Controversy over Ritual in 17th Century Korea

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The 17th century in Korean history was a turbulent period of cruel and sometimes bloody conflicts between different groups of the ruling class, usually called 'parties' or 'factions'. Their clashes began in the 16th century, but the last decades of the 17th century are considered to be the period when the partisan struggle reached its peak and determined all important aspects of Korean domestic policy. All members of the yangban stratum—the ruling elite in Chosön—had to take a part in the conflicts, because to avoid them meant non-participation in state and public activities and self-isolation. This factionalism paralyzed the bureaucratic system and created many victims, as it was inseparable from frequent purges and repressions against hostile factions.

The social institution called 'party' is not of Korean origin. Its history began in China, where such bureaucratic groups were usual. The Confucian orthodoxy has never recognized the right of officials to establish factions or groups, the purpose of which would be different from those of the state. Ideological tradition proclaimed the prosperity of the state as the only purpose for every perfect Confucian. Such a theory was hardly compatible with partisan activity which was an object of severe and usually fruitless criticism from at least the Tang (7-10th century) until the end of the Chinese empire. Since the Song dynasty the phrase "the partisan struggle destroys the coun-

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try” was widespread in the Far East. A similar expression belongs to the notorious Chinese politician and scholar Ouyang Xiu who said “Common ideas unite noble persons and they become friends, common profits unite vulgar people and they become partisan members.”

The period of partisan struggle in Chosŏn lasted from the 1560s to the 1730s (certain traces of it could be found also in later periods). However, the history of the partisan struggle is inseparable from the so-called ‘literati purges’ which marked the previous period of Korean history. These events were shown by E. Wagner in his well-known work in which a detailed description of this political turmoil.²

The roots of factionalism in Korea were deep enough, but the formal reasons for a new conflict often were strange and incomprehensible from a modern European point of view. A special role was played by the rites which had a great significance in the traditional culture of the Far East. The correct execution of rites was a necessary condition for the stability of both the society and the Universe. The medieval Koreans were sure that mistakes in the ritual field would inevitably lead to chaos and catastrophes. In the Far Eastern traditional consciousness, rites, especially those connected with the monarch or members of the royal family, were the sacral foundation of general harmony. This great importance of the rites was shown during the famous ‘Controversy over Ritual’ which was the culmination of the partisan struggle in Late Chosŏn. ‘Controversy over Ritual’ provides us with interesting material for a case study of political confrontation within the traditional Confucian society.

The present article is based upon the doctoral dissertation entitled “Parties and Political Struggle in Late Yi Korea” I submitted to Leningrad State University. The main sources of this article and dissertation are original Korean manuscripts and xylographs preserved in the rich collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Leningrad Branch. However, many difficulties in my work resulted from the lack of recent secondary literature in Soviet libraries.

By the beginning of the 1660s there were three parties in the Korean elite: the Namin (Southerners), Soin (Westerners) and Pugin (Northerners), but the latter had not recovered from the disaster of 1623 when the Westerners

2 E. W. Wagner, The Literati Purges: Political Conflict in Early Yi Korea, Cambridge, MA, 1974
organized a successful coup d'état and dethroned Kwanghaegun who during his rule (1608-1623) enthusiastically supported by the Pugin. During the sweeping purges following the coup d'état, many Pugin were dismissed from office, imprisoned and even executed. Thus, in fact only two factions, the Namin and the Sōin, were active participants in the political game. The parties had 'geographical' names, but this does neither show the orientation of the parties in foreign policy nor regional differences in their composition. The problem of existing regional or social differences between the parties is still unsolved. Traditionally, the names of the Korean parties indicated the district of Seoul in which their founders lived. The founder of the Sōin's party, Sim Ŭi-gyŏm(1535-1587) lived in the western part of the Korean capital, while the residence of the Namin's first leader situated in southern Seoul. Korean parties had no institutionalized, rigid, organizational structure. They consisted of a small active nucleus (mostly high-ranking political and administrative figures) numbering only a few dozen persons and numerous small yangban.

In old Korea, every rich nobleman had under his protection many poor yangban who were connected with him through patron relations. He helped them to find official posts and sometimes permitted them to live in his house. In exchange, his clients executed his orders and commissions, not excluding morally dubious and even criminal ones. [For interesting evidence provided by European travellers and diplomats, see Opisanje Korei [Description of Korea]—a huge compilation of materials on late traditional Korea published in Russian in 1901].

Every Korean party may be characterized as an agglomeration of clients subordinated to a few powerful persons who formed the party leadership. When a party took power, it usually purged all members of the other parties and appointed its own members to all important posts. As I suppose, rivalry for posts was the key factor leading to endless political turmoil and frequent purges in Late Chosŏn, the number of posts was strictly limited and did not increase over time, while the number of candidates increased greatly. According to the system of hereditary and semi-hereditary social groups existing in Late Chosŏn, the right to occupy official posts was the most significant privilege of the highest social elite. Korean law determined that if members of one family had not served the state for more than three generations, the family lost its yangban position

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3 Opisanje Korei. 2nd edition, Moscow, 1960, p 350
and privileges. This would have been a tragedy for an ambitious nobleman, because a Confucian tradition looked upon public service as the only way of life for a noble and moral person. As a result, yangban did their best to receive official posts. The number of yangban increased greatly with the increase of the population, and such a development made success in the official world more and more difficult. The idea that the partisan struggle had sociodemographic roots has been expressed by a number of scholars, for example, by Lee Ki-baik. The subjects of the partisan disputes were very often not connected with political problems, and beneath the surface there was a vulgar power-for-power's sake struggle.

In the 1620s-1650s, Korean political life was controlled by the Sŏin's party, but sometimes representatives from other parties were allowed to occupy certain posts (usually not very important ones). The temporary stabilization of the political situation probably resulted from this measure as well as from the dangerous international situation. The role of foreign threat as a stabilizer of factional conflict was noted by the first researcher of the history of partisan struggle, Yi Kön-ch'ang, more than a hundred years ago.

A new crisis began in the 1660s. The circumstances which led to this crisis were occasioned by a difficult situation in the ruling family. King Injo (ruled 1623-1649) had four sons, the eldest of whom was proclaimed heir to the thrown as Prince Sohyŏn. After the Manchu invasion of 1637 he and his brother, Prince Pongnim, had to go as hostages to Manchuria and later to Peking. There he took lessons from European missionaries and became one of the first high-ranking Koreans to have direct contact with Western civilization. However, fate did not make him king, because only two months after returning home he died in Seoul. As was usual in the medieval world, the death of such prominent a person was followed by rumours about his having been poisoned or secretly killed, but this is hardly believable. Thus, Prince Pongnim became the new heir to the Korean throne. He ruled the country from 1649 to 1659 and is known as Hyojong. Hyojong was succeeded by his son Hyŏnjong.

Hyojong died on June 23, 1659. His death posed a difficult problem to all Confucian scholars and experts on rites, who could not decide on what kind of mourning was to be observed by Queen Dowager Cho, who was the

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4. Lee Ki-baik, Mmpok-kwa Yŏksa (Nation and History), Seoul, 1987, p81
5. Yi Kön-ch'ang, Tangūi tongnyah, Seoul, 1971
second wife of Hyojong's father, King Injong. Traditionally, Far Eastern scholars payed great attention to the mourning system, and all problems concerning this subject were discussed in dozens, often even in hundreds of memorials written by the most prominent persons. The main manual and textbook of Confucian rites was the Yili or Book of Rites In the Yili a clear distinction is made between the eldest son continuing the main line changja and any other (collateral) sons. After the death of an eldest son members of his family had to observe mourning for three years, while in the case of another son's death the period of mourning was limited to one year However, the Yili also said "If the eldest son dies, the next son becomes the changja."

The Ministry of Rites, the administrative body responsible for the correct execution of the most important rites, was confronted with this controversy after the death of Hyojong, and, being unable to find a good solution of the problem, decided to ask for help. On June 24, the Ministry of Rites informed the Court and highest officials about the situation. It wrote: "Queen Dowager has a problem with [the period she must wear] her mourning dress. There is no [information on this] in the Kukbo Orjeui. Must [she] wear [her mourning] dress for three years? Must [she] wear [her mourning] dress for one year? There is nothing reliable in the rites." This was the beginning of the most bitter factional dispute known as the 'Controversy over Ritual'.

Opinions on the subject differed greatly. At first, a group of influential scholar-officials, led by Councillor Chong Tae-hwa himself, presented a memorial to the new king Hyojong in which they insisted on one-year mourning, because the late king was only the Queen-Dowager's second son. Among the most active supporters of a one-year mourning were the outstanding Korean philosopher, poet and politician Song Si-yol, a leader of the Soin's party, and his closest friend, Song Chun-gil. In 1659, Song Si-yol was the minister of administration, a very powerful post. Besides his considerable political influence, Song Si-yol was considered as one of the best experts on Neo-Confucian theory. Therefore, his support of a one-year mourning period was significant.  

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6 Kang Sang-un, "Yesong-kwa Noso Pundang (Controversy over Ritual and Separation of Young and Old Parties), Han, 1974, No.7, p.55
8 Ibid.
The subject under discussion was of extreme importance because it was connected with sacral rites concerning the royal family. It would have been strange if the political opponents of Song Si-yŏl and the dominating Western party had not used this excellent opportunity to begin a large-scale campaign of criticizing them and their activities. The organizers of the attack were leaders of the Namin who had been almost isolated from the political life since the 1630s. Yun Hyu, a leader of the Namin's party, and, like Song Si-yŏl, not only politician, but also a scholar and writer, declared that mourning was to be observed for three years. Yun Hyu insisted that if Hyojong had occupied the throne he would have been the heir of the main line. However, the Confucian scholars did not play any important role in the conflict, which from its beginning was stimulated by factional controversy. The one-year mourning suggestion was supported by the Sŏin, while their main opponents from the Namin's party insisted on a three-year mourning period. The few remaining members of the Pugun's party probably did not take part in the discussion, because the author did not find any evidence of their active participation during this Controversy over ritual.

Song Si-yŏl formulated the theory of the so-called 'four cases of heirship', which was based upon his long-term study of the Confucian classics. According to his theory, the heirship can be 'correct and truthful' when the heir is the eldest son, 'incorrect and untruthful' when the heir is a grandson, the father of whom is not an eldest son, 'correct but untruthful' when the heir is a younger son, 'incorrect but truthful' when the heir is a grandson, the father of whom was an eldest son. According to this theory, the heirship of Hyojong was 'correct but untruthful'. This conclusion confused a lot of scholars, who saw it as a dangerous heterodoxy and encroachment on the power of the ruling monarch. Among these cautious Confucians were even many Sŏin who had been loyal followers of their leader before. It is quite understandable, because the main accusation of the Namin against Song Si-yŏl was that he denied the legitimacy of Hyojong's power by dening his right to be the only legitimate heir. However, the majority of the Sŏin continued to support Song Si-yŏl.

In the course of the discussion, both sides used refined casuistics, quot-

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9 Kukcho pgam, Vol. 39, pp 2b-3a
Chogyo kumun, Vol. 3, pp 66a-66b
10 Kim Tu-hŏn, "Yeo-ŭi Yesok," Han, 1974, No 7, p.25
ing an astonishing number of historical and Confucian texts. In the present article, we shall not pay much attention to their arguments, because they are more interesting for the history of Confucianism in Korea than for the political history of the country. I have characterized the basic features of each side's position above.\(^{11}\)

By the spring of 1660 accusations against Song Si-yŏl were so intense that the king himself decided to write him a personal letter. In it, Hyŏnjong expressed his support and calmed Song Si-yŏl "Since old times loyal and wise people have been slandered".\(^{12}\) However, even the personal unambiguous sympathy of the monarch was unable to stop the furious attack against the Sŏm's party and its most powerful leader. In the third month of 1660, a long memorandum was sent to Hyŏnjong by Hŏ Mok, who later became a famous politician, but who at the beginning of the 1660s was only a low-ranking official. In his memorandum, Hŏ Mok requested to call together a council of the highest officials and the most prominent experts on the Confucian ritual theory. The council was to study the possibility of replacing one-year mourning by a three-year mourning period. The arguments of Hŏ Mok were similar to those used by other supporters of the Namin's party: after the death of the eldest son, the late king had occupied his place, and therefore he was to be regarded not as the second son, but as the changja.\(^{13}\)

Hŏ Mok's proposal was adopted, and the council was assembled. Among its participants were members of both parties and thus both opinions on the length of the mourning period were represented, but the domination of the Sŏm in the most influential government posts determined the complete victory of Song Si-yŏl's proposal. A significant role in the dispute was played by the Minister of Rites, Yun Kang. He must have been a very cautious person, because up to that moment he had not taken part in the ritual discussion, in spite of its being closely connected with the tasks of his office. Now he decided to stop the dispute, but did it in a careful manner. During the council, Yun Kang proposed to look for a similar situation in the preceding history of the dynasty. By 1660, the dynasty had ruled Korea for more than two and a half centuries, and it was possible that the necessary precedent existed in the Korean past. Yun Kang's proposal was not only very careful, but also very Confucian, for it reflected an essential feature of

11. Cheyo chuby, Vol. 11, pp. 31a–69b (a detailed survey of arguments)
13. Ibid., Vol. 39, pp.13a–14a
the traditional Korean mentality. A tendency in every difficult case to find a precedent in written materials. Few years later, during a new dispute on ritual problems, this feature of Confucian political culture was clearly expressed by Councillor Kim Su-hüng who said: “The matters of rites are too important to be discussed on the basis of oral legends and not written documents.”

The main official source of dynastic history was the Chosön Wango Sillok. Copies of this detailed and vast daily chronicle were kept in Seoul and a few mountain fortresses. Only a strictly limited number of scholars and officials had the right to use these materials. Hyŏnjong ordered his historiographers to begin to study these materials, and soon the precedent was found. A similar situation had taken place after the death of Yejong (ruled Chosŏn in 1469 for only few months). After his death, the Queen Dowager observed mourning for one year only. Thus, the position of Song Si-yŏl received historiographical support. It gave all the foundation for not changing the length of the mourning period.

However, the Namin did not want to retreat. The problem was too important, and victory in the struggle would be an excellent opportunity for taking power and a number of profitable posts. Just after the above-mentioned council, Hyŏnjong received a new memorial authored by Yun Sŏn-do, an outstanding poet and a retired official. In his youth he had been one of the organizers of the 1623 coup d'état. By the 1660s, this remarkable member of the Namin’s party had dedicated himself mostly to his poetical work. The memorial was full of accusations against Song Si-yŏl. The king considered this action an attempt to press for a new decision and became angry. Having read the memorial, Hyŏnjong said: “Yun Sŏn-do has an dishonest heart. He dares to present a memorial full of sly schemes and wants [thereby] to destroy a connection between the monarch and his subordinates.” The king rejected Yun Sŏn-do’s proposal.

Yun Sŏn-do’s action made the Sŏin angry, but their hate was mixed with anxiety. Yi Kŏn-ch’ang, a 19th century scholar and researcher of factionalism, wrote in his Tangŭi t’ongnyak (Sketch of partisan opinions) that after the case of Yun Sŏn-do many Sŏin began to say: “Namin want to falsify this [the length of mourning] and use it for killing Song Si-yŏl

14 Hyŏnjong sillok, Vol. 22, p. 28a
15. Kukcho p'ogram, Vol. 39, p. 15a
and other Sŏin”.\textsuperscript{16} Certainly, the Namin at that time had no such blood-thirsty plans. On the other hand, the Sŏin's party was not likely to be afraid of such a development, but desired to punish a rebel who openly tried to criticize the dominating Sŏin's party and its famous leader Song Si-yŏl. The most influential leaders of the Sŏin did thier best to make the king as angry at Yun Sŏn-do and his followers as possible. Their efforts were successful as a result of their campaign, Yun Sŏn-do was exiled to a distant county Members of the Namin's party tried to help the poet, but were unsuccessful. Some of those who protected Yun Sŏn-do or asked the king to pardon him lost their posts. In the 5th month, after a year had passed since the death of Hyojong, the mourning was ended. Thus, the first stage of the Controversy over Ritual was won by the Sŏin's party. This greatly strengthened its position. The most considerable influence over the decision-making process at Court was wielded by Song Si-yŏl himself.

Having lost all important posts, the Namin dreamed about counterattack and revenge and waited for a favourable moment. An attempt occurred in 1666, when Yu Se-ch'ŏl, a scholar-official from Kyŏngsang province, handed in a collective petition to the king. The petition was concerned with the problem of mourning, and the main object of criticism was Song Si-yŏl. Yu Se-ch'ŏl collected about 1400 signatures from the Namin's party in his native province, but the attempt failed, as did the next one organized by the Namin four years later, in 1670.\textsuperscript{17} The total monopolization of power in Chosŏn by the Sŏin's party also had certain favorable consequences. It led to political stabilization. Like all other stable periods in the 16-17th centuries, however, it was only temporary. The Court and the highest officials had to pay much more attention to practical activities, including measures against the famines which were dangerously frequent in Korea at that time (the pages of the Kakebo poyam, an abridged chronicle of Chosŏn dynasty, are full of information about famines).

Partisan fever rose again in 1674, when Lady Chang, Hyojong's Queen and Hyŏnjong's mother, died. At that time, Queen Dowager Cho was still alive, and the question of how long she would have to observe mourning was again at the center of heated disputes. If the husband of the last queen had been an eldest son, mourning would have to be observed for one year,

\textsuperscript{16} Yi Kŏn-ch'ang, Tangūs tongnyuk, Seoul, 1971, p. 21 (supplement)
\textsuperscript{17} Cheju kimun, Vol. 3, pp. 75a-75b
otherwise for only nine months. The question was similar to the turbulent discussions of 1660, but the Southerners decided to use the situation for a new attempt at pushing the Sŏin out of government. Suddenly, Hyŏnjong received a memorial from To Sin-jing, a Namin and unknown scholar who argued in favour of a one-year mourning period. Therefore, the king assembled a new council of scholars, experts and officials to solve the problem. The first council on August 14 could not find a reliable solution. The next meeting took place August 15. Some experts participating in the discussion explained that the term changja meant not only 'the eldest lineal son' but also 'the eldest surviving son of the main wife (not concubine)'. The Namin continued to insist that the adoption of a nine-month mourning period would mean a denial of the sovereign's legitimacy. The Sŏngjongwun (Royal Secretariat) presented a similar report. This development displeased the king, who had understandable reasons for being angry: there was a possibility of a terrible mistake in such an important field as the execution of rites concerning the king himself and members of the royal family. The king ordered the arrest of several high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Rites. He also sent the Councillor Kim Su-hŭng (needless to say, from the ruling Sŏin's party) into retirement and appointed to this important post the Namin Ho Chŏk. Many censors of the Saganwun (Board of Censors) were also expelled from office, because they attempted to stop the repressions by imploring and admonishing the king.\(^{18}\)

Now we can only guess how this situation might have changed over time, because on October 17 Hyŏnjong suddenly died. He was succeeded by his son known by his temple name, Sukchong. In 1674 the new king was extremely young, he was only 13.

The half-century long reign of Sukchong was marked by a series of political crises and coup d'état, and was an epoch of unprecedented instability. In this period the partisan struggle reached its greatest intensity. To a certain degree, it was provoked by many features of the king's psychological nature. The more one reads on his life and activities, the more one gets to dislike him. He was cruel and hot-tempered, but weak-willed person. He was often under considerable influence from his Court and officials, and many of his actions are perplexing, strange and inconsistent. Very often, Sukchong avenged himself of those who just before had been his best consultants and

\(^{18}\) *Ibid.*, Vol 3, p. 77b
friends, and soon began to mourn their fate.

Only one month after the beginning of his rule, the king received a memorial from Kwak Se-gŏn, an obscure Confucian from Chinju. He accused Song Si-yŏl of "destroying the rites and disturbing the state affairs". The Sŏin's party tried to punish the rebel, but did not succeed. Kwak Se-gŏn's action was only the signal for a mass-attack on the Sŏin's party and its prominent leader. Kwak Se-gŏn's memorial was succeeded by many letters written to Sukchong by the Namin protesting against decisions taken by Song Si-yŏl and requested severe punishment for him. The Sŏin did everything to save their leader. They stressed his old age (at that time Song Si-yŏl was 71), outstanding talents and great merits, but all these arguments achieved no results. By this time, the political superiority of the Namin was clear. They had established control over the highest administrative post of Councillor occupied by Hö Mok, a Namin politician. By the end of 1674, the Namin's party probably also controlled other important posts in different government bodies. This determined the fate of Song Si-yŏl as well as of a number of other active Sŏin. After the official demand for his dismissal presented to the king by the Saganwon and other important offices in which the Namin formed a majority, Song Si-yŏl was exiled to the province of Hamgyŏng.¹⁹

This incident is known in Korean history as 'the case of Insŏn-taebi's mourning' and may be seen as typical for a Chosŏn coup d'état of that period. In Chosŏn, there were two possible ways for seizing power. Sometimes the conspirators tried to overthrow a ruling king by force and replace him with their own candidate, usually a member of the Yi family considered to be sympathetic to the plot organizers. This was an extremely dangerous course and true Confucians could not favor such a way of action. Indeed, the idea of an armed revolt against the sovereign was probably even more abhorred in Korea's traditional political culture than in medieval Europe. The period of active partisan struggle began in the 1570s and lasted until the end of the 1730s. During these one and a half centuries of political turmoil and violence only two attempts at overthrowing the king took place. The first was in 1623 and led Injŏ to power, and the second was inspired by Yi Injwa in 1727 and failed. The alternative to a coup was seizing power without overthrowing the king. The usual method was to slander one's opponents,


*Chosŏn chorye*, Vol. 12, p. 18a
and to make the king dismiss them and instead appoint to the highest posts supporters of the plot’s organizers. After establishing control over the most important posts, the victorious party began purges on the lower levels of the state system. This method of political fighting was more acceptable to persons educated in the traditional Confucian style.

The fall of Song Si-yŏl and Kim Su-hŭng meant the replacement of the Sŏn’s party by the Namin’s party, supporters of which occupied the majority of key posts within the Korean establishment. Among the new rulers of the country there were Hŏ Mok and Yun Sŏn-do, as well as Yun Hye, who had now returned from his exile. Soon after the dismissal of Song Si-yŏl, Yun Hye sent a letter to Sukchong in which he expressed his support of the king’s decision. He stated “Alas! on the surface Song Si-yŏl behaved like a virtuous Confucian, but in his heart he had dark intentions.”

After taking power, a successful party often separated into two factions, which sometimes became independent parties, for example, the Namin’s and Pugin’s parties in the 1590s and Noron’s (Old Doctrine) and the Soron’s (Young Doctrine) parties one century later. However, the division of a party did not always result in its transformation into two new factions. If a party kept power for a long period, it usually had enough time for such a transformation, if not, then after the end of its influence, the party’s factions often reunited into one party. The separation of a party into factions seems to have been the result of internal social processes within Late Chosŏn society. As mentioned above, the basic stimulus for partisan struggle was fighting for positions in the establishment. Usually, after capturing power, a victorious party discovered a simple, but unfortunate fact: posts were never numerous enough to be distributed among all its supporters. Conflicts among former friends arose, and new groups were formed that, under favourable circumstances, could develop into new parties.

A similar process began in the Namin’s party after 1674. The object of the first discussions among the winners was the future fate of their enemies. A Namin, known as the ‘Namin Ch’ŏngnyu’, demanded large-scale persecution of the Sŏn. Their leader, Hŏ Mok, spent more than ten years in exile after being accused by Song Si-yŏl, and his dreams of revenge are understandable. Another group was called the ‘Namin T’angnyu’ and tried to avoid bloodshed. However, very soon the discussion about the fate of Song Si-yŏl

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20. Ch'ogyo kimun, Vol. 3, p 87b
changed through mutual accusations. The Sukchong Sillok says "[They] slandered each other and began to consider [one another] as great enemies." This was typical and only a new coup d'état prevented both factions from transforming themselves into new parties.

As long as Song Si-yol was alive, the Namin (especially their 'Ch'ongnyu' faction) could not sleep in peace. In 1679, they launched a new campaign to achieve his execution. In the spring of that year, Song Sang-min tried to protect Song Si-yol, but he was arrested and tortured. After this event, several leading state officials requested that Song Si-yol be sent to "a remote island and be strictly isolated." Hö Mok, an aged leader of the 'Ch'ongnyu' faction, took an active part in the discussion despite the fact that he was retired and insisted on Song Si-yol's execution. After these attacks, Song Si-yol was sent to Kojudo island and 'isolated' there. The life of this remarkable philosopher was in evident danger, but he was saved by a sudden and unexpected change in the political situation.

The first stage of a new coup d'état was the April 26 incident of 1680. This event is strange and rather comical from a modern European point of view. Before the incident, the grandfather of Councillor Hö Chök had received an honorary title. For this occasion, Hö Chök gave a banquet in his mansion and among the invited guests was the young king himself. When Sukchong wanted to leave his palace for Hö Chok's house, he could not find his marquee and asked for it. He was told that the marquee (His Majesty's marquee!) had been taken by Hö Chök Sukchong thought that such action showed disrespect and disloyalty and did not go to the banquet. This incident was certainly of small political importance, but Sukchong was young and quick-tempered, and in a situation of everyday instability so typical at 17th century Korea, these personality features of the ruler could have considerable significance. The king inquired about the guests of the banquet. Because most of them were the Namin, the king showed his power by replacing some high-level officials with their opponents of the Namin's party.

21. Sukchong sillok, Vol. 8, p.33a
22. Yi Kôn-ch'ang, Ibid., pp. 28-29 (supplement)
23. Choja kumum, Vol. 3, pp. 91a-91b
24. Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 92a
25. Yi Kôn-ch'ang, Ibid., p. 31 (supplement)
Certainly, the king’s displeasure was provoked by the Sŏin, who considered the situation an excellent opportunity for seizing power. The most suitable and traditional way for this was personnel changes within the highest echelons and subsequent large-scale purges. First it was necessary to make the king angry at the high ministers. The best method was accusations of high treason, i.e., organization of a plot against the king. It is difficult or even impossible to know if such accusations were correct. In 1680 the Sŏin’s party used this old method Kim Sŏk-ju, one of the few Sŏin who occupied high post even during the years 1674–1680 (he was a relative of the king) accused Hŏ Kyŏn, a son of Councillor Hŏ Chŏk by one of his concubines Long before, Hŏ Kyŏn had been exiled after beating a slave concubine of Kim U-myŏng, Sukchong’s father-in-law. During his exile, he was reported to have established contacts with exiled princes who were being punished for their unvirtuous behavior. They were all accused of plotting against Sukchong and arrested. Then Kim Sŏk-ju insisted on the dismissal of Councillor Hŏ Chŏk. This was an usual maneuver, because control over such an important post was necessary for any party. Kim Su-hang, who had suffered with Song Si-yŏl, replaced Hŏ Chŏk. This was only the first dismissal. By the end of 1680 all members of the Namun’s party had left their posts, some of them were arrested, exiled or even executed. Among them were Hŏ Chŏk who was ordered to kill himself as well as Yun Hyu, an outstanding philosopher and active partisan fighter and many others. Instead a great number of Sŏin returned from exile.

The return of Song Si-yŏl was the greatest triumph for this aged scholar-official and philosopher who by that time had become an idol for the whole Sŏin’s party. He arrived in Seoul at the end of 1680. The king himself organized a solemn meeting rite (six years before Sukchong had exiled Song Si-yŏl, ten years later he would order the philosopher to commit suicide, and twenty years after he would bemoan the tragic fate of his ‘best subject’). As soon as Song Si-yŏl arrived in the capital, Sukchong invited him for a long talk, during which Song Si-yŏl behaved almost as the king’s tutor, loyal, but honest and rigid.

26 About this case, see Chosa chuby, Vol. 12, p 20a
27. Chosa kimun, Vol. 3, pp 92b–93a
28. Kukiebo jogam, Vol. 43, pp 11a–14b
It was a complete victory of the Sŏn’s party, but it was far from being the end of the partisan struggle. On the contrary, ‘Controversy over Ritual’ stimulated inter-party friction. The victory of one party was the defeat of another, which soon would do its best to recover its position and to start a counter-attack. Stabilization was impossible as long as the social roots of partisan strife remained untouched, and the king himself did nothing to prevent new clashes. This situation continued to exist in Chosŏn long after the ‘Controversy over Ritual’ until the 1730s when Yŏngjo began his successful policy of equalization.

GLOSSARY

Changga 長子
Ch'ŏng T'ae-hwa 鄭太和
Ch'wa chibyo 朝野輯要
Ch'wa kmun 朝野記聞
Ch'ŏngnam 淸南
Controversy over Ritual 禮訟
Correct and truthful 亦正亦體
Correct but untruthful 體而不正
Councillor 領議政
Hŏ Chŏk 許積
Hŏ Kyŏn 許堅
Hŏ Mok 許穆
incorrect and untruthful 不正不體
incorrect but truthful 不體而正
Kim Sŏk-ju 金錫爵
Kim Su-hang 金壽恒
Kim Su-hŭng 金壽興
Kim U-myŏng 金佑明
Kukcho Oryeui 國朝五禮儀
Kukcho pogram 國朝寶鑑
Kwak se-gŏn 郭世棟
Lady Chang 張嬉姹
Lee Ki-baek 李基白
Literate purges 士禍

Minister of Administration
吏曹判書
Minister of Rites 禮曹判書
Ministry of Rites 禮曹
Namn 南人
Noron 老論
party 黨
Pongnim 鳳林
Pugin 北人
Queen Dowager Cho 趙大妃
Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修
Sin Ói-gyŏm 沈義謙
Sŏn 西人
Song Sang-min 宋尙敏
Song Si-yŏl 宋時烈
Soron 少論
T'angnam 濟南
Tangši tongnyak 黨議通略
the case of Inson-aebi's mourning
仁宣大妃服制問題
the partisan struggle destroys
the country 黨爭誤國
To Sin-jŏng 都慎微
Yi In-jwa 李麟佐
Yi Kŏn-ch’ang  李建昌  Yun Hyu  尹鈺
Yu  儀禮  Yun Kang  尹隆
Yŏkpyŏn kisul  植藜室記述  Yun Sŏn-do  尹善道
Yu Se-ch’ŏl  柳世哲