



Reform or Maintenance of the Land System as Executing Justice: A Comparison of Jeong Yakyong and King Jeongjo

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Abstract

The goal of both Jeong Yakyong and King Jeongjo was to resolve the gap between rich and poor that in their day was increasing due to landowners buying up extensive areas of land. They regarded this as a question of executing justice. Therefore, Jeong argued the hamlet-land system, and later supplemented this with the well-field system, as he believed this would equalize the people's livelihoods while increasing government revenue. Jeongjo also implemented the well-field system for land reform, albeit on a trial basis for a short period in some towns. Jeongjo's goal was to allow villagers to be farmers in times of peace and soldiers in times war, though ultimately he did not achieve this aim. Later, Jeongjo implemented the military provision-land system of his predecessor King Yeongjo, fearing the implementation of the well-field system would cause popular resentment. Jeong Yakyong's long-term proposal was for the implementation of the well-field system nationwide. In this, Jeong's proposal was reformative, whereas Jeongjo sought only to maintain the existing land system. But both Jeong and Jeongjo's support of rice paddies meant the maintenance of an existing system, not reform. In his reform proposals, Jeong's focus was on justice, while that of Jeongjo was social stability.

Keywords: well-field system, military provision land (屯田), rice paddies (水田), hamlet-land system (閭田), gap between rich and poor, stability

Introduction

During the reign of King Jeongjo 正祖 (r. 1776–1800; penname, Hongjae 弘齋) of Korea's Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), that king and Jeong Yakyong 丁若鏞 (1762–1836; penname, Dasan 茶山), his royal secretary (*seungji* 承旨), debated the implementation of land reforms to bridge the severe gap between rich and poor caused by the growing power of landowners, reforms they regarded as executing justice.¹ In this article, I compare the land reform proposals of Jeong Yakyong and King Jeongjo in furtherance of justice. Several scholars have examined Jeong Yakyong's land reform proposals: the hamlet-land (*yeojeon* 閭田) and well-field (*jeongjeon* 井田) systems (G. Park 1977; Choe 2019; Shin 1986). Shin Yongha (1986) argued that Jeong Yakyong's proposals were not reformative but feudal in nature. However, others have disputed Shin's assertions, arguing that Jeong Yakyong's emphasis on social equality made his proposals modern systems (Y. Yi 1996). Some researchers have debated whether Jeong Yakyong's ultimate goal was the well-field or the hamlet-land system (Y. Yi 1996; Jo 1998). Yi Jongwoo (2018) identified the implicit idea of economic liberty in both the hamlet-land and well-field systems, while Kang Boseong (2022) examined the debate on the well-field system by Neo-Confucian scholars during the mid-Joseon period. Kang examined the view of the Neo-Confucian scholar Han Baekgyeom 韓百謙 (1552–1615) on the well-field system, Yu Geun's 柳根 (1549–1627) support for Han, and Nam Guman's 南九萬 (1629–1711) criticism of Han. In this article, I examine the debate between Jeong Yakyong and King Jeongjo concerning the land reform as a question of justice, while comparing their respective approaches.

1. Jeong Yakyong's proposals to the king can be found in his work, *Nongchaek* (Questions and Answers on Agricultural Policy) (Jeong 2002d, 188a–d).

Implementing Justice through Resolving the Severe Gap between Rich and Poor

According to Jeong Yakyong's *Inquiry into the Roots of Politics* (*Wonjeong* 原政), politics implies rectifying the country's defective land system. He argued that the current defective system had created a wide gap between rich and poor, a result of landowners buying up large areas of land. Therefore, Jeong claimed that the land must be redistributed equally among the people. According to him, reforming the land system at that time was tantamount to executing justice.

Politics means correcting wrong. Even though they are all our people, some are rich because they own many fertile farms, while some are poor because they do not own any farm, not even barren land. It would be considered correct governance if the land were evenly distributed among the people and the system were rectified. The ruler rectifies this issue, improves the land, and evenly distributes it to the people. This is politics. Those who own fertile land discard the surplus crop, while others who do not own even a barren piece of land face scarcity of food. Therefore, the ruler creates the ship and wagon, and standardizes weights and measures. He moves the surplus produce from one area to another that has not produced enough. In this way, both sides are able to communicate with each other. The ruler rectifies the error, and that is governance.² (Jeong 2002f, 212b)

Jeong Yakyong believed that wealth should be equally distributed among the people. In his manuscript, *On Land* (*Jeollon* 田論), he characterized the distribution of wealth in the form of land as the most important issue in politics. Moreover, he emphasized that whether the harvest be a surplus or deficient one, it was necessary to develop transportation for the people to exchange their produce. Therefore, he regarded politics as a process of

2. 政也者, 正也. 均吾民也, 何使之竝地之利而富厚, 何使之阻地之澤而貧薄? 爲之計地, 與民而均分焉, 以正之, 謂之政. 均吾民也, 何使之積土之所豐而棄其餘, 何使之闕土之所蓄而憂其匱? 爲之作舟車謹權量, 遷其貨得, 通其有無, 以正之, 謂之政.

rectifying an existing error in the land system.

According to Jeong Yakyong's *On Land*, at the beginning of the world all people were created equal (Jeong 2002b, 1:233a–b).³ However, by Jeong Yakyong's time in late Joseon, the gap between rich and poor had widened due to landowners' increasing acquisition of land (Jeong 2002b, 233b).⁴ The landowners were growing richer as the farmers grew poorer. Accordingly, he proposed the hamlet-land system, a land reform to ensure the welfare of farmers. As Jeong relates it:

Heaven gives birth to the people, and the first thing Heaven does is to put them on arable land so that they can live and eat. Then Heaven also sets up a ruler and his magistrates to act as the father and mother of the people and to equalize and regulate their production so that they can live side by side. But the ruler and his magistrates watch nonchalantly while their charges fight each other to take over and swallow as much land as they can, and they do nothing to stop them. They allow the strong and robust to get even more while the weak are simply shoved aside until the fall to the ground and die. Could you say that such men make good rulers and magistrates? For that reason, those are able to regulate the production of the people so that everyone has an equal share and can live side by side do what a ruler and his magistrate should do Those unable to do so do the opposite of what a ruler and his magistrates should do.⁵ (Jeong 2002b, 1:233a–b)

Jeong Yakyong argued that it was the ruler's duty to eradicate starvation among his people and ensure equality. Jeong Yakyong's idea of original equality in the world as expressed in his *On Land* is similar to the notion

3. 天生斯民, 先爲之置田地, 令生而就哺焉。

4. 今文武貴臣及閭巷富人, 一戶粟數千石者甚衆, 計其田不下百結, 則是殘九百九十人之命, 以肥一戶者也。國中富人如嶺南崔氏湖南王氏, 粟萬石者有之, 計其田不下四百結, 則是殘三千九百九十人之命, 以肥一戶者也。

5. 天生斯民, 先爲之置田地, 令生而就哺焉。既又爲之立君立牧, 令爲民父母, 得均制其產而竝活之, 而爲君牧者拱手孰視其諸子之相攻奪竝吞而莫之禁也, 使強壯者益獲, 而弱者受擠批, 顛于地以死, 則其爲君牧者, 將善爲人君牧者乎? 故能均制其產而竝活之者, 君牧者也; 不能均制其產而竝活之者, 負君牧者也。 Translation of James Palais (Jeong 1996, 64).

detailed in his *Inquiry into the Root of the Ruler* (*Wonmok* 原牧), wherein at the beginning of the world there was no social class. At that time, according to Jeong, the people lived without a class system and elected their rulers to resolve conflicts (Jeong 2002g, 213d–214a).⁶ The former idea implies economic equality and the latter, political equality.

In *On Land*, Jeong Yakyong proposes that rulers place the responsibility of distributing the modes of production—agriculture, manual industry, and commerce—on the people (Jeong 2002b, 1:233b).⁷ At the time, high-level civil and military officials and wealthy landlords might possess up to ten thousand *seok* (a sack of 40kg) of grain, capable of feeding about 990 people for one year. Examples include the Choe clan of Yeongnam (Gyeongsang-do province) and the Wang clan of Honam (Jeolla-do province) (Jeong 2002b, 1:233b).⁸ For this reason, Jeong Yakyong argued that land needed to be redistributed equally among the people. At the time, Joseon's total arable farmland was 800,000 *gyeol* (or about 8,647,200 km²) and the country's population was about eight million. One household was counted as having ten persons. Therefore, Jeong argued, if one *gyeol* of land could be distributed to each household, the population would become economically equal, with an improved standard of living (Jeong 2002b, 1:233b).⁹ He regarded the implementation of the system as a matter of carrying out justice.

According to Jeong's *Gyeongse yupyo* (Treatise on Government), the land should be distributed to skilled farmers, while others should be made to work in other areas: handicrafts, commerce, forestry, fishing, stock farming, and for women, the making of thread and garments. Jeong argued that people good at commerce should do commerce and those talented in

6. 遼古之初，民而已，豈有牧哉？民于然聚居，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。

7. 既又爲之立君立牧，令爲民父母，得均制其產而竝活之。不能均制其產而竝活之者，負君牧者也。

8. 國中富人如嶺南崔氏湖南王氏，粟萬石者有之，計其田不下四百結，則是殘三千九百九十人之命，以肥一戶者也。

9. 試以十口爲一戶，則每一戶得田一結，然後其產爲均也。

handicrafts should work in handicrafts (Jeong 2002a, 5:385c–d).¹⁰ Following this, all industries would develop evenly, according to Jeong. And similar to this idea from the *Gyeongse yupyo* is Jeong's view from *Jeollon* that it would be just if those who farm received land, while those who do not farm did not receive land (Jeong 2002b, 2:233c).¹¹ This was justice in the view of Jeong Yakyong. According to Park Jonggeun, by distributing land to skilled farmers, Jeong Yakyong sought to maximize the labor capacity of farmers and the rationalization of agricultural management (J. Park 1963, 196). In this regard, Yoon Suk-Ho (2018, 84) argued that Jeong's goal in land reform was the redistribution of the land to good farmers to have them responsible for its cultivation.

Unlike Jeong Yakyong, King Jeongjo perceived that even if the land system were reformed, the rich would nevertheless become richer and the poor poorer. Moreover, he could not find the right provincial rulers to implement land reforms. Therefore, he considered the maintenance of the existing system rather than its replacement.

At the beginning of the Tang 唐 dynasty, the *koufentian* 口分田 [distributed land according to population] and *shiyetian* 世業田 [inherited land] systems were implemented. However, the lands were soon bought up by landowners. The land system cannot suddenly be changed thus. The first thing a ruler must do is to survey the land again, but if a town cannot find the right official to undertake it, it would be better not to undertake it at all. (Jeongjo 2001h, 206c)¹²

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10. 飯雖貴，悉天下之民而歸於田，亦困而死而已矣。工不攻金攻木攻陶瓦埴埴，以出其器用，則有死已矣。商不通貨財還無，以濟其匱乏，則有死已矣。虞不作山澤之材，牧不蕃食鳥獸，嬪不治絲麻葛紵，以資其衣服，則有死已矣。若是者，皆不可以爲農。不可以爲農，則不可以授田，計口立率，以分其田，有是理乎？田也者，天子諸侯之物也，天子諸侯之有是田，而頒之於農夫也。猶今之富人，有是田而授之於佃夫也，富人之授田于佃夫也。必擇其健壯勤蓄，有婦子傭奴可助其功者授之，天子諸侯之授田也，何以異是？冢宰以九職，任萬民，唯其可農者，任之以農，故九職農居一焉。盡天下之民而計口分田，有是理乎？父母有十子，其可農者農之。其可工者工之，可賈者賈之，其職事既分，其生理以贍，冢宰之以九職，任萬民，何以異是？
 11. 使農者得田，不爲農者不得之則斯可矣。
 12. 唐初，始立口分世業之法，旋爲兼并者所占，田制之不可猝變，類如此，目下先務，改量爲上，但邑不得人，則不如不改量。 *Jeongjo sillok*, *gwon* 53, Year 24 (1800), Month 2, Day 22, Entry 1. This was the king's reply to a memorial submitted by Yi Gyeongsin.

King Jeongjo believed in the importance of accurately surveying land and levying the appropriate tax. However, his plan could not be implemented due to the lack of qualified local governors (Jeongjo 2001h, 206c); Jeongjo lacked faith in his officials' abilities. Rather, Jeongjo made local governors teach agricultural techniques to farmers, and attempted to implement measures to increase their harvests.

Even though I directed the farmers to sprinkle rice seeds when they could not plant rice seedlings in the drought, the irresponsible farmers idled away their time, and local governors paid no attention to agriculture. They did not follow my directive. My order to focus on farming eventually remained a futile remark on paper. How I lament that! There are grains suited to the land type, and there are grains suitable for the season. If the local governors carefully examine the grain suitable for the land and know the right time to plow and sow the seeds in the field, how can he worry about the people being unable to eat grain? (Jeongjo 2001g, 347d)¹³

According to King Jeongjo, it was his own duty to ensure all people were treated equally and that there was sufficient food for everyone.¹⁴ This constituted the practice of justice according to King Jeongjo. However, Jeongjo did not consider humans to be essentially equal, as Jeong Yakyong did.

King Jeongjo and Jeong Yakyong's Debates on the Implementation of Land Reform

King Jeongjo often held debates with *chogye munsin* 抄啓文臣 (young and

13. 每當水旱不適，秧節過期之年，雖有代播之令，愚民懶於耕作，邑倅暗於農理，致使務農之朝令，徒作紙上之空言，可勝歎哉！蓋地有宜土之穀，穀有及時之種...爲守宰者，苟能相土之宜，度時之可，以耕以播，則何患不食實？

14. King Jeongjo described himself through the metaphor of the moon (Jeongjo 2001k, 159c-d), implying he was an absolute enlightened monarch. Traditionally, the sun in East Asia was identified with the Emperor of China, whereas the authority of the Korean king was merely expressed in terms of moonlight (Kantorowicz 1957, 272; Lovins 2018, 11).

competent scholar-officials recruited and educated under King Jeongjo). In Jeongjo's debates with Jeong Yak-yong, the king's inquiry was whether the well-field and limited-field systems—meaning land system reform—could be implemented in Joseon. King Jeongjo possessed the will to reform the land system of the period, wishing as he did to resolve the severe gap between rich and poor caused by the increasing holdings of landowners.

The king [Jeongjo] said, “After the implementation of *cheonmak* 阡陌 [land reform by Shang Yang 商鞅], meaning the abolition of the well-field system, the rich bought up a lot of the land and so the great landlords began to emerge...When Zhang Hengqu 張橫渠 [Zhang Zai 張載] argued for the reimplementation of the well-field system, some worried about bringing much trouble upon the people and fostering unrest by such a reimplementation. When Dong Jiangdou 董江都 [Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒] discussed the implementation of the limited-land system (限田), some worried about a public outcry and so that reimplementation went nowhere...After the passing of many generations, cannot the old system be reimplemented now? Can we not recreate that original system unchanged by referencing that old system, and so hand it down to all future generations?”...Jeong Yak-yong replied, “The well-field system was abolished, so the land boundaries also disappeared. Therefore, lands were not reclaimed and poor skills increased. The people's sumptuous moods were increasing and so there were not enough farmers to undertake the work of farming. Therefore, Dong Zhongshu discussed the implementation of the limited-land system and Zhang Hengqu argued for the reimplementation of the well-field system and the rice paddy system in Yuji's proposal and in Xu Zhenming's proposal. Talking about the distant past, their words were empty. Cannot these systems be implemented again? At present, those systems cannot be implemented.”¹⁵ (Jeong 2002d, 187d–188a)

15. 王若曰...粵自阡陌開，而竝兼之徒始起...張橫渠思復井牧之制，而或慮其勞民動衆；董江都議行限田之法，而或病其徒擾無...豈世級漸降，古制不可復行於今歟？抑別有通變得宜，酌古準今，垂萬世不易之通憲歟？...及夫井地既廢，溝洫又淤，則地利不可闢也。淫技日興，侈風漸盛，則人力不可紓也。於是乎江都限田之議，橫渠井牧之論，虞集水田之奏，貞明潞水之篇，莫不坐譚遠古，空言無補，無亦天運之不可復廻歟？抑世莫之用也。

In this inquiry of King Jeongjo and reply by Jeong Yak-yong, both King Jeongjo and Jeong Yak-yong regarded the well-field and the limited-land systems as sound ones, because they considered the systems as capable of closing the gap between rich and poor. King Jeongjo believed that the gap between rich and poor was exacerbated by the abolishment of the well-field system. The well-field system was abolished by Shang Yang 商鞅 (?–338 BCE) in the reign of Duke Xiao 孝公 (381–338 BCE) of Qin 秦. Therefore, King Jeongjo wanted to reimplement the well-field system to bridge the gap between rich and poor. After the abolishment of the well-field system, Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077, penname, 橫渠 Hengqu), a Confucian scholar of China's Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279), argued for the reimplement of the well-field system, but his argument was criticized due to its potential to cause popular unrest. When Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE, a.k.a. Dong Jiangdou 董江都), a Confucian scholar of the Han 漢 dynasty (220 BCE–202 CE) of China, discussed the implementation of the limited-land system (限田), others worried about public outcry and so that reimplement went nowhere. Here King Jeongjo quotes the criticisms of the argument of Zhang Zai and Dong Zhongshu. Jeongjo also worried about popular unrest from any attempt to reimplement the well-field system or limited-land system. Like King Jeongjo, Jeong Yak-yong also regarded the well-field system or limited-land system positively for their potential to resolve the severe gap between rich and poor.

The next inquiry of King Jeongjo concerned methods for the development of agriculture because the king regarded agriculture as the most important industry. In Jeong Yak-yong's reply to the monarch's inquiry, he proposed the implementation of the equal-field system, and to this end, a land survey should first be done.

The king [Jeongjo] said, "Ah, it is the top priority of state affairs to give importance [in agriculture] to the fundamental teachings and to curb the lowest technology, so I contemplate this day and night. Thus, I send the people messages of encouragement for farming in early spring"...Jeong Yak-yong replied, "In general, the establishment of the foundation of the people depends only on the two words, equal field. At present, the well-

field system, whereby eight households cultivate land distributed to them as their own private land, and [among this land] cultivate jointly one public field to use its harvest to cover the tax, cannot be implemented. Evaluating the fertility of the land, limiting the possession of land, and narrowing the gap between rich and poor, depends on an assessment of the land using registers and maps. This will provide information on the actual population, including soldiers who are willing to die for the country and the farmers who wish to cultivate crops. This depends solely on Your Majesty [King Jeongjo] looking into this diligently.”¹⁶ (Jeong 2002d, 188a–d)

King Jeongjo did not reply to this submission by Jeong Yak-yong, because it was itself a reply to King Jeongjo’s inquiry.

Land System Reform or Maintenance: A Comparison of Jeong Yak-yong and King Jeongjo

According to the *Nongchaek* 農策 (Questions and Answers on Agricultural Policy) compiled by Jeong Yak-yong, the debate between King Jeongjo and Jeong Yak-yong concerned whether the well-field, limited-land, or equal-field systems might be suitable for implementation in Joseon. Both King Jeongjo and Jeong Yak-yong discussed the systems in their writings. First, let us compare Jeong Yak-yong’s and King Jeongjo’s views on the well-field system.¹⁷

16. 嗚呼! 重本教抑末技, 卽王政之首務, 而予寡人夙夜念茲者也。孟春之月, 每下勸農之教...若夫立民之本, 亦惟在均田二字。噫! 井地助耕之法, 雖不可與論於今世, 因阡陌之勢, 量肥瘠之品, 制其多寡, 平其富貧。亦惟手握版圖, 默運神機之在何如耳。如是然後, 民口可得其實總, 兵力可得其死心, 而天下之農, 舉熙熙然願耕其野矣, 惟殿下澄省而懲行之。臣謹對。

17. The well-field system concerns the equal distribution of land. It was implemented during the Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE) of China until its abolishment by Shang Yang. In this system, the land was divided into nine equal parts, which were then distributed one to each of eight households, with the harvest shared among them. These eight households jointly cultivated the ninth part, to use it to pay taxes. According to Mencius, this was the start of benevolent politics (*renzheng* 仁政) (Mencius 1970, 3A3, 549–550), the practice of the Kingly Way (*wangdao* 王道), and ideal Confucian governance.

According to Jeong, the implementation of the well-field system would be difficult in Joseon due to the country's many mountains and valleys, and also because rice in Joseon was cultivated using a water-logging technique, not dry fields, whereas the well-field system was meant for land with dry fields.

Will the well-field system be implemented? No, because it can be implemented only on a lean field. Now that Joseon has good irrigation facilities, how can we throw away the rice paddy? The well-field system can be implemented only on a flat surface. Since cultivation [in Joseon] has been taken up in valleys by means of logging, can we abandon the slope fields?¹⁸ (Jeong 2002b, 2:233c)

Rice-paddy (*sujeon* 水田) farming was prevalent at that time, whereas the well-field system could only effectively be implemented in dry fields, making its implementation problematic in Joseon, according to Jeong Yakyong. Further, according to Jeong, the rice-paddy system was a sound one and did not require reform. King Jeongjo was interested enough in rice cultivation to farm a rice paddy in the rear yard of Changdeok Palace (Changdeokgung 昌德宮),¹⁹ implying that Jeongjo, like Jeong Yakyong, also desired the maintenance of the current rice-paddy system.

Like Jeong Yakyong, King Jeongjo also argued the implementation of the well-field system in Joseon was difficult because of the country's many small fields, mountains, and valleys.

The boundary of the well-field is difficult to draw in our state because of many small fields and mountains and valleys.²⁰ (Jeongjo 2001b, 417b)

But unlike Jeong Yakyong, King Jeongjo did not say the well-field system could not be implemented in Joseon due to the country's prevalent rice-

18. 將爲井田乎? 曰否. 井田不可行也. 井田者, 旱田也. 水利既興, 秔稌既甘矣, 棄水田哉? 井田者, 平田也. 割柞既力, 山谿既闢矣, 棄餘田哉?

19. *Jeongjo sillok, gwon* 5, Year 2 (1778), Month 6, Day 3, Entry 1.

20. 略有施行者, 至于我東, 壤地偏小, 而山谿居多, 井界難設.

paddy cultivation.

The well-field system proposed by Jeong Yakyong was an alternative to the hamlet-land system, an original land system devised by Jeong Yakyong (Yoon 2022, 228). Jeong proposed to institute the hamlet-land system as a means of preventing the unjust ownership of land by people other than farmers, thereby ameliorating starvation among farmers. According to the hamlet-land system, land should be given only to those who farm, and not to those who do not, including those in the industrial, government, and commercial spheres, who can trade goods or services for grain (Jeong 2002b, 2:233c).²¹ If the government grants land to those who do not farm—officials, merchants, and industrialists—they may become landlords, reducing farmers to peasants. Jeong Yakyong was concerned about this, and so proposed reforming the land system to narrow the gap between rich and poor, and so provide minimal food security for the starving peoples. To this end, Jeong conceived of the hamlet-land system (Jeong 2002b, 4:234a).²² Under this system, all villagers jointly cultivate farms in their villages and distribute crops according to hours of contributed labor (Jeong 2002b, 3:233d).²³ According to Shin Yongha (1986), Jeong proposed this system with reference to the system of farmers' cooperatives (*dure*), a custom among rural communities at the time.

Further, according to this hamlet-land system, farmers begin by working on the hamlet land where they were born. However, if that land yield proves too low, they may move elsewhere. According to Jeong, farmers' movement to other lands should be permitted because of the people's nature of seeking to serve their own interests (Jeong 2002b, 4:234a),²⁴ which implies

21. 農者得田，不爲農者不得之，農者得穀，不爲農者不得之。工以其器易，商以其貨易，無傷也。

22. 上不出令而民之田地均，上不出令而民之富貧均，熙熙然來，穰穰然往，不出八九年，國中之田均矣。

23. 凡一閭之田，令一閭之人咸治厥事，無此疆爾界，唯閭長之命是聽，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。

24. 閭長曰：某甲耕彼，某乙芸彼，職事既分。有負耒耜挈妻子而至者曰：願受一廛，將奈何？曰：受之而已矣。曰：一閭之田不加廣，一閭之民無定額奈何？曰：民之趨利也，由水之趨下也。知地廣而人力詘也，知田小而出穀多也，知秋之分糧之高也。然後負耒耜挈妻子而至，願受一廛也。曰然。

economic liberty (J. Yi 2018). According to Jeong, human nature is based on the pursuit of pleasure (*giho* 嗜好) (Jeong 2002e, 39a).²⁵ Thus, farmers will always seek to move to more profitable hamlet land. When farmers move to a high-yielding land, the distribution of that land's product will decrease due to the higher concentration of residents. Therefore, a farmer might seek to move again to an area that would yield a higher harvest. According to Jeong Yakyong, the distribution of the harvest yield to villagers is naturally equal (Jeong 2002b, 4:234a).²⁶ The chief distributes the harvest only to those who contribute toward increasing the yield of the land, and not to those who do not farm. Scholars should take up commercial, industrial, or agricultural occupations, or might receive some produce based on their contributions to increasing farming yield by providing new agricultural technology. According to Jeong Yakyong, farmers can create an equal life for themselves through the hamlet-land system.²⁷

Under the hamlet-land system, it is difficult to raise taxes in a good harvest year and lower taxes in a bad harvest year. Thus, Jeong Yakyong then proposed the implementation of the well-field system in *Jeollon*, wherein the government could collect taxes based on whether it was a good or poor harvest.

It would be most appropriate for both the state and the people to prohibit that families accumulate large amounts of land and to institute a tax of one tenth of the crop, but a tithe is not such an easy thing to do. Shouldn't you see how plentiful the crop is in a given year and then raise or lower the taxes accordingly? Only the well-field system does that; my hamlet-land system does not provide for it. Instead, I calculate the size of the crop in view of the fertility of the land and take an average of the crop over several years in order to establish a set amount for the grain tax. I do not

25. 性者, 吾人之嗜好也.

26. 有閭焉, 二十家共一閭, 閭長曰: 某甲畚彼, 某乙糞彼, 職事既分. 有負耒耜挈妻子而去者曰: 適彼樂土, 將奈何? 亦聽之而已矣. 民之辟害也, 若火之遘濕也. 知地狹而人力贏也, 知力倍而得穀少也, 知秋之分糧之廉也. 然後負耒耜挈妻子而去, 適彼樂土也, 故上不出令而民之宅里均, 上不出令而民之田地均.

27. Some scholars even suggest that the hamlet-land system influenced the Juche ideology of Kim Il-sung. (K. Kim 1998, 313–551; David-West 2011, 93–121).

then either raise or lower the rate. When there is a particularly bad harvest, I would temporarily forgive the taxes but then I would temporarily increase the taxes when there is a particularly bountiful harvest in order to make up for the previous shortfall. By so doing, the state has a fixed income, the people have a fixed supply of food, and all the problems that exist at present can be controlled.²⁸ (Jeong 2002b, 6:234c)

However, Jeong notes the well-field system as unsuited to conditions in Joseon because of the country's many mountains and its rice paddies (Jeong 2002b, 2:233c).²⁹ But later, in his *Gyeongse yupyo*, Jeong also proposes that the system might be adjusted to suit the unique conditions of Joseon (Jeong 2002a, 1:13d).³⁰ This argument of Jeong Yakyong is both a revision of his earlier argument in the *Jeollon* and a critique of King Jeongjo's claim that the unique conditions of Joseon made it unsuitable for the well-field system.³¹ Jeong felt this system would be good for Joseon as it could adjust taxes according to each year's harvest and that the appropriate tax should be harvested from a tenth of the land (Jeong 2002b, 6:234c).³² In the well-field system, the public field is the ninth field and it is from this field that the tax is obtained. Therefore, Under this system, when eight households jointly cultivate public land, meaning the ninth field, they tend to become lazy, thereby impacting revenue and taxes. Therefore, according to Jeong, it would be better to levy a ninth or a tenth of the produce as tax rather than having households jointly cultivate public land. Thus, Jeong Yakyong argued

28. 罷兼竝之家，而行什一之稅，則國與民俱富矣然什一之稅，不可易言也。將視歲之豐儉而上下其稅乎？唯井田爲然，閭田不可爲也。相土之肥瘠，量穀之多寡，較數歲之中以爲常令，一定其總，不得加減，唯大無之年，權貸其稅，遇大有之年，照數賠補，則國有定入，民有定供，而諸亂俱整矣。 Translation of James Palais (Jeong 1996, 67–68).

29. 將爲井田乎？曰：否。井田不可行也，井田者旱田也，水利既興，秔稌既甘矣。棄水田哉？井田者，平田也，割柞既力，山谿既闢矣，棄餘田哉？

30. 又我邦地勢，山林多而原濕少，井田誠不可爲也。然有一法焉，無井田之形而有井田之實，不亦善乎？每田十結，以其一結爲公田，以附近九結，爲私田，令九結佃夫，同治公田一結，以當王稅，其私田九結，不稅不賦，悉入其家，則於是乎井田也。

31. 至于我東，壤地偏小，而山谿居多，井界難設。 *Jeongjo sillok, gwon* 5, Year 2 (1778), Month 6, Day 4, Entry 1.

32. 田以什一而稅，法也。 Accordingly, some scholars have claimed that Jeong Yakyong's system focused on collecting taxes from the farmers (Y. Kim 1990, 100–120; Jo 1998).

that the implementation of the system might be achieved both by balancing the income of farmers and government revenue. In this regard, Yi Yeonghun (1996) has argued that in *Gyeongse yupyo*, Jeong was only proposing a form of tax reform rather than land reform to the well-field system. The reason Jeong proposed the well-field system was not merely to implement a system of past sages,³³ but more practically to bridge the gap between rich and poor. The well-field system was proposed after Jeong Yakyong had created the hamlet-land system, though some scholars have claimed that the hamlet-land system was created after the well-field system (Yun 1931; Takahashi 1936; Jo 1998, 99–137). Unlike these scholars, Park Chanseung (1986) has argued that Jeong Yakyong proposed the well-field system only after abandoning the hamlet-land system. For his part, Jo Seongeul has claimed that Jeong Yakyong considered the implementation of the well-field system followed by the secondary implementation of the hamlet-land system. Essentially, Jo argues, Jeong considered a temporary implementation of the hamlet-land system in situations where the well-field system could not be implemented. Therefore, Jeong Yakyong did not abandon the hamlet-land system (Jo 1998). However, I argue that Jeong Yakyong's well-field system supplemented the hamlet-land system. The adoption of the hamlet-land system and the well-field system as proposed by Jeong Yakyong constituted a reform of the landholding system.

According to Jeong, to implement the well-field system, the government should first buy up the land owned by landowners.³⁴ For this reason, the implementation of the system would be an extenuated process.³⁵ If the landowner opposes such a purchase, the government should not mandate it.³⁶ Jeong also proposed the appointment of landowners and talented

33. 井田者，聖人之經法也。經法，可通於古今，利行於古而不便於今者，必其法有所不明而然，非天下之理，有古今之殊也。Jeong Yakyong, “Jeongjeollon” 井田論 (On the Well-Field System), in *Gyeongse yupyo* (2002a, 5:84a).

34. 買取私田，以爲公田。Jeong Yakyong, “Gyeongjeonsa” 經田司 (Land System Office), in *Gyeongse yupyo* (2002a, 1:13d).

35. 今也，羣黎百姓爲田主，斯其所難圖也。必持之數百年不撓，收之有漸，行之有序而後，乃可以復先古之法。Jeong Yakyong, “Jeongjeollon” 井田論 (On the Well-Field System), in *Gyeongse yupyo* (2002a, 5:85d).

36. 推廣之井，民若不肯，不必強之。Jeong Yakyong, “Jeongjeonui” 井田議 (Interpretation of the

individuals to serve as officers to implement the system.³⁷ Such was the proposal of Jeong Yakyong, based on his official position. By contrast, Yi Sangho (2011) has argued that Jeong Yakyong's well-field system was unfeasible.

Jeong Yakyong's proposal for the well-field system was a way to prevent corrupt officials from exploiting taxation.³⁸ This system was to provide the people with plenty of food, while the government's increased revenues would ensure officials were well paid (Jeong 2002b, 1:234d).³⁹ According to Jeong Yakyong, this would be a system of equal wealth for all, and thereby an implementation of justice.

Like Jeong Yakyong, King Jeongjo also regarded the well-field system as an effective one. Therefore, he implemented the well-field system on a trial basis in some villages for a short period, but it did not yield good results. Consequently, he refrained from implementing it for a longer period or on a larger scale.

I [King Jeongjo] tried to establish both military services and farming practices in the country. Therefore, I have implemented the well-field system in some towns of Gyeonggi 京畿 and Gwandong 關東 provinces. However, the soldiers did not enter farming and the farmers did not become soldiers.⁴⁰ (Jeongjo 2001f, 200c)

King Jeongjo's goal in implementing the well-field system was to allow villagers be farmers in time of peace and soldiers in time of war. Its

Well-Field System), in *Gyeongse yupyo* (2002a, 7:141c).

37. 宜選高貴幹局之人, 使作此井. Jeong Yakyong, "Jeongjeonui" 井田議 (Interpretation of the Well-Field System), in *Gyeongse yupyo* (2002a, 5:141c).

38. 今之急務, 莫如使農夫多, 欲農夫多, 則貪官猾吏之侵害農夫者, 宜謀禁斷, 欲禁此害, 則非束之以井鋤九一之法, 無可奈何! 堯舜復起, 必無以外於是矣. Jeong Yakyong, "Jeonje" (On the Land System), in *Gyeongse yupyo* (2002a, 8:134b).

39. 公稅既什一矣, 國用既倍增矣, 祿不可不厚也. 今既無兼竝之田, 又從而薄其祿, 則國無君子者矣. 令仰足以事父母, 俯足以育妻子, 又足以周族黨養賓客字僕隸崇第宅美衣馬而後, 有願立於朝者矣.

40. 寓兵於農, 卽予苦心, 特以井田一區之意, 行之於畿甸關東若而邑, 而此亦未必兵者爲農, 農者爲兵.

implementation by King Jeongjo was reformatory in nature; it was an effort to resolve the severe gap between rich and poor caused by the rise of large landowners. Unlike King Jeongjo, Jeong Yak-yong claimed the system was the best for military training (Jeong 2002a, 2:30b),⁴¹ meaning that King Jeongjo's goal might be achieved due to the system's military training element. The system implemented by King Jeongjo was a temporary land reform based on the well-field system. By contrast, Kim Seongyun has argued that King Jeongjo and his officials were unable to implement land reform due to lack of authority (S. Kim 1997, 166). According to Park Hyeonmo, King Jeongjo had reservations about the implementation of the well-field system (H. Park 2003, 25). However, these researchers overlook the implementation of the well-field system by King Jeongjo.

Unlike Jeong Yak-yong, King Jeongjo considered it impossible to implement the well-field system nationwide in the long term because he regarded the system as unsuitable for Joseon.⁴² Although Jeong Yak-yong proposed implementing the well-field system, King Jeongjo did not do so beyond the small trial implementations mentioned above. To implement the well-field system, King Jeongjo would have needed to purchase land from landowners, something the state lacked the revenue to do. Even if the king had sufficient funds, the landowners would be unwilling to sell their lands. Therefore, believing that the whole country could fall into a state of unrest, he did not implement the system across the country.

King Jeongjo implemented the well-field system in some select towns in hopes of solving both military and agricultural problems, though he ultimately failed to achieve his goals. As a result, he implemented the military provision-land system (*dunjeon* 屯田) rather than the well-field system. The goal of the military provision-land system was the self-sufficiency of villages wherein soldiers would perform military service while farmers engaged in agriculture. Jeongjo regarded the system of military

41. 臣竊伏念，養兵之法，井田爲上，屯田次之。

42. 蓋仁政，必自經界始，而人之以此爲心者絕少。先以斂民富國爲心，真所謂寧有盜臣者也。若使改量未量之前，民之胥動浮言，容有極哉？...上曰：“我國阡陌，異於中華，則井田元非可論矣。”
Jeongjo sillok, gwon 45, Year 20 (1796), Month 9, Day 20, Entry 1.

provision land as more suitable to Joseon's conditions than the well-field system, and so implemented it in Gyeonggi-do 京畿道 and Yangseo 兩西 (Hwanghae-do 黃海道 and Pyeongan-do 平安道) (Jeongjo 2001e, 212b).⁴³ He regarded the implementation of the military provision-land system as the same as the well-field system of Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077: penname Hengqu 橫渠), a neo-Confucian scholar of the Song dynasty. Thus, the military provision-land system was implemented following the trial implementation of the well-field system in some towns of Gyeonggi-do and Gwandong for a short period. In Zhang Hengqu's well-field system, the state collected taxes amounting to 1/9 of the harvest (Zhang 1994, 123).⁴⁴ Therefore, King Jeongjo would also collect a corresponding tax on the harvest. Jeongjo regarded the implementation of the system as having the same effect as the well-field system.

The military provision land (*dunjeon* 屯田) is a good system, but it has not been implemented in my state...I cultivated the military provision land in two platoons of Jangyongyeong 壯勇營 in several towns in Gyeonggi-do 京畿道. I encouraged them to farm in the spring and the summer and pursue archery and hunting in the fall and the winter. I saved the harvest, paid the soldiers, and equipped the rest with military weapons. Therefore, I matched military and farming. This is in line with the well-field system proposed by Zhang Hengqu 張橫渠.⁴⁵ (Jeongjo 2001g, 272c)

However, Jeong Yakyong viewed this system critically, because military provision lands constituted only 1/100 of the country's private lands, and so could not produce good results (Jeong 2002c, 164d). Compared to the military provision-land system of King Jeongjo, Jeong Yakyong argued that the well-field system was better for military training (Jeong 2002a, 2:30b).⁴⁶ The military provision-land system was already functioning during the

43. 設爲屯田于兩西.

44. 野九一而助, 郊之外助也.

45. 屯田美制也, 惟我國有名而無實...予方於畿內數三山郡, 置壯勇營, 鄉軍二哨, 設屯田, 春夏俾耕作, 秋冬俾射獵, 儲土出穀而廩其軍, 取贏餘, 需其資裝, 以寓兵農相依之義, 此與張橫渠一區井田, 同其意也.

46. 臣竊伏念, 養兵之法, 井田爲上, 屯田次之.

reigns of King Yeongjo (r. 1724–1776; the late king and grandfather of Jeongjo) (Jeongjo 2001f, 199a–b).⁴⁷ Thus, the implementation of the system by King Jeongjo was not reform per se but the maintenance of an existing system. By contrast, the well-field system proposed by Jeong Yakyong was reformative.

Secondly, according to Jeong Yakyong's *Nongchaek*, King Jeongjo inquired of Jeong whether the limited-field system was suitable for Joseon (Jeong 2002d, 187d). In his *Jeollon*, Jeong Yakyong argued there was no need to implement a system restricting land trade in Joseon because the people could simply trade under someone else's name to escape such restrictions (Jeong 2002b, 2:233c).⁴⁸ The implementation of the system had been proposed by Im Bakyu 林博儒, but King Jeongjo criticized the proposal as he regarded the system as unsuited for Joseon (Jeongjo 2001a, 194a).⁴⁹ Therefore, both King Jeongjo and Jeong regarded the system as an ill fit for the conditions of Joseon.

Thirdly, in Jeong Yakyong's reply to the inquiry of King Jeongjo in the *Nongchaek*, Jeong Yakyong proposed that the matter of greatest import to state affairs was the implementation of the equal-field system. This was reformative in nature. And to implement this system, a land survey first had to be conducted (Jeong 2002d, 188c–d). But this land survey was not done countrywide but only in some towns, as King Jeongjo worried about the potential for popular unrest (Jeongjo 2001i, 113d).⁵⁰

By contrast, according to the claim of Jeong Yakyong in *Jeollon*, the equal distribution of land among the people as mandated by the equal-field system could not be implemented due to the difficulties of measuring

47. Before King Yeongjo, this system had already been implemented during the reigns of King Hyeonjong 顯宗 (r. 1659–1674), Gwanghaegun 光海君 (r. 1608–1623), King Seonjo 宣祖 (r. 1567–1608), King Sejo 世祖 (r. 1455–1468), and King Munjong 文宗 (r. 1450–1452) (Jeongjo 2001f, 12:199a–b). 文廟朝給農器農牛, 開咸吉屯田, 以養邊軍. 光廟朝定置官鎮屯田, 自二十結, 至十二結有差. 宣廟朝置屯田於慶興鹿屯島, 又置訓局屯田, 相臣領其事. 顯廟朝移屬糧餉廳於戶曹, 使之策應訓局.

48. 將爲限田乎? 曰否, 限田不可行也. 限田者, 買田至幾畝而不得加, 鬻田至幾畝而不得減者也, 藉我以人之名而加之焉, 孰知之乎? 藉人以吾之名而減之焉, 孰知之乎? 故限田不可行也.

49. 限田事, 言非不好, 勢難容議.

50. 量田, 祖宗朝亦多有之. 今亦有數邑行之者, 而通八路一齊爲之, 不但近於擾民.

population change every year and evaluating the varying fertility of the land (Jeong 2002b, 2:233c).⁵¹ This position is similar to that of King Jeongjo (Jeongjo 2001d, 385b).⁵² In reply to the proposal of Yi Gyeongsin 李敬臣, King Jeongjo stated that the well-field system could not be implemented due to its unsuitability for Joseon, and the equal-field and limited-field systems, as ancient land systems, were also unsuited.⁵³

Unlike Jeong Yakyong, King Jeongjo considered it better to reform the effective aspects of the country's existing land systems rather than implement the equal-field system or limited-field system. Thus, land reform focused on such things as the classification of land into six grades according to its quality, creating systems of annex land (*sokjeon* 續田), expanding reclaimed land (*gagyeongjeon* 加耕田), and office land (*jikjeon* 職田), among others (Jeongjo 2001c, 491d–492a).⁵⁴ Therefore, in this sense King Jeongjo was not reformative, but focused on the maintenance of the existing system.

Conclusion

The common goal of Jeong Yakyong and King Jeongjo was to reduce the severe gap between the country's rich and poor caused by the growing holdings of landowners. Both regarded it as a matter of universal ethics and justice. Therefore, Jeong Yakyong proposed the implementation of the well-field system to ensure the equality and well-being of the people while increasing government revenues. The argument for the implementation of

51. 將爲均田乎? 曰否, 均田不可行也。均田者, 計田與口而均分之者也, 戶口增損, 月異而歲殊, 今年以甲率分, 明年以乙率分, 毫忽之差, 巧歷莫察, 饒瘠之別, 頃畝莫限矣, 均乎哉? 故限田不可行也。雖然人皆知井田之不可復, 而獨均田限田, 明理識務者亦肯言之, 吾竊惑焉。

52. 雖使均田之制行...近之在一二年之中, 遠之在十數年之外, 一等變爲九等, 九等變爲一等, 等愈分而愈難辨也。

53. 持平 李敬臣 上疏曰... 批曰...第八條量田云云, 欲復三代之制, 當先井田, 而井田既不可復矣, 均田限田, 亦可謂近古。 *Jeongjo sillok, gwon* 53, Year 24 (1800), Month 2, Day 22, Entry 1.

54. 曰: 方田也, 曰: 直田也, 曰: 梯田也, 曰: 圭田也, 曰: 勾股田也, 此又田名之大略也。後又有續田加耕田, 曰: 續云者, 何也? 常耕謂正田, 或耕或陳謂續田, 而正田之中, 土品劣者, 降稱續田。曰: 加耕云者, 何也? 帳外可耕之地, 勸民起墾, 是所謂量外加耕田, 而隨起收稅, 金科玉條, 無非良法美制也。

the well-field system was reformatory, whereas the use of paddy farming was the maintenance of an existing land system. Jeong believed in equality and a society without class divisions, which he argued characterized original society before the severe gap between landlords and farmers emerged. Thus, he regarded the implementation of the well-field system as a question of justice.

King Jeongjo held different views from Jeong Yakyong. Therefore, King Jeongjo did not implement the well-field system across the country in the long term. Rather he implemented trial versions of the system in some villages and for only a limited period. The goal of King Jeongjo was to allow villagers to be farmers in time of peace and soldiers in time of war. The implementation of the well-field system meant the reform of an existing land system. However, in this he did not achieve his goal. Instead of the implementation of the well-field system, he implemented the system of military provision land (*dunjeon* 屯田) in some regions, and regarded this as similar to the implementation of the well-field system because it facilitated both military training and farming. The system of military provision land had already been implemented by King Yeongjo, grandfather Jeongjo and his predecessor as king. Thus, this in effect meant the maintenance of an existing land system. Fearful that implementation of the well-field system could trigger unrest among the people, King Jeongjo had local governors impart agricultural techniques to farmers to increase their yield. This led to an increase in government revenue and promoted the well-being of the people. According to King Jeongjo, this was the best way to practice justice.

Jeong Yakyong's proposal for implementation of the well-field system was intended to realize justice through land reform, while paddy farming meant the maintenance of an existing land system, not reform. By contrast, King Jeongjo's realization of justice, with the exception of some limited land reform through the temporary implementation of the well-field system in some villages, meant the maintenance of the existing system.

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