



Tarrying with Predicament: A New Approach to Jeong Yakyong's Idea on "Ren" 仁 (humaneness) in Noneo gogumju

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Abstract

The present article explores Dasan Jeong Yakyong's conceptualization of humaneness (仁) within his philosophical framework, focusing on the multilayered structure of the concept as revealed in his commentaries in Noneo gogumju. While previous scholarship has highlighted Dasan's departure from Neo-Confucian views by interpreting humaneness as relational rather than internal or individualistic, limited attention has been given to its specific role in elucidating his philosophy. Despite the consensus on the importance of Dasan's reinterpretation of humaneness in contrasting with Neo-Confucianism, its function as a key term in his thought remains understudied. Dasan's emphasis on the relatedness of humaneness aims not only to refute internality but also to encourage individual moral self-cultivation within the constraints of human existence. Moreover, this conception of humaneness is intricately linked to his holistic understanding of humanity. Thus, this paper elucidates the emphasis on situational uncertainty and plurality within Dasan's reinterpretation of humaneness, alongside a comprehensive discussion of these themes within the conceptual framework of actual practice (行事) and situation (勢) that he later developed in his philosophical perspective.

Keywords: humaneness, Noneo gogumju, Neo-Confucianism, relatedness, individuality, uncertainty, plurality, actual practice, situation

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Introduction

Following the tumultuous period of the Japanese invasions (1592–1598) and subsequent incursions by the Manchus (1636), and amidst the transition from the Ming to Qing dynasties in China, scholars of the Joseon era embarked on endeavors to innovate and deepen their understanding of the prevailing Neo-Confucian orthodoxy in distinctive ways. Notably, this intellectual landscape witnessed diversification and individualization in scholarly pursuits, exemplified by endeavors such as Song Siyeol's 宋時烈 (1607–1689) exploration of ritual learning (禮學), Yun Jeung's 尹拯 (1629–1714) advocacy of practical learning (實學), Yun Hyu's 尹鑰 (1617–1680) critique of Zhu Xi 朱熹, Park Sedang's 朴世堂 (1629–1703) commentaries on *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, the Ganghwa school's (江華學派) acceptance of Yangming learning (陽明學), and Jeong Yakyong's 丁若鏞 (1762–1836) deconstruction of the learning of principle (理學).

Against this historical backdrop, Jeong Yakyong, known widely by his pseudonym Dasan 茶山, articulated the concept of *humaneness* (*ren* 仁) in his work *Noneo gogumju* 論語古今註 (Exegeses of the Analects of All Time), through a distinct methodological approach involving the reevaluation of existing commentaries (古今註) and a reinterpretation of the *Analects*. Given that Dasan employed a methodology akin to Zhu Xi's approach to combat Buddhism through annotations on the Confucian classics, it becomes imperative to delve into Dasan's logic and reflections via the commentaries he provided on the Confucian classics. Given that humaneness constitutes a pivotal concept within the *Analects*, a meticulous examination of Dasan's commentaries in *Noneo gogumju* is essential for a comprehensive understanding of his conception of humaneness as a philosophical term.

Scholarship to date has posited that Dasan construed humaneness as a relational or intersubjective term, thereby rejecting the Neo-Confucian presumption regarding the internality or individuality of nature (*xing* 性)¹

1. For Dasan, the term “nature” almost always signifies “human nature,” not the nature of physical entities or the natural world.

and principle (*li* 理).² Such arguments shed light on the origins of Dasan's critical thought and the philosophical direction he pursued. However, limited research has been conducted on elucidating how his critical mindset is intricately linked to his overarching system of thought. Particularly, scant attention has been devoted to exploring the specific function of his conception of humaneness as a pivotal term for elucidating his philosophy, notwithstanding the consensus among prior studies regarding the significance of his reinterpretation of humaneness in delineating his thought as an antithesis to Neo-Confucianism.³

Against this backdrop, this paper endeavors to elucidate the structure of the concept of humaneness in Dasan's commentaries on the *Analects*, with a focus on the *how* aspect. It argues that the emphasis Dasan placed on the relatedness of humaneness is not solely geared toward negating internality, but rather towards fostering individual endeavors aimed at achieving moral self-cultivation in the face of the situational constraints inherent in human existence. Furthermore, this conception of humaneness is intricately intertwined with his holistic perspective on human beings.

The Context of the Composition of *Noneo gogumju* and Dasan's Concept of Humaneness⁴

With the assistance of his disciples, Yi Ganghoe 李綱會 (1789–?) and Yun Jongsim 尹鍾心 (1793–1853), Dasan completed his *Noneo gogumju* during the winter of the *gyeyu* year (1813), when he was 52 years old and living in

2. For some illuminating discussions about the significance of humaneness in Dasan's philosophy, see Keum (2006); Jeong (2021); Baek (2007); S. Kim (2010); Chung (2017); Cawley (2014); and Setton (1997).

3. For the paragraphs in which Dasan emphasized humaneness as a crucial term in his philosophy, see Jeong Yakyong (2012b, 154–156; 2012e, 10:175–176; 2012f, 220). For his emphasis on the *Analects*, see Jeong Yakyong (2012g, 20; 2012b, 153, 159) and “Noneo daechaek” 論語對策 in Jeong Yakyong (2012e, 9:175–176).

4. The content of this chapter has been revised and supplemented based on a part of the author's master's thesis (Jo 2017).

exile in Gangjin. According to a letter sent to his elder brother Jeong Yakjeon 丁若銓 (1758–1816), who was himself in exile on Heuksando Island, Dasan had completed his studies on the Six Classics and was considering embarking on a comprehensive study of the Four Books, with the writing of *Noneo gogeuju* marking the beginning of this endeavor.

Although I am aware of the clear benefits of the *doin* method [one of the arts of nourishing life in Daoism], for the past twelve years, I have found myself diligently immersed in the study of the Six Classics, often waking up early in the morning and staying up late into the night, leaving little time for anything else. Now that I have finally completed the study of the Six Classics, I intend to devote some of my time to contemplation on the *doin* method, while also making efforts to keep a clean room and cultivate myself throughout the day. However, it would be even better if there were no books in the room at all, as it is difficult to break old habits, and I find myself once again drawn to literary pursuits.

[...]

Now, I wish to compile a book by gathering together the best commentaries on the *Analects*, following the examples set by existing commentaries by He Yan 何晏 [?-249] or Zhu Xi 朱子 [Zhu Xi], but this task is not without its challenges. While it is not as difficult to grasp the philosophical significance [of the *Analects*] as the study of the Six Classics, it requires both a physical and mental exertion that is not insignificant.⁵ (Jeong Yakyong 2012a, 215–216)

As evident from the letter above, when Dasan was planning to write *Noneo gogeuju*, he intended to create a standardized version of the collected commentaries on the *Analects* by selecting well-crafted annotations from various editions, borrowing the format of He Yan or Zhu Xi. However, as the actual work progressed, this initial plan underwent a transformative innovation, guided by Dasan's creative insights, towards a completely new

5. 導引法必知其有益，而十二年晨興夜寢，慥慥於六經之事，無暇爲此，今六經幸而卒業，當淨掃一室，朝乾夕惕之暇，留意導引。房中無一卷書更好，但宿習難去，畢竟更事文墨耳。[...] 方欲取『論語』，依『集解』·『集注』之例，集千古而取其所長，勒成一部，而此雖與六經之役自發義理者，不無難易，其費精用心，亦自不少。 All translations are the author's.

interpretation of the *Analects* by utilizing the existing annotations in a groundbreaking manner. According to Dasan, this transformation was necessary because upon thorough examination some of the interpretations in existing commentaries were deemed fundamentally unsound. A letter Dasan sent to Jeong Yakjeon during the height of his writing clearly indicates a significant departure from the original plan.

Upon thoroughly examining the existing commentaries, I found that some of them were entirely unreasonable. Consequently, I inevitably closed the book, closed my eyes, and sat down, forgetting to eat and sleep as I pondered. As a result, new philosophical ideas poured forth.

[...]

Furthermore, in the process of adjudicating conflicting commentaries, I have not only cited both schools [old and new commentaries] but also introduced new assertions, defeating many arguments to the extent that they can no longer be spoken of. If the heavens grant me enough time to complete this work, the resulting book shall surely be worth reading.⁶ (Jeong Yakyong 2012a, 216–217)

This letter offers significant information from two perspectives. Firstly, it reveals Dasan's self-perception as a *judge* adjudicating various existing commentaries. In contrast to the ordinary and modest intentions and humble demeanor evident in the previous letter, a stringent judicial attitude emerges here, discerning the rightness and wrongness of existing commentaries with sharp intellect. Upon examining the contents of *Noneo gogumju*, one can readily notice that it has a markedly different composition from *Collected Explanations of the Analects* (*Lunyu jijie* 論語集解) of He Yan or *Collected Annotations of the Analects* (*Lunyu jizhu* 論語集註) of Zhu Xi. *Noneo gogumju* is replete with Dasan's own evaluations and judgments to the extent that it might aptly be termed a *courtroom* of commentaries. The fact that Dasan had the self-awareness of his rigorous

6. 其奈歷考古今之說, 都不合理者有之. 於是不得不掩卷瞑目而坐, 或忘食焉, 或忘寢焉, 必有新義理, 洒然出來 [...] 又其決訟者, 於兩家所引之外, 別有斷案今日始出, 使落訟者不能復言者多. 天若假我以日月, 得了此業, 則其書頗可觀.

judicial demeanor can be regarded as a crucial clue to discerning Dasan's guiding principles in writing *Noneo gogeuimju*.

Another aspect is that the unique format of the *Noneo gogeuimju* was likely not preconceived, but rather emerged during the writing process. In the preceding letter, little room was used to express personal opinion, and only a modest plan of "gathering together the best commentaries on the *Analects*" was presented. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the innovative rhetorical techniques employed by Dasan in *Noneo gogeuimju* were not preconceived during the preparatory stage of writing, but instead likely emerged during the writing process while Dasan deliberated effective communication methods for articulating his "new philosophical ideas" or adjudicating the disputes among existing commentaries. Thus, it is rational to speculate that the distinctive format of *Noneo gogeuimju*, unprecedented in the commentarial tradition on the *Analects*, was created through a combination of Dasan's lifelong scholarship and his own originality.

Based on these pieces of information, it can be inferred that Dasan's distinctive commentaries in *Noneo gogeuimju* are not only the result of a lifetime of systematic documentation, but are also the condensation of intellectual activities over a relatively short period. The significant change in Dasan's attitude before and during the writing process is evidence for this. While Dasan acted as the *organizer* of existing commentaries on the *Analects* prior to commencing his writing, he transformed into the *adjudicator* of these commentaries during the actual writing. Consequently, analyzing Dasan's philosophical characteristics derived from *Noneo gogeuimju*, wherein he compressed his lifelong research on the *Analects* into an innovative form, is deemed essential for elucidating the entirety of his philosophical system. In particular, the concept of *humaneness* is one of the core concepts in the *Analects*, and Dasan formulated his own interpretation of humaneness in his *Noneo gogeuimju*. Considering this, the necessity of studying Dasan's concept of humaneness is evident.

Basis: Two Clues

In the introductory section to *Noneo gogeumju*, instead of a conventional preface, Jeong Yakyong presents a synopsis comprising 175 collected statements expressing his personal insights regarding the *Analects*. Among these, two statements are particularly significant when examining Dasan's conception of humaneness.

- Statement No. 2: I proved that the concepts of humaneness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom (仁義禮智) are realized through actual practice rather than simply existing as principles (理) in one's mind [referring to *Analects* 1:2].⁷ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:20)
- Statement No. 92: I proved that although two individuals make humaneness, the practice of humaneness ultimately depends on individual resolve rather than a collaborative effort to achieve it together [referring to *Analects* 12:1].⁸ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:25)

Evidently, the former underscores the attainment of humaneness through practical engagement, while the latter underscores individual determination and effort. To elucidate the former statement further, it is imperative to scrutinize Dasan's commentary on *Analects* 1:2.

Humaneness means that two persons are together. To serve one's father with filial piety is humaneness, [in this case] a father and a son are the two persons; To serve one's elder brother with fraternal respectfulness is humaneness, [in this case] an elder brother and a younger brother are the two persons; To serve one's sovereign with sincerity is humaneness, [in this case] a sovereign and a servant are the two persons; To shepherd one's subject with affection is humaneness, [in this case] a governor and a subject are the two persons. All relationships between two persons, including that of a married couple or friends, we can call them humane if

7. 辨仁義禮智之名, 成於行事, 非在心之理.

8. 辨二人爲仁, 而爲仁由己, 非二人共成之.

they manage to fulfill the Way.⁹ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:34)

The actual practice of humaneness occurs within the realm of human relationships rather than within the confines of individual cognition. This assertion can be readily linked to Dasan's critique of the Neo-Confucian doctrine concerning the internalization of virtue (德), nature (性), and principle (理).

Nowadays, most Confucians think that these four values of humaneness, righteousness, propriety and wisdom (仁義禮智) exist inside one's stomach like the five viscera, and that the four beginnings (四端) stem from them. This understanding is erroneous.¹⁰ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:34)

If one were to regard the principle as nature, fathoming the principle as knowing nature...our lifework would be just one thing: fathoming the principle....Is the pursuit of understanding nature and heaven not inherently "lofty but impractical"?¹¹ The philosophy of the past sages was not at all like this.¹² (Jeong Yakyong 2012c, 7:34)

Nevertheless, if we perceive the relatedness of humaneness solely as an opposition to the internal nature of Neo-Confucian moral metaphysics, interpreting statement No. 92 in conjunction with No. 2 becomes challenging. Statement No. 92 elucidates this difficulty:

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9. 仁者，二人相與也。事親孝爲仁，父與子二人也。事兄悌爲仁，兄與弟二人也。事君忠爲仁，君與臣二人也。牧民慈爲仁，牧與民二人也。以至夫婦朋友，凡二人之間，盡其道者，皆仁也。
 10. 今之儒者，認之爲仁義禮智四顆，在人腹中如五臟然，而四端皆從此出，此則誤矣。
 11. One of the reviewers of this paper suggested that “高遠而無實” would be better translated as “distant and impractical,” or even “out of reach and unrealistic.” While I understand the intent behind this suggestion, I believe it is uncommon to translate the term “高遠” in such a negative light. Generally, “高遠” only takes on a negative connotation in cases where it is excessively lofty, such as in the expressions, “過於高遠” or “失於高遠.” This perspective aligns with Dasan's thinking as well.
 12. 若以理爲性，以窮理爲知性...則吾人一生事業，惟有窮理一事而已...知性知天，無或近於高遠而無實乎？先聖之學，斷不如此。

Originally, two persons make humaneness. For that reason, one who seeks humaneness sometimes seeks it not from oneself, but from other persons. Hence, Confucius vehemently opposed this notion, stating: “The subjects will serve you if you cultivate yourself, and there will be humaneness. Two persons fulfill their duty—how can one seek it from others?”¹³ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 9:16)

Dasan astutely recognizes the potential drawback of emphasizing relationality, which may diminish one’s intrinsic drive for self-cultivation due to a misinterpretation of the notion that “two persons make humaneness” (二人爲仁). He clarifies that this statement should be understood as “an individual can achieve humaneness within the context of interpersonal relationships through voluntary self-cultivation.”

The exposition of humaneness as presented above directs our focus towards the individual dimension rather than solely emphasizing relational dynamics in the exercise of humaneness. Furthermore, it underscores that the notion of relatedness concerning humaneness should not be simplistically viewed as a direct contradiction to the internal or individual aspects of Neo-Confucian ethical principles. This is evident in Dasan’s explicit emphasis on individual exertion and intrinsic drive towards moral conduct. Therefore, the pertinent inquiry arises: what is the connection between individual endeavor (No. 92) and the relational aspect of humaneness (No. 2) within Dasan’s philosophical framework?¹⁴

Another Category: Situational Uncertainty

As outlined thus far, it is evident that Dasan underscored at least two facets within his conception of humaneness: relatedness and individuality.

13. 原來二人爲仁，故求仁者，或於自求之外，更求諸人。孔子嚴嚴辨破曰：“自修則民服，於是乎爲仁。一盡二人本分—豈由人乎哉？”

14. Previous research has considered the individual aspect of humaneness that No. 2 indicates as being supplementary, which forms the condition of a subject for conducting moral behavior in human relationships. See Keum (2006) and Y. Kim (2012).

Furthermore, he demonstrated a keen awareness of the potential peril of moral laxity stemming from misconceptions regarding the relational aspect of humaneness. The current objective is to situate these seemingly divergent factors within the broader landscape of Dasan's philosophical framework and derive philosophical insights from this holistic perspective.

To address this challenge, it is essential to acknowledge that Dasan's understanding of humaneness is not limited to those two aforementioned categories. There is another dimension in his idea of humaneness which prior research has not spotlighted. Within *Noneo gogumju*, there exist innovative annotations pertaining to humaneness that provide insights into Dasan's philosophy from a distinct perspective.

However, this third category manifests implicitly in the form of commentary, indicating that Dasan did not explicitly articulate it as statements No. 2 or No. 92. Nonetheless, these commentaries not only offer novel interpretations but also serve as expressions of his philosophy, reflecting a consistent perspective on humaneness. Previous research has often regarded them merely as *novel* annotations rather than *philosophical* ones. Moving forward, this paper delves into relevant commentaries in *Noneo gogumju*, employing close reading in the context of Dasan's interpretative strategy on the *Analects*.

Some commentaries in *Noneo gogumju* discussing humaneness are presented in a coherent discourse emphasizing *uncertainty*, suggesting that while individual effort is deemed essential in achieving humaneness, it cannot guarantee its attainment or completion. How precisely this third emphasis is articulated in the commentaries on the *Analects* is exemplified below.

Humaneness in a Trap (井有仁)

When faced with a perilous situation where humaneness is akin to a lethal trap, would a virtuous man, or *gunja* 君子 (*junzi* in Chinese), willingly enter this trap despite knowing it will result in his demise? This provocative inquiry was posed by Zai Wo 宰我, a remarkable yet audacious disciple of Confucius.

Zai Wo asked, “If someone suggests that ‘Humaneness is in the trap,’ a humane man will follow him.” Confucius said, “Why should he do so? A virtuous man may be made to go to the trap, but he cannot be made to go down into it. He may be deceived, but he cannot be destroyed.”¹⁵

This translation is according to Dasan’s interpretation. In his “Wonui chonggwol” 原義總括 (Overview of the Original Meanings), Dasan provides the following interpretation:

- Statement No. 52: I proved that the sentence *jing you ren* 井有仁 should be read as *jing you ren* 阱有仁 [humaneness is in the trap] [referring to *Analects* 6:25].¹⁶ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:23)

What made Dasan interpret *jing you ren* 井有仁 different from the existing commentaries?¹⁷ Here is his explanation:

As for the virtuous man, there is a classic example of “accomplishing humaneness by sacrificing one’s life” (殺身成仁). Zai Wo had a doubt about it and asked, “Suppose that an extremely dangerous situation, not different from a trap, could make one accomplish humaneness by sacrificing one’s life. Then does the humane person also go in for it in greedy expectation of the honor?” Confucius replied, “It is not so. The virtuous man can be made to go away to avoid danger but cannot be made to fall with the expectation of gaining profit; he may be deceived with a reasonable excuse but cannot be ensnared by the absurd Way. How can there be a person who pushes himself into the extremely dangerous situation and greedily expect the honor of humaneness?”¹⁸ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:239)

15. 宰我問曰：“仁者，雖告之曰，‘井有仁焉’其從之也？”子曰：“何爲其然也？君子可逝也，不可陷也，可欺也，不可罔也。” (*Analects* 6:25).

16. 辨井有仁，當作阱有仁。

17. In his *Collected Annotations of the Analects* (*Lunyu jizhu* 論語集註), Zhu Xi translated “井有仁” as “a person who has fallen into a well.”

18. 君子有殺身成仁之義，宰我疑而問之曰：“今有必死之地，無異陷阱，而赴之可以殺身而成仁，則仁者亦貪其名而從之乎？”子曰：“不然。君子可使之遠害而去，不可使之見利而墮也。可誑之以理之所有，不可罩之以道之所迷。豈有貪仁之名，而陷身於必死之地者乎？”

In this passage, Zai Wo poses a hypothetical scenario to underscore the paramount importance of humaneness, suggesting that one should prioritize it above all else, even at the expense of one's own life. This inquiry encapsulates a fundamental question regarding the universal applicability of the principle of "accomplishing humaneness by sacrificing one's life" (殺身成仁). Dasan, in his analysis, interprets Zai Wo as emblematic of the pragmatic thinking that prevailed during that era.¹⁹

To grasp the underlying intent of this commentary, it is imperative to contextualize it within the broader discourse of the *Analects*, as expounded upon by Dasan.

Confucius said, "My ideal Way was not realized. I wish I got upon a raft, and floated on the sea. He who will accompany me will be You [Zi Lu]." Zi Lu was glad to hear this. Confucius said, "Because You surpasses me in his love for bravery, he will accompany me without taking the situation into consideration."²⁰

Dasan's commentary states:

The line under discussion bears a resemblance to Zai Wo's query in its connotations. It can be rephrased to convey, "Even if I were to suggest that 'one can only practice the Way by boarding a small raft and floating on the sea,' Zi Lu would still follow me."²¹ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:170)

According to Dasan, Confucius's response to Zai Wo's inquiry is intricately linked to his critique of Zi Lu, who demonstrates no fear in navigating treacherous waters with a small raft to embody righteousness. Given Zi Lu's forthright demeanor and unwavering resolve, Confucius, while admiring his character, expresses concern for his future.²² From Dasan's perspective, it is

19. See the commentary on *Analects* 17:20 in *Noneo gogeumju*.

20. 子曰：“道不行，乘桴浮于海，從我者，其由與？”子路聞之喜。子曰：“由也好勇過我，無所取材（*Analects* 5:6）。

21. 此經語意，與宰我之言相類。蓋曰：“子路雖告之曰乘桴浮海，可以行道，必將從之也。”

22. See the commentary on *Analects* 11:13 in *Noneo gogeumju*.

Zi Lu who boldly immerses himself in the “trap of humaneness,” while Zai Wo harbors suspicions about it. Consequently, Dasan’s position on the unreflective pursuit of “sacrificing oneself to achieve humaneness” (殺身成仁) can be inferred from his commentary on “without taking the situation into consideration” (無所取材), which elucidates Confucius’s assessment of Zi Lu.

Confucius’s underlying message can be distilled as follows: “Crossing an ocean of ten thousand *li* with a tiny raft—this is the situation of extreme danger and eventual death. If it is for practicing the Way, however, I am willing to undertake this endeavor alone. And You must accompany me also.” On the one hand, Confucius commends Zi Lu’s fervent dedication to practicing the Way; while on the other hand, he acknowledges Zi Lu’s unwavering commitment to follow him, even at the risk of his own life. One sage and one worthy here understand each other’s spirits, deeply touching people’s hearts even a thousand years later. How could Zi Lu not be filled with gladness at such recognition?²³ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:169–170)

Zi Lu was in a rush to practice the Way. In addition, he was determined not to betray Confucius even if he is in a state of predicament. Confucius, with his first statement, made evident Zi Lu’s whole heart and made it known to others. This is the reason Zi Lu was deeply moved by Confucius’s understanding of his sincerity and extremely satisfied with it. How, then, could one deride Zi Lu’s genuine joy? Similarly, Confucius’s subsequent statement was also not intended as mockery toward Zi Lu. Instead, it served as an elucidation of the underlying significance of his initial remark: “Only Zi Lu surpasses me in his love for bravery and also can forge ahead in any case, without taking the situation into consideration. I therefore endorse his decision to accompany me.”²⁴ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:170)

23. 孔子之意，若曰‘乘一片之桴，涉萬里之海，此是危險必死之地。然苟以行道之故，吾將獨行，則由也必從之’。一則許子路心熱於行道，一則知子路舍命以從師。一聖一賢，意氣相許，千載之下，尚令人感激，子路安得不喜？

24. 子路之心，急欲行道，又於夫子，雖水火塗炭，誓不相捨。孔子一言，剔出子路一片肝膽，昭示衆

Dasan contends that Zi Lu's valor merits universal admiration, and his jubilation reflects genuine excitement. However, Dasan also underscores the importance of considering situational variables and uncertainties when practicing humaneness. Therefore, in his commentary, Dasan aligns Confucius with Zai Wo's perspective, emphasizing a careful attitude which takes the situational factors into consideration.

Moreover, while Dasan emphasizes situational uncertainty, it is essential to recognize that his attitude toward Zi Lu remains favorable. It is crucial to bear in mind that Dasan's conception of humaneness is multifaceted, and his emphasis on individual effort is equally significant alongside other aspects of his interpretation.

The Plurality of Humaneness (如其仁)

Dasan's ambivalent perspective on the concept of "sacrificing oneself to achieve humaneness" (殺身成仁) and the contrast between Zai Wo and Zi Lu is further evident in other commentaries found in *Noneo gogumju*. This can be confirmed through Dasan's distinctive interpretation of the contrast between Guan Zhong 管仲 and Shao Hu 召忽, as depicted in two relevant chapters of the *Analects*.

Zi Lu said, "Duke Huan killed his brother Jiu, when Shao Hu died for his master, Guan Zhong did not die. May not I say that he was not humane?" Confucius said, "Duke Huan assembled all the feudal lords together nine times without weapons and chariots—it was all through the influence of Guan Zhong. His achievements are like Shao Hu's humaneness! His achievements are like Shao Hu's humaneness!"²⁵

Zi Gong said, "Guan Zhong, I apprehend, was not humane! When Duke Huan killed his brother Jiu, Guan Zhong did not die but helped Huan

人，此子路所以感激知己，而喜不自勝也。子路之喜，何可譏乎！下節亦非譏子路者，乃上節之釋義也。“唯其好勇過我，又能遇事直前，無所裁度，故我許其從行云耳。”

25. 子路曰：“桓公殺公子糾，召忽死之，管仲不死。”曰：“未仁乎？”子曰：“桓公九合諸侯，不以兵車，管仲之力也。如其仁，如其仁” (*Analects* 14:17).

instead.” Confucius said, “Guan Zhong helped Duke Huan, made him leader of all the feudal lords, and rectified the whole world. Down to the present day, the people enjoy the gifts which he conferred. But for Guan Zhong, we should now be wearing our hair unbound, and wearing the right-over-left closing. How can one, from the perspective of the small fidelity of common men and common women, require him to commit suicide in a stream or ditch, no one knowing anything about him?”²⁶

From the outset, Confucius’s disposition towards Guan Zhong was not one-dimensional, giving rise to historical controversies. Here are the chapters in which Confucius unusually recognizes Guan Zhong as an individual who attained humaneness, the pinnacle virtue in the *Analects*. Through new commentaries on these utterances of Confucius, Dasan elucidates that both Guan Zhong and Shao Hu achieved the “precisely” identical level of humaneness. Let us look at Dasan’s commentary on the upper chapter first:

While Zi Lu acknowledged Shao Hu had accomplished humaneness by sacrificing his life, he thought that Guan Zhong had not accomplished humaneness...I supplement that because *ru* equals *dang* [equivalent] and *qi ren* means Shao Hu’s humaneness, therefore the meaning of this line is that Guan Zhong’s achievements are sufficient as to be equivalent to Shao Hu’s humaneness (*ru qi ren* 如其仁). The reason he uttered this twice is that he became aware at last that the two persons were equal by comparing and measuring.²⁷ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 9:129–130)

Zi Lu knew only that Shao Hu could accomplish humaneness by sacrificing his life, and didn’t know that Guan Zhong’s achievements covered the entire world with humaneness. Confucius, therefore, highly praised his achievements saying: “Although Guan Zhong didn’t die, his

26. 子貢曰：“管仲非仁者與！桓公殺公子糾，不能死，又相之。”子曰：“管仲相桓公，霸諸侯，一匡天下。民到于今受其賜，微管仲，吾其被髮左衽矣。豈若匹夫匹婦之爲諒也，自經於溝瀆而莫之知也？”(*Analects* 14:18).

27. 子路謂召忽殺身成仁，疑管仲未仁...補曰如，猶當也。其仁，謂召忽之仁也，言管仲之功足以當召忽之仁。【如其仁】再言之者，較計秤量，而終覺其可相當也。

achievements deserve to be equivalent to Shao Hu's death."²⁸ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 9:133)

The essence of the argument is straightforward: Guan Zhong should be acknowledged as equally humane as Shao Hu, given his profound impact on benefiting the whole world under heaven. What distinguishes Dasan's commentary is his interpretation of "*ru qi ren*" 如其仁 as signifying "same as Shao Hu's humaneness." As anticipated, Dasan's "Overview of the Original Meanings" provides an explanation for this particular chapter.

- Statement No. 113: I proved that "*ru qi ren, ru qi ren*" means that Guan Zhong's achievements are sufficient as to be equivalent to Shao Hu's humaneness [referring to *Analects* 14:17].²⁹ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 8:27)

As previously discussed regarding the interpretation of "humaneness is in the trap," Dasan's commentary aims to underscore the significance of situational context in the practice of humaneness. To gain a more detailed understanding of his intention, it is instructive to examine the commentary on the second chapter:

In the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, are there not countless cases in history of sons murdering their fathers and younger brothers murdering their older brothers?...For example, Confucius often called both Ji Zha of Wo and Qu Yuan of Wei virtuous men. But whenever a national crisis happened, they did not involve themselves in it. How can one say that they had no "righteousness between ruler and minister" for their former ruler? Noble scions and noble brothers are legally qualified to be rulers. So if their status is legitimate, it is obligatory not to regard them as enemies. These are examples of justice in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Shao Hu's death is truly humane, but Guan Zhong's achievements are not necessarily

28. 子路獨以召忽爲殺身成仁，而不知管仲之功將仁覆天下。故孔子盛稱其功曰：“管仲雖不死，亦可以當召忽之死也。”

29. 辨如其仁如其仁，謂管仲之功，足以當召忽之仁。

inhumane....To insist that only sacrifice can be humaneness goes against the Classics.³⁰ (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 135–136)

During the Spring and Autumn Period, a turbulent era marked by swift regime fluctuations, ethical standards for assessing loyalty or disloyalty diverged significantly from those of the subsequent imperial age. Acknowledging this historical background, Dasan extrapolates the principles of situational ethics, suggesting that achieving humaneness can manifest in various forms beyond mere “self-sacrifice” (殺身).

It is reasonable to infer that Dasan intended to convey the idea of *plurality* through these commentaries. According to Dasan, practicing humaneness can take various paths, devoid of an absolute standard, as long as they culminate in the realization of humaneness. Through the juxtaposition of figures like Zi Lu and Zai Wo, Guan Zhong and Shao Hu, Dasan believed he effectively illustrated his approach of embracing uncertainty in the interpretations of the *Analects*.

Embracing Uncertainty and the Hardship of Existence

In *Noneo gogumju*, Dasan presents several distinctive commentaries that underscore the situational nature of humaneness.³¹ Through meticulous argumentation in the form of commentary, Dasan consistently emphasizes the importance of situational awareness and the diversity of paths to achieving humaneness. This notion elucidates why he accentuates the challenges inherent in practicing humaneness in other contexts.

Confucius seldom spoke of humaneness, because humaneness is difficult to achieve; Confucius said that the firm, the enduring, the simple, and the

30. 歷觀『春秋』，凡子弑其父·弟弑其兄者，前後何限?...若吳季札·衛蘧瑗，皆仲尼之所嘗亟稱爲君子者，而每有國難，身必不與，豈皆無君臣之義於其前君乎？公子公弟，法當君國，既正其位，義不敢讎，此『春秋』之義例也....召忽之死，固爲仁矣，管仲之事，未必爲不仁也....必以殉死爲仁者，違於經也。

31. See Dasan's commentaries on the *Analects* 1:3, 4:4, 4:5, and 4:7 in *Noneo gogumju*.

modest are near to humaneness, because humaneness is difficult to achieve; Confucius said that fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with humaneness, because humaneness is difficult to achieve. What else can be there outside humaneness? ('The reason the ancients did not carelessly give utterance to their words, was that they feared lest their actions should not come up to them.' This saying apparently does not mention humaneness, but it actually indicates humaneness.).³² (Jeong Yakyong 2012e, 9:20)

For Dasan, humaneness is situated within the realm of human interactions, emerging as a consequence of individual practice. Why is it so difficult to achieve? Because there lie myriad uncertainties between one's inner intentions and the external manifestation of humaneness. Consequently, there cannot be an idealized model for practicing humaneness, nor should individuals be harshly criticized for failing to attain it, given the complexities involved. Dasan's admiration for Zi Lu's courage, despite his tragic fate amid political upheaval in Wei, illustrates that his understanding of situationality transcends mere consequentialism or relativism. This multi-layered conception of humaneness reflects Dasan's philosophical perspective on the existential struggle inherent in human existence.

The themes of individual effort and situational adversity reappear in Dasan's later writings. For instance, in *Simgyeong milheom* 心經密驗 (Personal Examination of the Classic of the Mind) Dasan succinctly summarizes his perspective on humanity in a single paragraph.

In summary, the spiritual essence of human beings involves three principles. Regarding their nature, it delights in goodness and is ashamed of evil. This is what Mencius meant when he said that nature was good. Regarding their faculty of deliberation [lit. to weigh and compare], they can do both good and evil. It was on this that Gaozi based his analogy of swirling water, and Yang Xiong based his explanation of a mixture of good and evil. Regarding conduct, it is difficult to do good and easy to do evil.

32. 孔子罕言仁，爲其難行也；孔子曰 剛毅·木訥，近仁，爲其難行也；孔子曰 巧言令色，鮮矣仁，謂其難行也。仁外有事乎？（古者言之不出，耻躬之不逮，亦不標仁字，而其實言仁也）。

This is what led Xunzi to propound his theory that human nature is evil. Although Xunzi and Yang Xiong made erroneous theories because they misunderstood nature, that does not mean that these three principles do not exist within the spiritual essence of human beings.³³ (Jeong Yakyong 2012f, 199)

According to Dasan, one of the inherent characteristics of human beings is their actual practice (行事), which contributes to the difficulty in achieving humaneness. This concept stands in stark contrast to Neo-Confucian philosophy, which attributes human imperfection to “physical nature” (氣質之性). Dasan, by highlighting the inherent challenges of human existence, firmly asserts that the ideal state of effortlessness (無爲) in the pursuit of humaneness does not exist. Instead, human beings are ordained to be in an ever-struggling state of subjectivity.

It is clear that the notion of situationality in humaneness discussed earlier aligns closely with the concept of actual practice (行事). Furthermore, in his writings Dasan later replaces the term actual practice with “situation” (勢).

The spiritual mind that heaven endowed involves faculty, situation, and nature....[S]ituation is the circumstances and the mechanism. Gluttony and lust seduce from within; fame and wealth seduce from without. Moreover, because an individual’s temperament likes comfort and dislikes effort, situation makes it difficult to follow goodness and easy to follow evil. It is not that heaven was ignorant and made situations like that. Only under such a situation, can a person who practices goodness treasure it.³⁴ (Jeong Yakyong 2012d, 362)

By depicting situationality as not just an external impediment but an

33. 總之，靈體之內，厥有三理。言乎其性，則樂善而恥惡，此孟子所謂性善也。言乎其權衡，則可善而可惡，此告子湍水之喻，揚雄善惡渾之說所由作也。言乎其行事，則難善而易惡，此荀卿性惡之說所由作也。苟與揚也，認性字本誤，其說以差，非吾人靈體之內，本無此三理也。

34. 天之賦靈知也，有才焉，有勢焉，有性焉....勢者，其地·其機也。食色誘於內，名利引於外。又其氣質之私，好逸而惡勞，故其勢從善如登，從惡如崩。天非不知而使之然也，爲如是，然後其爲善者，可貴也。

intrinsic aspect of human existence, Dasan endeavors to illustrate the multifaceted nature of individuals, encompassing relational orientation, individual autonomy, and situational hardship. Through this philosophical exploration, Dasan's novel interpretation of the *Analects* and humaneness profoundly influences his broader philosophical framework.

Conclusion

In summary, it can be concluded that in *Noneo gogumju*, Dasan not only emphasizes the relatedness of humaneness but also illustrates its multifaceted aspects, encompassing the inevitable existential hardships, alongside the ethical decisions made by the moral agent within them.

Dasan establishes humaneness as the cornerstone of his moral philosophy. Particularly, in his commentary on the concept of humaneness in the *Noneo gogumju*, Dasan consistently explains the situational nature of humaneness by emphasizing situational uncertainty in the process of action and plurality in the outcomes of action. As mentioned above, this concept presents a notable departure from the Neo-Confucian mode of thinking, wherein the moral imperfection of human beings is ascribed to physical nature (氣質).

Previous research has correctly detailed how Dasan's novel ideas and commentaries on humaneness were prompted by his critique of Neo-Confucian moral metaphysics. However, it is important to note that Dasan's concept of relatedness in humaneness is not simply an antithesis to the internality or ideality emphasized in Neo-Confucianism. As discussed, relatedness serves as the dynamic arena in which humaneness is realized and fulfilled, as individuals navigate the tension between inner morality and external circumstances. This underlying implication of the concept of humaneness significantly influenced the formation of Dasan's perspective on human beings.

This article aimed to elucidate *how* Dasan's concept of humaneness fits within his own philosophical framework by uncovering the multilayered structure of the concept latent in his commentaries in *Noneo gogumju*.

Thus far, Dasan's philosophical significance has often been attributed to his *disassembly* or *deconstruction* of Neo-Confucianism, and he has been labeled an exemplary scholar of Practical Learning (*silhak* 實學) in the late Joseon period. Consequently, the intention behind Dasan's commentaries and the inner structure of his concept of humaneness has not received sufficient attention. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the overall structure of Dasan's philosophy.

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