

Special Essay

Problems in Research on King Chǒngjo and the Chǒngjo Era*

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Chǒngjo and Kyujanggak: The “Kyujanggak Collection”

I would first like to congratulate the Seoul National University Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies for holding this international academic conference in conjunction with this year’s special exhibition. It is an honor to give the keynote speech, but also a great burden. I have been a beneficiary of Kyujanggak for over forty years, since the “Kyujanggak collection” moved from Tongsung-tong to Seoul National University’s Kwanak campus. I am embarrassed to say, I do not think the work I produced over these years is commensurate to such generosity. This feeling only intensifies when I think of the scope and aspiration of the new framework of government administration Chǒngjo had in mind when he established Kyujanggak anew in the rear garden (*huwǒn*) of Ch’angdǒk Palace more than 240 years ago.

In the time of the Three Dynasties [*samdae* 三代; Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties], because pedagogical virtue [*sado* 師道] was supreme, governance was magnificent

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and customs were beautiful, and the world was benevolent. Subsequent to the time of the Three Dynasties, because pedagogical virtue was subordinate, hollow words were unhelpful and times in which governance prevailed were ever rare. If a sage stimulates and encourages [his pupils] and assumes the duty of a sagely king [*kunsa* 君師], leading with virtue and uniformly practicing propriety, the world will then be as the one in the time of the Three Dynasties. Thus, changes that take days will be but a matter of instants. While I am without virtue, with regard to benevolence, I will not yield my place as teacher [*sa* 師].

“Those of the first class do not yield to others and say they will be in the second class.” These are Cheng Yi’s words, which I have already taken to heart. What I desire is to be in the first class. (Written by *Wōnim chikchehak* Sō Yongbo in the *chōngsa* year [Chōngjo 21; 1797], “*Itūngnok*” 日得錄 [Records of daily achievements], *Hunō* 訓語 [words of instruction], *Hongjae chōnsō* 弘齋全書 [Complete works of Hongjae], vol. 176)

At the outset of his reign, Chōngjo established Kyujanggak to compile the documents of his predecessors and “books of the world.” Bringing together talented individuals, Kyujanggak served as the cradle of policy and as a space for scholarly pursuit. Sometimes referred to as the “Scholar Monarch” (*Hakcha kunju*),¹ Chōngjo referred to himself as “Sovereign Teacher” (*kunsa* 君師), aspiring to realize the ideal politics of *samdae* 三代 and the Chinese principle of *Uhyōn chwach’ōk* 右賢左戚, which prioritized the selection of officials based on capability rather than family ties. The basis for this ambition was academic pride. As the passage above clearly conveys, when it came to scholarship, he resolved to have no equal. In fact, he was unmatched in his reading and writing of difficult texts. This was a teacher who “encouraged” his students.

There is not one insignificant document among Kyujanggak’s many historical materials revealing the scope and orientation of Chōngjo’s administration. These materials show Chosōn society at its peak and the ways the king and his ministers thought about and dealt with prevailing problems. Currently, the “Kyujanggak collection,” which includes materials pertaining not only to state administration of the Chōngjo era but also subsequent eras, is carefully arranged and categorized by type. The utility of these materials is boundless not only for scholars but also society as a whole.

This utility has improved remarkably through the efforts of SNU professors,

1. Professor Chōng Okcha designated Chōngjo the “scholar king who realized Chosōn’s literary renaissance.” See Chōng Okcha, “Chōngjo: Chosōn ūi munye puhŭng ūl irukhan hakcha kunju” [Chōngjo: The scholar king who realized Chosōn’s literary renaissance], in *63-in ūi yōksa hakcha ka ssim Han’guksa immul yōlchōn* 2 [Collected biographies of Korean historical figures written by sixty-three historians, vol. 2], ed. Han Yōng’u sōnsaeng chōngnyōn kinyōm nonch’ong kanhaeng wiwonhoe [Han Yōng’u retirement commemoration volume publishing committee] (Seoul: Tolbegae, 2003), 412–445.

researchers, administrators, and related institutions since the establishment of the Kyujanggak Collection Committee (*Kyujanggak tosǒ wiiwǒnhoe*) in 1962.² This is certainly a positive development. It also means, however, I am left with very little to say today. Furthermore, I cannot say I have ever researched in depth topics such as “Chosǒn’s Topography of Learning during King Chǒngjo’s Reign” or “Chǒngjo’s Life and Scholarship through *Ŏjǒngsǒ* and *Myǒngch’ansǒ*.”³ I worry, then, that what I have to say may be a bit off topic. All the same, I would like to briefly share with you my feelings about research on the Chǒngjo era. I base this account on my experience with the Kyujanggak collection about ten years ago, when several colleagues and I published a book, *Chǒngjo and the Chǒngjo Era*.⁴ Over the course of this project, I was able to corroborate a few basic facts and also acquire a basic knowledge of Kyujanggak materials. Today, I will relate my experience in terms of two aspects: the scope of Chǒngjo’s *T’angp’yǒng* politics and problems with the use of Kyujanggak materials.

Chǒngjo and his Era

[In 1779, on his way to pay respects at King Hyojong’s tomb, Chǒngjo boards a royal boat (*yongju* 龍舟) at the river port of Kwangnarul] Turning to a courtier, the King said: “Filling the mountains are the people and filling the fields is ripe grain. The harvest is fortunately abundant truly because Heaven takes care. Reflecting on my lack of virtue, how can this be? All we do is desperately wish for a good harvest, year after year. As for the people, they are countless. The land is filled with them, young and old. Coming to this place today and looking upon them, I think of what I might do so that not one be without a rightful place. Yet I know, it is my ministers’ contribution alone that would make this possible.”

Upon hearing this, Kim Sangch’al and others replied: “His Majesty’s mind is anxious thinking that even one of his people might not acquire [a rightful place]. Truly, if His Majesty extends this thought to practical affairs, neglecting it not but a little upon returning to the Palace Court, this would surely mean the happiness

2. Sǒul taehakkyo chungang tosǒgwan [Seoul National University Central Library], *Sǒul taehakkyo tosǒgwan osim nyǒnsa 1946–1996* [A fifty-year history of Seoul National University libraries, 1946–1996] (Seoul: Sǒul taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 1996), 72.

3. Editor’s note: the former refers to a panel at the 12th Kyujanggak Symposium that was devoted to the intellectual endeavors of King Chǒngjo and his officials. The latter refers to the special exhibition that opened one day before the conference, entitled “In’gan Chǒngjo, kunju Chǒngjo: *Ŏjǒngsǒ-myǒngch’ansǒ rǔl t’onghae pon Chǒngjo ūi sam kwa isang*” [Chǒngjo as king and as man: The life and ideals of Chǒngjo in his writings]. See the catalogue of the exhibition published under the same title (Seoul: Kyujanggak Han’gukhak yǒn’guwǒn, 2019).

4. Kim Ingǒl [Kim In-geol] et al., *Chǒngjo wa Chǒngjo sidae* [Chǒngjo and the Chǒngjo era] (Seoul: Sǒul taehakkyo ch’ulp’an munhwawǒn, 2011).

of the people and the country [*min'guk* 民國].”

The King replied: “The King is like a boat and the people like water. Having boarded this boat and come to the people, I shall be ever more urgently aware. Generally speaking, it is actual things that move a man’s heart. As one said long ago, ‘Knowledge of things proceeds from their direct experience’ 觸類而長. In the past my ancestor [Sukchong] painted a boat on water 舟水圖. He ordered a minister to entitle the illustration and provide it with a written commentary.”⁵

Upon inheriting the grave and wearisome task of governing the people and the country from his predecessor King Yǒngjo, the most urgent problem King Chǒngjo faced was ensuring the people’s welfare. Whatever the issue, he would overcome any challenge in the interest of the people. The problem of “administering to the people’s welfare” (*anmin* 安民) served as the justification for Chǒngjo’s policies. This problem was equally important for government officials, who administered policy together with the king. Chǒngjo’s attitude regarding punitive measures for government officials also demonstrates this; he regarded the “corruption law” (*changnyul* 贓律) and “treason law” (*yǒgyul* 逆律) as equally important.⁶ It was for this reason that Chǒngjo also struggled with his ministers, who argued that such a policy line would undermine the political order. This did not mean, however, that Chǒngjo denied the basic framework of government by consensus between king and minister (*kunsin kongch'i*).

In debating the scope of Chǒngjo’s *T'angp'yǒng* politics, one must define Chǒngjo’s basic policy orientation of *uhyǒn chwach'ök* 右賢左戚: favoring “wise literati” (*hyǒn sadaebu* 賢士大夫) over those with ties to the royal family. This orientation itself was based on two basic policies. The first was *T'angp'yǒngch'aek* 蕩平策, or the “policy of impartiality,” which stipulated the selection of officials on the basis of ability rather than factional affiliation. The second was *Hangmun chǒngch'i* 學文政治 or “scholarly politics.” With respect to Chǒngjo’s practice of selecting officials on the basis of ability, the reason why scholars have paid such attention to the Kyujanggak *Ch'ogyo munsin* 抄啓文臣 system, which pertained to the selection and training of young officials, and the selection of four “illegitimate children” (*sǒl ch'ulsin* 庶孽出身) as document inspectors is related to the fact that Kyujanggak lay at the heart of Chǒngjo’s “scholarly politics.” What lay at the heart of the *T'angp'yǒng* policy, on the other hand, were the Chief State Councilors (*Yǒngsang* 領相), who presided over the administration of the military and literary branches of the bureaucracy. It is for this reason that many scholars describe Chǒngjo’s *T'angp'yǒng* policy as coming to full fruition

5. *Chosǒn wangjo sillok* [Annals of the Chosǒn Dynasty] 8 [1779/08/03], first entry.

6. *Chosǒn wangjo sillok* 39 [1794/06/16], third entry.

in the twelfth year of his reign (1788) with the appointment of Ch'ae Chegong 蔡濟恭 (1720–1799), a member of the Nam'in (southerner) faction, as Right State Councilor (*usang*).⁷

Chǒngjo was deeply knowledgeable and respectful of the structure of Chosŏn court politics that had prevailed since the dynasty's founding. This structure consisted of the hierarchical relations between ministers, including those of the State Council (*Ŭijǒngbu*), Six Ministries (*Yukcho*), Office of Inspector General (*Sabǒnbu*), Office of Censors (*Saganwǒn*), and so on. Furthermore, he alone appointed ministers suitable to these positions. The importance of the State Councilors was recognized from the time of T'oegyŏ Yi Hwang 退溪李滉 (1501–1570) and Yulgok Yi I 栗谷李珣 (1536–1584), who both cited the failure of Cho Kwangjo's reforms (which triggered the *kimyo sabwa*, the first literati purge of 1519) as proof there was a time and place for reform. The manner in which Yulgok welcomed the selection of Pak Sun 朴淳 (1523–1589), who well understood the situation of the rural literati (*sarim*), as Right State Councilor clearly conveys the importance of the position of Chief State Councilor (*yǒngsang* 領相) with regard to reforms within the bureaucracy.

In pursuing a *ch'ǒngnon* 清論-centered⁸ *T'angp'yǒng* policy characterized by “moral duty” (*ǔri*), Chǒngjo emphasized the importance of strict bureaucratic hierarchy pivoting on the trinity of the State Councilors and their clear ascendancy over the rest of the ministers. The importance of the position of Chief State Councilor is expressed in a letter written by Tasan Chǒng Yagyong 茶山 丁若鏞 (1762–1836) while in exile to his sons, in which he explained how the king had always considered him or Yi Kiyang 李基讓 (1744–1802) to succeed the Nam'in Ch'ae Chegong as Chief State Councilor.⁹ While expressing

7. Unlike Yǒngjo, Chǒngjo pursued a policy of strengthening the throne while embracing the rhetoric of the three political factions (i.e., Noron, Soron, and Nam'in). Following ten years of effort, he appointed leaders of each faction (Kim Ch'iin of the Noron, Yi Sǒngwǒn of the Soron, and Ch'ae Chegong of the Nam'in) as the three chief councilors, marking the beginning of the system of the trinity of State Councilors (*Samsang ch'eje* 三相體制), which delivered political stability. Yu Ponghak, *Chǒngjo taewang ūi kkum* [The dream of King Chǒngjo] (Seoul: Sin'gu munhwasa, 2009), 88–90.

8. Editor's note: *Ch'ǒngnon* refers to a political stance characterized by rigid adherence to principle and sharp attacks against deviations from perceived norms; it is also known as *chullon* 峻論. On the opposite side of the political spectrum is *wallon* 緩論, a position characterized by compromise and flexibility towards principles.

9. “Tu adūl ege poyō chunūn kagye” [Family rules (*kagye* 家誡) for my two sons]. “Pogam [Yi Kiyang's courtesy name] was young and learned under the tutelage of Chǒngsan Yi Pyǒnghyu and Yehǒn Yi Ch'ōrhwan. He would go on foot and study diligently, putting all his effort into learning the classics. Later he became the governor of Chinsan. Once, when the King was urgently looking for someone to paint a royal portrait, many recommended Pogam, who

this thought, he referenced a passage from *The Book of Changes* (*I Ching* 易經), “A nobleman’s thoughts do not diverge from his position,” recalling his failures as a young man when his scholarship and knowledge were insufficient. Serving the king, he emphasized, was not a matter of winning the king’s love and affection but his respect and trust. This was thus the path to attaining a high-ranking ministerial appointment.¹⁰

A well-known example of Chǒngjo’s scholarly politics, which he conducted through the Kyujanggak, is Chǒngjo’s acknowledgement of Yi Sǒgu’s 李書九 (1754–1825) ability. “Although not even a Kyujanggak minister,” he declared, “he is better than a Kyujanggak minister.” Chǒngjo’s entrustment of Yi Sǒgu with a number of enterprises is a notable example of Chǒngjo era “politics by consensus between king and minister” (*kunsin kongch’i*).¹¹ While Ch’ŏkchae 惕齋 Yi Sǒgu was extraordinarily talented in practical affairs, his reputation was further augmented by his close friendship with his teacher Yŏnam Pak Chiwŏn 燕巖 朴趾源 (1737–1805) and his remarkable scholarly and artistic ability evident in his exchanges with the Pukhak (northern learning) faction.¹² As Chǒngjo resolved to cultivate respect for literary scholarship by pursuing the restoration

quickly made his way to Seoul. Soon he was granted a house and after just a few years rose to the rank of Vice Minister [*Ch’amp’an*]. This was an unprecedented event at the time. The King has always compared Pogam to Wang Ling, who succeeded Xiao He, and me to Chen Ping.” Written in Dasan’s study, *yuno* month, *kagyŏng mujin* year [1808]. Xiao He, Wang Ling, and Chen Ping were classic examples of chief state councilors in ancient China. Chǒngjo compared the outstanding Chief State Councilor Ch’ae Chegong to Xiao He, Pogam Yi Kiyang, who succeed Ch’ae Chegong, to Wang Ling, who succeeded Xiao He, and Tasan, who served as an aide to Yi Kiyang, to Chen Ping.

10. “Hagyŏn ege poyŏ chunŭn kagye” [Family rules for (Chǒng) Hagyŏn]. “Words exchanged at the banquet can be warm, and when the situation calls for it, the king may secretly put all his trust in you; being entrusted with the role of secret assistant, royal letters may come one after the other, but no matter how frequent the gifts, they are not solely due to the King’s grace. They make people jealous. Meanwhile, they need not necessarily mean a promotion. Why might this be the case? This is because the King must also avoid suspicion. Thus, one is treated as a concubine and labors like a slave without any assurance of promotion to a high-ranking position.”

11. Yu Ponghak, “Yi Sǒgu, piun ū sarim ch’ŏngnon chǒngch’iga” [Yi Sǒgu: Politician of the ill-fated *Sarim ch’ŏngnon* ideology], in *63-in ūi yŏksa hakcha ka ssŭn Han’guksa inmul yŏlchŏn* 2, 446–474.

12. Along with former Royal Secretary Yi Kihwan, Kyujanggak minister Yi Mansu, and civil official Yun Haengim, Ch’ŏkchae Yi Sǒgu was one of the four scholars who responded to Chǒngjo’s astronomy policy decreed in the thirteenth year of his reign (1789). See Mun Chungyang, “18-segi huban Chosŏn kwahak ūi yŏksa sigan” [The historical time of Chosŏn science in the late eighteenth century], in *Chǒngjo wa Chǒngjo sidae* [Chǒngjo and the Chǒngjo era], Kim Ingŏl [Kim In-geol] et al. (Seoul: Sŏul taehakkyo ch’ulp’an munhwawŏn, 2011), 17–56.

of orthodox literary style (*munch'e panjǒng* 文體反正), Yi Sǒgu—along with his teacher Pak Chiwŏn—stubbornly refused to repent, rather criticizing the king for this policy. He supported the king's scholarly politics but vehemently opposed his cultural policy, which impeded scholarship, culture, art, and intellectual ideas. Yi Sǒgu's conduct thus provides a good example of the extent to which Chǒngjo persistently advocated *Ch'ǒngnon t'angp'yǒng* and the selection of officials on the basis of merit.

Not only did Chǒngjo firmly grasp the political structure that had prevailed since the dynasty's founding but also the efforts and achievements of his predecessors and their retainers, who, having experienced the hardship of the Hideyoshi and Manchu invasions and dealt with the aftermath, shared particularly close bonds of friendship. In particular, there was no one more knowledgeable of the general politics of the Yǒngjo era. Chǒngjo intended to succeed his grandfather's intentions, but not without reflecting on his own. For example, he paid respects and left an inscription at the *Taerosa* 大老祠, the shrine of Song Siyŏl 宋時烈 (1607–1689), who is said to have had a very close relationship with King Hyojong (r. 1650–1659), and wrote a preface for Song Siyŏl's collected works, the *Songja taejŏn* 宋子大全.¹³ As evident in the passage on the *Chusudo* 舟水圖 (Boat on water), which Sukchong composed early in his reign and showed separately to Nam'in Ministers Hŏ Chŏk 許積 (1610–1680) and Hŏ Mok 許穆 (1595–1682), Chǒngjo reinterpreted the water as representing “the people” (*min* 民) rather than “the courtiers” (*sillyo* 臣僚).¹⁴ As one

13. Standing in front of the Ŏsudang (Fish and water pavilion), Chǒngjo decreed the following: “It was at this pavilion that Hyojong would give audience with wise men. Hyojong's association with wise men was like Emperor Zhaolie of Shu Han's association with Zhuge Liang. As the name of this pavilion conveys, arriving at the engraving above its entrance, unity brightly manifests. One senses the anticipation as intentions finally come to fruition after many difficult years of intimate council.... The ministers, too, must know the origins of this name.” Recorded by Kyujanggak *Wŏnim chikchehak* Kim Chaech'an in the *pyŏngjin* year (Chǒngjo 20; 1796). “Iltŭngnok” 17, Hunŏ 4, *Hongjae chŏnsŏ*, vol. 176.

14. According to Yi Mansu, writing in Chǒngjo's Account of Conduct (*Haengjang* 行狀), Chǒngjo related the facts pertaining to the *Chusudo* when arriving at Kwangnaru and boarding the king's boat (*yongju* 龍舟) as follows: “The King is like a boat and the people like water. Riding in this boat now and coming face to face with the people, I am filled with fearful thoughts. A long time ago, a predecessor of mine drew the *Chusudo* and called forth His courtiers, ordering them to give it a title. This act itself reflected this way of thinking.” Regarding Sukchong's production of the *Chusudo*, in the first year of his reign, Sukchong ordered an artist to compose the illustration, to which he himself affixed a title. He then called forth Hŏ Chŏk and Hŏ Mok and showed the work to each of them separately, expatiating on the likeness between a king and a reed floating atop ocean waves with respect to the relationship between a king and his ministers. As expressed in the illustration, the boat represents the king and the water represents the ministers. A boat without an oar will inevitably tip upon encountering stormy waters, implying the meaning of royal virtue

further example, he expanded Sukchong's Kyujanggak, a structure that had been under the jurisdiction of the Royal Family Management Office (*Chongbusi*), into the Chuhamnu Pavilion at Ch'angdök Palace and inscribed the title *Ösumun* over the entrance.

One should also note how Chöngjo succeeded Yöngjo's *T'angp'yöng* policy, moving away from the person-oriented *Wallon t'angp'yöng* 緩論蕩平 to the principle-centered *Ch'öngnon t'angp'yöng* 清論蕩平. In his later years, Chöngjo listed Yöngjo's three achievements as *T'angp'yöng*, *Kyunyök* 均役 (equalized military tax law), and *Chunch'ön* 濬川 (dredging Ch'önggye Stream). Even so, he was critical of the *Kyunyök* policy. It seems he acknowledged the problem of meddling in the grain exchange system as a means of supplementing local government finance, which had deteriorated since implementation of the *Kyunyök* law. Relatedly, Yun Haengim 尹行恁 (1762–1801) wrote in his epitaph for Chöngjo, “In establishing the Personal Guard Corps [*Changyongyöng* 壯勇營, [Chöngjo] intended to abolish the *Kyunyök* law.”¹⁵

Four principles that appear in the *Taego* 大誥 (Great declaration), promulgated in the second year of Chöngjo's reign, succinctly express the scale of Chöngjo's management of national affairs. These are *minsän* 民產 (perpetuation of the people), *injae* 人材 (talented men), *yungjöng* 戎政 (military administration), and *chaeyong* 財用 (financial management). In general, the rationale for these principles was the people's interest. Thus “perpetuation of the people” (*minsän*) is the first listed among the four; to even begin to realize ideal Confucian politics, the people's stability is naturally a basic priority. Even outside of these principles, Chöngjo actively sought out means of serving the people's interest. Despite the opposition of high-ranking ministers, he implemented a

(*kundök* 君德). In other words, the water must be calm for the boat to be stable. Through the *Chusudo*, Sukchong thus compelled his ministers to respect the meaning of the *Chusudo* and fulfill their duty in assisting the king. See “Kyöngjajo,” *Sukchong sillok* [Annals of King Sukchong] 4 [1675/11/16], first entry; and *Sukchong taewang haengjang* [Account of conduct of King Sukchong the Great].

15. “Night and day without rest, always thinking of the people no matter how trivial the matter, there was nothing he did not consider. If something was harmful, he would do whatever necessary to provide relief. The people thus came to know blessings and benefits, the effects of which were all the more powerful as time passed. Even so, if even one disadvantaged person caught his eye, he would agonize over whether he had achieved his objective. He thus distributed medicine to cure disease, stubbornly helped with funerals, and used his private funds to prepare for years of hardship, putting away supplies, and created the Personal Guard Corps [*Changyöng*] with the intention of abolishing the *Kyunyök* law. Furthermore, he also patiently pursued the selection of qualified officials, even among sons of concubines or lowborn [*ch'önmin*] mothers [*sööl* 庶孽], abolishment of inherited slave (*nobi*) status, and reform of the grain-loan system [*chojök* 糶糶], although unsuccessful.” *Yun Haengim i ssin kölling chimun* [Yun Haengim's epitaph for Chöngjo].

system of appeals to address people's suffering. Methods of appeal included letters written directly to the king (*sangŏn* 上言) and approaching the king's procession while striking a gong (*kyŏkchaeng* 擊鐃).¹⁶ Furthermore, as mentioned above, Chǒngjo created the Personal Guard Corps (*Changyongyŏn*) with the intention of replacing the *Kyumyŏk* law, also a source of people's suffering. However, Chǒngjo's attentiveness to the needs of the people did not necessarily mean he neglected the needs of the state. This is demonstrated by the last of the four principles, which pertained to financial policy (*chaeyong*). To be sure, this principle also related to the people's interests. The Ministry of Taxation (*Hojo* 戶曹) and the people's prosperity were particularly correlated. Yet state finances had implications on a much wider scale; this was "state housekeeping." For this reason, the four principles roughly divide into two categories, relating to "affairs of the people" (*minsa* 民事), on the one hand, and "affairs of the state" (*kukkye* 國計; more literally, "state accounts"), on the other. The *min'guk* issue, frequently emphasized in studies of the Yŏngjo and Chǒngjo eras and onward, can be understood precisely in this regard: *min'guk* connoted "affairs of the people and state" (*minsa kukkye*). I will come back to this problem in the next section.

Chǒngjo was keenly interested in dealing with the "affairs of the people and state." In turn, the scholar bureaucrats, who were expected to govern in conjunction with the king to aid society and rectify social problems, more or less remained within this framework. Chǒng Yagyong, who befriended Chǒngjo while a scholar at the National Confucian Academy (*Sŏnggyun'gwan*), demonstrates this point well. When serving as a county magistrate (*pusa* 府使) in Koksan, he made the following remarks as he set free Yi Kyesim, who had led a protest of more than a thousand people: "The reason why the government office is in the wrong is because the people must be able to protest when they are subjected to harm. A person like you [Yi Kyesim] should be compensated, even if it costs the government office a thousand pieces of gold."¹⁷ He also wrote the following upon completing his three "major works" (*Kyŏngse yup'yo*, *Mongmin simsŏ*, and *Himhŭm simsŏ*): "I could finally spend less time thinking about the affairs of the people and state [*min'guk chi sa* 民國之事], such as the code of law, bureaucracy, military, and treasury, and focus on the Confucian Classics [*Kyŏngjŏn*], rooting out chaotic thoughts and reviving proper theory."¹⁸

16. Han Sangwŏn, *Chosŏn hugi sahoe wa sowŏn chedo: Sangŏn-kyŏkchaeng yŏn'gu* [Late Chosŏn society and the system of appeals to the king: Letters of appeal and oral petitions delivered by striking a gong] (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1996).

17. Chǒng Yagyong, *Mongmin simsŏ* [Admonitions on governing the people].

18. Chǒng Yagyong, *Hagyū ka ttŏnal ttae noja sama kagye* [Family rules to help Hagyu with

Recent research has focused on the Yǒngjo and Chǒngjo eras as a transitional period. The *T'angp'yong* monarchs developed a point of contact between the people and the monarchy, denying faction members' fulfillment of "moral duty" (*ǔri*)—declaring themselves the sovereign authority in this regard—suppressing the interests of the scholar officials, and actively pursuing policies that would protect the common people. Scholars have described this development as the transition from "politics by consensus between king and minister" (*kunsin kongch'i* 君臣共治) to "politics by consensus between king and people" (*kunmin kongch'i* 君民共治). In other words, they assert the emergence of a political regime during the Yǒngjo and Chǒngjo eras in which the people became a political subject. However, this so-called "republicanism" (*min'guk*) was an object of political discourse, not a determinant.¹⁹ Chǒngjo's idea of a new political system was excluding royal in-laws from national affairs (*uhyōn chwach'ōk*). For that matter, future kings did not perpetuate this "new" system.²⁰ Keenly aware of the important role literati opinion (*saron* 士論) had played in the political crisis that arose in the waning years of Yǒngjo's reign,²¹ Chǒngjo actively embraced *Ch'ōngnon* scholars in pursuing a prosperous *T'angp'yōng* policy. Thus, as evident in the passage below, Chǒngjo attributed the first epoch in centuries without a peasant uprising to the power of the literati:

his trip].

19. Kim Ingōl [Kim In-geol], "Chǒngjo ūi 'kukch'e' insik" [Chǒngjo's perception of the "national polity"], in *Chǒngjo wa Chǒngjo sidae* [Chǒngjo and the Chǒngjo era], Kim Ingōl et al. (Seoul: Sōul taehakkyo ch'ulp'an munhwawōn, 2011), 103–142.

20. "Every one of the literati is opposed [to this]. In these conditions, a country cannot be a country. A long time ago, those with royal family ties [*ch'ōngni* 戚里] stood between the king and the court ministers. There was thus a hierarchical disparity between the king and the ministers, and the political system was worthy of respect. Today, the many people are allowed to directly approach the king. The effects of this are truly more harmful than those caused by the relatives. Lately I have become more keenly aware of this. However, since this condition is already in motion, it cannot be suddenly changed. I will implement it only reluctantly for my generation. However, future kings should not implement this law. Only when the true nature of the nation is restored through the use of maternal relatives will the country be a country." Kim Chosun (1765–1832), "Yōngch'un ogūmgi" [Record of beautiful sounds in Yōngch'un], in *P'unggo chip* [Collected works of Kim Chosun].

21. "I have known the importance and indispensability of the scholars [*saryu* 士類] for some time. I do not need to know history to know this. Besides, speaking from personal experience, despite the many difficult and dangerous circumstances I dealt with over the course of the *kabo* [Yǒngjo 50] and *ūlmi* [Yǒngjo 51] years, that which allowed me to strictly observe moral duty [*ǔri*] was that I more than anyone knew well the importance of literati opinion [*saron* 士論]. Would anyone say the strength of the scholars is minor?" Written by *Wōnim chebak* Kim Chongsu, 1786 (Chǒngjo 10), "Itūngnok" 15, Hunō 2.

Our Dynasty's establishment of a country of literati reflected the intention to preserve just rule [*sedo* 世道] and observe the will of man. The oneness of the joy and anxiety of the ministers from families that have held prominent posts for generations [*kyomok sesin* 喬木世臣] and those of the country is like the moral duty between father and son. By the power of the literati, for the first time in centuries farmers have not taken up arms and risen up in a [rowdy and riotous] rebellion because of starvation or mistreatment. (Written by *Kǒnggyo chikchehak* Yi Mansu in the *chǒngsa* year [Chǒngjo 21; 1797], "Iltūngnok" 17, Hunö 4, in *Hongjae chǒnsö*, vol. 176)

Such were the bounds of Chongjo's thinking. Less than ten years after his death, a "rebellion" (*millan*) arose in Koksan, Hwanghae Province along with the "governance by royal in-law families" (*oech'ök sedo chǒngch'i*) he initiated.

Problems in the Use and Interpretation of Sources

Following liberation, the field of Korean Studies struggled through division and the Korean War, gradually taking shape by the late 1950s and early 1960s. The foundation for this renewal emerged in the field of Korean history with "internal development theory" (*naejaejök palchǒllon*), which served as a basic historiographical paradigm in the 1960s and 1970s. Professor Kim Yongsöp was central in this regard. By presenting a novel image of late Chǒson period society through his analysis of land registers, he established a firm basis for refuting colonial historiography, perpetuated by the Japanese empire, which portrayed Chosǒn as "stagnant" (*chǒngch'esǒngnon*) and "lacking subjectivity" (*t'ayulsǒngnon*). Kim Yongsöp argued that the development of commercial agriculture started in the late Chosǒn period and culminated in Korean "modernity." This development would also have important repercussions for the writing of "Korean literary history."²² In the 1980s, and particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, a movement began in Korean historiography—one that by now has lost much of its momentum—which endeavored to overcome colonialist historiography and restore subjectivity to Korean history by understanding it as a process of internal development. This movement served as the point of departure for a paradigm shift in Korean studies. Few can deny that these successive developments were possible due to the emergence of a new generation of scholars and the "Kyujanggak collection."

22. See Kim Yunsik, "Illyusa üi widaehan mangjip, 'künda'e rül wihayö" [A profound delusion of human history: For "modernity"], in *Kküt naji annün kangüi* [An unfinished lecture] (Seoul: Söul taehakkyo ch'ulpanbu, 2004), 19–20.

One might easily misunderstand the Kyujanggak collection merely as materials for Korean studies researchers. Featuring such diverse materials as the massive “catalogue of Chinese materials” (*Chungguk pon mongnok*), however, the collection ranges across a boundless array of subjects. Indeed, it serves as the basis for valuable research results not just in the humanities but also the natural sciences. The point has thus been made that collaborative research carried out at the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, conventionally characterized by the uncovering of basic facts (phenomena), should incorporate interdisciplinary and comparative-historical inquiry. A rigorous understanding of basic (historical) facts (phenomena), however, is naturally fundamental to the pursuit of a new interdisciplinary, comparative-historical research paradigm. This is simply because of the unpleasant possibility of “errors” in Korean Studies research leading to wasted effort and misleading the public.

One problem I have experienced among those concerning the use of Kyujanggak materials has to do with the scale of Chǒngjo’s politics, namely, the *min’guk* problem. As one may surmise from my rather uninspired explication of this problem, there is a need for more rigor regarding relevant terminology and conceptualization. Recently, a number of researchers in the social sciences have challenged, perhaps somewhat ungenerously, perceptions of the *min’guk* idea among some historians; rather than a shift in consciousness or a transformation in philosophy of governance, they argue, “A more appropriate interpretation would be that its ultimate goal was the strengthening of control over the people.”²³ On the other hand, some argue that even if the “people’s” political awakening and participation were unintended, they nonetheless greatly impacted the configuration of their political-social consciousness. They thus “judge” the nineteenth-century popular rebellions as “strongly characterized by the ‘people’s’ independent intention to restore ‘republicanism’ [*min’guk*].” Such was the first step toward the “democratization of the idea of the people as the foundation of the nation [*minbonjuŭi*].”²⁴ Meanwhile, proponents of the “theory of republican politics” (*min’guk chǒngch’iron*) advance an even more sweeping claim, asserting that the *Tangp’yǒng* kings achieved a revolutionary

23. Song Hoğun, *Inmin ūi t’ansaeng: Kongnonjang ūi kujo pyǒndong* [The birth of the people: The structural transformation of the public sphere] (Seoul: Maŭmsa, 2011), 49–51.

24. Ko Hŭit’ak, “Han’guk kŭndae ūi kukka konggongsǒng ūisik: ‘Min’ ūi ch’amyǒ wa ch’eje taeŭng tullǒsan Tonghak-Ch’ǒndogyo undong ūi sarye rŭl chungsim ūro” [State consciousness of the “public” in Korean modernity: The ‘people’s’ participation and the *Tonghak/Ch’ǒndogyo* movements with respect to state reaction], in *Chosǒn Wangjo ūi konggongsǒng tamnon* [Chosǒn Dynasty discourse on the “public”], Chǒng Sunu et al. (Seoul: Han’gukhak chungang yǒn’guwǒn ch’ulp’anbu, 2016), 164–170.

change in the character of the Korean nation, transforming it from the “Chosŏn Nation” (*Chosŏn kuk*), mired in literati factional conflict, to the “Chosŏn Republic” (*Chosŏn min’guk*).²⁵

I myself was an early challenger of the “theory of republican politics,” pointing out its flaws while attempting to explain the emphasis on the *min’guk* issue in the era of *T’angp’yong* politics. In sum, the *min’guk* issue served as a means of highlighting the precarious state of court politics at the time: In an atmosphere of ever worsening political conflict, court factions did little but denigrate one another while “people’s concerns and affairs of the state” (*minu kukkye* 民憂國計) were forgotten.²⁶ I argued that “republicanism” in the Yǒngjo and Chǒngjo eras, as a political objective, corresponded to “affairs of the people and state” (*min’guk chi sa*) and “affairs of the people and state accounts” (*minsā kukkye*); it did not extend to the creation of a new political regime based on “government by consensus between the king and people” (*kunmin kongch’iron*). The following passage, in which Chǒngjo discusses the costs of visiting Hwasŏng Fortress following its completion, demonstrates this point well:

In a message to the superintendent [*tangsang* 堂上] of the office in charge of miscellaneous matters at Hwasŏng Fortress [*chǒngniso* 整理所], [Chǒngjo] stated the following: “The Crown Princess [*Chagung*] desires to pay her respects at the Hyǒllungwŏn [Prince Sado’s tomb]. Yet this requires a great deal of effort and each time she worries about troubling the people and the state [*min’guk* 民國]. In order to deal with this issue, I have set aside ten thousand *ryang* to cover the expenses of the royal procession [*haenghaeng* 幸行]. Meanwhile, the ministers have also considered the expenses for such an undertaking, including the costs of palanquins, food, water, clothing, supplies for the soldiers and horses, and other matters related to the rest of the retinue. Let not the people and the towns [*minim* 民邑] bear even the smallest cost.” (Written by *Wŏnim chikchehak* Kim Chaech’an in the *pyŏngjin* year [Chǒngjo 20; 1796]. “Itūngnok” [Daily records], Hunŏ, in *Hongjae chŏnsŏ* [Complete works of Hongjae], vol. 176.

25. Hwang T’aeyŏn, “Chosŏn sidae kukka konggongsŏng ūi kujo pyŏndong kwa kŭndaehwa: ‘Chosŏn min’guk’ kwa ‘Taehan cheguk’ esŏ ‘Taehan min’guk’ ūro” [The structural transformation of the state’s idea of the “public” in the Chosŏn era and modernization: From the “Chosŏn Republic” and “Taehan Empire” to the “Republic of Korea”], in *Chosŏn Wangjo ūi konggongsŏng tammon* [Chosŏn Dynasty discourse on the “public”], Chǒng Sunu et al. (Seoul: Han’gukhak chungang yŏn’guwŏn ch’ulp’anbu, 2016), 21. Proponents of the “theory of the Chosŏn Republic” see the “theory of republican politics” advanced by a number of historians as arguing little more than “Yǒngjo and Chǒngjo were alike” (*kunbu ilch’eron*). The former theory goes further, arguing that Chǒngjo’s republicanism was succeeded by Kojong with the Taehan Empire through to the Republic of Korea.

26. Kim Ingŏl [Kim In-geol], “Chǒngjo ūi ‘kukch’e’ insik.”

This passage provides a symbolic instance in which issues with the “people and state” (*min’guk*) are referenced alongside issues with the “people and towns” (*minūp*). To summarize the content of the passage, Chŏngjo has interred his father, Prince Sado, in the Hyŏllyungwŏn and he is worried that his mother Crown Princess Hong’s (Hyegyŏnggung) trips to and from the tomb will burden the “people and state” (*min’guk*). He thus arranges for ten thousand *sŏk* of grain to be sent to the *Chŏngniso*, the office presiding over the management of Hwasŏng Fortress, where the tomb is located, with the intent that the expenses for his mother’s trips be covered by the interest gathered from the grain. Furthermore, he explains that he has done this so that the trips might not burden even the “people or towns” (*minūp*) that lay on the road from the palace to the Hyŏllyungwŏn, referring to the residents of these towns and the officials in charge of town finances.²⁷ What worried Crown Princess Hong, then, was harming the livelihood of the people and the state, and one should take *min’guk* to mean little more than “people and state.”

This strict conceptualization of *min’guk* as “affairs of the people and the state” (*kukkye minsa*) comes across even more clearly in the following passage, which pertains to *Wŏnim chikchehak* Kim Chaech’an’s 金載瓚 (1746–1827) handling of an appeal (*sangso*) to the court of King Sunjo written by Chŏlla Governor Yi Sanghwang 李相瓚 (1763–1841).

The Governor’s [Yi Sanghwang] appeal describes a year of hardship for the province and the need for five kinds of urgent assistance. Regarding the people’s hardships, it looks like he is endeavoring to grasp the circumstances of the poor. Regarding countermeasures, it looks like he will avoid a major disaster. One might say that, in a situation where he is forced to choose between state accounts [*kukkye* 國計] and the affairs of the people [*minsa* 民事], he has ultimately given weight to the affairs of the people. This is not because he has failed to consider the

27. The fact that the term “people and state” (*min’guk*) was used with respect to the capital and the corresponding term “people and towns” (*minūp*) with respect to the counties (*kun*) and prefectures (*hyŏn*) of the countryside is intelligible in the following example regarding Kyŏngsan County in the mid-nineteenth century. The finances of the “people and towns” (*minūp*) were depleted due to interest payments collected over seven years via the grain loan (*hwan’gok*) system. Hearing that the people and town would do whatever they could to pay off the debt and believing this to be the general will of the people, the county magistrate agreed to provide assistance. Upon closer inspection, however, local strongmen (*toho*) and cunning officials (*hwalli*) had used public opinion as a pretext for their own scheme. “大抵前年秋冬以來 民邑等稱以七年移質之餘 事力蕩竭 不可不變通云 而始則通文焉 次則鄉會焉 又其次則邑訴焉 又其終則議送焉 故縣令認以爲大同之論 如此招致衆民 詢其所願 依其所言論報 而蒙許題是乎所 ... 追後詳探事機 則本非大同之論 土豪則厭春結之出錢 猾吏則利冬之奇貨 數三人創謾假託輿論 設此奸計也.” *Oksan munch’ŏp* 玉山文牒, Kyŏngsan County 慶山縣, Ch’ŏlchong 2 (1851).

burden on state accounts but because he knows that one is no more important than the other. His duty is to oversee the province and his position is to be near the people. That with which he is entrusted is the affairs of the people and that which he witnesses is the people's suffering. If a course of action that might satisfy both the people [*min*] and the country [*kuk*] is lacking, deliberation of the costs and benefits cannot but prioritize one over the other.²⁸

Much can be inferred about the meaning of *min'guk* simply by looking at different examples of usage. It may be difficult to escape the temptation to create new concepts by statistically processing various combinations of the term. In any case, the term *min'guk* in the Chǒngjo era was quite remote from a political concept connoting a “nation under the joint sovereignty of the king and people.” The terms “affairs of the people and state” (*min'guk chi sa* 民國之事) and “affairs of the people and state accounts” (*minsa kukkye* 民事國計) were used in the same concrete sense. More precisely, *min'guk* generally corresponded to the people's livelihood and state finances. Furthermore, as suggested above, the term was used idiomatically. With reference to matters outside the capital, *min'guk* 民國 could be exchanged for *minŭp* 民邑. In other words, it also referred to the “livelihood of the people” and “town affairs” (i.e., finances and management).²⁹

One might say the examples I have presented thus far show how errors in historical research can stimulate leaps in logic characteristic of the unbridled imagination of the adjacent social sciences. Naturally the opposite may also be

28. Kim Chaech'an, *Haesōgillok*, vol. 15, fourteenth day of the tenth month of the *kyōngjo* year (Sunjo 10; 1810). 斟酌乎 國計民事之間 而終不得不歸重于民事 蓋道臣非不念 國計之悶 殆無異於民事 而職既按道 地是近民 故所身擔者民事也 所目擊者民憂也 民國之間 果無以兩得其宜 則損益之論 自不免一有所偏矣。

29. “A request was made that the State Council see to the affairs of the people of Yang-ŭp [Hwangju, Koksan County, Hwanghae Province], which the Governor enumerated one by one. In general, the grounds on which each town speaks are disunity [*bammol* 合沒] and drifting [*yumang* 流亡]. Those which make handling the people difficult are also disunity and drifting. Calculating their interests, cunning officials in the countryside contrive to hide such disunity and drifting and ultimately conditions are arising in which it is impossible to settle state accounts and the affairs of the people [*kukkye minsa* 國計民事].... Day by day the number of people grows smaller and taxes go unpaid. In the future, the people and towns will not support each other. This is not just the case for Koksan Hwangju Yang-ŭp, but one might say that Yang-ŭp is a particularly serious case.” Kim Chaech'an, *Haesōgillok*, vol. 15, thirtieth day of the second month of the *kapsul* year (Sunjo 14; 1814). The use of the term *min'guk* in the example above corresponds to the use of *minŭp* here. In the latter case, the sovereign subjects who see to the livelihood of the towns are the local magistrates (*suryōng* 守令) and officials (*ihyangch'ŭng* 吏鄉層). Correspondingly, those in charge of “state accounting” were the king himself and executive-level officials in charge of state finance, such as ministers belonging to the Ministry of Taxation (*Hojo p'anŏ*).

true. In any case, this is not a problem limited to Korean Studies. “There’s no such thing as a free lunch,” as they say, and so even as materials and research results become ever more accessible, ambition advances in turn and imagination starts to blur perceptions of the facts. This is a matter of course. Yet I believe, with time, such mistakes can be rectified. It is for this reason that one cannot overemphasize scholarly deliberation. Korean Studies scholars must work ever harder to adopt impartial and broad perspectives and establish rigorous and accessible indexes to ensure that deliberation is productive.

To understand the Chǒngjo era, one must naturally consider the prevailing social problems and measures pursued by the ruling class—specifically, the king and his ministers—to resolve them. Might not such an attitude allow more varied approaches to understanding the *min’guk* issue of the Yǒngjo and Chǒngjo eras? Consider, once again, Yun Haengim’s epitaph for Chǒngjo.

He thus distributed medicine to cure disease, stubbornly helped with funerals, and used his private funds to prepare for years of hardship, putting away supplies, and created the Personal Guard Corps [*Changyǒng*] with the intention of abolishing the *Kyumyǒk* law. Furthermore, he also patiently pursued the selection of qualified officials, even among the sons of concubines or lowborn [*ch’ǒnmin*] mothers [*sǒl* 庶孽], abolishment of inherited slave (*nobi*) status, and reform of the grain-loan system [*chojǒk* 糶糴], although unsuccessful. (*Yun Haengim i ssim kǒlling chimun* [Yun Haengim’s epitaph for Chǒngjo])

The second problem I would like to mention is the digitization of materials. Over the course of collaborative projects, I too have benefited from digitization, searching through materials previously inaccessible to me and filling in the gaps in existing research. Mass digitization has thus produced significant results, expanding our curiosity and understanding. Yet even while digitization has made materials more accessible and research more fruitful, there are a number of side effects that require addressing. Abuse of the “search” function without a comprehensive understanding of historical context, for example, can plausibly disconnect research from reality. Meanwhile, what about the errors in digitized materials?

In particular, the ongoing processing of historical documents in China (*Hanjǒk kongjǒng* 漢籍工程) is setting off alarm bells for Korean Studies. Currently in China, through a number of platforms in major universities and at the state level, major efforts are underway to digitize all documents written in literary Sinitic (*hanja* 漢字)—of course, with the condition that original documents are presented alongside digitized versions. In this regard, a systematic response at the state level in Korea is urgently needed.

I made this point in a presentation seven years ago at the First World University East Asian Libraries International Academic Conference: Collaboration and the Sharing of Materials (*Che-1-hoe segye taehak Tongasia tosōgwan kukche haksul taehoe: Munhōn charyo ū hapchak kwa kongyu*; October 29–30, 2012).³⁰ Essentially, I affirmed the necessity of transcending Eurocentrism to pay attention to Asian values. It is in this sense that the creation of a digital archive making premodern materials composed in literary Sinitic readily available to ordinary researchers would be greatly significant. However, for such an enterprise to bear fruit for society, which at the moment is exhibiting signs of turmoil, it must preserve the particularities of the individual nations historically a part of the literary Sinitic cultural sphere (*hanja munhwakwōn*). It should thus be an internationally cooperative and collaborative project; unilateral digitization of historical documents is unhelpful.

Materials belonging to the “Kyujanggak collection” and the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies have served as the foundation for Korean Studies. This status will not fade in the future. Among the tasks of succeeding the spirit of Chǒngjo’s establishment of the Kyujanggak, the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies must take on a leading role in systematically processing and organizing not only its own materials but also all “Korean Studies materials” at the national level. The question of whether Korean Studies can attain citizenship in the global academic market depends on whether it can produce original

30. My remarks at the conference can be summed up as follows. “The topic of this conference, ‘Compiling and Sharing Materials,’ has significant implications for the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, which also seeks to overcome Eurocentrism and discover new ways of resolving global issues. While this task will not be easy, I believe that various efforts and concrete enterprises carried out under a common goal can help us to enhance mutual understanding and overcome real difficulties. The large-scale opening of Southeast Asian historical materials may widen mutual understanding and mutual respect. Furthermore, I think this effort in which we are engaged can serve as the basis for resolving various current issues, offering a global vision transcending Eurocentrism and Asiaticism. Sympathizing with the various plans presented over the past two days, if I could add just one thing, it would be that compilation of materials should not be one-sided; it must be characterized by the active participation of every region and library, which possess many materials, and mutual exchange ensuring diversity. In this manner, it must also consider methods of developing the future generations of each region. The Kyujanggak began as a cradle of policy, succeeding the Royal Library [*Wangsil tosōgwan*] and Royal Research Institute [*Wangsil yōn’gu kigwan*]. On the basis of the Kyujanggak materials, which are related to state management and have been accumulated through various channels, the Seoul National University Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, with which I am affiliated, is developing into the global locus of Korean Studies. It is my hope that this forum today will provide the first step toward the historical materials of our research institute to move beyond their role as materials for Korean Studies researchers alone, receiving the attention of scholars interested in Korean experiences from all disciplines and from all over the world.”

content. I only hope that the opportunity to develop this “capacity for originality” not be missed.

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