

# Introduction

The Confucian discourses of "civil" (*wen* in Chinese, *mun* in Korean, and *bun* in Japanese) and "military" (*wu* in Chinese, *mu* in Korean, *bu* in Japanese) values are often seen as key to political shifts in premodern East Asia. To be sure, depending on the circumstances in which the Confucian framework of governance was put into practice, the political landscape was not immune from ad hoc power struggles specific to each country. However, on the whole, the relationship between civil and military values was a good guide to the institutional distribution of power and authority among stakeholders. What circumstances gave more weight to civil than to military values? How was the trope of martial conduct distinguishable from one country to another? The spectrum of Confucian knowledge, which maintained a symbiotic relationship with political practice, offers a window through which we can explore statecraft in premodern East Asia.

This special issue of *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies*, which aims to contribute to understanding power relations in premodern East Asian countries, offers five articles dealing with Confucian knowledge, the relationship between civil and military values, and politics and governance in premodern China, Korea, and Japan. The key questions include: How was Confucian knowledge affected by politics? How did the relationship between civil and military values reflect or shape political practice and ideology? What caused the values of learning and war to converge or diverge? In answering these questions, each article pays attention to cases in China, Korea, or Japan.

In focusing on the impact of the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, Chun-chieh Huang asks how Confucian political ideology weathered, or was compromised by, autocratic rule in premodern China and Korea. Confucian teachings, which

aimed to promote politics for the people, were, in theory, irreconcilable with the governing principles of premodern China and Korea, which were grounded in the exclusive authority of the emperor or the king. In solving this puzzle, Huang suggests that, when Confucian knowledge was applied, there was often tension between Confucian values and the reigning political power. These tensions were resolved in one of two ways: (1) by modifying Confucian ideology so that it fit the existing reality or (2) by aligning the existing reality with a specifically selected set of Confucian values. This is a keen observation. On the whole, by exploring the relations between Confucian knowledge and political practice (exemplified in an anti-Confucian political hegemon), Huang focuses on explicating the ideological makeup of Confucian politics in premodern China and Korea.

Challenging the common understanding of civil-centred political hegemony in Chosŏn Korea, John Duncan sheds new light on how the boundaries between civil values and military values were porous, and even interchangeable, from the late twelfth to the early sixteenth centuries. Cheng-Zhu Learning, which claimed to elevate civil officials over military officials, is generally accepted as the backbone of Chosŏn Korea's political system, but Duncan rebuffs this kind of stereotypical, unsubstantiated thinking. Instead, he argues that, over a period of about three centuries, the Confucian ideology of civil supremacy was compromised by the vested interests of powerful families, until it finally took hold in the sixteenth century. Duncan's research should dissipate the intellectual sloth that has long kept scholars clinging to the myth of Cheng-Zhu Learning as a dominant explanation of Chosŏn Korea's politics. The system of civil service examinations, with which the families of the ruling class became so preoccupied, left a lasting imprint on the mindset of Chosŏn Koreans; however, as Duncan makes clear, the binary structure of "civil versus military" followed a far more complex trajectory of adjustment and contest than has hitherto been discussed.

Focusing on early seventeenth-century Chosŏn Korea, when the supremacy of Confucian civil values was entrenched, Nam-lin Hur examines how the ruling-class men of Chosŏn society tried to free themselves from the duty of military service. When it came to the importance of national defence, nobody seemed to belittle the tradition of Confucian teachings, which stressed the balance between civil arts and military arts. But Choson Korea's scholar-officials and literati, who were steeped in Confucian ideas of civil statecraft, strongly resisted any attempt to connect them to the practice of the military arts, even though the latter was for their own safety and national security. As Hur implies, what lay behind the separation of civil values and military values was the class interests and political calculations of the civil-centred *sajok* (the ruling class), which had little sympathy for the collective well-being of the nation. By the early seventeenth century, the boundary between civil officials and military officials, which had previously been porous, was cemented over, and the banner of Confucian statecraft in late Chosŏn Korea was hoisted by civil officials. In this process, the Confucian respect for military arts was socially denigrated.

In premodern Japan, the Confucian notion that the complementary balance of civil arts and military arts is a prelude to stable governance has a particular historical trajectory. Japan's governing principles were always bound up with the tradition of the imperial institution. In addition, what made the Japanese mode of "civil" (*bun*) and "military" (*bu*) peculiar was the dual structure of language and meaning. The terms *bun* and *bu* are derived from a form of Confucianism that was imported from the continent; however, in Japanese politics, these terms were applied and understood within the context of samurai-dominated statecraft. In his article, Thomas Colan traces the shifting meanings of "civil" and "military" in a premodern Japan that eventually subjected the values associated with the former to the values associated with the latter. The meanings of these two terms were tailored to suit the needs of the time—a process that separated them from their Confucian context. Colan notes the extent to which, due to their mastery of literary and military skills (which they pursued in their isolated monasteries),

Buddhist monks were hailed as exemplifying the secrets of both civil and military arts.

Oleg Benesch examines the path followed by Japanese *bun-bu* (civil-military) thought during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods by tracing the trajectory that led to the rise of Japan's idiosyncratic *bushidō* ("the way of the warrior") in the late 1890s and 1900s. Until the Bakumatsu period the concepts of *bun* and *bu* followed two directions: (1) the samurai estate's claim to civil arts and its insistence on the dominance of military over civil values, and (2) the association of *bun* and *bu* with China and Japan, respectively. With the coming of foreign threats in the early nineteenth century, among growing nativist movements, the samurai's embrace of civil arts was criticized as a symptom of a weakened militancy. Here, Benesch sees a trend in which Japan's militancy coalesced into the "great way of the country of the gods" and was further invigorated by Wang Yangming's ideas on the unity of thought and action. The path towards the rise of *bushidō* discourses after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 was well paved. In contextualizing the upsurge of Japan's militancy, which proved to be fruitful for Meiji Japan, Benesch introduces how East Asian reformers such as Pak Ŭnsik (Korean) and Liang Qichao (Chinese) were attracted to Japan's modern reconfiguration of the *bun-bu* relationship.

Generally, the five articles collected in this special edition contribute to understanding how the two key Confucian concepts of "civil" and "military" interacted with politics, statecraft, and the social order in premodern East Asian countries. The authors find that Confucian ideology differed depending upon local circumstances and was not an unyielding guide to how politics should be exercised. Although the way in which civil and military values happened to be combined was invariably justified in Confucian terms, it was always a result of constant negotiations that involved vested interests and shifting political institutions. The political landscapes of premodern East Asian countries portrayed in these articles, viewed through the prism of civil and martial values,

were complex, multilayered, and diverse. This suggests that the theme of Confucian ideology and politics offers a fertile ground for ongoing border-crossing case studies and comparative discussions.♦



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