

## THE ROLE OF WANG YANGMING'S IDEAS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEO-CONFUCIANISM IN CHINA

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the philosophical doctrine of the great thinker Wang Yangming, who played an important role in traditional Chinese philosophical thought and contributed with his ideas to the development of Neo-Confucianism.

**Keywords:** Yangmingism, unity of knowledge and action, virtuous thought, idealism, human, Buddhism, Daoism.

“Great ancient civilizations are always similar, understand each other, and are spiritually close. The cultures and ideals of the Uzbek and Chinese peoples are similar. Our historical relations date back to the beginning of the Great Silk Road”<sup>1</sup>.

Science and culture in China have been formed in a unique way over the centuries. Various philosophical schools emerged, developed, and declined at different times. Some of them still play an important role in the development of modern China. The philosophical ideas developed there created a distinct school in the East. This school has played a significant role in the socio-cultural life of Southeast Asian countries for centuries.

The philosophical school of Yangmingism created by the famous Chinese thinker Wang Yangming is one such school. Wang Shouren (1472–1529), known by his pseudonym Yangming, was born in the ancient Shaoxing province of China. A testament to his fame as a philosopher and individual is that information about his birth, childhood, and works is often mixed with legendary tales. For instance, it is said that he was in his mother’s womb not for nine but for fourteen months.

The philosopher's immense role in Chinese socio-cultural life can be seen in the fact that a monument was erected in his name in the Confucius Temple in 1584. Only three great philosophers have monuments there.

Wang Yangming’s worldview was strongly influenced by Buddhism and Daoism. The emphasis on human nature and the internal world of the person led to the anthropologization of Yangmingism<sup>2</sup>. Unlike earlier philosophers, the individual became the central object of his philosophy. Thus, it was not abstract humanity but the concrete individual who gained primary importance. His focus on the subject, rather than the object, distinguishes him from the famous Confucian scholar Zhu Xi.

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<sup>1</sup> Sh.M.Mirziyoyev. “O‘zbekiston – Xitoy: ming yilliklarni qamrab olgan do‘stlik va hamkorlik”. “Jenmin jibao” (人民日报). Pekin – 22.01.2024. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202401/1305819.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> Санжарбек Султонбекович Хошимов ВАН ЯН МИН ФАЛСАФИЙ ТАЪЛИМОТИНИНГ МАЪНАВИЙ-АХЛОҚИЙ ВА ГНОСЕОЛОГИК ҚИРРАЛАРИ // Academic research in educational sciences. 2020. №3. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/van-yan-min-falsafiy-talimotining-manaviy-ahlo-iy-va-gnoseologik-irralari>

Wang Yangming was a famous representative of Neo-Confucianism, both a follower and critic of Zhu Xi. He distinguished between the concepts of “li” and “si” in traditional Chinese philosophical thought. According to Wang, “li” is the essence of existence located in our hearts, and the essence of the heart is inner knowledge. “Si” is the expression of inner knowledge. “Li” always requires “si.” Understanding the essence of objects in existence means grasping this inner knowledge. Therefore, Wang emphasized self-knowledge and experience. For Zhu Xi, self-cultivation and correction of faults were key, while for Wang Yangming, the crucial matter was analyzing one's actions and thoughts, i.e., learning to comprehend inner knowledge. While Zhu Xi believed knowledge precedes action, Wang Yangming emphasized the unity of knowledge and action. His ideas were influenced by the Chan Buddhist school. Developing the teachings of “unity of knowledge and action” and “virtuous thought” were among Wang’s greatest achievements. It is evident that many ideas from Buddhism and Daoism influenced Yangmingism.

Researchers note that despite being a deeply rooted Neo-Confucian, Wang Yangming accepted some other ideas as well. He modified the theoretical roots of his teachings due to subjective and objective reasons.

There are ambiguities and various interpretations in understanding some of Wang’s philosophical ideas. Western researchers have characterized Yangmingism as idealism, “idealistic monism,” “dynamic idealism,” “non-scientific idealism,” “philosophy of religion,” and concluded that “Wang Yangming was an idealist” or that “in no case did he deny the reality of the external world.”

In many studies, Wang is regarded as a subjective idealist, leading to his doctrine being labeled as intuitionism<sup>3</sup>. Such definitions can be found in the works of orientalist A.A. Petrov<sup>4</sup>. This is because some researchers liken the concept of “liangzhi” (virtuous thought) in Yangmingism to intuitionism. Wang explained knowledge as the highest stage of understanding and awareness<sup>5</sup>.

According to researchers, the idea of “unity of knowledge and action” helps solve issues related to human virtues. These qualities are innate, and a person’s success or failure in life depends on them. Their unity enables a person to find their true self, form their identity, and achieve success. In other words, to solve any problem, one must first acquire correct knowledge and then apply it in practice. This, according to them, is the unity of knowledge and action.

The core of Wang Yangming’s teachings is the human problem. However, the goal of this teaching is not to study human existence, but to show the path to becoming a perfect person. These philosophical

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<sup>3</sup> Khoshimov, Sanjarbek Sultanbekovich. "Thoughts about human nature in chinese philosophical thinking and their interpretation in the ideas of wang yan min." Scientific Bulletin of Namangan State University 2.1 (2020): 173-177.

<sup>4</sup> Sultanbekovich, H. S. (2023). The Philosophy of Human in the Doctrine of Wang Yang Ming. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy and Culture, 4(6), 194-197. Retrieved from <https://cajipc.centralasianstudies.org/index.php/CAJLPC/article/view/920>

<sup>5</sup> Хошимов С. ВАН ЯН МИН ФАЛСАФАСИДА ИНСОН ТАБИАТИ ТАҲЛИЛИ АНАЛИЗ ПРИРОДЫ ЧЕЛОВЕКА В ФИЛОСОФИИ ВАН ЯНЬ МИН // Экономика и социум. 2021. №12-2 (91). URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/van-yan-min-falsafasida-inson-tabiiati-ta-lili-analiz-prirody-cheloveka-v-filosofii-van-yan-min>

ideas of Yangmingism were not limited to China but influenced the worldviews of Korea, Japan, and other Far Eastern peoples for a certain period. Notably, in Japan, it was a leading philosophical current before the Meiji Revolution (the bourgeois revolution of 1867–68 that replaced shogunate rule with imperial power).

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