

Preface

There is no established consensus regarding the initial period when Confucianism was first embraced in Korea. However, it's clear that it dates back to a time before the Three Kingdoms (三國) era, and it is equally evident that Confucianism played a dominant role in Korean society from the late Goryeo (高麗) to the early Joseon dynasty. Especially during the middle Joseon period, based on comprehensive research into Zhu Xi Learning (朱子學), Joseon Neo-Confucianism (朝鮮性理學) was firmly established. Following the 17th century, as the Sarim school (士林派) seized power and Zhu Xi Learning became a potent ruling ideology, there was a thorough exploration of Confucian thought. A notable instance of this is the commentary work on the Complete Work of Zhuzi (Zhuzi Daquan 朱子大全) which spanned over 160 years from the 17th century, culminating in Lee Hang-ro's (李恒老: 1792-1868) compilation of the Collected and Supplemented Annotations on the Complete Work of Zhuzi (Juja Daejeon Chaeui Jipbo 朱子大全筭疑輯補) in the 19th century.

During the Joseon era, Confucian thought evolved through intense debates. The three significant debates of Korean Neo-Confucianism, namely the Four Virtues and Seven Emotions (sadan chiljeong 四端七情) debate of the 16th century, the Northern Learning (Ho 湖) and the Southern Learning (Rak 洛) debate of the 18th century, and the Heart Theory (Sim-Seol 心說) debate of the 19th century, are notable examples. The leading figures in these debates meticulously analyzed and reinterpreted the Confucian classics, including the Four Books (sishu 四書) and Five Classics (wujing 五經) and Zhu Xi Learning (Zhuzi Xue 朱子學), to legitimize their academic positions and criticize their opponents' views. Such a tradition has been inherited by contemporary Confucian scholars, leading to a rich accumulation of high-quality research outcomes in Korean academia, with new papers and books being published every year. However, efforts to analyze, critique, and summarize these research achievements to suggest new research directions are rare. Most publications end up being read by only a few specialists, making it challenging for them to play a meaningful role in academia and society.

Acknowledging this issue, our research group, since 2015, undertook the task to review the current state of Confucian studies in Korea, systematically organize the research findings, and reflect on them critically. The results have been published in Korean, Chinese, and English. Just as the proverb states, "Even a bead needs to be threaded to become a gem," our initiative aimed to thread individual papers and books to craft the gem that is Korean Confucianism.

As previously mentioned, we have a tradition of vigorous debate. Through this report, we hope that researchers' works will not fade away but be highlighted as academic and societal issues, fostering a productive space for discussion. Furthermore, with the English publication of this report, we aspire for the current state and achievements of Korean Confucianism to gain international recognition.

This report was produced with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. We extend our deepest gratitude to all involved parties.

November 25th, 2023

From the Institute of Korean Philosophical Thought

Woo Kwan Je

Director of Paju Cultural Center

Choi Young Jin

**Head of the Yulgok Studies (栗谷學) Content Development
and International Dissemination Project**