

Chapter 6

**Yangming Studies in Korea**

## 1. Introduction

This article is the result of a comprehensive analysis of the research outcomes of Yangming studies in Korea among the academic papers published in Korea in 2019. The search criteria were papers published in journals registered in the Korean Citation Index(KCI) of the National Research Foundation(NRF) and doctoral theses from January to December 2019. The paper collections that were searched for this report's analysis are classified into four categories based on the classification scheme of the NRF: philosophy(n=25), Confucian studies(n=4), other humanities(n=1), and Chinese language and literature(n=1).

Among the papers identified using the above search criteria, 18 papers were found to cover Yangming studies in Korea. To give a clear overview of these papers, they were first classified by scholar and topic covered. Each paper was then briefly presented under the category it was assigned to: 1) papers on Jeong Je-du(Ganghwa School); 2) papers on Yangming School(Yangmyeonghak) and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism(Seongnihak); and 3) other papers. Finally, in-depth analysis and review were performed on the major papers.

## 2. Classification by Scholar/Topic

### 1) Papers on Jeong Je-du(Ganghwa School)(n=8)

1. Yi Nam-ok: "A study on the Academic Exchange with Jeong Je-du and Seoin-Noron's line", *YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.52
2. Jeon, Sungkun: "The Innate Moral Wisdom Theory and The Spiritual Heart-Mind Theory", *YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.52
3. Chun, Byung-don: "A Study on Academic Philosophy of Mid-Hagok

- School”, *YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.54
4. KIM Jae-Hwa: “A Study on Shim Dae-yoon’s Concept of the Gewuzhizhi(格物致知)”, *TAE-DONG YEARLY REVIEW OF CLASSICS* 2019, vol.43
  5. Han Jeong Gil: “Nangok Yi Geon-bang's Joseon Confucianism and Wang Yangming”, *TAE-DONG YEARLY REVIEW OF CLASSICS* 2019, vol.43
  6. Yunkyeong Kim: “Theoretical Ground of Joseonhak(Korean Studies) Written by Jeong In-bo from the Perspective of Modern East Asia”, *YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.52
  7. Kim, Sea-jeong 1, CHOJISUN 2: “Current Situation and Prospect of the Research on Ha-gok Studies through the Analysis of International Conferences on Gang-hwa School of Yang-ming Studies”, *Studies in Confucianism* 2019, vol.48
  8. Kim Yong-Jae: “The Subject Matter of the Study of Korean Yang-ming Studies”, *Studies in Confucianism* 2019, vol.47

Among the 18 papers on Yangming studies in Korea published in 2019, eight papers cover Jeong Je-du(Ganghwa School). Despite a slight downturn in this number compared to 2018(11 out of 19 papers), the main area of research still focuses on Jeong Je-du(Ganghwa School), confirming again the predominance of the Ganghwa school in Yangming studies in Korea.

(1) Yi Nam-ok’s paper, “A study on the Academic Exchange with Jeong Je-du and Seoin-Noron’s Line,” is an attempt to fill a gap in the body of existing literature. Jeong Je-du’s scholarship is usually accessed within the framework of the Soron line, such as through Park Se-che(penname: Namgye). From the standpoint that the Yangming school arose in opposition to the Zhu Xi school, that is, Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, it is certainly natural to use Soron as the foothold of Jeong Je-du’s

Yangming school given that Noron was the self-proclaimed defender of the Zhu Xi school in the Joseon period.

To quote Yi Nam-ok in this context, “Although Jeong Je-du increasingly leans toward Soron over time, his circle of scholarly friends includes, to a great part, Seoin-Noron’s line. Additionally, no significant differences are observed in the content of his scholarly exchanges with these two lines. This allows a reappraisal of Jeong Je-du as ‘a scholar whose intellectual pursuit was beyond factional allegiances’ instead of confining him to the set frame of ‘a Soron scholar of the Yangming school.’” This is a novel and straightforward claim. If it were founded on an unequivocal fact, its implications for intellectual history would be significant. The position of the existing research history does not presuppose that Jeong Je-du did not engage in any exchange with Noron scholars. Nor is it enough to claim that ten percent or more of Jeong Je-du’s scholarly relationship was with Seoin-Noron’s line based on the number of letters. However, this claim provides some food for thought. There is a strong personal connection between Jeong Je-du and Soron, even considering his academic background alone. Yi Nam-ok’s argument that it is necessary to consider his academic connection with the Noron line irrespective of his strong Soron background offers an occasion to set him apart from the established frame of stereotypical understanding. Extending this line of thought, it may be assumed that the distinction between Jeong Je-du’s exchanges with Soron or Noron may not yield any meaningful conclusions. For Jeong Je-du, as a Yangming scholar, both factions belong equally to the Zhu-Xi school.

(2) Jeon Sungkun’s paper, “The Innate Moral Wisdom Theory and The Spiritual Heart-Mind Theory,” brings remarkable insight to the comparison of Hagok’s theory of moral wisdom(良知論) and Dasan’s theory of spiritual intelligence(靈知論). Of course, this comparison requires the prerequisite that Jeon Sungkun, whose main research line is

Dasan, should be familiar with the similarities and differences of the clearly distinctive notions of Xing(性 human nature) of the Zhu Xi school and Liangzhi(良知 moral wisdom) of the Yangming school. This prerequisite is coupled with the inevitable doubt as to whether Jeon understood the gist of Hagok's theory of moral wisdom. Jeon's accurate understanding of Hagok's Liangzhi is all the more important as he examines it in the light of Dasans Lingzhi(靈知), with the Zhu Xi school on the opposite side.

(3) Chun Byung-don's paper, "A Study on Academic Philosophy of Mid-Hagok School," examines the Hagok school with a focus on its prominent scholars, namely Wangu(宛丘), Shinjae(信齋), and Seokcheon(石泉). The author has continuously published papers on the Hagok school over the past several years. To begin with, the term "Mid-Hagok" in the title is eye-catching, given that it is not a commonly used academic term. Chun's attempt to justify the rationale for this paper by using the term "Mid-Hagok School" is not sufficient to determine the adequacy of the term itself and the validity of grouping the three named scholars into the "Mid-Hagok school." This uncertainty, coupled with the burden of debriefing the "ambiguous Hagok School", carries a risk of endangering the *raison d'être* of this paper itself.

(4) Kim Jae-hwa's paper, "A Study on Shim Dae-yoon's Concept of the Gewuzhizhi(格物致知)," covers a noteworthy subject. Shim Dae-yoon(沈大允, 1806-1872) has been researched and published by Jang Byeong-han every year. Jeong In-bo rightly pointed out the following: "[Shim Dae-yoon] is a scholar of modern Joseon. Among his contemporaries, Yi Ik and An Jeong-bok were prominent historians, and Jeong Yak-yong stood out as a political theorist. Shim Dae-yoon, however, persevered in his life as a loner, and his name was buried in oblivion.(...) To be fair, however, his clear-cut definitions and brilliant interpretations stood out in the multitude of theories and interpretations. He is no doubt a splendid light of the Confucian classics in Joseon." As such, Shim Dae-yoon is

a great scholar of the Confucian classics who reached a unique level of achievement. His scholarship is also related to Gahak(Jiaxue 家學 Family School), whereby Shim Yuk, a brother of his great-grandfather, was the head disciple of Jeong Je-du.

(5) Han Jeong-gil's paper, "Nangok Yi Geon-bang's Joseon Confucianism and Wang Yangming," can be assessed as an important discovery of historical material. The author explains how its context is embedded in academic history: "Nangok(蘭谷) Yi Geon-bang(李建芳, 1861-1939) is a Yangming scholar, as revealed in the comment made by Widang(爲堂) Jeong In-bo(鄭寅普), his disciple.(...) However, Jeong In-bo does not mention his teacher Yi Geon-bang's understanding of the Yangming school. Even in Yi Geon-bang's masterpiece Nangok-Jongo(蘭谷存稿 Nangok's Remaining Manuscripts), he hardly covers the Yangming school. For this reason, research on Yi Geon-bang's understanding of the Yangming school has no other choice but to clench onto a few phrases in Nangok-Jongo. However, Yi Geon-bang left a highly sophisticated appraisal of the Yangming school in an article titled 'Joseon Confucianism(朝鮮儒學) and Wang Yangming(王陽明),' which was published in DongA Ilbo in an eight-part serial from April 15 to June 12, 1933, under the pseudonym of Gilseongsanin(吉星山人). The author behind the pseudonym Gilseongsanin has remained unknown thus far. For this reason, the DongA Ilbo article, 'Joseon Confucianism(朝鮮儒學) and Wang Yangming(王陽明),' has remained in shadow and the text is anonymous.(...) This article is significant in that Yi Geon-bang left a piece of writing titled 'Joseon Confucianism(朝鮮儒學) and Wang Yangming(王陽明)' in addition to Nangok-Jongo. Based on this, we can assume that Yi Geon-bang wrote this article under the pseudonym of Gilseongsanin." Yangmyeonghak Yeonron(陽明學演論), the classical masterpiece covering the study of Joseon Yangming, is a compilation of Jeong In-bo's serial published in the DongA Ilbo from September 8 to

December 17, 1933. This article is preceded by Yi Geon-bang's DongA Ilbo's eight-part serial, "Joseon Confucianism(朝鮮儒學) and Wang Yangming(王陽明)," published under the pseudonym Gilseongsanin. A throughway of the Yangming school was thus opened by the teacher and paved by the student.

(6) In the paper, "Theoretical Ground of Joseonhak(Korean Studies) Written by Jeong In-bo from the Perspective of Modern East Asia," Kim Yun-kyeong, who has assiduously published papers on Yangming studies in Korea over the past years, guides readers through Jeong In-bo's Joseonhak. The unclear term "subjective Joseonhak" is somewhat ambiguous, but the paper gives a clear overview of Jeong In-bo's genealogy of Joseonhak.

(7) The paper, "Current Situation and Prospect of the Research on Hagog Studies through an Analysis of International Conferences on Ganghwa School of Yang-ming Studies," co-authored by Kim Sea-jeong and Cho Ji-sun, summarizes the current status of research on Yangming studies in Korea. In this paper, the authors, who have played a leading role in systemizing Yangming studies at home and abroad, provide afresh an overall synopsis of the body of research outcomes accumulated thus far.

(8) Kim Yong-jae's paper, "The Subject Matter of the Study of Korean Yang-ming Studies," provides a synopsis of Yangming studies, as does Kim Sea-jeong and Cho Ji-sun's paper presented above, by categorizing the studies by topic based on the genealogy from the Hagog school to the Korean Yangming school and the relationship between Silhak and Catholicism as well as modernity.

## 2) Papers on the relationship between the Yangming school and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism

1. Hwang Gabyeon: "The Development Patterns of the Zhu Xi's School of Thought in Joseon and Neo-Confucian Scholars' Misunderstanding of the Yang Ming's School of Thought in Joseon"(*Journal of Eastern Philosophy* 2019, vol.00, no.100)
2. kim min-jae, KIM HEE YOUNG, Woo, Ji-yeon, Kim Yong-Jae: "A Study on the Critical Perception of Yang-Ming Studies by Neo-Confucian Scholars in the Early Joseon Dynasty"(*YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.52)
3. KIM HEE YOUNG, kim min-jae, Kim Yong-Jae: "The principle of human nature scholar of the doctrines of Wang Yangming critical awareness about the review"(*Journal of Eastern Philosophy* 2019, vol.00, no.98)
4. Woo, Ji-yeon, kim min-jae, Kim Yong-Jae: "A Review of Critical Perceptions of Yang-Ming Studies by Neo-Confucian Scholars of the Joseon Dynasty(2)"(*YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.53)
5. Ham Young-Dae: "Learning of Yangming(陽明) of Seongho(星湖) School"(*YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.52,)
- 6 Yunkyeong Kim: "Multi-level implications of Practical Learning based on the Sincere Mind in the transition period of modern age"(*YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.53)
- 7 Yunkyeong Kim: "Practicalism of Seol Tae-hee and Yangming-studies"(*YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.55)

A salient feature of the papers covering Yangming studies in Korea and published in 2019 may be that a relatively high proportion of them(three out of seven) examined the Yangming school and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism(in this section, hereinafter "Songlihak," the Korean version

of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism) from a comparative perspective. All three such papers focus on the association between Songlihak and the Yangming school and were carried out as part of an NRF project.

(1) Hwang Gab-yeon, a former president of the Korean Society of Yang-Ming Studies, is an accomplished scholar of Song-Ming Confucianism specializing in the study of similarities and differences between the Zhu Xi school and Seonglihak. In his paper, “The Development Patterns of the Zhu Xi’s School of Thought in Joseon and Neo-Confucian Scholars’ Misunderstanding of the Yang Ming’s School of Thought in Joseon,” he reaffirms his current position. This paper is embedded in his work, which elucidates the originality of Seonglihak.

(2) “A Study on the Critical Perception of Yang-Ming Studies by Neo-Confucian Scholars in the Early Joseon Dynasty,” by Kim Min-jae et al., (3) “The Principle of the Human Nature Scholar of the Doctrines of Wang Yangming and Critical Awareness About the Review,” by Kim Hee-young et al., and (4) “A Review of Critical Perceptions of Yang-Ming Studies by Neo-Confucian Scholars of the Joseon Dynasty,” by Woo Ji-yeon et al., are research outcomes of an NRF project.

(5) In “Learning About the Yangming(陽明) of Seongho(星湖) School,” Ham Young-dae demonstrates a new approach. We can detect this new approach in the following statement by the author: “This paper examines whether there is a contact point with Yangming School in the inner atmosphere of the Seongho school instead of unreasonably insisting on finding a direct link between the Seongho school and the Yangming school. Specifically, I gauged the possibility of context and contact point on which the Seongho school can embrace the Yangming school by performing an in-depth analysis of the possibility of an interface between the Seongho school and the Yangming school in the direction of thinking in steering the discussions related to Byeok-idan-ron(闢異端論 anti-heresy theory) and Shimsingwen(心身觀 mind body view).”

(6) Kim Yun-kyeong's paper, "Multi-Level Implications of Practical Learning Based on the Sincere Mind in the Transition Period of Modern Age" calls for a thorough reflection on the conceptual term "Silsimsilhak(實心實學 Practical Learning of Sincere Mind)," which has thus far been exclusively attributed to the Yangming school: "Silsimsilhak, which has been regarded as a salient feature of the Hagok school, which is representative of Joseon's Yangming school, was not the Hagok school's exclusive asset. In particular, during the modern transition period, the reinterpretation and practice of schools of thought centered around Silsimsilhak were actively performed as a response by Confucian intellectuals to crisis situations such as the encroachment by Western culture and imperialism on our sovereignty. Hagok scholars, such as Yi Geon-chang, Yi Geon-seung, Yi Geon-bang, and Jeong In-bo, advocated Silsimsilhak, which emphasized subjectivity on the basis of truth. Their Silsimsilhak is tantamount to 'Silhak(實學), which practices Sincere Mind(實心).' Therefore, Silhak can be different depending on what Silsim, the sincere mind, is geared to, whereby the state of(一真無假) of Silsim, an ever-truthful state of mind without even an iota of falsity, is important. Only in this state of Iljinmuga can Silsim point to the correct theory. Zhu Xi scholars such as Gwak Jong-seok and Jeon Woo reasserted the completion of Seonglihak based on truthfulness to defend the essence of the traditional school and universal truth. That is, their Silsimsilhak is tantamount to 'doing Silhak(實學) with Sincere Mind(實心).' Here, Silsim is set as an attitude of doing Silhak in contrast to the view of the Hagok school, which takes Silsim as the reference point. Silsimsilhak pursued by the Yangming school and the Zhu Xi school during the modern transition period was geared toward the establishment of subjectivity and universality, respectively. Another implication for Silsimsilhak is that they resulted in the difference in their theories and patterns of practice; this implication still lingers in the present age."

(7) Kim Yun-kyeong's paper, "Practicalism of Seol Tae-hee and Yangming Studies," covers scholars unfamiliar to Korean academia. As indicated by the author, 20th-century intellectuals attracted to Joseon's Yangming school can be grouped into descendants of the Hagok school and Confucian reformists influenced by the research outcomes of the Japanese Yangming school. Yi Geon-chang, Yi Geon-seung, Yi Geon-bang, and Jeong In-bo belong to the former group, and Choe Nam-seon, Park Eun-sik, and Seol Tae-hee to the latter. Seol Tae-hee(薛泰熙, 1875-1940; penname: Ochon 梧寸; nickname: Gukhyang 國鄉) was a social activist, Confucianist, and Chinese classicist. He was born in Dancheon, Hamgyeongnam-do, studied law at Meiji University, founded the Han-buk Hung Hak Hoe(漢北興學會), and led the Patriotic Enlightenment Movement and Korean Production Movement.

### 3) Others

1. Kim, Seon-Hee: "Yang-ming Studies and Western Learning in China and the Joseon Dynasty"(*YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.52)
2. Kim Yong-Jae: "The purpose and meaning of the comparative 'study of Yangming(陽明學)', and its direction"(*TOEGYE-HAK-LON-GIB* 2019, vol., no.24)
3. Kim, Sea-jeong: "New prospect of research on Yangming studies in Korea nowadays"(*YANG-MING STUDIES* 2019, vol., no.54)

(1) Seon-hee Kim's paper, "Yang-ming Studies and Western Learning in China and the Joseon Dynasty," examines the affinity between Seohak, especially Catholicism, and the Yangming school, with a focus on 16-century China and 18th-century Joseon.

(2) Kim Yong-jae's paper, "The Purpose and Meaning of the

Comparative ‘Study of Yangming(陽明學)’ and Its Direction,” is based on his earlier study as revealed by the author: This article extends part of the ‘research plan’ of the research project selected by the ‘2018 General Joint Research Support Program’ of the National Research Foundation(NRF). The research outcomes targeted by this article are critical reviews on the Yangming school by Joseon Seonglihak scholars published in 2019.

(3) Sea-jeong Kim’s paper, “New Prospect of Research on Current Yangming Studies in Korea” reflects the academic standing and long research experience of the author, the incumbent president of the Korean Society of Yang-Ming studies.

### 3. Analysis and Review of Major Papers

The religious nature of Confucianism is an object of extensive research that has been thoroughly studied. Matteo Ricci found religious features similar to Christianity in pre-Qin Confucianism. Extending this finding to the religiosity of Song-Ming Confucianism, we can pose the following questions: Does the Zhu Xi school have a high affinity with Catholicism(Christianity)? Does the Yangming school have a high affinity with Catholicism(Christianity)? Similarities between Yahweh God, the transcendental being, and God the Holy Spirit can be found in the Zhu Xi school and the Yangming school, respectively. That is, both schools have religious features.

On the other hand, upon reflection on the historical development process, the Yangming school’s affinity with Catholicism(Christianity) may be said to be high. Typical examples are Mateo Ricci’s missionary activities in 16th-century China and the activities of the Sinseo division(信西派 sect believing in the West) within the Seongho school in 18th-century Joseon.

Kim Seon-hee's paper, "Yang-ming Studies and Western Learning in China and the Joseon Dynasty," studied the affinity between Catholicism and the Yangming school by examining a series of events that took place in 16th-century China and 18th-century Joseon. Regarding 16th-century China, the author notes: "It may conclusively be said that in the Matteo Ricci era, the Yangming school served as a kind of window to introduce Seohak into Chinese society and culture. Yangming scholars' open interpretation of Confucian theories and the pursuit of practical knowledge formed a kind of common denominator in the missionary activities of Jesuits." Regarding 18th-century Joseon, the author notes: "Kwon Cheol-shin, who learned the academic attitude of autodidactic learning(自得之學) in the Seongho school, advanced to the Yangming school and further to Seohak-Catholicism on his own accord. At least one of the reasons can be ascribed to the theoretical novelty of Seohak. For him, Seohak was not simply a different type of learning, but a new learning.(...) While it cannot be assumed that he advanced to Seohak-Catholicism through the Yangming school, it may be safely assumed that he approached Seohak-Catholicism with the same intellectual attitude he adopted when he was led toward the Yangming school."

As Kim Seon-hee reveals in her paper, the affinity between Catholicism and the Yangming school is confirmed in several ways in the current research history. In that case, what is the contact point of this affinity?

Kim Seon-hee develops a very interesting characterization in Chapter 4, "Joseon's Book of Hogyo and Yangming School": "Lingming(靈明 intelligence and consciousness) was originally a common expression used in the Yangming school. It is an abbreviation of Xu-ling-ming-jue(虛靈明覺 pure intelligence and clear consciousness), which is also used in the context of Seonglihak, although there are not many examples. Lingming was rather used more actively in the Yangming school in the sense of 'the wisdom merged in the cosmic consciousness inherent in human mind'

and ‘the heavenly Dao’ in itself.(…) Jesuit members used the concept of Lingming to explain the characteristics of a ‘rational soul’ that only humans have. In addition to the plant soul that controls growth and nutrition and the animal soul that controls movement and sensation, humans have a rational soul equipped with intelligence and consciousness. (…)

Interestingly, it was Dasan Jeong Yak-yong who developed the concept of Lingming as a new regulation of human understanding through Seohak. He explained anew the human structure that can make intelligent and moral choices using concepts such as Lingming(靈明), Lingming bodi(靈明之體), and Lingming mind(靈明之心), on the basis of which he attempted to redetermine the relationship to Sang-je(Shangdi 上帝, Heavenly Emperor) as the prime cause of the cosmos and moral supervisor. In this context, Jesuits’ strategy to derive not only rational ability but also faith in the prime cause may be reviewed from the perspective of the Yangming school.”

Kim Seon-hee presents the Liangzhi(良知 moral wisdom) of the Yangming school and the Holy Spirit of Catholicism as a contact point. This point automatically attracts researchers familiar with Catholicism(Christianity) and the Yangming school, including Kim Sun-hee. The direction taken is correct. However, the difficulty lies in the fact that as it is not easy to understand the Holy Spirit, nor is it simple to understand Liangzhi. Any error can put the study at the risk of limiting itself to the level of unsophisticated data arrangement.

## 4. Evaluation and Outlook

The quantitative uptrend of research in the Yangming school in Korea has been maintained over recent years: 8 papers in 2014, 12 in 2015, 15 in 2016, 16 in 2017, 19 in 2018, and 18 in 2019. This is a very encouraging phenomenon for the Korean Yangming school. The number of papers on Yangming studies in Korea published in major journals in one year is not at all small. This demonstrates the significant proportion the Yangming school makes up in the overall Joseon Confucian history. In 2019, the number of papers was maintained at the level of previous years, but no qualitative leap was observed.

As has repeatedly been pointed out, in order to revitalize the Joseon Yangming school in the future, it is necessary to expand the arena of discussion by discovering new Yangming scholars and exploring new themes. The biggest obstacle to reaching this goal is the limitation in the literature. Researchers will have to spare no effort to move forward in this respect. Among the papers published in 2019, Han Jeong-gil's paper, "Nangok Yi Geon-bang's Joseon Confucianism and Wang Yangming," is highly recommendable because the author provided a basis to break through this limitation. Kim Seon-hee's paper, "Yang-ming Studies and Western Learning in China and the Joseon Dynasty," which comparatively examines the related events in 16th-century China and 18th-century Joseon, also has unique merit: it is based on accumulated research outcomes and uses refined expressions.

