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The State and Identity Construction in Chosŏn Korea

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Asian Languages and Cultures

by

Joon Hur

2019

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The State and Identity Construction in Chosŏn Korea

by

Joon Hur

Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor John Duncan, Chair

This dissertation examines whether, among Koreans in the premodern period, there existed a shared collective identity that could be utilized by modernizing nationalists and that significantly informed the nature of nationalism in twentieth century Korea. The specific time this dissertation delves into is the period of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), especially the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which are believed to be the most important period of Korea's institutional and philosophical systemization. Examining the reciprocal interactions among Chosŏn people and their accompanying political and intellectual debates, this dissertation explores how the government's state-building project, generally understood as Korea's Confucianization in existing studies, contributed to the construction of a shared collective identity among the constituent social groups of Chosŏn.

This dissertation consists of four chapters. Chapter One delves into ritual debates such as the debates on the sacrifice to Heaven during the early Chosŏn period in which the Chosŏn elite should refer to their state's history and tradition to support their arguments. Chapter Two

deals with the tension between Korea's socio-cultural heritage and the new cultural and institutional tendencies accompanied by the influx of Neo-Confucianism in the late fifteenth century. Chapter Three examines how the elite's efforts to transmit their core values to the non-elite influenced the construction of people's sense of belonging to a larger collectivity whose members shared the same social and cultural values. The final chapter discusses how the non-elite in Chosŏn reacted to the elite's guidance and how they reinterpreted the values the elite emphasized. This chapter leads to the conclusion that the systemization of rituals and institutions where various social groups of Chosŏn people could reciprocally interact contributed to the construction of a certain Koreanness

By putting more emphasis on Korea's historical and cultural context, this dissertation suggests that Korea had its own process of change, constructing a distinctive political and social entity which is different from but not inferior to Western nation-states. Also, questioning dangerous generalizations about "Asian" or "Confucian" cultures, this dissertation posits that Korea and other Asian cultures should be seen not as backwaters outside the mainstream of world history but rather as representative examples of the historical processes of nation formation.

The dissertation of Joon Hur is approved.

Namhee Lee

George Edson Dutton

Andrea Sue Goldman

John Duncan, Committee Chair

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2019

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Hur Yoong and Noh Sung Yeul,  
for their endless love and support,  
and most of all,  
Hee Kyung, without whose prayers and love,  
this dissertation would not be possible

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## Introduction

Korea's complicated historical experiences, such as frequent politico-cultural interactions with various ethnic groups in East Asia, Western imperialist states' intrusions, and the colonial experience under Japan make issues related to origins of Korea's culture and identity especially significant and sensitive, along with continuing conflicts between different historical interpretations of East Asia's past influenced by Euro-centrism, Sino-centrism, and orientalism. During the time of Korea's victimization in the era of imperialism and during the Cold War, in the process of overcoming these difficulties, various discourses on Korea were constructed by different historical agents for their socio-political purposes.

Since Japanese colonial historiography defined Korea as a society culturally behind and historically subservient to China and Japan, there have been many attempts among Korean scholars to prove Koreans' historical independence and cultural superiority. Nationalist historians' racial historical works,<sup>1</sup> which constructed the myth of the Korean nation as a homogenous group descended from the mythical primogenitor Tan'gun, is the result of those attempts. Earlier nationalist historians' efforts to find the origins of Koreans' national identity from the very early stage of Korean history, which were closely related to Koreans' national pride about their history, influenced later generations' nationalist historiography which tried to find a fit between Korean history and the concept of universal history relying on linear development.

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing "Korean" Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial myth in Korean State-Formation Theories*, Harvard East Asian monographs 187 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 2.

It was in this context that Confucianism and Confucian rituals, once considered as causes of Korea's backwardness, began to be regarded as important elements of Korea's social development. Unlike earlier historians of the Japanese colonial period, later generations of South Korean nationalist historians in the post-liberation period regarded Neo-Confucianism, especially Cheng-Zhu learning, as a philosophical source leading Korea's social development that is in line with a law of universal history relying on linear development. The idea that Cheng-Zhu philosophy contributed to the defeats of absentee landlords and the victories of small landlords who comprised the so-called *sinhŭng sadaebu* in the late Koryŏ and the *sarim* in the early and mid-Chosŏn, written with the desire to prove Korea's potential for the transition from a feudal society to a capitalistic society, had a significant impact on Korean historiography.<sup>2</sup> Under that influence, the notion that Chung-Zhu learning represented the class interests of medium and small landlords against those of the aristocratic large landlords, elaborated by Yi Tae-jin,<sup>3</sup> became an important premise for many Korean historians. It is no surprise, therefore, that even in ritual-focused studies, the elaboration and sophistication of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) philosophy during the Chosŏn dynasty were often explained as the result of a political struggle between different socio-economic classes and as evidence proving that Korea was on the track of universal historical progress.<sup>4</sup> With this reevaluation of Confucianism, Koreans could find a proud historical heritage beyond the ancient history of Korean kingdoms and through the Chosŏn dynasty.

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<sup>2</sup> Yi T'aejin, ed., *Chosŏn sidae chŏngch'isa ūi chae chomyŏng*, Kaejŏngp'an (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Yi T'aejin, "Sarimp'a ūi yuhyangso pongnip undong," *Chindan hakpo* 34-35 (1973).

<sup>4</sup> Chi Tuhwan, *Chosŏn chŏn'gi ūirye yŏn'gu: sŏngnihak chŏngt'ongnon ūl chungsim ūro*, Ch'op'an, Han'guk munhwa yŏn'gu ch'ongsŏ 31 (Seoul: Sŏul Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 1994), 272.

Despite the positive impacts on Korean historiography left by nationalist historians who attempted to search for the origins of Korea's present political and social accomplishments not from external influences but from internal potential, it is still questionable that putting so much emphasis on linear "progress" is the best way to effectively reveal how Chosŏn-era Koreans developed locally specific identities and practices within what was then regarded as universal Confucian civilization. As a matter of fact, attempts to mechanically apply Eurocentric conceptualizations of social development to Korean history have, in many cases if not always, ended up confirming certain limitations on the Korean version of progress<sup>5</sup> despite their initial intention to reveal Korea's potential for development comparable to those of European states. It is natural therefore that in such studies trapped in the framework of linear development, the "failure narrative" of Japanese colonial historiography has often been repeated.<sup>6</sup>

Studies criticizing the problems of evolutionary history have pointed out that hasty applications of Western concepts of historical development to Korean history distort historical facts and thus are not helpful for better understanding Korea's historical specificity. In these studies, the concept of Neo-Confucianism as an ideological basis for medium and small landlords who led radical social changes is seriously challenged. With careful examinations of the Chosŏn ruling class's places of residence, economic backgrounds, family ties<sup>7</sup> and official

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 267-272.

<sup>6</sup> In brief his explanation of the articles in *Chosŏn sidae chŏngch'isa ūi chae chomyŏng*, Yi praised Ishii Hisao's "Hugi ijo tangaengsa e kwanhan il koch'al" as one which emphasizes Korean history's positive aspects. But he seems not to have realized that the "failure narrative" is hidden in Ishii's article. For details, see Ishii Hisao, "Hugi ijo tangaengsa e kwanhan il koch'al," in *Chosŏn sidae chŏngch'isa ūi chae chomyŏng*, ed. Yi Tajin (Seoul: T'aeaksa, 2003), 63-94.

<sup>7</sup> John B. Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, Korean studies of the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges: Political Conflict in Early Yi Korea*, Harvard East Asian monographs 58 (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center: distributed by Harvard University Press, 1974).



careers<sup>8</sup>, such studies argue that class conflict, which was seen as working as the prime moving force in Western history, was not serious in Korea because of the low degree of social differentiation in Chosŏn Korea.<sup>9</sup> Thus, these studies discredit the mainstream depictions of the many radical social changes in Korean history, indicate the futility of the emphasis on linear historical progress, and suggest the possibility of different ways of social change in Korea.

Those criticisms of the discourse that Korea shared so-called “universal” development with European states naturally raise other questions; what role, then, did Confucianism play in Korean history? If there were no revolutionary social changes comparable to those in Western states in Chosŏn Korea, what did Chosŏn people accomplish with this philosophy? Did Chosŏn Korea’s Confucianism have any intellectual distinctiveness from those of other Asian states, or was it just an adaptation of a putatively universal Asiatic mode of thought or a replica of China’s intellectual trends? Were Chosŏn people really ideologically and practically controlled by Confucian dogmatism which hindered Korea’s successful modernization?<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the necessity of examining Korea’s intellectual characteristics was emphasized and various studies focusing more on the complicated intellectual terrain among the elites of the Chosŏn dynasty emerged from both Korean and Western academia.

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<sup>8</sup> Chŏng Tu-hŭi, *Chosŏn sidae ūi taegan yŏn’gu*, Ch’op’an, Sŏgang Taehakkyo Inmun Kwahak Yŏn’guso immun yŏn’gu chŏn’gan, che 35-chip (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn dynasty*, 279.

<sup>10</sup> Confucianism has often been explained as what retarded Korea’s fundamental social transformation during the national crisis in the nineteenth century. For example, Palais insisted that due to the emphasis on Confucian ethics and standards, which consequently increased the *yangban* elite’s privileges, Korea’s socio-political system lacked some essential prerequisites for social reform such as the ‘aggrandizement of monarchical and central government power and the curtailment of elite privilege.’ For details, see James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975). Deuchler’s study also deals with this issue. See Martina Deuchler, *Confucian Gentlemen and Barbarian Envoys: The Opening of Korea, 1875-1885* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977).

Some of those studies revealed that Cheng-Zhu learning was not the only political philosophy of the ruling class of the Chosŏn dynasty<sup>11</sup> and confirmed that there existed ideological and philosophical flexibility in Chosŏn Korea, at least in its early period.<sup>12</sup> Others revealed the fact that Korea's Confucianization was not the result of a single revolutionary social reform but the embodiment of negotiation and competition between newly imported foreign ideas and local and traditional cultures<sup>13</sup> and attempted to analyze how Confucianism was deployed for the Korean kingship and ruling class's political ideology within Korea's political, social and cultural milieu.<sup>14</sup> There were also several studies seeing Confucianism as a part of a much broader Chosŏn culture which was a mixture of various religious and philosophical elements. Showing that there were dynamic interactions between Confucianism and pre-existing religions and philosophies, and that various philosophies and religions had different roles and statuses in different social areas, these studies also help prove that the Chosŏn elite's adoption of Confucianism as an official state ideology does not mean that the

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<sup>11</sup> Regarding this, see Kim Honggyung, *Chosŏn ch'ogi kwanhakhp'a ūi yuhak sasang*, Che 1-p'an, Sin Han'guk sasangsa 6 (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1996) and Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn dynasty*.

<sup>12</sup> John B. Duncan, "Examinations and Orthodoxy in Chosŏn dynasty Korea," in *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, eds. Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms (Los Angeles, Calif.: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002), 65-94.

<sup>13</sup> Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*, Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series 36 (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> JaHyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*, Studies in Oriental culture, no. 21 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Among recent studies, refer to Chŏng Chaehun, *Chosŏn chŏn'gi yugyo chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu*, Ch'op'an, T'aehak ch'ongsŏ 15 (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 2005).

people of Chosŏn-era Korea lost a sense of self as a inheritor of a distinct historical and cultural heritages.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the accomplishments of the above studies showing Korea's intellectual dynamics, however, it seems that many studies of Korean history still focus more on revealing "Confucian traits" of Korea's social institutions and cultural practices as if Confucianism is the sole decisive element through which Korean history and culture can be aptly understood. In this context where the significance of Confucianism has been overemphasized, Korea's cultural distinctiveness and important social changes were often relegated to contingencies of its Confucianization, which is also problematic in that "Confucianization" has been arbitrarily interpreted as "civilization," "dogmatization," or "sinicization" depending on modern historians' perspectives and desires.

On the one hand, considerable numbers of studies seem to still have the belief that Chosŏn's Confucianism proves the state's potential for socio-political progress. In this context, even studies dealing with Chosŏn's ritual practices build their arguments based on the framework of class struggle mentioned before.<sup>16</sup> Also, while pointing out that the Chosŏn elite's intellectual terrain was quite complicated, some other studies ended with the conclusion that this intellectual diversity does not necessarily indicate the elite's philosophical deviation from Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup> Put it differently, in many studies, Confucianism has been

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<sup>15</sup> See Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life*, Studies of the East Asian Institute (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985). Also refer to, Robert E. Buswell Jr., "Buddhism under Confucian Domination: The Synthetic Vision of Sŏsan Hyujŏng" in *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, eds. JaHyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 134-159.

<sup>16</sup> Yi Pŏm-jik, *Chosŏn sidae yehak yŏn'gu*, Ch'op'an, Han'guksa yŏn'gu ch'ongsŏ 16 (Seoul: Kukhak Charyowŏn, 2004). 423-425.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see Kim, *Chosŏn ch'ogi kwanhakp'a ŭi yuhak sasang*, 73.

presented as an important piece of evidence proving that Korea's intellectual sophistication was parallel to Western intellectual movements which made modernization possible. On the other hand, there are studies that criticize those historians who put too much effort to find Korean equivalents for European historical courses of modernization. These studies point out that what the Chosŏn elite attempted to achieve is actualizing ancient Confucian sages' teachings in their society rather than making a revolutionary social change. In this context, they argued that Chosŏn society was past-oriented rather than future-oriented<sup>18</sup> and as time passed, Chosŏn Korea became an intellectually and philosophically inflexible society putting much emphasis on ritual propriety.<sup>19</sup>

As a matter of fact, these two different groups of studies are directly related to a significant issue on how to understand Korea's premodern period and its influence on the modernization of Korea. However, their common view regarding Confucianism as a decisive element in constructing the formation of Chosŏn politics and culture often results in simplifying the complicated historical process of premodern Korea. Put differently, there exists a possibility that, in many of the previous studies, various socio-political interactions among the Chosŏn elite, and between the elite and non-elite, made with different intentions, are simply presented as the process of Confucianization of Korea. I am not denying here that Confucianism significantly influenced Korea's culture and institutions. But what I try more to point out is that "Confucianization" is a modern term "for which there is no exact original

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<sup>18</sup> James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty*, Korean studies of the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies (Seattle, Wash: University of Washington Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Kye Sŭng-bŏm (Seung B. Kye), *Chŏngjidoen sigan: Chosŏn ũi Taebodan kwa kŭndae ũi munt'ŏk*, Ch'op'an, Sŏgang haksul ch'ongsŏ 27 (Seoul: Sŏgang Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 2011).

indigenous equivalent”<sup>20</sup> which indicates that the meaning of the term “Confucianization” has been defined by dominant socio-political discourses among modern scholars rather than existing as a specific socio-cultural phenomena in the past.<sup>21</sup>

In this regard, unlike many existing studies which build their arguments on the premise that Korea was Confucianized, and thus often regard various historical events and socio-cultural aspects as the results following Confucianization, this dissertation will focus more on showing how Chosŏn people negotiated with each other to apply Confucian teachings to their socio-political behaviors in the consideration of their social reality. Here, “Confucianization” will be explained as a social phenomenon which was accompanied by Chosŏn people’s socio-political behaviors to accomplish their political purposes or to solve social problems rather than as their ultimate political and ideological goal. Also, in this context, “Confucianism” will be explained not as an absolute dogmatic philosophy which forcefully controlled the people’s thought and practices but as a useful resource even non-elites could refer to and use for their own benefit.

It should be mentioned here is that this dissertation’s attempt to see Confucianism as one of various intellectual and institutional resources available to Chosŏn people is not intended to simply undervalue existing studies’ discovery of various intellectual and political aspects of Confucian culture in Chosŏn. Rather, this dissertation intends to facilitate more discussions on the culture and identity of Chosŏn and their relevance to the state-building enterprise in modern

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<sup>20</sup> Liam C. Kelly, “‘Confucianism’ in Vietnam: A State of the Field Essay,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1 (2006), 316.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding this, Lionel Jensen’s study, which points out the term “Confucius” and “Confucianism” were manufactured by Jesuit missionaries in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century China, and effectively proves the terms’ limitations and artificiality is notable. For details, see Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions & Universal Civilization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

Korea which, if I understood correctly, is the most significant issue many scholars of the history of Korea try to deal with in their studies. Therefore, examining the validity of discourses of “failure” or “success” of Confucianism which had been used to define the political and cultural identity of present-day Korea, this dissertation will explore the process of identity construction itself.

Interestingly, while some Korean modern nationalists in the early twentieth century had presented Confucianism as a national culture to consolidate the contemporary Koreans into the new modern nation which is an artificial community that is extremely difficult to conceive,<sup>22</sup> many of them simply regarded the Korean nation having existed from the beginning of the history. Because this primordialist approach had been repeated until a recent time without serious challenge, Chosŏn people’s application of Confucian ideas to their institutions and practices has been understood as the Korean nation’s national enterprise, which is the reason why “Confucianism” had to be highly praised or seriously criticized as the cause of Korean nations’ success or failure in the studies of Korean history.

Responding to this primordialist approach which is often combined with nationalists’ historical perspectives and tends to emphasize Korea’s historical uniqueness and racial superiority, some recent studies seriously criticized the concept of Koreans as one homogenous nation as teleologically constructed to magnify Korean national pride, whose unexpected and negative results include totalitarianism and racism.<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that such studies

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<sup>22</sup> Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Kim Haboush and Joan R. Piggott, eds., *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, Studies of the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Edson Robinson, eds., *Colonial modernity in Korea*, Harvard East Asian monographs 184 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1999).

warning of the danger of the concept of Korea's national identity as a homogeneous race also doubt the concept of a "historical continuity" of Koreans, using as its critical foundation the Western concept of nations as modern constructs. Also, even such studies that see Korea's nationalism positively considering its traumatic historical experiences and the consequent need to protect its political and historical independence, and studies understanding Korean nationalism not as a tool of teleology but as the product of its particular political and cultural context,<sup>24</sup> are premised on the fact that nationalism was invented in the modern period. In other words, in many studies, especially those of Western academia, the national identity Koreans have shared is explained not as the product of complicated interactions between the agents of Korean history but as a Korean version of modern historical invention; such studies emphasizing Koreans' subjectivity and activeness in constructing their own identity also concluded that a Korean national identity began to be created only after the late nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

However, as overemphasis on Confucianism often simplified the complicated historical process of Korea, too much reliance on Western concepts of the nation and nationalism also conceal some important issues in Korea's past; especially, it cannot provide any analytical framework for Korean history before the late nineteenth century. Considering these problems, several significant studies revealed the limited utility of Western nomenclatures and tried to search for the origins of Korean collective identity in the premodern period. It should be noted, however, that these studies do not repeat but rather warn against nationalist historians'

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<sup>24</sup> Timothy Brook and Andre Schmid, eds., *Nation work: Asian Elites and National Identities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

“teleological vision of inexorable and inevitable rise of a modern Korean nation.”<sup>26</sup> These studies present the possibility that Korea’s modern nationalism was informed in part by pre-existing collective identities, emphasizing Korea’s historical context which is totally different from and thus cannot be easily explained by Western historical categories. Examining “proto nationalist forms of collective identification in four areas, such as language, ethnicity, religion, and membership in a lasting political entity...the mostly cited attributes of modern nations,”<sup>27</sup> John Duncan has already suggested that modern Korean nationalism is largely conditioned by “a preexisting sense of identification with a larger collective identity.”<sup>28</sup> Delving into a ritual controversy in the seventeenth century, JaHyun Kim Haboush saw that “the consciousness of a unique identity among seventeenth-century Korean intellectuals was a consciousness of national identity”, though it was not shared by the non-elites.<sup>29</sup>

What these studies focus on to reveal Korea’s historical context are embodiments of various interactions, negotiations and competitions among its social constituents. Examining these specific social products, they effectively argue that Korea’s present is not just the result of its passive responses to outside impacts but the result of its own historical experiences, avoiding historical distortions which often link abstract or insignificant social aspects to prerequisite elements of modern society. Although these studies hesitate to clearly conclude

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<sup>26</sup> John Duncan, "The *Taehak yŏnŭi chimnyak* and the Politics of Confucian Learning in the Early Chosŏn" (unpublished article), 15.

<sup>27</sup> John Duncan, "Proto-nationalism in Premodern Korea," in *Perspectives on Korea*, eds. Sang-Oak Lee and Duk-Soo Park (Sydney: Honolulu, Hawaii: Wild Peony; International distribution by University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 201-202.

<sup>28</sup> John Duncan, "Proto-nationalism in Premodern Korea," 203.

<sup>29</sup> JaHyun Kim Haboush, "Constructing the Center: The Ritual Controversy and the Search for a New Identity in Seventeenth-Century Korea," in *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, eds. JaHyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 46-90.



how to define or what terms should be used for the collective identity of pre-modern Koreans, it is true that they lay a foundation for my studies attempting to deconstruct and subsequently reconstruct the concept of modern states by examining the process of intellectual and philosophical transition in Korean history, and to redefine the concept of modernization itself not by ignoring existing studies but by revealing their limitations derived from West-centered historical viewpoints.

Inspired and influenced by these previous studies but also with the intention to deal with some controversial issues those studies did not solve, this dissertation will attempt to prove that despite some discrepancies between its features and the definition of modern nationalism, Koreans' collective identity before the introduction of this Western concept is historically so significant that the present definition and the scope of the application of "nationalism" need to be reconsidered. To do so, the dissertation will raise two specific questions. The first question asks whether there existed a shared sense of collectivity among all Chosŏn people which made them regard themselves as members of a distinctive political or cultural entity. Because the Korean elites' emphasis on and reference to Confucian culture and institutions has often been regarded as evidence of elite sinophilism in many studies of the Korean history, it is necessary to examine whether and how the elites recognized themselves as a politico-culturally independent group and attempted to share their belief in the state's historical distinctiveness with the rest of the people under their governance. Related to the first question, the second one will inquire as to whether a certain membership in this political entity was shared by all Koreans transcending social status barriers. Specifically, this question will ask whether there existed a core rule or principle which should be applied to all people in Chosŏn Korea, regardless of their social status and which helped the people believe that they were treated properly as significant social constituents by the state.

As the above-mentioned previous studies did in examining how Koreans' modern national identity has been constructed, this dissertation also will refer to Anthony Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* which points out that "there is considerable continuity of *ends* between pre-modern *ethnie* and modern nations." Here, Smith does not simply link premodern people's cognition on the difference between "us" and "them," caused by social interaction, to modern national identity. Rather, to elaborate his idea of continuity between premodern and modern social identities, he brings up the concept of the 'myth-symbol' complex which consists of "myths, symbols, memories and values" of a certain social group. According to Smith, "myths, symbols, memories and values are 'carried' in and by forms and genres of artifacts and activities which change only very slowly," and these cultural aspects make the *ethnie* "exceptionally durable." Even demographic changes such as the influx of new populations cannot easily "engineer a radical breakdown of the quality of ethnicity" unless "the new immigrants overwhelm the old inhabitants, both physically and culturally." Modern nationalisms emerge with the revival of this 'myth-symbol' complex or the combination of the old and newer complexes.<sup>30</sup>

In many senses, Smith's study can provide theoretical support for this dissertation seeking the origins of Korean national identity in the Chosŏn period. First, emphasizing cultural unity rather than racial purity as a prerequisite of national identity, his study helps to broaden the scope of the definition of the Korean nation. In fact, although Duncan already pointed out the fact that many different ethnic populations have successively become Koreans in the history of Korea,<sup>31</sup> nationalist historians' insistence that the Korean nation is a racially homogenous

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, UK: New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1986).14-16.

<sup>31</sup> John Duncan, "Hyanghwain: Migration and Assimilation in Chosŏn Korea," *Acta Koreana* 3 (2000).

group still remains a dominant discourse in the field of Korean studies. Although this dissertation, like those studies based on the nationalist view, also attempts to find the origin of Koreans' national identity in the premodern era, it will not simply define the Korean nation on the basis of biological or racial consistency. Rather, this dissertation will examine how Chosŏn became a community retaining a sense of distinctiveness and solidarity –an *ethnie*, to borrow Smith's word– and how the shared sense was transformed to a much broader collectivity, comparable to modern nationalism. Smith's theoretical argument that race intermingling does not necessarily impair the quality of a Korean *ethnie* helps this attempt to link premodern collective identity to modern Korean national identity. Second, by pointing out the limitation of the instrumentalist concept of national identity, which sees identity as the product of social interactions among different groups, Smith's study also reveals the limited utility of the concept of “negative ethnicity” that is said to be constructed by negative interactions between different social groups, such as a war. This makes it necessary to explore the possibility of the existence of a shared collective identity –or identity construction process– from earlier periods when Koreans had yet to experience serious foreign invasions such as the Imjin War and the Manchu invasion.<sup>32</sup> Thus, my study will extend the scope of the examination of Korean identity construction to early Chosŏn.

Especially related to national identity in Smith's study is “a social magnetism and psychological charge” which is, according to him, attached to the “myth-symbol complex.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dealing with the issue of Korean nationalism, Haboush's studies focus on the influence of the large scale of conflicts between Chosŏn and other states. See JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Great East Asian War and the Birth of the Korean Nation*, eds. William Joseph Haboush and Jisoo M. Kim (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); and JaHyun Kim Haboush, “Constructing the Center: The Ritual Controversy and the Search for a New Identity in Seventeenth-Century Korea,” in *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, eds. JaHyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

Given the fact that modernizers attempt to rediscover or reinvent myths, symbols and values whenever they need to reinforce nationalism, it is reasonable to accept the idea that the ‘myth-symbol’ complex diffused to a given population<sup>34</sup> is helpful to make the people a group that shares a common sense of history and destiny. In this regard, this dissertation will examine how Chosŏn people came to share certain social values and historical memories which can be “the basis of a nation’s core heritage,”<sup>35</sup> that is directly linked to modern national identity.

For an effective examination of the ‘myth-symbol’ complex in Chosŏn, this dissertation will explore Chosŏn’s ritual practices because in many cases, Chosŏn rituals are the embodiment of careful discussions on the state’s historical and mythical past, as well as its socio-cultural values. For example, the debates over how to institutionalize the rituals around the sacrifice for Heaven in the early Chosŏn period show how seriously Chosŏn Kings and officials discussed the meanings of Korea’s history and myths that they should transmit to future generations, and also the social norms they should observe for the maintenance of both Korea’s cultural distinctiveness and universal Confucian values.

But there still remain the questions of asking whether state rituals, usually reflecting elite social views, influenced the construction of a much broader collective identity which could be shared by all people in Chosŏn Korea. Even if the elites of the Chosŏn dynasty acknowledged their historical genealogy and evidence of their distinctive and continuous socio-historical status, can their identity awareness be diffused to all Koreans across social status

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 160.

barriers and overcoming individuals' rigid sub-group memberships which were, according to Ernest Gellner, evidence of the impossibility of the existence of nationalism?<sup>36</sup>

It seems that ritual can be a useful category for finding answers for these complicated questions. Many ritual theories agree that ritualization is neither merely “the expression of a subjective state” nor a simple reflection of a certain social situation; rather, ritualization is the strategic manipulation of ‘context’ itself.<sup>37</sup> This presents us with the idea that even though the state rituals of Chosŏn Korea were institutionalized by the Chosŏn elite, it does not necessarily mean that the influence of the rituals was only limited to the elite circle. As Catherine Bell argues, ritual “can rarely be pinned down in general since ritualized practices constantly play off the field of action in which they emerge.”<sup>38</sup> That is, even an elite-focused ritual can exert a considerable influence in a very different social context. Also, ritual could reorganize the context itself as mentioned above and the reorganized social orders reversely can be reflected in the ritual practice. It seems, therefore, that there is no reason to undervalue the existence of Korean elite's shared identity as an independent political and historical entity merely as a rigid “sub-group membership” which could not be shared with different groups.

Another important point is that ritual activities are effective in differentiating the ritual performer from others. However, as Bell points out, ritual also produces “a loose sense of totality and systematicity.”<sup>39</sup> This idea suggests a possibility that the Chosŏn elite could construct multiple identities through ritual; for instance, the identity as advocates of Confucian

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<sup>36</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed, New perspectives on the past (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 138-139.

<sup>37</sup> Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 100.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>39</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 104.

orthodoxy which could be constructed through the Confucian elements of state rituals. Also, identity as Koreans, which was constructed by historical reflection in state rituals, could differentiate Koreans from other political and historical groups. It should be noted, however, that the fact that the Chosŏn elite could have multiple identities does not contradict the conjecture that Chosŏn people shared a collective identity as an independent political and cultural community. The Chosŏn ruling class reinforced their political authority through ritual activities, which are, according to theories on ritual, “effective in grounding and displaying a sense of community.”<sup>40</sup> Continuously repeated performances of state-sponsored rituals might help people share the meaning of the rituals and thus make possible the existence of a collective identity widely shared by Koreans during the Chosŏn period. It should be noted that state-led rituals were performed not only in the political center but also in various local communities, and Chosŏn elites encouraged commoners to participate in the rituals. Despite commoner’s initial resistance to state-led local rituals such as *hyangsarye* (the Village Archery Ritual) and *hyang’ŭmjurye* (the Village Drinking Ritual) based on Confucian teachings, the state continuously tried to implement the rituals through which, they believed, important social values could be instilled to all Koreans. This shows how much the Chosŏn elites tried to include commoners in a socio-cultural community where the constituents share a sense of unity beyond pre-existing subgroup membership.

Last, but not least, a significant point related to rituals is that ritual practices “do not function as an instrument of heavy-handed social control.”<sup>41</sup> According to this, the sense of community which ritualization can produce is one which does not override “the autonomy of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 221-222.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 221.

individuals of subgroups.” This exemplifies the social structure of the Chosŏn dynasty where there existed various sub-group memberships among different social groups. Regarding this, however, one should note that ritualization can take “arbitrary or necessary common interests and ground them in an understanding of the hegemonic order.”<sup>42</sup> That is, in a society where social constituents had a shared understanding of the dominant social ideology, ritual can contribute to social integration, maximizing commonality among various social groups. Therefore, given the fact that in Chosŏn Korea there were various efforts to instill Confucian philosophy and to share its ritual practices, it is highly possible that there existed some affective or cultural unity between various social groups of Chosŏn society, regardless of their autonomous and independent subculture. The notion of “rituals of resistance” that contributes to constructing a subculture while not breaking away from the dominant ideology,<sup>43</sup> together with Bourdieu’s concept of “integration in and through division,”<sup>44</sup> also can support the possibility of the existence of a unique social identity shared by Chosŏn people. In fact, Chosŏn elites did not simply reject traditional local beliefs and practices. Rather, they tried to integrate those cultural traditions with Confucian ideas and practices. Therefore, through the rituals, commoners could not only balance their traditional ways of life and Confucian ideas but also have a sense of belonging to the much broadened community, the Chosŏn state.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>43</sup> John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts, “Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview,” in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1976), 9-74; Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 17-19, 133. These studies suggest that “symbolic” forms of resistance through ritual activities effectively constitute group identity and ethos but do not mark a real break with the dominant ideology.

<sup>44</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge studies in social anthropology; 16 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 163.

To conclude, the purpose of this dissertation is to prove that there existed a “Koreanness,” a certain tie linking premodern Korea to its modern form, even before the introduction of Western theoretical concepts and that present day Korea with a modern nation-state form is not just a derivative product of Western impact but also an embodiment of Koreans’ own cultural and political heritage. To elaborate the idea which suggests that Korea had its own historical path which contributed to the emergence of modern forms of Korean society no less than Western political and intellectual influence did, this dissertation will focus considerably on whether among people in the Chosŏn period, there existed a shared “collective identity” that could be utilized by modernizing nationalists and that significantly informed the nature of nationalism in twentieth century Korea. In doing so, modern artificial terms like “Confucianism” and “nationalism” which have caused some misunderstandings of Korea’s culture and history, will be also carefully reexamined.



## Chapter 1: Ritual Debates in Early Chosŏn

### Introduction

Many studies have explained the establishment and development of the Chosŏn dynasty with the term “Confucianization.” However, while “Confucianization” is a useful term to point out the fact that there had been significant philosophical and institutional changes during the Chosŏn era, the term does not effectively show in what sense and how important the changes are in Korean history. Put differently, due to the vagueness of its meaning, the term Confucianization makes it difficult to discuss what political visions and intentions the founders of the Chosŏn dynasty had. Of course, political leaders of the Chosŏn had consistently proclaimed that their ultimate goal was creating a state where the social ideals of the Three Dynasties could be realized and the teachings of the sages be actualized. However, the proclamation was likely made to express their social beliefs and attitudes, not their specific political purposes or policies.

Worse yet, due to the vague definition of “Confucianization,” historians’ reliance on the term results in rather arbitrary interpretations of the history of Chosŏn. The historical view insisting that Chosŏn officials’ reference to “Confucian texts” and emphasis on “ritual propriety” inevitably caused the intensification of sino-centric view in Chosŏn society is one of those examples.<sup>45</sup> Given this, rather than simply defining the Chosŏn government’s various attempts to newly systematize their practices and institutions as the process of “Confucianization,” it seems more important to learn from those attempts what political vision Chosŏn officials had

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<sup>45</sup> Especially in Japanese colonial historiography, Confucianism of Chosŏn Korea was often interpreted as an ideological tool to justify its rulers’ political and philosophical subjugation to China.

and how they changed their ways of thought and behaviors.

Bearing this in mind, this chapter will point out that the Chosŏn elite's political debates and actions did not always occur as a result of their emphasis on Confucianism. In doing so, it will also suggest the possibility that, in many cases, the elite referred to Confucian sages' teachings for the purposes of coming to better decisions on political matters. In other words, this chapter will suggest that for the Chosŏn elite, Confucian thoughts were useful resources which could be referred to when necessary, not an absolute or inflexible tenet by which all of their thoughts and practices were restrained and controlled.

As one way of doing this, this chapter will begin with a case study about the Chosŏn elite's discussions on the sacrifice to Heaven. While the elite's discussions regarding the establishment, implementation and abolition of this ritual are directly related to their understandings on and attitudes toward ritual propriety based on the Classics, the discussions were initiated by their need to identify the newly established state and its people within the contemporary national and international situations. Therefore, a careful examination of the debates about the sacrifice to Heaven might be helpful to reveal what role Confucianism played in Chosŏn politics. Delving into issues relating to the sacrifice to Heaven, this case study will also provide an opportunity to rethink Sino-centrism, one of the most controversial issues in East Asian history, which, according to conventional views, came to be shared by many of the Chosŏn elite since they made Confucianism their dominant political ideology. After this, the rest of this chapter will suggest a new way of understanding Chosŏn politics and many significant issues which have often been concealed by "Confucian" characteristics.

## **A case study: Chosŏn and the sacrifice to Heaven**

### **a) The history of the sacrifice to Heaven**

When the Chosŏn dynasty was established, Cho Pak 趙璞 (1356-1408), the minister of the Board of Rites (*Yejo chŏnsŏ*) advised King T'aejo (1392-1398) to abolish *Wŏn'gu* (園丘, the Round Mound), the place for the sacrifice to Heaven, insisting that only the “Son of Heaven” can perform this ritual. Cho’s insistence was supported by a group of officials who emphasized an old dictum that “only the Son of Heaven can offer a sacrifice to Heaven and feudal lords to mountains and streams.”<sup>46</sup> However, after King T'aejong (1400-1418) was enthroned, new officials of the Board of Rites argued that the sacrifice to Heaven should not be abolished because since the Three Kingdoms period it had been performed. Although some officials pointed out that the Chosŏn kings’ implementation of the sacrifice to Heaven was a violation of ritual propriety, it seems that sacrifices at *Wŏndan* were maintained for a certain time without serious opposition. The fact that there had been detailed discussions on the regulations regarding the construction of and performance in *Wŏndan* proves it.

However, the fact that many officials agreed that Chosŏn kings could perform the sacrifice rituals at *Wŏndan* does not mean that all of them agreed that the kings could enjoy the status as the “Son of Heaven.” For example, while they did not entirely oppose the ritual performed at *Wŏndan*, Ha Yun 河崙 (1347-1416) and Hŏ Cho 許稠 (1369-1439) insisted that instead of the sacrifice to Heaven, Chosŏn kings should perform sacrifices only to *Tongbang ch'ŏngje*<sup>47</sup> arguing that Chosŏn kings’ sacrifice to entire heaven was improper. The officials

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<sup>46</sup> For details, see explanations about “Royal regulation (Wang Zhi, 王制)” in the *Book of Rites (Liji, 禮記)*.

<sup>47</sup> *T'aejong sillok* (22. 11. 12. Imjin). There are five gods worshipped in Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and Shamanism. They are *Tongbang ch'ŏngje* (東方青帝, Blue god responsible for the east), *Sŏbang paekche* (西方白帝, White god responsible for the west), *Nambang chŏkche* (南方赤帝, Red god responsible for the south), *Pukpang hŭkche* (北方黑帝, Black god responsible for the north) and *Chungang hwangje* (中央黃帝 or *Hwangjeryo*, Yellow god responsible for the center). It was believed that *Hoch'ŏn sangje* (昊天上帝) is the god above these five gods and controlled entire heaven.

who supported sacrifices to *Tongbang ch'öngje* contended that sacrifice to *Ch'öngje* was proper to Korean kings given that kings of the Qin(秦) dynasty offered sacrifices to *Söbang paekche*. Although King T'aejong showed his desire to maintain the sacrifice to Heaven at first, he soon agreed with the proponents of abolition of *Wöndan*.<sup>48</sup> Because main argument of the abolitionists were "Heaven does not respond to improperly performed rituals," the mutual agreement between King T'aejong and the abolitionists proves that at least ostensibly, both of them admitted that Chosön kings had the same status as China's feudal lords who were unqualified for the sacrifice to Heaven. However, the debates on the sacrifice to Heaven at *Wöndan* were not easily concluded.

In the sixteenth year of the reign of King T'aejong, Pyön Kyeryang 卞季良 (1369-1430), one of the influential court officials of the period, presented a memorial arguing that King T'aejong should perform the sacrifice to Heaven to save the people across the country who had suffered from a serious drought. Even though Pyön emphasized the practical purpose to re-institutionalize the sacrifice to Heaven, he did not simply ignore the importance of Confucian propriety itself. Rather, like his opponents, he also relied on textual authority of the Classics, which were believed to present appropriate ways of people's behavior, to prove that he also shared the same sages' teachings with most officials. To respond to the abolitionists whose arguments were based on an old dictum that "only the Son of Heaven can offer a sacrifice to heaven and feudal lords to mountains and streams,"<sup>49</sup> Pyön supported his idea with important Chinese classical texts such as the *Book of poetry* (詩經, Kor. *Sigyöng*, Chi. *Shijing*), which

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<sup>48</sup> *T'aejong sillok* (22. 11. 12. Imjin), *T'aejong sillok* (24. 12. 8. Chöngch'uk).

<sup>49</sup> This phrase is also shown in the *Prime tortoise of the record bureau* (冊府元龜, *Cefu yuangui*), the Song dynasty's historical encyclopedia of political essays, autobiography, memorials and decrees, compiled under Wang Qinruo (王欽若) and Yang Yi (楊億).

has the dictum that “people can offer sacrifices to all gods” and the *Book of history* (書經, Kor. *Sōgyōng*, Chi. *Shujing*) which mentions the importance of the sacrifice to Heaven to maintain the cosmic order. He also pointed out that the ways to keep proprieties are different depending on time and space and that even Confucian sages such as Confucius and Zhu Xi had allowed different applications of Confucian propriety.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, putting much emphasis on social realities, he insisted that the sacrifice to Heaven was not a violation of the principle of propriety but a king’s duty, if their state had unusually serious problems. He even argued that if King T’aejong did not perform a sacrifice to Heaven even at the time of national crisis, only out of the desire to keep ritual propriety, and just concentrated only on self-cultivation and self-reflection, it would be not only futile but also harmful.<sup>51</sup> Pyōn’s main argument that the Chosŏn kings’ implementation of the sacrifice to Heaven to solve national problems does not impair ritual propriety had been continuously used by his proponents and followers.<sup>52</sup> Because two different opinions on *Wōndan* relied on the textual authority of the Classics, the debates among those two groups could not be easily concluded and the debates were repeated until the end of King Sejong (1418-1450)’s reign.

The records of the *Sillok* do not clearly show whether the ritual performance at *Wōndan* was halted during the reign of King Sejong. Only the fact that King Sejong mentioned that he did not want to talk about this issue anymore<sup>53</sup> and that King Sejo (1455-1468), the son of King

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<sup>50</sup> *T’aejong sillok* (31. 16. 6. Sinyu).

<sup>51</sup> *T’aejong sillok* (31. 16. 6. Sinyu).

<sup>52</sup> *Sejong sillok* (125. 31. 7. Imo).

<sup>53</sup> *Sejong sillok* (105. 26. 7. Chōngmyo).

Sejong, said that the sacrifice to Heaven had not been performed in his days<sup>54</sup> proves that the ritual at *Wöndan* was not implemented for a certain period between the reigns of King Sejong and King Sejo. However, as shown in the record, the debates on the sacrifice to Heaven were repeated during the entire reign of King Sejong as well as in the reign of King Munjong (1450-1452).

Interestingly, when King Sejo actively attempted to perform sacrifices, there was no serious debate about whether the king's implementation of sacrifices to Heaven was ritually proper. Most debates on *Wöndan* shown in the *Sejo sillok* were just about the regulations regarding construction of and ritual performance at the site.<sup>55</sup> For seven years, King Sejo personally performed sacrifices to Heaven at *Wön'gu*.<sup>56</sup> However, in December of the tenth year of his reign, he abolished *Wön'gu* sacrifice without any explanation.<sup>57</sup> Many historians believe that King Sejo gave up his right to perform sacrifices to Heaven to observe so-called "Confucian propriety."

#### **b) Historical issues regarding the sacrifice to Heaven**

Imanishi Ryū asserted that the belief that Chosŏn was a loyal tributary nation of the Chinese emperor was commonly shared by Chosŏn people during the entire period. Influenced by Imanishi's study, some Korean historians often regarded Chosŏn rulers' emphasis on the propriety of *sadae* (事大, serve the great) as a humiliating part of Korean history. Refuting

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<sup>54</sup> *Sejo sillok* (6. 3. 1. Ūrhae).

<sup>55</sup> Han Hyöngju, *Chosŏn ch'ogi kukka cherye yön'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 2002), 53-54.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>57</sup> *Sejo sillok* (34. 10. 12. Chönghae).

Imanishi's assertion, other Korean historians proved that Chosŏn's *sadae* policy actually gave many practical benefits to Chosŏn Korea.<sup>58</sup> However, it seems that most Korean historians agree that with Chosŏn's Confucianization, the idea of *sadae* inevitably became one of the most decisive factors in Chosŏn's political decisions. The problem here is that if one regards the purpose of various debates among Chosŏn founders simply as Confucianization, it is highly possible that one might be trapped in the failure narrative saying that from its beginning, the Chosŏn dynasty was destined to lose its political independence.

In this context, it seems that Chosŏn leaders' discussions on the implementation and institutionalization of the sacrifice to Heaven also need to be carefully examined because most historians of Chosŏn agree that the debates on this ritual were directly related to the *sadae* idea. Also, the fact that the *Sillok* does not show any examples of the practices of this ritual after King Sejo's reign and that this ritual was removed from the National Five Rites (*Kukcho oryeŭi*, 國朝五禮儀) is generally accepted as the inevitable result of the sophistication of Confucian philosophy. It is natural, therefore, that even without any specific record in the *Sillok*, most historians of Chosŏn came to conclude that the sacrifice to Heaven was practically abolished until it was re-established in the Taehan Empire (1897-1910). It is also said that the disappearance of the record about the ritual at *Wŏn 'gu* in the *Sillok* proves that Chosŏn people's practices finally came to be limited by Confucian ideas which cannot be entirely free from a Han China-centered view.

For instance, Kim T'aeyŏng, in his article "Chosŏn ch'ogi sajŏn ŭi sŏngnip e taehayŏ," explains that the debates about the sacrifice to Heaven resulted from the contradictory situation

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<sup>58</sup> Examining the tributary system, one crucial part of the *sadae* policy, Chŏn Haejong points out that historically there had existed various benefits Korea could obtain from China through the policy, which is one of the main reasons Chosŏn kept it. For details, see Chŏn Haejong, *Hanjung kwan 'gyesa yon 'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1970), 26-58.

of Chosŏn –politically independent but ideologically subject to China.<sup>59</sup> He further explains that because Chosŏn leaders regarded their status as being the Chinese emperor’s subjects, they could not officially institutionalize the sacrifice to Heaven and thus, most sacrifices performed to Heaven in Chosŏn should be understood as exceptional cases. That is, although Kim suggests the possibility of the ongoing existence of the sacrifice to Heaven during the Chosŏn era and emphasizes Chosŏn leaders’ attempts to maintain their institutional traditions, what he points out through ritual debates on the sacrifice to Heaven is that in the process of Confucianization, Chosŏn came to lost its equal status with China.<sup>60</sup>

Han Ugŭn explains the rearrangement of the code of sacrifices (*sajŏn*, 祀典) as the embodiment of Chosŏn’s Confucianization with its careful considerations of other religions and beliefs. He suggests that one important reason why the sacrifice to Heaven was abolished is Chosŏn rulers’ distrust of the ritual’s “manifest function.”<sup>61</sup> It is noticeable because with this suggestion, he could insist that Chosŏn people tried to maintain cultural and historical independence and that their practice was not regulated only by Confucian ideology. However, his assertion that Chosŏn rulers maintained other religious rituals because they believed in those rituals’ “latent function” makes it difficult to understand his argument.<sup>62</sup>

Among historians, it was Han Yŏngu who ascribed a more positive value to Chosŏn’s implementation of the sacrifice to Heaven. Han argues that Pyŏn Kyeryang and Yang Sŏngji

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<sup>59</sup> Kim T’aeyŏng, “Chosŏn ch’ogi sajŏn ūi sŏngnip e taehayŏ,” *Yŏksa hakpo* 58 (1973), 116-118.

<sup>60</sup> Kim explains it as “yokyojŏk irwŏnhwa (儒教的一元化).” See, Kim, “Chosŏn ch’ogi sajŏn ūi sŏngnip e taehayŏ,” 118.

<sup>61</sup> Han Ugŭn, “Chosŏn wangjo ch’ogi e issŏsŏ ūi yugyo inyŏm ūi silch’ŏn kwa sinang-chonggyo,” *Hanguksaron* 3 (1976). In this article, Han used this English term to explain the Korean words, “myŏngbun sang ūi kinŭng.”

<sup>62</sup> This English term was used to explain the Korean words, “chamjaejok kinŭng.”



梁誠之 (1415-1482)'s attempts to revitalize the sacrifice to Heaven were the ways of emphasizing a unique national identity of Chosŏn people. Unlike Kim T'aeyŏng who pointed out Pyŏn's acceptance of Chosŏn's inferior status to China in his memorials, and downplayed Pyŏn's requests for Chosŏn kings to perform the sacrifice to Heaven, Han praises those attempts arguing that these should be understood as Pyŏn's effort to elevate the status of Chosŏn and its kings. Han also insists that Yang Sŏngji's emphasis on Korean history and tradition and his attempts to institutionalize the sacrifice to Heaven prove that Koreans in early Chosŏn made efforts to develop their society with a shared consciousness as a nation.<sup>63</sup> However, Han does not clearly explain why the rituals performed to Heaven were stopped and what the discontinuance of the rituals means in Korean history. Ironically, the more he praised Yang Sŏngji as a nation-centered leader, the more Yang became an exceptional person in the history of Chosŏn. Put differently, Han's emphasis on Yang's effort to construct a sense of communal identity without any further explanation neither denies the opinions that the sacrifice to Heaven disappeared after the reign of King Sejo nor refutes the view that China-centered views, widely shared among Korean officials, led to the abolition of the ritual.

Similarly to Han, Yamauchi Koichi tries to show Chosŏn leaders' independent spirit shown in their efforts to carry out the sacrifice to Heaven. Even about Ha Yun and Hŏ Cho's remonstrance that Chosŏn kings should perform sacrifices only to *Tongbang ch'ŏngje* rather than to the Heavenly King of all of heaven (*Hoch'ŏn sangje*), which is often regarded as Chosŏn officials' acceptance of a China-centered world view, Yamauchi insists that Ha and Hŏ's suggestion also should be understood as efforts to maintain the Chosŏn kings right to contact

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<sup>63</sup> Han Yŏngu, *Chosŏn chŏn'gi sahoe sasang yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Chisik Sanŏpsa, 1983). In this book, Han emphasizes the development of the self and the identity of the Korean nation (*minjokchŏk chaa palchŏn* (民族的自我發展)) in Chosŏn period.

Heaven. In this context, Yamauchi points out that Chosŏn's political leaders shared the belief that their right to rule the state was endowed by the mandate of Heaven and argues that the *sadae* policy in early Chosŏn should be understood as a practical and diplomatic strategy, not as the manifestation of their ideological beliefs.<sup>64</sup> However, because he also focuses only on very early period of the Chosŏn dynasty, his article does not deal with how these ritual debates continued.

Recently, Han Hyŏngju in his book *Chosŏn ch'ogi kukka chech'ŏn yŏngu* examines how the code of sacrifices (*sajŏn*) had been arranged. In his book, Han attempts to more clearly reveal the relations between various state rituals and the political and social background of early Chosŏn. In doing so, he asserts that in the reign of King Sejo, sacrifices to Heaven were performed to legitimize the king's political authority and thus, the purpose of the ritual at the time was very different from that of earlier periods. In detail, he argues that while sacrifices to Heaven in the period between the reigns of King T'aejo and Sejong were performed by high officials to pray for rain, the rituals in the reign of King Sejo were always by the king himself and there was no prayer for rain. Han also suggests that political and diplomatic instability might be the reason why King Sejo institutionalized and personally participated in the ritual.<sup>65</sup> However, he does not tackle why the ritual was abandoned after the tenth year of King Sejo's reign. He just repeated that because of the importance of ritual propriety, the sacrifice to Heaven might not have been maintained.

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<sup>64</sup> Yamauchi Koichi, "On the National Self-Respect Against Ming in the Early Years of the Lee Dynasty (朝鮮初期に於ける對明自尊の意識)," *Chōsen Gakuho* 92 (1979), 69. His explanation on Kwŏn Kŭn's ambivalent attitude toward Ming China is referable. For details, also see Kwŏn Kŭn, *Ŭngjesi chipchu* (應制詩集註).

<sup>65</sup> Han Hyŏngju, *Chosŏn ch'ogi kukka cherye yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 2002), 39-40.

**c) A hypothetical review of the history of ritual debates on the sacrifice to Heaven**

As mentioned above, most studies regarding the sacrifice to Heaven were carried out with the premise that this rite was abandoned in the Chosŏn dynasty until Emperor Kojong (1863-1907) revitalized it because Chosŏn officials ascribed great importance to Confucian propriety both in ideology and practice. However, if there is any evidence that the sacrifice to Heaven had been maintained and frequently performed without detailed discussions –in other words, if the Chosŏn elite and intellectuals separated ideological debates and their practices– this premise should be reconsidered. Bearing this in mind, one needs to carefully re-examine the record of ritual performances after the tenth year of the reign of King Sejo.

As briefly stated above, the records that the sacrifices to Heaven were performed at *Wŏndan* or *Wŏn'gu* are not shown in the *Sillok* after the reign of King Sejo, which is believed to prove that the Chosŏn kings abandoned the right to perform this ritual because of ritual propriety. But, if one carefully examines the *Sillok*, one might find other possibilities. First of all, one needs to refer to the following record of the reign of King Chŏngjo (1776-1800).

Our dynasty's institution of *Wŏn'gu* was changed to that of *Namdan*.<sup>66</sup>

This suggests the possibility that the sacrifice to Heaven had been performed under different names. However, to avoid possible mistakes, whether sacrifices to Heaven were performed at *Namdan* should be more carefully examined. In this regard, the record of the ninth year of the reign of King Injo (1623-1649) is notable. Confronting a serious drought, King Injo ordered as follows,

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<sup>66</sup> *Chŏngjo sillok* (22. 10. 8. Musin).

Because we are in this serious situation, I intend to personally pray at *Namdan*.

All of you, officiants and stewards at rites, should try to move Heaven's mind with your sincerity.<sup>67</sup>

Above record shows that King Injo attempted to impress Heaven with his personal prayer at *Namdan*. The next day's entry in the *Sillok* shows that the king went to "the southern place (*Namgyo*, 南郊) where the altar is located"<sup>68</sup> and performed a ritual for rain.<sup>69</sup> Given that he prayed for rain at this place during a natural disaster and he clearly mentioned Heaven, it is highly possible that the ritual performance at *Namdan* he mentioned was the sacrifice to Heaven. However, because it is still possible that he wanted to move Heaven's mind with a prayer to other gods, more evidence might be needed. Fortunately, the record of the seventeenth year of the reign of King Injo shows that an official complained that while ritual officiants performed sacrificial rituals at *Chongmyo* (the Royal Shrine, 宗廟) and *sannŭng* (royal mausoleum, 山陵) with sincerity, they did not at *Kyosa* (the place for the sacrifice to Heaven and Earth, 郊祀) and at *sanch'ŏn* (mountains and streams, 山川), and asked them to ameliorate and revitalize the original institutional and ritual propriety.<sup>70</sup> These records from the reigns of Kings Injo and Chŏngjo suggest the possibility that the sacrifice to Heaven had been maintained and performed without the need to have serious ritual debates in the late Chosŏn period.

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<sup>67</sup> *Injo sillok* (24. 9. 5. Chŏnghae).

<sup>68</sup> The record reads "namgyodanso (南郊檀所)" which can be contracted as "Namdan (南檀)."

<sup>69</sup> *Injo sillok* (24. 9. 5. Muja).

<sup>70</sup> *Injo sillok* (38. 17. 5. Chŏngch'uk).

One might argue that even though, during King Injo's reign the Ming dynasty still existed, because its power was seriously diminished, Chosŏn kings could perform the sacrifice to Heaven. However, if Chosŏn rulers really had a China-centered (or Han China-centered) view and obediently followed ideologically regulated ritual propriety and regarded themselves as subjects of Ming China, they could not perform the ritual while the Ming emperors still reigned. Moreover, the regime of King Injo was born of a military coup supported by pro-Ming groups who put much emphasis on Confucian propriety in their diplomatic dealings with foreign countries. That is, if even the king who agreed with the importance of Confucian rules performed sacrifices to Heaven, it also could be crucial evidence proving that Chosŏn rulers were not seriously subject to a China-centered view or *sadae* idea unless they were in the situation where they should, for their benefit or to avoid any trouble, refer to or follow those ideas, such as having diplomatic interactions with Ming China. Because it is still true that the reign of King Injo was during a time of political and diplomatic turmoil where exceptional political behaviors can occur, however, whether there were other cases of the sacrifice to Heaven in different times should be examined. Furthermore, because there is a record in *Injo sillok* suggesting that *Namgyo* or *Namdan* does not always mean the place for the sacrifice to Heaven,<sup>71</sup> it also needs to more carefully examined how great the possibility was that sacrifices performed at *Namgyo* were actually the same sacrifices for Heaven as those done at *Wŏn'gu*.

Regarding this issue, entries in the *Sejo sillok* show that *Wŏn'gu* and *Namgyo* appearing in the *Sillok* have an identical meaning in many cases as the place for the sacrifice to Heaven. On March in the third year of his reign, King Sejo sent several civil governors a document

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<sup>71</sup> An entry of *Injo sillok* shows that King Injo performed sacrifices to *sanch'ŏn* at *namgyo*, not to heaven. *Injo sillok* (25. 9. 7. Chŏngch'uk).

mentioning he had performed a significant ritual at *Namgyo* on the fifteenth day of the month.<sup>72</sup> According to the entry on the fifteenth day, the ritual King Sejo personally performed was the sacrifice to Heaven at *Wŏn'gu*.<sup>73</sup> These examples prove that the recorders of the *Sillok* often identified “the sacrifice at *Namgyo*” with the sacrifice to Heaven at *Wŏn'gu*. As a matter of fact, according to the cosmology of Confucianism, the sacrifice to Heaven should be performed at the Round Mound south of the capital.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, to Chosŏn rulers who had this knowledge, *Namgyo* was a word which could easily replace *Wŏn'gu*. This can be proved by the fact that when talking about the sacrifice to Heaven in China, Chosŏn rulers often used the word “*Namgyo*” to indicate the place Ming emperors performed the ritual.<sup>75</sup>

Another example suggesting that it is highly possible that the sacrifices at *Namgyo* are the sacrifices for Heaven is the discussion between King Kwanghae (1608-1623) and his subjects regarding ritual propriety. When King Kwanghae showed his desire to personally perform a ritual at *Namgyo*, he was opposed by many of his subjects among whom, the Office of the Special Counselors (*Hongmun'gwan*) said as follows,

Personally performing a ritual at *Namgyo* is not allowed for feudal lords. Nevertheless, you attempt to construct the Round Mound now, which makes your subjects confused and

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<sup>72</sup> *Sejo sillok* (6. 3. 1. Kapsin).

<sup>73</sup> *Sejo sillok* (6. 3. 1. Kyŏngo).

<sup>74</sup> Another ritual, allowed only for the emperor, the sacrifice to Earth was performed at the Square Pool (方澤) in northern place of the capital. For detailed explanation, refer to Angela Zito, *Of Body & Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 128-192, 144-152.

<sup>75</sup> *Yŏnsan'gun ilgi* (5. 1. 5. Sinmyo), *Sŏnjo sillok* (58. 27. 12. Imja).

embarrassed by your intention.<sup>76</sup>

The two points of the *Hongmun'gwan's* opposition, that the ritual at *Namgyo* was a ritual allowed only for the emperor and that King Kwanghae attempted to construct a *Wŏn'gu* for this ritual, indicate that *Namgyo* was the place Chosŏn kings performed the sacrifice to Heaven. If it can be said that the ritual performed at *Namgyo* was the sacrifice to Heaven, it can be also said that the records in the *Sillok* show that Chosŏn kings performed the sacrifice to Heaven in various periods as needed. According to an entry, King Sŏnjo (1567-1608) personally performed a sacrifice at the altar placed at *Namgyo* to pray for rain.<sup>77</sup> Other than the examples mentioned above, King Injo performed sacrifices praying for rain at *Namgyo* from the beginning of his reign.<sup>78</sup> King Hyojong (1649-1659) and Sukchong (1674-1720) personally visited the place and performed the rituals for rain<sup>79</sup> and King Yŏngjo (1724-1776) ordered high officials to perform the sacrifice for rain at *Namgyo*.<sup>80</sup>

It is possible that not all the rituals performed at *Namgyo* were sacrifices to Heaven and that details of the rituals were not the exactly same as those of Chinese emperors' rituals at the Round Mound. However, given that almost all of the *Namgyo* rituals were performed to pray for rain in the same season as previous Kings performed sacrifices to Heaven at *Wŏn'gu* for rain, there is no need to simply deny the possibility that Chosŏn rulers agreed to perform the

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<sup>76</sup> *Kwanghaegun ilgi* [chungch'obon] (106. 8. 8. Muo).

<sup>77</sup> *Sŏnjo sujŏng sillok* (4. 3. 4. Musul).

<sup>78</sup> *Injo sillok* (6. 2. 5. Kapsul), *Injo sillok* (18. 6. 6. Kyŏngsul).

<sup>79</sup> *Hyojong sillok* (8. 3. 4. Musin), *Sukchong sillok* (24. 18. 5. Kyehae), *Sukchong sillok* (28. 21. 5. Kapsul).

<sup>80</sup> *Yŏngjo sillok* (31. 8. 4. Sinyu), *Yŏngjo sillok* (118. 48. 5. Kimi).

sacrifice to Heaven when it was needed for the state's benefit. Then, the existing view that with the emphasis on Confucian propriety, Chosŏn rulers were voluntarily subjected to China both practically and ideologically which, according to this view, led to their abandonment of the sacrifice to Heaven, should be reexamined. As shown in examples of the reigns of King Kwanghae and King Injo who had totally different views on application of Confucian propriety to their diplomacy with Chinese states,<sup>81</sup> Chosŏn rulers, regardless of their attitudes towards ritual propriety, performed or had desires to perform the sacrifice to Heaven, which proves that they were not willing to depreciate the status of themselves and their state.

As a matter of fact, it seems more reasonable to insist that although Chosŏn rulers could not openly proclaim their state as an empire due to the international situation at the time, they still wanted to have their people believe that their kings were the politically highest and their state was the center of the world. In this context, the conventional view that the emphasis on Confucian propriety accompanied by sinocentrism made Chosŏn kings abolish royal rituals that were only allowed to the Chinese emperor does not seem to be persuasive. Rather, more persuasive is the suggestion made in the section above that Chosŏn kings had maintained the sacrifice to Heaven, which suggests that they were not entirely subjected to Confucian ideas but aptly used them for their political purposes. Again, there is no need to hastily conclude that Chosŏn kings simply gave up their right to perform rituals of the highest degree of importance which were useful to legitimize their political authority. As will be shown, the view that Chosŏn rulers voluntarily and rigorously limited their rights as independent ritual performers must be reconsidered with the reexamination of the premise that Chosŏn people could not but have a

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<sup>81</sup> Regarding this, see Seung B. Kye, "In the Shadow of the Father: Court Opposition and the Reign of King Kwanghae in Early Seventeenth-Century Chosŏn Korea" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2006); Han Myŏnggi, *Kwanghaegun –tagwŏrhan oegyo chŏngch'aek ūl p'yŏlch'in kunju* (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 2000).



China-centered view as a result of its “Confucian transformation.”

**d) The Chosŏn king presiding over politics and rituals**

As briefly mentioned above, the reason why many existing studies commonly insist that Chosŏn rulers abandoned the sacrifice to Heaven is that these studies agree with the premise that Chosŏn rulers became reluctant to perform any ritual that was only allowed to the emperor according to the expansion of their knowledge of Confucian ritual propriety. Due to the premise whereby Chosŏn kings’ abandonment of rituals of the highest degree of significance has been regarded as natural, careful examination of Chosŏn kings’ sacrifices to Earth, which are also categorized as an imperial ritual, has often been neglected. This ritual was merely mentioned together with the sacrifice to Heaven as evidence showing that unlike Koryŏ’s ritual manual, the National Five Rites of Chosŏn did not contain these two imperial rituals due to the Chosŏn elite’s emphasis on Confucian propriety.<sup>82</sup>

Regarding this issue, the record in the *Yŏngjo sillok* is worthy of notice. When King Yŏngjo mentioned his opinion on the amendment of the Procedures of Rituals (*holgi*, 笏記), Sin Ch’iun 申致雲 (1700-1755), the third minister of the Board of Rites (*Yejo ch’amŭi*), said as follows,

Because kings’ personal ritual performance at *Pukkyo* was not recorded in *Oryeŭi*, we remade *holgi* with some addition and alteration this time.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Han Hyŏngju, *Chosŏn ch’ogi kukka cherye yŏn’gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 2002), 9.

<sup>83</sup> *Yŏngjo sillok* (31. 8. 6. Imsin).

Responding to Sin, King Yǒngjo said, “I personally performed a ritual at *Pukkyo* (the northern place, 北郊) in the year of ũlsa referring to precedents.” This conversation between Sin and King Yǒngjo is sufficient to raise a question: why did the king personally perform, and Sin made a *holgi* for, this ritual at *Pukkyo* which was not institutionalized in *Oryeŭi*? What significant meaning did the ritual have for Chosŏn kings?

*Sillok* entries show that, from the beginning of the state, Chosŏn kings had frequently prayed for rain at *Pukkyo* which suggests that this ritual had contained a great deal of significance for Chosŏn kings as one of their representative ritual performances. Several entries in the *Sillok* might support this conjecture. When Pyŏn Kyeryang asked King T’aejong to reinstate the sacrifice to Heaven, King T’aejong refused it saying that due to his subjects’ requests that he pray for rain to *sangje*, he had ordered one of his subjects to perform the ritual at *Pukkyo*, but to no avail.<sup>84</sup> Although this entry does not clearly show whether the ritual performed at *Pukkyo* was exactly the sacrifice to Heaven, it sufficiently proves that the ritual at *Pukkyo* had a great significance, sufficient to satisfy those who asked the king to perform the sacrifice to Heaven, a ritual reserved for the emperor. An entry in *Yǒngjo sillok* also shows the importance of the *Pukkyo* ritual. In the twenty ninth year of his reign, King Yǒngjo mentioned that even though several rituals for rain had already been performed, that year’s drought persisted. What the king decided in order to resolve this problem was to personally perform the ritual for rain at *Pukkyo*.<sup>85</sup> This might mean that Chosŏn people believed that the ritual at *Pukkyo* was very effective and powerful and suggests that the object to which this ritual was performed had the highest status compared to the objects of other rituals. The fact that “*Pukkyo*,”

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<sup>84</sup> *T’aejong sillok* (34. 17. 12. Ŭryu).

<sup>85</sup> *Yǒngjo sillok* (79. 29. 5. Kapcha).

which was regarded as a place for an important state ritual, is not mentioned in both Chinese and Korean ritual manuals<sup>86</sup> might mean that the term was used to replace another appellation of a ritual or the place the ritual was performed, just as “*Namgyo*” was often used instead of *Wŏn’gu*. As a matter of fact, in Chinese states, “*Beijiao* (Kor. *Pukkyo*, 北郊)” had been used to mean the place where the Square Pool (*Pangt’aek*, 方澤) for the Grand Sacrifice to Earth was located. Given the Chosŏn elite’s knowledge of the Grand Sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, it is highly possible that they could easily use “*Pukkyo*” to mean the place for the sacrifice to Earth just as they used “*Namgyo*” to mean the place for the sacrifice to Heaven.<sup>87</sup> If the ritual at *Pukkyo* corresponds to the emperor’s ritual at *Pangt’aek*, the Chosŏn kings’ frequent reliance on the ritual at *Pukkyo* and their recognition of the significance of the ritual becomes understandable.

In fact, even if we only consider the fact that Chosŏn kings attempted to maintain the *Namgyo-Pukkyo* structure, a spatial configuration of ritual places which was originally created for the emperors’ rituals, it is sufficient to assert that Chosŏn kings desired to proclaim their status as the highest authority in terms of politics and rituals, at least within their state. Put succinctly, it can be said that Chosŏn kings did not necessarily agree with the idea that Chinese emperors had higher status than Chosŏn kings, nor were they obsessed with ritual propriety that would reinforce this idea.

This does not intend to argue that Chosŏn Korea had equal political status with Ming

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<sup>86</sup> In “*Lizhi*” (禮志) in *Mingshi* (明史), the terms *dongjiao* (東郊) and *xijiao* (西郊) are shown. But *beijiao* (北郊) was not used as the official name for a ritual.

<sup>87</sup> As shown in Pak Chiwŏn’s *Yŏrha ilgi* (*The Jehol Diary*), to the Chosŏn elite, it might be a common sense that *wŏn’gu* was located at *namgyo* and *pangt’aek* at *pukkyo*. For the reference, see Pak Chiwŏn, *Yŏrha ilgi* (熱河日記): “*hwangdo kiryak* (黃圖紀略) –*hwangsŏng kumun* (皇城九門).”

China in their relationship. It is true that Chosŏn Korea was in the inferior position when it had diplomatic relations with Ming China and thus, needed to accept China's political requests in many cases. The fact that in *Oryeŭi*, Grand Sacrifices to Heaven and Earth were removed clearly proves Chosŏn's relatively inferior political status, whether its kings performed those rituals temporarily or unofficially. However, if Chosŏn leaders' political activities were free from China-centered interpretations of the Classics, it might prove that continuously repeated serious ritual debates did not result in an incorrigible sinicization of Chosŏn people's thoughts and practices. Put differently, given the records about the rituals at *Namkyo* and *Pukkyo*, there is a need to reexamine the widely accepted historians' generalizations: 1) The Chosŏn founders' attempts to Confucianize their state inevitably caused the result that its rulers' behaviors came to be limited by Confucianism. 2) Their *sadae* policy was ideologically justified and taken for granted as their Confucian philosophy became more sophisticated. Unfortunately, whether the rituals at *Namkyo* and *Pukkyo* were exactly the same as sacrifices to Heaven and Earth at *Wŏn'gu* and *Pangt'aek* is not clear. However, only with the fact that Chosŏn kings had maintained the belief that they had the right to directly contact Heaven and Earth, and the fact that they used the textual authority of the Classics very wisely for their national benefit, the Chosŏn rulers' remarks, professing to be subjects of Chinese emperors as shown in their ritual debates, should be carefully reexamined and reassessed.

One might argue that ritual propriety was an important issue to the early Chosŏn leaders and their ritual debates on the sacrifice to Heaven facilitated the state's Confucianization from its beginning. But, there still remain some questions. If maintenance of ritual propriety was so important to Chosŏn rulers, how could they frequently perform so-called improper rituals even after the code of sacrifices, the National Five Rites, was completed? How was it possible that the kings chose to perform rituals not institutionalized in official code even in the late Chosŏn

period when Confucian philosophy was more sophisticated? The term “Confucianization” only simplifies various political activities and accompanying ritual debates in early Chosŏn and thus makes it difficult to understand the complicated historical processes of the Chosŏn dynasty. Therefore, to understand Chosŏn rulers’ political intentions hidden in the debates about ritual propriety and the contents of the Classics, various ritual debates other than those about the sacrifice to Heaven should also be examined.

### **Making a new self-consciousness**

When Pyŏn Kyeryang insisted on the need to perform sacrifices to Heaven, he supported his idea with history. In a memorial, he stated that

Our (Eastern) country had had and fulfilled the duty of sacrifice to Heaven, which cannot be overlooked now....Our state was founded by the progenitor, Tan’gun, who came from Heaven, and is not one of the states enfeoffed by the Son of Heaven (天子) in China.<sup>88</sup>

Pyŏn emphasized not only the fact that the sacrifice to Heaven had been a long tradition of Chosŏn Korea but also that Chosŏn Korea had a unique historical path which began from Tan’gun. He criticized some officials who contended that Tan’gun did not have much opportunity to learn Chinese culture and thus, was not very civilized. Refuting their arguments that the ways of ritual in the period of Tan’gun were improper and that Koreans should follow the rituals introduced by China after the Tan’gun period, Pyŏn pointed out that even the

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<sup>88</sup> *T’aejong sillok* (31. 16. 6. Sinyu).

Hongwu emperor (1368-1398) allowed for Chosŏn to maintain its own traditional ritual ways.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, traditional Korean ritual ways, such as non-Confucian sacrifices to Heaven, to Pyŏn, were not a deviation from the principle of propriety which Chosŏn rulers should maintain. It is notable that in his argument relying on the existence of Korea's own primogenitor Tan'gun, Chosŏn was defined as a totally different political and cultural entity from Ming China.

The emphasis on Tan'gun was repeated by Yang Sŏngji during King Sejo's reign. In his memorial, stating the importance of sacrifices for previous Korean rulers, Yang presents an interesting genealogy of Korean rulers. In the genealogy, Yang called Tan'gun the king of early Chosŏn and Kija the king of late Chosŏn.<sup>90</sup> Positioning Kija after Tan'gun in the genealogy and making Kija a successor of Tan'gun, Yang insisted that Korean history had begun even before Chinese thought and culture were introduced. The examples of Pyŏn and Yang show that the two officials who asserted the need to perform sacrifices to Heaven also tried to construct a strong self-consciousness of their state. Then, what were the opinions of other officials who emphasized ritual propriety more and opposed the Chosŏn kings' sacrifice to Heaven?

Hŏ Cho was one of the officials who opposed Chosŏn kings' sacrifice to heaven. As a matter of fact, he was one of the officials who suggested that national sacrifices be offered to Kija who had contributed to Korea's civilization. In modern historiography, Chosŏn officials' intellectual inclinations emphasizing Kija have often been regarded as distinguishable from those highlighting Tan'gun.<sup>91</sup> Then, was Hŏ, who suggested sacrifices to Kija but opposed

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<sup>89</sup> This is one of the repertoires Chosŏn officials frequently used to argue that Koreans should not unconditionally follow the ways of ritual recorded in the Classics. For instance, the same statements can be found in *T'aegjong sillok* (22. 11. 10. Kabin) and *Sejo sillok* (3. 2. 3. Chŏngyu).

<sup>90</sup> *Sejo sillok* (3. 2. 3. Chŏngyu).

<sup>91</sup> In her *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, Martina Deuchler argues that the architects of the Chosŏn dynasty such as Chŏng Tojŏn 鄭道傳 (1342-1398), Kwŏn Kŭn and Ha Yun attempted to remove the vestiges of

Chosŏn kings' sacrifice to Heaven, an intellectual and philosophical opponent of Pyŏn Kyeryang? Can one argue that Hŏ put much more emphasis on Chinese culture and philosophy than Korean tradition? Before answering the question, one needs to bear in mind that, as John Duncan indicates, many Chosŏn officials came from the same scholarly background and possibly held "the same historically and culturally-informed view of Chosŏn identity."<sup>92</sup> As a matter of fact, both Hŏ Cho and Pyŏn Kyeryang studied under Kwŏn Kŭn 權近 (1352-1409). When Hŏ suggested sacrifices to Kija, the Board of Rites, where he served, and its minister Ha Yun continuously emphasized the importance of sacrifices to Tan'gun.<sup>93</sup> Given these, it seems highly possible that what Hŏ wanted to emphasize by insisting on performing sacrifices to Kija was Korea's brilliant culture and history proclaiming that the rise of Confucianism in Korea was coeval with that of China. In this context, rather than simply regarding the debates on sacrifices to Tan'gun and Kija as ideological conflicts between a Korea-centered view and a China-centered view, it seems more reasonable to understand the debates as discussions on how to define and construct the identity of Chosŏn.

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indigenous, that is "non-Kija customs." That is, she explains that the architects of Chosŏn had different ideas and blueprints for their state from other officials who put much more emphasis on Korean tradition (*t'osok*) (Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 122-123). In *Voice from the North*, Sun Joo Kim suggests the possibility that by the eighteenth century, Tan'gun had not gained popular recognition by Chosŏn central elites compared to Kija (Sun Joo Kim, *Voice from the north: resurrecting regional identity through the life and work of Yi Sihang (1672-1736)* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 148-149). Even Han Young-woo (Han Yŏngu), who points out that to many Chosŏn officials, Kija was not a symbol of Korea's political subservience to China but that of Korea's political independence, agrees that Kija was somehow a symbol of Koreans' efforts to maintain "a polite relationship with China." (Han Young-woo (Han Yŏngu), "Kija worship in the Koryŏ and Early Yi Dynasties: A Cultural Symbol in the Relationship Between Korea and China," in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, eds. Wm. Theodore de Bary and JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 371). Regarding this, what I want to emphasize here is that Chosŏn officials' Kija worship should not be simply regarded as a reflection of their China-centered world view.

<sup>92</sup> John Duncan, "The *Taehak yŏnŭi chimnyak* and the Politics of Confucian Learning in the Early Chosŏn" (unpublished article).

<sup>93</sup> *T'aejong sillok* (23. 12. 6. Kimi).

It seems that Chosŏn officials' debates on the sacrifice to Tan'gun was one of their efforts to construct a very new self-consciousness which was totally different from that of the previous period. For those who have a primordialist vision of the nation as timeless, it might not be easily acceptable that the debates on the sacrifice to Tan'gun, whose name had already been in historical records written in Koryŏ, were their endeavor to make a significant conceptual change to construct the identity for the state and its people. However, the *Sillok* shows that even King Sejong was reluctant to accept the idea that Tan'gun was a common ancestor of all people in Chosŏn Korea. When Pyŏn Kyeryang asked the king to perform sacrifices to Tan'gun together with the primogenitors of the Three kingdoms at the same altar, King Sejong refused the suggestion at first, saying that if sacrifices to Tan'gun were performed at the same shrine with the primogenitors of the Three kingdoms, the rituals might be improper because, according to his knowledge, the Three kingdoms were different political entities from that of Tan'gun.<sup>94</sup> That is, the historical genealogy that regards Tan'gun as the primogenitor of the Korean nation, which is widely accepted by modern Koreans, was not necessarily accepted by the king. Before long, Yu Kwan, the former Third State Councilor (*uŏijŏng*), sent King Sejong a memorial saying that a shrine in the county of Munhwa (*Munhwahyŏn*, 文化縣) dedicated to Tanung Ch'ŏnwang (the king as the Son of Heaven, 天王), Tanin Ch'ŏnwang, and Tan'gun Ch'ŏnwang reveals the possibility that this county was the old capital of the state of Tan'gun. In this memorial, he also asked the king to order the office to find the exact site of the capital to build complete and correct knowledge of the history of Tan'gun, which Chosŏn people had different understandings about and attitudes toward. On top of that, Yu argued that Tan'gun lived in the same time period as emperor Yao more than one thousand years before Kija came to Korea and

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<sup>94</sup> *Sejong sillok* (37. 9. 9. Kich'uk).



thus, sacrifices to Tan'gun, the primogenitor of Chosŏn, should not be performed at the shrine for Kija, who belonged to a later generation.<sup>95</sup> These examples show that in early Chosŏn, its leaders tried to define their state and people as a unique group emphasizing their distinct history and culture. As a way to advance this endeavor, a group of elites attempted to complete the state's genealogy which could embrace the entirety of the people of Chosŏn as members of a community which originated in the distant past, the state of Tan'gun; this is an effort to consolidate scattered knowledge and to transform various groups' different memories into a collective memory at the national level.

As Anthony Smith aptly points out, religions and priesthoods can play a central role in transmitting and disseminating communal memory, and in celebrating the sense of common identity, especially in societies where formal systems of education were lacking or deficient.<sup>96</sup> In this vein, it is natural that Chosŏn rulers, who needed to legitimize their political authority and to secure the people's loyalty, considered how to elaborate various rituals which would be useful not only to proclaim their socio-political supremacy but also to transform the people under their rule into a collectivity sharing a common ancestor and history. Chosŏn officials' debates about ritual propriety were not simply discussions about their philosophical or religious beliefs. Rather those debates were made to extend a sense of collective identity to the constituents of Chosŏn and to construct a more stable state. In this context, even though Chosŏn officials referred to the Classics, filled with Confucian precepts and ideas, it should not be simply said that their repeated debates on ritual propriety were intended only to Sinicize their state or dogmatize a specific ideology. Rather, those ritual debates should be understood as

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<sup>95</sup> *Sejong sillok* (40. 10. 6. Ŭlmi).

<sup>96</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, UK: New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1986), 157-161.

Chosŏn's own way of state building which is worthy of study as an example for better understanding the diversity and difference of the historical developments of various states in the world.

## Chapter 2: Confucianism and Korea's Cultural Traditions

### Introduction

In presenting the Chosŏn elite's different opinions on their ritual performances, the previous chapter briefly mentioned that elites holding different ideas should not be simply regarded as two opposing groups in a binary categorization. Significant scholarship on Korean history has constructed a framework explaining the history of Chosŏn as a confrontation between sincere Neo-Confucian supporters –or, followers of Zhu Xi's ideas– who finally became the dominant political group of Chosŏn and their political and philosophical opponents, those Chosŏn elites who advocated the importance of indigenous culture and traditions, which were often non-Confucian.

In this dichotomy, those Chosŏn elites who prioritized Korea's cultural and institutional traditions have often been labeled as “nationalists” or “advocates of national practice (*kuksok*, 國俗),” rather than as passionate supporters of Confucianism despite the fact that many of their political activities and remarks were made on the basis of the precepts in the Classics. Taking for granted this binary understanding of the Chosŏn elite, many conventional studies have often attempted to find the reasons for those “atypical” elite's emphases on non-Confucian Korean tradition in their economic, intellectual and political backgrounds. However, as shown from the fact that Yang Sŏngji, who was generally classified as a *kuksok* supporter, was eulogized as a sincere Zhu Xi follower by Kim An'guk 金安國 (1478-1543), who was regarded as one of the sincere advocates of Cheng-Zhu Learning in the early sixteenth century,<sup>97</sup> emphasis on national tradition does not always mean rejection of Confucianism, and vice versa.

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<sup>97</sup> John B. Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 250.

Rather, it seems that in many cases, Chosŏn elites carefully referred to both Korea's own socio-cultural traditions and Confucianism for their state politics.

In this context, avoiding the conventional narrative emphasizing the confrontations between national traditions and Confucianism or a Korea-centered view and Sino centrism, this chapter will explore how the elite used their knowledge of both national traditions and Confucianism as political capital to actualize their political purposes. In addition, examining reciprocal interactions between these two intellectual and cultural elements, this chapter will also discuss whether there existed any significant political issues that the Chosŏn elite commonly and persistently had interests in.

### **Upholding tradition, respecting Confucianism**

As Duncan aptly points out, the intellectual landscape of Chosŏn –especially early Chosŏn– was a complex mixture of a variety of intellectual traditions.<sup>98</sup> It should be remembered, therefore, that simply categorizing Chosŏn elites of the period as “nationalists” or “Confucian adherents” based on a few of their political remarks often conceals more important socio-political issues dealt with in their discussions in the political arena.

The case of Hŏ Cho is a good example, suggesting that national pride and reverence for Confucian sages could coexist even in an individual's cognitive system without any contradiction. Hŏ was the one who opposed the Chosŏn kings' sacrifices to Heaven and put more emphasis on the sacrifice to Kija. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, however, his political remarks should be understood as reflecting his concern on how to proclaim the

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<sup>98</sup> There coexisted the statecraft-oriented learning of the Northern Song, the Cheng-Zhu Learning of Southern Song, and the old Han-Tang style learning emphasizing literary skills. For details, see Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, 237-265.

political legitimacy and cultural superiority of Chosŏn, not as his acceptance of its political and cultural inferiority. In fact, it seems that Hŏ thought that the cultural development of Chosŏn Korea was not behind Ming China. Therefore, when Kim Chŏm 金漸 (1369-1457), an assistant secretary (*ch'amch'an*, 參贊), suggested that King Sejong should follow Ming China's law and culture, Hŏ revealed his criticism of Kim's heavy dependence on China. In his insistence, Hŏ clearly pointed out that regardless of Chinese emperors' preferences, Chosŏn kings should observe Confucian principles and ritual propriety.<sup>99</sup> In other words, to Hŏ, observance of Confucian ideas and practice was important for Chosŏn to boast its political and cultural superiority internationally and to perform better state politics domestically, not to be a loyal subject state to Ming China.

As Hŏ's case suggests, it cannot be simply said that all of those who put more emphasis on Confucian propriety simply abhorred Korea's traditional ways of life. Rather, when they found discrepancies between the two, many Chosŏn officials discussed how to effectively harmonize these two different socio-cultural elements with a consideration of the state's socio-political reality. Their references to popular beliefs and rituals and efforts to transform them into Confucian style rituals when they created codes to govern national sacrifices proves this.<sup>100</sup>

Especially when they attempted to interfere in people's ways of life, the elite should more prudently consider the significance and influence of national tradition. In the eleventh year of the reign of King T'aejong, the Board of Rites (*Yejo*, 禮曹) indicated that there was a difference between the regulations on mourning dress in the Six Codes of Governance (*Yukchŏn*,

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<sup>99</sup> *Sejong sillok* (3. 1. 1. Pyŏngjin).

<sup>100</sup> Han Hyŏngju, *Chosŏn ch'ogi kukka cherye yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 2002), 164-168.

六典)<sup>101</sup> and those in Zhu Xi's family ritual (朱子家禮, Kor. *Chuja karye*, Chi. *Zhuzi, jiali*). According to Zhu Xi's family ritual, parents in-law and sons-in-law should wear the lowest level of mourning dress (*sima*, 總麻), among five different levels of mourning dress, for each other. But, Korean tradition was different. While parents-in-law wore the fourth level of mourning dress (*sogong*, 小功) for their sons-in-law, sons-in-law wore the second level of mourning dress (*kinyŏn*, 期年)<sup>102</sup> for their parents-in-law. Showing an eclectic attitude, the Korean legal code, *Yukchŏn*, states that parents-in-law should wear the lowest degree (the fifth) of mourning dress (*sima*) for their sons-in-law while sons-in-law should wear the second level of mourning dress (*kinyŏn*). The Board of Rites argued that because Koreans should follow traditional ritual ways, parents-in-law should wear the fourth degree of mourning dress (*sogong*).<sup>103</sup>

Here, one can find both the regulation of *Yukchŏn* and insistence that the Board of Rites should not simply follow Zhu Xi's ritual regulation. This proves that even when they discussed important ritual propriety, the Chosŏn elite had carefully considered their cultural traditions and social reality. It seems natural, therefore, that in systemizing their legal system and ritual

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<sup>101</sup> The full name of the Six Codes of Governance is *Kyŏngje yukchŏn* (經濟六典) and it was written on the basis of legal regulations implemented since the year of Muijn (1388). Since its publication in 1397, it had been the main legal code of the Chosŏn dynasty before the National Code (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, 經國大典) was published in the reign of King Sŏngjong. The National Code was greatly influenced by the Six Codes of Governance.

<sup>102</sup> The five levels of mourning dress are *ch'amch'oe* (斬衰), *chaech'oe* (齊衰), *taegong* (大功), *sogong* (小功), *sima* (總麻). Depending on who is mourned, the second level of mourning dress is combined with different mourning periods such as three years, one year, five months and three months. In Korean legal codes, the mourning dress sons-in-law should wear for their parents-in-law is written as "*kinyŏn* (期年)" which means one year, the mourning period for the second level of mourning dress. Following this example, I explained "*kinyŏn*" as the second level of mourning dress here. Regarding this, see *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, 3: Yejŏn (禮典), Obok (五服).

<sup>103</sup> *T'aejong sillok* (22. 11. 12 (a leap month). Kimyo).

regulations, they came to refer to and use a much larger pool of the Confucian repertoire as well as traditional customs rather than relying only on Zhu Xi's text. The National Code (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, 經國大典) which was completed later in the reign of King Sŏngjong (1469-1494) also shows this. In *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, the mourning dress regulations mentioned above followed Zhu Xi's family ritual. Interestingly, however, the regulations on the mourning period for a deceased mother followed *Yili* (the Classic of Rites, 儀禮) which states that the mourning period for a mother who died before her husband should be one year.<sup>104</sup> It is not certain whether this peculiarity came from Korean males' intention to lower female's status, as Martina Deuchler argues.<sup>105</sup> Suffice it to say here that the completed ritual manuals of Chosŏn were not simply products of a monolithic cultural element but the embodiment of careful negotiations between various groups of people.

At last, one anecdote should be mentioned here to avoid any misunderstanding, possibly caused by Deuchler's above insistence, that Chosŏn's completed ritual regulations reflected only the elite's intentions to, with their Confucian knowledge, severely restrict all their subjects' discretion in performing their own ritual services. In the thirteenth year of the reign of King T'aejong, a civil governor of Ch'ungch'ŏng province reported that

Pyŏn Chongsaeng, a daughter of the magistrate of *P'aju* (抱州監務) named Pyŏn Hŭi from Yŏhŭng district, lost her mother at age thirteen and stayed by her mother's grave for three years with a young slave. After the mourning period, her father also died. She also maintained three years of mourning wearing the highest degree of mourning dress

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<sup>104</sup> *Yili* (儀禮), *Sangfu* (喪服).

<sup>105</sup> Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 179-186.

(*ch'amch'oe*, 斬衰).<sup>106</sup>

Observing three years of mourning for a mother who died before the father is Zhu Xi's regulation, not the rule of *Yili* which Chosŏn officials' preferred when making the ritual regulation for a deceased mother. Rather than having discussions on whether Pyŏn's ritual performances were desirable, however, King T'aejong ordered a gate constructed to commemorate her filial piety. In this anecdote, the ruler did not show any gesture to forcefully control people's practices or limit a female's right to ritual services. This also suggests that the Chosŏn elite's applications of their knowledge of the Classics and ritual propriety to people's lives were not forceful diffusions of their dogmatic belief but deliberate political behaviors which in some sense should have a certain flexibility with the consideration of socio-political and socio-cultural situations of the state.

In this vein, coexistence of national traditions and Confucian ideas in Chosŏn society was very natural, not exceptional or atypical. Therefore, Chosŏn elites have used their knowledge about Confucian thought and practices to redefine their community's identity and reinforce their pride in their history and culture. However, many existing studies have ascribed the maintenance of non-Confucian practices and the elite's emphasis on their historical and cultural differences during the early Chosŏn period to the low degree of Confucianization at the time. Responding to this argument, in this chapter, I will tackle the era of King Sŏngjong who has been regarded as an exemplary Confucian king not only by later Chosŏn elites but also by modern historians. I will also try to reveal the important political vision or plan shared by Chosŏn people which has often been neglected due to existing studies' emphasis on

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<sup>106</sup> *T'aejong sillok* (25. 13. 2. Pyŏngjin).



“Confucianism” and “Confucianization.”

### Politics in the reign of King Sǒngjong

There were many reasons why the reign of King Sǒngjong is understood as an important time in Korea’s Confucianization. First of all, when he began his own rule after the regency of Queen Dowager Chǒnghŭi (貞熹王后), King Sǒngjong attempted to distinguish his politics from that of the Queen Dowager and her husband King Sejo, who favored Buddhism.<sup>107</sup> Political systems by which officials could hold in check kings’ despotic power, such as the Royal Lecture (*kyǒngyǒn*, 經筵)<sup>108</sup> and the Censorial Offices (*taegan*, 臺諫),<sup>109</sup> were greatly developed. Furthermore, the rise of the *sarim* group made up of locally based medium and small landlords armed with Cheng-Zhu philosophy, and represented by Kim Chongjik 金宗直 (1431-1492)<sup>110</sup> has been regarded as evidence proving that Korea’s Confucianization had accelerated during King Sǒngjong’s reign.

Although the conventional view that the *sarim*, who were very different in their socio-economic and socio-philosophical backgrounds from the previous political power group (*hun’gu*), challenged and radically changed the existing political system is useful to define the time of King Sǒngjong as that of Confucianization, other studies explore the time of King

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<sup>107</sup> Kwǒn Yǒnung, “Sejo tae ūi pulgyo chǒngch’aek,” *Chindan hakpo* 75 (1993); Yi Hoyǒng, “Sǔng Sin Mi e taehayǒ,” *Sahak chi* 10 (1976).

<sup>108</sup> Song Ungsǒb, “Sǒngjong ūi chǔgwi wa kukchǒng unyǒng pangsik ūi pyǒnhwa,” *Sahak chi* 49 (2014), 228-321.

<sup>109</sup> Chǒng Tuhŭi, *Chosǒn sidae ūi taegan yǒn’gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1994). Ch’oe Sǔnghŭi, *Chosǒn ch’ogi ǒllonsa yǒn’gu* (Seoul: Chisik sanǒpsa, 2004), 439-456.

<sup>110</sup> Ch’oe Sǔnghŭi, *Chosǒn ch’ogi chǒngch’isa yǒn’gu* (Seoul: Chisik sanǒpsa, 2002), 455-463.

Sǒngjong from a somewhat different point of view. Ch'oe Sūnghŭi pointed out that during the reign of King Sǒngjong, Kim Chongjik and his followers called “*sarim*” neither had much conflict with existing power group nor aggressively impeached them. He concluded that at this time, the power of the *sarim* was not sufficient to take the lead in the state’s politics.<sup>111</sup> In a similar vein, Song Ungsǒb recently insisted that the changes in the political system that happened during the reign of King Sǒngjong were made by not *sarim* but by *hun’gu* with their desire to remove the remnants of the despotic politics of the previous regime and to complete and stabilize the bureaucracy.<sup>112</sup> Carefully examining the backgrounds of censorial officials, Chǒng Tuhŭi revealed the fact that those who criticized the *hun’gu* group shared the same familial, social and intellectual backgrounds with the targets of their political criticism, and pointed out that the dichotomy of the *sarim-hun’gu* framework is insufficient to understand the politics of King Sǒngjong’s reign.<sup>113</sup>

These studies suggest that although it is true that during King Sǒngjong’s reign, the emphasis on precepts in the Classics made many changes in the state’s politics, the changes were not the result of the emergence of a new group whose social backgrounds and political philosophy were totally different from the previous elite group of early Chosǒn. In a similar vein, it should be also reconsidered whether making a radical break from all past socio-political institutions and cultural traditions was the most significant political purpose of the officials in King Sǒngjong’s period, if not all of the officials were antagonistic to socio-political and socio-cultural aspects of the past.

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<sup>111</sup> Ch'oe Sūnghŭi, *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Song Ungsǒb, “Sǒngjong ūi chŭgwi wa kukchǒng unyǒng pangsik ūi pyǒnhwa.”

<sup>113</sup> Chǒng Tuhŭi, *Chosǒn sidae ūi taegan yǒn’gu*, 124-143.

As a matter of fact, although the king and his time was praised as exemplary for later Confucian officials and scholars, the politics in King Sǒngjong's reign set a precedent on which later kings could rely when they desired to maintain non-Confucian state rituals. In the reign of King Sǒngjong, sacrifices for rain were frequently performed at *Sogyǒksǒ* (昭格署),<sup>114</sup> one of the non-Confucian institutions, which became a main target of later Confucian officials' severe criticism. When King Sǒngjong asked the Royal Secretariat (*Sǔngjǒngwǒn*, 承政院) whether the institution should be abolished, Kwǒn Kǒn 權健 (1458-1501), the Second Royal Secretary (*chwasǔngji*, 左承旨) responded that because the sacrifice to the stars was an important ritual with a long history, it should not be abolished. It seems that the king also did not have any intention to abolish the ritual in that he not only agreed that the ritual should be maintained but also asked that the ritual be performed with sincerity.<sup>115</sup> Several years later, the reader in the Royal Lectures (*sidokkwan*, 侍讀官), Yi Talsǒn 李達善 (1457-1505), suggested that the king abolish the ritual, pointing out that the ritual at *Sogyǒksǒ* was a Daoist one and thus it was a violation of ritual propriety. However, King Sǒngjong rejected Yi's suggestion, indicating that the ritual had existed since previous kings' reigns and thus should be maintained.<sup>116</sup>

On the same day, the king also showed a generous attitude toward Buddhism. When Sim Hoe 沈澹 (1418-1493), the Director in the Bureau of State Records (*yǒngsa*, 領事), insinuated that Buddhist temples should be destroyed for the state, the king refuted Sim's claim saying that he did not want to create any disturbance in Buddhist monks' lives because they

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<sup>114</sup> *Sogyǒksǒ* is a Daoist temple where Chosǒn kings sacrificed to the sun, the moon, and the stars.

<sup>115</sup> *Sǒngjong sillok* (16. 15. 1. Kapchin).

<sup>116</sup> *Sǒngjong sillok* (261. 23. 1. Kyemi).

were also his people and the most important duty for rulers is make people's lives peaceful.<sup>117</sup> The favorable attitudes towards Buddhism among King Sǒngjong and his subjects also could be found in their discussions of a Buddhist ritual, *kisinje* (忌晨祭).<sup>118</sup> *Kisinje* is a memorial service for deceased ancestors carried out by monks in a Buddhist style and during this ritual, the tablets of the royal ancestors were placed on the ground and the ancestors were called Buddha's disciples.<sup>119</sup> Due to this, this ritual became one of the targets of Confucian officials' vehement criticism. Ironically, the one who abolished *kisinje* was King Yǒnsan (1494-1506) who was labelled as a tyrant who severely impaired the foundation of Confucian politics of Chosǒn, not King Sǒngjong who is regarded as an advocate of Confucianism.<sup>120</sup> Rather than abolishing *kisinje*, King Sǒngjong and his subjects considered how to apply Zhu Xi's ritual manuals to a non-Confucian ritual.<sup>121</sup>

Given this, it does not seem that King Sǒngjong and his subjects aspired to break with previous kings' politics. Even non-Confucian rituals which later were labelled detrimental to state politics were tolerated without serious opposition during the reign of King Sǒngjong. This does not deny the fact that at the time, Chosǒn officials put much emphasis on Confucian precepts in the Classics and made efforts to build a political system based on Confucian sages' teachings. Rather, this proves that the Confucianization of this period, if it really exists, was not an ultimate political goal for which other issues should be set aside but one of the ways to

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<sup>117</sup> *Sǒngjong sillok* (261. 23. 1. Kyemi).

<sup>118</sup> It is also called *kisinjae* (忌晨齋).

<sup>119</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (24. 11. 2. Chǒngch'uk).

<sup>120</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (1. 1. 9. Ŭlmi).

<sup>121</sup> *Sǒngjong sillok* (239. 21. 4. Kyemi).

stabilize and develop the government's capacity to manage their politics. Therefore, the officials of the time did not actively attempt to eradicate non-Confucian rituals.

In fact, from the beginning, the regime of King Sǒngjong had continuously felt the need to stabilize the state. The government's political authority was in many senses impaired by King Sejo's military coup and his despotic politics.<sup>122</sup> When he acceded to the throne, King Sǒngjong was so young that he needed the regency of Queen Dowager Chǒnghŭi. Moreover, because he was not a former king's son, his accession was not expected by many others. This unstable political situation during King Sǒngjong's reign made even some officials who had considerably contributed to constructing the existing social order and political system in the reign of King Sejo agree that they should reshape their ways of state politics making a harmonization between Confucian precepts and the state's cultural and political traditions.

What should not be neglected here is what the officials urgently needed in order to stabilize their regime was not merely the resystemization of political institutions. Given that the legitimacy of political authority is significant for all political regimes because it is helpful to draw the support of the people under their rule, it is natural that the officials in the reign of King Sǒngjong also sought to secure the peoples' loyalty. In this context, it should also be mentioned that if the officials emphasized Confucian teachings, this resulted from their consideration of how to effectively embrace their people. In addition, despite their increased interests in Confucian ideals and knowledge, they could not neglect to maintain the previous regimes' policies if they were useful to reinforce the social constituents' collectivity and to draw their support for the government. Put succinctly, Confucianization during Sǒngjong's time was not the process of removing or attenuating Chosŏn people's recognition and memory of their past.

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<sup>122</sup> Chǒng Tuhŭi, *Chosŏn sidae ũi taegan yŏn'gu*, 45-48.

Even the king, who was regarded as a Confucian moral exemplar who made many institutional and cultural changes never agreed with any policy to annihilate the state's legacies if they were useful to promote social cohesion which would help extend his government's political authority. In this vein, previous regimes' efforts to proclaim the distinctiveness of the state and its people, and its cultural and political independence should be consistently maintained in the reign of King Sŏngjong. It seems that the emphasis on Confucian teachings in the reign of King Sŏngjong helped those efforts and policies rather than hindered them.

### **Confucianism and history making**

As Pierre Bourdieu aptly points out, “the self-evidence of the world is reduplicated by the instituted discourses about the world.” What brings “subjective experience” to “the reassuring unanimity of a socially approved and collectively attested sense” is the “*authority* and *necessity* of a collective position.”<sup>123</sup> If a ruling group wants to draw their ruling targets' supports, to emphasize the connectedness between the two might be a useful way. It is very natural, therefore, that when they are in a certain crisis, rulers cannot neglect to construct a powerful discourse putting more emphasis on all social constituents' shared experiences which can magnify the sense of collectivity among the people.

In this vein, during the fifteenth century when the Chosŏn was established and its political unrest still remained, the founders of the new state and their successors needed to legitimize their politics to secure the people's loyalty. To do this, unprecedented numbers of government-published history books were compiled. Beginning with *Koryŏkuksa* (高麗國事)

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<sup>123</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 167.

written by Chǒng Tojǒn, many important history books such as *Tongguk saryak* (東國史略), *Koryōsa* (高麗史), *Koryōsa chōryo* (高麗史節要), *Samguksa chōryo* (三國史節要) and *Tongguk t'onggam* (東國通鑑) were compiled and published in the period. The publications of these history books prove that the leaders of Chosŏn had much interest in constructing a shared history with which they could legitimize their political authority and effectively embrace their people.

As is generally explained in studies of Chosŏn historiography, the Chosŏn elite made many efforts to build and develop a more inclusive historical narrative to justify their rule and to strengthen the power of the monarchy.<sup>124</sup> Writing about Tan'gun and Kija in history books, Chosŏn elites boasted of their state's long history and cultural superiority<sup>125</sup> and attempted to instill in their people an idea that they had been reciprocally interrelated for a long time as one collective group. Regarding this, existing studies aptly point out that in the series of publications of their history, Chosŏn elites expanded the range of the concept of "We." To aptly prove this, the studies present an important fact that a *Silla* (新羅)<sup>126</sup>-centered view in *Tongguk saryak* which focuses more on specific locality was replaced by a much broader historical view putting equal emphasis on the other two ancient states in the Korean peninsula in *Samguksa chōryo*,<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Chǒng Kubok, "Tongguk saryak e taehan saryojök koch'al," *Yöksa hakpo* 68 (1975); Han Yǒngu, "Chosŏn ch'ogi yöksa sösul kwa yöksa insik," *Han'guk hakpo* 3.2 (1977).

<sup>125</sup> For more details, see Han Yǒngu, "Chosŏn ch'ogi yöksa sösul kwa yöksa insik," 57-61.

<sup>126</sup> An ancient state of the Three Kingdoms Period of Korea which is placed in the southeastern part of Korean peninsula.

<sup>127</sup> Han Yǒngu, "Tongguk t'onggam ūi yöksa sösul kwa yöksa insik," *Han'guk hakpo* 5.2-3 (1979).

which was, according to the studies, the effort to build a “framework for a national history.”<sup>128</sup>

It seems, however, that these studies try to explain Chosŏn’s history writing using a framework that puts much emphasis on the state’s Confucian transformation resulting from the political victory of Neo-Confucian adherents against their political and philosophical opponents. It is true that when they wrote, compiled and published history books, Chosŏn elites were influenced by Confucianism. However, what should be pointed out here is that because many of these studies have a primordialist vision of the nation as timeless and thus, define the Chosŏn elite’s self-recognition of their identity as “nationalism,” the elite’s reference to Confucianism—precisely, teachings and ideas in the Classics also shared by other contemporary East Asian political communities—came to be explained as a factor which possibly weakened or limited Chosŏn people’s nation-centered view.

Inevitably, whether consciously or unconsciously, Confucianism or the systemization of the politics based on it have often been explained as opposing national culture and traditions. In his analysis of *Tongguk t’onggam*, Han Yŏngu argues that this book has an ambivalent historical perspective combining both the *sarim* and *hun’gu*’s attitudes.<sup>129</sup> While defining the historical views of *hun’gu* who had led the state in the reign of King Sejo as nationalistic,<sup>130</sup> he explains that the *sarim* group, newly emerging in the reign of King Sŏngjong, had interests in constructing a *sarim*-dominant society where ritual propriety for both personal relations and

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<sup>128</sup> Han called it “minjokchŏgin kuksa ch’egye.” See Han, “Tongguk t’onggam ūi yŏksa sŏsul kwa yŏksa insik (ha),” *Han’guk hakpo* 5.3 (1979).

<sup>129</sup> Han Yŏngu, “Tongguk t’onggam ūi yŏksa sŏsul kwa yŏksa insik (ha),” *Han’guk hakpo* 5.3 (1979), 68-70.

<sup>130</sup> Han, *Ibid.*



diplomacy was much more emphasized than supporting their state and nation.<sup>131</sup> In this framework, emphases on Chosŏn's independent history and distinctive culture were understood as an exceptional phenomenon shown only at the early stage of Chosŏn when its politics was somewhat despotic due to the lack of institutional systemization and philosophical elaboration. On the contrary, the elaboration and systemization of Chosŏn politics based on Confucian ideas emphasizing "righteousness" and "propriety" have often been presented as the main cause of the state's sinicization.

Regarding this issue, it should be noted that the Confucianism-nationalism dichotomy can be reasonable only if it is proved that the concept of nationalism was already shared by people in early Chosŏn. It seems, however, that by the fifteenth century, even the elite's memories of their past varied as shown above, which might make the elite attempt to build a history for their state. Although it is true that the elite shared the belief that the ruling class of Chosŏn are a historically distinctive group,<sup>132</sup> they did not yet construct a consistent narrative clearly explaining about how the group was generated, how they built their own political community and what past experiences they shared with other groups of people. Given this, there is no reason to hastily label Confucianism as a main factor disturbing Chosŏn people's attempt to build a proud narrative of their past.

Min Hyŏn'gu rightly argues that even though the Chosŏn elite considered how to harmonize ritual propriety emphasized in the Classics with their ways of politics and lives and often showed humble attitudes regarding their state and themselves, this does not necessarily

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<sup>131</sup> Han Yŏngu, "Chosŏn ch'ogi yŏksa sŏsul kwa yŏksa insik," 61.

<sup>132</sup> For instance, Yang Sŏngji explained that there had been a ruling group called the great hereditary group (*taega sejok*, 大家世族) who protected Korea from treacherous elements. See Yang Sŏngji, *Nuljae chip*, "sokp'yŏn." For a more detailed explanation about this and an English translation of Yang's words, see Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 151-153.

mean that they believed that their state had been politically subjugated to and was culturally inferior to the bigger states in the history of China. According to Min, the fact that the chronological record of Koryŏ kings' reigns in *Koryŏsa* was entitled "Sega (世家)," which had been used for feudal lords, instead of "Pon'gi (本紀)" for emperors,<sup>133</sup> reflects the Chosŏn elite's prudent consideration of the relationship between Yuan and Koryŏ, not a self-depreciation of their past.<sup>134</sup> Rather, given that the *Koryŏsa* severely criticized those who showed pro-Yuan attitudes and committed treason against Koryŏ<sup>135</sup> and that this book revealed the Chosŏn elite's pride in their culture and the belief that their civilization was comparable to China, the Chosŏn elite shared the recognition that they had maintained a historically and culturally independent political community and desired to proclaim this proud self-identity.<sup>136</sup>

This suggests that the Chosŏn elite's reference to Confucian texts contributed to making an effective discourse for their purpose to proclaim the state's political legitimacy and cultural excellence. Their acceptance of their inferior status to the Ming within the contemporary world order with their adherence to ritual propriety in the Classics might look subservient from the perspective of moderns who had the concept of "nation" and "nation state." However, to Chosŏn elites who recognized the historical difference of their people and themselves but did not yet have the experience to clearly define the difference, reinforcing the people's belief that they belonged to Chosŏn, and letting them be proud of the belongingness might be complicated; in this situation, Confucian teachings could be a useful guidance and

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<sup>133</sup> *Koryŏsa*: Ch'ansu Koryŏsa pŏmnye (纂修高麗史凡例).

<sup>134</sup> Min Hyŏn'gu, "Koryŏsa e panyŏngdoen myŏngbullon ūi sŏngkyŏk," *Chindan hakpo* 40 (1975).

<sup>135</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 40-45: Yŏlchŏn (列傳): panyŏk (叛逆).

<sup>136</sup> Min Hyŏn'gu, "Koryŏsa e panyŏngdoen myŏngbullon ūi sŏngkyŏk," 175-177.

reference for the elite.

It is not a coincidence, therefore, that when the importance of Confucian teachings was emphasized after the reign of King Sejo, a group of officials attempted to incorporate a famous Confucian text, the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (*Taxue yanyi*, 大學衍義) composed by the Song Confucian Zhen Dexiu 眞德秀 (1178-1235) with the records about the history of Koryŏ. In the third year in the reign of King Sŏngjong, a group of officials led by Yi Sŏkhyŏng 李石亨 (1415-1477) presented a book titled the *Abridged Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (*Taehak yŏnŭi chimnyak*, 大學衍義輯略) to the king.<sup>137</sup> From the beginning of the state, the Chosŏn elite had much interest in the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* in that this text provides historical examples which help audiences' understandings on the teachings in the *Great Learning* (*Taxue*, 大學). Although the frequency of references to the text decreased during the reign of King Sejo, from the time of King Sŏngjong, the interests in and the emphasis on the text increased again.<sup>138</sup> In this situation, Yi Sŏkhyŏng and his colleagues created a new reference to the *Great Learning*, presumably in order to help the king's Confucian learning.

Interestingly, after deleting many entries from the Five Classics and the Four Books included in the original *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* in consideration of the fact that those had already been dealt with in the Royal Lecture, Yi and his colleagues incorporated the entries from *Koryŏsa* into the *Abridged Extended Meaning of the Great Learning*.<sup>139</sup> Given

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<sup>137</sup> *Sŏngjong sillok* (17. 3. 4. Imo).

<sup>138</sup> Chŏng Chaehun, *Chosŏn chŏn'gi yugyo chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu* (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 2005), 126-142.

<sup>139</sup> *Taehak yŏnŭi chimnyak*, (大學衍義輯略): Sŏ (序).

that this book was the product of the officials' mutual agreement on the significant role of Confucian classics for a new political systemization of the state and education for the new king, the composition of *Taehak yŏnŭi chimnyak* suggests the possibility that the main concern of the Chosŏn officials at the beginning of King Sŏngjong's reign was how to interpret the sages' precepts in the Classics on the basis of their historical background and how to use them for their politics, not a literal application of those to Chosŏn society. With flexible attitudes towards Confucian texts, therefore, a group of officials led by Yi Sŏkhyŏng could edit the original Confucian texts based on their political needs.

However, the fact that King Sŏngjong ordered the restriction of the book's publication after he met Ch'oe Sukchong 崔淑精 (1432-1479) and An Yangsaeng 安良生 (dates unknown), who opposed to the publication, shows that the attitudes toward Confucian texts among the Chosŏn elite at the time were not homogenous. Specifically, unlike the compilers of *Taehak yŏnŭi chimnyak*, Ch'oe and An argued that it was improper to add or remove even one word from the original *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning*.<sup>140</sup> However, even though these two different groups show different opinions about the issue of how to use Confucian texts for their politics, their political concern was not too different in that like Yi, Ch'oe also made many efforts to preserve various memories of the state's past. Ch'oe participated in the compilation of *Samguksa chŏryŏ* which, as mentioned above, broadened the scale of the state's history embracing more people in the past, and also participated in the compilation of the *Tongmunsŏn*, an anthology of poetry and other writings from Silla, through Koryŏ, and down to the late fifteenth century. Moreover, Ch'oe also left some writings which inscribed locals' memories to various landscapes in the state and thus contributed to transforming individuals' memories to

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<sup>140</sup> *Sŏngjong sillok* (43. 5. 6. Pyŏngja).

the state's memory.<sup>141</sup> That is, it cannot be simply said that Yi and Ch'oe's different attitudes toward a Confucian text mean that they had totally different political visions.

Regarding this issue, examining the political and intellectual experiences of those two, Duncan suggests that they possibly shared “the same historically and culturally-informed view of Chosŏn identity.” Also, he points out that the two leaders' confrontation reflects “the tensions between two separate visions of Chosŏn identity” which were “inherent in the effort to remake Korean society and politics according to the model offered by Cheng-Zhu Learning.” Duncan's study reminds us that Confucianism provided significant references for the Chosŏn elite who sought a better way to define their state's historical and cultural distinctiveness, but was not an absolute tenet to which all political and intellectual concerns of Chosŏn people should be subject.<sup>142</sup>

This does not deny the fact that Chosŏn people's ways of life were considerably influenced and changed by Confucianism. However, it should be remembered that their resolution to apply Confucian teachings to their lives might be made to accomplish their vision of better lives. Especially for the officials who had the responsibility to rule the state, their reliance on a certain Confucian teaching might be made at the very moment when they believed that it would provide better solutions for their state politics. Therefore, although *Taehak yŏnŭi chimnyak* was not widely used in the reign of King Sŏngjong due to opposition from those who put more emphasis on the authority of Confucian texts, later generations of Chosŏn kings and their subjects, who had larger numbers of Confucian texts and probably had greater knowledge of Confucian precepts that their Confucian predecessors, showed their interest in the book

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<sup>141</sup> *Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽), 41: “Hwangjumok (黃州牧) – Kojŏk (古跡).”

<sup>142</sup> John Duncan, “The *Taehak yŏnŭi chimnyak* and the Politics of Confucian Learning in the Early Chosŏn,” (unpublished article).

again<sup>143</sup> probably due to the needs of their times.

In sum, the Chosŏn elite's continuous interest in their past and their considerations of how to proclaim their state's distinctive past without rejecting the textual authority of the Classics prove that despite its importance for state politics, Confucianism was not the sole factor or absolute value influencing Chosŏn politics. Despite the existence of competing ideas and attitudes toward Confucian learning among Chosŏn officials, there also existed a consistently maintained and collectively shared political vision which were very important to them as government officials. It seems that by the fifteenth century, the most important task for the state's leaders was defining identities for the state and its ruling class to stabilize and legitimize their governance. It can also be conjectured that after they made certain accomplishments for the purpose, the Chosŏn elite would attempt to share their beliefs in the state's historical and cultural brilliance with non-elite groups; probably getting some help from Confucian discourses and teaching. In this vein, even when examining the sixteenth century, which has been believed to be the most important period of Korea's Confucianization, it is important to find what the elite continuously sought at the political level with their efforts to instill Confucian ideas to their people. It is also important to learn about how the non-elite groups in the state responded to the elite's Confucianizing policies in their own ways.

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<sup>143</sup> *Hyŏnjong Kaesu sillok* (11. 5. 10. Pyŏngsul), *Sukchong sillok* (46. 34. 5. Kyŏngjin).

## Chapter 3: Politics of Social Integration

### Introduction

In 1519 during the reign of King Chungjong (1506-1544), there was a political upheaval which has been regarded as a significant historical incident of Chosŏn Korea. During the political turmoil, the *kimyo sahwa* (the literati purge of the *kimyo* year), a group of political officials in the central government who had received strong support from King Chungjong were suddenly executed or banished by the king. At the time, the purge was unexpected because King Chungjong, who was involuntarily selected as a king by the leaders of the military coup, had heavily relied on the purged group after he began to strengthen his voice starting from the eighth year of his reign.<sup>144</sup> One of his subjects even criticized King Chungjong saying that the purge could not be clearly justified without the king's explanation of why he suddenly decided to purge the group of officials whose political philosophy and policies were strongly favored and supported by the king.<sup>145</sup> Unlike two literati purges during the reign of King Yŏnsan, the *kimyo sahwa* was unexpected and thus, the main cause of this political incident was in many senses not so clear as the previous purges. More noticeably, the victims of the purge came to be honored as loyal subjects and moral exemplars by later scholars and officials, and their honor and status were restored.

Given the victims' sudden fall and dramatic rehabilitation, it seems natural that modern historians attempted to understand the purge as the result of a power struggle between two different political groups. In many existing studies, it has often been said that

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<sup>144</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (18. 8. 4. Kihae).

<sup>145</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 11. Chŏngmi).

this was one of the incidents which resulted from the rupture between newly emerging Confucian reformers and an existing conservative power group.

Sin Sökho points out that the *kimyo sahwa* can be interpreted as a political conflict between high officials, most of whom gained bureaucratic power by helping the throne and new scholar officials who had recently entered the political center based on their knowledge of Neo-Confucianism. Sin also categorized the high officials and merit subjects as the conservative group, putting more emphasis on royal tradition and whose intellectual orientations focused more on the practice of belles lettres; and new scholar officials as socio-cultural and socio-institutional reformers attempting to eradicate non-Confucian practices and rituals with their emphasis on Neo-Confucian Learning.<sup>146</sup>

Yi Pyönghyu follows the *sarim-hun'gu* framework which explains that the political conflicts among central government officials of the Chosön resulted from the challenge of *sarim*, made up of locally based medium and small landlords armed with Cheng-Zhu philosophy, to the *hun'gu*, described as capital-based large landlords.<sup>147</sup> Yi interprets the reign of King Chungjong as a time of significant transition from a conservative *hun'gu*-led society to a reforming and Neo-Confucian based *sarim*-led one.<sup>148</sup> Although he finds that the dichotomy between *sarim* and *hun'gu* does not entirely explain the complicated relations between Chosön elites, he does not abandon the *sarim-hun'gu* framework which generally focuses more on political struggles among different political factions. Therefore, he describes

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<sup>146</sup> Sin Sökho, *Sin Sökho chönjip* (Seoul: Sin Söwon, 1996), 445-446.

<sup>147</sup> Yi T'aejin, "Sarimp'a üi yuhyangso pongnip undong," *Chindan hakpo* 34-35 (1973).

<sup>148</sup> Yi Pyönghyu, *Chosön chön'gi kiho sarimp'a yön'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1984), 89.



many of the *sarim* group's political activities based on their Neo-Confucian knowledge as ways to enhance their political power.<sup>149</sup>

Regarding politics in the reign of King Chungjong, Ch'oe Idon focuses more on the conventionalization of the *nanggwan* officials' right to recommend their successors (*nanggwan kwǒn*). Indicating that with that right secured, the *sarim* group could effectively check merit subjects and high officials on the political stage,<sup>150</sup> Ch'oe suggests that the reinforcement of *nanggwan kwǒn* helped some *sarim* officials constitute the *kimyo* group and made the group politically influential. Consequently, to enhance their political influence, the *kimyo* group attempted to strengthen *nanggwan kwǒn* more, which resulted in their conflicts with the *hun'gu* group who criticized the excessive enhancement of the *nanggwan* officials' power and lamented that the hierarchical order of the political stage was seriously disrupted.<sup>151</sup>

Those studies helped to map the complicated political and intellectual structure of mid-Chosŏn. It is also true, however, that with the studies' emphasis on political struggle among Chosŏn elite groups, a rather simplified interpretational framework has been constructed –or strengthened– regarding Chosŏn history. Because they identified the main cause of this violent political incident as the process of Confucianization of the state led by the *sarim*, many Korean historians came to present the Confucian transformation of the state as the foremost premise of, and at the same time, the ultimate goal of Chosŏn politics which finally came to be dominated by the *sarim*.

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<sup>149</sup> Yi Pyŏnghyu, 168.

<sup>150</sup> Ch'oe Idon, *Chosŏn chunggi sarim chŏngch'ŭi kujo yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1994), 130.

<sup>151</sup> Ch'oe, 148.

It is true that the leading officials, especially the victims of the purge, heavily relied on Confucian texts such as Zhu Xi's manual of family rituals when they launched their socio-political and socio-cultural projects. However, it seems hasty to insist that Confucianization of social institutions and rituals was Chosŏn officials' final goal if there is no additional detailed explanation on why all their political behaviors should be understood as particularly "Confucian" ones.<sup>152</sup> As a matter of fact, King Chungjong's regime suffered from political instability for a considerable time. For eight years, following the king's ascension to the throne, several attempted rebellions occurred refusing to accept the political legitimacy of the regime built on the military coup. International circumstances also were hostile to the new regime. Repeated skirmishes between Ming and Mongol forces made Chosŏn officials worry about their national security. Japanese pirates' intrusions at the southern coastline were also not stopped. Even in the fifth year of the king, the Japanese who resided in Kyŏngsang province participated in a disturbance supported by Tsushima.

Given that King Chungjong's regime desperately needed to stabilize the state and restore the government to its perceived proper role, politics before the *kimyo sahwa* should not be simplified just as a power struggle. Also, if it is difficult to affirm that the bureaucrats' official discussions regarding Confucian texts, institutions and rituals were motivated only by their quasi-religious beliefs, the way they used Confucianism for their practical purposes also should be carefully examined. Moreover, as Liam Kelly aptly points out in his studies about Vietnamese Confucianism, "Confucianism" and "Confucianization" are modern terms "for

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<sup>152</sup> In many cases, when they cannot find a fit between the Chosŏn elite's political behaviors and Confucian teachings, existing studies often use some words such as "exceptional" and "unorthodox" to explain the reason of the lack of Confucian elements. This proves that the studies examine the politics of Chosŏn Korea within the framework of "Confucianism."

which there is no exact original indigenous equivalent.”<sup>153</sup> It seems, therefore, that the attempt to explain the politics of the reign of King Chungjong only with the framework of “Confucianization” might conceal many important aspects of Chosŏn politics. Bearing this in mind, unlike other studies putting much emphasis on “Confucianization” when they explain the politics of the reign of King Chungjong, this chapter will focus more on what political vision the elite of the period shared and what historical impact their political behavior left.

### **What is Confucian civilization?**

As many studies point out, the victims of the *kimyo sahwa* ardently initiated political and social reforms in keeping with Confucian learning and rituals. Lamenting the situation of their state having the problems of improper ritual performances and lack of Confucian resources,<sup>154</sup> they argued that in order to recover the disrupted social order, the ideal politics of the Three Dynasties should be restored. As the way to actualize their ideals, they relied on various classical texts such as the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of poetry* and the *Book of history*, not to mention Zhu Xi’s texts.<sup>155</sup>

It seems natural, therefore, that the victims of the *kimyo sahwa* or their supporters have been regarded as ardent Confucians, often called *sarim*, in many Korean studies. Their political defeat and abolition of their politics were also explained as the delay of Confucianization led by their political opponents who have been regarded as a conservative

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<sup>153</sup> Liam C. Kelly, “‘Confucianism’ in Vietnam: A State of the Field Essay,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1 (2006), 316.

<sup>154</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (23. 10. 10. Pyŏngja), (23. 10. 11. Kapsin).

<sup>155</sup> For Chosŏn officials, it is necessary to refer to various Confucian texts besides Zhu Xi’s because Zhu Xi’s texts were not enough to provide all the knowledge necessary for their reform project for their society and culture.

or less Confucian political group, whom existing studies call *hun'gu* or *hunch'ök*. In this context, the restoration of the victims and their politics in later generations has been regarded as the victory of Confucianism and the completion of Korea's Confucianization. Although the victims of *kimyo sahwa* often had conflicts with specific officials such as Chŏng Kwangp'il 鄭光弼 (1462-1538) and Nam Kon 南袞 (1471-1527) regarding government politics and state rituals, however, it still seems difficult to categorize the officials who opposed the *kimyo* group (the "men of 1519") as one group. Even Chŏng and Nam disagreed with each other in various political discussions, and their attitudes and reaction toward the purge were totally different.<sup>156</sup> Related to this, it is necessary to reexamine the idea that the *kimyo sahwa* proves the fact that there were serious political conflicts among different political groups regarding the state's Confucianization. If there indeed existed a political group that aggressively opposed the *kimyo* group's reform policies, it should also be carefully examined whether their opposition came from their philosophical concerns about the *kimyo* group's emphasis on Confucian thought and practices or from their practical concerns about the expected failure of the *kimyo* group's reform policies. In this regard, it will be worth reexamining Chosŏn bureaucrats' official remarks in Confucian language to find out not only their intellectual and philosophical preferences, but the blueprints for their state policies. This also will make it possible to discuss how the Chosŏn government's politics specifically changed the practices and thoughts of the people if the change cannot be explained using the term Confucianization.

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<sup>156</sup> Some Korean studies attempt to differentiate the *kimyo* group arguing that their socio-economic and family background is very different from existing power group. This argument was effectively refuted by Edward Wagner who proved that there was no remarkable difference between the *kimyo* group and their political opponents.

There are several political behaviors of the *kimyo* group which make recent historians argue that the group of officials were ardent Confucians who laid the foundation of Korea's Confucianization. The representative one among those behaviors is the *kimyo* group's efforts to abolish non-Confucian state rituals and institutions such as *kisinje* and *Sogyōksō*. Especially, the serious criticism of *Sogyōksō* by Cho Kwangjo 趙光祖 (1482-1519), a leader of the *kimyo* group, who willingly resigned from his official posts to abolish the non-Confucian institution, has been explained as evidence showing his zeal for Confucianization of the state which made the king and other government officials his political opponents. It is true that Cho dramatically opposed King Chungjong regarding the issue of *Sogyōksō*, but he is not the only one who insisted on abolishing non-Confucian institutions and rituals at the risk of losing the king's trust and support. Right after King Chungjong took the throne, Song Il 宋軼 (1454-1520), the Minister of Rites, insisted that *kisinjae*, the memorial services for deceased ancestors carried out by monks in a Buddhist style, should be abolished and almost all the government officials supported this insistence even though King Chungjong was strongly opposed.<sup>157</sup> That is, from the beginning of the new regime, even before Cho Kwangjo entered the political stage and his group was formed, there had been attempts to reform state institutions and rituals.

As a matter of fact, although he openly claimed to be a Confucian king and agreed to launch Confucian policies, King Chungjong was not passionate to reform or abolish non-Confucian rituals. For example, stating that *kisinjae* was the rite former kings such as King Sejong and Sōngjong, who were regarded as Confucian moral exemplars, had maintained, he strongly opposed abolition of *kisinjae* even until the eleventh year of his reign. In the same

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<sup>157</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (1. 1. 9. Ŭlmi).

year, Yi Haeng 李荇 (1478-1534), the First Counselor of the Office of the Special Counselors (*Hongmun'gwan pujehak*), presented a memorial urging the king to abolish *kisinje*. In his memorial, Yi Haeng insisted that even former kings' institutions and rituals could be rescinded if those were improper and asked the king to show his will to reject heterodoxy through the abolishment of *kisinje*.<sup>158</sup> The language Yi used in his memorial is as “Confucian” as the *kimyo* group's language. As the officials who are usually categorized as the *kimyo* group did, Yi criticized King Chungjong's reluctance to reform the state rituals and institutions and his adherence to the precedent of former kings without consideration of their propriety. Yi also insisted that state politics should always be based on the orthodox way. Interestingly, however, Yi Haeng was the one who later came to have serious conflicts with the *kimyo* group. Even when Yi Haeng and Cho Kwangjo shared a mutual agreement on the issue of *kisinjae*, Yi had a totally different view on the subjects' right to freely make suggestions on kings' political behaviors, and because of this, he was impeached and designated as the oppressor of Confucian propriety. However, regarding Confucianization of state institutions and rituals, there was no big difference between Yi and Cho at least in terms of their language.

The commonality between Yi and Cho can also be found between the *kimyo* group and other scholars when they had discussions regarding how to eradicate non-Confucian elements from state rituals and institutions. Indicating that in *kisinjae*, Chosŏn kings were often labeled as disciples of Buddha,<sup>159</sup> Kim Ŭnggi 金應箕 (1455-1519), the Third State Councillor (*uŭijŏng*) at the time, severely criticized *kisinjae*'s impropriety and insisted on the

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<sup>158</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (25. 11. 5. Chŏngmi).

<sup>159</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (24. 11. 2. Chŏngch'uk).

eradication of Buddhist cultural elements at court.<sup>160</sup> Kim also argued for the eradication of other non-Confucian rituals and related institutions such as the *Sogyŏksŏ* institution, where Daoist rituals to the sun, the moon, and the stars, were performed.<sup>161</sup> As a matter of fact, the abolition of *Sogyŏksŏ* was repeatedly insisted on by Chosŏn officials, including the *kimyo* group, over a long period of time during the Chosŏn dynasty. Despite the fact that Kim shared same opinions with the *kimyo* group regarding reform policies of state rituals, however, Kim was condemned as an opportunist and impeached by the *kimyo* group because he showed vague attitudes toward several significant political issues about which government officials had intense debates. Nam Kon, who was often categorized as the *kimyo* group's archenemy, also strongly asserted that *kisinaje* should be completely abolished.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, when King Chungjong attempted to reestablish *Sogyŏksŏ* after the *kimyo sahwa*, Nam, although he was the one who led the purge, opposed the king's opinion and clearly showed his negative view on the institution saying "heterodox institutions should be abolished."<sup>163</sup> As these examples prove, there was a mutual agreement that a reformation of rituals and institutions based on classical manuals, widely defined as "Confucian texts," should be accomplished. This opinion was not the unique idea of only the *kimyo* group but was the basic premise of Chosŏn politics on which there was no objection among the government officials. Therefore, if the term "Confucianization" simply means the institutional reform based on Confucian texts, the term is not so helpful to understand Chosŏn politics in-depth

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<sup>160</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (24. 11. 3. Chŏnghae).

<sup>161</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (24. 11. 2. Chŏngch'uk).

<sup>162</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (25. 11. 5. Imin).

<sup>163</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 1. Pyŏngo).

because it does not specifically reveal how Chosŏn officials tried to stabilize their state exchanging their various political opinions and views.

Another way to scrutinize the validity of the idea of radical philosophical differences among Chosŏn officials is to examine how different their opinions on and attitudes toward certain Confucian texts were when they discussed how to apply the content of the texts to practical state politics. In many of the existing studies, the *kimyo* group's emphasis on Zhu Xi's *Elementary Learning* (*Sohak*; Chi. *Xiaoxue*, 小學) has often been regarded as one important element which enables one to differentiate the group from other officials. That is, the state's attempt to stabilize the social order and proper human relations among its social constituents based on Confucian moral precepts have been explained as the *kimyo* group's way of Confucianization. As a matter of fact, the *kimyo* group were not the only officials who put great emphasis on *Sohak*. In the eleventh year of King Chungjong's reign, Nam Kon pointed out the problem that Chosŏn Confucian scholars did not read *Sohak*, the content of which Zhu Xi tried to disseminate in order to restore the Three Dynasties' ideals. Then, he suggested that *Sohak* should be a required text for the government civil service examination.<sup>164</sup> Even after the *kimyo sahwa*, Nam's attitude toward *Sohak* was consistent. After the purge, lamenting that studying *Sohak* became taboo among local people and emphasizing that *Sohak* is a valuable text, Nam insisted that *Sohak* is worthy to read,<sup>165</sup> and to dispel the people's misunderstanding, the state should urge the scholars to teach proper ways of life.<sup>166</sup> Nam is not a special case. When the *kimyo* group emphasized the value of

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<sup>164</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (23. 11. 15. Chŏngyu).

<sup>165</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (42. 16. 9. Imja).

<sup>166</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (41. 16. 1. Ŭlch'uk).



*Sohak*, and even after the group was politically purged, there was no one who denied the significant value of the text and was opposed to the urgency of its wide dissemination in society. As shown above, there was no room for difference in discussions regarding the fact that the government should rule the state relying on the power of the texts written by Confucian sages. They all agreed upon that. Put differently, the officials' discussion on *Sohak* was not merely about how much the text is philosophically valuable but also how much it is useful for government politics. Focusing only on the state's "Confucianization" is not helpful to learn what specific political issues the officials had discussions on using Confucian texts, the most available resources from which they could find necessary lessons and useful information. Therefore, any attempts to excessively put emphasis on the "Confucianization process" of Chosŏn fails to reveal the more complicated practical level of state politics.

The view that a group of officials severely opposed to the *kimyo* group's emphasis on learning the Confucian Classics because of their different intellectual disposition also needs to be reconsidered. As a matter of fact, the dichotomy of the *sarim-hun'gu* framework which categorized Chosŏn officials into two different political groups based on their economic backgrounds also has another binary concept within it, classifying the officials into two groups with different intellectual preferences. While the *kimyo* group was explained as the group who preferred the men of morality versed in Neo-Confucian texts and teachings, their opponents were understood as the group who put more emphasis on the officials' ability to write in the belles lettres' style in composing government documents. This is quite understandable given that some officials who had conflicts with the *kimyo* group such as Nam Kon and Yi Haeng were often categorized as those who emphasized the importance of the ability of literary arts in their period. In fact, Nam Kon, who has been indicated as a conspirator of the *kimyo sahwa*, continuously emphasized the significance of literary arts

both during and after the heyday of the *kimyo* group.<sup>167</sup> Regarding this, when the *kimyo* group warned Chungjong that he should not be confused by words of “superficiality and frivolity” stressing the importance of literary arts, *Sillok* historians remarked that the *kimyo* group were criticizing Nam’s preference for literary arts.<sup>168</sup> Yi Haeng, who was impeached by the *kimyo* group, was summoned back to the government as Director of the Office of Special Counselors (*Hongmun’gwan taejehak*) after the *kimyo sahwa* and was ordered to revise the rules of literary style with Nam.<sup>169</sup> Previously, he was also included in the group of candidates for “teachers of Confucianism (*sayu*, 師儒)” recommended by Yu Sun 柳洵 (1441-1517), the Chief State Councilor, presumably due to his skill in the literary arts.<sup>170</sup> That is why even Edward Wagner, who criticized the *sarim-hun’gu* dichotomy, followed previously existing views explaining this difference of intellectual interest among Chosŏn officials, in other words, their different degrees of loyalty to Neo-Confucianism, is one of the important reasons for the political conflicts between the *kimyo* group and their opponents.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (27. 12. 1. Ŭlmi), *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 1. Kyŏngja).

<sup>168</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (29. 12. 9. Ŭryu), *Chungjong sillok* (29. 12. 9. Muja).

<sup>169</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (37.14. 12. Muja), *Chungjong sillok* (38.15. 1. Pyŏngo).

<sup>170</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (21. 9. 12. Kiyu). Yu Sun explained that he included the men who were skillful at literary arts because the positions of “teachers of Confucianism” required both the mastery of the Confucian Classics and adeptness at literary arts.

<sup>171</sup> Edward W. Wagner, *The Literati Purges: Political Conflict in Early Yi Korea*, Harvard East Asian monographs 58 (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center : distributed by Harvard University Press, 1974), 92. Here, Wagner points out that because he could not find in the *Sillok* the disparaging terms the *kimyo* group used to criticize those who preferred literary arts, he quoted Sin Sŏkho’s translation. It shows that Wagner was not free from Sin’s framework which links the political conflicts at the time to the government officials’ different beliefs in and attitudes toward Confucianism.

This view is helpful to show that there existed various officials of different intellectual orientations in the government. However, it also may cause a simplified interpretation of Chosŏn politics merely focusing more on a power struggle if it cannot explain how and why the officials' different intellectual preferences caused serious political conflicts which finally ended in the violent purge of the *kimyo* group; if it cannot do so, this view may result in the simple conclusion that in the reign of King Chungjong, there was a power struggle among government officials who scrambled for their intellectual preferences and philosophical dispositions, which at most only repeats the general existing views that there had existed a chronic factional struggle among Chosŏn officials due to their pedantic debates on Neo-Confucianism. In other words, this view also does not explain what specific political issues, except the issue of Confucianism, the officials of Chungjong's government had discussed.

In addition, it seems hasty to conclude that some officials focused on the importance of literary arts only to attack the men who took heed of Confucian teachings. As a matter of fact, Nam and Yi, who were regarded as men with a preference for literary arts and as political opponents of the men with a preference for the Confucian Classics, never denied the idea that "learning in the Confucian Classics is the root, and the art of literary composition is the branch." Although Nam repeatedly emphasized the importance of literary arts, he always agreed that a deeper understanding of the Confucian Classics should precede literary compositions. He only insisted that literary arts were important and necessary to prove the state's advanced degree of civilization to Ming China while both states maintained a diplomatic relationship.<sup>172</sup> After he was summoned back to the government after the *kimyo*

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<sup>172</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (20. 9. 2. Sinch'uk), *Chungjong sillok* (27. 12. 1. Ŭlmi), *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 1. Kyŏngja).

*sahwa*, Yi Haeng argued that the elite should focus on studying the Confucian Classics.<sup>173</sup> It also should be noted that even when the *kimyo* group put more emphasis on the Confucian Classics, Cho Kwangjo did not deny the significance of literary arts as criteria for selecting government officials.<sup>174</sup>

Then, the argument that there existed a group of officials who severely opposed the *kimyo* group also needs to be reconsidered. Simply put, the officials who had political conflicts cannot be easily categorized as a homogeneous group who shared the same political opinions. Although after the *kimyo sahwa*, Yi Haeng, who was impeached and ousted by the *kimyo* group, was summoned back to the government at Nam Kon's request and thus, they have often been regarded as the same political group, Yi and Nam had totally different views when they talked about the subjects' right to freely make suggestions on kings' political behaviors in the early period of King Chungjong's reign. At this time, rather than agreeing with Yi's opinion, Nam strongly supported the *kimyo* group's insinuations which vehemently criticized Yi's views defining it as anti-Confucian. Kim Ŭnggi and Nam Kon also were categorized as belonging to the same group in the studies emphasizing the conflicts between high ministers and the censorial officials represented as the *kimyo* group. However, their relations with the *kimyo* group were also very different. When there were political feuds between former and present censorial officials represented by Yi Haeng and Cho Kwangjo respectively, many officials including Kim Ŭnggi were reluctant to participate in the debate among the two groups, who was right, and how so. According to King Chungjong, Nam Kon was the first one who criticized the officials' vague attitudes when the state needed to

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<sup>173</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (44. 17. 4. Kyōngja).

<sup>174</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (35. 14. 4. Kisa).

discriminate the good from the bad.<sup>175</sup> In fact, Nam Kon, in many political debates, supported Cho Kwangjo's opinions and suggested Cho's rapid promotion to the king.

Given these complicated relations among the officials during the reign of King Chungjong, it seems that the existing studies' emphasis on "Confucianization" of Korean society does not effectively show the political dynamics during the reign of King Chungjong in that with the vague meaning of the term Confucianization, it is very difficult to reveal different ideas among the officials. Differently put, the examples mentioned above prove that the emphasis on "Confucianization" can show only the existence of an agreed way of Chosŏn politics, not what social views and political plans the officials tried to stabilize their society. In this context, what should be done to learn more about the politics of early Chosŏn and historical impact of the politics is not to examine how and how much the state was Confucianized, which itself will be a very difficult work because of the vagueness of the term "Confucianization." Rather, for this purpose, it should be carefully examined how "Confucian" rhetoric or repertoire were used for and harmonized with Chosŏn officials' specific political plans and their own social views.

### **Confucianization as a state-building policy**

As discussed above, it seems that when Chosŏn officials criticized others' ritual propriety or intellectual disposition based on their own knowledge of classical texts, not all their reliance on and reference to Confucian teachings were in terms of ideological behaviors. The view that sees all their political remarks and behaviors as based on Confucian teachings, some of which were filled with rhetoric, as their efforts to actualize their own religious and

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<sup>175</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (24. 11. 3. Kich'uk).

philosophical beliefs, only results in categorizing Chosŏn officials into different ideological groups who naturally came to have serious power struggles in seeking hegemony. This might not help us learn what socio-cultural changes their politics accomplished, if those changes are beyond the “Confucianization” category. Given that the officials discussed not only Confucianism but what they wanted to do with Confucian ideas, it is necessary to reexamine the issues that were repeatedly dealt with in the central government to learn how Confucian texts and institutions influenced state politics.

**a) Dissemination of *Sohak***

The classical texts the Chosŏn elite relied on were used not only as philosophical guidebooks for the people’s self-cultivation but also as useful resources and references with much information for the government officials’ statecraft. In this regard, discussions about *Sohak* among Chosŏn officials, which were in many studies explained as examples revealing their philosophical and political conflicts regarding Confucianization, need to be reexamined to learn specifically with what political visions the officials engaged in the discussions. Records in the *Sillok* show that it is highly probable that the conflicts among Chosŏn bureaucrats about *Sohak* were caused by their different opinions, not about the value of this text for Confucianization of the state, but about how to adapt the ideas and teachings in the text to real politics to restore the ruined social order of Chosŏn. This is revealed when Yi Yuch’ŏng 李惟清 (1459-1531) discussed the *kimyo* group’s political mistakes related to their efforts to publish and disseminate *Sohak*. After the group was purged, Yi pointed out that the one of the important mistakes of the *kimyo* group was that they hastily concluded that with the dissemination of *Sohak*, they could easily restore the ideal politics of legendary periods of

emperor Yao and Shun within very short period.<sup>176</sup> Put differently, what Yi pointed out is not the *kimyo* groups' reliance on Confucianism but their radical reform policy. Nam Sejun 南世準 (1478-1533), the Second Censor of the Office of the Censor-General, after the purge, also indicated that the *kimyo* group attempted to radically transform their society but failed to make the people observe the social norm the state wanted to maintain.<sup>177</sup> In both Yi and Nam's insistences, the harm the *kimyo* group left to the state was caused by their political failure to rule the state in proper way, not by their desire to Confucianize the state. Then what political aspects of *Sohak* had made various officials mutually agree the wide dissemination of the text? What is the political purpose Chosŏn officials commonly sought to attain with the dissemination of the text, but failed under the *kimyo* group's leadership?

In the eighth year of his reign, in a letter to the ministers, King Chungjong emphasized that ideal society could be constructed only when all the people, from ministers to commoners, observe ritual propriety, and ordered the ministers to help all people, including women and children, live by shared social norms.<sup>178</sup> This letter suggests the possibility that during the period of King Chungjong when the ruling class urgently needed to stabilize their state and its ruined social order, their politics, which modern historians often defined as "Confucian," focused mainly on how to effectively integrate the people into the state.

The *Hongmun'gwan*'s suggestion made in the twelfth year in the reign of King Chungjong proves that the state's efforts to disseminate *Sohak* is motivated by a desire to instill core social values to the people in order to make them as an integrated part of the

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<sup>176</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (39. 15. 6. Ŭrhae).

<sup>177</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 1. Musin).

<sup>178</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (17. 8. 2. Ŭlsa).

state.<sup>179</sup> At first, the *Hongmun'gwan* praised the king's efforts to distribute *Sok samgang haengsilto* (*A sequel of the illustrated Guide to the Three Bonds*) and *Sohak* to both center and peripheries. Then, they pointed out why dissemination of *Sohak* is more urgent than that of *Samgang haengsilto*. According to their explanation, the moral exemplars listed in *Samgang haengsilto* are very special cases that mainly happened in politically urgent situations. They argued, therefore, that to effectively integrate all the people of the state, from ministers to commoners, the state should translate the texts dealing with social norms related to people's everyday life such as *Sohak* and *Yŏlnyŏjŏn* (*Biographies of Chaste Women*) into the Korean alphabet and distribute them. The *Hongmun'gwan*'s proposal clearly shows that the state's interest in the dissemination of Confucian texts is to construct a well-organized socio-political entity which the ruling elite could effectively control with certain rules they initiated.

According to Ernest Gellner, "the 'state' is the institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order."<sup>180</sup> In other words, what is clearly shown in Chosŏn officials' efforts to disseminate Confucian texts is, as "order-enforcing agencies," they relied on their material resources in order to achieve their purpose of stabilizing the state. This suggests the possibility that various policies of the period, which modern historians often labeled "Confucian", are directly related to laying a new foundation for the new regime. In other words, a so-called "Confucian" politics might be initiated by their desire to solve immanent problems of the state. For a better understanding of Chosŏn society, therefore, it seems more worthwhile to examine how Chosŏn elites had set up

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<sup>179</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (28. 12. 6. Sinmi).

<sup>180</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*, 2nd ed, New perspectives on the past (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 4.



political institutions and social practices with their knowledge of Confucian teachings to effect their state policies, rather than simply attempting to find Confucian traits from their political activities. In this context, the Chosŏn officials' interest in and consequent heated debates on various cultural performances also need to be examined with the consideration of their political purpose of state-building.

### **b) Ritual practices, history and the construction of identity**

It seems natural that in performing various rites, Chosŏn officials had a desire to proclaim their state as a distinctive political entity and to share this self-awareness with all the people of the state. Catherine Bell aptly points out that ritual can work as a social device giving its practitioners and spectators a “sense of community.”<sup>181</sup> It seems, therefore, that examinations of the debates about state rituals can help us understand how Chosŏn people perceived their social and political position within their contemporary national and international situations and how this perception influenced the construction and development of the new political entity.

Especially, regarding the issue of how the debates among Chosŏn elites on Confucian rituals were closely related to the elite's self-awareness and state-building politics, it is worthy to examine the debates on the installation of renowned Korean Confucians in the National Confucian Shrine. Even though various Confucian scholars were mentioned for canonization, the *kimyo* group mainly recommended three Confucians, Chŏng Mongju 鄭夢周 (1337-1392), Kim Koengp'il 金宏弼 (1454-1504) and Chŏng Yŏch'ang 鄭汝昌 (1450-1504). However, Kim Koengp'il and Chŏng Yŏch'ang could not be canonized at the

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<sup>181</sup> Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 221.

time because many officials pointed out that both Confucians' achievements were merely the assembling and teaching of neighboring children. Only Chǒng Mongju was canonized and installed in the National Confucian Shrine.<sup>182</sup>

Although Chǒng Mongju was called a great Neo-Confucian when he was recommended for canonization by the officials of King Chungjong's regime, he, as a matter of fact, made no direct contribution to the elaboration of the Neo-Confucianist philosophy in Korea. Prominent Neo-Confucians of later generations such as Yi Hwang 李滉 (1501-1570) and Yi I 李珥 (1536-1584) mentioned that Chǒng was merely a loyal subject rather than a Confucian scholar<sup>183</sup> and his writing was not particularly remarkable.<sup>184</sup> Nonetheless, almost all government officials agreed that Chǒng could be installed in the shrine although there were minor oppositions to the canonization project. It should be noted that there was a crucial argument for Chǒng's canonization with which even the dissenters could not but agree. The argument is that Chǒng was a representative Korean Neo-Confucian scholar no one can be compared to in its history. Repeating this argument in their debates on his canonization, the project initiators used the term "our Eastern country (*odongbang* 吾東方 or *adongbang* 我東方)"<sup>185</sup> which had been used to emphasize that Chosŏn was a distinctive political and cultural entity. Kim Chǒng 金淨 (1486-1521), who also urged the king to install Chǒng in the shrine, used same argument that saying that Chǒng Mongju was the only real

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<sup>182</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (29. 12. 9. Kich'uk).

<sup>183</sup> Yi I, *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 31: Oroksang(語錄上).

<sup>184</sup> Yi Hwang, *T'oegye chŏnsŏ*, 2: Si (詩).

<sup>185</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (27. 12. 2. Kyŏngsin).

Neo-Confucian for “five hundred years of our country.”<sup>186</sup> Here, linking five hundred years of Koryŏ history to Chosŏn, Kim emphasized the historicity of Korea whose people should be distinguished from others. In fact, Kim was not the only one who felt the need to emphasize his sense of belonging to a unique historical and cultural entity. Even Ch’oe Suksaeng 崔淑生 (1457-1520) clearly showed his opinion that the state should publish the record about profound Confucians of “our country” which had existed since the Three period.<sup>187</sup> In this context, Ch’oe also pointed out that installing Chŏng’s tablet in the National Confucian Shrine, the state could construct its own genealogy of Confucian sages starting from Kija in Kojosŏn through Sŏl Ch’ong 薛聰 (655-?) and Ch’oe Ch’iwŏn 崔致遠 (857-?) in Silla to An Hyang 安珦 (1243-1306) and Chŏng Mongju in Koryŏ.<sup>188</sup> Simply put, Chŏng Mongju’s canonization was not merely a ritual ceremony to commemorate an individual scholar. Because his canonization was directly related to the way to define their state’s identity and construct its own history, Chŏng could be a Confucian who could be installed in the National Confucian Shrine without having strong opposition unlike Kim Koengp’il and Chŏng Yŏch’ang.

Anthony Smith argues that an *ethnie* formed by a shared language, myth and history is a core element of a modern nation. According to him, the belief that they shared a common “past” makes a certain group of people a “mythical and emotional union of kin groups

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<sup>186</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (29. 12. 8. Ŭlmyo).

<sup>187</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (29. 12. 8. Ŭlsa).

<sup>188</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (29. 12. 8. Imja).

sharing a common ‘history and destiny.’”<sup>189</sup> Given this, it seems that the government officials’ interest in rituals was coming from their desire to extend their self-awareness to commoners and instill the idea that people of the Chosŏn belonged to a community which has its own historical and cultural experiences. In other words, Chosŏn officials during the reign of King Chungjong, tried to, through cultural performances, integrate various groups of people as the people of the state sharing a sense of belonging to a larger socio-political entity and understanding essential elements of the state’s thought and practices.

Of course, the ritual debates during the reign of King Chungjong were not the only nor the first examples showing Chosŏn officials’ understanding of the importance of history as state politics. From the late fourteenth century when the Mongol empire’s demise was accelerated, the leaders of various groups in Northeast Asia competitively attempted to secure support from current or potential constituents in their polities. As one of those, the founders of the Chosŏn dynasty also defined their polity’s identity as distinctive from others in order to attract the sympathy of their people and convince them to stay within the polity. In this context, after the establishment of the state, the Chosŏn government published various kinds of history books over the course of the state’s first century as mentioned in the previous chapter. This was an unprecedented activity.<sup>190</sup> In addition, they created heroic narratives of the past that turned their past achievements into political capital that legitimized their governance. An example of this is *Yongbi ŏch’ŏn ka* (*Song of the Dragon Flying to Heaven*)

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<sup>189</sup> For details, see Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, UK: New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>190</sup> Han Yŏngu, “Chosŏn ch’ogi yŏksa sŏsul kwa yŏksa insik,” 57.

which recorded the exploits of Yi Sǒnggye (King T'aejo) 李成桂 (1335-1408), the first king of the dynasty, against the Red Turbans.<sup>191</sup>

However, it was not easy for the elite to successfully share the self-awareness or self-determination expressed in history books with the rest of the state. As K. von Beyme points out, “the historical memory of groups is not something which can be derived from the mere existence of a group.” Historical memories can be constructed when existing elements are *reinforced and cultivated* by families, communes, regions and political entities. The dominant elite of the state try to invent historical memories for the central level of identity-building when a new state is created or a state needs national cohesion.<sup>192</sup> For Chosǒn rulers who needed to integrate people with fluid identities in order to successfully establish and stabilize their state, the construction of a larger group consciousness might be the *conditio sine qua non*. Therefore, the fact that they finally built a state that would last for around five hundred years means that they succeeded in constructing politically influential national historical memories under which various historical memories of different subgroups and regions should be subsumed.<sup>193</sup> As a matter of fact, regardless of their political propensities, the Chosǒn elite collaboratively had inscribed various memorable past events, especially significant at the national level, into various subgroups’ surroundings and everyday lives which could

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<sup>191</sup> David M. Robinson, *Empire’s Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 266-268.

<sup>192</sup> Klaus von Beyme, *On Political Culture, Cultural Policy, Art and Politics*. (Cham: Springer, 2014), 19-32.

<sup>193</sup> Klaus von Beyme, *On Political Culture, Cultural Policy, Art and Politics*, 21-24.

contribute to turning the groups into people of the state, that is, according to Smith, a group of common ‘history and destiny.’<sup>194</sup>

For example, in his writing about the county of Munhwa (文化縣), Kim An’guk discussed the devastation wrought by the Red Turbans which might be remembered not only by the people in the county but also many other Chosŏn people. Interestingly, when Kim introduced the county in the beginning of the writing, he clearly mentioned that this place is “the hometown of Tan’gun, the first king and primogenitor of our Eastern Country (我東國始王檀君).” He also explained that it is the state that had tried to restore the devastated county.<sup>195</sup> Here, scattered individual memories about the Red Turbans came to have the possibility to be turned into “our history” that happened in the land of “our ancestor.” Put succinctly, Kim’s writing had the potential to encourage Chosŏn people to share sympathy with each other, have gratitude to the state, and finally to have an extended identity as members of a larger polity which went beyond their previous identities as members of small groups and regions.

Similarly, Yi Haeng, who frequently showed different political opinions from Kim,<sup>196</sup> also often inscribed historical memories in the people’s surroundings. In his letter to Yi Sajong 李嗣宗 (dates unknown), who was appointed as the Magistrate’s Aide of Kyŏngsŏng

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<sup>194</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 207.

<sup>195</sup> Kim An’guk, *Mojae chip* (慕齋集), “Munhwahyŏn yich’i ki (文化縣移治記).”

<sup>196</sup> Again, the fact that Kim and Yi, categorized as a victim and an initiator of the *kimyo sahwa*, had different political opinions and had some conflicts on the political stage does not mean that they thought of each other as political enemies. In a letter to Kim, Yi mentioned his long friendship with Kim and showed his wish to meet him soon. See Yi Haeng, *Yongjae chip* (容齋集), 7: “tap kukkyŏng Kim An’guk sŏ (答國卿金安國書).” In this context, there is no need to simplify the political debates among Chosŏn officials during the reign of King Chungjong as power struggles caused by their hostilities toward other political groups.

(*Kyöngsöng p'an'gwan*), Yi Haeng pointed out that in the distant past, the Changbaek Mountains had been occupied by the Jurchens who were suppressed by Chosön's power and virtue.<sup>197</sup> A similar discussion of Kilsöng county, which is located near the Changbaek Mountains, is also found in *Sinjüng tongguk yöji süngnam* (*Newly Verified Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea*) of which Yi himself was one of the editors. This book explains that this region, originally Koguryö territory, had been occupied by the Jurchens until Yun Kwan 尹瓘 (?-1111), a general in the reign of King Yejong (1105-1122) in the Koryö dynasty, made it "our" territory. It adds that although it was retaken by the Jurchens, this region was restored in the second year of the reign of King Kongyang (1389-1392) and finally came to belong to Chosön.<sup>198</sup> These writings, influenced by Yi, informed the people in the region how their living place became Chosön territory; reading these writings and learning about the state's engagement in the region, the people of Kilsöng county could regard themselves as an inseparable part of the state. This shows that, like Kim An'guk, Yi Haeng also made an effort to write works which have the potential for transforming a regional group's memory and experience into national history through which the state could consolidate separate groups to form a group of shared collectivity.

As a matter of fact, the title *Sinjüng tongguk yöji süngnam* itself has a meaning that gives a glimpse of the fact that the editors of this book had different ideas from those who wrote and edited previous geography books, called *chiriji* (地理志). "*Süngnam* (勝覽)" has the meanings, "the one worth seeing," "the one worth recording," "the unique one," "the best

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<sup>197</sup> Yi Haeng, *Yongjae chip* (容齋集), 3: "song Yi p'an'gwan puim kyöngsöng-sajong (送李判官赴任鏡城-嗣宗)."

<sup>198</sup> *Sinjüng tongguk yöji süngnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽), 50: "Kilsöng hyön (吉城縣)."

scenery” and so on. This means that this book was not intended to give basic information on the geography of Chosŏn but to record memorable and significant issues related to the territory of the state.<sup>199</sup> It is natural, therefore, that in introducing certain administrative districts or natural environments, entries in the book recall past events that can retrieve and reinforce the memories of the residents in those places, and describe how the state had engaged in their lives.

For example, the entry about Muju county explains that the Sang Mountain in the county was a shelter for the people nearby when the Khitan and Wako invaded the region. The entry continues by mentioning the fact that attempts by Ch’oe Yŏng 崔瑩 (1316-1388), a Koryŏ general, to construct a fortress and storehouse for the protection of the region were stopped by Ch’oe Yundŏk 崔潤德 (1376-1445), the Border Inspector (*ch’ech’alsa*, 體察使) in the reign of King Sejong in the Chosŏn dynasty, when Ch’oe found that the place was strategically disadvantageous for defense due to its geographic features. Interestingly, the description of the past difficulties of the people and the Chosŏn government’s involvement in the region is followed with a poem by Yu Hoin 俞好仁 (1445-1494) praising the beautiful scenery and peaceful lives in the region, which were newly added when Yi Haeng participated in the editorial process for the book.<sup>200</sup> The entry about Hwangju province recalls the death and devastation caused by the Red Turbans.<sup>201</sup> However, the editors of this book did

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<sup>199</sup> Kim Sŭng-p’il, “*Sinjŭng Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*” e taehan munhŏnhakchŏk yŏn’gu, Chosŏn sahoe kwahak haksulchip ; Minjok kojŏnhak p’yŏn (P’yŏngyang: Sahoe Kwahak Ch’ulp’ansa, 2009), 48-49.

<sup>200</sup> *Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽), 39: “Muju (茂朱) – Sanchŏn (山川).”

<sup>201</sup> *Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽), 41: “Hwangjumok (黃州牧) – Kojŏk (古跡).” For an English translation of the poem written by Ch’oe Sukchŏng about the devastation inflicted by the Red Turbans in this entry, see David M. Robinson, *Empire’s Twilight*, 263.



not neglect to add into the original edition three heroes<sup>202</sup> who repelled these enemies with Yi Sönggye, who later established the Chosön dynasty, but who were purged by incompetent and corrupt Koryö government.<sup>203</sup> These examples prove that what the elite, particularly the editors of the book including Yi Haeng, might want to insist is that the rulers of the state were those who shared the tragic memories of various constituent groups and had tried to resolve their difficulties and console their sadness; with the assertion that the people in different regions had been taken care of by the state, the memories of different social constituents no longer remained as their own but became the state's history that should be remembered by entire constituent groups of Chosön. It can be said, therefore, that this book's publication reflects the Chosön elite's desire to inculcate their people with a sense of community. With this book's publication and circulation, this sense could be reinforced whenever the people contacted, in their everyday lives, their surroundings which contained their own memories that were now transformed into national history.

The canonization of Chöng Mongju examined above proceeded in this historical context in which Chosön officials aspired to construct a collective memory with which they could effectively consolidate various groups of people into a community of common destiny. Chöng's canonization and the installation of his tablet in the National Confucian Shrine was an apt choice given that with the historical memories inscribed in rituals, the effectiveness of ritual activities in differentiating the ritual performer from others<sup>204</sup> might be maximized. It seems that by the reign of King Chungjong, the Chosön elite came to have a certain

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<sup>202</sup> They are An U 安祐 (?-1362), Kim Tükpae 金得培 (1312-1362), and Yi Pangsil 李芳實 (1298-1362).

<sup>203</sup> *Sinjüng tongguk yöji süngnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽), 41: "Hwangjumok (黃州牧) – Kojök (古跡)." See particularly the part under the subheading "sinjüng."

<sup>204</sup> Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 102.

understanding on the synergy that shared histories and rituals could produce. In this vein, Im Jegwang 林霽光 (dates unknown), a Lecturer of the National Academy (*Sŏnggyun'gwan chikkang*, 成均館直講), suggested to the king that the state examine its histories to find men of prominence and establish shrines at the places of their exploits or loyal deaths and perform memorial services for them every spring and autumn.<sup>205</sup> In this context, although the ritual debate above was about Confucian scholars who the *kimyo* group respected, there is no need to simply regard it as only an example of the “Confucianization” of the state or as a power struggle between the *kimyo* group and its opponents.

As frequently pointed out, people’s “*participation* in central institutions”<sup>206</sup> are important for identity-building within the framework of a larger national state. Because ritual performances in the National Shrine of Chosŏn were reproduced in the Hall of Great Consummation (*Taesŏngjŏn*, 大成殿) at county public schools (*hyanggyo*, 鄉校) where various groups interacted,<sup>207</sup> the inscription of national memories in the rituals could directly influence the cultivation of the people’s sense of collectivity. In this context, the canonization of Chŏng Mongju was a very important issue for Chosŏn officials who desired to stabilize and systemize their state. As modern politicians did when they built nation-states, Chosŏn officials attempted to build their collective identity which not only helped legitimize their

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<sup>205</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 10. Chŏngmyo).

<sup>206</sup> Klaus von Beyme, *On Political Culture, Cultural Policy, Art and Politics*, 20.

<sup>207</sup> To learn details about how *hyanggyo* changed from places for education to places for active interactions between various social groups over the passage of time, see Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1990).

political authority but also constructed a political community historically and culturally distinguished from others.

**c) Ideas of integration of the people**

Above, I argued that the discussions regarding the enshrinement of Chosŏn Confucians based on Confucian style rituals were not about how to Confucianize the state as much as they were an attempt to construct the state's identity. One of the main interests of government officials during the reign of King Chungjong was, as was shown in the example above, to construct the concept that Chosŏn was a distinctive and highly integrated political and social community to which all Chosŏn people belonged. The lecture about the *Reflection on Things at Hand* (*Jin si lu*, 近思錄) given by Ki Chun 奇遵 (1492-1521), one of the leading officials of the *kimyo* group, at the Royal Lecture in the fourteenth year of King Chungjong's reign, shows that the idea regarding various social groups as social constituents belonging to the same community began to be shared among government officials.

The record of the *Sillok* says that Ki had a discussion on an idea that all people are brothers and sisters sharing the same womb (*tongp'o*, 同胞),<sup>208</sup> which originally came from the *Western Inscription* (*Ximing*, 西銘) written by Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077), a prominent Neo-Confucian philosopher in the Song dynasty. Although Confucian teachings emphasize that all people should have the opportunity to learn sages' teachings, and some modern scholars such as Kang Youwei, a Chinese scholar, used this Confucian tradition to explain significant concepts of the nation,<sup>209</sup> it is rare to see Chosŏn officials in the central

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<sup>208</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 9. Kimi).

<sup>209</sup> Kang Youwei, *Mengziwei* (孟子微) vol. 1, 6.

government using Zhang's phrase which regards all people as siblings from the same parents. Naturally, in most records in the *Sillok* before the lecture, the term *tongp'o* was used only to indicate someone's siblings as its general usage, not to define any meaning and significance of people for the state.

It is in the *Yönsan'gun ilgi*, a record of the end of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, that the phrase in *Ximing* that all people are *tongp'o* first appears in the *Sillok*. One thing that should be noted is that Chosön officials used the phrase that all people are *tongp'o* differently from Zhang Zai's original intention. Originally in *Ximing*, Zhang Zai used the phrase to emphasize his belief that all people, and even all beings under heaven, share a cosmological principle and thus, he himself should have relationships with various people and objects without discrimination. In sum, Zhang's phrase reveals his worldview and cosmology rejecting the idea of differences among human beings, and between human and other beings. When using the phrase in *Ximing*, however, Chosön officials focused more on the relationship between the people and their kings, reminding readers that the people of Chosön belonged to the kings and emphasizing the attitudes kings should maintain towards their subjects.

In the third year of the reign of King Yönsan, Min Hyojüng 閔孝曾 (1448-1513), a local governor of Söngch'ön (成川府使), quoted Zhang's phrase in the context of advising that the king should love his subjects.<sup>210</sup> The Office of the Inspector-General (*Sahönbu*) also gave the king similar advice in the ninth year of his reign insisting that he should be benevolent to his people, who are theoretically his sisters and brothers, when the king ordered

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<sup>210</sup> *Yönsan'gun ilgi* (27. 3. 9. Kapcha).

the removal of houses adjacent to the walls of the palaces.<sup>211</sup> Put simply, in these two cases, the term *tongp'o* was used to emphasize the idea that Chosŏn people are the “brothers and sisters” of Chosŏn kings, in other words, that the people belonged to and should be taken care of by the Chosŏn government, and not to simply repeat Zhang’s view of human beings as a whole. Interestingly, it seems that the term *tongp'o* (*tongbao* in Mandarin Chinese), came to be used similarly in China around the same time. In *Xiaozong shilu*, the record of around the same time as that of King Yŏnsan, *tongbao* was used to link the people to the Chinese emperor for the first time in the *Ming Shilu*. Here, as in the cases in the *Yŏnsan’gun ilgi*, *tongbao* was used to emphasize the role of the Chinese emperor to take care of his brothers and sisters, his subjects.<sup>212</sup>

The fact that from the end of the fifteenth century the phrase in *Ximing* including the word *tongp'o* appeared in official government records in both China and Korea might mean that in East Asia there emerged a new socio-cultural trend attempting to re-define the people in each polity. Given that defining people under their political authority as their brethren can be an effective strategy for certain political leaders who seek stability in their polity, it seems possible that a Confucian idea was interpreted in similar ways in both Ming and Chosŏn, who shared a similar historical trajectory during this period. Both states were established following the collapse of the Yuan empire and in the process of their establishment needed to secure the people’s loyalty to their new regimes and detach them from loyalty to the Yuan empire. However, even around one hundred years after the two states were established, the political situations of both states were in many ways unstable due to repeated political

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<sup>211</sup> *Yŏnsan’gun ilgi* (51. 9. 11. Kimyo).

<sup>212</sup> See *Xiaozong shilu*, hongzhi 3, 3<sup>rd</sup> moon.

struggles often accompanying military coups. Therefore, it is possible that the sense of collectivity of the two states' peoples was relatively weak.

Regarding this, it should be noted that the collapse of empires does not always result in the emergence of national states. Here, I am not repeating either the idea that in this period national feelings in the modern sense that one belonged to a definite nation hardly existed,<sup>213</sup> or the insistence that the case of the collapse of the Mongol Empire was not related to the general pattern of empire-to-nation transition.<sup>214</sup> Rather, what I intend to point out here is that for a sense of belonging to a polity to emerge and be widely shared by various groups of people, what is needed is the time-consuming process of stabilizing the polity and the construction of a collectivity led by a small elite group.<sup>215</sup> Unlike the primordialists' belief, theoretical studies dealing with nationalism point out that only after the state is constructed can the nation emerge.<sup>216</sup> Only with the state's efforts to disseminate national identity (which originally existed only among a narrow stratum of the elite) even to subaltern groups, can the people of the state share a sense of belonging to the same group.<sup>217</sup> Referring to the theoretical studies, it is highly possible that the emergence of Zhang Zai's phrase in the official records of both the Ming and Chosŏn and the new usage of *tongp'o* resulted from the two governments' efforts to secure people's loyalty to their leadership with the emphasis on

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<sup>213</sup> Robinson, *Empire's Twilight*, 8.

<sup>214</sup> Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayalı and Eric Van Young, eds., *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, World (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 9.

<sup>215</sup> Esherick, Kayalı and Van Young, eds., 14.

<sup>216</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 44-45.

<sup>217</sup> Esherick, Kayalı and Van Young, *Empire to nation*, 14.

the close relationship between the ruler and ruled. Overcoming the political difficulties caused by both internal and international situations and attempting to stabilize their societies, the government leaders in both states needed to emphasize the intimacy between the rulers and the ruled to justify and legitimize their political power.

As mentioned above, the political situation during the reign of King Chungjong was unstable. The fact that King Chungjong's government was the product of a military coup weakened its legitimacy both politically and morally; thus the government had some difficulty in securing its political authority. Moreover, with the complicated process to reorganize its structure and institutions, the government did not function properly, especially when dealing with issues on its periphery.<sup>218</sup> It seems not to be a coincidence that in this situation, where both King Chungjong and his government officials had some difficulty in securing the people's loyalty, Ki emphasized the ideal relationship between the people and the state represented by the king. It is reasonable to expect that in presenting Zhang Zai's idea in the Royal Lecture, Ki showed his opinion regarding how to get the people's support and secure their loyalty to properly rule the state.

Also, the fact that Ki, as the officials of King Yǒnsan, used the term *tongp'o* to indicate the people in the state proves that since around the end of the fifteenth century, Chosŏn bureaucrats had continuously felt the need to reconsider and redefine the status and role of their people. Since this period, with the frequent quotation of Zhang Zai's phrase by Chosŏn officials, the term *tongp'o*, which means "brothers and sisters sharing the same womb" and thus possibly could be used to emphasize the people's belongingness to the same group, began to be used to define the target of the state's politics. Interestingly, since that

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<sup>218</sup> For details, see Chŏng Tuhŭi, *Cho Kwangjo: silch'ŏnjŏk chisigin ūi sam, isang kwa hyŏnsil sai esŏ* (Seoul: Ak'anet, 2000), 25-68.

time, *tongp'o* came to be generally used to indicate the people of the state, not an individual's siblings.<sup>219</sup> This reveals that the need to emphasize the intimate relationship among all the people to secure their loyalty made Chosŏn elites discover the usefulness of Zhang's phrase and caused the change of the meaning of *tongp'o*. It seems that this intellectual trend had been maintained from that time on, regardless of the changes in the political situation and of leading political groups. For instance, even when the purged *kimyo* group was not yet reinstated, Yi Ŏnjŏk 李彦迪 (1491-1553), who shared some philosophical and educational background with the group, reminded King Chungjong that all Chosŏn people are his *tongp'o* when he advised that King Chungjong should not rely on legal punishment to control the people.<sup>220</sup> It seems that, finally, during the reign of King Sŏnjo when Chosŏn experienced the Imjin War, the term *tongp'o* clearly became a word putting emphasis on Chosŏn people's collectivity.<sup>221</sup>

What should be emphasized again here is that the term *tongp'o* indicated all Chosŏn people regardless of social status and background and therefore, the frequent uses of this term were probably intended to integrate the constituents of the state. The uses of *tongp'o* in the latter half of Chosŏn history clearly show that the subject of the state the term indicated was not merely a small number of elites but all people of different social statuses. In his letter written to arouse the people's national sentiment during the Imjin War, Ko Chonghu 高從厚 (1554-1593) emphasized that all people in Chŏlla Province were *tongp'o*, "whoever they

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<sup>219</sup> For details, see *Sŏnjo sillok* (21. 20. 11. Pyŏngŏ).

<sup>220</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (92. 34. 19. Kapsin).

<sup>221</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (51. 27. 5. Kapchin). Also see JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Great East Asian War and the Birth of the Korean Nation*, eds. William Joseph Haboush and Jisoo M. Kim (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 47.



might be.”<sup>222</sup> Reproaching himself, King Sukchong used *tongp’o* to indicate many people who died from hunger in Pyŏngan Province, whose dead bodies were left on the street, and thus, were probably not members of the ruling elite.<sup>223</sup> When he used *tongp’o*, King Yŏngjo mentioned that at least according to his perspective, there are no differences among his people.<sup>224</sup> This inclusive aspect of the term *tongp’o* was also shown at the time the term began to be used to mean the subjects of the state. In Yi Ŏnjŏk’s example above, Yi used the term *tongp’o* in order to defend Buddhist monks who were forcefully expelled from their temples by the state.<sup>225</sup> Ki Chun also used the term *tongp’o* when he discussed the issue of nationwide hunger in the state.<sup>226</sup> Given these examples, it seems clear that Chosŏn rulers and elites used this term with the intention of emphasizing the people’s belongingness to the state. Put simply, Ki’s decision to give a lecture on *Reflection on Things at Hand* reflected the contemporary intellectual trend of the elites making efforts to define their people’s socio-political identity as part of their attempts to stabilize their state and complete the process of state-building.

## Rethinking the politics of King Chungjong’s reign

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<sup>222</sup> *Chŏnggirok* (正氣錄), 13-14. For an English translation of Ko’s letter, see JaHyun Kim Haboush, “Open Letters: Patriotic Exhortations During the Imjin War,” in *Epistolary Korea: Letters in the Communicative Space of the Chosŏn, 1392-1910*, ed. JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 135-137.

<sup>223</sup> *Sukchong sillok* (31. 23. 5. Imo), *Sukchong sillok* (31. 23. 7. Kyemi).

<sup>224</sup> *Yŏngjo sillok* (71. 26. 7. Kyemyo).

<sup>225</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (92. 34. 19. Kapsin).

<sup>226</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 9. Kimi).

Many existing studies linked the *kimyo* group's local-level politics to their desire to Confucianize the state. Consequently, other officials' different opinions were often regarded as their resistance to the total Confucianization of local society. This presumed that conflicts are also often explained as power struggles between different political groups based on different social classes.<sup>227</sup> But, given that many of the political debates in the central government at the time were related to their interests in how to integrate various social constituents into the state, it is highly probable that the government launched local-level projects to transform various people who had been isolated from the central government's policies into the people of the state sharing a recognition of their collectivity.

One of the serious court debates on the government's local policies, which had fluctuated with the literati purge of the *kimyo* year and thus are often regarded as evidence of power struggle, is about the tenure of civil governors (*kwanch'alsa*, 觀察使). The *kimyo* group insisted that civil governors should stay at the same place for two years. However, many high officials argued that the tenure of civil governors should be limited to just one year.<sup>228</sup> Existing studies explained that the different opinions were caused by different social classes at the political center, both of whom did not want to lose their control of local societies which were their political origin and at the same time their economic support. However, if one frees oneself from the conventional views, the debates can be understood differently.

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<sup>227</sup> This interpretation is also under the influence of the the *sarim-hun'gu* dichotomy. In this framework, local societies of the Chosŏn dynasty have often been pointed to as the origin of the *sarim*, made up of locally based medium and small landlords armed with Cheng-Zhu philosophy. For details, see Yi T'aejin, "Sarimp'a ūi yuhyangso pongnip undong," *Chindan hakpo* 34-35 (1973).

<sup>228</sup> The tenure of civil governors of Hamgyŏng and Pyŏngan provinces were two years.

Regarding this, Graeme Gill's study on modern politics is notable. Gill aptly points out that the establishment of states has involved "the expansion of central power to encompass regions not initially under control."<sup>229</sup> His book also explained that during the state construction process, the rotation of local officials is a very important issue that government officials should discuss. In order to do their duty properly, local officials "must be highly familiar with local community and its problems." However, when they become too close to their community and have more concern with the issues of the community than the central government's, "the centre's capacity to continue to exercise political control" over the community might collapse. Therefore, governments need to rotate local officials to prevent them from sinking roots into their local community. The problem here is that the officials can never become "sufficiently familiar with it to be able to act effectively in the centre's interests."<sup>230</sup>

During the reign of King Chungjong of the Chosŏn dynasty, some officials such as Cho Kwangjo, Kim Chŏng, Ki Chun and Kim Allo 金安老 (1481-1537) brought this issue into political debates arguing that civil governors should have enough time to properly perform their political duties, such as the "edification of the people."<sup>231</sup> Cho Kwangjo insisted that ordinary people were reluctant to follow the new policy or instruction at first even if those ones were good and thus, governors of the short period of tenure would accomplish

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<sup>229</sup> Graeme J. Gill, *The Nature and Development of the Modern State* (Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 31.

<sup>230</sup> Gill, 30-31.

<sup>231</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (31. 13. 1. Kabin), *Chungjong sillok* (33. 13. 5. Mujin), *Chungjong sillok* (35. 14. 2. Muin), *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 5. Kyemyo). Ki Chun even insisted that the tenure for civil governors should be three years.

only minor things but cause many troubles in their place.<sup>232</sup> Put succinctly, government officials such as Cho focused more on building a familiarity between provincial governors and their residents which, they believed, would facilitate the state's effective control local society.

On the other hand, other officials such as Chǒng Kwangp'il, Sin Yonggae 申用漑 (1463-1519) and Nam Kon pointed out that if the tenure of civil governors were extended, their families should accompany them to their places of duty, which would not only increase the need of human and material resources but also cause many accompanying problems.<sup>233</sup> Therefore, they argued that the state did not need to change the existing tenure at the risk of increasing local residents' burdens, particularly during a bad year's harvest.<sup>234</sup> Interestingly, most of this group of officials were also opposed to a nationwide launch of the community compact (*hyangyak*) that the former group supported, and the reason of their opposition is worthy of examination. Chǒng pointed out that due to the influence of the community compact, even artisans and merchants often gathered to advance their group interests which made them neglect their duties to the state.<sup>235</sup> Nam insisted that the community compact made people follow *toyakchǒng* (the head of *hyangyak*) and not the national law.<sup>236</sup> The remarks of both Chǒng and Nam show that they believed that if local offices and locals had

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<sup>232</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (35. 14. 4. Imjin).

<sup>233</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (33. 13. 5. Pyǒngin), *Chungjong sillok* (35. 14. 2. Muin), *Chungjong sillok* (35. 14. 4. Imjin), *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 5. Sinhae).

<sup>234</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 5. Sinhae).

<sup>235</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 11. Kyǒngsul).

<sup>236</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 5. Imja).

too much autonomy, the state might fail to effectively control local society and local people. Their opposition to the extension of the tenure of civil governors can be understood in the same context. Put differently, this group of officials opposed the extension of the tenure in that they believed it would disturb the central government's engagement in local society by having various groups of people seek benefits only for their own groups rather than that of the state –that is, cultivating their identity as subgroup members and not as people of the state.

In sum, the two groups had debates about how the state could effectively control local society and integrate various groups of people into the state by having them follow the government's political and philosophical instructions. Given this, it is difficult to accept conventional studies' assertions that political debates among Chosŏn officials existed only to advance power struggles between different ideological groups each of which focused more on constructing their own economic base in local places. Rather, the political debates on local policies should be understood as the government's efforts to extend its power to local society and elaborate the state's political structure. Therefore, for a better understanding of the Chungjong government's local policies, we should overcome the conventional studies' dichotomy that presents the debates on local policies as evidence of the conflicts between proponents and opponents of the Confucianization of local society.

## Chapter 4: Reinforcement of a Sense of Identity

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, while suggesting a reexamination of the politics of King Chungjong's reign, I argued that many of the political remarks and debates in the central government in the reign of King Chungjong, which in conventional views have been explained with excessive emphasis on the social influence of Confucianism, were related to government officials' awareness of the need to reorganize and stabilize the social structure and to integrate various social constituents into the state. For this political goal, Chosŏn officials launched local-level projects to transform various people who had been isolated from the central government's policies into the people of the state. It is those political attempts that were crucial to help the people of the state share a recognition of their collectivity.

Unlike existing views insisting that the Confucianization of Chosŏn society started from localities with local scholars' voluntary attempts to civilize and educate people in their areas –more accurately, opposing the cultural and academic tendency of the center, the situation of Chosŏn local society reveals that it was almost impossible for Chosŏn people to accomplish nation-wide socio-cultural reform without the central government's active assistance. Above all, before the state's intervention, the general socio-cultural structure of Chosŏn local society was totally different from what the government leaders had envisioned. For a better understanding of how the dominant culture and practices of the Chosŏn dynasty were constructed, it seems necessary to reexamine whether the local society of Chosŏn had any potential to create or accept new philosophical thoughts to replace of existing traditions, as

some studies putting heavy emphasis on local dynamics indicate.

### **Rethinking local society in early Chosŏn**

Some studies emphasizing the potential for socio-cultural change in the periphery during the early Chosŏn period generally agree with the following explanations: with the social crisis in late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn, the stability of rural areas which had been maintained by traditional institutions such as *hyangdo*, *tongyak* and *kye* was seriously impaired.<sup>237</sup> It was medium and small landlords in the rural areas who led the stabilization of these agitated local societies. Though most of them were new settlers from other places, they could easily preserve their economic status as landlords in new places. Moreover, receiving *ch'ŏmsŏl chik* (supernumerary posts), they could obtain *p'umgwan*<sup>238</sup> status and thus could exert social influence within their localities as *sajok* (scholar-officials). They tried to stabilize their areas with efforts to reconstruct and reorganize existing practices and institutions, and in the process, they often rebuffed state intervention.<sup>239</sup> Neo-Confucianism became the cultural capital with which they could challenge government officials' authority and take social positions superior to other social groups who still relied on traditional thoughts and practices.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Yi T'aejin, "Sarimp'a ūi yuhyangso pongnip undong (sang)," *Chindan hakpo* 34 (1972), 12. For more details regarding *hyangdo*, *tongyak*, and *kye* see Yi Haejun, *Chosŏn sigi ch'ollak sahoesa* (Seoul: Minjok Munhwasa, 1996), 99-103.

<sup>238</sup> Some historians interpret this to mean "men of rank and office," but others believe it was a title designating a petty local clerk of low status.

<sup>239</sup> This explanation was presented for the first time in Yi T'aejin, "Sarimp'a ūi yuhyangso pongnip undong (ha)," *Chindan hakpo* 35 (1973) and had huge influence on later studies. Some studies dealing with *hyangyak* also were influenced by this. Han Sanggwŏn, "16-17 segi hyangyak kigu wa sŏnggyŏk," *Chindan hakpo* 58 (1984) is an example.

<sup>240</sup> Yi T'aejin, "Sarimp'a ūi yuhyangso pongnip undong (ha)," 32-33.

However, there are several controversial issues in the aforementioned arguments. First of all, what does *p'umgwan* status mean? Emphasizing the *p'umgwan*'s autonomous power, some studies insist that although *p'umgwan* had only nominal posts, their office ranks (*kwanp'um*) were often higher than those of local magistrates and thus, *p'umgwan* could openly contradict magistrates and reject their orders.<sup>241</sup> However, unlike this argument, there are many records which show that *p'umgwan* were subject to local magistrates' authority and should follow the magistrates' requests. As an example, during a court debate about the local politics, Hō Cho argues as follows:

Even if *p'umgwan*, *li* [rural petty officials] and commoners accuse local magistrates, and the magistrates are truly guilty, the magistrates, who are higher than the accusers, should not be punished if they did not commit serious crimes causing a national crisis or they did not illegally kill people. If the accusation is false, the accusers who are lower than the magistrates should be more harshly punished.<sup>242</sup>

In above record, *p'umgwan* are regarded as the ones who should be subject to government officials' political authority like rural petty officials or commoners. Given this, the insistence that all *p'umgwan* are *sajok* seems unreliable. There is another record, though written in a later period, which even more clearly differentiates *p'umgwan* from *sajok*. In his explanation, Yi Munjae 李文載 (1615~1689), who was a member of a prominent lineage in Namwŏn, explains *p'umgwan* as follows,

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<sup>241</sup> Yi T'aejin, "Sarimp'a ūi yuhyangso pongnip undong (sang)," 23-24.

<sup>242</sup> *Sejong sillok* (9. 2. 9. Muin).



Though our Namwŏn is a large district as much as one hundred *li*, the number of *sajok* is extremely small compared to that of *p'umgwan* households which number five hundred. Therefore, in this place, scholars' teachings are limited and public virtue cannot be supported.<sup>243</sup>

According to Yi, during the Chosŏn period *p'umgwan* were regarded not as *sajok* but as those who threatened the public virtue the *sajok* supported. Yi's insistence that *p'umgwan* were different from *sajok* can be supported by many records in the *Sillok* which show that the term *p'umgwan* was in many cases used instead of *chwasu* or *pyŏlgam* who should support local magistrates as subordinates.<sup>244</sup> Given this, the insistence that *p'umgwan* were *sajok* and that they could have social power and authority equivalent to or greater than local magistrates dispatched from the center seems unreliable. Needless to say, the insistence that a group of rural people, who obtained their office ranks through *ch'ŏmsŏl chik*, successfully became central government officials also seems farfetched. Therefore, even though there are some records showing *p'umgwan* and *hayngni*'s presumptuous behaviors toward local magistrates, those should be understood simply as their illegal actions during the time when the central government's political influence was not yet fully extended to the entire state, not as evidence of local potential to launch a particular nationwide politico-ideological reform project.

The insistence that so-called medium and small landlords attempted to reorganize the

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<sup>243</sup> Yi Munjae, *Sŏktong yugo* (石洞遺稿), 6: 41.

<sup>244</sup> *T'aejong sillok* (34. 17. 11. Muin), *Sŏnjo sillok* (76. 29. 6. Chŏngmi). I learned this idea from Song Chunho's book. For more details, see Song Chunho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu: Chosŏn sahoe ūi kujo wa sŏngkyŏk mit kŭ pyŏnch'ŏn e kwanhan yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1987), 146-150.

social structure of their localities with the help of Cheng-Zhu learning also need to be reconsidered. Studies making this argument define medium and small landlords as new settlers from other provinces and thus, as very different social constituents from other rural residents. A question arises from this premise: How could this small number of settlers challenge the existing social order in their local areas? How could they successfully deconstruct, without any assistance from the government, existing traditional practices and institutions which, according to these studies, were supported by high officials of the state? Were the radical attempts to abolish traditional local practices, if these really existed, initiated based on an agreement among so-called *sajok* or *sarim* both in the capital and in the provinces?

Regarding this, it should be noted that traditional ideas and practices were very influential in rural areas and had been maintained by local people for a long time. Moreover, not all *sajok* were antagonistic toward traditional institutions and practices, and many *sajok* did not try to radically abolish or deconstruct them. For example, Sŏng Hyŏn 成僣 (1439-1504), a prominent scholar-official in early Chosŏn, wrote the following,

In these days, social customs and culture have become vulgar and shallow except for *hyangdo* which is the only good custom. In villages, people have a social gathering, the number of whose constituents are usually seven, eight or nine and in some cases as many as around one hundred. Every month, village people drink wine together. If one of the village people is bereaved of any of his family, the people helped him; some prepare his mourning dress or a coffin for the deceased; some prepare flambeaus and food; some help to carry the bier or to build a tomb. All village people wear *sima*.<sup>245</sup> This is a very good

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<sup>245</sup> The lowest level of mourning dress among five different levels of mourning dress.

custom.<sup>246</sup>

As shown in Sǒng's attitude toward local tradition, even influential *sajok* accepted and often supported non-Confucian rituals and practices because they fully understood these traditions' strong influence on local societies which could not be easily overturned.<sup>247</sup> Given this, it seems unpersuasive that small numbers of settlers in rural places armed with Neo-Confucian philosophy, which was rather alien to the locals, could effectively deconstruct influential existing traditions maintained by the majority of local residents, and even supported by high officials of the central government.<sup>248</sup> Put simply, general understandings and explanations of local societies in early Chosǒn that assert that a group of the new settlers who became *p'umgwan* through *ch'ōmsōl chik* developed into *sajok* and could entirely control their areas, and that their cultural assets could not only overwhelm traditional culture in local societies but also change the practices and thoughts of the entire state need to be reconsidered.

This is not to argue that local areas did not have any potential for social change and it is not to deny local *sajok*'s influence in rural areas. It also should be noted that many *yangban*

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<sup>246</sup> Sǒng Hyǒn, *Yongjae ch'onghwa* (慵齋叢話), 8: Changüi (葬儀).

<sup>247</sup> Regarding this, see Hǒ Mok 許穆 (1595-1682), *Kiǒn* (記言), 37: *ch'irisayubunomun* (置里社諭父老文). Hǒ shows his favor to non-Confucian sacrifices performed in local societies.

<sup>248</sup> In his "Sarimp'a üi yuhyangso pongnip undong (ha)," Yi T'aejin insists that capital-based large landlords wanted to maintain the pre-existing social system and thus, they could not easily forsake traditional non-Confucian rituals and practices. This argument is logically contradictory with Yi's other argument that a small number of medium and small landlords who had recently moved to local areas tried to totally and radically overturn existing local traditions. For this, one needs to refer to the fact that in the premodern era, even when a state's official ideology was constructed, popular beliefs and religions were in many cases referred to and used. Regarding this, see Romeyn Taylor, "Official and Popular Religion and the Political Organization of Chinese Society in the Ming," in *Orthodoxy in late imperial China*, ed Kwang-Ching Liu. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

residents in rural areas were new settlers<sup>249</sup> from other places and thus, they might have conflicts with preexisting social groups, as existing studies have already pointed out. But these facts do not necessarily support the insistence that the local *sajok* had autonomous power to control their societies both politically and culturally and could transform not only some rural areas but also the entire state without, or sometimes even refusing, the government's intervention. Therefore, it should be reconsidered whether the socio-cultural transformation of early Chosŏn was possible without the state's active engagement.

As mentioned above, local areas in early Chosŏn were controlled by traditional thoughts and practices which had existed for a long time and were supported by most rural residents. Unlike some existing studies' insurances, however, there is no clear evidence proving that local societies had enough people who had the ability and power to overturn the existing social order and system in the rural areas. Given this, it seems more reasonable to assert that the socio-cultural transformation during the early Chosŏn period came about through the state's active political intervention in the lives of local people, not by local people's socio-cultural and socio-political autonomy. Put differently, it is probable that the socio-cultural transformation in various local places in early Chosŏn resulted from the government's efforts at state-building. If so, various debates among government officials on local politics should be understood not simply as power struggles between *sarim* and *hun'gu* but as the government's efforts to bring various people into state-initiated thought and practices.

Based on these understandings, if there existed any attempt made by the elites in the political center to actively interact with residents in rural areas and to engage in their lives and social practices, the effort should be carefully examined to learn how it influenced the

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<sup>249</sup> Regarding this, see also Song Chun-ho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu: Chosŏn sahoe ūi kujo wa sŏngkyŏk mit kŭ pyŏnch'ŏn e kwanhan yŏn'gu*, Chungp'an (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1987).

relations between the center and the periphery, and what historical impact it had upon traditional Korean society. In the following parts, I will describe what socio-political and socio-cultural moves the elites in the political center made to construct the society they envisioned, which, I believe, might be helpful to learn how the collectivity among different social constituents of Chosŏn were constructed with the development of the state. But the non-elite of the state will not be explained merely as recipients of the elite's ideological or behavioral guidance. Rather, I will argue that without the reactions of non-elite groups based on their own understandings and reinterpretations of the elite's socio-political vision and activities, the emergence of a collective identity shared by all people of the state regardless of their social status might be impossible.

### **Social integration and *hyangyak***

#### **a) The establishment of *hyangyak* in the reign of King Chungjong**

The Chosŏn state began to have much interest in *hyangyak* when Kim An'guk, the civil governor (*kwanch'alsa*) of Kyŏngsang Province, translated the *Lü Family Community Compact* (*Lü shi xiangyue*, 呂氏鄉約) into the Korean vernacular and distributed it in the area where he resided in the twelfth year of the reign of King Chungjong. Given that this time overlaps with when *kimyo sarim*<sup>250</sup> represented by Cho Kwangjo were fully supported by the king and Kim himself was one of the *kimyo sarim*, and that Kim's translation was based on Zhu Xi's revised version of *Lü Compact*, there is no reason to deny that *hyangyak* were established due to the *sarim*'s political intention to instill core values of Cheng-Zhu learning into local societies. Moreover, the fact that the frequency of the discussions on *hyangyak* in the government

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<sup>250</sup> It should be noted that Chosŏn people used the term *sarim* to indicate scholar-officials who were strongly committed to moralistic Neo-Confucianism (Tohak), not a discrete socio-economic group.

remarkably decreased after the purge in the *kimyo* year (*kimyo sahwa*), and that active debates on *hyangyak* were resumed during the reign of King Myōngjong (1545-1567) when the victims of the *kimyo sahwa* were posthumously rehabilitated, prove that the *hyangyak* institution was actualized with the support of the *sarim*. Therefore, the central government's active involvement with the establishment of this institution was often presented as a unique characteristic of Korean community compacts.<sup>251</sup>

However, with the premise that localities where *hyangyak* were practiced were controlled by locally based medium and small landlords and the origins of the *sarim* in the central government, many studies delving into the state's involvement in *hyangyak* focus more on the power struggle among different socio-economic groups in the central government. As mentioned above, however, there is no clear evidence that government officials consisted of different socio-economic groups. Moreover, very low seems the possibility that localities in early Chosŏn had a social structure where so-called medium and small landlords' Confucian thoughts effectively worked as, to borrow Bourdieu's words, "cultural capital" with which the landlords could be the vanguards of social reform not only in their localities but also for the entire state.<sup>252</sup> Given this, there is no reason to deny that court debates on *hyangyak* were an important part of state politics to integrate various subgroups, whose culture was very divergent from the state ideology, into a larger political entity, and not just a power struggle only among a handful of government officials.

In fact, Chosŏn is not the only case where the state attempted to disseminate the

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<sup>251</sup> Yi Kŭnmyōng, "Chu hŭi (Zhu Xi) ŭi chŭngson yŏssi hyangyak kwa Chosŏn sahoe," *Chungguk hakpo* 45 (2002).

<sup>252</sup> Regarding this, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, Cambridge studies in social anthropology; 16 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 171-197.

*hyangyak* institution for the purpose of integrating and controlling people within it. It is true that when Lü Dajun 呂大鈞 (1031-1082) drafted his community compact, his main concern was the well-being of a local community,<sup>253</sup> and he relied on “local initiative in settling matters of communal life,” trying to “keep central government agencies at a distance.”<sup>254</sup> However, as shown in the fact that many governments of Chinese dynasties also had had interests in institutionalizing practices of *hyangyak* whenever they had problems of controlling their various social constituents, governments in history had been actively engaged in instituting *hyangyak*. For example, the institutionalization of the *hyangyak* (Chi. *xiangyue*) of Ming China was initiated by the government in attempting to bring male commoners “within the orbit of imperial indoctrination”<sup>255</sup> after the Hongwu emperor’s village administration system (*lijia*) lost its efficiency.<sup>256</sup> During the Qing dynasty, especially after the second year of the reign of Emperor Yongzheng (1722-1735), the Community compact of the Qing, which was used to indoctrinate common folk with Confucian virtues, operated under government direction.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Monika Übelhör, “Some Ways of Instilling Confucian Values at the Village Level,” in *Norms and the state in China*, eds. Chun-Chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), 31.

<sup>254</sup> Monika Übelhör, “The Community Compact (*Hsiang-yüeh*) of the Sung and Its Educational Significance,” in *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, eds. Wm. Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 380.

<sup>255</sup> Joseph P. McDermott, “Emperor, élites, and commoners: the community pact ritual of the late Ming,” in *State and court ritual in China*, ed. Joseph P. McDermott. (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 306.

<sup>256</sup> The Hongwu emperor’s vision of village life was the settled and isolated village, self-sufficient in its economy and self-sustaining in its ecology. But with the socio-economic development of the Ming, his *lijia* model came to lose its functional efficiency. Regarding this, see Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 1999). Also, see Song Chöngsu, *Chungguk künse hyangch’on sahoesa yöngu* (Seoul: Hyeon, 1997).

<sup>257</sup> Victor Mair, “Languages and Technology in the Written Popularization of the Sacred Edict,” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, eds. David G. Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 325-359.

That is, community compacts of the Qing were a medium for the distribution of government-supported ideas which were clearly shown in *Shengyu guangxun* (Amplified instructions on the Sacred Edict, 聖諭廣訓).<sup>258</sup>

As shown in the examples above, it is very natural that government officials of Chosŏn had discussions on *hyangyak* for state administration. There is no need to link their interests and intervention in the operation of *hyangyak* simply to a power struggle among different socio-economic groups. Rather, given that the elite of Chosŏn believed that the best way to construct a harmoniously ordered society was applying Confucian principles to people's behavior in everyday life, it seems natural that the officials regarded *hyangyak* which prescribed proper ways of social behavior as a part of the state's body politic. Because of this importance, although *hyangyak* was part of local rituals, discussions about *hyangyak* in the reign of King Chungjong were made together with debates on seemingly more significant state rituals, such as rites at *T'aeilchon*, *Sogyŏksŏ*,<sup>259</sup> and the sacrifice for the forcefully abdicated previous King Nosan (King Tanjong (1452-1455)),<sup>260</sup> which were directly related to the king's political authority. It is also highly possible that some officials had the belief that *hyangyak* was very effective for state administration to control localities. In this context, Cho Kwangjo told the king that in localities where *hyangyak* institution was established, social conflicts were rare and

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<sup>258</sup> Song Chŏngsu, *Chungguk kŭnse hyangch'on sahoesa yŏngu*, 350-351.

<sup>259</sup> *T'aeilchŏn* is the shrine where sacrifices to the stars were performed. *Sogyŏksŏ* is the shrine where Chosŏn kings sacrificed to the sun, the moon, and the stars. Although the rituals performed in both places were Daoist rites, these rituals traditionally symbolized Chosŏn kings' political power and authority. Regarding this, see Chŏng Tuhŭi, *Cho Kwangjo: silch'ŏnjŏk chisigin ūi sam, isang kwa hyŏnsil sai esŏ* (Seoul: Ak'anet, 2000), 151-174.

<sup>260</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (33. 13. 6. Kabin), *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 9. Imin), *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 7. Chŏngsa).



tax collection operated smoothly.<sup>261</sup>

However, the institutionalization of *hyangyak* in various localities was not an easy project and it was always accompanied by the government's strong and effective administrative actions. Even Cho Kwangjo, who actively insisted that *hyangyak* rituals should be performed throughout the entire state, admitted that the establishment of *hyangyak* in localities was difficult, arguing as follows,

Nowadays, unlike its original plan, *hyangyak* were hastily institutionalized. It is against the kings' way. This problem is generally caused by local magistrates' forceful attempts to establish *hyangyak*. Because the same problems were repeated in the capital, I discussed this issue with the heads of five departments. The way of politics should not be hasty and forceful. The best politics is gradually attempting to civilize the people with the kings' virtue.<sup>262</sup>

As shown above, it seems that the localities of Chosŏn did not have the foundation to accept Confucian culture even by the sixteenth century. The records in the *Sillok* show that local magistrates reported that local people laughed at *hyangsarye* (the Village Archery Ritual)<sup>263</sup> and that though local people participated in *hyangyak*, they did not understand its crucial meanings and points.<sup>264</sup> Given this, studies on *hyangyak* should begin with the premise that this institution was a part of the government's painstaking project to include localities within the

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<sup>261</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 9. Imin).

<sup>262</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 10. Kyŏnggo).

<sup>263</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 6. Kyŏnggo).

<sup>264</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 10. Kyŏnggo), *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 1. Kyŏngsul).

state not only by controlling their material resources but also regulating their thoughts and behaviors.

**b) *Hyangyak* and its social influence**

As explained above, conflicting opinions among government officials on *hyangyak* need to be understood not as being caused by socio-economic interests but by different views on state politics. In fact, opponents of *hyangyak* never simply rebuffed their proponents' original intention to integrate the people into the state, disseminating government philosophical and behavioral guidance based on Neo-Confucian thoughts. In the discussions on *hyangyak* with Cho Kwangjo, Chŏng Kwangp'il pointed out the inherent problems of this institution arguing as follows,

*Hyangyak* is a good institution. However, if the participants act incorrectly, this institution will weaken local magistrates' political authority. So, the institutionalization should be made very carefully.<sup>265</sup>

Unlike Cho Kwangjo who believed that *hyangyak* would be helpful to encourage local people to follow the government's guidance, Chŏng Kwangp'il was worried about its negative effect on state politics. In similar contexts, opponents of *hyangyak* argued that before its institutionalization, the potential problems *hyangyak* might cause should be considered carefully. They pointed out that the majority of local people were ignorant and thus, it might be difficult to expect that *hyangyak* would help locals understand correctly the government's

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<sup>265</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 9. Imin).

political intentions and vision. In this regard, they insisted that a hasty institutionalization of *hyangyak* in localities will not only deteriorate the quality of local lives but also cause unnecessary socio-political conflicts in the state.<sup>266</sup> From the opponents' perspective, the state's politics for local societies should rely on the law not on Confucian civilization. As matter of fact, supporters of *hyangyak* shared the recognition of local realities with its opponents. The fact that even King Chungjong, who was at the time an active supporter of *hyangyak*, admitted that the civilizing of local people would take a long time<sup>267</sup> proves that as its opponents anticipated, implementation of *hyangyak* in Chosŏn local societies often brought about results very different from what the elite in the political center envisioned and expected. In this context, the debates on *hyangyak* seem a part of ongoing political debates of the reign of King Chungjong about how to harmonize Confucian idealism and legalist ideas,<sup>268</sup> and were not just a part of strife among officials of differing socio-economic backgrounds.

It is natural, therefore, that the opponents' criticism of *hyangyak* did not lead to the abandonment of attempts to civilize local societies. They still had the duty to teach the people in the state the importance of virtuous behaviors. Therefore, they even had a willingness to support *hyangyak* if it would be used only for mutual assistance among local people to help in covering the heavy costs connected with natural disasters or local events such as burials.<sup>269</sup> What they pointed out is that *hyangyak* practices, especially those implemented under the direction of the *kimyo* group, made the people deviate from the social order set by the

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<sup>266</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 1. Kyesa), *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 1. Kyŏngja).

<sup>267</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 9. Sinhae), *Chungjong sillok* (35. 14. 5. Mujin).

<sup>268</sup> For instance, Nam Kon, who severely criticized *hyangyak*, warned that the practice of *hyangyak* will make local people openly reject state law. See *Chungjong sillok* (34. 14. 5. Imja).

<sup>269</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 11. Kyŏngsul).

government which was requisite to stabilize the state, rather than help them follow the elite's thoughts and become loyal constituents of the state. In this context, they pointed out that *kimyo sarim's hyangyak* policy, neglecting careful considerations on contemporary social situations, had made the boundary of social status blurred<sup>270</sup> and impaired Confucian scholars' social prestige.<sup>271</sup> It seems that advocates for *hyangyak* also agreed that for a better operation of the state, social boundaries among state constituents should be clearly drawn; it may mean that to the Chosŏn elite, the integration of the people does not necessarily mean the elimination of social boundaries, which might impose different senses of identity on different social groups. The fact that after the *kimyo sahwa*, those who are often regarded as the ideological successors of the *kimyo* group attempted to reflect in their *hyangyak* regulations this criticism of *hyangyak* as previously practiced, proves that the elite shared a certain commonality on how to integrate their people without losing their socio-political prestige.

Yi Hwang's "Preamble to the Articles of the Community Compact (*hyangnip yakcho sŏ*)" is an example showing that after the *kimyo sahwa*, initiators of *hyangyak* accepted the criticism of the political opponents of the *kimyo sarim*. This preamble does not even mention the four imperatives of *Lü Compact*<sup>272</sup> and focuses more on constructing clear social boundaries among different social status groups with detailed provisions.<sup>273</sup> It shows that *hyangyak*

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<sup>270</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (42. 16. 9. Imja).

<sup>271</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 3. Kabo).

<sup>272</sup> These are 1) encourage each other to do virtuous deeds and carry out appropriate duties (德業相勸); 2) correct each other's wrongful conduct and failings (過失相規); 3) associate with each other according to rites and customs (禮俗相交); 4) offer each other according to rites and customs (患難相恤).

<sup>273</sup> Yi Hwang, *T'oegye chŏnsŏ*, 42: Sŏ, ki, pal, myogaljimyŏng (序·記·跋·墓碣誌銘), *hyangnip yakcho sŏ* (鄉立約條序). For detailed explanation and an English translation, see Martina Deuchler, "The Practice of Confucianism: Ritual and Order in Chosŏn Dynasty Korea," in *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in*

practices after the *kimyo sahwa* came to have a new tendency which was very different from those of *kimyo sarim*. This difference seems to be made with the elite's mutual agreement that the actualization of the *Lü Compact* in the early part of King Chungjong's reign, which neglected the state's reality, caused some social problems such as the destabilization of established social structures and identities. The new tendency was repeated in later *hyangyak* practices. In his Haeju Compact, Yi I writes,

Participants in the gathering (of *hyagyak*) should have their seats according to the order of their ages. If they are *sööl* or not *sajok*, their seats should be placed separately (from the *sajok* group). For the person who are not *sajok* but had superior learning and virtue, his seats should be placed together (with the *sajok* group) based on his age....If there are prominent officials, their seats should be placed, regardless of their ages, separately from the others.<sup>274</sup>

Put simply, Yi I, like Yi Hwang, tried to make a clear distinction between different social status groups with the belief that it is the way to uphold the order of the state. As Yi Söngmu aptly points out, the excessive emphasis on making distinctions between different social constituents with detailed criteria was one of characteristics of Chosön *hyangyak*.<sup>275</sup>

In this context, when he discussed Chosön *hyangyak*, James Palais focuses more on

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*China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, eds. Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms (Los Angeles, Calif.: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002), and Sakai Tadao, "Yi Yulgok and the Community Compact," in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism*, eds. Wm. Theodore de Bary and JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 324-325.

<sup>274</sup> Yi I, *Yulgok chönsö*, 16:Chapchö (雜著), Haeju Hyangyak (海州鄉約), Yesok sanggyu (禮俗相交).

<sup>275</sup> Yi Söngmu, "Yö ssi hyangyak kwa Chuja chüngson hyangyak," *Chindan hakpo* 71 (1991).

the literati's emphasis on the clear distinction between different social status groups.<sup>276</sup> Arguing that community compacts in Chosŏn "could not have convinced too many peasants that they could obtain justice through the community compact when forced to bow and kowtow to the mighty," he concluded that *hyangyak* was the ruling class's forceful institution to restrict people's private life with their intention of supporting Chosŏn's rigid hierarchical system rather than to accomplish social harmony and justice.<sup>277</sup> It is true that historically, community compacts were used by local leaders to justify their autonomy and power in maintaining local order<sup>278</sup> and through this institution, prominent local lineages could defend their particular interests.<sup>279</sup> Moreover, the community compact in Chosŏn did not have a specific ritual such as the Five Bows and Three Kowtows ritual of the Ming which clearly treated all people, regardless of their social backgrounds, as subjects directly linked to the state and emperor.<sup>280</sup> Therefore, it is highly probable that *yangban* of the Chosŏn dynasty used *hyangyak* for their benefit which may have been separate from the state's wishes, and in fact, there are many records proving that this actually happened. Again, however, regarding local societies and

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<sup>276</sup> James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle, Wash: University of Washington Press, 1996), 716-734.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 734.

<sup>278</sup> Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 72.

<sup>279</sup> Martina Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors' Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2015), 403.

<sup>280</sup> After repeated discussions, King Sŏnjo concluded that his government would not directly engage in the implementation of *hyangyak*. (*Sŏnjo sillok* (7. 6. 8. Kapcha)). After the decision, Chosŏn's community compacts were initiated and implemented by individual Confucian literati. Without the government's specific ritual instruction or forceful legal regulation, community compacts in various places of the state did not have a unitary form. For details on the Ming *xiangyue*, see Joseph P. McDermott, "Emperor, élites, and commoners: the community pact ritual of the late Ming," in *State and Court Ritual in China*, 310-311.

*hyangyak*, the state's roles should not be undervalued by excessive emphasis on local literati autonomy. In fact, without local magistrates' help, some regulations of *hyangyak* could not be maintained and thus, when they drafted *hyangyak*, the initiators clearly mentioned the need for officials' help. Therefore, even if local literati sought private benefits through *hyangyak*, these attempts would have been limited by the state's political plan. Moreover, because many *hyangyak* initiators in Chosŏn were incumbent or former government officials or were connected to capital-based power groups, they did not neglect to reflect in their *hyangyak* the state's interest in integrating various groups of social constituents as the people of the state.

Moreover, as found in the elite's concerns about non-elite groups' social behaviors, it seems that the elite of the state could not control the effects of the implementation of *hyangyak*. Rather, various groups of local people seem to have actively attempted to negotiate their social statuses and rights vis-a-vis the state relying on the knowledge and information they became familiar with through the elite's moral and philosophical guidance, such as *hyangyak*. Therefore, unlike the positive evaluations of the supporters of *hyangyak* who insisted that it helped even ignorant people tell right from wrong,<sup>281</sup> critics of *hyangyak* argued that because of this practice, they came to confront a world where the lowborn and slaves obtained the power to execute punishment and socio-culturally inferior local strongmen presumptuously attempted to judge right and wrong.<sup>282</sup>

Interestingly, despite their different attitudes towards *hyangyak*, both supporters and opponents of its implementation commonly admitted that, at the time, various social groups of Chosŏn were influenced by *hyangyak* and attempted to actualize what they learned from this

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<sup>281</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (33. 13. 6. Chŏnghae).

<sup>282</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 1. Musin).

practice. As shown in the opponents' criticism of this practice and following the agreement of later *hyangyak* initiators, however, various groups' reactions to the implementation of this local practice were not always consistent with what the elite initially expected because the respondents might want to reinterpret the values they learned from the state's guidance based on their own interests and needs.<sup>283</sup> This inconsistency might cause serious discussions on *hyangyak* among government officials because depending on one's personal viewpoint it could either be understood as advancing local civilization or disrupting the local social order. But, the historically significant point here is that with the state's local policies, which were initiated mainly to encourage the non-elite in locals share the elite's thoughts and beliefs and follow their moral and practical guidance, facilitated the locals' unexpected collective activities about which government officials discussed their response.

Then, how was it possible that when the elite made efforts to instill their core ideas to people in the state with a desire to draw clear social boundaries among the state constituents, the non-elite attempted to reinterpret and appropriate the very ideas for their own benefit? It could be possible because the elite might have a much larger political plan than merely seeking their own benefit with an emphasis on their higher social status; the plan to integrate people in the state and share a sense of collectivity with them. I am not arguing that some of the Chosŏn elite decided to share their ways of thinking and behavior with various social groups due to their egalitarian ideas; in fact, as shown above, no one of the elite wanted social boundaries to be blurred. Rather what I point out here is that the elite's desire to keep their socio-political

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<sup>283</sup> Deuchler aptly points out that "the subordinated classes' compliance with dominant-class values" was a "struggle for symbols" rather than a "passive submission." See, Martina Deuchler, "The Practice of Confucianism: Ritual and Order in Chosŏn Dynasty Korea," in *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, eds. Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms (Los Angeles, Calif.: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002), 332. Also, for the opinions of the opponents of *hyangyak* implementation, see *Chungjong sillok* (38. 15. 1. Kyesa).



prestige did not always hinder the development of a sense of collectivity among the people in the state.

It seems that rather than restricting people's behavior simply to maintain existing social statuses, the Chosŏn elite encouraged people to identify themselves as significant social constituents of the state with an understanding of important social values that the elite and non-elite should both respect. In the following part, I will show that the Chosŏn elite's attempt to draw clear social boundaries among the people was just a part of the various ways they attempted to maintain social order. Put differently, this was one of their ways of state-building. Subsequently, I will also argue that the elite did not hold different expectations of people's behavior based on their social statuses if the behavior was directly related to some universally significant social values, which might be helpful to integrate various groups of people and to develop a sense of collectivity among them.

### ***Kyŏngminp'yŏn***

#### **a) Bibliographic significance**

As briefly discussed above, one of the main conflicts among the elite in the central government during the reign of King Chungjong was about how to consolidate different social groups into a larger single entity, the state. Some of the elite presented the education of the people through ritual performances and text distribution as the best way for social integration. They, represented by the *kimyo* group, believed that once the entirety of the people in the state understood the core social values the elite supported, the state would be systemized and stabilized; *hyangyak* was implemented by this belief. Others, with their distrust of the intelligence and disposition of non-elite provincials, argued that the state should interfere in their lives with legal regulations. Although each group's point of emphasis was different from

the other's, both, to a certain degree, agreed with each other's opinion. Moreover, as local policies and rituals in later periods show with repeated discussions (which were often simplified as evidence of political struggles according to conventional historical views), Chosŏn officials had continuously extended the degree of the agreement; so, both the elite's emphasis on the need to educate all people in the state and their effort not to lose their socio-political prestige were repeated and maintained.

For a better understanding of Chosŏn officials' complicated attitudes toward their people and whether their politics and policies somehow contributed to an effective consolidation of the state's constituents, *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* is worth careful examination for several reasons. First of all, it was written by Kim Chŏngguk 金正國 (1485-1541), a younger brother of Kim An'guk, when he was governor (*kamsa*) of Hwanghae province. Unlike the *Lü Family Community Compact* his brother translated into the Korean vernacular and distributed, which focused more on encouraging virtuous lives and ideal human relationships, his *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* clearly reveals his belief that in order to rule local society effectively, penal punishments should be accompanied by education in the human virtues. Considering Kim's family background and political career, his reliance on penal regulations suggests the possibility that *hyangyak* supporters in his period might not deny the efficiency and necessity of legal regulations for their politics.<sup>284</sup> Therefore, a careful examination of this book is helpful to learn more details about what stance the *kimyo* group took on the issue of the integration of the people outside of the political center, for which, they agreed, both education and legal regulations were

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<sup>284</sup> Even though sometimes it was said that both Kim An'guk and Kim Chŏngguk were not prime members of the *kimyo* group (*Chungjong sillok* (87. 33. 4. Sinhae)), in many records, they were regarded as important members of the group. Moreover, Kim Chŏngguk himself expressed his sense of camaraderie with the group in his *kimyo tangjŏk* contained in *Sajae chip* (思齋集).

necessary.

Secondly, it should be noted that the significance of this book was continuously discussed during late Chosŏn period. Because this book was produced in the *kimyo* year when the *kimyo sahwa* happened and Kim Chŏngguk himself was also impeached with others in the *kimyo* group, it presumably was not widely circulated, referred to and used.<sup>285</sup> However, since Hŏ Yŏp 許擘 (1517-1580) republished this book when he served as the civil governor of Kyŏngsang Province,<sup>286</sup> many prominent officials and scholars had requested that the state should republish this book to help educate the people in the state and civilize their customs.<sup>287</sup> Among them, Song Inmyŏng 宋寅明 (1689-1746), the Second State Councillor when he advised King Yŏngjo to use *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* for the education of the people, insisted that this book would be just as helpful to educate the people as Yi I's *hyangyak*.<sup>288</sup> The fact that the elite in late Chosŏn who, as Yi's *hyangyak* proves, came to have a mutual agreement on the importance of legal and penal regulations as well as moral education, emphasized the value of this book for their politics proves that *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* has a certain consistency with the

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<sup>285</sup> Regarded as one of the colleagues of Cho Kwangjo, Kim Chŏngguk was also a target of impeachment. However, King Chungjong and other officials showed a favorable attitude toward him at the beginning of the purge and he avoided being severely punished, as Cho Kwangjo and Kim Chŏng were (*Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 12. Ŭryu)). But, with others' suspicion of his relationship to Cho and Kim, he had continuously been a target of later impeachments for a considerable length of time (*Chungjong sillok* (43. 16. 10. Ŭlmi), *Chungjong sillok* (43. 16. 10. Sinch'uk)).

<sup>286</sup> *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* (Tongkyŏng kyoyuk taehak pon (東京教育大學本)): Chunggan kyŏngminp'yŏn sŏ (重刊警民編序).

<sup>287</sup> *Hyojong sillok* (17. 7. 7. Kapsul), *Hyojong sillok* (20. 9. 12. Chŏnghae), *Sukjong sillok* (12. 7. 7. Imsin), *Sukjong sillok* (45. 33. 11. Sinmi), *Yŏngjo sillok* (61. 21. 1. Kabo). For more detailed history, see Kim Chŏngguk, *Kyŏngminp'yŏn –kyohwawa hyŏngpŏrŭi iujunguro ponŭn Chosŏn sahoe–*, trans. and ed. Chŏng Hohun (Seoul: Ak'anet, 2012), 15-25.

<sup>288</sup> *Yŏngjo sillok* (61. 21. 1. Kabo).

political principles and vision the Chosŏn elite had carried out for a long time. Therefore, to learn how effective state politics were to control the lives of the general public and what changes were effected by the policies of the center, *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* is worthy to be carefully examined.

**b) The rule of differentiation, the principle of equalization**

Kim Chŏngguk's *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* can be differentiated from other contemporary moral guidebooks and behavioral manuals such as the *Lü Family Community Compact* that his brother, Kim An'guk, translated in that it has very detailed penal regulations. Its preface, however, shows that Kim's inclusion of those regulations in this book does not mean that he preferred to forcefully regulate people's behaviors for a better state politics due to his distrust of the general public's morality and intelligence. Kim begins his preface as follows,

Penal law was initially made by benevolent kings who loved their people. If statesmen only discuss how to administer the law and punish people without any efforts to lead people to lives of virtue, is not their politics the same as deceiving their people?<sup>289</sup>

Kim, although he included detailed penal regulations, presumably according to his belief in their effectiveness, did not prefer legal regulation to moral education. As revealed in his preface and even from the composition of the book, what he preferred for ruling the people is to make them voluntarily try to be virtuous men through moral education; he seems to have included penal regulations as auxiliary ways to help people to attain the purpose of avoiding evil by the fear of punishment.

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<sup>289</sup> *Kyŏngminp'yŏn*: Sŏ.

Moreover, Kim does not share the distrust of the intelligence and morality of commoners and non-elites with those officials who preferred legal regulations for local governance. Rather, saying,

If the future audience regards this work merely as an unrealistic writing and keep living idle lives only wasting provisions and time without any enthusiastic and sincere attempt to educate the people and civilize their customs, this is opposed to what I intended. (Those recorded in this writing are what) we, as those who take care of our people, should always bear in mind.<sup>290</sup>

Kim repeated the *kimyo* group's insistence that even people in remote rural places with vulgar customs could be changed and improved through a nationwide dissemination of the sages' teachings, which was often regarded as too radical and imprudent by others. This proves that although *Kyōngminp'yōn* contains penal regulations which were presumably appealing to the elite in a later period, both Kim and the elite in late Chosŏn who wanted to republish this book never relinquished their belief that in order to stabilize their state and restore the ideal politics of the Three Dynasties, they should make efforts to help the entire people in Chosŏn share a certain degree of understanding of the important social values they had regarded as significant and crucial for the state and society. Despite different degrees of emphasis, almost all of the Chosŏn elite, including the critics of the *kimyo* group, agreed with this.

But, even if the Chosŏn elite shared a belief that a desirable social transformation could be accomplished by people's education, what degree of moral and behavioral change did the elite expect or want the non-elites to achieve? As explained before, the elite never had any

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

willingness to forsake their prestigious social status regardless of the degrees of their trust in non-elite groups' moral or intellectual potential. Punishment of criminals is a representative area where people in the state were treated differently based on their social status. Therefore, the fact that Kim Chǒngguk placed penal regulations in *Kyǒngminp'yǒn*, and the value of the text was emphasized even in later periods, requires more examination of this book to learn what kind of social transformation the general Chosǒn elite wanted to attain and what social changes were really made through these elite efforts.

In *Kyǒngminp'yǒn*, Kim clearly differentiated social constituents based on their social statuses when he described desirable behaviors for humans and necessary punishments for criminals. Above all, its fifth section, headed “slaves and masters (奴主),” directly delineates different rights and duties of slaves and their owners. When he discussed the principle of the relationship between slaves and masters, he only mentioned slaves' duties, insisting that slaves must not disobey their masters' will. Also, the penal regulation part also discusses various levels of punishments exclusively for slaves' crimes committed against their masters.<sup>291</sup> In these two parts, Kim explained that slaves should serve their masters as subjects serve the king and if slaves attempted to hurt their masters, they should be punished as traitors were.<sup>292</sup> This is not the only section taking for granted the existence of social hierarchy. In the sixth section about the relationships in a neighborhood, Kim explained the principle that one should not insult the older or higher. The penal regulation in the section also says that “if the lowly despise or defy

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<sup>291</sup> Each section of *Kyǒngminp'yǒn* is divided into two parts; the part on the principles of a certain human relationship and the part on penal regulation.

<sup>292</sup> *Kyǒngminp'yǒn*: noju (奴主).

the noble, they also should be punished.”<sup>293</sup>

These prove that to a certain degree, Kim Chǒngguk, and probably the *kimyo* group as well, aside from their belief in the need to integrate various social groups with a unitary social idea, had a desire to distinguish themselves from other social constituents. However, it should also be noted that Kim’s differentiation of the social constituents of Chosǒn based on their social statuses was only limited to these two sections out of thirteen. Of course, there are attempts to make hierarchies among people based on different genders<sup>294</sup> and residential regions,<sup>295</sup> but not based on their social statuses. Simply put, barring some exceptions, for most cases of human relationships, *Kyǒngminp’yǒn* applied the same principle and rule to all people regardless of their social statuses.

In this context, it might be hasty to conclude that the Chosǒn elite’s efforts to share their beliefs and ideas with other, non-elite people were caused only by their desire to make their superior social position secure, a goal which they had many other useful methods to attain. Rather, given the fact that this book mainly delivers ethical precepts that should be universally obeyed and most of its penal regulations are applied equally to all people regardless of their

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<sup>293</sup> *Kyǒngminp’yǒn*: illi (隣里).

<sup>294</sup> In the penal regulation part in the section on sexual crimes, women who commit adultery are subjected to more severe punishment than men who commit the same crime. But it cannot simply be said that regarding sexual crimes, women were always discriminated against by men. The next regulation gives women more protection from sexual crimes stipulating that even if it was made by a mutual agreement, if a male had sex with a female minor under the age of twelve, he should be hanged. Also, the last regulation clearly mentions that except in the cases of rape, both men and women should be punished to the same degree for sexual crimes such as adultery. (*Kyǒngminp’yǒn*: pǒmgan (犯奸)). The section clearly showing different degrees of punishments based on gender is the one about the relationship between husbands and wives. But these differentiated punishments have nothing to do with social statuses (*Kyǒngminp’yǒn*: pubu (夫婦)).

<sup>295</sup> In the section about the hoarding of grains, Kim showed his discriminatory attitude toward people in the northern provinces, criticizing them for acting without forethought in farming (*Kyǒngminp’yǒn*: chǒjǒk (儲積)).

status, it seems more reasonable to conclude that what the general Chosŏn elite represented by Kim focused more on was to consolidate various social groups under a core idea and within a larger community sharing a sense of the same group membership.

The first section of *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* dealing with filial piety, which was regarded as the most significant social value, reveals more about the elite's interests when they published and tried to use this text. Explaining this important human virtue, it says, "if one tends to his parents with filial piety and obeys them without any defiance, local society should praise his virtue and the state should praise and reward him."<sup>296</sup> It shows that moral behaviors on a personal level were an important matter that should be addressed on a national level; the elite had the people learn that regardless of the differences in their social statuses, they had common duties and rights as the state's constituents, which might be helpful to encourage the people in the state to share a sense of belonging to the same group.

The section about neighborhoods, some parts of which have the elite's discriminatory attitudes as mentioned above, also clearly shows that Kim had a great interest in consolidating the people in certain community rather than emphasizing different statuses among various social groups. For example, it equates the relationship between neighbors with that of relatives. Therefore, focusing naturally on how neighbors could maintain harmonious lives, it insists that neighbors should help each other and that the ones who have more power should not harm the relatively weak.<sup>297</sup> In this context, it cannot simply be said that Kim placed discriminatory penal regulations in this section only to guarantee the hierarchically higher group's social prestige. Rather, given that he included warnings against the unruly conduct of both the higher and lower,

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<sup>296</sup> *Kyŏngminp'yŏn*: pumo (父母).

<sup>297</sup> *Kyŏngminp'yŏn*: illi (隣里).



Kim's demarcation of social boundaries among the people can be understood as one of the ways he attempted to integrate them as constituents of the same community and attempted to avoid any potential conflicts between different social groups (whether or not this way seems reasonable from a present day perspective).

The *Lii Family Community Compact*, which Kim An'guk translated and taught and many of the *kimyo* group attempted to disseminate widely, supports this conjecture. In this book, what is requested of the leaders of local society, who needed to make their community well organized on the foundation of ideal human relationships, is high virtue not high status.<sup>298</sup> Surely, this book was written based on the premise that people could be treated differently based on their social statuses.<sup>299</sup> However, discrimination based on ascribed social status is rarely shown. Most cases of differentiation were based on acquired status such as government office positions<sup>300</sup> which could be obtained by passing the civil service examination, but even these kind of regulations comprised a minor portion of the book and they are not in the main text but added to it in a smaller font. This proves that these discriminatory regulations were included only as auxiliary ways to help certain constituents of society maintain harmonious lives. It can be confirmed again, therefore, that the main goal of King An'guk and the *kimyo* group when they insisted on institutionalizing *hyangyak* was to actualize their political plan to educate the people and induce them to obey important ethical norms according to their own understanding which would help them rule the state properly and effectively; for them, differentiating the people in the state based on social status was not their main interest.

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<sup>298</sup> *Yōssi hyangyak ōnhae* (ilsökpon (呂氏鄉約諺解, 一石本), 1-2.

<sup>299</sup> For instance, at a meeting, participants' seats were decided by their social status. *Yōssi hyangyak ōnhae*, 14-15. For Korean vernacular version see *Yōssi hyangyak ōnhae*, 24.

<sup>300</sup> For details, see *Yōssi hyangyak ōnhae*, 24-27 and 41.

In the same context, when *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* discussed some important social values and ideal models of human relationships which should be applied to the entire people of the state, Kim Chŏngguk did not need to and could not put much emphasis on differentiating people based on their social positions. Therefore, as *Yŏssi hyangyak (Lü Family Community Compact)* does, only when dealing with direct social interactions between the *sajok* elite and non-elite does *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* mention the elite's superiority<sup>301</sup> This commonality between *Yŏssi hyangyak* and *Kyŏngminp'yŏn* suggests the possibility that the Chosŏn elite did not seriously concern themselves with applying different behavioral proprieties to the state's constituents based on their social positions. Although the state's National Code (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, 經國大典) attempts to apply different regulations to different statuses of people, the elite did not have much interest in seriously applying the regulatory clauses to real lives to limit individuals' discretionary power for their social behaviors as long as those behaviors did not violate significant social norms.

Put simply, the elite's intention to inscribe a sense of belonging to a larger collectivity in the minds of various social groups was not entirely contradictory to their desire to maintain their superior social position. I am neither arguing that the elite had an egalitarian idea which made them tolerant toward non-elite's arbitrary interpretation of proper social behaviors nor insisting that the non-elite totally agreed with the elite's methods of social integration. Rather, I insist here that in having the chance to "participate in a particular conception of the world" that the elite made through moral and behavioral guidebooks and ritual performances, various

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<sup>301</sup> Of course, it is possible that Kim described the penal regulations because he was afraid that the elite's prestige would be impaired by the challenges of the non-elite. However, the fact that Kim put his emphasis on the elite's superiority only in the parts regarding social interactions between the elite and non-elite suggests that the differentiation was placed only to help the much broader purpose of his writing and that he might regard the differentiation of social statuses as a proper way to maintain social order like the differentiation based on ages.

social groups carried on their own intellectual activities which modified the social concepts the elite had constructed.<sup>302</sup> A shared sense of collectivity among the constituent people in a certain society is not simply dictated by a small number of leading groups who initiate socio-political projects. It only can be shared by the entirety of the social constituents when they come to cognitively acknowledge their collectivity. Differently put, if the same group membership existed among Chosŏn people, it was not simply given by the elite group but constructed by various people's intellectual activities. The next section will explore how the elite and non-elite interacted in the conception of the world and what resulted from their interactions.

### **Social interaction and the construction of the collectivity**

As shown before, Chosŏn officials made various efforts to disseminate Neo-Confucian thoughts and teach the proper ways of social behavior, even to people in remote rural areas, through the distribution of texts and the institutionalization of diverse levels of rituals. It seems that their decision to acculturate local society was not merely a superficial proclamation nor simply political rhetoric. Many records in the *Sillok* show that Chosŏn kings and officials continuously checked to see whether their local policies succeeded in civilizing local people and consequently whether they understood ritual propriety and changed their social behaviors. This proves that when they launched their local policies to educate local people in diverse ways, government officials expected specific results, particularly that the entirety of Chosŏn people, regardless of their origins and status, should share some consistency in their social practices which reflected their understandings of significant social values. It is natural, therefore, that Chosŏn officials actively engaged in local policies to harmonize the people's practices with the

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<sup>302</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans., Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 5-14.

government's moral guidance and ritual manuals. To show how the state would treat people who sincerely observed Confucian moral standards, the state in various ways rewarded people worthy of high praise due to their moral activities. For the people who could be regarded as exemplars of Confucian behaviors, the government constructed monuments in their village, reduced their tax burden or honored them with various presents.<sup>303</sup>

Regarding this, Pak Chu in her study brings up several noteworthy points. First of all, in the *Sillok*, although the relatively many filial sons and daughters who were officially celebrated by the state are shown in *Sejong sillok* and *Tanjong sillok*, the largest number of the rewarded filial sons and daughters were recorded in *Chungjong sillok*.<sup>304</sup> The records in *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsilto* (*New Continued Illustrated Exemplars of the Three Bonds in Korea*, 東國新續三綱行實圖) dealing with the Confucian ideals of the state also show that the number of filial sons and daughters began to explosively increase during the reign of King Chungjong.<sup>305</sup> Put simply, both *Sillok* and *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsilto* commonly show that compared to early Chosŏn, a much larger number of men of Confucian virtue were reported to the state and rewarded and celebrated from the early sixteenth century on. Secondly, before the sixteenth century, most of the awarded filial sons and daughters and chaste women recorded

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<sup>303</sup> Representative studies tackling this issue are as follows, Nishikawa Takao (西川孝雄), "Richō seihyōsha yaku menjo no ichikenkyū –tokuni kōshi, retsujo no fukuko o chūshin ni– (李朝旌表者役免除の一研究 –特に孝子,烈女の復戸を中心に–)," *Nogoya daigaku touyoushi kenkyū hōkoku* 4 (1976), Hiraki Makoto(平木實), "Chōsenouchō shoki no seihyō kyōka seisaku nitsuite (朝鮮王朝初期の旌表教化政策 について)," *Chōsen gaku* 81(1976), Pak Chu, *Chosŏn sidae ūi chōngp'yo chōngch'aek* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1990).

<sup>304</sup> Pak Chu, *Chosŏn sidae ūi chōngp'yo chōngch'aek* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1990), 16.

<sup>305</sup> Pak, 19.

in the *Sillok* were *sajok*, the ruling elite.<sup>306</sup> At the time, only a small portion of non-*sajok* were reported to the government for their virtuous behaviors. But from sixteenth century on, there was a remarkable increase in the number of commoners and lowborn celebrated by the state (and recorded in the *Sillok*) as Confucian moral exemplars.<sup>307</sup> Based on these findings, Pak concludes that Confucian ethics came to be a communal value of Chosŏn society shared even by commoners and the lowborn.<sup>308</sup>

As Pak aptly points out, many records in texts published by the state's elite such as the *Sillok* suggest at a high probability that with the passage of time, Chosŏn elite's efforts to share their belief in proper thought and practices with all social constituents of the state succeeded to draw active responses from the people outside of the political center. The *Sillok* shows that various moral behaviors of commoners and the lowborn were reported to government and the government rewarded them during the reign of King Chungjong. However, it should be noted that not all virtuous human behaviors which deserve public praise from the perspective of Confucians are the embodiment of Confucian ideas and fit well with the notion of ritual propriety that Confucianism emphasizes. It is highly possible that some sacrificial behaviors especially for family members are emotional and instinctive rather than Confucian. In this context, the Chosŏn elite often pointed out that even though cutting fingers and using them as cures for ill family members are laudable behaviors which should be rewarded by the state,

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<sup>306</sup> Pak, 62. According to Pak, non-*sajok* filial sons and daughters and chaste women take up only 12% of the total awardees in *Sillok* records before the sixteenth century.

<sup>307</sup> Pak, 137.

<sup>308</sup> Pak, 234.

those behaviors are not proper but extreme conduct.<sup>309</sup> It was also indicated that such impulsive actions are not as significant as constant expressions and behaviors of filial piety.<sup>310</sup>

Given this, any hasty attempt to conclude that all virtuous behaviors of non-elites were the result of the government politics based on Confucianism should be avoided. Rather, for an analysis of how the non-elites of the Chosŏn responded to the state's politics to encompass them and control their thought and behavior, it should be more carefully explored whether there is any specific change in their social behaviors which could not happen without referring to the state's moral and behavioral guidance. Particularly, if many of the non-elites made efforts to maintain the newly patterned behaviors even at the cost of their material well-being, those behaviors deserve careful examination in terms of the interactions between a state and its people. Regarding this, what should be noted is the increased number of reports about non-elite's observance of a three year mourning period from the sixteenth century on, at which time the elite in the political center attempted to have all the people and regions in the state under their control through Neo-Confucian philosophy and practices.

In the twelfth year of King Chungjong's reign, Kim An'guk, the civil governor of Kyŏngsang Province, reported to the government that a salt producer in Kŏje island spent three years at his mother's grave site after her death.<sup>311</sup> In the thirteenth year of the king's reign, Yi Chahwa 李自華 (?-1520), a civil governor of Kyŏnggi Province reported that a daughter of a sailor in the navy observed a three year mourning period for her dead husband.<sup>312</sup> In the same

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<sup>309</sup> *Sejong sillok* (58. 14. 11. Kyemi), *Sejong sillok* (94. 23. 10. Ŭryu).

<sup>310</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (62. 23. 8. Kyŏngsin).

<sup>311</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (30. 12. 10. Musin).

<sup>312</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (32. 13. 3. Chŏngsa).

year, Han Sehwan 韓世桓 (1470-1522), a civil governor of Kyōngsang Province, reported that many people in his province spent three years mourning their dead husbands and parents.<sup>313</sup> Based on the occupations and names of the people mentioned above, it seems that they were probably not in the ruling elite group and were not duty-bound to spend three years mourning the dead, either legally and culturally. Moreover, in the legal code of the Chosŏn dynasty, three years of mourning was not allowed to commoners and the lowborn.<sup>314</sup> Nonetheless, records show that the number of commoners and lowborn who wanted to observe three years of mourning increased.

However, the fact that this change happened most notably from when the *kimyo* group led the government might make the records' authenticity debatable. As mentioned earlier, from the beginning, Chungjong's regime had valued Confucian ethics. In this context, the *kimyo* group emphasized the urgency of effectively distributing Confucian ideas and practices to the people of different statuses in various regions. Therefore, if any local officials were related to the *kimyo* group or supported their political vision, it is possible that the officials' reports regarding non-elite's observance of three years of mourning resulted from their desires to prove the efficiency of policies led by the *kimyo* group. Put differently, it should be carefully examined whether the increased number of the reports of non-elite observing a three year mourning period merely reflects the desire of a certain political group to justify and praise their own political activities. In this regard, it is worthwhile to explore who reported the non-elite's virtuous behavior and whether the same kind of behavior was consistently reported to and praised by the state even after the heyday of the *kimyo* group.

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<sup>313</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 10. Kapsin).

<sup>314</sup> *Kyōngguk taejōn*, 3: Yejōn (禮典), Obok (五服).

Among the three provincial governors mentioned above, except Kim An'guk who was regarded as a member of the *kimyo* group,<sup>315</sup> there is no evidence that the other two also had close relationships with the group. Although like other officials, he advised King Chungjong to make efforts to uphold ritual propriety based on the Confucian Classics, Yi Chahwa had often been criticized by other officials because he violated the duty of abstinence during his mourning period whose importance was repeatedly emphasized by contemporary officials and scholars including the *kimyo* group.<sup>316</sup> It is natural, therefore, that when he was appointed the second minister of the Board of Rites (*Yejo ch'amp'an*), the censorial offices, many of whose posts were taken by the *kimyo* group at the time, admonished the king that Yi did not deserve a post dealing with significant state affairs regarding ritual propriety.<sup>317</sup> Han Sehwan seems to have had a favorable stance toward the *kimyo* group. He was one of the officials who advocated Cho Kwangjo and his colleagues during the discussions of punishments for the *kimyo* group after the purge.<sup>318</sup> However, given that his political status was never impaired after the political purge, he seems not to have had a deep relationship and frequent interactions with the *kimyo* group. Moreover, when Han was appointed as the civil governor of Kyöngsang Province, Yun Chaim 尹自任 (1488-1519), one of the *kimyo* group, who was executed at the purge, advised the king to appoint a different person pointing out that Han did not have enough ability to civilize a

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<sup>315</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (87. 33. 4. Sinhae). Although Kim's opinions on some political issues were different from those of some leading officials in the *kimyo* group such as Cho Kwangjo, and consequently he avoided execution at the time of the literati purge of the *kimyo* year, many of his political ideas have commonality with those of the *kimyo* group and his political activities also were praised and supported by the group.

<sup>316</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (27. 12. 2. Musin).

<sup>317</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 8. Kimyo), *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 8. Kyemi).

<sup>318</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 11. Pyöngo), *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 12. Üryu).



locality although he was also a valuable asset of the government.<sup>319</sup>

Given these examples, there is no reason to undervalue the authenticity of the reports about non-elite's three years of mourning, or to simply regard the reports as the product of the political manipulation of a certain group. As Yi's and Han's cases show, regardless of their relationship with the *kimyo* group, many local officials agreed about the importance of helping the non-elites understand the value of ritual propriety and reported socio-cultural changes in their regions. It should also be mentioned that both Yi and Han were elders of the *kimyo* group on the political stage and did not necessarily even have to make efforts to gain the group's favor. Particularly in Han's case, even after he was appointed as the civil governor of Kyöngsang Province, it was repeatedly mentioned that his predecessor Kim An'guk contributed to improving Kyöngsang Province's culture with the distribution of *Lü Family Community Compact* translated into the Korean vernacular, and Zhu Xi's *Elementary Learning (Sohak)*;<sup>320</sup> due to his achievement, King Chungjong considered having Kim remain in office after his term was over.<sup>321</sup> Given Kim's reputation as governor of Kyöngsang Province and the relatively short time Han spent in Kyöngsang after his appointment as Kim's successor, it seems unreasonable to insist that Han made the report to attribute the region's socio-cultural improvement only to himself.

On top of this, one of Kim's reports makes the authenticity of local governors' reports more likely suggesting that their reports were made within the operating system of the government, rather than under the influence of a certain political group's own interests and

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<sup>319</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 7. Kyeche'uk).

<sup>320</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (30. 12. 11. Chöngghae), *Chungjong sillok* (32. 13. 4. Kyesa), *Chungjong sillok* (33. 13. 6. Chöngghae).

<sup>321</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (30. 12. 11. Sinsa), *Chungjong sillok* (31. 13. 1. Kabin).

benefits. During the year when Kim reported about some non-elite's practice of three years of mourning, he also reported a patricide in his district, Miryang of Kyöngsang Province.<sup>322</sup> The incident rejected filial piety, the most significant value the state had emphasized, and was regarded as evidence revealing the degeneration of morals in Kim's district. King Chungjong lamented the lack of his own virtue and ordered the interrogation of Kim and the degradation of the status of Miryang from *pu* (district, 府) to *hyŏn* (county, 縣).<sup>323</sup> The fact that Kim reported this serious crime (which was remembered more than twenty years later) to the central government at a time when the most important duty of provincial governors was to elevate morality in their regions,<sup>324</sup> shows that the government system to control local officials functioned well and local officials could not easily deceive the central government by manipulating reports of what happened in their districts.

Examination of the records after the *kimyo* group were purged is also helpful to learn that since the sixteenth century, local governors' reports regarding non-elite's observance of the three year mourning period had been consistently maintained regardless of the officials' political propensities and political situations where they were. There were many records about virtuous behaviors including observance of three years of mourning of the people in local society. Among those, the reports clearly indicating non-elite observance of three years of mourning, which should be examined to learn how the non-elite responded to the elite's attempts to control their lives, were made three local officials, Yun Ŭnp'il 尹殷弼 (?-1535), a civil governor of Kyönggi, Kim Hüiyŏl 金希說 (dates unknown), a regent of Kaesŏng (*Kaesŏng*

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<sup>322</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (31. 12. 12. Kabin).

<sup>323</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (31. 12. 12. Kyönggo), *Chungjong sillok* (31. 12. 12 (leap month). Chöngch'uk).

<sup>324</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (93. 35. 7. Ŭlmi).

*yusu*) and Im Paengnyǒng 林百齡 (1498-1546), a civil governor of Kyǒnggi.

Yun Ŭnp'il reported in the thirtieth year of King Chungjong's reign that a sailor in his district observed a three year mourning period for his dead parents. Impressed with the ignorant person's filial piety, the king ordered to construct a commemorative gate at the entry of his village and exempt his tax duty.<sup>325</sup> Kim Hŭiyŏl sent a report about a state-owned slave who stayed in a hut next to her deceased mother's grave and never went back home by the time the report was made. The king rewarded the slave with the same way as the previous example.<sup>326</sup> In the thirty seventh year of the kings' reign, Im Paengnyǒng presented a report informing that a commoner in his region had lived for three years in a hut next to her deceased father's grave and spent three more years wearing mourning dress to mourn his mother who died so early that he could not observe three years of mourning and asked the king to construct a commemorative gate and exempt his tax duty.<sup>327</sup>

Among these three officials, except Yun Ŭnp'il, the other two did not have the chance to form close relationships with the *kimyo* group. Kim Hŭiyŏl and Im Paengnyǒng became government officials, passing the civil service examinations in the year of the *kimyo*.<sup>328</sup> Given that they began their careers as government officials during the same year the *kimyo* group were purged, it seems hard to imagine that they had a close relationship with the group in the political sphere. Although Im studied under Pak Sang 朴祥 (1474-1530)<sup>329</sup> who shared common ideas

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<sup>325</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (79. 30. 4. Kyǒngja).

<sup>326</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (95. 36. 6. Chǒngmyo).

<sup>327</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (97. 37. 3. Kyǒngin).

<sup>328</sup> *Kukcho munkwa pangmok*: kimyo singnyǒnbang.

<sup>329</sup> *Kukcho inmulchi* 2, Myǒngjongcho. 53.

about morality and political vision with Cho Kwangjo and Kim Chǒng, this does not necessarily mean that Im had supported the *kimyo* group during his entire political career. Especially during the reign of King Myǒngjong, Im showed hostile attitudes toward officials who positively judged the *kimyo* group's past politics and was indicated as one of three representative vicious retainers who plotted another literati purge during the *ũlsa* year (*ũlsa sahwǎ*).<sup>330</sup> Even about Yun Ŭnp'il, who collaborated with the *kimyo* group many times<sup>331</sup> and supported the group when they were on the verge of being punished, some other officials thought that he had some connections with those who presumably initiated the purge based on the fact that Yun was neither punished nor forced to lose his political status during the purge.<sup>332</sup> The fact that when Cho Kwangjo was inspector-general (*taesahǒn*), the Office of the Inspector-General (*Sahǒnbu*) showed their skepticism about Yun's general quality and ability<sup>333</sup> also suggests that there is no need to insist that Yun's agreement on several policies the *kimyo* group initiated resulted from his close, or private, relationship with them.

Based on these facts, it seems that records in the *Sillok* revealing the increase in the number of non-elite willing to observe the three year mourning period are reliable. As a matter of fact, the increased number of government debates about this issue clearly show that there was a considerable change in the attitudes of commoners and the lowborn towards mourning

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<sup>330</sup> Chang Yu 張維 (1587-1638), *Kyegok sǒnsaeng chip*, 6: Sǒ (序), Pukch'ang Gook yangsǒnsaeng sijip sǒ (北倉古玉兩先生詩集序).

<sup>331</sup> Working as a head censorial official, Yun, with Cho Kwangjo and Kim Chǒng, asked the king to abolish *Sogyǒksǒ* and to deprive some unqualified officials of merit subject status (*Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 8. Muja), *Chungjong sillok* (34. 13. 8. Kyǒngin)). Regarding local policies, Yun showed the same opinion as the *kimyo* group, insisting that local governors' terms in office should be increased. (*Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 5. Imja)).

<sup>332</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (44. 17. 4. Kabo).

<sup>333</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 5. Sinmyo).

rituals as a result of the government's efforts to disseminate Confucian ideas and practices. However, it seems that initially, many officials of the state were reluctant to welcome the non-elites' observance of the three year mourning period. When King Chungjong consulted *Yejo* about a request to allow local petty officials' observance of three year mourning period, the office responded as follows,

According to *Taejŏn songnok* (*Expansion of the National Code*, 大典續錄), the mourning period *hayngni* should observe for their parents is one hundred days. If *hyangni*'s observance of the three year mourning period is allowed, they could neglect their official duties with the excuse of observing the mourning period and the state could not prevent such fraudulent attempts. However, (theoretically,) the three year mourning period should be applied to all people from the emperor to commoners. If the state did not allow the request of those who want to observe three years of mourning, it would be contradictory to our state's political vision of ruling our people with moral values such as filial piety. Therefore, the request should be allowed.<sup>334</sup>

The Board of Rite's response reveals that despite the Chosŏn elites' agreement about the universality of observing three years of mourning, many of them were also worried about negative effects the universal application of the ritual would cause. Particularly, for government officials who were unable to effectively perform their duties without manpower, the universal application of three years of mourning was undesirable. In this context, the mourning period of military men (*kunsa*, 軍士) had been a controversial issue for a long time.<sup>335</sup> Even the Board of

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<sup>334</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (15. 7. 3. Pyŏngjo).

<sup>335</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (16. 7. 7. Ŭlmi), *Chungjong sillok* (22. 10. 7. Sinhae), *Chungjong sillok* (25. 11. 7. Ŭlsa).

War (*Pyŏngjo*) clearly opposed applying the three year mourning period to all people regardless of their status and duty, insisting that most military men did not want to observe three years of mourning in the fear of losing their supporters (*posol*, 保率)<sup>336</sup> and that when they would ask the state's permission for their observance of the mourning period, the state should have a local magistrate (*suryŏng*) examine the request carefully to protect any fraudulent attempt to obtain their own benefit.<sup>337</sup>

The Board of War's insistence reveals the reluctance Chosŏn officials had had from the beginning of the state. Worrying about the lack of necessary manpower, they could not legalize the universal application of the three year mourning period, which inevitably caused the loss of labor. Therefore, rather than urge all people of the state to observe three years of mourning, they reduced mourning periods for military men and commoners, which were reflected in the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* (National Code, 經國大典).<sup>338</sup> But as the Board of Rites also indicated above, to maintain consistency with their emphasis on filial piety and ritual propriety as the fundamental values the people of the state must respect, officials could not simply prohibit the non-elite from mourning their parents for three years if they wanted to observe the mourning period.

Chosŏn officials could remain vague about their stance on this issue if non-elite groups

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<sup>336</sup> *Posol*, consisted of *Poin* (保人) and *Soljŏng* (率丁), did their military service by helping soldiers and their families, instead of serving as actual soldiers in the army. *Poin* provided cloth to soldiers' families as financial support and *Soljŏng* provided their labor to the state in the place of those who served in the army.

<sup>337</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (23. 10. 9. Kyŏngin).

<sup>338</sup> *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, 3: *Yejŏn* (禮典), *Obok* (五服).

were not particularly concerned about their mourning periods, as the officials had expected.<sup>339</sup> It seems, however, that once they confronted the increased number of requests regarding non-elite's mourning rituals, the elite could not simply avoid having discussions on the matter. When the issue of non-elite's mourning periods was raised<sup>340</sup> –in other words, when they were asked to solve the contradiction between the ideal ritual propriety in the *Book of Rites*<sup>341</sup> and the regulation of the National Code written in consideration of the real situation of the state; the officials of Chungjong's government who claimed to apply the ideas contained in the Classics to their state politics could not easily draw a clear conclusion. At first, this issue seemed to be well resolved because the related political debates focused only on the mourning period of military men and the National Code clearly stipulated that among military men, those who want can have three years to mourn their deceased parents.<sup>342</sup> However, it was not the end but the beginning of court debates on this perplexing issue.

In the *Kyōngguk taejōn*, the mourning period allowed to commoners is one hundred days, the same as that of military men. But the *Taejōn* has an exceptional regulation only for military men with the rather vague statement that with their voluntary request, they could be allowed three years of mourning, which was probably added to show the Chosŏn elite's respect for the instruction in the *Book of Rites*, which would indicate the universal application of the

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<sup>339</sup> The *Pyōngjo* reference above shows that the elite expected that the non-elite might be reluctant to observe three years of mourning due to their material losses from taking so much time away from their work. King Chungjong showed his opinion that the loss of labor caused by mourning ritual might be manageable (*Chungjong sillok* (26. 11. 11. Kyemi)).

<sup>340</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (15. 7. 3. Pyōngo).

<sup>341</sup> For details, see the *Book of Rites* (*Lizi*, 禮記), “Record of Smaller Matters in the Dress of Mourning (sang fu xiao ji, 喪服小記).”

<sup>342</sup> *Kyōngguk taejōn*, 3: Yejōn (禮典), Obok (五服).

three year mourning period. Once the three year mourning period for military men was officially confirmed<sup>343</sup> and to support this decision, the principle that the three year mourning period should be applied to all people from the emperor to commoners was repeatedly emphasized,<sup>344</sup> it came to be necessary to discuss whether the state should allow commoners, who originally shared the same mourning period with military men, three years of mourning if they want to observe it. Because the existence of the exceptional regulation for military men in the Code reveals the Chosŏn' elite's unavoidable emphasis on instruction in the Classics as mentioned above, if the regulation was referred to and its meaning and importance were repeatedly emphasized, government officials should inevitably reexamine the applicable target of three years of mourning.

When the issue of commoners' mourning period was raised, many Chosŏn officials, in different ways, showed their reluctance to openly allow three years of mourning to commoners. Among the three ministers, Sin Yonggae, the Third State Councillor (*uŭijŏng*) clearly opposed the commoners' observance of the three year mourning period indicating that the Code's regulation limiting their mourning period was the product of previous kings' consideration of the state's reality. Kim Ŭnggi, the Second State Councillor (*chwaŭijŏng*) also showed skepticism of the universal application of the three year mourning insisting that there was no need to make any additional law to support commoners' three years of mourning.<sup>345</sup> Although

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<sup>343</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (22. 10. 7. Sinhae), *Chungjong sillok* (25. 11. 7. Ŭlsa).

<sup>344</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (18. 8. 4. Imja), *Chungjong sillok* (23. 10. 9. Kyŏngin).

<sup>345</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (26. 11. 9. Kapchin). At this time, among the three ministers, Chŏng Kwangp'il, the First State Councillor (*yŏngŭijŏng*) supported commoners' three years of mourning. But, rather than emphasize the need for universal application of the mourning period, Chŏng also focused on the *taejŏn*'s additional regulation saying that only those who desire it can have three years for their mourning. Moreover, he also showed his worry that with universal application of three years of mourning, state would have difficulties caused from labor



King Chungjong, unlike these high officials, showed his desire to apply the three years of mourning to all people in the state as the Classics instructed, the fact that he also repeatedly mentioned that only when they expressed their desire voluntarily<sup>346</sup> commoners could be allowed to observe the mourning period shows that he was also reluctant to make any clear decision on this issue and thus did not want to make any legal regulation.

However, as these discussions were repeated and mourners' desire to be filial to their deceased parents had generally been respected, no government officials could strongly object to an extended application of the three years of mourning. Although they did not attempt to change the Code's regulation, the officials soon agreed that extending commoners' mourning period was desirable. Sin Yonggae, who put more weight on commoners' reduced mourning periods based on the regulation, even changed his attitude, insisting that universal application of three years of mourning regardless of mourners' social statuses were correct. With the repetition of the discussions, Kim Ŭnggi also no longer showed a negative attitude toward commoners' three years of mourning. At this point, Kim insisted that three years of mourning should be allowed even to slaves if they wanted to observe the mourning period, suggesting an extended application of the principle contained in the *Taejŏn*'s regulation for military men's mourning.<sup>347</sup>

After commoners' three years of mourning began to be taken for granted and as a result, the value of universal application of three years of mourning came to be more emphasized, the

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loss. That is, his stance on commoners' mourning period was similar to the other two councilors who relied on the vague regulation in the *taejŏn*.

<sup>346</sup> For example, *Chungjong sillok* (22. 10. 7. Sinhae), *Chungjong sillok* (25. 11. 7. Ŭlsa), *Chungjong sillok* (26. 11. 9. Kabin), *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 8. Kyehae).

<sup>347</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (26. 11. 11. Kyemi).

mourning period of slaves, many of whom were needed particularly for state office work, also became an important issue of the court debates. Of course, when the issue was raised, some officials expressed their negative view on applying the three year mourning period even to the lowborn and slaves. Ch'oe Suksaeng insisted that the three year mourning period should not be allowed to artisans, merchants, and slaves due to his belief that they probably wanted to have a three year mourning period to avoid taxes and labor duty. Ch'oe even opposed commoner's three year mourning period pointing out that traditionally, people had performed and observed different rituals based on their social status.<sup>348</sup> However, once the legal binding force of the Code's regulation limiting mourning periods of military men and commoners was lost, no one could strongly object to any individuals' right to express their filial piety. With the emphasis on the universal value of filial piety, the general trend among court officials at the time regarded labor loss, probably caused when the three year mourning period was applied to all people of the state, as a minor issue.<sup>349</sup> In this context, the insistence that three years of mourning should be allowed to the lowborn and slaves was made in court debates,<sup>350</sup> and according to Cho Kwangjo, unlike during the previous period, there rose a new socio-cultural trend that even the lowborn and slaves were willing to observe the three year mourning period.<sup>351</sup> At this time, the increase in non-elite observance of three years of mourning, which also can be confirmed by local governors' reports mentioned earlier, seems notable to the extent that a civil governor

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<sup>348</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (31. 13. 1. Kabin).

<sup>349</sup> Chōng Kwangp'il, Kim Ŭnggi, and Ch'oe Suksaeng were reluctant to agree with the idea that three years of mourning should be allowed to the lowborn and slaves due to the labor loss caused when these servile groups had a long mourning period. See *Chungjong sillok* (26. 11. 9. Kapchin), *Chungjong sillok* (26. 11. 11. Kyemi), *Chungjong sillok* (31. 13. 1. Kabin).

<sup>350</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (31. 13. 1. Kabin).

<sup>351</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (32. 13. 3. Kapcha).

experienced and asked the state to solve the problems accompanying non-elites' three years of mourning.<sup>352</sup>

The fact that non-elites' mourning periods were seriously dealt with in government not only theoretically but also with the consideration of social reality shows that there occurred a remarkable change in both contemporary people's behaviors and thoughts at the time. In fact, the reign of King Chungjong is not the first time when non-elite's three years of mourning was suggested.<sup>353</sup> However, it is from this king's reign that government officials reached a mutual agreement that they should encourage all people of the state to observe three years of mourning, which in some senses meant that at least theoretically, the officials admitted –or could not but admit–that there existed universal values that all people in the state, regardless of their social statuses, had the right to seek and attain, which should not be infringed by any legal sanction made by the elite in consideration of political efficiency.

Regarding this issue, it should be noted that this major conceptual change was not merely the product of the elite's efforts to actualize Confucian ideals in their politics because many of them, unlike their mutual agreement on the need to emphasize the value of ideas and

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<sup>352</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (35. 14. 1. Kyōngja).

<sup>353</sup> In the thirteenth year of King Sejong's reign, Sin Sang, the minister of Rites insisted that all people including the lowborn and slaves should have three years for their mourning period (*Sejong sillok* (51. 13. 3. Pyōngja)). However, given that by the twenty eighth year of the same king's reign, princes' three years of mourning for their deceased mother was not institutionalized (*Sejong sillok* (111. 28. 3. Kyesa)), discussions on non-elite's mourning period in the king's reign seem superficial and rather theoretical. In the reign of King Sōngjong, *Kyōngsang udo chōltosa* (the Army Commandor of Kyōngsangu Province) reported that more than one thousand commoners wanted to observe three years of mourning based on the *tajōn*'s regulation allowing three years of mourning to military men with such desires. However, even in this report, he merely suggested limiting commoners' mourning period to one hundred days, and allowing a three year mourning period to military men, especially those having social status as *sajok* elite (*Sōngjong sillok* (20. 3. 7. Musin)). Even King Chungjong simply disregarded a local Confucian's suggestion of the universal application of the mourning period at an earlier time, insisting that he could not arbitrarily change the content of the National Code made by his predecessors (*Chungjong sillok* (5. 3. 2. Kisa)).

practices written in the Classics, were reluctant to accept universal ritual propriety which transcended the social boundaries they had drawn. What brought a significant conceptual and practical change in social constituents of the state was the non-elite's understandings of and consequent reactions to the elite's moral and practical guidance. Although it is difficult to affirm the authenticity of the record in the *Sōngjong sillok* pointing out that in one province, there were more than one thousand people who made a request for a three year mourning period,<sup>354</sup> it suggests the possibility that commoners knew they could negotiate with the state and the elite about their ritual propriety.

Moreover, what triggered the discussions during the reign of King Chungjong on the mourning periods in the Code was an appeal from a local petty official in Hwanghae Province. In his memorial, referring to the principle of universal application of three years of mourning in the *Book of Rites*, he asked the state to extend local petty officials' mourning period from one hundred days to three years "according to military men's case" which allows three years of mourning if they want.<sup>355</sup> The fact that he quoted the regulation about military men's mourning ritual to attempt to challenge the legal effect of the regulation restraining his groups' mourning period shows that he already understood that the exceptional regulation in the Code was not made merely to emphasize the priority of military men and that it could be aptly used to guarantee people's right to observe their filial duty as they wished.<sup>356</sup> Put differently, he knew

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<sup>354</sup> *Sōngjong sillok* (20. 3. 7. Musin).

<sup>355</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (15. 7. 3. Pyōngo). For details about mourning rituals for local petty officials, see the *Taejōn songnok*, 3: Yejōn (禮典), Chamnyōng (雜令), 11.

<sup>356</sup> As discussions following the local petty official's memorial show, when he mentioned the regulation for military men, what officials focused on was not the group that *taejōn* allows the exception for but the condition where the exception must be allowed. Therefore, the more the issue was discussed, the more people could be allowed to observe three years of mourning if they showed their desire to do so.

that although the elite had attempted to draw clear social boundaries among social constituents with the legal code, they did not –and could not– entirely deprive the people of the chance to have the same rights regarding some important issues.

The social phenomenon that many commoners attempted to observe three years of mourning also could be understood in the same context. Given that in the early Chosŏn, even many of the elite were unfamiliar with and reluctant to observe three years of mourning, this long mourning period was not familiar to commoners either at the time. On top of that, referring to government officials' initial attitude toward and their reluctance to accept commoners' desire to observe three years of mourning due to some practical concerns, local officials who had the duty of tax collection in their jurisdiction might not actively encourage their people to have a long mourning period, which was not allowed in the National Code and might cause labor loss and production decrease. Also, it is also nonsensical to simply believe that, without any additional information, commoners voluntarily decided to have a long mourning period, which might work negatively when they tried to fulfill their labor and tax duties and stabilize their livelihood. Rather, it would be more reasonable to understand that their decisions to observe three years of mourning were made based on their understanding on the value of filial piety and the consequent benefits of showing their respect and loyalty to these values through ritual performances. What made it possible for them to understand their society and culture, and to learn how to react to government politics in this new context is surely the result of the elite's emphasis on the social significance of the behavioral expression of human virtues. Repeatedly learning the significance of sincere actualization of human virtues, they could realize that their social behaviors did not need to be restrained by ritual manuals set by the elite if such behaviors were admitted to be virtuous. They learned that the state focused more on whether they understood the importance of the actualization of virtue rather than on whether their behaviors

were made according to the ritual manuals created by the elite. Put simply, it can be said that the non-elite's requests for the state's permission to allow them three years of mourning resulted from their understanding of their rights and desires, and attempts to obtain both the symbolic and real benefits from exercising the rights.

I am not claiming that because of the elite's efforts, many people of the state came to decide to sincerely follow Confucian teachings. As described earlier, many government officials pointed out that many commoners and the lowborn observed three years of mourning just to avoid their tax burden and labor duty.<sup>357</sup> However, even if commoners and the lowborn observed the three year mourning period for their practical purposes, not for their loyalties toward Confucian thought, it does not diminish the importance of the fact that they accepted the Confucian practice because their desire to observe three years of mourning means they clearly understood what social value was emphasized in the state and with what social behavior they could get benefits from the state. The non-elite group did not hesitate to observe the three year mourning period because they knew that at least regarding this social behavior they had a right to be treated equally with the ruling elite group –they would be praised and rewarded due to their filial pieties and be exempted from their public duties, just as the ruling elites were. The application of the same mourning periods to all people in a group means that regarding some important social values, there should be no discrimination among people regardless of their social status, education and localities. Put simply, due to the central government's and ruling elite's constant interest in local culture and non-elite's practices and following responses from the ruled in the state, Chosŏn people could identify themselves with a much larger political entity. This complicated interaction between the

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<sup>357</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (31. 13. 1. Kabin).

rulers and ruled of the state contributed to construction and development of a shared collective identity among Chosŏn's constituents, despite of the existence social boundaries.

## Conclusion

### **After the *kimyo sahwa***

After the *kimyo sahwa*, many of the *kimyo* group's political suggestions were rejected and the state's policies reverted to their former state. The *Sogyōksō* was restored<sup>358</sup> in King Chungjong's reign and the *kisinjae* was likewise restored in King Myōngjong's reign.<sup>359</sup> Similarly to the change of these ritual institutions in the political center, the local policies the *kimyo* group had attempted to launch were also revoked. Especially, the *kimyo* group's way of implementation of *hyangyak* which presumably contributed to the facilitation of interactions between the state's elite and non-elite, and the central government and local society, was criticized and rejected.

Seemingly, the rescission of the *kimyo* group's policies was a regression of the state's politics that hindered the Chosŏn government's institutional and cultural reform process which, I have argued, contributed to the integration of the constituent people into the state as a way of state-building. Moreover, the historical perspective focusing more on the political struggle between *sarim* and *hun'gu* makes the political situation after the *kimyo sahwa* seem like a total rejection of the political vision the *kimyo* group had tried to actualize. However, given that many Chosŏn elites had shared certain common ideas regarding their political ideals and that it is very difficult to divide government officials into two opposing groups, it should be carefully reexamined whether the *kimyo* group's defeat in the political arena meant any radical change in

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<sup>358</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (46. 17. 12. Pyōngsul); To learn the details about the debates about abolishment and restoration of *Sogyōksō*, see Chōng Tuhŭi, *Cho Kwangjo*, 164-174; Yi Pyōnghyu, "Sogyōksō hyōkp'a nonŭi wa sarimp'a," *Kyonam sahak* 1 (1985).

<sup>359</sup> *Myōngjong sillok* (11. 6. 3. Imja).



the greater political project the state had pursued for a considerably long time.

Especially, it should be scrutinized to see if there happened any radical change of political attitudes among state officials after the *kimyo sahwa* regarding more substantial issues of state politics such as how to legitimize the government and how to secure support and loyalty from the people under its rule. This attitudinal change, if it existed, might be evidence of a significant transition of the state's political philosophy which might directly influence the interactions between the state and its people, the rulers and ruled, as well as self-identities various constituents of the state might have had. More specifically, it is essential to examine how government officials after the *kimyo sahwa* evaluated the political ways the *kimyo* group had suggested for a better understanding not only of the characteristics of the political clash in the reign of King Chungjong, which was followed by the literati purge, but also of what the elite in early Chosŏn prioritized in their politics.

The political discussions after the *kimyo sahwa* show that Chosŏn officials still had much interest in intervening in people's lives and attempting to make their socio-cultural practices reflect the values the ruling elite had idealized. Various records in the *Sillok* show that the government continuously checked to see if its efforts to instill Confucian values in localities proceeded well, examining the actual condition of *hyangyak* and the implementation of *hyangsarye* (the Village Archery Ritual) and *hyang'ŭmjurye* (the Village Drinking Ritual).<sup>360</sup> Therefore, even though it is true that after the *kimyo sahwa*, the critics of the *kimyo* group seriously reproached many of the group's policies, it cannot be simply said that this criticism was merely a byproduct of the political struggle between two opposing political groups or that the critics totally rejected all of the *kimyo* group's political vision.

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<sup>360</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (57. 21. 7. Imin), *Chungjong sillok* (101. 38. 11. Sinch'uk).

On top of this, it should be also noted that criticism of the *kimyo* group's policies shown after the *kimyo sahwa* cannot be taken as evidence that there existed a certain political group who opposed the state's ongoing efforts to share important elite socio-cultural values with the entire population of the state due to their enmity against the *kimyo* group. As a matter of fact, not all those who criticized the *kimyo* group's political ways supported the purge of the group. Rather, among those who revealed their criticism of the *kimyo* group after the *kimyo sahwa*, there were many who agreed with and continued the group's political vision. In other words, after the *kimyo sahwa*, a considerable number of central government officials, including those who have been categorized as *sarim* in studies based on the *sarim-hun'gu* framework, pointed out that the *kimyo* group overemphasized the urgency in implementing *hyangyak* although they agreed with its significance in state politics.

During the reign of King Myǒngjong, Chu Sebung 周世鵬 (1495-1554), the expositor (侍講官), who also emphasized the importance of the *hyangyak*, pointed out that when the *kimyo* group implemented *hyangyak* in local places, many social problems had occurred. Also, unlike the *kimyo* group who believed *hyangyak* should be implemented in all places of the state including its capital,<sup>361</sup> Chu clearly mentioned that *hyangyak* was an institution not for people in the capital but only for those in rural places who had not obtained the chance to be civilized by the kingly way.<sup>362</sup> Chu's lukewarm support for the state's engagement in *hyangyak* was shared by his contemporary political leaders. Yun In'gyǒng 尹仁鏡 (1476-1548), the first State Councillor (*yǒngūijǒng*), also insisted that although *hyangyak* was a good institution, it was useless for the government to make a new law to intervene in its

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<sup>361</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (36. 14. 7. Kiyu), *Chungjong sillok* (37. 14. 10. Kyǒngo).

<sup>362</sup> *Myǒngjong sillok* (4. 1. 8. Kabo).

establishment and operation because in localities, there were not enough virtuous men who could be leaders of *hyangyak*.<sup>363</sup> Put simply, some Chosŏn officials after the *kimyo sahwa* shared an agreement that *hyangyak* is an institution only for rural villages where Confucian civilization was not fully accomplished and that the government did not need to enact a new law to implement this institution in all regions of the state forcefully and indiscriminately and without detailed considerations of the various regional situations.

It also does not seem that these political remarks containing criticism of the *kimyo* group resulted only from the political situation, where some officials, who are often categorized as *hun'gu* or *hunch'ŏk* in existing studies, exerted considerable influence on state politics after the *kimyo sahwa*. Similar criticisms were found even during the reign of King Sŏnjo which is seen as a period when the state politics were led by the *sarim*. Even Yi Hwang, who clearly showed his respect to Cho Kwangjo and abhorrence of Nam Kon, also pointed out that despite their moral and intellectual prominence, the *kimyo* group made some political mistakes due to their haste to actualize their socio-political ideals.<sup>364</sup> Like Yi, in the reign of King Sŏnjo, there were many officials who criticized the *kimyo* group's policies regardless of their respect for the group and their agreement with the groups' larger political vision; the *kimyo* group's *hyangyak* policy was one of the main targets of this criticism.

It is worthy to look over why those officials opposed *hyangyak* in order to learn if there was any important change in the state's political blueprint in that most of the officials did not have direct conflicts with the *kimyo* group and were not related to the political purge at the year of *kimyo* and thus, their opposition to the group's policy might result from their

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<sup>363</sup> *Myŏngjong sillok* (4. 1. 8. Chŏngmi).

<sup>364</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (2. 1. 9. Chŏngmyo).

different thought from those of the group and not from their hatred toward the group or their way to justify themselves as political opponents of the group. The Board of Rites' suggestion made in the fourth year of the reign of King Sŏnjo shows an aspect of the ambivalent attitude towards *hyangyak* among government officials. In this suggestion, the Board of Rites pointed out that although *hyangyak* is good to civilize the state's customs and educate its people, if the state forcefully implemented this institution when the people suffered from hunger and cold and so forth, they could not afford to observe ritual propriety and etiquette; it would only cause various social problems. In this regard, the board also insisted that rather than doing so hastily, the state should carry out *hyangyak* gradually in consideration of each locality's situation such as the presence of intellectually and morally superior people.<sup>365</sup>

Put simply, the Board of Rites raised a doubt as to whether the Chosŏn elite's desire to share Confucian ideas and values with the people in the state, often represented by *hyangyak*, should have higher priority than the other political actions of the state. In other words, among state officials, there was a tendency to emphasize the need to consider the state's social reality before taking an action to actualize the Confucian ideal. Yu Hŭich'un 柳希春 (1513-1577), who studied under Kim An'guk<sup>366</sup>, who decisively contributed to the spread of *hyangyak*, was skeptical about the urgent need for national implementation of *hyangyak*. Pointing out that Zhu Xi also mentioned the difficulty in institutionalizing *hyangyak*,<sup>367</sup> Yu insisted that it is necessary to wait for the best social condition to better carry out *hyangyak*.<sup>368</sup> Like Yu, Yi I

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<sup>365</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (5. 4. 2. Kyŏngsin).

<sup>366</sup> *Kukcho inmulchi* 2, Injocho. 31.

<sup>367</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (6. 5. 10. Pyŏngja), *Sŏnjo sillok* (7. 6. 8. Chŏngsa), *Sŏnjo sillok* (7. 6. 8. Kapcha).

<sup>368</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (8. 7. 2. Kimi).

also argued that the state's engagement in *hyangyak* was not the most urgent socio-political issue in his time. Yi believed that for the government, it is much more significant to give relief to the people who suffered from various social problems such as economic difficulties than to educate them and civilize their practices.<sup>369</sup> In this vein, he indicated that the government politics should give priority to the people's well-being and suggested that the government seek the way of the people's education such as *hyangyak* only after it resolved the problems related to the people's livelihood.<sup>370</sup>

Unlike those who were reluctant to immediately institutionalize *hyangyak* on a national level, there were also many officials who emphasized the urgency of the implementation of *hyangyak*, one of whom is Hō Yōp who republished *Kyōngminp'yōn*.<sup>371</sup> Pointing out the fact that Zhu Xi himself edited and annotated the *Lü Family Community Compact*, these officials criticized those opinions, putting emphasis on the practical difficulties regarding the implementation of *hyangyak*.<sup>372</sup> Insisting that if the king had a firm determination to civilize his state, he could not only institutionalize *hyangyak* but also restore ideal social culture and political institutions of the Three Dynasties, they urged the king to immediately institutionalize *hyangyak* for the state's civilization.<sup>373</sup>

These debates in the central government about how to educate the non-elite outside the political and cultural center produced somewhat eclectic results; the government did not

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<sup>369</sup> *Sōnjo sillok* (8. 7. 2. Kapsul).

<sup>370</sup> *Sōnjo sillok* (8. 7. 2. Pyōngo), *Sōnjo sillok* (8. 7. 2. Kapsul).

<sup>371</sup> *Sōnjo sillok* (7. 6. 8. Chōngsa), *Sōnjo sujōng sillok* (6. 5. 10. Kabin).

<sup>372</sup> *Sōnjo sillok* (7. 6. 8. Chōngsa), *Sōnjo sillok* (7. 6. 8. Kapcha).

<sup>373</sup> *Sōnjo sillok* (7. 6. 8. Chōngsa).

make any law or regulation to enforce *hyangyak*, but many of the Confucian literati made their own *hyangyak* regulations and implemented those practices in their residential places. This is seemingly contradictory and appears to mean that after the *kimyo sahwa*, the state chose a new political direction abandoning their support of the passionate desires to distribute Confucian values to the entire state. Put simply, the fact that the government did not legally and institutionally support *hyangyak* possibly looks as if the state cancelled a national project to create a certain consistency among its people's practices, and individual Confucian literati came to have autonomous power to practically and intellectually influence the people in their places; if each locality was in fact influenced mainly by individual elites' intellectual and philosophical propensities, it might be difficult to say that Chosŏn people had a chance to share a larger collectivity which was beyond their sense of identities as constituents of small groups because their ways of lives and senses of identity might be vary due to the absence of the state's unitary guidance of the people's thought and behaviors.

Then, what does it mean that in the situation where the central government refused to take responsibility of implementing *hyangyak* after political debates between the state officials, the elites, who were closely connected to the political center and fully understood what conclusion the government made, voluntarily supported *hyangyak*? Does it mean that there were many elites who opposed the government's local policies and attempted to rule the places they resided in by their own thoughts and beliefs? Had the government yet to have administrative efficiency to control the local society? Did the elite implement *hyangyak* for their own social and cultural interests which were independent of the state's political interests and plans?

Regarding this, it should be mentioned again that many of these *hyangyak* initiators themselves were or were connected to incumbent or former government officials. Therefore,

it is difficult to categorize the Chosŏn elite into two different groups; the central government officials who led state politics and the elites in local places whose socio-political visions were rejected in the political center and thus attempted to actualize those visions in small communities. This suggests the possibility that in many cases, institutional reforms and cultural movements happened in local society were the reflection of the common interests of the leading elite of the state who could exert much influence on the state's policies. Back to the issue of *hyangyak*, the fact that Yi I, who showed a negative opinion on the state's direct intervention regarding *hyangyak* at the political discussions in the central government, made efforts to establish his own *hyangyak* practices<sup>374</sup> shows that *hyangyak* was possibly implemented in local society with the support and agreement of government officials. Then, it can be said that some officials' opposition to the state's intervention on *hyangyak* does not necessarily mean that they denied the need and efficiency of *hyangyak* practice. In addition, it can be also said that this opposition never means a rejection of the state's long-held political vision to distribute crucial social values to the people of the state.

The fact that those who supported *hyangyak* objected to the state's direct engagement in it might still look contradictory. But examination of their detailed arguments shows that despite the difference in the details of their thoughts, the Chosŏn elite had shared a certain consistent political ideal. Although he disagreed with the idea of the state's immediate institutionalization of *hyangyak*, Yu Hŭich'un insisted that this ritual practice, whose importance Zhu Xi had emphasized, should be respected.<sup>375</sup> Yu even pointed out that despite

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<sup>374</sup> Yi I made Sŏwŏn Hyangyak in the fourth year of the reign of King Sŏnjo and Haeju Hyangyak in its tenth year. For the contents of these *hyangyak* regulations, see Yi I, *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 16:Chapchŏ (雜著), Sŏwŏn Hyangyak (西原鄉約) and Haeju Hyangyak (海州鄉約).

<sup>375</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (6. 5. 10. Pyŏngja).

prospective problems the urgent implementation of *hyangyak* might cause, a part of its regulations deserved to be immediately put in practice and would help to civilize the people's customs and practices.<sup>376</sup> Yi I also did not underestimate the importance of *hyangyak*. When he heard King Sŏnjo intended to institutionalize it, Yi praised the king's decision and advised him to cultivate his mind and behaviors first for the success of the implementation of *hyangyak* practice.<sup>377</sup>

Given these, it does not seem that Yu and Yi had greatly different thoughts on the education and civilization of the state's people from those who urged the king to implement *hyangyak*. In fact, as shown in the remarks from both Kim Uong 金宇顛 (1540-1603), who supported the instant implementation of *hyangyak*, and Yi I, who preferred to wait for more suitable time for the practice, most of the government officials agreed that without king's support, civilizing the people of the state is impossible.<sup>378</sup> That is, there existed a mutual agreement among state officials and the elite group that in order to accomplish the people's civilization, the government should support institutions and practices related to the people's education. This means that when such officials as Yu and Yi opposed the government's direct engagement in *hyangyak*, their oppositions were neither a total denial of the significance of this ritual practice nor the complete rejection of the idea that the elite should share important ethical norms and ritual propriety with all the people in the society for a better state politics.

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<sup>376</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (8. 7. 2. Kimi).

<sup>377</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (7. 6. 10. Kimi).

<sup>378</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (7. 6. 9. Musul), *Sŏnjo sillok* (7. 6. 10. Kimi).



As shown in Yu and Yi's common insistence that the government should postpone the implementation of *hyangyak* until the people's well-being was improved,<sup>379</sup> some officials believed that the government should not immediately engage in *hyangyak* because in the situation where the people struggled in their livelihood, the government's forceful intervention in people's practices was neither urgent nor effective. However, as shown in the fact that Yi I voluntarily implemented his own *hyangyak* regulations, they did not cease their efforts to civilize the state's culture and practice. In other words, when they opposed the government's hasty institutionalization of *hyangyak*, what they denied is not the need for a socio-educational movement to civilize the state's culture and practices. Rather, they warned against the adverse effects of the elite's unrealistic expectations of radical improvement and of a socio-cultural reality that their unadvised engagement in the lives of non-elites through forceful government administrative apparatus might cause.

### **Transformation through education**

When Hŏ Yŏp criticized Yi I due to his negative attitudes toward the government's engagement in *hyangyak*, Yi I responded as follows,

Even the relationship between father and son will be impaired if a father forcefully has his son study without any consideration of the son's hunger and cold. Will not the same happen in the relationship between the state and people?

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<sup>379</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (8. 7. 2. Pyŏngo), *Sŏnjo sillok* (8. 7. 2. Kapsul).

Yi also added that in order to civilize the non-elite's practices, the elite should try to be moral and behavioral exemplars and that any attempt to control the people's lives only with written instruction would cause bad results.<sup>380</sup> It shows that Yi believed that the change of people's thought and behaviors could be made only when they were impressed by and decided to voluntarily follow the elite's guidance. From Yi's perspective, therefore, enforcing a law or regulations with the expectation of immediate results is not effective but harmful for the people's civilization. In this regard, Yi pointed out that for the construction of stabilized localities, both the high and low status people should learn and be moved by the sages' teachings.<sup>381</sup>

There were many who had similar views to Yi I. Before Yi I, Yi Hwang insisted that for local harmony, scholars should be the exemplars of proper behavior based on Confucian principles and lead people to follow the Way (道).<sup>382</sup> In the memorial given to King Sŏnjo, the Board of Rites argued that only after the elite immersed the "vulgar people" in rural areas, who could not understand "propriety" in the sage's teachings consciously or unconsciously, they would be gradually changed for the better.<sup>383</sup> Put differently, many elites believed and insisted that to make all the constituent people in the state understand important social values which the state had emphasized from its establishment, a social condition where exemplary social behaviors and practices were consistently exposed to the people should be built in

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<sup>380</sup> *Sŏnjo sujŏng sillok* (8. 7. 2. Pyŏngo).

<sup>381</sup> Yi I, *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*, 13: Sŏ (序), P'aju hyangyaksŏ (坡州鄉約序).

<sup>382</sup> Yi Hwang, *T'oegye chŏnsŏ*, 42: Sŏ, ki, pal, myogaljimyŏng (序·記·跋·墓碣誌銘), hyangnip yakcho sŏ (鄉立約條序).

<sup>383</sup> *Sŏnjo sillok* (8. 7. 5. Chŏngyu).

advance; they believed that this is helpful not only to improve individuals' personal qualities but also to stabilize the society. According to this concept, the civilization of the state's culture and practices, which was a common goal of the Chosŏn elite, cannot but be painstaking and time-consuming work. It was difficult to expect that the state's constituents, many of whom were non-elite, should understand Confucian ethics and ritual propriety within a short period; it was also difficult to believe that without this understanding, they would voluntarily follow the state's moral and behavioral guidance. Therefore, if the state forcefully, without waiting until any general social consensus on values of Confucian thought was made, attempted to engage in the non-elite's lives with the expectation of a radical social transformation, it would naturally cause social disruption, not social integration.

In this vein, the government's relinquishment of engaging in *hyangyak* and individual elites' efforts to make their own *hyangyak* in the place they resided were not totally contradictory to each other. Once a government's policy accompanies a legal regulation, it inevitably comes to have certain coercion and at the same time loses considerable flexibility. Therefore, even those who agreed with the importance of *hyangyak* opposed enacting a law to enforce a nationwide implementation of *hyangyak* due to their concerns with the coercive aspects legal regulations often have as well as their lack of consideration of various social situations in different time and places. However, due to their recognition of the importance of the moral and behavioral improvement of the people, they never stopped their efforts to educate the people in their localities in their own ways. In this context, the fact that many former and incumbent officials made and implemented their own *hyangyak* should not be understood as a small elite group's resistance to the state's official policy. Rather, given that they were actual and important agents of state politics and that even those who were responsible for the government's disengagement in *hyangyak* implemented their own

*hyangyak* in their places of residence, it can be said that the maintenance of *hyangyak* practice by individual elites served the state's larger political plan well.

It is true that right after the *kimyo sahwa*, Cho Kwangjo, a leader of the *kimyo* group, was often compared to Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) who sought to expand the scope of government involvement in society, the economy, and culture.<sup>384</sup> It does not seem, however, that the criticism against the *kimyo* group meant that the Chosŏn elite rejected the state's direct control of the people's ways of life. As Chŏng Tuhŭi points out, those who compared Cho to Wang never specifically explained in what sense Cho was similar to Wang; in most cases, they just mentioned that like Wang, Cho also disturbed the state's stability. As a matter of fact, unlike Wang's reform programs, the *kimyo* group's political suggestions lacked specific and detailed plans.<sup>385</sup> Rather than theoretical debates, the groups' political suggestions were filled with their passionate emphasis on importance of following proper Confucian ways. Moreover, although their opponents labeled the group as similar to Wang's faction, many of the *kimyo* group's philosophical and political ideas followed *Dao xue* (道學) scholars such as Zhu Xi. For instance, they repeatedly put more emphasis on morality than the literary skills needed to prepare for the civil service examinations.<sup>386</sup> But, when they attempted to equate the *kimyo* group with Wan Anshi's faction, the opponents of the *kimyo*

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<sup>384</sup> *Chungjong sillok* (54. 20. 7. Kyŏngŏ), *Chungjong sillok* (66. 24. 10. Muin); Regarding Wang Anshi's New Policies program, see Peter Bol, "Culture, Society, and Neo-Confucianism, Twelfth to Sixteenth Century," in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, eds. Christine J. Loomis, Paul J. Smith, and Richard Von Glahn (Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 241-283.

<sup>385</sup> Chŏng Tuhŭi, *Cho Kwangjo: silch'ŏnjŏk chisigin ūi sam, isang kwa hyŏnsil sai esŏ* (Seoul: Ak'anet, 2000), 275-276.

<sup>386</sup> *Dao xue* scholars emphasized "the learning for becoming a sage" and contrasted this view of true learning with learning the literary composition style of the Tang dynasty required for the civil service examination. See Peter Bol, "Culture, Society, and Neo-Confucianism, Twelfth to Sixteenth Century."

group did not carefully consider how those two group's politics were intellectually and theoretically similar. They focused more on pointing out that the two groups both tried to radically change the existing social systems which might cause social disorder.

It seems that although the *kimyo* group followed the *Dao xue* ideas which prioritize morality, they, unlike Song *Dao xue* scholars, did not envision the establishment of locally autonomous institutions. Rather, as officials in the central government, they insisted that the government urgently take the lead in socio-cultural transformation. Therefore, despite the fact that Cho Kwangjo was often compared to Wang Anshi, it seems difficult to define the debates between Chosŏn officials regarding the *kimyo* group's political actions, such as the institutionalization of local community compacts, as the result of the tension between those who desired to construct a strong activist central government and those who envisioned autonomous and morally superior local societies, which is found in the conflicts among the Song intellectuals.<sup>387</sup> Rather, it should be understood as mainly resulting from government officials' different opinions about how to understand Confucian teachings and incorporate them into real politics. This is clearly shown in the criticisms of the *kimyo* group's policies after the *kimyo sahwa* when even the critics of the *kimyo* group no longer needed to slander them and their politics groundlessly. As mentioned above, some officials who even had a similar political vision and intellectual propensity to the *kimyo* group criticized the group's policies and had disputes with those who supported *hyangyak*, one of the representative legacies of the group. But, as also explained previously, they did not totally reject the government's involvement in *hyangyak*. Rather, they pointed out that some supporters of *hyangyak* misunderstood Zhu Xi's real intentions or that the proponents did not know proper

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

ways to actualize Confucian ideals in political ways. That is, because they were closely connected to government politics, most Chosŏn elites in the political center never openly rejected or neglected the state's and the elites' role in the moral education of the people. Rather, despite their different thoughts, they agreed that the state should engage in its people's lives. Put simply, although there was a methodological change, the Chosŏn elite neither forgot the significance of cultural interconnectedness between elite and non-elite for the stabilization of the state, nor ceased their efforts to instill their social values in non-elite society. On the contrary, as a method for the state's civilization, they chose a long-term educational process instead of any forceful regulation, minimizing the risk of resistance from the people.

The way of education based on a consistent interaction between the elite and non-elite naturally helped the non-elite continuously participate in the conception of the world the elite had constructed. Of course, the non-elite's frequent contact with the elite's values and practices made a major contribution to the construction of an elite-centered society where the elites could enjoy high social prestige and thus, the social boundary between the elite and non-elite was clearly drawn. However, as Gramsci aptly points out, all men are intellectuals who can carry on their own intellectual activity and thus, their participation in a particular conception of the world helps them contribute to and sustain a conception of the world, on the one hand, and modify it to bring into being new modes of thought, on the other hand.<sup>388</sup> Given this, non-elites in Chosŏn who had constantly observed certain kinds of social behaviors from the elite's instruction manuals, such as *hyangyak*, had many opportunities to reinterpret the elite's thoughts and practices, and possibly modify the elite's social concept itself.

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<sup>388</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans., Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 5-14.

The non-elite's attempt to secure the right to observe three years of mourning is a specific example of their intellectual activities reinterpreting the elite's moral and behavioral guidance. This example also proves that their intellectual activities could contribute to making a new dominant social concept as shown by the fact that the Chosŏn elite, who preferred to differentiate the state's social constituents based on their social statuses and thus, were initially reluctant to accept the universal application of three years of mourning, agreed with the newly suggested idea that all individuals' desire and right to observe important social values should be guaranteed regardless of their social status. Although not all incumbent government officials were passionate in their support of this idea due to their concerns regarding administrative reality, it seems that many elites consistently made efforts to widely spread it, interacting with and educating the non-elite.

For example, Hwang Chonghae 黃宗海 (1579-1642) encouraged even lower persons (*hain*) to observe the three year mourning period. In his *Golden Orchid Kye* (*Kŭmnan'gye*), he suggested that if a low status person observed three years of mourning with sincerity, he should be rewarded, his filial behavior announced to people of all different social statuses, and also reported to the local magistrate.<sup>389</sup> Yi Yut'ae 李惟泰 (1607-1684) also in his *hyangyak* encouraged the people in his local area to observe a three year mourning period, indicating that if lower persons observe three years of mourning, their virtue should be praised and their behavior recorded.<sup>390</sup> These show that after a social consensus was made regarding the issue of individuals' right to live a life learning important social values and observing ritual propriety, the Chosŏn elite continuously informed the non-elite that their

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<sup>389</sup> Hwang Chonghae, *Huch'ŏn chip* 7:4-13.

<sup>390</sup> Yi Yut'ae, *Ch'oryŏ hyangyak*: Hyangyak mun (鄉約文), yesok sanggyo (禮俗相交).

attempts to emulate the elite's rituals were officially laudable and not blameful. Of course, this was originally part of the elite's continuous efforts to actualize their own socio-political blueprint by letting non-elites follow their ideological and behavioral guidance. However, as they chose, for this purpose, a long-term interaction with the non-elite based on moral education and ritual performances, the elite could not ignore the non-elite's reactions. Rather, they should respect the non-elite group's behavioral right, negotiating with the group about ritual propriety. The fact that some elites added the three years of mourning to their *hyangyak* proves that they did not always have negative attitudes towards the non-elite group's intellectual activities and consequent reactions to their instruction, and were willing to actively negotiate with them. Consequently, the intellectual and behavioral interactions between the elite and non-elite constantly continued and thus, the non-elite's opportunities to understand, reinterpret and modify the elite's thought were secured and maintained.

Put differently, Confucian thought and practices which were the elite's cultural capital securing their social dominance and prestige also became the non-elite's assets which helped them protect their rights and become active agents of the state. Boudewijin Walraven points out that Confucian culture was transmitted to "layers of the population that were far removed from the centre of power" through *muga* (巫歌, Song of the Shaman).<sup>391</sup> As Walraven indicates, some shamanic texts such as "Sŏngjo p'uri" 成造푸리 clearly reveal the fact that the non-elite of the Chosŏn recognized and emphasized the significance of the Three Bonds and the Five Relationships.<sup>392</sup> This means that with their frequent interactions with the elite,

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<sup>391</sup> Boudewijin Walraven, "Divine Territory: Shaman Songs, Elite Culture and the Nation," *Korean Histories* 2.2 (2011), 56.

<sup>392</sup> Regarding this, see *Ibid.*, 47. Also, see Son Chint'ae, *Chōsen hinka ihen* 朝鮮神歌遺編 (Tokyo: Kyōdo kenkyūsha, 1930), 1.



the non-elite group came to learn that displaying their understanding of Confucianism and ability to observe Confucian rituals would bring social benefits which made them feel a certain membership in the society they belonged to. The increase in the number of commoners and lowborn celebrated by the state (and recorded in the *Sillok*) as Confucian moral exemplars from the sixteenth century on<sup>393</sup> is another very specific example of reciprocal interactions between the elite and non-elite which probably helped the non-elite learn how they should respond to the elite's emphasis on Confucian thought and practices.

We can imagine, therefore, that from a certain point, a common set of Confucian social values came to be shared by Chosŏn people as a whole. In this context, when Kim Sŏngil 金誠一 (1538-1584) wrote an exhorting letter addressed to the people of all different statuses in Yŏngnam province to recruit for the volunteer army during the Imjin War and thus needed to emphasize the people's collectivity, he pointed out that during the time of Silla, Koryŏ and Chosŏn, the province produced many men of filial piety and loyalty. In the letter, Kim also brought out the fact that the province produced distinguished Confucian scholars such as T'oegye and Nammyŏng (Cho Sik 曹植 (1501-1572)) and many other scholars who emulated them.<sup>394</sup> Put differently, this letter indicates that valuing Confucian thought and ethical norms was one of the main characteristics of Yŏngnam people –and also, given that this letter placed the past of this province in the history of the entire state, the entire people of

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<sup>393</sup> Based on this increase, Pak Chu contended that Confucian ethics became a communal value of Chosŏn society shared even by commoners and the lowborn. I mentioned her study in chapter 4. For more details, see Pak Chu, *Chosŏn sidae ūi chŏngp'yo chŏngch'aek* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1990), 229-235.

<sup>394</sup> *Hakpong chip*, 3:Ch'oyu mun (招諭文), Ch'oyu ilto samin mun (招諭一道士民文).

the Chosŏn<sup>395</sup>— which distinguished them from others. This suggests that by the time of the Imjin War, representative Confucian norms, practices and institutions, together with national history, became a significant cultural asset with which Chosŏn people recognized their feeling of belonging to the state. It is natural, therefore, that the non-elite in Chosŏn kept trying to participate in Confucian institutions and rituals to seek social benefits. The elite’s attempt to educate the non-elite through various ways of social interaction for the purpose of the state’s transformation continued to provide the non-elite with more chances for participation.

I am neither arguing here that the non-elite attained similar levels of understanding of Confucianism as compared to the elite, nor insisting that they became sincere followers of Confucian thought with their own intellectual activities. As Gramsci indicates, intellectual activity is distinguished according to levels.<sup>396</sup> Many of the intellectual activities of the non-elite in Chosŏn could not be the same as those of the highest level of the elite. Therefore, it is an undeniable truth that Confucianism often contributed to a division of Chosŏn people. Put differently, the Chosŏn elite used Confucian culture to obtain more social privilege, which actually and conceptually deepened the social discrimination and inequality among Chosŏn people. However, it should also be noted that the non-elite’s realization of the significance Confucianism had in their society helped them resist the elite’s monopolization of social prestige and benefits. As explained in detail regarding the issue of the mourning rituals, the non-elite had continuously experienced and learned that upholding Confucian culture and participating in Confucian practices and institutions was their duty and, at the same time, their

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<sup>395</sup> Haboush aptly points out that this letter “speaks of the ethical imperative to remain a human being and a person of Chosŏn. Regarding this, see JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Great East Asian War and the Birth of the Korean Nation*, eds. William Joseph Haboush and Jisoo M. Kim (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 41.

<sup>396</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 5-14.

right to seek the social prestige, honor and benefits most of the elite had enjoyed. The Chosŏn elite who maintained the way of sharing of Confucian core values with the non-elite to effectively rule their state and improve its social environment and culture could not simply ignore the non-elite's quest for their rights. Rather, in many cases, especially in the official political stage, many of the elite agreed that the non-elite's right to engage in Confucian culture and practices should be supported.

Thus, the non-elite's participation in elite-centered practices and institutions increased. The increase of the number of non-elite students in community schools (*hyanggyo*, 鄉校) and private schools (*sŏwŏn*, 書院) proves this. Of course, the non-elite's participation in these educational institutions might not be made by their sincere desire to improve their level of understanding of Confucian philosophy. Probably, most of the non-elite students attended the schools with the desire to get exemptions from their duties of military and labor service.<sup>397</sup> However, these attempts of the non-elite also should not be simply criticized as deceptive actions disturbing the public order of the state. Focusing only on the fact that the many of the non-elite sought to avoid their duties of military service by participating in Confucian institutions only results in drawing a conclusion that there were people who used expedient means which were not helpful for the state, which is in many senses similar to the criticism from the elite perspective at the time. Seeing these non-elite's actions as their responses to the Confucian social order of the state, rather than simply criticizing their attempts to neglect their duties, is more helpful to understand their relationship with and roles in the state.

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<sup>397</sup> The following studies are helpful to learn more details of this issue. Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏngu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1990); Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn sidae sŏwŏn kwa yangban* (P'aju: Chimmundang, 2004).

From the non-elite's perspective, attendance in Confucian educational institutions was one of a few ways for them to share the social privileges generally given only to the elite. Once they learned that their participation in Confucian schools could not be officially rejected by the government<sup>398</sup>—like their observance of the three years of mourning— they realized that they possessed the right to ask the state to allow and support their engagement in higher level of Confucian culture and practices. The more they interacted with the elite and learned their ways of life, the more knowledge the non-elite came to have about how to secure their political and social rights and how to obtain the state's official support for their social behavior. Furthermore, it seems that as a central agent which has the duty to offer the people a wider access to Confucian education, the state encouraged, rather than discouraged, the non-elite to participate in educational institutions and did not neglect its duty to formally give the accompanying benefit to the participants. In other words, although many individual elites in Chosŏn made various efforts to deepen a conceptual differentiation among the constituent people in society,<sup>399</sup> the official politics of the state did not reject, due to its larger plan to strengthen the people's sense of belongingness to the state, the non-elite groups' requests to be allowed to share the elite's practices and institutions. Therefore, with the frequent

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<sup>398</sup> As shown in Yun's studies mentioned above, rather than relying on forceful legal restrictions, the elite of Chosŏn tried to differentiate elite and non-elite students in various ways such as creating differences in their residential spaces in the schools.

<sup>399</sup> In his studies, Song Chunho explains in detail how the Chosŏn elite allowed partial legal equality for non-elite groups but at the same time strengthened the conceptual differentiation between the elite and non-elite. See Song Chunho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu: Chosŏn sahoe ūi kujo wa sŏngkyŏk mit kŭ pyŏnch'ŏn e kwanhan yŏn'gu*, (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1987) and Song Chunho, "Chosŏn sidae ūi kwakŏ wa yangban mit yangin (I) – munkwa wa saengwŏn chinasasi rŭl chungsim ūro hayŏ–," *Yŏksa hakpo* 69 (1976), 101-135. Martina Deuchler argues that to perpetuate their high social status, the Chosŏn elite relied on an array of cultural activities such as ancestral ceremony rituals rather than state-authorized activities like the civil service examination. See, Martina Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors' Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2015), 341-415.

intellectual and behavioral interactions with the elite, the non-elite may have realized that they were also significant social constituents whose rights were protected by the state.<sup>400</sup>

In other words, it can be said that although the elite's political decision to transform their society through education in Confucian thought was helpful to naturalize the non-elites' acknowledgement of the elite's qualifications as both cultural and political leaders, this decision also gave the non-elites opportunities to accumulate their knowledge of the values of elite culture and thus provided them with motivation to actively engage in the elite's practices and institutions.

### **Culture, state, and nation**

Chosŏn was not the only state putting emphasis on the people's education in its politics. Attempts to transform society through education were often found in East Asian history. In Ming China, as Stevan Harrell aptly points out, "the civilizing center draws its ideological rationale from the belief that the process of domination is one of helping the dominated to attain or at least approach the superior cultural, religious and moral qualities characteristic of the center itself."<sup>401</sup> This politics to achieve social transformation through

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<sup>400</sup> Regarding the issue of the state's support for Confucian institutions, Yun Hŭimyŏn brings up the fact that *hyanggyo* had a larger number of non-elite students who were exempted from their duties of military service compared to *sŏwŏn*. With this fact, Yun insists that unlike the general belief that *sŏwŏn* were regarded as a more significant institution than *hyanggyo* in society, the state had more concerns about the management of *hyanggyo*, the local schools operated by the state (see, Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn sidae sŏwŏn kwa yangban*, 276). That is, even when many elite students preferred to study in *sŏwŏn*, the private schools run by individual elites, the state continuously had great interest in, and engaged in, *hyanggyo* administration. This proves that even though Chosŏn was an elite-centered society, the state did not neglect its duty to provide educational opportunity and its accompanying social benefit for the non-elite. It is highly possible, therefore, that participating in both the public and private educational institutions and engaging in various affairs related to those, the non-elite might have a sense that they were part of the state and that the state provided social benefits and protections.

<sup>401</sup> Stevan Harrell, ed., *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 4.

education were surely helpful for various social groups in the Ming to creatively respond to or to manipulate the state's central commands. Regarding this, pointing out that the influence of the civilizing project of Ming China "did not flow only one way, from the center to periphery,"<sup>402</sup> Sarah Schneewind explains that the Ming state was built from below as well as from above by Ming people and that the people colonized government institutions and documents to serve their social, political, personal, and religious needs and interests.<sup>403</sup>

About this social dynamic, many Chinese historians have commonly indicated that before the Qing, local instruments of ideological control were promoted separate from the state by different players, many of whom were gave priority to their own localities.<sup>404</sup> However, as Evelyn Rawski describes community schools as "charitable elementary schools established in towns and villages on local initiative with the state's blessing,"<sup>405</sup> scholars have not simply identified this localist orientation with opposition to imperial authority. These studies of Chinese history support my contention that in Korea, the politics emphasizing people's education helped various social groups in the state learn and reinterpret the government's ideological and behavioral instructions, and create their own ways of life with which they could effectively challenge the rulers' often oppressive and discriminatory

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<sup>402</sup> Sarah Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 and 169.

<sup>404</sup> Christine J. Loomis, Paul J. Smith and Richard Von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 25-33. About the Qing's great oversight of religious institutions, schools, *baojia*, the "community compact" lecture system, and local mechanisms of indoctrination and social control, see Roy Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 90 and 117.

<sup>405</sup> Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, "Economic and Social Foundations of Late Imperial Culture," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, eds. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 11.

thoughts and practices while not totally breaking away from them. The rituals and institutions encouraged by the state may not have been run in the ways intended but nonetheless contributed to the extension of the people's sense of unity.

In Chosŏn's case, what the state's efforts to educate its people brought and its historical significance should be more carefully examined. First of all, the attempts of various social groups in Chosŏn to participate in the elite's practices and institutions, which were impossible to actualize without changing state politics, show that Chosŏn people began to become politicized. The process by which various social groups in Chosŏn acquired the right to perform three years of mourning is a clear example proving that by learning about significant socio-cultural values that the state supported, Chosŏn people found an effective way to participate in state politics. Whether what they desired was honor as sincere Confucians or merely some worldly benefits such as labor exemption, in any case, various social status groups in Chosŏn had asked for and consequently succeeded in changing the state's politics which differentiated its constituent people's duties and rights based on their social status.

As Smith points out, "to mobilize formerly passive objects of history into citizens and subjects of history requires in turn a new attitude to power."<sup>406</sup> The requests made by various social constituents in Chosŏn meant that there were some attitudinal changes among Chosŏn people regarding their political influence. Moreover, the experience of changing the state politics that the ruling class had monopolized might have helped Chosŏn people not only realize that they had influential political power but also learn where the power came from; The state's way of cultural civilization and social transformation through education helped

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<sup>406</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, UK: New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1986), 156.

Chosŏn people learn that the cultural capital they had acquired by learning from the elite's instruction was a significant asset with which they could influence the state's important political decisions. Smith also insists that "the conjunction of culture with politics" is a key element of nationalism.<sup>407</sup> According to this, various social groups' acquisition of the right to perform three years of mourning probably contributed to extending their sense of belonging to the state and collectivity because in the process of this accomplishment, they saw that their cultural assets provided them with political power which could even influence the application of legal regulations described in the National Code. With this result, they were no longer merely passive recipients of the rulers' instruction but active political participants. Put simply, Chosŏn people moved toward nationhood by politicizing themselves.

This political accomplishment might have made stronger the sense of distinctiveness and solidarity the people already held; Due to the government's continuous efforts to have them share the state's historical memory, Chosŏn people might already have shared a "linear conception of history" which, according to Smith, "nationalism espouses." Linking various constituent people who could not know each other, these historical memories fixed the "sociological solidity" of Chosŏn as a large community. Also, the Chosŏn elite's continuous efforts to retrieve historical memories and inscribe them into the state's landscape might be helpful for various groups of Chosŏn people to share the concept of a "territorial 'homeland'" in which they were located. Many people in Chosŏn, who never travelled far beyond their villages, were able to experience "the formation of a compact space in which to control their destinies."<sup>408</sup> One might argue that because text distribution was limited at the time, especially

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 161-173.



compared to European countries in the period of “print-capitalism,” it is difficult to say that Chosŏn people had a sense of shared history and territory. However, it should be noted that in Chosŏn history, oral traditions played a similar role to that of publications. Regarding this, Duncan’s study of the *Imjinnok* (Record of 1592, 壬辰錄) is notable although it is about late Chosŏn. In this study, examining different editions of *Imjinnok*, Duncan contends that the oral traditions which appear to have been spread throughout the Korean peninsula and which were told by professional storytellers at marketplaces and other locales may have helped Chosŏn people believe that they all belonged to a community of shared genealogy and territory.<sup>409</sup> Given the culture of and also the power of the oral traditions, it can be said that the elite’s efforts to encourage Chosŏn people to share a collectivity could be accomplished despite the limitations of the publication and distribution of printed materials. It is highly probable, therefore, that with the concept of a shared history and territory, Chosŏn had a new mental construct, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s words, an “imagined community”, to which they believed they belonged. In this situation, their realization that they could influence the central government’s political decisions could not but strengthen their emotional and mental tie to the state.

Furthermore, whatever their initial political intention was, the state politics of Chosŏn continuously contributed to strengthening the people’s membership in the state. In official political discussions, the elite defined the non-elite as their own people to which they owe special responsibility. In implementation of their political vision, the elite kept attempting to acculturate the non-elite group through rituals and educational institutions. Therefore, even

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<sup>409</sup> John Duncan, “Imjin waeran ūi kiŏk kwa minjok ūisik hyŏngsŏng –Imjinnok tŭng min’gan chŏnsŭng e nat’anan minjung ūi minjok ūisik,” in *Imjin Waeran, Tong Asia Chŏnjaeng*, eds. Chŏng Tuhŭi and Yi Kyŏngsun (Seoul: Humanist, 2007), 147-163.

the non-elite in Chosŏn had been treated and trained as social members of the state who should participate in and contribute to the retrieval of the Three Dynasties' ideal which is at the same time an official political goal of the Chosŏn state. "Mobilizing the included membership for a common *political* goal" is significant for turning an *ethnie* into nation. It is because with this mobilization and inclusion, a great measure of class difference can be accommodated "within overall common ethnic culture."<sup>410</sup> As a matter of fact, responding to these elite's politics, the non-elite learned that despite existing legal restrictions, they could not only share elite culture and practices but also acquire accompanying benefits from the state. Put differently, they learned that they were not excluded from but allowed to participate in the state's political and cultural activities as significant constituents of the state. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that the Chosŏn elite's politics to transform their society through education heightened the people's sense of membership in the state. Realizing that their social rights could be guaranteed and protected by the state, they could become actual agents and participants in the state politics, not just passive recipients.

I am not hastily arguing here that Chosŏn was a modern "nation-state." During the Chosŏn period, social boundaries between the elite and commoners existed and the distinction between different social groups often became clearer according to the elite's politics. Moreover, in this period, the notion that all members of the state are equal, one of the hallmarks of nationalism, did not exist. I also do not simply insist here that some Confucian ideas shared by many premodern East Asians can be directly linked to important elements of modern nationalism. Rather, what I am pointing out here is that as such scholars as E. J. Hobsbawm and Linda Colley suggest, ingredients of nationalism and its trajectory are locally

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 165-169.

embedded and diverse.<sup>411</sup> Regarding Korean history, Boudewijin Walraven already pointed out that Benedict Anderson's assumption that developments associated with modernity such as print capitalism were crucial to the origin of national consciousness<sup>412</sup> cannot be universally applied to all states.<sup>413</sup> Suggesting the possibility that premodern Korea, due to its remarkable endurance and centralized bureaucracy, created a homogenous collectivity with a sense of shared identity much earlier than happened in European countries,<sup>414</sup> John Duncan pointed out that "the sense of identification among the Korean people, both elites and commoners, with a larger collectivity represented by the state is not a twentieth-century novelty" but "something that dates back hundreds of years."<sup>415</sup>

In a similar vein, I am suggesting that the conventional assumption that a nation is a modern phenomenon should be reconsidered. Especially, I am challenging recent Korean historians' insistence that a Korean "nation" only came into being after the state encountered Western and Japanese imperialism. Even though it is true that Korean nationalists in the early twentieth century contributed to developing a modern sense of Korean nationhood, it should be noted that as Liah Greenfeld points out, that nationalism was a potent force before it

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<sup>411</sup> Referring to the latter, JaHyun Kim Haboush insists that the trajectory of Korean nationalism is totally different from that of Europe. Regarding this, see JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Great East Asian War and the Birth of the Korean Nation*, eds. William Joseph Haboush and Jisoo M. Kim (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 3-8.

<sup>412</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 37-46.

<sup>413</sup> Boudewijin Walraven, "Divine Territory: Shaman Songs, Elite Culture and the Nation," *Korean Histories* 2.2 (2011), 58.

<sup>414</sup> John Duncan, "Proto-nationalism in Premodern Korea" in *Perspectives on Korea*, eds. Sang-Oak Lee and Duk-Soo Park (Sydney: Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 200.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

became a mass phenomenon in many cases.<sup>416</sup> As a matter of fact, without a preexisting sense of collective identity, it is doubtful that Koreans would have been able to create a strong nationalism simply due to the efforts of the modern nationalist elite, and the newly introduced industrial culture, in such a relatively short period and on a limited infrastructure between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather, it seems more appropriate to argue that the elite might find efficiency in the discourse on nationalism on the basis of their people's historical and cultural experiences. Given this, it is more reasonable to carefully examine how in Korea, whose historical experiences are different from those of the countries of Western Europe, nationalism has been constructed, rather than simply defining the Korean 'nation' as a modern novelty.

Ernest Gellner argues that pre-modern societies had no place for nations or nationalism because the elites in the pre-modern era were unable to generate any ideology which could overcome the social divisions which originated from each individual's rigid sub-group membership – membership rooted in regions or provinces.<sup>417</sup> However, he himself indicates that although it is atypical, in China there was “a high culture linked more to an ethic and a state bureaucracy than to a faith and church” which “anticipated the modern linkage of state and culture.”<sup>418</sup> In Chosŏn Korea, with the people's realization of its significance, Confucian thought and practices could not be monopolized by a small ruling elite. The fact that the discussions of people's mourning periods, which was highly important

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<sup>416</sup> Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>417</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed, New perspectives on the past (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 138-139.

<sup>418</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 141.

to the extent that high officials in the central government had serious political feuds regarding this in the seventeenth century,<sup>419</sup> were made among all different status groups proves that there were attempts from various social constituents to share elite culture and its values. The elite's approval of the observance of three years of mourning among non-elite groups also suggests that Chosŏn Korea was in the process of making a larger collectivity which transcended the social divisions made by both legal regulations and existing social concepts.

Rather than demonstrating its philosophical superiority, Chosŏn people's familiarity with Confucianism contributed to constructing their collective identity. Kim Sŏngil's exhorting letter mentioned above needs to be mentioned here again to discuss this issue. As I mentioned, in this letter, created to arouse people's national sentiment, Kim repeatedly mentioned the degree of Confucianization of Yŏngnam – which also related to the overall Confucianization of Chosŏn Korea. In European countries, when the elite's religious culture was disseminated beyond the court and bureaucracy and shared by the non-elite, it often contributed to transforming older ethnic communities in the direction of nationhood.<sup>420</sup> Kim's letter shows that a similar social situation had been created before and during the late sixteenth century. He emphasized that Chosŏn people were civilized by Confucian culture and practices right at the moment he desperately felt the need to inspire national commitment among the public to fight against foreign invaders. This suggests that due to the socio-cultural interactions between the elite and non-elite, Chosŏn people came to have a communal culture with which they could be bound together as a larger unity.

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<sup>419</sup> Regarding this see, JaHyun Kim Haboush, "Constructing the Center: The Ritual Controversy and the Search for a New Identity in Seventeenth-Century Korea," in *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, eds. JaHyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 46-90.

<sup>420</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, UK: New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1986), 157-161.

Anthony Smith points out that “myths, symbols, memories and value” diffused to a given population can be “the basis of a nation’s core heritage,”<sup>421</sup> which can be directly linked to modern national identity. As shown above, the elite of the Chosŏn dynasty tried to define the state’s identity culturally and historically and to share the defined identity with the people through various cultural performances. It cannot be denied that those attempts were helpful to make the people have a sense of belonging to a larger collectivity. Moreover, the elite constantly tried to instill the core values of Confucianism in various social groups through textual circulation and ritual performances. Also, responding to the elite’s politics, the non-elites of Chosŏn came to understand that there existed important social rules which should be applied equally to all people regardless of their social position.

Again, I am not here ignoring the fact that the state law of Chosŏn clearly drew social boundaries among its constituents which often justified social discrimination in the society. Also, I am not denying that the elite continuously attempted to monopolize social prestige and privileges in both legal and cultural ways. Surely, the discriminatory tools deterred the emergence of a sense of equality which is significant for modern nationalism. However, it should be noted that the Chosŏn elite accepted and the non-elite shared an idea that some significant values could not be monopolized by a particular figure or group. It should be also emphasized that this idea was politically and socially justified in that the non-elite’s efforts to participate in those rituals and educational institutions monopolized by the elite were, at least theoretically, supported and encouraged by the state and ruling elite, rather than prohibited.

Given this, it can be said that in Chosŏn, whose historical and cultural backgrounds were totally different from countries of Western Europe, its social constituents made efforts to

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 160.

improve their state's socio-political and socio-cultural structure and in the process, came to have a shared sense of same group membership on their own terms. The non-elite challenged social discrimination stipulated in the National Code with their knowledge of Confucian thought and practices, and the state and ruling elite often responded favorably emphasizing the importance of Confucian values rather than legal regulations. This social interaction provided Chosŏn people with equal behavioral rights, although only in some limited political and cultural spheres. Therefore, it can be said that with continuous and active social interactions, various social constituents in Chosŏn came to share a "larger collectivity identified and symbolized by the state"<sup>422</sup> which overcome individuals' sub-group memberships. This suggests, I argue, that the construction of a certain "Koreanness" was already in progress in Chosŏn before the concept of the "nation" was introduced to Korea in the late nineteenth century.

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<sup>422</sup> John Duncan, "Proto-nationalism in Premodern Korea" In *Perspectives on Korea*, eds. Sang-Oak Lee and Duk-Soo Park (Sydney: Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 221.

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