Chapter One

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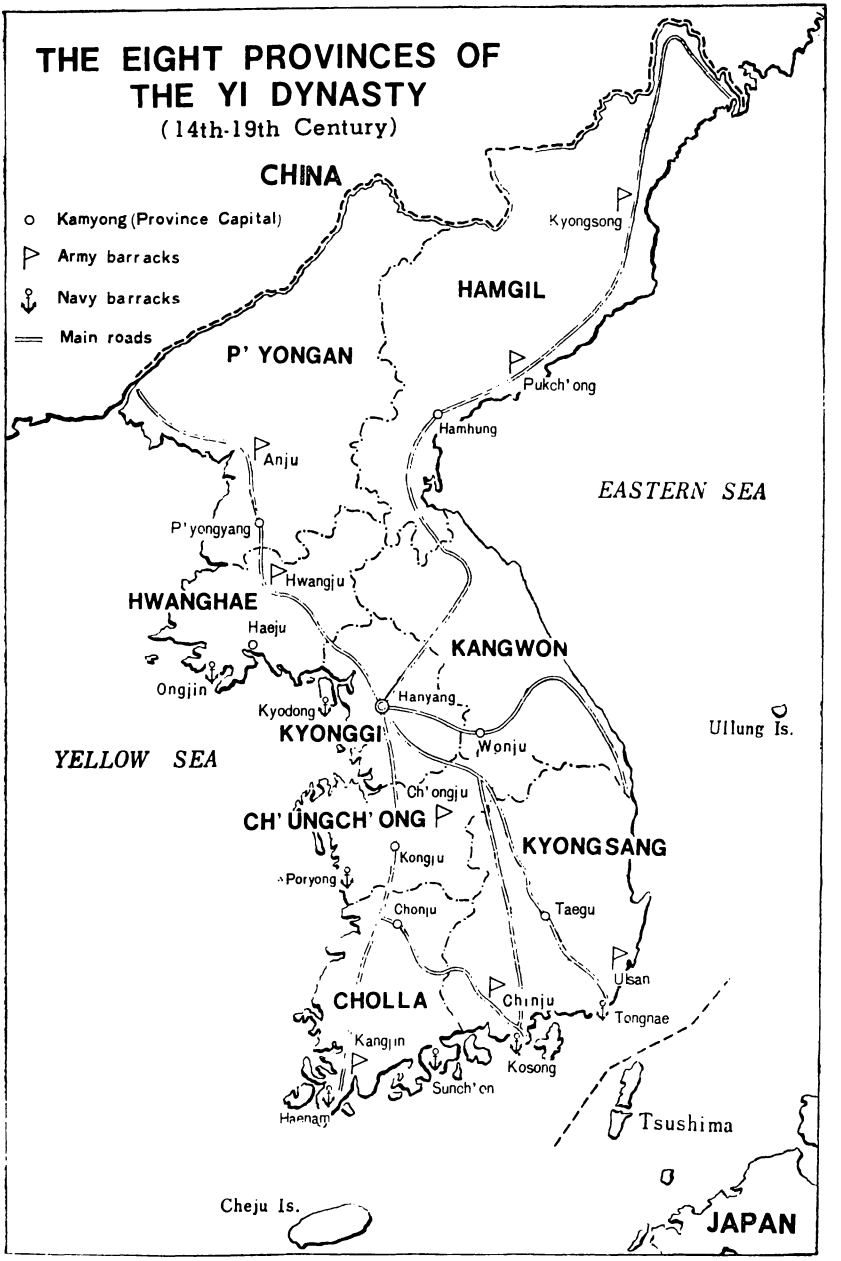
"Admonition on the Transitory"

Ha-sang arrived six days after Monk Hyejang had been cremated. Although Tasan was not unaware of this Buddhist practice, actually to witness the ritual for his friend Hyejang from the beginning to the end—first the placing of the body in the coffin, then the incineration, and finally the scattering of the ashes—was unbearably painful. Even for Tasan, a man hardened by the vicissitudes of his ill-fated life and no longer perturbed by ordinary worldly events, the experience was deeply shocking. Ten years younger than Tasan, Hyejang had been thirty-nine, in the prime of life. He had been born into a humble and destitute family, but soon after entering the priesthood he became a renowned scholar-monk. His reputation for extraordinary wisdom and scholarship encompassing both Sŏn Buddhism[1] and the philosophy of divination spread quickly throughout the entire Buddhist domain. He was also so well-versed in the Confucian classics that Tasan had pronounced him a Confucian scholar of great learning and virtue. And yet, Hyejang had been rough in personality, easily aroused to violent temper, eager to accept the offer of a drink and given to wanton drunkenness. He followed the Sŏn Buddhist teaching, "It is not wrong to eat red meat and have women"; however, the realm of sainthood only beckoned him from afar.

Never a common monk, Hyejang had been achingly aware of the

1. Sŏn is the Buddhist sect known largely in the West as Chan Buddhism (in China) or Zen Buddhism (in Japan).



Korea in the Yi dynasty. From Han Woo-keun, *History of Korea* (Seoul: Eul-Yoo Publishing Co., 1970). By permission of the publisher.

transitory nature of man's life. Great, therefore, was his worldly anguish. In wine he sought to appease the suffering and remorse of his life, and his body and soul languished in search of a self free from both. For a long time he had been afflicted with an abdominal swelling caused by his uncontrollable drinking, and recently he had been desperately ill for over ten days in the northern hermitage of Taehŭng Temple on Mount Taedun. On the morning of September 15, 1811, Tasan received word from the temple that Hyejang's condition had taken a turn for the worse.[2] Upon receiving the news, he left his thatched abode for the temple, which lay at a distance of some twenty-five miles. Though short, Tasan was powerfully built, but he was aware that his strength had dissipated after ten years in exile. For such a man, the journey was long.

On that day, as he hurried, the sea shimmered like silver sands reflecting an autumn sun, and the heavy fragrance of mellowing citrus filled the air. At the foot of the mountain, reeds swayed, shedding silvery powder as the wind swept over them. Wild chrysanthemums grew in profusion along the road that ran close to the sea, and lovely, too, were the autumn tints of the grasses. Beyond anything else, Tasan loved this dreamlike landscape of his otherwise desolate banishment. However, his glance did not linger upon his surroundings that day. His friend was dying; Tasan ran as though it were his first taste of despair and sorrow. A man of many accomplishments, he had weathered myriad hardships in his life, and yet he was now in a state of total disarray.

"Esteemed teacher, why don't you slow down? Nothing has happened yet. What if you should become ill?" cried Hyejang's disciple, trailing a few steps behind Tasan. The young novice had come from the temple the night before with news of Hyejang's imminent death, and had had no time to rest.

"No. We must get there before sunset."

But Tasan's thoughts outpaced his footsteps. The September full moon hung resplendent in the sky by the time he was on the mountain path leading to the northern hermitage where Hyejang lay dying. His mind, which had been somewhat calmed during the day-

2. In this novel, days and months follow the Chinese lunar calendar, which is about thirty-five days ahead of the Gregorian calendar. Thus, September 15 would be August 11 or 12.

long journey, began to race again, causing him to stumble several times despite the brightness of the night.

Beyond the thick forest of camellia, pine, and nutmeg, light flickered from the lone hermitage, and the grave sound of sutras chanted in unison permeated the air, evoking at once feelings of inscrutable solemnity and terror. Deeply perturbed, Tasan climbed the hill, unmindful of hunger and weariness. He found Hyejang panting beneath an ink-black blanket, facing west in the direction of salvation. A circle of monks sat around him, their palms pressed together in the meditation position, chanting "Admonition on the Transitory," a sutra for the dying, to help him cross the bitter sea of life into Nirvana.

Hyejang was now beyond hearing. He fought ferociously against his untimely end, as if his life, though it flickered like a wisp of floating cloud, refused to return to the ultimate beginning—the void. Bereft of consciousness, his flesh, betraying the transcendent soul, obstinately denied death's approach. His was no calm passing into the realm of quiescence. "Gruesome" was the only word to describe the death scene: eyes wide open, teeth grinding, fists striking the air, he clawed at his chest, howling like an animal. Nowhere were there any remnants of the virtue of the exalted self he had attained through his devotion to the classics of Confucianism, Buddhism, the philosophy of divination, and Sŏn.

Tasan wept in his mind as he watched the death throes. Pity and sorrow like a rising tide overwhelmed him, a soundless wail breaking within him. How he wished that this exit from life could have been serene and detached, as befitted the celebrated monk that Hyejang had been.

For two nights Hyejang lay dying. The monks, now weary from chanting, ceaselessly repeated the sutra for the dying as though hastening his demise. In spite of the cruel pain of the death throes, the end itself came with astonishing ease. It was past midnight and the bright moon rode serene in the crystalline sky.

Tasan sank in sorrow, though with an ineffable sense of release. The chants still went on as a few of the monks moved about in noiseless haste. Obeying Buddhist law, however, Hyejang's two beloved disciples did not keen. On the surface of their pale shaven heads, the thick veins that extended from their temples throbbed

and wiggled like worms. When a young novice carrying a candle passed them, Tasan saw their contorted faces stained with tears.

The cleansing and clothing of the dead began before dawn, while warmth still lingered in the body. Three monks, the sleeves of their black robes rolled up to the shoulders, began shaving the head in the midst of the Chant for the Shedding of the Hair: "Awake, now, the soul of Hyejang, one who has just entered the Realm of Perfect Quiescence . . ." Soon the body was taken to the bathhouse, and after the washing of the hands and feet and the dressing in an undergarment were completed, a monk's robe was slipped on. While the Chant for the Placement of the Crown went on in unison, a crown was placed on the head.

Tasan, a Confucian scholar well-versed in the classics, had penned many sharp, lucid commentaries on them. He left behind him prodigious volumes of writings, including many on the School of Rites, ranging from a masterwork on major rites called *Designs for Good Government* to lesser ones on household rituals. But his writings on mourning rites numbered the greatest, totalling more than sixty volumes. Thus, although he sharply criticized the currently followed *Family Rites* of Chu Hsi as overly cumbersome, he had a thorough knowledge of the established practice of the time.

Nevertheless, as the Buddhist funeral ceremonies unfolded before him for the first time, Tasan was awestruck. The wonder and the impact intensified as the monks began the ritual of placing the corpse in a meditation position. They sat the body, not yet stiffened, in full lotus position, and draped a monk's robe from the right shoulder. In a crescendo of chanting, the body was lowered into a rectangular coffin, and then carried to the crematorium within the temple grounds. Around a large, flat rock stood flags of five colors—yellow, blue, red, black, and white—each facing the direction which its color symbolized. On the rock were spread thick layers of charcoal, and next to it piled some sacks of charcoal. The coffin was lifted up and placed atop the rock, upon which a monk threw a wet straw mat. In a moment, several monks opened the sacks and piled the charcoal high around the coffin until it was entirely covered. They lit the pine resins and brought them to the charcoal to be ignited, the Chant for the Fire resounding all the while.

In the crystal-clear day, the splendor of autumn foliage, like a spread of embroidered silk, enveloped the mountain; above, the sky

hung deep blue in sorrow. The charcoal soon caught fire in the brisk wind and shot up in gigantic flames. Smokeless and odorless—was it because of the wind, or the wet straw mat on the rock?—the lovely fire burned on. One had a sense of witnessing sacred fire. Forgetting his own sorrow, Tasan gazed upon a scene of ultimate pathos. Though this was a time of Buddhist suppression, unconsciously a Buddhist prayer, forbidden to a high-born scholar-official like himself, escaped his mouth: "May his soul rest in peace."

Autumn dusk came swiftly to the mountain temple, but there was still no end in sight to the cremation ceremony, which had begun early in the morning. The cinnabar and yellow flames, even more beautiful and mysterious as the full moon ascended, burned on. At about seven, the flames finally began to subside. At last, a chant announcing the conclusion of the cremation ceremony was sung, while the straw mat, still wet from repeated soaking, was lifted from the rock. In the early evening, the mountain temple was already shrouded with the thickness of the night.

A shock awaited Tasan next morning. After scarcely touching the offering of food, he went out to the crematorium. There was no sign of fire on the rock. In its place was a neat pile of white ashes. A few monks poked the ashes, exposing a scattering of bones, while others, now less numerous than the night before, intoned the Chant for the Gathering of Bones: "Unattainable. Indissoluble." With long wooden chopsticks, they picked up the bones, to the last sliver, and deposited each one in a heavy brass bowl. Still chanting, some of the monks ground the bones to fine powder while others came toward them bearing a large brass bowl full of steaming rice. The powdered bone was mixed with the rice, then scattered over the rock. A dreadful sight followed. Even before the monks left, the birds flocked. In an instant, the snowy white rice was covered with birds. By the time they flew away, nothing remained on the rock. Hyejang had given his worldly flesh in beatitude as the ultimate offering. Overwhelmed by an inexpressible sense of emptiness, Tasan gazed upon the now-vacant rock. It was said that when the flesh had returned to the four elements from which it came—earth, water, fire, and wind—the soul, separated from the flesh like a solitary dewdrop, would return to this world in a form determined by the law of transmigration. Where, then, seeking a new karma, had Hyejang's soul departed? Tasan closed his eyes. He had known of

Hyejang's long suffering and painful path as he sought enlightenment in the philosophy of divination, and he had understood Hyejang's atonement for his heresy. A Buddhist monk, Hyejang had come to deny the Buddhist doctrine that life is inescapably bound by the eternal Chain of Causation and had begun to acknowledge its finality as determined by Providence. In his new insight, life was not "nothingness," but "fulfillment." Finally, he had grasped the truth as revealed in the *I Ching.*

In the morning, after a sleepless night full of myriad thoughts and emotions, Tasan and one of Hyejang's disciples gathered wild fruits on the mountainside and offered them with some wine at Hyejang's grave. Asking the disciple to keen, for they were now alone, Tasan read a eulogy, and he felt sure that Hyejang must be pleased on his way to Nirvana.

Tormented by the memory of the carnal agonies of Hyejang's death, Tasan lost himself in wine, and wept day and night trying to escape from the thought of his departed friend. Thus five days went by. Finally, becoming aware that he was cold and thirsty, he awoke from a drunken sleep with a moan.

Someone stirred outside. "Teacher," called a young voice, barely out of adolescence.

"Oh, it's you, Chong-sim. Have you just returned?"

"Yes. I brought back some nutmeg cake. I'll serve some presently with the tea." Chong-sim, one of Tasan's eighteen disciples, had been away on two days' leave. Though modulated with a slight southern accent, Chong-sim's was correct capital speech. He was nineteen, and years later he would write an epilogue to *Investigation into Korean Sŏn Buddhism*, which Tasan helped compile. Intelligent and soft-spoken, he served his master with complete devotion.

Nutmeg abounded in Tasan's maternal clan village. It was late September, and the harvest of the nuts would already be coming to an end. Knowing how much Tasan loved nutmeg cake, Chong-sim had taken advantage of his time off to fetch some. Two days would hardly have been enough time to reach the village, have the cake made, and return. How he must have hurried; how tired he must be, despite his youth, to have traveled the distance in such a short time. Touched by Chong-sim's devotion, Tasan's eyes were filled with tears as he thanked him.

The responsibility of preparing tea had been Chong-sim's since before anyone could remember. The youth expertly set the tea kettle on a clay brazier. The tea soon began to brew, its mellow aroma filling the air. Tasan trembled unconsciously as the fragrance of the tea seeped into his nostrils. A longing, like pain, pierced him.

Tea, yes, tea. Hyejang, each year on the Day of the Grain Rains, which usually fell in the middle of March, would climb Mount Mandŏk to pick the tea leaves, taking care not to miss the right moment when they were just the size of "sparrows' tongues." He would send Tasan the tea he had so carefully gathered. The loneliness surged in Tasan, missing his friend. In his trouble-ridden life, how many such partings had he experienced, each wound leaving a scar? Tasan could touch neither the tea nor the cake he so enjoyed. Resting his head on a wooden box-pillow, he closed his eyes. He recalled the time when he first met Hyejang, and events of the past ten years surfaced in his mind, rushing before his eyes like the designs in a kaleidoscope.

It was the spring of 1805, four years after Tasan had been sent to Kangjin as the result of the Catholic Persecution of 1801. He spent days in isolation and mournfulness as the people of Kangjin shunned him, afraid of coming into contact with a treasonous heretic. Taking pity on his homelessness, an old woman who kept a tavern at the outskirts of East Gate gave him a tiny room, which barely sheltered him from the harsh elements outside. He named it the Cottage of the Four Principles—peace, ceremony, stability, and activity—and lived there for four years, writing incessantly in that dungeonlike room. Since coming to Kangjin, Tasan had immersed himself in study of the *I Ching*, spending more of his time and energy on it than on any other Confucian classic. Five years of intensive research and refinement culminated in the completion of *The I Ching as Interpreted by Tasan.*

Tasan understood well the people of Kangjin, who feared and avoided him. It was here in this region that his maternal cousin, Yun Chi-ch'ung, had been martyred, and this incident had precipitated the Catholic Persecution of 1801. They knew only too well the severity of the laws and cruelty of the punishment. Indeed, they regarded Tasan as a dangerous heretic who could bring divine wrath upon them. Even the Yun clansmen had mistreated him, one of their own, when he visited them. The Catholics' mortal crime was their

faith in Western religion. Their family properties were confiscated, they were executed or died in prison, and their families were forced to disperse. The extreme fear of the townspeople, therefore, was perfectly reasonable.

In the seclusion of his banishment, Tasan was so hungry for human contact that on some rare occasions when a poor man who came to the wretched tavern for a drink happened to exchange a few words with him, it would be enough to cheer him up and sustain him for a few days. In this way a friendship had developed between Tasan and a simple old man called P'yo, the tavern-keeper's brother, who tilled a small lot leased from the Paengnyŏn Temple. The old man regularly came to the market, held six times a month, and then to the tavern. Each time he came, he knelt in front of Tasan's room to pay his respects to him. He was extremely poor, and even on his outings he was always dressed in rags. "How difficult it must be for you," he would say to comfort Tasan, forgetting his own hardships.

The year after Tasan had arrived in Kangjin, the old man had entered the tavern as usual, while the noisy customers were speaking somberly among themselves.

"Did his wound become infected?"

"Such a catastrophe I have never seen before!"

"He must have been driven to it. What a pity, what a pity!"

"Whatever it is, it's really a wicked thing to happen, isn't it?"

Their conversation had suddenly stopped when they noticed the old man, but each had already had his say, and the story was clear to Tasan.

Old P'yo had a nephew who lived in Nojŏn. A son was born to him soon after the funeral of his father. Barely three days old, the infant was registered for military taxation, while the grandfather's name was still on the list. Since the family was practically starving, and unable to pay a tax levied on the three "able-bodied men" in the same family, the family ox was confiscated. The nephew took out a knife and cut off his own penis, wailing, "It's because of this damn thing that my family has to suffer." His wife ran to the officials carrying the severed penis, blood still dripping from it. She begged them in vain for mercy. The guards locked the door, and the woman kept on weeping in front of it.

On market days, Tasan usually closed his door tightly, shutting himself away from the noise. That day, however, he realized what

had happened from the exchanges of the crowd outside. He was dumbfounded by the horror and absurdity of the story. Ruefully, he stroked his long beard. Then, taking out a brush, he composed a poem in one sweeping moment. He titled it "Elegy on the Castration":

Mournful is the young woman's wail in the reed field.
Echoing against the prison wall, her lament rises to heaven.
Though many a soldier-husband has failed to return home,
Since olden times, no story such as this—no tale of castration—
Has ever been told before.
She is already clothed in mourning garb for her father-in-law
And her babe barely out of his mother's womb.
Why, then, three generations listed on the military registry?

Before reaching the age of twenty, Tasan followed his father, the magistrate of the district, to their native town, and had the opportunity to observe him ruling over the people. For a short time, Tasan himself had served as a magistrate with compassion and fairness. However, it was only in banishment that he had become deeply disturbed by the infinite sufferings of the people under the inconsistencies of the system, the breaches of official discipline, and the corrupt officials.

After the mutilation incident, Tasan became closer to the old man. One balmy autumn day, old P'yo came to see Tasan, though it was not a market day. "How is His Excellency today?" he asked, addressing Tasan in deference to his former official title, Royal Secretary, instead of as the "gentleman from Seoul."

As usual, Tasan was immersed in reading in his room, which was dark even in the middle of the day. The books piled near his desk had been borrowed from the library of his maternal clan, for which he had had to walk more than twenty-five miles and endure the displeasure of his unwelcoming kin. Even the small writing table and the ink-slab were pieces that had been abandoned in their barn, and that he had salvaged and repaired.

Watching the scholar preoccupied with reading in a windowless room—and how could one read in darkness?—P'yo often wondered if Tasan might not indeed be a heretic who practiced magic as they said Catholics did. Out of reverence, he usually refrained from speaking to Tasan, but seeing no one in the tavern and taking advantage of the door that had been left half open to let the warm,

springlike air in, he called once again. Tasan, who had not heard him the first time, went on reading aloud in a vigorous and proud voice.

"Your Excellency."

Pushing his spectacles back on his forehead, Tasan looked toward the old man. His face had become pale during his long confinement. P'yo felt himself to be unworthy in the presence of a man who dazzled him with his imposing features—the prominent forehead, noble nose, full cheekbones, large, elongated eyes, and the beautiful, thick black beard. Daunted, P'yo fumbled, "Well . . ."

"What is it?"

"I have a friend who works as a servant in Mandŏk Temple . . ."

"What about him?"

"He tells me that a monk named Hyejang has been living there since this spring."

"Who is Hyejang?"

"He is a young monk of high esteem. Everyone wants to meet him, but they say he refuses. That makes them even more eager."

"Why do they so wish to meet him?"

"Because, being a high priest, he also reads fortunes from one's countenance, and he's good at soothsaying."

"Strange. A Buddhist monk telling fortunes."

"No. It's not what you think," the old man added, shaking both his head and hands vigorously. "He doesn't do it for a fee. Whatever remarks he drops in passing here and there happen to be astonishingly correct."

"A peculiar monk, indeed." Showing no interest, Tasan slid his spectacles back onto his face.

"Your Excellency," continued the old man hastily, "to tell you the truth, the monk Hyejang says he must meet you."

"Meet me? Why?" Tasan's eyes widened.

P'yo lowered his head, avoiding Tasan's eyes as though blinded by them. Looking up, he urged Tasan in earnest, saying, "He wants to meet you very sincerely. Why don't you go see him? He is a very famous monk."

"Who is this monk who anxiously and sincerely wants to meet me, a treasonous heretic, whom everyone else avoids and fears like a demon god?" thought Tasan, and yet he was moved.

The next day after lunch, Tasan, guided by the old man, set out

for Mandŏk Temple. Situated facing the sea on the slope of Mount Mandŏk, the temple was celebrated throughout the Koryŏ (918–1392) and the Yi (1392–1910) dynasties for producing famous monks. Tasan wore an informal outfit consisting of cotton trousers and a shirt, and a wide-sleeved outercoat tied with a dark blue sash. He had thought of putting on the more formal long gown left hanging on its stand, unused in his long confinement, but thinking of his circumstances, he had changed his mind, and just added a wide-brimmed horsehair hat. Nonetheless, uncommon dignity and nobility exuded from him. Not for him the swaggering, unsteady steps of an aristocrat; Tasan's gait was so swift for a short man that, although accustomed to walking, P'yo was forced to hurry after Tasan breathlessly. During the trip, a distance of five miles from town, Tasan did not pause for a moment to rest and never once stumbled on the way up the rocky slope to the temple, where fall arrived early. The temple lay deep in blazing autumn hues. The dizzying splendor of the foliage, like brilliant colors freshly painted on the sanctuary of a grand Buddhist temple, struck the visitor with awe. The deathly calm, in which all sounds seemed crystallized, contrasted with the grandeur of the colors, simultaneously symbolizing both suffering and deliverance.

"I wonder where he is. He must have gone further up the mountain to cut wood." Mumbling to himself, the old man disappeared to look for his friend.

Tasan contemplated a hanging scroll of calligraphy in the style of the Six Dynasties of China, attributed to Kim Saeng, then his eyes rested on the sea before him. In the fickle autumn weather, mist was fast enveloping the sea, and the day soon turned overcast. Only a portion of the island in front, and the summit of the mountain behind, were faintly visible. The reeds growing on the slope swayed in confusion, and fine misty rain like smoke spread from the sea, filling the temple garden.

"It's raining. Why don't you come in to keep yourself dry?" Tasan turned around and saw a spry monk of about thirty, wearing an ink-black shirt and trousers. He did not wear a monk's robe, nor did he greet Tasan with palms pressed together as was customary for a Buddhist when meeting all living creatures. Tasan noticed a large scar on his shaven head. He had a sharp nose, and even sharper eyes. Instinctively, Tasan knew that this must be Hyejang.

"Thank you," Tasan said gently, following the monk to the entrance, where he took off his shoes. As he was about to enter, he could not hold back a bitter smile. The disorder was just as he imagined it would be, unsuitable for a monk's cell. It was clear that a novice's care had not reached this room, with its uncleared bedding, clothing in a heap pushed into the corner, and bottle of wine lying near the door.

Though stories abounded of the eccentric behavior of many celebrated monks, such disorder was repugnant to Tasan, an orderly and rational man. The waywardness of such monks seemed to him mere pretense, impertinent and even vicious. He mused as he recoiled that he had yet to meet a truly virtuous monk. Pushing away the bedding, he sat down.

"It seems there is no tea left for this poor monk," muttered Hyejang, picking up the empty bottle, and shaking it, his speech slurred as if from drinking.

A faint smile appeared on Tasan's face. He knew that the sharp eyes he had seen outside were not those of a drunk.

"You like to drink, don't you?"

"Like to drink? No, it's only cereal tea."

"Indeed. No doubt, then, it must be fermented cereal."

"No matter. In whatever form one eats cereal, boiled, kneaded, or fermented, monks can eat it, too. Isn't 'Oak in the Garden' also the way of the Buddha, I wonder?"

Tasan tensed slightly. A Confucian scholar, he was unversed in Sŏn Buddhism. However, he had heard of a story told by the Hwadu sect: One day a monk asked a master, Choju, "What is the Buddha's way?" The master answered, "It is in the oak tree in the front garden." Upon hearing this, the monk was said to have attained great enlightenment, realizing that everything contains the Buddha's way.

The paper window squeaked in the wind like a sob as the fine misty rain turned into a heavy downpour.

"I am sorry to be a burden to you. I just wanted to shelter myself from the rain," said Tasan, feeling uncomfortable.

"It must be our karma to meet each other like this. Since everything has its cause and effect, our meeting, too, is the result of five hundred chains of reincarnations. You, my elderly brother, are the

old yang, and this humble monk the young yin. This meeting is propitious."

"What do you mean?"

"To tell you the truth, a little while ago, this humble monk had some nutmeg cake. Then a strange thing happened. I dropped a chopstick twice. Yin follows yang, and according to the hexagrams of the *I Ching*, the meeting of the two brings about great attainment."

"Impudence! All phenomena constantly change. How dare you discuss good and evil omens by such superstitious methods?" said Tasan, gathering his coat and standing up to leave. Capriciously, the weather had changed; the rain had stopped and the clouds were now torn, exposing patches of blue sky.

By the time Tasan reached the tavern, the short autumn day had already given way to dusk. He washed his feet, and was about to enter the room when Hyejang, the monk he had so inauspiciously met, dashed in frantically and prostrated himself in front of Tasan's room.

"Illustrious teacher Chŏng,[3] how have you deceived this destitute monk whose only steadfast yearning day and night has been to meet you? I was blind not to have recognized you. I have followed your honorable shadow," Hyejang sobbed, his head still pressed to the ground. Moved by the sincerity of the monk's words, Tasan, in his stockinged feet, came down to the yard and, taking Hyejang's hand, led him to his room. Thus began their relationship, which could not have taken place without the consequential effect of five hundred chains of reincarnations. They spent the night debating the philosophy of divination.

At the time of their meeting, Tasan had just begun to concentrate on studying the *I Ching*, or *Book of Change*, the most difficult of the Confucian classics. Even Confucius himself is said to have struggled; he so loved the book that the leather which bound it wore off three times. If one hundred men pursued the path to the understanding of the *I Ching*, there would be one hundred ways to achieve that understanding; indeed, it was said to be laid out in a labyrinth of darkness. Tasan rejected the idea that the study of divination was a mere practice of magic to determine the principle

3. Tasan's given name was Chŏng Yag-yong. As the story explains, he took the name Tasan as his pen name.

of yin and yang. He argued, instead, that it was a systematic theory developed by the sages of ancient times in an effort to divine the mandate of Heaven.

It was their mutual interest in the study of the *I Ching* that had brought Tasan and Hyejang together, and bound them in deep friendship. Impressive was the picture of the two men huddled together in discourse all through the night under the flickering lamplight, one a somber scholar in banishment, the other a poverty-stricken monk in the time of Buddhist repression. Hyejang's unexpected mastery of the Confucian and Chu Hsi classics prompted Tasan to declare that he was indeed a scholar of great learning and virtue. However, Hyejang, recognizing the superiority of Tasan's commentaries, surrendered himself and became his disciple. Before the end of the year, Hyejang had arranged for his mentor to move into a new residence, called the Mountain Abode of Precious Benevolence, situated on the slope of Mount Ui. Thus, Tasan was finally able to escape from the small, dank room in the tavern. In his new residence, he spent the winter with his son, Hag-yŏn, devoting himself to the boy's education.

Tasan influenced Hyejang in many ways. The disciple discovered in himself a love for poetry, to which he had previously been indifferent. Since his introduction to Tasan's interpretation of the *I Ching*, he had begun to doubt the foundation of his philosophy of life, which caused him to suffer further.

Nor was Hyejang's influence on his teacher's growing interest in Sŏn Buddhism insignificant. Though ordinarily acerbic, rough, and stubborn, Hyejang was gentle and considerate to Tasan. Soon after Tasan moved to his new residence, Hyejang sent the fresh tea-leaf buds that grew on the slope of Mount Mandŏk. It was Tasan's first taste of the beverage, and it converted him into a great lover of tea. His enthusiasm for it was such that he chose for himself the pen name Tasan, meaning "tea-mountain."

In the spring of 1808, Tasan again moved, this time to Kyuldong on Mount Tasan, to a villa owned by his maternal kin, Yun Tan, a retired government official. After settling in his new home, Tasan began accepting disciples to whom he taught the Confucian classics.

He did not waste away his exiled days in idle distraction. With his eighteen disciples, Tasan dug out the area near the thatched cottage which had been built through the kindness of Yun Tan for

Tasan to use as his lecture hall. Bringing large stones from the mountain, Tasan fashioned a square pond modeled after a typical Yi dynasty design. He constructed a miniature island, and diverted water from the mountain stream to make a waterfall that cascaded into the pond. He planted irises and placed camellia bushes around the pond, where their evergreen branches would spread over the water. A celebrated physician, he planted medicinal herbs in the patches along the mountain slope.

Mount Tasan, as the name indicated, was covered with tea plants. Joy filled him as he watched their lustrous leaves and white flowers flutter like pear blossoms, filling the air with fragrance. Plum trees and camellia bushes also bloomed on the mountain, and the age-old trees gave forth their perfumed scent. In autumn, the yellow nutmeg flowers intoxicated the entire village with their sweet aroma. Indeed, Tasan's new home would have been a paradise on earth were it not for the loneliness, and even that Hyejang helped him bear by being both a thoughtful friend and an exceptionally sagacious disciple.

That year on the Day of the Grain Rains, Hyejang came to visit Tasan as usual, though his ailment had reached an advanced stage. The swelling had obviously worsened, and it was clear to Tasan that his friend was suffering from a liver disease. He knew of a rare medicine he believed would certainly help; however, since he was living in banishment, it was out of his reach. Feeling desolate, he had his disciples go out and fish for loaches, which he stuffed into an aged squash and boiled, a humble remedy. Tasan persuaded Hyejang to drink the broth in the hope of reducing the swelling.

Hyejang took out a bunch of newly made fur brushes from his shoulder pack. "I caught some weasels that were making noises near the furnace; I had some spare moments." Known for his dexterity, Hyejang excelled especially in the art of brush making. It must have required all of his last energy to make these. Tasan's eyes filled with tears.

"Because of you it seems weasels will soon be an extinct species in Taehŭng Temple," he bantered, in a rare attempt at humor. "Magnificent work of art! Now I will no longer be able to blame the brush for my poor calligraphy." His face contorted in an effort to smile.

Even as they gathered the tea leaves together, Hyejang had breathed with difficulty. That troubled breathing still rang in Ta-