

## **Between Confucian Ideology and the State: A New Approach to Understanding the Literati Purge of 1519**

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The term of Confucian state is self-contradictory. How is Confucianism able to be confined in a particular political entity seeking its own interest? So is the term of scholar-official. How can a Confucian scholar pursuing 'This Culture' of Confucius coincide with the governmental functionary? In this paper I discuss how the two concepts of Confucianism and the state and scholar and official compromise and compete with each other.

The first 'state' of China, in its modern sense, was invented by Ch'in Shih Huang-ti and the Legalists. Confucians had to adjust themselves to the new political environment. The doctrine of the mandate of heaven, exalting the king's authority on the one hand and controlling its arbitrariness on the other was contrived by the Confucians of the imperial era. Even though they inherited the myth of the sage-ministers of Mencius and tried to limit autocracy, many imperial Confucians oscillated the two ideological posts of pure (controlling) Confucianism and Legalist Confucianism. When in government they had to choose their political identity being either authentic Confucians or the king's subjects.

Neo-Confucians, criticizing the conformist posture of the imperial Confucians of the Han and T'ang period, made it clear that the essence of Confucian spirit lay in its controlling power. However, the more they took the radical position, the more their self-consciousness dissociated. As long as they remained officials, they could not help choosing their priority between being authentic scholars or officials.

The literati purges of mid Chosŏn Korea were triggered by the Neo-Confucians claiming the supremacy of Confucian ideology over the state and the king's authority. They had to confront the king on the one hand and the **official**-scholars on the other. In spite of seeming defeat, the martyrdom of the orthodox Neo-Confucian **scholar**-officials decided a Korean identity which put more value on Confucianism than the state.

*Keywords: Confucian state, scholar-official, literati purge, authority, power, sage-king, sage-minister*

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## 1. Introduction

The dichotomy of ‘Conservativeness and Progress’ has long prevailed for understanding Korean history, in particular, of the Chosŏn dynasty. It has been conceived, for example, that the political confrontation of the late Koryŏ period was the struggle between the conservative Yi Saek faction and the progressive Chŏng To-jŏn faction (To Hyŏn-chŏl 1999; Ch’oe Yŏn-shik 1997). In the same way the literati purges of the sixteenth century Chosŏn have been thought to have been triggered by the intense conflict between the conservative *hun’gupa* and the progressive *sarimpa* (Kim Ton 1997; Ch’oe Yi-don 1997). The socio-economic reductionism, that is to say, the binary of the large landowners and the small and middle landowners has presented itself as a predominant analytical framework for that simple dichotomy. It is a good sign, however, that a growing number of studies have begun to find the causes of the political conflicts in the difference of ideological commitment or policy priority among the bureaucrats.

Many studies, nevertheless, seem to still cling to the preposition of colonial studies, which found one of the central phenomena of the Chosŏn Dynasty to be factionalism by illustrating the political strife as that developed between the two distinctively divided political forces. The literati purges of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century are no exception. Those who conducted research on the socio-economic condition and the family lineages of the bureaucrats of the period, however, have argued that the two were indeed bifurcated from a homogeneous group in socio-economic status and ideology (Wagner 1980a; Chŏng Tu-hi 2002). But this approach should not be confused with the view of the naked political strife devoid of any ideological commitment. I am sure that the freedom from the reductive dichotomy will lead us to a new understanding of the Chosŏn dynasty, especially of the middle period. A new approach does not delve into the dubious

two groups any more. Nor does it go for naked political strife.

Then what makes a new approach 'new'? It will be the king and the state.<sup>1</sup> Of course former studies have mentioned the kings such as King Yönsan'gun and King Chungjong as well. But it is undeniable that they have not dealt with the kings, born to be political beings, seriously. What they have lost is the problem of a king's authority, in particular, influenced by Neo-Confucianism. A state is the clearly territorialized place in which a king's authority is exercised. When understanding the literati purges in terms of the political conflicts amongst the bureaucrats on the definition of the state and the king's authority, we come to know that the line of confrontation has transferred to between the king and the bureaucrats even though the king seldom took part in the political debates pro-actively. In this case, the conservative bureaucrats are to be conceived as the king's representatives. A king, as a whole, carries out his will by means of approving or influencing. Thus what we should be concerned with is not the dialogue among the political forces apparent in the *Veritable Records of the Chosön Dynasty* but the ideological code controlling over it behind the scenes.

According to this code, the term 'Confucian state' is self-contradictory. It is because the state of China, in its modern sense, is the invention of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti (the first emperor of Ch'in), a symbol of the anti-Chinese. Both the state and the bureaucracy are the outcomes of Legalist thinking. The Han Empire was a state in which the irreconcilable ideologies of Confucianism were based on the rites (*li*) of the kin society, and of Legalism based on law (*fa*). For this reason, we should consider the internal ideological tension latent in the term 'imperial Confucianism' or 'Confucian empire' (Mote 1971). In the ideal type, it may be that a state and its bureaucracy belong to an emperor, whereas culture and ideology belong to the Confucian scholars. At this point, the consciousness of the Confucian scholar-officials starts to be dissociated. Every **scholar**-official faces an identity crisis of whether in priority he identifies himself as being a Confucian scholar or an official. The authentic scholar-officials find ruling legitimacy primarily in Confucian

1. In this paper, I do not discriminate between the terms state or king in most cases because in the pre-modern East Asian countries like China and Korea, a king was believed to be equal to the state itself.

ideology and try to control a king's domineering power and the abuse of the state according to the imperatives of Confucianism. To the contrary, however, the **official**-scholars sanctify the king as the highest political symbol, and endeavor to enhance the wealth and power of the state by approaching Confucianism from the point of view of the state.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the very code of evaluating the literati purges, in particular, of 1519<sup>3</sup>, is not so much a binary of *hungupa* and *sarimpa* as the discordance of the state (or the king) and Confucian ideology. The critical questions will be these: What decided primarily the political legitimacy of the Confucian state of the Chosŏn Dynasty? Do we confront Confucianism with the state or compromise with it? Wagner (1980b; 1974) is the first scholar who looked straight at this point. Yet, his conclusion seeing the purges as the political conflicts of the State Council on behalf of the king and the Censorate is, to be sure, insufficient. He did not give full sight on the ideological structure of the Confucian bureaucracy, especially, the censorial system. Suffice it to say that when the Censorate is considered as the 'institutionalized resistant' contrived by the Confucians since the First Compromise<sup>4</sup> of the Han Empire, we will come to its essence more closely.<sup>5</sup>

The literati purges, in particular, of 1519, were triggered by the orthodox Neo-Confucians questioning the First Compromise. Is Confucianism, in the world, able to be conjunct with the state in a harmonious way? The frustration stemming from a sense of the paradox dormant in a term Confucian state radically conditioned the political orientation of the orthodox Neo-Confucians. From this unhappy consciousness of the scholar-officials, the ideological tension of Confucianism and the state has grown to be intense. They saw no possibility of the conjunction of the lineage of the kingship (*wang-t'ung*) and that of the orthodox tao (*tao-t'ung*). Briefly speaking, the four literati purges were the collision of these two competing lineage charis-

2. Kim SangJun (2001) defined each character of Confucian politics as constraining Moralpolitik and enabling Moralpolitik. For details of Kim's analysis on the structure of Confucian ideology, see his Ph.D. dissertation (2000).

3. I'll prove in the later part of this paper why the purge of 1519 (*Kimyo Sahwa*) matters.

4. On the historical compromise between the state (or Legalism) and the Confucian scholars (or Confucianism), refer to Wright (1994: 33); Fairbank (1992: 62-64); Levenson & Shurmann (1971: 80-82); and Mote (1971: 71).

mas. Which charisma should be adopted as the sole judge of political affairs? Who holds the actual power? In this paper, I discuss the character of the king's political authority and Confucian bureaucracy, the precondition in which the political conflicts of the mid Chosŏn period unfolded. I also evaluate the question of whether the political debate in Chungjong's reign was a discourse on the ontological meaning of the Confucian state.

## 2. King and Hierocratic Bureaucracy in the Confucian State

### *Confucian King's Authority and the Problem of the State*

The irony of the Confucian state is that no Confucian has been inaugurated as a king in founding a new dynasty. In most cases, the kings of the pre-modern era of China and Korea came from peasants or military heroes.<sup>6</sup> The war charisma held by them was essential in establishing and maintaining a political entity. The point is to disguise and ritualize the primitive violence of a king's power for gaining the voluntary obedience of the people. Power must be transformed to authority at that moment.

Max Weber is one of the first scholars who distinguished authority from power. According to him, authority is the ability to bring about obedience. It is sharply contrasted with power that accomplishes one's will against the resistance of others (Weber 1968: 212). Those two concepts on legitimacy represent a medieval history of the West in which the pope possessed the *auctoritas* and the emperor the *potestas* (Schmitt 1976: 42). In comparison with its Western counterpart, according to Weber, the emperor of China remained primarily a pontifex. The military charisma of the warlord and the pacifist charisma of the sorcerer were united in one hand, and his imperial authority emerged predominantly from magical charisma (Weber 1964: 30-31). If

5. Hucker (1966) is one of the first scholars who approached the censorial system of the Confucian state from ideological perspectives.

6. For example, Ming T'ai-tsu (the first emperor of Ming China) was a leader of the peasant rebels and Yi Sŏng-gye, the first king of Chosŏn Korea, was a famous military commander in the late Koryŏ dynasty.

a state is ruled by means of the pacifist (magical) charisma as a whole, it cannot be a political entity but must be a cultural one.<sup>7</sup> Thus Weber defined the ancient state of China as a large family based on kin relationships. His concept of a patrimonial state is closely related with this anthropological evaluation.<sup>8</sup>

Weber's understanding on Chinese history, however, fails to notice the critical points. Among others, he did not distinguish imperial China from Chinese civilization (a world under the heaven, 天下). Needless to say, he could not see that it was the war charisma that propelled them to form an imperial state and maintain it behind the scenes. As Balazs (1964) pointed out, it is true that modern China has still been succeeding to the political and institutional legacy of pre-modern China. It is not a correct perception, however, that the 'pre-modernity' of old China belongs solely to Confucian patrimony and a kinship system.<sup>9</sup> What had contributed in building modern China, indeed, was the imperial China invented in the Han dynasty, that is to say, a hybrid of Confucianism and Legalism. Of course, imperial China as well has been conceived in terms of a cultural entity. The endless invasions of the barbarians have always confirmed the fact that the political entity coincides with the cultural entity. Nevertheless, once China started to evolve into a 'state' during the Warring States period, a variety of heterogeneous factors, to be sure, came to be incorporated in her (Mote 1971). The bureaucracy in central government and the *Hsien* system in local areas highlight the heterogeneity. As such, imperial China is a state in which the seemingly irreconcilable and actually competing two discrete orders cohabited with each other, the family ritual on the one hand, and the law on the other.<sup>10</sup> In such a hybrid state, a king is not only favored as the highest 'Father' in the hierarchy, he is also recognized as a sovereign wielding overwhelming power beyond the limit of

7. "In the role of high priest the emperor was an essential element of cultural cohesion among the individual states which always varied in size and power" (Weber 1964: 26).
8. In examining the problem of authority in ancient China, however, Weber's theory of authority based on a theory of charisma has only limited plausibility. In spite of his study on the kinship system of China, he gives no further analysis on the sustained authority based on social hierarchy. He failed to see that authority was intimately connected with a hierarchal interpretation of the social order. For this matter, see Arendt (1977).
9. I wonder what Weber would say about patriotism against the 'parents' will' apparent in Confucian states.

the family (Ch'oe Chin-dŏk 2001). For the latter, the war charisma of a king has constantly revealed its political significance.

The war charisma of an emperor has never perished. After the termination of human sacrifices of the Shang dynasty, the ruler's authority was based on ritually directed violence in the form of animal sacrifices, warfare, and hunting. Since hunting as violence against animals was practiced for war against men, the two major state services were actually sacrifices and warfare. Both involved the ritualized taking of life, and this defined the realm of political power (Lewis 1990). This "sanctioned violence" of the ruler has been sustained in spite of the humanized transformation of political power into arts, myth, and ritual since the Chou dynasty (Chang 1983). And it conditioned the unique mode of existence of the emperor as a sovereign of the state. The emperor's role as a source of spontaneous, irrational, or unpredictable acts was opposed to the routineized, predictable action (or inaction) of bureaucrats (Fairbank 1992: 68). To the contrary of Weber's optimistic expectation that the Chinese emperor conducted himself according to the ethical imperatives of the old classical scriptures (Weber 1964: 31), he did not — and could not — commit himself solely to Confucianism. The sanctioned violence of the emperor presented itself as a major engine for domination even in the Confucianized state. With all kinds of rhetoric and ritual, the Chinese emperor, if he resolved to be condemned as tyrant,<sup>11</sup> could punish and take the lives of his bureaucrats. And only he was eligible to mobilize the military forces. The hereditary successorship, the very opposite conception of *sŏnyang* (a voluntary abdication to a virtuous man), was the means of monopoly of violence by one legitimate family and, further, by one person. The myth of a sage-king immune from any sense of violence has been never achieved in a real state. No wonder, the myth of the sage-king invented way prior to the formation of imperial China lacks in the conception of a state.<sup>12</sup>

The king of a certain state can hardly coincide with a sage-king as a cultural hero. A sage-king is not (and cannot be) conscious of the competitors. Otherwise, a king as a sovereign is predestined to live with the

10. A term of *guotsia* or *kukga*, the Chinese and Korean translation of a state, in fact, is a compound word comprising of a state (*kuk*) and a family (*ga*).

fluctuation of the state's fate in competition with other states.<sup>13</sup> What grasps our attention is that the more a king exerts to develop a — mostly economic and military — fortune for his state, the further he goes away from the image of the ancient sage-kings.<sup>14</sup> It was never believed that the sage-kings involved themselves in enhancing national interest. The anti-Confucian legacies such as arbitrariness, sanctioned violence, and hereditary succession entailed from the king's existence as a sovereign of the state. As a result, the myth of a sage-king provided the Confucians living in imperial China with a strong weapon to check the discretionary power of the incumbent kings. Now, a sage-king is transformed into a goal to be reached by the kings of the contemporary. At the same time, the mission of the Confucians is clarified to protect the Confucian ideal from the encroachment of the king's power and the state. Here we need to take a look at Tung Chung-shu, the ideologue of Emperor Wu of the early Han dynasty.

The doctrine of the mandate of heaven of Tung, who presented the Han Empire with Confucian legitimacy, is in fact double-edged. Although the doctrine of the mandate of heaven required obedience to the ruler as one of its essential features, it also required the ruler to obey the moral laws of the cosmos (Wood 1995: 9). Heaven as a rationalized God was believed to secure the cosmic order. What is striking is that the common people (*min*) were thought to represent and even be identified with heaven itself. Here emerge the three key concepts to understand the doctrine of the mandate of heaven and the theory of min supremacy (*minbonjuui*) apparent in Confucianism (Ch'oe Chindōk 2000: 132-140): heaven (*ch'ŏn*), king (*gun*) and people (*min*). Today's archeological accomplishments give evidence that the appearance of heaven coincided with the discovery of people (Chang 1980).

11. In my view, King Yōnsan 'gun of the Chosōn dynasty was the very case.

12. On the invention and political meaning of the myth of the sage-king, see Henderson (1991).

13. On the political ontology of the king as a sovereign, see Spence (1975), ch. VI. In this chapter, Spence gives an excellent illustration of the Emperor K'ang-hsi's humble confession about his political life.

14. It is how the Chōng To-jōn faction confronted the Yi Saek faction with respect to the problem of the ideal image of the king in the revolutionary period of late Koryō Korea. In comparison with the ancient sage-kings, Chōng argued, T'ai-tsung of T'ang China who had long been venerated as the most prominent emperor in the Chinese history, was nothing more than an artful Pa-taoist (To Hyōn-chōl 1999).

In other words, as the worship of Sang-ti (the Lord on High) of the Sang dynasty, in which slaves were offered for sacrifice and buried in their master's tomb, was being superseded by the worship of heaven of the Chou dynasty, people began to be exalted to the position of heaven. The belief that people were none other than heaven itself exercised its controlling power against the arbitrariness of the rulers. To be sure, Tung implied that the essence of imperial Confucianism must stand at the side of controlling Confucianism by introducing the doctrine of the mandate of heaven and the theory of *min* supremacy developed in the ancient Chou dynasty in the newly founded imperial China. The allegation that the political thought of Tung lay in controlling Confucianism rather than the advocacy of autocracy is supported by the fact that he was a faithful successor of Mencius who pro-actively criticized the princes of the Warring States.

In comparison with the Ch'un-ch'iu period of Confucius when the old authority of the Chou dynasty was not broken down wholesale, the Warring States period of which Mencius was a part was in chaos. The *justa cuasa* of *tsun-wang jang-i* (revering the ruler of Chou and expelling the barbarians) came to be not supported by the feudal lords any longer. At the same time it was a period of transition in which the 'true' states were showing up. The political and ethical power of feudal law of the Chou dynasty (*Chou-li*) having governed the kinship relation between an emperor (son of heaven) and the feudal lords waned to the point of extinction. Mencius could not but lift his hope for a sage-king from amongst contemporary princes who found their authority in either the lineage charisma of hereditary transmission or sanctioned violence. If Mencius spoke with morality and *wang-tao*, they responded with profit and *pa-tao*. While Mencius approached politics in terms of culture, they understood it in terms of the state. From an axiological perspective, both of them spoke different languages.

The breakthrough Mencius found was simple and clear. Contrasted with Confucius, who sanctified the founders of the ancient dynasties, he started to mythicize the legendary ministers who had been thought to assist the sage-kings. It was in principle a giving-up of the doctrine of a sage-king and at the same time an adjustment of Confucianism to the new political entity of the state. Mencius' heroes began to be transferred from the sage-kings such as Yao, Shun, Yu, T'ang, Wun, and Wu

to the sage-ministers such as Po I, Yi Yin, Liu Hsia Hui, Confucius, Tzu-ssu and Tseng-tzu. It is how the myth of the sage-ministers was invented. These “outstanding men” (*Mencius* 5A: 10) paralleled the ancient sage-kings in their moral excellence and were brought up to the fore as advisors of the kings. Asked about the reason why he refused to see the princes, Mencius justified his attitude giving an old episode:

Duke Mu frequently went to see Tzu-ssu. “How did kings of states with a thousand chariots in antiquity make friends with a Scholar?” he asked. Tzu-ssu was displeased. “What the ancients talked about,” said he, “was serving them, not making friends with them.” The reason for Tzu-ssu’s displeasure was surely this. “In point of position, you are the prince and I am your subject. How dare I be friend with you? In point of virtue, it is you who ought to serve me. How can you presume to be friends with me?” (*Mencius* 5B: 7)

According to Mencius, the king and the Confucian scholar possesses ‘rank’ and ‘virtue’ with respect to each other. It reminds us of the fact that the pope and the emperor were separated according to *auctoritas* and *potestas* in the West. Mencius, singling out rank, age, and virtue as three things revered in the world, insisted that the king owning only one of the three should come to see himself as possessing virtue, the most valuable thing of the three (*Mencius* 2B: 2). The split of rank and virtue accelerated to make an abyss between the world of politics and the world of morality. The lineage of the kinship was separated from the lineage of the orthodox tao completely.

The Neo-Confucians of Sung China were very faithful to follow Tung’s strategy of exalting the kingship on the one hand and controlling it on the other by means of the doctrine of the mandate of heaven. For them, Confucians of T’ang China exploited the sublime idea by making the king a living God. The encroachment of the institutionalized religions like Buddhism and Taoism made things worse. In the sight of an authentic history of Confucianism, the T’ang period was a “Dark Age” of China. It is for this reason that Ch’eng Hao, one of the harbingers of Neo-Confucianism esteemed himself for succeeding to the lineage of the orthodox tao interrupted for more than a millennium

since Mencius. Chu Hsi, a compiler of Neo-Confucianism developed the doctrine of the tao-t'ung based on the venerable spirit of a myth of the sage-ministers of Mencius. The doctrine of tao-t'ung, even though it is an inheritor of the doctrine of the mandate of heaven of Tung Chung-shu, is much more pessimistic on real politics. From the radical separation of the wang-t'ung and tao-t'ung, Neo-Confucians made up a peculiar tension of the secular and the sacred.

The political theory of Neo-Confucianism is based on its unique dualism on human nature. Neo-Confucians found a ruling legitimacy in the heaven transcending the king's power of this world. Belittling the king's authority they identified themselves with *chün-tzu*, who possessed *Li* (principle, a rationalized heaven) as a part of their nature and clarified it by learning the Confucian classics and cultivating the moral self. Neo-Confucians definitely knew that this world was not a moral world. They, too, argued kingship must be absolute. Without a strongly established kingship, an ordered society could not be expected. Kingship, however, cannot be transcendental to this world. In the sight of transcendental *Li*, it has, not less than, a transitory significance. In a world of *Li*, kingship falls down to a relative value. Kingship has the power only to regulate an unstable world of *Ch'i* (vital force), furthermore, a turbid one. On the contrary, a world of *Li* leads us to eternity. *Li* penetrates the universe and establishes human nature. *Chün-tzu* is a prophet of *Li* warning the people of this world (de Bary 1991: 9). *Li* is the sole standard to justify man's conduct. Not surprisingly, Confucian intellectuals could neither adjust themselves to the status quo nor permit themselves to accept the rules of the game defined in narrowly conceived power relationships since their concerned effort to change the world was dictated by a comprehensive vision of the human project empowered by philosophy of *Li*. Even though they were in the world, they were definitely not of the world (Tu 1993: 10).

The doctrine of the mandate of heaven of Tung Chung-shu and the doctrine of the tao-t'ung succeed the lack of confidence in the real politics of Mencius. The political power was not thought to have any positive roles except to avoid anarchy. The rulers inevitably involved in violence could not join the disciples of 'This Culture' Confucius had advocated. A state did not have its own goal. It bore significance only when it serves the noble ideal of Confucianism. Orthodox Confucians

searched the political goal of the Confucian state not in the national interest but in the guard of Confucian culture and moral perfection. The life-taking task of the literati in the Confucian state was to keep the king on the right track to moral perfection. In this sense, they were not so much politicians as the teachers of the king. Then, what about the bureaucratic organization of which they were a part? Did it play a role solely as the king's machine?

### *Confucian Bureaucracy and the Identity Problem of the Literati*

Considering the diverse spectrum of Confucianism from Hsu Tzu to Mencius and from Ch'en Liang to Chu Hsi, the doctrine of tao-t'ung of the Chu Hsi school seems to be a very weird thinking. The doctrine of tao-t'ung drives politics to a radical confrontation with morality, dismissing the peculiarity of political values. Neo-Confucians, the prophets of the Confucian tao, were inevitably at odd terms with a ruler, a man of the political from his birth.<sup>15</sup> Neo-Confucians, nevertheless, did not go to break the First Compromise with the emperor of the Han dynasty. Instead of inventing a new institution confronting and controlling the political power, they endeavored to embed the hierocratic spirit into the established political institution of the state.<sup>16</sup> The bureaucracy since Sung China never remained a political machine seeking the king's favor. As long as insisting on the orthodoxy from Mencius's time, the bureaucrats have been the sanctioned resisters in principle.

It goes too far, however, to conceive the bureaucracy of the Confucian state as a perfect equivalent to the Western Church. The primary goal of the bureaucracy of the Confucian state was always to search for the king's secure and national interest. According to Creel (1964), who has studied the birth of bureaucracy of ancient China, the first form of bureaucracy showed up in the barbarian states such as Ch'u and Ch'in. The complicated family system of Chou based on the family code is not consistent with the ideal of bureaucracy based on the impersonal hierarchy between the king and the subjects. The

15. Dardess (1983) examined the inescapable conflict between the orthodox Neo-Confucian elites and Ming T'ai-tsu in the founding of the Ming dynasty. See also Wood (1995) about the Sung Neo-Confucians' challenge to autocracy.

bureaucracy was a new system invented with the birth of the centralized state based on law. The First Compromise, as a matter of fact, was the problem of whether Confucians participated in the bureaucracy contrived by the Legalists. The existence of the scholar-officials, unique in China and Korea, was the outcome of the compromise between Confucians and Legalists.

Of no doubt, the bureaucratic ideology did include a spectrum of ideas ranging from Legalist-like realism at one extreme to unchallengeable Confucian idealism at the other. But they were all within the expanded mainstream of Imperial Confucianism. For this reason, Hucker (1959: 186) argued to replace the words Legalism and Confucianism with such terms as “rigorist Confucianism” and “humanist Confucianism”. The Confucian bureaucracy has been praised as the ‘modern and rational organization’ (Creel 1964: 155) on the one hand and at the same time condemned as ‘a critical obstacle to the Modernization’ of the East on the other (Huang 1981; Balazs 1964).

After the rise of Neo-Confucianism, however, the true color has been clarified. The censorial system firmly established in the Ming and Chosŏn dynasties since the fourteenth century had nothing to do with governmental control of private publications or entertainment. It did not work according to normal police activity. Rather, it represents an organized and systematic effort by the government to police itself (Hucker op. cit.). The censorial system assured the basic roles of the Confucian bureaucracy consisted in its hierocratic function constraining the political power. On this point, Chosŏn went further than Ming. As we shall see, the Fourth Censor (Chŏngŏn) of the Office of the Censor-General (Saganwon), who was in charge of remonstrating with true information, was eligible to put forth his opinion to the king no less than the State Councillors did. And in contrast with the counterpart of T’ang and Sung China, the inspectors of Chosŏn were responsible to speak out, in addition to the original task of inspecting the wrong

16. Weber’s allegation is plausible to the extent that no creative tension between the state and the church has been developed in China. But it is presumptuous to say there was no tension between the secular and the sacred. In this chapter, I discuss the institutionalized tension of the kind developed in the Confucian state.

doings of the officials. Finally as the Office of the Special Counselors (Hongmungwan) founded originally for the maintenance of the classical records and royal advice got to be involved in inspecting and remonstrating, which in fact were not mentioned in the National Code, the three offices (samsa) grew to be a powerful political organization in limiting autocracy (Ch'oe Yi-don 1997: 28). Their weapon was remonstrance and impeachment.

The literati purges of mid Chosŏn have been evaluated as ideological conflicts between two distinctively separated groups, that is to say, the *sarimpa* and the *hungupa* (Yi Pyŏng-hyu 1998). As Wagner argued, however, there is a lack in empirical evidence to support the allegations that these two claimed discrete ideologies due to their level of understanding of Neo-Confucian learning and that the socio-economic backgrounds of both were clearly differentiated. The confronting bureaucrats shared, to be sure, the same political ideology of Confucianism and at large they came from Kyŏnggi and Ch'ungch'ŏng provinces near Seoul.<sup>17</sup> They were only distinguished in their political orientations and philosophical inclinations. Even among the Censorate, the young Neo-Confucians often failed to voice the same opinions. All advocated Confucian political ideology but orientated it differently, which decided their political prescriptions in different ways (Kim Ton 1997: 115-125; Han Yŏng-u 1981: 223).<sup>18</sup>

What makes it much worse is the prevalent assumption: A group of orthodox Neo-Confucians retired to the Kyŏngsang area and that their descendants began to enter government through the Censorate in King Sŏngjong and Chungjong's reigns. And finally most of them were purged by the immoral and power-orientated *hungupa*. But it disregards the clear fact that there have been a bundle of debates on governmental policy and national ceremony among the bureaucrats since the formative period of the Chosŏn dynasty (Chi Tu-hwan 1998, 1996). Among the debaters, to be sure, did orthodox Neo-Confucians exist

17. In this sense, I do not agree to the established allegation that the Confucians of the early period of the Chosŏn dynasty were not authentic Neo-Confucians. As a matter of fact, Kim Chong-jik, a revered Neo-Confucian hero of Chosŏn, is a controversial figure. On the ambivalence of his political career, see Han Ch'ung-hui (1997) and Kim Yŏng-bong (1995). In particular, the latter furthers the criticism on the fictitious idea of the lineage of the orthodox tao. Kim emphasizes a political motive in inventing the Korean tao-t'ung (66-69).

advocating dauntlessly the guidelines of the Sung scholars? It is presumptuous, nonetheless, to conclude that all of them had a connection with the *sarim* in the Kyōngsang area. To the best of my knowledge, the literati purges, in particular, of 1519, were not the conflicts of the dubious groups *hungu* and *sarim*, but those of the **official**-scholars and the **scholar**-officials.

The conflicts among those who were common in their political ideology, for instance, between the State Councillors and the Censorate, within the State Councillors and within the Censorate etc., seem to have been expected with the appearance of the paradoxical concept of scholar-official. In the Confucian state, Confucian ideology and the state (or king's authority) must adjust themselves to each other. The ensuing question would be whether the tao-t'ung was subservient to the wang-t'ung or vice versa. The point concerned the king's authority rather than the Confucian ideal itself. The early Neo-Confucians such as Pyōn Kye-ryang and Yang Sōng-ji, who were closer to the bureaucrats than scholars, devoted their entire lives to enhancing the king's authority and strengthening the state.<sup>19</sup> But they refused to be Machiavellians who extracted morality out of politics. Instead they added moral excellence to the king's power. That is to say, they tried to restore the image of the ancient sage-kings in their own time for the security and prosperity of the newly founded dynasty. Thus they were much closer to political theologians of 16th century Europe than to Machiavelli and other humanists of Italy. The three terms of law, military, and national interest in general were the key to understanding their political thoughts. What is interesting is, among the Legalists in Confucian dress, no one identified as being a Legalist. But sometimes they supported Wang An-Shih, a famous reformer of Northern Sung, who had been rebuked by the orthodox Neo-Confucians as a baseman (Chi Tu-hwan 1998: 88-92). Not surprisingly, most of the Legalist-like

18. On this matter Han Yōng-u's searched for the reason by examining the family relationship of the Censorates who advocated the political position of the king and high-officials with the Merit Subjects (*kongsin*) and the high echelons of the government since King Sejo's reign. By so doing he showed that some of the Censorate had good reason to be listed toward the statism rather than Confucian ideology itself.

19. For their political careers and activities, see Yi Han-su (2001) and Han Yōng-u (1983) respectively.

Neo-Confucians were excluded from the Korean lineage of the orthodox tao invented by later *sarim*.

On the contrary, the orthodox Neo-Confucians founding their political identity in the classics rather than political experience rarely remained faithful to the king all the time. They never identified themselves as simple functionaries. Nor does it mean that they objected to obeying the orders of the king. They, too, exalted the king's authority for the purpose of expelling the evil of chaos from the state. But it is certain that they remained as latent resistants. When the king violated or even showed a hint of violating the rituals designated in the old Confucian classics, they did not hesitate to remonstrate at the risk of their own life. For them, national wealth and power bore significance to the extent that it presented a good living condition for people, the representation of heaven. They firmly believed in the Mencius' notion that the welfare of the people determined heavenly contentment and the correct functioning of the cosmic order. Nevertheless, they thought it was a transitory goal on the way to moral perfection. If the former seeks its own interest at the sacrifice of the latter, it must be given up.

In confronting the Legalist-like Confucians, orthodox Neo-Confucians developed their political weapons comprising remonstrance and impeachment. In the meanwhile, a right to speak (*ŏn'gwon*) had emerged as a pivotal prestige. For them, a public channel of remonstrance (*ŏnro*) seemed to have much more significance for the civilization of the state than any other, even the king's authority. Remonstrance was believed to be the very means to bring about the ideals of Confucian antiquity once again, here and now. In comparison with the Legalist posture of the nationalist Neo-Confucians, the advocacy of a channel of remonstrance is certain to have been engineered by ideological thinking devoid of any distinctive sense of a modern state. Thus, in the conflicts among the literati in the early 16th century, we encounter the clash between Confucian ideology and the state, and the identity problems of the literati at the crossroads of being Confucian scholars or bureaucratic officials.

In next section, I'll look into one of the political debates on the literati purge of 1519. We shall come to know it cannot be categorized as a conflict between the State Councillors and the Censorate let alone the *hungupa* and the *sarimpa*. What is clear is that the bureaucrats

were bifurcated between the state and the channel of remonstrance. In the middle, we scarcely encounter the voice of the king himself. But the essence of the controversy was about the actual status of the king in the Confucian state.

### 3. The Political Controversy of 1515

#### *Memorial of Pak Sang and Kim Chong and a Sense of Crisis*

In spring of 1515, many natural disasters occurred, and other extraordinary things. A hen changed to a rooster, a chick with four legs was born, and frost, hail, and earthquakes continued in series. The evil omen from heaven daunted King Chungjong, for the restoration of 1506 had been justified by the doctrine of the mandate of heaven. It was raising a crisis of the legitimacy of his rule. The spring of 1515, without any noticeable significance in politics, ironically was undergoing a severe crisis. For a breakthrough, King Chungjong issued an order to act according to ritual. He wanted to appease the wrathful heaven by means of observing the correct methods dictated in Confucianism. Soon after, Pak Sang, the governor of Tamyang area and Kim Chong, the county magistrate of Sunch'ang forwarded a long memorial, in which they argued that the deposal of the king's first wife Mrs. Shin brought about the moral and natural disorder of the moment.<sup>20</sup> They thought the improper break of wedlock undermined one of the great bonds of humanity providing the Confucian state of Chosŏn with ideological justification.

Some critical problems were involved therein. First, it implied the illegitimacy and immorality of the restoration of 1506 from the beginning, and second, it provoked controversy towards the legal status of Queen Changgyŏng, who just had passed away after 8 years of official life. In short, it was about the legitimacy of King Chungjong's reign. Alarmed and agitated, King Chungjong found fault with the Royal Secretariat bringing the delicate issue to him in direct hand without a thorough preview. Pak Sang and Kim Chong had put forth a memorial

20. King Chungjong's first wife was a daughter of Shin Su-gun, one of the favorite subjects of King Yŏnsan'gun.

with the top sealed. As a matter of course, the Royal Secretariat dared not to open. King Chungjong could not take any measures in the face of the challenge to his authority. How could he punish those who presented the memorial according to his own order? Ironically it was the Censorate that saved King Chungjong from the quandary, who had been remonstrating the king about the problem of responsibility for the disasters.

### *State Council vs. Censorate*

Three days after the presentation of the memorial, all of the members of the Censorate, including Inspector General Kwon Min-su and Censor General Yi Haeng, started to impeach and ask to jail Pak Sang and Kim Chŏng for provoking the wicked argument. King Chungjong conjured up no other alternatives but to implement a punishment. Now things grew complicated. Expectedly, the State Councillors lodged protest against the king's self-contradictory actions. They argued that the content of the memorial was definitely unreasonable, but nonetheless the presenters ought to be immune from punishment as they only responded to the king's order for opinions. It was thought that the channel of remonstrance should not be blocked because of its content. In confronting the State Councillors, however, the Fourth Inspector (Chip'yong) Ch'ae Ch'im and the Fourth Censor (Chŏngŏn) P'yo Ping — the young Censorates, insisted that the right to remonstrate should not be exalted over the authority of the state. They continued that although their political profession was to remonstrate, remonstrance endangering the state should be checked and even punished. Ch'ae Ch'im strongly criticized the State Councillors, saying that considering their posts, the high echelons must risk their lives defending the security of the state but they cherished only their right to remonstrate without any proper consideration of the state. On the contrary, the Fourth State Councillor (Chwach'ansong) Chang Sun-son reminded King Chungjong of King Yŏnsan'gun's failure, which resulted from oppression to the remonstrance of the officials. He said that if King Chungjong belittled the faithful opinions of the subjects, he would tread the very steps King Yŏnsan had taken. Agitated, King Chungjong ordered to arrest those accused and exiled them.

Against our expectation, it was the Censorate who defended the

king's position. We cannot say all of them were related with the family of the Merit Subjects since King Sejo's reign. Then what about the high-officials confronting the Censorate by advocating the unparalleled value of the remonstrance? Were they orthodox Neo-Confucians from the Kyöngsang area? What matters here is not so much the region as the political orientation. But we have yet to hear other voices from the first controversy. We shall see soon that the controversy did not unfold distinctively along the contour of the high-officials and the Censorate.

### *The Split of the Censorate*

On November 20th, things changed drastically. Cho Kwang-jo, a couple of days after his appointment to Fourth Censor, forwarded a memorial asking to fire the officials of the Censorate. He argued:

Lately, Pak Sang and Kim Chöng put forth the memorial after the king's order for opinions from around the whole state. If it is too radical, you only discard it. How come you find them guilty? If the State Councillors ask to punish them, the Censorate is to defend the remonstrators' position for the purpose of enlarging the public channel of remonstrations. However, the current Censorate in turn blocked the channel and spoiled their profession. How am I able to work with them? If we cannot go along together, you'd better fire all of us.<sup>21</sup>

The political debates between the State Councillors and the Censorate turned into that among the Censorate themselves. At a loss, King Chungjong consulted with the State Councillors on this dilemma and finally decided to change all the members of the Censorate.<sup>22</sup> However, things were not made better. In spite of the wholesome change of the members, the new Censorate turned out to be composed of people with heterodox political orientations. Soon after the shift, the officials of the Office of the Inspector-General asked for a judgment on their internal discordance. Of course, most officials of the Office agreed on Cho Kwang-jo's argumentation. Third Inspector (Changnyöng) Kim Hüi-su and Yu Po, however, put forward other opinion:

21. *Chungjong Shillok* 10/11/21.

We believe that it was solely for the sake of the state that the former Censorate asked to punish those accused. In the face of the problem of the state's security, it does not bear a crucial significance whether the channel for remonstrance is open or not. And when it comes to importance, the state is unparalleled.<sup>23</sup>

King Chungjong started to regret his hasty judgment of changing the Censorate without deep consideration. Even the drastic change of the members of the Censorate failed to curb the internal split among the Censorate. The binary of the state and channel of remonstrance still remained unchallenged. The sole option for King Chungjong was nothing but to change the members of the Censorate once more.<sup>24</sup> But this time a new Censor-General Pang Yu-ryŏng impeached the Office of the Inspector-General, which suspended a final conclusion on which argumentation was right. The officials of the Office of the Inspector-General found both reasonable. The discordance within the Office of the Inspector-General appeared once more between the two Censor offices.

No escape was found for this quandary. As a royal adviser, the Office of the Special Counselors could not help raising a hand to both sides. First Counselor (Pujehak) Kim Kŭn-sa reconciled both saying:

Comparing both sides, they had good intention at the beginning. But they finally fell into the fallacy of curving the straight in order to make the curved straight.... Although [the goal of] their remarks seemed to be different, we, with careful scrutiny, come to a conclusion that both serve the national interest and accordingly, mean well. We should say the right is right and the wrong is wrong and by doing so let everybody speak [for the sake of the state]. It is of no sense to argue the right including the wrong of one's side and to blame the wrong including the right of the other's.<sup>25</sup>

22. Yi Haeng was replaced by Yi Chang-gon as Inspector-General and Kwon Min-su was replaced by Kim An-guk as Censor-General.

23. *Chungjong Shillok* 10/11/27.

24. Pak Yŏl replaced Yi Chang-gon and Pang Yu-ryŏng took the position of Kim An-guk.

Kim Kŭn-sa's ambiguous remark, for sure, failed to satisfy King Chungjong. King Chungjong must not have understood the essence of the intense controversy among the bureaucrats lasting over a year. However, Kim Kŭn-sa's ambivalence gives us a key to understanding the unhappy consciousness of the Confucian scholar-officials. He found that Confucian ideology and the state were in principle at odds with each other. If you go to your own extremes, there will be no chance to be reconciled. He found the only solution for the dilemma in only taking the good intentions of both extremes. Of course, he did not (could not) come to a final conclusion, but rather he chose a safe road to the extent to avoiding the catastrophe.

Sooner or later it came to be clear on which side the bureaucrats stood overall. After a year, Cho Kwang-jo had been promoted to Junior Sixth Counselor (Pusuch'an), and, those who had argued the theory of state supremacy over the right to remonstrate were weakened and almost vanished from the bureaucracy. Among the officials, no one dared to challenge the absolute significance of the remonstrance channel. Many officials who once stood on the side of the theory of state supremacy started to ask for punishment for their previous 'wrong' judgments. Now the right and the wrong came to be clear. Pak Sang and Kim Chŏng were set free and attained new official positions.

It was the first political incident in which Cho Kwang-jo, who would turn out to be the most radical of the period, showed his official figure in the *Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty*. During his four year political career, he (and his followers) never compromised with the nationalists let alone the king's relatives, most of whom were rent-seekers. And he, indeed, won the most debates. His intransigent approach to political issues attracted the younger generation and other orthodox Neo-Confucians. As long as Confucianism was being upheld as national ideology, the **scholar**-officials always commanded legitimacy over the **official**-scholars

The one-sided victory of the right to remonstrate over state supremacy, however, is certain to have catalyzed the literati purges of 1519. The Confucian literati had to choose their political identity somewhere between a **scholar**-official and an **official**-scholar. No one identi-

fied himself purely as a Legalist-like official. And everyone exalted the king's authority. But everyone did not conceive it in the same way. As the hole to the abyss grew larger, the chance for a clash increased.

#### 4. Conclusion: A Search for the Identity of the Confucian state

The **official**-scholars who tried to adjust Confucian ideology to the state found ruling legitimacy in the law-making power of the king of this world. The national security and interest were their most compelling political concerns.<sup>26</sup> It was conceived that a king must guard a state, and in this sense, he must be exalted to a sovereign commanding all of the state. Confucian ideology was no exception. The right to remonstrance of the Censorate would be sustained but could be checked in critical moments. For them, a king was the state itself. On the contrary, for the **scholar**-officials who tried to shape the state by the dictates of Confucianism a state could not be the sole judge of political affairs. It was thought that a state must be subservient to Confucianism and that a king could be recognized as a sovereign only if he conducted himself according to the dictates of Confucian ideology. The arbitrary wielding of a king's power, even though it would bring considerable interests into the state, could hardly be justified. A king was a limited being who had to be led and educated by his subjects who claimed themselves to be a voice of the Confucian tao.

The series of incidents that started in 1515 and came to an end with *Kimyo Sahwa* in 1519, however, were the controversy over the identity problems of the **scholar**-officials. It was the problem of the status of the state and the king's authority that the orthodox scholar-officials provoked, and the conformist official-scholar defended. Now, the identity problems of the Confucian state and scholar-officials that agitated the Confucian bureaucrats had grown to a factional confrontation. The political controversy of the period unfolded in a much more elaborated theoretical framework than that which was brought to an end with the

26. Yun Chōng's article (1997) shows clearly the different political orientations of orthodox Neo-Confucians and nationalist Neo-Confucians even though he adopted the traditional binary terms of *sarimpa* and *hungupa*.

literati purges of 1498 or 1504. In the first two purges in which the king and the orthodox Neo-Confucians faced direct collision, King Yōnsan'gun wanted to wield his discretionary power rather than rationalize it.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, his remarks were carried away in a fit of passion and irrationality. Overwhelmed by his voice, the rational defense of the **official**-scholars was not found overtly. The feature of the period from 1515 to 1519, however, is the very opposite. In comparison with King Yōnsan'gun's reign, the weakness, incompetence and ambivalence of King Chungjong, ironically, enabled to bring the incidents of the period to an open debate among the bureaucrats. The conclusion of the debates was that a king (and a state) could not bear any significance nor seize any power free from Confucian ideology. Its unavoidable corollary is the question of who was the actual political body ruling the Confucian state of Chosŏn.

In the divine body of the King the actual power and political symbolism, which sanctified the former, were incorporated (Kim Sŏk-gŭn 1995: 102). The problem of political symbolism lying in opposition to political power is nothing but a problem of authority. As the actual power is rising, the feature of political symbols is being shrunk. On the other hand, it is a moment when the actual power is being weakened that the feature of political symbolism is emerging.<sup>28</sup> Here I must say once more that, as much as the **official**-scholars who exalted the state and national codes, the orthodox **scholar**-officials who emphasized the doctrine of the mandate of heaven and remonstrance channel as well were never dubious of king's absolute authority. The scholar-officials of the Chosŏn dynasty did not hesitate to raise the question of a king's authority. The point is whether it belonged to actual power or political symbolism. Without question, while the **official**-scholars tended toward the actual exercise of the king's power, the **scholar**-officials conceived the absoluteness of the king's authority as a limit to anarchy.

27. In a summary of the purge of 1504 (*Kapcha Sahwa*), Wagner (1974) mentioned the political orientation of King Yōnsan'gun as this: "The essence of this point was that the government could only function properly and effectively if its lines of authority were firmly drawn, separating the functions of each component agency, passing through the channels of the Six Boards and State Council, and all converging in the sovereign at the top. The sovereign's discretionary power should be unlimited and his actions should be beyond cavil or reproach (p. 67).

In contrast with the former's positive perception on kingship, the latter adopted a defensive view on it. Apparently, the orthodox Neo-Confucians who conceived kingship in terms of political symbolism did not raise a question of actual power. Instead, by asking to delegate the deliberation and judgment on the national affairs to a Prime Minister or State Council, they suggested implicitly that the literati held actual political power.<sup>29</sup> In this Neo-Confucian way they were inheriting the myth of the sage-ministers invented by Mencius.

The four year controversy among the bureaucrats resulted in changing the actual political body from the king to the literati by digging into the potential crevice between actual power and political symbolism. King Yŏnsan'gun's tyranny and King Chungjong's vacillation drove the scholar-officials to the point that the actual power of a king was nothing but evil. T'eogye's *Ten Diagrams of Sage Learning* definitely show what a king should be in mid sixteenth century Korea (Kalton 1988). T'eogye's king is a philosopher-king immune from any hint of violence. The king is getting exalted to political symbolism never reached in this world. He is doomed to his endeavor to be a sage his entire life.

The scholar-officials of the sixteenth century, dismantling the political symbolism of the fifteenth century, started to construct a new political symbolism. Even though they did not clearly understand what they were actually involved in, they were creating a new approach to Confucianism and the state. Until the eighteenth century when Korea had to cope with its legitimacy crisis caused by a new world order (Haboush 1999), the political symbolism established in the sixteenth century had been maintained. The literati purge, in particular, the one of 1519, was the first controversy on Korean identity that searched for a new relationship between Confucianism and the state.

28. On the relationship of power and authority in Asian contexts, see Pye (1985), ch. 2.

29. A demand for a 'delegated rule of the State Council' was another hot issue prevailing among the bureaucrats in the reign of King Chungjong. And a theory of 'the rule of a Prime Minister' has been a key concept of mainstream scholar-officials of Chosŏn such as Chŏng To-jŏn, Cho Kwang-jo, and Song Shi-yŏl (Kim Chun-sŏk 1990).

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