

# Academic Trends within Nineteenth-Century Korean Neo-Confucianism\*

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This article seeks to offer a broad examination of the historical trajectory of Neo-Confucian thought in the Chosŏn Dynasty of the nineteenth century. In so doing, the article aspires to go beyond the pre-established view of equating Neo-Confucianism with the conservative *wijŏng ch'ŏksa* (“upholding orthodoxy, rejecting heterodoxy”) movement. First, attention will be paid to the fact that sequels to some of the most authoritative Neo-Confucian texts, such as the *Reflections on Things at Hand* (*Jinsi lu*) and *Elementary Learning* (*Sohak*), continued to appear in the Chosŏn period. The publication of sequels to *Reflections* was part of a trend to establish a canon by systematizing the Korean Neo-Confucian tradition within the format of the *Reflections*, and thereby situate Korean Neo-Confucianism as the successor of the Neo-Confucian canons of the Six Classics, Four Books, and *Reflections*. The publication of the sequels to *Elementary Learning* was part of a trend to popularize Korean Neo-Confucianism by organizing it within the format of the *Elementary Learning* and thus propagate Neo-Confucian ethics throughout the various strata of society. If these sequels were efforts to systematize the tradition of Korean Neo-Confucianism in a scholarly format, the encounter of Korean Neo-Confucianism with modernity led to undertakings that sought to engage with this new reality through the production of the *Kugyŏng yŏnŭi* (Extensive exposition of the Nine Canons). In this work, we can identify attempts by Korean Neo-Confucianists to communicate with the contemporary currents of modernity. This article reflects on the historical significance of the academic trends of nineteenth-century Korean Neo-Confucianism, which can be characterized as canonization, popularization, and contemporization. It thus seeks to overcome the *wijŏng ch'ŏksa* framework and give justice to the changes that Korean Neo-Confucianism underwent during this period.

**Keywords:** Neo-Confucianism, *Reflections on Things at Hand*, *Elementary Learning*, *Kugyŏng yŏnŭi*, canonization, popularization, contemporization

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