

The Joseon Government's Changing Perception of Early Catholicism Examined through Law Application*

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This paper attempts to analyze the process by which early Catholicism in Joseon was repressed and persecuted through a primarily legal perspective. In doing so, I will try to lay out exactly how the Joseon government chose to legally handle the problem of Catholicism and seek to show how this legal treatment changed over time and reveal the reasons for this shift in law application. Here I will focus on the period between 1784 and 1801, which spans the time between the first Catholic baptism of a Korean and the major persecution campaign which occurred in 1801. While previous research has partially examined the repression and persecution of early Catholicism from a legal perspective before, this paper seeks to analyze the legal treatment of early Catholicism as a whole and cast light on its historical developments. Importantly, I will refer not only to the specific laws applied against Catholics but also incorporate the royal commands, which could exist separate from the legal code, into my analysis. In doing so, I will try to demonstrate that the importance of the king's judicial agency in treating criminal cases in Joseon was paramount. By the end, I hope to have shown precisely how and why the legal handling of Catholicism grew progressively harsher.

Keywords: Early Catholicism, Joseon dynasty, law application, heresy, theft, repression, persecution

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