Selections from *The Extant Writings of Im Yunjidang*

Biographies

*This section contains two biographies written by Im Yunjidang; both concern women who distinguished themselves as morally outstanding.*

*The first biography is about Lady Han, whose husband was in the scholarly lineage of Song Siyeol, one of the most distinguished philosophers of the late Joseon Dynasty; Yunjidang and her brothers regarded him as their intellectual progenitor. Yunjidang makes clear that Lady Han scrupulously fulfilled her familial duties but also developed her intellectual abilities, overcoming the formidable challenges impeding such an education in her time. The biography contains a memorable account of Lady Han gently but decisively instructing her husband about the true aim of learning—moral self-cultivation—and warning him to avoid being tempted to pursue fame and high social status.*

1) Biography of the Wife of Mr. Song (Neungsang)[[1]](#footnote-1)

宋氏 能相 婦傳 b084\_431a

The daughter of Han Gyejin 韓啟震,[[2]](#footnote-2) who was Fourth Inspector (*Jipyeong* 持平) [in the Office of the Inspector-General (*Saheonbu* 司憲府)][[3]](#footnote-3), married Mr. Song (Neungsang). She lost her mother when she was young and showed absolute sincerity in her grief and suffering. When she married [and was preparing to leave for her new home], she happened to be looking through some cases and trunks, and came upon some calligraphy written by her mother; she was immediately overcome with sorrow and cried until the tears soaked the clothes she was wearing.

Once, when her husband’s cousins were describing their highest aspiration to him, they said, “We admire Yulgok’s[[4]](#footnote-4) moral virtue as well as his great fame and high status.” Her husband agreed with what they said, but once all of them had left Han asked her husband, “What did you think of what your cousins said?” Her husband replied, “It was good.” Han quietly smiled and her husband asked, “Why are you smiling?” She replied, “I think about it in the following way. Moral virtue is what made Yulgok the man he was. Had he been poor and lowly and lived in a mean and narrow lane deep in the mountains, would that have diminished his virtue in any way? Though he enjoyed great fame and high status what did this add to his virtue? Now, had your cousins only talked about his moral virtue then they would sincerely admire virtue. But they talked about his great fame and high status together with his virtue; this is not to admire virtue. The true state of their minds is that they admire high status. You think this good, but isn’t this impermissible?” Upon hearing this, her husband deferred to her view. Subsequently, he committed himself to his own moral cultivation with the aim of becoming a true Confucian.

Han served her father and mother-in-law, and completely fulfilled the duties of being a good wife. Her mother-in-law often would personally reel silk from cocoons; her sons’ wives asked her to let them do this for her, but she declined. Thereupon, the wives left; each returning to her room; only Han did not presume to do so, but instead kept the fire going and continued to serve her mother-in-law; agile and alert, reverential and respectful, she never was remiss or negligent. She covered up the difficulty of her labors and wanted to help her mother-in-law with the cooking in order to make things easier. Han not only carried out such duties, she also had great literary talent. Her father believed in the popular practices and ideas of his day and so did not provide her with a formal education. Nevertheless, she often devoted herself to the study of the classics and histories and so gained a comprehensive understanding of their great principles. Unfortunately, her life was destined to be short and she died. Is this not lamentable!

The Encomium says,

[Lady] Han was the wife of Mr. Song;

She was a woman of great virtue and achievement.

She was filial to her parents;

And greatly advanced in understanding.

She led her husband to follow the Way;

And encouraged him in his studies.

The ancients called such a woman a ‘heroic wife.’[[5]](#footnote-5)

Does this not refer to her?

She was not granted a full span of life;

But I never saw her stop short.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Why is one given life? Why is it taken away?

It is difficult to have faith in[[7]](#footnote-7) pattern-principle.

*The second biography is about two women whose exploits were often discussed Yunjidang’s time.[[8]](#footnote-8) The central theme is how this mother and daughter fulfilled their respective obligations of fidelity and filial piety by plotting and carrying out revenge against the man who murdered their husband and father. They further demonstrated their exceptional moral character by turning themselves in after completing their revenge but were pardoned on the basis of their moral excellence. Yunjidang makes a point of saying that their achievement was something “most men would prove incapable of doing.”*

2) The Biography of Two Women: Choe and Hong

崔洪二女傳 b084\_431

[Mother] Choe 崔 and [daughter] Hong 洪 refer to the wife and daughter of a solider named Hong 洪 from the Samga District (*Samga-hyeon* 三嘉縣) [in Gyeongsang Province [慶](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E6%85%B6)[尙](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E5%B0%99)道]. This soldier was killed and these two women wanted to take revenge against the one who had killed him. They said to one another, “The only way in which human beings differ from birds and beasts is in having the virtues of filial piety and chastity. That a wife takes revenge for [the killing of] her husband is [part of] chastity. That a child takes revenge for [the killing of] her father is [part of] filial piety. Now, unfortunately, my husband and your father suffered harm at the hands of another. If we do not take revenge simply because we covet our own lives, then how could we bear to face him in the world below? Moreover, [if we fail to act) how can we take our stand in this world?”

From that moment onward, they held their daggers at their sides and kept their eyes on the family against which they sought to take revenge. After several years had passed, they saw an opportunity [to act] and stabbed them to death. They entered the district [court] and reported what they had done. The Grand Supervisor (*taesu* 太守) listened to their account and the royal court decided the case, pardoning them of the crime of murder and further exempting their family from further liability.

Gentlemen say that what these two women did was resolute, filial, and, moreover, courageous. Most men would prove incapable of doing what they achieved. The *Book of Odes* says, “The members of our family accept their fate and never alter their course ”[[9]](#footnote-9) Does this not apply to the case of these two women?

Discourses

*The Discourse (non 論) is a genre found among the writings of many orthodox neo-Confucians. It usually takes up and discusses some well-known historical figure, often rendering an assessment of his character and actions. Many Discourses employ the literary technique of dialogue to advance their analysis, and this is the case with several of Yunjidang’s Discourses.*

*The first selection concerns a well-known figure, Misaeng Go, mentioned in the* Analects*, who is criticized by Gongja for begging vinegar from a neighbour to give to someone who had asked it of him. Gongja’s original complaint focuses on Misaeng Go’s aim, which turned out to be not helping the person in need but surreptitiously securing the vinegar from a neighbor in order to curry favour with the one who had come to him for help. Yunjidang extends and develops the analysis of this case, considering several additional aspects and hypothetical variations. In the process, she brings to light a number of important moral concerns that while general in nature and related to the problem of moral signalling are particularly salient for relational forms of morality, such as Confucianism.*

1. Discourse On Misaeng Go[[10]](#footnote-10) Begging Vinegar

論微生高乞醢

[Yunjidang said,] “The pattern-principle underlying the creation and transformation of Heaven and Earth is overwhelmingly upright.[[11]](#footnote-11) Human beings receive this upright pattern-principle at birth and it is without anything crooked or corrupt. Any slight corruption they might incur results in the destruction of the pattern-principle received at birth. And so, noble people must be watchful [over their endowment of pattern-principle]![[12]](#footnote-12) They are reverent in order to straighten the inner life and righteous in order to square the outer life[[13]](#footnote-13)—all in order to preserve this upright pattern-principle. “Although the corruption Misaeng Go incurred in begging vinegar from his neighbor in order to curry favor with another is slight, the injury done to [his] uprightness was great.”[[14]](#footnote-14) It is appropriate that he did not escape the censure of the sage [i.e. Gongja]. As for those who are upright, they have or lack certain things and take or give certain things; in all respects, though, they remain attentive to what is right. If they pretend to lack something that they have, if they pretend to have something that they lack, if they should not take something but take it, or if they should not give something but give it—in all such cases they fail to be upright. How could Go be considered upright!”

Someone asked, “There are situations that are difficult to handle. For example, if those close to one have a compelling need of something, rely on one to give it to them, and are sincerely reporting their situation. Since one understands that they are going without and their entreaties grow increasingly strong, what is one to do? From what I infer, Go must have had compelling reasons like this. I doubt whether [giving them what they lack in such circumstances] would injure the genuine and generous Way of the noble person. Isn’t what you say excessive?”

[I] replied, “Be that as it may, as for the way noble people preserve their heart-minds and manage affairs, they are absolutely sincere and trustworthy and do not allow for the slightest compromise. And so, Gongja would not grant An Ro (C. Yan Lu)’s request to sell his carriage in order to buy an outer shell for his son’s coffin.[[15]](#footnote-15) In general, when it is not appropriate to give something and one comprises and gives it this is because one goes against a sincere heart-mind and the upright Way—how could this be so only in the case of An Ro’s self centered [request]? If one “twists one’s intentions in order to follow along with things,”[[16]](#footnote-16) one falls into the category of compromise and a lack of uprightness. Though the noble person is genuine and generous, I have never heard of one following such a way.”

Someone said, “Be that as it may, if someone’s father or brother is ill and they come and report their distress and beg for medicine that one lacks but one’s neighbor has, then should one still not ask their neighbor to give them the medicine out of concern that it would harm one’s uprightness?”

[I] replied, “No it would not. Human life is a weighty matter, more weighty than the repugnance one feels toward begging from one’s neighbor. When there is a weighty matter in play, in response, the repugnance becomes lighter. When Maengja said one should reach out to save one’s drowning sister-in-law and that this is a matter of weighing the alternatives,[[17]](#footnote-17) he offered a good example of this kind of case. On the other hand, vinegar is a trivial thing of no consequence while begging is an action that by nature we are not inclined to do. How can Go alone not feel this way? Nevertheless, Go forced himself to perform an action most do not want to do in order to secure something of no consequence on behalf of another. The heart-mind that motivated his action surely lies in a desire ‘to poach the merit of others in order to curry favor.’[[18]](#footnote-18) This is like stealing something from a person’s home in order to give it to another. What could entail a greater violation of uprightness than this! If you simply consider this one act, you can understand what kind of man he was. And so, this is why the master repudiated him in such a harsh manner.”

“When considering whether to beg something from one’s neighbor, a noble person must decide the matter by weighing what is heavy and light. If one begs [from one’s neighbor] in order to give [to another], there must be something substantial [in play]—then uprightness is found in doing just this. One cannot simply stick to a single, inflexible rule. Nevertheless, to call Go upright, would this not be odd and perverse! On another day, the master said, ‘Human beings are born to be upright. If they lose their uprightness, they will be lucky to escape with their lives.’[[19]](#footnote-19) Those like Misaeng Go would indeed be lucky if they escape with their lives—wouldn’t they?”

*The second Discourse again picks up an idea first raised in the* Analects *but in this case made famous by Jeong I in his essay on the same theme.[[20]](#footnote-20) Gongja commended Anja*, *his favorite disciple, for being able to take joy in learning despite his poverty. Yunjidang explores this theme, claiming that the source of Anja’s joy was the Heaven he discovered within himself. She goes on to explore a number of issues concerning Anja’s joy, presented through the form of a dialogue in this Discourse. Among these are: how he managed to not let his poverty undermine his ability to provide for his parents (for if he failed to provide for them, how could he savor his own joy), how his joy differed from that of Gongja, and whether sagehood and the joy that comes with it are things one can acquire through learning?*

4) Discourse On What Anja Took Joy In

論顔子所樂

Someone asked me, “The Master said Anja was someone who did not allow his joy to be affected [by hardship].[[21]](#footnote-21) What was it that Anja took joy in?”

I replied, “He took joy in heaven. What is heaven? Heaven is pattern-principle. Heaven inherently is within my nature; this is what Anja took joy in. Maengja said, ‘The myriad things all are complete within me. To reflect on myself and find that I am sincere—there is no greater joy than this!’[[22]](#footnote-22) Most people have this joy but lose it. Sages possess this joy as their nature and make full use of it. Students [of the Way] understand this joy and seek for it. Nevertheless, joy comes only after learning; [without learning, one cannot attain such joy]. Among the things that Anja said was, ‘What kind of person was Sun?[[23]](#footnote-23) What kind of person am I? One who exerts oneself [as Sun did] will be like Sun.’[[24]](#footnote-24) The Master also said that [Anja] was the kind of person who, ‘if he came into possession of one good thing, he would clasp it to his breast and not lose it.’[[25]](#footnote-25) This was how earnestly he loved learning. And so, from the fact that he could go ‘for three months without having anything contrary to [the standard of] humaneness [in his heart-mind]’[[26]](#footnote-26) and ‘even when he wanted to give up [learning] he could not’[[27]](#footnote-27) we can understand his joy. He fell short of the joy of sages only ever so slightly. He looked upon the joy of average people as not going beyond concerns about honor and disgrace, gain and loss; why stop at saying [only] that his joy is as different from theirs as heaven is from earth or bugs are from snow-geese?”

[The questioner further] said, “This is so, but the Master said that Anja ‘often was in want.’[[28]](#footnote-28) So how could he have avoided poverty? Ordinary people feel the need to provide for their parents. Could someone as worthy as Anja not worry about not being able to provide for his parents and be content in his own joy?”

I replied, “This is not the case. How could you not have heard about Jeungja who was so poor that though ‘when he straightened his hat, the chin strap would break; when he fastened his collar, his elbows would poke through his jacket’[[29]](#footnote-29) and yet who always provided his parents with wine and meat and worked to nurture his resolve.[[30]](#footnote-30) Though Anja was poor, how do you know that he did not work at nurturing his parents as assiduously as Jeungja worked to strengthen his resolve but instead simply ended up in poverty? Moreover, though he worried about being unable to provide for his parents, what he worried about was [according with] heavenly pattern-principle, and this is to take joy in heaven. How can you call this worrying and how can you suspect that he would allow this to affect his joy? I believe that for Anja being in want was his joy in heaven. How could this be? Because in his joy of heaven he forgot his poverty. And so, he was unaware of his poverty and did not consciously seek to avoid it. When he came to be in want, he regarded his being in want as his joy in heaven; is this not fitting? This is why Gongja profoundly admired and commended him. The joy of Gongja and Anja was equally heavenly, but Gongja ‘could find joy in eating coarse grain, having only water to drink, and using his bended arm for a pillow’[[31]](#footnote-31) while Anja, ‘having but a single bamboo dish of rice, a single ladle of water to drink, and living in a mean and narrow lane did not allow his joy to be affected.’[[32]](#footnote-32) The difference between them concerned [finding joy] in [poverty] versus not allowing [poverty to affect one’s joy], making an effort and not making an effort, maintaining [one’s joy] and transforming [one’s joy]. It is not that there are two different types of joy. Had Anja lived into old age[[33]](#footnote-33) without changing, his joy would have been the same as the sages. How, then, could he have been considered merely a secondary sage! This is why Gongja loved him so profoundly and mourned for him excessively.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

[The questioner further] said, “Sages are born with knowledge;[[35]](#footnote-35) this is not something one can attain through learning. And yet, you say that had Anja lived into old age he would not [merely] be regarded as a secondary sage. If this is so, is sagehood something one can attain through learning? I am confused about this.”

I replied, “‘Sages and I are the same in kind.’[[36]](#footnote-36) Ordinary people and sages all receive the principle-pattern of the Great Ultimate as their nature. It is only because of differences in the degree to which they are ensnared by their endowments of *gi* (C. *qi*)and benighted by their desires for things that there are different levels of understanding and ignorance, worthiness and unworthiness. Nevertheless, in terms of the original nature with which they are endowed, they are all the same. And so, those who have awakened understand that the nature they received [at birth] is the same as that of Yo[[37]](#footnote-37) and Sun and commit themselves to attaining it—like a traveller looking for the way home or someone eating seeking to be full[[38]](#footnote-38)—in order to reach the level of a sage. As for the name ‘sage’ it simply denotes someone who is ‘great and transforms others.’[[39]](#footnote-39) Maengja said, ‘Everyone can become a Yo or a Sun.”[[40]](#footnote-40) If even ordinary people can become a Yo or a Sun how much more possible is this for someone like Anja, who had the ability of a secondary sage? Nevertheless, if you want to become a sage you should first seek for what Anja took joy in. If you want to seek for what Anja took joy in, you should first learn Anja’s love of learning. How can you love learning? By attending to the four prohibitions.[[41]](#footnote-41) [If you want to attend to] the four prohibitions, you should begin by studying broadly and restraining yourself in accordance with the rituals.[[42]](#footnote-42)

*The final example of the Discourse genre is about On Gyo,[[43]](#footnote-43) a minister widely renowned for his loyalty and filial piety. Yunjidang argues he was in fact neither filial nor loyal but rather self-centered and coveted fame. On Gyo has been praised for being so devoted to his lord that when assigned a dangerous mission he immediately broke free from his mother’s desperate attempt to hold him back, “tearing the hem of his garment.” Yunjidang argues that On Gyo acted on orders from someone who was not at the time his lord, and so he could have declined without violating duty. She also argues that it is implausible to believe that On Gyo was the only person qualified to complete this mission. Furthermore, even granting that the mission was essential to the survival of the state and On Gyo was the only one qualified to complete the task, he still should have explained all of this to his mother and sought her blessing instead of brusquely tearing himself from her arms. Had he done so, she likely would have sent him to do his duty, but had she told him to remain, he should have turned down the assignment, for filial piety is the most basic of human relationships and essential for other virtues, such as loyalty.*

2. Discourse on On Gyo (C. Wen Jiao)[[44]](#footnote-44) Tearing the Hem of his Garment [and Departing]

The *Analects* says, “Master Yu (C. You)[[45]](#footnote-45) said, ‘Filial piety and brotherly respect—are they not the roots of humaneness!’”[[46]](#footnote-46) An ancient text also proclaims, “If you seek for loyal ministers, look at the gate of filial sons.”[[47]](#footnote-47) There has never been anyone who proved loyal as a minister who was not filial as a son. On Gyo of the Jin dynasty originally had a reputation for being devoutly filial throughout his county and village. When the Western Jin dynasty collapsed (317 CE), the world was thrown into chaos and confusion, barbarians gathered like clouds on the horizon, and people like Yu Gon (C. Liu Kun),[[48]](#footnote-48) Dan Pilje (C. Duan Pidi),[[49]](#footnote-49) and others swore blood oaths with one another and dispatched representatives and submitted petitions in an attempt to influence the Prince of Nang Ya (C. Lang Ya) [to assume the throne].[[50]](#footnote-50) Yu Gon said to Taejin (i.e. On Gyo)*,* “I am achieving great things in the area north of the Yellow River and want you to carry a petition to [Sama Ye] south of the Yellow River and urge him [to claim the throne].”[[51]](#footnote-51) Taejin accepted this mission and made preparations to depart. As he was about to leave, his mother, Madame Choi (C. Cui), took hold of his lapel, but Taejin pulled away abruptly, tearing the hem of his garment, and departed. His mother’s taking hold of his lapel was the highest expression of a mother’s love for her child. Not considering the moral imperative to save the world in her time, she thought only that he might fall into danger and perish. Her son tore the hem of his garment because he worried that his mother would not let go and he would be unable to successfully complete his work and gain renown throughout the world. Alas! The relationship between parent and child is the first of the Five Relationships, and mutual love between them is Heavenly pattern-principle. Completing one’s work is the basis for gaining fame and benefit, but the desire for success is self-centered. To allow the self-centered [desire] to complete one’s work to harm the greatest affection to be found among the Five Relationships, even someone lacking in humaneness would be unlikely to do such a thing—how much less someone like Taejin, who enjoyed the reputation of being filial? How could he bear to do this?

Oh! For those who serve as ministers, on occasions when they must carry out their lord’s commands in circumstances of danger and chaos, it is right that they are not swayed by personal affection. Nevertheless, they should keep in mind their parents’ anxiousness and distress, remember that they are in their parents’ thoughts, and find it difficult to bow and take leave of them. [Moreover] what Taejin did was not a case of carrying out his lord’s commands; rather, this was the command of Yu Gon. So why didn’t Taejin accede to his mother’s request and arrange for someone else to carry out [this mission]?

Someone said, “Yu Gon had to send Taejin; isn’t this clearly the case? If he had sent someone else and that person had miscarried the affair, then the revival of the Jin could not be assured. This is also the reason Taejin could not refuse the mission.”

Yunjidang replied, “This is not so. There has never been an age with as much overflowing talent as was available in their time. How could there be no one other than Taejin to take up this assignment? Moreover, at the time, Taejin and Emperor Won were not yet established in the relationship of ruler and minister, and so had he acceded to his mother’s request and not gone, what harm would that have done to his loyalty? Oh! When he tore the hem of his garment and left, what did this do to his mother’s heart? The *Book of Odes* says, ‘Oh father!—you gave me life; Oh mother!—you nourished me…The kindness I wish to repay is as limitless as the heavens.’[[52]](#footnote-52) If Taejin was as devoutly filial as was said of him in his time, how could he have endured behaving as he did? This is why I say, when we consider this affair, we know that he was not really sincerely filial; we also know that he was not really loyal to his lord.”

Someone said, “Originally Taejin had the reputation of being fervently loyal and magnanimous because when his state had been destroyed and his lord disgraced and he was overcome with sincere sadness and indignation, he worked together with Yu Gon and others of like mind to establish Emperor Won and plan for the revival of the state. The survival or destruction of the Jin depended on their actions. Though you say that, at the time, Taejin and Emperor Won were not yet established in the relationship of ruler and minister, how, on that day, could any minister of Jin bear to sit idly by and watch as the temples and ancestral altars [of the Jin] were cut off and the territory of the Central Kingdom lost [to barbarians] without thinking of some way to revive the state? It is true that Taejin was unable to realize both perfect loyalty and filial piety; why though do you criticize him so severely?”

Yunjidang replied, “This too is not so. Had his mother been fortunate enough to enjoy a thorough understanding of the situation, as Jin Yeong’s mother[[53]](#footnote-53) was, she would have urged him to be careful but still sent him on his mission. Then, from the very start, he would have been able to realize both loyalty and filial piety. Now, since this was not the case, as a son, he should have assumed a pleasing countenance and pleasant expression, explained [to his mother] in detail the extreme situation the state was in and what duty demanded of him as a minister. He should have waited until he was able to resolve any remaining doubts she might have and insure that she was at ease; then, he should have calmly bowed and taken his leave. In this way, within (i.e. toward his family) he would have realized filial piety to his parents and without (i.e. to his lord) he would have fulfilled his duty to be loyal to the state. What, in the end, are his renowned achievement and outstanding reputation worth, given that he earned them by tearing the hem of his garment, stabbing [the heart of his mother’s] affection, and being able to endure forsaking his obligation to be a filial son? Maengja said, ‘If the blind man (i.e. Emperor Sun’s father) had killed someone, Sun would have fled secretly carrying his father on his back and settled by the shore of the sea, delighting in his life and forgetting all about the empire.’[[54]](#footnote-54) If even the empire can be regarded [so lightly] how much easier should this be when it is merely self-centered achievement and advantage? Abandoning one’s parents and stabbing [the heart of] their affection with an eye toward realizing mundane ends—is this really the way a filial son behaves? Can one who behaves this way avoid offending against the great [Emperor] Sun? If, as someone said, there was no one else who could have been sent on this mission, Taejin was the one person needed to insure the revival of the Jin dynasty, he had no prospect of resolving his mother’s doubts, he felt the difficulty of fulfilling both the duties of loyalty and filial piety, and [under these circumstances] he acted as he did, then Taejin’s behavior might be forgiven. Now, since this was not the case, and still he behaved as he did, we must wonder how a son could bear to do such a thing and how it could be motivated by anything other than a self-centered desire for gain.

Oh! The supreme tender feelings of a loving mother will always focus on her son’s safety in times of chaos; it is only fitting that such feelings will go to any extreme. If her son, after tearing the hem of his garment and departing, should die amidst the chaos and she is unable to see him again, what pain shall this loving mother feel to the end of her days! Even if he does not die while abroad, if when he returns his aged mother, ill with anxiety and worry, already has passed away, even if Taejin then were to weep till he is old and toothless, what good would it do? Though he mourns until he is withered and wasted, how could this be enough to atone for his behavior? One who is filial is accommodating and compliant. Can one really call Taejin’s tearing the hem of his garment and departing accommodating and compliant? Alas! Someone like Taejin is indeed lucky that the learned have not condemned him. I cannot believe he really had the reputation for being devoutly filial in his time.

Alas! Filial piety is the source of the hundred good types of behavior. Since he lost the original source, even if he fully developed all the worthy capabilities under heaven, he still would not be worth talking about. Even if one completely exhausts oneself in working ardently for the imperial family, still, if one is not filial to one’s parents, one cannot really be loyal to one’s lord. What would such efforts amount to? If, when his mother took hold of his lapel, Taejin had immediately acceded to her will, politely declined Yu Gon’s request, and to the end of his life taken care of her in a simple thatched hut, thereby being the perfection of a filial son, then, though he might not have been famous in his own time, how could he not have enjoyed glory for ten thousand generations thereafter? In the past, Jegal Gongmyeong (C. Zhuge Kongming)[[55]](#footnote-55) lived at the end of the Han dynasty. He ploughed his own fields and did not seek to become famous. Later on, in response to three personal visits by Emperor Soyeol (C. Zhaolie),[[56]](#footnote-56) he subsequently served him and succeeded in implementing his ‘three-legged tripod’ strategy,[[57]](#footnote-57) which led to his immortal reputation. And so, if one cultivates virtue in oneself, then one’s reputation naturally will become outstanding. If one lacks virtue and first thinks about establishing a name for oneself, though one might achieve some renown in a given age, one will not avoid being held up as the subject of critical discussions for ten thousand generations. Dong Jungseo (C. Dong Zhongshu)[[58]](#footnote-58) said, ‘Humane people correct their principles and do not plot to achieve gain; they make clear the Way and do not calculate their personal achievement.’[[59]](#footnote-59) We can say that people like Taejin turn their back on the proper standard of the Way and put working for gain as their highest priority. They themselves ruin the source of the hundred good types of behavior; is this not why they cannot avoid the censure of cultivated people?”

Extant Writings of Gang Jeongildang

Poems:

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| 1. Beginning to Study (1799)  I began to study at the age of thirty,  Not knowing which direction to turn.  Even today, I must be diligent,  Aspiring to be like the ancients. | 2. Human Nature is Good  Originally, human nature is wholly good,  Developing it fully, one becomes a sage.  To desire humaneness, humaneness lies therein,[[60]](#footnote-60)  Make pattern-principle clear and oneself sincere. |

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| --- | --- |
| 3. For my Husband  Ashamed of my lack of talent and Virtue,  When young, I studied needlework.  Authentic work requires exerting oneself,  Without worrying about clothes and food.[[61]](#footnote-61) | 4. Encouraging the Youth  You must be diligent in your studies,  Do not squander the vitality of youth.  How can you be satisfied with just memorization and recitation?[[62]](#footnote-62)  You should aspire to be a sage or worthy! |

Brief personal notes :

1. This morning, an old woman arrived offering a peck of rice and a catty of meat. I asked her the reason and she replied, “When I was travelling outside the city, I was accosted by vagabonds. Your husband happened to be passing by and in tears I appealed[[63]](#footnote-63) for his help [standing] at the foot of his horse. He harshly upbraided the vagabonds and, subsequently, I was able to avoid them. I was profoundly moved by his kindness, and so, I offer this to show my sincerity.”

When [the old woman came to our house,] I heard you entertaining visitors in the men’s quarters and so did not dare to disturb you; on my own, I decided to return what she had offered. The old woman firmly and resolutely would not accept this, and so I told her, “My husband already has fasted for seven days and declined a gift of one thousand gold coins. How can I possibly accept what you bring?” The old woman then sighed, picked up her rice and meat, and left.

Though she came with the wholehearted intention to offer a gift, had I accepted it, I would have been suspected of selling your favor, and so I handled it in this way. I don’t know what you think about this.

2. Once, I happened to hear you reprimand someone; you sounded extremely angry. This is not the middle way. If you seek to correct this person in this way, without first being correct yourself, how can this be regarded as acceptable? I hope that you will think about this.

3. The *Book of Changes* says, “Be moderate in eating and drinking.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Wine is a crude aspect of eating and drinking. I hope you will be moderate in your drinking and careful in regard to your virtue. If you happen to reprimand someone harshly, on some occasion, might you come close to overstepping the mean in your reprimand? A gentleman must take special care to apply himself in regard to his voice, expression, and speech. The*Book of Odes* says, “The mild and respectful man. He possesses the foundation of Virtue.”[[65]](#footnote-65) When you reprimand others, I dare to respectfully counsel you to keep a bit more mild and harmonious temperament.

4. If I have real Virtue, even if people do not know this, how does it harm [my Virtue]? If I lack real Virtue, even if people offer empty praise, how does this add to [my Virtue]? If I have a piece of jade and this person says it is just an ordinary stone, this does no harm to the jade. If I have a stone and this person says it is a piece of jade, this does not add to the stone. I want you, my husband, to work at real Virtue. Do not be ashamed beneath heaven; do not be mortified upon the earth; do not be distressed whether people know or do not know.[[66]](#footnote-66)

1. Song Neungsang宋能相 (1709-58) was a late Joseon dynasty philosopher and a direct descendent of Song Siyeol 宋時烈 (1607-89) (see below). His ancestral home was Eunjin 恩津; his given name (*ja* 字) was Saryong 士龍, and his pen names (*ho* 號) were Unpyeong 雲坪 and Donghaeja東海子. Song Neungsang knew and exchanged views with Yunjidang’s brother Im Seongju任聖周 (1711-88); both were members of the Old Doctrine (*Noron* 老論), which, along with the Young Doctrine (*Soron* 少論) represented a schism among the earlier Westerners (*Seoin* 西人). The Westerners was a political faction that dominated Korea in the 17th century. Largely as a result of a rift between Song Siyeol, one of the most powerful and influential Westerners, and his student Yun Jeung 尹拯 (1629–1714); the Westerners divided into the Young Doctrine, which opposed Song Siyeol, and the Old Doctrine, which supported him. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Han Gyejin (1689-?). His ancestral home was Cheongju 清州; his given name was Gyemyeong 季明. He was a younger brother of Han Wonjin 韓元震 (1682-1751) and studied under Gwon Sangha 權尙夏 (1641-1721), pen name Suam 遂菴 and Hansujae 寒水齋, who is known as the foremost disciple of Song Siyeol. Han attained the rank of Third Minister (*Chamui* 參議) in the Ministry of Taxation (*Hojo* 戶曹). Han Gyejin was also a friend of Im Seongju. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In translating traditional Korean institutional titles, we follow the *Korean History Thesaurus* and the *Glossary of Korean Studies* maintained by the National Institute of Korean History and the Academy of Korean Studies respectively. When a variety of translations are given, we follow the one used in the English version of the *Veritable Records of Joseon Dynasty* (*Joseon Wangjo Sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Yulgok [栗](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E6%A0%97)[谷](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E8%B0%B7) is the pen name of Yi I 李珥 (1536-84), one of the two most prominent Confucian scholars of the Joseon dynasty, the other being his older contemporary Yi Hwang 李滉 (1501-70), whose pen name was Toegye 退溪. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A heroic wife is literally a “female knight or scholar” (*yeosa* 女士) See the *Book of Odes, Mao* #247. In the corpus of Korean neo-Confucian funeral orations and tomb inscriptions (*myojimyeong* 墓誌銘), *yeosa* often was used to praise a woman’s intelligence and virtuous deeds, describing them as comparable to what the best male Confucian scholars (*sa* 士) might achieve. Jeong Hyun (C. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄) and Gong Yeongdal (C. Kong Yingda 孔穎達), in their commentaries on this passage, explain a *yeosa* as a woman with scholarly deeds (士行), who therefore is able to produce a worthy and wise (賢智) son. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. *Analects* 9.21, “The Master said of Anja (C. Yanzi 顔子), ‘Alas! I saw his constant progress; I never saw him stop short.’” Like Lady Han, Anja died young; he was Gongja (C. Kongzi 孔子)’s favorite disciple. See the fourth Discourse below, “Discourse On What Anja Took Joy In.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. the “Common Possession of Pure Virtue” (*Ham yu il deok C. Xian you yi de* 咸有一德), section of the *Book of History* (*Sangseo* C. *Shangshu* 尚書), which says in part, “Oh! It is difficult to have faith in Heaven; its mandate is not constant!” (嗚呼! 天難諶, 命靡常) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Gyeongmi Gim points out that the story of Choe and Hong was well known and discussed in several other Korean works and speculates that Yunjidang may have heard of it from her brothers. Gim further notes that Yunjidang elaborated the tale by including the conversation between the two women in which they decided to take revenge, offering the important insight that by letting the two women speak for themselves, Yunjidang presents them as full moral agents who were perfectly at ease not only to criticize but punish a man they regarded as morally reprehensible. (Gim 2019, 95-96). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See the *Book of Odes*, *Mao* #68. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Misaeng Go (C. Weisheng Gao)微生高.The theme of this discourse concerns *Analects* 5.24. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Literally, the character translated here as “upright” means “straight” (*jik*, C. *zhi*)直 and it is was translated that way in the quote from the *Analects* that appears in footnote thirteen above. Cf. *Analects* 13.18. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Cf. Chapter one of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which cautions, “The cultivated person is watchful over himself when alone.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See the “Line Statements” (*muneo;* C. *wenyan* 文言) on the hexagram *gon* (C. *kun*) 坤 in the *Book of Changes*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This is quote from Jeong I (C. Cheng Yi) 程頤 cited by Ju Hui (C. Zhu Xi) 朱熹 (1130-1200) in his commentary on *Analects* 5.23. See the *Collected Commentaries on the* Analects, (*Noneo jipju*; C. *Lunyu jizhu* 論語集註) 5.36a. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See *Analects* 11.8, “When An Yeon died, An Ro begged the carriage of the Master to sell and get an outer shell for his son’s coffin.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is part of Ju Hui’s commentary on *Analects* 5.23. See the *Collected Commentaries on the* Analects, 5.36a. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In *Mencius* 4A17, Maengja argues that one clearly should override the general standing prohibition against men and women touching one another in exceptional cases such as one presented to him, in which one’s sister-in-law is at risk of drowning right in front of one. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This is part of Ju Hui’s commentary on *Analects* 5.23. See *Collected Commentaries on the* Analects, 5.36a. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Analects* 6.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For a translation see “What Kind of Learning Was it that Yanzi Loved?” in Justin Tiwald and Bryan W. Van Norden, Eds., *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han to the 20th Century*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company 2014): 152-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Analects* 6.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Mencius* 7A4. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Sun (C. Shun) 舜was a legendary sage ruler; he is said to have lived sometime between 2294 and 2184 BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Mencius* 3A1. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Doctrine of the Mean* Chapter 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Analects* 6.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Analects* 9.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Analects* 11.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Jeungja (C. Zengzi) 曾子 was another of Gongja’s disciple. For the story cited here, see the “Giving Away a Throne” chapter of the *Jangja* (C. *Zhuangzi* 莊子). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The *Jangja* passage cited above goes on to say that “he who nourishes his resolve forgets about his physical form.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Analects* 16.9 where Gongja says that those born with knowledge are the highest type, and those who attain knowledge through learning come next. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Analects* 6.11 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Anja died prematurely, at the age of 33. See *Analects* 11.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See *Analects* 11.10, which describes how deeply Gongja was aggrieved by the early death of Anja. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See *Analects* 16.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Mencius* 6A7. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Yo (C. Yao) 堯 was a legendary sage ruler; his traditional dates are c. 2356-2255 BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. This line is from a comment by Ho An’guk (C. Hu Anguo) 胡安國 (1074-1138) that is quoted by Zhu Xi in his commentary on *Analects* 9.11. See *Collected Commentaries on the* Analects, (*Lunyu jizhu* 論語集註) 5.3b-4a. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Mencius* 7B25. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Mencius* 6B22. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Analects* 12.1. The four prohibitions are to not look, listen, speak, or act in any way that is contrary to the rituals. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Analects* 6.27. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. On Gyo (C. Wen Jiao) 溫嶠 (288–329 CE), whose courtesy name was Taejin (C. Taizhen) 太真, known formally as Duke Chungmu (C. Zhongwu) of Sian (C. Shi'an) (*Sian Chungmu gong*; C. *Shian Zhongwu gong* 始安忠武公), was a renowned general and governor who lived during the Jin dynasty (265-420 CE). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
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45. Yu Yak (C. You Ruo) 有若 was a disciple of Gonja (C. Kongzi). He was a native of No (C. Lu). His courtesy name was Jayak (C. Ziruo) 子若. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *Analects* 1.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. ### This line appears in the sixteenth biography *Yeoljeon je sibyuk* (C. *Liezhuan di shiliu*)列傳第十六 of the *History of the Later Han* (*Hu Han Seo;* C. *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書), chapter 26(*gwon isib yuk*卷二十六).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Yu Gon (C. Yu Gon) 劉琨 (271-318 CE) was a Jin general who for years fought but ultimately lost Byeong (C. Bing) Province 并州 (what is now modern central and northern Shanxi Province) to the Han Jo (C. Han Zhao) 漢趙 (304-29), a Southern Hyungno (C. Xiongnu) 匈奴 state and adversary of the Jin. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Dan Pilje (C. Duan Pidi) 段匹磾 (?-321 CE) was the governor of Yu (C. You) Province 幽州 (what is now modern Beijing, Tianjin, and northern Hebei). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. When Sama Eop (C. Sima Ye) 司馬鄴 or 司馬業, who became Emperor Min of Jin 晉愍帝 (300-18 CE), the last Western Jin monarch, was captured by the Han Jo former officials like Yu Gon, Dan Pilje and others plotted together to re-establish the Jin dynasty to their own advantage. Dan killed Yu in 318 when he came to believe Yu posed a threat to his own designs on power. The Prince of Nang Ya (C. Lang Ya) 琅琊 is Sama Ye (C. Sima Rui) 司馬睿 (276-322 CE; r. 317-22 CE) who becameEmperor Won (C. Yuan) of Jin 晉元帝. When the Hyungno captured Jang An (C. Chang An)長安 (in 316 CE), the capital of Jin, the Emperor, Sama Ye was forced to abdicate the throne. Sama Ye, had escaped from Jang An to Geon'gang (C. Jiankang) 建康 (present day Nanjing) and declared himself the new Emperor of Jin. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. In other words, Yu Gon commissioned On Gyo to make his way to Geon’gang to present Sama Ye, the Prince of Nang Ya, with his petition to assume the imperial title, which subsequently he did. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Book of Odes*, *Mao* # 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Jin Yeong (C. Chen Ying) 陳嬰 (?-183 BCE) lived at the very end of the Jin (C. Qin) 秦 dynasty (221-206 BCE) and the beginning of the Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE; 25–220 CE). As the Jin collapsed, a group of people who were leading the revolt came to him and urged him to declare himself king. His mother though advised him against this arguing that since the overthrow of the Jin was not complete, to accept such a sudden rise in status would pose great peril. He followed his mother’s advice and refused to accept the title of king. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *Mencius* 7A35. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Better known as Jegal Ryang (C. Zhuge Liang) 諸葛亮 (181–234 CE), his courtesy name was Gongmyeong (C. Kongming)孔明. He was a politician, military strategist, writer, engineer and inventor who lived during the Three Kingdoms 三國時代 (220-80) period in China. Recognized as the most accomplished strategist of his era, his reputation as an intelligent and learned scholar grew even while he lived in relative seclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Emperor Soyeol (C. Zhaolie) 昭烈皇帝 is the posthumous name of Yu Bi (C. Liu Bei) 劉備 (161-223 CE), whose courtesy name was Hyundeok (C. Xuande) 玄德. He founded the state of Chok Han (C. Shu Han) 蜀漢 (221–263 CE) during the Three Kingdoms Period. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. In which he pitted different states against one another in ways that all contributed to the victory of the lord he served. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Dong Jungseo (C. Dong Zhongshu) 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) was a Han dynasty Chinese scholar. He is traditionally associated with the promotion of Confucianism as the official ideology of the Chinese imperial state. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. These lines appear in Dong Jungseo’s *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunchu beollo*; C. *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露) 17.14a (*SKQS*). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Cf. *Analects* 7.30: The Master said, “Is benevolence far off? I desire humaneness, and lo and behold, humaneness arrives.” [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. In this poem Jeongildang is urging her husband to focus on his studies and not worry about supporting the family, which she does through her needlework. Her “authentic work” enables his. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. “Learning by memorization and recitation” (*gisong ji hak*; C. *jisong zhi xue* 記誦之學) was a common target of neo-Confucian criticism. It referred to a sterile type of learning and was opposed to “learning for oneself” (*wigi ji hak*; C. *weiji zhi xue* 為己之學), which meant learning to improve oneself morally. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Reading 訢 as訴 in the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. The hexagram *I* (C. *Yi*) 頤 in the *Book of Changes*. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. These lines are from the “Greater Odes” chapter of the *Book of Odes*, *Mao* #256. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. The idea that a person of genuine virtue is not concerned whether or not he is recognized is found in *Analects* 1.1. The metaphor of stone and jade recalls the well-known story of Mr. Hwa’s jade (*Hwassi byeok*; C. *Heshibi* 和氏璧) in chapter thirteen of the *Hanbija* (C. *Hanfeizi*) 韓非子.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-66)