

Feature Article 【專題論文】

Confucianism and Military Service in Early
Seventeenth-Century Chosŏn Korea
十七世紀初期朝鮮的儒學與軍事

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Abstract

Chosŏn Korea's military system remained enigmatic in that, on paper, it looked well maintained; however, whenever it was faced with the task of national defense, it failed miserably. The leaders, including the king, seemed to be highly supportive of strong national defense, but when it came to the issue of how it should be put into practice, they almost always betrayed what they purported. The problem was the members of the ruling-class *sajok* who tried to free themselves from the duty of military service despite their verbal emphasis on the importance of national defense. Their efforts at avoiding military service always proved to be successful, leaving the nation's military capacity all but much paralyzed whenever it was needed. In this article, Hur traces how, in the early seventeenth century, just after the nation had been subjected to the terror of foreign invasion, *sajok* men tried to avoid military service. To free themselves from military duty, *sajok* men turned to the privileges bestowed by learning, which, under Confucianism, was considered to be of greater value than the military arts. For its part, the government recognized the class interests of the *sajok* and exempted them from military service. When hard pressed by foreign threats, the government often resorted to ad hoc measures (such as the *kogang* test and *hop'ae* law) in an attempt to mobilize *sajok* men, but such measures did not result in any changes. Hur explores how the values of the civil and military arts, both of which were embraced by Confucianism, were pitted against each other in Chosŏn Korea's politics, which was heavily laden with unbridgeable class interests that favored the *sajok*.

摘要

韓國在朝鮮王朝時期的軍事系統至今仍然令人難以理解：書面上看來維持良好，但是每當面臨國防任務時，便不幸失效。包括國王在內的領導者似乎都極為支持強有力的國防，但是每當面臨如何付諸實現的問題時，他們幾乎總是背叛自己原先的計畫。問題出在統治階級的士族成員，儘管他們口頭上強調國防的重要性，卻試圖為自己免除兵役上的義務。他們逃避兵役的努力總被證實是成功的，使國家的軍力在需要時幾乎癱瘓。作者在本文中追溯十七世紀初期的士族如何在國家方才飽受外族入侵的驚恐之後不久試圖逃避兵役。為了免除軍役，士族轉向學識所賦予的特權：儒家思想認為學識較武術具有更高的價值。就其本身而言，政府承認士族的階級利益，免除他們的兵役。當受到外力威脅的強烈壓力時，政府往往訴諸於臨時性措施（如：考講測驗和號牌制度），以動員士族，但是這些措施並未帶來任何改變。作者探討文、武的價值——兩者皆為儒家思想所接受——如何在嚴重充滿無可逾越的階級利益，士族受到偏袒的朝鮮王朝政治上互相對立。

I. Introduction: Civil versus Military in Chosŏn Korea

During the years of the Imjin War (1592-1598), the Chosŏn government tried to enhance its military strength by implementing two new special measures. One involved the establishment of the Military Training Agency (*Hullyŏn dogam* 訓練都監), and the other involved the recruitment of military officers through special military service examinations—a system known as "military examinations for wide mobilization" (*kwangch'ui mukwa* 廣取武科). These new measures were expected to produce a strong fighting force capable of holding off Japanese invaders. However, as it turned out, there was no evidence that either the *Hullyŏn dogam* soldiers or the elite officers recruited through the military examinations affected the tide of warfare.

Nevertheless, these two measures defied the operational principles of Chosŏn Korea's military system. The *Hullyŏn dogam*, which emulated China's military system of professional soldiers (*yangbyŏngje* 養兵制), signified a departure from the military system of peasant-soldiers (*pubyŏngje* 府兵制), which had been in place from the early years of the Chosŏn dynasty.¹ Unlike the system of professional soldiers, in which all military provisions and weapons were provided by public finances, the system of peasant-soldiers was based on the principle of self-provisioning, according to which soldiers were expected to support themselves out of their own pockets and to prepare all necessary military equipment, including weapons. If they could not do this by themselves, the government would assign support-taxpayers to the soldiers on duty, even though this system was frequently dysfunctional. In contrast, the *Hullyŏn dogam* was

1 Kim Sŏng'u 김성우, *Chosŏn chunggi kukka wa sajak* 조선중기 국가와 사족 (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 2001), p. 442 and Kim Chongsu 金種洙, *Chosŏn hugi chungang kunje yŏn'gu: Hullyŏn dogam ūi sŏlnip kwa sahoe pyŏndong* 朝鮮後期 中央軍制研究 : 訓練都監의 設立과 社會變動 (Seoul: Hyeon, 2003), pp. 138-144.

financed by the government. In the eyes of Chosŏn Koreans, it was amazing that soldiers should be fed and equipped by the government.

In the spring of 1594, the court created the *Hullyŏn dogam* in Hansŏng and assigned it to defend the capital in place of the decimated former defensive force. It is known that the *Hullyŏn dogam* followed the model suggested in the *Jixiao shinshu* 紀效新書—a manual of military strategy authored by Qi Jiguang (1528-88), who had been instrumental in fending off the "Japanese pirates" in southern Ming China in the late 1550s and early 1560s. King Sŏnjo (r. 1567-1608) charged Yu Sŏngnyong, one of the highest court officials, to supervise this newly created elite corps. The Military Training Agency was composed of the units of a freshly recruited "three-skills army" (*samsubyŏng*), comprising musketeers (*p'osu*), bowmen (*sasu*), and close-combat killers (*salsu*).²

Following the precedent of 1583-84, in which a corps of emergency troops was recruited through special military examinations in Hamgyŏng Province when Nit'anggae (尼蕩介) invaded the northern border, the Chosŏn court, in exile in Ŭiju, announced in the fifth month of 1592 a series of specially scheduled "military examinations for wide mobilization" (*kwangch'ui mukwa*), or "augmented examinations" (*chŭnggwangsi*). King Sŏnjo proclaimed that they were open to anyone, even slaves (*nobi*). In normal times, regular military service examinations, which were supposed to be comparable to civil service exams, were rare, prestigious, and very difficult to pass. The exams were usually offered at three-year intervals, and the applicants had to undergo three stages of testing: the local preliminary examination held throughout the country; the intermediary examination held in the capital; and the palace examination held in the king's presence, at which all the candidates who had succeeded in passing the previous two stages were ranked.³ However, when the court announced a special

2 Hur Nam-lin, "National Defense in Shambles: Wartime Military Buildup in Chosŏn Korea, 1592-98," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (December, 2009), pp. 124-125.

3 For more details, see Eugene Y. Park, *Between Dreams and Reality: The Military Examination in Late Chosŏn Korea, 1600-1894* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007),

examination in the fifth month of 1592, it was made clear that anyone who scored two or more hits out of ten arrow shots would be considered successful and, accordingly, decorated as having successfully passed the exam.

When these two ad hoc military measures (the *Hullyŏn dogam* and the *kwangch'ui mukwa*) were introduced, the court officials (mostly civilians who were initially reluctant to endorse these measures) cheered the value of "the military" and offered their moral support. The soldiers of the *Hullyŏn dogam*, who were publicly fed and equipped, signaled a new model of military service. Similarly, the *kwangch'ui mukwa* ushered in a new era of military recruitment as they were open to all classes, including the *nobi* (who, being slaves, were not regarded as being equal to members of other classes and, thus, were exempt from military duty). Military values, which, with regard to social prestige and political influence, had long lagged far behind civil values, were put to an unparalleled test as Chosŏn Korea slid into a wartime crisis. Not long after, Yu Sŏngnyong, the director of the *Hullyŏn dogam*, reported to King Sŏnjo: "Now we begin to see a strong effect, although it has been only for three or four months. The agency soldiers who have acquired military skills are no different from [Qi Jiguang's] skilled soldiers of Zhejiang who are good at cannon shooting. I strongly feel that we must continue to train [these soldiers]."⁴ Similarly, having tasted quick success in the recruitment of supposedly elite troops through the *kwangch'ui mukwa* in P'yŏng'an Province, King Sŏnjo gave the order to extend this strategy to other provinces in order to enhance a speedy military build-up.

But the jubilation did not last long as the *Hullyŏn dogam* soon began to face difficulties. In the mid-second month of 1595, Military Training Agency officials explained why it was so difficult to fill vacancies: "Recruitment is conducted only when there are some military provisions available [...] No matter how hard

pp. 26-27.

4 See Yu Sŏngnyong 柳成龍, *Kŭnp'okchip* 芹曝集 ("Ch'ŏng hullyŏn kunsŏ kye 請訓練軍士啓," spring 1594).

we try, currently, soldiers are treated poorly and they suffer from hunger."⁵ Obviously, the government was struggling to feed the agency's soldiers, who numbered only about one thousand. For their part, the hungry agency soldiers did not display much interest in offering military service to their country. As Second State Councillor Kim Ŭngnam (金應南) pointed out late in the ninth month of 1595, many soldiers joined the *Hullyŏn dogam* because they had nothing to eat and were in search of food.⁶ When the government failed to feed them, they began to desert.

The supposedly elite officers recruited through special military exams were no different from the agency soldiers as they were not provided with food, weapons, support-taxpayers, or clothing and so were forced to serve at defense positions far from their villages. When they were called to take part in national defense, they did not respond to the order, went into hiding, or simply fled. Moreover, the frequency of special exams, and the ease with which they were passed, allowed many men (including slaves and outcasts) to elevate their social status (even if mostly on paper). The manner in which the special military examination was conducted was so detrimental to the social hierarchy that many people, particularly *sajok* (士族, family members, relatives, and descendants of scholar-officials) men, often ridiculed the situation, saying: "If you want to find a slave in flight, check the roster of exam passers!"⁷

Nevertheless, because there were no effective alternatives, the *Hullyŏn dogam* and the *kwangch'ui mukwa* were maintained throughout the Imjin War. Some officials grumbled about the uselessness of these new systems, but nobody dared to deny the importance of the military, which seemed to offer a glimmer of hope for Chosŏn Korea's moribund defense forces. In wartime Chosŏn Korea,

5 *Sŏnjo sillok* 宣祖實錄 (*Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄), 60, 1595/2/19 (Insul).

6 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 67, 1595/9/24 (Kyesa).

7 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 87, 1597/4/19 (Kimyo).

civil officials were quick to applaud military values and to argue for a stronger military.

After the Imjin War, however, these same officials suddenly became hostile towards the *Hullyŏn dogam* and the *kwangch'ui mukwa* that had failed to provide any significant national defense. As far as these officials were concerned, the crisis of national defense ended with the withdrawal of Japanese invaders from the Korean peninsula. A sizable Ming force, which was still stationed in Korea, also greatly alleviated their military concerns.

However, the respite did not last long. The Ming troops began to withdraw, and by the ninth month of 1600 Chosŏn Korea was responsible for its own defense. Even as the horror of the Imjin War lingered, Japan began to show renewed signs of hostility.⁸ Nevertheless, no highly placed government officials argued for reinvigorating the *Hullyŏn dogam* either through public financing or the *kwangch'ui mukwa*. The Chosŏn government fell into a quandary. The government, which had suffered from a dearth of soldiers during wartime, eventually decided to assign the idle men of the *sajok* class to military duty. The *sajok* class, which occupied a sizable segment of the nation's population, was almost untapped during the war, despite its privilege and wealth.

What specific measures did the Chosŏn government take to bring *sajok* men into military service? Regardless of what measures were taken, enticing *sajok* men into the military made a lot of sense. They were not only well-instructed in the Confucian values of loyalty and public service, but they were also responsible for leading and governing the country. In economic terms, they were the only social class that, through self-provisioning, could afford the burden of military duty.

8 Min Tŏkki, *Chŏn-kŭndae Tong-Asia segye ūi Han-Il kwan'gye* 前近代 동아시아 세계의 韓日관계 (Seoul: Kyŏngin munhwasa, 2007), pp. 136-142.

In this article, I trace how, in the early seventeenth century, just after the Imjin War, the Chosŏn government tried to revamp the military and how the *sajok* reacted to its efforts. For Chosŏn Korea, which had just barely weathered a devastating foreign invasion, the importance of the military could not have been clearer. The issue of military build-up in postwar Chosŏn Korea tested how serious the government was about emphasizing the value of military service. It also showed how serious *sajok* men were about defending the country they led.

Chosŏn Korea during the crisis of the Imjin War was dominated by civil officials and Confucian intellectuals. But these people failed miserably when it came to protecting the lives of their country people. Now, it was time for these same ruling-class men to demonstrate how well they could lead the country in peacetime. This was why, after the Imjin War, the government paid the utmost attention to remedying the military system.⁹ Had *sajok* men awakened to the importance of the military? And were they determined to guard the country? The balance between civil and military values was put to its most critical test in post-Imjin Chosŏn Korea.

II. Trial and Error in the Policy of Recruiting *Sajok* for Military Service

In 1599, right after the Imjin War, aiming to reorganize the system of military duty (*kunyŏk* 軍役), the government directed its administrative power to

9 After the Imjin War, during which the previous five-guard system for the defense of the capital (known as *owije* 五衛制) had been found wanting, the Chosŏn Korean government restructured the nation's defense system into five new central divisions (known as *ogunyŏngje* 五軍營制, including the Hullyŏn agency and four additional divisions [Öyŏngch'ŏng 御營廳, Ch'ongyungch'ŏng 摠戎廳, Suŏch'ŏng 守禦廳, and Kŭmwiyŏng 禁衛營], which were established one by one in the early seventeenth century) and into local sog'o units, naval units, and other border defense divisions. For details, see James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1996), pp. 503-518.

the task of drawing up a comprehensive nationwide military roster. One might wonder what military duty meant to Chosŏn Koreans. In principle, on a rotational basis, the Chosŏn Korean government imposed military duty upon all able-bodied males of sixteen to sixty years old, both *sajok* and commoners. The only exceptions were royal family members, government officials, former officials with a rank of the second degree or higher, sons of high officials, exam passers (*saengwŏn* 生員 and *chinsa* 進士), students enrolled in government-funded schools, and male slaves.¹⁰ Once drafted, soldiers, who were divided into two groups—cavalrymen and foot soldiers—were expected to fulfill their duty for two months, either in the capital as "soldiers on duty in the capital" (*pŏnsanggun* 番上軍) or at other assigned local posts as "soldiers in local defense" (*yubanggun* 留防軍). After their tour of duty, they returned to their off-duty lives for a period of fourteen months. This meant that soldiers were called to serve once every sixteen months. Those who were not drafted had to pay a military tax, which was used to support soldiers on duty.

However, in the mid-sixteenth century, the government, which was financially pinched, allowed foot soldiers to pay a cloth tax (known as *kunjŏk sup'o* 軍籍收布) rather than to undergo military duty.¹¹ Performing one's military duty was gradually transformed into paying a tax, and foot soldiers rapidly disappeared as a corrupt government diverted the income from military-substitute taxes to purposes other than hiring soldiers. As for the cavalry, those who were assigned to the capital still had to procure—with the help of assigned support tax-payers—horses, bows and arrows, swords, and other equipment. They then had to make it to the capital, find temporary accommodation, fulfill their military duty at an assigned post, and then return to their home once their tour of duty had been completed. The problem was that cavalrymen, who often

10 For more details on the system of military duty in Chosŏn Korea, see Yukkun sagwan hakkyo Han'guk kunsu yŏn'gusil 陸軍士官學校 韓國軍事研究室 (ed.), *Han'guk kunjesa: kŭnse Chosŏn chŏn'gi p'yŏn* 韓國軍制史：近世朝鮮 前期篇 (Seoul: Yukkun ponbu, 1968), pp. 25-26.

11 *Chungjong sillok* 中宗實錄 (*Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄), 94, 1541/2/15 (Imsin).

performed back-breaking labor, were so poorly supported and impoverished that some of them lacked the most basic necessities, put up with unsanitary conditions, and died of disease or starvation. The duty of serving in the cavalry in the capital fell like a curse upon those who could not avoid it.¹² By the late sixteenth century, military duty had become a form of suffering that was to be avoided at all costs; yet it was also something that the government had to restore for the sake of national defense.

The first step towards restoring the system of military duty involved the compilation of a military registry (*kunjŏk* 軍籍)—a registry in which all eligible men were supposed to be identified and, hence, rendered available for military service. It offered the most basic data for military recruitment and, based on it, the government, according to a clear set of rules, was supposed to pick out enrollees and assign them to military positions.

The 1599 effort to compile a military registry did not mean that the Chosŏn government did not have a military roster. The government had a roster, but it was quite useless and, indeed, even counter-productive: it had not been updated for more than two decades, during which time many enrollees had died or had their names deleted, and no new enrollees were added. This roster was an empty husk.¹³ Without a workable military roster, the task of recruiting soldiers was almost impossible—at best, it was arbitrary, unfair, and vulnerable to corruption. Military strength, Chosŏn leaders often argued, was primarily contingent upon the quality of the military roster. How to recruit soldiers on the basis of a military

12 Kim Chongsu 金種洙, "17-segi kunyŏkche ūi ch'ui wa kaehyŏknon 17 세기 軍役制의推移와 改革論," *Han'guksaron* 韓國史論, vol. 22 (1990), pp. 139-141.

13 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 96, 1598/1/26 (Imja). The law dictated that the government compile a population register once every three years and a military roster once every six years, but it was not kept. The military roster that the government used during the Imjin War was the one compiled in 1574. In 1595, the government tried to update the roster but to no avail. See *Kwanghaegun ilgi* 光海君日記 (*Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄), 82, 1614/9/16 (Ūlch'uk) and Yun Yongch'ul 尹用出, "Imjin Waeran sigi kunyŏkche ūi tongyo wa kaep'yŏn 壬辰倭亂 시기 軍役制의 동요와 개편," *Yŏksa wa segye* 역사와 세계, vol. 13 (1989), pp. 87-88.

roster was a critical issue and had to be properly handled; however, it was a non-starter if the roster itself was not viable. If a man was not enrolled in the military roster, there was no way to draft him. And this meant that he was permanently exempt from military duty.

In 1599, the government attempted to register all eligible male members of the *sajok* and commoner classes in the military roster (known as *Kihae kunjök*) by enforcing a uniform countrywide standard. This roster (called *taegö kunjök* 大舉軍籍) differed from the one compiled in 1574 (*Kapsul kunjök*) in that it allowed local magistrates to take local situations into account when surveying and enlisting families (*t'ongyung chakho* 通融作戶).¹⁴ In compiling the 1599 military roster, King Sönjo wanted to be certain not to repeat the mistakes of the 1574 roster, which had been corrupted by mass evasions and, thus, had resulted in suffering and hardship for those who had registered.

In pushing the compilation of "a comprehensive military roster," the Chosön government wanted to achieve at least two goals. The first was to locate and enroll as many people as possible. This was particularly critical, given that the reserve pool of military force had shrunk to the point at which even the task of recruiting palace guards was not easy. Clearly, evasion of military duty was quite pervasive. The second goal of the roster was to secure a sufficient number of support-taxpayers (*pongjok* 奉足) for the *Hullyön dogam* soldiers. Due to lack of finances, agency soldiers, who were supposed to receive full government support, were gradually impoverished. In attempting to address this situation, the Chosön court tried to lessen the burden on the government treasury by incorporating the elements of the support-taxpayer system into the *Hullyön dogam*. In other words, instead of feeding and equipping the agency soldiers out of public revenues, the government attempted to shift a significant portion of this burden onto its people.

14 *Sönjo sillok*, 96, 1598/1/26 (Imja).

However, neither of these goals was satisfactorily achieved. The problem was a structural one. In a situation in which there was no workable population registry, it was almost impossible to compile a comprehensive military roster. There were no reliable data on residents and families from which men eligible for military duty could be identified. The previous registry, which had been compiled decades earlier, was outdated and useless. In order to compile a new population registry, local officials had to visit each family and collect new data; but the Chosŏn government did not have the administrative ability to perform this task. It did try, but the result was most disappointing. The number of men listed in the 1599 countrywide military roster was even smaller than the number of men of one province (out of eight) listed in the prewar military roster. In other words, more than 85 percent of the country's eligible men had slipped through the military roster and continued to maintain the legal status of being exempt from military duty.

The second goal of the military roster, which involved securing support-taxpayers for agency soldiers, was nowhere close to being realized. On the second day of the twelfth month of 1600, King Sŏnjo handed down his order (to Kim Sihŏn, a royal secretary): "These days Confucian students [*yusaeng* 儒生] study the four classics only for the civil service examination, and they do not know anything about the *Sohak* [*Xiaoxue* 小學, Confucian *Book of Little Learning*]. From now on, we should test [*sigang* 試講] all students with the text of the *Sohak* and allow only those who pass the test to enroll in the Sŏnggyungwan. Those who pass the test in the countryside should enroll in the local schools [*hyanggyo* 鄉校] of their village."¹⁵ This was an order designed to keep young *sajok* men from flocking to enroll in public educational institutions just to prepare for the civil service examination. The rush of young *sajok* men to Sŏnggyungwan or to local *hyanggyo* caused a big headache for the government,

15 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 132, 1600/12/2 (Sinmi).

which struggled to secure a stable reserve military force. Why was the zeal of young *sajok* men to study Confucian classics such a bother to the government?

The problem lay in the peculiar system of Chosŏn society, which recognized special privileges associated with the students of Confucian education—a system to which, beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, the Chosŏn government itself succumbed. According to this system, all students enrolled in public schools (including Sŏnggyungwan, Sahak [四學, Four Schools in Hansŏng], and *hyanggyo*) were exempt from military duty, and, for the most part, the government allowed the *sajok* to enjoy the privileges of military exemption. For example, in 1600, the Cheju magistrate complained that the soldiers on duty on the island amounted to merely one-third of the required number, but Confucian schools were overflowing with men who, being students, were thereby exempt from military service.¹⁶ The Chosŏn government, which was sustained by the *sajok* class, could not but acquiesce to many of the rights and interests claimed by that class. Interestingly, when the government yielded to the demands of the *sajok*, it did so not by specifying why they warranted government sanction but, rather, by falling back on the sanctity of Confucian learning. Those who were endowed with Confucian learning were treated as though they were above secular governance.

The only practical way for the government to impose military duty upon *sajok* men was to cut them off from the public sanction of Confucian learning. However, this task involved a paradox, for the government was based on the principles of Confucianism and, therefore, was supposed to promote Confucian learning as widely as possible. Nonetheless, given its need for national defense, the government had to do something to prevent the ruling class from further

16 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 132, 1600/12/3 (Imsin). Those who were enrolled above the prescribed number of students were called *aekeo kyosaeng* 額外校生, and they usually acquired admission by donating money or bribing school officials. See Kang Sŏnghŭi 姜聲姬, "17-segi kyosaeng kogang ūi chedohwa wa kŭ un'yŏng 17世紀 校生考講의 制度化와 그 運營," *Yŏksa kyoyuk* 역사교육, vol. 73 (2000), pp. 111-112.

crippling the system of military service. In order to prevent *sajok* men from avoiding military duty, the government decided to examine them on Confucian learning: if they failed the exam, their right of exemption from military duty would be revoked.¹⁷ This qualifying exam, which was called *kogang* (考講, written/oral examination of Confucian classics), was a last ditch attempt to prevent the country's national defense from being eroded by the very people who were supposed to uphold it.¹⁸

Based on King Sŏnjo's order in 1600, the Border Defense Command (Pibyŏnsa) officials proceeded to administer the *kogang* test of the Confucian *Sohak* to young *sajok* men with the intention of securing support-taxpayers for the *Hullyŏn dogam* soldiers. Once enrolled as support-taxpayers, these *sajok* men were obliged to substitute their military service with tax payment for the *Hullyŏn dogam*—a monetized form of military service. As a result of the *kogang* test, the government was able to secure around twenty-six hundred men (half of whom were from Kyŏnggi Province), mostly *sajok*, as support-taxpayers, and they were ordered to support the agency soldiers, who numbered about seventeen hundred at this time.¹⁹ Were the agency soldiers now free from hunger?

Such high expectations were easily betrayed. The *sajok* men who failed to demonstrate a minimum knowledge of the *Sohak* (*nakkang kyosaeng* 落講校生) and, as a result, were designated as support-taxpayers, began to storm the Border Defense Command and *Hullyŏn dogam* in groups, engaging in angry protests from all sides. They pointed out that there were many idle men who, after having been freed from slavery or public obligation, were avoiding military service, and

17 The marks of *t'ong* (通, the first grade), *ryak* (略, the second grade), and *cho* (粗, the third grade) were considered a pass while the mark of *bu* 不 was a fail. See *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典, vol. 3 (Yejŏn chekwa kangsŏ 禮典 諸科 講書).

18 *Kogang* was a form of test practiced throughout the Chosŏn period, along with *chesul* 製述, the aim being to check government officials and students to ensure that they kept up their Confucian learning. In particular, students could be enrolled in *hyanggyo* after passing the test of *Sohak* and four Confucian classics; after being admitted, they were, in theory, subjected to periodic tests (daily, monthly, and biannually) of one form or another.

19 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 135, 1601/3/15 (Kyeche'uk).

they complained that the "poison of invasive violence [was] first directed to *sajok* and Confucian students."²⁰ The officials of the Border Defense Command and *Hullyŏn dogam* heeded these complaints and suggested to the king that the state should treat the *sajok* and Confucian students with due respect. King Sŏnjo silently acquiesced to this suggestion, and many prospective support-taxpayers were consequently exempted from what they regarded as an insult.

In 1602, Chŏng Kyŏng'un (鄭慶雲), a *sajok* man in Hamyang in Kyŏngsang Province, recorded in his diary *Kodae illok* (孤臺日錄) how the *kogang* test was conducted in the countryside: "[My] nephew went to Sanyang in order to receive the *kogang* test of *Sohak* (3/1). [On the following day my] nephew came back and said that he got the score of *cho* (粗). How fortunate! I hear that the examiner was not strict [and] that all examinees were exempted from military recruitment. I am not happy about this."²¹ Chŏng Kyŏng'un was delighted that his nephew had been exempted from military service but unhappy that nobody had failed the exam. On the twentieth day of the eleventh month of 1604, there was another *kogang* test, and, again, all examinees passed without any trouble.²² It was almost as though the *kogang* functioned as a rite of passage whose purpose was to legally relieve *sajok* men from military obligation.²³ Those who failed and

20 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 135, 1601/3/15 (Kyeche'uk). The "violence" mentioned in this complaint denotes a state of affairs in which it would be possible for *sajok* people to end up offering financial support to slaves who had been drafted into the *Hullyŏn dogam*. This possibility was understood as a direct violation of the most fundamental social principle of class distinctions—the master-slave relationship.

21 Chŏng Kyŏng'un 鄭慶雲, *Kodae illok* 孤臺日錄, compiled by Nammyŏnghak yŏn'guwŏn 南冥學研究院 (P'aju: T'aehaksa, 2009), p. 365.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 443. Another legitimate way of doing away with the hassle of the *kogang* test involved buying, with a set amount of grain or a horse, a certificate of exemption from the *kogang* (this was known as *myŏn'gangch'ŏb* 免講帖). The system of *myŏn'gangch'ŏb* was introduced by the government, which wanted to raise much needed extra revenue after the Imjin War. For a detailed discussion, see Yi Mangyu 李萬珪, *Chosŏn kyoyuksa* 朝鮮教育史 (Seoul: Ŭlyu munhwasa, 1947), p. 171 and Kang Sŏnghŭi, "17-segi kyosaeng kogang ūi chedohwa wa kŭ un'yŏng 17世紀 校生考講의 制度化와 그 運營," *Yŏksa kyoyuk* 역사교육, vol. 73 (2000), pp. 133-137.

23 For comparison, see Kim Sŏng'u 김성우, *Chosŏn chunggi kukka wa sajak* 조선중기 국가와 사족 (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 2001), pp. 451, 456.

were thus registered as support-taxpayers were usually those who could not afford to bribe the examiners.

For more than two years the Chosŏn government made efforts to recruit support-taxpayers for the *Hullyŏn dogam*, and the *sajok* tried to defeat these efforts. Whenever the two sides collided over the *kogang* test, the winner usually proved to be the *sajok*. On the thirtieth day of the eighth month of 1603, officials reported to the king that the number of support-taxpayers they had been able to locate was about seven hundred.²⁴ These seven hundred or so support-taxpayers were supposed to provide economic support to about seventeen hundred agency soldiers. Originally, the government planned to assign at least one or two support-taxpayers to each agency soldier; however, it could only assign one support-taxpayer to two or three agency soldiers. It was a non-starter.

One might wonder how seven hundred support-taxpayers were located and registered in the Kihae military roster and from which pool of *sajok* men they were derived. The data that might tell us the total number of *sajok* men eligible for military service in the early 1600s are not available. However, according to some data collected in 1626, at least forty thousand *sajok* men were eligible for military service, and two-thirds of them, or about twenty-six thousand, failed to pass the *kogang* test.²⁵ Roughly speaking, this means that only seven hundred men were taken from a pool of twenty-six thousand prospective support-taxpayers. This is what military service and, by extension, military values, meant to Chosŏn Korea's ruling class.

When public demand for their service became too threatening, *sajok* men, who stood at the forefront of Confucian learning, capitalized on Confucian civil values in order to overcome Confucian military values. In 1605, the Jurchens defeated Korean troops at the northern border and occupied the eastern garrison

24 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 165, 1603/8/30 (Kyeche'uk).

25 *Injo sillok* 仁祖實錄 (*Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄), 13, 1626/intercalary-6/15 (Ŭlmyo).

(東關), causing alarm in the court in Hansŏng. In 1605, out of panic, the government tried to tap the *sajok* with another round of the *kogang* test, but the former again proved to be both smart and elusive. In 1606, to counter the resistance of the *sajok*, the government proceeded to compile a population registry. The 1606 population registry, known as the Pyŏng'o family register, was to be used by the government to provide census data in order to tightly control the populace, including the *sajok*.²⁶ But, given that the government simply did not have the ability to compile a population registry, this proved to be no more than a dream. Instead of conducting a direct survey of the population, the government asked the people to volunteer their family data (*kakcha sŏngjŏk* 各自成籍), which would then be used to levy taxes. The people were not so foolish as to open themselves up to taxation and military service.

In this situation, the only remaining government option was to squeeze the commoners, who were forced either to pay a military surtax for the *Hullyŏn dogam*—a surtax (one *tu* 斗 of rice per one *kyŏl* 結 of land) that was referred to as *samsumi* (三手米)²⁷—or to offer themselves as soldiers. In fact, those who were unlucky enough to be "captured" in the countryside were "strictly guarded and transported to Hansŏng like prisoners."²⁸ If they fled, their relatives were punished with imprisonment. To add insult to injury, those captives who could not afford to bribe local officials with cloth (*p'omok* 布木) in order to receive mild treatment were given harsh placements.²⁹

26 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 200, 1606/6/22 (kimi).

27 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 203, 1606/9/22 (Muja).

28 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 217, 1607/10/1 (Kyŏngsin).

29 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 200, 1606/6/9 (Pyŏng'o). Once drafted, agency soldiers sold their property, moved to Hansŏng, and received a government salary and the help of support taxpayers while performing their military service. However, the financial support of agency soldiers was never so much that the government allowed them to earn supplementary income by conducting commerce. Government officials claimed that many agency soldiers, who were now transformed into street merchants, were so negligent of military training that they looked like commercial entrepreneurs competing with licensed merchants in Hansŏng. See Kim Chongsu 金種洙, "17-segi kunyŏkche ūi ch'ui wa kaehyŏknon 17 세기 軍役制의 推移와 改革論," *Han'guksaron* 韓國史論, vol. 22 (1990), pp. 149-150.

On the nineteenth day of the fifth month of 1605, the Office of Inspector-General (Sanhŏnbu) memorialized King Sŏnjo:

[The king's] order regarding support-taxpayers has remained unfulfilled for seven years [...] The failure to fill the quota of support-taxpayers partly stems from the negligence of officials but it also takes advantage of the lax regulations of the law. According to the law, the article on the issue of providing support-taxpayers to the *Hullyŏn dogam* says that "the *sajok* are not allowed [to be recruited]." We surely cannot recruit the children of *sajok* families who are famed for civil arts or are promising readers [*toksŏin* 讀書人] [of Confucian texts]. But, according to the [Kyŏngguk] law, "descendants of merit-officials are assigned to Ch'ungsunwi [a palace guard]." Given this, the descendants of families without merit, who fail the *kogang* test, should be registered as support-taxpayers even though they belong to the *sajok* class. Nonetheless, non-*sajok* people, who disguise themselves as *sajok*, purchase a public certificate [*kwangyo* 官教] and exempt themselves from tax burdens for good.³⁰

It came to be commonly believed that *sajok* men were entitled to be relieved from military obligation. When it came to the *sajok* class, military exemption was almost universally government-sanctioned. Not surprisingly, commoners, or non-*sajok* people, also tried to escape military obligation through whatever means available. During the remaining years of King Sŏnjo's reign (which concluded in 1608), the *Hullyŏn dogam* remained tension-filled and added a great deal of strife to the Chosŏn court.³¹

30 *Sŏnjo sillok*, 199, 1606/5/19 (Pyŏngsul).

31 For a detailed discussion of the maintenance of the *Hullyŏn dogam*, see Kim Chongsu 金種洙, *Chosŏn hugi chungang kunje yŏn'gu: Hullyŏn dogam ūi sŏlnip kwa sahoe pyŏndong* 朝鮮後期中央軍制研究：訓練都監의 設立과 社會變動 (Seoul: Hyeon, 2003), pp. 150-174.

III. A Tug of War over *Hop'ae* Law and Confucian Civilians

When King Kwanghae (r. 1608-23) was enthroned in 1609, his officials advised him that it was time to implement the law of *hop'ae* (號牌, household tally) in order to compile an accurate population registry as well as a workable military roster. They argued that, without these two basic sources of data, it would be difficult to collect tax revenues and to build up the military for national defense.³² King Kwanghae responded speedily. He ordered that all adults carry a wooden, government-issued identification tally. In the eleventh month of 1610, royal censors reported: "Since the implementation of the *hop'ae* law, those who used to hide from public obligations flock to Hansŏng and seek places to evade public obligation. Many of them register their names in school rosters [*hakchŏk* 學籍], so much so that all school rosters have overflowed."³³ The royal censors suggested that the government tighten the enrollment procedures by executing the *kogang* test.

The household tally law seemed to work to identify those who were hiding from military and other public obligations. Panicked, those affected sought legal methods of evasion, and one of their favorites involved enrolling their names in the rosters of Sŏnggyungwan, Sahak, and *hyanggyo*. What continued unchanged was the fact that all students of Confucian learning in these schools—people who presumably aspired to eventually lead the country—were automatically exempted from all public obligations. In order to curb the number of young men flowing into the privileged haven of Confucian educational institutions, the government again imposed the *kogang* test of *Sohak*. It is not known how effective this measure was in deterring those who wished to abandon their obligations.

Once the *hop'ae* law was enforced, the Chŏlla governor (Yun Hwi) reported: "Some *sajok* people began to worry that their status would not be preserved and

32 *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, 15, 1609/4/4 (Ŭlmyo).

33 *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, 35, 1610/11/9 (Kyŏngsul).

some commoners went into hiding in the mountains, saying that they would not carry a wooden ID tally even if they had to die [...] Buddhist monks who wander around like scattering clouds and avoid military service exhibit strange behavior once they are forced to carry a wooden ID tally."³⁴ In the capital as well, some residents tried to bribe royal family members to derail the law that was forcing them to carry a wooden tally. In addition to this resistance, there were also some serious technical issues regarding how wooden tallies were issued, authorized, and renewed as well as regarding how to prevent and/or confiscate illegal tallies.³⁵

The more serious problem with which the government had to contend involved the unrelenting efforts of *sajok* people to kill the *hop'ae* law. The *hop'ae* law stipulated that all residents, including *nobi*, indentured laborers, and tenant peasants, had to be entered in the population registry and, at all times, had to carry an authorized wooden identification tally.³⁶ The *sajok* families, who owned many servants and tenant peasants, did not like the law because it exposed to government tax collectors the sources of their taxable income. They protested vigorously that the new law was detrimental to their efforts to recover from the Imjin War and that it was contrary to the spirit of Confucian benevolence. When their protests were not heard, they proceeded to act: they refused to provide officials with information on their families, sabotaged the survey process, and/or tried to prevent officials from entering their villages.

With complaints pouring in from all sides, the government was discouraged. It began to retreat, removing the most hated items one by one and delaying the full implementation of the law. The much-ameliorated law went into effect in the first month of 1612, but it, too, encountered difficulties. On the seventh day of the second month of 1612, a rebellion broke out in Hwanghae Province, and officials reported that the arrested rebel leader Kim Chikchae (金直哉) claimed

34 *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, 35, 1610/11/12 (Kyeche'uk).

35 *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, 35, 1610/11/12 (Kyeche'uk).

36 *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, 35, 1610/11/23 (Kapcha).

that his grudges stemmed from the *hop'ae* law—a claim that cannot be verified.³⁷ Nevertheless, frightened royal censors proceeded to advise the king that, in order to prevent further disturbances, the law should be scrapped. King Kwanghae yielded, and, in the seventh month of 1612, the law was dead. It had survived only six months. The government, which attempted to establish a stable source of revenues and a sustainable military system by tapping the material and human resources of the *sajok* class, again found itself unable to surmount the latter's interests. King Kwanghae's attempts to redress the nation's financial and military systems came to an end in 1612.

Similarly, the execution of the *kogang* test, which was designed to bring *sajok* men into military service, did not go well. An official (Hwang Chungyun, a Jip'yōng) reported: "Kyōngsang Province, which is considered home to Confucian scholars, is the backbone of the country, but school rosters have their own fixed quota. The quota of school enrollees in Andong is 90, but those who are not enrolled in the school roster number 500 to 600."³⁸ Hwang added that it would be unfair to simply recruit those not enrolled in the school roster for military service because many of them were actually more skilled in Confucian learning than were those attending schools. Three months later, Yi Ich'ōm (Minister of Rites) urged the king to "stop testing Confucian students as soon as possible, rescind the order that exam executioners be dispatched, and exempt the Kyōngsang *sajok* residents from undergoing the misfortune of being subjected to sudden investigation."³⁹

Not long after, Chosŏn Korea greeted a new age. King Injo (r. 1623-1649) was installed after King Kwanghae was dethroned and banished to Cheju Island. Once taking power, the new king and his followers, staunch supporters of the

37 *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, 50, 1612/2/18 (Kyemi). Obviously, negative reactions to the implementation of the *hop'ae* law stemmed from the fact that, once enrolled in the *hop'ae* registry, people were targeted for all kinds of taxes. In order to avoid ruthless exploitation, many commoners opted to be enrolled in the register of slaves or *sajok* families.

38 *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, 147, 1619/12/10 (Kimi).

39 *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, 147, 1620/3/11 (Kich'uk).

Western faction, felt that something fundamental had to be done in order to keep public finances in check and to restructure national defense. Because nobody in government knew how many people were taxable or recruitable as soldiers or support-taxpayers, the obvious move involved compiling an accurate population registry.

In 1626, the Injo court announced the implementation of the *hop'ae* law, proclaiming that it would be executed in the capital from the first day of the third month and in the local areas from the first day of the fourth month.⁴⁰ The government's strong will generated impressive results—within a year, the country's male population increased from about 1.03 million to 2.26 million (about 120 percent)!⁴¹ Before the *hop'ae* law was put into practice, the population size registered in the government's roster had been a bit more than 1 million, but once all residents were required to carry wooden identification tallies, the government was delighted to find that that the country actually had 1.23 million more taxable male residents than it had thought.

It was a bonanza. In order to organize the extra *sajok* men enrolled in schools into a corps of support-taxpayers, the government proceeded to give them an upgraded *kogang* test. Previously, those who could read and understand some select sentences in the *Sohak* were regarded as exam passers, but the government added one more text—*Taehak* (大學, *Great Learning*)—to the test. Those who failed one of the two texts were deprived of the right of exemption from military service.⁴² But, again, it was an unrealistic project because those who failed did not easily yield to the penalty of being subjected to military obligations.

On the fourth day of the eighth month of 1626, the royal censors, who heeded public opinion, told King Injo:

40 *Injo sillok*, 10, 1625/12/16 (Kyŏng'in).

41 *Injo sillok*, 13, 1626/6/5 (Pyŏngja).

42 *Injo sillok*, 13, 1626/7/19 (Kich'uk).

The most difficult task in the law of military roster is to organize *sajok* men as support-taxpayers. In the beginning of the dynasty, the title of support-taxpayer was not of low status, so that even the descendants of high-status families were all recruited [as support-taxpayers]. But this law has long been derelict, and the title of support-taxpayer has also decreased in status. In the current age, suffering from bad customs, where low-status people casually look down upon high-status people, assigning *sajok* as support-taxpayers would be a bad idea. Commoners would indiscriminately belittle the *sajok* if the latter were recruited as support-taxpayers or mobilized as common labor at public places. If this happens, the government would encounter *sajok's* uncontrollable resentment [...] Military cloth might be collected from them, but the old norm of status distinction is not something that could be compromised.⁴³

The royal censors then argued that the good customs and manners of status distinction should not be spoiled, even for the purpose of national defense.

What the royal censors suggested was simple and unequivocal: military duty (*kunyŏk* 軍役) was a job for pariahs, and it should not be assigned to the *sajok*, whether as soldiers or as support-taxpayers. Rather than having the *sajok* share the burden of national defense, the royal censors suggested considering the option of letting them pay a cloth tax. But the *sajok* did not like that suggestion either.

Amid the continuing complaints raised by the *sajok*, royal inspectors told the king that *sajok* men in the three southern provinces "would regard being assigned as support taxpayers as being dragged into a death field." They then recommended that if a "military cloth tax" should be collected, its title should be changed to "failure-in-lecture cloth" (*nakkang sup'o* 落講收布) or something

43 *Injo sillok*, 14, 1626/8/4 (Kyemyo).

similar.⁴⁴ About three months later, the royal inspectors further insisted: "Those who fail in the *kogang* test are all assigned military obligations. This amounts to nothing other than assigning them the status of lowly slaves [...] The state could obtain thousands of soldiers but would lose the minds of the *sajok*."⁴⁵ Again, the royal inspectors urged the king to collect the "penalty cloth" (*pŏlp'o* 罰布) from those *sajok* who failed the *kogang* test rather than to insist they perform their "military obligation" (軍役). No matter what was suggested, the *sajok* reacted with distaste to the word "military" (*kun* 軍) whenever it was associated with them, however slightly. For them, "military" was simply a dirty word and was to be avoided at all costs.

King Injo was caught in a quandary. The more he pushed for the *hop'ae* law, the more *sajok* resistance intensified. His problem lay in the fact that his own kingship would not be sustainable without the strong support of the *sajok*, and he knew all too well what could happen if he antagonized them too much. After all, he had been made king by a group of *sajok* who outmaneuvered their political opponents and ousted King Kwanghae in the name of Confucian righteousness—something that could be employed in many different ways to suit the needs of the time. Some members of the Northern faction, who supported King Kwanghae, were executed or banished as a result of their ill-fated power struggle against the Western faction. Once the storm of political upheaval subsided, the remaining members of the Northern faction settled in their home villages as *sajok* and continued to enjoy their status and privileges. In this sense, their class interests did not differ from those of any other *sajok*.

King Injo attempted to protect the status interests of the *sajok* by downgrading the high standards of the *hop'ae* law.⁴⁶ Once he began to retreat,

44 *Injo sillok*, 14, 1626/8/10 (Kiyu).

45 *Injo sillok*, 14, 1626/11/21 (Kyŏng'in).

46 For details, see Kang Sŏnghŭi, "17-segi kyosaeng kogang ūi chedohwa wa kŭ un'yŏng 17世紀 校生考講의 制度化와 그 運營," *Yŏksa kyoyuk* 역사교육, vol. 73 (2000), pp. 117-118 and Pak Yŏnho 朴連鎬, "Injo-Sukjong yŏn'gan ūi kunyŏk kwa kyosaeng kogang 仁祖~肅宗年間の

some court officials pushed for further concessions. These officials were supposed to be the king's trusted allies; however, when it came to the issue of class interests, they quickly turned into *sajok* who were determined to guard the stable economic and social base of their home villages, to which they might return at any time. Why were the *sajok* so special? On the twenty-second day of the eleventh month of 1626, Inspector-General Chang Yu (張維) and others said to King Injo:

The *sajok* and *nobi* of our country are a unique institution under heaven. But thanks to this institution, the order of high and low as well as nobility and lowliness is established. And, because of this order, the country is sustained. When the war broke out, the *sajok* all maintained their righteousness and they neither betrayed the country nor surrendered to the Japanese enemy. The righteous armies who arose in the three southern provinces were all from *sajok* families. In contrast, since there were no *sajok* families in areas like Hamgyŏng Province, many rebelled or collaborated with the Japanese. People like Kuk Kyŏng'in, who kidnapped Prince Imhae, were also from Hamgyŏng Province. Given all this, there are many clear reasons why we have to nurture and protect the *sajok*. If we suppress them and organize them into military units in the name of law, the *sajok* in Hansŏng and other areas will all be saddened and the families that have maintained hundreds of years of tradition and honor will lament that, overnight, they have become social outcasts.⁴⁷

Chang Yu noted that the *sajok* were the backbone of the country and that they should not have to perform the dirty job of military service.

軍役科 校生考講, "Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'gu" 정신문화연구, vol. 28 (1986), pp. 209-223.

47 *Injo sillok*, 14, 1626/11/22 (Sinmyo).

Interestingly, Chang Yu presented the job of military service as being righteous and sacred during the Imjin War but dirty and irreverent in the postwar era. He insisted that military service during the Imjin War helped to save the country from the Japanese enemy but that military service in the post-Imjin era was dishonorable and shameful. The only thing that distinguished the former from the latter was that, in the former, the *sajok* had volunteered to fight the Japanese. As far as the *sajok* were concerned, it was not acceptable for the country to impose military service in peacetime. Chang Yu and almost all other high court officials determined that voluntary military service was praiseworthy but that imposed military service was humiliating. This involved an interesting logic. The *sajok* were praised as the saviors of Chosŏn Korea only when they were categorized as belonging to irregular guerrilla armies, or as righteous fighters (*ũbyŏng* 義兵), not when they were categorized as belonging to regular armies (*kwan'gun* 官軍). This implies that the *sajok* had neither needed nor been required to fight against the Japanese invaders during the Imjin War but, rather, that they had volunteered to sacrifice themselves to save their country. According to Chang Yu, this voluntary sacrifice distinguished the *sajok* from the people of other classes.

Military service had two completely different faces in Chosŏn society, depending on how it was exercised—that is, depending on whether it was voluntary or non-voluntary. Voluntary military service was seen as loyal and righteous; non-voluntary military service was seen as humiliating. The common ground between voluntary and non-voluntary service was national defense, but it should be noted that the *sajok* believed voluntary service was not necessary in peacetime and, therefore, that they should be exempt from non-voluntary military service in post-Imjin Chosŏn Korea.

It did not matter whether these *sajok* assertions made sense: what mattered was that the *sajok* were united in their argument. King Injo eventually exempted the *sajok* from the requirement of the *kogang* test, which was associated with the

national defense of non-voluntary service.⁴⁸ As far as *sajok* people were concerned, the experiences of the Imjin War proved that the fate of Chosŏn Korea was inseparable from that of the *sajok* and that the country-saving power of the latter was grounded in their voluntary military service.

Of course, this did not mean that all *sajok* people had fought as members of "righteous armies" against the Japanese, but that did not matter. The truth was that only a very few of them fought for, at most, one or two years at the beginning of the war and that all the others went into hiding. As a matter of fact, many of the righteous armies were comprised of *nobi* people who had been mobilized by their *sajok* masters. Still, what mattered was that the *sajok* were able to identify themselves as loyal volunteers in "righteous armies." The key point was straightforward: the *sajok* were different from the commoners, not to mention the *nobi*, and, accordingly, they deserved special treatment. Ironically, one of the prerogatives upon which the *sajok* insisted was permanent exemption from military service. And this did indeed give them a unique place in post-Imjin Chosŏn society.

Chosŏn Korea was transformed into a country of *sajok*, even though it depended on the labor of the remaining population. On the nineteenth day of the first month of 1627, before fleeing to Kanghwa Island ahead of thirty-thousand strong Manchu cavalry, King Injo proclaimed:

The goal of the *hop'ae* law originally lay in refilling military vacancies caused by flights or deaths and in removing the maladies of coercive military recruitment or substitution, not in inflicting suffering upon the people. But, in executing the law, which had been derelict for more than one hundred years, [the government] has too hastily tried to recruit by force an innumerable number of idle men and has failed to implement it

48 *Injo sillok*, 14, 1626/12/30 (Mujin).

without causing trouble [...] The *kogang* test is not something we invented. It is based on classics. Nevertheless, it has turned out to be unsuitable for our times. It was designed to encourage people, but, instead, they complained about its harshness.⁴⁹

King Injo regretted that, due to the *kogang* test and *hop'ae* law, he had lost the support of the people. After apologizing for the trouble they had caused, he ordered the court officials to "call back all commissioners dispatched to each province, to collect and destroy all wooden identification tallies, to burn all related documents, and to pardon and release all persons who had been imprisoned or banished because of the *hop'ae* law."⁵⁰ King Injo's instinct for survival in a time of national crisis was fully operative. With this kingly announcement, the *hop'ae* law, which had been tried on and off over the past two decades or so, was abandoned, and, more importantly, *sajok* men were all freed from military obligation. Thus, at a time of national crisis, they lost a chance to serve their country by practicing the Confucian virtue of military valor. But no one lamented this.⁵¹

As far as military service was concerned, the *sajok* stood above the law. They were officially proclaimed to share the same fate as the country and, in return, were granted the privilege of exemption from military service. All this sounds contradictory, but it was exactly the way things were in Chosŏn Korea. Chang Yu explains why:

49 *Injo sillok*, 15, 1627/1/19 (Chŏnghae).

50 *Injo sillok*, 15, 1627/1/19 (Chŏnghae).

51 Interestingly, in 1644, when the crisis of Qing's invasions was over, King Injo proceeded to reintroduce a strengthened law relating to the *kogang* test, which contained thirteen detailed articles. According to this law, those who failed the test were allowed to retake it in three years; and, if they failed again, they were to be designated as a support taxpayer. But, as usual in Chosŏn Korea, this law either was not strictly applied or was too often frozen due to all kinds of excuse (including epidemics, famines, and unfavorable public opinion). Those who faced military obligations could also avoid them through bribery. For more details, see Kang Sŏnghŭi, "17-segi kyosaeng kogang ūi chedohwa wa kŭ un'yŏng 17世紀 校生考講의 制度化와 그 運營," *Yŏksa kyoyuk* 역사교육, vol. 73 (2000), pp. 121-125.

The so-called *sajok* in our country are indeed unique under heaven. They do not till the soil, so those who engage in agriculture are not abundant. They do not grasp weapons, so those who are soldiers are not abundant. Because of them, our country is poor and weak. But it is also true that the justice and subsistence of our country are both dependent upon them. For this reason, I once said that, since the people were like shadows or echoes when compared to the *sajok*, "we can afford to lose the minds of the people (*minsim* 民心) but we cannot afford to lose the minds of *sajok* (*sasim* 士心)."⁵²

According to Chang Yu, without the *sajok*, Chosŏn Korea could not be sustained; therefore, they should be set apart from other people and treated in a special manner. With regard to special treatment, Chang Yu specifically refers to the abolition of the *kogang* test as well as to exemption from military service. It is of course ludicrous that evasion of military service was justified in the name of *sajok* loyalty to their country.

IV. Conclusion

Among the leaders who laid the foundation of the Chosŏn dynasty were many Confucian ideologues. Chŏng Tojŏn (鄭道傳, 1342-1398), one of these, was particularly critical of the previous Koryŏ dynasty, which had long been swayed by military leaders. Chŏng was firmly committed to the Neo-Confucian principles of civil governance and played a key role in establishing a civil-centered governing system for the new dynasty. He neither ignored the role of military officials nor disregarded the value of military arts, but he did not want to see civil values overpowered by military values. The Chosŏn dynasty began as a country that privileged its Confucian officials.

52 *Chŭngbo munhŏn piko* 增補文獻備考, 109, pyŏnggo 兵考, 1.

The political institutions of the Chosŏn dynasty were structured so as to elevate civil officials and intellectuals over military officials, as was figuratively reflected in the seating arrangement at the palace. Based on the theory of yin and yang, palace seating was as follows: the kingly seat resided in the middle, with military officials seated on the left (yin, where the sun sets) and civil officials seated on the right (yang, where the sun rises). In order to make sure that the right was not manipulated by the left, military commandship was delegated to civil officials, who were expected to exercise it according to the principles of Confucian decorum (*ye* 禮). Indeed, the Chosŏn dynasty idealized the politics of Confucian decorum. Theoretically, anything that strayed from Confucian decorum could be subjected to criticism and punishment, including the exercise of military power. Civil officials, who mastered the art of Confucian decorum, tried to exercise supremacy over the military and all other state affairs.

Nevertheless, nobody dared to belittle the value of military service. Government leaders, including kings, emphasized, at least at a discursive level, the balance between civil and military values, and they often warned against the tendency to disrespect the role of the military. This was particularly so in the fifteenth century, when the court was able to exercise its political will over all the people, including the *sajok*, according to the principle of universal governance (*chemin chŏngch'aek* 濟民政策).

However, things began to change in the sixteenth century, particularly through the years of the Imjin War and thereafter. To be sure, Japan's invasion awakened Chosŏn Korea to the painful reality that a weak military could result in the annihilation of the dynasty. During the war, King Sŏnjo, government leaders, and intellectuals all stressed the importance of the military and national defense. Interestingly, however, their actions often betrayed their words: the military was denigrated and its value rarely extolled. Many *sajok* men even tried to destroy the system of mandatory military recruitment when it threatened to affect them, and the *sajok* class did not strongly support the value of the military arts.

After the war, *sajok* people were eager to praise their alleged loyal behavior and military engagement with the invaders; however, at the same time, they were desperate to exempt themselves from military service. For them, postwar military service was the job of social outcasts, and anything related to the military was socially denigrated. Ironically, *sajok* men justified their exemption from military obligation by resorting to privileged access to the Confucian classics, which never downplay the importance of national defense. Nevertheless, Confucian learning offered an escape from military service, and, through the *kogang* test, the government gradually recognized the tax-free privilege of Confucian learning. It was ironic that the *kogang* test, which was originally designed to ensure *sajok* military service, ended up ensuring that the *sajok* need not share the burden of national defense. Confucian knowledge, which gained absolute status in early seventeenth-century Chosŏn society, provided the *sajok* with a safe haven from military service and, by extension, from tax obligations.♦

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Feature Article 【專題論文】

The Two Paths of Writing and Warring in
Medieval Japan
日本中世文武的分途

Thomas D. CONLAN*

Keywords: civil (*bun*) and military (*bu*), scribes (*tegaki*), chamberlains (*kurōdo*), warrior ideals, Public military authority (*kōbu*), Kamakura bakufu, Ashikaga bakufu, court

關鍵詞：文武、手書、藏人、武士理想、公武、鎌倉幕府、足利幕府、朝廷

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