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Special Feature

What Master Hwadam Loved to Learn: The *Hwadam jip* and Seo Gyeongdeok's Place in the Intellectual History of Joseon

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Introduction

Seo Gyeongdeok 徐敬德 (1489-1546), better known as Hwadam 花潭 or Master Hwadam, is seen today as a respected scholar of the Joseon period. He is undisputedly held in high regard as one of the founding figures of early Korean Neo-Confucianism (*dohak* 道學). In both popular culture and academic scholarship, his life and thought have been regarded as bearing remarkable signs of the culture of Joseon's literati, such as the dedication to Learning, sagely behavior which his contemporaries praised, and a lifelong modest demeanor.¹ Seo Gyeongdeok's scholarship has also been highly praised in the 20th century in both North and South Korea.² His scholarship, mentioned since the colonial era in the very first intellectual or philosophical histories of Korean Confucianism (*yugyo* 儒教; *yuhak* 儒學),³ has more often than not been labelled a philosophy—or thought—of Vital Energy (*gi cheolhak* 氣哲學; *gi sasang* 氣思想), or materialist thinking (*yumullon* 唯物論; *muljil juui* 物質主義).⁴ Studies have drawn lines of direct affiliation or possible influence between Seo Gyeongdeok's favorite objects of study and the ideas developed by several late “schools” of Joseon, such as the so-called Giho School (*giho hakpa* 畿湖學派), the School of Practical Learning (*silhak pa* 實學派), the School of Northern Learning (*bukhak pa* 北學派), or the Nak School (*nakhak pa* 洛學派), to name a few.⁵ These attempts at delineating scholarly lineages that would include Seo Gyeongdeok as a forerunner in the genealogy of Korean Neo-Confucianism, be it orthodox or unorthodox,⁶ have been duly conveyed in most of the histories of Confucianism in Joseon written in the 20th century and have ended up becoming common knowledge today.

* I would like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments for revision and the editors of this article for their invaluable assistance in polishing the manuscript.

1. The reference study, republished several times, is Yi 1998. One of the most complete translations of his works is Kim 2002.
2. About North Korean studies, see, for instance, in English, Glomb 2015.
3. The following scholars, among others, mentioned his name and scholarship in the modern era: Jang Jiyeon, Takahashi Tōru 高橋亨, Yi Byeongdo, Geum Jangtae, Hwang Eui Dong, and Yun Sasun.
4. See the studies by Hyeon Sangyun; Yu Seungguk; Yi Namyong. For details more recently and in English, however, see Huh 2003, 579-80. For North Korea, see for example Jeong et al. 1962.
5. See for example Sin 2000; Yi 1998.
6. These terms refer here to the commonly accepted frame of *seongnihak jeok* 성리학적 versus *tal seonngnihak jeok* 탈 성리학적, within which the various Confucian schools in Joseon Korea have been generally distinguished and classified in modern times.

Despite the good image he has been enjoying in popular imagination and unofficial histories,⁷ however, a positive evaluation of Seo Gyeongdeok during the Joseon period was not taken for granted in intellectual circles and the official arena for several centuries. On the contrary, praising Seo Gyeongdeok as a true Master worthy of emulation was a difficult task a handful of scholars had to successively fight to accomplish, after the two big names of Korean Neo-Confucianism (*seongnihak* 性理學), Yi Hwang 李滉 (1501-1570) and Yi I 李珣 (1536–1584), criticized him in the late 16th century. This article examines how assessments of Seo Gyeongdeok evolved during the Joseon period to reflect on the role he was both denied and granted in the course of the history of Joseon. My investigation proceeds in three parts: first, I start by examining why Seo Gyeongdeok presented a borderline case for 16th century Neo-Confucian scholars. Seo Gyeongdeok's eremitic stance, taste for numerology, and self-teaching method will be examined. I then discuss in the second part how the compilation of Seo Gyeongdeok's collected works, the *Hwadam jip* 花潭集, is a manifestation of the deliberate strategies employed by generations of supporters from the 16th to the 18th centuries to restore Seo Gyeongdeok's image. I argue that the *Hwadam jip* is what gave him the credentials to be acknowledged as an orthodox Confucian scholar and turn him into Master Hwadam for posterity. The last part examines how the compilers of the *Hwadam jip* defined and characterized what might be called the Hwadam Learning (*Hwadam hak* 花潭學; *Hwadam sasang* 花潭思想) and provided the key to assessing Seo Gyeongdeok's life and thought. The conclusion opens up some perspectives about the legacy of Seo Gyeongdeok and the so-called Hwadam school (*Hwadam hakpa* 花潭學派) within the Transmission of the Way (*dotong* 道統) in Korea.

Seo Gyeongdeok as a Borderline Case: Eremitism, Numerology, and Self-teaching

Portrayed as a popular hero, a sage hermit empowered with magical skills, one of the “three prodigies” of Songdo (*Songdo samjeol* 松都三絕), a sympathetic movie character, an iconic rusticated scholar, a specialist of the *Book of Changes*,

7. See for example Dongguk University Hanguk munhak yeonguso 1981.

the major thinker of the “Philosophy of the Vital Energy,” and even as the remarkable man who resisted the charms of Hwang Jini 黃眞伊 (c.1506-c.1560), Seo Gyeongdeok, despite the numerous studies, movies, novels, and various writings his life and personality has given way to, largely remains a historical enigma. At first sight, he poses a set of challenges to anyone hoping to appraise him as a man and thinker. On the one hand, reliable biographical accounts of him are relatively scarce in his collected works (*munjip* 文集); on the other, the oral tales and unofficial histories (*yasa* 野史 and *yadam* 野談) he features in provide colorfully detailed stories. Depending on the material and approach, therefore, Seo Gyeongdeok lends himself to multiple biographical interpretations. One main feature of his life, however, is consistently highlighted: eremitism. Seo Gyeongdeok has also been called a “scholar living amidst mountains and forests” (*sallim* 山林), a “recluse scholar” (*eumsa* 隱士), a “retired scholar” (*cheosa* 處士), or a “hidden scholar” (*ilsa* 逸士). For instance, in the early 18th century, the *silhak* scholar Yi Junghwan 李重煥 (1680-1752) described him in his geographical text *Guide to Select Villages* (*Taengniji* 擇里志) as a *jingsa* 徵士, which can be interpreted as a scholar refusing to serve despite being offered a bureaucratic appointment (Sin 2000, 182). As for Seo Gyeongdeok, he simply called himself a “student” (*hakja* 學者) or a “man of mountains and fields” (*sanya ji in* 山野之人).

Seo Gyeongdeok is certainly not the one and only recluse scholar in the history of Joseon. There were several cases of renowned recluse scholars in the 15th century, a time marked by the beginning of the “literati purges” (*sahwa* 士禍), which were first launched by Yeonsan-gun 燕山君 and led to the formation of the so-called *sarim* 士林 group. The deliberate retirement from any official position or the forced reclusion of the *sarim* scholars were praised as signs of moral courage and dignity by later scholars from the 16th century onward. To do so was to follow the traditional Confucian theory that endorsed the decision to withdraw from political affairs when the Way was lost, i.e., during times of disorder. Thus, they were considered legitimate. For Confucian scholars, eremitism was basically understood as a withdrawal or retirement and was acceptable as long as it was a sign of protest against the poor moral condition of the state.⁸ For kings, posthumously acknowledging virtuous retired scholars was a means to better establish their own political legitimacy before scholar-

8. On this topic, see in English Vervoorn 1990; Berkowitz 2000.

officials.⁹ According to the extant materials about his life, Seo Gyeongdeok's eremitism does not seem to have been driven by any particular political or moral concern. Rather, it seems to have been a matter of personal preference or personality. Several entries of the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* compare his case with that of Seong Suchim 成守琛 (1493-1564), his contemporary and a noted *sarim* scholar and disciple of Jo Gwangjo 趙光祖 (1482-1519), who remained retired after the 1519 purge. An 1567 entry in the *Veritable Records of Myeongjong* recounts an episode when the king asked the scholar-officials to discuss bestowing posthumous titles (*jeungjak* 贈爵) upon the two of them, notably saying that he did not know enough about the case of Seo Gyeongdeok. The historian has added that compared to Seong Suchim, Seo Gyeongdeok stood out as the best example of a recluse (*ilmin* 逸民) declining appointments to focus on Confucian learning, and that his scholarship was highly regarded by his contemporaries.¹⁰ This tells us that 21 years after his death, in the last year of Myeongjong's reign, Seo Gyeongdeok was renowned in the court for his eremitism, whereas his scholarship and merits were not known in detail.

Seo Gyeongdeok was born in 1489 in Gaeseong, a lively merchant city well connected and closely located to the capital. He was still a child during the 1498 purge (*muo sahwa* 戊午士禍) and a teenager during the 1504 purge (*gapja sahwa* 甲子士禍). According to the "Chronological Biography" (*yeonbo* 年譜), in 1502, the 14-year-old Seo Gyeongdeok went to learn the *Book of Documents* from a teacher in Gaeseong but was disappointed and finally realized that it was better to think by himself (*sadeuk* 思得).¹¹ Right before the breakout of *gimyo sahwa* 己卯士禍 and the fall of Jo Gwangjo and the *sarim* group from the court, the then 31-year-old Seo Gyeongdeok was selected for appointment by recommendation through the "special recruitment of 1519" (*cheongeogwa* 薦舉科; *gimyo cheongwa* 己卯薦科), which he declined.¹² Seemingly oblivious of all the traumatic events happening to the *sarim* scholars, Seo Gyeongdeok had

9. For the recent details, see Skonicki 2018, 287-26.

10. *Myeongjong sillok*, 34:1a (1567/1/3#1): "傳曰: '近日成守琛之贈爵, 予知其歿, 故特命之, 而徐敬德事, 則未之覺矣。'【敬德, 松都人, 中司馬試。嘗結茅於五冠山之花潭。身居窮約, 學究淵源, 造詣極深。實儒者之高蹈, 盛世之逸民也。昔在中廟朝, 嘗以一官召, 而不起。至今上朝始歿焉。世談高逸之士, 必與成守琛並數, 而敬德之學問, 實爲一世所仰矣。】"

11. "Chronological Biography," paragraph 14 (1502): "先生十四歲。松京有一講書者。先生從而受尚書。至暮三百。講書者不肯授曰。此舉世鮮曉者。先生怪之。退而精思十五日。通之。乃知書之可以思得也。"

12. "Chronological Biography," paragraph 31 (1519): "先生三十一歲。時朝廷設薦舉科。被薦者一百二十八人。先生爲首。辭不就。"

been unconcernedly pursuing his intellectual investigation during the prime of his life. At age 43 he belatedly passed the *saeng-won* examination in 1531 with flying colors upon his mother's command and went to study at the Royal Academy (Seonggyungwan 成均館), but withdrew soon afterwards.¹³ Twice in his fifties, in 1540 and 1544, he was offered minor official positions by Kim Anguk 金安國 (1478-1543), the leader of the *sarim* scholars under Jungjong's reign (1506-1544), but declined again both times.¹⁴ For 1545, the year of the *eulsa sahwa* 乙巳士禍, the "Chronological Biography" only mentions that Seo Gyeongdeok wrote—but eventually did not submit—a memorial to Injong about rituals of royal mourning; the king himself died suddenly afterwards.¹⁵ Thus the major biographical accounts of Seo Gyeongdeok depict a consistent refusal to engage with political matters and officialdom throughout his life. His eremitic stance cannot be defined as morally driven and may have been despised for that reason by well-established Confucian scholars in the 16th century. These scholars, often having passed the civil service examinations and holding official positions, may have felt compelled to make some sort of moral statement by either engaging in or retiring from worldly affairs in face of such troubled times. In 1575, when the topic of bestowing higher titles on Seong Suchim and Seo Gyeongdeok was discussed again in the court, Yi I argued that Seong Suchim should be honored more highly than Seo Gyeongdeok since Seong's virtue and talents (*deokgi* 德器) were undoubtedly higher, although Seo Gyeongdeok's scholarship had more depth. He also said that his fellow scholars were upset that honorary titles did not follow the superior criterion of virtue when comparing the two retired scholars.¹⁶ Clearly, scholarship was less important than virtue or loyalty; Seo Gyeongdeok was less honorable than Seong Suchim, who had fallen victim to the *gimyo* purge. Interestingly, an 1586 entry from the *Revised Records of Seonjo* (*Seonjo sujeong sillok* 宣祖修正實錄) contains a memorial submitted by Jo Heon 趙憲 (1544-1592), a disciple of Seong Suchim, discussing factional strife,

13. "Chronological Biography," paragraph 43; "Tombstone Inscription," paragraph 14.

14. "Chronological Biography," paragraphs 52 (1540); paragraph 56 (1544).

15. "Tombstone Inscription," paragraph 16: "已而病間. 乙巳春. 草疏. 極論喪制之失. 疏成而不果上. 莫意. 或言孝陵方在諒闇過哀. 將有巨測之禍也. 七月. 孝陵昇遐. 喪制亦如之."

16. *Seonjo sujeong sillok*, 9:32a (1575/11/28#2): "珥因啓曰: '臣有欲達之事, 未得從容, 不敢達也. 臣今有復焉. 徐敬德, 成守琛, 一時竝出, 學問之功, 敬德固深, 而德器之厚, 守琛爲優, 故論者互分優劣. 先王朝贈守琛爲執義, 贈敬德爲佐郎, 近日加贈敬德爲右相, 而守琛之贈, 則不加焉. 士類以爲歎. 臣意加贈爲當. 守琛頑廉儒立之功, 真可尚也已.'"

in which he notably said that Seo Gyeongdeok's eremitism was a consequence of the 1545 purge.¹⁷ This shows that depending on the political context and standpoint, Seo Gyeongdeok's case was assessed in radically different ways.

Seo Gyeongdeok's eremitism posed a special problem for the following generation of scholars, for it was deeply related to his particular method of practicing Confucian Learning. Regarded as potentially unorthodox, the method was thus difficult to evaluate. Several renowned scholars of the 16th century such as Yi Hwang, Yi I, Seong Hon 成渾 (1535-1598), Yu Huichun 柳希春 (1513-1577), Sin Heum 申欽 (1566-1628), Yi Hangbok 李恒福 (1556-1618), and Yi Sik 李植 (1584-1647) assessed Seo Gyeongdeok's life or scholarship in their writings. Not surprisingly, a few disciples of Seo Gyeongdeok—particularly Heo Yeop 許曄 (1517-1580) and Bak Sun 朴淳 (1523-1589)—did the same. These various assessments, carefully compiled in the “Remaining Materials” (*yusa* 遺事) of the *Hwadam jip*,¹⁸ show a variety of opinions ranging from negative and skeptical to lukewarm and laudatory. Among them, Yi Hwang and Yi I's opinions have certainly made the most enduring and strongest impact on how Seo Gyeongdeok has been perceived for centuries. They have never failed to be alluded to or cited in studies of Seo Gyeongdeok's thought, past and present. Yi Hwang and Yi I both noticed and stressed Seo Gyeongdeok's unusual and free-spirited way of learning. What 16th century scholar-officials had generally criticized and puzzled over was the way Seo Gyeongdeok had learned on his own without relying on the guidance of a master or the canonical writings and reference texts of his time. The question of what Hwadam used to read, learn, and study was deeply connected to the very definition of orthodox Learning that *sarim* scholars sought during their time. What was at stake in the assessment of Seo Gyeongdeok's way of learning and, by extension, his qualifications as a true Confucian master, was the definition of orthodoxy as well as orthopraxy as understood by Neo-Confucianism in late Joseon. According to Yi I's diary, Yi Hwang was among the ones who

17. *Seonjo sujeong sillok*, 20:2a (1586/10/1#1): “又如徐敬德之遯于花潭; 金麟厚之絕意名宦; 曹植, 李恒之幽栖海隅, 莫非乙巳之禍, 有以激之也。”

18. This compilation is also called *eonhaeng jamnok* 言行雜錄, with a slightly different presentation and content, depending on the editions of the *Hwadam jip*. The testimonies about Seo Gyeongdeok first appeared in the addendum (*buruk* 附錄) of the third edition in 1652. They were supplemented and titled *eonhaeng jamnok* in the fourth edition in 1770, but were altered again and titled *yusa* in the fifth and final edition in 1787.

held the most radical views on Seo Gyeongdeok by saying that his scholarship was unorthodox. Yi Hwang argued that an examination of Seo Gyeongdeok's remaining writings at times diverged from the "teachings of the Sages and Worthies."¹⁹ The major issues Yi Hwang had with Seo Gyeongdeok were not his scholarly attitude but rather his core ideas, especially those related to the relationship between the Principle and Vital Energy. Regarding this specific matter, which 16th century scholars had obsessively focused on and debated among themselves, Yi Hwang considered that nothing in Seo Gyeongdeok's reflections were useful. As for Yi I, he was more balanced in his views.

As seen earlier, assessing the intellectual and moral caliber of various scholars was not only a common topic for philosophical discussions among literati—it also fell within the area of state affairs in Joseon. The official recognition of Confucian masters was subject to royal approval. Discussions evaluating various literati were held before the king and his court. In 1570, Seonjo ordered Yu Huichun to compile the *Records of the Kingdom's Confucian Masters* (*Gukjo yuseollok* 國朝儒先錄), which presented the words and deeds of a few selected scholars.²⁰ Bak Sun then begged Yu Huichun to include Seo Gyeongdeok among them. While acknowledging Seo Gyeongdeok's authentic scholarly attitude, Yu Huichun lamented the fact that his teaching was numerology (*subak* 數學) and did not dare take on the responsibility of including him in the selection. He instead advised that Bak Sun should himself argue in favor of his former master.²¹ Seo Gyeongdeok's case was discussed several times at court during the latter half of the 16th century: in 1566 under Myeongjong's reign, and in 1572, 1573, and 1575 under Seonjo's reign. The 1573 discussion, a follow up of a memorial submitted by several scholar-officials, helps us understand what was at stake:

Fifth month. *Jijungchu* Hong Seom, from the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio, Lecturer Jeong Jongyeong and Special Lecturer Yun Hyeon, from the Office of Royal Lectures, and *Uyun* Yun Geunsun, from the Ministry

19. *Gyeongyeon ilgi* 經筵日記 (or *Seokdam ilgi* 石潭日記), quoted in the *Hwadam jip*: "[...] 其所著文集行于世. 議論時與聖賢有差異. 故李滉以爲非儒者正脈云."

20. Yu Huichun selected, for instance, Kim Goengpil, Jeong Yeochang, Jo Gwangjo, and Yi Eonjeok.

21. *Miam ilgi* 眉巖日記 by Yu Huichun quoted in the *Hwadam jip*: "朴思菴淳語柳眉巖希春曰. 儒先錄中. 徐某可得請於上而參入耶. 對曰. 徐某固有學行. 但其學數學也. 奈何. 曰. 邵康節以數學得隨周程之後. 蔡元定以數學亦附朱張之間. 爲人大槩正. 而以學淑其徒. 得參儒先錄何妨?"

of Capital City, wrote a memorial saying, “Even though Seo Gyeongdeok focused his learning on numbers, the good faith he has demonstrated and the writings he has left outshines that of previous Confucians. However, only the title of Assistant Section Chief has been bestowed upon him. We plead that he be conferred a new posthumous title.” Yu Huichun said, “The issue of Gyeongdeok’s focus on numbers is just the same as that of Shao Kangjie and Cai Yuanding’s relationship with Cheng/Zhu learning. This is why Yi Hwang, who said that his scholarship was unreliable, nevertheless acknowledged that as far as virtuous conduct was concerned, he was irreproachable.”²²

As can be seen above, the problem posed by Seo Gyeongdeok was that his learning was regarded again and again as simple speculations on numbers despite the high standard of his scholarship. According to most of his critics, Seo Gyeongdeok’s understanding of the *Changes* followed the “studies of images and numbers” (*sangsubhak* 象數學), which is related to Chao Yuezhi 晁悅之 (1059-1129), Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), Shao Yong 邵雍 (1012-1077), Shao Bowen 邵伯溫 (1057-1134), and Zhu Zhen 朱震 (1072-1138), and not the orthodox “studies of meanings and principles” (*uirihak* 義理學) as illustrated by Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), and Cai Yuanding 蔡元定 (1135-1198). Yu Huichun’s remark in the quotation alludes to the ambiguities existing within the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy between these two hermeneutic traditions of the *Book of Changes*. The distinction is indeed blurred in the case of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), who, despite his overall trust in Cheng Yi’s views, mostly followed the “studies of images and numbers” in his own interpretation of the meaning and use of the *Changes* as well as the sequence of the hexagrams proposed by Shao Yong.²³ For the Korean scholar-officials of the late 16th century, the philosophical legacy of Seo Gyeongdeok, who was an unequivocal follower of Shao Yong, was difficult to assess because of his obsessive focus on images and numbers. The most crucial discussion about bestowing on him a posthumous title took place in 1575, again during Seonjo’s reign. The episode recounting these discussions at court went as follows :

22. “Chronological Biography,” paragraph 61 (1573): “五月. 知中樞洪暹, 知經筵鄭宗榮, 特進官尹鉉, 右尹尹根壽啓曰. 徐敬德雖學主於數. 然其德義立言. 高出前儒. 只贈佐郎. 請更贈. 柳希春曰. 敬德學術主數. 若邵康節, 蔡元定之於程朱. 故李滉論其不的. 然道德踐履則有之.”

23. On these topics, see in English Kidder et al. 1990; Hon 2005.

Fifth month. Court councilors plead to bestow another posthumous title upon the master. The king said, “Many texts written by Gyeongdeok discuss Vital Energy and numbers without alluding to the issue of self-cultivation. I am not mistaken; this is numerology, is it not? Moreover, there are many dubious aspects of his way of learning and practicing.” First Councilor Yi I responded, “The way Gyeongdeok used to learn and practice is most certainly not what beginners in learning should imitate. His learning comes from Hengqu [Zhang Zai], and what he wrote can be described as being in accordance with the teachings of the sages and worthies, but I am not sure of this. Yet, what people usually call a scholar is just someone who mimics the words of previous Confucians to express himself without understanding anything in his own heart and mind. Many of Gyeongdeok’s profound thoughts and far-reaching achievements are proof of his subtle and excellent understanding of things in his very core. This is truly quite to the opposite of the philological and belletristic learning.” Whereupon the king gave his consent and ordered that the title of Great Officer of Sungnok Greatly Correcting and Strengthening the State, Third State Councilor of the State Council, Lecturer of the Office of Royal Lectures, and Annalist of the Office of Spring and Autumn be bestowed upon him. The king also conferred an honorific name, Mungang, composed of the characters mun, signifying an erudition matching one’s moral conduct, and gang, for the comprehension of the fundamentals.²⁴

In this rather lengthy entry, Yi I, who was then First Councilor, expresses his views on Seo Gyeongdeok clearly and ends up convincing the king to bestow on him a higher posthumous title. Yi I defines Seo Gyeongdeok as a follower of Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077) and praises him for having attained the “wonder of acquiring his own knowledge” (*jadeuk ji myo* 自得之妙). He is obviously cautious about assessing the exact nature of Seo Gyeongdeok’s learning, but he does not hesitate to stress his authentic scholarly attitude and intellectual prowess. Yi I’s main reservations concern Seo Gyeongdeok’s method of learning, which is not fitted for beginners and thus not worthy of emulation.

24. “Chronological Biography,” paragraph 62 (1575): “五月. 朝臣請加贈先生職. 上曰. 敬德所著書. 多論氣數. 而不及於修身之事. 無乃是數學耶. 且其工夫多有可疑處. 副提學李珣啓敬德工夫. 固非初學所可法. 其學出於橫渠. 其所著書. 若謂之膾合聖賢之旨則臣不知也. 但世之所謂學者. 只做先儒之說以爲言. 而心中無所得. 敬德則深思遠詣. 多有自得之妙. 實非言語文字之學也. 於是上許之. 命贈大匡輔國崇祿大夫. 議政府右議政兼領經筵. 監春秋館事. 賜諡曰文康. 道德博聞曰文. 淵源流通曰康.”

Outside the formal setting of a royal audience in the court, where his opinion was under the scrutiny of his peers, Yi I also expressed his opinion of Seo Gyeongdeok several times in his diary and correspondences. For example, in a letter to his friend Seong Hon, he compared the merits of Jo Gwangjo, Seo Gyeongdeok, and Yi Hwang. He gave more credit to Seo Gyeongdeok than Yi Hwang when comparing the two in particular. According to him, Yi Hwang stuck too much to his readings, whereas Seo Gyeongdeok relied too much on his own abilities, which were nevertheless undeniably outstanding. He was much impressed by Seo's way of "achieving his own understanding" (*jadeuk ji gyeon* 自得之見) without relying on readings, while at the same time stressing that Seo Gyeongdeok unfortunately missed the final development of his line of reasoning regarding the relationship between the Principle and Vital Energy. Yi I speaks in much more laudatory terms about Seo Gyeongdeok in his correspondences than during the audiences at court: he even goes on to say that Seo Gyeongdeok's use of his mind-and-heart was admirable.²⁵ The same goes for Yi Hwang, who criticized Seo Gyeongdeok's learning as seen before, but also made laudatory comments in his correspondences regarding Seo's outstanding abilities, bright mind, and virtuous behavior. He even called him a genuinely "outstanding talent"—or a hero—of the country (*odong hogeol ji jae* 吾東豪傑之才),²⁶ a reference to Mencius's description of Chen Liang 陳良, an admirer of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius.²⁷

To sum up, in the 16th century, assessments about Seo Gyeongdeok were strongly ambivalent. On the one hand, he was a renowned scholar from the Gaeseong area to whom ritual homage was paid in the local Sungyang Academy (Sungyang seowon 崧陽書院)²⁸ and whose dedication to his studies,

25. "Remaining Materials": "近觀靜菴, 退溪, 花潭三先生之說. 靜菴最高, 退溪次之, 花潭又次之. 就中靜菴, 花潭. 多自得之味. 退溪多依樣之味. 花潭則聰明過人. 而厚重不足. 其讀書窮理. 不拘文字而多用意思. 聰明過人. 故見之不難. 厚重不足. 故得少為足. 其於理氣不相離之妙處. 瞭然目見. 非他人讀書依樣之比. 故便為至樂. 以為湛一清虛之氣無物不在. 自以為得千聖不盡傳之妙. 而殊不知向上更有理通氣局一節. 繼善成性之理則無物不在. 而湛一清虛之氣則多有不在者也. 理無變而氣有變. 元氣生生不息. 往者過. 來者續而已往之氣. 已無所在. 而花潭則以為一氣長存. 往者不過. 來者不續. 此花潭所以有認氣為理之病也. 雖然. 偏全間花潭是自得之見也. 今之學者. 開口便說理無形而氣有形. 理氣決非一物. 此非自言也. 傳人之言也. 何足以敵花潭之口. 而服花潭之心哉."

26. "Remaining Materials": "答退溪書曰. 花潭誠吾東豪傑之才. 道德淺深. 雖未可遽論. 然儘是知道人. 其可小之."

27. *Mengzi* III.A.4: "吾聞用夏變夷者, 未聞變於夷者也. 陳良, 楚產也. 悅周公, 仲尼之道, 北學於中國. 北方之學者, 未能或之先也. 彼所謂豪傑之士也."

28. On this topic, see especially Chung 2020, 68-88.

filial piety, outstanding abilities, and specific knowledge of the *Changes* were generally acknowledged by most of the influent literati of the time. On the other hand, however, he was criticized for his eremitism, which was detached from any apparent political concern; his approach to the *Changes* borrowed from the less orthodox—and probably less understood—“studies of images and numbers”; and his method of learning based on self-reliance and personal abilities. Seo Gyeongdeok himself seems to have been well aware of his unusual method of learning and acknowledged that this was not something students should follow. He allegedly said that he had been unable to succeed in learning from a teacher but hoped that his own teaching would let his followers not have to work as hard as he had to.²⁹ Seo Gyeongdeok’s way of learning and teaching was under scrutiny, and a consensus seems to have been difficult to reach, especially considering his highly debatable views about the Principle and Vital Energy. But things started to change in the following centuries, mostly thanks to the dedication of the disciples and admirers who all gathered to make his legacy more visible. They wanted to correct the common, rather negative, understanding of Seo Gyeongdeok, and the result of their relentless efforts was the repeated compilations of his collected writings, the *Hwadam jip*.³⁰

Defense and Illustration of a Confucian Master: The *Hwadam jip*

When 16th century scholar-officials and kings commented or expressed their views about Seo Gyeongdeok, they tended to admit that their knowledge of his thinking was shallow and sometimes, solely based on hearsay. This reminds us that Seo Gyeongdeok did not write much and that his remaining writings were limited, partial, and difficult to access. His surviving writings may appear as piecemeal explanations on a few topics and circumstantial pieces that happened to be saved from oblivion. When he realized that his days were numbered, he only dictated a set of four texts to clarify his position regarding a few subjects, all related to cosmology, that were discussed in his circles.³¹ His legacy as a

29. Yi I, *Gyeong-yeon ilgi* cited in the *Hwadam jip*: “敬德開城人. [...] 其學. 不事讀書. 專用探索. 既得之後. 讀書以證之. 常曰. 我不得師. 故用功至深. 後人依吾言. 則用功不至如我之勞矣.”

30. For a systematic and detailed overview on this topic, see Jeong 2018, 43-75.

31. “Chronological Biography,” paragraph 56 (1544).

scholar thus seems to have been transmitted over decades mainly through an assortment of scattered texts and his reputation according to his direct disciples and the scholars who happened to know or meet him at some point. This would not be surprising, since Seo Gyeongdeok was an influential local personality from Gaeseong, who interacted with major intellectual circles of his time throughout his life. In that sense, Kim Anguk's proposals to give him a position twice is particularly meaningful. Seo Gyeongdeok also met renowned poets, such as Seong Un 成運 (1497-1579) and Jo Sik 曹植 (1501-1572), during his trips to famous mountains.³² Although he had been leading a life of seclusion dedicated to his own studies, he did teach and foster many disciples. Some of them became powerful high officials under Seonjo's reign, such as Bak Sun 朴淳 (1523-1589), Heo Yeop 許曄 (1517-1580), Bak Minheon 朴民獻 (1516-1586), and Jeong Jiyeon 鄭芝衍 (1525-1583). Others gained fame as respected scholars such as Min Sun 閔純 (1519-1591) and No Susin 盧守愼 (1515-1590). Many of these disciples, such as Bak Sun, Heo Yeop, Yi Jiham 李之菡 (1517-1578), Kim Hyeson 金惠孫 (died 1585), Ma Huigyeong 馬義慶 (1525-1589), Sin Yeok 申潁 (dates unknown), and Jang Gasun 張可順 (1493-1549), were famous for their mastery of the *Book of Changes*. From the 17th century, the disciples and several scholar-officials of the Gaeseong and Hanyang areas tried to respond to the criticisms of heterodoxy leveled at who they called "Master Hwadam" (*Hwadam seonsaeng* 花潭先生). They partially achieved their goals, since in the early 17th century, the Hwagok Academy (Hwagok seowon 花谷書院) in Gaeseong, where sacrifices were specifically performed for Master Hwadam, was granted a royal charter. A special tombstone under the royal order (*sindobi* 神道碑) was also erected, and Seo Gyeongdeok was bestowed with honorary posthumous titles. But the official recognition of Seo Gyeongdeok as a true Confucian master of the Korean Transmission of the Way (*dotong* 道統) was still partial, since he was in the end denied entry into the Confucian Shrine, Munmyo 文廟. Seo Gyeongdeok's followers hence had to adapt and sharpen their strategy to obtain a better recognition of their master's symbolic status. For that purpose, they dedicated a lot of energy and human and material resources to recompile, improve, print, and make available his *munjip*.

32. He travelled to several mountains in the Honam and Yeongnam regions in 1509 at age 21 and went to mounts Seongni, Byeon, Jiri, and Geumgang at age 34.

There have been five different editions of the *Hwadam jip* in the Joseon period, from the 16th to the 18th centuries, which is quite remarkable for such a small set of remaining texts. The first edition was probably compiled by Seo Gyeongdeok's direct disciples Bak Minheon 朴民獻 (1516-1586) and Heo Yeop under the reigns of Myeongjong and Seonjo; unfortunately, it was lost during the Imjin War (1592-1598). The compilation was simple: two volumes without any specific classification or peritext. Around the same time, a hand-written compilation was circulated among interested scholars. This compilation, probably read by Yi Hwang and Yi I, was later edited and printed in the second edition by Hong Bang 洪霧 (1573-1638) in 1605, when he was in office in Eunsan, Pyeongan Province.³³ Hong Bang was following the steps of his father, Hong Isang 洪履祥 (1549-1615), a disciple of Min Sun and former magistrate of Gaeseong, in order to pay homage to Seo Gyeongdeok. This 1605 single-volume Eunsan edition (*eulsa Eunsan bon* 乙巳殷山本) was kept at the Hwagok Academy and included for the first time some biographical information thanks to the long and informative tombstone inscription written by Bak Minheon in 1585. The third edition was made in 1652 at the Sungyang Academy by Yun Hyu 尹鑄 (1617-1680). This edition additionally included a postface written in 1601 by Yun Hyu's father, Yun Hyoseon 尹孝全 (1563-1619), who was in turn a disciple of Min Sun and Yi Hwang, as well as various testimonies and statements about Seo Gyeongdeok, which were gathered in the addendum (*burok* 附錄). The badly damaged state of the 1605 edition led to the fourth edition, which was made in 1770 in Gaeseong under the initiative of local scholars such as Han Myeongsang 韓命相 (*born* 1651) and Ma Jigwang 馬之光 (born 1726) and the participation of the magistrate Chae Wiha 蔡緯夏 (born 1720). This Gaeseong edition of the 46th year of King Yeongjo (*Yeongjo gyeongin Gaeseong bon* 英祖庚寅開城本) was called "The Collected Works of Master Hwadam" (*Hwadam seonsaeng munjip* 花潭先生文集). It was based on the hand-written and rearranged copy of the third edition made in 1752 by Kim Yonggyeom 金用謙 (1702-1789), the grandson of Kim Suhang 金壽恒 (1629-1689) and nephew of Kim Wonhaeng 金元行 (1703-1772). This fourth edition was the first attempt to systematically classify, by literary genre, the contents of the compilation. A number of peritexts were added: five postfaces, one preface

33. Preface by Yun Hyoseon 尹孝全 (1601).

by the then magistrate of Gaeseong, Won Inson 元仁孫 (1721-1774), a “List of Disciples,” and a “Chronological Biography.” As for the testimonies about Seo Gyeongdeok, which had been first included in the previous 1652 edition, they were enriched with positive evaluations of Seo Gyeongdeok and compiled under the title “Miscellanies of Words and Acts” (*eonhaeng jammok* 言行雜錄). The last edition of the *Hwadam jip* was printed again in Gaeseong in 1787 but at the Hwagok Academy, that is to say, less than twenty years after the fourth edition. It was supervised by Jo Yuseon 趙有善 (1731-1809), a friend of Kim Yonggyeom and the most prominent scholar from Gaeseong who was leading the Sungyang Academy. He was helped by local scholars, among which some had taken part in compiling the fourth edition of the *Hwadam jip*. This is the most complete edition and contains even more peritexts than its predecessor: a second preface by the then Gaeseong magistrate, Yun Suk 尹塾 (1734-1797), and more poems and testimonies about Seo Gyeongdeok written by various scholars as well as the Hwagok and Sungyang academies. This last edition from the Joseon period made some alterations on the existing 1770 compilation. Notably, it suppressed some of the negative evaluations from the testimonies about Seo Gyeongdeok and a few entries from the “List of Disciples.” Moreover, it altered the “Chronological Biography” in both its formal presentation and content.

The objective of these disciples and admirers, all variously linked to the Gaeseong area, for having the *Hwadam jip* compiled and printed several times over two centuries must have been twofold. The obvious one was to provide the most accurate testimony to Seo Gyeongdeok’s life and thought—this is what the direct disciples did in the first two editions. The first two *Hwadam jip* can therefore be seen as material objectifications of the homage paid by disciples to their master. Things slightly evolved in the 18th century. The compilers of the *Hwadam jip* in the Gaeseong area, who were not direct disciples of Seo Gyeongdeok or his disciples, started to build a narrative of a local genealogy of the Way—placing Seo Gyeongdeok as the first Master—in order to strengthen their own legitimacy within the wider intellectual arena. This is not surprising as it was a common feature of *munjip*-making in the late Joseon period.³⁴ But there was a second goal, which is apparent from the numerous peritexts that had been painstakingly added to the *munjip* until the final 1787 Gaeseong edition:

34. See on this topic Kim 2013, 97-127.

it was to correct the misinterpretations about Hwadam's Learning (*Hwadam hak* 花潭學) and provide a key to reading his writings and understanding his intellectual legacy. Here the *Hwadam jip* was an instrument used for the defense and illustration of "Master Hwadam," who according to his followers, should be regarded as a major and fully orthodox Confucian master. The fourth and fifth editions, both made in Gaeseong, undeniably attest to the tremendous efforts made by a handful of Gaeseong scholars in the 18th century with the help of local magistrates to turn Seo Gyeongdeok into one of the most important masters of the Korean Transmission of the Way.

The formal organization of the *Hwadam jip* is worth examining closely, for it implements a certain way of reading the whole compilation. Among the 22 texts of prose contained in the *Hwadam jip*, there are 2 memorials, 5 letters, 2 inscriptions on zither, 2 short statements, and 13 "miscellanies." These miscellanies mainly deal with cosmology, with the exception of the 2 statements about the courtesy names of Bak Minheon and Kim Hangeol 金漢傑 (dates unknown) at the very end. Moreover, 4 out of these 13 texts are random and curt comments on Shao Yong's cosmochrony and phonology. In order to tackle the problem posed by the undeniable influence of Shao Yong on Seo Gyeongdeok, his supporters employed two different strategies. The first one was to show that contrary to common knowledge, Seo Gyeongdeok's cosmology was in line with the orthodoxy, although it seems to follow only the "studies of images and numbers." Since the very first edition of the *Hwadam jip* in the 16th century, the compilers placed first among the prose writings the four texts that Seo Gyeongdeok dictated to Heo Yeop on his death bed: "The Origin of the Patterning Principle and Vital Energy" (*wonigi* 原理氣), "Explanation of the Patterning Principle and Vital Energy" (*igiseol* 理氣說), "Explanation of the Supreme Void" (*taeheoseol* 太虛說), and "Discussions about Spirits and Spiritual Forces, Death and Life" (*gwisin sasaeng non* 鬼神死生論). In the last edition, which followed stricter rules of classification compared with previous editions, these texts were still placed at the very beginning of the "miscellanies part" (*japjeo* 雜著) even though they should have been placed last according to the chronological order followed in each bibliographical section. The reason was no doubt the common assumption that these texts, which dealt with notions of the Principle and Vital Energy, had been regarded as the most characteristic samples of Seo Gyeongdeok's philosophical teachings. Hence, the proper rules of classification seem to have been adjusted with little hesitation. In addition,

not only are the texts closer to Zhang Zai's views than those of Shao Yong, their writing style also contrasts with that of the miscellanies dealing with Shao Yong's philosophy. One might even wonder whether the disciples, who took note of Seo Gyeongdeok's words, and the successive compilers of the *munjip* slightly altered the wording to make it match the common standard of the philosophical texts of their time. This is plausible, considering how Kim Yonggyeom acknowledged that he had himself rearranged the third edition and polished the wording.³⁵ Contentwise, the influence of Zhang Zai, which had already been underlined by Yi I as seen before, is clearly manifest in these four texts. The compilation methods chosen for successive editions of the *Hwadam jip* constantly highlight these four texts while overshadowing the rest of the miscellanies. Claims of Seo Gyeongdeok's allegiance to orthodoxy would certainly be better accepted if Zhang Zai and Zhou Dunyi rather than Shao Yong were explicitly taken as the model of reference.

The second strategy possibly employed by Hwadam's supporters was to further stress a few aspects of Hwadam's biography to counter the arguments criticizing Seo Gyeongdeok's amoral eremitic stance and unorthodox method of learning. A few texts in the *munjip* including a handful of memorials and letters are of particular interest in terms of eremitism. The *Hwadam jip* only records two memorials, which was little for a scholar in Joseon. The first is a short and conventional memorial declining the appointment as Caretaker of the Hureung Royal Shrine in 1544 right before Jungjong 中宗 (1488-1544) passed away. The second, titled "Memorial Addressed to the Great King Injong Discussing the Error of Not Following the Ancients in the Regulations for Official Royal Mourning," was written to Injong but never sent for reasons that are unknown.³⁶ Such few memorials can be seen as a blatant illustration of Seo Gyeongdeok's lack of interest in worldly affairs. But the first memorial declining a position takes on added significance when it is read with a letter, or an "additional note," to be more precise, sent to Bak Minheon. In this concise note, Seo Gyeongdeok actually hesitates in 1543 before refusing the appointment. He seems to have eventually decided to refuse considering his health and age, as he was 56 years

35. Postface by Kim Yonggyeom (1752), paragraph 1: "花潭徐先生. 資稟芙蓉. 學究天人. 寔我東之邵堯夫也. 第其著述不多. 只有文集一冊行于世. 惟此零星文字. 非可以盡知先生者. 而又其編次無倫脊. 板本甚漫漶. 不成規模. 尤可惜也."

36. "Tombstone Inscription," paragraph 16: "乙巳春. 草疏. 極論喪制之失. 疏成而不果上. 莫意."

old and sick at that time.³⁷ This little excerpt, which is the only passage among Seo Gyeongdeok's remaining writings where he expresses an opinion about serving or retiring, importantly casts doubt on his supposedly radical attitude of withdrawal. This may be why it was carefully included among the four letters contained in the *Hwadam jip*. As for the unsent memorial written for Injong, it enjoys a special place within the *munjip*: kept and duly compiled despite the fact that it was never sent, it is, significantly, mentioned in one of the two lengthiest entries in the "Chronological Biography," which lacks substance and detail otherwise. Parts of the memorial are fully quoted, and the contents are summarized precisely in the 1787 edition unlike the previous edition of 1770, where a biography was added for the first time to the *munjip*. Clearly, the last compilers of the *Hwadam jip* found it worthy of the utmost consideration. The memorial is a long, substantial, and thorough discussion about royal mourning rituals, mainly referring to the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) and *Zhu Xi's Family Rituals* (*Zhuzi jiali* 朱子家禮). It not only shows Seo Gyeongdeok's meticulous mind and passion, particularly in his ideas about technical matters, but also his genuine concern for lower people. The last part of the memorial deals with the sufferings of the people forced to build lavish royal mounds and sharply criticizes the extravagant and ritually incorrect expenditures of the court used for constructing the graves of the royal family.³⁸ Thus the very existence of this memorial may have been crucial for the compilers of the *Hwadam jip* to attest to Seo Gyeongdeok's extensive knowledge of the most Confucian of all rituals, i.e., mourning rituals, as well as his compassion towards the people, a virtue expected from a Confucian master. Moreover, this memorial was a precious asset that shed light on Seo Gyeongdeok's political and ethical thinking.³⁹ The opening part, which discusses rites and emotions, proved that Seo Gyeongdeok also dealt with ethics. When read with several other texts of the *munjip* such as his responses to Bak Jihwa 朴枝華 (1513-1592),⁴⁰ this memorial further helps portray Seo Gyeongdeok as a genuine master of Confucian rituals, who was regularly consulted by his contemporaries. Therefore, if all these letters and

37. "復朴頤正帖. [...] 某之進退, 熟慮有素, 不以人言去就, 衰老自揣不堪, 已書辭狀."

38. "Memorial," paragraphs 32 to 36.

39. This appears in the 1605 postface by Yun Deukwan, in paragraph 7: "其上孝陵擬疏, 論喪制不古之失, 要復三代之禮者, 辭旨懇惻, 令人感歎, 先生之學, 亦何嘗偏於數也, 如使先生致用於當世, 則其嘉言至論之上陳於社稷, 裨益於世教者必不小, 而庶幾斯民蒙其福矣, 惜乎其未也."

40. "Letter Answering Bak Gunsil"; "Additional Note in Reply to Jjeong."

memorials, especially in the last edition of the *Hwadam jip*, are read together, it is clear that Seo Gyeongdeok was arguably not a mere specialist of the *Changes* solely focused on cosmology and numbers.

All these “non-philosophical” texts have often been and are still overlooked when examining Seo Gyeongdeok’s “learning”—or “philosophy,” in modern terminology—for the reason that they do not deal with what has been considered the core object of his studies and teachings: numerology, or in more laudatory terms, cosmology. However, the texts carefully recorded in the *Hwadam jip* by generations of compilers from the 16th to 18th centuries might have served the essential purpose of reinforcing and corroborating the image of a virtuous man Seo Gyeongdeok had been already enjoying in popular knowledge and oral culture. It is worth briefly mentioning here the best known anecdote of his life in public imagination: his chaste and respectful interaction with Hwang Jini. Beyond the spicy anecdote, two aspects should be underlined for the purpose of our discussion. First, Seo Gyeongdeok’s attitude was praised by Hwang Jini herself, not by third parties, and she made a comparison between master Hwadam and a renowned seon Buddhist master from the Gaeseong area, Jijok-*seonsa* 知足禪師. The latter failed, whereas Seo Gyeongdeok passed the experiment she had made up to test their respective morality by spending the night with each of them in a single room. She ended up calling Seo Gyeongdeok a “Sage” (*seongin* 聖人) and praised him all her life.⁴¹ Second, resisting carnal desires to stay focused on Learning or meditation may sound trite, but it provided a significant criterion in evaluating whether or not a scholar “possessed the Way.” Seo Gyeongdeok’s method of learning involved a lot of meditation and thinking by himself, as is attested by his biography. He was even said to have fallen badly sick in his early twenties because of his unreasonable and obsessive meditative practice⁴² and even had to travel for a couple of months to the mountains to regain his strength. Although “quiet sitting” (*jeongjwa* 靜坐), a form of meditation, was practiced by Neo-Confucian scholars, it had an undeniably Buddhist flavor, especially among those who did

41. See *SikSOROK* 識小錄 by Heo Gyun 許筠 (1569-1618), who was Heo Yeop’s son, the *Cheongbirok* 淸脾錄 by Yi Deokmu 李德懋 (1741-1793), and the *Yeollyeosisilgisul* 燃藜室記述 by Yi Geungik 李肯翊 (1736-1806). On this topic, see also Yi 1998, 115-46; Han 2015, 280-84.

42. “Chronological Biography,” paragraph 21 (1509): “先生二十一歲。危坐一室。思索太苦。臨食不辨其味。或累日不睡。如是三年。遂至成疾。雖欲不爲思索。亦不得也。”

not read books extensively to learn as Seo Gyeongdeok did. Thus, connecting Seo Gyeongdeok's way of learning with his unwavering determination to live according to his moral standards—understood here as resisting desires and focusing on learning—might have been a rather convincing way to judge whether he possessed strong moral virtues. Another anecdote, recorded in the “List of Disciples,” which was added since the 1770 *Hwadam jip* onward, is worth quoting on this matter. It concerns Yi Jiham and cites the words of Seo Gyeongdeok himself: “[...] In his youth, [Yi Jiham] received instruction in the *Changes* from [Master Hwadam]. While he was living in a neighboring residence, the hostess came to him under the cover of the night, yearning to corrupt him. He scolded her loudly in the name of the Patterning Principle. When the master heard this, he could not stop praising him warmly and said: ‘He is now my master, not only my friend. And what a lesson to be given!’”⁴³

Defining “Hwadam’s Learning”: The Original Confucian School

As we have examined, what is generally regarded in the *Hwadam jip* as secondary texts and trivial anecdotes—all related to Seo Gyeongdeok's biography and not his philosophy—play in fact a critical role to challenge and nuance the common assumptions about him and his Learning. Moreover, the two abovementioned strategies employed by his supporters when compiling the *munjip* can be seen clearly in one of the five postfaces of the *Hwadam jip*—the one written for the fourth edition of the *Hwadam jip* by Yun Deukgwon 尹得觀 (born 1710), a disciple of Bak Pilju 朴弼周 (1680-1748), Bak Changwon 朴昌元 (1683-1753), and Eo Yubong 魚有鳳 (1672-1744).⁴⁴

43. “List of Disciples,” paragraph 5: “[...] 妙歲。受易於先生。僑寓隣舍。主人婦乘夜欲亂之。公據理呵責。先生聞之。稱謝不已曰。公敬德之師。非敬德之友也。而況受業耶。”

44. Postface by Yun Deukgwon (1725), paragraphs 3 to 6: “我東學者。推靜。退二先生爲首。花潭徐先生生於其間。三先生理氣說之互有得失。有栗谷文成公之論。而其所自得則歸之先生與靜菴。蓋亦推許之意在其中也。吾祖月汀公嘗朝天。天朝學士有問傳箕子疇數。孔孟心法者。則以靜菴諸賢與先生爲對而曰。徐某講明性理之學而數學尤精。此蓋當時講定於退溪者而退溪他日。傾嚮先生甚。其著於吟詠者可見。則世儒之或以先生之學偏於數而少之。是不知也。數者理也。學焉而不知理則烏足謂學。孔夫子繫易之辭。是數也。設夫子無刪詩述禮之事而只易繫傳。則其可以學數而少夫子耶。先生早時。精思筌三百。一望自通曉。遂知書之可以思得。壁書天地萬物之名。思之忘寢食。以至貫徹。朱子嘗說學者先識得字義。然後因從此尋箇義理。觀於先生。信然。今集中原理氣等說。皆先生思得之言也。”

[...] Among our Eastern scholars, both masters Jeongam [Jo Gwangjo] and Toegye [Yi Hwang] could be considered the best. But master Seo Hwadam was born between the two. The explanations given by each of the three masters about the Patterning Principle and Vital Energy contain truths and untruths when compared one to another. This was discussed by Yulgok [Yi I], venerable Munseong, who only retained the master and Jeongam because they achieved understanding on their own. There is most certainly an expression of praise implied in such an opinion.

My forefather the Marquis Woljeong [Yun Geunsu 尹根壽] was sent on a mission to the celestial court. When the scholars of the Chinese court asked him whether Gija's divisions and his science of numbers, as well as Confucius and Mencius' method of the mind, had been transmitted in our country, naming the master along with Jeongam and other sages, he answered: "A certain Seo has clearly explained the Learning of Nature and Principle, and he's even more well-versed in numerology." This took place at a time when the tenure of explanations conformed to Toegye's views. But later on, Toegye himself was very lenient with the master, as can be seen in the views he expressed in his poetry. So, average Confucians have sometimes accused the master's scholarship, in order to belittle it, of excessive bias towards numbers, but this is ignorance.

Numbers are patterning principles. To choose to learn without knowing the Patterning Principle, can this truly be called Learning? Master Confucius' commentaries provided the *Changes* with their coherence: so this is the same when dealing with numbers. Supposing that Confucius had never worked on editing the *Odes* or focusing on the *Rites*, and that only his commentaries on the *Changes* had been transmitted, would it be even thinkable to belittle the Master himself by criticizing him for studying numbers?

Early in his life master Seo meditated for one full year. Afterwards he was able to immediately and naturally comprehend all things, and thereupon he became aware that what is written in books could also be fathomed through thinking alone. He then wrote on his walls the names of all things and beings between heaven and earth, and could not eat or sleep for thinking, until he finally understood the unity pervading all things. Zhu Xi used to say that whoever wants to really learn must beforehand understand the meaning of words and after that, depending on this preliminary work, one might be able to seek the underlying patterning principles. When considering the master, this is indeed the case. The texts of the present compilation, "The origin of the Patterning Principle and Vital Energy" and so forth, are all expressions of this comprehension of his through thinking alone. [...]

This single quotation crystallizes the rhetoric used by the disciples and supporters in the peritexts added successively to the first edition of the *Hwadam jip* to defend, define, and promote Seo Gyeongdeok's Learning. It puts forward authoritative arguments by alluding to figures of reference in the 18th century, such as Jo Gwangjo, Yi I, Yi Hwang, as well as Yun Geunsu 尹根壽 (1537-1616), the founder of the Southerners and disciple of Yi Hwang. Moreover, it explicitly refers to the highest possible towering figures in Korean Confucianism: Gija, Confucius, Mencius, and Zhu Xi. Here, Yun Deukgwon gives the contours of what was Seo Gyeongdeok's true Learning according to his disciples and followers in the 18th century: a "Learning of Nature and Principle" (*seongni ji hak* 性理之學) and a "Learning of the Mind-and-Heart" (*simhak* 心學). His method of the mind (*simbeop* 心法) was directly inherited from Confucius and Mencius; his science of numbers, from Gija. As for his "Studying of Numbers," which had been pinpointed since the 16th century, it should be regarded as falling within the realm of the orthodox "Learning of Principle," since "numbers are patterning principles." Yun also explains that Seo Gyeongdeok's meditative method of "thinking alone" allowed him to "comprehend things immediately and fully" (*ilmangjatonghyo* 一望自通曉) and aimed primarily at understanding the "unity pervading all things" (*gwancheol* 貫徹) and "seeking the underlying patterning principles" (*simgae uiri* 尋簡義理). By alluding to the notions of the "all-pervading unity" (*gwan* 貫), "comprehension" or "continuity through changes" (*tong* 通), and "meanings and principles" (*uiri* 義理), Yun Deukgwon explicitly meant that Seo Gyeongdeok's method was orthodox, since it had been faithfully (*sin* 信) following the teachings of Confucius, the *Book of Changes*, and Zhu Xi, respectively. The account of Yun Geunsu's words at the Chinese court was also duly recorded in the "Chronological Biography." This entry is worth noting, since it is followed by another entry saying that upon meeting Chinese emissaries and asked which Korean scholars knew about the "Learning of Mind-and-Heart" from Confucius and Mencius, Yi Hwang would have cited Seo Gyeongdeok, along with Jo Gwangjo, Kim Anguk, Jeong Yeochang 鄭汝昌 (1450-1504), and Kim Goengpil 金宏弼 (1454-1504). Gi Daeseong and Yu Huichun, when asked in a similar setting who in Joseon was comparable with Zhu Xi and the Cheng brothers, would have also cited Seo Gyeongdeok.⁴⁵

45. "Chronological Biography," paragraph 59: "宣廟初. 詔使許公國, 魏公時亮問東方有知孔孟心學者. 李文純公滉. 以先生及寒暄, 一蠶, 靜菴, 慕齋爲對. 明年, 歐公希稷至. 又問有如何朱者. 眉巖柳希春, 高峯奇大

In the third paragraph of the quotation above, Yun Deukgwan compares Seo Gyeongdeok to Confucius himself in developing his argument, which is as follows: Hwadam's Learning cannot be labeled as numerology by only considering his remaining writings since these testimonies are incomplete. It would be the same as assessing Confucius' teachings as cosmology, by only considering his work on the *Changes*. All the prefaces and postfaces of the *Hwadam jip* insisting upon not judging Seo's Learning solely on surviving texts repeatedly stressed the unfortunate paucity of his remaining writings. Another comparison in order to understand what Seo Gyeongdeok's disciples may have wanted to say would be to compare him with Confucius's favorite disciple, Yan Hui 顏回 (c. 521–481 BC). Indeed, Seo Gyeongdeok's leading a poor life was famous to the point of becoming a topos. His frugal eremitism, driven by his unquenchable quest for knowledge and clear-sightedness and regardless of political and social affairs as well as the resources of his household and family, was known by all to the point that he was considered an immortal, or a "true person" (*jimin* 真人), as put by Yun Suk 尹塾 (1734–1797)⁴⁶ in his 1786 preface.⁴⁷ Frugality, when paired with constancy, genuineness, and fervor toward study, is a virtue highly praised by Confucians.⁴⁸ Among Confucius' disciples, Yan Hui was the personification of this complete dedication to learning and the propensity for being content with little—be it fame, power, or wealth. Seo Gyeongdeok is famous for having spent his nights and days in the little straw

升. 議對如前.”

46. Yun Suk 尹塾 (1734–1797). He was a member of the powerful Papyeong Yun clan (Papyeong Yun-ssi 坡平尹氏) from Paju in Gyeonggi Province. In 1761, Yun Suk passed the Higher Civil Service Examination and was appointed Royal Scribe at the Hall of Writing Skills (*yemunghan* 藝文館). The following year, when the Crown Prince Jangheon 莊獻 (1735–1762), better known as Crown Prince Sado 思悼, was accused of plotting a coup against his father, Yun Suk sought clemency for the prince. He drew on himself the wrath of Jeongjo, who sent him into exile in Gangjin. When Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800) inherited the throne, Yun Suk was called back to the court and appointed at the Ministry of War. In 1783, he was promoted Censor-General (*daesagan* 大司諫) and Minister of War. Later, he was exiled again to Hwanghae Province. It is at that time that he wrote this preface to the *Hwadam jip*. When he was called back to the court, he was appointed First Minister-without-Portfolio (*panjungchubusa* 判中樞府事). After his death, he was bestowed the title of Chief State Counselor (*yeonguijeong* 領議政) and the posthumous name of Chungbuk 忠肅.
47. “New Preface to the Collected Writings of Master Hwadam” by Yun Suk, paragraph 8 (1786): “窮居山僻. 不厭糟糠. 而抱經論道. 隱而不顯. 當中廟彙茅之世. 不能立朝而行道. 及仁宗汲梗之日. 遽爾抱弓而泣天. 終身為少微真人.”
48. *Analec*s 4.5: “子曰: 富與貴, 是人之所欲也; 不以其道得之, 不處也. 貧與賤, 是人之惡也; 不以其道得之, 不去也. 君子去仁, 惡乎成名. 君子無終食之間違仁, 造次必於是, 顛沛必於是.”

pavilion called Seosajeong 逝斯亭, which he had made built in the north of Gaeseong next to the Florid Pool, Hwadam. There, he is said to have had to skip meals regularly, due to the lack of resources, though he paid little attention to such circumstances. He enjoyed instead studying by himself and with his disciples, as well as being outdoors and fishing.⁴⁹ Right before passing away, he asked his disciples to take him to the pool where he could bathe while enjoying his last moments in nature.⁵⁰

One important and little known aspect of Seo Gyeongdeok's personality is his natural ability to be joyful, content, and happy. Heo Yeop notably described him as having spontaneously danced out of joy when wandering in mountains.⁵¹ Expressions of worry, irritation, anger, pessimism, or deep exhaustion are not readily found in his remaining writings. He appears genuinely satisfied with his poor but studious life, just like Yan Hui. Seo Gyeongdeok's last words are worth remembering in this regard: "When his end was approaching, one of his disciples had asked him, 'Master, how are you feeling now?' The master replied, 'It has already been a long time since I came to understand the principles behind life and death. I feel at peace.'"⁵² Throughout his life, mainly spent cloistered in his pavilion in Hwadam, Seo Gyeongdeok seems to have attained contentment and fulfillment. Confucius himself was also described as satisfied at the end of his life in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記). Seo Gyeongdeok's ability to enjoy his life of study and frugality presented a solid criterion to positively assess both his Learning and his obtaining of the Way.

In his well-known dissertation written around 1056 at the Imperial Academy (Taixue 太學) and titled "Treatise on What Master Yan Loved to Learn" (*Yanzi suohao hexuelun* 顏子所好何學論), Cheng Yi argued that Sagehood (*shengxue* in Chinese; *seonghak* in Korean 聖學) could be gifted by birth but also obtained through "learning," notably by understanding by one's self.⁵³ He took Yan Hui as the best example of the sagehood gained

49. Yun Suk's preface, paragraph 10: "府治之北十里. 有花谷院宇. 寔先生生時攸學. 而沒後藏修之所. 其側有一間茅亭. 名逝斯. 即先生盤桓垂釣之處也."

50. "Chronological Biography," paragraph 58 (1546): "[...] 先生自甲辰冬. 連在床褥. 是日病革. 令侍者昇出潭上. 澡浴而還. 食頃乃卒."

51. "Remaining Materials," quoting the *Jeoneonwanghaengnok* 前言往行錄 by Heo Yeop: "花潭遇山水佳處. 輒起舞."

52. *Ibid.*: "臨終. 有一門生問曰. 先生今日意思何如. 先生曰. 死生之理. 知之已久. 意思安矣."

53. The dissertation is recorded in the *Collected Works of the Two Cheng* [Brothers] (*Er Cheng ji* 二程集), as well as the *Survey of Song and Yuan Confucianists* (*SongYuan xue'an* 宋元學案), *juan* 16, compiled

through this process of learning. What Yan Hui was doing, or “busy at” (*sa* 事), was practicing the virtue of humanity (*ren* in Chinese; *in* in Korean 仁). To discuss this point, Cheng Yi based his argumentation on three authoritative quotations taken from the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), the *Analects*, and the “Great Treatise” (*Xici* 繫辭) of the *Book of Change* (*Yijing* in Chinese; *Yeokgyeong* in Korean 易經).⁵⁴ All these quotations focus on Yan Hui’s constancy, steadfastness, and coherence in practicing Learning, that is to say, in daily ethics. Seo Gyeongdeok also shared these virtues, as explained at length in most of the peritexts of the *Hwadam jip*. As Yun Hyoseon 尹孝先 (1563-1619)⁵⁵ put it in the 1601 postface,

In his learning, the master sought only genuineness, was focused on inner mental attentiveness and gave precedence to the investigation of things and the expansion of knowledge. When he had not exhausted the meaning of a word, he would then think about other possible meanings and when he still had not grasped it, he would develop his understanding by putting his efforts into practicing what he had already understood. He set a rigorous curriculum for himself and moved progressively forward. When his learning came to fulfillment, his viewpoint had changed significantly and, thus, he quickly reached the goal that he had set for himself. He had an unbending mind within and his good-natured manners shone without. Balance and harmony were rooted deep in his nature and the *Odes* and *Documents* drove his behavior. A life of destitution and hunger did not weaken his heart, nor

by Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610-1695).

54. *Zhongyong* 8: “子曰: 回之為人也, 擇乎中庸, 得一善, 則拳拳服膺而弗失之矣”; *Analects* 6.2: “哀公問: 弟子孰為好學? 孔子對曰: 有顏回者好學, 不遷怒, 不貳過. 不幸短命死矣! 今也則亡, 未聞好學者也”; *Xici* 2.5: “子曰: 顏氏之子, 其殆庶幾乎? 有不善未嘗不知, 知之未嘗復行也. 易曰: 不遠復, 无祇悔, 元吉.”
55. Yun Hyoseon 尹孝先 (1563-1619) was from the Yun clan of Namwon 南原 in Jeolla Province (Namwon Yun-ssi 南原尹氏). Better known under the name of Yun Hyojeon 尹孝全, his courtesy name was Gicheon 沂川 and usual name, Yeongcho 詠初. His paternal great grandfather, Yun Gwan 尹寬 (1490-1550), was a disciple of Jo Gwangjo and a renowned Confucian scholar. His grandfather, Yun Ho 尹虎 (d. 1393), was Vice Minister of Personnel and his father, Yun Huison 尹喜孫 (d. 1522), was also an influent scholar-official. His son, Yun Hyu 尹鑄 (1617-1680), was a famous Confucian scholar-official and the leader of the Southerners (Namin 南人). Yun Hyoseon studied with Hwadam’s disciple Min Sun as well as Toegy’s disciple Jeong Gu 鄭述 (1543-1620). He was affiliated with the Northerners (Bugin 北人) and he took the side of the Little Northerners when the Northerners split into two factions. Yun Hyoseon obtained a protected appointment (*eumseo* 蔭敍) but successfully passed the Higher Civil Service Examination in 1605. Yun Hyoseon wrote this postface to the *Hwadam jip* before passing the Higher Civil Service Examination and embarking onto his tumultuous political life.

did the lust of fame or gain compromise his determination. He spent his whole life in the woods, pondering past and present.⁵⁶

As the title clearly shows, Cheng Yi's dissertation focused on the "pleasure" (*ho* 好) that Yan Hui took in the process of learning through self-cultivation. This is a reference to one anecdote from the *Analects* in which Duke Ai of Lu asked Confucius which of his disciples loved learning, and Confucius answered, "There was Yan Hui—he loved learning, never took his anger out on others, never repeated his mistakes. Regrettably, he had a short life and is dead now. Since then, there are none who love learning, or none I've heard of."⁵⁷ The "Chronological Biography" of the *Hwadam jip* writes that Seo Gyeongdeok would say about himself, "When I turned twenty, I decided never to make the same mistake twice,"⁵⁸ implicitly comparing himself with Yan Hui. In his 1585 "Tombstone Inscription," Bak Minheon depicted Seo Gyeongdeok as a master whom we might again be tempted to describe in the image and likeness of Yan Hui:

The master was not even thirty yet and had already investigated things and extended his knowledge. He said: "It is only when I was fifty that my thoughts were sincere; such was the order of my learning process" [...] By nature, he was a man of extreme filial piety and he read the *Book of Rites* when he was mourning his parents. [...] He was truly considerate with his brothers, and he educated his spouses with gentleness. If a dispute arose among his sons or younger siblings, he would settle it gently and never blame them with stern words. Throughout his life he disliked ostentatious behavior, and when interacting with villagers, he talked cheerfully all day, without behaving any differently with them. [...] His household lived in extreme poverty. Sometimes, they had no food to cook for several days running but they remained always tranquil. When he guided his pupils in their studies and saw them make steady progress, joy shone on his features. [...] In the latter years of his life, the Master's virtue was increasingly vigorous and was apparent in the brightness of his countenance and the

56. "Postface to the Collected Works of Master Hwadam" 花潭先生文集跋, paragraphs 7 and 8: "先生之學. 一於誠. 主於敬. 且以格致為先. 有一字不窮. 更思他義不得. 知之之至. 力行其所知之志. 嚴立課程. 進進無已. 及其有成則用夏丕變. 快造所期. 陽剛立於內. 粹容著於外. 中和立其本. 詩書飭其躬. 不以貧餓動其心. 不以威利撓其志. 一生林下. 俯仰今古."

57. Watson 2007; *Analects* 6.3: "哀公問: 弟子孰為好學? 孔子對曰: 有顏回者好學, 不遷怒, 不貳過. 不幸短命死矣! 今也則亡, 未聞好學者也."

58. "Chronological Biography," paragraph 20 (1508): "先生二十歲. 嘗曰. 吾二十. 便欲不貳過."

suppleness of his back. Just looking at him, one could tell that he had acquired the Way. Local people were positively transformed by his virtue.⁵⁹

Seo Gyeongdeok and Yan Hui shared the same personality traits and led similar lifestyles: they were poor and recluse but cared about others; they were dedicated to learning in a manner resembling obsession; and they both enjoyed their ways of learning. Thanks to their genuineness, they “acquired the Way” in the end and set an example for others. Following Bak Minheon, we might say that Seo Gyeongdeok, despite his unusual method of learning and his specific intellectual proclivities, always remained true to himself and the Learning Confucius had admired through the example of his favorite disciple. Perhaps this was how Seo Gyeongdeok, whose eremitism may be best explained by his loving learning so much, became called a posteriori the “cheerful immortal” (*soseon* 笑仙),⁶⁰ whose “joy shone on his features.”

Conclusion

Seo Gyeongdeok’s status as an iconic Confucian scholar today may well have grown mainly—if not only—thanks to the generations of numerous disciples and followers who devoted significant efforts and resources between the 16th and 18th centuries to restore his ambivalent image in the public knowledge, the court, and scholarly circles. Their most emblematic achievement was the *Hwadam jip*, whose successive editions were each time labors of love and dedication. The 1787 edition, printed in Gaeseong at the Hwagok Academy and used today as reference, contains an impressive number of peritexts for such a small compilation of heterogeneous writings, which were the only remaining testimonies of Seo Gyeongdeok’s life and thought first after the ravages of oblivion, and then war, destruction, and time. The major actors of this long rehabilitation project were Seo Gyeongdeok’s direct disciples Bak Minheon and Heo Yeop, his indirect disciples Hong Isang and Yun Hyoseon, their sons Hong Bang and Yun Hyu, curious minds and admirers such as Kim Yonggyeom and

59. “Tombstone Inscription,” paragraphs 11 to 13.

60. “List of Disciples,” paragraph 19, entry on Jeong Jiyeon 鄭芝衍 (1525-1583): “鄭芝衍. [...] 受業於履素齋. 或遊於徐花潭, 成笑仙之門.”

Yun Deukgwan, Gaeseong scholars such as Han Myeongsang, Ma Jigwang, and Jo Yuseon, and a few Gaeseong magistrates such as Won Inson, Cha Wiha, and Yun Suk. Many other scholars and members of the local elites from the Gaeseong and Gyeonggi areas as well as scholars from other provinces who had studied the teachings of Seo Gyeongdeok or his disciples, likely also took part to different extents.

This study has shown that assessments of Seo Gyeongdeok reached a peak in the 16th century under the reigns of Myeongjong and Seonjo, with Yi Hwang and Yi I expressing their opinions widely. Yi Hwang, while acknowledging Seo's virtues, was the most critical, specifically of the philosophical issues surrounding the Principle and Vital Energy. But it was Yi I, born 47 years after Seo Gyeongdeok's death, who played a key role in shaping a particular image of Seo Gyeongdeok's persona and thought for posterity. Despite his reservations during audiences at court, he was rather laudatory about his scholarship in private. The "Hwadam Learning" or "Hwadam School" has been commonly linked with the "Yulgok Learning" and "Giho School." This connection, substantiated by geographical factors in recent studies (Sin 2000, 180-94) as well as similar philosophical grounds, might explain why Hwadam's thought has been overwhelmingly understood as a "Learning of Vital Energy," which is believed to have paved the way to Yi I's own speculations about the Principle and Vital Energy.

The formal organization of the *Hwadam jip*, compiled between the 16th and 18th centuries, presented a certain reading grid that gave a clear precedence to the set of texts that were *à la manière de* Zhang Zai and dealt with cosmology, recalling the orthodox teachings of both Northern and Southern Song thinkers. Hence Shao Yong's influence, as well as Seo Gyeongdeok's unmistakable interest in the interpretation of "images and numbers," or numerology, were slightly downplayed. These features were not only acknowledged in most of the editions; they were assumed as well, except for the last one, which instead stressed that Hwadam Learning belonged to the orthodox "Learning of Nature and Principle." Modern studies, interested in philosophy or intellectual history, have largely focused on the four antemortem texts that stand apart in the *munjip*. The rest of the texts have been mostly left aside⁶¹ and used only to

61. There are some exceptions. Among them, the majority of the studies have examined so far Seo Gyeongdeok's cosmology. But a handful of recent studies have been focusing on other texts and themes of the *Hwadam jip*. See for example Sim 2009, 67-96; Cho 2018.

make general statements about Seo Gyeongdeok's life and thought if necessary. Defining Seo Gyeongdeok's teachings as a "Learning of Vital Energy" may be convenient and useful to draw clear-cut genealogies of the Korean intellectual lineages, but it is not satisfactory.

This study has also demonstrated that, according to the generations of followers involved in the compilation of the *Hwadam jip* until the 1787 edition, "Hwadam Learning" could better be defined as a "Learning of Mind-and-Heart" coming from Confucius and Mencius. I have even proposed a comparison with the figure of Yan Hui to highlight one canonical definition of Confucian Learning coming from Confucius himself in the *Analects*: the joy felt while learning. This criterion was stressed by Cheng Yi when addressing the case of Yan Hui in his famous dissertation, which became the reference for understanding Neo-Confucianism. Moreover, according to Seo Gyeongdeok's disciples and later supporters, Hwadam's "Learning of the Mind-and-Heart" was in line with the "Learning of Nature and Principle" promoted by Zhu Xi, as well as by Yi Hwang and Yi I in Korea. Seo Gyeongdeok could therefore be legitimately honored and paid homage to as "Master Hwadam," a genuine Confucian Sage of Joseon who "transformed the people" thanks to his virtue. Although he was not enshrined in the Munmyo, he could nevertheless be referred to as a founding figure of the Korean tradition. The very making of the *Hwadam jip* fulfilled the need of the scholars of late Joseon, especially those from the Gaeseong area such as Jo Yuseon, who were eager to build up their own specific lineage within the broad official narrative of the Transmission of the Way in the late Joseon period.

This study leads to a set of possible prospective topics: an examination of the criteria used to assess Confucian scholars in the Korean tradition is one. A second investigation could look into the exact nature of Hwadam Learning through a close reading of Seo Gyeongdeok's writings in the *Hwadam jip* as a coherent whole and not as a mere juxtaposition of heterogeneous texts. A third topic could consist of further exploring Seo Gyeongdeok's legacy by way of the philosophical teachings and biographical trajectories of his disciples.⁶² These three possible directions of study, however, overlap in one salient feature—Seo Gyeongdeok's studies of the *Changes*. This topic should be addressed first

62. This would be a study following up the work already done by Sin 2000, but also Hwang 2003.

through different methodological approaches, ideally combined together: local history,⁶³ philosophical exegesis, biographical studies, literature studies, and most importantly, the history of cosmological studies in Joseon Korea, a fascinating field that still awaits to be fully developed.

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63. The local approach has been already examined, for example by Sin 2000, 180-94; Noh 2014, 307-59.

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Abstract

Based on the analysis of the *Hwadam jip* 花潭集 and its peritexts (prefaces, postfaces, chronological biography, etc.) in particular, this study focuses on the contrasting assessments of Seo Gyeongdeok 徐敬德 (1489-1546) during the Joseon period. It analyzes why and how the followers of Seo Gyeongdeok laid out multiple strategies in the compilation of his *munjip* to counteract the criticisms expressed by high-profile Neo-Confucian scholar-officials, such as Yi Hwang and Yi I under Seonjo's reign. These criticisms toward Seo Gyeongdeok's eremitism, his approach to the *Changes*, and his specific way of practising Confucian learning, which had been regarded as potentially unorthodox, were all addressed in different ways by the successive compilers of the *munjip* between the 16th and 18th centuries. This article argues that the *Hwadam jip*, especially the last edition in 1787, is what may have played a major role in turning Seo Gyeongdeok into Master Hwadam, one of the most respected Confucian scholars nowadays. By mixing carefully chosen biographical elements with philosophical arguments, this most complete edition printed at the Hwagok Academy by the scholars of Gaeseong can be seen as an attempt to provide a holistic understanding of "Hwadam Learning" and trace their own lineage within the orthodox "Transmission of the Way" in the process. Seo Gyeongdeok is presented as a direct disciple of Confucius, in the manner of Yan Hui and, hence, worthy of the utmost respect and recognition. Ironically, although Seo Gyeongdeok has been duly acknowledged as a forerunner of the Neo-Confucian tradition of Joseon in modern histories of Korean Confucianism, the definition of "Hwadam Learning" as a "Learning of Mind-and-Heart" in line with the "Learning of Nature and Principle" as proposed in the final edition of the *Hwadam jip* is not the one that prevails today.

Keywords: Seo Gyeongdeok, Hwadam, Learning, biography, eremitism, Neo-Confucianism, *Changes*, images and numbers, numerology, *munjip*, Transmission of the Way, Gaeseong

