

The Rise of the Brokered State: Situating Administrative Expansion in Chosŏn Korea*

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Between 1500 and 1800 CE, patterns of governance on the Korean Peninsula shifted toward a dynamic that I term the “rise of the brokered state.” While central political authority increasingly became entrenched in a small number of elite families residing in the capital region, the reach of the Chosŏn state continued to grow through local institutions such as clerks and military garrisons. Likewise, avenues of interaction between Seoul and the provinces broadened thanks to the social and organizational consolidation of local elites. Over time, the government was able to utilize a widening assemblage of bureaucratic administration and local cooperation to expand state management of resources such as grain and timber. Previous scholarship has often situated Chosŏn center-local dynamics within vectors of conflict, stagnation, or progress. My analysis reframes Chosŏn administrative expansion as an interactive process through which a wide array of local *yangban*, clerks, military officials, and monks became key intermediaries between the central government and the provinces, in turn forming the infrastructural contours of the Chosŏn state itself.

Keywords: Chosŏn, brokerage, center-local dynamics, comparative state formation, environmental history

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