



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Founding the Chosŏn Dynasty

Founding the new dynasty of Chosŏn—replacing the Koryŏ dynasty that had ruled Korea for nearly five hundred years—was not an easy task for General Yi Sŏnggye. First he had to overcome the forces of opposition that had a vested interest in the Koryŏ court. This he accomplished with little bloodshed by means of a coup d'état. Imposing a new rule on the disaffected people, however, was an entirely different matter. Therefore, Yi Sŏnggye had to rely upon the Neo-Confucian literati to organize a new government and set up a new code of regulations for his fledgling state. Fortunately for him, he was able to attract a number of capable and reform-minded scholar-officials who were willing to work with him. With their help, Yi Sŏnggye justified the inauguration of the new dynasty in the name of the Mandate of Heaven.

Thus, the Chosŏn state embarked on its course toward realizing a Neo-Confucian society while rejecting or suppressing deeply rooted Buddhist beliefs and native traditions. To start anew, the dynastic founder decided to shift the capital from Songdo (now Kaesŏng). After careful considerations of several alternative sites, Hanyang (present-day Seoul) was chosen as the new capital, which then was developed in accord with careful city planning.

Upon his ascension to the throne on the seventeenth of the seventh month in 1392, King T'aejo issued decrees covering a variety of administra-

tive issues, making appointments throughout the top bureaucracy, and reporting the founding of the new dynasty to the Ming emperor. On the twenty-eighth, he issued what may be called his "founding edict," asserting his legitimacy, claiming the loyalty of his officials, and setting forth the means and rationale for action in several key areas of government. DC

King T'aejo: Founding Edict

[From *T'aejo sillok* 1:43a-45a]

The king issued the following edict to all the officials and the people:

The king announces:

It is Heaven which created all the people of the earth, Heaven which ordaines their rulers, Heaven which nurtured them to share life with each other, and Heaven which governed them so as to enjoy peace with one another. There have been both good and bad rulers, and there have been times when people followed their rulers willingly and other times when they turned against them. Some have been blessed with the Mandate of Heaven and others have lost it. This is a principle that has remained constant.

On the sixteenth of the seventh month of the twenty-fifth year in the reign of the Hung-wu Emperor [1392], the Privy Council [*Top'yŏngŭisasa*] and all ranks of officials together urged me to take the throne, saying: "After King Kongmin died leaving no legitimate heir the doom of the Koryŏ dynasty was sealed. Although King Kongyang [1389-1392] was empowered temporarily to take charge of state affairs, he was confused and broke the law, causing many people to rebel and even his own relatives to turn against him, and he was incapable of preserving and protecting the ancestral shrines and institutions. How could anyone restore what Heaven has abandoned? The ancestral shrines and institutions should only be entrusted to one who is worthy, and the throne must not be left vacant for long. People's minds are all looking up to your meritorious achievements and virtue, and you should accept the throne to rectify the situation, thereby satisfying the people's desire."

Fearful that I lack both virtue and capacity to assume the awesome responsibilities, I declined the offer of the throne repeatedly. But I am told that the people's wishes are such that Heaven's will is clearly manifested in them and that no one should refuse the wishes of the people, for to do so is to act contrary to the will of Heaven. Because the people insisted so steadfastly, I yielded finally to their will and ascended the throne. Now that we are at the threshold of a new beginning, I must show abundant grace, and I hereby announce the following policies for the benefit of the people.

As for the civil and the military examinations, I will not abandon one in favor of the other. Let more students be chosen for the Royal Confucian Academy in the capital and the county schools in order to promote scholarship and train men of talent. The original purpose of the examination system was to recruit men of talent for the state. With the practice of calling the examiners "masters" and the candidates "disciples," the system of impartial selection has been replaced by a system of private favors. This does not accord with the original purpose of the law. From now on, the registrar of the Royal Confucian Academy in the capital and the governors of each province will select those students in their schools who are bright in the classics and of good character; they will certify their age, clan, and three ancestors and record the classics they have mastered; and then they will send them to the director of the Royal Confucian Academy. The students will then be examined on their knowledge of the classics, and those who did well on the Four Books and the Five Classics as well as the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance* [Tzu-chih t'ung-chien] will be ranked according to the degree of their mastery. Those who pass this first stage of the examination will be sent to the Ministry of Rites for the second stage, where they will be tested on their ability to compose documentary prose [p'yo], memorials [chang], and rhyme-prose [kobu]. They will then be examined at the final stage on problem essays [ch'aengmun]. Of those who are successful in all three stages of examination, thirty-three men will be selected. They will then be forwarded to the Ministry of Personnel for appointment to an office according to their abilities.

The Military Training Administration will be in charge of instruction in military matters. Candidates will be instructed in the seven military classics as well as marksmanship and horsemanship, and they will then be ranked according to their mastery of the classics and their skill as marksmen and horsemen. Thirty-three finalists will be awarded the military degree in the manner of awarding the civil examination degree. Their names then will be sent to the Ministry of War for official appointment.

The cardinal rituals of our state are the rites of capping, marriage, funerals, and ancestor worship. In order for human relations to be harmonized and customs to be rectified, let the Ministry of Rites carefully research the classics and codes, deliberate on past practices, and then establish regulations for the rituals.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of the magistrates, whose duties involve direct dealing with the people. The Privy Council, the Censorate, and the Six Ministries will recommend those whom they know to be just, fair, upright, and capable of appointments as magistrates. After thirty months in office, those whose records are outstanding will be promoted. If any fail to live up to expectations, those who recommended them will bear the blame.

Because of the importance of morals and customs, we should encourage loyal

ministers, filial sons, righteous husbands, and faithful wives. Let local officials seek out such people and recommend them for preferential treatment and further advancement and for memorial arches to commemorate their virtuous deeds.

The king should place importance on extending sympathy and providing relief to aged widowers and widows, orphans, and the childless. All local officials should assist those who are hungry and destitute within their jurisdiction and should give them exemption from corvée duties.

Toward the end of Koryŏ, there was no unified system of criminal justice. The Ministry of Punishments, the constabulary, and the detention halls all meted out punishments on their own. These were not always appropriate. Henceforth the Ministry of Punishments will be in charge of the criminal code, litigation, and criminal investigations and punishments. The constabulary, on the other hand, will be in charge of patrolling, catching thieves, and maintaining order. At present, when the Ministry of Punishments renders judgment in a case, the culprit is invariably stripped of his writ of appointment and forced to resign his post, even if the offense is only punishable by flogging, and guilt is attached to his descendants. This is not the way the sage-kings meant it to be. DC

Admonition to the New King

[From *T'aejo sillok* 1:40a-42b]

The Office of the Inspector-General was one of two main bodies (the other was the Office of the Censor-General) whose functions included remonstrating with the king and pronouncing on morals in general and abuse of public office in particular. The inspector-general was a high-ranking official (Rank 2B), sometimes even a member of the State Council. This document is an admonition to the new king to avoid the evil practices of the past by setting up new procedures. A key element is the repeated concern over the appointment of good men to office, reflecting the early Chosŏn dynasty's critiques of government in the late Koryŏ period. Notable too are the numerous allusions to the Chinese classics, which give authority and legitimacy to the ideas being expressed. DC

Once again the Inspector-General memorialized the throne:

Your Majesty, responding to the call of Heaven, has accepted the mandate and has now ascended the throne. In the *Book of Documents* it is written: "God dwelling in the great heavens has changed his decree in favor of his eldest son and this great dynasty of Yin. Our king has received that decree. Unbounded is

the happiness connected with it, and unbounded is the anxiety. Oh! How can he be other than reverent?"¹

Reverence is the heart's controlling force and the basis of all things. Thus, whether on such important occasions as serving and offering sacrifices to Heaven or in such small matters as rising, dwelling, eating, and resting, one should never turn away from piety for even a moment. Thus it is our earnest wish that Your Majesty think constantly as if you were with the Lord of Heaven and act as if the Lord of Heaven were present, even in moments of idleness. In dealing with matters of state, you should be even more prudent in your thinking. If you do this, the reverence in your heart will be sufficient to move Heaven, and you will be able to realize the ideal rule.

With this memorial we undertake respectfully to enumerate certain things you should do. We sincerely hope that you will adopt and implement them so that the model of this generation can be emulated by myriad generations.

First, establish rules and laws. One who wishes to rule his state well should not be concerned about safety and peril; rather, he should be concerned with whether the rules and laws are properly established.

Second is an unambiguous system of rewards and punishments. Third is the cleaving to superior men and distancing yourself from inferior men. Truly it is necessary to distinguish between superior men and inferior men. The superior man is one who is honest and holds to principle, not relying on others; who knows how to act with utmost loyalty when in office and how to counsel the sovereign in his weakness when not in office; who is open and fair-minded; who is concerned about the ancestral shrines and institutions and not about himself. The inferior man is one who is wicked and sycophantic; who curries favor to gain acceptance; who usurps authority and abuses it; who claims credit for the accomplishments of others and ingratiates himself with servile flattery; who is concerned solely with his selfish interests without heeding others' opinions. Superior men are hard to find and easy to lose, inferior men are easy to find and hard to get rid of.

Fourth is the willingness to accept remonstrance. The sovereign's majesty is like thunder; his power is as weighty as iron. Is it an easy thing for the minister to brave the thunder and bear the heavy weight to offer his sovereign words as if to cure his ailments? And yet the difference between accepting and rejecting such advice can mean the difference between good fortune and disaster, between profit and loss for the state.

Fifth is rooting out slanderous talk. Sixth is to beware of indolence and dissoluteness. The desire to be in repose in the palace; to feast on fine food; to enjoy the ministrations of your queen and palace women, the pleasures of the

hunt, raising dogs and horses; and to amuse yourself with flowers and plants: all these things harm men's disposition and dissipate their will. Therefore, one must exercise caution. For indeed, the Mandate of Heaven is a transient thing.

Seventh is respect for frugality and economy.

Eighth is the shunning of eunuchs. The problem of eunuchs is an old one.

Ninth is the weeding out of unqualified Buddhist clergy. They mingle with ordinary people, using high-sounding words and professing high ideals, bedazzling even scholars and intimidating simple folk with talk of retribution for sin, fostering wasteful habits among the people and encouraging them to forsake their proper occupations. Indeed, nothing is more likely to destroy the state and sicken the people than this. We beseech Your Majesty to round up these Buddhist clerics and examine them carefully on their doctrine and practice. Those who truly know the doctrine and truly practice virtue should be allowed to teach; all the others should be made to let their hair grow out and return to their former occupations.

Tenth is the regulation of access to the palace. The establishment of the palace is meant to enhance the sovereign's power and to define clearly the boundary between the inner and outer courts. We beseech Your Majesty to order the gate guards to prohibit the unauthorized entry of anyone without official position, and especially to spurn shamans who practice women's magic and those who cunningly flatter.

Your ministers believe that trust is the sovereign's greatest asset—for the state is protected by the people, and the people are protected by trust. For this reason, the sage would sooner have done without an army and food to eat than to have done without trust, and that is a profound lesson for later generations and our time as well. If you do not act with trust in attracting superior men and spurning inferior men, the superior will easily become estranged from you, and the inferior will easily find their way into your company. If you do not act with trust in hearing remonstrance and in trying to root out slander, you will find that good advice seems unpleasant to the ear while flattering words will come to influence your decisions. We beseech Your Majesty to keep this trust unwaveringly and firmly, to enforce these points as faithfully as the seasons follow one another, never forsaking the mandate granted you by Heaven above to help you, nor the desires of the officials and the people to have you lead them as their king, so that unbounded peace will prevail for myriad generations.

DC

[From *Taejo sillok* 6:11a-13a]

Choosing a new location for the capital was an important symbolic step for the new dynasty. The decadence of the final years of Koryŏ encouraged thoughts of a fresh start in a new city, despite the great effort and inconvenience that would attend such a move. Many things had to be taken into account in siting the new city. It had to be defensible, for example, yet accessible by water and road so that officials could travel and taxable commodities could be carried in and out. The lay of the land was important, too, though T'aejo's officials differed in their respect for the laws of geomancy. The Chinese classics had to be consulted in order to determine precedents for moving the capital. And beneath it all were the practical considerations of officials who apparently did not want to leave Songdo, the metropolitan center of Korea, for the undeveloped valley of Hanyang (present-day Seoul).

DC

In considering whether to establish the capital here, he had first ordered his officials to scout out the area.

The Director of Treasury Chŏng Tojŏn said: "Since the Three Kingdoms period in our country, our capitals have been Kyerim [Kyŏngju] in the east, Wansan [Chŏnju] in the south, and P'yŏngyang in the north, while in the center there is Songgyŏng [Songdo or Kaesŏng]. Kyerim and Wansan are located in isolated corners of the country, in places too remote for the effective conduct of royal business. P'yŏngyang is too near the northern frontier, and your minister believes it, too, is unsuitable for a capital.

"Your Majesty's rule follows that of the collapsed former dynasty. Because the people's livelihood has not yet recovered and the foundation of the state has not yet been consolidated, it would be better that you first pacify the people and allow them to rest so that they can regain strength. You should select a suitable site for the capital in accordance with the heavenly signs and people's wishes and should wait for a proper time to move. In this way, all will be safe while your dynasty's rule over Chosŏn will be everlasting along with the descendants of your ministers.

"Those who discuss geomancy nowadays are drawing on the experiences of earlier people rather than on their own, just as your minister's words are based on the experiences of earlier people. How, then, can one believe in geomancers and reject the wisdom of Confucian scholars? Your minister's fervent hope is that

Your Majesty will deeply ponder this problem, put the people's welfare first, and only then try divination to determine a new capital, so as to avoid misfortunes."

The next day the king inspected the ancient palace sites of the southern capital and observed the configurations of the mountains. He then asked Yun Sindal and his other companions:

"What about this place?"

Yun replied: "Within the borders of our land, Songdo is the best spot of all, but this is next best. However, it has one regrettable feature: the northwest corner is too low, so the spring water dries up too readily."

The king was pleased and said: "How can there be no deficiencies even in Songdo? As I see the terrain of this place, it seems like a fit location for a royal capital. What is more, it is accessible by water, it is centrally located, and it will also be a convenient place for the people."

The king then spoke to the Royal Preceptor Chach'o, asking: "What do you think?"

Chach'o answered: "There are heights and scenic beauty on all sides here, and the center is level. It is a good place for fortifications and also for a capital. Still, you should consider the opinions of many people before you decide."

The king then ordered his ministers to discuss it, and they returned with a consensus: "If you are determined to move the capital, then this is a good place to move it to."

Ha Yun [1347-1416] alone dissented, saying: "The mountains seem well configured, but from the standpoint of geomancy it cannot be considered good."

Then the king, acting on the advice of his ministers, decided on Hanyang as the capital.

Political Thought in Early Chosŏn

The founders of Chosŏn were fully committed to Sung Neo-Confucianism as their guiding creed and endeavored to transform Korea into a Confucian state in which the Ch'eng-Chu tradition would be properly preserved. For the scholar-officials of early Chosŏn, Neo-Confucianism was above all a political philosophy that, grounded in the sociopolitical models of China's antiquity, provided them with reliable and efficient patterns for reforming state and society. They spoke of Neo-Confucianism as "substantial learning" (*sirohak*) that provided not only a new political vision but also answers to the most pressing problems of their time.

Korean Neo-Confucianism recognized the *Great Learning* (*Ta hsüeh*)—the small treatise that Chu Hsi (1130–1200) had selected as one of the Four Books—as the basic text that outlined a systematic and pragmatic program for moral education as well as political action. The fundamental purpose of scholarship now was to re-create the ideal political order as exemplified by China's sage-rulers, Yao and Shun, and the founders of the Hsia, Shang, and Chou. This connection between scholarship and good rule developed in the course of time into an idealistic imperative of great intensity that ran like a thread through all political thought of early Chosŏn.

RULING THE NEW DYNASTY

Kwŏn Kŭn (1352–1409) was one of the spiritual founders of Chosŏn Korea. In his treatises and commentaries on the Chinese classics he laid out the basic concepts of Neo-Confucianism and illuminated their relevance for the political as well as the social life of the new dynasty. He emphasized the importance of Confucian learning for activating people's moral nature, a process of self-realization that was to culminate in the development of the proper human relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, elder and younger. One of Kwŏn Kŭn's favorite texts was the *Great Learning*, in which he found an outline for social and political action.

The following memorial (1401) was written after a fire in Such'ang Palace, the royal home of the last Koryŏ kings, in which Yi Sŏnggye had held his enthronement ceremony. Because this fire was interpreted as a warning of Heaven to King T'aejong's young rule (1400–1418), Kwŏn Kŭn pointed out six matters to which the king should pay special attention: loyalty to King T'aejo (1392–1398), administration of state affairs, treatment of officials, attendance at royal lectures, rewarding of loyalty, and performance of state rituals. Kwŏn Kŭn advocated in particular the rehabilitation of his teacher, Chŏng Mongju (1337–1392), who had died as a Koryŏ loyalist. MD

Kwŏn Kŭn: On Royal Action

[From *T'aejong sillok* 1:4b–7b]

On Treating Court Officials

Although the distinction of ruler and minister is ceremonially strict, their relationship must be emotionally intimate. In olden times, the ruler was intimate and close to his high ministers, and he met face to face with his court officials.

Rulers of later generations lived hidden in their palaces, and the ministers they received at court bowed perfunctorily and then retired. Since the feelings of ruler and ministers did not at all match, the wicked and the false deceived their ruler and took pleasure in concealing from him the gains and losses outside the palace and the interests and urgent concerns of the people.

Your servant wishes that from now on Your Majesty would regularly sit in court and receive your ministers in audience all through the day. You should grant an audience to all officials who depart and take leave or come from outside the court, regardless of their rank. If you use warm words to console them and clear

questions to draw them out, all your officials will have grateful hearts, and you will learn all about the affairs of the people.

On Attending Royal Lectures

The way of emperors and kings is made bright through scholarship, and the rule of emperors and kings is extensive because of scholarship. From antiquity, those kings who were good even established royal lectures in order to investigate the learning of the sages.

Your servant respectfully wishes that, regardless of the brilliance of your natural talents or the inadequacy of the Confucian scholars, Your Majesty would daily attend the royal lectures and, with unprejudiced mind and humble determination, diligently pursue the studies.

On Rewarding Loyalty

Since antiquity, rulers have certainly rewarded scholars of integrity and rightness as a means to secure the social fabric for myriad generations. In my view, Chŏng Mongju of the former dynasty, as a poor scholar, received T'aejo's special favor of recommendation and thus advanced to high office. Was his heart unwilling to repay T'aejo such favors? With the brilliance of his talents and knowledge was he unaware of the direction in which the Heavenly Mandate and the hearts of the people went? Did he not know that the house of Wang was doomed? Did he not know that his safety was at stake? Even so, he concentrated his mind on what he was doing and did not swerve from his integrity. Therefore he suffered death. That is what is called "even in great emergencies not being deprived of one's principles." Chŏng Mongju died in Koryŏ. Is it utterly impossible to honor him posthumously today?

MD

NEW GOVERNMENT

With his broad erudition and energetic character, Chŏng Tojŏn was a prime mover in the founding process of the new dynasty. In his philosophical works he outlined the Confucian point of view and aggressively turned against Buddhism. He put an end to the Confucians' traditional tolerance of the Buddhist creed and advanced philosophical arguments against it. He also paid close attention to renewing and tightening the governmental structure. Inspired by the *Rites of Chou* (*Chou li*), Chŏng Tojŏn wrote the *Administrative Codes of Chosŏn* (*Chosŏn kyŏngguk chŏn*), in which he drafted the constitutional outline of the new dynasty. Although he emphasized the

ruler's pivotal position in the governing process, he equally envisaged a strong standing for the *ch'ongjae* (prime minister), whose major task was to assist the king at the head of a well-organized administration. He also recognized the importance of the censorial agencies for checking the king as well as for supervising the officialdom. Chŏng Tojŏn's major concern, however, was the building of a government that would function through benevolence rather than force. In this sense he followed the Mencian tradition that eschewed coercion and espoused virtue as the sole means for winning the people's hearts. Chŏng Tojŏn's ideas exerted a lasting influence on the legislative process during the dynasty's first century. MD

Chŏng Tojŏn: On the Prime Minister

[From *Sambong chip* 7:5a-6a]

The administrative department is the domain of the prime minister. As the functionaries, et cetera, are all subject to the prime minister, administering the educational department also is one of the prime minister's duties. If the prime minister gets the right men, the Six Ministries are well run, and the hundred offices are well regulated. Therefore it is said: "The ruler's task consists in settling for one chief minister." This points to the prime minister.

Above, he assists the king; below, he guides the officials and controls all the people. His task is indeed great! Furthermore, the abilities of rulers differ: some are dull, and some bright; some are strong, and some weak. The prime minister goes along with the ruler's goodness, but corrects his badness; he presents him with the feasible, but withholds from him the wrong. By so doing, he enables the ruler to enter the realm of the Great Mean. Therefore he is called "assistant"; this means that he supports and assists.

All the officials have different tasks, and the people have different occupations. The prime minister treats them fairly so that each does not lose what is proper for him; he treats them impartially so that all gain their proper place. Therefore he is called "chief minister"; this means that he rules and directs.

Only the prime minister knows about the services of the royal consorts and concubines, the duties of the eunuchs, the enjoyments of carriages and horses, of dress and ornaments, the provision of food and drink within the confines of the royal palace. He is an important minister. He is the one the ruler faces with ritual decorum, yet he personally attends to the minutest matters. Is this not trivial? No! The royal consorts, the concubines, and the eunuchs are actually ready for the royal summons. But if the prime minister does not watch over them, they might

deceive the king with wickedness and flattery. The carriages and horses, the dress and ornaments, the food and drink are actually for the provision of the royal person. But if the prime minister does not economize, there might be luxurious and lavish expenditures. Therefore the earlier kings established laws and entrusted them all to the prime minister, who uses them for regulating and restraining. Their concern was far-reaching!

The great Confucian of the Sung, Chen Te-hsiu [1178-1235], discussed the task of the prime minister and said: "He corrects himself and rectifies the ruler; he knows the people and tends to the affairs." How excellent are these words! In my opinion, the perfection of self and the rectification of the ruler are the foundation of politics, and knowing the people and administering the affairs are the mechanism of politics. Therefore I have discussed this topic here. MD

THE KINGLY WAY

A prominent scholar-official of the mid-fifteenth century, Yang Sŏngji (1415-1482) outlined for the teenaged King Tanjong (1452-1455) the essentials of kingly rule. Like his predecessors, Yang Sŏngji emphasized the close correlation between the king's moral stature and the stability and success of his rule. For striking a healthy balance between these two, the selection of capable officials was a king's foremost task. He needed the scholar-officials for his own enlightenment—the pursuit of "right learning" (*chŏnghak*) required their instruction and explanations. But he needed them equally to carry the message of kingly rule beyond the palace walls. The scholar-officials were thus not only the king's teachers but also the most effective propagandists of the kingly way among the people at large. MD

Yang Sŏngji: Discussion on the Kingly Way

[From *Nulchae chip* 1:22b-24a]

Your servant has heard that there are three essentials a ruler keeps in mind: humaneness, understanding, and resoluteness. Humaneness means loving and nourishing the people. Understanding means differentiating between good and bad. Resoluteness means keeping inferior men at a distance. There are also three essentials for governing a country: to employ right men, to heed admonitions, and to reward and punish. If one employs the right men, all matters are regulated. If one heeds admonitions, everything good accumulates. If one is trustworthy in rewarding and stern in punishing, the good are encouraged and the bad take

warning. And the whole world will exert itself. Ah! Heaven has created the people, but it cannot rule them by itself. Therefore it has entrusted them to the ruler. The ruler cares for the people, but he cannot rule them alone. Therefore he commits them to officials.

Now, in the capital the State Council supervises the hundred officials, and the Six Ministries manage all matters. It is proper to charge those in high positions with supporting and nourishing the royal virtue and those in low positions with aiding and fostering the people's livelihood. For selecting officials, it is necessary to choose the proper men; for collecting taxes and levies, it is necessary to have equal standards; for rites and education, it is necessary to cultivate understanding; for the military administration, it is necessary to motivate to action; for punishments, it is necessary to be impartial and forgiving; for works and repairs, it is necessary to be careful and economical. In all matters of the various offices, it is necessary to be diligent and cautious.

Outside the capital, the governors administer localities, and the local magistrates are in charge of counties. The governor investigates the sufferings of the people and checks the greediness and cruelty of local magistrates. He encourages agriculture in order to enrich the people's livelihood, and promotes schools in order to rectify their customs. When assigning corvée labor, he takes care to be impartial and equitable; when deciding prison sentences, he is determined to be sincere and honest. He promotes what is profitable and does away with what is harmful. It is his task to preserve and care for the people.

The provincial military commanders control separate areas. Each fortification and river station must have adjoining land, and it is necessary to train the soldiers well and make them courageous, to make the weapons and equipment strong and sharp, to maintain the fortresses and embankments well and in good repair, and to keep sufficient provisions. The training must be diligent and the patrolling alert. The commander's task is the raising of troops and the defense of the country.

The Royal Secretariat is the king's mouthpiece, and the censorial agencies are the eyes and ears of the state. The Royal Secretariat issues the royal orders and handles all important matters. The Office of the Censor-General amends deficiencies of the royal orders and corrects omissions. The Office of the Inspector-General screens all offices and scrutinizes the gains or failures of the court and the good or bad actions of the officials. This is its responsibility.

Your Majesty should also put your mind to right learning for making clear the source from which right rule comes forth. You should keep close to the right men for the benefit of your enlightenment. You should engage high officials and widen the channel of memorials. You should act with care every single day and be

concerned at the beginning about the end. With high and low you should be in mutual harmony and with capital and countryside in cooperation to maintain forever the peaceful rule of the dynastic ancestors.

MD

THE WAY OF PRINCIPLE

At the end of the dynasty's first century, the founders' Confucian vision of a perfect government under a virtuous ruler still remained unfulfilled. Indeed, the century had witnessed Sejo's (1455–1468) usurpation of the throne and Yŏnsangun's (1494–1506) contemptuous and arbitrary rule. The Confucian officialdom itself had lost much of its initial enthusiasm and was bogged down in sterile book learning. Only a relatively small number of scholar-officials continued to pursue the Neo-Confucian dream. Collectively, they became known as the Neo-Confucian literati (*sarim*). One of them was Cho Kwangjo (1482–1519), who became the recognized leader of an ideological and political restoration movement that centered on the embodiment of the Way (*to*) in government. Emphasizing the value of scholarship for an enlightened rule, Cho had as one of his principal concerns the cultivation of personal virtue as the mainspring of a ruler's transforming influence (*hwa*). Ruler and scholar were therefore interdependent, and only the ruler's judicious use of the scholar-officials could result in the re-creation of government on the pattern of Yao and Shun, the idealized legendary rulers in China. Cho Kwangjo and his followers espoused these views from the vantage point of the censorial agencies, but, as it had before, such ideological pressure in the end proved counterproductive. Cho Kwangjo became the most prominent victim of the literati purge of 1519. His legacy, however, endured throughout the sixteenth century.

MD

Cho Kwangjo: On Problems of the Time

[From *Chŏngam chip* 3:12b–14b]

In our country at the time of King Sejong [1418–1450], rites, music, literature, institutions, and implementations were similar to those of the Chou period. But in the first years of the deposed Yŏnsangun [1494–1506], King Sŏngjong's [1469–1494] coffin had not been long in the memorial chamber when matters in the palace were already deplorable and not one person was able to preserve its integrity. Therefore the scholar-officials all lost their determination and finally were bewildered and confused, but nobody came to their rescue. Because the

virtue and benevolence of the dynastic founders were abundant and rich and had penetrated the people's minds, after Your Majesty ascended the throne the people's minds were about to turn toward goodness. Old habits and corrupt customs, however, are difficult to reform all at once. If at this very moment the scholars' mores are not rectified, the people's livelihood is not enriched, and an indestructible basis for many future generations is not established, what will the royal descendants take as a model? Why is it that from ancient times the one who wished to rule was not able to rule well? It is because there were inferior men who took pleasure in slandering others and starting trouble. Your servant says that if Your Majesty's learning is daily progressing toward higher knowledge and brighter insights and you treat your high ministers with greater sincerity, they will not dare make wild statements in front of you and will certainly devote themselves completely to the affairs of the state. If the affairs of the state are not handled by Your Majesty's high ministers, high and low will oppose each other and not find harmony, and good rule will not be achieved. MD

Cho Kwangjo: On the Superior Man and the Inferior Man

[From *Chungjong sillok* 32:66a-b]

The ruler's entire mind must be brilliantly clear before he is able to recognize the wicked and the upright among men. Since even among inferior men there are some who resemble superior men, there are certain to be inferior men among the officials. If one observes their words and actions, one naturally recognizes whether they are worthy or not. If the ruler, however, does not make an effort to investigate matters and extend his knowledge, he may take a superior man for an inferior man or an inferior man for a superior man. Furthermore, when an inferior man attacks a superior man, he may point at him and call him an inferior man. Or someone may say that a man's words and actions are incongruous, or that he is fishing for fame. A ruler cannot but closely observe such cliquish scholars. Now the ruler should clearly differentiate their kind. If there are wicked men who speak up, he should call them wicked. He should evaluate them and call them either right or wrong. If the judgment of right and wrong emanates from the ruler, the scholars' mores will naturally turn toward what is correct. MD

ON SAGE LEARNING

Yi Hwang (1501-1570) did not have a brilliant political career in the central government, but his influence on the political thinking at court, exercised

from deep in the countryside, was nevertheless considerable. In 1568, during his last sojourn in the capital before his death, he submitted the *Memorial on Six Points Presented in 1568* (*Mujin yukcho so*) to King Sŏnjo (1567–1608). This document is one of the most powerful political statements of the Chosŏn dynasty. After reading it, Sŏnjo exclaimed: "These six points are indeed the wise legacy of antiquity, but equally the most urgent matters of our days."

The first two points deal with problems that had become acute because Sŏnjo, at the age of fifteen, had been chosen to succeed his uncle Myŏngjong (1545–1567), who had died without leaving an heir. They include correct continuation of the royal line, close relations with the two dowager-regents, and guarding against slander. The theme of the third point, here translated in large part, is Sage Learning (*sŏnghak*) as the basis of good rule. It adheres closely to the teachings of Chu Hsi in the *Great Learning* and *The Mean*. The fourth point elucidates the development of the Way (*to*) from antiquity to early Chosŏn, warns against heterodox teachings (Buddhism), and entreats the young king to give the Way a permanent abode in Korea. In the fifth point Yi Hwang emphasizes the importance of trustworthy high officials and the censorial agencies. The last point shows the close connection between recognizing the will of Heaven and the kingly way.

Yi I (1536–1584), who with his older contemporary Yi Hwang dominated the field of Neo-Confucian philosophy in the sixteenth century, did not exhaust his efforts in speculative thinking. He paid equally close attention to the practical problems of his time, and his pronouncements on political, economic, and social issues were widely respected. He did not tire of repeating his fundamental insight, according to which the health and stability of the state rested solely on the peasantry, and he therefore termed the strengthening of the peasants' livelihood the most urgent task of his time.

The *Memorial in Ten Thousand Words* (1574), of which some key passages are translated here, is only one of several important political documents Yi I submitted to King Sŏnjo. It combines Neo-Confucian instruction on kingly rule and popular indoctrination with practical advice on economic, military, and administrative matters. Most significantly, Yi I called for flexibility in policy planning and legislation, and thus distinctly distanced himself from timeworn legal conservatism. For him, too, the basic program of internal cultivation and its application to politics, outlined in Chu Hsi's commentary on the *Great Learning*, remained the foundation of all moral and, by extension, political action.

Yi Hwang: Memorial on Six Points

[From *Toegye chönsö* 6:42a-46b]*Third: By Esteeming Sage Learning, the Basis of Good Rule Is Built*

Your servant has heard that the essential method of the mind, which is part of the learning of the emperors and kings, originated from the Great Shun's order to Yü that said: "The mind of man is precarious. The mind of the Way is barely perceptible. Be discriminating, be single-minded. Hold fast to the Mean."¹

Shun entrusted the world to Yü with the wish that he should pacify it. Among the words with which he addressed him, none were more urgent than those on government. But Shun's injunctions and admonitions to Yü did not go beyond these words, because he realized that learning and perfect virtue constitute the great foundation of ruling, while discrimination and single-mindedness are the great law of scholarship. If the great foundation of ruling is established with the great law of scholarship, all the governances of the world will emanate from this. Because the plans of the sages of antiquity are like this, even your ignorant servant understands that Sage Learning is the basis of perfect rule and presumptuously addresses Your Majesty on this subject.

Even so, Shun's words only spoke of precariousness and subtlety without giving the reason for them; they only instructed the ruler to be discriminating and single-minded without indicating the method of being discriminating and single-minded. It was very difficult for men of later generations who wanted, on the basis of these words, to know the method exactly and put it into practice. Therefore several sages followed one upon the other, and with Confucius the method became well established. This was the *Great Learning's* "investigation of things" and "extending of one's knowledge [understanding]," "being sincere in one's intentions," and "rectifying the mind-and-heart"; and the *Mean's* manifesting goodness and being sincere with oneself. Thereafter various Confucians successively emerged until Chu Hsi. His theories, which were indeed brilliant, were embodied in his commentaries and questions on the *Great Learning* and *The Mean*. If we now concentrate on these two books and pursue the learning of true knowledge and practice, it is like seeing the sun in the sky upon opening one's eyes, or like walking on the wide path simply by placing one's foot on it.

Regrettably, however, there are few rulers in this world who aspire to this learning. And among those who do aspire to it and are able to make a beginning, few reach the end. Ah! That is the reason why this learning has not been transmitted and government is not like that of old. Yet there is hope that it will become like this!

From the nearness of our own nature and appearance and daily applied human

relationships to the myriad things of heaven and earth and the vicissitudes of past and present, everything has in itself the principle of what is and the norm of what must be. This is what is called the Mean of what exists by itself through nature. Therefore, learning must be broad, inquiry accurate, thinking careful, and judgment enlightened. These are the four elements of the extension of knowledge, and among them careful thinking is the most important. What is thinking? It means to search for it in the mind and to obtain it through experience. If one can experience it in the mind and clearly differentiate its principle, if one wishes the inner workings of good and bad and the judgment of rightness and profit, of right and wrong, to be completely exact and free of error, then it is possible to know truly and without doubt the reason for what are called "precariousness" and "subtlety" and the method of being discriminating and single-minded.

Because Your Majesty has already made a beginning in the study of these four elements and set out on this course, your servant hopes that, on the basis of this beginning, you will make an even more sustained effort. The procedure and the items of your study should be based on the details pointed out in Chu Hsi's queries. You should make reverent seriousness your priority and investigate all matters in terms of the reason for their existence and the norm of what they should be. You should ponder this deeply, turn it over in your mind, thoroughly internalize it, and finally reach the ultimate limits of these four elements. If you make such great efforts over a long period of time, one morning, without your realizing it, all problems will dissipate and be solved and there will be a sudden breakthrough to integral comprehension. Then at last you will understand the meaning of the statement that "substance and functions have one source, and there is no gap between the manifest and the hidden."² Neither confused by precariousness and subtlety nor bewildered by discrimination and single-mindedness, you will hold fast to the Mean: this is what is called true knowledge.

Your servant wishes also to speak about earnest action. To be sincere in one's intentions is to investigate thoroughly the subtle, even the reality of a single hair. To rectify one's mind is to investigate action and quiescence, even the correctness of one single matter. Cultivating your personal life, don't get trapped in partiality. Regulating the family, don't err in one-sidedness. Be alert and fearful; be watchful when alone. Strengthen your determination without resting. These are the elements of earnest action, and among them mind and intention are the most important. The mind is the heavenly ruler, and the will comes forth from it. If one first makes sincere what comes forth, this sincerity will be sufficient to stop the ten thousand errors. If one rectifies the heavenly ruler, that is, the mind, the whole body will follow its orders, and its movements will all have reality.

Your Majesty has already made a beginning and a start in regard to these various efforts. Your servant hopes that, on the basis of this start, you will make an even more sincere effort. For rules and guidance you should follow the instructions that these two books, *Great Learning* and *The Mean*, hand down, and make reverent seriousness your priority. If at all times and everywhere, in all your thoughts, you are guided by them and remain cautious in all your affairs, the manifold desires will be washed away from the mind, and the Five Relations and all actions will be polished to their very best.

Someone may say: "The learning of emperors and kings is not the same as the learning of scholars and students." But this difference only applies to textual exegesis and laboring over compilation. If one makes reverent seriousness the basis, investigates the principles of all things in order to extend knowledge, and examines oneself in order to practice it—are these not the essentials for making the method of mind subtle and transmitting the learning of the Way? And is there in this respect any difference between emperors and kings and ordinary men?

If you pay attention to this, it will indeed be fortunate!

MD

Yi I: Memorial in Ten Thousand Words

[From *Yulgok chönsö* 5:13b–15b; 24b–25b]

What is called timeliness means being flexible in accordance with time to establish laws and to save the people. Master Ch'eng, when discussing the *Book of Changes*, said that to know time and to recognize the timely circumstances are the great method of learning the *Book of Changes*. He also said: "Change according to time is the constant rule." In general, laws are established according to a particular time; as times change, the laws do not remain the same. Shun followed upon Yao, and appropriately everything remained unchanged, yet he divided the nine provinces into twelve. Yü followed upon Shun, and appropriately everything remained unchanged, yet he changed the twelve provinces back to nine. Was this because sages like to make changes? They did so only in accordance with their time. In general, what can be changed in accordance with a particular time are the laws and institutions. Unchangeable, however, in ancient as well as in present times, are the kingly way, humane government, the three bonds that exist between ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife, and the five constants of humaneness, rightness, ritual decorum, wisdom, and trustworthiness. In later generations, when skilled mastery of the Way was no longer to be found, the unchangeable was at times changed, and the changeable was at times adhered

to. For this reason the days of political order were generally few, whereas the days of disorder were generally numerous.

Speaking of our eastern region, Korea, there is no textual evidence of Chi Tzu's Eight Rules,³ and when at the time of the Three Kingdoms, disturbances broke out, the government policies were obliterated. The five hundred years of the former dynasty, Koryŏ, were darkened by the wind and rain of political crises. Arriving at our dynasty, King T'aejo started the dynastic fortunes. King Sejong preserved and advanced them and first used the *Six Codes of Governance* (*Kyŏngje yukchŏn*). Under King Sŏngjong the *State Code* [1485] was published, and thereafter, in accordance with time, laws were established and called the *Supplementary Code*. Because sage-king followed upon sage-king, there was appropriately nothing that was not the same; the one used the *Six Codes of Governance*, the other the *State Code*. That these were augmented by the *Supplementary Code* was but an adjustment to the time.

At the beginning of the dynasty, the officials were free to submit their opinions. Institutions were created, but people did not regard them as strange nor was the execution of law interrupted. The people were thus able to rest easy. In contrast, Yŏnsangun was wild and unruly and his expenditures lavish. He changed the tribute laws of the dynastic founders and was daily intent on harming the people and benefiting the royal house. When King Chungjong brought about a restoration, the government should have been made as before, but during the first years those in charge of the state were only ignorant meritorious subjects. Thereupon the worthies of the year *kimyo* [1519] wanted action, but they were falsely accused and destroyed. This was followed by the purge of the year *ŭlsa* [1545], which was even more cruel than the one of [1519]. From then on the Neo-Confucian literati lost heart and regarded an unobtrusive life as good luck. Since they did not dare speak up on state affairs, cunning and powerful groups acted according to their own will and without scruples. What was profitable to them they preserved as old laws; what stood in their way they abolished with new laws. They were solely intent on fleecing the people and fattening themselves. They went so far that the state was daily more hard pressed and the national foundation daily more weakened. Was there anyone who thought about this matter, even if only for an instant?

There are five principles for pacifying the people: first, to open one's sincere mind in order to obtain the sympathy of all subordinates; second, to revise the tribute plan in order to abolish the hardship of coercion and extortion; third, to uphold frugality in order to reverse the trend of extravagance; fourth, to change the selection of slaves for service in the capital in order to relieve the unhappy

lot of the public and private slaves; fifth, to revise the military administration in order to strengthen internal as well as external security.

Now I see that Your Majesty's qualifications are impressive: your humanity sufficient to protect the people, your intelligence sufficient to discern cunning, your resoluteness sufficient to decide on sanctions. But Your Majesty's aspiration to become a sage is not firm, and your sincerity to seek right rule is not genuine. Assuming that you cannot reach the level of earlier kings, you withdraw and refer to your own smallness, giving no thought to advancement and development. I do not know what you have experienced to make you like this. If you make a genuine effort toward self-cultivation and put your sincere mind to pacifying the people, you will be able to find worthies and rule with them, you will be able to correct the abuses and salvage the situation.

MD