

2020  
**Report on Korean  
Confucianism Studies**

Analysis and Outlook of Researches on  
Confucianism in Korean Academia in 2020

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# Report on Korean Confucianism Studies

Analysis and Outlook of Researches on  
Confucianism in Korean Academia in 2020

**Yulgok Institute**

Yulgok Studies Content Development and  
International Dissemination Project Team

## Editor's Note

There is no consensus on when Confucianism was first introduced in Korea. What is clear, however, is that it occurred before the Three Kingdoms period and was a dominant philosophy in Korean society from the end of Goryeo throughout the Joseon Dynasty. In particular, with the establishment of Joseon Neo-Confucianism on the basis of full-fledged research on Neo-Confucianism in the mid-Joseon Dynasty and its adoption as the governing ideology on the post-17th century political stage by the seizure of power through Sarim Scholars, Confucianism began to be thoroughly studied in Korea. As a showcase example, the commentary on *Zhu Zi Daquan* (朱子大全, Juja Daejeon in Korean pronunciation; A Major Compilation of Zhu Zi's Works) was conducted for about 160 years starting in the 17th century and finalized by Yi Hang-ro in the 19th century with a compilation entitled *Juja Daejeon Chaui Jipbo* (朱子大全筭疑輯補; A Commentary Book on *Zhu Zi Daquan*).

Confucianism developed in the Joseon Dynasty by means of intense debates among scholars of different positions. Most salient among these debates are the Sadanchiljeong debate in the 16th century, the Horak debate in the 18th century, and the Shimseol debate in the 19th century. The main players of these debates justified their theories and meticulously

analyzed and reinterpreted Classical Confucian Scriptures (Sishū Wǔjīng 四書五經, Saseo Ogyeong in Korean pronunciation; Four Books and Five Classics) and Neo-Confucianism in order to criticize and counter their opponents' arguments. This tradition has been passed on to modern Confucian scholars, and the Korean academic world has a vast body of high-level research achievements on Confucianism accumulated over centuries, with new papers and books published every year.

However, few attempts have yet been undertaken to analyze, criticize, and systemize research results on Confucianism with a view to suggesting new research directions. Individual papers and books rarely go beyond being published and read by a limited number of specialists, and it is difficult for them to play a meaningful role in academia and society.

This awareness problem acted as the driving force for the project team to launch this project examining the current status of research on Confucianism in Korea conducted in the past year and systematically arranging the research outcomes to enable critical reflection on them. The results of this project have been published in Korean and English. As the Korean saying goes, "Even if you have three sacks full of pearls, they are of no use unless you thread them into a necklace," the project team

intended to thread numerous papers and books into a jewel of Korean Confucianism.

As mentioned above, we have a tradition of heated debates. This report is expected to help Korean Confucianism researchers develop excellent research outcomes and bring these forth from their concealed corners to the forefront of academic and social discourses, creating a space for productive debates. With the publication of the English version of this report, it is also expected that the current landscape of Korean Confucian studies and their achievements will be disseminated on a global scale.

The study leading to this report was conducted with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. We are deeply indebted to all those involved.

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