

# Cambridge Elements

Elements on Women in the History of Philosophy

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-01066-5 — Im Yunjidang  
Sungmoon Kim  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009010665](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009010665)  
DOI: 10.1017/9781009024068

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First published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-009-01066-5 Paperback  
ISSN 2634-4645 (online)  
ISSN 2634-4637 (print)

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## Im Yunjidang

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DOI: 10.1017/9781009024068  
First published online: July 2022

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**Abstract:** This Element aims to critically examine the philosophical thought of Im Yunjidang (任允摯堂, 1721–93), a female Korean Neo-Confucian philosopher from the Chosŏn (朝鮮) dynasty (1392–1910), and to present her as a feminist thinker. Unlike most Korean women of her time, Yunjidang had the exceptional opportunity to be introduced to a major philosophical debate among Korean Neo-Confucians, which was focused on two core questions – whether sages and commoners share the same heart–mind and whether the natures of human beings and animals are identical. In the course of engaging in this debate, she was able to reformulate Neo-Confucian metaphysics and the ethics of moral self-cultivation, culminating in her bold ideas of the moral equality between men and women and the possibility of female sagehood. By proposing a “stage approach” to feminism that is also sensitive to the cultural context, this Element shows that Yunjidang’s philosophical thought could be best captured in terms of Confucian feminism.

**Keywords:** Im Yunjidang, Neo-Confucianism, Korean philosophy, Female sagehood, Confucian feminism

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ISBNs: 9781009010665 (PB), 9781009024068 (OC)  
ISSNs: 2634-4645 (online), 2634-4637 (print)

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