Yulgok’s notes on T’oegye (with a focus on Gyengyeon ilgi)

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Abstract

Although Yulgok Yi I was never a follower of T’oegye Yi Hwang, nor a disciple, his unconcealed admiration and reverence towards T’oegye is well known, as well as his difference of opinion regarding the sachil 四七論 and igi 理氣論 theories. We know that in 1559 he visited T’oegye at Tosan and that this visit resulted in a series of letters and poems exchanged by the two scholars in recognition of the impressions they were left with. From them, we can detach some elements of Yulgok’s view on T’oegye and his understanding of T’oegye’s work before he challenged some of the latter’s philosophical theories. In the Gyengyeon ilgi we can find another note that Yulgok made about T’oegye. Although brief, the characterization made by Yulgok is powerful and bears information beyond the scholarly philosophical talents of T’oegye towards the politics of the Sarimp’’a. This paper revisits the relationship between T’oegye and Yulgok by identifying and interpreting the direct references of the two Confucian scholars about each other, insisting mostly on Yulgok’s view on T’oegye.