

T'aengniji by Yi Chunghwan (1690–1756?): Land and Politics

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Abstract: This article examines *T'aengniji* (1751) by Yi Chunghwan (1690–1756?) in three different historical periods: late Chosŏn, the beginning of the 1910s, and the 1970s. These three stages were selected to compare how changes in Korean politics were reflected in the understanding of the book and in the understanding of the idea of *sojunghwa* 小中華, or Korea as “Little China,” in particular. These stages also depict the popularization of *T'aengniji* from its completion by Yi Chunghwan in manuscript form to its printing by Ch'oe Namsŏn (1890–1957) in 1912 and the first translations into Korean during Pak Chŏnghŭi's presidency (1963–79). A comparison of different *T'aengniji* manuscripts with the printed version by Ch'oe Namsŏn shows that the devotion to the Ming dynasty emphasized by Yi Chunghwan vanished in the beginning of the twentieth century under the pressure of the strong influence of social Darwinist ideas. The version by Ch'oe Namsŏn was used for the first translations from *hanmun* (Literary Sinitic) into modern Korean, thus changing the original meaning of many phrases. On the other hand, a Korea-centered *T'aengniji* that emphasized the importance of Korean history, geography, and culture contributed to the building of modern Korean ethnicity. Analysis of the same description of Mount Paektu in Yi Chunghwan's *T'aengniji* and Ch'oe Namsŏn's *T'aengniji* shows how one piece of information was read differently by different readers. Depending on the historical period when the book was read and the dominant political course of the time, the Korean Peninsula depicted in *T'aengniji* was either Confucian and *sadae* compliant or prosperous, strong, and autonomous.

Keywords: *T'aengniji*, historical rereading, interpretation, educational politics, Ch'oe Namsŏn

Introduction

T'aengniji 擇里志, a famous work of Korean geographic and geomantic literature, illustrates the idea of a connection between changes in history and understandings of geography and nature. The title *T'aengniji* can be translated as *Book for Choosing Settlements* (Yoon C. 2019) or *Treatise on Selecting a Village* (Bohnet 2020: 569).

This book was probably completed in 1751 by Yi Chunghwan 李重煥 (1690–1756?), a Korean scholar in reclusion, and until the beginning of the twentieth century circulated in multiple anonymous manuscript versions. Judging by the number of *T'aengniji* manuscripts in libraries and in internet auctions, Inshil Ch'oe Yoon (2013: 227) suggests that over the course of two centuries there could have been hundreds, if not thousands, of hand-copied texts. The

book was written in a traditional *chiji minch'an* 地誌 民饌 approach—a gazetteer inspired by the author's own will.¹

In 1884, *Taengniji* was translated into Japanese under the title *Chōsen hachiiki-shi* 朝鮮八域誌 (Book of the Eight Chosŏn Districts) by Japanese doctor and diplomat Kondō Masuki 近藤真鋤 (1840–92) (Fang 1969: 177–78),² who traveled to Chosŏn in 1870 to work in the diplomatic legation in Pusan. It was the first translation that introduced *Taengniji* to Japanese readers but did not influence Korean scholarship.³

More important, almost thirty years later, in 1912, Korean poet and publisher Ch'oe Namsŏn 崔南善 (1890–1957) unified different existing versions of Yi Chunghwan's work and published an edited version of *Taengniji*. This was also in *hanmun* (Literary Sinitic) but had some corrections both in the organization of the chapters and in the writing style, which will be discussed below.

In 1923–24, another edition of *Taengniji* was published by the *Umun'gwan sŏhoe* 友文館書會. The book was named *Secret Geographic Descriptions of the Eight Provinces* (*Chosŏn p'alto pimil chiji* 朝鮮八道秘密地誌). It was in mixed script and differed from Ch'oe Namsŏn's *Taengniji*. This text was edited by writers Yun Hūigu 尹喜求 (1867–1926) and Hyŏn Pyŏngju 玄丙周 (1880–1938).

In the 1970s, Korean scholars used original manuscripts of Yi Chunghwan's work, Ch'oe Namsŏn's *Taengniji*, and the reprinted *Chosŏn p'alto pimil chiji*. However, with the first translations of the book into modern Korean, it was Ch'oe Namsŏn's *Taengniji* that became the basis for subsequent translations and research.⁴

Today, the book is considered one of the most valuable sources on Chosŏn geography and economics. *Taengniji* was broad in its scope and covered many topics, from Korean history to trade, so naturally it attracted different readers who chose what they considered most important. Some anonymous readers changed the text (Yoon C. 2013: 225). Some readers incorporated parts of *Taengniji* into their own works (Pae 2015: 181; Yoon C. 2013, 226).

This article argues that *Taengniji* by Yi Chunghwan is also an important source on the idea of *sojunghwa* (小中華, “Small China”) in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Chosŏn. The concept of *sojunghwa* meant that, in terms of preserving cultural values, Chosŏn was a legitimate heir to the Middle Kingdom and thus the new cultural center of the Far East after the Ming-Qing transition. Yi Chunghwan proved his point through geographical, historical, and cultural examples. Due to changed historical premises, this context was not encouraged by Ch'oe Namsŏn and his followers, who succeeded in eliminating this information. Later, with the growing popularity of the idea of resurrecting late-Chosŏn *sirhak* (實學, “practical learning”) in 1930–90, which insisted on presentiment of modernity in late Chosŏn, such practical aspects as geography and economics came to the fore. If at first the geography in *Taengniji* was a language of science and politics, it became exclusively a language of science in these more modern readings. Evaluating Yi Chunghwan's contribution to the development of Chosŏn geography, modern Korean scholars praise the excellence of his description of landscapes and mountains (Han et al. 2007: 250).

By analyzing different interpretations of *T'aengniji* and scholarly responses to them, this article tries to examine how minor corrections in the text reflected political changes in Korean history. First, we analyze how Yi Chunghwan connected geography and *sojunghwa*; this is followed by an examination of how *T'aengniji* was read at the beginning of the twentieth century when it was printed by Ch'oe Namsŏn; and finally, we investigate the circumstances that caused its popularity among Koreans from the 1970s.

***T'aengniji* in the Premodern Period**

It was common for traditional Korean geography to focus on China—either placing it in the center of the map or showing Korea in relation to Chinese territory. Until the late Chosŏn, Korean people imagined the surrounding world through the frame of Sinocentrism.

By the time Yi Chunghwan wrote *T'aengniji*, Koreans had come to know some of the representative examples of European cartography, including Matteo Ricci's *Complete Terrestrial Map of all Countries* (Kunyu wanguo quantu 坤輿萬國全圖)—this was the first such example, brought to Korea in 1603; the following year saw the introduction of Ricci's *Map of the Heavens and the Earth as seen from Obscurity* (Liangyi xuanlan tu 兩儀玄覽圖) (Ledyard 1994: 249), then Ferdinand Verbiest's *Complete Map of the Earth* (Kunyu quantu 坤輿全圖), the Sino-European *Complete Terrestrial Map* (Shanghai yudi quantu 山海輿地全圖), and so on.

Chinese and Koreans were curious to obtain new knowledge, though Koreans mostly retained the traditional worldview explained in the words of Ch'oe Sŏkchŏng 崔錫鼎 (1646–1715) in 1708. As Gari Ledyard (1994: 254) notes, while the Westerners saw the world as round, the view considered orthodox in Korea was, “The way [*dao*] of the earth emphasizes quiescence, and its inherent character [*de*] is squareness.” There was a real and an imagined geography, deeply connected to Korean self-consciousness.

After the Manchu Qing (1644–1912) displaced the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Chosŏn kept the Ming as its temporal reference point on maps (Bae 2008: 54). Koreans considered the Qing uncivilized barbarians, as the Manchu had been a branch of the Jurchen people. When the Ming were still in power, Koreans viewed the Jurchens as inferior neighbors and tried to create a multilayered ethnic hierarchy (S. Kim 2017: 31). In 1637, the Manchu forcefully concluded new, formal Sino-Korean tributary relations with Chosŏn under the notion of *sadae* (事大, “serving the great”), turning this hierarchy upside down, and Korean intellectuals faced a dilemma over whether the Manchu had the right to rule over them as the Ming had. Chosŏn adopted a delicate diplomacy—while supporting Qing in formal *sadae* relations, Korean intellectuals remained faithful to the Ming dynasty and emphasized the connection between Ming and Chosŏn, whereby the latter inherited the role of Confucian center in the Far East.

In the late seventeenth century the idea of *sojunghwa* (“Small China”) and the necessity for cultural dominance in the Far Eastern region that had first appeared in thirteenth-century Koryŏ reemerged. Judging by *T'aengniji* texts, it had not disappeared by the mid-eighteenth century.

In his work, Yi Chunghwan connects China and Korea through history, culture, historical events, prominent people, location of the countries, and features of their landscapes. Sometimes, to prove his point, he turns to Korean traditional geographical thinking (*p'ungsu chiri söl* 風水地理說). Let us examine several lines from the book: “A branch of Mount Kunlun 崑崙 extended to the south of the great desert and formed Mount Yuwulu 醫巫閭山 in the east, ending abruptly to form the Liaodong Plain 療東. Over at the other end of the plain, the mountain range rose again to form Mount Paektu 白頭山 which is called Mount Buxian 不咸山 in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*” (Yi Chunghwan 1912: 11).

Mount Buxian is indeed mentioned in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, but in the modern translation, we do not find any correlation between Mount Buxian and Mount Paektu, though we do find the name “Chosŏn” in the “Classic of the Regions within the Seas” chapter (*Sanhaegyŏng* 2012: 386). Despite the fact that Yi Chunghwan tried to convey exact geographic information, it was more important for him to connect Mount Kunlun and Mount Paektu symbolically—two sacred mountains, inhabited, according to various legends, by spirits and gods. For the Han-Chinese people who shared strong Sinocentric ideas, Mount Kunlun was the center of the universe or the world mountain. If these two mountains are linked to each other by an invisible bond, then “the vital energy” 精氣 runs one thousand *ri* to the north, between the two rivers, and moving to the south, it ends up with the Ninggu Pagoda 寧固塔. A mountain range that extended behind became the head of all Korean mountain ranges (*Chosŏn sanmaek* 朝鮮山脈)” (Yi Chunghwan 1912: 11). According to Yi Chunghwan, the “vitality” of the Chinese sacred mountains travels a great distance and, through the conduit of Mount Paektu, fills all the Korean mountains. A very interesting point indeed, especially in accordance with the political situation of that time.

Mount Paektu was a cradle for many Korean states—Ancient Chosŏn 古朝鮮 (?–108 BCE), Koguryŏ 高句麗 (37 BCE–668 CE), Puyŏ 夫餘 (2 BCE–494 CE), and Parhae 渤海 (or Bohai, 698–926)—and therefore was worshipped by the peoples of Korea and northeast China (Kontsevich 2001: 453). The Manchus called the mountain Mount Changbai, and it was considered a sacred place and a homeland for the Manchu. The same was true for Koreans: Mount Paektu was located in the province where Chosŏn’s first king, Taejo Yi Sŏnggye 太祖 李成桂 (1335–1408, r. 1392–98) had originated, and thus later the mountain region was considered a source of Chosŏn’s prosperity and legitimacy.

Due to the constant border wars between Korea and the Jurchen people, of which the Manchus were a branch, the region was not always in the Korean realm, but as Yang Bo-kyung (2004: 265) states, “as China and Chosŏn began having border disputes around the mountain, its role as a holy place grew stronger.” This region was highly important both for the Manchu and Korean people because it was connected to their ethnicity.

Since the 1680s, the Qing “deployed several interrelated approaches to territorial integration, each involving the reframing of Chinese and non-Chinese practices in terms that reflected the multifaceted and diverse nature of the Qing” (Whiteman 2015: 34). For Koreans, Mount Paektu was not included in mountain

worship ceremonies in the mid-Chosŏn period, yet it became a Korean place and the core to Korean topography in the late seventeenth century despite the fact that it was not actually located in the Korean realm (Song 2016: 159). Only in the mid-eighteenth century did Chosŏn intellectuals claim that the mountain itself was actually within Chosŏn territory (S. Kim 2017: 59). Indeed, this happened as soon as Korean scholars came to the conclusion that all Korean mountains are interconnected, and Yi Chunghwan's (1912: 64) *T'aengniji* was one of the first works to make this assertion:

Mount Paektu lies between the Jurchen and Chosŏn as a royal parasol for the nation. . . . From Mount Paektu to Hamhŭng the main mountain range runs down the middle of the northern part of the country. An eastern branch stretches toward the south of the Tumen River. A western branch stretches toward the south of the Yalu River. The eastern ridge of the range goes to the East Sea. . . . The main mountain range runs continuously south for several thousand *ri* to join Mount T'aebaek in Kyŏngsang province.

Ch'ŏllyŏng Mountain Pass is where Hamgyŏng Province borders on Kangwŏn Province. It is the main passage leading northward. To the south, there are many mountains and passes: Ch'ujiryŏng Mountain Pass, Mount Kŭmgang, Yŏnsuryŏng Mountain Pass, Osaengnyŏng Mountain Pass, Mount Sŏrak, Mount Han'gye, Mount Odae, Taegwal-lyŏng Mountain Pass, and Paekpongyŏng Mountain Pass. And after them there is Mount T'aebaek.

In *T'aengniji*, Yi Chunghwan did not give a name to these connected ranges. However, the idea that all Korean mountain ranges are connected was developed at the same time by his great-uncle Yi Ik in his *Sŏngho Sasŏl* 星湖僊說 (Insignificant Sayings of Sŏngho [i.e., Yi Ik]), finished circa the 1760s. Yi Ik named these connected ranges the *Paektu taegan* 白頭大幹, or the Great Paektu Trunk. Later an official, Sin Kyŏngjun 申景濬 (1712–81), consistently described the mountain ranges and their connection with one another in his *San'gyŏngp'yo* 山經表 (Description of Mountains, 1770), utilizing the term *Paektu taegan* again. However, the geographical and cultural connection between the mountain ranges that Yi Chunghwan described in his *T'aengniji*, though unnamed, remained important for late-Chosŏn scholars who shared the concept of *sojunghwa*. The vital energy that runs from Mount Kunlun and then heads south through Mount Paektu transmits auspiciousness from the Middle Kingdom to Chosŏn. Thus, Chosŏn becomes the new center of the world, while Korean mountains become the symbolic heirs to Mount Kunlun.

According to Yi Chunghwan, the Korean Peninsula was provided with the same energy that comes from Mount Kunlun in China. Nature itself favors Chosŏn and encourages it to become a new Middle Kingdom.

Here Yi Chunghwan uses Korean traditional geography (*p'ungsu chiri sŏl*). To prove the point that his contemporaries understood this tricky combination of geography, politics, and philosophy, let us examine Wi Paekkyu's 魏伯珪 (1727–98) critiques of the *p'ungsu* connection between Mount Kunlun and Mount Paektu. Wi confronts the *p'ungsu* idea of an invisible energy or *ki* 氣 starting from Mount

Kunlun based on the second doctrine of *p'ungsu chiri söl* theory, whereby *ki* differs according to the points of the compass where it is found and asks how the quality of the *ki* should be determined after it has changed directions innumerable times since it started flowing from Kunlun (Eggert 2002: 252).⁵

Yi Chunghwan dedicates a chapter to *p'ungsu*, and he is one of those authors who explain the rules of this theory from a logical point of view. Yoon Hong-key (2006: 210) mentions that even if the intellectual conception of connected Korean mountain ranges made an impact on the development of practical learning (*sirhak* 實學), the inclusion of *p'ungsu* in a written work was not typical for Korean intellectuals of late Chosŏn because at that time European geographical works were the trend. However, following East Asian traditions, Yi Chunghwan (1912: 65) imagined the peninsula as a human being, which was far from the European point of view: “Since ancient times, there has been a saying that our country is shaped like an old man sitting with his head to north-north-east and his feet toward south-south-east and that the western side is open towards China forming the shape of a person who is bowing to China. Therefore, our country has a long relationship with China.”

Yi Chunghwan explained how the mere appearance of the country on the map determined the diplomatic relationship. “Bowling” to China, Chosŏn expressed its “filial piety” and showed its willingness to “serve the great.” The geographical conditions and landscape influenced the behavior and manners of the entire nation as well: “Because there is neither a river stretching one thousand *ri* nor a plain wider than one hundred *ri*, Korea cannot produce a great man. Barbarians from the west, north and east and the Jurchen entered China and in turn became emperors. Only our country did not. Faithful, we have never dreamt of doing this” (65).

For Yi Chunghwan, the Koreans were faithful and softhearted, yet narrow-minded. They followed the Confucian way, performed the prescribed rituals, and preserved the codes of the ancient sages. They were not warriors (*muin* 武人), and they chose the brush and the written word over weapons. For a Confucian gentleman, being a man of letters (*munin* 文人) was more important than being a *muin*, and this was one more aspect that qualified Chosŏn to become the new Middle Kingdom, because the Qing, the Jurchen who had entered China and become emperors, were warriors and barbarians.

To prove his point, Yi Chunghwan emphasized the greatness of Korean geography as closely connected to that of China. But Chosŏn geography was not simply secondary to Chinese geography; it had some unique features of its own. For example, here is Yi (66) on Mount Kŭmgang: “The twelve thousand peaks of Mount Kŭmgang are rock caves, rock peaks, rock river basins, and waterfalls passing over the rocks. The mountains, valleys, caves, springs, ponds and waterfalls are made of nothing but white stones. Mount Kŭmgang was called Mount Kaegol 皆骨 [All Bones] because there is not even a tiny piece of land. . . . There is no other mountain like it Under Heaven.”⁶

Yi Chunghwan (66) claimed that even the Chinese people are fond of Mount Kŭmgang and would like to live in Chosŏn. Korean nature for Yi Chunghwan

was not only beautiful but expressive, calm, and magnificent. He depicts Korean landscapes in detail, paying attention to the mountains, rivers, and valleys—as long as they are important for *p'ungsu* and for the development of agriculture and trade. For him, Korean geography was one of the reasons Chosŏn should inherit the Middle Kingdom's place.

Yi Chunghwan formed a new cultural world view, and on this new cultural map, Chosŏn was surrounded by “barbarians”: the warrior Qing and inferior Japan. The Imjin War proved that Japan was not a kind neighbor but pursued its own self-interests. In the Chosŏn literature of the period, the Japanese people are mostly depicted as hostile and rude, and *T'aengniji* shares this idea. The lands inhabited by uncivilized barbarians cannot be used as an example and cannot be a role model; on the contrary, these people should be educated and led. Barbarians destroy harmony not only inside their own country but in the lands surrounding them. For example, here is a passage from the description of the southwestern province of Chŏlla: “The eight towns are too close to the South Sea. During winter, leaves do not change color, worms do not hibernate, and the sultry heat vapors from the mountains and the sea form a source of miasma. The area is close to Japan; that is why, even though the soil is rich, it is not a desirable place to live” (Yi Chunghwan 1912: 32).

In this passage, Yi Chunghwan demonstrates the lack of harmony in the land. Instead of the four seasons traditionally experienced over most of the Korean Peninsula, Chŏlla has only warm weather. The leaves on trees do not change color and do not fall as they do in other places familiar to Yi Chunghwan. It feels as if time, or cyclicity, has stopped. The word for “air” used here is *kijŭng* 氣蒸, which consists of two parts: “*ki*-energy” and “steam.” Thus, this air is dangerous for people who live there. The reasons for this lie in the geographical conditions of the place—it is too far from the symbolic center and too close to the symbolic periphery and to potentially uncivilized barbarians who threaten the inhabitants of the land not only physically, through piracy and armed attacks, but also spiritually and culturally.

We see a similar analogy in the passage dedicated to Kyŏngsang Province: “To the south of Yŏnggang Stream there are thirteen towns. From the olden days few talented people [from there obtained government posts]. The neighbors by the sea are the Japanese. The streams are poisonous. It is not a desirable place to live” (28). Earlier in the book, in the beginning of the section on Kyŏngsang Province, Yi Chunghwan states that Kyŏngsang Province is located in one of the most desirable places from the perspective of *p'ungsu* (24). However, here we see a direct instruction not to live in a certain part of Kyŏngsang. The reason is its close proximity to the barbarians who influence the surrounding areas and even prevent officials from passing the civil exams and getting government posts.

T'aengniji explained the surrounding landscapes in terms of the cultural dichotomy “we-they.” In the “we” storyline, Yi Chunghwan emphasized how Korean and Han-Chinese history, culture, and geography were connected in opposing this discourse to “they,” namely, Qing China and Japan. This constituted a Korea-centered “civilized-barbarian” (*huayi* 華夷) cultural hierarchy.

In the late eighteenth century, after Mu-ke-deng's second expedition, when he established a stone marker as the boundary between Qing and Chosŏn (1712), many Korean literati were afraid that the marker in reality meant a loss of Chosŏn territory. They believed that the real Qing-Chosŏn boundary was located not on the Tumen River but in a place farther north (S. Kim 2017: 73). Yi Chunghwan, too, emphasized that the northern territories were Korean. He provided a historical comment on semilegendary Korean king of Chinese origin Kija's (箕子, Jizi 1122–1082 BCE) legacy in the northern regions of Chosŏn, stating that Korea was acquainted with Confucian traditions (Yi Chunghwan 1912: 12). In this statement he expressed a sentiment shared by other Chosŏn scholars (Huh Tae-yong 2008: 102–3).

There are many examples where Yi Chunghwan writes with traditional *sojunghwa* ideas typical of the late eighteenth century, and quotations and ideas from *Taengniji* can be found in many other geographical works of the period, including those by Yu Chungnim 柳重臨 (1705–71), Sŏ Yugu 徐有榘 (1764–1845), and An Chŏngbok 安鼎福 (1712–91).

The translation of *Taengniji* into Japanese in 1884 by Japanese doctor and diplomat Kondō Masuki can be considered in several aspects. First, it was a way for Japanese officialdom to get a better understanding of Korea and its geographical features, which were important for conducting military operations and implementing trading contacts. Second, it was important for the study of Korean history, which the Japanese government could utilize to justify its foreign policy. Up until 1876, when the first diplomatic agreement in Korean history, the Japan-Korean Treaty of Amity, was signed, the Japanese saw the peninsula from the perspective of Pusan city, where the “Japan House” was located. Korean geography books such as *Taengniji* introduced the peninsula to the Japanese elite. The Japanese government had shown great interest in Korean literature in the precolonial period and during it as well. Hong Isŏp (1974: 44) supposes that the translation of *Taengniji* by Kondō Masuki, a small book of fifty pages, was used to gather information about the country before its colonization, so the translation emphasized matters of transportation, economics (production and trade), provincial customs, and history. Ideas of *sojunghwa* did not correspond with its goals.

On the other hand, Canadian missionary to Korea James Gale (1863–1937) praised *Taengniji* not for its geography but for its *p'ungsu* theory (Gale 1902). He was the first foreigner to introduce this book to an English-speaking world audience.

In 1910, Yi Chunghwan's work was published in Japan as *P'aryŏkchi* 八域誌 (Book of Eight Districts) by the Chōsen Kosho Kankō 朝鮮古書刊行會 (Society for the Publication of Antiquarian Korean Books). However, this edition did not influence Koreans as much as the first publication of *Taengniji* by young Ch'oe Namsŏn 崔南善 (1890–1957) in 1912.

***Taengniji* and the Challenges of Modernity**

Taengniji during the Japanese Colonial Period

Yi Chunghwan and Ch'oe Namsŏn literally belonged to different worlds. Yi Chunghwan had a Confucian background, and he wrote *Taengniji* in his sixties. His work was addressed to *sadaebu* 士大夫 scholar officials. By contrast, Ch'oe

Namsön received his education in modernized Japan, where he was inspired by social Darwinism. An ambitious young man in his twenties, he addressed his first publication to the younger generation. In Ch'oe's opinion, the future of his homeland depended on an educated youth who would be responsible for the country and be proud of its brave past. To motivate the youth, it was necessary to emphasize Chosön's achievements (Kim Hyönju 2007: 229–30).

As Chizuko Allen (2014: 205) writes, “The world that Ch'oe imagined was not a battlefield full of the strong and the weak struggling to dominate others or save themselves, but a network of interconnected nations and peoples affecting one another in intricate ways.” After 1910, when Korea became a colony of Japan, Ch'oe Namsön resisted this change by emphasizing Korea's unique and indigenous cultural traditions, hoping that this would help Koreans maintain and strengthen their national identity (Allen 2005: 29).

In December 1910, Ch'oe Namsön and several other intellectuals formed the Chosön Kwangmunhoe (朝鮮光文會, Association for Glorifying [Korea's] Literature). The association collected valuable premodern texts to highlight Korea's cultural heritage. The founders decided that their main aim was the selection, edition, publication, and promotion of the most valuable Korean classics and important writings (Gur'eva 2011: 232).

The first books published by the Chosön Kwangmunhoe were a chronicle of the early history of Korea, *Tongguk t'onggam* 東國通鑑, and a Beijing travelogue, *Yörha ilgi* 熱河日記. The first geographical classic was published in 1912, and it was none other than *T'aengniji*.⁷ In the following years, the association published eighteen volumes of works from the Chosön period on such subjects as history, geography, economics, linguistics, literature, and military science (Paek 1970: 68).

However, *T'aengniji* by Yi Chunghwan was not the same as the *T'aengniji* published by Ch'oe Namsön. It was rewritten anew to suit the new political situation. The book was still published in *hanmun* as Yi Chunghwan wrote it, but the text was infused with a new meaning. As Pae Usöng (2004: 214) states, “In the Ch'oe Namsön narrative, the history of *sadae* that Yi Chunghwan was so proud of was turned into a history of apathy where it was impossible even to dare to think differently from what was common in China.”

This is not an exaggeration. Pae Usöng was one of the first scholars to compare the original *hanmun* manuscripts with the edited *hanmun* version by Ch'oe Namsön, and he found discrepancies in the Literary Sinitic leading to totally different meanings. Observe, for example, these two expressions: 恪勤事大 “be industrious in *sadae*” in the original manuscript was changed into 不敢意他 “not dare to think otherwise” in the new book. There are more similar examples in the text: *hwangjo* 皇朝 “the imperial court” became the “Ming dynasty”; *chogong* 朝貢 “pay tribute to the imperial court” became *t'ongsöp* 通涉 “be in relation with”; *ch'ungsun* 忠順 “be loyal and obedient” was changed to *ch'inni* 親泥 “be on friendly terms with”; and so on.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Sinocentric system and *sadae* concept were regarded as imprudent and disdainful delusions. Ch'oe struggled to emphasize Korea's independence, its long history and original culture, and his new

updated version of *Taengniji* suited this purpose perfectly. The book was used to enlighten Korean people and unify them against the dangers from outside.

Ch'oe Namsön created a text that omitted the close connection between Korea and China, a connection that did not serve his purposes. He was interested in certain particular facts that *Taengniji* gave him: Korea's long history, the unity of its provinces, the uniqueness of Korean customs, and their differences from Japanese ones (Ch'oe did not change the definition of the Japanese people as barbarians).

Ch'oe dedicated several years to the study of Korean geography and nationalism. In his new *Taengniji*, he praised Mount Kūmgang and Mount Paektu and their historical and cultural importance. The connection between Mount Kunlun and Mount Paektu was maintained, as well as was the connections among all the Korean mountain ranges. We can suppose that they were preserved due to the positive reaction by foreign scholars to Yi Chunghwan's bold statement on the connection of the mountain ranges.

For example, this very point was mentioned in Kotō Bundjirō's *Orographic Sketch of Korea*, where Kotō praised Yi Chunghwan's knowledge of geography but disagreed with the idea that Korean mountains are connected to one another. Instead, Kotō suggested that there are two mountain systems on the Korean Peninsula (1903: 5–7). Kotō also introduced English-language readers to the term *the Korean Range* (5–7), meaning the *Paektu taegan*. Incidentally, he also used the same phrase from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* that Yi Chunghwan cited, though Kotō suggested it was a mistake (51).⁸ Ch'oe Namsön, who had studied in Japan and was interested in geography, could not have been ignorant of Kotō's publication.

Avoiding analysis of *sojunghwa* and critiques of the political and social situation in the late Chosön, Ch'oe Namsön, in the preface to his book, presented *Taengniji* as the one of the first writings on cultural geography. He also organized a standard form for *Taengniji* after comparing various manuscripts. His edition—and these days any formal explanation of *Taengniji*—consists of four lengthy chapters: “The Four Classes of People” (Samin ch'ongnon 四民總論), “Discourse on the Eight Provinces” (P'alto ch'ongnon 八道總論), with eight sections named after each of the eight Chosön provinces), and “Discourse on the Selection of Habitable Places” (Pokkō ch'ongnon 卜居總論), including sections on geography (*chiri* 地理), livelihood (*saengni* 生利), social characteristics (*insim* 人心), and mountains and waters (*sansu* 山水), followed by a conclusion (*ch'ongnon* 總論). This combination seems logical and suitable, as it covers the maximum of possible chapters in various manuscripts of the late eighteenth century.

Taengniji under the Pak Chōnghūi Regime

During the period of Japanese colonial rule, especially from the 1930s, Korean classics were neither read nor openly discussed, so the mass promotion of *Taengniji* began only during Pak Chōnghūi's (1917–79) presidency in the 1960s and 1970s. The reason for this spontaneous interest and promotion of the book may lie in the *Charter of National Education* (Kungmin Kyoyuk Hōnjang 國民教育憲章,

1968), which included such terms as “national restoration,” “independence,” and “revitalization of our ancestors’ splendid spirit.”

Moreover, the geographical and economic content of *T'aengniji* corresponded with the popularity of *sirhak* studies that first developed in the 1930s and began to thrive in the 1970s. According to this body of scholarship, *sirhak* is “an important intellectual movement of Korea, especially between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and represented a new spirit of enquiry among many Confucian scholars who were outside of political power. *Sirhak* scholars emphasized the practical values of life, such as economic sufficiency, while Neo-Confucianism emphasized metaphysical theories. *Sirhak* gave more value to the material things and practical ethics than did Neo-Confucianism” (Leaman 2001: 505). Thus, it is not unusual to today see the short epithet “*Sirhak* scholar” beside Yi Chunghwan’s name in Korean reference works.

In 1963, the Korean Geographic Society (Taehan chiri hakhoe 大漢地理學會) published a volume that included two different studies of Yi Chunghwan’s work. One author, Sō Suin (1963: 83–90), used an original text titled *T'aengniji*, while the other author, No Toyang (1963: 91–96), used a text titled *P'aryokchi*. Both articles offered a short retelling of the text but considered it from different angles. Sō emphasized the place of *T'aengniji* among other geographical works of the Chosŏn period, while No aimed to classify the lands in the writing according to their convenience—for life, for hermitage, for shelter during wars, for temporary solitude, and so on. Both scholars also introduced the reader to a short biography of Yi Chunghwan. This kind of variety demonstrates that in the early 1960s there was no standard version with which to work; both scholars used original texts and paid attention not to the outdated *sojunghwa* context but to practical geography.⁹

During the 1970s four different translations into modern Korean (No in 1969, Yi Iksŏng in 1971, Yi Yŏnt'aek in 1975, and Chŏng Yŏntak in 1977) and two reprints of the book (No in 1972 and 1977) appeared in the Republic of Korea. The original text was not Yi Chunghwan’s manuscript, which was difficult in any case to define due to the abundance of versions, but Ch'oe Namsŏn’s edition that became the object of intensive research in the late twentieth century. In 1976, No and Chang Poun (1976: 37) again repeated Ch'oe Namsŏn’s statement that *T'aengniji* was a book on cultural geography.

In 1974 and 1978, a version of *T'aengniji* written in mixed script and earlier published in 1923–24 under the title *Chosŏn p'alto pimil chiji* was reprinted by Sŏngjin Munhwasa. However, it did not affect the popularity of the Ch'oe Namsŏn edition. This book consisted of 22 chapters with an introduction and a conclusion, along with an attached map of the Korean Peninsula and a schematic drawing of the *Paektu taegan*. It was focused solely on the geography. The chapter on the “Four Classes of People” was omitted, and the internal division in the “Discourse on the Selection of Habitable Places” was organized differently from Ch'oe Namsŏn’s edition. The role of China in Korean history was also reduced. For example, the episode when Tang China helped Silla in the war against Paekche and Koguryŏ in the seventh century was excluded (*Chosŏn p'alto pimil chiji* 1978: 2). This correction led to the disappearance of the history of Unified Silla in the book. It seems the editors

were not interested in documenting the long history of diplomatic relations between China and Korea in the book, opting instead to focus on Korean geography.

During this period *Taengniji* was considered primarily in its geographical aspects. As the landscape and its reflection in world culture traditionally played a distinct integrating role in the formation of collective identity, it is likely that the geographical aspects of *Taengniji* were considered, on the one hand, an achievement of Korean traditional thought and, on the other hand, as a source for formation of collective Korean identity.

As for *p'ungsu* theory, Yoon Hong-key (1976: 10) criticized Yi Chunghwan for including *p'ungsu* theory in *Taengniji*, while others, like Hong Isöp (1946: 250–51), argued that the inclusion of *p'ungsu* in the narrative is a product of Yi's time.

Despite the existence of numerous different original manuscripts, South Korean scholars of this period decided to choose Ch'oe Namsön's edition and his idea that *Taengniji* was a book on cultural geography. North Korean encyclopedias, too, mentioning known titles of Yi Chunghwan's classic, explained the contents of the book based on the structure created by Ch'oe Namsön (Paekkwä 2001: 155–56; Kungnip 1955: 444–45). The concept of *sojunghwa* either was omitted or not mentioned, and the inclusion of *p'ungsu* was taken as a part of traditional culture.

Conclusion

Taengniji is one of those rare books that were popular in the time of Chosön, then again during both the period of Japanese rule and in independent Korea. *Taengniji* served the purpose of unifying the Korean people and preserving and protecting Korean historical and geographical traditions and independence.

The example of *Taengniji* in the eighteenth century and its rereadings in the twentieth century show that written content can be read differently depending on the political circumstances of the times. *Taengniji* is a book on Korean geography, history, trade, and customs, but when first written it carried certain political and cultural meanings specific to its historical moment. Two centuries later, Korea's historical situation had changed. In the eighteenth century, Yi Chunghwan praised *sojunghwa* ideas, but in the beginning of the twentieth century and in the second part of the twentieth century, these notions had no specific meaning for readers. Inclusion of this cultural code would not have resonated with new *Taengniji* readers. Nonetheless, despite these many historical changes, the book remained popular because, through its explanations of Korean geography, history, and culture, it supported Korean ethnic self-consciousness.

One of the crucial examples of such a different reading concerns Mount Paektu. In the eighteenth century, due to the persistent influence of the Qing and Qing-Korean disputes over the northern border, Mount Paektu emerged as a symbol of Chosön and Korean ethnicity. *Taengniji* demonstrated the increased importance of this mountain for intellectuals—Mount Paektu became heir to Mount Kunlun and transmitted auspicious energy from the previous Middle Kingdom to Korea. This geographic and symbolic connection of the Korean mountain range to China's sacred Mount Kunlun was one of the most important ideas of Yi Chunghwan's time, and its significance was not only geographical but also politi-

cal. Culturally, it meant the connection of lands under the same ruling hand. It symbolized a united Korea and united people who shared the same history, geography, and heroes as the Middle Kingdom.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule, there was a danger that Korea might lose its uniqueness as the Japanese government aimed to assimilate Korean people through the use and incorporation of the Japanese language, books, and traditions. Ch'oe Namsŏn resisted this cultural dominance with the help of Korean classics, and one of those was *Taengniji*. He dismissed *sojunghwa*-related content but preserved the facts he thought might affect Korean readers in a positive way. *Taengniji* became the first Korean book on cultural geography, and this statement predetermined the book's future.

Ch'oe Namsŏn's translation of *Taengniji* served as a source that helped Korean people become acquainted with traditional Korean geography and learn the traditional names of the nation's landscapes and mountains. Yi Chunghwan's ideas on geography were indeed original for late Chosŏn, and later, in the 1960s and 1970s, they attracted scholars of *sirhak* who started to study the book's contents and translate it. At the beginning of the twentieth century, *Taengniji* was introduced to foreigners who also understood it differently, depending on their educational background and historical premises.

NOTES

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1. Such gazetteers first appeared in early Chinese history and then became popular in Korea. They described Korean history, landscapes, lands, and roads, often including episodes from biographies of prominent people. These writings took Chinese historical and geographical works as an example, and their number increased every year. Korean encyclopedias, bibliographies, and descriptions of separate counties and provinces included geography as well as history.

2. In *The Asami Library: A Descriptive Catalogue* it is written that Kondō was born in 1840 and died in 1872 (Fang 1969: 177–78).

3. One of these readers was a famous Japanese geographer, Kotō Bundjiro (i.e., Kotō Bunjiro 小藤文次郎, 1856–1935). In 1903, he published his English-language study *An Orographic Sketch of Korea*, which became popular in Europe. The article was based on several field expeditions conducted by Kotō in 1900–01 and 1901–02 and on German and Russian scholarly works of the late nineteenth century. He also mentioned *Taengniji* as *Chosŏn p'aryŏkchi* (*Chyo-syŏn-phal-yŏk-chi* 朝鮮八域誌). In this article Kotō Bundjiro praised Yi Chunghwan for his detailed and correct geographic explanations. This work introduced *Taengniji* to world scholars. Thus, for example, in Russian Koreanology one of the first mentions of *Chosŏn p'aryŏkchi* was in 1912 (Kiuner 1912). Later, Herman Lautensach (1886–1971) also cited *Orographic sketch of Korea* as well as *Chosŏn p'aryŏkchi* in his work (Lautensach 1945).

4. In this article the translation of *Taengniji* is also based on Ch'oe Namsŏn's edition, to avoid misinterpretations.

5. Admittedly, among the scholars in the seventeen–eighteenth centuries whose opinions on *p'ungsu* Marion Eggert (2002: 251) examined, Wi was in the minority.
6. “[All] Under Heaven” (*ch'onha* 天下) is a metaphor for the universe, or in a more specific usage, “the Middle Kingdom.”
7. Ch'oe planned to publish twenty-two geographical works, among them *Tongguk chiriji* 東國地理志, *Pukhan chi* 北漢誌, *Tonggyöng chapki* 東京雜記, and *San'gyöngp'yo* 山經表.
8. “In the Chan-hai-king (山海經), or book treating of seas and mountains, it is called Pan-hien-chan” (this seems to be misspelled) (Kotō 1903: 51).
9. I would note that in Soviet Korean studies, too, Yi Chunghwan's work was mentioned both as *T'aengniji* and *P'aryokchi*.

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