

Should People Blame *Sangje* for Evil and Suffering?—Dasan Jeong Yakyong’s Reformulation of the Confucian Problem of Evil through His Re-interpretation of the Poem *Tang*

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Abstract

Influenced by Catholicism, Korean Confucian philosopher Dasan Jeong Yakyong 茶山丁若鏞 (1762–1836) formulated a unique re-interpretation of the concept of *Sangje* 上帝 in the *Five Classics*. Remarkably, in his re-interpretation of the poem *Tang* from the *Book of Odes*, which was widely regarded as a political analogy rather than a religious poem, Dasan claimed that according to *Tang*, *Sangje* is a perfectly good judge who rewards the virtuous and punishes the wicked, and therefore people’s resentment against *Sangje* is unjustified. This paper argues that Dasan “re-religionized” *Tang* as a Confucian version of the problem of evil and suffering: if *Sangje* is an omnibenevolent and omniscient God, why was there evil and suffering in the world? Dasan’s solution to the problem is that, according to *Tang*, since all evil and sufferings were caused by people’s free will, people should not blame *Sangje*. Yet this paper argues that Dasan’s answer is inconsistent with the context of the *Book of Odes* where resentment against Heaven or *Sangje* is frequently justified. Therefore, Dasan’s solution to the problem of evil embedded in *Tang* implies an implicit criticism of the *Decade of Tang*, although he might not be aware of that.

Keywords: Korean philosophy, Confucianism, Philosophy of Religion, Christianity, Contextual Theology

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I. Introduction

Dasan Jeong Yakyong 茶山 丁若鏞 (1762–1836) is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers in the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897). Being dissatisfied with the official Jujahak (“school of Zhu Xi”), as a major figure of the Silhak (“school of practical studies”), Dasan re-interpreted *Four Books* and *Five Classics* with the help of Qing dynasty Chinese philology, Classic studies, Western thoughts, and even Catholicism. The inclusiveness and progressiveness of his philosophy contrast with the conservative Jujahak scholars at that time, making Dasan a unique philosopher.

Dasan’s emphasis on the concept of *Sangje* 上帝 as a personal God and moral judge in his re-interpretations of *Four Books* and *Five Classics*, evidenced by his analysis of *Tang* from the *Book of Odes*, outstood his philosophy among mainline Confucian interpreters. Zhu Xi regarded *Di* 帝 (synonym of *Sangje*) merely as a metaphor for Heaven, a principle but not a personal God: “The *Book of Odes* seems to claim that there is a person [in Heaven] above, e.g. ‘*Di* is angry.’ But it only means there is a principle. All under Heaven revere the principle, so it is named *Di*.”¹ Similarly, Kong suggested that *Sangje* in *Tang*² is merely a metaphor for the monarch, as we shall see in this paper (Kong 1999, 17.4:1144).³ Since Korean Confucians were influenced by both Kong’s and Zhu’s traditions, as we shall see in the following, the mainline Korean interpreters also rarely interpreted *Sangje* as a personal God.

The trend of not regarding *Sangje* as a personal God among Chinese (and also Korean) Confucians may be explained by Mou Zong-san. In his *Xinti yu Xingti* 心體與性體 (Mind Substance and Nature Substance),

¹ 詩書所說，便似有箇人在上恁地，如「帝乃震怒」之類。然這箇亦只是理如此。天下莫尊於理，故以帝名之 (Zhuzi *Yulei* 朱子語類 3.11). All translations of Classical Chinese, if not stated, are translated by the author, with the original text preserved in the endnote for reference.

² Although in other poems Kong read *Sangje* as one of the *Wufang Shangdi* 五方上帝, who were originally ancient emperors and magnified as Gods after death. For example, Kong argued that *Sangje* referred to *Cangdi* 蒼帝 in the poem *Shengmin* 生民 (Kong 1999, 17.1:1059).

³ Citations of *Maoshi Zhengyi* in this paper, if not specified, refer to the Simplified Chinese version of *Maoshi Zhengyi* published by Peking University Press in 1999.

Mou argued that from Mengzi onward Confucians intentionally shifted their emphasis from religion to metaphysics. As Mou said:

Di 帝 and *Tian* 天 in the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of Documents* were all encountered transcendentally, as both referred to a personal God. But they are transformed into a moral and metaphysical substance through Kongzi's *Ren* 仁 and Mengzi's mind nature. From then on, the transcendent Heaven and the immanent mind nature are unified. Both *Di*, *Tian*, and the mind nature become the *jigan zhenji* 寂感真機 ("silent moment of mystical experience") of the creation of the universe or morality. From this perspective, the "transcendent encounter of Heaven" (*duiyue zaitian* 對越在天) becomes an immanent encounter (*naizai didui* 內在地對), which is known as the manifestation through the observing subject (*Ditichengdang* 觀體承當). (Mou 2003, 26)

While Mou acknowledged the religious aspects of the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of Documents*, he highlighted that from Kongzi and Mengzi onwards, Confucians "de-religionize" the texts by re-interpreting *Ti* and *Dian* as metaphysical foundations of morality, because they intentionally "de-religionize" and "philosophilize" the texts. Nevertheless, the religious aspects of both classics were rediscovered by Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century. In Joachim Bouvet's (1656–1730) *Gujin Jingtianjian* 古今敬天鑒, Bouvet listed several citations from *Four Books* and *Five Classics*, including *Tang*, arguing that ancient Confucians also believed in a monotheistic and personal God and therefore Catholicism is consistent with Confucianism. Bouvet argued that "if the people who are created and governed by Heaven are rational and spiritual, how can the creating and governing Heaven not be rational and spiritual?"⁴ From this perspective, one may argue that missionaries and Confucians influenced by Catholicism (including Dasan) "re-religionize" *Tang* by rediscovering its religious dimension which had been disregarded by former Confucian interpreters.

Owing to his Catholic family background, Dasan had already studied Western thoughts in his teenage. The clan of Jeong was powerful during King Jeongjo's 正祖 (1752–1800) reign (1776–1800) when Dasan's father

⁴ 由天所生、所治之民且有則而靈，豈生之、治之之天反不如民，而無靈無則乎？(Zeng 2003, vol. 19, 238)

Jeong Jaewon 丁載遠 (1730–1792) had a strong link with the powerful minister and the leader of the Sipa 時派 sect Chae Jegong 蔡濟恭 (1720–1799). Dasan’s brother Jeong Yakjong 丁若鍾 (1760–1801) was the leader of the first Catholic community in Korea and a good friend of Yi Byeok 李蘖 (1754–1786), who introduced Western thoughts and Catholicism from Jesuits in China to Korea. Besides, Dasan was also influenced by the Western studies of Udam Jeong Sihan 愚潭 丁時翰 (1625–1707, of the same clan) and Seongho Yi Ik 星湖 李瀼 (1681–1763) whose teaching was taught by Dasan’s father (Keum 2000, 186).

Yet following the sudden death of King Jeongjo in 1800, Sipa 時派 lost power while the Byeokpa 僻派⁵ seized power and launched the Sinyu Persecution in 1801. Three hundred Catholics were executed, including Dasan’s brother Jeong Yakjong, and others were exiled. Dasan began his 18 years of exile when most of his poems and books were written. Owing to his traumatic experience and safety concerns, Dasan never explicitly confessed or even discussed Christian faith in his surviving writings. As a result, how “Catholic” is Dasan’s philosophy becomes a controversial issue. Some scholars like Don Baker (2004) and Tsai Cheng-Feng (2012) insist that Dasan is not a Catholic and merely rediscovered the religiousness of Confucianism by re-interpreting *Four Books* and *Five Classics* with the help of philology. Others like Kevin Cawley (2014), Lin Yueh-hui (2022), and Gim Gyeol (2020) argue that Dasan’s re-interpretations of *Four Books* and *Five Classics* are largely inspired by Catholicism, remarkably his concept of *Sangje* as a personal, creator and monotheistic God, largely influenced by Matteo Ricci’s *Tianzhu shiyi*, as we shall see below.

Considering the Catholic background of Dasan’s family, this paper adopts a Catholic/Christian reading of Dasan’s philosophy and argues

⁵ The court of the Joseon dynasty was dominated by party struggles from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. In the early nineteenth century, the court was divided into two parties, Sipa and Byeokpa. Byeokpa agreed with Yeongjo’s 英祖 (1694–1776) execution of the crown prince Sado 思悼世子 (1735–1762) in 1762, while Sipa disagreed. As a result, when Sado’s son Jeongjo 正祖 was enthroned in 1777, Sipa seized power while Byeokpa declined. Yet after Jeongjo’s sudden death in 1800, Byeokpa regained power and prosecuted Sipa. But Byeokpa’s return to power was short-lived as the consort kin, as the Andong clan of Kim 安東金氏 immediately dominated the court during Sunjo’s 純祖 (1790–1834) reign.

that Dasan's Confucian-Christian re-interpretation of the poem *Tang* from the *Book of Documents* where he discusses the people's resentment against *Sangje* (上帝, God) provides a solution to the problem of evil and suffering, although such a re-interpretation contradicts the context of the *Book of Odes*. Below is the argument flow of this paper:

1. Dasan regarded people's resentment against *Sangje* expressed in *Tang* as a religious problem of evil and suffering rather than merely a political analogy.
2. Influenced by Catholicism, Dasan argued that according to *Tang* these people's resentment is unjustified as disasters result from these people's wrongdoings.
3. The context of the *Decade of Tang* from the *Book of Odes* justifies people's resentment against *Sangje* and blames *Sangje* for causing evil and suffering.
4. Statement (2) contradicts statement (3).
5. Therefore, Dasan's re-interpretation of *Tang* as a solution to the problem of evil and suffering implies a criticism of the *Decade of Tang* from the *Book of Odes*.

By investigating Dasan's re-religionization of the poem *Tang* in light of recent research on the relationship between Catholicism and Dasan's philosophy, this paper reveals the uniqueness of Dasan's interpretation of the text: although the perfect good of *Sangje* was also acknowledged by other interpreters, they rarely acknowledge *Sangje* as a perfectly good *judge* but merely the fundamental moral principle. As mentioned above, Zhu Xi argued that *Sangje* is not a personal God but just a synonym of Heaven (天) and principle (理). By contrast, inspired and influenced by Catholicism, Dasan understood *Sangje* in terms of a personal God and argued that the author of *Tang* denounced people's resentment against *Sangje* because *Sangje* was not responsible for evil and suffering. In the following section, I will explain why this paper advocates a Catholic interpretation of Dasan's philosophy.

II. Literature Review

To understand Dasan's philosophy, one must understand the academic tradition of Silhak in advance. According to Keum Jang-tae:

Although orthodox Dohak 道學 [“the studies of the Way”] Neo-Confucianism continued to be the thought that dominated society, people began to become deeply aware of its abuses and criticized its conservative and rigid stance. Intellectual unrest arose in many quarters of society and, through this, a reform theory was developed together with a movement to accept Qing China's more developed civilization. During this time factional powers appeared, rejecting not only metaphysics but also basic Confucian concepts. The conflict between orthodox Confucianism, which considered metaphysical theory as its basic principle, and Western thought became one of the problems of the time. (Keum 2000, 184)

Keum identified two Korean intellectual sources of Dasan's philosophy: the Bukhak school (北學派) and the Seongho school (星湖學派). The Bukhak school, or the “school of utilisation and welfare” (利用厚生派) (Keum 2000, 140), was led by Hong Daeyong 洪大容 (1731–1783), Bak Jiwon 朴趾源 (1737–1805), and Bak Jega 朴齊家 (1750–1815), who had all participated in diplomatic visits to the Manchurian Qing dynasty and were amazed by the Manchurian civilization and Western thoughts and therefore challenged the official Cheng Zhu school (particularly Jujahak). Hong Daeyong refuted *Yingyan Wuxin* 陰陽五行 cosmology and a China-centred worldview, while Bak Jiwon and Bak Jega criticized the idealistic moral ideology of the scholars of Jujahak scholars and called for promoting utility and social welfare for the improvement of people's living standards (Keum 2000, 140). While their emphasis on improving people's living influenced Dasan's major work *Mongmin Simseo* 牧民心書 (The Chief Minister's Instructions), unlike Dasan, philosophers of the Bukhak school respected yet did not accept Catholicism.

By contrast, scholars of the Seongho school were divided on whether to accept Catholicism. Yi Ik, the founder of the school, seems to be compassionate to Catholicism. Since Yi Ik was interested in

Western thoughts and read Matteo Ricci's *Tianzhu Shiyi* 天主實義. As Keum notes, "While recognizing Western superiority in the field of astronomy and calendrical science and finding areas of mutual agreement between Catholicism and Confucianism on matters of ethics, Yi Ik rejected the idea of heaven and hell, choosing instead to keep the Confucian position" (Keum 2000, 186). While Yi Ik's appreciation of Catholicism was condemned by his conservative student and the well-known historian An Jeongbok 安鼎福 (1712–1791), the majority of Yi Ik's followers, including Yi Byeok and Jeong Yakjong, were converted to Catholicism (Cawley 2012). Influenced by his father, uncles, and brothers, Dasan studied Yi Ik's writings early in his teenage and was influenced by Yi Ik's studies of the *Book of Odes*. In Dasan's later writings, he often appreciated Yi Ik's philosophy and had written a poem praising Yi Ik titled *Bakhak* 博學 (erudition) (Jeong 1963, I-2:63). As Kim Sugyeong indicated, like Yi Ik, Dasan did not merely criticize or appreciate Zhu Xi or Kong Yingda's commentaries but highlighted comparative studies of texts to verify which interpretations are more consistent (Kim 2012, 228). This is one of the reasons why Dasan's understanding of *Tang* is more similar to Zhu Xi's than Kong Yingda's, as we shall see in the following.

Nevertheless, being influenced by advances in philology in seventeenth-century China, both the Seongho school and the Bukhak school challenged the Neo-Confucian (remarkably Zhu Xi's) interpretations of *Four Books* and *Five Classics*. The Qian-Jia school (乾嘉學派) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries employed philological methods to re-interpret Confucian texts. They argued that one should investigate the etymology of every character of the text to reconstruct the original meanings. The methodology of the Qian-Jia school was appreciated by Bak Jega and adopted by Kim Jeonghui 金正喜 (1786–1856) (Keum 2000, 144) and Dasan (Keum 2000, 183). Yet as we shall see, Dasan did not follow the Qian-Jia interpretation of *Tang* but presented a Christian and Western studies-inspired reformulation of the text.

Dasan's emphasis on the concept of *Sangje* in his interpretations of *Four Books* and *Five Classics* is often regarded as evidence that Dasan was a Catholic. Yet some scholars disagree that Dasan was a

Catholic. Baker argues that *Sangje* was just a term for the ruler of the universe in the *Book of Documents*. “Tasan [Dasan] called God the ruler of the cosmos, not the creator His God was solely a moral force. That was what made him a Confucian God” (Baker 2004, 174). Likewise, Tsai Chen-Feng argues that *Sangje* in Dasan’s context is very different from the Christian God, for *Sangje* was not a final judge but is merely a source of human good nature (Tsai 2012, 145). Tsai also argues that Dasan highlighted the concept of *Sangje* for three reasons: re-emphasising sacrifices to Heaven in *Five Classics*, re-interpreting the ritual of sacrifice as an essential moral practice, and grounding a “settling point of eternity or transcendence” so that one may find peace and comfort (Tsai 2012, 152). Nevertheless, while Tsai’s observation aligns with Mou’s argument that the concept of a personal God was embedded in Confucian classics (yet intentionally rejected by Mengzi), Tsai failed to explain why Dasan would “rediscover” and “reassert” the idea of *Sangje* if Dasan was not inspired by Catholicism.

This paper rejects the non-Catholic interpretations above and is in favor of a Catholic interpretation for several reasons. Firstly, as Kevin Cawley quotes from Dasan, Baker’s argument contradicts Dasan’s writings where Dasan acknowledges *Sangje* as creator: “Who is *Sangje*? *Sangje* is a being that creates [造化; K. *johwa*], governs [宰制; K. *chaeje*] and sustains [安養; K. *anyang*] heaven, earth, spirits, humans and all things, but also transcends them” (Cawley 2014, 309).⁶ It should be noticed that *Johwa* 造化 and *Anyang* 安養 are both terms used by Ricci when explaining the concept of a creator God. The first chapter of *Tianzhu Shiyi* was titled as “Tianzhu began to institute, manipulate and sustain Heaven, the earth and all beings” (Ricci n.d., I:1).⁷ In the same dialogue, the Chinese scholar also used the term *Johwa* when he asked that “what are the evidence for the institution and creation of all beings in the beginning [of the universe]?” (Ricci n.d., I:4).⁸ Considering the Catholic background of Dasan’s family, it is likely that Dasan adopted

⁶ 上帝者何。是於天地神人之外。造化天地神人萬物之類。而宰制安養之者也。(From *Chunchu Gojing* 春秋考徵; See Jeong 1963, II-36:19)

⁷ 天主始制天地萬物而主宰安養之。

⁸ 然其原制造化萬物，何以徵也？

the terms *Johwa*⁹ and *Anyang* from Christianity but attributed them to *Sangje* rather than *Tianzhu*.

Secondly, contrary to Tsai's belief, Dasan acknowledged *Sangje* as a moral judge. As Dasan claimed when interpreting the *Book of Document*, "rewards are known as Heavenly command while punishments are known as Heavenly penalty."¹⁰ As demonstrated in this article, in Dasan's writings, Heaven is equivalent to *Sangje*. Since the concepts of God as creator and moral judge were emphasized by Matteo Ricci's writings which Dasan was familiar with, Dasan's concept of *Sangje* as creator and moral judge is likely inspired by Christianity rather than merely from interpretations of the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*.

Finally, Dasan's acknowledgement of *Sangje* as a personal and monotheistic God clearly suggests that his philosophy is strongly influenced by Catholicism. When Dasan interpreted *Mencius* 7A.1, "by exhausting one's mind, one knows one's nature. Knowing one's nature, one knows Heaven," in terms of the concept of *Sangje*, he explicitly claimed that *Sangje* is a personal and monotheistic God. Dasan challenged Cheng Yi's (1033–1107) interpretation that "the mind, the nature and Heaven are one principle (*li* 理)," because "The principle has no love or hatred. The principle has no joy or anger. It is empty and silent with no name and no substance. If we received our nature from such a principle, it can hardly manifest the way to us."¹¹ Here Dasan argued that if human nature is received from Heaven, there must be one acting subject who assigns human nature to all human beings. Such a subject can only be *Sangje*, as Dasan continued, "The Lord of Heaven is *Sangje*. *Sangje* is named Heaven just as a monarch is named as a nation."¹² Therefore, it is appropriate to regard Dasan as a Catholic-inspired interpreter of Confucian classics.

⁹ While reviewer 1 questioned Cawley's translation of *johwa* to creation and preferred "transformation," the later seems to be inappropriate, because the Chinese character *jo* 造 essentially means to create or to make rather than merely "to transform."

¹⁰ 賞曰天命。罰曰天討。(From *Jungyong Jajam* 中庸自箴; See Jeong 1963, II-3:2)

¹¹ 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。(From *Maengja Youi* 孟子要義; See Jeong 1963, II-6:5)

¹² 天之主宰為上帝。其謂之天者。猶國君之稱國。(From *Maengja Youi* 孟子要義; See Jeong 1963, II-6:5)

However, while Dasan's concept of *Sangje* is inspired by Catholicism, there are differences between Dasan's *Sangje* and God in Catholic doctrines, which are not mentioned by Cawley but discussed by Lin. As Lin argued, Dasan seems to only accept the concept of natural revelation but not the supernatural revelation in Catholicism.

Jeong should be familiar with and accept the natural revelation which understands *Shangdi* [*Sangje*] through reason. But Jeong cannot easily accept the historical revelation revealed by supernatural revelation in Catholicism, including the final judgement by Shangdi, teaching on heaven and hell, Jesus' incarnation and death on the cross. In this sense, there are still differences between "Shangdi" in Western studies and the Confucian "Shangdi" emphasized by Jeong. (Lin 2020, 17)

As Ivanhoe indicated, "There is no doubt that this tradition [i.e. Catholicism] influenced his thinking, but it is mistaken to regard him as imposing Catholic views onto Confucianism. He was inspired by Catholicism, but he drew upon and his thought very much follows the trajectory of the early Confucian tradition" (Ivanhoe 2016, 234). Therefore, this paper suggests that Dasan's re-interpretation of *Sangje* is inspired and influenced by Catholic and Western studies and acknowledged the differences between Dasan's *Sangje* and God in Catholicism.

Based upon the evidence above, this paper adopts Cawley's argument that Dasan's writings are influenced by Ricci's *Tianzhu Shiyi* and *Sangje* in Dasan's context refers to a monotheistic and personal God "who replaces Neo-Confucian metaphysical concepts." The following section analyses how Dasan's Catholic understanding of *Sangje* influences his re-religionization of the poem *Tang* and distinguishes him from other interpreters.

III. Traditional Interpretations of the Concept of *Sangje* in *Tang*

This section summarizes the traditional concept and Korean interpretations of *Sangje* in *Tang* and argues that none of them have

ever discussed the text in light of the problem of evil and suffering which assumed the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent personal God. Chinese philologists from the Han dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE, 25–220 CE) and the *Tang* dynasty (618–907) argued that *Sangje* in *Tang* is a metaphor for the emperor and therefore the poem is not religious but political. By contrast, Zhu Xi identified *Tang* as a “poem of blaming Heaven” (怨天之辭) and argued that people were angry with *Sangje* just because they failed to keep the Heavenly command and therefore suffered from their wrongdoings. Zhu Xi’s interpretation was adopted by the Korean Neo-Confucian interpreters from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In other words, people’s resentment against *Sangje* for disasters was unjustified from Zhu Xi’s perspective.

Tang 蕩 is a poem from the decade of *Tang*, the section of the *Greater Odes* (大雅 *Daya*), the *Book of Odes*. The *Greater Odes* is a collection of poems written by noblemen during the Western Zhou dynasty (1045–771 BCE). According to Kong Yingda’s 孔穎達 (574–648) *Maoshi Zhengyi* (毛詩正義), the Chinese word *ya* 雅 refers to “correction. It means that the currently corrected will be the examples for future generations.”¹³ In other words, for Kong, the main ideas of poems from the *Greater Odes* are about political or moral teachings: poets thought there was something wrong in the nation that needed to be “corrected.” As a result, when Qian-Jia philologists from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries restored the Han dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE, 25–220 CE) tradition of interpretations, they were inclined to regard *Tang* solely as a political analogy rather than a religious poem, even though the text itself looks religious. Below is the text of the poem *Tang*:

Grand is God on high (*Sangje*), he is the ruler of the people below;
Terrible is God on high, his charge has many rules.
Heaven gives birth to the multitudinous people,
But its charge is not to be relied on;
There is nobody who has not a beginning, but few can have a (normal)
end. (Karlgrén 1974, 214)¹⁴

¹³ 雅，正也，言今之正者，以為後世法。(Kong 1999, 1.1:11)

¹⁴ 蕩蕩上帝、下民之辟。疾威上帝、其命多辟。天生烝民、其命匪諶。靡不有初、鮮克有終。

According to Kong's commentary, this poem is a poem where Duke Mu of Zhao (召穆公, ?-?) satirized the tyranny and the lawlessness of the reign of the King Li of Zhou (周厲王, ?-828 BCE). Kong underscores:

This poem means that the one who destroyed laws was the king of *Sangje* who was lawless and became the ruler of the people below. It also means that the king implemented lawless commands, heavy taxation and cruel punishment. Such a person is the king of *Sangje* and the commands of his governance are evil [邪僻 *xiepi*]. . . . Heaven desired people to be faithful, yet the king taught people to be evil and people lost their faithfulness. All people had their original minds inclining to the Way of goodness yet a few of them remained virtuous in the end. Now they all follow the evil fashion¹⁵

But why did the poet use the term “*Sangje*” if he aimed to criticize the king, not Heaven? Kong explained:

Sangje is another name for Heaven. Heaven never turns wicked and cannot be used in the poem *Tang*, therefore *Sangje* is known as a metaphor for the king. This suggests that the poet dared not to condemn the king and used *Sangje* as a metaphor.¹⁶

Here Kong agreed with Dasan that *Sangje* and Heaven are synonyms. Yet Kong's argument is inconsistent: if *Sangje* and Heaven are synonyms and yet the term Heaven is not appropriate for the poem *Tang*, why would *Sangje* only be an appropriate term? Did Kong suggest that *Sangje* could turn wicked, but Heaven could not?

Being not aware of such an inconsistency, Kong continued to justify his argument that *Sangje* is the metaphor for the king by quoting Mao Heng's 毛亨 (? -?) commentary on the poem *Pan* 板 that “*Sangje* refers

¹⁵ 穆公傷厲王無道，壞滅法度。言今蕩蕩然廢壞法度者，上帝之君王，乃以此無法度，而為下民之君也。又言王無法度之事，重賦斂以疾病人，峻刑法以威罪人。如此者，是上帝之君王，又其下政教之命甚多邪僻。言其無法度，不由舊章也。元本天之生此眾民，其使人君為政化之，命以教導之，非欲使之誠信乎？言天欲使之誠信。今王以邪僻教之，故民皆無復誠信。無不有其初心，欲庶幾慕善道，少能有其終行，今皆化從惡俗，是違天生民立教之意，故所以傷之也。(Kong 1999, 18.1:1155)

¹⁶ 上帝者，天之別名。天無所壞，不得與蕩蕩共文，故知上帝以托君王，言其不敢斥王，故托之上帝也。(Kong 1999, 18.1:1154)

to the name of the king. . . Using Heaven and *Sangje* as metaphors for the king is a common practice in the *Book of Odes*.¹⁷

Even though Kong's interpretation of *Tang* is inconsistent, his authoritative commentary was accepted by Qian-Jia philologists. For instance, Chen Qiyuan's 陳啟源 (?–1683/1689) *An Exegesis on Mao's Poems* (毛詩稽古編卷) argued that "*Sangje* refers to the King Li and this poem mocked his lawlessness."¹⁸ Wang Xianqian's 王先謙 (1842–1917) *Collected Commentaries on Book of Odes by Three Traditions* (詩三家義集疏) also agreed that the poem is a satire of King Li's tyranny: "According to the tradition of Lu, *Tang* is the same as *Pi* (evil) . . . 'Terrible is *Sangje*, his charge has many rules' refers to unjust [governance]."¹⁹ None of them acknowledge *Tang* as a poem blaming Heaven or *Sangje*.

Like Qian-Jia philologists, some Korean interpreters also agreed with Kong's interpretations. According to Kim, unlike conservative scholars, Seong Haeung 成海應 (1760–1839) argued that to have a comprehensive understanding of Confucian texts, one should not only study commentaries written in Song dynasty but also commentaries written in Han dynasty (Kim 2012, 182). Kim said:

"Grand is *Sangje*, he is the ruler of the people below." This refers to the Way of the monarch should be great. But why is now *Sangje* terrible, and why does his charge have many rules? Because the Heavenly command is not constant and only enacts the moral. Someone received the enactment initially but lost his initial goodness and lost his enactment in the end. So it is said that "few can have a (normal) end." (Seong 2006, 3:4)²⁰

When replying to King Jeongjo's questions, Choe Byeok 崔壁 (1762–1813) also replied: "This poem was written to mock King Li."²¹ Dasan may have heard of these commentaries on *Tang* written by Seong and

¹⁷ 《板》傳曰：「上帝以稱王者。」《桑柔》傳曰：「昊天斥王。」然則王稱天稱帝，《詩》之通義。(Kong 1999, 7.4: 1144)

¹⁸ 蓋上帝本指厲王譏其無法度。(Chen n.d., 21:2)

¹⁹ 魯蕩作盪者釋訓盪盪僻也。 . . . 疾威上帝其命多僻言不公也。(X. Wang, XII-8:5)

²⁰ 統言爲君之道。當廣大。而今此疾威之上帝。何其命之多僻也。蓋天命靡常。唯善是與。其初之得之也。以靡有不初也。其終之失之也。以鮮克有終也。

²¹ 此詩本爲刺厲王而作。(Choe 1930, 4:3)

Choe, for Seong was a senior to Dasan while Choe is Dasan's junior working in the royal library (Gyujanggak 奎章閣). Yet, unlike Seong and Choe, Dasan did not read *Tang* merely as a political analogy.

By contrast, although Zhu Xi agreed that the poem *Tang* is a political metaphor, he disagreed with Kong's interpretation and identified *Tang* as "words of blaming Heaven" (怨天之辭). Zhu Xi said:

Tang means "great appearance" while *Pi* means the king. "Terrible" refers to tyranny. "Many rules" means many evil things in which the common people truly believed. This means that such a great *Sangje* was the ruler of the people below. Now such a tyrannic *Sangje* had many evil commands. Why? When Heaven gave birth to all people, some Heavenly commands were not believed by the people. In the beginning, when commands are enacted, everyone was good, yet a few could complete the way of goodness in the end. Hence, chaos was caused. In the end, Heavenly commands faded and looked as if they were terrible and evil. This poem began with "words of blaming Heaven" and concluded with a self-reflection. As the Duke Kang of Liu (劉康公, ?-544) said, "That people receiving lives between Heaven and earth is called command [命 *ming*]; those who can nurture commands are blessed, yet those who cannot are failed and in disasters."²²

Zhu Xi argued that there is a turn within the first paragraph of *Tang*: in the beginning, people blamed *Sangje* for evil and suffering, yet in the end the poet said evil and suffering are caused by people themselves. While Kong regarded *Tang* as a poem satirising the king, Zhu regarded *Tang* as a poem criticising the people.

As Jujahak was the official philosophy in the Joseon dynasty, several Korean interpreters were in favor of Zhu's interpretation. For instance, Kim Gwiju (金龜柱 1740–1786) argued that *Tang* criticized both the King and the people for not keeping the Heavenly command continuously. Kim said: "Grand is *Sangje*' indicates that commands enacted by Heaven are also morally good. Then the poem states that

²² 蕩蕩廣大貌辟君也疾威猶暴虐也多辟多邪辟也烝衆謀信也○言此蕩蕩之上帝乃下民之君也今此暴虐之上帝其命乃多邪僻者何哉蓋天生衆民其命有不可信者蓋其降命之初無有不善而人少能以善道自終是以致此大亂使天命亦罔克終如疾威而多僻也蓋始為怨天之辭而卒自解之如此劉康公曰民受天地之中以生所謂命也能者養之以福不能者敗以取禍此之謂也 (From *Shiji Chuan* 詩集傳; See Zhu 1958, 203)

prosperity depends on efforts. So disasters did not come from Heaven. Human beings deserve what they have earned.”²⁵

Despite the disagreement between Kong and Zhu, both agreed that *Tang* is a political analogy and not a religious poem. Kong regarded *Tang* as a criticism of King Li of Zhou while Zhu regarded *Tang* as a criticism of the people. In the following, we shall see while Dasan agreed with Zhu Xi that *Tang* criticized the people, Dasan re-religionized the poem as a discourse on the problem of evil.

IV. Dasan's Re-religionization of *Sangje* in *Tang*

Although Dasan agreed with Zhu that *Sangje* should not be blamed for disasters and misfortune and criticized people's unjustified resentment against *Sangje*, Dasan refused to label *Tang* as “words of blaming Heaven.” *Dasan* also disagreed with Kong and his supporters who read *Tang* as a political poem satirising the King because Dasan regarded the poem as a religious poem and “Heavenly enactment” was the main theme of the decade of *Tang*. While Zhu and Kong only regarded *Tang* as a political poem, this section highlights how Dasan religionized *Tang*.

Dasan explicitly claimed that the main idea of *Tang* is not to blame *Sangje* but expresses people's fear of *Sangje*'s judgment. The concept of *Sangje* as the judge is related to Dasan's understanding of *Sangje* as a personal God according to his re-interpretation of the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning*. Dasan further argued that according to the *Book of Odes*, natural disasters result from *Sangje*'s punishment for vicious tyrants and therefore are justified.

Dasan's discussion began with King Jeongjo's question on the rhetorical structure of the poem *Tang*. As mentioned above, the first paragraph of *Tang* which begins with “Great is *Sangje*” is rhetorically peculiar, because all other paragraphs begin with “Wen Wan said: ‘Alas! Alas, you Yin-Shang!’” King Jeongjo realized such a problem and asked his ministers why. Jeongjo's intellectual discussions with his ministers

²⁵ 蕩蕩上帝者。明天之降命。初未嘗不善也。再言汝興是力者。明禍非由天。人實自取也。(Kim 2001, 1:26)

were recorded in *Gyeongsa Gangui* 經史講義 (Lectures on Classics and Historical Accounts) from King Jeongjo's diary *Hongjae Jeonseo* 弘齋全書 (Complete Collection of Hongjae) in detail because Jeongjo was strongly interested in philosophy.

Gyeongsa Gangui was a series of lectures on Confucian canons and histories when Jeongjo gathered learned officers for academic discussions on different Confucian canons. According to the *Joseon Wangjo Sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄, *Gyeongsa Gangui* was proposed by Seong Yudang (成柳憇, ?-?) on the twenty-second day of the first lunar month in 1777. Seong was worried about the quality of officers and students studying at Hongmungwan 弘文館 (literally meaning "School of Magnifying Literature") and argued that the King could organize seminars asking students to present and debate academically. (*Joseon Wangjo Sillok*, Jeongjo year 2, month 1, day 22). Jeongjo agreed with Seong and selected learned officers and students (whom Jeongjo appointed as *chogye munsin* 抄啓文臣, literally meaning "reporters") under 37-year-old to give lectures on *Four Books* and *Five Classics* (Chiou 2017, 194). In 1776, Jeongjo reformed the Gyujanggak (奎章閣, the royal library of the Joseon dynasty) and appointed young scholars as *chogye munsin* working there from 1781 onwards (Kim 2012, 68). Their main tasks were to give lectures based on questions asked by Jeongjo related to Confucian classics (Chiou 2017, 52). Remarkably, *Gyeongsa Gangui* was part of the *Gyeongsa Gangui* consisting of five seminars on the *Book of Odes* from 1781 to 1790 involving 49 *chogye munsin*. Unsurprisingly, Dasan, who was well known for his knowledge and was favored by Jeongjo, was a regular speaker in *Gyeongsa Gangui*. According to Kim Sugyeong's research, in 1789 Dasan answered Jeongjo's questions 117 times (Kim 2012, 68), making him the second person who answered Jeongjo the most.²⁴ Jeongjo summarized the intention of these seminars as such:

Fu Guan 輔廣 (?-?) was a pure Confucian, yet his *Questions Asked by Child* 童子問 merely recited the questions from Zhu Xi's commentaries. On the other hand, modern Confucians defamed previous sages and

²⁴ The first was Seo Yugu 徐有渠 (1764–1845), who answered Jeongjo 181 times in 1790.

created their new teaching with insufficient verification. All questions asked in these seminars were based on Zhu Xi's commentaries and referred to all kinds of interpretations. [Discussions on] names and objects only seek positive verification, while [those on] characters and sentences only follow the literal context. This aims to condemn the trend of studies on the *Book of Odes* which inclined to exaggerations and grotesque.²⁵

Here Jeongjo expressed his dissatisfaction with all Chinese and Korean interpreters in the quotation above and asked his officers to provide new perspectives. Jeongjo also clarified that he was a follower of Jujahak, but he believed that Jujahak needs to be assessed critically. For this reason, Jeongjo frequently quoted Mao Qiling's 毛奇齡 (1623–1716) commentaries who was a famous critique of Jujahak, as Kim Sugyeong observed (Kim 2012, 73). From this perspective, *Gyeongsa Gangui* was a significant academic event when scholars were invited to criticize not only the “new teaching” of the Qian-Jia school but also the official Jujahak, showing Jeongjo's tolerance of academic freedom and diversity. Dasan's innovative re-interpretation of *Tang* was proposed under this historical context: Dasan and other scholars were allowed to challenge Zhu Xi's interpretations of the *Book of Odes* in *Gyeongsa Gangui* because of Jeongjo's tolerance (Kim 2012, 72).

Nevertheless, different from Kim, Tsai Chih-Che questioned the extent of the so-called academic freedom under Jeonjo's reign and argued that Jeonjo's ultimate aim was to reveal and defend an authentic Jujahak. Since Jeonjo believed that only through the principle of “seeking the common ground among differences” (異中求同) (Tsai 2021, 81), one can rediscover the “true face” of Jujahak (Tsai 2021, 88). For this reason, Tsai suggested that Jeongjo's tolerance is limited. For example, Jeonjo asked diplomats to purchase books in South China to avoid the “influence of Yangmingism” (Tsai 2021, 88). Tsai even argued that Jeongjo adopted the moderate strategy of “excluding heresies and empowering orthodoxies” (闢異端、扶正道) to restore Jujahak and resist

²⁵ 輔漢卿之醇儒，所著《童子問》亦不免多背朱傳之譏。至如近代儒者之公詆前賢，別創新義，尤不足多辨。此編發問。本之以朱傳。參之以衆說。名物則只求其實然之證。字句則但核其文從之訓。以懲說詩者好夸競奇之風云。(Jeongjo [1814] 2001, 80:9)

the influence from Western studies and Catholicism which inspired Silhak (Tsai 2021, 92). Tsai also argued that Jeongjo believed that Korean Confucians were “the successors of the Dao Tong in the post-Zhu Xi era” and “defend Jujahak apologetically” (2019, 73). From this perspective, *Gyeongsa Gangui* should be regarded as Jeongjo’s moderate strategy to resist “heretical” teachings rather than tolerance to non-Zhu Xi thoughts, so Dasan and other contemporaneous scholars were required to reconcile their teaching with Jujahak in *Gyeongsa Gangui* rather than challenging his teaching.²⁶

While an analysis of Jeongjo’s real intention behind this cultural policy is out of the main theme of this article, one should acknowledge that there is no contradiction between Kim’s and Tsai’s²⁷ different interpretations of Jeongjo’s intentions: Jeongjo allowed Dasan and other scholars to express viewpoints different from Zhu Xi’s orthodox teaching so that he could reveal Zhu Xi’s true teaching by comparing and assessing different perspectives, which gave Dasan and other philosophers from this time the room to express their alternative interpretations within Jeongjo’s framework. Chiou summarized Jeongjo’s framework of discussions on the *Book of Odes* in *Gyeongsa Gangui* into three principles as follows:

1. Good readers of the *Book of Odes* should infer meanings beyond poems.²⁸
2. The *Book of Odes* is difficult to read because of its appreciation and satires.²⁹
3. Discussion on the *Book of Odes* is preceded by clarifications of ancient and modern debates.³⁰ (Chiou 2017, 196–99)

²⁶ However, according to Gim, textual evidence shows that Jeongjo in fact challenged Zhu Xi’s interpretation of the *Book of Odes*, making Tsai’s claim questionable. See Kim (2012, 83).

²⁷ Yet Tsai failed to explain why Jeongjo frequently used Mao Qiling’s philological studies of the *Book of Odes* if he was a devout Zhu Xi’s supporter, making his argument weaker than Chiou’s and Gim’s. Tsai even did not mention Mao’s influence on Jeongjo’s reading of the *Book of Odes*. See Kim (2012, 74).

²⁸ 善觀詩者當推詩外之意.

²⁹ 詩之難讀在於美刺.

³⁰ 說《詩》當先釐清古今聚訟.

Chiou's observations concur with Kim who argued that Jeongjo's *Gyeongsa Gangui* was fundamentally different from lectures called by the former king Yeongjo 英祖 (1694–1776), as Jeongjo emphasized on literal interpretations over dogmatic and moral applications (Kim 2012, 67). Furthermore, the third principle is remarkably important as Jeongjo highlighted the necessities to study the *Book of Odes* from different perspectives, including the Qian-Jia school and other Korean Confucians (Kim 2012, 86). For this reason, as underscored below, Dasan and other scholars frequently referred to different Chinese and Korean commentators when answering Jeongjo's questions. Besides, as shown below, Dasan's interpretations of *Tang* addressed Jeongjo's second principle, that satires in the *Book of Odes* were difficult to interpret, by arguing that *Tang* is not a satire.

When Jeongjo asked why the first paragraph of *Tang* began with "Great is *Sangje*" but not "Wen Wan said: 'Alas! Alas, you Yin-Shang!'" as other paragraphs did, different ministers proposed their answers. For instance, Seo Yugu answered that it was because the first paragraph was a summary of the whole chapter (Jeongjo [1814] 2001, 92:9). While Dasan's answer was not recorded for unknown reasons, in Dasan's own book *Lectures on the Book of Odes* 詩經講義, he recorded his answer to the same question asked by Jeongjo:

I answer his majesty: the first paragraph is the main theme of the whole chapter. "Heavenly charge is not to be relied on" is the main idea. "There is nobody who has not a beginning, but few can have a (normal) end." This refers to the rise and fall of the Shang Dynasty and does not necessarily mean that human nature begins with good and ends with evil.

Also, according to *Honfan* 洪範 [a chapter of the *Book of Documents*], *Tang* means "no one-sidedness," which contrasts with "his charge has many rules." One may also refer to the quotation in the chapter *Zikong* 至公 of the book *Shuo Yuan* 說苑.⁵¹

⁵¹ 臣對曰首章乃是一篇之總旨。天命匪謬。即其大綱。靡不有初。鮮克有終者。殷商之興亡也。未必爲人性之始善終惡。(From *Sigyeong Gangui* 詩經講義; See Jeong 1963, II-19:6)

Here Dasan still acknowledged that *Tang* was a moral criticism of the Shang dynasty and did not exclude the possibility that it may also refer to the problem of human nature (i.e. if human nature is essentially good, why would there be moral evil?) as Zhu Xi indicated. But then Dasan moved on to discuss the role of Heaven or *Sangje* as a moral judge, which “religionized” the original discussion:

I have further reflected: the men of superior [君子] in ancient time served [God] reverently and dared not to blame Heaven. Hence, it is unreasonable for them to accuse *Sangje* [上帝] as a tyrannic *Sangje*.

I said: Terrible means fear. It means that one should hastily revere virtues as if people of the lower fear *Sangje*. *Sangje*'s commands are all righteous and reasonable, but why are there extremes and evils? It is because people only keep virtues in the beginning but not in the end. As a result, *Sangje* changes his enactment accordingly. Great [*Tang*] is the most righteous virtue. If [*Sangje*] is great and bright, how can it be blamed for being tyrannic and evil? This is the main theme of the poem: to learn a lesson from the Shang dynasty which was destroyed by Heaven. How can one say that Heavenly commands are evil?³²

Here Dasan referred to *Sangje* as an omni-righteous God rather than a sovereign or a monarch, because the latter's commands are not “all righteous and reasonable” (其命皆出公理). In fact, Dasan consistently highlighted the idea of *Sangje* and Noumenon as a personal God and a moral judge in his interpretations of the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics* (Kim 2012, 145). For example:

The Lord of Heaven is *Sangje*. *Sangje* is named Heaven just as a monarch is named as a nation. We dare not speak disrespectfully. That vast and visible Heaven is nothing more than the roof and shelter of houses; its status is no higher than the earth, water and fire. How could it be the foundation of human nature and morality?

³² 又據洪範蕩蕩者無偏之意。與多辟相照。說苑至公編所引。可以參考也。臣又思之。古之君子。小心昭事。不敢怨天。指上帝曰暴虐之上帝。無是理也。臣謂疾威者。疾畏也。猶言疾敬德下民若疾畏上帝。其命皆出公理。豈有僻偏者乎。由人執德之有始無終。故上帝之命。隨之有改耳。蕩蕩至公之德。方且發明；豈敢詬之為暴虐邪僻哉。此詩大旨。皆殷鑒之戒也。天之亡殷。豈可曰邪辟之命也哉。(From *Gyeongsa Gangui* 詩經講義; See Jeong 1963, II-19:6)

... [Therefore,] the *Book of Odes* said “those who feared the majesty of Heaven is therefore blessed,” and “those who revered the anger of Heaven dared not to seek pleasures.”³³

Dasan even distinguished Heaven from *Sangje* for even Heaven is created by *Sangje*, and criticized Confucians for confusing Heaven with *Sangje*, drawing on ideas from Matteo Ricci’s text:

The major mistake in both ancient and modern times is misunderstanding Heaven as *Sangje*. Even Yao, Shun, Zhou, and Confucius made the same mistake. Therefore, interpreting ancient classics with modern horizons often leads to many errors all stemming from this. Who is *Sangje*? *Sangje* is a being that creates, governs and sustains heaven, earth, spirits, humans, and all things, but also transcends them.³⁴

Gim argued that according to Dasan, *Sangje* is a passionate, intelligent and creative God (G. Gim 2020, 140). Because *Sangje* is a transcendent moral judge, Dasan further highlighted that the sage-kings taught people to fear God’s judgement and to act morally, because *Sangje* judges not only monarchs but also the people.³⁵ In other words, for Dasan, the poem *Tang* is an example of how *Sangje* as a moral judge punished the evil Shang dynasty, which is consistent with Dasan’s interpretation of *Sangje* in other Confucian texts. Here *Sangje* is not merely a moral principle (Heavenly Command) but a transcendent acting subject that rewards the good and punishes the evil.

Although Dasan agreed with Zhu Xi that *Tang* depicted the people’s resentment against *Sangje* as unjustified, Dasan disagreed with Zhu Xi in the following aspects:

³³ 天之主宰，為上帝。其謂之天者，猶國君之稱國，不敢斥言之意也。彼蒼蒼有形之天，在吾人不過為屋宇軒轅，其品級不過與土地水火為一等，豈吾人性道之本乎？... 詩云畏天之威。于時保之。詩云敬天之怒。無敢戲豫。(From *Maengja Youi* 孟子要義; See Jeong 1963, II-6:5)

³⁴ 古今大病全在乎認天為帝，而堯、舜、周、孔不如是錯認。故以今眼釋古經，一往多誤，凡以是也。上帝者何？是於天地、神人之外，造化天地、神人、萬物之類，而宰制安養之者也。(From *Chunchu Gojing* 春秋考徵; See Jeong 1963, II-36:19)

³⁵ 天之降罰。不惟人君之失德。亦由下民之殃咎。(From *Sigyeong Gangui* 詩經講義; See Jeong 1963, II-19:11.8)

1. Zhu Xi described *Tang* as “words of blaming Heaven” while Dasan did not.
2. Zhu Xi read *Tang* merely as a political poem while Dasan religionized *Tang*.
3. Zhu Xi regarded the problem of human nature as the main theme of *Tang* while Dasan regarded *Sangje*’s punishment of the people as the main theme instead.

Yet the disagreement (1) could be solved by clarifying Zhu Xi’s wording. When Zhu Xi indicated *Tang* as “words of blaming Heaven,” he added that at the end the author of *Tang* also denounced people’s words of blaming Heaven. In this sense, Zhu Xi and Dasan agreed with each other, thus disagreement (1) ceases to exist.

Yet disagreements (2) and (3) are unsolved. While Zhu Xi imposed his framework of human nature on the text, Dasan placed the text in the context of his religious philosophy: that *Sangje* is a moral judge. Dasan’s religionization of the text is clearly missing in Zhu Xi’s interpretation.

Unlike his contemporaries who were in favor of Kong’s interpretation owing to the influence of the Qian-Jia school, Dasan disagreed with Kong’s reading of *Tang* solely as a political analogy. Dasan’s criticism of Kong is recorded in his dialogue with Jeongjo:

[The King said:] “An old interpretation claimed that this poem satirized the King Li of Zhou, yet investigations revealed that the poem was not written in the time during King Li’s reign. Another interpretation is that this poem traced back to a historical figure and staired him, yet Zhu Xi denied it. Since Zhu Xi had already made a conclusion, one should not bother. Now, what if we regard the poem as a moral self-examination [自警] and read it repeatedly . . . we ought to read the poem in this way. What do you think?”

Dasan answered: “Duke Wu 武公 [a typo of Duke Mu of Zhao 召穆公] was born in the late period during the reign of King Xuan, while such a poem was written after Duke Wu had died. One may refer to *Zuo’s Commentary on Spring and Autumn* and the *Discourses of the States*. Hence it is clear that the poem is for self-examination rather than satirising King Li. Yet self-experience is precious in reading

poems. Hence, as the sages teach, whether this poem is satiric or self-examining needs not to be discussed.” (Jeongjo [1814] 2001, vol. 92, bk. 29)³⁶

As mentioned above, Jeongjo pointed out that satires in the *Book of Odes* were difficult to be understood. Yet here Dasan simply suggested that *Tang* was not a satire.³⁷ Here both Dasan and Jeongjo implicitly rejected Kong’s interpretation even though they claimed that they “suspended” the debate on whether the poem is satiric or self-examining because both mentioned historical evidence against Kong’s interpretation (that the poem could not be written during King Li’s reign).

While the above dialogue was recorded in both Jeongjo’s diary and Dasan’s *Lectures on the Book of Odes*, Dasan’s answer in the latter expressed his criticism of Kong more directly:

I answered his majesty: Duke Wu was born in the late period during the reign of King Xuan, yet this poem was written at the end of Duke Wu’s life. There are references in *Zuo’s Commentary on Spring and Autumn and the Discourses of the States*. So, one should read the poem as a self-examination. While there seem to be many words satirizing King Li in the poem, the meanings of these words are suspicious. Yet the way of reading poems is about self-experience. As the sages teach, one should not bother with textual criticism [gogeo 考據, the philological school].³⁸

³⁶ 此詩舊說以爲刺厲王。而考其時世不合。則又有追刺之說。朱子非之矣。既有朱子定論。則今不必更爲疑難。惟將此作衛武自警看。而反復諷詠。... 讀詩法。恐當如此。未知如何。

若鋪對。武公生於宣王之末。而此詩作於武公既老後。左傳國語皆有所據。則其爲自警。而非刺厲王明矣。然讀詩之貴乎體驗。誠如聖教。此詩之爲刺爲警。雖存而勿論亦可矣。

³⁷ Here Dasan’s reading of *Tang* as a poem from the *Song* 頌 is different from his reading of poems from the *Guofeng* 國風 which he regarded as political satires, which suggests that Dasan treated two books with different attitudes (Kim 2012, 212). Gim pointed out that according to Dasan, the three literary devices, direct narrative (*fu* 賦), explicit contrast (*bi* 比) and implicit comparison (*xing* 興) only exists in *Guofeng* but not *Song* (Kim 2012, 217–18).

³⁸ 臣對曰武公之生。在於宣王末年。而此詩之作。又在武公末年。左傳國語皆有所據。此所以爲自警也。然篇中亦多刺王之言。此甚可疑。然讀詩之法。貴乎體驗。誠如聖教。今不必更事考據矣。(From *Gyeongsa Gangui* 詩經講義; See Jeong 1963, II-19:6)

Here Dasan claimed that both the poems *Tang* and *Yi* could not be about political satires about King Li by using the method of textual criticism, yet at the same time, he highlighted that detailed “textual criticism” should not be used when reading poems. While there seem to be conflicts between Dasan’s arguments and practices regarding the applicability of the method of textual criticism on reading poems, one may argue that Dasan did not fully deny the role of textual criticism and simply highlighted both textual criticism and experiential interpretation could complement each other.³⁹

Alternatively, such a contradiction is avoided if here the word *gogeo* 考據 refers to the “philological school” rather than “textual criticism,” namely, the Qian-Jia school, which was popular among other scholars, especially Bak Jega and Kim Jeonghui. Here the difference between Dasan and his contemporary scholars is highlighted: although Dasan adopted certain methodologies of the Qian-Jia school, he did not entirely follow their academic tradition. As mentioned above, Dasan seems to integrate both textual criticism and experiential interpretation when discussing *Tang* and *Yi*. Yet such a methodology is against the practice of Qian-Jia School. In Ruan Yuan’s 阮元 (1764–1849) preface for Wang Yin-zhi’s 王引之 (1766–1834) *Jingyi Shuwen* 經義述聞, he defined the ultimate aim of the Qian-Jia School as follows:

Whatever ancient Confucians misinterpreted should be verified with circumstantial evidence and analogized indirectly to reveal original meanings, so when the ancient sages see our argument they would laugh and say: “Your words are correct! Thousands of years of misinterpretations are finally clarified.”⁴⁰

As Yang Chin-fu explained, “to reveal original meanings” (得其本意所在) means an in-depth investigation of sources of texts (Yang 2009, 64). The ideas of “self-examination” highlighted by Dasan is contrary

³⁹ Thanks for the reviewer for highlighting that textual analysis and experiential interpretation are not contradictory but may complement each other in Dasan’s philosophy.

⁴⁰ 凡古儒所誤解者，無不旁證曲喻，而得其本意所在，使古聖賢見之必解頤曰：吾言固若是！數千年誤解之，今得明矣。(Y. Wang, 1:1)

to the methods of the Qian-Jia school because the Qian-Jia school was only interested in the original meaning of the texts in themselves and the elimination of personal prejudices. However, Dasan's adaptation of self-examination shows that he was not limited to the Qian-Jia philological methodologies when interpreting *Tang* and *Yi*.

Furthermore, Dasan's highlight of "self-examination" aligns with Zhu Xi's understanding of the *Book of Odes*, who also referred to *Discourses of the States* to justify his view:

In fact, the prefaces of the *Book of Odes* are not trustworthy . . . by contrast, the claim in *Discourses of the States* that [*Tang*] is Duke Wu's poem for self-examination is trustworthy. Generally speaking, the ancients and the modern scholars write poems in the same way: they have their perceptions and feelings and express their emotions and temper. When do they satirize others? If one only regards the prefaces as standards and interprets every poem as appreciations or satires, one is destroying the meanings expressed by poets.⁴¹

Therefore, although Dasan may disagree with Zhu Xi's philosophy in other aspects, in the case of interpreting *Tang*, Dasan agreed with Zhu Xi rather than the Qian-Jia philologists: instead of investigating whom Duke Wu aimed to satire in the poems as the philologists did, Dasan and Zhu Xi merely regarded the text as Duke Wu's self-examination.

Yet self-examination in Dasan's context also has a religious sense which is not found in Zhu Xi's commentaries. Dasan's emphasis on "self-examination" when reading *Tang* is also highly associated with his philosophy of religion, where self-examination or self-reflection is discussed in terms of *Sangje* or Heaven. As Dasan claimed when interpreting the teaching of *sindok* 慎獨 ("alert when being alone") in the *Doctrine of the Mean*:

Someone's wrongdoings were concealed and never revealed throughout their lives. Men of inferiority are used to lying to the people below

⁴¹ 詩序實不足信. . . 國語以為武公自警之詩, 卻是可信. 大率古人作詩, 與今人作詩一般, 其間亦自有感物道情, 吟詠情性, 幾時盡是譏刺他人? 只緣序者立例, 篇篇要作美刺說, 將詩人意思盡穿鑿壞了! (Zhuzi Yulei 朱子語類, 80:19)

and the monarch above. How can they believe in empty words like “the concealed must be seen and the tiny must be manifested” proclaimed by men of superiority? If one does not believe in the presence of a supervisor, there is no alert when being alone.⁴²

In other words, self-examination is triggered by a transcendent supervisor, namely *Sangje*, as Dasan continued:

The splendor of Heaven is directly communicated with humans’ minds. Nothing concealed is unseen. Nothing tiny is not shined. When He shines in this room, the Sun supervises here. When humans know that, even the audacious can only be alert and terrified.⁴³

Dasan suggests the origin of self-examination: *Sangje* presents and supervises → nothing is unknown to Him → humans are alert and terrified → humans examine themselves even when being alone. Here *Sangje* is assumed to be not only *omnibenevolent* but also *omniscient* because nothing is unknown to Him. It is likely that Dasan’s concept of the omniscient God comes from Christianity as the concept of omniscience is rarely mentioned by Confucians.

However, the concept of omnipotence seems to be missing in Dasan’s philosophy. The traditional Western formulation of the problem of evil of suffering is that: if God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, how could there be evil and suffering in the human world? But Dasan’s version is that: if *Sangje* is omniscient and omnibenevolent, how could there be evil and suffering in the human world? Since *Sangje* is not omnipotent, one may reply that there was evil and suffering because *Sangje* could not stop them.

Yet Dasan’s solution to the problem of evil still follows the traditional Christian solution: *all evils and sufferings are caused by humans’ free will* (as we shall see in the discussion of Ricci’s *Tianzhu Shiyi* below). As Dasan indicated:

⁴² 有終身掩諱而未嘗發露者。下可以欺人。上可以欺君。小習知其然。君子以空言怵之曰莫見乎隱。莫顯乎微。其肯信之乎。不信降監者。必無以慎其獨矣。(From Jungyong Jajam 中庸自箴; See Jeong 1963, II-3:5)

⁴³ 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。(From Jungyong Jajam 中庸自箴; See Jeong 1963, II-3:3)

The ancient served Heaven and Gods with substantial minds. Movement and stillness are where a will [*illyeom* 一念] arises. [It can be] either sincere or insincere, and either good or evil. They warned: “The Sun supervises here.” Hence being alert and terrified is essentially being distinct and serious.⁴⁴

Besides *illyeom*, Dasan also used the term *gwon* 權 (“power”) to refer to the concept of free will when interpreting *Mencius*:

Heaven grants autonomy to human beings, so that they may desire good and do good, and desire evil and do evil. There are fluctuations and indefiniteness because *gwon* 權 belongs to the self, unlike beasts of which minds are fixed [*jeongsim* 定心]. Therefore, goods are the merits of the self, while moral evils are the sins of the self. This is owing to the *gwon* of the mind but not the nature.⁴⁵

Based on the text above, Fang Xu-dang suggested that Dasan explained the problem of evil in terms of free will: although human nature is good, it only implies an inclination to moral good, while human beings can freely choose to do good or evil (Fang 2015, 113). Fang argued that there are three principles of the soul in Dasan’s philosophy: *Seong* 性 (nature), *Gwonhyeong* 權衡 (weighing) and *Haengsa* 行事 (acts, or *Gu* 具, instruments) in the early period but *Seong* 性, *Jae* 才 (talent) and *Se* 勢 (trend) in the late period. Yet both *gwonhyeong* and *jae* refer to “can be good or evil” (可善而可惡) while *Haengsa*, *gu*, and *se* refer to “difficult to be good but easy to be evil” (難善易惡) (Fang 2015, 112). While Huang Chun-chieh ruled out the possibility that Dasan’s concept of *Gwonhyeong* and *Jae* is inspired by Catholicism and insisted that these concepts solely come from *Mencius* without providing evidence ruling out Catholic influence (Huang 2019, 142), Fang pointed out that Dasan’s terminology is inconsistent with *Mencius* and suggested that these may be owing to Catholic influence because *Jae* in *Mencius* is

⁴⁴ 古人實心事天，實心事神，一動一靜，一念之萌，或誠或偽，或善或惡，戒之曰日監在茲，故其戒慎恐懼慎獨之切，真切篤。 (From *Jungyong Ganguibo* 中庸講義補; See Jeong 1963, II-4:18)

⁴⁵ 故天之於人，予之以自主之權，使其欲善則為善，欲惡則為惡，游移不定，其權在己，不似禽獸之有定心，故為善則實為己功，為惡則實為己罪，此心之權也，非所謂性也。 (From *Maengja Youi* 孟子要義; See Jeong 1963, II-6:5)

necessarily good although Fang did not further investigate Christian legacy in Dasan's philosophy (Fang 2015, 112). Possible influences by the Catholic notion of free will will be discussed below.

Nonetheless, unlike Fang, based on the same quotation above, Kim Woo-hyung argued that free will has no place in Dasan's philosophy. According to Kim, Dasan "viewed weighing [gwonhyeong] as the essential basis for distinguishing good from evil and merit from sin might be justified" but "makes it clear in the passage just cited that the fundamental difference between humans and animals like in human's preference of and disposition to goodness, not in weighing" (Kim 2014, 61). However, compared to Fang's thesis, Kim's argument is unconvincing. Based on Kim's mistranslation of *jeongsim* 定心 to "fixed direction" rather than "fixed mind," Kim argued that in Dasan's philosophy of mind, humans are distinguished from animals by their inclinations to goodness, and therefore Dasan's "notion of weighing, whose function is secondary to the inclination for the pursuit of goodness (virtue), does not carry any insinuation of free will or autonomous authority to make a choice" (Kim 2014, 64). Yet even if weighing is merely a secondary function in Dasan's philosophy, it does not imply that the freedom of making choice is unimportant in Dasan's ethics. Furthermore, if animals only have "fixed minds" or "fixed directions" and therefore different from humans, without emphasising humans' free will but merely highlighting humans' fixed inclination to goodness, humans' minds would also be "fixed."⁴⁶ Here Fang's reformulation of Dasan's philosophy of mind is more plausible: Fang highlighted three layers in Dasan's metaethics: there is a natural inclination to goodness, but one chooses to be good and evil, and it is "difficult to be good but easy to be evil" when one is confused by bodily desires. Based on this three principles theory — *seong* 性 ("original nature"), *gwonhyeong* 勸形 ("external conditions"), and *haengsa* 行事 ("human actions"), or alternatively *seong* 性, *jae* 才, and *se* 德, Dasan criticized Gaozi and Yang Xiong for only acknowledging *gwonhyeong*

⁴⁶ Furthermore, in Dasan's philosophy, the inclination to goodness is not unique to humans beings, but also exists in animals, as Dasan acknowledged in his discussion of Cheng Hao's observation of chicks 觀雞雜說. See Yang (2009, 34).

or *jae* and Xunzi for only acknowledging *haengsa* (which can be either good or evil) or *se* (which is inclined to evil), and disregarding the original good human nature highlighted by Mengzi.⁴⁷ Although human nature is good, human's free will may choose evil and bring suffering, and human is vulnerable to temptations. Therefore, one should not blame *Sangje* for evil and suffering but should blame oneself for choosing wrong or not manifesting moral goodness. As Dasan highlighted, one should act morally and fear *Sangje* who is the moral judge because "The Heavenly way manifests the principle of sufferings and blessings."⁴⁸

Owing to Dasan's Catholic background and the fact that the free will argument was a classic Catholic response to the problem of evil, several scholars suggested that Dasan's concept of free will is inspired by Matteo Ricci *Tianzhu Shiyi* 天主實義. For example, Baek Ming-Jeong argued that "Dasan understood the human heart with the concept of spiritual character or spiritual clarity, considered this as the common link between God and man, and saw there is in the human heart a free will to choose good have all been judged be perspectives resulting from the impact of Western learning" (Baek 2012, 259). Interestingly, in Matteo Ricci's *Tianzhu Shiyi*, free will was also translated as *nyeom*:

When one encounters a state of affairs, at the same time there are two contradictory wills [*nyeom* 念]. For example, when I am enticed by wine and sex, I am immediately inclined to follow, but then I realize it is not right. The former is the mind of beasts when one has no difference from beasts. The latter is the mind of humans which is equivalent to the Heavenly spirit.⁴⁹

The notion of "two contradictory wills" is also found in Dasan's writings, as he claimed:

⁴⁷ 總之靈體之內，厥有三理。言乎其性則樂善而恥惡。此孟子所謂性善也。言乎其權衡則可善而可惡。此告子湍水之喻。揚雄善惡渾之說所由作也。言乎其行事則難善而易惡。行荀卿性惡之說所由作也。苟與揚也。認性字本誤。其說以差。非吾人靈體之內。本無此三理也。(Jeong 1963, II:2:28)

⁴⁸ 天道昭禍福之理。人主操刑賞之權。聖人著祥殃之戒。此君子之三畏也。(From *Noneo Gogejumju* 論語古今註; See Jeong 1963, II-14:3.7)

⁴⁹ 人之遇一事也，且同一時也，而有兩念並興，屢覺兩逆，如吾或惑酒色，即似迷戀欲從，又複慮其非理。從彼，謂之獸心，與禽獸無別；從此，謂之人心，與天神相同也。(Ricci n.d., I-3:28)

Humans always have two contrary but co-existing wills [*ji* 志]. When unrighteous offerings are presented, there is a desire to receive and a desire not to receive. When there are troubles to achieve humaneness, there is a desire to avoid and a desire not to avoid. The desire to receive and avoid is a bodily desire, while the desire not to receive and not to avoid is the righteous desire.⁵⁰

Accordingly, both Ricci and Dasan proposed that evil and suffering result from humans' wills. People's resentment against *Sangje* mentioned in *Tang* is unjustified. Yet one may still challenge why there were occasions when the just suffered yet the wicked were happy. Ricci's reply was straightforward: in God's final judgement, the wicked will be condemned to hell while the just will ascend to Heaven (Ricci n.d., I-2:26). Yet heaven and hell are missing in Dasan's philosophy. Dasan was reluctant to discuss the afterlife, as he argued: "Men of superiority do not pay attention to the place after death."⁵¹ It is unclear whether it was because Dasan regarded discussion on Catholic concepts of heaven and hell would be politically dangerous, or because Dasan agreed with Kongzi that "You do not yet understand life—how could you possibly understand death?" (*Analects* 11.12; See Slingerland 2003, 115), or, more than likely, both reasons count. In any case, *Sangje's* judgement in Dasan's philosophy never refers to the afterlife but to this life. In the case of *Tang*, people were immediately punished by *Sangje* when they failed to keep Heavenly commandments.

V. Problem: Inconsistency with the Context of the *Decade of Tang*

While Zhu Xi criticized that the people's resentment against *Sangje* expressed in *Tang* is unjustified, to solve the problem of evil, Dasan argued that *Tang* not only criticized people's resentment against *Sangje*

⁵⁰ 人恒有二志。相反而竝發者。有餽而將非義也則欲受而兼欲不受焉。有患而將成仁也則欲避而兼欲不避焉。夫欲受與欲避者。是氣質之欲也。其欲不受而不避者。是道義之欲也。(From *Maengja Youi* 孟子要義; See Jeong 1963, II-6:19)

⁵¹ 死後之地。君子之所不屑留意也。(From *Dangung Jamo* 檀弓箴誤; See Jeong 1963, III-17:14)

but also asserted people's fear for the righteous judgement of *Sangje*. I previously argued that Dasan misinterpreted the text because affirming rather than criticizing people's resentment against *Sangje* or Heaven is the main theme of poems in the *Decade of Tang*. In the *Decade of Tang*, the poem *Tang* was followed by *Yi*, where the poet explicitly blamed Heaven for not listening to people's voices and justified the people's resentment against *Sangje*.

The previous section illustrates how Dasan presented his reformulation of the problem of evil and suffering via the re-religionization of *Tang* in the light of Catholic doctrines of God and free will, making his interpretation different from Zhu Xi's and Kong's. Yet whether Dasan's unique interpretation of *Tang* agrees with its contexts is debatable.

While Dasan isolated *Tang* in his re-interpretation of the text yet claimed it represented the "main idea" of the *Decade of Tang*, the poem should be read in the context of the *Decade of Tang*, which contains eleven poems: *Tang*, *Yi*, *Sang Rou*, *Yun Han*, *Song Gao*, *Zheng Min*, *Han Yi*, *Jiang Han*, *Chang Wu*, *Zhang Yang*, and *Shao Min*. While Heaven and *Sangje* are also presented as objects to be resented by the people in these poems, the people's resentment seems to be justified. For example, in the second last paragraph of the poem of *Yi*:

- Great Heaven is very (bright =) enlightened, but I am living without joy;
- When I see you so (darkened =) unenlightened, my heart is very sad.
- I instruct you inculcatingly, but you listen to me with (slighting =) contempt;
- you do not use (my words) for taking instructions from them, on the contrary, you use them for making cruel jests;
- you allege that I do not understand, and yet I am an octogenarian.⁵²

(Karlgrén 1974, 218–19)

If one follows Kong's reading of the decade of *Tang* as a collection of political satires, the quotation above could be interpreted as a minister

⁵² 昊天孔昭，我生靡樂。視爾夢夢，我心慘慘。誨爾諄諄，聽我藐藐。匪用為教，覆用為虐。借曰未知，亦聿既耄。

blaming the monarch for not listening to his advice. As Kong claimed, “the advisors’ words failed to enter the king’s mind and hence his words were not accepted” (Kong 1999, 18.1:1155).⁵³ Yet if one follows Dasan’s religionization of the passage, the text is difficult to comprehend. Why would an omniscient and omni-benevolent *Sangje* reject good advice and make cruel jests?

“Yi” (夷) is followed by another poem “San Jou” (商頌) which directly blamed *Sangje* for causing natural disasters:

- Heaven sends down death and disorder, it destroys our appointed king;
- sends down these nocuous insects (on the grain), the husbandry is utterly suffering;
- lamentable and pained is the central kingdom, all things together are utterly (waste =) ruined;
- I have no strength, and so I think of the Vaulted Blue.⁵⁴

(Karlgrén 1974, 222)

Here Heaven can hardly refer to the king because even the king was destroyed by Heaven in the quotation above. A king is impossible to cause natural disasters. A similar accusation is also found in *Yun Han* when people blamed *Sangje* for droughts:

- The drought is excessive, with all our force we loathe and (try to) eliminate it;
- why does one (sc. Heaven) make us suffer by drought—we do not know the cause of it;
- our prayers for the (year =) harvest have been very (early =) betimes, the sacrifice to the (four) Quarters and the Soil have not been late;
- but Great Heaven, not (think about =) consider us;
- we have been reverent to the bright Spirits, there ought to be no grudge or anger.⁵⁵

(Karlgrén 1974, 225–26)

⁵³ 是諫者之言，不入王心，故言其不入也。

⁵⁴ 天降喪亂，滅我立王。降此蝻賊，稼穡卒瘁。哀憫中國，具贅卒荒。靡有旅力，以念穹蒼。

⁵⁵ 旱既大甚，則不可推。兢兢業業，如霆如雷。周餘黎民，靡有子遺。昊天上帝，則不我遺。胡不相畏，先祖于摧。

Nonetheless, “San Jou” and *Yun Han* did not challenge Dasan’s interpretation, because the resentment against Heaven expressed in “San Jou” can be solved by adopting Kong’s interpretation that this poem merely described Heaven’s punishment of the tyrannic king and did not blame Heaven (Kong 1999, 18.1:1154).⁵⁶ By contrast, Dasan could hardly explain *Yi* which explicitly blames Heaven for not answering people’s prayers, unless Dasan regarded *Yi* as merely a political analogy as Kong suggested.

Dasan strangely overlooked all these passages in his *Lectures on the Book of Odes*, possibly because he was aware of the inconsistency between these passages and his re-interpretation of *Tang*. Dasan’s only reply is found in Jeongjo’s diary, where he claimed that the poem *Tang* is different from other poems in the *Book of Odes* in terms of rhetoric strategies:

There were many satiric poems during King Li’s time, including “Min Lao,” “Ban,” “Tang,” and “San Jou.” “Min Lao” is remarkably deep in meaning, while the words of *Tang* are sincere . . . all these suggest that while humans share similar feelings, their expressions are slightly different, yet their loyalty and loves are the same. (Jeongjo [1814] 2001, vol. 92, bk. 29)⁵⁷

Accordingly, one may defend Dasan by declaring that only *Tang* is a religious poem while other poems in the decade of *Tang* are political satires. Nevertheless, instead of defending Dasan’s argument, the quotation incites more inconsistencies in Dasan’s philosophy. In the same dialogue, Dasan agreed with Jeongjo that *Tang* should not be regarded a satiric poem, yet here Dasan seems to suggest that *Tang* is just a satiric poem in a different style. This conflicts with Dasan’s claim that one should not read *Tang* as a satiric poem. Moreover, Dasan failed to demonstrate that *Tang* had a religious theme that is essentially different from other poems in the decade of *Tang* but merely claimed that the style of *Tang* was different. Furthermore, even if Dasan suc-

⁵⁶ 言天以王貪酷之政，故下此死喪亂國之災，以滅盡我所恃立以為王者之物，謂災害五穀也。

⁵⁷ 厲王之時，刺詩多矣。民勞板蕩桑柔是也。民勞之詩其辭深。蕩之詩其辭衷。桑柔之詩其辭婉。可見其人性情。音調略有不同。而忠愛則一。

cessfully demonstrated the essential difference between *Tang* and other poems in the decade of *Tang*, he could hardly explain why *Tang* as a religious poem is put in the same chapter as other political poems.

VI. Conclusion

Although Dasan's re-religionization of *Tang* is inconsistent with the context of the decade of *Tang* and even seems to impose his philosophy of religion on the text, one should sympathize with the limitation of Dasan's age where religious persecution was widespread, claiming many of his friends and members of his own family. The hostility of the Joseon dynasty against Catholicism during Dasan's time means that Dasan could not develop his Catholic-influenced philosophy of religion independently: he had to cunningly conceal his own philosophy of religion in his interpretations of the *Five Classics*, especially the *Book of Odes* where *Sangje* was frequently mentioned.

Yet Dasan's creative interpretation also exposed the weakness of the interpretations of Kong, Zhu Xi, and their followers: the majority of them assume *Tang* merely as a political satiric poem and disregarded its religious elements. Dasan revealed the religiousness of *Tang*, yet his reading is one-sided because he selected texts that were consistent with his reformulation of the problem of evil—if *Sangje* was omniscient and omni-benevolent, how could there be evil and suffering?—and his solution to it—that evil and suffering are caused by people's wrongdoings and therefore their resentment against *Sangje* was unjustified. Dasan avoided materials from the *Book of Odes* that supported the resentment against *Sangje* simply because they contradicted the premise of Dasan's philosophy of religion.

For this reason, Dasan's re-religionization of *Tang* distinguishes him from the majority of interpreters. He did not read *Tang* as a political poem criticising the monarch (as Kong claimed). Although Dasan agreed with Zhu Xi that the poem denounced the people, Dasan did not read the text in terms of Zhu Xi's theory on human nature but in terms of the problem of evil, because Dasan acknowledged *Sangje* as an omniscient and omni-benevolent personal God who judges, supervises

and monitors human beings rather than merely a moral principle (*li*) (as Kong or Zhu Xi understood it). This makes Dasan look very different from other contemporaneous scholars who generally preferred Kong's interpretation to Zhu Xi's.

One may argue that Dasan could avoid the inconsistency between his re-religionization of *Tang* and the context of the decade of *Tang* by modifying Zhu Xi's interpretation: to acknowledge *Tang* and even other poems as resentment against *Sangje* and condemn these texts from a Confucian-Catholic position. Yet even Zhu Xi insisted that *Tang* did not aim to criticize *Sangje* but denounce people's resentment against *Sangje*, and questioning the main theme of poems in the *Book of Odes* could have meant political and legal consequences for Dasan. Considering the historical reality of his time, Dasan's re-interpretation of *Tang* was inevitably restrained due to political persecutions of Catholics, meaning even his life was at risk. Future research on Dasan should sympathize with Dasan's limitations and reveal the implicit impacts of Catholicism on Dasan's re-interpretation of *Five Classics* and *Four Books* instead of simply pointing out the inconsistency between Dasan's analysis and the contexts of *Five Classics*.

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