

The Establishment of Literati Governance Society in Early Joseon, and Its Continuation

Yim Min-Hyeok

From its conception, the Confucian intellectuals of Joseon began to use literati governance (*munchi* in Korean) as the dynasty's ruling mechanism in order to actualize their dreams of bringing about an ideal society based on Confucian ethical principles. Thus, it was only natural for these individuals to perceive military officials as a class of people who should not only be denigrated, but discriminated against as well. The philosophical background of these Confucian intellectuals can be said to have its origins in Mencius' concept of a virtuous government (王道, The Way of a good king), in which he advocated the supremacy of a literati governance system based on the notions of virtue (仁, *ren*) and righteousness (義, *yi*) over a military-based one.

The main notions of this literati governance are clearly evident in the proclamation of the foundation of a new dynasty by Yi Seong-gye (King Taejo, r. 1392-1398). As part of their quest to create a new concept of the state, those who succeeded Yi Seong-gye to the throne also adhered to the principles of his literati governance. Confucian scholars, who perceived the limitations of a military-based governing structure, attempted to design a state that was based on a literati governance system. Even as Joseon found itself rocked by the instability resulting from constant encroachments of Japanese marauders and Jurchen tribes, these scholars continued to be critical of basic defense policies such as conducting military exercises (*gangmu* in Korean), fortifications, and increasing military expenditures. For these scholars, the most important quality that a ruler should display was that of virtue towards the general population. As a result, those military officials within the various government departments soon found themselves being discriminated against. Their success in building such a literati governance system is clearly evidenced by the inclusion of a clause in the Great Code of Joseon that only literati officials should be entrusted with the task of operating the core political organizations. In terms of foreign policy, these intellectuals adopted a policy of "serving the great" towards China (*sadae* in Korean), while establishing

amicable relations with Japan and the Jurchen (*gyorin* in Korean).

In addition, the intellectuals needed to establish the ideological symbols required to create the unified structure which would have to be put in place in order to actualize this literati governance system. This process was exemplified by the establishment of National Confucian Shrine (*munmyo* in Korean) and the subsequent downgrading of the Military Shrine (*mumyo* in Korean). Moreover, the consolidation of the literati governance system and weakening of the perception of military defense resulted in the practice of conducting regular military exercises also being increasingly discarded from the reign of King Seongjong (r. 1469-1494) onwards. In fact, during the reigns of the Yeonsan-gun (r. 1494-1506) and King Jungjong (r. 1506-1544) this practice was all but abolished altogether.

The literati governance ideology developed by these Confucian intellectuals is also clearly visible in the concept of the state and national defense strategy which prevailed during the reign of King Seonjo (r. 1567-1608) when the nation found itself under foreign attack. While King Seonjo displayed a strong willingness to repel the invading forces, leading Confucian intellectuals of the day such as Yi Yi, Jo Mok, Kim Wu-ong, and Yu Seong-ryong emphasized the need to guarantee peace and order among the people based on the Confucian concepts of virtue and righteousness. In other words, even as battle raged all around them, these scholars continued to adhere to the Confucian concepts of virtue and righteousness found in the literati governance system as the basis of their defense policy. This kind of notion provides us with some insight into Joseon's perception of defense and its strategy during the Hideyoshi Invasion of Joseon. Moreover, this kind of notion also provides us with a clue as to why the Joseon dynasty was able to survive for as long as it did.

Keywords: Literati governance (munchi), ritual governance (yechi), sadaegyorin, Confucian Shrine (munmyo), Military Shrine (mumyo), gangmu, virtue (ren) and righteousness (yi)

Introduction

Joseon was a society ruled by scholar-officials who advocated a Neo-Confucian political ideology. Joseon, which established a system designed to recruit the necessary literati and military officials that was based on the use of examinations, and another to select the so-called Eumgwan (officials who are appointed

posts without passing examinations) through a protected appointment system (*eumseo*), boasted a very hierarchical ruling structure based on Confucianism in which scholar-officials occupied higher positions than military ones. Joseon's power structure, in which the Confucian intellectuals occupied the dominant position, was also based on Mencius' philosophy with regards to a virtuous government and Confucian ritual principles. Thus, the relationship between the ruler and the meritorious subjects, as well as Joseon's defense policy, was based on the Mencian notion of guaranteeing peace and order among the people.

The efforts to reorganize the political order which were carried out in the aftermath of the founding of the Joseon dynasty were designed to achieve the purging of military-based political factions, the absorption of the private armies into the central military, and the transformation of the previous military-based ruling structure into literati governance. The new society which Joseon hoped to bring about was the so-called "literati governance society" in which scholar-officials would play the dominant role. The advent of this new society also entailed an overhaul of the legal, institutional, and social structures of the state in accordance with Confucian rites. Moreover, the establishment of the *sadaegyorin* (the principle of serving the great and maintaining amicable ties with neighboring states) approach to foreign relations can also be seen as having its origins in this literati governance society. In this regards, the new rulers hoped to remove the threat of military conflict by adopting a more reciprocity based approach to foreign relations that would enable them to construct the ideal politics based on the literati governance system.

However, from a historical standpoint, there had never been a case in which a state had completely done away with its military; and this even when a literati governance structure was in place. Although pursuing such a goal, Joseon was nevertheless forced during the early stages of the dynasty to establish and maintain the following defense measures: the regional and central command garrison system (*jingwan-cheje* in Korean), which served as the basic defense policy of Joseon during the early stages; the victory strategy adapted to ward off attacks by Japanese marauders (*jeseungbangnyak* in Korean) system in place during the 16th century; and the comprehensive defense strategy formulated right before the Hideyoshi Invasion of Joseon. However, the intrinsic nature of this literati governance, which was exemplified by its disregard of the importance of military defense and its contemptuous treatment of military officials, resulted in weakening the efficiency of these defense policies. The continuous attacks orchestrated by intellectuals on Joseon's national defense policy, a policy which

the external circumstances surrounding Korea at that time made necessary, and the gradual decrease in military exercises were made possible by literati governance's deep penetration of Joseon's political and philosophical psyche. In this regards, the frenzied efforts by the meritorious subjects to establish various *munmyo* (Confucian Shrine), while curtailing the number of *mumyo* (Military Shrine), can be perceived as having been the result of their desire to establish the literati governance as the state's utmost value. Thus, the national crisis (war) which engulfed Joseon during this period can be seen as having been caused by the fundamental weaknesses of this literati governance system. Nevertheless, the effect of the fundamental nature of the literati governance, which is based on the notion that gaining the support of people represents the most important action a ruler can take to maintain the security of the state and assure national defense, should not be overlooked from a military standpoint.

With this in mind, this paper will analyze the basic nature and characteristics of this literati governance society advocated by the ruling class (*yangban* in Korean); the discrimination between literati and military officials; and the process through which this society was established. Thereafter, an analysis of the perception of national defense which prevailed during the reign of King Seonjo, who came to power in the period immediately preceding the Hideyoshi Invasion of Joseon, will be carried out. It is hoped that by doing so, a better understanding can be brought about of the process through which the Confucian intellectuals put their political ideology of literati governance into effect, and of how the eventual goal of literati governance—the acquisition of the people's support is related to Joseon's defense policy and its long history.

The Advent of Confucian Politics and Literati Governance Following the Founding of Joseon

The Confucian intellectuals who played the leading role in the foundation of Joseon adopted Neo-Confucianism as the philosophical basis of their reform efforts through which a new society was to be built. In his proclamation announcing the foundation of the new dynasty, King Taejo identified the construction of a literati governance state ruled by culture (文, *mun* in Korean) and Confucian rites (禮, *li*) as the main objective of the new state:

“In ancient times, the son of Heaven (*cheonja* in Korean) worshipped at

seven shrines (七廟), while the emperor could perform ancestral rituals at five shrines (五廟). The emperor established the Royal Ancestral Shrine (*jongmyo* in Korean) to his left and the altars of land and grain (*sajik* in Korean) to his right.” (*Veritable Records of King Taejo*, Vol. 1, July 28th of the First Year of King Taejo)

Thus, King Taejo made evident his desire to construct a capital area based on the urban plans established in Ancient China in order to lay the foundation for a literati governance state. Thereafter, Taejo proceeded to identify the manner in which he would deal with the Wang clan (royal families of Goryeo), his plans for the establishment of a literati and military examination system, and the process through which the series of ritual of passage collectively called *gwanhonsangje* (coming-of-age, marriage, funeral, and ancestor worship) would be implemented in order to assure that proper customs and traditions would be established; all of which can be perceived as social institutions designed to facilitate the construction of the literati governance state. As can be seen in the *Joseon gyeonguk-jeon* (Guidebook of Joseon Administration), these social institutions in all likelihood reflect Jeong Do-jeon’s political mind-set, “The manner in which this *gwanhonsangje* system is set up has a deep impact on that state’s basic social customs and traditions; thus, in order to establish the desired social order, these matters should be dealt with at the national level” (*Guidebook of Joseon Administration*). The Inspector-General Yun Hyang of the Office of the Inspector-General (*Saheonbu* in Korean) argued that not only should the state be governed by Confucian rites (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 26, September 3rd of the 13th Year of King Taejong) but that the security of this state should also be based on similar rites as well (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 41, September 27th of the 10th Year of King Sejong). These Confucian intellectuals’ perception of the state provides valuable insight into the process through which Confucian thought was reflected in Joseon’s founding philosophy. Moreover, it also serves to elucidate the process through which the institutional foundation of this new society based on the literati governance--including the law of national rituals (*sajeon* in Korean) (which consist of the royal ancestral shrine, ruler’s ceremonious cultivation of his own plot (*jeokjeon* in Korean), altars of land and grain, ritual to worship the mountain and river gods (*sancheon* in Korean), ritual to worship the village gods (*seonghwang* in Korean), and the ritual in which Confucius is worshipped at the Confucius Shrine (*munseonwang seokjeonje* in Korean) (*Veritable Records of King Taejo*,

Vol.1, August 11th of the First Year of King Taejo), and the *gwanhonsangje* (Veritable Records of King Taejo, Vol.7, June 6th of the Fourth Year of King Taejo) - came about.

King Taejo's ruling philosophy based on the principle of literati governance was inherited by his successors as well. As can be seen from the following comments attributed to Gweon Geun during the reign of King Taejong (r. 1400-1418), the main focus during this period remained cultural politics (*munjeong* in Korean):

“Since our nation was founded based on the notion of literati governance advanced by the three sage Kings, we have finally acquired a period of peace” (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 1, January 14th of the First Year of King Taejong)

“Our ruler has advanced the literati governance system by seeking out the wisdom of the Confucian scholars on the subject” (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 11, May 13th of the Sixth Year of King Taejong)

“Is it not my duty to put my limited knowledge to work for our king so that we can actualize literati governance?” (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 13, March 24th of the Seventh Year of King Taejong)

Meanwhile, King Sejong (r. 1418-1450) stated, “Since I ascended to the throne I have concentrated on the consolidation of literati governance while not concerning myself with military matters” (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 60, May 3rd of the 15th Year of King Sejong). Moreover, King Seongjong (r. 1469-1494) provided the following explanation as to why he participated in an archery ceremony with his male relatives, “While our state has been able to actualize the literati governance system by consistently promoting the Great Song politics, we have been incapable of properly strengthening our military strategy” (*Veritable Records of King Seongjong*, Vol. 91, April 4th, of the Ninth Year of King Seongjong). Thus, we can see from these examples that the main focus of the early rulers of the Joseon dynasty was the establishment of the literati governance system.

The new dynasty founded on the principle of a literati governance society needed to establish the ideological basis for their new kingdom, as well as to define its national characteristics, in order to assure the legitimacy of the regime. During the third year of King Taejo, the new monarch asked his advisors about how to be a good ruler, to which Jeon Baek-yeong retorted:

“Your Royal Majesty was able to seize control of the 500-year-old Wang dynasty (Goryeo) through your superior military prowess ... According to the Confucian Classics, Emperor Guangwu (光武帝, the founder of the Later Han dynasty) put down his sword and began to advocate the need for culture and ethics. He stopped riding horses and began promoting *dao* (The Way). Thus, because he focused on the adoption of this literati governance system, he earned the respect and admiration of future generations.”

Thus, Jeon was in essence attempting to persuade the new king to open up a dialogue with the Confucian scholars (*gyeongyeon* in Korean) regarding the need to follow the example of Emperor Guangwu and to adopt the *munchi* system (*Veritable Records of King Taejo*, Vol. 6, August 2nd of the Third Year of King Taejo). In other words, although Yi Seong-gye (Taejo) had come to power through force of arms, his ruling method should be based on culture rather than the military. These Confucian scholars implored the new king to follow the example set by ancient Chinese kings, such as King Wu, when selecting his ruling system. The following quote is taken from a petition sent to the king by an individual by the name of Jo Jun in which he implored the monarch:

“Your Royal Majesty has virtuously appointed a member of the Wang clan by granting Majeon to conduct rituals for King Gongmin of Goryeo. This situation can be likened to King Wu’s appointment of the Viscount of Wei to a similar position within the Sung government.”

Jo implored Taejo to follow the example set by kings Yu (禹), Tang (湯), and Wu (武), and to adopt the ways of the Former and Later Han Dynasty (*Veritable Records of King Taejo*, Vol. 2, December 16th of the 1st Year of King Taejo). In the *Record of Music* section of *The Book of Rites* (*Yegi* in Korean), a detailed account of the actions of King Wu written by Confucius himself can be found. Thus, this is the basic summary of how King Wu abandoned military means in favor of cultural politics.

Such ancient Chinese political traditions were considered to be the ideal example which the new rulers of Joseon should aspire to in order to establish a new peaceful era of literati governance. This kind of consciousness is clearly reflected in music composed in order to consolidate the basis of the kingdom during the reign of King Sejong, music which lauded the legitimacy, greatness,

and history of Joseon. King Taejo acted according to the government organization in charge of establishing ritual institutions (*Uiryese-sangjeongso* in Korean):

“Our great King Taejo was able to use his military prowess to found a new kingdom; meanwhile, King Taejong was able to usher in an era of peace through the adoption of the literati governance system designed to attain the harmonization of music and rites.”

As such, while these individuals created the “military dance” by praising King Taejo’s use of his military prowess, they also made “literati dance” by King Taejong as the one who achieved harmony between culture and the military (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 57, September 1st of the 14th Year of King Sejong).

If we can thus claim that Joseon society is one based on literati governance and ritual governance (*yechi* in Korean), then what is the relation between these two? In short, ritual and culture represent some of the ruling tools available to a state. While ritual governance can be seen as the contrast of legal governance (*beopchi* in Korean), literati governance can be perceived as the contrast of a military governance system. From the standpoint of ruling mechanisms, literati governance and ritual governance can be viewed as exhibiting some differences. Thus, when An Gi, the governor of Suweon, brought a white pheasant to the king, the meritorious subjects who had gathered in Seoul to celebrate the monarch exclaimed, “we have finally been able to put in place rites, music, and penal administration because the military has been suppressed and literati governance has been promoted” (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 95, March 24th of the 24th Year of King Sejong). As such, the ruling mechanisms used to implement this literati governance society were the principle of enlightening the people (*gyohwa* in Korean) of rites and music (*yeak* in Korean) and the laws (*beopryeong* in Korean) of penal administration (*hyeongjeong* in Korean).

However, the concepts of rites and culture cannot completely be differentiated from one another either. In the following quote from the *Analecets of Confucius*, Chapter 5, Zhu Xi notes that *dao* embodied is *mun*, it designates *yeak* as “*mun*” can be understood to mean the *yeak* system. The petition submitted by Confucian scholars to King Sejong which read, “*li* was prepared and then harmonized with music, thus flourished *munchi*” (*Veritable Records of King Munjong*, Vol. 1, May 21st of the 1st Year of King Munjong), can be surmised as having the same fundamental meaning as the quote taken from the *Analecets*

of *Confucius* found above. In other words, Joseon, which adopted the Confucian ideology as its ruling mechanism, placed more emphasis on rite than on the concept of law. We can find many such examples in which *munchi* is expressed as *yeak*. In the *Gukeo* (國語), there is a reference to “*mun* is Etiquette,” while in the *Sunja* (荀子, Thoughts of Xun-zi), we find a reference to “*mun* is a Law.” Here we can see how “*mun*” means the way of ethics and law. Moreover, in another part of the *Gukeo*, we find the following passage: *mun* is a generic name for Virtues. Here, “*mun*” is taken to mean virtue. As such, *munchi* meant *Deokchi* (德治, virtuous rule). In other words, the concepts of “*mun*” and “*ye*” were in essence understood as carrying the same meaning. Furthermore, as “*li*” also meant “*beop*” (law), we can surmise that there is not much difference between a literati governance and a ritual governance society.

This being the case, how should foreign relations be established under this literati governance society? The Confucian intellectual Kim Wu-ong argued that a state could assure that it would never be destroyed by upholding rites. Meanwhile, another Confucian intellectual, Yu Seong-ryong, claimed that the period of the Warring States in China was one in which a decline in rites occurred and the national order collapsed. These two individuals were thus of the mind-set that the rise and fall of a state was dependent on the state in question’s ability to uphold rites. The founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang advocated the restoration of the “real” China and based his foreign policy on the tributary system (Ha Wu-bong, 1994: 254). Therefore, Joseon, which became a part of the Sino-centric world order, adopted a similar ruling system to the one that prevailed in China. Joseon’s serving the great (*sadae* in Korean) diplomacy was based on the patriarchal feudal system found during the Zhou dynasty, in which tributes were given to the Emperor in exchange for his blessing. Thus, this system was based on the ritual principles governing the relationship between the ruler and feudal lords. The nature of the ritual principles in place during the Zhou dynasty makes it clear that the relationship between Ming China and Joseon was one between superior and inferior. Therefore it was impossible for the two states to establish diplomatic relations as equals. Furthermore, as long as Joseon abided by these ritual principles, the possibility of war breaking out with China was all but inconceivable.

In the aftermath of the foundation of the new dynasty, some problems emerged in terms of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the new state and Ming China, which was also experiencing internal political upheavals at that time. The source of these problems was the language employed by the

rulers of Joseon in their letter to the Chinese Emperor, language to which the Ming rulers took exception. As a result of this issue, calls began to emerge within some segments of Joseon society for an invasion of the Liaodong Peninsula. Such calls had their origins in the widespread belief that the Ming's improper requests were harming Joseon's national interests, and bringing the independence of the new kingdom into question. Nevertheless, the decision was made that the best way of protecting Joseon's national interests and its independence was to continue the *Sadae* policy towards China.

Some examples of the perception of serving the great which existed at that time are clearly visible in Jeong Do-jeon's "serve the great with rites" (*Sambongjip* Vol. 13) and King Taejong's quotes to the effect that, "if our nation abandons the rites of serving the great, the Emperor of China will dispatch troops to punish us for our sin" (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 13, April 8th of the 7th Year of King Taejong) and "To serve the great does not mean that we are afraid of China, rather it is simply abiding by the proper rites" (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 22, August 18th of the 8th Year of King Taejong). Thus, "serving the great" was perceived as being an integral part of rites. Moreover, this fact is also clearly discernible in Gweon Geun's petition (*Yangchonjip*, Vol. 32) and Byeon Gye-ryang's *Bongsa-yukjo* (*Chungeongjip*, Vol. 6). Here, serving the great was considered to represent the essence of rites or the justification for superior—inferior relations. Thus, the notion of serving the great was also based on the ritual order that would be established in accordance with Confucian morality to bring about literati governance.

Meanwhile, as Japan was considered to hold the same status as Korea within the Sino-centric world order, that of a tributary state of China, Joseon's diplomatic ties with Japan were governed by the principle of amicable relations with neighboring states (*gyorin* in Korean). In 1404, during the Muromachi Period (1333-1573), the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu presented a letter of credentials to the Joseon king which was subsequently accepted by the latter, thus signifying that the two countries had established diplomatic ties (Ha Wu-bong: 258). Although amicable ties were established, this was not understood to mean that a relationship amongst equals actually existed. Joseon's diplomacy towards Japan was established based on the same kind of carrot-and-stick approach that was applied to the Jurchen in the Northern provinces. As such, sometimes a conciliatory policy was employed, and at other times a more aggressive approach was used.

The ritual order which Joseon set up to govern its own society and its

international relations was a system whose very existence was based on culture rather than brute military force. The blueprint for a literati governance society expounded upon by Yi Seong-gye in his announcement of the foundation of a new dynasty was subsequently adopted by his successors on the throne, who praised the superiority of this ruling tradition. With regards to its neighbors, Joseon pursued more amicable international order based on rites while also attempting to alleviate military tension. Thus, during the earliest stages of the dynasty, efforts were made to consolidate the notion of literati governance as the foundation for Joseon's domestic and international policies.

Discrimination between the Scholar- and Military-Officials and the Consolidation of the Literati Governance System

Some of the main actors who took part in the construction of the new dynasty through their role in placing Yi Seong-gye on the throne, continued to maintain their own private armies even after the founding of the new nation. As these military groups' main interest was transferred from warfare with outside powers, or with domestic enemies, to the reorganization of the domestic political structure, these forces had no choice but to come into conflict with the Confucian ideology advocated by leading intellectuals. During a debate over the course of military reform Jeong Do-jeon maintained:

“Since time immortal the ruler's reign over his people has been based on culture, while rebellions have been suppressed through force. Thus, for the ruler, literati and military officials can be likened to his two arms, neither of which should be leaned on too heavily or cut off altogether.”
(*Veritable Records of King Taejo*, Vol. 5, February 29th of the 3rd Year of King Taejo)¹

Jeong's comments were motivated by his desire to avoid aggravating officials from the military faction, as well as by the importance that had to be placed on

1. Jeong spoke in a similar manner when explaining the origin of the names of the buildings of Yungmunru (隆文樓) and Yungmuru (隆武樓) attached to Gyeongbok Palace.

national defense during that particular period.

This emphasis on the importance of both the literati and military aspects was the result of the indivisible nature of the national ideology of the new dynasty and the national policy which prevailed at the onset of the new regime. As mentioned above, this period was one in which instability prevailed as a result of the calls within Joseon society for an attack on the Liaodong Peninsula, as well as of the repeated Jurchen attempts to invade Joseon. As such, Joseon had no other option during this period but to focus its attention on its defenses and the taking of the necessary military preparations. This had the effect of stimulating Jeong Do-jeon to write the military training manual (*Jinbeopseo* in Korean), which was subsequently implemented within the actual military. In addition to the reorganization of the central military system, a military service examination system was also established in order to educate the human resources who would be responsible for national defense and strategies (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 3, April 10th of the 2nd Year of King Taejong).² Moreover, individuals who possessed both literati and military skills were highly sought after during this period.

The practice of conducting military exercises also became institutionalized during this period. While petitioning the throne to implement military exercises the Headquarters of Three Joint Armies (*Uiheungsamgunbu* in Korean) complained that, “Your Majesty has been consistently preoccupied with matters related to rites and culture since founding the new dynasty; however, you have shown little interest in military exercises” (*Veritable Records of King Taejo*, Vol. 10, November 30th of the 5th Year of King Taejo). As such, while meritorious subjects such as Jo Jun were busy criticizing the king for having gone on a hunting expedition, military exercises were still being carried out (*Veritable Records of King Taejo*, Vol. 15, December 17th of the 7th Year of King Taejo). In the second year of King Taejong, the Susubeop was established; regular hunting

2. Amidst these circumstances, a phenomenon appeared in which military post were more highly sought after than the civil ones. Officials from the Three Offices (Samgwan: *Hongmungwan*, or Office of Special Counselors, *Yemunghan*, or Office of Royal Decrees, and *Gyoseogwan*, or Office of History Collators) told potential applicants during the time of the administration of the military service examination that “Anyone who has already passed the civil service examination does not need to take this test, but simply practice your self-defense skills while conducting your civilian tasks. However, if any such individual is here today because he thought that he would gain more benefit by passing this examination should be ashamed of himself.”

included military exercises by seasons (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, June 11th of the 2nd Year of King Taejong).

Moreover, the kings who succeeded Taejong to the throne were also unable to do away completely with their affection for the military. For his part, Taejong was said to be fond of engaging in archery with other members of the royal family at the the *cheonghwa* pavilion in palace; a practice which the Office of Policy Critics (*Saganweon* in Korean) was very critical of, as can be seen in the following quote, “Your Majesty enjoys taking part in the art of archery; however, you are less inclined to participate in the Royal Lectures as demanded by our office” (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 5, March 3rd of the 3rd Year of King Taejong). To which Taejong shot back, “How dare you speak in such an impudent manner that is sure to vex my kinsmen. A conflict would most certainly arise between literati and military officials” (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 5, March 27th of the 3rd Year of King Taejong). Thus, we can see that during this period the government still had to worry about antagonizing members of the royal clan who had a military background. Moreover, it is also evident that the military continued to exercise a dominant role within the ruling structure from petitioning of the king to the throne presented by the Supreme Administrative Body (*munhabu* in Korean) “despite their cardinal official position, the Six Ministers of the Government guard the King by grasping shields and swords being together with soldiers. This is not the proper ethical manner in which the *sadaebu* (士大夫, scholar-officials) should be treated” (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 1, June 4th of the 1st Year of King Taejong). During the reign of King Sejong, Jurchen invasions began to occur with more frequency and more intensity. Thus, the need to crush the Jurchen and establish clear demarcations between the two states became one of the government’s top priorities. During the latter period of Sejong’s rule, a Mongolian tribe known as the Oyrats also began to threaten Joseon’s borders.

Under such an emergency situation in which external circumstances were growing tenser by the day, and in which Joseon still boasted a government that was dominated by military figures, civil officials nevertheless actively criticized the national defense policy, including: the practice of conducting military exercises, the upkeep of fortresses, and the expansion of the military budget. Moreover, these scholar-officials also wanted to make clear their desire to bring about a ritual Confucian society through the eradication of the military structure and the gaining of the people’s hearts. As such, even amidst such a crisis situation, these scholar-officials continued to emphasize the importance of social har-

mony and the possibility of the people turning their backs on the government. During one of the lectures for the Crown Prince held during the reign of King Jeongjong (r. 1398-1400), Yi Seo, who was one of the Crown Prince's teachers, suggested that a fortress should be built in order to ward off Japanese marauders; a suggestion that was accepted by the future monarch. In response to this, an official by the name of Kim Gwa retorted that more emphasis should be placed on the development of agriculture than on the building of fortresses and military units (*Veritable Records of King Jeongjong*, Vol. 4, May 17th of the 2nd Year of King Jeongjong). In addition, a group of scholar-officials submitted a petition to the throne in which they argued that as the expansion of the military colonies system (*dunjeon* in Korean) and of the military tax would unnecessarily aggravate the general population, these should be done away with altogether (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 13, June 28th of the 7th Year of King Taejong). Meanwhile, other scholar-officials criticized the establishment of a fortress along the coast which would serve to repel a Japanese invasion (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 51, January 16th of the 13th Year of King Sejong).

This opposition can be perceived as stemming from these Confucian intellectuals' realization of the limits of ruling the state through military force. In this regards, the direction pursued by the following three leading intellectuals can be perceived as having its origins in this fact. Thus, while Jeong Do-jeon pursued the establishment of bureaucracy dominated prime ministers (Han Young-woo 1983: 132-146); Nam Eun advocated the removal of all private militaries at the provincial level (*Veritable Records of King Taejo*, Vol. 13, March 20th of the 7th Year of King Taejo) and Byeon Jung-ryang requested, in a petition, that the princes' rights to possess private armies be curtailed as well (*Veritable Records of King Taejo*, Vol. 14, August 26th of the 7th Year of King Taejo). The breaking up of private militias and the subsequent adsorption of their members into the national military thus become one of the most crucial tasks which had to be carried out in order to establish a centralized government system. The possession of such private militias by most political factions presented a constant threat to the king's authority and the power structure. Thus, such external threats to the ruling structure had to be eradicated. Furthermore, in order to rule the state with more efficient ruling mechanisms than the simple use of military force, it was necessary to gradually establish a ruling structure that was based on Neo-Confucianism ideology.

“According to the Book of Rites, to hide soldiers in individuals’ houses does not represent an example of proper rites. This practice threatens the virtuous king. Moreover, a meritorious subject who forms such a private army automatically becomes violent and in time emerges as a threat to the king himself.” (*Veritable Records of King Jeongjong*, Vol. 4, April 6th of the 2nd Year of King Jeongjong)

We can see in the above quote attributed to Gweon Geun during the second year of the reign of King Jeongjong that the possession of private armies became an obstacle to the implementation of the literati governance system.

As time went by the environment in which the military was given top priority and the emphasis was placed on the development of both literati and military skills found at the beginning of the dynasty began to change towards a new structure in which the military was discriminated against and the military’s power was diluted. We can also see that the effort to discriminate against those who passed the military service examination in favor of scholar-officials had already begun.

The intention to discriminate against military officials is clearly evident in the following petition submitted by Left State Councilor Hwang Hui and Right State Councilor Maeng Sa-seong:

“The employment of both literati and military officials cannot be completely done away with nor can too much emphasis be placed on any one side. However, in the Confucian Classics, the military was degraded while culture was given a preeminent position. This is the Way the king should rule heaven and earth as well as the state. Our great king Taejong placed more emphasis on military rather than literati matters. However, this was nothing more than a temporary measure that allowed him to centralize power. Nevertheless, this was not an honorable way of going about doing so. ... It is our fervent hope that, as following the Basic Six Codes (Weonryukjeon in Korean), if Your Majesty do away with the practice to bestow a sunshade and banquets to passagers of the military service examinations, examining in the Four books and One Classic, you will come to rule in a manner akin to how the good generals of ancient days, who concentrated on cultivating knowledge and favored rites and music, governed their states.” (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 43, January 3rd of the 11th Year of King Sejong)

The reform measures suggested by the above two individuals were, in accordance with the prevailing periodic trends, designed to abolish the practice of literati and military officials receiving similar treatment. Furthermore, these individuals desired to strengthen the importance of the Confucian Classics in the military service examination in order to create a societal atmosphere in which even the military generals were well versed in odes and history, as well as on the subject of rites and music. These goals had as their ultimate objective the achievement of a literati governance society. In order to do so, the Confucian intellectuals tried to persuade the king about the process which would have to be carried out so as to bring about this literati governance society; a process which involved encompassing these military officials within the literati governance framework through the employment of a discriminatory strategy. This plan was brought to life in the form of the Great Code of Joseon, in which it was written that a bureaucracy centered around the scholar-officials should emerge as the core force governing the nation's main administrative organizations. The *Gyeonggukdaejeon* (National Code) was also the result of the drive by scholar-officials to become the main force in politics and in the society.

In addition to the literati governance society, these scholar-officials also needed to create an ideological symbol which they could rally around in order to usher in a unified structure. This was realized through the establishment of Confucian shrines. These Confucian intellectuals were of the mind-set that they could use their political authority to spread the Confucian ideology and create a unified ruling structure by establishing Confucian shrines and getting the king to conduct rituals to worship Confucius (*seokjeon*). However, once these Confucian shrines were established, the king's actions at these shrines could be regarded as his high regard for culture and his concurrent disregard for the military. As such, there emerged calls from within some segments of the military for the government to establish military shrine as well (Kim Hae-young, 2000: 53; Shim Seung-koo, 2003). The following lengthy quote is attributed to Park A-saeng, a military official during the reign of King Sejong:

“For the previous Three Dynasties (Xia, Yin, Zhou), literati and military officials were treated as equals. Thus, during peace time the meritorious subjects favored by the king became state councilors, while when war raged they donned their military attire. These individuals ruled society with a pure heart and a moral mind. However, the practice these days of separating literati and military officials, with the scholar-officials being in

charge of state planning, and the military limited to defense matters, represents something that has never been heard of before. As such, the overemphasis on culture, while all but disregarding the military, or vice versa, represents an unjust practice, as we cannot focus solely on one of these at the total detriment of the other. Confucius' opening of the doors to learning has resulted in him being worshiped in Confucian shrines established the world over. Yeomang used his military talents to save the people from misery and allowed the people to live in peace, thus restoring the Way through his outstanding achievements. Moreover, he left behind secret books for future generations to learn from. Thus, good kings honored him by establishing military shrines. However, these days, the focus is solely on the need to respect culture, while the military shrines are all but abandoned. This is not the balance between the military and literati spheres which the Way seeks to bring about." (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol.51 March 17th of the 13th Year of King Sejong)

As such, Park argued that the proper respect for both the culture and military could be obtained by observing the traditions that were maintained during the previous three dynasties of worshipping at both Confucian and military shrines. With this in mind, he demanded that military shrines be established to the north of the military academy (*Hunryeongwan* in Korean) so that military officials could engage in worship rituals.

King Taejong forwarded Park A-saeng's petition to the concerned office for further review and made officials from the the Hall of Worthies (*Jiphyeonjeon* in Korean) look into the Confucian Classics in order to verify the veracity of Park's claims. The following passage is from the report filed by the concerned office:

"The practice of worshipping at Confucian shrines, which has been around for a long time now, is not solely conducted to show respect for culture. Rather, this practice is based on the fact that the great saint Confucius descended straight from the heavens and proceeded to teach all kings. Therefore, if we establish separate military shrines, this would insinuate that we the people of Joseon consider Confucius' influence to have been limited to the sphere of culture, while we perceive Yeomang's influence as being restricted to the military sphere. This is not the way in which the harmonization of the culture and military should be carried out.

What's more, as applicants must study the Confucian Classics as part of their preparations for the military service examination, this proves that we do not separate the literati from the military aspect.”

As such, Confucius, who left behind lessons for all of humanity to learn, is described as the teacher of all kings, and as someone who should be worshipped without any distinction between culture and military. King Taejong once asked why he should bow before such a man who was not even a king, and why the people should worship Confucius, who was posthumously made king and given the reign name of *munseon*, while not paying the same courtesy to Yeomang (Museong), to whom a similar honor was bestowed after his death. This appears to have been Taejong's way of insinuating that such worship at Confucian shrines represented a violation of one of Joseon's founding principles, that of the inseparability of the literati and military spheres (Kim Hae-young: 52).³ However, the practice of lowering one's status to that of prince in order to worship Confucius was perceived as a sign of the ruler's willingness to follow in the footsteps of Confucius and become a virtuous ruler (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 28, July 11th of the 14th Year of King Taejong). In the end, the decision was taken that such military shrines should not be built. For the Confucian intellectuals who advocated the need for a virtuous government based on the notion of literati governance, the building of such military shrines was an act that could not be tolerated. Moreover, the creation of two different symbols for the nation, i.e., Military and Confucian Shrines, would make the task of achieving a unified structure and doing away with factionalism impossible to obtain. The issue of erecting military shrines was once again raised during the reign of King Sejo by Yang Seong-ji, and reviewed once more at the beginning of the reign of King Seongjong. In the end, all of these petitions were rejected (*Sejo sillok*, Vol. 3, March 28th of the 2nd Year of King Sejo; *Veritable Records of King Seongjong*, Vol. 5, May 15th of the 1st Year of King Seongjong).

3. I am of the mindset that in order to do away with any such misgivings regarding the separation of the military from the civil sphere, the Confucian scholars had students from the Sungkyunkwan (成均館, National Confucian Academy) take part in military ceremonies during the 16th year of the reign of King Sejong and the second year of the reign of King Danjong. Meanwhile, King Taejong and King Sejo, who ascended the throne through political manipulations and intrigue, began the practice of worshipping at Confucian shrines immediately upon their appointment as king in order to legitimize their rule.

These scholar-officials also made no qualms about their desire to put an end to the conducting of military exercises by raising the negative aspects of this practice. When King Jeongjong announced that he planned to travel to a hot spring (*onjeong* in Korean) in Pyeongju in order to take part in such a military exercise, officials from the Office of Remonstrance (*Nangsa* in Korean), while stating that “the practice of conducting military exercises is clearly enshrined in our constitution,” nevertheless proceeded to raise their strong objections and to enumerate the negative attributes of this practice (*Veritable Records of King Jeongjong*, Vol. 6, October 3rd of the 2nd Year of King Jeongjong). When King Taejong wanted to include hunting as part of the ceremonies conducted at the Royal Ancestral Shrine, Kim Gwa raised the following objections: “Other people already possess the impression that Your Majesty is fond of hunting. However, Your Majesty is now forcing us to turn it into a hunting ritual. I humbly protest such an inclusion” (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 6, October 1st of the 3rd Year of King Taejong). Thereafter, scholar-officials severely criticized any attempts by successive kings to conduct such military exercises (*Veritable Records of King Jeongjong*, Vol. 2, October 8th of the 1st Year of King Jeongjong, and Vol. 4, April 6th of the 2nd Year of King Jeongjong; *Veritable Records of King Taejong*, Vol. 4, September 19th of the 2nd Year of King Taejong, Vol. 6, September 26th of the 3rd Year of King Taejong, Vol. 11, February 22nd of the 6th Year of King Taejong, Vol. 12, September 7th of the 6th Year of King Taejong, Vol. 21, February 25th of the 11th Year of King Taejong, Vol. 29, January 18th of the 15th Year of King Taejong; *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 78, September 14th of the 19th Year of King Sejong). King Sejong had the following to say on this issue:

“The conducting of military exercises is one of the most important national tasks which must be conducted in order to maintain military preparedness. As this practice was enshrined by King Taejong in the constitution with future generation in mind, it is impossible for me to abolish it outright. However, there are some officials who thoughtlessly criticize this practice as an example of the king’s private ambitions making their way into the public sphere without giving any consideration to the above—mentioned reality. This is nonsense which the king cannot abide by. According to Mencius, any kind of practice which places a heavy burden on the population should not be carried out. However, the number of such military exercises which are conducted in spring and fall within a

year is so small that its effects on the overall population are quite limited. As such, I see no reason to cancel such exercises. Let me use the example of the building of fortresses along the coastal areas of Pyeongando. While such a fortification was desperately needed, the meritorious subjects' objections on the grounds that this would cause an inordinate burden on the population resulted in the cancellation of this project. These same people are now attempting to build such a fortification in the aftermath of their near total devastation at the hands of outside forces, all of which has resulted in placing an even greater burden on the population. I am of the mind-set that the simple objection to such or such an action on the grounds that it may cause a negative effect, while totally disregarding the political reality on the ground is fundamentally wrong." (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 63, January 15th of the 16th Year of King Sejong)

Accordingly, Sejong made his intention of continuing to conduct these military exercises which he perceived as being an important national task. Sejong also took issue with the lackadaisical approach towards defense which resulted in the deferral of the building of the fortifications needed in the Northern provinces to ward off attacks from the Jurchen for fear that such an endeavor would place a heavy burden on the population. Sejong, who regarded national defense as an important task, actively promoted the development of new weapons. In the *Book of Military Strategies (Jindoji-beop* in Korean) written during the third year of the reign of King Sejong, the mobilize shooters (*Hwatongsu* in Korean) was first introduced. Meanwhile, other weaponry, which had previously been used exclusively in naval battles, also began to be used for guarding the castle as well. Moreover, the literally fire cartwheel (*hwacha* in Korean) was developed (Roh Young-koo, 2002: 130-15).

However, the consolidation of the literati governance society resulted in lowering the political and social standing of military officials and in the military's role in assuring national defense being curtailed; all of which caused the onset of a *laissez-faire* attitude towards national defense. The suspicion of such military exercises during the reign of King Seongjong resulted in further decreasing the importance of national defense in the people's mind-set (Lee Hyeon-su, 2002: 248). Moreover, during the reigns of the Yeonsan-gun and King Jungjong, these military exercises were all but discarded altogether. Although basic military training (*tawi* in Korean) was conducted under the Yeonsan-gun (*Yeonsan-gun*

ilgi, Vol. 39, October 18th of the 6th Year of Yeonsan-gun), a large-scale military exercise was only carried out on one occasion, that is, during the 31st year of the reign of Jungjong. Jungjong, like Sejong, also tried to emphasize the importance of national defense and why such military exercises should be carried out:

“The Ministry of Military Affairs should be the ones to decide when military exercises should be conducted. However, over the last fifty years they have been restrained from taking such actions. As a result, our military, not only the regular soldiers but the generals as well, now have no inkling about how to go about defending the nation. Such a lack of military discipline has never been seen before. Moreover, our soldiers have grown so slothful that they now even refuse to conduct basic training for even one day, how can we then expect them to carry out full-fledged military exercises? However, in the Confucian Classics, a saying can be found which reads that going to war without making the necessary military preparations is the equivalent of sacrificing your people. Moreover, there is another saying which states that the most important tasks of the state are to carry out national rites and to assure the defense of the nation. Therefore, how can we totally discard the practice of conducting military exercises?” (*Veritable Records of King Jungjong*, Vol. 82, June 21st of the 31st Year of King Jungjong)

Kim Geun-sa, although conceding the importance of basic training and the conducting of military exercises for soldiers, pointed out the damage that the conducting of such exercises would have on the general population, its negative impact on the personal security of the king (who would take part in these exercises), the scarcity of the animals needed to conduct these exercises, as well as the impact on local regions. However Kim in the end agreed with Jungjong, and the decision was taken to hold these military exercises. At the beginning of October of that year, the government began to establish the basic framework for these exercises, including the timetable; the order in which these exercises would unfold; their duration; and the units which would take part. However, these plans were subsequently cancelled as a result of the outbreak of a large fire in the capital area (*Veritable Records of King Jungjong*, Vol. 82, September 13th of the 31st Year of King Jungjong). As time went by the literati governance system became so deeply entrenched that it even affected the process of selecting literati-generals, with scholar-officials even appointed to the governorship of

special military districts (*Veritable Records of King Seongjong*, Vol. 210, December 3rd of the 18th Year of King Seongjong).

As a result of the suspension of these military exercises, Joseon's military capabilities were all but wiped out. The conducting of these military exercises was only recommenced during the 28th year of the reign of King Seonjo (1595). While such military exercises could be discarded because of the generally peaceful circumstances which prevailed both internally and externally during this period, the consolidation of the literati governance system, and its subsequent impact on the general perception of national defense, also emerged as another crucial variable which led to this denouement.

Perception of Defense during the Early Period of the Reign of King Seonjo and the Continuation of the Literati Governance System

The early stages of the reign of King Seonjo were marked by a relatively high degree of peace internally and externally, with Joseon not subjected to any major attacks from foreign pirates. However, in February of the 16th year of King Seonjo, the government received news that the Jurchen leader Nitanggae had invaded the Gyeongweon and Asan areas. In response, the Joseon government dispatched generals and eighty soldiers to repel this invasion. However, news soon surfaced that these forces had been routed and that the fortresses in Gyeongweon and Anweon had fallen into enemy hands (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, February 9th of the 16th Year of King Seonjo). During the ensuing discussions between the king and his meritorious subjects on how to respond to this rapidly worsening situation, some of the meritorious subjects continued to argue that not much should be made of the situation, as these Jurchens were nothing more than a bunch of barbarians living on the outskirts of Joseon's territory who did not represent a real threat to the future of the dynasty.

King Seonjo was of a different opinion on the subject. The king was of the mind-set that the armed forces should be assembled and dispatched to subjugate the Jurchens. Once this has been achieved, he argued, those barbarians who were willing to recognize the rule of Joseon could be appointed to look over their own people. The Border Defense Command (*Bibyeonsa* in Korean), which agreed with Seonjo, offered to dispatch its forces in order to bring this plan to fruition (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 17, February 10th of the 16th Year

of King Seonjo).

As part of his plan to secure Joseon's borders Seonjo suggested the following: the implementation of an emigration policy to those areas along the northern border; the recruitment of private slaves; the development of the mining industry; the selection of military officials to oversee these areas; and the recruitment of the necessary human resources. In other words, Seonjo's plan was intended to secure the military leadership, units, and military supplies that would be needed to assure the defense of the nation. Here, the desired human resources were brave and courageous Confucian scholars who possessed tremendous military skills. In other words, the human resources needed to protect the nation should possess not only highly developed military skills, but also the qualities found in scholar-officials. Seonjo's plan for national defense was quite different from Yi Yi's six measures to assure national defense (*Yukjogye* in Korean), and those of other Confucian scholars such as Jo Mok, Kim Wu-ong and Yu Seong-ryong. While these Confucian scholars perceived the gaining of the people's support as the most important element in assuring national defense, Seonjo put more emphasis on the need to make the necessary military preparations and employ actual military force to punish the enemy.

During this period, Yi Yi, who was then serving as the Minister of Military Affairs, made the following suggestions:

“Our nation has enjoyed a long period of peace. However, the growing malaise within the military exemplified by a shortage of units and rations has resulted in making it possible for a single insignificant barbarian to invade our borders and throw the entire nation into consternation. How will we be able to repel the invasion of a bigger enemy? ... Let us now talk about the current threat caused by the presence of enemy forces in the Gweongweon area. The simple reality is that we will need much more than a year or two to pacify that area. If we do not dispatch our armed forces to this area, we will never be able to again enjoy a moment of peace in six garrison forts (*Yukjin* in Korean).” (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 17, February 15th of the 16th Year of King Seonjo; *Yulgok jeonso*, Vol. 8)

Therefore, Yi introduced six measures which should be put into place in order to assure the nation's defense should an unexpected emergency occur. First, select capable individuals; second, educate the general population; third, increase the

military budget; fourth, organize a border defense force; fifth, develop adequate military strategies; sixth, pursue a cultural enlightenment policy. These measures were for the most part in keeping with Seonjo's own suggestions. Yi Yi singled out the inefficient nature of the military system, as exemplified by the constant turnover in the military leadership. Thus, to rectify this, the proper human resources should be selected and appointed to the position where their skills could be best served. Yi Yi did not elaborate on any measures pertaining to the methods in which these military officials should be selected and educated. However, Yi's sixth measure marks a clear departure from Seonjo's plan. In this measure, Yi emphasized the importance of a cultural enlightenment based on Mencius' principles of virtue and rites and Oh Gi's Four Virtues (四德); he referred to the Confucian culture on the grounds that leaders had to instill their people with the proper rites and encourage them to cultivate self-righteousness in order to rule a state or lead the military. This measure is thus directly related to the first one to select the "capable" individuals, it means that the teaching by them who have righteous virtue and the Four Virtues.

The basis of Seonjo's plan and Yi Yi's national defense policy can be broken down into two sections. The first pertains to their perception of the state, or rather national defense, while the second can be identified as their strategies to bring their respective plans to fruition. Their perception of national defense was based on Joseon's perception of the Jurchen and accordingly, how relations were established between the two. Meanwhile, their defense strategies can be summarized as the means through which the necessary units and supplies could be secured. In reality, as soon as the conflict broke out, discussions should have been held to come up with a proper response. Yi had once asserted that at the very least 100,000 well trained soldiers should be available in order to respond to an unexpected crisis (*Collected Works of Yulgok*, Vol. 34). However, Yu Seong-ryong came out against Yi's suggestion on the grounds that, "to raise a military under such peaceful circumstances is to invite disaster on your doorstep." In other words, for Yu, the most important element of assuring national defense was to gain the people's hearts rather than raising a potent military. Therefore, Yu argued that Yi's suggestion represented an example of misplaced concern. Meanwhile General Yi Il, who was the main actor in the pacification of the Jurchen invasion, wrote the victory strategy (*Jeseunghannyak* in Korean) in which he asserted the need to maintain and upgrade the military bases and garrisons in the Hamgyeong area. However, the government in power during this period displayed little appetite for the holding of discussions on the

topic of the selection and recruitment of soldiers, or for the securing and transportation of the necessary military supplies. In other words, government officials during this period regarded Nitanggae's invasion as a trivial matter and exhibited an indolent attitude towards the issue of defense.⁴ In May of that same year, a mere three months later, the government finally set about recruiting units and securing the necessary supplies after 20,000 barbarians invaded the Jongseong area (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 17, May 13th of the 16th Year of King Seonjo). In response, the government dispatched more archers and weapons to the area in question (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 17, May 26th of the 16th Year of King Seonjo), and then some time later finally set about recruiting soldiers in every province (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 17, June 11th of the 16th Year of King Seonjo).

The government's frenzied attempts to establish a defense policy in the aftermath of these crises in the end came to naught. In December of that same year the Border Defense Command published a report in which the following was written:

“As the current circumstances in the northern area remain unsettled, our efforts to bring stability to the area, despite the government's clear willingness to do so, have been fraught with difficulties. The Border Patrolling Inspector (*Dosunchalsa* in Korean) envoy dispatched to this area over a year ago reports that no measures have yet to be taken to deal with this situation. The circumstances will remain much the same if we do not implement proper measures by next spring to deal with this situation and simply continue to dispatch troops and supplies to the area” (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 17, December 17th of the 16th Year of King Seonjo).

As such, the Joseon government was draining its national power by simply dispatching troops and supplies without putting proper measures into place; a situation which resulted in its will to ward off the foreign invaders being significantly

4. Two years after this particular incident, Joseon still remained unable to establish complete control over the area in which Nitanggae had been active. Seonjo, worried about this situation in the northern territories, told his meritorious subjects, “These days, everyone says that the situation on the northern borders is insignificant as it is unfolding in an area that is of little importance to the overall well-being of the state.”

weakened as well. To rectify this situation, the Border Defense Command dispatched a government official to investigate the border's situation in the northern areas and to establish proper response measures (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 18, January 14th of the 17th Year of King Seonjo). However, the indolent attitude of the organizations that would have to oversee the process of establishing the necessary policies made it hard to believe that any results would come of this investigation. Amidst these circumstances, King Seonjo ordered his military to mobilize in order to repel all foreign invaders from Joseon and restore the state's dignity. This kind of display on the part of Seonjo exhibits his willingness to adopt a policy line that would involve the use of military force to crush his enemies.

King Seonjo's hard-line policy was based not on a desire to simply repel the enemy but to inflict damage by taking the fight to him. As shown in the following passage taken from a petition submitted by Jo Mok, Seonjo would maintain this attitude from some time into the future, "these days, many unpleasant rumors are circulating amongst the population regarding Your Majesty's intention to launch an attack on the northern areas." When presented with Seonjo's proposed measures to protect the northern territories, Jo Mok retorted that the first task that should be carried out was to establish fundamental principles, and that once this was done, the measures needed to undertake a war could be put into effect:

"Although everybody knows that a war will have to be launched to conquer the barbarians, it is very hard to regain the people's support once it has been lost. Thus, if Your Majesty desires to implement a policy course in conjunction with the one or two meritorious subjects who support it, Your Majesty should be well aware that the general population will not support such an endeavor." (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 18 September of the 17th Year of Seonjo; *Weolcheon seonsaeng munjip*, Vol. 2)

Thus, the perception was that once the people's support was lost it would be impossible to secure the northern territories. In other words, should the people be forced to be subjected to the disaster that is war, a bigger danger could befall the nation. What's more, these barbarian invasions were a regular part of life that could not be avoided since time long past. Thus, in order to eventually do away with this worry once and for all, Joseon should establish a righteous governing system and carry out good politics to ensure the well-being of its people.

Jo Mok's opinion is similar to the political thought of Kim Wu-ong. Kim believed that human resources were a state's main source of power. As such, if their enlightened spirit was able to influence the whole world, then even these barbarians would come to recognize the need for them to surrender to Joseon. Moreover, Kim argued that the Chungcheong, Jeolla and Gyeongsang Provinces (*Hasamdo* in Korean) represented the foundation of the state. He however pointed out that although there was now a general lack of human resources in these provinces, recruitment in these areas continues unabated (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 19, February 20th of the 18th Year of King Seonjo). Thus, Kim believed that the fundamental means of repelling such barbarian attacks should be to subdue them using a conciliatory policy, and that the exploitation of human resources for defense purposes was contrary to Joseon's ruling philosophy based on the notion of gaining the people's support. Kim's claim that: "the enemies of the Wei dynasty were able to destroy it because of its immoral and uncultured ways. Had they upheld the importance of rites, the Wei would still exist today. Thus, we can see the importance of a state's enlightenment and customs"; makes it clear that he felt that political stability was dependent on the achievement of an ethics-based ruling structure (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 13, March 26th of the 12th Year of King Seonjo).

The possession of such a perception of the state by Confucian intellectuals clearly reflects the consistent nature of their political beliefs; that is, that they advocated the same policies in times of peace as they did during crises. A debate was conducted on the section on "The Official of Jin China Bowed Three Times" in *Zuozhuan* (左傳, Commentary of Zhu) during one of the morning lectures conducted in the 12th year of the reign of King Seonjo. At that time, Yu Seong-ryong argued that "...the king issued orders and decrees of an exceptional quality, because Jin possessed superior human resources the king's orders could be faithfully implemented, thus ensuring that the dynasty would survive." Kim Wu-ong added to this:

"Jin did not possess solely a king capable of making enlightened decisions, they also possessed human resources who were able to carry out the tasks of replenishing of military supplies and the repair of weapons, while also helping Confucian intellectuals with their tasks. As a result, they were able to create a strong defense system as well as a virtuous government. Thus, Qin (秦), who had invaded Jin (晉) with the intention of destroying it, was forced to realize that this was an impossible task and

voluntarily withdrew.” (*Veritable Records of King Seonjo*, Vol. 13 June 8th of the 12th Year of Seonjo)

Therefore, the debate centered around these intellectuals perception of the state and their political philosophy which was based on the usage of human resources and the foundation of an rites—based literati governance system which would serve as the most important means of protecting the state.

The opinions of Jo Mok, Yu Seong-ryong, and Kim Wu-ong have some relation to the six measures suggested by Yi Yi. Both of these camps advocated that the gaining of the people’s support through the adoption of an enlightenment policy and the advent of a virtuous government based on Confucian ideology was the best means of ensuring the defense of the state.⁵ Even under these circumstances in which a war was raging in the country’s outer regions, the Confucian intellectuals continued to argue, in accordance with their political philosophy based on the notion of a literati governance society, that the pursuit of the people’s enlightenment should be the basis of the nation’s defense strategy. As such, in the literati governance society, gaining the people’s support was perceived as the core element in assuring effective ruling mechanisms and ensuring the defense of the state. This kind of political philosophy had been passed down since the foundation of Joseon.

Conclusion

Joseon was a literati governance society in which scholar-officials who possessed a Neo-Confucian based ideology played the leading role in managing the state. These scholar-officials perception of the state was based on the notion of implementing a virtuous government based on the establishment of a national order based on rites. Therefore, it was only natural for these officials to disregard the importance of conducting military exercises and to discriminate against military officials. The philosophical foundation of these officials outlook was based on Mencius’ notion of a virtuous government (the Way of a good king), which

5. During the lectures on Juja gangmok (朱子綱目), Jeong Eon-sin stated as follows: “When the barbarians are in the ascendancy no state can resist their attacks even if they put all their efforts into doing so. It should thus be obvious that our starving people cannot do so either.”

in turn had its origins in the notion of literati governance based on the principles of virtue and righteousness.

From the time King Taejo first announced his intention of establishing a literati governance (ritual governance) society, this notion became a part of the founding principles of Joseon which was passed down to from generation to generation, with Taejo's successors praising the tradition of throwing down the sword and promoting culture. Confucian intellectuals who perceived the difficulties associated with ruling a state solely through military means, hoped to build a national ruling structure that would be based on the concept of *mun*. In its foreign relations, Joseon adopted a policy of serving the great towards Ming China, in which the relationship was defined as one between a superior and an inferior. In the beginning, Joseon actively pursued the policy of serving the great based on rites. On the other hand, Joseon adopted a policy of amicable relations towards Japan and the Jurchens. Therefore, the importance of the defense policy was weakened under this literati governance society, while the literati official based power structure was further consolidated.

Some of the people who helped put Yi Seong-gye on the throne maintained their own private military retainers even after the foundation of Joseon. Thus, it can be said that the main political factions at the outset of the dynasty were more military—oriented in nature. The nature of the circumstances which prevailed at the outset of the dynasty, exemplified by the calls for an attack to be launched on the Liaodong peninsula and by the frequent Jurchen attacks on Joseon itself, forced the new regime to concentrate on national defense and the necessary military exercises. However, some after the establishment of the new dynasty the limitations of a ruling mechanism based on military force began to become apparent. As a result, it became evident that all military threats which remained outside of the ruling structure should be done away with. In addition, the need arose to establish a new structure based on Confucian ideology, one which was believed, would be more effective. Confucian intellectuals soon began to openly criticize national defense policies such as those pertaining to military exercises, the upkeep of fortresses, and increases in the military budget, with this criticism not even abating during periods of crisis. One part of these Confucian intellectuals discrimination strategy designed to subjugate the military officials to the literati governance framework involved the inclusion of the Confucian Classics in the military service examination. In this regards, the establishment of a government structure in which scholar-officials played the leading role can be perceived as stemming from this desire to establish a literati governance society.

In addition, the intellectuals needed to establish the ideological symbols required to create the unified structure which would have to be put in place in order to actualize this literati governance system. This process was exemplified by the establishment of the *munmyo* (Confucian Shrine). During the reign of King Sejong, Park A-saeng demanded that military shrines also be established and that the harmony between *mun* and *mu* be restored. Nevertheless, in accordance with the Confucian belief that Confucius, who as the teacher of kings the world over transcended *mun* and *mu*, should be worshipped by everybody, no such military shrines were established.

As a result of the decreasing emphasis on military preparations, the number of military exercises which were conducted began to decrease during the reign of Seongjong; it all but disappeared during the reigns of the Yeonsan-gun and King Jungjong. Such military exercises were restarted only in 1595. While these military exercises could be discarded because of the generally peaceful circumstances which prevailed both internally and externally during this period, the consolidation of the literati governance system, and its subsequent impact on the general perception of national defense, also emerged as another crucial variable which led to this denouement.

The perception of the state and defense policy which existed at the onset of the reign of King Seonjo is clearly visible in the debate which took place within the government following the reception of information in February of the 16th year of Seonjo that a Jurchen leader named Nitanggae had invaded the Gweongweon and Asan areas. As part of his plan to secure Joseon's borders Seonjo suggested the following: the implementation of an emigration policy to those areas along the northern border; the recruitment of private slaves; the development of the mining industry; the selection of military officials to oversee these areas; and the recruitment of the necessary human resources. In other words, Seonjo's plan was intended to secure the military leadership, units, and military supplies that would be needed to assure the defense of the nation. Yi Yi, who served as minister of defense during this period, introduced six measures which should be put into place in order to assure the nation's defense should an unexpected emergency occur. These measures were for the most part in keeping with Seonjo's own suggestions. However, Yi Yi's sixth measure marked a clear departure from Seonjo's plan. Yi, based on Mencius' principles of virtue and rites and Oh Gi's Four Virtues, emphasized the importance of a cultural enlightenment using Confucian culture.

However, the government which prevailed during this period displayed little

appetite for the holding of discussions on the topic of the selection and recruitment of soldiers and the securing and transportation of the necessary military supplies. The *Bibyeonsa*'s efforts to establish reactionary measures in order to deal with these upheavals also came to naught. Meanwhile, Seonjo exhibited his willingness to adopt a policy line that would involve the use of military force to crush his enemies. In response to this, the Confucian intellectual argued that once the people's support was lost it would be impossible to secure the northern territories. For his part, during lectures with the king, Kim Wu-ong emphasized the need to subjugate the barbarians using a conciliatory policy and to gain the people's support. He also emphasized the fact that political stability was dependent on the achievement of a ruling structure based on rites. Other Confucian intellectuals such as Yu Seong-ryong were not very different from that of Kim Wu-ong. Even under these circumstances in which a war was raging in the country's outer regions, the Confucian intellectuals continued to argue, in accordance with their political philosophy based on the notion of a literati governance society, that the pursuit of the people's enlightenment should be the basis of the nation's defense strategy. Gaining the people's support was perceived as the core element in assuring effective ruling mechanisms and ensuring the defense of the state in a literati governance society. This kind of political philosophy had been in place since the foundation of Joseon.

References

Historical Materials

- Byeon Gye-ryang. *Chunjeongjip* (Collected works of Chunjeong).
 Gweon Gun. *Yangchonjip* (Collected Works of Yangchon).
 Jeong Do-jeon. *Sambongjip* (Collected Works of Sambong).
 Jo Mok. *Weolcheon seonsaeng munjip* (Collected Works of Weolcheon).
Joseon wangjo sillok (Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty).
 Yi Yi. *Yulgokjip* (Collected Works of Yulgok).

Modern References

- Ha Woo-bong. 1994. "Joseonjeongiui daeilgwangye" (Relationship with Japan in Early Joseon). Lecture on the history of relationship between Korea and

Japan.

Han Young-woo. 1983. *Jeongdojeon sasangui yeongu* (The Study of Jeong Do-jeon's Thoughts). Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

Kim Hae-young. 2000. "Joseon chogi munmyo hyangsajee daehayeo" (A Study on the Confucian Shrine and Rituals in the Early Joseon Dynasty). *Joseonsidae sahakbo* (The Journal of the Joseon Dynasty) 15. Seoul: Joseon Dynasty History Association.

Lee Hyun-Soo. 2002. "Joseonchogi gangmu sihaengsaryewa gunsajeok gineung" (The Military Function Revealed in the Practices of "Gangmu" in the Early Joseon Dynasty). *Gunsa* (Military History) Vol. 45. Seoul: Institute for Military History Compilation, Ministry of National Defense.

Roh Young-koo. 2002. *Joseonhugi byeongseowa jeonbeobui yeongu* (Military Tactical Manuals and Military Strategies Written and Devised in the Late Joseon Dynasty). Ph.D. dissertation, Seoul National University.

Shim Seung-koo. 2003. "Joseonhugi mumyoui changgeongwa hyangsau jeongchijeok uimi" (Political Significance of the Establishment of a Military Shrine and Rituals in the Late Joseon Period). *Joseonsidaewi jeongchiwa jedo* (Joseon Politics and Institutions). Seoul: Jimoondang.

Yim Min-Hyeok received his Ph.D. in Korean history from The Academy of Korean Studies. He is currently Research Fellow of Jangseo-gak Library (library of the royal Yi family of the Joseon dynasty), The Academy of Korean Studies. He is interested in the bureaucratic, status, and ritual system of Joseon dynasty.