional Confucian background.

Just as Shin and other Confucians who renounced Catholic doctrines, Jeong A. also encountered the common question on the immortality of the soul. In *Jugyo Yoji*, as Jeong A. preaches that a person receives rewards and punishments after death, a common response goes: “After a person dies once, his body decays and disappears; then how is reward or punishment meted?” (p. 68). Jeong A. answers:

After death, a person’s body decays, but the soul does not die. An animal’s soul is formed from its body and it only knows that which takes place in its body, such as hunger, fullness, cold, and warmth. When it dies, the soul attached to the body also disappears. The human soul, however, is not formed from the body. Rather, when the [human] body is birthed, the Lord of Heaven attaches to it a supernatural soul. A human being, therefore, takes pleasure and displeasure even in things that lie outside the body. For instance,

<sup>1</sup> His immediate family, including his wife Yu Joy (Cecelia; 1761–1839), first son Jeong Cheol-sang (Carlos; ?–1801), second son Jeong ha-sang (Paul; 1795–1835), and his wife Jeong Jeong-hye (Elizabeth, 1797–1839) were also martyred during the persecutions of 1801 and 1839. Later, they were beatified by Pop Pius XI in 1925, and canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1984 (Y.-J. Jeong 2012, p. 19).

when someone praises me, even though this does not fill my stomach, I feel needless pleasure, and when someone insults me, even though this causes no pain to my body, I feel needless displeasure. This mind that takes pleasure and displeasure surely does not originate from the body but from the soul. Human beings, therefore, are different from animals in that they have a separate soul, and the soul does not die even if the body dies. Additionally, the divine soul cannot be burned in a fire, cut with a blade, or suffer from a disease, and it has no way to die since it has no physical form. (pp. 68–69)

Jeong A. argues that the human soul is different from that of animals since it is not formed from the body. He brings to the attention that humans, unlike animals, take pleasure or pain even in things that have nothing to do with bodily pleasure and pain: one is pleased with someone's praise, and one is distressed by another's insults. These are the common signs that humans possess a different kind of soul which has nothing to do with one's corporeal body. Since the divine soul is not related to the body, it cannot be injured or harmed, hence, it is eternal in its existence.

If the human soul is not related to the body and its sensations, how would it feel the pleasure and pain after death? Jeong A. again explicates as follows:

All things cannot know pleasure and pain without consciousness, and only after possessing consciousness can they know pleasure and pain. (. . .) when a person dies and the soul departs, if honey is placed in his mouth he cannot know if it is sweet or bitter, and when his flesh is stabbed with a knife he does not know that it hurts. From this, we see that the soul is truly the source of pleasure and pain. Whether it stays in the body or leaves the body, the consciousness of the soul remains the same. Then how can it not experience pleasure and pain? (pp. 70–71)

Human consciousness or rationality, according to Jeong A., is the true source of pleasure and pain. Here, although he does not explain how the rational soul of humans differentiate itself from the mere vegetative or sensitive souls of plants and animals, he has in mind that the kind of pleasure and pain humans take is not limited to the momentary sensation. As Giulio Aleni puts it, humans possess memories from which they retrieve the old good feelings and painful recollections from the past; moreover, they have questions and imaginations from which they expect in hope and predict in anxiety (Aleni 1873, pp. 50–53). While Shin was adamant that human souls were no different from animal souls in that they are both ethereal force *ki* that would dissipate eventually, Jeong A. focused on the special character of humans that could not be captured in the neo-Confucian *li-ki* framework.

Jeong A. describes the Lord of Heaven as “the father of all fathers, and the lord of all lords” (Y.-J. Jeong 2012, p. 47). Just as a father and a lord would wisely and fairly exercise their authority and power over the members of family and state, the Lord of Heaven would bring final justice to all human beings.

The Lord of Heaven is exceedingly wise, exceedingly powerful, exceedingly good, exceedingly strict, and exceedingly just. Thus, he most certainly rewards the good person and punishes the evil person. As he is exceedingly wise, he will know a person's goodness and wickedness. As he is exceedingly powerful, he will have the authority to reward and to punish according to his will. As he is exceedingly strict, he will hate the wicked person and punish him. As he is exceedingly just, he will certainly set the right reward and the punishment. Therefore, since his arranging of the world, no good person will go without receiving his reward from the Lord of Heaven, and no wicked person will go without receiving punishment from the Lord of Heaven. (p. 66)

Jeong A. further reasons that there must be Heaven and Hell, the symbolic place for reward and punishment after death if there is any justice for individual deeds. He explains that it is impossible to judge goodness or the wickedness during one's lifetime, for various reasons. One may be good in the beginning but later become wicked, and vice versa (p. 66); if the rewards and punishments were

meted for every action, then there would be a huge social confusion; if the Lord were to inflict a great punishment and kill a sinner, then he would have no way to repent for his wrongdoing and correct and himself again (p. 66). Moreover, no worldly pleasures or pains can do justice to the number of merits and demerits a person commits during his lifetime. One particularly interesting example of 'worldly riches' Jeong A. describes goes as follows:

It is impossible to repay the goodness or the wickedness of a person through worldly prosperity or adversity. As a person's goodness and wickedness cannot be determined during his life, he does not receive reward or punishment from the Lord of Heaven. Additionally, worldly riches are limited in number, but there is no fixed amount to the number of good people. For instance, there are three ministers in a country, but if there are ten people who are worthy of becoming ministers, with only three seats, how can all of them be made ministers? (p. 67)

Jeong A. is here appealing to commoners as well as Confucian elites, whose ideal is to become ministers to govern people with humaneness and justice. He wholly understands that, in a Confucian moral society, the appeal to extreme beauty or abundance of food may invite commoner's heart, but certainly put off the interest of the scholar-elites. He is hence portraying the kind of paradise where the righteous Confucians are in top seats, bringing harmony and propriety to the world. In other words, he is suggesting that the riches and wealth in Heaven are not only private satisfactions and corporeal indulgence, but are for the greater, common good.

Jeong A.'s picture assumes that there are no proper rewards in this world, because "there are many good people in this world who are poor, and many wicked people who are rich" (p. 66). During his time, this kind of sentiment was shared not only among pro-Catholics, but also among anti-Catholics like Shin and Ahn, who belonged to the Southern faction declining in power. The only difference was that anti-Catholics held that a true Confucian would still only single-mindedly do what is right, without expecting further consequences (cf. S.-Y. Chung 2011). From the perspective of the common people, however, it was natural for them to doubt the existence of Heaven. Jeong A. saw the urgent need to convince them that there is a just principle, although it may not belong to 'this world':

In the world, even a wicked person enjoys wealth and fame and lives in pleasure all his life, while even a good person spends his life in pain because he is poor and lowly. Seeing this, people doubt the existence of a master in heaven and earth, or they doubt his justice. (. . . ) On the last day, by raising the person to heaven after death, the Lord of Heaven will make all the people understand clearly how he repays all the good deeds that this person performed throughout his life. (p. 98)

Unlike Shin who explained that the good people abided by the universal principle *li* and thereby naturally bringing upon themselves social recognition and praises, Jeong A. observed that such evaluation from the community could not reflect the true motivation behind a person's action.

It is impossible to know the state of someone's heart during his life in this world. If a wicked person pretends to be good, those who are ignorant think he is good. If a good person suffers pain, others who are ignorant think he is wicked. Hence, as the goodness or the wickedness of a person does not show clearly, the Lord of Heaven justly carries out his judgment once and for all, fully revealing each person's hidden goodness and wickedness. All people under heaven from every age and place will see each other and know each other, and at this time the Lord of Heaven will make them understand his great justice. (p. 98)

Jeong A. here describes how one's actions are on the day of Last Judgment 'fully revealed' and 'seen and known' by all people under heaven. It implicitly draws on the Confucian value system in which if one continuously does a right thing, the people around him and society at large eventually will recognize his goodness and it becomes his reward for the past good deeds. Jeong A. is painfully aware

that the communal and state recognition in the present world does not do justice to one's intentions, decisions, and actions. Although Confucius himself warned that the ideal person *junzi* would not be bitter about others not recognizing him (*Analects* 1.1) (Confucius 1979), Jeong A. still holds onto the hope of social approval and communal respect through the Lord of Heaven.

As Jeong A. translates the wealth and riches of the afterlife into major Confucian values such as governance and social recognition, how does he explain the resurrection of the body? He again brings the interrogator to ask, "A person's soul does not die, and will receive reward and punishment. Yet since the person's body has now died and become dust, how will he live again and receive reward and punishment?" He responds, "the Lord of Heaven created heaven and earth, the angels, human beings, and all things from nothing. How can he not be able to resurrect a person who existed once before?" (p. 100) His reason for the resurrection of the body goes as follows:

Additionally, only when both the soul and the body become united can a person be complete. Now although a soul may ascend to heaven and enjoy bliss, it will remain only half a person until it unites with its body. Then, in the end, one can say that a person is complete only when the body is resurrected and united with the soul. How then will the Lord of Heaven allow only half a good person to stay in heaven? ( . . . ) Moreover, whether a person does a good deed or a wicked deed, the soul does not act alone, but the body assists, and the two act as one. ( . . . ) Additionally, at this time, every person assumes his original body and is resurrected. If the soul unites with a different body, his will would be to punish an innocent body and not to reward a body that has done good deeds. How can the exceedingly just law of the Lord of Heaven be thus? (p. 100)

Jeong A. claims that since a person is comprised with a soul and body, one's reward and punishment is only complete when they have united again. One's good and evil actions are decided by mind but assisted by the body; hence, one is rewarded with bodily pleasures and punished by physical pains as one is judged by the Lord of Heaven. The kind of bodily pleasure is described as follows:

When the bodies of the righteous are resurrected, the Lord of Heaven will bestow a special grace so that there will be no appearance of disease, old age, or even youth, and all will become like Jesus. Their appearance will be kind and good, strong and firm, beautiful and marvelous. ( . . . ) This body will ascend to heaven to serve Jesus together with countless angels and countless saints, enjoying boundless blessings. Since blessings and pleasures of the soul are infinitely better than those of the body, how can they be described in words? Having also become a beloved child of the Lord of Heaven, the soul will be a brother and a friend to the angels and the saints. With such infinite happiness, to what can the soul's preciousness and glory be compared? (pp. 100–101)

It is notable here that Jeong A. emphasizes the spiritual blessings and gratifications that are 'infinitely better' than the bodily pleasures. In his descriptions of infinite happiness of the soul, we find some notions adaptable in Confucian terms, such as the 'serving' of Jesus the Lord, 'brotherhood' and 'friendship' with angels and saints.

Jeong A. and his immediate family members were among the first martyrs of the early Korean Catholic Church. They were deeply convinced by the Christian notion of spirituality, with the vision of an afterlife in which the omnipotent and omniscient Lord brings justice to all the individual choices of action. Jeong A. wrote a catechistic book persuasive not only to the commoners but also to scholar-elites like himself, who greatly appreciate the Confucian values such as humane governorship, social recognition, serving parents and lords, brotherhood, and friendship with the neighbors. Such values were subtly weaved into his arguments and descriptions of the human soul, Heaven and Hell, and the resurrection of the body, which helped to mitigate the outlandishness of the foreign thoughts and assimilate them into the Confucian background.

#### 4. Reconciliation of Catholicism and Confucianism

As briefly mentioned before, Jeong A.'s brothers were initially moved by Catholic doctrines and their novel ideas of human spirituality. Tasan and his brother Jeong Yag-jeon so deeply influenced by Jesuit works such as *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, that while they were scholar-officers at the university *Sungkyunkwan*, their answers were markedly infused in Jesuit ideas. When the Joseon government later identified Catholicism as a heresy and began to oppress the believers, however, they openly renounced Catholicism (cf. (Y.-J. Jeong 2012, (vol. 3), pp. 252–55)).

Despite his open apostasy, Tasan was sent to exile because of his previous interest in Western Learning and family-relation with Catholic martyrs. In the Kangjin province, the place of exile, he built a hut named *Yeoyudang*, meaning 'being wary and cautious as if crossing a half-frozen lake.' He had the academic honesty and sincerity to write what he believed as true, but he needed to be extremely careful to not borrow Catholic terminologies that would plunge him into trouble again. During his 18 years of exile, he wrote and edited five hundred volumes of books, including commentaries on all the major Confucian canons. Looking into Tasan's writings and commentaries on human spirituality, one may find a creative new scheme that neither denounces Catholicism nor implements Catholicism. It distances itself from the rigid neo-Confucian framework on human nature, but it avoids the sensitive issues pertaining to Catholic doctrines (cf. S.-Y. Chung 2016). This section will examine Tasan's reconciliatory perspective on human spirituality by comparing it with earlier stances by Shin and Jeong A.

Regarding the immortality of the human soul (*hon*) or spiritual soul (*yeong-hon*), Shin and other traditional neo-Confucian scholars outright refuted it as impossible, claiming it is tied to one's body. Just as the mind makes one's body its home, it no longer exists as it departs from the body. On the contrary, Jeong A. reasoned that the human mind was built in such a way that it took pleasure and pain beyond its bodily desires. A human's spiritual soul is different from animals and the human mind controls its body, but is not controlled by the body. On this point, Tasan asserts that the human mind and body, spirit and form are neither together nor separate, but "mysteriously united (神形妙合)" in the following sense:

Human spirit and form are mysteriously united. A body becoming fat or thin is also related [to the spirit]. If one's mind is generous then the body gets large and strong; when one is covetous, then the eyes lose focus. When there is beauty inside, then the face illuminates and the back straightens; when there is guilt inside, then the sweat comes out and the face reddens. These are all clear evidence that the spirit and form are mysteriously united. (Y.-Y. Jeong 2012, (vol. 7), p. 53)

Tasan carefully equates human spirit with the general term *sim*, the heart-mind. He argues that human nature *seong* is not an entity but a common 'quality' shared by all humans. In this way, Tasan is inclined to individuality (mind) rather than commonality (nature). He analyzes:

Only after spirit and form are mysteriously united, does one become human. Therefore, in ancient Classics, they referred to it as 'body (身)' or 'me (己)'. However, there is no one name particularly designating the empty spiritual conscious faculty. Later scholars who want to call it separately borrowed some names such as mind (心), mysterious (神), spirit (靈), soul (魂), but they are all borrowed names. Mencius called the formless the 'great body,' and the form the 'small body.' Buddha called the formless the 'dharma body,' and the form the 'physical body.' They are all added names. (Y.-Y. Jeong 2012, (vol. 6), p. 195)

Tasan discusses that, in Confucianism, there is no particular name for the 'spirit' or the 'formless' part of ourselves. Neo-Confucian scholars of his time debated over two candidates—*sim* (the heart-mind) and *seong* (the nature)—to name the spirit, and Tasan chooses *sim* over *seong* for the following reason:

Today, scholars hotly debate over the two words—'heart-mind' and 'nature'. Some speak of the heart-mind as great and the nature as small; some speak of nature as great and

the heart-mind as small. ( . . . ) Those regarding the heart-mind as great, emphasize the mysterious union of spirit and form, hold that there is only one heart-mind. Those regarding nature as great upholds the word 'nature' as the proper name for the 'great body' or the 'Dharma body (法身).' If one must borrow one word to name the great body, then 'heart-mind' would be closer, while 'nature' would not fit. If we see how the word 'nature' is constructed, then we must read it like it is the appetite of a pheasant, an inclination of a deer, quality of grass, and properties of trees, etc. The term 'nature' refers to dispositions and tendency (嗜好), not something remote and grandiose. (Y.-Y. Jeong 2012, (vol. 6), p. 196)

Tasan holds that human nature is a moral disposition of mind, liking goodness and disliking wickedness. It is quite similar to the Jesuit scholar's description of the human spirit and its appetites for the good (cf. I.-C. Chung 2012), but he found the sources from the ancient Classics like *The Book of Mencius*. The question then is whether Tasan's *sim* is immortal as Jesuits and Jeong A.'s spiritual soul.

As we have seen previously, Shin argued that the word *hon* connoted the dissipation. Jeong A. contended that the human spiritual soul, *yeong-hon*, was special in that it was different from animal souls and immortal by its nature. Within more than five volumes of Tasan work, no single usage of *hon* in the sense of the human spirit can be found; whether it is the *yeong-hon* (spiritual soul), the *shin-hon* (mysterious soul), or the *hon-ryeong* (soul-spirit), the name is heavily burdened with connotation of either dissipation (mortality) or the Catholic doctrine of the immortal soul. Hence Tasan made up special terms for the human heart-mind, such as the '*yeong-myeong* (spiritual brightness, 靈明)', the '*yeong-ji* (spiritual knowing, 靈知)', and the '*yeong-che* (spiritual body, 靈體)'. He only used the word 'spiritual body' once and sparingly used the term 'spiritual knowing'. He did not wish his special terminology to have a Buddhist or Yang-ming undertone. His favorite term was 'spiritual brightness' which designated the faculty of the human mind as rational, balanced, and lucid. It is not to be confused with *ki*, the material energy-force or ethereal, smoke-like entity. The delicate issue of individual immortality is also shrewdly avoided. The term '*myeong* (brightness)' has the connotation of heaven-sent, eternal virtue in the *Great Learning* ('*myeong-deok* the bright virtue'), yet at the same time, it is the 'spiritual' faculty of individual human mind.

In relation to Heaven and Hell, Shin fiercely repudiated that it provokes the selfish interest of people while Jeong A. found it essential for there to be any justice for one's good actions. Tasan again avoided both ends on this issue. Shin asserted that people do get the social recognition if one unflinchingly follows the universal principle and does the right thing regardless of the outcome. Jeong A. argued that the final recognition was from the Lord of Heaven. Tasan reconciles both stances in his own way:

If a person does one good thing, then his mind will be filled with pleasure. If he does one bad thing, then his mind will become stained with guilt. Even if he has not done anything good, if others praise him as good, then he will feel good and happy. Even if he has not done anything bad, if others condemn him, then he will feel bad and angry. As such, [the spiritual brightness] naturally knows good acts are praiseworthy and bad deeds are blameworthy. (Y.-Y. Jeong 2012, (vol. 6), p. 195)

Tasan admits that social approval and disapproval is important to guide one's choice of actions. Still, the focus and motivation of one's action should not be to win the good opinion of others, but to be satisfied in himself: even if one can deceive others, one cannot deceive oneself. He illustrates as follows:

Let us speak of a person who accumulates righteous deeds. In the beginning, he does not feel shame confronting others and does not feel guilty confronting themselves. As he accumulates more, his heart-mind opens up and his body grows big, his face brightens and his back straightens. As he accumulates even more, the 'vast, flood-like *ki*' will flare out, it will be extremely large and strong, as to fulfill all the spaces between heaven and earth. Then no wealth and honor can taint him, poverty and lowliness cannot change him, and threats and

weapons cannot defeat him. Thus, he will mysteriously transform himself, as to be one with the heaven and earth in virtue, and be one with the sun and moon in brightness; finally, he becomes a fully virtuous man. (Y.-Y. Jeong 2012, (vol. 6), p. 196)

In the above, Tasan is describing a person going through a complete self-transformation through choosing and carrying out the right action. One becomes strong and marvelous in appearance, not by God's special grace<sup>2</sup> but by his own accumulation of good deeds. Through self-transformation, one goes beyond the social recognition and threat; that is, one is transcending this world without leaving this world.

In the same context, since a person is free to choose one's course of action, one may not abide by the universal principle embedded in one's mind. He vividly pictures that one may deceive people around, but one cannot escape from one's own guilt and fear.

Suppose another person who does one thing against his own conscience today. Tomorrow, he repeats doing the same thing. He will be dissatisfied and stuffed inside, fearful and guilty. He gives up and tells himself "I am already doomed"; he will be in pieces and tell himself "it is over." Thereby his willpower fades and withers, his *ki* breaks down and crushes him. Then when someone tempts him with small profits, he will yield to it like a dog or pig; when someone threatens him with authority, he will succumb to it like a fox or rabbit. He will grow haggard and flagged, and eventually, die in tears. (Y.-Y. Jeong 2012, (vol. 6), p. 197)

Tasan describes how one is literally being punished by his own actions without appealing to the Lord of Heaven. As a person does one thing against the good conscience, one is making one's own personal hell out of this world. Although there is no state officer or Lord of Heaven who would inflict great pain on oneself, one's spirit becomes as base as that of an animal's, and one's body—appearance and posture—becomes weary and haggard. In summary, human actions are rewarded and punished not by the community nor by the Lord, but by one's own conscience. One is creating one's own personal heaven and hell during one's lifetime. The 'spiritual brightness' of a human is built in such a way that one is bound to feel dignified and proud if one does a right thing and to feel guilty and fearful otherwise (Y.-Y. Jeong 2012, (vol. 4), pp. 163–167).

In this sense, Tasan does not need to address the resurrection of the body after death. The body and spirit are mysteriously combined and the body reflects the state of the spirit. In Confucianism, the 'body' does not need to be one's own physical organism. After death, one's individuality is extended in many forms (cf. Tu 1985). One's organic component is continued by one's children and generations after that; one's spiritual legacy is transmitted by students and disciples. If there is no one to inherit the level of one's scholarship in the present world and time, then one may write and leave books behind, waiting for another generation of young scholars to discover the genuine dimension of one's spiritual brightness. Tasan wrote more than five hundred volumes of books which he compiled meticulously in order (cf. B. R. Kim 2011); he was prepared to be discovered. More importantly, Tasan never called himself 'Tasan'. He always used the penname 'Sa-am (俟菴; waiting-in-hermitage)', waiting for a later generation to find and resurrect him.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> However, it is debatable whether, in Tasan's philosophy, there is absolutely no place for the special grace of the Lord. For example, Tasan describes that every person is born neither good nor evil, but one day one 'suddenly' realizes that one good action will transform oneself a little. A hint of God's special grace is implied in such passages. Back (2015) also discusses the special ming (mandate) of Heaven in Tasan's philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> 'Tasan (tea-mountain)' is the mountain name in the place of exile. It painfully reminded him of the unnecessarily long period of exile, which prevented him from government service that he had hoped for. I assume that he was widely called, rather humiliatingly, as Tasan after the exile from the scholars from opposing faction. His sons and disciples never addressed him with the penname Tasan. It was officially recorded in his annals compiled by his great-great-grandson, who might not have aware of this fact. The penname Tasan first had was Sa-am (俟菴). I speculate that it was given after his meeting at the Cheonjin-am (天菴) to study Western Learning. It is quite remarkable that almost all the study group members of Cheonjin-am, have their penname ending with 'am (菴): Nok-am (鹿菴) Kwon Chul-sin, Yi-am (移菴) Kwon Il-sin, Son-am (巽菴) Jeong Yag-jeon, Seon-am (選菴) Jeong Yag-jong, Sa-am (俟菴) Jeong Yag-yong, and Bok-am (伏菴) Yi Ki-yang.

## 5. Conclusions

So far, this paper examined and discussed the three ways of responding to the Christian notion of human spirituality that was new and alien to the Joseon people and scholars deeply entrenched in the Confucian framework. Three scholars from Sunggho school and their respective works are chosen to represent the initial reactions to this so-called Western Learning.

The first reaction was that of refutation and repudiation by Shin Hudam, who contested the idea of the immortality of the human spiritual soul. In his neo-Confucian view, the soul belongs to the realm of *ki*, the ethereal force that will dissipate into the air as the dead body deteriorates into dust. They are closely related, they live together during one's lifetime and die together after one's death. In his eyes, the reason why the western scholar-missionaries emphasized the immortality of the individual human soul is to entice them with the promise of Heavenly pleasure and threaten them with pains in Hell by provoking people's selfish interest to pursue what is beneficial only to their physical self. Unlike the Confucian value system in which one does the right thing without ulterior motives, people are motivated to do good only out of hope or fear of reward and punishment in the next life. The notion of Heaven and Hell and the eternity beyond makes this present world temporal and transient. People would not genuinely devote their life and significance in the everyday relational and communal duties if they started to belittle 'this' world as fleeting. There is no need to even mention the resurrection of the body, the very act of appealing to one's bodily pleasure and pain and individual immortality leads people to calculate one's private, selfish interest before their public and communal responsibilities. In a gist, there is no way to find true humanism and friendship from the Christian idea of human spirituality.

The second response is quite the contrary. Early Catholic believers and martyrs like Jeong A. recognized and revered it as the one true way of living. He holds that the humans have a unique place in this world and we can reason out that the human soul is immortal. Humans, unlike animals, take interest in what is beyond their immediate physical sensations and take pleasures and pains in matters that have nothing to do with their bodily comfort. Communal praise and insult are what humans are concerned about and the desire to live forever is unique only to human beings. The spiritual soul, *yeong-hon*, is, therefore, separate from the body and can last after it departs from its form. Moreover, if there was any justice for one's actions, and if there was an absolute ruler of everything under heaven, then there must be a life after death. The merits and demerits of human actions cannot be assessed during one's lifetime and the rewards and punishment cannot be meted out with the limitation in this secular world. The righteous people, according to Jeong A.'s description, will ascend to heaven and become ministers who spread benevolence. They will serve the Lord and become brothers with angels and friends with saints. As the body is resurrected, a person becomes one whole human who enjoys both the bodily pleasures, as well as the spiritual happiness, although the latter is far more powerful and blissful. In other words, the Catholic notion of human spirituality for Jeong A. does not stand against the Confucian ethical values. One is as humane, just, and responsible, if not more, when one adopts the everlasting vision of one's own spiritual soul: one's past deeds are not just buried under one's graves but are to be judged and sentenced to perpetual blessings or condemnations.

Finally, there was a creative attempt to reconcile Christianity with traditional Confucianism. Tasan Jeong Yag-yong was one such innovative thinker who successfully weaved Catholic ideas into the Confucian framework. Although he openly renounced the Catholic faith, it was out of fear of getting into conflict with the government. He criticizes the long-held *li-ki* structure of neo-Confucianism and found the Catholic discussions on human spirituality convincing in certain aspects. He attests that the spirit and form are mysteriously united to become a human being. The human spirit-mind, which he advertently named as the 'spiritual brightness,' is related to, but not bounded by, one's physical body. The human face and body are transformed brilliantly in this world by doing what is right, and it is transformed miserably by doing what is against one's conscience. He portrays humans, together with their innate conscience, as the creator of Heaven and Hell in this present world. Although Tasan does not explicitly mention the eternity of the human spirit and resurrection of the individual body,

he implicitly holds onto the idea of ‘living again’ by being discovered by later generation of scholars who would study his works and ‘resurrect’ his individual unique ideas. Such a hope is well-reflected in his real penname Sa-am: waiting-in-hermitage.

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