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NATURE" (性) AND "HEART-MIND" (心) AND ITS  
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## **Reviving the Confucian spirit of ethical practicality: Tasan's notions of "human nature" (性) and "heart-mind" (心) and its political implication**

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Chŏng Yagyong 丁若鏞 (1762-1836), or Tasan 茶山, one of the representative figures from the late Chosŏn period who criticized the idealism of Chosŏn Neo-Confucian learning, looked forward to reestablishing a Confucian worldview that would be inseparably united to life and action. His deist interpretation of the "Sovereign in High" (上帝) as being moral and sensitive to human affairs provides an ontological basis to his theory on the original nature of humans. He defines the human nature, with which everyone is granted by the celestial decree (命), in terms of moral inclination (嗜好). And the latter gives human beings the impulsion necessary for self-realization. To the Neo-Confucian theory that aims at understanding and developing the principle inherent in the universe and to human beings, he substitutes a theory that, according to him, allows the actualization and realization of Confucian ideal through practice and human relations.

This paper aims to give some broad outline of Tasan's Confucian thought around the concepts of human "original nature" (性) and "heart/mind" (心). His deistic interpretation of the Lord on High as being sensitive to moral and human affairs allows him to give an ontological foundation to his theory on the original nature of human beings. Human nature, which is bestowed on every human being by heavenly decree, is defined for him in terms of moral inclination. This is what gives man the necessary impetus to the realization of his own self.

In Confucian tradition, the notion of *sŏng* (性), "original nature" or "human nature", is constantly related to the way of understanding the fundamental character of human beings, on which depends the theory of self-perfection. While the Cheng-Zhu school set down the "original nature" as the basis of any human act, some Chosŏn scholars of the second half of the dynasty doubted that the principle of human act is *a priori* provided and that any human act is already programmed in an innate nature. Here are some examples. According to Hong Taeyong 洪大容 (1731-1783) for whom a unique basis of the act cannot be commonly transmitted to humans, human nature differs from one culture to another. For Tasan Chŏng Yagyong (1762-1836), it is simply given as an orientation or an inclination, and it is accomplished through practices and social actions. As for Ch'ŏe Han'gi 崔漢綺 (1803-1879), he considers that the basis of the act is neither directly nor *a priori* given but acquired through the repetitive process of awareness<sup>1</sup>.

Tasan's idea on this subject in particular includes some interesting points: not only for

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<sup>1</sup> Ahn 2002, 170-171.

its challenging originality against the Neo-Confucian orthodox cosmology of the Cheng-Zhu school but also for its reflection of the intellectual current and the political turmoil in which he was engaged.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, which was the dominant ideology of the Chosŏn dynasty, was challenged in intellectual circles. The world of the literati was split into several factions according to their political interests and their ideological and exegetic positions. Chosŏn society was also undergoing significant social and economic changes on the regional level as well as on the central level. But most literati were engaged in political conflicts related to debates on exegetic matters, ritual problems or moral duties. Moreover it seems that a number of people from the *Yangban* class cared only about preserving their authority and social privileges and about getting richer at the expense of the people suffering from social contradictions and exploitation at the hands of corrupt regional magistrates and civil servants. For some literati, dissident in minority, it was a period of disillusionment with the Chosŏn Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, but also that of the first encounter with Western sciences and religion. In this context some new intellectual currents subsequently named as “Practical Learning” appeared.

At that time, hence, Chosŏn literati society was marked by the polarization of philosophical orientations and the monopolization of political power, which revolved around the well-known Rites Disputes, in particular between the Old Doctrine faction (Noron) and the Southerner faction (Namin). Several new currents of thought such as the so-called “School of Northern Learning”, the Chosŏn Yangming school and the Southerners faction came into being amongst controversies and struggles against ideological dogmatism and estrangement from everyday affairs of Chosŏn Cheng-Zhu school, and these included: bureaucratic orthodoxy, rigidity and political monopoly of the faction in power and corruption of the ruling class.

In particular, the Old Doctrine faction, often in power, and the Southerner faction, often excluded from the political sphere, differed in their views on the status of the monarchy in relation to the class of scholar-bureaucrats. In the spirit of early Confucianism, the greatest wisdom is inborn and monarchial authority is given by heavenly decree. When a scholar agrees with his monarch’s political orientation, he serves as a minister or an adviser. Otherwise, he leaves the government or even the country. But Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism provided the literati class with another worldview. According to this new system of thought, it is the scholars who understand principle, hence the heavenly decree, through studying. Therefore the monarch should be able to point out excellent scholars to put them in charge of decision-making posts within the government. And if he does not follow the Way, his legitimacy can be questioned and scholar’s groups may consider a radical method to re-establish the correct Way of governing. It means that monarchial status is not absolute and his authority must submit to Principle. Following the Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucian ideology, the Old Doctrine faction did not grant the king special status even within a ritual system, while the Southerner faction, who attempted to regain the original Confucian spirit, recognized the special status of the king.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Old Doctrine faction was often in power and the autocratic government by one party resulted in the weakening of royal power. Since the beginning of his

reign (1724-1776), Yòngjo had initiated the “policy of impartiality” to reinforce the king’s power and put to rest the inter-factional dispute. However, the logic of his policy was based on the problematic situation of that time, and he was unable to change the fundamental view of royal authority. It is his successor, Chòngjo (r. 1776-1800), who applied himself to provide a theoretical base to his own “policy of impartiality” which had a new orientation. His stance on the matter of monarchical authority is that the ideal ruler is one who is at once a sovereign prince and accomplished scholar because he is in a good position to govern and has the necessary wisdom, like the sage-kings in the Ancient China. If he then established a special lecture program in which young scholar-bureaucrats answered questions on Confucian Classics set by the king himself, it could be for the purpose of convincing his subjects of his idea. In this period, Tasan was a student at the National Confucian Academy before becoming a young scholar-bureaucrat who found favor with the king. The latter encouraged Tasan in his learning and had political and academic influence on him. This initial orientation of Tasan’s thought never changed even in his last work on Classics.

### **Tasan**

Tasan was born in 1762. At that time his family lived by the upper reaches of the Han River in Kwangju County, Kyònggi Province. In his childhood, Tasan had studied historical writings and the Confucian Classics with his father, who had held office as a regional magistrate. When, at the age of twenty-one (1783), he was a student at *Sònggyun’gwan*, the National Confucian Academy, he had already attracted King Chongjo (正祖; r. 1776-1800)’s attention and special favours for his talents and knowledge of the Classics.

Tasan spent eleven years of his life in various public offices, eighteen years in exile and another eighteen years in retirement. From 27 to 38, he held several key posts in central government and was responsible for different assignments. Tasan’s entourage was part of the Southerners faction. This group enjoyed the protection of King Chòngjo during his reign, and the king showed a special friendship to Tasan until his last days. Indeed, after the death of Chòngjo, the Old Doctrine faction returned to power and Tasan was then sent into exile because of his involvement in scandals related to the spread of Catholicism. Despite this royal protection throughout his life, Tasan was victim of political manoeuvring of some literati of the opposite faction, who precluded his promotion and opposed his recall to the court after his exile.

Tasan considered that the society of his time was seriously ill. According to him, the greatest problems of his time were due to the tyranny and corruption of officials, and the famine that was raging among the people. In several poems he wrote while living in direct contact with the people, he focussed on the absurdity generated by an unjust social system and a corrupt, incompetent and weak ruling class; he expressed his compassion for the suffering people. Faced with a situation in which he felt hopeless, Tasan had developed a reformist form of thinking.

During his 18 years of exile, Tasan devoted all his time to the study and writing of many books. His works focus essentially on the exegesis of the Confucian classics and on scrutiny and concrete studies of the political system.

His research on a theory of self-perfection is based on exegesis of the Classics as well

as its interpretation of the concepts of “original nature” (性) and “heart/mind” (心). The first phase of the study is for him to regain the spirit that permeates the Classics to seize the Way. The latter serves as a principle for the control of the human “heart/mind”. He also puts particular emphasis on the need to return to the spirit of the Classics of the pre-imperial period. Priority is thus given to the Six Classics and not to the Four Books.

Tasan sought to restore a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) that is closely united to life and action. Under the influence of various currents of thought of his time, and in some respects by differing from the Cheng Zhu neo-Confucian school, he reinterpreted the concept of “nature” and “heart/mind” with an approach based on the concrete and real social needs of his time. For the neo-Confucian theory that aims to understand and develop the principle inherent to the universe and the human being, he has substituted a theory that would allow man to act and achieve Confucian ideals through practice and human relations.

### **The Lord on high and the origin of ethics**

In the era of disillusionment with the ideology of neo-Confucian Chosŏn and first encounters with sciences and religion of the West (from the 17th century), some scholars sought to regain the spirit of Confucian origins. They criticized the system of thought of the Korean Cheng-Zhu school which they considered too speculative and dogmatic. They sought new interpretations of the Classics and new systems of socio-political organization. Among them, some were stimulated by the criticism of neo-Confucianism by Western missionaries - Christianity had been known by Korean scholars since the early 17th century. Under the influence of the theory advanced by the missionaries in China that Christianity has a supplementary relationship with Confucianism, these scholars developed a Confucian deism. They brought up to date a concept and ethos based on religious respect to the Lord on High of ancient China, partly because of the influence they received from a monotheistic theology, and partly because they believed that the veneration of a god could create moral practice.

In their thinking and cosmological notion of “Lord on High” (*sangje*), they restored the piety and religious veneration of the “Lord on High” of Confucianism in ancient China, while differentiating it from the Christian God taught in the books of the Jesuits in China. Yi Ik (李瀾 1681-1763) assigned a status of divinity to “that by which everything is so”, that is, the “*li*-Principle” or “Supreme Ultimate” (*taiji* 太極), and made it an object of worship. In other words, he advocated a deistic interpretation of “Lord on High”, which is a synthesis of the concepts of Heaven from primitive Confucianism on one hand and from neo-Confucianism on the other. The resurgence of the concept of “Lord on High” made it possible to associate the religious piety of early Confucianism to the ethic of neo-Confucianism of the Cheng-Zhu school. Yi Ik restored meaning to the belief in “Lord on High”, placing it at the origin of the human moral sense. For him, the moral acts are rooted in religious piety. He highlighted religious practice, which according to him postulates the respect due to a deity. Thus he attributed the origin of the moral sense to “Lord on High”, i.e. a personal god, not the “Principle” or “Supreme Ultimate” which is an impersonal principle, because an impersonal principle would be for human beings less convincing and compelling. Following in Yi Ik’s wake, and thus turning to a deistic view of

the world based on a primitive Confucianism, Tasan revived also the god of the Chinese Antiquity to put the pious man in face of an omnipotent and omniscient god, who judges good and evil committed by man who, in turn, is filled with fear and respect.

*Li principle, he writes, has neither consciousness nor power; for what reason might we be fearful and reverential towards him<sup>2</sup>*

*Sangje*上帝 was a term commonly used before the end of the Zhou as seen in the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Documents* and the *Ritual of Zhou*. Man meets, says Tasan, the Lord on High in sacrificial rites, and he feels inside himself the divine approach and illumination. The Lord on High is both a transcendent and internal being to the universe. Tasan highlights two of its features. Firstly, this deity is not simply a cosmic principle but it reigns over the universe. This feature, he does not share it with human beings. Secondly he is of such perspicacity that it penetrates the heart and mind of man. This character, he shares it with man and the spirits. The perspicacity of the Lord on High is immanent in human beings and contributes to shape their original nature (性命).

*« The spiritual perceptiveness of Heaven penetrates straight man's heart/mind. There is nothing subtle it couldn't observe, there is nothing tenuous it couldn't illuminate. It lights up the room and keeps watch over us here every day. By being aware, even a bold man could not fail to be fearful and reverential [towards Heaven] »<sup>3</sup>.*

The perceptiveness of the Lord on High is his omniscience, that of man is his morality. The Lord on High is the supreme Good, therefore the model and the foundation of any moral value. He is also the one who urges man to do good and punishes evil. So he is a being that allows a moral awareness, and the latter allows people to recognize the Lord on High.

*« What [the Lord on High] attributes to the nature of the heart/mind so that man turns to good and away from evil, it is the heavenly decree. When [he] observes the here and now to reward good and punish evil, it is also the heavenly decree »<sup>4</sup>.*

*« When man is conceived in the embryo, Heaven gives him a clear-sighted and formless body. Its nature is to take pleasure in doing good and in having an aversion to evil, to love virtue and to feel ashamed of vice »<sup>5</sup>.*

Tasan stresses the importance of “knowing Heaven” and “serving Heaven” through human

<sup>2</sup> « 中庸自箴 », 與全 (2), 卷3, 5a.7-8, : 理本無知, 亦無威能, 何所誠而慎之 ?

<sup>3</sup> « 中庸自箴 », 與全 (2), 卷3, 5b.4-6, : 天之靈明。直通人心。無隱不察。無微不燭。照臨此室。日監在茲。人苟知此。雖有大膽者。不能不戒慎恐懼矣。

<sup>4</sup> « 論語古今註 », 與全 (2), 卷8, 39a:10-11 : 賦於心性。使之向善違惡。固天命也。日監在茲。以之福善禍淫。亦天命也。

<sup>5</sup> « 中庸自箴 », 與全 (2), 卷1, 2b.7-8 : 蓋人之胚胎既成天則賦之以靈明無形之體而其為物也樂善而惡惡, 好德而恥污, 斯之謂性也。

relationships, in other words by the fulfillment of their moral responsibilities<sup>6</sup>.

*« To search for the heavenly decree in the original heart/mind, is the study of the sage who serves Heaven »<sup>7</sup>.*

### **The original human nature decreed by Heaven (性命)**

In Tasan, the original nature of human beings decreed by Heaven is defined by the inclination of the moral heart/mind of the Way<sup>8</sup>.

Let's first see how he justifies this notion through classical texts. Tasan notices that the ancients spoke of a desiring nature. Mencius had already put this argument forward when speaking about the original goodness of human nature. Just as the mouth likes tasting delicious flavors, the ears hearing pleasant sounds and the eyes seeing beautiful colors, original human nature loves doing good. Just as the preferences of these organs are the same in every human being, the moral inclination of the heart is also the same. And yet,

*« It is said in the Book of Odes: Heaven gives all beings the principles of their being and the moral law with the existence. human beings, thanks to this law, loves and cultivates virtue. Confucius said: « The author of this ode, didn't he know the Way? » Thus man receives always the moral law with the principles of his being, and because he has this law, he loves and cultivates virtue »<sup>9</sup>. When the author of the poem and Confucius discussing on the nature, they spoke of what ordinary people liked or disliked »<sup>10</sup>.*

Original human nature is thus a moral inclination. And among all inclinations, it is the deepest source. Tasan indeed distinguishes three levels of inclination, namely: desire (欲), joy (樂), nature (性), from the distinction made by Mencius in the following passage : « A vast territory, a great number of people are the things being in accordance with the desire of the man of virtue, but this is not what causes him great joy. To be at the head of the empire and achieve peace for all peoples, is for the man of virtue a great joy, but what he has received from his original nature does not consist of this ».

*« Mencius distinguished three characters, writes Tasan, and made them correspond to three levels. To the least profound level corresponds the desire, and then comes joy. Original nature is at the deepest level where the passions of Man take root. When we say that the good man follows his nature, this means that he follows his inclination. But Nature (性) is a designation for the natural (自然), while inclination (嗜好)*

<sup>6</sup> « 中庸自箴 », *Yöyudang chönsö* 與猶堂全書 (與全 ci-après)(2), 卷1, 19b.9-20a.3.

<sup>7</sup> « 中庸自箴 » 4a.1-2 : 求天命於本心者聖人昭事之學也.

<sup>8</sup> « 孟子要義 », 與全 (2), 卷6, 39a.7-8 : 心者吾人大體之借名也。性者心之所嗜好也。虛氣知覺。亦恐欠分曉。

<sup>9</sup> « 孟子 », 告子章句上 : 《詩》曰 : 『天生蒸民, 有物有則。民之秉彝, 好是懿德。』孔子曰 : 『為此詩者, 其知道乎 ! 故有物必有則, 民之秉彝也, 故好是懿德。』

<sup>10</sup> « 孟子要義 », 與全 (2), 卷6, 23b.5-6 : 詩人孔子論性。專主好惡而言。於此可驗。

*evokes something shallow (淺). [However,] if nature was not a kind of inclination, the expression 'follow nature' (所性) would not be possible. As desire, joy and nature are parts of the same kind, nature is inclination »<sup>11</sup>.*

Thence Tasan does not see the original nature in the same way as the scholars of the Cheng-Zhu school. He refuses the notion of *li* (理) set down as the principle by the Cheng-Zhu school and he also refuses the idea that “nature is principle” (性即理). According to this school, what is formless is the “principle” and what has a form and substance is the “breath” and “nature” decreed by Heaven is “principle” and, the “seven emotions” are “breath”. For Tasan, Cheng Yi is wrong to think that heart/mind, nature and heaven are only a single principle (心性天一理). He doubts that there is any ancient written proof that could lend credibility to this assertion.

*« If we tie up ten thousands differences to identify them in one and then [we separate them] to form a chaos, it would be impossible to think and discuss, divide and distinguish things and the affairs of the world. We might consider as a supreme prodigious way the practice that consists in resting the heart/mind in the dark and indistinct, and keeping it quiet and still. Was this Confucius' way of thinking ? »<sup>12</sup>*

Moreover, he stresses that the “*li*-principle” cannot be the foundation that provides man his original nature. For him, it is impossible to speak of morality based on an impersonal cosmic principle. On the interpretation of the following passage from the *Zhongyong* or *Doctrine of the mean* : “What Heaven has decreed is called nature”, Tasan rejects Zhang Zai’s 张载 (Heng Qu 横渠, 1020 -1077) notion of Heaven that defines the sky as Supreme Emptiness 太虚. Similarly, the structuring principle or “the reason something is what it is” is for Zhu Xi the foundation of ethics, this impersonal “principle” without conscience and sense cannot judge human thoughts and behaviors. And therefore it can be neither a model nor a foundation of morality. For Tasan, the Heavenly Decree is the command of the Lord on High and original nature specific to man is not the principle imparted to every human being but the gift of a moral potentiality, an inclination to love good.

*« What is “principle”? It has neither affection nor hatred, nor joy nor anger. It is empty, without name, without body. Although we received nature from this, it will be hard to see it as the Way »<sup>13</sup>.*

However, as desire and joy are emotions (情), one can wonder if the nature belongs to

<sup>11</sup> « 孟子要義 », 與全 (2), 卷6, 42b10-43a.1 : 欲樂性三字。孟子分作三層。最淺者欲也。其次樂也。其最深而透為本人之癖好者性也。君子所性。猶言君子所嗜好也。但嗜好猶淺。而性則自然之名也。若云性非嗜好之類。則所性二字。不能成文。欲樂性三字。既為同類。則性者嗜好也。

<sup>12</sup> « 孟子要義 », 與全 (2), 卷6, 38a.12-b.1 : 東萬殊而歸一。復成混沌。則凡天下之事。不可思議。不可分別。惟有棲心冥漠。寂然不動。為無上妙法而已。斯豈洙泗之舊觀哉。

<sup>13</sup> « 孟子要義 », 與全 (2), 卷6, 38b.1-2 : 理者何物。理無愛憎。理無喜怒。空空漠漠。無名無體。而謂吾人稟於此而受性。亦難乎其為道矣。

it. On this issue, Tasan separates nature from emotion because their origins are different. For him, they differ from one another because nature is received from Heaven and emotion comes from the human being.

*« Emotion is caused by human. Therefore it can be good or bad. The inclination of original nature is received from Heaven and there is only good without evil. How can we put them in the same category? »<sup>14</sup>.*

For Tasan, only moral inclination which every human being is invariably and impartially granted by the Heaven can be called “original nature”. Once the moral inclination is limited and dependent on the fate of each (命), it is then no longer original nature<sup>15</sup>. While moral values and powers are, by nature, desired by everyone, there may be circumstances or social positions that do not facilitate their implementation. Yet Tasan discourages the use of particular situations as a pretext to relinquish one’s moral vocations.

*“One cannot dare not to make all his heart on the pretext of not falling at the right time, or not being in the right situation. Moral duties to be observed between father and son, and between sovereign and subject, the way to be followed in respecting guests and appreciating sages, and the rectitude of the heart venerating the Way of Heaven, all come from original nature decreed by Heaven (天性). We cannot change it on the pretext of not having the same fate. Therefore a good man does not refer to his fate. »<sup>16</sup>.*

### **The heart/mind (心)**

As to the concept of “heart/mind”, Tasan generally adheres to the broad outlines of the Zhuxiste tradition. The heart/mind is the original self (本有之己), it governs the body and provides the ability to think. It consists of two separate components: the “heart/mind” of the Way and the human “heart/mind”. The first corresponds to what is great (大体) in human being’s constitution, linked to the original nature decreed by Heaven. It is desire of the Way and follows its inclination toward good. The second covers what is lesser (小体) in human being’s constitution, linked to the “breath of life and matter”. It is carnal desire, the selfish desire of the individual interest and self-esteem, it follows natural inclinations every man has to survive.

Desire is both dangerous and powerful. Man acts according to his desires without which he would accomplish nothing in the world. When a human being feels inside himself two opposing desires, when a conflict between the “heart/mind” of the Way and the human heart/mind occurs, it is the harbinger (forerunner) before the separation of good and evil. At this moment, thanks to the heart/mind of the Way, man can distinguish right from wrong, love virtue

<sup>14</sup> « 孟子要義 », 與全 (2), 卷6, 21b.7-8 : 情動由乎人。故可善可惡。性好受於天。故有善無惡。豈可一例論乎。

<sup>15</sup> « 孟子要義 », 與全 (2), 卷6, 50b.3-5: 性字原是嗜好之意。故世人皆以嗜好爲性。孟子獨曰若是性也。則人必均得。今既得之有命。則其非性可知也。

<sup>16</sup> « 孟子要義 » (2), 與全 (2), 卷6, 51a.4-7 : 不以其不遇其時不處其位。而或敢不盡心焉。誠以父子君臣之倫。敬賓尊賢之法。欽崇天道之誠。皆出於天性。不可以所遇之不同。有所改易。故君子不謂命也。

and succeed in sacrificing his life to keep intact his moral virtue. When the “lesser constitution” desires and the “greater constitution” prohibits and when that which prohibits controls that which desires, it is called “disciplining the self”. But the “greater constitution” and the “lesser constitution” together form the self. Therefore, the question of value judgments and moral responsibility becomes deeply and keenly important.

The originality of Tasan about the concept of “heart/mind” may rest in the fact that he puts a particular emphasis on the moral responsibility that he places on the “heart/mind”. He stresses in his philosophical works that it is neither in nature nor in the body but in the heart/mind that the origin of moral responsibility must be looked for. For if man were programmed to do good, he could have no merit for the good he would do; if he were programmed to do evil, he might receive no criticism for the evil that he would commit.<sup>17</sup>

For Tasan, a moral question arises and is settled in the heart/mind. Heaven has invested man not only with a nature that prefers good but also with the ability to choose it. The human heart/mind is given a right to decide independently. One can do good with his original nature, but he can also set out in another way. Given his capacity to judge and his freedom to choose between good and evil, the moral responsibility is incumbent upon him. Tasan dwells on the following idea: virtue is not contained in original nature; good is not realized automatically by nature; instead they are the command from Heaven; and man can have his merits or commit misconduct, according to his decision to or not to follow this command.

He reminds each one about the moral responsibility of their heart/mind, which is master of thinking subject and able to judge, to want and to act. He makes responsible for evil the “heart/mind” that sinks into vice (陷溺) or succumbs to carnal or selfish desire. He puts emphasis on man’s will and autonomy in relation to virtue, and on the human relationship understood as a way by which man realizes virtue<sup>18</sup>.

This freedom of choice and of action, this possibility to be good or bad, reflects the instability and the anxiety that inhabit the human heart/mind. In the eyes of Tasan, man in his human condition, can only poorly know the nature decreed by Heaven. Because of this, a thinking subject “reflects strongly and makes every effort to overcome the self” (猛省而力克). However, it is possible that man is not aware of the evil he commits, because his moral thought, even though supported by his original nature, may not be properly operating because he is plunged into a selfish desire. This gives him reason to be careful and fearful (戒愼恐懼) and to exalt moral nature (尊德性). For a human being who has the right to decide for himself, what is important is the moral thought (思) which is a faculty of the “heart/mind”.

### **Virtue and self-perfection**

Almost every moral reflection in Tasan converges on the matter of actions /conduct (行事)

<sup>17</sup> « 論語古今註 » (9), 與全 (2), 卷15, 12a:4-11 : 孟子之謂性善。豈有差乎。但不得不善。人則無功。於是又賦之以可善可惡之權。聽其自主。欲向善則聽。欲趨惡則聽。此功罪之所以起也。天既賦之以好德恥惡之性。而若其行善行惡。令可游移。任其所為。此其神權妙旨之凜然可畏者也。何則好德恥惡。既分明矣。自此以往。其向善汝功也。其趨惡汝罪也。不可畏乎。禽獸之性。本不能好德恥惡。故善不為功。惡不為罪。斯大驗也。苟使人性不得不善。如蝨之不得不孝。如蜂之不得不忠。如元央之不得不烈。天下其復有善人乎。

<sup>18</sup> « 孟子要義 » (2), 與全 (2), 卷6, 21-23.

which is for him equal to that of successful self-perfection. According to him, self-perfection aims to “serve Heaven” and “attain heavenly virtue”, and it is realized only with the accomplishment of ethical responsibilities through human relations. This effort for self-perfection consists in several phases: the co-expression (co-appearance) of the human heart/mind and the heart/mind of the Way on a concrete event, awareness of the conflict of these two hearts/minds, choice made through moral reflection, and then put into practice.

With Tasan, who on this subject follows the interpretation of Hyu Yun (尹鑄 1617-1680), the notion of virtue is diametrically displaced in relation to other concepts in the structure of the Neo-Confucian moral theory. On the pivot of the concept of original nature that we saw earlier, the theoretical schema on self-perfection is inverted, virtue is no longer at the level of principle or of the original nature of the heart/mind, but at the level of actions and their consequences. If Tasan rejects the concept that embodies virtue in original nature, it is also because for him the distinction of good from evil can be done only in the context of human relationships. Following the interpretation of his predecessor Yun Hyu, he considers virtue as the *a posteriori* acquired fruit of a development of moral inclinations. What exists in the heart/mind is the moral desire as potential virtue. Virtue presupposes action and involves all of the following constituent phases: the original nature of the heart/mind, its manifestation through the heart/mind of the Way, its choice and action. What might be called “virtue” is a fulfillment, a realization or externalization of probity that is obtained through moral action. In its classical sense, the term of virtue means nothing other than the practice of social norms, such as the practice of filial piety or fraternal respect. Confucius and Mencius frequently compared the attainment of virtue to the task of self-perfection. Similarly, Tasan only admits performed virtue, thus restricting the method for self-perfection to moral practice.

*« Initially there is no virtue in the heart/mind, if not the nature of righteousness (or honesty). We refer to “virtue” when we put into practice what the right heart/mind decides. [The constitution of the character tōk shows that it is a matter of implementing the right heart (德之为字行直心)]. The word virtue only can apply to good acts done. Before acting, how can we have our moral force shining? »<sup>19</sup>*

For Tasan, moral principles are not *a priori* included in human original nature. Where are then the notions of “the four sprouts” (or four beginnings) (compassion, shame at evil, respect, discerning right and wrong) placed, which are expressions of Principle He interprets the expression “four sprouts” as follows: a germ (端) corresponds to the departure of the heart/mind toward the implementation of the virtues; a thinker chooses good for himself and puts it into practice; from there one can speak of the virtues. To highlight the effort to be made to achieve the decision of the “heart/mind”, Tasan distinguishes moral decision from moral action. And he recalls that the four Confucian virtues, in (humaneness/humanity), ui (rightness/righteousness), ye (ritual/property), chi (wisdom), designate the achievements, acts of good, as mentioned

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<sup>19</sup> « 大學公議 » (1), 與全 (2), 卷1, 8a.1-2: 心本無德。惟有直性。能行吾之直心者。斯謂之德。[德之爲字。行直心]。行善而後德之名立焉。不行之前。身豈有明德乎。

above. In the expression of the “Great Learning”, “causing to shine” is achieved not by linguistic explanation but by act/conduct<sup>20</sup>.

Tasan also redefines the idea of self-perfection in terms of social engagement through moral practice. An ancient interpretation of the character in (仁), which defines it as the relationship between two people, allows him to advance the idea that virtue *in* is achieved only in the meeting of people and it is only thanks to interpersonal relationships that one can improve oneself.

« *The ancient Confucian disciples - disciples of the school Cheng- Zhu – , said Tasan, considered the Classic – “Great Learning” - as a [treaty on] the method to regulate the heart/mind and nature. But the ancient Sages had considered the regulation of heart/mind and nature as a matter of practice, and it cannot be out of human relationships* »<sup>21</sup>.

« *What does our Way consist of? This is nothing more than to excel in between us (善於際)* »<sup>22</sup>.

He also replaces the Cheng Yi’s formula: “strengthen the inner life to rectify the outer life” by this: regulate the outside to bring peace and order inside<sup>23</sup>.

By way of conclusion, we can reflect on how these concepts we have just considered in Tasan affect the Confucian ideal. Echoing Zhu Xi’s formulation, Tasan describes the learning of a man of virtue as “nothing more than to improve himself and order the state.” According to the classical idea of Confucianism, the task of ordering the state can be accomplished only through the moral strength of political leaders. The art of governing which is worthy of the name of Sage, is acquired by the exemplary practice of virtues, which encourages men to love each other. Tasan is very committed to this idea, which is found particularly in his interpretation of the term or *ch’inmin* 亲民 or *sinmin* 新民 of the *Great Learning*. Following Cheng Yi’s exegesis, Zhu Xi replaced the term Ch’in 親 by the sin 新 in “ch’inmin” to interpret it as “bringing the people to a state of renewal”. But this interpretation could only emphasize the charismatic side of leadership. Wang Yangming, on the other hand, insisted on keeping the term *ch’inmin* in its original formulation. He understood it as “love the people”, which allowed him to highlight the idea of practical commitment of the sovereign who has not only to fulfill the needs of the people but also to educate them. Tasan distinguishes himself from these two great figures of neo-Confucianism, in interpreting the expression *ch’inmin* by “ensuring that the people love each other”. For him, it is a matter of natural results arising from the virtuous behavior of the ruler who applies himself to his own self-perfection<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> « 上弇園書 », 與全 (1), 卷18, 40a.6-7: 明者非以言語講明之。行之然後乃明。

<sup>21</sup> « 大學公議 » (1), 與全 (2), 卷1, 13a.9-10: 故先儒遂以此經為治心繕性之法。然先聖之治心繕性。每在於行事。行事不外於人倫。

<sup>22</sup> « 論語古今註 » (7), 與全 (2), 卷13, 43b:9: 吾道何為者也。不過為善於其際耳。

<sup>23</sup> « 心經密驗 », 與全 (2), 卷2, 31b.8-10: 程子曰惟恐不直內。內直則外必方。○案四勿箴曰發禁躁妄。內斯靜專。所謂制之於外。以安其內者此也。愚甚喜此語。大抵表裏交修。其德不孤。不可作一偏說。

<sup>24</sup> « 大學公議 » (1), 與全 (2), 卷1, 11a.

In this way Tasan puts emphasis on the interdependence of these two poles of the Confucian ideal: the self-perfection of the man of honor is not possible outside the art of ordering the state, because the self-perfection is completed only through the fulfillment of moral responsibilities. Both tasks must be carried out simultaneously and these two requirements of the ideal Confucian are interdependent. This idea could provide a theoretical logic to a reinforcement of the king's power, allowing claims not only that the sovereign prince who cultivates his morals has the ability to govern, but also that only the one who, from the direct governing place, puts in practice an act of the state can really cultivate morals.

However, king Chôngjo died too early to get to know this idea.

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