

Chapter 6

Yangming Studies in Korea

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of a comprehensive analysis of the research outcomes of Yangming studies in Korea among the academic papers published in Korea in 2020. 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 2020.

The targeted journals searched for review were 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 collected using the above search criteria, 13 were found to cover Yangming studies in Korea. To give a clear overview of these papers, I classified them by scholar and topic, presented each paper under their respective category, and analyzed/reviewed major papers. The papers were classified into three categories: 1) papers on Jeong Je-du (Ganghwa School); 2) papers on Yangmingism (陽明學 Yangmyeonghak in Korean and Yangmingxue in Chinese) and Seonglihak ([Cheng-zhu] Xinglixue [程朱]性理學, Neo-Confucianism); and 3) other papers.

2. Classification by Scholar/Topic

1) Papers on Jeong Je-du (Ganghwa School)

- 1 Seo, Gang-Hwie: The concept of the “truth (jinli)” of Ha-Gok and the concept of the “original condition (bonche)” of the Orthodox Yangming School (*THE Journal of Asian Philosophy in Korea* (54), 2020)

- 2 Bae, Byeong-dae: The structure of “Haoran chapter’s explanation by Mencius” in Hagok and its ethical implications (*YANG-MING STUDIES* (57), 2020)
- 3 Park, Hyun-jung: A study of Gyeshanseonseang-Hakrok in Jangseogak (*YANG-MING STUDIES* (59), 2020)
- 4 Park, Hyun-jung: A comparative study on the characteristics and perspectives of the Hagok School of thought originating from different sub-schools (*YANG-MING STUDIES* (56), 2020)
- 5 Chin, Sung-su: As tudy on DamwonJungInbo’s parenting-focused on family narrative-(*YANG-MINGSTUDIES*(56),2020)
- 6 Park, Sung-ho: Hagok’s thoughts for the post-COVID-19 era: focusing on living principle and empathy (*YANG-MING STUDIES* (59), 2020)

Among the 13 papers on Yangming studies in Korea published in 2020, six are about Jeong Je-du (Ganghwa School). Despite a slight decrease compared to 2019 (8 out of 18 papers), the mainstream of research remains focused on Jeong Je-du (Ganghwa School), confirming again the predominance of the Ganghwa School in Yangming studies in Korea.

Seo Gang-hwie’s paper “The concept of the ‘truth (jinli/zhenli 真理)’ of Hagok and the concept of the ‘original condition (bonche/benti 本體)’ of the Orthodox Yangming School” examined the concepts of jinli and saengli (shengli 生理 principle of life) expounded by Hagok Jeong Je-du (霞谷 鄭齊斗, 1649–1739) with the aim of determining how imjeong-jongyok (任情從欲 arbitrary pursuit of desire), which was criticized by Hagok as the problem of Yangmingism, could be solved. The author first puts forth his arguments using the chart of saengli and jinli. The argumentation approach of distinguishing saengli and jinli has been widely used in Korean Yangmingism research. A prime example may be the doctoral thesis by Kim Gyo-bin.

The author summarizes his arguments and analysis as follows: “Hagok refuted li (理 principle), Cheng-Ju School’s core ideology, and advocated the concept of saengli (生理 principle of life) to emphasize the vital dynamics of li. At the same time, he taught to choose jinli (truth 眞理) to prevent saengli from being constrained by sentiment. This train of thought is very similar to the reasoning modality of the Orthodox Yangmingism that opposed the Taeju and Guijeok Schools.”

The author then extends the discussion to the area only superficially covered thus far by Korean Confucian scholars in his capacity as an expert in Chinese schools of Yangming studies, namely Hagok’s association with Chinese Yangming scholars: “The three leading scholars of the Orthodox Yangming School, namely Chu su-ik (Zou Shouyi 鄒守益, 1491–1562; courtesy name: Dongkuo 東廓), Gu yang-deok (Ou Yangde 歐陽德, 1496–1554; courtesy name: Nanye 南野), and Jin gu-chun (Chen Jiuchuan 陳九川 1494–1562; courtesy name: Mingshui 明水), realized the importance of bonche (benti 本體, original condition) for learning through their exchanges with Wang Ki (Wang Ji 王畿, 1498–1583; courtesy name: Longxi 龍溪; a.k.a. 王龍溪). They held on to the position that bonche can be restored through study and used it as the rationale for pointing out the problems in the Guijeok School or Taeju School. The Guijeok School neglected the vital dynamics of study by mistaking the bonche for original substance. From Hagok’s point of view, the Guijeok School overemphasized the nature of bonche at the cost of vital dynamics, and Taeju School’s overemphasis on naturalness at the cost of study was interpreted by Hagok as losing the bonche of jinli by exclusive emphasis on saengli. For Hagok, saengli and jinli are inseparable from each other because self-identity is gained through jinli, which in turn is guaranteed only through saengli. This view of Hagok has a common ground with the relationship between study and bonche of the Orthodox Yangming School.” I will return to this paper in the analysis of important papers.

Jeong Je-du put forth his Yangmingism-related positions through annotations on Confucian classics. This is an aspect frequently mentioned as a feature distinguishing between Korean and Chinese researchers of Yangmingism. Just as Wang Yangming commented that Yuk-san succeeded the Mencius School, so too Mo Jong-sam (Mou Zongsan 牟宗三) argues that the Yangming School of Mind (Yangmyeong-Simhak/ Yangming-Xinxue 陽明心學) is the orthodox line of Mencius studies. Mencius has always been used as a source of inspiration in the simhak (xinxue 心學 school of mind [psychology]) line.

In Bae Byeong-dae's paper "Structure of Hagok's Mencius theory and its ethical implications," research achievements to date are thoroughly reviewed. The author summarizes the study as follows: "Hagok asserted that the entire book of Mencius proves that Yangming's theories are correct. He took a particularly keen interest in the Haoran (浩然) Chapter of the Mencius, the key classic of Yangmingism. The Haoran Chapter is concise but quite rich in philosophical implications. For this reason, it is one of the most difficult parts to understand in the Mencius and has attracted a wealth of debates among annotators. Jib'eui (集義 accumulation of righteous mind) and yanggi (養氣 cultivation of vital energy), which are the methods of self-cultivation taught by Mencius in the Haoran Chapter, are bonche-based immanent cultivations of the self. Therefore, an analysis of Hagok's interpretation of the Haoran Chapter and comprehension of its inner structure would reveal not only the philosophical implications contained in the chapter but also Hagok's scholarly characteristics."

Park Hyun-jung studied Yangmingism at Peking University (北京大學). Since her return to Korea, she has continued Chinese Yangmingism and has also taken a keen interest in Yangming studies in Korea, publishing her research outcomes every year. In 2020, she published two papers: "A study of Gyeshanseonseang-Hakrok in Jangseo-gak" and "A comparative study on the characteristics and perspectives of the Hagok School of

thought originating from different sub-schools.” Yangmingism prioritizes internalization (自得) over committal to memory (默記) of the Confucian classics. This has also led to a relatively small body of bibliographical literature on Yangmingism. On this note, it is a positive signal that a bibliographic investigation was attempted in the paper “A study of Gyeshanseonseang-Hakrok in Jangseo-gak.” The author presents that purport of the paper as follows: “A basic analysis of the organization and overall contents of Gyeshanseonseang-Hakrok is performed. The aspects of Jeong Je-du’s early acceptance of Yangmingism is derived through an in-depth analysis of the philosophical characteristics of the excerpts from the original texts of Wang Su-in (Wang Shouren 王守仁). Jeong Je-du’s collection of excerpts (抄集), whose authorship has recently been identified, is expected to serve as an important document for understanding Jeong Je-du’s Yangmyeonghak because it is not a mere copy of the entire statements of Wang Shouren, such as in Jeonseup-ron (Chuanlixu 傳習錄) but a collection of the excerpts subjectively selected by Jeong Je-du himself. This study is a new attempt to overcome the bibliographic limitation of Jeong Je-du’s Yangmyeonghak thus far dependent only on the *Hagok Anthology*.” Park Hyun-jung’s second paper, “A comparative study on the characteristics and perspectives of the Hagok School of thought originating from different sub-schools,” will be reviewed in the in-depth analysis section.

Chin Sung-su published several papers focusing on the educational aspects of Confucian studies in Korea. “A study on Damwon Jung Inbo’s parenting - focused on the family narrative” is one such paper. The abstract of this paper reads: “Damwon, as a successor of the Ganghwa School, emphasized the unity of knowledge and action (知行合一). What was his influence on his family and children? How is he remembered by them? This paper examines family experiences Damwon had in building a trusting relationship with his children in light of his parenting

attitudes. It explores Damwon's fatherly attitude by examining how he raised his children as a father, not as a thinker or a national scholar representing the late Joseon Dynasty. It can be verified that Damwon's parenting was more effectively carried out through direct experiences based on his everyday words and actions, beliefs, values, and views of life than by specific logically imposed concepts and phrases. Instructions and disciplines toward the vision and goal constitute an important part of general education, but family education is not mere instructions and discipline because instructions and discipline can make us understand and realize a specific fact, but the force that drives us to put them into practice is emotional touch and lingering impressions. In this context, Damwon's parenting was carried out by mobilizing senses and memories to communicate and recorded through family narratives."

Park Sung-ho has put much effort into unfolding traditional thoughts in modern narratives, as shown in a series of his papers published so far. His paper, "Hagok's thoughts for the post-COVID-19 era: focusing on living principle and empathy," also adopts his early approach. The author presents the paper as follows: "The study aims to examine whether Hagok's thoughts have a universal value as a new standard in the post-COVID-19 era. In this context, the prospects and tasks of the post-COVID-19 era are explained as the transition from heteronomy (他律) to autonomy (自律) and the shift from ego to eco. The saengli (生理 living principle) and gamtong (感同 empathy) in Hagok's thoughts are then examined in search of an ideological clue to address this problem." Since the author foregrounds Hagok's thoughts in today's situation, the reality of this discussion should be appraised. It is somewhat questionable whether this grandiose argument will lead to a practical solution."

2) Papers related to Yangmingism and Neo-Confucianism

- 1 Kim, Hyoung-Chan: Toegye Yi Hwang's critique of Yangmingism and the establishment of Joseon Confucianism (*The T'oegye Hakbo* (THE JOURNAL OF T'OEGYE STUDIES) (148), 2020)
- 2 Lee, Hae-im: Tendency in Choe Myung-gil and Jo Ik's interpretation of Confucian classics and its significance: focused on "Samunlog, Maengjagiui" (*PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION* (58), 2020)
- 3 Jeon, Su-Yeon.Kim, Min-Jae.Kim, Yong-Jae: A review of critical perceptions of *YANG-MING STUDIES* by Neo-Confucian Scholars of the Joseon Dynasty (4) - focusing on Park Se-Chae's "Wang Yangming's Scholarly Discrimination (王陽明學辨)" - (*Studies in Confucianism* (51), 2020)
- 4 Kim, Hee-young, Kim, Min-jae, Kim, Yong-jae: A review of critical perceptions of *YANG-MING STUDIES* by Neo-Confucian scholars of the Joseon Dynasty (3) - Focusing on the thoughts of Lee, Min-Seo-Seo, Jong-Tae-Song, Jing-Eun - (*YANG-MING STUDIES* (56), 2020)
- 5 Hwang, In-Ok: A study on the Yangmingistic aspects of Sabyeonrok Zhong-yong
- focusing on the first chapter of Zhong-yong - (*Studies in Confucianism* (51), 2020)
- 6 Park, Jeoung-Sim: Reading Park Eun-sik's Daedong thought in the context of modern East Asian studies (*Studies in Confucianism* (51), 2020)

The linkage between Toegye and Yangmingism was first raised a century ago based on the Lido-seol (理到說 Li-revealed theory). Kim Hyoung-chan's paper, "Toegye Yi Hwang's Critique of Yangmingism and the Establishment of Joseon Confucianism," explains, against the background

of research achievements in Korea to date, the process by which the Toegye School gained a foothold as Korea's Neo-Confucian School of Mind by criticizing the Yangming School of Mind (陽明心學).

Kim presents his paper as follows: "The 16th-century Sadanchiljeong debate (四端七情論爭, debate on four beginnings and seven feelings), in which Yi Hwang and Yi I directly participated, became a decisive occasion for Joseon scholars to take particular interest in the Likisimseong debate (Liqixinxing 理氣心性論), which characterized Confucianism in Joseon. However, a more fundamental reason for the emphasis, which Toegye, Yulgok, and later Joseon Confucian scholars put on the Likisimseong debate, needs to be sought in the context of the tasks facing the Joseon intellectuals at the time, that is, a reflective review of the Zhu Xi School (Zhuzixue 朱子學) that has been pursued by them since the inception of the Joseon Dynasty, and the alternative thereto, rather than in the Likisimseong debate. Around that time, Yangmingism, which grew by criticizing Zhuzixue, was popular in China, and the philosophical and ideological reflections of Joseon intellectuals could not occur independently of the influence of such Chinese Yangmingism. However, Yangmingism met with intense criticism in Joseon, and Confucianism in Joseon moved toward building a unique scholarly framework while refusing Yangmingism, focusing on the Likisimseong debate (理氣心性論). Toegye stood at center stage in this process by playing a central role in the criticism of Yangmingism. Instead of accepting the scholarly achievements of Yangmingism, Toegye opted for the path of supplementing Zhuzixue by vehemently defending Zhuzixue against the criticism of Yangmingism. Toegye's theories of Libal (理發說 manifestation of Li) and Lijado (理自到說 spontaneous occurrence of Li) were achievements made in the context of a critical awareness to actively overcome Yangmingism's critique of Zhuzixue. Toegye's criticism was that the Yangmingist theory of unity of knowledge and action (知行合一說) is applicable to hyeong-ki (形氣

material disposition) but not to *eui-li* (義理 righteous principle), arguing that the goal of Confucianism is instinctive and spontaneous moral and emotional decisions and actions in both *hyeong-ki* and *eui-li* (義理), as in the situation of a child about to fall into a well (*yujaijeong/ruzirujing* 孺子入井) exemplified by Mencius as a natural manifestation of moral emotionality. Toegye sought to actively accommodate and overcome Yangming's critique within the framework of Zhu Xi's theories by explaining the spontaneous nature of moral emotionality, judgment, and action as the role (發 manifestation or 自到 spontaneous occurrence) of *li* (理), which had the effect of substituting mind-based Toegye Simhak (退溪心學) for *li*-based Yangming Simhak (陽明心學). As Joseon's intellectuals joined these debates with preconceived pro or con views, Joseon's Neo-Confucianism could evolve in a direction that complemented Zhuzixue and overcame Yangmingism. As noted in the examination above, Toegye's critique on Yangmingism and incorporation of its critical awareness within the framework of Zhuzixue fundamentally prevented Yangmingism from taking root and contributed to the establishment and development of Joseon's Neo-Confucianism characterized by the refined *Likisimseong* debate (理氣心性論).” Here, the claim that “Toegye sought to actively accommodate and overcome Yangming's critique within the framework of Zhu Xi's theories by explaining the spontaneous nature of moral emotionality, judgment, and action as the role (發 manifestation or 自到 spontaneous occurrence) of *li* (理), which had the effect of substituting mind-based Toegye Simhak (退溪心學) for *li*-based Yangming Simhak (陽明心學)” seems to be a rather far-fetched and bold statement. Likewise, there seems to be little ground for the claim that Toegye's *Li*-revealed theory (理到說) accommodated and overcame Yangmingist criticisms of Zhuzixue.

Lee Hae-im's paper, “Tendency in Choe Myung-gil and Jo Ik's interpretation of Confucian classics and its significance: focused on

Samunlog and Maengjagiui,” pursues the following research question: “Is the figurehead of 17th-century Joseon Yangmyeonghak Jo Ik or Choe Myung-gil?” The author presents the study process and results as follows: With the Noron faction in power in the 17th century, Joseon’s Confucian classics were evolving in the direction of refining Zhuzixue. Therefore, no scholars dared to oppose Zhuzixue in 17th century Joseon. This is proven by the fact that Samunlog (思問錄) and Maengjagiui (孟子記疑) were handed down from generation to generation only as a copy of the Choe clan. Paradoxically, the sealed book inside Samunlog shows the diversity of Joseon’s Confucian Classics studies, as evidenced by Maengjagiui (孟子記疑) of Samunlog written in the form of dialogue between Choe and Jo, who understand Mencius from the viewpoints of Yangmingism and Zhuxixue, respectively. Furthermore, Choe Myung-gil, around the age of 50, presented opinions somewhat deviating from those of Wang Yangming. From this, the answer to the research question (Is the figurehead of 17th-century Joseon Yangmyeonghak Jo Ik or Choe Myung-gil?) can be inferred.”

Jeon Su-yeon, Kim Min-jae, and Kim Yong-jae’s paper, “A review of critical perceptions of *YANG-MING STUDIES* by Neo-Confucian scholars of the Joseon Dynasty (4) - focusing on Park Se-Chae’s ‘Wang Yangming’s scholarly discrimination’ (王陽明學辨)” and Kim Hee-young, Kim Min-jae, and Kim Yong-jae’s paper, “A review of critical perceptions of *YANG-MING STUDIES* by Neo-Confucian scholars of the Joseon Dynasty (3) - focusing on the thoughts of Lee Min-Seo, Seo Jong-Tae, and Song, Jing-Eun,” are the results of a joint research project supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea. This project publishes papers every year under the subject of “the review of Joseon Neo-Confucian scholars’ critical perceptions of Yangmingism.”

First, in the paper on Park Se-chae’s critique of Yangmingism, the reason for the critique is described as follows: “After Yi Hwang’s critique of

Yangmingxue, it was dismissed as Soenhak (禪學 study of zen). In addition to this situation, Park Se-chaë's concern was that Joseon would follow the example of the Ming Dynasty, seeing the doldrums of Confucianism in the Ming Dynasty after Lu-Wang Xue's (陸王學) popularity. This concern caused Park Se-chaë's scholarly tendency to take an anti-heretic position, attaching importance to Confucian Orthodoxy (道統).” The author defines Park Se-chaë's critique of Yangmingxue as such: “Although Park Se-chaë's critique of Yangmingxue also winds up as the standpoint that ‘Yangmingxue is Soenhak’ as did Yi Hwang's critique, the former differentiates itself from the latter in that (1) an analysis of Zhiliangzhi was attempted, (2) Wang Shouren's works were targeted, and (3) a critique of Yangmingxue was derived after perusing Wang Shouren's collection of writings.”

The second paper examines Confucian scholars less well-known as critics of Yangmingxue: “This study examines the critical views of Yangmingxue of Seoha Lee Min-Seo, Manjeongdang Seo Jong-sae, and Yakheon Song Jing-eun, who were active in the 17th and early 18th centuries. These three scholars share many similarities as high-ranking government officials of the Seoin (西人) faction, who lived in the same period and criticized Yangmingxue. Lee Min-seo understood Yangmingxue as Zhiliangzhi (致良知, attainment of the innate knowledge of goodness) and Wanwuyiti (萬物一體, philosophy of the unity of all things) and viewed Yangmingxue as trapped in the negative frame of Zisi (自私 selfish desire) and haoyi (好異 mystery), putting forth a critique that Yangmingxue cannot accomplish Confucian sagehood because it denies learning. Seo Jong-tae's critique of Yangmingxue was argumentation anchored in Zhuzixue rather than denying its fundamental principles. Song Jing-eun criticized Wang Souren's Gewuzhizhi (格物致知 acquiring knowledge by observing natural phenomena) and Zhixingheyi (知行合一 unity of knowledge and action) with arguments fully based on Zhuzixue.

In these critiques, insurmountable differences exist in the understandings of the concepts of Lianzhi (良知 innate knowledge of goodness) and li (理 principle) between Zhu Xi and Wang Shouren. While this study could not clarify the entire spectrum of the criticism on Yangmingxue rampant among Joseon Confucianists in the 17th and 18th centuries, it at least showed the fact that the intellectuals of the time shared the major Yangmingist concepts, such as Zhiliangzhi (致良知), Zhixingheyi (知行合一), and Wanwuyiti (萬物一體), as well as the differences in the understandings of the classics between Zhu Xi and Wang Shouren. It was also verified that there were also scholars, such as Lee Min-seo, who had positive views of Wang Shouren's scholarly pursuit and talent, while not accepting Yangmingxue."

One of the difficulties in Yangming studies is the task of detecting the so-called Yangju-Eumwang (Yangzhu-Yinwang 陽朱陰王 professed Zhu Xi shy Yangming) Confucian scholars. Despite the risk of fallacy due to overenthusiasm, this process is essential for expanding the scope of Yangming studies in Korea.

Hwang In-ok's paper "A study on the Yangmingistic aspects of Sabyeonrok Zhongyong – focusing on the first chapter of Zhongyong" can be evaluated as a work that expands the scope of Yangming studies in Korea, as mentioned above. The author's own evaluation is as follows: "Seogye was a scholar with an open-minded view of learning and was interested in not only Confucianism but also other learnings such as Buddhism and Taoism. He lived at the inception of Yangmingism in Joseon and had a favorable attitude toward Yangmingism, directly or indirectly communicating with Yangming scholars such as Choe Myung-gil. Seogye's annotations to Zhongyong showed Yangmingistic traits according to three aspects. First, he set a new direction of interpreting the classics by accommodating Yangmingxue in the scholarly environment dominated by Zhuzixue and thus contributed to the ideological

development thereafter. Second, he rejected a universal and theoretical worldview and emphasized that humans are the main agents of activities by recognizing Simmyeong (心明 brightness of mind). Third, Seogye differentiated between the objective world of materials and subjective world of values by differentiating between human and material properties and found what needed to be put into practice from among the instructions of the classics, emphasizing the power of execution. Extracting Yangmingistic views reflected in his interpretation of Zhongyong would allow us to better identify the trends of early Yangmingism and also contribute to the study on Silhak (實學) in the late Joseon period.”

Park Jeong-shim specialized in Park Eun-sik, who was his supervisor for the PhD thesis. According to Park Jeong-shim, it is problematic to define Park Eun-sik as a Yangmyeonghak scholar. Unlike Jeong In-bo, Park Eun-sik cannot be definitely classified this way despite his endeavor to rescue Joseon from hardships through Yangmyeonghak. Nor is the focus of Park Jeong-shim’s 2020 paper “Reading Park Eun-sik’s Daedong thought in the context of modern East Asian studies” is on Yangmyeong-Simhak (陽明心學). Admittedly, Park Eun-sik evaluated Yangmyeonghak as a traditional ideology that could replace Zhuzixue in his attempt to find an ideology that can replace Zhuzixue, refusing to settle for the authority of Zhuzixue as an ideology for awakening the national identity and protecting the nation from the danger of being extinguished. This is also reflected in Park Eun-sik’s Daedong thought. “Western modernity has undergone variations in East Asia in the forms of the dissolution of Sinocentrism, Eurocentric civilization, and the violence of Orientalism. A key issue in Confucian studies in East Asia has been how to understand and implement humanity in the modern national context. Park Eun-sik pursued a modern society based on the knowledge of goodness (良知) as moral autonomy. Shifting his focus from the yangban (aristocratic) class immersed in old-fashioned traditions, he foregrounded the nonliterary minjung (grassroots), who

possessed the spontaneity of innate knowledge of goodness, as the subject of modern Korean society. In the age of equal rights, minjung does not strive for expansive nationalism but seeks a Daedong (utopia of great unity) society that eliminates coercive tyranny and aggressive imperialism. Therefore, Korea's independence based on Zhiliangzhi (致良知, attainment of the innate knowledge of goodness) should be a process for realizing world peace and humanitarianism. Japan planted orientalism in the place where Sinocentrism was dissolved. Orientalism, which was also the theory of Japanese domination, was enveloped with the universality of Confucianism (同文論) as a camouflage ideology, BUT it was an anti-Confucian process, for it was used to justify imperial invasion. Not only did Kang Yuwei acknowledge the dissolution of Sinocentrism, but he also argued that everything that causes discrimination and oppression, such as gender, family, nationality, and race, should be dismantled. Taciturn acceptance of the Neo-Confucian ideology while holding on to the Sinocentric worldview, as Yoo In-seok did, even if it was manifested as resistance to imperial invasion, cannot be regarded as a proper reflection of modern upheaval. Therefore, Park Eun-sik established becoming the subject of overcoming the overpowering imperialism and realizing egalitarianism as the immediate task of the Korean people. Herein lies the significance of Park Eun-sik's ideas, which did not lose sight of the image of a nation while pursuing world peace extending beyond the imperial invasion that was in its midst."

3) Papers on other topics

- 1 Kim, Sea-Jeong: The past, present, and future of research on *YANG-MING STUDIES* in the Joseon Dynasty focusing on research on general *YANG-MING STUDIES* in the Joseon Dynasty (*Studies in Confucianism* (52), 2020)

Kim Sea-Jeong's paper, "The past, present, and future of research on *YANG-MING STUDIES* in the Joseon Dynasty focusing on research on general *YANG-MING STUDIES* in the Joseon Dynasty," is based on data accumulated and arranged over a long period of time. This paper adds to a series of papers on the subject over the past few years. The tasks of Yangming studies presented by the author deserve attention: "First, it is necessary to reflect research results arranged by period and domain as well as those of individual Yangming scholars by discussion topics covering the overall research activities of the Yangming studies in the Joseon Dynasty. Second, it is necessary to consider the domains of literature and history as well as philology, which has been the main domain of interest of the general Yangming studies in the Joseon Dynasty. Third, it is necessary to advance arguments about Yangming studies in the Joseon Dynasty in association with present-day problems."

3. Analysis and Review of Major Papers

The task of verifying and establishing the uniqueness of Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak is the mission incumbent on Korean Yangmyeonghak researchers. Yangming studies in Korea to date have primarily attempted to ensure the uniqueness of Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak by placing him between the two camps of Zhuzixue and Yangmyeonghak and dexterously combining Jeong Je-du's scholarly aspects of both Yangmyeonghak and Zhuzixue. In other words, although Jeong Je-du revered Yangmyeonghak, he thought that there were Zhuzixue traits that compensated for the shortcomings of Yangmyeonghak. This research trend is a strategy favored by researchers with degrees in Korea.

Meanwhile, researchers who returned to Korea after studying Yangmingxue in China have tried to identify the characteristics or

uniqueness of Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak by comparing it to Chinese Yangmingxue based on an in-depth understanding of the development of the latter.

Park Hyun-Jung dichotomizes the existing research trends into right-wing and left-wing Yangmingistic factions. Park's explication about the right-wing camp is as follows: "This can be regarded as the mainstream theory among Korean researchers, primarily drawing on Kim Gyo-bin's distinction between general, vital, and true principles (beomli, saengli, and jinli 凡理-生理-眞理). The right-wing camp argues that Jeong Je-du succeeded the right-wing Yangming faction along the lines of Yoo Jong-jo and Hwang Jong-hee as well as Choo Su-il and Seop Pyo, considering Jeong Je-du's conceptual operation and theoretical characteristics centering on the concept of truth. In addition, despite the unidimensional characteristics in understanding Yangji (良知 knowledge of goodness) as cheyong-ilwon (體用一源 substance and use have the same origin), it also shows the aspect of understanding cheyong-ilwon centering on value-centered bonche." Regarding the left-wing camp, "Some studies argue that among the left-wing views of Hagokhak (Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak), Na Yeo-bang represents the conceptual proximity and Wang Ki the theoretical proximity. A theoretic analysis proposes that Jeong Je-du had a positive view of hyeonseong-yangji (現成良知 theory of the knowledge of goodness manifested here and now) chi here and now and museon-muak (neither good nor evil) of simche (心體 substance of mind) with his understanding of Hyeonseong line's unidimensional cheyong-ilwon and thought that Jeong Je-du's learning method focusing on the elimination of attachment was similar to that of Wang Ki."

Park Hyung-jung unfolds her argument advocating the left-wing tendency of Hagokhak as follows: "This text examined Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak from scholastic viewpoints under three criteria: cheyong-related view, acceptance or refusal of hyeonseong-yangji and museon-

muak of simche, and the position related to learning theory. From the foregoing description, the conclusion of this article is that it can agree to a certain extent with the research outcomes thus far that Jeong Je-du's understanding and tendency of Yangmyeonghak is generally closer to the left-wing than to the right-wing text."

A limitation of Park Hyun-jung's study is that it does not distinguish between the so-called orthodox (centrist) and left-wing perspectives represented by Chu Dong-gwak and Gu Yang-deok, respectively. It seems to have been overlooked that both scholars criticized left-wing scholars such as Wang Ki advocating hyeonseong-yangji while criticizing the yangji-ron (theory of knowledge of goodness) of right-wing scholars Seop Pyo and Na Yeomam. These aspects need to be clarified to enhance the rigor of research comparing Chinese Yangmingxue and Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak. To put it differently, in terms of cheyong-ilwon advocating hyeonseong-yangji, which is referred to as a characteristic of left-wing Yangmingism by Park, both orthodox and left-wing scholars opposed to the right-wing position, but the former refused the nature-centered (自然爲宗) left-wing argumentation.

On the other hand, determining the uniqueness of Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak requires determining its similarities and differences with Chinese Yangmingxue. The prime statement that is referred to as the most important task in verifying and establishing the uniqueness of Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak is imjeong-jongyok (任情從欲 arbitrary pursuit of desire), four characters that have reportedly been accused by Jeong Je-du of carrying the evil effect of Yangmyeonghak. It is a quite attractive resource for those who want to understand Jeong Je-du from the perspective of Zhuzixue. For those who want to understand Jeong Je-du from the perspective of Yangmyeonghak, it is necessary to establish the Jeong Je-du style Yangmyeonghak, which overcomes the evil effect of changgwang-bangja (changkuang-fangzi 猖狂放恣 imprudence and

insolence). The most frequently used frame in this context is *mulli-saengli-jinli* (物理-生理-真理 principles of material, life, and truth) as expounded by Zhuzixue, Yangmyeonghak, and Hagokhak, respectively.

Seo Gang-hwie sought to discern the uniqueness of Jeong Je-du's Yangmyeonghak appropriately using *saengli* and *jinli*. For example, adopting the conceptual structure of *saengli*, he argued: "Leading figures of the Orthodox Yangming School, namely, Chu su-ik (Zou Shouyi 鄒守益, 1491–1562, courtesy name: Dongkuo 東廓), Gu yang-deok (Ou Yangde 歐陽德, 1496–1554, courtesy name: Nanye 南野), and Jin gu-chun 陳九川 (Chen Jiuchuan 1494–1562, courtesy name: Mingshui 明水), realized the importance of *bonche* (*benti* 本體, original condition) for learning through their exchanges with Wang Yong-gye (Wang Longxi 王龍溪, 1498–1583). They held on to the position that *bonche* can be restored through study and used it as the rationale for pointing out the problems in the Guijeok School or Taeju School. The Guijeok School neglected the vital dynamics of study by mistaking the *bonche* for substance. From Hagok's point of view, the Guijeok School overemphasized the nature of *bonche* at the cost of vital dynamics." On the other hand, adopting the conceptual structure of *jinli*, he argued: "The Taeju School overemphasized naturalness at the cost of study. This can also be interpreted from Hagok's viewpoint as a loss of the *bonche* of *jinli* by exclusively emphasizing *saengli*. For Hagok, *saengli* and *jinli* are inseparable from each other because self-identity is gained through *jinli*, which in turn is guaranteed only through *saengli*."

Seo Gang-hwie seems to have found an assemblage point by appropriately combining existing research outcomes. However, his argumentation is valid only if it satisfies a premise, that is, the frame in which *jinli* takes a position superior to *saengli*.

In this context, Kim Gyo-bin's narrative, which generalizes this frame, deserves attention, specifically with regard to *saengli*: For Hagok, the

evil effect of Yangmingism is rejecting Zhu Xi's logic of seeking reason in things outside the self but carrying the risk of fallacy due to desire when seeking reason in the self. With this critical awareness, it is important to clearly define li (理) in Hagok's statements. The statements to which the author valued the most as providing clues to solve this problem are "Li is taking saengli as the central principle of all types of li (fanli 凡理) and selecting jinli over saengli" (Kim Goy-bin, Yangming scholar Jeong Je-du's philosophy, 1995, 27–28); "Hagok mentioned saengli (shengli 生理) as a higher concept of mulli (wuli 物理), which is used as basis for Zhuzixue, and sought to gain truth in it, fighting back the risk of Yangmingistic imjeong-jongyok (renqing-congyu 任情從欲 arbitrary pursuit of desire giving in to feelings) in an effort to solve the problems of Zhuzixue and Yangmingism through his philosophical system" (op. cit., 104); "The inference that sim (xin 心 mind) corresponds to saengli and seong (xing 性 nature) to jinli in it will ultimately gain confidence" (op. cit., 123); "Saengli contains both good and evil, and jinli is pure goodness. Along with the logic that if the component of evil is eliminated from saengli...it was verified that the true form composing saengli is jinli...Jinli, which is the goodness component of saengli as expounded by Hagok, is myeongdeok (mingde 明德 bright virtue). Truth is attained not by exploring external things but by fostering yangji (liangzhi 良知 innate knowledge of goodness) contained in myeongdeok" (op. cit., 42–45).

Kim Gyo-bin's argumentation is attractive but is also exposed to harsh critiques. For example, Kim Yoon-kyung noted that "Jeong Je-du's explanation of li (理) divided into three components in this article was not intended to emphasize jinche (zhenti 真體 substance of truth), and Jeong Je-du was not meant to emphasize the true nature of li. Furthermore, the seong-jeong (xing-qing 性情) relationship in Zhuzixue, in which jujaeseong (zhuzeixing 主宰性 dominant nature) is lacking, is different from Jeong Je-du's concept of cheyong. In addition, jinli and saengli are

not fundamentally different, nor is ki (qi 氣) excluded from the concept of jinli” (Learning theory in the developmental process of Yangmyeonghak in the 16th/17th century, PhD thesis, Sungkyunkwan University, 2010).

In order to determine the veracity of the frame proposed by Kim Gyo-sil that saengli (shengli 生理 principle of life) is above jinli (zhenli 真理 principles of truth) despite their oneness, it is necessary to thoroughly examine Jeong Je-du’s own statements.

Let us first examine saengli. By connecting saengli with changgwang-bangja (猖狂放恣 imprudence and insolence) and positioning jinli on top of it, desire-related saengli is dealt with as a layer subordinate to jinli. To find out if this setting stands to reason, it is necessary to analyze saengsin-myeonggeun (shenshen-minggen 生身命根, the origin of life that engenders body), by which saengli is explained. Saengsin-myeonggeun consists of “substance of nature” (性之質) and “virtue of nature” (性之德). That is, spirit and vital energy are combined to form a living being that is regulated by saengli. With a living being consisting of spirit and matter, saengli is the principle governing both realms, and saengsin-myeonggeun (生身命根) is the mechanism by which saengli is embodied in each entity. Since each human being has saengsin-myeonggeun, a biologically healthy state can be maintained by safeguarding saengli and grow into a spiritually outstanding person. To put it in a nutshell, saengli is not human desire but principle of life.

Next, let us examine jinli. The sentence “生理之中，擇其真理，是乃可以爲理矣” (If jinli is selected from amid saengli, jinli is the principle of principles) is the prime rationale for setting jinli as superordinate to saengli. Seo Gang-hwie also presents this sentence as the rationale for his claim. How can this sentence be interpreted? Fortunately, the *Hagok anthology* (Vol. 9, Joneon [middle part]) contains a passage that provides a clue to its interpretation: “生理之體，本謂此爾。雖然又其一箇活潑生理全體生生者，卽必有真實之理，[體。] 無極之極，而於穆、沖漠、至純、至一

之體焉者，乃其爲理之真體也。 [是乃所謂道者也命者也。] 人心之神，一箇活體生理，全體惻怛者，是必有其真誠惻怛、純粹至善，而至微、至靜、至一之體焉者，是乃其爲性之本體也。 [就其中本體有如是者，自然本如是。是正所謂性者也道者也，聖人惟是而已。]” (*Hagok Anthology*, Vol. 9, Joneon [middle part])

In this quote, two sentences, “The principle of truth (眞實之理) is in the substance of saengli (生理之體), which is the truth of principle (理之眞體)” and “A true sincerity and compassion (眞誠惻怛) is in the spirit of human mind (人心之神), which is the bonche of nature (性之本體),” have a very similar conceptual structure to the foundation for the jinli-related arguments “生理之中，擇其眞理，是乃可以爲理矣。” A close look at the quote, however, reveals that no distinction is made between the substance of saengli and the truth of principle and between the spirit of human mind and bonche of nature. This being so, the phrase “生理之中，擇其眞理” involves no ground for judging that there is jinli that has a separate existence beyond saengli. While the utility and intention of adopting the frame positioning jinli atop saengli are fully understandable, the accusation of 矯枉之過 is hardly deniable.

4. Evaluation and Outlook

The steady quantitative increase in research in Yangming studies in Korea in recent years (8 papers in 2014, 12 in 2015, 15 in 2016, 16 in 2017, 19 in 2018, and 18 in 2019) took a downturn in 2020 with 13 papers. We will have to wait and see in 2021 whether this downturn will be short-lived or whether it will become a trend. This decrease concerns not only Korean Yangmyeonghak but also Chinese Yangmingxue.

With the number of papers on Yangming studies in Korea published in major academic journals within one year maintained at a sizable level, the

share of Yangmyeonghak (Hagokhak line) in the entire history of Joseon Confucianism is far from being insignificant. In 2020, despite the number of papers maintained at an expected level, no ground-breaking work was published.

As has repeatedly been pointed out, in order to revitalize the studies on Joseon Yangmyeonghak in the future, it will be necessary to expand the arena of discussion by discovering new Yangming scholars and exploring new topics. The biggest obstacle to reaching this goal is the limitations in the literature. Researchers will have to keep up their efforts to move forward in this respect.