Economic Transformation and Socio-Political Trends in Sixteenth-Century East Asia

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Introduction

Research on China and Japan during the past two decades has paid great attention to the sixteenth century, deeming it an important era of transformation. For scholars of China this period is fascinating in that it represents a critical juncture in history where massive social changes are clearly revealed for the first time. Similarly, students of Japanese history view this century with considerable interest, for they consider it to be the period when the transition from a medieval to a modern society was effected.

In contrast to this active state of research on the sixteenth century in China and Japan, scholarly inquiry into this age in Korea lags badly behind that on other periods, and indeed conventional wisdom presumes this period to have been a declining one, a 'dark age'.

There are reasons one might provide to explain why the sixteenth century in Korea has been understood in such negative terms. As is well-known,
numerous distortions were introduced into Korean historiography during the period of Japanese colonial administration and these have bequeathed even to the present day an unnecessarily negative understanding of the Korean past. As one example—and one of the most tenacious—we may cite the belief that the Chosŏn monarchy was brought to ruin by literati purges, factional feuding, and reliance upon neo-Confucianism. The sixteenth century is precisely the period in Korean history when the literati purges were most frequent and neo-Confucianism was most flourishing. Accordingly, insofar as negative preconceptions of these phenomena held sway, it is not surprising that this period lost its interest as an object of research. Very recently there have been efforts made to shatter such stereotypes in some areas of Korean history. However, even to the present this period, by and large, has been avoided due to the power of such preconceptions.

In accounts of Chinese and Japanese history, the sixteenth century is treated as a period of fundamental transformation, when the circulation of commodities on a large scale was realized. Domestically, markets in farm villages formed and developed into a unified market system, while externally there was a great expansion in the volume of foreign trade. A necessary observation here is that the political conditions accompanying such an economic transformation were by no means tranquil. Late Ming China, in addition to suffering a series of popular uprisings, saw incessant conflict between court eunuchs and literati. Similarly, in Japan we find peasant rebellions (takki 一揆) and the internecine struggles of the sengoku continuing for a century. In view of this there seems a need to illuminate in a somewhat more positive light the sixteenth century literati pruges by tracing their relation to the social and economic changes of that era.

While the results of recent scholarship attempting to obtain a fresh perspective on the topic of Korea in the sixteenth century may be extremely meager when compared with those of research on China and Japan, they do provide a good basis for comparing and contrasting, from an economic point of view, the crucial transformations already confirmed in China and Japan.

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2 For studies on the sixteenth century in Korea urging a fresh understanding of the era see Kang Man-gil, “Simnyuk segi sahoe-i pyŏnhwa”, in Pundan sidae-i yŏksa insik (Seoul Ch'angbi-sa, 1980), Yi Tae-jun, “Juroku seiki no Kankokushi ni taisuru rika no hoko”, in Chosen gakukho, no. 110, January 1984, and Yi Tae-jun, Han'guk sahoea vŏn'gu, 1986. The authors are in basic agreement on economic history but show major differences in their views of political and intellectual history.
with those in known to have occurred in Korea. Such a comparative project
is not only interesting in its own right, but is, I believe, fundamental to the
larger goal of an understanding of transformation in sixteenth-century East
Asia in coherent and systematic terms.

1. Development of Rural Markets and the Maturation
of a Monetary Economy

The most important factor responsible for the growth in the circulation
of goods in sixteenth-century China and Japan is understood to be the for-
mation and development of rural markets. Commercial transactions had
been common in administrative centers and other cities linked to political
power, but by and large it is from this period that the marketplace began to
establish a firm base in rural society.

In the case of China, we can find the first signs of the village markets as
far back as the Sung Dynasty, however, it is generally believed that markets
having fixed schedules of operation and organized into larger regional units
did not come to maturity until the late Ming and early Ch'ing dynasties. These markets had various forms and were known by a variety of names, in-
cluding: hsiao-shih, ts'’un-shih, hsu-shih, ts’ai-o-shih, shih-chi etc.

The growth of the market in Japan reveals a similar pattern. While
there is one school of opinion which dates the advent of the regularized mar-
ket there, conducted three times a month, to the middle of the fourteenth
century, the prototypical example of Japanese rural markets, the rokusai-sai,
meeting six times a month, is thought not to have undergone full-scale de-
velopment until the Sengoku Period following the Onm Rebellion in 1467.

Coincidence or not, in Korea as well it can be confirmed that the rural
market system was gathering strength during roughly the same period. Dur-
ing the Koryŏ period there was a form of market known as the hyŏnshi.

However, like markets in China before the Sung Dynasty, these did not

3 There are numerous studies on the rural markets in China, the work of Shiba Yoshinobu,
"Chugoku chusei no shogyo", in Chuseish koza 3, chusei no toshi (Gakuseisha, 1983) is the
major source on this issue for this paper.
4 Toyoda Takeshi, "Chusei shogyo no shujiyuso", in Takei Nihonsh sosho, ryutsushi 1, 1969
pp 68-69
5 Yi Kyōng-sik, "Sinnyuk segi changshih-ın ŏngmp-kwa kū kiban", in Han'guksa yŏn'gu, vol
57, 1969, pp 76-79
extend beyond administrative centers, and even those disappeared in the series of domestic and foreign disorders of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the mid-fifteenth century, it was noted that provincial markets had not yet formed. "At present in our nation there are markets in the capital, but there are not markets in the towns and counties of the various provinces."6 Documentary sources of this period contain references to a number of types of merchants (e.g., haengsang, yuksang, susang, haesang),7 but the existence of such long-distance commercial activities provides no basis for classifying such merchants as agents of a regularized market. Later in the century early Chosŏn Dynasty commerce underwent great change. From around 1470 markets began to appear across the entire Cholla province. The earliest appearance of the phenomenon involved various localities where people would open "market stalls" (sip'o) on the streets several times a month on fixed days, collectively they were known as changmun.8 Such activity began to show up in two additional provinces, Kyongsang and Ch'ungch'ŏng, and spread to other areas, to the extent that by the early sixteenth century it could be noted that "markets (ch'angmun) have been established in all the provinces."9

The emergence of rural markets at the end of the fifteenth century in the Chosŏn Dynasty has not passed unremarked in studies of this period, but there has been a general reluctance to relate this phenomenon to those of the development of commerce and the growth of a monetary economy. Rather, standard interpretations of these markets, no doubt strongly influenced by negative preconceptions of this period, merely judge them to be the result of starvation brought about by natural disasters or by heavy military and tax burdens imposed by the government. They are seen as the result of efforts on the part of the peasantry to succor the needy and nothing more.10 I am convinced that an investigation of the general conditions surrounding the advent and development of rural markets in East Asia provides a welcome opportunity to sweep away such a negative treatment of this topic, one which has been specifically inflicted upon Korean historiography.

6 Sejong sillok, vol. 59, Sejong 15, 1, msin
7 Kyŏngguk taejong, hojŏn, chapsejo
8 Sŏnggong sillok, vol. 20, Sŏnggong 3, 7, msul
9 Chunggong sillok, vol. 38, Chunggong 15, 3, kyul
10 A prime example is Miyabara Toichū, "Jugoroku seki: Chosen ni okeru chihô ichi", in Chosen gakusho, no. 9, 1955
The simultaneous appearance and growth of rural markets in the three East Asian nations during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries seems far from coincidental. All three nations had greatly extended their agricultural economic power through innovations in agricultural technology. It was this base of enhanced economic might that supported the rise of village markets.

While there are slight differences in the specific timing among the three nations, in general it was from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries that peasants switched to the technique of continuous cultivation, an advance which represents one of the most important transitions in the history of agricultural technology. In China through the T’ang Dynasty the common practice was to allow the land to lie fallow during alternate years using legumes to supply nitrogen necessary for the restoration of soil fertility. This and the practice of crop rotation were technically the most superior systems available. In Japan where the shoen system was wide-spread, common practice was to cultivate only in part, as signified by terms such as kata arashi and nenko. With the Muromachi Period the use of continuous cultivation (mansaku) became prevalent for the first time. In Korea as well, through the middle of the Koryo Dynasty, regular periods of letting the land lie fallow were widely employed, as evidenced by the terms ulyŏk-chŏn and chaeyŏk-chŏn. Yet another result of the development of agricultural technology in Korea was the reformation of the land tax system around the middle of the fifteenth century whereby in principle all good agricultural land was considered to be taxable and under constant cultivation; no official allowance was made for land to lie fallow.

A complex of factors, both social and technical, was responsible for the overcoming of limitations posed by the fallow-field technique. Of the social factors we may surmise that population increase was one of the most important. Daubing seeds in fertilizer prior to planting was an early form of

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11 Nishijima Takechi, "Semmyo-jutsu no nogaku", in Ajia-teki noho to nogyo shakai (Tokyo Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1969), pp 62-63
12 Nishijima Sadao, "Daidenho no shin-kashaku", in Chugoku kenzashi kenkyu(Tokyo Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1966)
13 Toda Yoshimi, "Chusei shoki nogyo no ichi tokushitsu" in Kyoto daigaku bungaku tokushuka, Kokusyu ronshu, vol 1
fertilizer application which had been practiced from ancient times, but there were many technical difficulties involved in full-scale application of fertilizer for the restoration of the fertility of the soil. These included the need to develop superior cultivation tools for weed removal, and the production of fertilizer in the large quantities needed for full-scale cultivation. Such tasks were by no means simple 15

The solution to such technical problems would come with the use of Chiangnan farming methods, which were first developed during the Southern Sung Dynasty and appeared elsewhere throughout the East Asian region from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries 16 The resolution of the difficulties in securing sufficient quantities of fertilizer, through the use of human waste and the ashes of vegetable matter, may be termed a feature common to the entire region. 17

At any rate, in terms of agricultural technology, the historical significance of the ability to make use of the new fertilizer technology on a large-scale was considerable: it brought in its wake the continuous cultivation of land, and in addition, greatly increased the productivity of a given acreage. Furthermore, the formation of rural markets may also be understood as resting upon the foundation of this achievement. Following the improvement in the agricultural economy and in society as a whole, even small-scale peasants were able to gain access to commercial products; markets in the society of rural villages put down roots and began to become visible in some localities, leading to a wide distribution of goods. In sum, the simultaneous growth of rural markets in sixteenth-century East Asia

15 Discussion of the technology of fertilizer application is based upon Nishiyama Takeichi, "Jukufun ko", in Ajia-teki noho to nogyo shakai

16 There are a number of outstanding studies in Japan of the Southern Sung Chiangnan farming techniques, especially those of Amano Gennosuke, Nishijima Sadao and Nishiyama Takeichi. In the case of Korea there is evidence that form the latter part of the fourteenth century the Chiangnan techniques were coming into use, and that at the very latest we can effort to overcome the limitations of fallow field agriculture from this period (see Yi Taejun, "Koryômal-Chosônocchi o-i sahoe pyönhwa") There exists the possibility that the inception of the change in farming technology might be dated somewhat earlier. In the case of Japan it is generally understood that a distinct change in agricultural practices occurred about the latter part of the thirteenth century, with a number of pieces of evidence showing this switch to a more intensive agriculture. See Nagahara Keji, "Chusëi keizaishi soron", in Nihon keizaishi tairiku, vol 2, Chuokoron (Tokyo Tokyo daigaku shuppankai,1966).

stemmed from a prior history of improvement in agricultural technology, and as will be seen below, the growth of such commerce also helped provide the stimulus, in the form of international trade, for the mutual development of the three East Asian nations.

Another aspect of the growth in the circulation of commercial goods in sixteenth-century East Asia is the maturation of a monetary economy. While the history of money itself is quite long, dating from ancient times, the establishment of a unified economic system based upon common use of a standardized currency is entirely different in nature from the mere production of currency and is a much more recent phenomenon. For example, in the case of China, small-value currency already existed in ancient times but had no connection with the rural economy and was not the large-value currency appropriate for settlement of major transactions. Ancient small-value currency was issued as part and parcel of policies dealing with tax and tribute payment. That is to say, ancient currency was characterized by its limited sphere of effectiveness, given that it was a small-currency measure of value needed and used for a specific set of purposes.

A true monetary economy in China originated in the late T’ang Dynasty with the increased use of gold, silver, and silk, and during the Five Dynasties period as various states minted and circulated silver and copper coinage in their territories. The new stage of monetary development thereby attained was extended and rendered systematic in the unified Sung state, copper coinage and silver currency were put into general circulation and used transactions everywhere, whether large or small, foreign or domestic. However, great though they were the developments of this period were still a far cry from those of the flourishing economic state of the 16th century.

For about three centuries from the middle of the tenth century, China suffered a huge outflow of silver resulting from the great demand for it by Islamic traders. This brought about major dislocations in the economy so that even maintaining a metallic currency system became problematic. The motivation behind the issuance of such paper currencies as the chiao-ch’ao and pao-ch’ao by the Southern Sung and its contemporaries, the Chin and

18 The following discussion of Chinese currency follows Shiba Yoshinobu, “Chugoku chusei no shogyo”
19 Miyazaki Iehisada, Godai shosho no Tsuka mondan, 1943
Yuan states, was an inevitable policy whose implementation resulted directly from this shortage of silver.\textsuperscript{21} This fiscal bind in China was not ameliorated in the slightest until after the founding of the Ming Dynasty when the Yung-lo Emperor (r. 1402-1424) instituted and active policy of expansion of silver mines.\textsuperscript{22} This subsequently proved a major factor in the economic success of the sixteenth century, and the reign of the Yung-lo Emperor constitutes a pivotal period in Chinese economic history.\textsuperscript{23}

The primary importance of the expansion of silver mines in China lay in its contribution to the restoration of the use of silver as the basic currency. Later, building upon this achievement, a land and head-tax system using silver for payment was put into practice thereby making the operation of a bi-metallic system of silver and copper standard. The result was a revitalization of the domestic economy. Accompanying this change was the popularity on the international market of such Chinese goods as textiles and porcelain so that silver from all over the world flowed into the Middle Kingdom, blessing it in the sixteenth century with prosperity.\textsuperscript{24}

In the case of Japan, from the eighth and ninth centuries, i.e. the Nara and early Heian Periods, the model of T'ang China was followed, and there were instances where copper coinage was minted and put into circulation. However, this was an ancient form of currency and the territorial extent of its circulation is said to have been limited to the capital and surrounding kinsai areas.\textsuperscript{25} Additionally, in succeeding periods, from the Kamakura period until the late sixteenth century, there was an absence of unified political force and no coinage was minted. Instead, copper cash from China was brought in as part of the tributary arrangements and then widely used as the standard currency.\textsuperscript{26} The resumption of minting dates from the end of the sixteenth century under Toyotomi Hideyoshi. This minting occurred at a time of fresh economic and political development following the Warring States Period. In the beginning, only gold currency and copper cash were minted but with the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate the system became more complex.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp 56-57
\item \textsuperscript{22} William S. Atwell, "International Bullion Flows and the Chinese Economy Circa 1530-1650", \textit{Past and Present}, vol. 95, 1983, p 78
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., pp 78-79
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp 80-86
\item \textsuperscript{25} Kobata Atsushi, \textit{Nihon no kahei}, 1958, p 14
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., Chapter 5, "Chugoku senka no ryutsu"
\end{itemize}
and made use of silver as well as gold and copper  

In the case of Korea, under the Koryŏ Dynasty of the tenth to the thirteenth centuries metallic currencies of iron, copper, and silver vessels were minted by turns. Documents relating the motivation for this minting are quite sparse so that it is difficult to know the exact circumstances in each case, but upon examination of the varieties of currency we may surmise that the Koryŏ government was attempting to keep in step with developments in China. This proved difficult, though, for conditions differed between the two states. Thus, iron and copper coins proved unsuccessful, for among the general populace there was a strong tendency to use grain and cloth as media of exchange. Only the system of silver vessels, inaugurated at the beginning of the twelfth century, found any great frequency of use, most likely due to its convenience in transactions involving international trade. But this system, too, faded in the fourteenth century, a victim of the Chinese shortage of silver, as the vessels were made smaller or were melted down. During the period of Yuan Mongol interference into the domestic affairs of the Koryŏ state, use of Yuan currency, use such as the pao-ch'iao, was forced upon Korea, this system, too, proved unpopular and was later discarded.

After extricating itself from Yuan influence, Koryŏ in the late fourteenth century launched a new currency system by issuing paper currency known as "mulberry currency" (chŏhwâ). Thus the Koryŏ government, like other states in East Asia, was unable to avoid currency problems in the wake of the general shortage of silver in East Asia since the thirteenth century.

Elaboration of the mulberry currency system was temporarily deferred by the political problems attendant upon the change from the Koryŏ to the Chosŏn Dynasty, but once stability had been attained the new regime set its hand to the task. The implementation of this system was far from smooth in that conversion was not guaranteed. The strong preference of the popu-

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27 Toyoda Takeshi, Chusei shogyo no shuyuso, p. 74, and "Shohn ryutsu no yakushin", in Taiket Nihondo sosho, vol 13, Ryutsush 1, 1969, p 120
28 Koryŏsa, 79, sikhwaj hwap'yegŏn
29 In 1287, because the practice of melting down silver vessels and blending them with copper to mint coinage had become alarmingly prevalent, the Koryŏ government issued an edict banning such activity, in 1331 small silver vessels were produced, thereby bringing to an end the use old silver vessels, loc cit.
30 Loc cit
31 Koryŏsa, 79, Kongyang-wang 3 nyŏn 7 wol kon
lace for cloth currency led the government to tinker with the system on several occasions, and about the time that the Ming Yung-lo Emperor was actively pursuing his policy of expansion of silver mines, mulberry currency was replaced with a copper currency system. It may be surmised that the Ming policy gave fresh hope to prospects for a metallic currency system in Choson Korea. Then, in 1429, only four years after the enactment of a copper currency system, the long-standing Choson court request to the Ming authorities that gold and silver be excluded from Korean tributary goods, on the grounds that they were not domestically produced, was granted. This clearly indicates a relaxation in the diplomatic tension between the two states over precious metals around this time. However, this diplomatic success meant that the Choson court would not set out on a policy of active mine developing, for it was feared that the energetic excavation of gold, silver, and copper could only eventually lead to the reinstatement of such precious metals as tribute items. The copper currency system, as well, was in line with this cautious policy for, in fact, it was inaugurated with the purchase of copper from Japan. In sum, the implementation of this system came at a time when prospects for the development of a metallic currency system were virtually ensured, given the Ming mining policy, but, at the same time, it was impossible to have confidence in its long-term diplomatic implications. As a result the system ended up being terminated as an experiment after only twenty years. Thus, in the end, the copper coinage system was thwarted by difficulties in formulating policy on how to obtain raw materials for its continuation.

Following the abandonment of the copper coinage system, the government settled on cloth currency and mulberry currency as the dual media of exchange. Cloth currency had enjoyed great popular use even during periods when mulberry currency and copper cash were circulated. The selection of this dual system signifies official recognition of this reality. In the Kyong guk taejon, the new legal code of the Choson state promulgated in the latter part

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33 At present no concrete evidence exists demonstrating an interrelation between the Ming Chinese policy of silver mine development and the operation of the copper coin system in Choson Korea. However, in view of the temporal congruity between the two and the exclusion of gold and silver from Korean tribute goods, it is possible to infer the existence of such an interrelation as detailed in this paper. I intend in the future to examine this issue in concrete detail. For the operation of the copper coin system in Korea, see Yi Chong-yong, "Choson ch'ogi hwap'yeje-ui pyönch'on".

34 Yi Chong-yong, "Choson ch'ogi hwap'yeje-ui pyönch'on".
of the fifteenth century both cloth currency and mulberry currency are stipulated as official currencies. Later, during the sixteenth century, between these two cloth currency would come to have even greater popularity. From the latter half of the fifteenth century there was an expansion in the production of cotton cloth resulting in a shift from ramie and hemp cloth to cotton as the principal variety of cloth currency. Cloth currency became so wide-spread in circulation that it almost completely eclipsed mulberry currency.

The dominance of cloth currency in Korea during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is a phenomenon which has not escaped notice in prior studies on the period, but it has, if anything, been commonly used as evidence demonstrating the “backwardness” of the Korean economy of this period. This naive viewpoint sees the inability of a metallic currency to take root and the use by the economy of the more appropriate cloth currency as indicative of a primitive barter economy. Yet, in view of the closeness of the economic ties between China and Korea demonstrated thus far, this judgement can only be termed hasty, based as it is on external evidence. Given the fact that the copper coin system was suspended in the early fifteenth century and resumed only in 1625, it is impossible to deny that the development of a metallic currency system in Korea was laggard. However, the sophistication of the dominant cloth currency economy should not be underestimated, either. Following the latter half of the fifteenth century, the main material used as cloth currency was cotton. As will be related later in this paper, not only did cotton become a major commercial item both at home and abroad, the circulation system based upon it developed greatly.

The cloth currency in Korea during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries took osung-p’o as the standard cloth currency (chong-p’o). Osung-p’o (‘five-ply cloth”) consisting of five sung, that is 400 ol (1 sung = 80 ol “strands”); 1 “bolt” (p’il) was 35 ch’ok in length. In addition, in the sixteenth century there was the sangp’o of two-ply and three-ply cloth which was also in wide circulation. These differed from the osung-p’o in that they were woven of 160 ol and 240 ol respectively, with one p’il being 30 ch’ok in length. These were so crudely woven that in popular parlance they became

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35 Kyôngguk taegôn, hojôn, kukp’ye
36 Miyabara Tochi, “Jugoroku soku Chosen ni okeru chihô ichi”
37 The discussion of cloth currency below follows Song Chae-sôn, “Sunmyuk segi myênp’o-ui hwap’ye kimûng”, in Pyon T’ae-sôp paksâ hwagap kinyôm sahak nonch’ong, 1986
known as *ch'up'o* or *akp'o* and could not be used for making clothing. The motive for making such cloth was sheerly economic: for its use as currency. Indeed, the reason why *sangp'o* was created in the first place by cutting short *osũng-p' o* was in an attempt to provide cloth currency suitable for use in minor transactions. The chart below shows the comparative values of the standard *osũng-p' o* (=*Chǒng-po*) and *sangp'o*.

**Comparative Values of Chǒng-p’o and Sang-p’o, with Rice Values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th><em>Chǒng</em> Ratio</th>
<th><em>Sang</em> Ratio</th>
<th>Ply and Length</th>
<th>Value in Rice</th>
<th>Rice Value Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1469</td>
<td>1 : 1</td>
<td>2 : 1</td>
<td>5 ply, 35 <em>ch'ŏk</em></td>
<td>4 <em>tu</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1502</td>
<td>2 : 1</td>
<td>3 : 1</td>
<td>3 ply, 30 <em>ch'ŏk</em></td>
<td>4 <em>tu</em></td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1415</td>
<td>3 : 1</td>
<td>4 : 1</td>
<td>1 ply, 30 <em>ch'ŏk</em></td>
<td>4 <em>tu</em> 3 <em>sũng</em></td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 *tu* = 10 *sũng*

As the chart shows, there is a regular relationship in the comparative value of the *chǒng-p’o* and *sang-p’o* tantamount to a currency system with three levels of value. In light of contemporary developments—especially that of the farm village market—it seems clear that three-*sũng* cloth and two-*sũng* cloth appeared and became systematized because they were essential to the livelihood of the peasants for use as small-value currency. In addition to this division between small- and large-value cloth currency there was the still more valuable silver in wide use. Taken as a whole it seems difficult not to view the economy of the time as a developed monetary economy involving systematic use of currency.

As will be detailed later, with the sixteenth century Korea entered a new phase of silver mine development. Trade of private merchants doing business with China greatly increased, thereby intensifying the demand for silver as a means of settlement for purchases of textiles, and spurring the initiation of active development of silver mines. The monetary economy of Korea in the sixteenth century only lacked the minting of copper coins; in its essential conditions it was the same as the metallic currency systems employed by

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38 Taken from Song Chae-sŏn, "Simnyuk segi myŏnp’o-ūi hwap’ye kinŭng", p 421
39 See part 3 of this paper
China and Japan.

The more mature nature of economic conditions served as a backdrop to increasingly forceful proposals urging the minting of copper coinage. The reason such suggestions were not followed was not due to economic mappropriateness, but rather stemmed from the corrupt practices of the official class. In politics of this era, real power was in the hands of the royal in-laws and their allies among the officials; with the sharp decline in public morality, it became a fashion for active officials to manipulate the military procurement and tax systems and thereby accumulate cotton cloth, considered the same as currency. Such unjust practices were, in the end, reformed thanks to the criticism of a new political force, so that, though late, by 1625 the copper coin system came to be officially adopted.

Given this overview of the changes in the monetary systems of the three nations of East Asia, with sixteenth century it seems possible to identify a new character to the development of the monetary economy in all three states. That is, as a result of improvements in agricultural technology, the economic might of the agricultural economy as a whole greatly improved. As markets developed in response to changes in farm village society, the commercial monetary system, the use of which had been most important in trade with distant lands, now took on a different aspect.

Another piece of evidence demonstrating the development of commerce in East Asia during the sixteenth century is the trend toward payment of taxes in money rather than in kind. The prime example of this trend is the adoption in China of the “single whip” tax system whereby payment was tendered in silver, while in Choson such features of the Korean tax collection system as the substitution of “tax farming” (pangnap) for local tribute goods may be best understood in the same light. Particularly in the case of China there has been considerable research on this topic, however, this occasion

40 Song Chae-sŏn, “Simnyuk segi myŏn’o-ŭi hwap’ye kmūng” demonstrates that in the tenth year of Chungong there was division in the court over the issue of currency, some called for the exclusive use of “mulberry currency” while others advocated the minting coinage.


permits no opportunity to delve into this and related issues.

Pursuing a new topic, I would next like to look at international trade, examining the degree of development of the circulation of commercial goods in East Asia.

2. Expansion of International Trade and Warfare

Already in the late T'ang and early Northern Sung dynasties trading relations in East Asia display harbingers of change as Chinese merchants penetrated outwardly as far as Southeast Asia. However, it was with Chinese pursuit of a new international order toward the end of the fourteenth century, based upon the tributary system, that a major international transformation began. As is well-known, the Ming tributary system was a form of diplomacy stemming from traditional Chinese conceptions of the civilized and the barbaric (hua-i); it demanded ritual submission from the governments of neighboring nations. Since the system required tribute as a concrete expression of such subservience, the not-inconsiderable practical gains to be obtained from trade in the form of tribute came to be of no less concern than issues of prestige. In so far as we may judge that the significance of the tributary system lay in its establishment of a variety of "trade framework", then one of its important goals was to secure the creation of an international order in the form of an expanded trading region extending over entire East Asia.

As trade in East Asia exhibited a lively development within a new, unitary "trade framework" and the volume of trade greatly expanded, by the middle of the sixteenth century the region was demonstrating its position as one of the centers of world trade, involving the participation of even European traders. The geographical core of the trade was, of course, the three East Asian nations, but the importance of traders from other areas such as the Ryukyu Islands and Europe in their role as intermediaries was not inconsiderable, though to an extent such trade was an artifact of the operation of the system itself.

The Ming tribute system ran parallel to the Chinese policy of marine exclusion. This marine exclusion did not signify a total blockade of trading activities, but rather was a domestic policy measure aimed solely at the Chinese.

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44 Tanaka Takeo, "Higashi Aja tsukō kiko no senritsu to tenkai", in Iwanami koza seikai rekishi, 16, 1970, 8, senyōhen, 1970
themselves; its main intent was the preservation of the right to monopolize trade on the part of the Ming government. Accordingly, the Ryukyu Islanders, acting in place of the inhabitants of Chinese coastal areas, came to serve as trading intermediaries. Acquiring spices and medicinal herbs from the South Seas they appeared frequently not only in Ming China, but also in Korea and Japan as well as other areas. However, beginning with the acceleration of domestic commercial development in the sixteenth century, Chinese living in coastal areas were not hindered as previously by the marine exclusion policy and were even able to disguise themselves as Japanese wako and conduct trade. As a result, the role of the Ryukyu Islanders could only decline. In the middle of the sixteenth century the entry of European traders, with the Portuguese at the fore, made turning the tide impossible for the Ryukyu traders.  

In Korea, at the outset of the Chosŏn Dynasty, the greatest effort was concentrated toward the goal of reducing the burden of tribute mandated under the tributary system. Hence, trade between Korea and China was, if anything, stagnant. However, from the end of the fifteenth century there began the import in large quantity of high-quality silk cloth and raw silk thread from China, which had the effect of creating an entirely new situation. The great demand for silk fabric arising at this time was a phenomenon finding its origin in the extension of agricultural economic power stemming from improved agricultural technology. While, on the one hand, this high demand for silk cloth became for a considerable time one part of a major political discussion denouncing the drift toward luxury in society, on the other hand, the social range of those demanding silk cloth expanded to the extent that even among commoners it had become necessary for wedding ceremonies.

Because settlement for silk cloth and silk thread obtained from China was asked in silver, this era provided a new opportunity for the development of domestic silver mines. Following the success of Korea in 1429 (the 11th

45 The above discussion is based upon Tanaka Takeo, “Higashi Aya tsuko kiko no seiritsu to tenkai”, Yamaguchi Keji, “Nihon no sakoku”, in Iwanami koza sekai rekishi, chusei 3, 1976, Sasaki Ginya, “Higashi Aya boekiigen no keisei to kokusai ninsiki”, in Iwanami koza sekai rekishi, chusei 3, 1976
46 Han Sang-gwon, “Simnyuk segi tae-Chungguk samuyŏk-ŭi chŏn’gae”, in Kim Ch’ŏl-jun paksal hwagap kunwom sahak nonch’ong, 1983
47 Yi Tae-jun, “Juroku seki no Kankokushı ni tassuru riak no hoko”, pp. 24-25
48 The following discussion is based upon Han Sang-gwon, “Simnyuk segi tae-Chungguk samuyŏk-ŭi chŏn’gae”, Yu Sung-ju, “Chosŏn chŏn’gi huban-ŭi tin gwangŏp yŏn’gu”, in Chindan hakpo 55, 1983
year of Sejong) in obtaining the exclusion of gold and silver from its tribu-
tary offerings, almost no domestic production was permitted lest such
precious metal be reinstated as tribute items. Purchase of some gold and sil-
ver was unavoidable, but when necessary was purchased in the smallest pos-
sible quantities from Japan. However, from the end of the fifteenth century
as the transformation detailed above began to take hold, the persistent
demands on the part of large-scale, wealthy merchants made policy revision
inevitable. The tax remittance system adopted in 1515 (the 10th year of
Chungjong) formally permitted the private operation of mines in return for
payment of military tax and a further revision of the law in 1551 (Myungjong
6) provided for an expansion in the degree of openness of the system by
integrating taxes assessed on such mining operations into the general tax
system.

At this juncture new technical support for the development of silver
mining was provided, namely the invention in 1503 (Yoansan'gun 9) by a com-
moner, Kim Kam-bul, and a slave, Kim Kom-dong, of a new technique for
the extraction and refinement of silver from lead ore.49 Nuggets of lead ore
contain a high proportion of silver, but until this time there had been no way
to extract it; hence, the ore had been useless until these two found, for the
first time, a technical solution to the problem. Tanch'on in Hamgyong Pro-
vince, which up to the present has been renowned as the location of the prem-
er silver mine in Korea, was originally a lead-producing region and only
switched to silver mining at this time.50 Furthermore, this technology was
soon passed on to Japan where it was to make a decisive contribution to ex-
expansion in the volume of silver production in the latter sixteenth century.51
Bearing in mind these facts, it is clear that the invention of this process can-
not be omitted from the history of commercial and industrial development in
the sixteenth century.

Korea in its trade with Japan at that time purchased gold, silver, and
copper while exporting grain (rice and beans) and unprocessed cotton (myonyu)

49 Shin Sok-ho, "Choson Chushiyuta no kingin mondai" in Inaba hakushi kanzei kinen
munsashin sonso, 1938, pp 410-411
50 Ibid, p 421
51 Ibid, pp 421-422. The author here introduces a source dealing with Japanese acquisition of
new technology. Paegam chapki by Otto Suk-kwon, concerning the expansion of Japanese
silver production in the latter part of the sixteenth century, see Kobata Atsushi, Kingin
boekkshi no kenkyu (Hoseidaijuku shuppankyoku, 1976), and Tashiro Kazui, Kinsei Nicho
tsuko boebunshu no kenkyu (Sobunsha, 1981)
and cotton cloth. As mentioned above, the import of precious metals stemmed from Korea’s tributary obligations with China in the fifteenth century. Additionally, the continued importation of silver in not inconsiderable quantities, even after the private operation of mines became permissible, was due to the necessity of ensuring a supply of silver greater than the quantity needed for the expanded import of silk from Ming China.

According to Japanese historical sources, the culture of the commoner class in Japan was more influenced by trade with Korea than by that with China. Relations between Japan and China were carried out in the form of tributary offerings under the “tally trade system.” This trade, which began in the early fifteenth century, at first was conducted by the bakufu and scheduled on the basis of one tribute mission every ten years; hence, the frequency was not high. After the middle of the fifteenth century, the participation of large monasteries, powerful daimyo and merchants from Sakai, Hakata and other areas brought a measure of vitality to the trade, but at this time as well, the goods imported (in theory “bestowed”) were at a far remove from commoner society. Major imports were silk fabric, silk thread, and copper coins; the silk cloth and silk thread were, by and large, accredited back in response to the demand of upper-class society, while the copper coinage was mostly exchanged on the return trip to Japan for silk products.

Trade with Korea, on the part of Japan, on the other hand, differed from this pattern of trade with China. Although Korea imposed restrictions on the trade, limiting it to three Korean ports (the so-called samp’o) dealing with Tsushima, still, not only was a range of society involved, from the shogunate to peasants and fishermen, but also, since the items of trade were more oriented toward daily necessities, their influence on commoner society was great.

The largest gains obtained by the Japanese from trade with Chosön were those stemming from the import of cotton products and the training in the techniques of cotton cultivation. According to pioneering research into the

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54 Tanaka Takeo, “Chusei kaiga boeki no seikaku” in Nihon kezai tanki 2, Chusenhen

55 Sasaki Ginya, “Higashi Aja boeikken no keisei to kokusaai munshiki”
Japanese cotton industry, the indigenization of cotton production in Japan in the early sixteenth century was wholly the result of importation of seeds and weaving technology from Chosŏn Korea. From the first part of the fifteenth century, the importation on cotton products from Korea by Japan is said to have shown an increasing emphasis upon unprocessed cotton (myŏnju), while in the latter half of the century, particularly following the large rebellions in the Ōnin and Bunmei periods, the transfer of technology took place in the midst of a sudden increase in demand for cotton cloth, with import reaching 100,000 p'il per year. The rebellion by Japanese at the three Korean ports in 1510 may be seen as having arisen due to resistance on the part of Tsushima islanders to new restrictions enacted by the Koreans on the outflow of cotton cloth, trade of which brought large profits to the Japanese.

The cotton cloth imported from Korea was widely used in a number of areas of Japanese life and brought great innovation to both the people’s livelihood and technology, to the degree that such change may be termed a “cotton revolution”.

Additionally, it may also be said that cotton made a decisive contribution to the development of transportation in Japan. Previously ships there had used sails constructed of woven reeds; once the Japanese switched to cotton-fiber sails the carrying capacity of their ships was enhanced and techniques of sail rigging were greatly streamlined resulting in increase in sailing speed. In Gifu Prefecture there is said to be a ritual, transmitted down to modern times, in which the people construct an effigy of a Korean king, dressing him in traditional Korean clothes and ceremonially placing cotton shoes on his feet. In these cotton shoes we find traces of the impact left upon Japan by the “cotton revolution”.

International trade in East Asia of the sixteenth century developed generally along the lines detailed above, demonstrating a clear relation with developments in each of the individual economies. This complex web of relationships among the three major trading partners was rudely shattered, however, in the vortex of war at the end of the century brought about by

56 Ono Koshi, “Honpo mokumen kigyo seiritsu no katei”, in Nihon keizai taisei 2, Chuseihen
57 The discussion below on the uses of cotton in Japan is based upon Sugiyama Hiroshi, “Chugoku-chosen-Nanban no kujutsu to junjyoku” in Iwanami koza Nihon rekishi, chusetsu, 4, 1976
58 Yi Chun-hui, “Karako odori to Chosensan”, in Edo jidai no Chosen-tsushinshi, Eizo bunka kyokai, 1979, p 59
Toyotomi Hideyoshi's so-called "entry into China" (tonyu) Hideyoshi's conception of this continental adventure may be explained on a political level as an attempt to reduce conflict among the sengoku daimyo. However, on an economic level, it may be understood as a revolution against the system, that is, it represented an attempt to smash at a single blow a system which was unfavorable to Japan, placed as it was in a position of inferiority. In Korea, Japan's unfavorable trading position may be traced back to the aftermath of the riots in the three Korean ports when the volume of trade authorized by Korea was slashed in half. In China the decision in 1547, on the pretext of rampant wako activity, to end the tribute mission from Japan was decisive. Subsequently virtually all trade between China and Japan fell into the hands of the wako, but the Portuguese later proved "superior" at playing this role, while relations between Korea and Japan showed no signs of improvement. It was precisely this system, so disadvantageous to Japan, which Hideyoshi intended to smash, using the military might assembled in the wars of unification.

The development of commerce and industry in Japan was first attained within the confines of domains managed by the sengoku daimyo. Positive encouragement of commerce and industry followed the need of the individual domains to provide the financial resources necessary for maintaining large-scale military strength during the struggles of the Sengoku Period. While efforts such as land reclamation and other water management projects were made in the field of agriculture, a general characteristic of domains during this period was the enactment of policies designed to spur commerce and the handicraft industry, e.g., the rakushi rakuza system, and the development of mines to supply needed gold and silver. In so far as the reality of management of domains involved such policies, the Nobunaga and Hideyoshi regimes for their part as well-composed as they were of the domains--had no choice but to attach political importance to domestic commercial rights and international trading rights. The Nobunaga regime hastened to seize control of Sakai, the bastion of domestic commerce, and the successor Hideyoshi

59 Nakamura Eiko, Nissen kanketsu no kenkyu, vol 2, p 55
60 Yamaguchi Kenji, "Nihon no sakoku", pp 447-449
regime captured, in virtually the final push of the unification drive, Hakata and adjoining areas which represented Japan’s window of communication with the continent. In that commercial and trading rights were so highly valued during the establishment of the unified government at the conclusion of this process, the “entry into China” would come about as a search for a new focus of action once unifications was complete.

Hideyosh’s conception of his enterprise may have represented an irresistible trend in Japanese history, but given the conditions of East Asia in the sixteenth century, it was a goal impossible to realize. While it is true that Japan prior to unification had greatly developed its economy, this was development solely in terms of the level of the Japanese economy of the day and was by no means the attainment of a level surpassing that of Ming China or Choson Korea. Not only did Japan in the early sixteenth century receive an initiation into the techniques of cotton cultivation and silver refinement, but it also acquired firearms from the Portuguese following 1543 and for a time purchased from the Chinese the gunpowder necessary for these new weapons.

In sum, even up to the first half of the sixteenth century Japan was in the position of having to import crucial technology from the outside. The indigenization of this technology during the latter half of the century was extremely important for Japanese history taken by itself, but looking from the perspective of the overall East Asian conditions at that time, this was a recovery from backwardness and by no means an advance to regional preeminence.

It is true that the muskets employed by the Japanese military in their invasion of Korea demonstrated considerable power. But the fact that they possessed only this one variety of firearm in truth reveals a point of cultural flimsiness. During naval battles Japanese gunners had only muskets and were in no position to defeat the Choson forces which deployed large cannon. The Korean army was at first pressed by the Japanese muskets and fought in desperate, losing battles, but subsequently, drawing upon the power of a long tradition of firearm technology, various weapons were manufactured and a recovery was made from a position of overwhelming inferiority.

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63 Sugiyama Hiroshi, “Chugoku-Chosen-Nanban no kyudatsu to kumijyoku”

64 For an account of the development of firearms in Korea up to the mumi invasion, see Hō Sendo, “Choson chungga hwagi-ui paldal”, in Yoko hakpo, vols 30 & 31, 1966
the Korean forces, but the Ming Southern Army as well, were able to crush the Japanese army by employing Chekiang military tactics which had earlier been developed for the purpose of dealing with wako and in which they were adept.

Hideyoshi’s construction of the magnificently luxurious jurakutei, with the prospect of unification before him, is a celebrated fact. But as Sugiyama Hiroshi expresses so well concerning the destruction of this palace following the suicide of Hideyoshi’s son Hidetsugu in 1595, “It was similar to the sight of the military might of Hideyoshi’s invasion forces being totally routed by the martial strength of the Chinese and Korean armies”.65 Unlike the expansionism practiced by the Hideyoshi regime, the Tokugawa bakufu hastened to restore relations with Korea through a policy of national seclusion, simplified and restricted foreign trade, a foreign policy one may well believe was the very best available for that time as a nation in East Asia.

3. Social and Political Unrest and the Ideological Response

The three nations of East Asia having undergone, as seen thus far, an important economic transformation, it is only to be expected that the political and social shocks following in its wake would not be inconsiderable. In actuality, as briefly touched upon in the introduction, the political conditions in each of the three nations were far from tranquil. In China we find the violent collision of court eunuchs and literati in the midst of a series of popular uprisings while in Japan the continuing peasant rebellions(ikki) formed a backdrop for the outbreak of fighting known as the sengoku stemming from friction between major and minor feudal lords. In the case of Choson, as well, while on the one hand repeated literati purges flared in the political center, on the other hand, “tax rebellions”(chōngnan) — most notably that of Im Kkŏk-chŏng — spread across the nation.66 The fact that in all three nations unrest appeared among different groups in society, regardless of social class, signifies the enormity of the economic transformation.

In history written on China and Japan, the essence of such disturbances has already been related to economic change. That is, they have been treated

65 Sugiyama Hiroshi, “Chugoku-Chosen-Nanban no kiutsu to kunjiryouku”
66 Yazawa Yasasuke, “Im Kkŏk-chŏng’ no hanran to sono shakai-teki haikai”, in Hatada Takahashi sensei koki kinenkai ed., Chosen rekishi ronshu, 1979
as events following upon the strife and confrontation within the ruling class over newly-created wealth and upon the dislocation brought about by the dissolution of the peasant class. In the case of China, the explanation runs as follows: after the mid-Ming, as the growth in commerce and handicraft industries accelerated, and as small-scale merchants and hired workers drawn from the peasant class appeared in sizable numbers, popular rebellions arose taking as their focus the abuses in direct management or in taxation practices of such enterprises as mining, salt production, textiles, and porcelain on the part of officials and eunuchs, both of whom enjoyed a great deal of actual power derived from the absolute authority of the emperor. The local gentry and literati, who themselves also belonged to the ruling class, on the one hand resisted abuses through the formation of elite groups composed of members of their own class, such as the Tunglin faction, but on the other hand they directly participated in uprisings instigated by merchants, wage laborers, and peasants.  

In Japan, too, a similar line of economic argument is advanced as explanation: during the Muromachi Period the production surplus of various sectors of the economy, including agriculture, commerce, and handicraft, increased, thus triggering a struggle between the class of high feudal lords such as the shugo daimyo and the class of low feudal lords who were resident on domanial property. As the relationship between these two groups reached a fever pitch of tension and confrontation, at the village level peasants formed community organizations and fomented rebellion as an expression of their mutual self interest brought on by economic change. So it was, continues the explanation, that Japan was pressed by both the ikki and the sengoku rebellions simultaneously.

The disturbances in Choson were, at root, not at odds with the conditions of the two other East Asian nations. In Choson the dissolution of the peasant class due to the development of commerce had reached a severe level. Although no doubt a somewhat exaggerated statement of the situ-

67 Fu I-ling, Ming-tau Chiang-nan shu-hun chung-chi shu-t'an (Shanghai, Jenmin chu’u-p’an-she, 1957) , Liu Yen, "Ming-mo ch’eng-shih chung-chi fa-ch’un-hsia ti ch’u-chi shu-hun yun-tung", in Ming-tau she-hua chung-chi lun-chi, 1979 , Sakai Tadao, "Mimatsu no shakai to shunj", in Chugoku zensho no kenkyu, 1960 , research in this field is voluminous and this list is far from exhaustive.

68 These are many excellent works by Japanese historians on the Sengoku Period. Here I will only cite Nagahara Keji (ed.), Sengoku jidai as a work which has received much attention.
ation, one contemporary observer asserted that, “At present, of peasants everywhere, nine out of ten have deserted farming for some other occupation, and only one holds to his original profession”, illustrating that the number of those transferring from agriculture to small-scale commerce had reached extreme proportions. In the process of such change, “the wandering dispossessed” (yusuja), who had lost their base of support had no choice but to become members of “tax rebellion” mobs. As this disruption was occurring at the local level, the ruling class split into two groups: the meritorious elite with their royal in-law allies (hun'gu ch'okshin), who as established officials showed a strong propensity for special privilege, and the sarim group, whose members were newly-risen officials. Of these two, the meritorious elite is comparable as a social entity to the eunuchs of the Ming or the great feudal lords of Japan. In that they attempted to guarantee their status through a special relationship with royal authority or the royal household establishment, there was fundamentally no difference between them and the Ming eunuchs. Then too, in their acquisition of wealth piece-by-piece they show not a few similarities with their Japanese and Chinese counterparts. In addition to granting guarantees on a regular basis of the rights to tax farming to specific groups for a fixed share of the proceeds, this coalition of the meritorious elite and royal in-laws would order local officials in coastal areas in the south-west to forcibly mobilize local citizens to develop low-lying tidal land, and then use profits reaped from such newly-secured land as the capital for trade in grain or as investment in mine development. In this way, in the midst of economic change, they were the group able to attain the most wealth, using the power of their office to serve as intermediaries, in collaboration with rich merchants. The relationship between these two groups is precisely the same as in China and Japan where the union between officials and merchants became a major problem. In the Choson Dynasty, the repeated literati purges came as a result of the newly-risen sarim criticism and attack upon the impropriety of the methods.

69 Chungong silleok, 29, Chungong 12, 8, musin
70 Yi Tae-jun, “Sarimp'a-ú yuhyangso pongu undong”, in Chundan hakpo, vols 33 & 34, 1972-1973, and “Sarimp'a ú hyangyak pogu undong”, in Han'guk munhwâ 4, 1984. These studies look in detail at the confrontation between the two groups against the background of the mua and kinyo literati purges.
71 Yi Tae-jun, “Simnyuk segi yónhae chiyok-ú ōjôn kaebal”, in Kim Chöl-jun pksa hwagap kinyóim sahak nonch'ong, 1983
used by the meritorious elite to acquire wealth; driven into a corner, the entrenched conservatives took revenge. The position of the saram literati, whose membership was mainly composed of small- and medium-scale landlords, was akin to that of the lesser feudal lords in Japan, also resident on their land, and the local gentry and literati who formed the Tunglin faction in China.

Although this may be a sweeping generalization, the numerous points of correspondence in the political and social conditions of the three East Asian nations, as detailed above, in the final analysis must be seen as issuing from the historical homogeneity of economic change itself.

Lastly, it is of considerable interest to examine the various forms taken by efforts to come to grips with these social and political disturbances. However, because a consideration of this general theme involves trends across the entire world of thought during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it will be difficult to look at the many issues involved in any great specificity given limitation of space. In general it is understood that the tendency was for the small- and medium-scale landlord class--or its equivalent--to search for a new social order using both Chu Hsi neo-Confucianism(sŏngnihak) Yang-ming neo-Confucianism, or Chu Hsi neo-Confucianism by itself. Here I will make brief reference only to the case of Chosŏn Korea which was characterized by its having taken up only sŏngnihak.

The precise reason why Korea, unlike China and Japan, rejected the Yang-ming school is not yet fully clear. Sŏngnihak is often understood as an ideology of rule based centrally upon agriculture. However, as has been made plain during the course of the current study, having granted such a relation, it would be unreasonable to blindly apply this generalization to Chosŏn society and maintain that Korea took up sŏngnihak thought because of an inherent bias toward agriculture, and hence, that development of commerce was either non-existent or at best backward. Sŏngnihak, in actuality, established its roots in Chosŏn society in the midst of great change ushered in by the circulation of market goods; it bears the stamp of its role as a response to this change.

The most important political activities involved in the process of establishing sŏngnihak socially in Chosŏn were the movement in the 1480s to propagate the hyangsarye, the hyanggŭmyurye, and the 1510s movement to

72 Yi Tae-jin, "Sarimp'a-ui yuhyangso pongnip undong"
encourage adoption of the *hyangyak*. The object toward which these reform-oriented political activities on the part of the *sarim* was nothing other than the disturbances aroused by the growth in the circulation of commodities. To put it another way, the goal was the restoration of stability attained through the use of Confucian methods applied to a rural society in the throes of severe social agitation stemming from the dissolution of the peasant class. It is a clear fact that the *sŏngnihak* outlook places its relative importance upon the social stability of rural society. It may also be said that the lead taken by the *sarim* in disseminating new techniques of irrigation and making used of waterways—water conservancy being vital to the development of wet-field agriculture—was one instance of the *sŏngnihak* program of rural stabilization.

However, this is not to say that their position functionally was equivalent to the denial of commercial development itself. When the issue of whether the rural markets(*changmun*) should be abolished or not was debated a number of members of the *sarim* group, including Yi Hwang (*T’oegeye*), spoke out in favor of the markets, maintaining that they were beneficial to the livelihood of the people and advocated that they be continued.

Additionally, during one stage of the movement to propagate the *hyangyak*, an effort was made to promote production of silk cloth by making sericulture a general secondary activity of rural households. Then too, the proposal to mint metallic currency, aimed at making it the core of a monetary system, found substantial support from this group. The degree to which Korean *sŏngnihak* was an ideological response to the atmosphere of commercialism is clearly visible in the importance it placed upon respect for frugality. As mentioned previously, one of the social consequences of economic change in the Chosŏn Dynasty evident from the latter part of the reign of Sŏngjong through the reign of Myŏngjong was the drift toward luxury, centered around clothing and jewelry, items used for weddings, and housing, a tendency which would become the object of denunciation. In such an atmosphere the original Confucian attitudes of diligence, frugality, and thrift received special attention. In sum, the *sarim* adherents, while not blindly

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73 Yi Tae-jun, "Sarimp’a-ŭ hyangyak pogŭp undong"
74 Yi Tae-jun, "Sinmyuk segi-ŭ ch’ŏnbang(po) kwangye-ŭ paldal!" in Han Wu-gŭn *paksa chongnyŏn kunyŏm sahak nonch’ong*, 1981
75 Yi Tae-jun, "Juroku sekka no Kankokushu ni tsasu Rikai no hoko", pp 20-22
76 Yi Tae-jun, "Sarimp’a-ŭ hyangyak pogŭp undong", pp 332-333
77 Song Chae-sŏn, "Sinmyuk segi myŏnpo-ŭ hawp’ye kintŭng " pp 20-22
rejecting commerce itself on the ideological basis of *mubon ŏngmal* (strive for agriculture, suppress commerce”) took a position arising from their class basis as small- and medium-scale resident landlords and pursued a commercial policy whose premise was the stability of rural society.

As implied by the repeated literati purges, the political position of the *sarim* throughout the sixteenth century was one of opposition and lack of access to power. They had few opportunities to realize the reform agenda they advocated. Toward the end of the century, the cessation of rule by the meritorious elite and royal in-laws brought a favorable political change for the *sarim* and long-cherished plans could for the first time be put into effect one-by-one. The best examples of these are the first-ever minting of metallic currency in 1625 and the enactment in 1650 of the *taedong-pŏp*—after a considerable period of discussion—aimed at reforming the structural irrationalities in the local tribute tax system.78

As is well-known, *sŏngnihak* was by no means a system of thought which actively advocated commercialism or industrialization. Yet, this school of thought, which in response to the conditions of the time strove to stabilize the rural economy and society, would in the future come to be a cultural feature of Korean society. The reason why the Chosŏn Dynasty did not collapse in the seventeenth century, despite suffering the mǔjn and twin Manchu invasions, is to sought primarily in this solid and secure basis of *sŏngnihak* thought.

**Conclusion**

This study has examined the development of the circulation of commodities in the three Wast Asian nations during the sixteenth century and at the political disturbances wrought by such change. The historiographical literature on China and Japan is replete with studies on these issues, the material presented here on these two nations contains nothing new. However, there has been a critical lack of studies which attempt to illuminate this period from the perspective of East Asia as a whole. Indeed, in so far as the similar process of transformation confirmed in both the Chinese and Japanese cases has yet to receive attention in Korean history, a truly

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78 Ko Sŏk-kyu, “Sunnyuk-sipch’il segi kongnap-je kaehyŏk-ŭi panghyang”, in *Han’guk saron*, vol. 12, 1985
balanced and complete understanding of the total East Asian region during this period remains impossible. This paper finds its significance in an attempt to remedy this situation. In this study there are more than a few items of specific facts and conditions regarding Korea in the sixteenth century which need to be supplemented by further research. However, I view this opportunity to reconsider a number of issues from a comparative historical perspective as very profitable: it seems one method of somewhat more quickly helping to research an area in which Korean historiography has lagged behind.

As is pointed out in the literature on China and Japan, the development in East Asia of an economy involving wide circulation of commercial goods, beginning in the sixteenth century and attaining its heyday in the eighteenth century, is highly significant in light of the influence it exerted up world history during this period.

Just how important this period of about three hundred years of economic growth was to East Asian history is amply demonstrated by the fact that when the world economic center began to toward the West due to the industrial revolution, the three nations of East Asia underwent simultaneous major rebellions in the nineteenth century, including the T’ai-p’ing rebellion in China, the Yonaoshi rebellion in Japan, and popular rebellions in Korea. The root causes of such major upheavals must, to an extent, be sought in the specific domestic conditions of each nation, but in view of the timing of these outbursts, one must think that the primary factor had to be a change in the international economic conditions. The world preeminence of the East Asian economy began to collapse as is indicated by the outflow of silver from China following the rise of industrial capitalism in the West. As a result, not only China, but also other nations, such as Korea and Japan, within the Sinitic economic sphere were unable to avoid internal rebellions.

79 Terada Takanobu, “shinin shonin to Sanshu shonin”, in Chuseishi kazō 3 (Gakuseisha, 1983)

This work details the economic conditions of the time and their changing nature based upon an examination of the merchants of Shinan.

80 Among the studies of the East Asian trading region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Tashiro Kazu’s, Kinsei Nitchō tsuka boekiishi no kenkyu focuses on the bilateral trading relations between Japan and Korea, but has also received a great deal of attention for its attempt to perceive the structure of the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese trading region from a fresh perspective.
GLOSSARY

akp’o 惡布
ch’up’o 瘋布
ch’ök 尺
chaeyŏk-chŏn 再易田
changmun 場門
chiaoch’ao 交鈔
chŏhwa 樟貨
Chŏlla Province 全羅道
chŏngnan 戰亂
Chŏng-p’o 正布
Ch’ungch’ŏng Province 忠清道
haeingsang 行商
haesang 海商
hsiao-shih 小市
hsu-shih 村市
hua-i 華夷
hun’gu ch’ŏkshin 勸舊戚臣
hyanggsarye 鄉射禮
hyanggyak 鄉約
hyangŭmjurye 鄉飲酒禮
hyŏnhsi 縣市
ikkı 一揆
ilyŏk-chŏn 一易田
jurakutei 聚楽齋
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Kyŏngsang Province 慶尚道
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mubon ǒngmal 務本仰末
myŏnju 綿紬
nenko 年荒
ol 宥
Osŭng-p’o 五升布
p’il 匹
pangnap 防納
pao-ch’ao 賓鈔
rakushi rakuza 樂市樂座
rokusai-sai 六齋市
samp’o 三浦
sangp’o 常布
sarim 士林
sengoku daimyo 戰國大名
shih-chi 市集
ship’o 市鋪
shugo daimyo 守護大名
sillok 實錄
susang 水商
sŏngnihak 性理學
sŭng 升
Taedong-pŏp 大同法
tonyu 唐入
ts’aao-shih 草市
ts’un-shih 鎮市
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Tunglin 東林
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yuksang 隨商
yusuja 遊手者