Introduction: Society and Ideology

This study started out with a simple observation: during the first century after the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) was founded, the volume of legislation that was concerned with social issues was unusually high. It far surpassed the scope of legislative activities ordinarily to be expected at the outset of a new dynasty. Moreover, not only the quantity, but the quality of that legislation was remarkable. It soon became clear that the early legislators attempted to introduce into Korean society notions and concepts which ran counter to established tradition and therefore gave rise to conflict. What were the motives that stimulated such legislative ventures? It was certainly not a new insight to link the spirit of that time to Confucianism, the declared "state religion" of the new dynasty. There the conventional wisdom seemed to end, and a multitude of questions and problems emerged. What, for example, were the elements in Confucianism that became the levers of social legislation? Which institutions of society were earmarked for change? What was the overall purpose of such endeavors? The general direction and the first results of this legislative campaign pointed to a general rationalization of social structure and organization on the basis of a patrilineal ideology. But had Korean society not always been a patrilineal society? This became one of the most challenging questions and necessitated research beyond the originally envisaged time limit

of early Chosŏn into the relatively unknown terrain of Koryŏ (918–1392).

The scope of the study at hand thus widened when it became clear that the developments at the beginning of Chosŏn could not be revealed without reference to Koryŏ society. Very little substantial research about Koryŏ society, however, had been done. Available information concentrated mainly on institutional, economic, and political history. A relatively small number of scattered articles treated aspects of Koryŏ's social history. An overall view of Koryŏ's social tradition that could have been used as background for evaluating early Chosŏn was altogether lacking. This explains the lengthy first part on Koryŏ in this book.

Throughout—this is true for Koryŏ as well as for Chosŏn—the data could not have been sorted merely in a historical framework. As I. M. Lewis pointed out years ago,[1] history has little or no theory, and therefore the social historian is fortunate to have at his disposal a vast body of theory developed by the social anthropologists. In the meantime, the insight that the historian and the social anthropologist tackle the same problems and questions and benefit from each other's methodology to resolve them has become commonplace.[2] It will become evident that the conception and the analytical framework of this study are greatly indebted to a combination of these two disciplines. The materials concerning Koryŏ social organization in particular are fragmentary. They are scattered over a long period of time and therefore do not reveal their meaning when merely put into a time sequence. Social anthropology provides the instruments that help unlock their meaning, relate it to other phenomena, and finally create an overall explanatory pattern. Such a procedure also avoids the hitherto all too prevalent danger of looking at Koryŏ data from the well-established interpretative framework of "Confucian" tradition.

Whatever the method, it cannot do more than concentrate on and arrange the data available in historical sources. The historian has no access to informants who would be able to fill the gaps in information and provide a "native" view. Therefore much of the day-to-day life remains in obscurity, and the reconstructions the

historian comes up with at best present the outer or normative limits within which life in historical times was lived. Where information is fragmentary, it is dangerous to argue a case on the basis of theory. On the other hand, without the advantage of comparative knowledge many a piece of intelligence would not yield its significance. This is again particularly true for Koryŏ. The dearth of materials allows glimpses rather than a panoramic view of Koryŏ's social life. The picture improves for early Chosŏn when many facets of life were discussed and singled out as target areas of reformatory policy.

This study is not a social history of Korea. Rather, it focuses on the process of change during the transition period from late Koryŏ to mid Chosŏn. To highlight the process of change, a few major topics were selected for discussion—ancestor worship and funerary rites, succession and inheritance, the position of women and the marriage institution, and the formation of descent groups. In the concluding chapter an attempt has been made to relate the significance of change in these areas of social life to the broader questions of status assertion and lineage formation.

The exploration of the above topics over a period of approximately seven hundred years has greatly benefitted from previous research undertaken within the last three decades by Korean and Japanese scholars of diverse persuasions. To be sure, in comparison with political, institutional, and economic history, social history has generally been a relatively neglected field of inquiry. Nevertheless, the number of Korean scholarly works treating specific social institutions or addressing particular questions of Korea's social past is rapidly increasing. In an underdeveloped research area, concentrating on single topics may at times unavoidably obstruct a researcher's comprehension and appreciation of connective links. Moreover, when researchers adhere to traditional periodization that follows dynastic cycles, they often overlook transition periods. There also are as yet few signs in Korea of cooperation between historians and social scientists, although such interdisciplinary cooperation will undoubtedly become more important in the future. In addition, the field has drawn much inspiration from the enviably rich studies of

Chinese society, which have set high standards by combining factual description with new theoretical approaches.

The purpose of this study, then, is to test two major hypotheses. First, the picture of Korean society as it emerged in the second half of Chosŏn (roughly from the second half of the seventeenth century) contrasts strikingly with the picture that can be drawn, however sketchily, of Korean society of the Koryŏ period. This conspicuous difference must have resulted from a fundamental transformation that Korean society underwent during the transition period from late Koryŏ to mid Chosŏn. Second, the driving force that initiated and directed this transformation was not so much generated by political or economic factors—in both these realms there was a great degree of continuity—than provided by Neo-Confucianism. Chinese Neo-Confucianism, which from late Koryŏ became the major intellectual force in Korea, inspired a new class of Korean scholar-officials with a particular vision of social organization and gave them the necessary guidelines to implant it in their own environment. The reorganization of Korean society thus inaugurated reached a scope and depth that were rarely attained by social action anywhere else. Although undated and nameless because it is not linked to a single datable event, the Confucian transformation of Korea ushered in a period of epochal change in Korean history.

THE CONTOURS OF KOREAN SOCIETY IN LATE CHOSŎN. To illustrate the immensity of this reorganization, a brief sketch of the salient features of Korean society, as they emerged in the course of the seventeenth century and survived into the twentieth century, may be in order. It is this picture that has become the standard view of "traditional Korean society" and has thus often obscured the extraordinary development of which it was the final result.

The hallmark of Korean society in late Chosŏn was a kinship system that rested on highly structured patrilineal descent groups. These patrilineages[3] comprised groups of agnates who derived their common descent from a real or putative apical ancestor *(sijo)* and identified themselves with a common surname *(sŏng)* and a common ancestral seat *(pon'gwan),*[4] for example the Kim of Andong or the

Yi of Chŏnju. Lineages (and families) clearly distinguished between main lines formed by the firstborn sons of primary wives, branch lines formed by sons born after the first son by the same mother, and secondary sons, who, as offspring of secondary wives, were of secondary status and therefore not full-fledged lineage members.[5] Lineage perpetuation thus was secured through primogeniture, and strict lineage exogamy was observed. The size of such groups varied in accordance with the relative prestige of the ancestor from whom they claimed descent. Recapture of ancestral prestige—the prestige of a high government official *(hyŏnjo),* for example—was a primary motivation for forming a new lineage or a lineage segment.[6] Lineage organization could therefore be quite complex, although Korean lineages generally were subject to lesser internal segmentation than their Chinese counterparts. A higher-order lineage could comprise thousands of members who lived in localized sub-lineages spread over the whole peninsula.[7] What held these kin structures together was the memory of common descent and a common geographical focus, the original ancestral seat (although the latter might be neither the place of birth nor residence for most of the kinsmen concerned).[8]

Important charters of common descent were the genealogies *(chokpo)* that began to appear in great numbers from roughly 1600 and were in the early 1930s still the most frequently printed publications.[9] The compilation of a genealogy usually was initiated by the members of a descent group residing in the capital who became aware of the importance of demonstrated common descent—for example, for attaining government office or for forging marriage alliances. They were therefore interested in displaying their influence and power in the political world by fostering the common ancestral bond with close relatives. Even though some of the latter may have lived in the countryside, geographical dispersal did not necessarily lead to a break in the consciousness of common identity. Lines within a larger descent group that for some time did not produce a prominent member (i.e., an examination passer and government officeholder), however, were eventually dropped from the records. Daughters were listed only when they married, if at all, and then by the name of

their husbands. Genealogies were thus from time to time amended and supplemented and, for large descent groups, grew into compendia of considerable volume and complexity. The impossibility of including all members of a descent group in one single genealogy could give rise to lineage segmentation. The inclusion of people with spurious backgrounds, moreover, at times caused disputes that induced certain lineage members to separate themselves and start their own genealogical records. Only properly certified lineage membership could ensure access to social, political, and economic prominence.[10]

The most intimate ritual expression of kinship was ancestor worship. Called *tangnae,* the worshipping group usually consisted of those agnatic kinsmen who traced their descent from a common great-great-grandfather and consequently wore mourning for each other according to the five mourning grades *(obok).* Such a group thus included third cousins. Chief officiant at the ancestral ceremonies was the primogeniture descendant of the most senior line *(chongga* or *pon'ga),* the "lineage grandson" *(chongson).* He was assisted by his counterparts of the collateral junior lines *(chi'ga* or *pun'ga).*[11] The foci of ritual action were lineage-owned graves and an ancestral hall *(sadang)* in which the wooden tablets of the ancestors were housed. Not only did the gatherings of these agnates at fixed dates during the year serve the purpose of presenting offerings to the common ancestors, but such demonstrations of common descent also enhanced kin solidarity and cooperation. At least a delegation, if not all, of these kinsmen was expected to be in attendance at the seasonal ancestral services for remoter antecedants conducted by members of more comprehensive lineage segments. The economic basis of ancestor worship was corporately held land that usually was administered by the primogeniture descendant. Besides these lineage rituals, individual ancestors were remembered on their death anniversaries with rites held in the households of their immediate descendants. While women were excluded from lineage rites, they participated at the domestic rites on the sidelines. Their principal function was the preparing of the sacrificial foods.[12]

Locality was one of the most salient principles of kinship orga-

nization in Korea. Ideally, agnates who descended from a common ancestor lived together in immediate geographic proximity and formed what was called "single-lineage villages" *(tongjok purak)*.[13] Such villages were most often founded by the descendants of an ancestor who had migrated to the locality. In the 1930s, some 15,000 such villages dotted the map of Korea, with a heavy concentration in the central and southern regions. Most of these villages were less than three hundred years old and seldom comprised more than sixty households.[14] In such settlements, the largest compound containing the most impressive tiled buildings and the ancestral hall usually belonged to the main line represented, the "big house" *(k'ŭn chip)*. It was surrounded by the smaller compounds of the various kinsmen who constituted the "small houses" *(chagŭn chip)*. The architectural design of these walled compounds complied with the Confucian dictum that the men's and the women's quarters had to be strictly separated: the master's domain *(sarang)* was situated close to the main gate *(taemun)*, whereas the inner rooms of the women were hidden behind a second gate *(chungmun)*. Nearby pavilions were common property.[15]

While the ritual head of the lineage *(chongson)* owed his prestige to his genealogical status, the "lineage elder" (*chongjang* or *munjang*), chosen from among the lineage members on the basis of age and experience, wielded the greatest authority within the lineage. Although he had no exclusive power over lineage finances and property, he could appoint various lineage officials *(yusa)* to assist him and convene the "lineage council" *(chonghoe)* in which the different households were represented by their respective heads. Council meetings were usually held in conjunction with the ancestral services; and matters discussed pertained to lineage finances, lineage graves, help to destitute lineage members, compilation and emendation of the genealogical records. Decisions were based upon majority opinion. Besides the lineage council, there were other lineage organizations, often endowed with their own property, that concerned themselves with lineage welfare, education, solidarity, and cooperation. The economic basis of a lineage was corporately held property in the form of slaves, land, woods, and buildings. The

amount of land, variously called "lineage land" *(chongt'o),* "exalted land" *(wit'o),* "ancestral service land" *(chejŏn),* or "grave land" *(myojŏn),* in principle increased in every generation because a certain proportion of each lineage member's estate would be set aside for defraying the costs of his funeral, ancestral rites, and upkeep of his grave.[16]

Economic wealth and ritual leadership might be said to reinforce each other when the two happened to coincide, but the former did not seriously challenge the latter in case the ritual main line was destitute economically. On the contrary, an impoverished "big house" could count on the support of wealthier lineage members, and economic motives seldom led to lineage segmentation. Maintenance of the main line did not only demand economic measures. Because of its overwhelming importance for continuing the lineage's ritual obligations, the main line had to be perpetuated, even at the cost of collateral lines. When it lacked a male heir, elaborate adoption procedures were invoked to secure an appropriate substitute. The ideal solution was the taking in of an agnatic nephew; but if none was available, the search extended, on the basis of genealogical records, to more remote collaterals. Even the giving up of an only son for the benefit of the main line was not considered an undue sacrifice.[17] Exclusive emphasis on male succession prevented a daughter from acquiring status in lineage affairs. Upon marriage, she joined her husband's group; and the door of her natal home closed behind her for good, even though she paid infrequent visits later on. In case she became widowed and, for economic reasons, returned to her own kin, she remained a member of her husband's lineage no matter how long she stayed away; and, after she died, it was the duty of her affines (her husband's kin) to perform ancestral rites for her.

Korean lineages were not only social and economic entities exerting paramount influence in local communities, they also constituted the reservoir from which the members of the officialdom were recruited. In other words, lineage organization was directly connected with the political process. This was, for example, stated in a scathing remark made by a middle-rank official, Kim Ching (1623–1676): "When the officials of the Board of Personnel recommend

someone to the throne, they always mention that he is worthy to be appointed or promoted because he is a son, brother, or a lineage member of so and so. They do not question whether he is wise or ignorant."[18] Lineage background, thus, was a critical determinant of a man's political career, and it was carefully checked when someone wanted to be admitted to the government examinations. Significantly, during the Chosŏn period the majority of the passers of the higher civil service examinations *(munkwa)* originated from a small number of prominent descent groups.

Usually only certain lines within lineage segments became politically well established in the capital, the sociopolitical hub of the kingdom, or its environs, yet the aura of eminence reflected on all lineage members, even those remaining in the countryside. The capital representatives of the various segments, however, did not necessarily pursue the same political goals, so that in the intermittent struggles for political power some survived, while others perished—without destroying the fame and fortunes of the lineage as a whole.[19] The more prominent a kin group, the greater were its chances to acquire land in even remote areas of the country, causing the dispersal of some of its members. Geographic overextension then could lead to weakened ties to the capital and consequent loss of political momentum, with the result that successful examination candidates were no longer produced. Distance from central power was, however, often compensated by local influence. The emergence of regional elite culture during the mid sixteenth century was a distinct and important facet of the overall political landscape of the Chosŏn dynasty.[20]

Lineage culture was closely related to Confucianism, the ideology that provided the moral foundation for both private and public life. Whether in the capital or in the countryside, a life of scholarship, ritual purity, and conspicuous consumption was required. A great number of lineages were directly connected with private academies *(sŏwŏn)*—centers of learning and local power that from the mid sixteenth century on not only trained prospective examination candidates for the central bureaucracy, but also grew into bastions of local self-sufficiency. At the core of these academies stood the shrines

in which exalted lineage members known for their learning and achievements were remembered at regular intervals. Controlling large amounts of tax-free land, these academies, and through them the lineages attached to them, exerted influence far beyond local boundaries.[21]

Lineages represented the social organization of the Korean upper class. Called *yangban,*[22] the elite of Chosŏn Korea constituted a relatively small segment, perhaps not more than ten percent, of the total population; but, drawing on descent and heredity, it monopolized the political process, economic wealth, and Confucian learning. Because yangban status was never clearly delineated legally, there is no sure guide to determine who deserved to be counted among the elite. Nevertheless, some criteria seem to have been indispensable: a clear line of descent, a "distinguished ancestor" *(hyŏnjo)*—"distinguished" meant, above all, scholarly reputation—from whom ancestry was traced and generally acknowledged, a clear geographic area within which such status was recognized, close marriage ties with other reputable lineages, and a special way of life.[23] It was thus largely the social environment, over which the government had little or no control, that set the rules of status ascription. Yangban status was clearly a relative concept and therefore could have quite different connotations of social and political prestige depending on whether it was claimed on the national or local level. Whatever their claim, established yangban were scarcely threatened by the inflation of "yangban ranks" toward the end of the dynasty, especially during the nineteenth century, by social upstarts who used yangban titles and purchased official ranks from the government, because the criteria mentioned above were lacking. Unlike the Chinese gentry, then, the Korean yangban showed the characteristics of a hereditary aristocracy that effectively controlled access to political power by defining eligibility for the examinations and occupied the upper echelons in government, possessed large landed wealth, and generally enjoyed the prestige and culture Confucian education conferred upon them.

How did the rest of the population organize itself? From of old, Korean society rested upon a strict social hierarchy which was topped

by a hereditary aristocracy, for most of the Chosŏn period known as yangban. The next lower status group was that of the "good people" (*yangin* or *sangmin*), usually termed "commoners," that is to say, those who did not belong to the ruling class. It was this group that had to bear the burden of taxation, military service,[24] and corvée labor. Its majority consisted of peasants who lived in scattered villages and tilled either their own land or, as tenants, that of others. Some were landless. From the late seventeenth century on, with the rise of commerce, a small number of commoners began to acquire some economic prominence in urban centers.

At the beginning of the dynasty, the demarcation line between yangban and commoners may not yet have been inflexibly drawn. No legal restrictions prevented commoners from taking the civil service examinations and occasionally holding minor government posts.[25] As the dynasty moved into its second century, however, the distinction between yangban and commoners as two separate status groups was marked; and in the extant household registers (*hojŏk*) of the seventeenth century, the terminology designating commoner householders clearly differed from that used for yangban.[26] Because commoners did not form lineages, their kinship system was less complex and less ritualized.[27]

Moreover, commoners did not keep genealogies and thus lacked recognized charters of descent. Intermarriage between yangban and commoners was rare for primary marriages, although commoner women entered yangban houses as secondary or minor wives (*ch'ŏp*). Visually, the commoners were distinguished from yangban by different dress and by their simpler mode of life.

In turn, commoners set themselves off against the lower class of "base people" (*ch'ŏnmin*), who consisted mostly of slaves but included those with base occupations, such as butchers, leatherworkers, and shamans. Membership in all these status groups was ascribed by birth rather than acquired by achievement, and the law as well as social custom guarded against infringement of social boundaries. Consciousness of social status, deeply rooted in Korean society, has lingered on until recent times.

This, in outline, is a generalized picture of Korean society as it

presented itself during the second half of the Chosŏn dynasty. Lineage organization was typical only for the elite segment of society—the product of a developmental process that at the beginning of the dynasty was set in motion by social reforms inspired by Neo-Confucianism. Because the Confucianization of Korean society is an upper-class phenomenon, the ensuing discussion will heavily concentrate on this upper class, well aware of the fact that an upper class does not constitute the whole of a society. Yet, in the Korean case (and this is not unique to Korea), the written record available was written by and for the elite and thus touches upon the lower classes only in special instances. Moreover, although Confucianism filtered down and provided cultural guidelines for the lives of commoners and slaves alike, it was a multivalent instrument that only when wielded in the hands of the upper class could reach its full sociopolitical and moral potential. It is therefore necessary to trace next the history of Confucianism in Korea.

THE TRANSMISSION OF CONFUCIANISM TO KOREA. As a part of Chinese culture, Confucianism reached the Korean peninsula at various stages of its development. Initial knowledge of Confucian tenets may have been transmitted through the Chinese commanderies that dominated the northern part of Korea during the first three centuries A.D. In 372, a Confucian academy reportedly was established in the native kingdom of Koguryŏ. With the rise of Paekche and Silla, Confucianism began to penetrate the southern half of the peninsula; and in 682, a Confucian academy was built in Kyŏngju, Silla's capital. Because the spiritual milieu in both kingdoms was dominated by Buddhism, the role of Confucianism was limited to some state functions, most notably the education of officials. This didactic duty gained importance during United Silla when in 788, in imitation of the T'ang, a kind of examination system was instituted, and the Confucian classics became the basic study materials of examination aspirants. But presumably more important for deepening and expanding the knowledge of Confucianism in Korea were the Korean students who returned home after spending some time in T'ang China. An outstanding example is Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn (857–

?), who sojourned seventeen years in T'ang China, passed the civil service examination in 874, and after his return propagated Confucian values as reasonable criteria for conducting state affairs. At that time, Confucian studies were principally pursued by men who belonged to the middle echelon, head-rank six *(yuktup'um),* of the general Silla aristocracy—men who, on the basis of their birth, were denied access to the top decision-making positions in government. Confucianism was then and later intimately connected with the search for rational standards that would weaken, if not sever, the indigenous link between the prerogatives of birth and political participation and would condition advancement to high office on achievement.[28]

T'ang influence remained decisive in Koryŏ. The dynastic founder, Wang Kŏn (877–943), surrounded himself with Confucian advisers and acknowledged Confucianism as the ideology of a centrally organized state, although at that time Koryŏ was anything but centralized. In 958, an examination system was established with Chinese assistance.[29] The basic Confucian literature was studied with the commentaries by K'ung Ying-ta (574–648), and this training generally served the purpose of providing the state with capable officials. More important than the government-sponsored school system for the development of Confucianism were the private schools which flourished from the second half of the eleventh century. These contributed significantly to the deepening of Confucian learning when the government-operated schools showed signs of decline. The most famous private school was that of Ch'oe Ch'ung (984–1068), who was later celebrated as the "Confucius of the Land East of the Sea." Ch'oe seems to have been preoccupied with such texts as the *Chung-yung* (Doctrine of the Mean), but it is uncertain whether he had knowledge of the revival of Confucianism in late T'ang and early Sung.[30]

There are various reasons why Korea was initially cut off from the intellectual developments in China known as Neo-Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism was principally a phenomenon of Southern Sung (1127–1279). Therefore, when the Jurchen overran and occupied North China in the early twelfth century, Korea's direct

contacts with South China were severed. Moreover, the establishment of military regimes in Korea from 1170 negatively affected the development of Confucianism. While some Confucian-trained bureaucrats continued to serve the military rulers, other Confucians fled from the center of power. They retreated into the mountains and, in symbiotic existence with the Buddhists, continued their studies. As refugees in Buddhist monasteries, they lived in inner and outer isolation, a circumstance that put a lasting imprint on Koryŏ Confucianism.

With the rise of the Mongol empire in the middle of the thirteenth century, an entirely new chapter in Korea's intellectual history was opened. Subjected to Mongol rule, Korea became part of a vast multinational system, and manifold human and material connections tied Korea to Peking. Although this integration imposed great sacrifices upon Korea, for the Korean Confucians it meant the opening of new intellectual horizons. Yüan China (1271–1368) provided an efficient network that facilitated the exchange of ideas, books, and men.

It was a gradual and rather precarious process through which Neo-Confucianism was transmitted from the south to North China—a process that began only after Khubilai (r. 1260–1294; after 1279 as Shih-tsu) had become convinced that it was more advantageous to recruit the Confucians of the occupied territories into government service than to kill them. The captive Neo-Confucian scholar, Chao Fu (c. 1206–c. 1299), in person brought the Neo-Confucian works north and started a successful teaching career at the Mongol court. His most prominent disciple was Hsü Heng (1209–1281) who with the zeal of a convert absorbed the teachings of the Ch'eng-Chu school and made them the basis of Confucianism in Yüan China.[31]

For Korea, first contact with this new world of thought was facilitated by the close marital relationships that existed between the Mongol imperial house and the royal family of Koryŏ. King Ch'ungnyŏl (r. 1274–1308) married one of Khubilai's daughters; and their son, the later King Ch'ungsŏn (r. 1308–1313), felt more at home in Peking than in Kaesŏng. One of his frequent trips be-

tween the two capitals became particularly momentous for Koryŏ Confucianism. When he returned to Peking in 1289, An Hyang (1243–1306) was a member of his retinue. Having passed the higher civil service examinations in 1260, An held some minor posts before he devoted himself to educational tasks in Kaesŏng. In 1289, he was appointed to the newly established Koryŏguk yuhak chegŏsa (Office for the Promotion of Confucian Studies in Korea), which was a subdivision of the Chŏngdong haengsŏng (Eastern Expedition Field Headquarters), an instrument of Mongol interference in Korean affairs.[32] It must have been because he was recognized as a mature Confucian scholar that An was selected to go to Peking. And this trip turned out to be a revelatory experience. His biography notes, "At that time the works of Master Chu [Chu Hsi] were newly circulating in Peking. When An first got to see them, he absorbed himself in them and respected them greatly. He recognized that they represented the true tradition of Confucius and Mencius, whereupon he copied them by hand, drew [Chu Hsi's] likeness, and brought everything back home."[33] After his return to Korea, An Hyang reportedly advanced to high office, but his main concern was the desolate state of scholarship. Therefore, in 1304, he established a scholarship fund and also sent a certain Kim Munjŏng to southern China to purchase portraits of Confucius and his disciples, some ritual implements, the classics, works by Confucian scholars, and the "new books" by Chu Hsi (1130–1200). An himself is said to have built behind his house a kind of memorial shrine in which he venerated the portraits of Confucius and Chu Hsi. In his words: "Chu Hsi's merits equal those of Confucius. If one wants to study Confucius, one ought to study Chu Hsi first!" Out of respect for his newly found master, An included in his pen name *(ho),* Hoehŏn, one character (Chin. *hui;* Kor. *hoe*) of Chu Hsi's pen name, Hui-an. When An went to Peking for a second time, he visited the Shrine of Confucius and was asked by some officials whether there was such a shrine in Korea. An reportedly answered promptly, "Our country's culture and rituals completely follow those of China. Why should there be no Shrine of Confucius?" His discussions of Neo-Confucian thought, moreover, agreed so closely with Chu Hsi's views

that his Chinese interlocuteurs exclaimed in admiration, "This is the Chu Hsi of the East!"[34]

Although such stories undoubtedly are apocryphal embellishment, they nevertheless underline the momentousness of An Hyang's first encounter with Neo-Confucianism. An's recognition of the Ch'eng-Chu school's unique contribution to Confucianism was the vital spark that set off new interest in Confucian studies at a time when the Korean Confucians were enthralled by Buddhist ideas. An's first concern, therefore, was the revitalization of the decayed school system. With the reconstruction of the Confucian Academy and the recruitment of some able teachers, "the Confucian atmosphere greatly improved, and those who wanted to study flocked together like clouds, for everyone realized for the first time that there was [something like] Neo-Confucianism *(tohak)*."[35] Among An's disciples were all those who contributed to the Confucian revival in the first half of the fourteenth century: Kwŏn Pu (1262–1346), U T'ak (1263–1342), Yi Chin (1244–1321), Yi Cho-nyŏn (1269–1343), Paek I-jŏng (n.d.), and Sin Ch'ŏn (?–1339).[36]

While An Hyang's efforts as an initiator and teacher were certainly important, continued stimulation received from firsthand contacts with Chinese scholars in Peking must have been crucial to sustain the initial enthusiasm. Especially Paek I-jŏng is credited with devoting himself with special fervor to Neo-Confucian studies. After spending some ten years in Peking, Paek reportedly returned home with many books and spurred widespread interest by demonstrating that Confucianism meant more than merely polishing literary styles.[37] To satisfy the demand for reading materials, in 1314 two officers of the Confucian Academy were dispatched to South China to purchase books. In the same year, the Mongol ruler himself sent a large gift of books, which apparently had belonged to the former imperial library of the Sung, to Kaesŏng. They were catalogued by Kwŏn Pu, Yi Chin, and others.[38] The following passage from U T'ak's biography may reflect the scholarly excitement of that time: "When the Neo-Confucian literature [lit., the commentaries of the Ch'eng] first arrived in the East, there was nobody

who could understand it. [U] T'ak closed his door and studied it for over a month. When he comprehended it, he taught it to students, whereby Neo-Confucianism began to flourish."[39]

An early product of such teaching efforts was Yi Che-hyŏn (1287–1367). Belonging to a family of scholars—his father, Yi Chin, was a classics scholar and his father-in-law, Kwŏn Pu, reportedly was the first who urged the printing of the Four Books in Korea[40]—Yi enjoyed a thoroughly "modern" education. His principal teacher apparently was Paek I-jŏng. He thus was well-versed in Neo-Confucian studies when he went to Peking in 1314 at the age of twenty-eight. There he was closely associated with King Ch'ungsŏn, who a year earlier had abdicated in favor of his son, King Ch'ungsuk (r. 1313–1329; 1332–1339). Ch'ungsŏn retired to the Mongol capital, where he founded the famous library, "Hall of the Ten Thousand Scrolls" (Man'gwŏndang). This library became an ideal meeting place for Chinese and Korean scholars to discuss Neo-Confucianism.[41]

The Chinese personalities with whom Yi Che-hyŏn had frequent contact in the Man'gwŏndang were all well-known scholars of their time.[42] Perhaps the most conspicuous name was that of Yao Sui (1238–1313), who was the nephew of the eminent Yao Shu (1203–1280), the man responsible for persuading Chao Fu to go north and introduce Neo-Confucianism to the Mongol court.[43] Yao Sui was one of Hsü Heng's most promising disciples and was close to Yüan Ming-shan (1269–1322), who in turn was a disciple of famous Wu Ch'eng (1249–1333). Educated in a southern academy that was connected with some of Chu Hsi's direct successors, Wu became a respected representative of the Ch'eng-Chu tradition in the north. Another of Wu Ch'eng's disciples, Yü Chi (1272–1348), a great literatus, was also an often-seen visitor in the Man'gwŏndang. From this brief list of names—it could easily be extended—it is clear that the men with whom Yi Che-hyŏn associated in the Man'gwŏndang belonged to the intellectual elite of the Mongol capital. All of them were directly connected with the Ch'eng-Chu school of thought and were instrumental in elevating Neo-Confucianism to the position of

state doctrine of the Yüan and in propagating Chu Hsi's works as the basic study canon for the civil service examinations revitalized in 1313.[44]

During the early fourteenth century, then, many personal contacts between Korean and Chinese scholars stimulated the growth of Neo-Confucian studies in Korea. The effect of this early dissemination may be reflected in the increasing number of Korean students who passed the higher civil service examinations in Peking.[45] One of the first passers was An Chin (?–1360), who after his success in 1318 had an active literary and historiographical career.[46] He was followed in 1321 by Ch'oe Hae (1287–1340), one of Yi Che-hyŏn's friends, who came from a scholarly milieu where Confucian studies were pursued with particular fervor.[47] One of Yi Che-hyŏn's most prominent disciples, Yi Kok (1298–1351), successfully passed the examinations in 1333 and subsequently was given various posts at the Mongol court. His son, Yi Saek (1328–1396), gained top honors in the examinations of 1354 and became the influential teacher of all those who helped build the intellectual foundation of the Chosŏn dynasty. Examination success in Peking not only honored scholarly excellence but also inspired a kind of professionalism which became the hallmark of the newly rising Confucian elite.

THE EARLY FORMATION OF KOREAN NEO-CONFUCIANISM. What was the nature of Yüan Neo-Confucianism that the Koreans absorbed in Peking and later disseminated in Korea? Unfortunately, only very few sources are left to tell the Korean side of this story, and therefore it is useful to approach the question first from the Chinese side. Yüan Neo-Confucianism was firmly grounded in the teachings of Chu Hsi and the Ch'eng brothers, Ch'eng Hao (1032–1085) and Ch'eng I (1033–1107), and took the Four Books as its scriptural foundation. Chu Hsi had grouped the Four Books —*Lun-yü* (Analects of Confucius), *Meng-tzu* (Works of Mencius), *Ta-hsüeh* (Great Learning), and *Chung-yung*—together for the first time and had elucidated them with extensive commentaries. Yüan Confucians chiefly occupied themselves with practical matters and shunned metaphysical speculations. Hsü Heng who came to dominate the philosoph-

ical scene particularly emphasized that "in ancient times, the rise of order and peace necessarily depended on elementary education and great learning."[48] Teaching in an essentially non-Chinese milieu, Hsü Heng stressed moral education and therefore made the *Hsiao-hsüeh* (Elementary Learning), a primer compiled by Chu Hsi in 1189, his basic text. It contained the elementary rules of personal conduct and interpersonal relationships. Being a simple text, it served as an introduction to the Four Books, especially the *Ta-hsüeh,* which took the moral issues up to the higher level of society, state, and world. The *Ta-hsüeh* was read mainly in the edition prepared by Chen Te-hsiu (1178–1235), the *Ta-hsüeh yen-i* (Extended Meaning of the Great Learning).[49] The Four Books were held in such high esteem that in 1313 they were decreed to become, with the Five Classics,[50] the core materials required for the civil service examinations. While Hsü Heng was concerned with extending Confucian learning beyond the elite, his foremost task was the education of the ruler. The ruler, Hsü believed, had first, in conformity with the precepts laid out in the *Ta-hsüeh,* to rectify his own mind and then become an example in the process of renovating the conduct of those below, leading them to moral lives. Hsü's teachings were pragmatic and action-oriented. His aim was to build a solid Confucian foundation upon which state and society could rest.[51]

Some major themes addressed by Hsü Heng and others are clearly reflected in the thinking of early Korean students of Neo-Confucianism. Yi Che-hyŏn characterized the new creed as "concrete (or solid) learning" *(sirhak),* and practicality was the tenor of his advice to Ch'ungsŏn. The king once pondered the reason why in Korea, long familiar with Chinese culture, the scholars were all adhering to Buddhism and occupied themselves with trivialities of writing style. Where were the learned men who understood the classics and polished their conduct? For this desolate state of scholarship Yi squarely held the king responsible. If he had extended the educational facilities, paid due respect to the Six Classics, and illuminated the Way of former kings, Yi preached, nobody would turn his back on "pure Confucianism" *(chinyu)* and follow the Buddhists; nobody would abandon "concrete learning" *(sirhak)* for trivialities

of writing style. Yi's message was clear: a king's first task was education.[52] In a memorial submitted on the occasion of Ch'ungmok's (r. 1344–1348) accession to the throne in 1344, Yi Che-hyŏn became more specific. Unmistakably referring to two key concepts of the *Ta-hsüeh,* Yi made the realization of "reverence" *(kyŏng)* and "watchfulness" *(sin)*—preconditions of kingly rule—dependent on the king's polishing his own virtue first. For doing so, the best method was instruction, and Yi recommended as study materials the *Hsiao-ching* (Classic of Filial Piety) and the Four Books. The aim was to practice the way of the "investigation of things" and the "perfection of knowledge," the "sincerity of the will" and the "rectification of the mind"—the four basic steps of self-cultivation. Once the Four Books were mastered, the next stage of instruction was the Six Classics.[53] Yi Che-hyŏn's pedagogical philosophy clearly rested on Yüan concepts and became the basis of all educational programs in late Koryŏ.

Yi Che-hyŏn's disciple, Yi Saek, articulated similar concerns. He called Confucianism "the source of the civilizatory process" and connected it with the workings of government. Human qualities form the foundation of government. If they are not cultivated, he said, the foundation is not firm. If they are not enlightened, the source is not clear. This was the state of things he observed in his own time and attributed it to the decay of the school system. "Of old, the scholars strove to become sages. Nowadays, remuneration is all the scholars are after." He sharply censured what he thought was meaningless scholarship and pleaded for the reconstruction of schools, both in the capital and in the provinces. Yi Saek became instrumental for the revival of the Confucian Academy (Sŏnggyun'gwan) in 1367, where he became one of the most inspiring teachers of Neo-Confucianism.[54]

At the center of early Korean Neo-Confucianism, thus, stood the revitalization of the education system, a precondition for spreading the teachings of the Ch'eng-Chu school in Korea. The curriculum was modelled after the precepts received from the Yüan teachers, and the whole educational venture rested on the optimistic assump-

tion that if the "learning of the sages" *(sŏnghak)* was sufficiently absorbed by the ruler and his officials, state and society would regain their vitality and harmony. There also was the notion that those called to assist this revitalization process should be recruited on the basis of their talents rather than their family backgrounds.[55]

The spiritual milieu in which the Neo-Confucians began to assert themselves was molded by Buddhism. Although a man like An Hyang had deplored that grass was growing in the Confucius Shrine, while everywhere else incense was burned in reverence for Buddha,[56] anti-Buddhist feelings at first were not strong. After all, Buddhist temples had protected the Confucians during the Military Period (1170–1270). The Koreans who studied in Peking under the Yüan also were not exposed to radical anti-Buddhism. On the contrary, the co-existence of the "Three Teachings" (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism) had a long tradition in China.[57] It is understandable therefore that scholars like Yi Che-hyŏn or Yi Saek did not make their commitment to Neo-Confucianism contingent on a critical attitude toward Buddhism. Paek Mun-bo (1303–1374) must thus have been one of the first to write a memorial entitled "In Rejection of Buddhism" *(Ch'ŏkpulso)*. But he, too, did not use doctrinal grounds for contrasting Confucianism with Buddhism. Rather, quoting Shao Yung's (1011–1077) complex cosmological chronology,[58] he pointed out that in Korea the age had come "to revere Yao and Shun and the Six Classics and to discontinue the [Buddhist] theories of merit and fate." If this were done, Paek maintained, the fate of the country would be secure for a long time as Heaven would be pure and protective and yin and yang in harmony with the time.[59]

The tone of the Confucians changed, however, under King Kongmin (r. 1351–1374). With waning Mongol domination and interference, an opportunity for national reassertion seemed to have arrived, and the Confucians began to clamor for a reform program far beyond the reconstruction of the school system. Lingering domination of pro-Mongol forces and the meteoric rise of a Buddhist monk, Sin Ton (?–1371), to the pinnacle of decision-making power

radicalized the Confucians' demands for renovation. Their laxity toward the Buddhists ended, and they began to envisage a new age in which Confucian norms and values would shape state and society.

NEO-CONFUCIANISM AS AN IDEOLOGY OF CHANGE. The transmission of Neo-Confucianism to Korea poses various important questions. How did the Koreans see themselves as inheritors of the Confucian heritage? What drew them to Neo-Confucianism? What were the elements within Neo-Confucianism that they could adopt as a sociopolitical ideology? Here some general aspects of these questions will be outlined, while the discussion of their practical application in early Chosŏn will form the subject of Chapter Two.

The Koreans seem never to have doubted their belonging to the civilized, that is, Confucian world. As Pyŏn Kye-ryang (1369–1430) put it: "Since antiquity Korea has revered rites *(ye)* and etiquette *(ŭi)* and submitted to Kija's teachings."[60] Having in the person of the legendary Kija a presumed direct link to Chinese antiquity, Korea had a natural claim to the heritage of "the Way" *(sado)* and was proud of it. "Was this not Heaven's special favor vis-à-vis Chosŏn?" Although the Koreans at times invoked the Mencian formula of "using Chinese doctrines to transform the barbarians" *(yung-Hsia pien-i)*[61] to justify and enforce the adoption of Chinese institutions, they were convinced of their natural propensity to become Confucians. This was the optimistic spirit of the Confucian scholars that prevailed throughout late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn.

What elements in Neo-Confucianism justified this optimism not only for a small elite but also for society at large? At the center of an answer to this question undoubtedly stands the Confucian conviction that human nature can be perfected from without, regardless of whether this nature is originally good or bad. Although the early Korean Neo-Confucians have left no clear pronouncements about this problem, circumstantial evidence suggests that they were aware of its overwhelming importance. How, for example, does one go about transforming corrupt Buddhist habits? Does one start from the feelings, that is, from within, or from the ritual details, that is, from without? For Chŏng To-jŏn (?1337–1398), false ritual prac-

tices could lead a son's feelings toward his parents astray, and therefore he insisted that reforms had to start with giving people suitable models for correcting their feelings.[62] Chŏng was not alone with this insight. At the beginning of Chosŏn, the opinion prevailed that, through stimulation from without, men's human properties not only could be guided but also profoundly changed. This belief in the perfectability of man demanded the creation of an appropriate environment in which human nature would be realized to its fullest. Such an environment could be achieved only through legislation that took the vagaries of human nature into account, that is, through Confucian legislation.[63]

A key role in this transformatory process was accorded to rites and rituals. Rites are "correct" acts in the outer realm that exert a profound impact on the inner disposition of man. In ancestor worship, for example, they not only demonstrate how things have to be done correctly but also are a crucial method for creating harmony among the participants. Rites thus address, beyond the individual, the collectivity of kin and, in a wider sense, society at large. They are principles that grow out of human relationships and form part of the entire normative sociopolitical order.[64] The Neo-Confucians of early Chosŏn clearly recognized the significance of rites as devices for ordering society; and for formulating their social policies, they heavily relied on the ritual literature of ancient China transmitted by the Sung Neo-Confucians.

Models for perfect ritual behavior and a sound sociopolitical order are contained in ancient China's canonical works that constituted the inexhaustible source of inspiration for generations of Confucians. In Korea, these works had been known for centuries and had served as the educational basis for examination candidates and instructional materials for kings. They gained critical relevance, however, as handbooks of change and reform through the commentaries of the Sung Neo-Confucians, especially Chu Hsi. It was these commentaries that unlocked their potential as guidebooks of social renovation. The canonical literature, in particular the *Li-chi* (Book of Rites), the *I-li* (Book of Etiquette and Ceremonies), and the *Chou-li* (The Rites of Chou), depicted in great detail an ideal society

created by the sage-kings of ancient China. Through the idealization of the Sung Neo-Confucians, the institutions of this "historical" age gained normative power, and it was this power that persuasively called for a re-creation of these institutions in the contemporary situation (Chin. *fu-ku;* Kor. *pokko*). This was a creative recourse to Chinese antiquity.[65] The Korean Neo-Confucians came under the spell of this canonical literature and interpreted it in the most literal sense. They were receptive to the call for renovation and understood it as a commitment to transforming their own society into a Confucian society. Their reenactment of ancient institutions at the beginning of Chosŏn was motivated as much by their sense of responsibility toward the classics as by their will to rectify the evils of their time. Nowhere in East Asia, therefore, was the re-creation of the institutions of Chinese antiquity more compelling than in Korea.

The sheer weight of its canonical literature makes Neo-Confucianism an elitist enterprise. It addresses the moral as well as the scholarly qualifications of its practicioners, the *ju* (Kor. *yu*), vaguely to be translated as "Confucians." Often used synonymously with *shih* (Kor. *sa*)—this term contains the notion of professionalism—the *ju* were men who made the studying and teaching of the Confucian classics their profession and at times, by passing the examinations, entered the officialdom. But the *ju* were more than merely learned scholars turned bureaucrats. A group apart and above general society, the *ju* adduced their special moral qualities as justification for taking on a leadership role within and without the government. In the widest sense of the word, they were professionals who with their moral endowment, learning, and skills were indispensable functionaries of state and society.[66]

In Korea, the nature of the *yu* as a professional group in the Koryŏ-Chosŏn transition was bound to considerations of social status. Neo-Confucian learning provided an important new method for asserting elite status. To be sure, the aforementioned men of head-rank six *(yuktup'um)* at the end of Silla and perhaps even the civil administrators *(nŭngmun nŭngni)* during the Military Period formed professional groups with distinct social overtones. But at

the end of Koryŏ and the beginning of Chosŏn, Neo-Confucian training became the professional ethos of a body of men who from within the established aristocratic order sought to increase their power by exploiting their special knowledge. This notion of superiority based on Neo-Confucian education thus did not transcend traditional considerations of heredity and upper-class privileges. Rather, it reinforced the social criteria of status ascription. In other words, the Neo-Confucians of early Chosŏn, in contrast to the *shih* of early Ming China, claimed social as well as professional eminence in their quest for power.

With the advent of Neo-Confucianism in Korea, an ideology[67] emerged that was addressing itself in a comprehensive and compelling way to social problems. It stimulated an unprecedented political discourse on man and society. Neo-Confucianism contained clear precepts of sociopolitical renovation and anchored the guarantee of their workability in the exemplary world of the sage-kings of Chinese antiquity. Moreover, the reformatory thrust of Neo-Confucianism turned its practitioners into activists and demanded their full commitment to its program of social change. The Neo-Confucians of early Chosŏn became infected with this call to action and strove to determine and implement a reform program that would Confucianize Korean society. After the failure of Wang An-shih's (1021–1086) reforms in eleventh-century China, their program was to become the most ambitious and creative reform experiment in the East Asian world.

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