

Reading at the Joseon Court: The Practice and Representation of Reading in the *Sejong sillok* (1418–1450)

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We know more about how Joseon people wrote, and the texts they produced, than about how and why they read. Existing scholarship has primarily investigated Korean premodern texts from a linguistic and bibliographical perspective, while comparatively few approaches have centered on the social and cultural aspects of their reading. The present paper offers an understanding of how the practice of reading represented a key component of the ideological and institutional configuration of the state during King Sejong's reign (1418–1450) by analyzing reading activities taking place in the context of the royal court as recorded in the *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Veritable records of the Joseon Dynasty) and other selected documentary and literary sources, mainly from the Kyujanggak archives. The paper starts by exploring the practice of reading in state rituals, assessing its significance as a public demonstration of royal authority. It then investigates how reading constituted a primary activity performed by the king, the crown prince, and other young male members of the royal family. Finally, it considers how the ruler actively used reading as an instrument of governance, assigning the reading of specific books as a strategy for reinforcing ideological and administrative control in and outside the royal palace.

Keywords: *dokseo* (reading), Sejong, *Joseon wangjo sillok* (The veritable records of the Joseon Dynasty), history of reading, reading practices

Introduction

Books stood at the center of the ideological and sociopolitical configuration of the Joseon state. The Confucian canon of the Four Books and the Five Classics formed the intellectual foundation of the Joseon scholar-official class and lay at

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