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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Understanding human nature through taste: Dasan Jeong Yak-yong's account of human-nature-as-taste

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Abstract

This essay investigates Dasan Jeong Yak-yong's (1762–1836) account of human-nature-as-taste, by comparing his commentaries on significant chapters in the *Mengzi* to Zhu Xi's commentaries. Dasan argues that human nature is understood through *giho*, taste sentiments and desires, and not as Principle (*li*). I first introduce Dasan's account of human-nature-as-taste in his commentaries to 3A1 and 7A4. Next, I argue that *giho* is most appropriately translated as “taste,” because this term captures the dispositional characteristics of *giho* as a mental faculty as well as its mental effects, such as desires, sentiments, and preferences. I then examine Dasan's and Zhu Xi's commentaries on 6A7 and 6A6, to illustrate how Dasan's view of human-nature-as-taste interprets the chapters differently from Zhu Xi's metaphysical account of human-nature-as-Principle, which Dasan considers as unsupported by the philological and contextual grounds. This exploration of Dasan's empirical account of human-nature-as-taste, serving as a preliminary for a philosophical study of his reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics and his performative account of moral self-cultivation, will provide us with an alternative perspective to the Neo-Confucian metaphysic-epistemic account of human nature.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

This essay investigates Dasan Jeong Yak-yong's (茶山 다산, 丁若鏞 정약용 1762–1836) account of human-nature-as-taste, by comparing his commentaries on significant chapters in the *Mengzi* to Zhu Xi's commentaries. Dasan argues that human nature (*xing* 性) is understood through *giho* (Kr.; Ch. *shihao* 嗜好), taste sentiments and desires, and not, as the Neo-Confucians believes, as *Principle* (*li* 理). Dasan's audacious reconstruction of Mengzi's account of human nature, which is based on his philological, exegetical, contextual, and philosophical investigations, exemplifies his criticisms of the orthodox Neo-Confucianism that prevailed as a socio-political foundation during Joseon Korea (1392–1910). This exploration of Dasan's account of human-nature-as-taste serves as a preliminary for a philosophical study of his reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics, as well as of his performative account of moral self-cultivation. Dasan's account will provide an empirical ethico-aesthetic approach to the *Mengzi* and Confucian moral practice, as an alternative to the Neo-Confucian metaphysic-epistemic approach.

This essay commences with introducing his account of human-nature-as-taste. By examining his commentaries to 3A1 and 7A4, we see how Dasan argues against the Neo-Confucian account of human-nature-as-Principle, but advocates that human nature is understood through taste. Next, for the sake of a conceptual clarity, I argue that *giho* is most appropriately translated as “taste.” The term “taste” is not only connected to individual esthetic and moral perceptions that are frequently mentioned in the Confucian Classics, but also captures the dispositional characteristics of *giho* as both senses of a mental faculty and mental effects, such as desires, sentiments, and preferences. In the subsequent sections, I examine Dasan's commentaries on 6A7 and 6A6, in contrast with Zhu Xi's views, with contextual analyses of the chapters. This examination will disclose the tension between two focal points embedded in these chapters, either the moral potential in human nature or its actualizations, which range from sentiments and desires, moral actions, to the excellent agents. Neo-Confucians concentrate on the potential, and consider the essence of human nature as residing in its universal origin of metaphysical Principle. In contrast, focusing on the characteristics of such actualizations, which conversely vindicate the shared potential, Dasan argues that human nature is understood through taste.

2 | DASAN'S ACCOUNT OF HUMAN NATURE AS TASTE (GIHO)

In the Korean intellectual tradition, Dasan is renowned for two distinct achievements: his practical theories for sociopolitical reform and his comprehensive re-investigation of the Confucian Classics. While the former culminates in “One Norm and Two Books,”¹ the latter is represented by Dasan's commentaries on the Four Books.² In the latter, he aims to restore the original meaning of the ancient Confucian teachings through a critical examination of the “old and new” commentaries on these texts. To achieve this goal, Dasan critiques the theoretical and practical deficiencies of prevailing forms of Neo-Confucianism.³

One of his most radical departures from Neo-Confucianism is his articulation of human nature. In contrast to Zhu Xi's account, which regards human nature as Principle, Dasan understands human nature as *giho*, our inclination to prefer something. The difference between the two philosophers' perspectives is highlighted in their respective commentaries on *Mengzi* 3A1, particularly on the line: “Mengzi discoursed the goodness of human nature (*xingshan* 性善), and his discussions always praised Yao and Shun.”⁴

To this first appearance of *xingshan*, Zhu Xi applies his metaphysical framework and asserts that “Nature is Principle with which humans are endowed from Heaven at birth. It is purely the highest good and contains nothing evil.”⁵ According to Zhu Xi, all humans are inherently good because they possess Principle, which is pure and good in their original nature. However, in contrast to this view, Dasan maintains that human nature is understood through taste:

What I call human nature is said primarily through taste (*giho*), as in the case that “Xie Anshi has the nature to prefer hearing music. Duke Zheng of Wei has the nature to like frugality.” Some have the nature to favor landscapes, while others have the nature to prefer calligraphy and paintings. All these cases demonstrate that human nature is considered through taste preferences. The meaning of “nature” is like this. Mengzi always discusses human nature in terms of taste.⁶ (Jeong, 2012, p. 90)

To support his view of human-nature-as-taste, Dasan first needs to present an argument that underscores the flaws of Zhu Xi’s account. Dasan’s critique appears in his interpretation of *Mengzi* 7A4, which states:

The myriad things are all here within me.⁷ There is no greater joy than to reflect upon oneself and find integrity (*cheng* 誠). Nothing brings one closer to benevolence than exerting oneself in the effort of sympathetic concern (*shu* 恕). (Ivanhoe, 2016, p. 217)

Zhu Xi interprets the first sentence as follows:

This refers to the original state of Principle (*li zhi benran* 理之本然). On a large scale, between rulers and ministers, and between fathers and children; on a small scale, in the minutiae of things, there is not a single aspect that does not have Principle in the elements of the nature. (Zhu, 1983, p. 350)

Since both things and humans share a metaphysical ground of Principle, the myriad things are within us. Zhu Xi considers Principle as significant in social relationships, including those between rulers and ministers as well as fathers and children, and diversified in minute things and affairs. He insists that this statement, “The myriad things are all here within me,” indicates that every aspect of our nature is necessarily endowed with Principle.

Next, Zhu Xi posits that the metaphysical foundation of Principle serves as the mediator for Mengzi’s following emphasis on the practices of “*cheng* (integrity)” and “*shu* (sympathetic concern)” to achieve benevolence.⁸ About *cheng*, Zhu Xi remarks,

Cheng is genuineness (*shi* 實). Reflect upon yourselves, and render Principle that is complete (*bei* 備) in you like the necessary facts (*shi*) of your dislike of a bad odor and favor of a beauty. Then if this practice [of *cheng*] is done as such, there is no need to wait for forced enhancement, as well as no disadvantages. The pleasure [of achieving *cheng*] is incomparable to other pleasures. (Zhu, 1983, p. 350)

Zhu Xi defends our general capability of practicing *cheng* based on Principle that is complete in us. This capability is demonstrated by the facts such as our common dislike of a bad odor. Such

perceptual preferences that we usually regard as general facts signify that Principle, shared “in the elements of the nature,” completely resides in us. Because Principle is complete in us, practicing *cheng* with regard to Principle does not require our forced nourishment, nor cause our loss of advantages. Instead, this practice allows us the supreme pleasure we can experience.

Zhu Xi suggests the priority of *cheng* over *shu* as the practice for achieving benevolence and actualizing Principle that we share with myriad things. His comments on 7A4 end with remarks about *shu*.

Qiang (強) is to make efforts. *Shu* is to extend oneself to reach others. If one reflects on oneself with integrity (*cheng*), one is benevolent. But if one is not with *cheng*, one still has self-interested thoughts (*siyi* 私意) interfering, and thus Principle is not pure. Therefore, when in all activities one make effort to extend oneself to reach others, one's heart disinterestedly achieve Principle, and benevolence is not far away.

This chapter indicates that Principle of myriad things is bestowed on my body. If I embody (*ti* 體) it and actualize (*shi* 實) it, then the Way will reside in me and the pleasure will be prosperous. If I practice (*xing* 行) it in terms of *shu*, self-interestedness is no longer tolerated such that benevolence is achievable.⁹

He suggests that one's practice of *shu* make “one's heart disinterestedly achieve Principle.” Evidently, the initial lesson emphasizes the practice of *cheng*, through which we can actualize Principle and thus attain the Way and the eminent pleasure. However, our self-interestedness poses a hindrance to practicing *cheng* as it taints the purity of Principle within us. Zhu Xi posits that *shu*, extending oneself to others, eradicates this hindrance arising from self-interestedness and makes “one's heart disinterestedly achieve Principle.” Although he does not explain how *shu* accomplishes benevolence in detail or clarify the sense of practicing (*xing*), this remark underscores Zhu Xi's core focus on Principle, which treats *cheng* and *shu* as essential methods for its attainment.

In contrast, Dasan claims that the crux of 7A4 contextually lies in the practices of *cheng* and *shu* rather than “the original state of Principle” that Zhu Xi emphasizes.

This passage [7A4] talks about “the one thread of truthfulness (忠 Ch. *zhong*; Kr. *chung*) and sympathetic concern (恕 Ch. *shu*; Kr. *seo*).” I like beauty and so know that other people like beauty too. I like owning property and so know that other people like owning property too. ... I dislike being lowly and disgraced and so know that other people dislike being lowly and disgraced. ... In winter I like to be the first to be warm; in summer I like to be the first to be cool. ... The *sentiments* (*qing* 情) and *desires* (*yu* 欲) that arise in response to the myriad things and affairs we encounter in our everyday lives are *all here within me*. I do not have to inquire into the feelings or examine the expressions on the faces of others in order to know that other people are the same as I am. ... This is what Kongzi called the “one thread.”¹⁰

Dasan considers that *cheng* and *shu* in this chapter correspond to Kongzi's “one thread.” Interestingly, Dasan immediately states our shared taste preferences, which are identified by sentiments and desires. But why are our taste preferences connected to Kongzi's “one thread”? Dasan believes that to do *cheng* and *shu* we should attend to our mental states, sentiments and desires, to which Mengzi's remark about “the myriad things” is also directed. Our interactions with “the myriad things” stem from our perceptions, which elicit sentiments and desires towards them. Consequently, independent

of their reliance on Principle, all these myriad things exist within us insofar as we perceive and desire those things.

This understanding of perceptual interactions forms a vital basis for doing *cheng* and *shu*. Our perceptions of external objects evoke corresponding sentiments and desires, often showing similarities. For instance, just as we derive pleasure from getting warm in winter, we experience a collective aversion to “being lowly and disgraced.” These similar sentiments and shared taste preferences suggest that we share similar natural dispositions of body and mind. As Mengzi’s emphasis of the “four sprouts” manifests, we can assume our inherent dispositions, serving as the underlying causes of our moral sentiments towards objects that incorporate morally relevant elements, such as our dignity and others’ sufferings. These dispositions attest to the natural potential to practice *cheng* and *shu*, the Kongzi’s Way.

However, Dasan argues that this shared potential is not validated by a metaphysical and imperceptible Principle, but rather by our similar sentiments and desires derived from our perceptions of the myriad things. To follow Kongzi’s “one thread,” we should carefully focus on such responses rather than seeking to understand the metaphysical origin of Principle. In Dasan’s view, positing an “original state of Principle” does neither capture the central point of Mengzi’s message, nor align with the mental states in “exerting oneself in the effort of sympathetic concern,” as the motivation for *shu* is rooted in the sentiments of compassion (*Mengzi* 7A4). Therefore, Dasan argues that our natural sentimental responses hold the key to practicing Kongzi’s Way.

Our attention to sentiments and desires in the practices of *cheng* and *shu* necessitates our engaging in sympathetic communications. For *cheng*, we examine our sentiments and desires by taking others’ perspectives on ourselves, while for *shu*, we need to correctly perceive others’ mental states by placing ourselves in their situations. Dasan emphasizes that training in sympathetic communications begins with recognizing the sameness of our natural preferences. Just as we dislike pain, others do too. Understanding this commonality does not require us to “inquire into the feelings or examine the expressions on the faces of others”; rather, we need to imagine how we would feel in their circumstances. The similarity of our sentiments and desires, like the hearts of compassion and approval, attests to their inherent cause in our shared nature. Dasan identifies this mental cause as moral taste, which he calls *giho*, rather than as metaphysical Principle.¹¹ In this way, Dasan argues that human nature is comprehended through *giho* and that our shared nature of *giho* serves as the foundation for doing *cheng* and *shu*.

Moreover, Dasan believes that the essence of these moral practices lies in our actual performances, which differs from Zhu Xi’s perspective on moral practice. Because Zhu Xi’s practicing primarily aims to understand Principle by removing our self-interestedness that obstructs its comprehension, it may not necessarily require actual moral performances. In contrast, Dasan advocates for a strong performative account of virtue, even stating that “the titles (*ming* 名) of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are accomplished after one’s performing (*xing-shi* 行事) [for the good]” (Jeong, 2012, p. 70).¹² Relying on our sentiments and desires, which are reinforced by our empathetic and sympathetic abilities, the practices of *cheng* and *shu* are likely to culminate in tangible performances.

With his performative view, Dasan worries that the Neo-Confucian approach leads people only to pursue an internal control and epistemological investigation for grasping Principle. In the end of his commentary on 7A4, Dasan laments that future students, perplexed by the vagueness and vastness of Principle, may struggle to identify where to begin their moral self-cultivation.

Kongzi meant that he could thread together the mad variety of the myriad things with a single word: *shu/seo* (Ch./Kr. “sympathetic concern”). The learning of Kongzi and Mengzi is as plain and familiar as this but former Confucians [Neo-Confucians] described Kongzi’s teaching about the “one thread” and Mengzi’s understanding of the “myriad things” in excessively extravagant terms, offering high-blown theories about principles permeating throughout Heaven, earth, and the myriad things and being fully present in every mote of dust. Vague and vast, [their explanations] are boundless and without end, causing those in subsequent times to be confused and not know where to put hand or foot. Is this not regrettable! (Jeong, 2012, p. 231; Ivanhoe, 2016, p. 219)

In summary, Dasan shifts the focus of human nature from the metaphysical Principle to moral sentiments and desires. I believe that this shift enables him to argue for a performative moral practice of the ancient Confucians, distinguished from Neo-Confucian practice that concentrates on an internal control to remove selfish desires for understanding Principle. In Dasan’s account of human-nature-as-taste, our natural potential of *giho* give rise to moral desires, of which fulfillments require actual performances.

3 | TASTE: TRANSLATION OF *GIHO*

This section explains why I consider “taste” as the most appropriate translation for *giho*. The term “taste” captures both the dispositional characteristics of *giho* as a mental faculty and its sense as mental effects, such as preferences, sentiments, and desires. Scholars have used different terms to translate *giho*. Setton translates *giho* as “innate proclivities or appetites” (Setton, 1997, p. 77), while Ivanhoe uses “desires and preferences” (Ivanhoe, 2016, p. 211). Others have translated *giho* as “human desires” (Baker, 2013, p. 44), “(moral) inclination” (Chung, 2013, p. 116), or “innate tendency (appetite)” (Baek, 2016, p. 245). However, these translations hardly represent the multi-faceted meanings of *giho*.

No doubt, *giho* can be understood as a proclivity, inclination, or tendency, given that it indicates a mental disposition. Moreover, *giho* can denote both short-term sentiments and desires as well as long-term preferences because it produces such mental effects. This indicates that *giho* stands for the mental effects of sentiments and desires as well as the mental cause in our nature that produces these effects. Moreover, *giho* embraces motivational and evaluative dimensions. When one has *gi* towards an object, one has a desire that leads one to act for the sake of that object. Conversely, when one feels *ho* towards an object, one approves of the object. One’s *giho* for coffee would mean both one’s genuine desire to drink a cup of coffee and one’s judgment that coffee is favorable. Additionally, one’s *giho* for coffee indicates that one’s epistemic sensibilities can determine its flavor and shape one’s preference for it.

Each character of *giho* represents a distinct aspect of motivation and evaluation in Mengzi’s moral psychology. Mengzi notes that “mouths have the same *gi* in flavors,” where *gi* implies the motivational aspect of desiring something (*Mengzi* 6A7). Similarly, the character *ho* indicates a person’s sentimental evaluation. One approves of an object’s value by liking it, just as “people are fond of (*ho*) this beautiful virtue” (*Mengzi* 6A6). Dasan cites these two phrases in his commentary on 3A1 to explain why he regards human nature as *giho*. Thus, *giho* stands for both one’s natural desire for a valuable thing and one’s evaluative approval of that thing. Moreover, these passages suggest that we have the same epistemic foundation for desiring (*gi*) flavors and liking

(*ho*) virtues; this foundation can also be referred to as *giho*. While one is an esthetic *giho*, the other is a moral *giho*.

The characteristics of *giho* help us establish criteria for assessing the appropriateness of translating it as “taste.” First, “taste” better represents both the dispositional characteristics of human nature and the epistemic sources of recognizing both types of dispositions: active desires and passive sentiments of approval. The dual nature of *giho* suggests that we should avoid using merely dispositional terms, such as “proclivity,” “inclination,” and “tendency.” These dispositional terms are too broad and general for distinguishing one’s dispositions that can be both natural and acquired or lack the necessary ethico-esthetic connotations that Dasan imbues into *giho*.

Secondly, if *giho* designates the essence of human nature, “taste” better corresponds to the *natural* foundation of that disposition. “Desires and preferences” only denotes the overall and individual mental effects of one’s perceiving specific objects and hardly signals *giho* as the natural cause or a mental faculty responsible for producing these mental states. “Appetite” may meet the criteria to denote both natural dispositions and produced sentiments and desires. However, “appetite” refers to our physiological dispositions and desires and not ethico-esthetic causes and effects in our minds. Dasan would be reluctant to accept “appetite” for *giho* because it is reminiscent of Gaozi’s view that human nature is our “appetites for food and sex” (*Mengzi* 6A4).

I propose that “taste” better corresponds to *giho*. Taste indicates both a physical sense and a mental faculty that humans share as well as the aroused sentiments of particular agents. The latter sense of “taste” includes sentiments, desires, preferences, and so on, while “taste” as a mental faculty accounts for their being embedded in human nature. The dual sense of taste remains similar in contemporary Korean (*giho*), Chinese (*shihao*), and Japanese (*shiko*), although the term in each language does not have as robust an ethico-esthetic sense as in Dasan’s usage. Moreover, “taste” facilitates a deeper philosophical discussion of *giho* as the essence of human nature. We can take advantage of the rich discussion about taste and human nature in eighteenth-century British esthetics and moral philosophy.¹³

In conclusion, “taste” is the most appropriate translation of *giho* because both “taste” and *giho* embrace the complexity of their referents without neglecting any significant dimension. They designate both the mental faculty and its resulting states as well as the source of moral evaluations and motivations.

4 | INTERPRETING HUMAN NATURE IN MENGZI 6A7

I have argued that Dasan’s account of human-nature-as-*giho* is supported by 6A7 and 6A6, which respectively has the usage of *gi* (preferences) and *ho* (liking). These chapters are also important for Zhu Xi’s account of human-nature-as-*li* because they contain the term of *li* and the concept of inherent virtues, of which ground he identifies as *li*. In this regard, comparing Zhu Xi’s and Dasan’s commentaries on each chapter will deepen our comprehension of each philosopher’s account of human nature.

Let us begin with 6A7. Dasan supports his comment to 3A1 that “Mengzi always discusses human nature in terms of taste” by citing “mouths have the same preferences in flavors” (Jeong, 2012, p. 90, *Mengzi* 6A7). This chapter is also significant for Zhu Xi because of its rare instance of *li*, which can be read in a metaphysical sense.¹⁴

This chapter, representing Dasan’s and Zhu Xi’s core concepts of taste and Principle, exhibits Mengzi’s conviction that we have the same moral potential in our nature as the sages. This is because “things of the same kind are all similar” in their nature and “we and the sage are of the

same kind.” Yet, we might consider that the variations of people’s bodily and mental traits undermine this claim. Mengzi thinks that such variations are not ascribed to the discrepancy of our natural potentials but to the external influences, just as the different growth of barely does not demonstrate their discrepant nature. People would have similar physical traits, as “similarity of all the shoes in the world” imply. However, the psychological variations in their esthetic preferences might be too prominent to maintain their shared natural preferences. Despite the apparent variety of our mental traits, Mengzi needs to justify the invariability of our natural potential about morality. For this aim he brings in a taste analogy that appeals to the masters of food, music, and beauty. In virtue of their excellences, we consent that our eyes, ears, and mouths share similar preferences in flavors, sound, and beauty. From this conclusion, Mengzi analogously proposes that the sages enable us to convince that our hearts have the same preferences in morality. In the end, Mengzi specifies the object that our hearts naturally prefer: “The sages first discovered and achieved (*de* 得) what our hearts prefer in common. Hence, principle and righteousness (*liyi* 理義) please our hearts just as meat pleases our mouths.”¹⁵

Mengzi’s analogical inference reveals two points of contact: (i) the perceptual masters and sages and (ii) the objects of our taste preferences. By selecting a primary pivot between the two points, we gain different perspectives for understanding Mengzi’s teachings. The first analogical link drives us to focus on the epistemic excellence of the masters and sages to assume that they figure out our natural preferences. Yi Ya and Shi Kuang’s discerning perceptions and accumulated knowledge would have enabled them to make precise esthetic judgments about people’s general preferences in flavors and sounds. Likewise, the sages, with their distinctive senses and excellent knowledge, provided correct moral judgments and appropriate standards and thus *discovered* our hearts’ general preferences for “principle and righteousness.” Therefore, as Eric Hutton’s moral connoisseurship view proposes, the sages’ accomplishment “consists in discovering the moral values that will please all people’s hearts,” making them true “connoisseurs of the human heart” (Hutton, 2002, pp. 168, 174). We are advised to follow the sages’ moral standards, which “indicate what our hearts innately desire,” because “we will ultimately find them most satisfying” (Hutton, 2002, p. 171).

By contrast, this chapter provides another analogical link between the preferred objects of our esthetic and moral perceptions. Relying on this link, Dobin Choi’s moral artisanship view (Choi, 2018) argues that Mengzi demonstrates our same natural preferences by positing a spectatorial perspective (the perspective of *us*) towards the objects that the masters and sages had created. Like Yi Ya, who is “the first to discover and achieve what our mouths prefer,” the sages are renowned as the first who “discovered and achieved what our hearts prefer in common” (*Mengzi* 6A7). This artisanship view finds the justification of their initial achievement not from their excellent judgments, but from the quality of their offerings. The “whole world” looks to Yi Ya regarding flavor because those who taste his dishes unanimously approve of their flavors. People’s uniform approval conversely indicates that they share the same cause of such approval, a faculty of taste, in their nature. Thus, our shared taste preferences are discovered through Yi Ya’s achievement in culinary creations, but this discovery is enabled by the sentiments and desires of the “whole world.” Similarly, the sages first present moral items, such as virtue, knowledge, actions, their lives, and so on, towards which spectators unanimously feel approval. This uniform approval demonstrates that our hearts have the same preferences by nature, indicating our shared moral potential. Mengzi identifies our hearts’ preferred objects as “principle and righteousness” because he recognizes that the sages’ moral items, the actualizations of our shared potential, are always associated with “principle and righteousness.” The sages actualized the moral potentials and offered their excellent moral items like moral artisans. As we and the sages are of the same

kind, we should be able to actualize this shared moral potential. If we yearn for its actualization, we should turn ourselves into creators of moral items. This spectatorial perspective, based on our sentiments and desires for the objects, understands Mengzi's teaching as "the necessity of our transition from passive spectators to active moral performers for moral self-cultivation" (Choi, 2018, p. 333).

These two contemporary accounts stem from different primary pivots, either on the sages and their moral judgments, or on the people and their moral sentiments. This division is inevitable to some extent. Mengzi instructs the same moral potential in human nature, which is justified by the uniform sentiments of the people but culminates in the sages' excellences that demonstrate the actualization of the potential. A connoisseurship view concentrates on the sages to claim that their epistemic efforts discover what our hearts prefer, whereas an artisanship view takes the perspective of the people who perceive the sages. The people's uniform approval demonstrates their natural *potential* for ethico-esthetic evaluation because they can experience proper *sentiments* towards objects under evaluation. This approach proposes other focal points for understanding of this chapter: centering either on the inherent *potential* or on the resulting *sentiment*.

One could choose to focus on the potential. Neo-Confucians interpret this potential as being grounded in metaphysical Principle and view our genuine sentiment as originating from the epistemic recognition of Principle. We can also shift the focus from the universal potential to the particular sentiments, which are empirical effects that stem from the potential. We can approximate the shared potential by examining our uniform sentiments and desires, derived from our perception of excellent items. This approach rather underscores our actual moral performances, of which motives are provided by such sentiments.

These contrasting approaches are represented by Dasan's and Zhu Xi's commentaries to 6A7. Regarding "principle and righteousness (*liyi*)," which our hearts prefer in common, Zhu Xi transmits Chung Yi's commentaries:

Cheng Yi says, "Principle is what resides in things. Righteousness is what deals with things. These indicate substance (*ti* 體) and function (*yong* 用). Mengzi remarks that none would not be pleased with principle and righteousness, but the sages recognize (*zhi* 知) and comprehend (*jue* 覺) such [a propensity to approve of *liyi*] beforehand. If one lacks such a propensity, one differs from human beings. ... It is not until carefully contemplating (*ticha* 體察) that, just as roasts please our mouth, principle and righteousness [*liyi*] please our heart that we can accomplish them". (Zhu, 1983, p. 330)

This commentary presents several notable points. First, Neo-Confucians distinguish between principle and righteousness in *liyi* and stress the fundamentality of metaphysical Principle. Principle is the "substance" of all things, including humans, while righteousness is the proper "function" through which one recognizes things. Second, Neo-Confucians emphasize the intellectual achievement of *liyi*. They argue that Mengzi attributes the sages' achievement of *liyi*, which our hearts universally admire, to the sages' excellent knowledge and comprehension of *liyi*. We should concentrate on improving our knowledge of substance [*li*] in terms of understanding its function [*yi*], as the sages did. Third, comprehending Principle leads to genuine pleasure. Mengzi's conclusion implies that the sages "achieved" and "discovered" something related to *liyi*. If their achievement means "recognizing" or "comprehending," then examining things through Principle is a method for obtaining true pleasure. Furthermore, this pleasure serves as a positive incentive for moral and intellectual self-cultivation.

However, compared with Mengzi's original text, these Neo-Confucian interpretations seem to be too narrow. First, we cannot rule out that the Neo-Confucian understanding of *liyi* might differ from Mengzi's sense of *liyi*. For Mengzi, our natural preference for *liyi* is associated with "the potential that Heaven confers on humans" (Mengzi 6A7). Given this association, we might consider *liyi* as endowed by Heaven, but hardly confine this endowment to metaphysical Principle that resides in things. From the original text, it is also difficult to substantiate Cheng's division between *li* as "substance" and *yi* as "function." Second, the sages' achievements can be more extensive than their moral knowledge and epistemic comprehension of *liyi*; their achievements can include their virtues, actions, and narratives of lives. Third, Mengzi's attention to uniform pleasures does not necessarily imply the dominance of intellectual pleasures. Given the analogical structure, the pleasures would embrace all sorts of pleasures from esthetic taste to intellectual enlightenments. These concerns suggest that the Neo-Confucian metaphysical framework restricts how one might understand the original text.

Dasan's criticism of the Neo-Confucian metaphysic-epistemic stance to 6A7 relies on its divergence from Mengzi's original teaching. First, Dasan is concerned with whether the character *li* has a metaphysical connotation. Investigating the various senses of *li* in ancient texts, he argues that *li* originally referred to "physical patterns (*maili* 脈理)" on jade stones and, rather symbolically, *li* denotes "literary principles (*wenli* 文理)," "geographical patterns (*dili* 地理)," "governing principles (*zhili* 治理)," "legal principles (*fali* 法理)," and so forth.¹⁶ Arguing that no usage of *li* demonstrates the Neo-Confucian metaphysical claims, such as "*Li* is what has no form while *qi* is what has materials," Dasan questions; "Does treating the nature as Principle (*li*) have evidence from the ancient texts?" (Jeong, 2012, p. 201). Additionally, considering that the dominant instances of *li* are practical, he suggests that *li* in 6A7 also signifies "practical principle" for our moral self-cultivation.¹⁷

Through his survey of *li*, Dasan claims that Zhu Xi's account of metaphysical *li* rests on a weak philological foundation. Strictly speaking, however, it is dubious whether this criticism qualifies as a *philosophical* refutation. The absence of the metaphysical sense of *li* in the ancient texts does not necessarily vindicate that the ontological approach to *li* is philosophically problematic, yet at best provides circumstantial evidence for the refutation.

Next, Dasan shifts the interpretive focus from the *potential* of human nature to the uniform pleasing *sentiments* that humans experience. He writes:

Here *liyi* stands for "the principle of Heaven (*tianli*)" and "morality and righteousness (*daoyi*)." What is unified with the principle of Heaven is always "good affairs (*shanshi*)," and what is achieved from morality and righteousness is always "good deeds (*shanxing*)." Good affairs and good deeds are what pleases human hearts. What pleases my heart is what pleases the hearts of others, but not what please the sages' hearts.¹⁸ While one good affair renders a thief pleasant, one good deed makes an unchaste woman happy. Isn't this what it means by "principle and righteousness delight our hearts"? Human hearts feel same pleasure, just as our mouth and tongue show same desires [*gi*], and our ears and eyes have same liking [*ho*]. All people in the world, including barbarians, frauds, chiefs, and fools, identically received the nature of Heaven's Mandate (*tianming zhi xing*).¹⁹ They have no difference in feeling pleasure from *li*, preferring *yi*, and being ashamed of vice and evil. (Jeong, 2012, p. 202)

Dasan claims that Mengzi's teaching centers on uniform pleasing sentiments that people experience when they witness good affairs and good deeds. Considering that even bad and

uncivilized people approve of good deeds, all humans have the natural potential to feel pleasure, especially towards the affairs that are associated with *liyi*. Dasan thinks that this potential, the root of such sentiments, is best understood as taste, which further demonstrates the goodness of human nature.

In contrast, Zhu Xi places less emphasis to the common pleasure of ordinary people. Instead, one can attain a higher pleasure when one discovers and comprehends metaphysical Principle. The sages, due to their understanding of *liyi* in human nature, experience this supreme pleasure before others did. Zhu Xi believes that anyone can accomplish this understanding and attain supreme pleasure because human nature involves Principle. Yet, understanding *liyi* requires an unceasing epistemic investigation into things; only a few ever attain this understanding. Although “the heart of Neo-Confucian thought consists in its theories and practices of self-cultivation,” this theoretical structure make its followers concentrate on the *discovery* of Principle in our nature by epistemic investigation and removing selfish desires (Tiwald & Angle, 2017, p. 133).²⁰ Thus, Zhu Xi’s view spotlights those who have intellectual accomplishments rather than those who commonly experience pleasure from their taste perceptions.

Dasan also thinks that Zhu Xi’s metaphysic-epistemic approach extends beyond the context of 6A7. This chapter emphasizes the sameness of human nature, which is demonstrated by our similar pleasing sentiments towards excellent things. Dasan would agree that, in the context of instructing practical moral self-cultivation, Mengzi adopts the perspective of ordinary individuals who witness the sages’ excellences. Furthermore, since sentiments are mental effects, their uniformity suggests that they have the same mental cause within our nature. Dasan identifies this cause as “taste,” which represents the innate potential to become good. Therefore, he believes that Mengzi consistently discusses human nature in terms of taste. Principle might represent this potential, but this approach is disconnected from the uniform sentiments, which Dasan regards as the contextual core.

Moreover, Dasan’s account of human-nature-as-taste regards moral self-cultivation as dependent on actual performances rather than on epistemic efforts to understand Principle. This performative transition hinges on the common pleasures experienced when witnessing the sages’ achievements, as well as good deeds and affairs. Our well-preserved moral taste gives rise to proper desires and sentiments, motivating us to act upon them. Additionally, as we derive pleasure from perceiving the sages’ virtues, we naturally desire to earn the approval of others. To achieve this, we should provide them with good affairs and deeds. We might occasionally disregard or overlook such motives, failing to fulfill them by actual performances. However, our nature of taste would treat such failure as moral self-disregard and yield a sentiment of shame. To avoid this shame, we should act on the moral desires. Dasan argues that as the practices of *cheng* and *shu* necessitate actual moral performances, our real-life moral deeds, rather than intellectual comprehension of abstract Principle, crystallize the inherent virtues in our nature.

Dasan considers the Neo-Confucian teachings, their extensive reliance on the metaphysical framework and their intellectual approach to self-cultivation, as less in harmony with Mengzi’s moral practice. However, we should note that his criticisms do not necessarily demonstrate that the Neo-Confucian ways of self-cultivation suffers from theoretical defects. Their epistemic practice could be meaningful as a way of learning to be a sage. Dasan’s criticisms seem to rely on his conviction of the philological authority of the ancient Confucian texts, much like how Neo-Confucians appeal to the metaphysical authority of Principle and *li-qi* distinction. Nevertheless, Dasan’s emphasis on taste and sentiments presents an alternative perspective for contextual analysis of this chapter.

5 | INTERPRETING HUMAN NATURE IN *MENGZI* 6A6

I have examined how Dasan's account of human-nature-as-taste is applied to Mengzi's taste analogy, in contrast with Zhu Xi's account of human-nature-as-Principle. Both philosophers also exhibit different views on 6A6, where Mengzi explicates the meaning of the goodness of human nature. To vindicate the goodness of human nature, Neo-Confucians attend to the basis of Principle that is pure and good, while Dasan appeals to our taste that yields uniform approval of good deeds and excellent exemplars.

The different views of Dasan and Zhu Xi are revealed in their interpretations of the poem that Mengzi cites in his discussion about human nature.

Heaven gives birth to the teeming people (天生蒸民),
 If there is a thing, there is a norm (有物有則).
 This (norm) is the constant people cleave to (民之秉夷),
 They are fond of this beautiful virtue (好是懿德).

This poem suggests that people are born with an innate norm, which grounds their liking or approving of beautiful virtue. Zhu Xi explains the poem this way:

A thing necessarily presupposes a norm. Ears and eyes entail the excellences (*de* 德) of good hearing and sharp eyesight. Fathers and sons imply the hearts of paternal love and filial piety. This is what people hold as their constant nature. Thus, it is the factuality (*qing* 情) [of human nature] that people cannot dislike this beautiful virtue. If we observe such factuality, then we can see that human nature is good.²¹ (Zhu, 1983, p. 328)

Zhu Xi's explanation is not detailed, but his philosophical views can extend it. In this poem, "things" are represented and identified by their "norm," which is considered as their essence. Moreover, "things" are paralleled with ears and eyes as well as fathers and sons, while a "norm" corresponds to the excellent states of good hearing and sharp vision, as well as the best reciprocal relationship between a father and sons through paternal love and filial piety. Zhu Xi's focus is placed on the norm, or excellence, of things rather than on particular things that would be imperfect. These examples suggest that the essence of things is identified when their norms are achieved. The genuine identities of ears and eyes are uncovered when they function well. The true essence of the father-son relationship is accomplished when each sincerely loves and respects the other. Extended to human nature, this analogy suggests that human individuals are things, and their nature is their norm. For the Neo-Confucians, the norm is Principle, which is shared by all things and humans, and is pure and good. Hence, they believe that Principle that is pure and good substantiate Mengzi's account of the goodness of human nature.

We can raise some questions to this Principle-based interpretation. Zhu Xi indicates that because people have a norm as Principle, they approve of the beautiful virtue, but he does not clearly expound the connection between people's approval and their nature-as-Principle. He also implies that we should strive to accomplish "the norm." As sharp vision explicates the norm of the eyes, the excellences of genuine humans accounts for their norm. However, this comment does not clearly propose the specific ways for such goals.

Zhu Xi seems to think that presenting Principle, the "norm" or "constant nature" of people, sufficiently explains "the factuality" that they cannot dislike beautiful virtues. This approach, relying

on Principle as the metaphysical foundation of both things and humans, supposes that Principle is prior to things. Given this theoretical priority, people's uniform approval of virtue is ascribed only to Principle. Unless we share Principle, we could not observe people's uniform approval.

However, both 6A6 and 6A7 allows us to draw from people's uniform sentiments of approval a "factuality" that is empirically tenable, as Dasan does. He cites Zhu Xi's comment on the poem—"it is the factuality that people cannot dislike this beautiful virtue"—without assessment, suggesting an agreement with Zhu Xi's acceptance of people's general preferences. However, Dasan adds that "the poet and Kongzi discourse on human nature primarily by likes and dislikes (*hao* 好惡)," which implies that this factuality does not necessarily requires us to posit a metaphysical cause for such sentiments (Jeong, 2012, p. 198). At the outset, the poet might have observed people's similar sentiments of approval when they perceived genuine virtues, as ancient historians recorded people's desires for Yi Ya's dishes, and then supposed a "norm" as a generalized maxim. Our similar likes and dislikes, as the poet and Kongzi did, let us assume that we humans share the epistemic ground for uniform sentiments, which is called *gih* and taste. Furthermore, we can take such sentiments as the primary means for comprehending and actualizing our nature. I think that this structure is embedded in Dasan's claim that human nature is understood *through* taste, which differs from stating that human nature *is* taste. Dasan would think that, because for interpreting these chapters we can dispense with the assumption of a metaphysical ground, the Neo-Confucians bear the burden of explicating how people's uniform approvals are necessarily associated with Principle.

After explaining the poem, Zhu Xi appends the Cheng brothers' suggestion that the *li-qi* distinction is useful for self-cultivation, which implicitly discredits Mengzi's teaching not elaborate. But Dasan defends Mengzi from the Neo-Confucian criticisms by emphasizing the contextual background. Zhu Xi writes:

Cheng Yi says, "Nature is principle. Principle is identical from Yao Shun to vulgar people. The potential derives from *qi*, but there is clear and tarnished *qi*. With limpid *qi*, one becomes a person of wisdom, but with impure *qi* one remains a fool. However, if one learns and knows it [Principle], regardless of the clarity of *qi*, one can achieve the goodness and restore the root of nature ...".

Cheng Hao says, "While discussing nature yet without examining *qi* makes one's project incomplete, discussing only *qi* without reflecting nature renders it obscure." (Zhu, 1983, p. 329)

The Cheng brothers introduce a distinction between Principle-based original nature and *qi*-based physical nature. According to Cheng Yi, human nature is connected with Principle and the potential with *qi*. One's impure *qi* is responsible for one's failure in becoming wise, but this failure can be overcome through efforts to know Principle. Furthermore, Cheng Hao believes that considering human nature in terms of the *li-qi* distinction is theoretically superior to ancient Confucianism, because the latter lacks this metaphysical framework. He categorizes Mengzi among those who could not complete their moral projects because Mengzi did not explore *qi* in his account of human nature.

Zhu Xi then discusses the Cheng brothers' views and emphasizes the importance of the efforts to grasp the nature:

The potential that Chengzi discusses is different what Mengzi means with *cai* (才). Because Mengzi only refers to what nature manifests, he says that "no potential is not good."²² Chengzi says *cai* with reference to what it receives from *qi*. This implies

that people's potential can be obscure or clear, as well as strong or weak [because of their discrepant *qi*], which is what Zhang Zai calls the “physical nature of *qi*.” Both views of Mengzi and Chengzi are plausible but different. Considering the principle of affairs (*shili* 事理), Chengzi's view [which ponders on both *li* and *qi*] is more elaborate. Although the *qi* that one received might be not good, it does not harm the original goodness of the nature. Although the nature is originally good, it cannot be achieved without the efforts of reflection and correction. (Zhu, 1983, p. 330)

Zhu Xi favors Chengzi's view over Mengzi's, as Chengzi's application of the *li-qi* distinction provides a more elaborate account of human nature and moral potential. While Principle renders one's original nature good, one's physical *qi* determines the quality of one's individual potential. Hence, agents can better determine how to make “efforts of reflection and correction” effectively: they first need to concentrate on controlling their physical *qi*.

For Dasan, this Neo-Confucian approach depends on contextual and philological misunderstandings, and lacks empirical likelihood. Relying on empirical and historical evidence Dasan argues against Cheng Yi that the goodness of humans is not associated with the qualities of their received *qi*. There are many historical figures who were known as having impure *qi* but became wise and virtuous, as well as many individuals who were unwise and obscure but filially devoted. These facts, Dasan argues, support that people's moral accomplishments rarely have something to do with their received *qi*.

Next, Dasan criticizes Cheng Hao's appraisal of Mengzi as “incomplete” because it neglects the contextual reason why Mengzi had to examine only nature and not *qi* in 6A6. Dasan writes:

If Mengzi discoursed on the principle of the heart and human nature with his disciples in an ordinary day, he would have discussed affairs that originate from physical *qi*. Here, all his discourses are uttered because of Gaozi's view. When Gaozi adhered to the appetite of physical *qi* and claimed that the appetite is human nature and the Mandate, Mengzi had a heart that is like someone encountering fire. To put out the fire, one should use water and not add firewood. Mengzi could not but discuss the original nature of “morality and righteousness (*daoyi*)” because of the context of their debate. Obviously, all humans have the appetite of physical *qi*, but it cannot be called human nature. Why? Things are divided into four categories. Xunzi says, “water and fire have *qi* but no life. Grasses and trees have life but no senses. Animals have senses but no righteousness. Humans all have *qi*, life, senses, and righteousness.”²³ ... Animals have life, motions, and senses. But we always discuss animals by motions and senses because they are more significant than mere life. Humans have a body with motions and senses, but above those there is the heart of *daoyi* that supervises the body. In discussing human nature, do we have to concentrate primarily on *daoyi* or balance it with motions and senses? ... Human nature originally has *daoyi* which countervails the appetite of physical *qi*. How can we say Mengzi's account is incomplete only because it does not discourse on *qi*?²⁴ (Jeong, 2012, p. 198)

Dasan highlights that Mengzi's primary objective was to refute Gaozi's animalistic account of human nature, understanding human nature solely in terms of *qi*-based physical appetites: “the desires for food and sex are our nature” (*Mengzi* 6A4). If Mengzi had discussed *qi*, it would have been like adding firewood to the fire. Instead, he focused on aspects that Gaozi's view could not account for, such as “the heart of *daoyi*,” which extends beyond the realm of

physical *qi*. Dasan believes that Cheng Hao's accusation of Mengzi being "incomplete" is misguided, as it ignores this context.

We have seen the contrasting commentaries of Zhu Xi and Dasan to Mengzi's discourse on human nature. While Zhu Xi's analysis rests on the metaphysical framework of Principle and *li-qi* distinction, Dasan's interpretation prioritizes the context of Mengzi's teaching, which focuses on people's standpoint and the factuality of their uniform sentiments. Dasan's contextual analysis, which does not require Principle, suggests that such Neo-Confucian interpretations stand only within readers' pre-existing convictions about the theoretical significance of applying the *li-qi* distinction to the original texts.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have presented Dasan Jeong Yak-yong's ethico-esthetic account of human-nature-as-taste (*giho*) in comparison with Zhu Xi's metaphysic-epistemic account of human-nature-as-Principle (*li*). Dasan critiques the dominance of the Neo-Confucian metaphysical framework in interpreting early Confucian texts, aiming to illuminate the original meanings of these texts from a fresh angle. This approach enables Dasan to propose an empirical account of human-nature-as-taste, which he believes both philologically consistent and contextually coherent with the *Mengzi*. Emphasizing the uniform sentiments and desires that Mengzi underlines, Dasan views them as a pathway to understanding our nature. Thus, he contends that human nature is best comprehended through *giho* or taste. Dasan's reliance on our taste, sentiments, and desires aligns with his proposal of a performative moral practice, distinguished from the Neo-Confucian intellectual moral practice. Dasan's focus on taste and performative moral practice is worth investigating, as it provides an alternative perspective to human nature and self-cultivation in Confucian ethical thought.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

I declare that there is no conflict of interest in this research.

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ENDNOTES

¹ This includes Dasan's *Gyeongseoyupo* (經世遺表, 1817) for a complete reformation of governing, *Mokminsimseo* (牧民心書, 1818) with principles for local governing, and *Heumheumsinseo* (欽欽新書, 1822) for proper application of the laws.

- ² After completing *Old and New Commentaries on the Analects* (*Noneo gogeuim ju* 論語古今註, 1813, recently translated by Hongkyung Kim (2016–21)), Dasan turned to his critical commentaries on the other three Books in 1814: *Maengjayo-ui* (孟子要義), *Daehak gong-ui* (大學公義), and *Jungyong jajam* (中庸自箴).
- ³ Korean scholars have characterized “Dasan’s entire classical studies as a return to ‘the learning by Zhu-Si [洙泗] waters’ (where Kongzi taught his disciples)” (Kim, 2016, p. 10).
- ⁴ I mainly use Bryan Van Norden’s (Mencius, 2008) translation of the *Mengzi* with some modifications unless otherwise indicated.
- ⁵ Zhu (1983, p. 251), Mencius (2008, p. 63). Van Norden translates *li* as the *Pattern*, but I use *Principle* for consistency.
- ⁶ My translation. Sometimes, I follow Ivanhoe’s (2016) translations.
- ⁷ Van Norden thinks that this interpretation “only makes sense if one accepts the metaphysics of the School of the Way,” so he translates the passage without metaphysical connotation: “The ten thousand things are all brought to completion by us” (Mencius, 2008, p. 172).
- ⁸ Hereafter, I use *cheng* and *shu* without translation for these practices.
- ⁹ Zhu Xi (1983, p. 350). More about *cheng*, see *Mengzi* 4A12.
- ¹⁰ Jeong (2012, p. 231), Ivanhoe (2016, p. 218), with some modifications. Kongzi’s “one thread” is discussed in *Analects* 4:15.
- ¹¹ Dasan’s view of our shared *giho* does not imply that the mental effects of our taste sentiments and desires are identical but rather that they have the same underlying mental cause. Regarding the individual variations of taste, Dasan would align with Mengzi’s stance, which suggests that such variations stem from external factors (*Mengzi* 6A7).
- ¹² The details of Dasan’s performative account is worth investigating in connection with his view of human nature, but I will postpone it to a later chance.
- ¹³ In his article “18th Century British Aesthetics,” Shelly (2020) first asks, “What is taste?”. David Hume’s (1711–76) inquiry into “human nature” enables a worthwhile comparative study with Dasan’s moral philosophy, because Hume also pays attention to the functions of taste, similar to the roles of *giho*, for understanding the ways of ethico-esthetic evaluation and motivation.
- ¹⁴ *Li* also appears in *Mengzi* 5B1 and 7B19, but these instances hardly have a metaphysical sense.
- ¹⁵ In this statement, *de* can mean not only the sages’ “epistemic discovery” of *liyi* but also their “actual achievement” of something that reflects *liyi*. I appreciate one reviewer’s suggestion to use both translations to disclose this point.
- ¹⁶ For his philological investigations on *li*, Dasan refers to *Huinanzi* (淮南子), *Liqi* (禮記), *Huangdi Neijing* (黃帝內經), *Book of Han* (漢書), *Book of Tang* (唐書), *Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸), *Book of Change* (易經, 易傳), *Zuo Zhuan* (左傳), the *Mengzi*.
- ¹⁷ In relation to Dasan’s philological investigation of *li*, Hongkyung Kim argues that Dasan’s philosophy concentrates on “practical principle (Kr. *silli* Ch. *shili* 實理)”: Dasan “repudiates the notion of the human nature of original thus-ness ... because it is not compatible with *silli*” (Kim, 2019, p. 369).
- ¹⁸ I think, with this phrase, Dasan contextually intends to emphasize the sameness of ordinary people’s pleasure. Thus, we need not apply a high standard to sages’ pleasure (perhaps from excellent knowledge) to understand what pleases my heart.
- ¹⁹ Dasan’s proposal of “the nature of Heaven’s Mandate,” distinguished from human-nature-as-*giho*, invites more discussions about its characteristics, which I hope to explore in a different essay.
- ²⁰ Tiwald and Angle divide Neo-Confucian models of cultivation into three types: direct and indirect Discovery models and a Formation model. Zhu Xi is located in the indirect Discovery group, in which “one employs practices like ‘getting a handle on things’ (*gewu* 格物) and ‘reverential attention’ (*jing* 敬) ... in order to gradually come to fully know Pattern” (Tiwald & Angle, 2017, p. 136). Their categorization attests that the primary aim of Neo-Confucian self-cultivation is to gain the knowledge of Principle.
- ²¹ Zhu Xi interprets *qing* in Mengzi’s remark, “as for what they are inherently, they can become good” (*Mengzi* 6A6), as “the movement of the nature” (Zhu, 1983, p. 328). Dasan regards *qing* as “what is true and actual,”

and asks us to “read *qing* as that in ‘understanding the truth’ in the *Analects* 19:19, not as emotions in natural characters and emotions (*xingqing*)” (Jeong, 2012, p. 196). Dasan’s view is similar to Graham’s emphasis on reading this *qing* as “the facts,” or “genuine” (Graham, 2002, p. 49, more about the characteristics of *qing*, refer to Seok (2021)). I use “factuality” for *qing* because it can mean both senses of “facts” and “actuality.”

²² Mengzi says, “as for their becoming not good, this is not the fault of their potential” (Mengzi 6A6).

²³ *Xunzi* 9.19.

²⁴ After defending Mengzi, Dasan argues against the Neo-Confucian appraisal of Kongzi that Kongzi regarded human nature solely as *qi*.

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