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## Introduction

Confucianism is commonly understood as a universal philosophy. When Confucius transvaluated *ren* (仁) from manliness into the inner virtue that makes a person humane or benevolent and elevated it as the moral virtue par excellence that encompasses the key attributes of all other virtues, he clearly presented Confucian self-cultivation as an ethical program that is available to all human beings.[1] Despite their contrasting accounts of human nature, Mencius and Xunzi, the two most important classical Confucian masters after the demise of Confucius, further articulated the Confucian ethic of moral self-cultivation under the guiding assumption that *anyone* who has successfully undergone the arduous process of moral development can become a sage, the paragon of immaculate moral character. Mencius in particular advanced the idea, which must have been perceived as quite radical by his contemporaries, that all human beings are originally good in the sense that they are born with the "sprouts" (*duan* 端) of cardinal moral virtues – such as *ren*, *yi* (義, righteousness), *li** (禮, ritual propriety), and *zhi* (智, wisdom or, more accurately, the ability to tell right from wrong) – which incline one to become good.[2] Most tellingly, Mencius called human nature "Heaven-decreed,"[3] where Heaven (*tian* 天) was understood by the ancient Chinese as the divine repository of goodness, thereby making it possible that *anyone* dedicated to the Way could carry out the moral mission to make society better and government humane. Therefore, as far as pre-Qin classical Confucianism is concerned, it would not be far-fetched to say that Confucianism aspires to the universal ethics of moral self-cultivation.

What is surprising is that there is little information about how this otherwise universal philosophy was understood, evaluated, or practiced by women, not only during the time of Confucius and his disciples but also after Confucianism became the state ideology and the dominant intellectual tradition throughout the subsequent imperial periods. As H. G. Creel aptly calls him, Confucius might have been one of the first "private teachers" in China who accepted *anyone* as his student as long as the prospect showed him due respect and was eager to learn, regardless of his social and economic

[1] For the pre-Confucian meaning of *ren* as "manliness," see E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 15. On *ren* as the Confucian moral virtue par excellence, see Wing-tsit Chan, "The Evolution of the Confucian Concept of *Jen*," *Philosophy East and West* 4:4 (1955), pp. 295–319; Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1985), pp. 75–85.

[2] *Mencius* 2A6. Throughout this Element, I have consulted *Mencius*, trans. D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin, 1970) for the text of the *Mencius*.

[3] *Mencius* 7A1; 7B24.

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background.[4] Of his many followers, however, not a single woman is known to have been his student, although there seems to be no textual evidence to suggest that Confucius believed women were incapable of becoming virtuous.[5] None of the interlocutors of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, who (directly or indirectly) helped these progenitors of the Confucian tradition to develop and refine their philosophical ideas, were women. No woman is reported to have made a notable contribution to the rise and subsequent development of Confucianism as a philosophical tradition. In fact, no classical Confucians explicitly criticized the prevailing social conventions that only men participated in public debates and decision-making processes and held public positions. Their admiration of a few extraordinary women of antiquity notwithstanding, none of the classical Confucians seem to have considered women as equal members of the ritual and philosophical communities they created.[6]

The rise of a new mode of Confucianism during the Song dynasty (960–1276) and its predominance as the state ideology and the intellectual trend during the Ming period (1368–1644) changed the political and philosophical landscape of China dramatically. The Song–Ming transformation of Confucianism into so-called Neo-Confucianism, however, which enunciated the Mencian account of good human nature in terms of the universal moral principle called *li* (理), thereby reinforcing the universalist and, arguably, egalitarian dimension of Confucianism, did not bring much change for women. No woman was given an opportunity to be part of the government otherwise undergirded by one of the most meritocratic selection mechanisms in human history,[7] and ritual norms and social conventions continued to prohibit women from presenting their own philosophical reflections on Confucian ethics, politics, and social practices to

[4] H. G. Creel, *Confucius and the Chinese Way* (New York: Harper & Row, 1949), p. 29. See also *Analects* 7.7 and 7.8. Throughout this Element, the English translations of the *Analects of Confucius* are adapted, unless noted otherwise, from *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin, 1979).

[5] Some critics contend that Confucius was a sexist based on the following statement: “Women and servants are particularly hard to manage; if you are too familiar with them, they grow insolent, but if you are too distant they grow resentful” (*Analects* 17.25). Elsewhere in the *Analects*, however, Confucius clearly acknowledges the talent of Tai Ren (太任), the wife of the founder of the Zhou dynasty, King Wen, as vital to the success of the new dynasty (*Analects* 8.20). For careful philological refutations of the charge of Confucius as a sexist, see Paul R. Goldin, “The View of Women in Early Confucianism” and Lisa Raphals, “Gendered Virtue Reconsidered: Notes from the Warring States and Han,” both in *The Sage and the Second Sex*, ed. Chenyang Li (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), pp. 139–143 and pp. 225–226, respectively.

[6] On ritual and philosophical communities created by early Confucians (Confucius, in particular), see Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[7] See Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

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broader intellectual communities. Ironically, until the twentieth century when Confucianism became completely displaced from its dominant political and intellectual position, women had been almost completely excluded from the world of philosophy, making it unthinkable to even imagine a female Confucian philosopher. As a result, almost everything we know about Confucianism as a philosophical and ethical tradition is based on works by male Confucian scholars who, informed by the heavily gendered interpretation of the relationship between *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽), neither acknowledged moral equality between men and women nor regarded women as equally capable of philosophical thinking and writing.[8] Even in some exceptional cases in which moral equality between men and women was affirmed and promoted in Confucian terms, it was always done by male Confucian scholars whose iconoclastic views deviated from the mainstream Confucian philosophical tradition including Song–Ming Neo-Confucianism.[9]

In this regard, Korea is not dramatically different from China. Confucianism was introduced to the Korean peninsula as early as the fourth century AD, but Confucianism was mainly employed as a political ideology or the method of statecraft until a group of Neo-Confucian scholars founded the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), replacing the Koryŏ (高麗) dynasty (918–1392) that left moral and spiritual matters to Buddhism, which was the state religion. As ardent followers of Song Neo-Confucians, especially the Cheng Brothers (Cheng Hao [程顥, 1032–85] and Cheng Yi [程頤, 1033–1107]) and Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200), Korean Neo-Confucians struggled to overcome the dualism between Confucian statecraft and Buddhist soulcraft that had characterized the Koryŏ system by embarking on a series of reforms; these culminated in the founding of a new dynasty firmly predicated on a Neo-Confucian moral vision and philosophical doctrine.[10] The defining characteristic of the Chosŏn dynasty, as a Neo-Confucian state, was the rule by scholar-bureaucrats immersed in Confucian classics – the so-called Four Books (*sishu* 四書), in particular, which were canonized by Zhu Xi as essential Neo-Confucian texts. For several centuries that followed, Korean Neo-Confucians transformed both

[8] It is debatable whether the *yin–yang* theory is androcentric in nature. But it is generally agreed that Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, 179–104 BC), one of the most important Confucian philosophers during the early Han period, (re)formulated the relation between *yin* and *yang* in heavily gendered terms. See Robin R. Wang, “Dong Zhongshu’s Transformation of ‘*Yin-Yang*’ Theory and Contesting of Gender Identity,” *Philosophy East and West* 55:2 (2005), pp. 209–231.

[9] See, for instance, Pauline C. Lee, “Li Zhi and John Stuart Mill: A Confucian Feminist Critique of Liberal Feminism,” in *The Sage and the Second Sex*, ed. Li, pp. 113–132.

[10] Kim Yŏng-su (김영수), *Kŏn’gugŭi chŏngch’i: Yŏmal sŏnch’o, hyŏngmyŏnggwa munmyŏng chŏnhwan* (건국의 정치: 여말선초, 혁명과 문명전환) [*The Politics of Founding: Revolution and the Transition of Civilization during the Late Koryŏ and Early Chosŏn Periods*] (Seoul: Ihaksa, 2006).

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Chosŏn's state apparatuses and, albeit more slowly, the entire society according to Neo-Confucian philosophical doctrines and ritual theories.[11] By the late seventeenth century, virtually all Koreans belonging to the *yangban* aristocratic class saw themselves as faithful followers of Zhu Xi and any deviation from his Neo-Confucian philosophical doctrines and ritual theories brought the condemnation of the "despoilers of the Way," which signaled the social death of the scholar in question. At worst, it further resulted in the end of the person's life and the discontinuation of his family's lineage.[12]

Not surprisingly, no women were officially involved in the creation and subsequent Neo-Confucian transformation of Chosŏn as Confucian scholars and scholar-officials. Nor were women given the opportunity to receive formal education based on Neo-Confucian classics, let alone to be part of the government by taking (and passing) the civil examination, despite the new state's aspiration to create a truly meritocratic society. As Neo-Confucian social norms became deeply entrenched in every nook and cranny of Korean society, most clearly evidenced in the patrilineal restructuring of the Korean family system,[13] various social and economic entitlements that women had previously enjoyed more or less equally with men were abolished, including the right to inherit the family estate. As a result, women were subject to a rigid patrilineal order in which they existed not so much as free moral agents, but rather as daughters, wives, or mothers, completely severed from the so-called "outer domain" (*wai* 外) or the public space, where they could interact with others through philosophical writings and ritual (and other social) activities and become involved in public affairs by virtue of the intellectual and moral qualities attained through Confucian education and moral self-cultivation. As prescribed by Neo-Confucian ritual norms, in the second half of the Chosŏn dynasty elite Korean women were strictly confined to "the inner chambers" (*nei* 內) within the family. In the inner chambers, most elite women received a limited form of Confucian education specifically tailored for women, mostly based on the texts written by male Confucians in vernacular Korean, whose primary purpose was to help inculcate "female virtues" (k. *yŏdŏk* 女德) or "wifely virtues"

[11] Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of State and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992).

[12] See Martina Deuchler, "Despoilers of the Way – Insulters of the Sages: Controversies over the Classics in Seventeenth-Century Korea," in *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, eds. JaHyun K. Haboush and Martina Deuchler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), pp. 91–133.

[13] SoonGu Lee (이순구), "Chosŏnsidae kajok chedoŭi pyŏnhwawa yŏsŏng (조선시대 가족제도의 변화와 여성) [The Change of the Family Structure and Women during the Chosŏn Period]," *Yŏsŏng kojŏn munhak yŏn'gu* 10 (2005), pp. 119–142.

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(k. *pudŏk* 婦德) such as submissiveness (*shun* 順), female chastity (*zhen* 貞), and widow suicide (*lie* 烈).[14]

This, however, does not mean that elite women in premodern China and Korea exercised no moral agency at all or took no part in intellectual, artistic, and social activities that helped expand their moral horizons, enlarge their social perspectives, or redefine their selfhood and social identities. As Dorothy Ko powerfully shows, elite Chinese women in seventeenth-century Jiangnan created a distinctive women's culture by forming various literary communities through their poetry, letters, dramas, and literary commentaries. Challenging the conventional image of Chinese women as helpless victims of an oppressive patriarchal social order, Ko calls for a more nuanced understanding of women in premodern China, neither as victims nor free autonomous agents, but as coparticipants of "new womanhood" enabled by wider educational opportunities for women in the most affluent Chinese region at the time and their emergence as writers.[15] While Ko investigates the fascinating rise of new womanhood in Jiangnan China through the formation of a series of literary communities largely outside the mainstream Confucian social order, Patricia Ebrey reconstructs women's social agency in their patriarchal Confucian context, giving special attention to the "opportunities" arising from Song China's otherwise rigidly gendered marriage system and the "choices" women made to shape their own lives; they thus enjoyed considerable autonomy.[16]

Although elite Korean women did not seem to have active interactions among themselves by forming literary communities of the sort that emerged in seventeenth-century Jiangnan China, they, too, though largely confined to inner chambers, engaged in intellectual activities, producing various sorts of literary work such as poetry and literary commentaries.[17] Even the *yangban* ladies who were deeply immersed in Confucian culture did not forfeit their moral agency wholesale. Nor did they become helplessly subject to male domination. Quite the contrary, during the second half of the Chosŏn dynasty many elite Korean women aspired to moral self-cultivation and believed that they could attain sagehood by earnestly fulfilling their female virtues. For example, Lady Chang

[14] Martina Deuchler captures the spread of female virtues throughout the Chosŏn dynasty in terms of "indoctrination." See her "Propagating Female Virtues in Chosŏn Korea," in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premondern China, Korea, and Japan*, eds. Dorothy Ko, JaHyun K. Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 142–169.

[15] Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[16] Patricia B. Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[17] See Yi Hye-sun (이혜순), *Chosŏncho hugi yŏsŏng chisŏngsa* (조선조 후기 여성 지성사) [*The History of Women Intellectuals in Late Chosŏn*] (Seoul: Ihwa yŏja taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2007).

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of Andong (1598–1680), a member of the *yangban* aristocratic class who is best known for her commitment and rigorous practice of Confucian rituals, famously said, "[I]f the action of the sage [consists in] a daily and ordinary morality, it could be a worry that people do not learn the way of sages. If one truly learns of the way of the sages, what difficulty could there be?"[18] Allegedly, Lady Chang immersed herself in the activities pertaining to good motherhood and good wifehood (or daughter-in-law-hood) – namely, the education of children as Confucian gentlemen (*junzi* 君子) and gentlewomen (*nujunji* 女君子) on the one hand, and ancestral rites and reception of guests on the other, the two most important ritual duties for a *yangban* woman. Around two centuries later, Kang Chŏngildang (姜靜一堂, 1772–1832) expressed her unswerving commitment to the ideal of Confucian gentlewoman (and sagehood) in the following poem:

> The way of the sages is like a great road,
> People from past to present have traveled it.
> Learning has no special way to achieve,
> One must explore and search out what is on high.
> The lessons and guidance offered in written records,
> Must be practiced as if before one's eyes.
> Be diligent! Drive straight ahead!
> And together we can roam exquisitely in the realm of the Way![19]
>
> (聖道如大路,古今之所由. 學問非別致,向上須探求. 卷中指南術, 歷歷在前脩. 勉哉駕直轡, 道域偕優遊.)

As such, we have two different approaches to women's moral agency. The historical studies by Ko and Ebrey approach the question of women's moral agency in the premodern Chinese context from a sociological and anthropological perspective, with a view to understanding the new mode of womanhood emerging from women's participation in literary activities and their formation

[18] SoonGu Lee, "The Exemplar Wife: The Life of Lady Chang of Andong in Historical Context," in *Women and Confucianism in Chosŏn Korea: New Perspectives*, eds. Youngmin Kim and Michael J. Pettid (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), p. 32. See also Deuchler, "Propagating Female Virtues in Chosŏn Korea," p. 149 for a similar expression by another elite Korean woman.

[19] Kang Chŏngildang (강정일당), *Chŏnildang yugo* 6a (translation assisted by Philip J. Ivanhoe). The page number refers to the digital page of the original classical Chinese text of the *Chŏngildang yugo* (靜一堂遺稿) [*The Bequeathed Writings of Kang Chŏngildang*] available from the Korean Classics database, https://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=MO#/dir/node?dataId=ITKC_MO_1163A_0020_010. For Kang Chŏngildang's idea of Neo-Confucian moral agency and female sagehood, see Sungmoon Kim, "From Wife to Moral Teacher: Kang Chŏngildang on Neo-Confucian Self-Cultivation," *Asian Philosophy* 24:1 (2014), pp. 28–47; and Yi Hye-sun (이혜순), "Kang chŏnildangŭi ye tamnon (강정일당의 예 담론) [Kang Chŏngidang's Discourse of Rituals]," *Ŏmun yŏn'gu* 33 (2005), pp. 135–159.

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of literary communities or to identifying the culture-informed "choices" and "opportunities" available to women as social actors. Still, this *external* approach does not critically address how women reflected upon their social existence as prescribed by (Neo-)Confucianism – as daughters, as daughters-in-law, as wives, or as mothers – in reference to the prevailing philosophical concepts and theories of the time. Women's Confucian-prescribed social identities may be bracketed when they venture (momentarily) into the alternative outer world where they could put on a new mantle of womanhood, but when they come back to their inner chambers they are still held by their existing Confucian identities, about which Ko has little to say. Likewise, the fact that women were able to meaningfully control their lives under the Confucian ritual order does not tell us much about how *they* understood moral agency and self-realization in their given social and intellectual context.

In marked contrast, the cases of Lady Chang and Chŏngildang provide an important insight into the inner world of Confucian women, how they understood their own social existence, their ethical life and moral agency, and the intellectual and political worlds in which they found themselves through the philosophical concepts and theories available to them. This is not to argue that examining elite women's positive reappropriation of Confucian moral discourse is the only appropriate way to uncover their moral agency. The point is that an *internal* approach to Confucian women's moral agency cannot be dismissed in favor of an external approach, under the presumption that an internal approach only reveals the social force of dominant Confucian norms in indoctrinating women or that the Confucian moral agency they exercised or the ideal of moral perfection to which they aspired as members of Confucian society was, at best, an expression of their false consciousness. What is needed is a study that investigates Confucian women's self-understanding and their philosophical reflections on themselves, paying full attention to the intellectual, social, and political world that surrounded them. Making a critical distinction between passive indoctrination and constitutive internalization of Confucian values,[20] this alternative approach helps us understand what the universal ethics of Confucian moral self-cultivation meant to women themselves and how it was reinterpreted and reappropriated by those who endeavored to attain sagehood as women. The problem is that there are few (extant) writings by Confucian women that can help us understand their philosophical minds.

This Element aims to embark upon an intellectual journey that has long been considered impossible in the Confucian tradition: to investigate the

[20] See also Heisook Kim, "Toward Critical Confucianism: Woman as a Method," *Han'guk yŏsŏng ch'ŏrak* 26 (2016), pp. 131–152.

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philosophical thought of a female Confucian philosopher and the contemporary debate on its feminist nature. The philosopher in question is known by her pen name Yunjidang whose family name was Im.[21] In many respects, Im Yunjidang (任允摯堂, 1721–93) was an extraordinary person. First, she was the only female Confucian philosopher throughout the Chosŏn dynasty whose philosophical essays and commentaries on Confucian classics are preserved in their original form.[22] Second, and more importantly, she critically reflected upon some of the key philosophical questions of the time from her unique perspective as a woman. Chŏngildang was one of the later female Korean Confucians who would be profoundly inspired by Yunjidang's bold claim that there should be no difference between men and women in terms of the Heaven-given ability to become a sage.[23] The intellectual lineage that Chŏngildang established between Yunjidang and herself as female Neo-Confucians is unprecedented and it is something that, to my knowledge, had never happened before in China or other Confucian East Asian societies.[24]

This Element consists of three main sections. Section 1 introduces Im Yunjidang's life and the political and intellectual worlds in which she found herself. I pay special attention to the Horak debate, one of the major philosophical debates among Korean Neo-Confucians during the Chosŏn dynasty, and show how Yunjidang's philosophical journey was motivated by some of the key questions raised in this debate. Then, in Section 2, I examine Yunjidang's philosophical thought with a special focus, first, on her metaphysical theory of *li* (理, principle) and *qi* (氣, vital force or, when applied to human beings, psychophysical stuff); second, on her account of human nature (*xing* 性) and heart–mind (*xin* 心); and finally, on her vision of moral equality between men

[21] Like most Korean women in the premodern period, Yunjidang's given name is unknown, even though she was a member of the *yangban* aristocratic class.

[22] It is reported that Chŏngildang, too, produced voluminous philosophical writings and commentaries, but most of these were lost due to fire and frequent relocation caused by poverty.

[23] It is important to note, though, that Yunjidang was not the first Neo-Confucian to argue that men and women are morally equal in terms of their Heaven-endowed nature and potential for moral development. Most notably, Yi Sangjŏng (李象靖, 1711–81), one of the (male) leading Neo-Confucian scholars of the T'oegye School, claimed: "Moral principles are rooted in a person's heart; whether they are fully or poorly developed does not depend on being high or low in status, or male or female. Thus, without instruction of books and practice, or without the guidance of teachers and friends, it is not possible to develop innate nature. Loyalty, filiality, righteousness, and chastity can therefore be found in abundance in men, but are rarely heard [to be] in women; they are abundant in the elite, but rarely found in the lower classes. It is not that the [H]eaven-bestowed talents are different. It is alone the circumstances that make them so" (quoted in Deuchler, "Propagating Female Virtues in Chosŏn Korea," p. 148).

[24] See Pak Hyŏn-suk (박현숙), "Kang chŏngildang: Sŏngnihakchŏk namnyŏ p'yŏngdŭngjuŭija (강정일당: 성리학적 남녀평등주의자) [Kang Chŏngildang: A Neo-Confucian Feminist]," *Yŏsŏng munhak yŏn'gu* 11 (2004), pp. 57–79.

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and women and the possibility of female sagehood.[25] Finally, in Section 3, I turn to the contemporary debate on Yunjidang: whether she can be understood as a feminist thinker. After critically examining both sides of the debate – the Enthusiasts, on one side, and the Skeptics, on the other, as I call them – I argue that Yunjidang's progressive philosophical thought can be best captured in terms of *Confucian feminism*. In making this argument, I propose what I call a "stage approach" to feminism that is sensitive to the cultural context in which women are situated. This Element concludes by noting some tension between Yunjidang's political conservatism and her progressive feminist philosophy.

## 1 Yunjidang: The Person and Her World

### 1.1 The Person

Yunjidang was born into a renowned aristocratic family in 1721.[26] Her great-grandfather was Im Ŭi-paek (任義伯, 1605–67) who served in various important governmental posts during the reigns of King Hyojong (r. 1649–59) and King Hyŏnjong (r. 1659–74), including chief royal secretary, vice-minister of the Bureau of Punishments, and governor of the P'yŏng'an province. He studied Neo-Confucianism under the tutelage of Kim Chang-saeng (金長生, 1548–1631), a former student of Yulgok[27] and one of the most distinguished

[25] There is an ongoing debate among contemporary scholars regarding the interpretation of *li* whose literal meaning is (close to) "pattern"– between "principle" and "coherence." Throughout this Element, I generally leave *li*, along with *qi*, untranslated, but where it is translated, I adopt "principle." Elsewhere, I revisited the contemporary debate on *li* in light of the philosophical and political debates between two Korean Neo-Confucians in the wake of the founding of the Chosŏn dynasty. See Sungmoon Kim, "Between Coherence and Principle: *Li* 理 and the Politics of Neo-Confucianism in Late Koryŏ Korea," *Philosophy East and West* 71:2 (2021), pp. 369–392.

[26] For a helpful survey on Yunjidang's life and philosophy, see Kim Kyŏng-mi (김경미), *Im yunjidang p'yŏngjŏn* (임윤지당 평전) [*A Critical Biography of Im Yunjidang*] (Seoul: Han'gyŏrye ch'ulp'an, 2019) and Yi Yŏng-ch'un (이영춘), *Im Yunjidang: Kugyŏk yunjidang yugo* (임윤지당: 국역 윤지당유고) [*Im Yunjidang: A Korean Translation of the Bequeathed Writings of Im Yunjidang*] (Seoul: Hyean, 1998), pp. 13–119. My discussion of Yunjidang's life is deeply indebted to Yi Yŏng-ch'un's seminal study on Yunjidang.

[27] Yulgok refers to Yi I (李珥, 1536–84), one of the two most prominent Korean Neo-Confucians along with Yi Hwang (李滉, 1502–71), also known as T'oegye. Though both T'oegye and Yulgok saw themselves as devoted followers of Zhu Xi, they interpreted Zhu Xi's metaphysics of *li* and *qi* differently, giving rise to two dominant Neo-Confucian scholarly (and political) communities. While T'oegye (and his followers) argued for coissuance of *li* and *qi* (k. *igihobal* 理氣互發), premised on the accounts of *li* and *qi* as two separate entities, Yulgok (and his followers) subscribed to the view that while *qi* issues itself, *li* merely rides on it, which supports the inseparability of *li* and *qi* (k. *kibal isŭng ilto* 氣發理乘一途). After they first seized power in the early seventeenth century, members of the Yulgok school, despite some political fluctuations, maintained both political and intellectual hegemony until the late nineteenth century. On the seminal debate between T'oegye and Yulgok on *li* and *qi*, see Edward Y. J. Chung, *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi T'oegye and Yi Yulgok: A Reappraisal of the "Four-Seven Thesis" and Its Practical Implications for Self-Cultivation* (Albany: State University of New York Press,

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Neo-Confucian scholars during the mid Chosŏn period, best known for his original studies on (Neo-)Confucian ritualism. As a member of the Yulgok school, Im Ŭi-paek was also closely acquainted with other leading Neo-Confucians of the time such as Song Siyŏl (宋時烈, 1607–89), arguably the most influential Korean Neo-Confucian of the seventeenth century, and Song Chun-kil (宋浚吉, 1606–72), both leaders of the Yulgok school at the time. Yunjidang's father and grandfather died before passing the civil examination but her eldest brother Im Myŏngju (任命周, 1705–57) held, among other positions, that of inspector at the Office of the Inspector-General, one of the governmental posts most desired by young scholar-bureaucrats as it was commonly believed to be the highway to bureaucratic success. Unfortunately, Im Myŏngju was banished from the government because of his bold criticism of King Yŏngjo (r. 1724–76) and this, in part, caused his untimely death. As Yi Hye-sun powerfully shows, some of Yunjidang's political commentaries seem to have been inspired by her brother's political tribulations and early death.[28]

Of Yunjidang's four other male siblings, two died young, but the remaining two became prominent Neo-Confucian scholars who made significant philosophical contributions to Neo-Confucian metaphysics. Im Sŏngju (任聖周, 1711–88), Yunjidang's second eldest brother, had the biggest influence on her as far as her Neo-Confucian scholarship is concerned. Though Im Sŏngju did not actively pursue an illustrious bureaucratic career, he earned a nationwide reputation as one of the most original thinkers in the history of Korean Neo-Confucianism by developing the monistic theory of *qi* metaphysics in which the importance of *li*, commonly understood in Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian philosophy as constituting the original nature of human beings and the myriad things in the world, is significantly reduced. Im Sŏngju's philosophy of *qi* was inherited and further developed by his younger brother Im Chŏngju (任靖周, 1727–96; Yunjidang's youngest brother), who like his brother emerged as a prominent Neo-Confucian scholar in the late Chosŏn period. Since Yunjidang's father died when she was only seven-years-old and her eldest brother was employed in the government away from the home, she was educated mainly by Im Sŏngju. He not only taught her basic Confucian ethics and rituals, based on the standard texts for women's education such as the *Xiaoxue* (小學, *The Small Learning*) and the *Lienu zhuan* (列女傳, *The Biographies of the Exemplary Women*), but further introduced her to the world of Neo-Confucian philosophy and classical studies, an extremely rare opportunity for a woman, even for one belonging to

1995); and Hyungchan Kim, *Korean Confucianism: The Philosophy and Politics of T'oegye and Yulgok* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

[28] Yi, *Chosŏncho hugi yŏsŏng chisŏngsa*, pp. 127–133.

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