Elements on Women in the History of Philosophy
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IM YUNJIDANG

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Im Yunjidang

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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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Contents

Introduction 1
1 Yunjidang: The Person and Her World 9
2 Im Yunjidang's Neo-Confucian Philosophy 23
3 Im Yunjidang and Confucian Feminism 43
   Summary and Conclusion 62
References 66