

# Comparison between Confucian Democracy of Dasan Jeong Yak-yong and Modern Democracy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

YI Jongwoo

## Abstract

*One salient feature of modern democracy is that people elect their head of state, either directly or indirectly. This popular democracy is the result of revolutions in England, the USA, and France. However, this feature is also present in Confucian democracy as asserted by the Korean thinker Dasan Jeong Yak-yong. As such, this article presents a comparative analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a founding framer of modern democracy, and Dasan, a Korean Confucian and democratic thinker. Rousseau argued that the people had the right to elect their sovereign directly and dismiss him if he harmed peace and equality in the city-state (in this case, Geneva). However, Dasan claimed that lords chosen by the people had the right to elect the ruler and remove or even execute a tyrant if it were justified. Although Dasan and Rousseau did not influence each other, they made the common argument that the people had a right to elect and remove their chief. Rousseau stated that the people could elect their ruler directly, but that they should remove that ruler in a peaceful way through an assembly. Dasan suggested that the people elect their ruler indirectly and remove a tyrant through justified revolution. Their respective conceptions of democracy both presuppose that the ruler should act on behalf of the people. Thus, this article analyzes the claims of these two thinkers when a ruler causes misery to the people.*

**Keywords:** Confucianism, democracy, people, popular will, ruler, revolution

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## Introduction

As of the 21st century, many countries of the world have adopted democracy as a political system. Most authoritarian states, including the former Soviet Union, abandoned authoritarianism in the latter part of the 20th century. A fundamental concept in democracy is the idea of the popular election of the ruler. At present, in the Republic of Korea (South Korea), as in most of the world, citizens elect their provincial governors, National Assembly members, local councilors, and even their president, directly. This modern democratic system was eloquently articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), whose thinking influenced the French Revolution. The thought of the Korean philosopher Dasan Jeong Yak-yong (1762–1836) is similar to that of Rousseau. In their political thinking, Dasan and Rousseau shared an emphasis on popular democracy despite their cultural and generational divide. That is, they both argued that the people, even though they might be impoverished and weak, had the right to elect and remove their chief. Dasan's Confucian democracy is people-oriented. It was influenced by Mencius but reconstructed and synthesized by Korean Confucians.

In this article, I will compare the political philosophies of Dasan and Rousseau. My objective is to seek commonalities between the Confucian democracy of Dasan and the modern democracy of Rousseau. Many studies have shown that Dasan's thinking has features of modern democracy, though others have argued to the contrary.<sup>1</sup> However, there has been no comparative study between Dasan and Rousseau to date. In addition, many researchers have viewed Rousseau's thought as seminal to the development of modern democracy (Dobrescu 2009, 467–490; Labro 2010–2011, 179–190; Macadam 1983, 231–234; Marcos 2000, 205–230; Simon 2004, 433–454; Vincenti 2006,

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1. The political thought of Dasan has been the focus of research of many scholars. They have debated whether Dasan was “modern.” At first, most researchers seemed to argue that modernity was present in Dasan (Ahn 1999, 303–304; Cho 1976, 82; Han 2002, 150–151). Later, some researchers, such as Don Baker (2013), disputed this, arguing that Dasan lacked modernity. Lee Yong-Joo (2013, 185–187) posed an argument similar to Baker's, viewing Dasan's “Tangnon 湯論” (Treatise on Ideal Government)” not as an argument for modern democracy, but rather for the reformation of Confucian statecraft.

25–23), though some authors have argued that Rousseau’s thought influenced the emergence of totalitarianism (Dunn 2002) or the communism of Marx and Lenin (Oh 2009, 228). However, I will not focus on whether the thought of Dasan contains features of modern democracy; instead, I will concentrate on the current value of Dasan’s Confucian democracy and compare it to the modern democracy as promoted by Rousseau.

## Historical Background

Dasan was influenced by reform-minded Neo-Confucian scholars like Seongho Yi Ik (1681–1763), Yulgok Yi I (1536–1584), and Bangye Yu Hyeongwon (1622–1673). Yi Ik established the Seongho School that focused on studies of classical Chinese texts from the pre-Han and Han periods (206BC–AD220), but is also known as having pioneered the Silhak 實學 (Practical Learning) school of Confucianism. Yi Ik’s thinking was based on a people-oriented doctrine and the statecraft of Yulgok Yi I and Bangye Yu Hyeongwon (1622–1673), as illustrated in the following quotes:

At that time, Yulgok asserted a number of reforms associated with sound national governance. However, high-level officials showed their dissatisfaction with his reforms, though by current standards his arguments were self-evident and appealing. Most of them may be enforced.<sup>2</sup>

In Joseon Dynasty, Yu Hyung-won was second to none in overall state affairs. Notwithstanding, he was always under continuous pressure. He failed to put forth his own thoughts with his real intention, which should be something desired. Yi Ik wrote *Gwagurok* 藿憂錄 (On Caring People’s

2. “如近世李栗谷多言更張，當時議者不聽也，以今考之，明快切實，八九可行，蓋國朝以來識務之最，惜乎今之尊之也” (Yi Ik, “Non gyeongjang 論更張” [Discussion on the Reformation of Old Systems], *Seongho jeonjip* [Complete Works of Seongho Yi Ik], vol. 46, 345c); “嘗曰我朝惟李栗谷，柳磻溪爲識務之最，而或抑而不施，或蘊而未顯，是爲可恨。於是作藿憂錄，其目十八，．．．皆是治平之術也” (Yi Ik, “Burok 附錄” [Supplement], vol. 2, “Sijang 謚狀” [Request for a Posthumous Epithet], *Seongho jeonjip* [Complete Works of Seongho Yi Ik], 197d).

Living), consisting of 18 chapters, . . . all of which are related to methods of improving people's living.<sup>3</sup>

The reason King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800) appointed Dasan to public office at the highest rank was because the King himself was focusing on a reform of the social system.

Dasan was also influenced by Western Learning (*seohak* 西學), namely, Catholicism and the natural sciences that were introduced to the Korean peninsula in the mid- to late Joseon period (1392–1910). Western Learning captivated the attention of Silhak scholars, but eventually contributed to the division of the Seongho School into two groups, the “anti-Western Learning line” (*gongseopa* 攻西派) and the “pro-Western Learning line” (*chinseopa* 親西派). The anti-Western Learning line led by An Jeong-bok 安鼎福 (1712–1791) and Shin Hu-dam 愼後聃 (1702–1761) criticized Catholicism while the pro-Western Learning line led by Kwon Cheol-sin 權哲身 (1736–1801) and Yi Byeok 李燾 (1754–1785) was in favor of it. Dasan can be said to have been influenced by both groups.

In comparison, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a thinker living under the absolute monarchy (*ancien régime*) of France's Louis XV (r. 1715–1774). At that time, the common people did not enjoy their civic rights, although modern civil society in which people could claim their rights was soon to be born. By contrast, Englishmen had already obtained their civic rights through their Glorious Revolution of 1688. One such right was that the government should protect private property, an argument made by John Locke (1632–1704) (2012, 99). This was the birth of modern civil society that would gradually spread over Europe. However, its consequence was the creation of great inequalities of wealth (Peled 1980, 1044). Rousseau argued for the equality of all men, claiming that inequalities would split the civic community.

3. “嘗曰我朝惟李栗谷，柳疇溪爲識務之最，而或抑而不施，或蘊而未顯，是爲可恨。於是作藿憂錄，其目十八，... 皆是治平之術也” (Yi Ik, “Burok,” vol. 2, “Sijang,” *Seongho jeonjip*, 197d).

## Elections and Popular Removal of the Ruler

Succinctly put, modern democracy can be described as a people's free election of their governors. This spirit can also be discerned in Dasan's statement that, in ancient times, people chose their own chief. Dasan said that originally there was no overall ruler; people simply existed. However, people eventually needed others to resolve conflicts arising among them. Therefore, they elected leaders and these leaders assembled to elect the overall ruler.<sup>4</sup> In other words, he stated that the ruler did not descend from heaven, nor did he rise up from the ground. It was the people who chose their lords and these lords then chose the ruler. In this context, Dasan argued that, if lords could not govern their domains properly, then the people had the right to remove these lords. By the same token, if the ruler cannot govern the kingdom properly, the lords may expel the ruler as well.

In what manner does the Son of Heaven in fact exist? Will Heaven send his Son through the rain to establish him as the Son of Heaven or make him emerge from the earth as the Son of Heaven? Here is what I think. Five families constituted a small neighboring community and chose one among them and appointed him the community chief. Then five communities formed a hamlet and chose one among those community chiefs to appoint as the hamlet chief. A few hamlets then constituted a township and chose a head. A few townships then constituted a county and chose a head. This process continued and the lord of lords became the ruler of

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4. The "Wonmok 原牧" (On the Ruler) describes the roles of the local governor and the ruler. The governors were those chosen by the people. Consequently, they were obligated to serve the people. Yet at the time the people were suffering due to the ill doings of these local governors. Therefore, Dasan criticized them in his "Wonmok": "遼古之初, 民而已, 豈有牧哉? 民于于然聚居, 有一夫與鄰闕莫之決, 有叟焉善爲公言, 就而正之, 四鄰咸服, 推而共尊之, 名曰: 里正 . . . 四方之伯, 推一人以爲宗, 名之曰: 皇王" (In ancient times, did not only lay people exist in the absence of any governors or rulers? People lived in a village. When a dispute was not amicably settled by the parties, they sought to resolve the case through an elder adhering to impartiality. Admired for his fair judgment, all tribes selected the elder as a well-respected man called the neighborhood chief. . . . All feudal lords appointed a person called the ruler.) (Jeong Yak-yong, "Wonmok," *Yeoyudang jeonseo* [Complete Works of Yeoyudang Jeong Yak-yong], book 1, vol. 1, 213–214).

the political entity that was formed in the end. So, the ruler was the one who was selected as the ruler by the people. If the people had not chosen him, then he could not have become the ruler. By the same token, if the five family heads found some reasons for which they could not support their community chief, they could meet and decide to replace him. This process continued and reached the upper-level community unit to replace the ruler. In the above process of so-called “subjects overthrowing their sovereign,” if the lords could change the ruler, what was the motivation behind it? This does not mean that when the sovereign is changed, the person who once sat as sovereign cannot step down to a lesser post, such as a “feudal” prince.<sup>5</sup>

As seen in the quote above, Dasan believed that, in ancient times, the people appointed and dismissed their chief. The passage stating it is the people themselves who select or remove their governor also appears in Dasan’s “Iljuseogeuk eunpyeon byeon 逸周書克殷篇辨” (Review of Meishi’s Annotation of Wu Conquering Zhou):

In each province, all people appointed their elders. They appointed their chief to be called the feudal lord. Through consultations in feudal lord meetings, a ruler was finally appointed to supervise them. . . . If a ruler inflicted cruel or lustful things upon his people, that ruler was ousted by the feudal lords. Then they began searching for other suitable candidates to replace the ousted ruler and then chose the [new] ruler.<sup>6</sup>

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5. “夫天子何爲而有也? 將天雨天子而立之乎? 抑涌出地爲天子乎? 五家爲鄰, 推長於五者爲隣長; 五鄰爲里, 推長於五者爲里長; 五鄙爲縣, 推長於五者爲縣長; 諸縣長之所共推者爲諸侯, 諸侯之所共推者爲天子, 天子者, 衆推之而成者也。夫衆推之而成, 亦衆不推之而不成, 故五家不協, 五家議之, 改鄰長; 五鄰不協, 二十五家議之, 改里長; 九侯八伯不協, 九侯八伯議之, 改天子。九侯八伯之改天子, 猶五家之改鄰長, 二十五家之改里長, 誰肯曰: 臣伐君哉? 又其改之也。使不得爲天子而已, 降而復于諸侯則許之” (Jeong Yak-yong, “Tangnon,” in *Yeoyudang jeonseo*, book 1, vol. 1, 243). “Tangnon” shows the track of development of Dasan’s thought on politics by the people. In “Wonmok” he writes that the people choose their ruler, while in “Tangnon” he appends to this the claim that the people can dismiss their ruler.
6. “民聚而求其長, 長列而求其帥, 各立一帥, 名之曰侯。侯之中有翹楚, 相與會議以戴之, . . . 有暴虐淫荒, 以殘害萬民者, 則相與會議以去之, 又戴一翹楚者, 以爲天子” (Jeong Yak-yong, “Iljuseogeuk eunpyeon byeon,” *Yeoyudang jeonseo*, book 2, 267d). The “Iljuseogeuk eunpyeon byeon” constitutes Dasan’s most advanced writing on popular politics. In it, Dasan reemphasizes his previous claims and corroborates the idea that the people can select and dismiss their rulers.

The “Iljuseogeuk eunpyeon byeon” is a sequel to “Tangnon 湯論” (Treatise on Ideal Government), Dasan wrote it to emphasize the idea once more that the ruler exists for the sake of the people. In “Wonmok,” Dasan stated that the people in ancient times appointed their leaders but unfortunate situations often arose in which the people suffered greatly under such leaders.

If people did not follow the order to offer the grains or cloth they had produced, the incumbent government continued to beat or strike them with a stick until blood was spilled.<sup>7</sup>

These leaders had originally been chosen by the people because they needed a wise man who could keep peace in their community. However, selfish leaders levied heavy taxes upon the people. Therefore, I argue that Dasan said this in order to warn such leaders and provided an historical precedent: “Tang killed the tyrant Jie.” His statement that the people removed their chief was influenced by Mencius’ argument that it was not necessarily mutiny for a minister to kill his ruler; such an act could be done for the sake of humaneness and righteousness, as in the case of Tang of Shang, a minister of Jie, who killed the ruler of Jie.

King Xuan of Qi asked, “Was it a fact that Tang banished Jie and that King Wu punished Zhou?” Mencius replied, “It is so in the records.” The King said, “Is it right for a minister to murder his sovereign?” Mencius said, “He who outrages humanity is a bandit. He who outrages righteousness is a ruffian. Such a person is a mere fellow. I have heard of punishing a mere fellow Zhou, but I have not heard of murdering a sovereign.”<sup>8</sup>

As the people were being oppressed by the tyranny of Jie and Zhou, Tang and Wu, their respective subordinates, killed them. They knew they were enacting the will of the people. This is Mencius’ interpretation of the case. Thus, Mencius’ thought may be termed people-oriented. However, Mencius did not state that the people could choose or dismiss their lords, and the

7. “今之守令. . . 有不出粟米, 麻絲以事之, 則撻之箠之, 見其流血而後止焉” (“Wonmok,” 213d).

8. “齊宣王問曰: 湯放桀, 武王伐紂, 有諸? 孟子對曰: 於傳有之。曰: 臣弑其君可乎? 曰: 賊仁者謂之賊; 賊義者謂之殘, 殘賊之人謂之一夫, 聞誅一夫紂矣, 未聞弑君也” (*Mencius* 2:8).

lords, in turn, could choose or dismiss the ruler.<sup>9</sup> This means that Mencius does not consider it to be the right of people to rebel against a tyrannical ruler. This is the crucial difference between Dasan and Mencius.

A similar statement is also discovered in a passage of Mateo Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven): "The Pope . . . has no heirs to his patrimony. Instead, a good man is elected to succeed him."<sup>10</sup> However, the Pope is not elected by the people, but by cardinals. This is different from what Dasan argues. Dasan might have been unwittingly influenced by this passage in *Tianzhu shiyi*.<sup>11</sup> However, in that work Ricci says nothing about a leader's dismissal by the people. This is another difference between Dasan and Ricci. In fact, Dasan's argument grew out of Mencius, who narrated how Tang and Wu removed the tyrants Jie and Zhou.

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9. Mencius did not believe that the people had the right to rebel against tyrannical rulers (see Tiwald 2008, 272). By contrast, most researchers argue that in Mencius' thinking the people do have the right to rebel against a tyrant (see Tu 1993, 6; Cheng 1998, 149–151; Ching 1998, 72; and Twiss 1998, 41–44). The article of Tiwald refuted these arguments.
10. “西士曰 . . . 主教者之位, 享三國之之, 然不婚配, 故無有襲嗣, 惟擇賢而立” (Ricci 1923, 140).
11. Dasan must have been familiar with the passage on the cardinals' election of the Pope in the *Tianzhu shiyi* of Ricci because he had actually read that book, as can be seen in the following passage: “甲辰春承薰之還也, 臣未及見承薰, 而若鏞與臣, 相逢於津村, 先說承薰薰來西書, 臣請見其書. 蓋承薰非不相親, 而猶不若若鏞之尤切, 故若鏞或以天主實義, 聖世芻蕘等語, 轉送於臣” (When Yi Seung-hun returned home in the spring of 1784, I still could not see him. However, when I met Jeong Yak-yong in the district around the Sungkyunkwan, he told me that Seung-hun brought in books of Western Learning. On hearing this, I told Yak-yong that I wanted to read those books. Actually, I was better acquainted with Yak-yong than Seung-hun. Yak-yong procured me the books, *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 and *Shengshi churao* 聖世芻蕘, and I could not help reading these.) (*Jeongjo sillok* [Annals of King Jeongjo], 13th day of the 11th lunar month, 15th year of King Jeongjo's reign [1791]). In the distant past, the cardinals' election of the Pope was recorded in Yi Su-gwang's (1563–1628) *Jibong yuseol* (Topical Discourses of Jibong Yi Su-gwang). This in turn was quoted by An Jeong-bok (1712–1791), a student of Seong Yi Ik and heir to Dasan: “芝峯類說曰: 大西國, 有利瑪竇者泛海八年, 越八萬里風濤, 居東粵十餘年, 所著天主實義. . . 其俗謂君曰: 教化皇, 不婚娶故無世襲嗣, 擇賢而立之” (The *Jibong yuseol* says, “The Western man Mateo Ricci arrived in China after sailing 80,000 *ri* [around 32,000 km] over eight years, and lived there [in China] for ten years. . . . The ruler of the Catholic Church is called Pope. He cannot marry and has no heirs to his patrimony. Instead, a good man is elected to succeed him.”) (“Cheonhakgo 天學考” [Thoughts on the Heavenly Knowledge], in *Sunamjip* 順菴集 [Complete Works of Sunam An Jeong-bok], vol. 19, 139–140).



Mencius' argument is connoted Confucian democracy in a broader context. Dasan's idea is also similar to that of Rousseau because Dasan also argued that the people had the right to dismiss and appoint their chiefs.

In his writings, Rousseau raised two important issues. The first was: "Does it please the Sovereign to preserve the present form of government?" The second was: "Does it please the people to leave its administration in the hands of those who are actually in charge of it?" (Rousseau 2012, 69–70). Further, Rousseau stated, "the depositaries of the executive power are not people's masters, but its officers; that it [the people] can set them up and pull them down when it likes; that for them there is no question of contract, but of obedience; that in taking charge of the functions the State imposes on them they are doing no more than fulfilling their duty as citizens, without having the remotest right to argue about the conditions" (Rousseau 2012, 68). This idea of Rousseau—that the people can change the government—was very revolutionary at the time because France was then under the absolutist rule of Louis XV.<sup>12</sup> Rousseau argued that the first human community was the family and that the first contract occurred between parents and children (Rousseau 2012, 1). Dasan stated that at first there were only people living in community,<sup>13</sup> and then five families assembled and elected a chief.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Rousseau's first contract was made between parents and children. For Dasan, in his "Tangnon," it is several families that first assemble to elect a chief, who served as the first contract. In other words, Dasan's first contract was made between five families and a community chief. This is none other than a Confucian *contract* based on filial piety, parents' affection for children, and fraternity. Rousseau's first contract is one wherein children need their father to take care of them (Rousseau 2012, 30). This is one difference between Dasan and Rousseau. However, when a father's preservation of his children is a manifestation of his affection, the children's

12. However, some scholars have argued Rousseau can be regarded as a counter-revolutionary (see McNeil 1953).

13. "邃古之初, 民而已, 豈有牧哉?" (In ancient times, did not only lay people exist in the absence of any governors or rulers?) ("Wonmok," 213–214).

14. "五家爲鄰, 推長於五者爲隣長" (Five families constituted a small neighboring community and chose one of their number and appointed him community chief.) ("Tangnon," 243).

obedience to the father is a manifestation of filial piety. In this sense, Rousseau is similar to Dasan.

Dasan stated that the people elected their chief and those chiefs then assembled to elect the ruler. In other words, the people did not elect their ruler directly, but by proxy. This is different from Rousseau's claim that the people should elect their sovereign directly. The former may be called indirect democracy and the latter direct democracy.<sup>15</sup> From Dasan's perspective, this was practicable in a large-scale state such as Joseon on the Korean peninsula. By contrast, for Rousseau, it was practicable only in a small city-state, such as Geneva (Rousseau 2012, 74–76), because in such a polity people could easily assemble and vote (Rousseau 2012, 46). Had Dasan lived in a small city-state, he might have made the same claim as Rousseau. Rousseau made his argument to criticize the tyranny of absolute monarchy that was based on the theory of the divine right of kings. Similarly, Dasan made the criticism that the ruler took his right to levy taxes on the people for granted. Furthermore, he argued that the ruler must act in the political realm for the welfare of the people, stating that this also should be applied equally to local government heads.

Does a governor exist to serve his people, or do his people exist to serve the governor? Currently, people are producing grains or cloth to serve a governor. Some people mobilize to attend to horses or carriages when seeing off a departing governor or welcoming a new one. On top of that, people spare no effort to serve a governor with all their heart and strength. Indeed, do people exist to serve a governor? No, never. A governor exists

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15. Although Rousseau wished for a democratic republic, he did not believe that ideal democracy was possible in reality. He wrote: "If there were people of gods, their government would be democratic. Such perfect government is not for men" (2012, 47). He also recognized the danger of democracy, remarking that there is no type of government more vulnerable to civil war and internal troubles than a democratic one: "It may be added that there is no government subjected to civil wars and intestine agitations than is a democratic or popular government" (2012, 46). Actually, Rousseau pursued the ideal community in the constitutional proposal for Corsica and his ideas for improvements to the Polish Constitution, which can be regarded as specific constitutional theories. However, these were not democratic (Putterman 2001).

to serve his people.<sup>16</sup>

From Rousseau's perspective, it was the primacy of popular sovereignty working through an assembly that could replace a ruler. However, for Dasan, it was the people who replaced their chief through an assembly. The peoples' selection and dismissal of their ruler is realized by integrating the individual wills of the community. Rousseau argues that the general will (*la volonté générale*) is established when individuals transfer their individual will to that of communal will. Therefore, in Rousseau's thinking, a social contract could be made through the general will. Rousseau's general will connotes the will of society and the totality of individual freedom in a righteous society. In addition, he argued that the general will has a constant tendency towards equality with an aim toward the common good.

Dasan argues that the free will to choose between right and wrong is given to individuals by Nature.<sup>17</sup> To him, moral behavior implies public jus-

16. “牧爲民有乎? 民爲牧生乎? 民出粟米麻絲, 以事其牧, 民出與馬騶從, 以送迎其牧, 民竭其膏血津髓, 以肥其牧, 民爲牧生乎? 曰: 否否, 牧爲民有也” (“Wonmok,” 213).

17. “天之於人, 予之以自主之權, 使其欲善則爲善, 欲惡則爲惡” (Heaven has endowed human beings with a faculty of deliberation to do good or evil.) (Jeong Yak-yong, *Maengja youi* 孟子要義 [Essential Meanings in the Book of Mencius], *Yeoyudang jeonseo*, book 2, vol. 5, 112c). I think this statement was influenced by Ricci's ideas in *Tianzhu shiyi*: “天主賦人此性, 能行二者, 所以厚人類也, 其能取捨此善, 非但增爲善之功, 于俾其功爲我功焉, 故曰: 天主所以生我, 非用我, 所以善我, 乃用我 此之謂也” (When the Lord of Heaven bestowed this nature on man, man was capable of doing both good and evil, and man was enriched thereby. Because man can take or reject goodness, not only is the merit of goodness increased, but that merit becomes man's own. It is therefore said that when the Lord of Heaven produced the man, he made no use of him, but that when he wanted him to be good, he had to make use of him.) (Ricci 1923, 118). This is a Roman Catholic catechism that Matteo Ricci composed, in which he made a Thomistic modification to Confucianism. Thomas Aquinas applied Aristotelian rationalism to Roman Catholic theology, thereby constructing what is accepted as the Roman Catholic theology of free will. Dasan, in turn, applied Thomism to Confucianism and established Practical Learning. Therefore, arguably, Dasan's philosophy of Practical Learning connotes Thomism and Aristotelianism (see Baker 2002, 62–68). For Dasan, a human being's moral sense or inclination toward ethical virtue is not the result of socialization or nurture, but rather an innate mechanism or trait (Chung 2013, 120). By contrast, Dasan's notion of the “faculty of autonomous thinking” (*jaju ji gwon* 自主之權) or the “beam balance” (*gwonhyeong* 權衡) interprets it as free choice, that is, Mencian rational thinking (see Ham 2012, 161). Baek

tice, whereas immoral behavior implies private desire. The human individual harbors both a desire for public justice and private desire. However, political freedom, meaning the freedom of the people to choose their chief, implies the public. In other words, it is to exercise the good that people assemble and dethrone a failing chief; it is the “heavenly principle” (*cheolli* 天理; *tianli* in Chinese). Thus, Dasan did not directly articulate a communal contract or a social contract in his writings because he regarded it as a natural duty and heavenly principle for the ruler to act in the political realm for the good of the people. Therefore, arguments for political freedom by Dasan and Rousseau share the same sort of logical trajectory.

Rousseau did not specifically mention how to resist when a sovereign violated a law that had been agreed upon by the people. Thus, it could be said that Rousseau only influenced the French Revolution indirectly. In this regard, it is difficult to find a direct relation between Rousseau and Dasan because of the latter’s statement that the people may be justified in executing a tyrannical chief they have chosen because such an act had ancient precedent. These acts can be said to constitute revolutions. However, Dasan does not necessarily mean that people can directly kill their ruler in a revolution. Rather, the people can remove the ruler indirectly through the lords and the ministers. In this regard, it is similar to the democratic system of some modern countries where people can remove their president during his or her term of office, although this is a relatively rare occurrence.<sup>18</sup> Dasan’s Confucian democracy means that people have the right to remove a tyrannical ruler.

Dasan’s political statements were similar to those of Locke. However, in Dasan’s view, the overarching political aim was to ensure a peaceful com-

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(2007, 416–421) argues that Dasan’s philosophy is derived from an annotation of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, in which he “chooses what is good and holds it firmly”

18. For example, in the United States system, the president can be impeached, and if later convicted by the Senate, he can be removed from office. President Nixon resigned because he was facing imminent impeachment and likely conviction. Just about all modern democracies have some provision for removing a bad ruler during his or her term of office. The South Korean president, Park Geun-hye, was impeached by the National Assembly in December 2016, and eventually removed from office in March 2017 following the Constitutional Court’s decision to uphold her impeachment.

munity, whereas for Locke (2012, 100) the government's role was to protect people's lives, liberty, and property. This is the crucial difference between Dasan and Locke.

## Obligations of the People to the Ruler

During Dasan's time, people had a duty to pay taxes to the ruler along with obligatory compulsory labor and military duty.<sup>19</sup> However, Dasan criticized these unfair duties and laws.<sup>20</sup> For example, Dasan paid wages to laborers constructing the Hwaseong fortress in line with the intention of King Jeongjo. At that time, commoners were required to perform unpaid corvée duties. However, King Jeongjo opted to pay them wages.<sup>21</sup> Because of this, Suwon Fortress was built faster and sturdier than the Han Fortress (Han seong), which was built in the era of King Sejong (r. 1418–1450). In Dasan's work, the foremost duty of the people was to pay taxes to the ruler. This was written in his discussion of the communal farming system (*yeojeonje* 閭田制) in “Jeollon 田論” (On Land). His argument was that, first and foremost,

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19. “領中樞府事蔡濟恭啓言: “國有大役, 則不得不使民, 有國通行之例也” (Chae Je-gong, Director of the Privy Council, told the king, “If there is a great construction project in a country, it is common in national governance that the people should be mobilized.”) (*Jeongjo sillok* 正祖實錄 [Annals of King Jeongjo], 22nd day of the 5th lunar month, 18th year of King Jeongjo's reign [1794]).
20. “田疇紊亂, 賦斂偏辟” (At this time, the land system had many flaws. Consequently, officials collected taxes unfairly from the people.) (“Bangnye chobon seo 邦禮草本序” [Preface to the Draft of a Treatise on Government], book 1, vol. 12, 270b). *Bangnye chobon* is the original title of *Gyeongse yupyo*. This entry is recorded in the *Gyeongse yupyo in* 經世遺表引 (Introduction to the Design for Good Government), volume 1 of the *Gyeongse yupyo* (Design for Good Government), where Dasan argues for the reform of the government system.
21. “上曰: ‘不待卿言, 豈不知事面之若此, 而本府城役, 必欲不勞一民, 予意有所在矣’” (The king said, “How could I understand what is going on if you never mention it? However, every single person must be mobilized to build Suwon Fortress, and I intend to do so.”) (*Jeongjo sillok*, 22nd day of the 5th month, 18th year of King Jeongjo's reign [1794]). This was the king's reply to the proposal of Chae Je-gong that people and monks should be used to build Suwon Fortress.

people should pay a portion of their harvest to the ruler. Second, people should pay a portion of their harvest to the hamlet chief. Third and lastly, they can distribute the remainder of their harvest amongst themselves according to their working days.

What do I mean by hamlet-land system? Under that system, you delineate boundaries according to the topography of the land—mountains, valleys, rivers, and streams. The territory enveloped by such a boundary you call the hamlet. . . . The hamlet chief will record in a ledger each day someone has worked. When the fall harvest is in, all five grains of the harvest will be shipped to the hamlet chief's office. He will divide up the grain and first ship off the taxes to the government. Next, he will pay his budget. Then he divides up the remainder of the grain among the hamlet members according to the days they worked as recorded in the ledger. . . . Those who have worked the most would get the most grain. Those who have worked the least would get the least. People's important duty was to pay taxes to their ruler.<sup>22</sup>

The system that Dasan developed was to save the starving and reform the land system of his time.

Dasan put reform into practice, which was divergent from the convention of King Jeongjo's era. Dasan practiced that reform because he thought that human nature was like an appetite,<sup>23</sup> while the role of the leader was to satisfy the people's needs. Although Dasan did not state that people could reject a ruler when the ruler asked them to provide labor for construction on behalf of the kingdom, he did think that labor should be compensated with wages. However, Dasan also advocated the reinforcement of monarchical power. This was because he thought royal authority should be stronger in the case of King Jeongjo so that that monarch could implement

22. “何謂閭田? 因山谿川原之勢而畫之爲界, 界之所函, 名之曰: 閭. . . 每役一日, 閭長注於冊簿, 秋既成, 凡五穀之物, 悉輸之閭長之堂, 分其糧, 先輸之公家之稅, 次輸之閭長之祿, 以其餘配之於日役之簿. . . 用力多者得糧高, 用力寡者得糧廉” (“Jeollon,” book 11, vol. 3, 233).

23. “曰: 性者, 嗜好也” (Human nature is appetite.) (“Jachan myojimyeong 自撰墓誌銘” [An Autobiographical Epitaph], book 1, vol. 16, 346). The “Jachan myojimyeong” is the epitaph Dasan wrote for himself concerning his ideas and career.

reforms.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Rousseau argued that citizens had the obligation to serve the state when the sovereign so requested. However, he thought the sovereign should not impose unnecessary burdens upon the citizenry. This is different from what Dasan argued. Unlike Dasan, Rousseau did not mention in *The Social Contract* that the state should pay wages to citizens:

Every service a citizen can render the State should be rendered as soon as the Sovereign demands it. However, the Sovereign, for its part, cannot impose upon its subjects any fetters that are useless to the community, nor can it even wish to do so, for no more by the law of reason than by the law of nature can anything occur without a cause. (Rousseau 2012, 19)

Rousseau claimed that people could reject an obligation when the ruler tried to impose an unnecessary burden upon them; if the ruler tries to mobilize people by force, people are obliged to resist by force. However, Rousseau did not explicitly state as much. By contrast, Dasan stated that people had the right to kill an unjust or tyrannical ruler, although Dasan did not state that people should do so directly. Instead, the lords whom the people elected should remove such a ruler. Therefore, Dasan advocated revolution, in which the lords with popular support would remove the ruler, not the revolution of the people per se. In addition, Dasan argued that people could remove a lord if that lord did something egregious in the political realm. However, it is plausible to assert that Dasan may have thought the people had the right to remove a tyrannical lord, considering that he said a lord who is a minister of a ruler could expel a tyrannical ruler. Dasan considered such an act as neither mutiny nor treason, but justice. Following

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24. Dasan's advocacy of strong sovereign power centering on the king is influenced by King Jeongjo's claim of *supreme principles* (*hwanggeuk* 皇極) of statecraft, which was brought into practice with the support of the Southerners (*namin* 南人) faction. In other words, Dasan and King Jeongjo were of the same mind concerning the direction of the royal regime. However, Dasan also occasionally criticized King Jeongjo for the prevalence of petty officials (*chogye munsin* 抄啓文臣) and the non-enforcement of the well-field system (see Park 2003, 14–26).

this line of reasoning, Dasan seems to have thought that the people could remove a tyrannical ruler directly if the lords fail to do so.

In addition, Rousseau claimed that people were obligated to a righteous state and that this would make them free. That is, individuals could become dominated by other individuals when they are free and independent from a state. Therefore, a righteous state could and should protect the people. Rousseau writes:

In order that the social compact is not an empty formula, it tacitly includes the undertaking, which alone can give force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free; for this is a condition which, by giving each citizen to his country, secures him against all personal dependence. In this lies the key to the working of the political machine; this alone legitimizes civil undertakings, which, without it, would be absurd, tyrannical, and liable to most frightful abuses. (Rousseau 2012, 11)<sup>25</sup>

Rousseau's general will means public interest. However, it is not geared towards profiting the majority. That is, it connotes the common good. Rousseau takes a critical stance, arguing that the interests of the majority may be damaging to those of the minority and the interests of the majority may not be the general will, but an individual opinion. The general will that he described was what was determined to be for the common good. Thus,

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25. Talmon (1953, 43) argues that Rousseau's philosophy could lead to totalitarian democracy, as there is a linkage between externalized general will and the idea of people's supreme power. Susan Dunn (2002, 4) points out that Rousseau's thinking, which was very radical and utopian at the time, unwittingly generated in the 20th century a situation in which totalitarianism, democracy of a one-party system, and communitarianism were complicatedly intertwined. James Miller (1984, 118) also states that elements of democratic dictatorship contained in Rousseau's philosophy flowed into the mainstream tradition of European socialism and met the needs of Vladimir Lenin in the era of socialist movements. More importantly, the discussion of Rousseau regarding freedom as a key component of human rights can be said to have influenced the thinking of Karl Marx (Oh 2009, 228). Bertrand Russell (1959, 660) even argues that Hitler was a product of Rousseau.



members should comply with it. Therefore, Rousseau's general will was not necessarily the interests of the majority or the ruler. He stated that people should obey the state when the state needed the people. This meant obedience to the general will.

The first and most important deduction from the principles we have laid down so far is that the general will alone can direct the State according to the objective for which it was instituted, i.e., the common good: for if the clashing of particular interests made the establishment of societies necessary, the agreement of these very interests made it possible. The common element in these different interests is what forms the social tie. Were there no point of agreement between them all, no society could exist. It is solely on the basis of this common interest that every society should be governed. (Rousseau 2012, 16)

Thus, Rousseau's general will did not mean the profit of the majority. Just as Rousseau endeavored to do, Dasan tried to fulfill the public good and regarded it as a heavenly principle. Moreover, he did not argue for the profit of the majority. His intent was not to replace the ruler with the majority will of a community, but to replace the ruler's will with the just and righteous interests of the whole. In short, the Confucian democracy of Dasan and the modern democracy of Rousseau share some aspects in their concepts of the public and justice. They both agree that the actions of the people and the ruler should be based on justice and rationality.

## Conclusion

Dasan and Rousseau share some aspects of their thinking, despite their separation in time, space, and culture. They both argued that certain rights, such as that of the poor and powerless people to elect and remove a chief, are *universal*, or at least crosscultural, regardless of time and place. Furthermore, it can be argued that, although their respective philosophies were derived from very different traditions, there is a "universality" in their common approaches to the same or similar issues. Dasan pursued a Confucian

democracy under the influence of Mencius, while Rousseau is considered a founder of modern democratic theory. Yet, there are similarities in their two philosophies perhaps because of the “universal” nature of the discourse. Rousseau has had tremendous influence on the development of modern liberal democracy as well as on the communism of Marx and Lenin (Oh 2009, 228). In addition, Rousseau influenced modern European social democratic policies of France, Germany, and the Nordic countries.

Many contemporary states have adopted democracy. Whether liberal democracy or social democracy, one of the most critical aspects of democratic systems is the principle that the ruler should act in the political realm for the benefit of the people, whatever ideology he adopts. In this respect, the political ideas of Dasan and Rousseau are both for the people. In this *age of hybridity*, such a comparative study as this may prove fruitful and deserving of scholarly attention. Moreover, modern democracy is a kind of representative politics in which the ruler is elected by the will of the majority. In such a process, the interests of the minority can be harmed or sacrificed entirely. Therefore, it is necessary to heed the populist political philosophies of Dasan and Rousseau in order to avoid any deleterious effects and to realize a better and more just society.

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