

Tasanhak, Korean Neo-Confucianism, & Curriculum Studies:
Complicating Conversations in Human Nature, Knowledge, and Justice¹

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I. Introduction

Chong Yag-yong, whose pen name was Tasan (茶山, Tea Mountain), is recognized as one of the most creative and progressive philosophers, politicians, and educators, among other roles, in Korean history. In 2012, the world recognized the 250th anniversary of Tasan's birth, including celebrations with which UNESCO is associated. While orthodox Neo-Confucianism was predominant in Korea, Tasan interpreted Neo-Confucianism by defining human nature not as predetermined by the Principle (the guiding principle of human nature, morality, and truth), but as open-ended and influenced by the subject's predilections (嗜好). Tasan's progressive, practical philosophy was implemented for the advancement of Korea's economic, political, cultural, technological, and educational development (Baker, 2010; O. C. Kim, 1994; Lee, 1986). The purpose of this paper is to examine *Tasanhak* (Tasan Studies) drawing in several curriculum issues concerning human nature, knowledge, and justice. Original translations of key passages are provided.²

Tasanhak involves contemporary dialogues in multiple disciplines that serve to theorize Tasan's philosophy and practice across political science, economics, sociology, and education, to list several (O.C. Kim, 1994; Y. Kim, 2012). Curriculum issues have been extended by interrogating historical, sociocultural, and political exchanges across worldwide curriculum studies (Miller, 2006). Introducing Tasan's different perspectives of knowledge, existence, and science complicates discourses in the curriculum studies field. Theorizing an important yet unknown philosopher

Books Discussed

Chong, Y. (1970). *Chungbo Yoyudang chonso* [The complete works of Chong Yagyong, supplemented and revised]. Vol. 2. Seoul, South Korea: Kyonin Munhwasa, 1970.*

Chong, Y. (1986). *Gukyok Yoyudang chonso: Gyung jip* [The complete works of Chong Yagyong, Classics, Korean version]. Vol. 1. Chonnam University Honam Scholarship Research Center [CUHSRC] (Trans.). Chonnam, South Korea: Chonnam National University Press.*

Chong, Y. (2010a). *Admonition on governing the people: Manual for all administrators*. Choi, B. (Trans.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Chong, Y. (2010b). *Yokju Non-uh go geum ju* [The translation of and commentary on the Analects]. Lee, J. (Trans.). Vols.1-5. Seoul, South Korea: Saam Press.*

like Tasan from a different time and space will contribute to the internationalization of curriculum studies by opening up provocative ideas regarding human nature, morality, knowledge, and justice. Tasan's interpretation of the Classics of Confucianism provides a different perspective from which to consider not only the complexity within Neo-Confucianism but also current curricular practices within the North American field. For example, I examine the ways in which Tasan's radical philosophy in 19th-century Korea provides a different lens to challenge assumptions behind the audit culture in US school reform. I invite curriculum scholars to imagine what intellectual and practical efforts we can make for social transformation. In particular, I investigate Tasan's work as it relates to three major curriculum issues that generate "complicated conversations" in curriculum studies (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995): What is human nature and morality? What is important knowledge and what is knowing/being known? How should knowledge be taught and who is included/excluded from learning? Before examining Tasan's intellectual work, I briefly provide some background information about Tasan's life and his academic heritage from Neo-Confucianism. The context of his academic work illustrates the ways in which he was involved in challenging orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism in his era.

2. Tasan and intellectual heritage

Tasan's Life

Tasan is remembered as a critical philosopher, reform-minded scholar/official, and advocate for sociopolitical justice (O. C. Kim, 1994; Setton, 1997). Endowed with a rich familial heritage, in addition to his own extraordinary talent, Tasan worked as a higher-level state civil official. King Chongjo (1752-1800) highly praised his brilliance and the king gave him tasks and missions, such as reviewing and compiling various texts concerning histories and rites; producing poems and essays in response to the topics he gave; and designing and constructing the fortress of a new royal city (*Hwa-sung*). Yet, both his family's affiliation with Catholicism and the death of King Chongjo made Tasan vulnerable to the opposition party's criticism, and he was exiled to a remote village (*Kang-jin*) for 18 years when he was 40 years old (Choi, 2010). Tasan's work is encyclopedic in its range and depth, and during this time he published his most celebrated books (Setton, 1997).

When Tasan started his exile, he began to study again the Six Classics and the Four Books, namely, *Shi Ching* (詩經 classic of poetry), *I Ching* (易經 classic of changes), *Shu Ching* (書經 classic of history), *Li Chi* (禮記 book of ritual), the *Ch'un-ch'iu* (春秋 the spring and autumn annals), and the *Yueh Ching* (樂經 classic of music), *The Analects* (論語), *Mencius* (孟子), *Great Learning* (大學), and *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸). Tasan analyzed the texts and collected related commentaries and theories from China, Korea, and Japan (Setton, 1997). The collected books were published during the days of the *Han* (206 BCE-220 CE) and *Wei* (265-420) dynasties as well as the *Ming* (1368-1644) and *Qing* (1644-1911) periods in China. Tasan's ultimate purpose was to establish his own views and ideas, to challenge misinterpretations, and to provide corrections and remedies (Choi, 2010). Once this project was accomplished, he started working on more practical books. He wrote books dealing with institutional reform of the central government, local administration, and the legal system: that is, *Admonitions on Governing the People: Manual for All Administrators* (牧民心書), *Design for Good Government* (經世致用), and *Toward a New Jurisprudence* (欽欽新書). In addition, he taught local students and made literary textbooks, *Children's Learning Books*—兒學編, *Ah-Hak-Pyun*—to improve children's literacy skills. Tasan's pedagogy is interwoven in these books so that all children can advance their literacy skills using concrete concepts and lived experiences.

Tasanbak and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism

Confucian teaching has influenced not only personal lives but also those who govern the state in East Asia (Setton, 1997). The Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi mainly developed Confucian teaching as Neo-Confucianism since the *Song* dynasty in China (around the 11th century). The orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism is drawn from metaphysics and it explains the manifestation of all realities by applying the *li-qi* cosmology. Principle [*li*理] is the essence as well as the guiding principle of human nature, morality, and truth. As a unifying principle, *li* controls the myriad beings of the universe. This natural law provides patterns, and material force [*qi*氣] is manifested by *li*. This normative nature of *li* is embodied in *qi*, which becomes the source of human desires (Setton, 1997). Although *li* and *qi* are primarily interdependent, *li* is considered the source of moral virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness. *Li* exists in a metaphysical manner and determines *qi*. In other words, *qi* is the instrument that exists as the practice of *li* (Wang, 2004). Thus, according to orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, the Principle comes before material force and the interactions between *li* and *qi* manifest all forms of existence (Jin, 1987).

Zhu Xi's metaphysics is closely connected with morality. The central concern of self-cultivation is the realization of *li* through the discipline of body and mind. The purity or impurity of *qi* in physical nature determines good/evil, and intellectual differences control the level of clarity (Setton, 1997). Only when a person attends to and regulates his or her emotions/actions can intellectual activity lead to the realization of *li*. The mind becomes the master of the body. Education aims to recover the goodness of human nature and restore its inherent goodness in people's daily lives. The ability to discipline self becomes essential to self-cultivation in orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism (Wang, 2004). A *li-qi* cosmological dualism provides a foundation to understand human nature as determined by birth. The level of self-cultivation through education is not equal to everyone. Depending on the endowment of assets to control *qi*, there exist "those who are good from their birth and those who are evil from their birth" (Chu Hsi, as cited in Setton, 1997, p. 70).

Influenced by orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, intellectual discourse in the *Joseon* dynasty (1392-1897) became more ideological, metaphysical, and hierarchical. The Korean Neo-Confucian worldview was developed through *li* and *qi* debates, and discourse about morality and education had become "ideologically rigid and restrictive" (Choi, 2010, p. xvi). In the 16th century, Yi Hwang (1501-1570) and Ki Taesung (1527-1572) had continuing ontological debates, known as *Four-Seven Debates*, which were studies of human nature (性, *Xing*). The Four Origins are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom; whereas the Seven Emotions are happiness, anger, sadness, awe, love, hate, and greed (Ro, 2003). Basically, *Four-Seven Debates* focus on an inquiry about the sources of the Four Origins and Seven Emotions (Jin, 1987). For example, the core of this dispute is the question, when a person feels sympathy for the poor, does the feeling come from either a categorical imperative of the Principle or an individual's emotions?

To answer this question, *Li-Qi Dualism* (理氣二元論) considers *li* and *qi* as separate. According to *Li-Qi Dualism*, the Four Origins are enacted by *li*'s movement and the Seven Emotions are represented by *qi*'s movement. Yi Hwang, a big supporter of this theory, articulates that the Four Origins are emanations from the Principle and the Seven Feelings are generated from the material force. Yi Hwang supports *Li-Qi Dualism* in order to articulate the difference between Heavenly Mind (天心 pure, absolute nature) and Human Mind (人心 impure nature with desires). His pursuit of *absolute morality* is similar to that of Immanuel Kant (Y. Kim, 2012). Yi Hwang makes a metaphor: Imagine a horse is moving forward and a person is sitting on the horse. People should separate between (a) a person who has a clear mindset and rides the horse and (b) a person who is drunk and just moves. The former

indicates behaviors driven by Heavenly Mind whereas the latter implies those driven by Human Mind.

On the other hand, *Li-Qi Monism* (理氣一元論) argues that both the Four Origins and the Seven Emotions are emotions. A unified relationship exists between the Four Origins and the Seven Emotions. Both *li* and *qi* exist in the Four Origins and the Seven Emotions. Ki Taseung argues that both the Four and the Seven are human feelings and they mingle with each other and are inseparable (Jin, 1987). Drawing from Ki Taseung, Yi I (1536-1584) postulates that people cannot separate pure nature (e.g., the moon in the sky) and real life (e.g., the moon reflected on the water). According to Yi I, it is problematic not to call the moon reflected in the water the moon. *Li* and *qi* cannot be separated; they are combined (E. Y. Chung, 1995). *Li-Qi Monism* highlights self-cultivation grounded in people's "real" lived experience (Y. Kim, 2012). Furthermore, Yi I's theory provides a foundation for Tasan's theorization of human nature beyond the metaphysical to a "more dynamic and psychological" sphere (Setton, 1997).

Overall, Yi Hwang values the Four Origins as the Principle and controlling source of human emotions. Yi Hwang's theory is closely related with orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism by underscoring the Principle (*li*) as the essence and guiding principle of human nature, morality, and truth. In contrast, Ki Taesung and Yi I consider the Four Origins as part of the Seven Emotions. This dispute is important for understanding morality and social structure in the *Joseon* dynasty. *Li-Qi Dualism* was politically applied to sustain "the stability of the existing of social order" (Jin, 1987, p. 356). Due to this clear separation between *li* and *qi*, scholars-bureaucrats claimed that only noblemen could possess the noble qualities of the Four Origins (*li*). Lay people or peasants could barely have the purely good Four Origins because nature or the material force (*qi*) controlled their behaviors. Yi I challenged this hierarchical practice of orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism with the use of *Li-Qi Monism*. Yi I argued that the Four Origins are parts of feelings (i.e., the Seven Feelings), and everyone can possess them (Jin, 1987).

These debates between *Li-Qi Dualism* and *Monism* were a major foundation of Korean philosophy of human nature, mind, emotion, and ethics. This inquiry into human nature was a starting point to extend discourse to moral responsibility, social problems, and administering people (Jin, 1987). By challenging his Neo-Confucian predecessors critically, Tasan reinvigorated the discussion of human nature with "internal consistency and breadth of scope" (Setton, 1997, p. 6). Tasan adopted unorthodox legacies from the *Yi I School* and *Li-Qi Monism*. Furthermore, *Li-Qi Monism* provided a foundation for considering mind as One not Multiple (Setton, 1997).

A major difference between *Li-Qi Monism* and Tasan's theory, however, was that the former did not question the metaphysical validity of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. *Li-Qi Monism* still relied on interactions between *li* and *qi* in explaining human nature—that is, a cosmological structure (Ro, 2003; Setton, 1997). Tasan, on the other hand, stepped further beyond the *li-qi* cosmology by challenging "the relevancy and orthodoxy" of the metaphysical, cosmological frameworks in explaining human nature and self-cultivation (Setton, 1997, p. 48). Tasan returned to the Classics, the original texts of Confucianism, and interpreted human nature differently (O. C. Kim, 1994). By theorizing human nature as predilections (性嗜好說), Tasan established an alternative framework to dismantle any predetermined understanding of human nature, mind, and emotion. Tasan reconceptualized human nature as tendencies, appetites, or proclivities "seeking fulfillment through moral actions" (Setton, 1997, p. 7). Tasan, at the same time, emphasized the vulnerability of human nature to bad deeds and underlined individuals' efforts—that is, self-cultivation—in order to acquire a good nature with moral conduct. Tasan established critical reactions to the ideological debates about human nature and morality by contesting the spirit entrenched in Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Tasan's theory challenged

previous theory about human nature (e.g., *Xing* as the Principle) that was politically and ideologically utilized to reinforce the social hierarchy (Setton, 1997). Furthermore, his theory provided a theoretical grounding to consider human nature as open-ended, not as the predetermined relationship between *li* and *qi*. Ultimately, Tasan’s interpretations of the Classics with progressive ideas provided a theoretical grounding for advancing social transformation in 19th century.

3. Translation Texts and Organization

Of Tasan’s more than 500 volumes, I chose several salient books in order to focus on three major curriculum issues of ontology, epistemology, and justice. Presumably, Tasan’s writing style is unfamiliar to modern curriculum theorists. Tasan presents the original text of the Classics and genealogically analyzes the text with the use of other scholars’ commentaries on the text. *Kaozhengxue* (考證學)—that is documentary archeology—influenced Tasan’s methods in interpreting the Classics (Setton, 1997). Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism had been institutionalized sociopolitically with the orthodox ideologies (e.g., classism, sexism) in the *Joseon* dynasty. Tasan’s theory of human nature as predilections (性嗜好說) challenged this ideology by emphasizing the subject’s moral action of preferring good to evil (Baker, 2010). I reviewed Tasan’s publications in their Korean translations first to find relevant texts for this project. Three major sets of works helped me narrow down texts: (a) *The Complete Works of Chong Yagyong, Classics, Korean Version. Vol. 1* [國譯與猶堂全書, 經集 I] (Chong, 1986); (b) *The Translation of and Commentary on the Analects* [譯註論語古今註] (Chong, 2010b); and (c) *The Complete Works of Chong Yagyong, Supplemented and Revised* [增補與猶堂全書 第 2 卷] (Chong, 1970).

Tasan published most of his books in Classic Chinese. Although King Sejong (1397-1450) and his assistants created the Korean alphabet (*Hangul*) in 1443, it was not until 1894 when *Hangul* finally became the official Korean language (M. K. Kim, 2010). For this project, I translated from Korean to English due to my ability to read Korean more effectively than Chinese. When I needed to clarify the meaning, I referred to the original texts written in Classic Chinese. Table 1 indicates the original texts and secondary sources that I predominantly used for translation.

Table 1
Original Texts and References for Translation

Section	Original Text (Classic Chinese)	Other Secondary Sources (Translated into Korean)
Human Nature	The Complete Works of Chong, Yagyong, Classics I (Chong, 1986, pp. 76-77).	Chong (1986). CUHSRC (trans.) pp. 197-201.
Knowledge	The Commentary on the Analects (Chong, 2010b, pp. 70-77, even pages).	Chong (2010b). Lee, B. (trans.). pp. 70-77, odd pages.
Pedagogy & Justice	The Complete Works of Chong, Yagyong, Supplemented and Revised (Chong, 1970, vol. 2, pp. 275-278).	Jung (2002) pp. 20-24. J. Kim (1999) pp. 56-57.

The limited texts in this paper cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of Tasanhak. It is pro-

blematic to use a bifurcation to explain Tasan's philosophy as progressive and that of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism as pre-modern (Y. Kim, 2012). Highly influenced by Neo-Confucianism in his time, Tasan recognized Zhu Xi's intellectual contribution to politics and society as well (O. C. Kim, 1994). Yet, theorizing Tasan's philosophy by explaining a major difference between *Tasanhak* and orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism will enhance readers' understanding, especially those who are not familiar with Confucian discourse. Tasan uses metaphors when he introduces philosophical concepts. Reading his work provides insights to examine his thoughts by connecting his concrete examples and metaphors. By engaging in Tasan's analogy and metaphor, readers consider diverse interpretations of human nature and thus understand Tasan's vision for sociopolitical transformation. Tasan actually implemented some of his progressive, creative ideas in politics, economics, and engineering. In education, he provided educational philosophy for equal education, and indeed published children's literacy textbooks. In the following sections, I translate and analyze Tasan's philosophy focusing on three curriculum issues: (a) human nature, (b) knowledge, and (c) education for *all*.

4. Human Nature (*Xing*) as Predilections

The inquiry on human nature has been a major philosophical and curricular discourse in Korea. In the *Joseon* dynasty, Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism was predominant, as was its understanding of human nature. Zhu Xi defines human nature as "the effects of the all-embracing" absolute Principle of *li* (Choi, 2010, p. xxix). Human nature is predetermined by the Principle and human behavior is enacted by the interaction of Principle-material force (*li-qi*). This cosmic dualism is connected with matters of morality or the problems of good/evil (Wang, 2004). Good/evil is already predetermined by the Principle and no room exists to consider any multiplicity of good/evil. Furthermore, as explained in Section 2, *Li-Qi Dualism in Four and Seven Debates* theoretically supported the sociopolitical practices of social hierarchy (e.g., classism) in the *Joseon* dynasty.

Tasan interprets human nature differently compared with previous Neo-Confucians. By returning to the original Classics and reviewing the texts, Tasan theorizes human nature as predilections. Morality is a choice between two conflicting preferences in that "human nature itself is not essentially either good or evil" (Choi, 2010, p. xxix). Tasan's new interpretation of human nature, drawing from the emphasis on predilections, is important as it highlights non-predetermined values concerning good/evil. By emphasizing human nature as conflicts between good/evil, Tasan provides an alternative framework to rethink orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism.

Tasan's critical reading about human nature is well described in the first chapter of *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Tasan adds comments on the first three phrases of chapter I: "What Heaven has conferred is called the nature; an accordance with this nature is called the path of duty; the regulation of this path is called instruction 天命之謂性 率性之謂道 修道之謂教" (Legge, 1960, p. 383).

Grounded in this text, Tasan theorizes human nature by emphasizing the predilections of mind (嗜好). Human nature is not what is given by Heaven but is the result of everyday decisions of human beings. Tasan utilizes major statements from Confucius and Mencius: "Control your *Xing* [human nature] and simply live accordingly day by day... Respectively move your mind and suppress *Xing*... Through practicing propriety, control people's *Xing*" (Chong, 1986, p. 198). Good nature is not pre-given, nor is it randomly controlled. Rather, *Xing* lets nature flow and listens carefully to what nature indicates. Tasan elaborates:

Usually, people define *Xing* as the totality of spirituality, but why do I conceptualize it as predilections? People sometimes say, "I like both cooked and raw fish," "I do not like rotten meat," "I like music," or "I do not like the sound made by a frog." All people define *Xing* with the use of a preference

nance...Confucius cited poetry of “the virtue of controlling preference.” It is not Confucian teaching if you drop the traits of predilections. (Chong, 1986, p. 199)

By emphasizing “preference” in conceptualizing human nature, Tasan intended to free it from the *li-qi* cosmology (Setton, 1997). Only if a person acts in a virtuous manner can he or she be called virtuous (Baker, 2010). Tasan modifies Mencius’s theory of *Xing-shan* [性善innate will to good] by distinguishing between absolute good (e.g., the Tao of Heaven) and not-so-absolute good (e.g., endurance) (Chong, 1986). Tasan admits that human nature is not already determined but is vulnerable to desire. Individuals should make efforts—that is self-cultivation—to acquire good nature. Unlike the claim of orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, human nature itself is neither good nor evil; yet, good and evil are the consequences of moral actions (Setton, 1997). In the following texts, Tasan revisits Mencius’s *Xing-shan* by highlighting human nature’s preference to choose good deeds over bad behaviors. Yet, human nature is not born with the innate will to do good deeds; good nature is acquired by continuous moral conducts like clearing thorns from the road. According Tasan, human nature involves “an intrinsic attraction” towards good deed, along with “a natural attraction” towards pleasurable actions (Baker, 2010, p. 58).

Human beings are always steeped in vice and why do we even consider human nature as *Xing-shan*? When humans conduct good deeds, they feel pleasant. Is it not because the deed fits with our tendency? Human beings feel empty as if the stomach was empty if they behave badly; is this not because they are against *Xing*? Only if we save a baby who is drowning in the water, only if we avoid food that is acquired unjustly, only if we help the elder carry heavy luggage, only if we defend an accused person who is innocent, then we feel comfortable. If a person does not conduct good deeds in these situations, he or she would not feel comfortable and would feel embarrassed. Does not it depend if the person followed *Xing* (率性) or not? (Chong, 1986, p. 199)

In explaining *Xing* as predilections, Baker (2010) uses an additional reference from Tasan’s *Commentary on Mencius*. As Baker indicates, Tasan stresses the difficulty in living a moral life through the use of a metaphor: following a moral path is more difficult than climbing up a rocky mountain, whereas responding to physical pleasure is much easier than rolling down the mountain (Baker, 2010). Tasan’s theorization of human nature as predilections underscores the purpose of education to acquire good nature by avoiding bad conducts. Thus, taking care of *Xing* is similar to taking care of roads. With the metaphor of a road, Tasan highlights human efforts to keep this road clean and organized. Without these efforts, the thorns occupy the road and thus a person loses his or her direction. Tasan emphasizes Tao in the process of education and self-cultivation, which is constructing good human nature. Human beings are delicate combinations of physical and spiritual forms, and two different preferences characterize human nature. The physical preference is required for survival (e.g., desire for food), and the spiritual preference is uniquely exemplified by human being’s love for virtue and shame of vice. The cultivation of Tao indicates practicing this spiritual preference. Human’s preference of love for virtue is analogous to growing rice in water (Setton, 1997). Most notably, Tasan highlights that the Heart of Tao (道心) generates *Xing*. By analyzing the etymology of *Xing*, Tasan posits the importance of following the Heart of Tao in pursuing virtuous life. Tasan elaborates:

Etymologically, *Xing* is from the heart. We combine a heart [心] and a life [生] to make the word *Xing* [性]. The Heart of Tao always tends to be good and it hides the virtue as well. An accordance with *Xing* [率性] is following what the Heart of Tao wants as well as following the desire of the Heart. In other words, an accordance with human nature is following the order from Heaven [天命]. When unjust, but delicious food is in front of you, the desire to eat food will be abundant. Yet, when the Heart of Tao quietly advises you, *You should not eat this. The source of this food is not right*, you do

not eat the food according to the recommendation (Chong, 1986, p. 200).

The Heart of Tao is crucial in theorizing *Xing* as predilections. As a gardener must prune thorns in flowers and clean the road of weeds, human nature needs to be kept clean. This pruning process is following what the Heart of Tao teaches to human beings. Tسان elaborated the teaching of Tao as, “if your conduct is not right, the Heart of Tao gives you regrets and it is the way in which Heaven orders you the right thing to do, little by little” (Chong, 1986, p. 200).

The theory of *Xing* as predilections provides an important ontological implication by emphasizing human beings’ goodness that needs to be cared for continuously. Tسان postulates that Heaven has provided human beings with *Xing*, that is, “the capacity for excellent good” (Chong, 1986, p. 200). If a person is against what *Xing* pursues, if a person behaves in ways of which *Xing* is ashamed, then this laziness is against the order of Heaven. Drawing from Confucian teaching, Tسان’s understanding of human nature enhances the virtue of *Xing*. He focuses on continuous efforts to practice Tao by choosing good deeds over bad conducts, not from an ontological debate grounded in the interactions between *li* and *qi*.

Overall, Tسان opened a space for rethinking human nature by rejecting pre-determined understandings of it. His theory of human nature highlights free will, choice, and moral autonomy (K. E. Kim, 2009). Human beings determine “moral courses of action” encountering “internal struggle” among different preferences (Setton, 1997, p. 83). The notion of internal struggle reflects Tسان’s emphasis on moral actions in self-cultivation. Tسان’s ontology of human being and its nature are closely related with his epistemology that theorizes about knowledge and the knower/known. In the next section, I examine Tسان’s epistemology by analyzing some of his major texts. Most notably, I highlight Tسان’s emphasis on “learning-through-practice” from the first chapter of *The Analects*.

5. Knowledge and Learning-through-Practice

The Analects is the primary text of Confucian teaching and Confucianism. The first chapter of *The Analects* addresses the importance of learning and the joy of learning with friends. Tسان emphasizes *learning-through-practice* as important pedagogy. That is, learning and moral practice are not separate, but must be combined by students or scholars in their daily lives. In other words, “Unless you practice what you learn, you have not learned it yet” (Chong, 2010, p. 75). Tسان’s epistemology is influenced by Yang-Ming Studies (陽明學) which emphasize “moral activism” (Setton, 1997, p. 18).

Tسان’s analysis of the first chapter of *the Analects* provides great resources to theorize his epistemology, including the elaboration of important knowledge, knower, and the known. In *the Analects*, Confucius said, “Is it not pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals? Is it not a joy to have friends come from afar? Is it not gentlemanly not to take offence when others fail to appreciate your abilities? 學而時習之, 不亦說乎; 有朋自遠方來, 不亦樂乎; 人不知而不慍 不亦君子乎” (Lau, 1979, p. 59).

In the analysis of Tسان’s epistemology, the initial inquiry stems from who is recognized as an educable person. In 19th-century Korea, sages and students were predominantly limited to male members of noble families. Although peasants and females were sometimes given literacy education locally, state-sponsored education was limited to noble families. Given this historical context, the interpretation of “friend” (朋, *Peng*) is thought-provoking. Tسان conceptualizes *Peng* as someone who shares similar thoughts. His interpretation contrasted with the previous understanding of *Peng*, which limits its boundaries to colleagues who have attended the same schools and studied with the same teachers. Tسان states, “*Peng* is someone who has similar thoughts and is a like-minded person (同志). How can the definition be limited to peers from the same school and the same master?” (Chong, 2010b, p. 73).

By citing a Chinese scholar *Kungua* (坤卦), Tasan defines Peng as a friend who “shares a similar understanding about Tao” (Chong, 2010b, p. 73). Thus, when a colleague shares his understanding of Tao and is willing to come from afar, Tasan emphasizes that the host is filled with joy initially and then it naturally spills its energy outside (*Le* 樂). Overall, Tasan illustrates the meaning of friends as “like-minded people” (同志) and conceptually dismantles the institutionalized practice of education and the definitions of academic friends.

In Confucian teaching, *Junzi* (君子, The Great Man) was the highest status that a person should pursue. Due to orthodox Neo-Confucianism, however, *Junzi* contained a limited meaning that a noble person should aim at in the *Joseon* dynasty. In order to challenge this limited meaning of *Junzi*, Tasan articulates, “In ancient times, only the person with virtue could work as a high-ranking governmental official. Nowadays, although a person does not have high status as a governmental official, the person is called as *Junzi* as long as the person is virtuous” (Chong, 2010, p. 73). Tasan’s reconceptualization of *Junzi* is crucial in the discussion of who is recognized as eligible to be educated and what is considered as knowing. Tasan’s interpretation of *Junzi* (君子) as a person who practices virtuous conducts opens up new understanding about an educable person. Tasan refutes the hegemonic ideology that some people by nature have a larger capacity for good than others. Everyone is equal vis-à-vis the potentiality for goodness. Infused throughout Tasan’s theory is the idea that, “human nature is only potentially good” (Setton, 1997, p. 86). This moral activism constructs the premise that virtue is not what *Junzi* possess but the effect of moral deeds. Overcoming selfish desire is an important process of self-cultivation (Setton, 1997). When *Junzi* is defined as the highest level of self-actualization for a limited population, Tasan pries open a space for everyone to become *Junzi* by practicing what he or she has learned with virtuous deeds.

In the course of his analysis of the first chapter of *the Analects*, Tasan further theorizes the meanings of learning. When the definition of learning is practicing tasks about Tao (學者, 業道之名), Tasan challenges this understanding of learning. Basically, Tasan argues that learning has more complex meanings beyond awakening human reason [enlightenment]. Tasan cites several Classics to support his argument about learning that contains multiple meanings.

The Chapter of Learning (學記) in *Li Chi* indicated, “One does not know Tao unless one learns about Tao.” Confucius said, “At the age of 15, I established a will to learn.” These statements mean that learning is “practicing Tao.” A book called *Shuowen* (說文) states, “learning is enlightenment (學, 覺也).” The previous enlightenment awakens the following enlightenments. Etymologically, the letters of learning and enlightenment have similar origins. Although these two words have the same origin, it is not right to induce their meanings in this phrase of enlightenment. (Chong, 2010b, p. 73)

In this excerpt, Tasan examines multiple meanings of learning by challenging the definition of learning limited to the enlightenment of human reason. Most notably, Tasan extends the notions of learning as acquiring knowledge through memorization by emphasizing active engagement and debates. Tasan introduces conventional ways of studying The Classic of Poetry and The Classic of History, starting with memorization. Yet, he disclaims rote memorization as optimal learning. Tasan states:

Rote memorization is not actual learning. There are so many things to learn in rituals, arts, and physical training; how can learning be limited to memorization? In *I Ching*, there is a phrase, “learning and internalizing the knowledge [講習] with friends.” The notion of learning by internalizing the knowledge [講] is a broader concept that encompasses debates [and the meaning should not be limited to memorization]. Students might use memorization for The Classic of Poetry and The Classic of History. However, how can learning [學] be limited to simply reciting and memorization?

(Chong, 2010b, p. 75)

Tasan develops multiple meanings of learning when he interprets the phrase, *Shi-Xi* (時習). Literally, *Shi-Xi* means to learn frequently. Tasan highlights that learning is an ongoing process of practice. Authentic learning flourishes when students practice the knowledge every day. Tasan states:

[Zhu Xi said,] if you learn to take care of your parents both in the morning and at night [昏定晨省], you practice it every day right after you learn it...If you learn the ritual of remembering your ancestors [祭禮], you practice the ritual...If you learn how to ride a horse and to shoot arrows, practice both of them; if you learn to write and calculate, practice them. All of these are collections of learning. Learning is knowing and practicing is conducting: “having learned something, to try it out at due intervals [學而時習]” is the process in which learning and practice go together. If you think to learn something without practicing it, you cannot know a real joy. (Chong, 2010b, p. 75)

How to think logically and to debate well, for Tasan, are important goals of learning. His emphasis on critical thinking rebuts grand narratives that Confucian teaching emphasizes recitation and memorization. In his article, “Interpretation, Autonomy, and Transformation: Chinese Pedagogic Discourse in a Cross-cultural Perspective,” Wu (2012) shares a similar idea about learning with Tasan. Wu challenges the rhetoric, blaming the Confucian heritage of educational failure of inquiry-based learning in East Asian culture. By citing *the Analects*, Wu introduces conversation between Confucius and his student Tsze-kung to show the ways in which Tsze-kung initiates a question and Confucius provides scaffolding for deep understanding.

Tsze-kung: What do you [think of] the poor man who does not flatter, and the rich man who is not proud?

Confucius: They will [be fine]; but they are not equal to him who, although poor, is yet cheerful, and to him who, although rich, loves the rules of propriety.

Tsze-kung: It is said in the *Odes*, “As you cut and then file, as you carve and then polish.” The meaning is the same, I apprehend, as that which you have just expressed.

Confucius: Tsze, I can begin to talk about the *Odes*. I told you one point, and you knew its proper sequence (*Analects* 1: 15, as cited in Wu 2012).

Wu highlights that the Confucian perspective about knowledge and learning moves beyond representing facts to a further inquiry process of self-cultivation. Merely accepting what a teacher says or a textbook indicates is not the final destination of learning. Tasan’s interpretation of real, meaningful learning is closer to the original Confucian perspective than that of other Neo-Confucians. As shown in the above excerpt, Confucius emphasizes a student’s autonomy and inquiry in learning by making connections with previous studies. Actual learning is an ongoing process of constant change of self, including questioning, reflecting, debating, and practicing knowledge in our daily lives. Wu’s emphasis on the Confucian concept of self-actualization by learning has a similar logic to Tasan’s *learning-through-practice*.

Tasan’s *learning-through-practice* reminds one of Deweyan progressive education with its focus on “learning by doing”—that is, emphasizing the value of experience in learning. When education was introduced to prepare future workers at the turn of the 20th century, Dewey (1997) emphasized education as creating democratic citizenship in a community. Dewey (2009) framed education as “a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 36). When educators aim only at preparing “future” workers to advance the economy, they miss out on the opportunity to create among children, teachers, and families a living community in the *here and now*. Dewey (2009) also underscores the role children’s own social activities must play in their development and learning.

Due to the different social structures of 19th-century Korea and the 20th-century United States,

Tasan's *learning-through-practice* does not directly aim to create a democratic citizenship. However, the emphasis on practicing learning in daily life has a common ground in both Tasan and Dewey. In addition, both of them highlight that learning without practice or communal contribution is not an authentic learning. According to Tasan, children are able to acquire information through their five senses and experience-based learning is important in their learning (Chong, 2010b). Tasan's epistemology, which underscores the practice of knowledge, is connected with Tasan's pedagogy of teaching and learning. In the next section, I develop Tasan's notion of justice and equity in education by introducing Tasan's educational theories and practices about what to teach and how to teach.

6. Education for *all*

Tasan was a politician and his major writings address the ways of governing people and administering provinces. During his 18-year exile in a rural area, Tasan opened a learning center for local children and educated them with his educational philosophy—that all children can learn with sufficient educational supports. Again, Tasan's philosophy was provocative in that official education at the time was limited to noble families. Peasants and their children were not recognized as educable human beings. Tasan wrote a preface for his brother, Chong Yak-jun, who opened a learning center on an island (Ahn, 2011). In this preface, Tasan acknowledges the limitations of learning conditions for local children when compared to noble families. However, Tasan emphasizes that this social condition does not exclude local children from learning possibilities. Tasan uses a metaphor of silkworms and different sizes of raising baskets to explain the different social conditions for each child in a hierarchical society. By recognizing this sociopolitical limitation for peasants, Tasan still underscores all children's capacities for learning. Tasan states,

The sizes of silkworms' raising baskets vary. A big basket reaches to the end of the raising room and a small basket is only a quarter of its size... When a person raises silkworms well by providing good leaves from mulberry trees, the silkworm grows bigger and produces thread for silk. The quality of thread is the same from big silkworms as from small silkworms. This principle is not different from the human world. The world itself is a raising basket. Heaven spreads people between different sizes of raising baskets... If a teacher who is knowledgeable about the Classics teaches the wisdom of the books to children, they will learn the wisdom of the books, show their passion about learning, and finally master the Classics. People in a small island are the same as those who live on big islands. (Chong, as cited in Ahn, 2011, pp. 84-85)

In this metaphor, Tasan uses the size of raising baskets and rooms as metaphors for different educational environments. While recognizing different educational and social conditions for education on a small island, Tasan does not underestimate the capacity of all children to develop with a proper education.

Tasan's philosophical commitment to equal education is incorporated into his work developing literary textbooks. Close examination of Tasan's literacy books, *Ah-Hak-Pyun* (兒學編, Children's Learning Books) allows one to see the ways in which Tasan's philosophy is closely related with his pedagogy. The organization of 2000 letters in *Ah-Hak-Pyun* demonstrates Tasan's logical thinking. The first volume, with 1000 letters, contains practical and concrete ideas drawing on nouns and natural phenomena. The familial relationships are emphasized in the first volume. The second volume, with 1000 letters, has abstract ideas, adjectives, and pronouns (J. Chung, 2002). Tasan's pedagogical strategy for literacy education stems from his critique of traditional literary textbooks. *Qianziwen* (千字文 The Thousand Character Essay), the most widely used literary textbooks, arranges 1000 letters from philosophical phrases. For example, Lim (2010) explains that the first eight letters in *Qianziwen* (i.e., heaven, earth,

black, yellow, house, cosmos, wide, & rough) address cosmology drawing from *I Ching* (易經 classic of changes). For Tasan, teaching letters from concrete, real life experience is more meaningful for young children. In analyzing Tasan's pedagogy, I examine his book, *Theory of Impossible Reading* (不可讀說), within which his ontology and epistemology are embedded.

Tasan reviews the purpose of language and letters in order to conceptualize the *Theory of Impossible Reading*: that is, a critique of literacy education in his time. According to Tasan, it is apparent that Chinese letters depend on the shapes and meanings of objects as well as the actions of the objects. Tasan argues that learning letters is learning the categorization of what meanings each letter brings and making distinctions among different categories. Students come to know the meanings and logic and then read and write texts (J. Chung, 2002). In 19th-century Korea, students learned the principles of making words from several books, including *Niah* (爾雅; a dictionary that explains names that appear in the Classics), *Shuowen* (說文, a dictionary to explain words in the Six Books), *Jijiuzhang* (急就章, a reference book to indicate the names of objects and last names), and *Yupian* (玉篇, a Chinese dictionary). These books, however, are complicated and they are not easy to master. Tasan argues that all of these letters are outdated and that the teachers do not take account of the children's young ages. Tasan points out that previous literacy textbooks do not follow students' learning capacities, in addition to having a poorly organized categorization of letters. In criticizing *Qianziwen* (千字文) Tasan states,

Qianziwen (千字文, Thousand-Character Essay) is recognized as the Book given by God's kingdom. However, this book is not appropriate to teach literacy to children. What logic is it to teach children the letters of "Heaven and Earth"—the first two letters in *Qianziwen*—and then move to the colors of "Black and Yellow"—the second two letters in *Qianziwen*—without learning the composition of heaven and earth, including the sun, the moon, satellites, stars, mountains, rivers, hills, and lands? When this book lets students learn only two colors, without extending colors to blue, red, dark black, white, dark red, purple, green, gray, and then moves to learn House and Cosmos (宇宙), what logic is this? (Jung, 2002, p. 22)

Tasan postulates that *Qianziwen* does not have a logical arrangement and that children are confused easily. Due to the lack of logic in the listing of words, students are confused between black (玄) and threading (纏). The similar pronunciation of these words confuses students' understanding. Tasan strongly argues that combining opposite meanings is effective in learning letters. He suggests that juxtaposing two opposite meanings enhances children's comprehension, including clean (清) with dirty (濁), near (近) with far (遠), light (輕) with heavy (重), and deep (深) with shallow (淺). Practicing a single letter does not help children's understanding of letters effectively. In addition, Tasan provides that concrete objects and abstract meanings are not in the same category. Emotions should not be in the same category as actions. Children cannot master letters unless they understand the categories and learn the delicate differences. The ability to read letters in *Qianziwen* does not mean that children have mastered letters (J. Chung, 2002). Table 2 compares the beginning 24 letters of *Qianziwen* and those of *Ah-Hak-Pyun*. Tasan begins with concrete objects that children actually see and observe. In addition, Tasan's emphasis on familial relationships and the distinctions between them based on age and gender is demonstrated (e.g., older brother, older sister, younger brother, younger sister).

Table 2

Juxtaposition Between Two Literacy Books: Qianziwen (千字文) and *Ah-Hak-Pyun* (兒學編)

Qianziwen	A-Hak-Pyun
天地玄黃 (heaven, earth, black, yellow)	天地父母 (heaven, earth, father, mother)
宇宙洪荒 (house, cosmos, wide, rough)	君臣夫婦 (king, public officer, husband, wife)
日月盈昃 (sun, moon, full, fade)	兄弟男女 (older brother, younger brother, man, woman)
辰宿列張 (stars, to sleep, to list, to provide)	姊妹娣嫂 (older sister, younger sister, younger sister-in-law, older sister-in-law)
寒來暑往 (cold, to come, hot, to go)	祖宗子孫 (ancestor, family, son, grandson)
秋收冬藏 (fall, to collect, winter, to hide)	姪姑甥舅 (niece, mother-in-law, nephew, father-in-law)

Tasan organizes the 2,000 letters categorically. *Ah-Hak-Pyun, Volume 1* focuses on concrete nouns and *Volume 2* indicates abstract concepts. In addition to organizing the letters logically, Tasan provides concrete ideas about how to teach them (Ahn, 2011). In the early 20th century, a Korean linguist scholar, Ji Seok-young (1855-1935), published Tasan's literacy textbooks in three languages of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, and they are still used for practicing Sino-Korean among young Korean children (J. Chung, 2002). Tasan's insight has continued to be recognized. Tasan's effort to advance children's literacy regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds reminds one of Paulo Freire's (1970) and Lev Tolstoy's (2010) endeavors for peasants' literacy education. Freire emphasized the conscientization of the oppressed for social transformation. Like Freire, Tolstoy also founded Peasant Schools at Yasnaya Polyana and established public education (Tolstoy, 2010). Tasan, Freire, and Tolstoy had the common wish to emphasize literacy education for *all—including* the underprivileged. Despite Tasan's effort to increase literacy with "optimal" texts, there are differences between Tasan and Freire. Influenced by critical theory tradition, Freire (1970) highlights enhancing students' conscientization through problem-posing education that can help to advance students' critical reflection and so inspire action to dismantle hegemonic, dehumanizing practices in education. Although Tasan thought of peasants and local children as educable and important, it is still debatable to what extent Tasan worked for achieving the modern ideal of "equal" education, by advancing students' critical consciousness about an unjust society. Ahn (2011) posits that Tasan, as part of the highest social rank, did not directly reject the social hierarchy and the customs in the *Joseon* dynasty. Jin (1987) and O. C. Kim (2010), in contrast, highlight Tasan's intellectual and practical work to address provocative thoughts of moral responsibility and social justice. Among these debates, I would propose that Tasan's intellectual and pragmatic contributions for justice are tremendous considering the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural context at the time. At a time when few politicians and scholars provided provocative ideas about social transformation, Tasan practiced his ideals for a better society not only philosophically (i.e., *Xing* as predilections) but also through practical efforts (e.g., teaching and publishing in local communities). His intellectual and practical contributions about justice were invaluable during his time, as they still are.

7. Complicating Conversations in Curriculum Studies

During the *Joseon* dynasty when Tasan lived, orthodox Neo-Confucianism operated as a force in support of the "hegemonic institutions and ruling powers" (O. C. Kim, 1994, p. 127). By advancing the theory of human nature (*Xing*) as predilections, Tasan challenged the ways in which Neo-Confucianism in *Joseon* dynasty operated sociopolitically. Unlike the *Four-Seven Debates* in Korea's Neo-Confuciani-

sm that addressed human nature from cosmological *li-qi* relations, Tasan underscored the subject's moral action and his or her ability to choose between good and bad conduct. Tasan claimed that Confucian teaching about a harmonious society with morality and justice had been devastated by these institutionalized hegemonic practices of exploiting the oppressed (Jin, 1987). While Zhu Xi's theory only served to exacerbate this social and economic inequity, Tasan, as a philosopher, politician, educator, and scientist, sought to transform society through both new thoughts about human nature and the development of social and educational policy. Most notably, Tasan theorized *Xing* as predilections (性嗜好說) as a means to challenge a fixed understanding about human nature from orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. By emphasizing human nature as being open-ended, not formed by predetermined acts, Tasan established a theoretical framework to challenge hegemonic, institutionalized educational practices. Like other Korean Neo-Confucianism thinkers, Tasan utilized questions about human nature as a starting point from which to move toward understanding all other social problems (Jin, 1987). Yet, Tasan's theory of human nature provided a new direction for thinking about knowledge and justice. Tasan underscored that the potential of goodness is equal within everyone and that educational practices must aim to cultivate good nature by encouraging moral actions within all (Setton, 1997).

Tasan's philosophy adds another layer of inquiry to the current review of the curriculum and school reform movement in the US. Many contemporary curriculum scholars have challenged school reform (e.g., No Child Left Behind, the Common Core State Standards) based on their critiques of the principles underlying Neoliberalism and market-oriented educational practices (e.g., Kumanshiro, 2012; Watkins, 2012). In his book *What Is Curriculum Theory?* William Pinar (2012) also criticizes current school reform movement as "school deform" (p. 16). While educational values of creativity and critical thinking skills have been abandoned, current school reform forces schools into the cram schools by manufacturing for higher testing scores (Pinar, 2012). Furthermore, Taubman (2009) utilizes neoconservative social agendas, learning science, and the psychoanalysis of fear, shame, and guilt as frameworks to challenge the current curriculum reform movement. As his book title shows, "Teaching by Numbers: Deconstructing the Discourse of Standards and Accountability in Education," Taubman revisits the assumptions of school reform as discursive and non-discursive practices of standardization and accountability.

Tasan's theory of human nature generates a different approach to rethinking recent curriculum practices. Both in the East and the West, educational reform mainly focuses on leading the global comparative assessments like PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) or TIMMS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science). Punishing or rewarding teachers depending on visible testing scores is a basic principle in the reform. Rather than considering students and teachers as the objects to be controlled, Tasan highlighted the subject's ethical practices to select good behavior over bad behavior. While Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism scarcely leave room for the subject's moral actions, Tasan returns to the value of following Tao by theorizing human nature as predilections. Self-cultivation is the core of his educational philosophy. Due to the flexibility of human nature, educational practices aim to teach students morality and social responsibility.

Tasan's philosophy of human nature suggests a dialogue about "following Tao" in the discourse of school/curriculum reform. When curriculum practices emphasize more control, standardization, and audit, Tasan's theory of human nature as predilections adds a layer of conversation to re-examine educators' and decision makers' taken-for-granted understandings about human nature, morality, and social responsibility. What assumptions do they keep about human nature when surveillance through standards and audit culture is the main mechanism in educational reform? Does any space exist to con-

sider Tasan's belief about human nature's active preference towards good deeds by following Tao? To what extent do curriculum scholars expect educators and decision makers to follow Tao constantly, as a gardener must prune thorns in flowers and clean the road of weeds?

Tasan's work helps us to raise these questions that the current critiques of school/curriculum reform do not consider frequently. The examination of human nature will not precipitate an immediate response to shift the dominant school reform discourse of standardization and accountability. However, the wisdom of the Eastern philosophical tradition of reviewing social phenomena by returning to human nature nonetheless represents a meaningful strategy for enriching dialogues about the current school/curriculum reform movement. For example, we can challenge the phenomena of scapegoating teachers by neglecting teachers' professionalism by borrowing from the logic of *Li-Qi* Dualism (理氣二元論). In the *Joseon* dynasty, the noble class was esteemed to possess the Principle that controls emotions. Political and educational decision-making was therefore mainly top-down procedures due to the non-noble class's barely possessing the Principle (Jin, 1987). The current curriculum reform movement uses a predominantly top-down strategy while scapegoating teachers about "failing" schools (Kumashiro, 2012). Tasan's harsh critique of orthodox Neo-Confucianism is connected with current educational phenomena, which generate a hierarchy among the professions by neglecting teachers' autonomy and professionalism that cannot be justified within a contemporary democratic context.

Tasan's argument about important knowledge also enables curriculum theorists to revisit the value of education, when only "measureable" knowledge is considered important in current educational practices. Conventionally, in the Confucianism tradition, memorization of the Classics and other material used to be considered as an important means to master knowledge (Wu, 2012). According to Tasan, memorization of the Classics is helpful in the beginning, but rote memory itself is not actual learning. When we return to the conversation between Tsze-kung and Confucius in the *Analects*, Tsze-kung is able to advance his learning about self-cultivation by drawing from some phrases in the *Odes*. Without memorizing important phrases in the Classics, an in-depth inquiry is not possible. Likewise, true learning is possible only if a student interprets and applies what he or she memorized through discussions, debates, and discoveries. Tasan interprets Confucian thought of emphasizing the balance between memorizing and utilizing what students memorized to cultivate moral actions. According to Tasan, a true interpretation of Confucian thought indicates that memorization is an important step toward more profound processes of true learning. As such, active participation in learning and debates that allow students to internalize knowledge with friends are crucial conduits for authentic learning. Tasan's emphasis on active participation in learning through experience, debate, and collaboration with peers challenges current curricular practices that focus on standardized testing preparations, which rely heavily on rote memorization of knowledge. Tasan's elaboration of *learning-through-practice* encourages teachers and policy makers to reconsider their epistemology and pedagogy.

Tasan's theory of human nature as well as his practice of equal education opens up a conversation about what justice means in our educational practices. In 19th-century Korea, the main purpose of education was to pass exams to become high-ranking public officials. Tasan also passed this exam and played the role of a state official. Orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, such as *Li-Qi* Dualism (理氣二元論) in the *Joseon* dynasty, theoretically supported this classism. Given this suffocating environment, I argue that Tasan engaged in intellectual and political work to advance morality and social justice in his time. As we have seen, Tasan's theory of active human nature shifted previous Neo-Confucianism for sustaining social hierarchy. Tasan's ontology and epistemology generated new ways of thinking about equal education and a just society: educating well-rounded leaders, creating appropriate teaching-learning materials, and preparing good teachers for all students.

Justice is an urgent and important issue in the curriculum studies discourse. Tasan's intellectual and practical efforts to advance justice in 19th-century Korea inspire a different level of conversation regarding what "justice" means for curriculum theorists in 21st century North America. Tasan highlighted classism as social injustice and proposed egalitarian ideas through publications and educational practices. Although students live in a democratic society where equal educational opportunity is promised in North America, racial/ethnic, gender, and class inequities are still prevalent. In his time, Tasan's theory of human nature opened a theoretical possibility to redefine a "learner" not as predetermined by social status but as flexible with sufficient support, regardless of a student's class, region, and age. *Tasanhak* provides a tool to review current social inequity critically and to imagine a different society. *Tasanhak* is important not only because of a vast amount of knowledge in 500 volumes of work, but also because of Tasan's progressive thoughts to make a more just society through alternative political, economic, and educational systems for equal opportunities. Tasan's intellectual work and his life invite curriculum scholars to consider what contributions curriculum theorists can make toward a different, just society within the given challenges and struggles of our time.

Endnotes

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²*Tasanhak* covers many disciplines including political science, physics, medicine, arts, and education, to list several. In Korea, three well-known books include *Admonitions on Governing the People: Manual for All Administrators* (牧民心書), *Design for Good Government* (經世致用), and *Toward a New Jurisprudence* (欽欽新書). Byonghyn Choi played the key role in translating *Admonitions on Governing the People* in English (Chong, 2010a). This 1133-page long book is one of the most recent, comprehensive books to grasp Tasan's scholarship. Tasan's original work is written in Classic Chinese, and Korean scholars have been translating the original work into Korean. Chonnam University Honam Scholarship Research Center (CUHSRC) translated *The Complete Works of Chong Yagyong Classics* (Chong, 1986). More recently, Ji Hyung Lee translated Tasan's *Commentaries on the Analects* (Chong, 2010b). Mark Setton (1997) introduced Tasan's philosophy in a compressive way. Setton provides in-depth understanding Tasan's ontology and political implication. For introducing Tasan's philosophy for curriculum scholars, I translated key passages from Tasan's work, which has not been translated into English. In Session 3, I further explain the specific texts that I used for this project.

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