

Materials on Korean Studies

**Peculiarities of *Yadam* Literature and  
the Present Condition of Sources**

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## Peculiarities of *Yadam* Literature and the Present Condition of Sources

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### 1. Tradition of *Pilgijaprok* and Apparition of *Yadam*

A significant number of Korean classics can be categorized as *pilgijaprok* (筆記雜錄), and most of them are records of an author's everyday experiences and thoughts from reading. *Pilgijaprok* is a style of narration that appeared with the forming of the *sadaebu* class in the late Goryeo dynasty. The *sadaebu* class, which grew as an elite class in late Goryeo and became the ruling class in the Joseon dynasty, propagated a number of literary styles and movements. Most notable are: styles of poetry such as *gyeonggichega* (景幾體歌), *sijo* (時調), *soagbu* (小樂府), and *gasa* (歌辭) and narrative styles such as *jeongi* (傳記) and *pilgijaprok*. With the rise of the *sadaebu* class in late Goryeo, *pilgijaprok* such as Yi Inro (李仁老, 1151-1220)'s *Pahanjip* (破閑集), Yi Gyubo (李奎報, 1168-1241)'s *Baekunsoseol* (白雲小說), Choe Ja (崔滋, 1188-1260)'s *Bohanjip* (補閑集), and Yi Jehyeon (李齊賢, 1287-1367)'s *Yeokongpaeseol* (櫟翁稗說) were produced.

*Pilgijaprok* is the recording of the author's own experiences and can be categorized as a narrative in a broad sense of the term. Although *pilgijaprok* is similar to today's literary miscellany, its themes and contents are broader than today's literary categorization as they include varieties of *sadaebu* literati's interests. Its themes include academic research, comments and reviews on poetry, everyday anecdotes, oral legends and folk tales, travel diaries, and humorous stories. *Pilgijaprok's* thematic varieties reflect the literary outlook of medieval Korean *sadaebu*. The medieval *sadaebu* conception of literature, different from today's differentiated humanities fields, encompassed the entire field of today's literature, history, and philosophy. *Pilgijaprok* therefore covers

historical, fictional, descriptive, critical, and argumentative aspects and characteristics of writing.

*Yadam* (野談), the subject of inquiry in this paper, is a style of literature that emerged from the tradition of *pilgijaprok* and reflects specific historical conditions of the late Joseon era. *Pilgijaprok* often included oral folk stories circulated by commoners. Reflecting the everyday lives and feelings of the lower classes, *yadam* literature's narrative is distinct from romantic and fantastic *jeongi* (傳奇) literature or *mongyurok* (夢遊錄) literature of the upper classes. *Yadam*, which occasionally made its way into *pilgijaprok* of the late Goryeo and early Joseon eras, became widespread by the late Joseon period. Such change reflects the rapid social changes of the late Joseon period, and *sadaebu* literati who paid attention to new stories reflecting changing realities of the late Joseon period gave birth to *yadam* literature.

In this paper, major works and narrative particularities of *yadam* literature will be reviewed, reflecting its historical trajectory from the first *yadam* literature, *Eouyadam* (於于野譚) by Yu Mongin (柳夢寅, 1559-1623), to works of the late nineteenth century. *Yadam* literature, generally speaking, is the literati recording of oral folk stories. As it went through two different processing modes, *yadam* often contains mixtures of different narrative characteristics. With the abovementioned factors, I want to further examine the narrative characteristics of *yadam* literature.

## 2. Narrative Method and Apparition of the First *Yadam* Literature

The main reason why *sadaebu* recorded folk tales is to produce interesting readings. Given the laxity and freedom to be creative, changes worth noting often occurred—many of these stories grew to contain important allegorical and satirical messages. *Eouyadam* is the first self-claimed *yadam* literature, and its author, Yu Mongin, incorporated folk tales with social criticisms. Here, I would like to take a story from *Eouyadam* and examine its contents. The protagonist in the story is Hwang Jini (黃眞伊), the most well-known *gisaeng* of the Joseon dynasty. The story contains four anecdotes, and the following are their summarizations:

① The story takes place in the first year of the Gajeong era (1522-1566). Hwang Jini of Songdo (today's Gaeseong) is a famous singer and a strong-

spirited woman. Hwang Jini heard that Seo Gyeongdeok (徐敬德) is the greatest scholar of the age and wanted to test him. When Hwang Jini asked Seo Gyeongdeok to become his disciple, Seo Gyeongdeok happily accepted her. Although Hwang Jini attempted to seduce Seo Gyeongdeok every night, he did not fall for it.

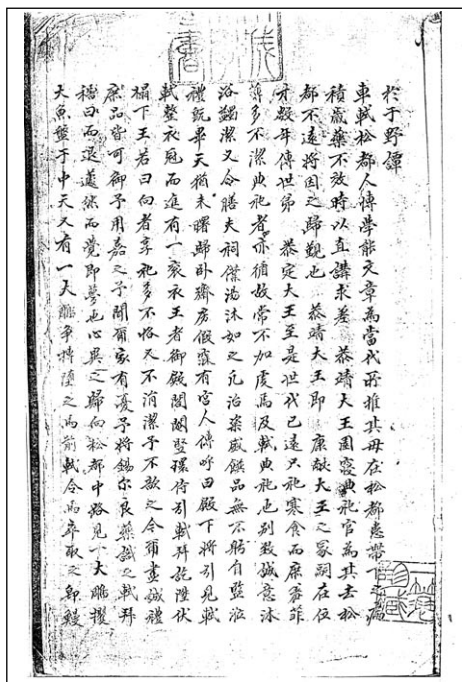
② Hwang Jini went sightseeing to Geumgangsan (Diamond Mountains) with a lower civil examination passer from a well-known family named Yi. They went just about everywhere at Geumgangsan. When they ran out of food, they would sometimes go beg for food at Buddhist temples or Hwang Jini would occasionally prostitute herself for food. Ten local literati held a banquet in a valley one day, and Hwang Jini went to the banquet and sang. Her beautiful voice echoed throughout the valley and impressed everyone. Hwang Jini fed Yi with the food she got from the banquet. Neighbors were shocked when Hwang Jini and Yi came back to Songdo a year later in rags.

③ *Seonjeongwan* (宣傳官, Joseon dynasty official position) Yi Sajong (李士宗) is a famous singer. Hwang Jini heard Yi Sajong's singing when Yi Sajong passed by Gaeseong, and Hwang Jini offered Yi Sajong to live with her at her house for six years. Hwang Jini lived at Yi Sajong's place for three years and Yi Sajong lived at Hwang Jini's place for three years. They both took care of each other's family during their stay. After six years, Hwang Jini left Yi Sajong's home.

④ Hwang Jini asked to be buried near a big road at her time of death. Im Je (林悌), on his way to assume the position of *Pyeongan dosa* (平安都事, Governor of Pyeongan Province), passed by Songdo and wrote a tribute on Hwang Jini's grave. Im Je was later criticized by the government for it.

The four anecdotes are independent folk stories about Hwang Jini circulating at the time, and all of them can be deemed unconventional according to everyday norms of the time. There is no apparent link connecting these stories or any explanation of Hwang Jini's unconventional actions. In other words, the authors of these stories have merely described the stories without intervening into the narrative. However, the four anecdotes are concatenated in the sense that they reinforce Hwang Jini's image as, despite her low status as a *gisaeng*, a rebel fighting against the constraints of medieval Confucianism. The author's

**Illustration 1** Handwritten manuscript of *Eouyadam*, 3 books, Seoul National University Library.



intention can be read through examining the image these anecdotes create and reinforce.

Although stories about Hwang Jini appear in various kinds of literature in subsequent eras, there is none which depicts Hwang Jini so staunchly as a resistor of medieval Confucianism as did *Eouyadam*. According to my research, *Jibongyuseol* (芝峯類設) by Yi Sugwang (李睟光, 1563-1628), *Songdogii* (松都記異) by Yi Deokhyeong (李德洞, 1566-1645), *Seongongjisorok* (惺翁識小錄) by Heo Gyun (許筠, 1569-1618), *Suchonmanrok* (水村漫錄) by Im Bang (任望, 1640-1724), *Isunrok* (二旬錄) by Gu Suhun (具樹勳, 1685-1757), *Yeonryeosilgisul* (燃藜室記述) by Yi Geungik (李肯翊, 1736-1806), *Cheongbirok* (淸脾錄) by Yi Deokmu (李德懋, 1741-1793), *Junggyeongji* (中京誌) by Kim Rijae (金履載, 1767-1847), *Gumgyepildam* (錦溪筆談) by Seo Yuyong (徐有英, 1801-1874), *Dongyahwijip* (東野彙輯) by Yi Wonmyeong (李源命, ?-?), *Sungyanggigujeon* (崧陽耆舊傳) by Kim Taekyeong (金澤榮, 1850-1927), and *Haedonggihwa* (海東奇話), *Gimunchonghwa* (記聞叢話), and *Dongyajiipsa* (東野輯史) by unknown authors contain writings on Hwang Jini.

Stories these *pilgijaprok* writings contain broadly are: ① stories on Hwang Jini's birth (*Songdogii*, *Seongongjisorok*, *Yeonryeosilgisul*, *Junggyeongji*, *Sungyanggigujeon*, and *Dongyajipsa*), ② stories which Hwang Jini calls herself, Seo Gyeongdok, and Bakyeon waterfall as *Songdosamjeol* (the best three of Songdo) (*Jibongyuseol*, *Seongongjisorok*, *Junggyeongji*, *Cheongbirok*, and *Sungyanggigujeon*), ③ stories about Hwang Jini's poetry talent—sometimes including anecdotes with So Seyang (1486-1562) (*Suchonmanrok*, *Cheongbirok*, and *Sungyanggigujeon*), ④ stories on Hwang Jini's beauty and musical talent (*Songdogii*, *Yeonryeosilgisul*, and *Cheongbirok*), ⑤ stories about Hwang Jini's love of traveling (*Seongonejisorok*, *Yeonryeosilgisul*, *Sungyanggigujeon*, and *Haedonggihwa*), and ⑥ stories on Hwang Jini's death and will (*Sungyanggigujeon* and *Dongyajipsa*).

They appear to have recorded miscellaneous stories about Hwang Jini, projecting an image of an unusually talented and beautiful *gisaeng*. *Eouyadam*, however, goes a step further in describing Hwang Jini as a rebellious woman resisting the shackles of medieval Confucianism.

Asking Seo Gyeongdeok to accept her as a student and later testing his character, traveling Geumgangsán with the son of an important official for a year, and concluding an economically equal contract marriage with Yi Sajong for six years represent Hwang Jini's radical aspects in resistance against the restraints of medieval Confucianism. Such radicalism in *Eouyadam* reflects the author Yu Mongin's own critical views against Confucianism. The last anecdote, in which Im Je is dismissed from the government for writing a tribute on Hwang Jini's grave, can be read as indirectly implying the author's sympathy toward Hwang Jini's deeds. Compared to other *pilgijaprok* writings, Yu Mongin deepened the significance and theme of Hwang Jini stories by carefully selecting and reconfiguring them. The author's unusual and critical perspective was the driving factor in the creation of the first *yadam* literature.

However, descriptions of Hwang Jini in *Eouyadam* are sometimes too remarkable to be real. Detailed descriptions of circumstances and conflict and growth of characters are entirely missing, and only shocking incidents are recorded. Such a lack may reflect the circumstances of the time when *yadam* literature was still forming. *Yadam* literature's dominant characteristic is that it acquires historic reality through oral transmissions. It can be inferred that activities of professional storytellers were relatively weak during the early seventeenth century. In addition, anecdotes about Hwang Jini do not reflect the dominant themes of late Joseon stories, such as the changing of social status and pursuing of wealth, which reflect

the historical changes during that time. Hwang Jini stories here only exaggeratedly express remarkable characteristics of Hwang Jini and have little to do with issues and conflicts in real life. Perhaps that is the main reason behind such a lack of conflict and growth of the characters in the Hwang Jini story.

### 3. Formation and Circulation of *Yadam* Literature during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

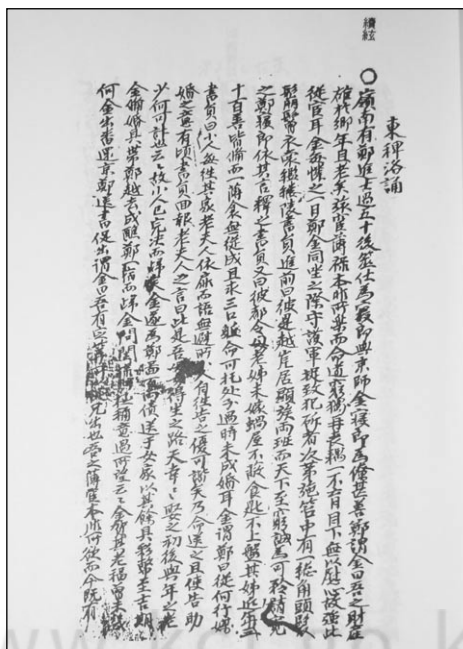
Following the appearance of *Eouyadam* in the early seventeenth century, *yadam* literature of various names appears in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Major works include *Cheonyerok* (天倪錄) by Im Bang (任埴, 1640-1724), *Dongpaeraksong* (東裨洛誦) by No Myeongheum (盧命欽, 1713-1775), *Haksanhaneon* (鶴山閑言) by Sin Donbok (辛敦復, 1692-1779), *Gyeseoyadam* (溪西野談) by Yi Huijun (李義準, 1775-?), *Sapgyomanrok* (雪橋漫錄) by An Seokgyeong (安錫徹, ?-1782), *Geumgyepildam* (錦溪筆談) by Seo Yuyong (徐有英, 1801-?), *Dongyahwijip* (東野彙輯) by Yi Wonmyeong (李源命, 1807-?), *Chasanpildam* (此山筆談) by Bae Jeon (裴焮 ?-?), and *Cheongguyadam* (青邱野談), *Gimunchonghwa* (記聞叢話), *Gyeapmanrok* (溪鴨漫錄), *Cheongyadamsu* (青野談藪), and *Cheoneonpyeon* (選諺篇) by unknown authors and editors. Besides these major works, there are countless *yadam* stories collected and recorded by literati. *Yadam*, by the late Joseon period, had a firm place in Korean literature as a leading genre of narrative literature. With the exception of Yi Wonmyeong, a scholar-official who passed the civil service examination and reached the post of *Ijopanseo* (Minister of Personnel), most authors were unfortunate literati who never served in government or only did so in the lowest positions. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with *Noron* (老論) domination of the government, the *sadaebu* group splits into a small number of ruling aristocratic families and a vast pool of marginalized literati. Authors of *yadam* literature were mostly literati who were marginalized from the government. Economically speaking, they were little different from commoners. No Myeongheum (盧命欽), the author of *Dongpaeraksong*, is a good example. Unable to economically self-support himself, No Myeongheum worked for thirty years as a resident private teacher at the home of Hong Bonghan (洪鳳漢, 1713-1778), a powerful and influential official during King Yeongjo's reign. At a time when making a living as a resident private tutor was considered shameful for learned persons, a number of marginalized literati were forced to live at homes of wealthy and powerful officials. Such



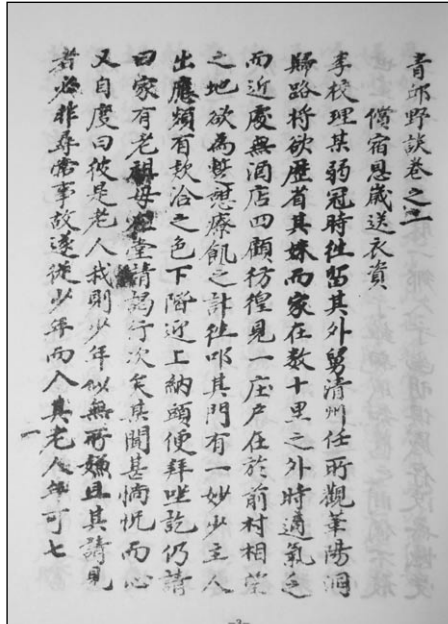
marginalization may have influenced these literati to adopt a critical view of the society they lived in and become more attentive to stories of the commoners.

*Yadam* literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was diverse in its contents as well as in quality. However, compared to *yadam* writings contained in *pilgijaprok* of the past, a number of quality writings comparable to today's short novels also appeared during this time. *Yadam* stories that exhibit exemplary literary qualities are called *Hanmundanpyeon* (漢文短篇, short stories written in literary Chinese), and a selection of such stories was published as *Ijohamundanpyeonjip* (李朝漢文短篇集) in 1978. This collection divides 176 *Hanmundanpyeon* stories into three volumes and six sections and added eleven stories by Yeonam Bak Jiwon (朴趾源, 1737-1805) as a supplement. The six sections are: 44 stories in the *Bu* (wealth) section, 26 stories in the *Seonggwa Jeong* (Sex and Feeling) section, 35 stories in the *Setae-Sinbundonghyang* (Prevailing State of the Time-Movements in Social Positions) section, 31 stories in the *Setae-Sijeongjubyeon* (Prevailing State of the Time-Living Conditions) section, 31 stories in the *Minjunggijill-Jeohanggwa Jwajeol* (Disposition of the Masses-

**Illustration 2** *Dongpaeraksong*, *Seobyeokoesa Haeoesuilbon* (栖碧外史海外蒐逸本), two volumes two books, handwritten, Dongyangmungo of Japan.



**Illustration 3** *Cheonggyadam*, Seobyekoesa Haeoesuilbon (栖碧外史海外菟逸本), eight volumes eight books, handwritten, Dongyangmungo of Japan.



Resistance and Frustration) section, and 20 stories in the *Minjunggijil2-Pungjawa Golgye* (Disposition of the Masses-Satire and Humor) section. Works in the collection vividly display the changing social realities of the late Joseon period. Major themes include the formation of new social relationships due to changes in the social order, love conflicts between man and woman resisting the restraints of social classes, corruption and contradictions of the ruling class, miserable realities of ruined *yangban*, rise of new persons of wealth, resistance of lower classes against the ruling class, footloose and scintillating popular culture, and formation of new ethics and values due to the development of a market economy.

Lively social changes in the late Joseon period produced unprecedented sources of stories, and such stories, along with urban development, were propagated by professional storytellers. *Yadam* stories are historical in the sense that they are based on true stories, but their circulation by storytellers changed their contents and made them also fictional. As can be seen from *Eouyadam's* Hwang Jini story, a recorder's position can decisively alter the story. The recorder of *yadam* may record the story truthfully or morph the story according

to his views. A recorder with a critical view toward society may infuse a serious theme into his stories, while a conservative recorder may alter stories according to the *yangban* class's liking. I'd like to further discuss this question by examining a story that produced different variations according to the position of the recorders.

[1] Dokyeok (讀易) (*Cheonggyadam* (Sungkyunkwan University copy), *Pasupyeon*)

① Yi Mo (李某), a scholar living in the Namsangol neighborhood of Seoul, planned to dedicate ten years to studying. He read *Juyeok* (周易) for seven years and ran out of food. He borrowed 30,000 nyang from Hong Dongji (洪同知), one of the wealthiest men in the country.

② Yi Mo continued studying for three more years. His wife increased their wealth by doing business with the borrowed money.

③ After he finished studying, Yi Mo tried to return the money to Hong Dongji with interest. Hong refused and only accepted the principal.

④ Yi Mo went to a remote village in Gangwon Province with the remaining sum. He built a house there and gathered poor people in the neighborhood and formed a village. They lived adequately.

⑤ Yi Mo's village was not affected by the Hideyoshi invasions.

[2] Heosaengbyeoljeon (許生別傳) (*Cheonggyadam* (Seoul National University copy), *Haedongyaseo*)

① Heo Saeng (許生) lived detached from the world. He planned to read *Juyeok* for ten years. After finding out that his wife sold her hair to procure food, Heo went to a well-known magnate of Gaeseong named Baek and borrowed 1,000 nyang.

② Heo Saeng went to Pyeongyang and wasted the borrowed 1,000 nyang playing at the house of Choun, a famous *gisaeng*. Heo Saeng borrowed an additional 9,000 nyang from Baek and wasted the money at Choun's house.

③ After using all the money, Heo Saeng asked for *Odonghwaro* (烏銅火爐, burner made of red copper) as a departing gift. Choun gave it to Heo Saeng.

④ After returning to Gaeseong, Heo Saeng showed *Odonghwaro* to Baek. Heo Saeng went to Hoeryeong (會寧), a town involved in trade with the Manchus, and sold *Odonghwaro* for 100,000 nyang to a Manchu trader.

⑤ Heo Saeng explained to Baek that *Odonghwaro* is a rare treasure made of

red copper and gave 100,000 nyang to Baek. When Baek refused the money and tried to give it back to Heo Saeng, Heo refused the money saying that he is a scholar who doesn't need money and was merely testing Baek. Baek realized that Heo Saeng is a man of unusual character and leaves food and money at Heo Saeng's home every month.

⑥ *Jeongseung* (Senior Minister) Yi Wan (李浣) was looking for men of talent while preparing for an expedition to the north against the Manchus. After hearing about Heo Saeng, Yi Wan visited Heo in person. Heo Saeng provided Yi Wan with three schemes: recruit men regardless of factions, collect *gunpo* (military tax) from *yangban*, or allow commoners to wear comfortable hobok (Manchu clothing).

⑦ When Yi Wan told Heo Saeng that none of the three plans could be implemented, Heo Saeng rebuked him and disappeared.

### [3] Yeo Saeng (呂生) (*Dongyahwijip*)

① Yeo Saeng is a scholar from Namsangol. Although capable of statecraft, he was not used by the government and lived poorly. No longer able to withstand poverty, Yeo Saeng borrowed 10,000 kkwemi from a well-known magnate and former official named Kim.

② Yeo Saeng gave 1,000 kkwemi to his wife to live on during the time he was not around, and left for the Yeongnam region. Kim sent one of his servants with Yeo Saeng and gave the rest of the money in bills.

③ Yeo Saeng went to places such as Hadong (河東) and Gonyang (昆陽), where marketable products of Yeongnam and Honam amass, and bought up all the products with the 9,000 kkwemi. When he bought up almost everything in the market, prices went up. Yeo Saeng made a huge profit by selling the products. Yeo Saeng amassed a huge amount of wealth through such tactics.

④ After hearing that bandits were in the area, Yeo Saeng went to the bandits and became their leader. Yeo Saeng gave each bandit 100 kkwemi and told them to bring their families and buy farming tools.

⑤ When the bandits returned with their families and farming tools, Yeo Saeng got them on a ship and settled on an uninhabited island. They farmed on the island, and made huge profits by selling the food during droughts. Yeo Saeng told the bandits to stop stealing from others and go back to their hometowns and farm. Yeo Saeng distributed 500 kkwemi, food, and ox to each bandit.

⑥ Yeo Saeng returned to Seoul. Yeo Saeng met Kim and told him about

what happened during the past ten years. Yeo Saeng gave Kim 1,000,000 nyang. When Kim Dongji tried to return half of the money, Yeo Saeng refused. Kim then vowed to support Yeo's everyday living expenses.

⑦ Yeo Saeng went back home and found his wife living well in a huge home. His wife also had made a fortune in business.

All three stories feature a rags to riches theme in which a poor scholar becomes rich by participating in commercial activities. Although these stories already existed before, late Joseon yadam literature exhibits a sense of realism. These stories are a reflection of the growing of capitalistic “sprouts” in the late Joseon period, which resulted in the popularity of commercial activities and the formation of a new group of persons of wealth. Such stories feature distinctive aspects of late Joseon society, including the miserable realities of ruined *yangban*, enrichment by cornering and hoarding, wandering farmers becoming bandits, and the unsupported nature of *bukbeolron* (北伐論, discourses on northern exhibition). It is probable that Heo Saeng was a real person, and stories

**Illustration 4** *Hangogwanoesa*, 140 volumes 70 books, handwritten copy, Academy of Korean Studies Jangseogak Library.



of his unusual experiences circulated among commoners while creating such variations. *Heosangjeon* by Bak Jiwon (1737-1805) is a short novel that infused such orally transmitted stories with the author's critical perspective. If the three abovementioned stories can be seen as general recordings of stories in circulation, *Heosangjeon* (許生傳) can be considered a similar story that achieved literary depth and consistency through the work of a great writer.

There were notable efforts to collect and publish *pilgijaprok* of the previous eras after the eighteenth century. The monumental publication of *Daedongyaseung* (大東野乘), which collected fifty-three kinds of *pilgijaprok* from the Sejong era (1418-1450) to the Injo era (1623-1649), into seventy-two volumes, is a good example of such efforts. *Hangogwanoesa* (寒臯觀外史) by Kim Ryeo (金鏞, 1766-1822), *Cheonggupaeseol* (靑丘稗說) by Yi Gysang (李奎象) and Yi Jangjae (李長載), and *Paerim* (稗林) and *Yaseung* (野乘) by unknown editors also reflect grand efforts in publishing *pilgijaprok* writings of the previous eras. Publication of such miscellaneous writings in a series reflects growing interest in these writings in the late Joseon period. *Yadam* writings were often included in these series. *Jungin* (middle people)'s rise is also a noted phenomenon in the late Joseon period. Reflecting such a development, *jungin* writers Jo Huiryong (趙熙龍, 1789-1866) and Yu Jaegeon (劉在建, 1793-1880) published *Hosanoegi* (壺山外記) and *Ihyanggyeonmunrok* (里鄉見聞錄), which presented stories on and about *jungin*.

#### 4. Value of *Yadam* Literature

*Yadam* is a recording in classical Chinese of unusual stories of the past. Due to its orality, *yadam* often achieves vivid reality and contains thoughts and aesthetic senses of the masses. However, the stories' aims and interests often differ due to the different inclinations of the authors. *Yadam* contains vivid recordings of people's everyday lives and feelings that are often difficult to find in fact-based works of history. Because *yadam* was created based upon people's everyday lives, it can be helpful in understanding Korean's values and aesthetic senses. It can also provide important materials for imaginative power in writing history. *Yadam* can also provide ample sources for today's historical novels, TV shows, and movies. *Yadam* can also stimulate writers' creative imagination.

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