

Critique of the Theory of Nature (*xing*) and Principle (*li*) in the Philosophy of Zhu Xi: Matteo Ricci and Chǒng Yagyong

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Taking recourse to the Aristotelian theory of four causes and the distinction between substance and accidents, as well as to the concept of intellectual consciousness (*lingjue* 靈覺), Matteo Ricci (Li Madou 利瑪竇, 1552–1610) argued that the notions of *taiji* 太極 and *li* 理 as expounded by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) cannot serve as the origin of existence, as their metaphysical equivalent God, does in Catholic Christianity. *Taiji* and *li* do not have consciousness and are moreover merely “accidents.” Unlike “substance,” an “accident” is something that is not essential for something to be what it is. Tasan Chǒng Yagyong 茶山 丁若鏞 (1762–1836) follows Ricci in claiming that *li* is but an accident, and no more than the “formal cause” of each individual object. A “formal cause” is what something is or should be, as distinct from the “material cause” (that of which it is made), the “efficient cause” (that which gives it shape or motion), or the “final cause” (the goal for which it is intended). Ricci and Tasan did not acknowledge the role of *li* as the “principle, ground, cause or the reason for the existence and operation of *qi* 氣” (*suoyi* 所以) as held by Zhu Xi’s school of nature and principle. Like Ricci,

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Tasan also dismissed the concept of *taiji* as “the undifferentiated state before heaven and earth came to be divided.” However, Tasan diverged markedly from Ricci with respect to the critique of the tenet “Nature is in fact principle (*Xing ji li* 性即理)”. Although Tasan and Ricci both separated *xing* 性 from *li* and deconstructed the meaning of *xing* from its connotation of original moral human nature, Tasan’s reconstructed *xing* is quite different from Ricci’s understanding “nothing other than the fundamental (*ben* 本) essence (*ti* 體) of each category of things.” Tasan’s unique contribution is his new definition of *xing* (K. *sōng*) as the appetite or preference/proclivity [for the moral good] (K. *keibo*, C. *shihao* 嗜好), which is quite Mencian in its affirmation of the presence of an incipient tendency toward the good in human beings. That he mentions that this *xing* (K. *sōng*), although divested of its *a priori* metaphysical connotations, is still mandated and bestowed by heaven as stated in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 [Doctrine of the Mean] further testifies to Tasan’s continued engagement with the classics.

Keywords: the supreme ultimate (*taiji*), principle (*li*), cause or the reason for the existence and operation of *qi* (*suoyi*), human nature (*xing*), appetite or preference/proclivity [for the moral good] (*sōng keibo*)

In his *Tianzhu shiyi* (“The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven,” Beijing, 1603), Matteo Ricci rejected the concept of ‘*taiji*’ or the supreme ultimate (equivalent to ‘*li*’ or principle) and its link with ‘*xing*’ (nature) in the philosophy of Zhu Xi (1130–1200) as a valid description of the ultimate metaphysical entity.¹ Tasan Chōng Yagyong (1762–1836) later took up this critique of the concepts in Chosōn Korea. This study examines Ricci’s and Tasan’s respective critiques and delves into their significance in terms of their differing philosophical systems. Although the outward manifestation of their reasons for rejecting the concept of *taiji/li* and *xing* appear to be similar, closer examination reveals that their viewpoints reflect particular concerns emerging from the differing contexts of their western scholastic Catholic philosophy and East Asian Neo-Confucian philosophy respectively. Tasan took into account both of these metaphysical approaches before making way for a unique vision of his own. To what degree does

¹ Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ienchu shi-i)*, Chinese-English edition, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, ed. Edward J. Malatesta (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1985), 77–119.

Tasan's metaphysics reflect a marked influence of Ricci's western scholastic tradition on the one hand and a creative engagement with various strands within the Neo-Confucian philosophical tradition that has its provenance in the thought of Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi on the other?

Zhu Xi on *Taiji* and *Li, Xing*²

Taiji first appears in the “Great and Venerable Teacher” (*da zongshi* 大宗師), the chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 in the context of “sky.”³ The term comes to take on a cosmological or ontological meaning in the “Appended Remarks” (*Xici zhibuan* 繫辭傳) of the *Book of Changes* 周易.⁴ After the Han dynasty there were two main accounts of *taiji*: one regarded it as the Dao 道 in the *Laozi* 老子 and the other saw it as a form of primeval all-encompassing *qi* or psycho-physical matter (*yuanqi* 元氣).⁵ Commonly explained as some original material substance of the universe, it was only with Zhu Xi in the Southern Song 南宋 period in China that *taiji* came to decisively take on the meaning of principle or *li*. Cheng Yi brought the primacy or prominence of *li* itself to the fore at an earlier period in Song history. It is worth noting that after Zhu Xi, the trend was often to revert to regarding *taiji* as *qi*. Just as Ricci and Tasan did later on, the Ming dynasty scholar Wang Tingxiang 王廷相 (1474–1544) among numerous others, viewed *taiji* as “*qi* in its undifferentiated and undivided whole state.”⁶

The positions of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi regarding the metaphysical status of *taiji* are significant as they go against the general *qi*-monistic trend in Chinese philosophy. Matteo Ricci either purposely ignored or inadvertently misunderstood this point later on when he came into contact with Cheng-Zhu thought. Ricci argued that *taiji* has to rely on *qi* (psycho-physical matter) and, as such, must be distinguished from the God of Christianity, who in terms of grace and virtue, represents a being of perfection (*ens perfectissimum*) not dependent on anything else for its existence.⁷ From

² For a complete detailed discussion of Zhu Xi's views on *taiji* and *xing*, see Hansang Kim, “Zhu Xi's Metaphysical System and the Role of *Taiji* (Great Ultimate),” *Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture* 20 (2013): 1–24.

³ Zhuangzi, *Yōkchu Changja* 1, trans. An Pyōngju, et. al. (Sōul: Chōnt'ong Munhwa Yōn'guhoe, 2007), 245–312.

⁴ See *Book of Changes*, “Appended Remarks,” pt. 1, ch. 11., in Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, ed. Hellmut Wilhelm, trans. Cary F. Baynes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 3rd Edition, Kindle Edition.

⁵ Ge Rongjin, *Zhongguo zhexue fanchoushi* (Heilongjiang: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1987), 39–44.

⁶ Hansang Kim, “Zhu Xi's Metaphysical System,” 4–6.

⁷ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 84–89.

a different perspective, however, it is ironic that *taiji* may actually be comparable to certain characteristics of the ultimate principle in scholastic philosophy, such as *primum principium*, *ens necessarium*, or *actus purus*. Both Aquinas, Ricci's forbear in Christian theology, and Zhu Xi claimed that the cause for existence exists "before" or "above," on an ontologically higher level than that of things that exist on the phenomenal level. Both God and *taiji*, moreover, may be regarded as the final cause in Aristotelian terms. Also, both creationism in Christianity and the "unfolding of the activity of *taiji*" (造化) in Cheng-Zhu thought are related to the realization of the good in the universe.⁸ Admittedly, how this is actualized in each tradition differs significantly, especially with regard to the power for achieving the ultimate *telos*. It could very well be that God is both the final cause and the formal cause, as well as the efficient cause of things in the universe, whereas *taiji* is only the final and formal cause but not the efficient cause with *qi* being the efficient cause in Cheng-Zhu thought.⁹

Although Zhu Xi learned of *taiji* as the 'principle of origin of the universe' from his teacher Li Tong 李侗 (1093–1163) as early as 1161, it seems he did not take an active interest in the complex ontological dimension of the subject until he began to delve into the theory of human mind and human nature. It was under the influence of Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180) that Zhu Xi came to consider *taiji* in connection with *xing* or human nature.¹⁰ In 1169, Zhu Xi postulated his theory of the two states of the mind [for cultivation] (*yifa weifa shuo* 已發未發說),¹¹ in which he equates Zhou Dunyi's 周敦頤 formulation "Indeterminate, yet the Great Ultimate" with *xing*.¹² After Zhu Xi put forth a revised understanding of the dualistic status and function of the mind comprising of both a metaphysical and a physical dimension in the new theory of equilibrium and harmony (*zhonghe xin shuo* 中和新說) in 1169, *taiji* in his system took on the role of a metaphysical ground-providing principle for the regular cycles of quiescence and movement in both nature and in human mind.¹³ Cheng-Zhu thought holds that in nature there is quiescence in the *yin* phase and movement in the *yang* phase, the two being complementary aspects of the physical realm of nature representing activity in

⁸ Yang Myŏngsu, *T'oegye sasang ūi sinbakhŏk ihae* [A theological reading of T'oegye's thought] (Sŏul: Ihwa Yŏja Tachakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 2016), 225–237.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chen Lai 陈来, *Zhu Xi zhexue yanjiu* [A study of the philosophy of Zhu Xi] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1987), 4–6.

¹¹ *Weifa* refers to the not-yet-activated phase of the heart-mind and *yifa* to the already activated or issued forth phase of the heart-mind respectively.

¹² Zhu Xi, *Zhu Xi ji* [Collected works of Zhu Xi], ed. Guo Di and Yi Po (Chengdu shi: Sichuan Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1996), 67. 3526.

¹³ Tomoeda Ryūtarō 友枝龍太郎. *Shushi no shisō keisei* 朱子の思想形成 [The formation of Zhu Xi's thought], Revised edition (Tōkyō: Shunjūsha, 1979), 95.

the world of *qi*, and governed by the ground-providing principle *li*, which ensures that there is order, and a certain rightful mode of operation in the natural realm.

A parallel phenomenon occurs in the human mind. For Zhu Xi, the mind encompasses both the dynamic and quiet phases (*dongjing* 動靜) and has two levels of existence. There is gathering in or inward convergence in the *weifa* phase (未發) and outward expansion or application in the *yifa* phase (已發), the two being complementary aspects of the cognitive and moral realm of the human mind governed by the ground-providing principle which when present in the human mind is referred to as *xing* or nature.¹⁴ The presence of *xing*, which is also principle (*li*), similarly ensures that there is order and a certain rightful and natural mode of operation in the realm of the human mind as well. The pre-intentional ‘universal’ state (*xin zhi weifa* 心之未發) before actual feelings are aroused is present *a priori*, and the post-intentional, phenomenal state (*xin zhi yifa* 心之已發) is manifested after the feelings issue forth. The mind’s active cognitive ability does not cease even in the *weifa* state. In fact, the *weifa* state is vitally important for Zhu’s theory of self-cultivation as this is the venue for the ‘nurturing’ and ‘growth’ of innate moral principle within oneself (*weifa hanyang* 未發涵養). The mind in its pre-intentional and universally-oriented state is characterized by the fact that specific thought intentions have not sprouted forth and yet active cognitive and moral consciousness is operative in such a way as to ensure mind’s readiness to react appropriately to all possible situations. In this state, private or selfish motives for action are absent and a certain impartiality and universality is proffered by the presence of the entire corpus of principle (*li*) to which humans need to take recourse in order to live integral and fulfilled lives.

It is after Zhu Xi’s monumental efforts to clarify the status and operative function of the human mind and human nature and the subsequent turnaround in his thinking in 1169 that he begins to delve in earnest into the ontological problem of *li* and *qi*. Zhu was faithful to the paradigm that the natural world and man are governed by identical norms. He felt that the dual structure of the human mind, namely the original moral human nature (*xing* 性) and the affective aspect of the phenomenal mind (*qing* 情) with mind itself (*xin* 心) as the “presiding power that adjudicates between *xing* and *qing*,” had to have a parallel dual structure in the world at large as well.¹⁵ Thus, the in-depth study into the ontology of the moral and cognitive status of the human mind provided the impetus for a more thorough speculative inquiry into the theory of fundamental essence or original entity (*benti*). In the *Commentary to the Explanations of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate* (*Taijitu shuo jie* 太極圖說解) in 1170, Zhu Xi laid down the relation between

¹⁴ Hansang Kim, “Zhu Xi’s Metaphysical System,” 6.

¹⁵ Hansang Kim, “Zhu Xi’s Metaphysical System,” 6.

taiji and things in the phenomenal world. In the *Commentary to the Explanations of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate*, *taiji* is not some primordial undivided material stuff or matter but rather the metaphysical *Dao* containing all the principles of movement and quiescence and of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽.¹⁶

The division of metaphysical and physical levels is indispensable to understanding Zhu Xi theory of self-cultivation, which would take a radically different turn without the primacy of *li*. In the well-known first conversation recorded in the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 between Zhu Xi in his later years and his disciple Chen Chun 陳淳 (1159–1223), Zhu explained that *taiji* as principle is present in all things and exists in tandem with them and yet has an ontological priority to the phenomenal world. *Taiji* is the ground for existence that gives order to the phenomenal world: “Even before heaven and earth have yet to exist, there must first be this *li*.”¹⁷ Zhu Xi conceived of *taiji* as a norm governing the phenomenal world and also characterized it as being the pure good, before the transformations in the realm of *yinyang* take place and relative good and evil appear on the phenomenal level due to the inevitable limitations presented by *qi*.¹⁸

Zhu posited that *taiji* exists ontologically on a different level from phenomena as a binding norm for human ethical conduct even though it permeates phenomena and is never separated from them. Zhu Xi continued to define *taiji*'s relationship with *yinyang* in a way that is markedly different from the original constitution-functional variation formulation (*tiyong* 體用) that some Cheng-Zhu scholars used, despite its Buddhist provenance, to account for the differing but related modes of existence in empirical and non-empirical entities.¹⁹

The reason Master Zhou referred to *wuji* 無極 was because he regarded [*taiji*] as being without spatial reference or physical form, existing before any phenomenal object existed, and at no time absent once objects came into being; and he regarded [it] as existing outside of *yinyang* while at no time not operating in the midst of *yinyang*. [It] pervades through all existence, is nowhere absent, and from the beginning could not be spoken of in terms of material attributes such as sound, smell, or physical traces.²⁰

¹⁶ Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi quanshu* [Complete works of Master Zhu], eds. Zhu Jieren, et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe; Hefei shi: Anhui Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2002), 13. 72–3.

¹⁷ Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* [Classified conversations of Master Zhu], eds. Li Jingde, et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1986), chapter 1.

¹⁸ Zhu, *Zhuzi yulei*, chapter 75, section 82.

¹⁹ Meng Peiyuan, *Lixue jianchou xitong* [The system of categories in the school of nature and principle] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1989), 148–171.

²⁰ Zhu, *Zhu Xi ji*, 36.1575–1576.

Taiji is not in a *tiyong* or original constitution-functional variation relationship with *yinyang*. In other words, *taiji* and *yinyang* do not give rise to each other and are not interchangeable; one is a metaphysical entity, and the other is the physical reality which “carries” it. There is a clear division of the level of existence into two distinct realms. Just as the mind is not just the phenomenal mind (*yifa*) but made up of the two levels, metaphysical and phenomenal, of *weifa* and *yifa* respectively, *taiji* exists on both phenomenal and metaphysical levels. *Taiji* is not separated from the world of *yinyang* and movement-quiescence but it is also depicted as being “outside of it.”²¹ This is a highly puzzling and incoherent formulation to understand if one analyzes it by means of formal logic. Rather, one has to interpret it as an expression of faith which proclaims that the ground-providing metaphysical entity is both immanent and transcendent vis-à-vis the physical world. If *taiji* were present only in the realm of *yinyang*, or indeed the same in substance to *yinyang* but only modally different in the fashion of the *tiyong* formulation, it could not serve as the utmost norm or the repository of all *li*. If *taiji* were only to be differentiated ontologically from the realm of *yinyang*, however, it could not have a pervading presence in the phenomenal world of man and nature and be in effective relationship with actually existing things.²² Ricci was unable, or unwilling, to see this important dimension related to the concept of *taiji* as expounded by Zhu Xi.

Matteo Ricci’s Rejection of the *Li* and *Xing*

Matteo Ricci’s views on Zhu Xi are based on an understanding of Thomistic philosophy as the normative universal truth. Ricci used the methodology furnished by Thomism to point out the errors of the primacy of *li* in the Cheng-Zhu School of nature and principle and to draw attention to the universal truth which it seemingly lacks. His ultimate goal was to reorient what he thought to be the deficient Cheng-Zhu thought to the normative truth. In his critique of Zhu, it is the Aristotelian concept of categories and the theory of four causes that are the tools Ricci employed.²³ This reflects the dominant approach of senior Jesuit missionaries in Asia who held that while the natural philosophy of China has some common ground with ancient Greek natural philosophy in the West, the former is lacking in Aristotelian methodology and Christian truth. In works such as *Ersbinyan* 二十五言 (Twenty-five sayings) and *Jiaoyou lun* 交友論 (Treatise on making friends), Ricci went on to show that the tenets of Confucianism are comparable

²¹ Hansang Kim, “Zhu Xi’s Metaphysical System,” 17.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 84.

to the ethical reflections by means of natural reason in Stoic philosophy, and argued for the view that such ethical reflection ought to be focused on God the creator.²⁴ The works contain references to God (*Shangdi* 上帝) as the creator and ruler of the universe, as well as to the role of *Shangdi* as the one directly responsible for correcting and making complete the imperfections of human beings. There are numerous attempts to propagate the Christian truths by inserting excerpts of exemplary cases of people with faith such as Barnabas, St. Paul, and St. Francis in as natural a manner as possible within these works.²⁵

Ricci uses the notion of *Shangdi* as the standard for determining how the notion of *li* has come to deviate from Christian truths. As a result, *Li* and *zhu* 主宰 (presiding, or exercising authority) come to take on different meanings. Such a rearrangement necessarily excludes the contemporary intellectual context arising originally from the Cheng-Zhu thought itself and only represents *li* from the perspective of Thomistic philosophy.

For the Zhu Xi school of nature and principle, heaven (*tian* 天) and *Shangdi* denote the presiding character (*zhu*) of *li* over things. The concept of *li* encompasses a movement away from notions of a personal deity that were originally present in the terms of *tian* and *Shangdi*, and represents a reinforcement of the notion of an objective principle or norm by which all existent beings must abide. In various places in his writings, Zhu Xi changes the meaning of phrases suggesting the bestowal of grace or good on the people by an anthropomorphic Heavenly being to that of the impersonal bestowal of *li* on human beings.²⁶ The bestowal of *li*, the principle which all beings in the universe including humans must necessarily follow, then connotes the aspect of “presiding” or “exercising authority” (*zhu*). On the other hand, Ricci regards the concept of *Shangdi* as having traces of the meaning of God as known to Christians (*Tianzhu* 天主), and uses the term *zhu* to mean that God takes an active role in the lives of myriad things, which are his creation. In this way, *zhu* comes to take on the meaning of an omnipotent and omniscient personal supreme being presiding over and taking care of creation.²⁷

The Zhu Xi school of nature and principle posited *taiji/li* as the source of all things in the universe even as it is pervasively present in all things and works in their midst in

²⁴ Matteo Ricci, *Kyou ron, Sūmul tasōt madi chamōn, Kūn sipp'yōn* [Treatise on making friends, Twenty-five sayings, Ten conversations with an eccentric man], trans. Song Yōngbae, et al. (Sōul: Sōul Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'an Munhwawōn, 2000), 30–35, 99, 132, 143, 158, 166, 182–183, 193–194, 202, 261, 376, 395, 450.

²⁵ Ricci, *Kyou ron*, 44–45, 128, 189–190.

²⁶ Zhu, *Zhuji quanshu*, 16. 2257.

²⁷ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 64–74.

seamless continuity with them. Zhu described this ultimate reality in a novel fashion as the “flow and progression of the heavenly mandate in the world” (*tianming zhi liuxing* 天命之流行).²⁸ The actual movement and tranquility in the phenomenal realm is the frame or tool for the manifestation of a metaphysical reality which has the dual aspects of ‘fundamental essence’ or ‘original entity’ (*benti*) and that of the ‘flow and progression in the world’ (*liuxing* 流行) respectively.²⁹ This factor makes it stand apart from *yinyang* which belongs to the straightforward empirical physical world of sensation and material objects.³⁰

Zhu Xi made it clear that the relationship between *taiji* and *yinyang* is not that of a temporal order of existence. *Taiji* neither gives birth to the myriad things nor exists temporally prior to things, but exists in tandem with them. Zhu Xi explained in his *Commentary to the Explanations of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate* that *taiji* is a non-empirical entity that serves as the pivot of creation and transformation and the foundation of things.³¹ Zhu also defined *taiji* as *benran zhi miao* 本然之妙 (the characteristic of the original entity of being unbounded by physical limitations), and the movement and quiescence within the phenomenal realm as *suocheng zhi ji* 所乘之機 (the physical frame that carries the metaphysical entity with it). Zhu Xi repeatedly confirmed the transcendent metaphysical character of *taiji* in his later writings and conversations with his students; he posited, for instance, that “*taiji* is not subject to constraints in space, has no material form or body, and cannot be confined to any particular location.”³² In 1186, with the completion of his monumental treatise on the study of the *Book of Changes*, the *Yixue qimeng* 易學啓蒙, Zhu also explained *taiji* as “the name for [the state in which] impressions (*xiang* 象) and distinctions due to unitary divisions (*shu* 數) have not taken shape, and yet the principles thereof are already present.”³³ In his correspondence with the Lu brothers, Zhu depicted it as being, “without form but characterized by the presence of principle.”³⁴

In stark contrast, taking recourse to the Aristotelian theory of four causes and the distinction between substance and accidents, as well as to the concept of intelligent consciousness, Ricci argued that *taiji/li* cannot serve as the origin of existence.³⁵ *Li* is of

²⁸ Zhu, *Zhuzi quanshu*, 13. 72.

²⁹ In the *Commentary to the Explanations of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate* (*Taijitu shuo jie*), the activity and tranquility of *taiji* is not a matter of *taiji* itself moving or becoming still, like an entity in the phenomenal realm. Rather *taiji* is the ground for quiescence in the *yin* phase and movement in the *yang* phase of nature.

³⁰ Zhu, *Zhu Xi ji*, 45. 2153.

³¹ Zhu, *Zhuzi quanshu*, 13. 72. Cf. *Taijitu shuo jie*.

³² Zhu, *Zhuzi yulei*, chapter 94, section 19.

³³ Zhu, *Zhuzi quanshu*, 1. 218. Cf. *Yixue qimeng*, ch. 2.

³⁴ Zhu, *Zhu Xi ji*, 36. 1568.

³⁵ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 77–101.

the category of accident in the Aristotelian scheme, is not a creator of things, and does not have consciousness.³⁶ It thus fails the test as the source of creation and cannot be equivalent to the Lord of heaven, *Tianzhu*. For Ricci, *li* was not a universal ontological principle; it was no more than the formal cause of each individual object, existing within the substance and giving it a name as an existence and thus acting in the capacity of defining the object *a posteriori*. *Li*'s form of content differs according to the name.³⁷ If a name differs, so does the *li* of the thing. This means that *li* is an accident that depends on something else.

The term intelligent consciousness (*lingjue*)³⁸ implies having the ability to make rational inference. *Li* becomes the content of the rational inference of concepts contained in the name of things.³⁹ The logic in the law of cause and effect to which Ricci ascribed dictates that an effect cannot temporarily precede its cause.⁴⁰ According to Ricci, *li* only exists in the minds of human beings, or else in things outside the mind, and is thus dependent on temporarily preceding things. He argued that such a principle could not be the source of all things. This is a different formulation from that of Zhu Xi:

The operations of heaven have neither sound nor smell. Yet this [*taiji*] is really the pivot of creation and transformation and the foundation of things of all kinds. Therefore, it is called “Indeterminate, yet the Great Ultimate.” It does not mean that outside of the Great Ultimate there is again an Ultimate of non-being.⁴¹

‘The foundation of things of all kinds’ (*pinhui zhi gendi* 品彙之根底) implies *taiji* serves as the fundamental basis or standard for the classification and coherent analysis of diverse events and objects. *Li* exists as a reality but it only manifests its reality inside events and hence cannot be described as an independent “substance” in the western Aristotelian and Thomistic sense Ricci employed. The original metaphysical entity in Zhu Xi never exists separately from phenomena in the evolving organismic world of *qi* but its status is distinguished from *suocheng zhi ji* (the physical frame or vessel that “carries” the metaphysical entity with it) by operating in the capacity of a constant reason, cause, purpose, ground, means, or measure for individual objects or events (*suoyi* 所以). In this sense, *li* is an ontological entity that is engaged in constant, active

³⁶ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 114–119.

³⁷ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 84–85.

³⁸ They are intelligence and consciousness, respectively.

³⁹ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 128–129.

⁴⁰ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 222–225.

⁴¹ Zhu, *Zhuzi quanshu*, 13. 72.

relationship with diverse phenomena (*qi*) that are continuously coming into and going out of existence. When Ricci defined *li* in terms of the substance-accident framework, he grossly ignored this ontic quality.⁴² Ricci understood *li* as *yilai zhe* 依賴者 (that which depends on something else)⁴³ and in so doing failed to underscore the importance of its role as the *suoyi* of events and things.⁴⁴ The stance that *li* cannot be described as substance *zili zhe* 自立者 (that which stands on its own) is more acceptable, albeit for a reason different from that of Ricci, but this argument too is problematic; *li* has logical and ontological priority, even primacy over *qi*, although not actual or temporal priority.

Ricci rejected the Cheng-Zhu formulation “*Xing ji li*” (Nature is in fact principle) by first relegating the status of *li* to the category of accident, and then by decoupling the meaning of *xing* from its connotation of original moral human nature present *a priori* in the human mind. For Ricci, “[n]ature’ is nothing other than the fundamental (*ben*) essence (*ti*) of each category of things. When one speaks of ‘each category’ of things one concludes that those of the same category have similar natures and that things of different categories have different natures.”⁴⁵ Ricci went on to say that “when things are substance (*zili zhe*), their natures are also autonomous (*zili*); and when things are accident (*yilai zhe*), their natures are also dependent (*yilai*).”⁴⁶

To the Cheng-Zhu school, the world—insofar as *li* is the reason, ground, or the means for its existence—is originally one full of the good. It is a supremely optimistic vision of life itself. All forms of life seek, or should seek, to maintain and recover that good and rectify that which is deviant or lacking where necessary, so that the full potency of this original goodness may be reinstated in the present. What makes the human truly human is the original moral human nature (*xing*) which is in fact the universal principle present in all things. *Xing* is manifested in the phenomenal realm as *qing*, or affective feelings and emotions, and it is incumbent on all people to enlarge, to the best of their ability, their capacity of mind to the fullest to make *li* manifest in accordance with the natural order of things. Here it must be noted that the mind and nature are coextensive with the rest of the world. There is no fundamental rift between oneself and the universe and there is no way for one to perfect oneself without being engaged with and perfecting the world.⁴⁷ Thus what is needed is the voluntary and proactive effort

⁴² Yi Ponggyu, “Tongsö üi chijök kyoch’ak: *Ch’önju sirü* üi i haesök kwa kü panhyang” [Intricacies in the cross-cultural intellectual exchanges between the East and the West: Various reactions to the interpretation of *li* in *Tianzhu Shiyi*], *Tongbang hakchi* 175 (2016): 135–136.

⁴³ Ricci used *yilai* 依賴 and *zili* 自立 respectively to denote the concepts of accident and substance in Aristotelian and scholastic philosophy.

⁴⁴ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 108–109.

⁴⁵ Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 349.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ I would like to thank Professor Philip J. Ivanhoe for this observation.

to realize that *xing* is innate goodness already given and present in one's psychological constitution. One then needs to embody and nurture that innate endowment and to strengthen it by various everyday acts of self-cultivation such as "always being awake" (*changxingxing* 常惺惺) and by being inwardly attentive and self-collected. Ethical result is not obtained through the decision of a faculty of the mind to choose the good which is outside the mind, but rather as the natural consequence of the attainment of an inner unity within the self.

With this unity the self is able to serve as a center of strength and agency that can manifest and unleash the full potential of the originally endowed goodness or *xing* in the *weifa* realm of the mind. The original meaning of terms such as *zhuzai*, *ling*, and *jue* in Cheng-Zhu thought had to do with these aspects of the mind that serve as a center of strength and agency. There is also the dimension of the objective inquiry and study of *li* in external things and objects known as *gewu* (格物) or the investigation of things and events that entails usage of rational inference but this is done in conjunction with the aforementioned exercises in self-cultivation. For Zhu, one becomes a subject not by choosing between good and evil but rather by steadily strengthening and acting from one's own inner space. This inner space is not empty or a *tabula rasa* but rather replete with *xing*, the original moral human nature, which is equivalent to the entire corpus of *li*. Although it is true that one is hampered in the enactment of becoming a subject by one's turbid and polluted psycho-physical endowment, this does not have to mean that one is imprisoned by one's necessity in a deterministic way. Through the efforts of self-cultivation one can develop a center of strength in one's inner space⁴⁸ so that the power of one's freedom exceeds that of one's necessity. Ricci neither recognized nor analyzed, or even mentioned any of this in his treatment of the concept of *xing*.

Chǒng Yagyong's Rejection of Zhu Xi's *Li* and *Xing*

Due to his personal circumstances of being under the threat of persecution for his earlier belief in Catholicism, Tasan was careful not to make any references to the western religion or its advocates. Although he was not in a position to quote Ricci directly due to the perilous political situation, Tasan took active recourse to the theoretical framework Ricci provided to engage in his own critique of the school of nature and principle. Tasan takes after Ricci in refuting the main metaphysical conceptions of the school of nature and principle, most notably *taiji*, *li*, and *xing*. In lieu of the Bible or western

⁴⁸ As we have seen, this is what the school of nature and principle refers to as the *weifa* or the pre-intentional and universal realm of the mind.

philosophy as the standard reference, however, Tasan appeals to the *Six classics* 六經 as the base for his claim that the Cheng-Zhu metaphysical terms were in fact Buddhist or pseudo-Buddhist origin and content. Tasan also shares with Ricci the rejection of various exercises of self-cultivation employed in Zhu Xi's school such as nurturing and keeping the innate principle within oneself (*banyang gongfu* 涵養工夫) and quiet meditation (*jingzuo* 靜坐).⁴⁹

What is interesting is that although there is no mention of Ricci in his writings, Tasan seems to use his ideas indirectly as the methodology for the critique of the main tenets of Zhu Xi. Tasan uses terms similar to those Ricci employed such as *zongpin* 宗品,⁵⁰ *yilai* 依賴,⁵¹ and *zili* 自立⁵² in his refutation of the metaphysical concept of *li* in Zhu Xi and his school. In a well-known episode, while serving at the Chosŏn National Academy (Sŏnggyun'gwan 成均館) at the age of twenty-two, Tasan answered the inquiries of the king on the question of the “issuing forth of *li* and *qi*” (K. *ibal kibal*, C. *lifā qīfā* 已發氣發), supporting the position of Yulgok Yi I 李珥 (1536–1584). The young Tasan took up a view that is strikingly similar to that of Ricci, vis-à-vis *li* and *qi*:

Qi is something that exists by itself (K. *chayu chi mul*, C. *zìyǒu zhī wù* 自有之物), and *li* is that which is dependent on and attached to something else (K. *ūibu chi p'um*, C. *yīfù zhī pīn* 依附之品). That which is dependent on and attached to something else must rely on that which exists on its own. Therefore, it is when *qi* issues forth, that this *li* comes to be.⁵³

In the passage following the above quoted section in the *Chungyong kangūibo* 中庸講義補 [Supplement to the Lectures on the *Doctrine of the Mean*], Tasan argued in support of Yi I's view that “that which issues forth (K. *pal chi cha*, C. *fā zhī zhě* 發之者) is *qi* and that which causes it to issue forth (K. *soi pal cha*, C. *suoyi fā zhě* 所以發者) is *li*.” Although this may indicate that Tasan was simply following Yulgok's definition of *li* and *qi*,⁵⁴ the specific vocabulary shows the marked influence of Ricci on Tasan's thought. If Tasan

⁴⁹ We have seen how, for Zhu Xi, moral effort encompassing both the *weifa* and the *yifa* states is necessary for effective self-cultivation. Professor Philip J. Ivanhoe has pointed out that these methods were not only too quietist for Tasan but also that, from Tasan's viewpoint, they were divorced from the phenomenal world and *ipso facto* could not improve human nature, a creature of the phenomenal world.

⁵⁰ Ricci used *zongpin* 宗品 to translate the concept “category” of Aristotelian and scholastic philosophy. See Ricci, *The True Meaning*, 108.

⁵¹ To depend on something else for existence.

⁵² To exist independently on its own.

⁵³ Chŏng Yagyong, *Chŏngbon Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* [Complete works of Yŏyudang, verified edition], vols. 1–37, eds. Song Chaeso, et al. (Sŏul: Tasan Haksul Munhwa Chaedan, 2012), 6. 396.

⁵⁴ Paek Minjŏng, *Chŏng Yagyong ūi ch'ŏrbak* [Philosophy of Chŏng Yagyong] (Sŏul: Ihaksa, 2007), 217–218.

meant the terms *chayu chi mul* and *ũibu chi p'um* in the sense of substance and attribute as Ricci defined, they are quite similar in style to Ricci's terms *zili zhe* and *yilai zhe*.⁵⁵

Tasan brought out historical evidence from the classics suggesting *li* originally referred to the characteristics of individual objects as seen in patterns along the grain of jade or stone (K. *maengni*, C. *maili* 脈理), and meant to treat or manage these objects in accordance with their characteristics (K. *ch'iri*, C. *zhili* 治理). For Tasan, these are characteristics we discover by studying the world and putting it into order. They are not things that exist *a priori* in the heart-mind that can be understood by inner reflection. *Li* is not a metaphysical concept for Tasan. Some modern scholars take after this interpretation of *li* and translate it as "pattern."⁵⁶ Tasan neither used *xing* to denote the universal moral good nature that is endowed in all things in an identical manner, nor did he define *xing* as *li* in these texts.⁵⁷

Tasan also regarded *taiji* as the pre-Song and classical "undifferentiated state before heaven and earth came to be divided" which "began to take on form and give birth to *yin* and *yang* as the beginning point of myriad things." There are no texts with the mention of *taiji* as principle without form.⁵⁸ Tasan thus limited the meaning of *li* to the characteristics particular to individual objects and the meaning of *taiji* to the Daoist notion of the undifferentiated and undivided original state of the material universe. Like Ricci, Tasan did not recognize the role of *li* as the ground, cause, or reason for the existence and operation of *qi* as held by the school of nature and principle.

At this point, one must ask why Tasan was so ready to abandon the concept of *li* on the one hand, while strongly advocating the belief in the existence of a personal God, *Sangje* (C. *Shangdi* 上帝) on the other. If Tasan had merely abandoned *li* and not proposed a theistic system, one could have supposed that his system had left metaphysics altogether. Tasan argued that the Cheng-Zhu conception of *li*, being abstract and other-worldly could play no physical causal role in our lives both because it cannot move matter and it is unable to motivate us. *Li* does not have the ability to inspire us emotionally to exert the effort necessary to act morally since it has no consciousness and is unable to instill fear in human beings.⁵⁹ Outwardly, the philosophies of both Ricci and Tasan involve the notion of a personal God as an integral part of their system. No one, however, would deny that the God denoted by *Sangje* is very different from the Christian God of Thomism. While Tasan's God inspires awe and obedience, the

⁵⁵ Chǒng, *Chǒngbon*, 6. 396.

⁵⁶ One might translate *li* as 'pattern' but it has to be remembered that rendering *li* as principle denotes the objective *a priori* existence of a beginning point of reference for value (*suoyiran* 所以然).

⁵⁷ Chǒng, *Chǒngbon*, 7. 202–203.

⁵⁸ Chǒng, *Chǒngbon*, 17. 178.

⁵⁹ Chǒng, *Chǒngbon*, 6. 233.

impersonal *Sangje* does not engage in revelation. Such a God was already present in the classics; it would be too simplistic to state that Tasan's belief in God was a direct result of Catholicism, although its influence cannot be discounted.⁶⁰ One might regard Tasan's introduction of *Sangje* as an incidental affair but most scholars on the subject agree that the role of *Sangje* in Tasan's thought and personal life was indeed central and great.⁶¹ Although Tasan abandoned *li* because he thought it was insufficient as a standard for the enactment of virtue, does *Sangje* represent a theistic replacement of the Cheng-Zhu principle, *li*? This question has entailed a very thorough inquiry, extensive discussion and at times heated debate in Korean philosophical and religious circles, and needs to be introduced anew in depth.⁶²

The point where Tasan diverged most markedly with Ricci with respect to the critique of the Cheng-Zhu principle, nature, and the formulation "Nature is in fact principle *Xing ji li*" is in his view on *xing*. Tasan is in agreement with Ricci that *li* is but an accident. Although they both separate *xing* from *li* and decouple the meaning of *xing* from its Cheng-Zhu connotation of original moral human nature, their alternative explanations differ considerably. Although there are indications that Tasan on the one hand regarded "nature" as the defining characteristic in individual things, his reconstructed *xing* is quite different from Ricci's explanation as "nothing other than the fundamental (*ben*) essence (*ti*) of each category of things." Tasan's unique contribution is his new definition of *xing* (K. *sŏng*) as the appetite or the preference and proclivity for the moral good (K. *keiho*, C. *shihao*), which is Mencian in its affirmation of the presence of an incipient tendency toward the good in human beings. In the *Maengja yŏui* 孟子要義 [Essential Meanings of the Mencius], Tasan's identity as a defender of the orthodox Way (*sado* 斯道) comes to the fore in the unfolding of his theory of nature wherein he reinterpreted *xing* in the Six Classics as appetite or preference.⁶³ Admittedly, Tasan noted that not all proclivities are for the good as some are for self-centered things as well. What is of note here is that this *xing*, although divested of its Cheng-Zhu metaphysical baggage, is still mandated and bestowed by heaven as stated in the *Zhongyong* [Doctrine of the mean] and in various works on the Four Books such as the *Nonŏ kogŏmju* 論語古今註 [Past and present annotations to the Analects of Confucius] and the *Chungyong chajam* 中庸自箴 [Self-admonitions from the *Doctrine of the Mean*].

⁶⁰ Chŏng Ilgyun, "Tasan Chŏng Yagyong ūi 'ch' ŏn' kaenyŏm e taehan chae koch'al" [A reconsideration of Tasan Chŏng Yagyong's concept of 'ch'ŏn (天)], *Tasan hak* 32 (2018): 61–120.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Refer especially to the articles on the subject in the following two special editions of the periodical *Tasan hak* (Tasan Studies) published by the Tasan Cultural Foundation: "The Meeting of East and West in the Thought of Tasan," *Tasan hak* 5 (2004): 7–331; "Tasan ūi sangjegwan kwa yŏngsŏng ūi munje" (Tasan's view on *Sangje* and the issue of spirituality), *Tasan hak* 32 (2018): 7–146.

⁶³ Chŏng, *Chŏngbon*, 7. 237.

In addition, Tasan criticized the Cheng-Zhu term original nature (K. *ponyŏn chi sŏng*, C. *benran zhi xing* 本然之性) as being a Buddhist-derived notion. He argued that the term “original nature” was actually derived from Buddhist works such as the *Surangama Sutra* (K. *Nŏngŏm kyŏng*, C. *Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經).⁶⁴ He went on to argue virtue is not an *a priori* reality which one has to “recover,” but rather the result of readily putting into practice one’s potential to do good as signaled by the presence of the appetite for the moral good in one’s mind. This is done by actively choosing and deciding good over that which is bad. Tasan carefully warned that one cannot achieve virtue by means of the appetite or preference for the good (*kiho*) alone.⁶⁵ One builds up moral strength as one would build up physical strength; one does not get stronger merely by thinking about pushups.

Tasan was strongly critical of the Cheng-Zhu claim that human ethics is based on the presence of a metaphysical principle that is endowed on all things. For Tasan, benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom (*ren yi li zhi* 仁義禮智) do not refer to a metaphysical nature or principle but rather are the virtues obtained through accumulation of good actions. Filial piety and respect for elders (K. *hyoje*, C. *xiaoti* 孝悌) for instance, is an ethical potentiality or tendency which one must conscientiously carry out in order to achieve benevolence (*ren*). One of the reasons he gave for this view is that without agency one cannot appropriate praise and blame. If one does good, one wins merit and deserves praise *because* the good is the result of choice and effort. For Tasan, *ren* is a comprehensive virtue that encompasses the total set of the results of ethical practices involving mutual reciprocal empathy between human beings. *Ren* can only be consummated between two human beings and is not applicable to animals and things. Tasan claims that the appetite or preference for commiseration, for the shame of one’s own wrong and the dislike of the wrong of others or the admiration of righteousness, for deference and compliance, and for right or wrong that are manifested as feelings in the mind “need to be expanded and made solid, otherwise the name of *ren yi li zhi* may never be established.”⁶⁶ This explanation differs from that of the Zhu Xi school in which *ren* exists *a priori* as the ground or reason for the existence of the feelings of commiseration, shame and dislike, righteousness, deference and compliance, and right or wrong.

The existence of *li* in the work of Zhu Xi connotes a world characterized by the presence of good in both natural and human realms. In a world in which the original state is good, how can we account for the existence of that which is bad? Because

⁶⁴ Chŏng, *Chŏngbon*, 9. 282.

⁶⁵ Chŏng, *Chŏngbon*, 2. 202.

⁶⁶ Chŏng, *Chŏngbon*, 7. 196–197.

all things exist in a state of goodness at origin, badness cannot be ascribed as simply existing beforehand in matter. While oft-repeated statements such as “Clear material force is the origin of good, and turbid material force is the origin of badness” have some basis in Zhu’s original words,⁶⁷ they are nevertheless too simplistic and need more elaboration.

In the *qi* which is endowed to each being, there is not a uniformity, as there are diverse modes of clear, turbid, pure, and mixed *qi*. In the case of a clear-minded and pure person, the *qi* and *li* form a harmonious whole and there is no impediment or concealment caused by the desire for goods. Those belonging to grades below cannot escape the inevitable bounds of the endowed *qi*.⁶⁸

Tasan’s rendering of the Cheng-Zhu account of that which is bad runs the risk of making Zhu’s theory appear as a form of crude determinism. That Tasan sees Zhu Xi as directly positing the turbid material force, or a turbid physical or material endowment, as basis for the existence of that which is bad is problematic.⁶⁹ Physical endowment (*qizhi* 氣質) is randomly bestowed, and as such it cannot be said to be bad per se. If we follow Zhu Xi’s own arguments closely, we discover that the crux of his argument for ethics lies in the belief that human beings are able to act in accordance with the inherent moral precepts that are present within their inner space, in spite of and regardless of the impediments actually presented by one’s limited, turbid, and often distorted psycho-physical endowment, even though this may require varying amounts of effort at moral self-cultivation.

Zhu’s point is that while the purpose of self-cultivation is to overcome the limitations posed by the impediments of the material endowment that makes up our physical, organic selves, if there were no inherently good nature to begin with, there would be no point in striving to overcome the impediments posed by the *qizhi*. Both Zhu Xi and Tasan followed the Mencian line that there is something within oneself upon which to base one’s actions and to pin one’s hopes. They diverged on the content of that which is found inside to guide people to the truth. For Tasan, such an inclination is but an incipient appetite, not a full-blown *a priori* metaphysical entity.

For Zhu Xi, selfish human desire and the desire for goods (*renyu* 人欲) emanate from the material physical endowment. Zhu explained that the unsavory element that develops in people after birth is largely due to contact with the material world and

⁶⁷ Zhu, *Zhuzi yulei*, chapter 4, section 60.

⁶⁸ Zhu, *Zhu Xi ji*, 15. 572.

⁶⁹ Chōng, *Chōngbon*, 9. 280.

the selfish desires that can result. Zhu also thought it inevitable that any physically instantiated being with its own individual body concerns itself with its own needs and desires but he did not maintain that this amounts to a certain badness existing inherently in beings themselves. Zhu asserts that private desires are aroused by the cognizance of things and objects. These private desires have the potential to develop into badness (惡). Zhu Xi posits that badness may result from the impediments posed by selfish human desires and the desire for goods after the mind issues forth, with one's endowed *qi* being possibly characterized by partiality, bias or deviance, depending on its clarity or turbidity. If one does not realize that it is incumbent on oneself to take note and monitor particular, possibly deviant, traits in one's respective physical endowment, one will end up in self-deception, leading to badness. Only through such a process of self-awareness and an assiduous effort to overcome one's material endowment based on the nurturing and the maintaining of the innate principle within oneself (*banyang gongfu*) can one escape the bounds of the physical endowment and the outward-oriented desire for goods, and thus avoid or overcome badness. Self-cultivation involves a form of active agency. Even though Tasan dismantles the *li-qi* paradigm, he still adheres to the goal of achieving sagehood in the tradition of the learning of the heart-mind (K. *simhak*, C. *xinxue* 心學) and does not wholly abandon the heritage of self-cultivation that is the hallmark of Neo-Confucianism. Tasan frames it, however, in a new and different context. As we have seen, Tasan decoupled the notion of *xing* from *li* by incorporating elements from the tenets of Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophies and redefined *xing* as an incipient proclivity toward the good in line with something more akin to classical Mencian teachings on human nature.

Conclusion

Taking recourse to the Aristotelian theory of four causes and the distinction between substance and accidents, as well as to the concept of intelligent consciousness (*lingjue*), Ricci argued that *taiji/li* cannot serve as the origin of existence. *Li* belongs to the category of accident in the Aristotelian scheme, is not a creator of things, and does not have consciousness. It thus fails the test as the source of creation and cannot be equivalent to the Lord of heaven, *Tianzhu*. For Ricci, *li* is not a universal ontological principle and no more than the formal cause of each individual object, existing within the substance and giving it a name as an existence, and thus acting in the capacity of defining the object *a posteriori*.

In Zhu Xi, the *li* is always flowing and progressing (*liuxing*) amidst the process of

creative growth and gradual expiring of things in the world of *qi*, while at the same time operating as the constant *suoyi* (reason, cause, purpose, ground, means, measure) for individual objects or events in the making. *Taiji/li* serves as the unifying order or principle of the growth and activity in both the natural world and the world of human society, but the term “principle” here would be laden with the multiple meanings assumed in the term *suoyi*.

Matteo Ricci argued that *taiji* has to rely on *qi* (psycho-physical matter), and as such to be distinguished from the God of Christianity, who in terms of grace and virtue, represents a being of perfection (*ens perfectissimum*), and a being not dependent on anything else for its existence. However, *taiji* as a concept exhibits certain characteristics of the ultimate principle in scholastic philosophy. It is ironic that Ricci was unable to detect such similarities.

The original metaphysical entity in Zhu Xi never exists separately from phenomena in the evolving organismic world of *qi*, but nonetheless its status is distinct from *suocheng zhi ji*, the physical frame or vessel that “carries” the metaphysical entity with it, by operating in the capacity of a *suoyi* for individual objects or events. In a sense, *li* is an ontological entity that is engaged in constant, active relationship with diverse phenomena (*qi*) that are continuously coming into and going out of existence. When Ricci defined *li* narrowly in terms of the substance-accident or the substance-attribute paradigms, he ignored the significance of such metaphysical characteristics of *li*.

Tasan took after Ricci in refuting the main metaphysical conceptions of the school of nature and principle, most notably *taiji*, *li*, and *xing*. In lieu of the Bible or western philosophy as the standard reference, however, Tasan appealed to the *Six Classics* as the base for his claim that the Cheng-Zhu metaphysical terms were in fact pseudo-Buddhist in origin and content. Tasan also shared with Ricci the rejection of various exercises in self-cultivation linked to the concept of innate *li* employed in Zhu Xi’s school, including nurturing and keeping the innate principle within oneself (*banyang gongfu*) and quiet meditation (*jingzuo*).

What is interesting is that although Tasan did not cite him, he used Ricci indirectly as a methodology for the critique of the main tenets of Cheng-Zhu thought. Tasan actually used terms similar to those of Ricci such as *zongpin*, *yilai* and *zili* to expound on his refutation of the metaphysical concept of *li* in Zhu Xi and his school. Although this may indicate that Tasan was simply following Yulgok’s definition of *li* and *qi* in giving his own, the specific vocabulary shows the marked influence of Ricci on his thought. If Tasan meant the two words *chayu chi mul* and *ũibui chi p’um* to be used in the sense of substance and attribute Ricci defined, then they are quite similar to Ricci’s *zili zhe* and *yilai zhe*.

Like Ricci, Tasan did not recognize or account for the role of *li* as the ground, cause or the reason for the existence and operation of *qi* as held by the school of nature and principle. The point where Tasan diverged most markedly from Ricci with respect to the critique of principle, nature, and the formulation “Nature is in fact principle (*Xing ji li*)” is in his view on *xing*. Tasan was in agreement with Ricci that *li* is but an accident. Although they both separate *xing* from *li* and sever the meaning of *xing* from its connotation of original moral human nature, their alternative explanations of the linguistic term differ considerably.

Tasan’s unique contribution is his new definition of *xing* (K. *sŏng*) as the appetite or preference [for the moral good] (K. *keibo*, C. *shihao*), which is Mencian in its affirmation of the presence of an incipient tendency toward the good in human beings. Tasan’s identity as a scholar belonging to the orthodox Way (C. *sidao*, K. *sado* 斯道) comes to the fore in the unfolding of his theory of nature as he reinterprets the meaning of *xing* in the *Six Classics* as the appetite or preference [for good]. Tasan maintains that this *xing* (K. *sŏng*), although divested of its metaphysical baggage, is still mandated and bestowed by heaven as stated in the *Zhongyong* [Doctrine of the Mean] in his various works on the Four Books. Zhu Xi’s metaphysical account has greater plausibility as an explanation of the normative function of *li* but Ricci deemed it inadequate as a complete comprehensive metaphysical account of the world. Tasan too, who was concerned primarily with the moral dimensions of *li*, saw it as inadequate for bringing about moral motivation.

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