Problems and the Present State of Research in the History of Status Hierarchy in Late Chosŏn

*KIM, In-geol*

1. Preface

"Status" is a categorical term referring to a group in pre-modern society. It signifies a group of human beings distinguished according to their legal system which separates them from other groups. It is both exclusive and hereditary according to blood origin. The criteria for belonging to a particular status group (with its privileges and responsibilities) need be prescribed by a legal system. The legal system for determining social status in Chosŏn Dynasty is the "Yangch'ŏnje", or "The System for Distinguishing Yangin (free-born) and Ch'ŏnnin (Nobi people)" (See Yu Sŭng-won's work, 1986 pp 4～12). This system was in place until the Kabo Peasant War of 1984 which eliminated the status hierarchy system throughout Chosŏn.

The Status Hierarchy System is established according to the historical conditions of a society. These historical conditions of the society also determine its character in the present. Thus, research in the status hierarchy system of the Chosŏn Dynasty has been centered on the incipient stages of the system. The results of this incipient activity deserve close attention. A close study of this era will resolve confusion over terminology used heretofore in research concerning the status hierarchy system.1

* Assistant Professor of Korean History, Seoul National University


1 The following three argumentative writings can help understand the main aspects of the results of study in this field.

Though a common research ground be reached for studying Early Chosŏn Dynasty status hierarchy system, significant problems remain. Research has been focused on “Social Status Hierarchy in Chosŏn” as it existed in the legal system of the time. However, common terminology and concepts have not yet been agreed upon; nor has there yet been a sufficient understanding of the historical character of Chosŏn Dynasty social hierarchy system and its rank structure.

Research in this area, especially concerning the Late Chosŏn Dynasty, has been lacking. Therefore, in order to achieve an understanding of the historical variations of the Chosŏn Dynasty status hierarchy system, it is necessary to review the present state and problems in research of the history of Late Chosŏn Dynasty status hierarchy system. This thesis is an attempt to address this problem.

Research into Late Chosŏn Dynasty status hierarchy system, beginning around 1960, became more active from around 1970. Studies concentrated on the “household registers” (hojŏk taekjang), thereby determining “status hierarchy organization” and the system for changing one’s hierarchical status and one’s lineage rank. This can be seen in Chart 1 below. Although there were also studies about “status hierarchical level” and, from 1980, “social power” these were not the norm. What is most noticeable about this period of research (1960~1980) is the tendency to associate changes in Late Chosŏn Dynasty rank structure with changes in status hierarchy. This trend did not continue, however, and there emerged a school of thought, which, analyzing the “job classifications” (ch'yangyŏk) of the household registries, maintained a “hierarchical status change = collapse of the hierarchical system = social progress” formula.

4 Yi Chun-gu, 1988, “Examination of Several Problems in the Understanding of Status Structure in Early Chosŏn Dynasty” *Taegu History Academic, Vol 34*

The examination of the history of research of status hierarchy in Early Chosŏn Dynasty was by Prof. Han Young-woo, “Several Problems in Research on Early Chosŏn Dynasty—Status, Land, and History of Thought” *Movements in Modern Korean History Academic Journal, 1982*
This formula was mainly a means of assimilating research materials. The period's research methodology was lacking in many respects. Though there were attempts to improve it problems remain today. Given these conditions progress has been made, both in quality and quantity, in correcting misunderstandings. This thesis, then, will attempt to examine research on the history of Late Chosŏn Dynasty status hierarchy system and, in particular, the variations in the use of the three terms “status hierarchy structure and change in the structure”, “status hierarchical rank” and “social power”. Not all of the theories of this period of research fall within these three categories, however, as none of the theories is unrelated to the above, this thesis proposes to concentrate on them.\(^5\) There is a problem, however, in that the standard of categorizing emerges in the separate topics of the thesis. As research progresses subcategories will emerge according methodology and theory. Theses covering eighteenth and nineteenth century (until 1894) Korea are established as the subject of this examination. The chart below will help

\[\text{CHART 1: CATEGORIZATION OF RESEARCH ON LATE CHOSŎN STATUS HIERARCHICAL HISTORY BY THEME AND TIME-FRAME}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME PERIOD</th>
<th>SHS/SC</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>Total**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1ST (1910~44)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2ND (1945~59)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3RD (1960~69)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4TH (1970~79)</td>
<td>16(1)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5TH (1980~89)</td>
<td>27(1)</td>
<td>50(2)</td>
<td>16(1)</td>
<td>93(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>56(3)</td>
<td>74(2)</td>
<td>18(1)</td>
<td>148(6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Numbers in parentheses designate numbers of books

** SHS = Status Hierarchical Structure, Sc = Structure Change, SL = Status Level; SP = Social Power

\(^5\) Ch'ông Man-jo, who examined the study of the history of research on status hierarchy of the Late Chosŏn Dynasty from 1979~1983, divided the study of status hierarchy systems into three types: 1) statistical explanations of household registers, 2) investigating the movement in status of a particular status level, either an individual or a family, 3) Movement of the wealthy and lower classes and changes in rural society. The Author's categorical standards are not unrelated to the above.
show the number and time-frame of these concerning the Chosŏn status hierarchy.

It is a bit of a contrivance to arbitrarily make the above five historical divisions, but it serves the purpose of showing the increase in the number and emphasis of works. On one hand, it is natural that research on late Chosŏn status hierarchy incorporate contemporary views on status hierarchy, but it must be mentioned that there were not many studies devoted exclusively to the subject. Such studies were largely excluded in favor of studies relating status hierarchy in relation to the history of thought. Theses written about the history of research and book reviews did not include works on status hierarchy. After liberation from Japanese occupation, with one or two exceptions, the results of North Korean research were also not included. This omission may be due either to the author's own inability or the unavailability of North Korean research materials. This work is a follow-up on another work by the author, published in 1987, titled, “The Present State of Research on the History of Status Hierarchy in Late Chosŏn”, which was one part of a work titled “Several Problems in the Decline of Korean Feudal Society”.

The author's original work researched and compared works by subject matter and research tendencies, whereas the present work is not able to discuss these matters, as it concentrates on the historical variations of the research works themselves. The reader is asked to refer to the author's original work to find a discussion of these topics.

2. Research Tendencies over Historical Periods

1) First Period: 1910–1944

As research in this period was conducted by extremely few people even the number of topics of interest of the time were very limited. With but one or two exceptions, even the methodology of research served but to verify the general thought of the society of the time. Interest generally lie in elucidating particular status hierarchical ranks, for instance, butchers (paekch'ing), illegitimate sons (sŏol) and “the seven servile positions” (Ch'ilban ch'ŏnyŏk: nobi class, musicians and entertainers, kisaeng, shoemakers, unpaid village

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6 Kim In-geol, 1987, "The Present State of Research on the History of Status Hierarchy in Late Chosŏn Dynasty" (Society for the Study of Modern History, Several Problems in the Understanding of the Korean Middle Ages Society)
workers, errand runners, Buddhist monks)
One may consider these but mere subjects of curiosity. The subjects were as diverse as the person’s interests. For instance, “The Study of the Chosŏn Butcher”, written by Imanishi Ryū in 1918, though not written in the form of a thesis, mentions the following occupations in the “Question and Answer” section of the English language The Korea Review: Nobility, Nobi, Mudang and P’ansu, Status of Women, A Brave Governor, Guilds and the like. The same is true of passages cited by researchers from the work “Social Rank in Chosŏn”, a work compiled over several years by Tanaka Tokutaro, a Japanese interpreter who worked in the Chosŏn government general office.
A later example is the research of Shikata Hiroshi (1938), who thoroughly analyzed the household register of one family, which influenced later research. It was meant to be material for research in the economic and productive capacity of Chosŏn Dynasty, but it does not constitute research in social status hierarchy nor have the character of social status history research. He divided his research material into that on Yangban (nobility), commoners and Nobi peoples. Concerning status hierarchy in Chosŏn society, he noted that the system was still being followed, as the standard, to that day.
One of the views that can be pointed out as prevailing at the time (early nineteenth century) is that the Chosŏn status hierarchy system was closed and strict and was an obstacle to social development. With this foundation, it might be implied that status hierarchy be abolished to give way to a new society, but this view represents a negative view of Chosŏn past, influenced by the theory of Chosŏn as a stagnated society. In the case of the Japanese researcher Shikata, one can see the difficulty of social control as a reason for change in Chosŏn’s status system. One can also see this in Shikata’s own conclusion. “One can imagine the corruption of society sufficiently, if one notes that these changes in status are becoming even greater in the latter days of the Late Chosŏn Dynasty.” One can also note well here Shikata’s opinion of a stagnant Chosŏn Dynasty.
But some other researches also need to be considered. For example, “Social Rank in Modern Chosŏn” (1934~35) by Kim Chŏng-sil Using his knowledge of sociology, he said the “Chungin”, or middle ranking person, was the equivalent of a commoner Class, broken up into nobility, commoners and slaves, was a closed and blocked system acquired only by heritage and limiting marriage to only those of the same class. Though he
had problems in his command of terms and analysis, he seems to have grasped the peculiarity of status in a declining feudal society.

Generally speaking research into Late Chosŏn Status History was not up to either the quality or quantity of the study of economic history.

2) Second Period: 1945～1959

There was also not much progress in the study of status hierarchy from the period of liberation from the Japanese to 1960. That there were but four works in this field supports this view. Yi Kwang-lin (1954) and Kim Sŏng-jun's (1958～59) research on "kum" (hostage system) and Kim Yŏng-su's (1948) work on Chosŏn's social rank system established a standard for research. A monk and a scholar of Buddhism, Kim Yŏng-su's study was also of the same level to some extent. Quoting several passages from the "Kyŏngguk taegŏn" (Grand Code of Government Administration) he disagreed that a Buddhist Monk was one of the Seven Lowly Occupations. "The Theory of the Yangban System" by Ko Chae-guk, "The Situation of Peasant in Chosŏn period" by Kim Yong-sŏp and two books by Kim Sŏk-hyŏng of North Korea7 were of remarkable achievement, although the periods which they researched were different.

Ko Chae-guk claimed that "rank distinction was according the nearness or farness from direct or indirect political powers and the royal family". He called this the Yangban system of Chosŏn society. He also offers a logic to be used by later research on the Yangban system of feudal lords and land owners who controlled peasants. Kim Yong-sŏp investigated peasants' lives under a feudal nation. This, however, was not an active study of status hierarchy, and but offered clues to understanding Chosŏn Dynasty status hier-

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7 Kim Sŏk-hyŏng, 1957, Farmers' Rank Organization in the Feudal Age of Chosŏn
Kim Sŏk-hyŏng, 1959, Yangban Theory

These two works use as a framework the period from the Three Kingdoms to the Chosŏn Dynasty and especially analyze the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These works have not been examined by the author, as they have already been examined by Prof. Han Young-woo, clause by clause, in his thesis "Several Problems in research in Early Chosŏn Dynasty---Status, Land and Research in the History of Thought" in Movements in Modern Korean History, Academic Journal, 1982. Kim Sŏk-hyŏng said in his work, "Status does not directly imply rank or rank structure", concerning the social economic situation and its legal manifestation (status) he said there is a basic correspondence, but there is also distortion and inaccuracy. He relates these manifestations with his "Status in Feudal Society as a legal manifestation". The author thinks that there is ample need for a reevaluation here.
archy and rank structure.

Generally speaking, no active studies of status hierarchy of quality and volume were made in this period

3) Third Period: 1960~1969

Though several new trends were seen in the 1960’s, studies were not yet active. In the beginning of this period Han Woo-keun, in his work “Areas of Modernization of Korean Social Rank Levels”, (1960) defined the concept of “status”, saying that, as it was established in the Chosŏn Dynasty’s Feudal Status Hierarchy, it could not have but disappeared as society progressed. His research, however, was not widely discussed later. This is due to the fact that the state of research on Chosŏn society at that time was not systematically developed. He says, “The bud of the freedom movement of the bourgeois classes gaining independent power was not able to bloom”; also “The obstinacy of the ruling class not only made late Chosŏn Dynasty stagnant and prevented development in the nation and society, but also created a self-restraint, which, after some time, resulted in the breakdown of the Chosŏn Dynasty, including the royal family themselves.” This study of Chosŏn Dynasty Status Hierarchy was much more active and broadly comparative than other studies, weak only in not rejecting the theory of stagnation in Chosŏn society.

In this period studies generally focused on the most recently published study. One noteworthy study, titled “Research on Nobı system” by Hiraki Makoto in 1969 appeared at the end of the third period and was continuously cited afterwards. His research was summarized in the 1982 “Research into the Late Chosŏn Dynasty Nobı System” This was very broad research on the trends of the servant class in Late Chosŏn Dynasty and, linking this with national policies on the Nobı class, it investigated the realities of the Nobı system. One cause of regret in this research, however, is the lack of a sufficient explanation for the fall of the Nobı system and what the real situation of the Nobı class was.

Research on status hierarchy was also conducted under more diverse topics at this time, for instance, “Hyangni” by Yi Chong-hang in 1963, “Kogong” (hired hands) by Pak Sŏng-su in 1964 and “Kongin” (tribute men) by Han Woo-keun in 1965.

On the other hand, are the works of those who used the results of this research in an attempt to explain social development in the Late Chosŏn
Dynasty, for instance, Kim Yong-sŏp’s “Decline in Status Hierarchy and Farmers and Land Ownership in Late Chosŏn Dynasty. Research in Land Distribution in Sangju County” (1963). While generally accepting the results of Shikata’s study, he interpreted household registers differently, thus bringing about a new page in the study of household registers. Kim confirmed the hypothesis that both the middle farming class and the common and lowborn classes were able to rise to the Yangban level through extra-production. His understanding of the problem, however, was confined to this period and did not succeed him.

In a different trend, there was also new research methods in accordance with sociological theories of class movement on the background of social movement in Chosŏn society. This methodological theory was not systematized yet and many problems were yet to be solved, but it had an effect on the fourth period of research. The most representative research is “Research on Form and Change of Chosŏn Dynasty” by Kim Yŏng-mo (1966–67), which used for the first time family genealogies and the lists of successful candidates of civil service examinations to do research on status hierarchy history. But he states the purpose of his research is to show the necessity for research on the ruling class in modern society and what type of character is necessary for leading this nonglorious society and to get a clue of what type of character is necessary for leading the glorious reunification of the people.

In spite of several of these new directions in research, the studies of this period failed to surpass the previous period’s level of understanding; indeed, in some cases, the level of the methodology even seemed to regress. Hong Sun-ch’ang, in his 1968 paper, states that status, in pre-modern society, was the chief consideration in the management of institutions and organizations. Hong says that status strictly determined a person’s position, occupation, treatment, and lifestyle. Hong concludes that status had a negative effect on modernization. Hong’s study suffers from his failure to indicate the particular significance of his research. In addition, the materials he quotes and his understanding of the subject are limited, making it difficult to accept his results as he presents them. This general lack of understanding, exemplified in his work, inspired many researchers to return to more basic research problems dealing with the Early Chosŏn Dynasty. These researchers hoped to lay the groundwork for later studies. However, most research of this period contains flaws in many areas.

During the 1970s, research methods improved enormously as more research materials became available. The subsequent increase in research brought many new problems to the forefront. One particularly pressing issue, examined through the analysis of household registers, involved the transformations in the status hierarchy. In addition, there was also much debate centering on the role that the government examination played in social mobility. Such research was related to similar research concerned with the history of status roles as they relate to kinship and farming communities.

As for the scope and content of research, research projects on the various strata of society (nobi, local functionaries, kogong) continued to be undertaken (Hiraki Makoto, 1971, 72, 78; Kim Jun-hŏn, 1973, Yi Su-gŏn, 1974; Han Yŏng-guk, 1977, 78, 79, Chŏn Hyŏng-t'aek, 1978, 79). In addition, the scope of research expanded to include such subjects as the Student of Hyanggyo and Sŏwon (Song Ch'an-shik, 1976). In particular, the research on Novi class intensified. Besides Hiraki, scholars like Han Yŏng-guk and Chŏn Hyŏng-t'aek helped raise the standards of research in this field.

Han Yŏng-guk, in his paper “Marriage Aspect of Nobi class during the Middle Period of the Chosŏn Dynasty” (1977, 78) shows that intermarriage between freeborn and Nobi was common during the 16th and 17th centuries. This was due to the enactment of the Chongch'ŏn-bŏp (which preceded the Chongmo-bŏp) as a means of satisfying the Private-Nobi owners’ demand for an increase in the number of Nobi people. Han goes on to explain the significance of the chongch’ŏn-bŏp and the chongmo-bŏp. Even more importantly, Han’s research goes on to explain the principles underlying the status system of the Chosŏn Dynasty and the way that these principles were actually applied. In this way, Han hopes to achieve a new understanding of the Chosŏn Dynasty itself. He asks, “In the Chosŏn Dynasty, where vertical movement in status was supposedly subject to severe restrictions and the economy, governmental finances and military affairs all supposedly depended on the commoners, how is it that regulations governing intermarriage (Chongch’ŏn-bŏp) enacted?

Chŏn Hyŏng-t’aek recognized the limitations of research on the history of institutions and regulations. Chŏn also felt that research using household registers to study the changing status of Nobi class was of limited value. In order to ascertain the actual conditions and causes of status mobility amongst Nobi class in the late Chosŏn Dynasty, Chŏn advocates the follow-
ing venues of investigation first, we must develop an objective understanding of the actual conditions of the Nobl class; secondly, we must develop more research material; thirdly, we should assume a direct connection between the Nobl system and the structure of society as a whole. In particular, we must try to elucidate the changes in Nobl system that were connected with the economic progress of late Chosŏn Dynasty society. Chŏn's research can be found in his paper "Mobility in the Nobl Class During the Late Chosŏn Dynasty" that he wrote in 1986.

This period's research concerning status mobility continued to make progress in certain areas. However, the basic tendency was to employ the concepts of status hierarchy or status change (social mobility) as the basic theme for research. Research in this field made enormous progress as it reaped the benefits of newly excavated household registers and antique books. Much long-deferred research finally got under way, providing a powerful impetus to studies in this area. Studies of the early Chosŏn Dynasty tended to raise questions concerning the basic problems inherent in the previous research, hence, these studies usually focused on such issues as: the criteria defining social stratification and classification of status roles, and the technical vocabulary and concepts used to speak of status. Research on the societal structure of the later Chosŏn Dynasty, on the other hand, largely ignored these basic questions. Instead, it focused on specific social strata, status hierarchy instability, or structural change affecting the status hierarchy. Studies on social strata have, for the most part, also reflected the general tendencies inherent in current studies in this area.

The character of the above research has its roots in its class theory. Here, we can perceive the influence of Korean and U.S. sociological research. As for some of the sociologist who have treated the history of social stratification during the late Chosŏn Dynasty, we might mention Kim Yŏng-mo (1978, 81) and Choe Chae-sŏk (1972, 1976) from Korea, and E.W. Wagner (1972, 78), Susan Shin (1972) and J.N. Sommerville (1974a, b) from the U.S. The majority of research, employing the basic perspective implies in class theory, have generally assumed that social mobility within the various strata of early Chosŏn Dynasty society was relatively common, but became less common as the social classes became increasingly rigid in the middle of the Chosŏn Dynasty period with the general tendency being a downward movement in status. According to this research, there was suddenly an upward movement in status during the last half of the 18th century, eventually setting
the stage for the dissolution of the social stratification system. The above understanding lacks the precision that a rigorous treatment of the subject requires. This is, to a large extent, inevitable when we consider the lack of research materials, in particular, the limited value of household registers. Nevertheless, this sort of treatment has contributed, in its own way, to our understanding of transformations in Chosŏn Dynasty society.

The limitations of this sort of understanding become apparent when we consider the issue of societal change within a broader perspective. After all, does such a view agree with what we know of Chosŏn Dynasty history? What does “progress” mean when used in the context of “class mobility”? The fact that these questions are generally absent in the studies done since the 1960s shows how researchers have attempted to use the conclusions from studies on the history of social stratification to confirm “development theory”. The researchers treating instability in the social stratification system of the late Chosŏn Dynasty have almost all relied on this sort methodology with similar motives. These researchers have thus failed to show the social stratification system’s historical role as an element of feudal society We may also note that these researchers did little to improve the methods used to analyze household registers: moreover, they were not able to clarify the proper use of terminology and concepts dealing with social strata. In addition, they failed to develop a theoretical description of social stratification.

From the same period, in the field of historical research, Chŏng Sŏk-ch'ong’s treatise “The Collapse of the Late Chosŏn Dynasty’s Social Status System” (1972) held a key position in the field at the time and subsequently had a profound influence on later research. Chŏng’s research was not limited to simplistic explanations based on theories of class mobility. Instead, Chŏng offered an explanation of the instability of the social stratification system. Furthermore, he explained this instability in terms of economic changes affecting the Late Chosŏn Dynasty. Chŏng, using Shikata method of analyzing household registers, analyzed the contents of household registers in Ulsan area. He concluded that the pyramid-shaped social structure of the beginning of the 18th century was inverted by the 19th century, this representing the collapse of status hierarchy.

8 J N Sommerville (Sŏ Ŭi-p’il) confirmed Chŏng Sŏk-ch'ong’s conclusions in his analysis of materials from the same area. However, his research suggests that the traditional hyangban successfully maintained their position, at least to some extent, even after the 18th century (Sŏ Ŭi-p’il, 1972)
However, Chŏng's interest in the instability of the social stratification system can be found in his view that "the status hierarchy is one of the pillars of feudal society and is just as important as the status of land. Indeed, we can explain changes in the status hierarchy in terms of changes in feudal society itself." Chŏng's research is limited to the extent that it fails to treat the social stratification system as an organic element of feudal society structure. Chŏng's paper makes use of a wide range of ancient texts, but the paper's real value lies in its treatment of the "movement for the liberation of the Nobility Class." In many ways, Chŏng's paper is representative of both the comparative merits and limitations of the period's research.

On the other hand, E.W. Wagner and Susan Shin, using a different method of analysis from that which Chŏng Sŏk-ch'ŏng used, looked at household registers from the one year era and compared the occupational status of the four previous generations with that of the current head of the household. These researcher questioned the validity of the previous, commonly-held view which held that the rigid social stratification system that had existed since the early Chosŏn Dynasty had become unstable after the 1592 Japanese invasion. In addition, these researchers cast doubt on the hypotheses of scholars such as Shikate and Kim Yong-sŏp who based their conclusions on such a view. Wagner and Shin pointed out that the status hierarchy had, in fact, developed a downward flow (had become more conservative) after the Japanese invasion, particularly during the 17th century. They emphasized the fact that the rigid status hierarchy, although it became unstable during the Late Chosŏn Dynasty, never did completely collapse.

Although many of the basic problems were left for later researchers, this period is to be commended for its tremendous activity, helping to provide a

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9 Ch'oe Yŏng-ho, in his 1984 paper "yuhak, haksalbong, kyosaeng-go," confirms this point, although he does not approach the issue through the analysis of household registers. Ch'oe, in his discussion of the military duty, stresses the fact that the regulation levying the Kyosaeng nakkangp'o tax at the beginning of Injo's reign was finally repealed because of the protestations of the suyok. Discussing the changes in 17th century Chosŏn Dynasty society, Ch'oe tells us, "Having come from influential families, the suyok were reluctant to share their monopoly on social recognition and special privileges excluding them from military service with the Confucian scholars who had been born from commoner (yangban) parentage." Ch'oe points out how, after the 17th century, "the status hierarchy structure fell into decline as both an institution and an ideology." More research is needed to determine whether this trend continued into the 18th and 19th centuries. We should keep in mind that Kim Yong-sŏp had previously pointed out the growing conservatism of the 17th century.
basis for subsequent studies of social strata. On this basis, questions concerning basic methodology could now be asked and solutions to these problems were now possible.

Deserving mention for their respective achievements, the work of the following two scholars is worth mention: firstly, Han Yŏng-guk, for his systematic treatment of problems concerning the critique of historical records (see his papers "Studies on Societal Transformation in the Taegu Area during the 18th and 19th centuries"—1976, and "The Kogong during the Late Chosŏn Dynasty"—1979); and secondly, Jung Ok-ja, for her development of a new perspective in her theses written in 1978 and 1981 where she observes "the characteristics of chungin class during its initial phase of development." She says, "This class played a vital role in the dispersion of traditional culture and the subsequent realization of a modern culture."

5) The Fifth Period: 1980—86

The 1980 left an indelible mark on the history of the current era. The spectre of modernization, which had formed a major undercurrent of the 1960s, now came to the surface bearing with it a new dynamism. The attempts to come to terms with the contradictions inherent in modern Korean society suffered many setbacks at this time. On the one hand, this led many scholars to seriously reflect on the meaning of social progress. On the other hand, interest in the changes confronting Korean society grew tremendously. The research of the period does not directly correspond to the general mood of the times; yet, there was, significantly enough, a new surge of interest in research concerning the social dynamics (the instigators of change) that brought about the dissolution of feudal era's social structure. In this period, most researchers used the methodological approach of the preceding period. Indeed, some of the writings seem to regress to the same level as those of the 1930s and 1940s. However, most of the research was conducted with an accurate reflection on past research. As a result the research of this period markedly progressed. In assessing the relative merits of this period, we may take note of the following.

had, of course, been done before, but the previous research was usually used in support of theories explaining the instability of status hierarchy during the Late Chosŏn Dynasty. Most of the new era’s scholars considered the idea of “an unstable status hierarchy during the late Chosŏn Dynasty” to be problematic. Thus, some of the researchers tried to develop new methodologies to cast light on the status hierarchy.

Scholars such as Kim P’il-dong (1982), Yi Hun-sang (1984, 85, 88) and Han Young-woo (1986, 88) established a new direction in the study of social strata with their research on the chungin and local petty officials (hyangnu, yijok). These scholars elucidated the actual characteristics of chungin class. In addition, they perceive the chungin class as “a new social power.” The most adamant defender of this new perspective is Yi Hun-sang. In his series of writings, he confirms the establishment and consequent growth of leading families and intelligentsia among Hyangnu class”. Han Young-woo, in his series, attempts to lay the foundation for an understanding of the same subject from a more concrete level. Han attempts to understand the various aspects of chungin class—its foundation process, its political position and its social situation—from an institutional level. Yi Chong-il, in his series of papers on Liberation of illegitimate sons, attempts to develop our understanding of social strata regulations during the early Chosŏn Dynasty.

Secondly, research on status hierarchy structure and structural change made enormous advances. The above mentioned case study by Choe Sŏng-hŭi brought to light certain faults in previous analysis of genealogical registers. In addition, Han Yong-guk, in his 1985 paper “Basic Research on Chosŏn Dynasty Household Registers”, reinterprets the meaning of household (ho) to uncover a new way of using household registers. In addition, research on occupation—the key to analyzing household registers—received new treatment by scholars such as Yi Chun-gu (1985, 89) and Choe Sŏng-hŭi. These studies gave us a clearer picture of occupations like yuhak, haksaeung, ŏbyu, ômmu, hallyang. In particular, Choe Sŏng-hŭi’s paper “A Case Study on Social Mobility During the Late Chosŏn Period” (1985a) pointed out the limitations of previous research that had analyzed household registers according to occupational classifications. In another paper “The Taegaje system of Yangban in Chosŏn Dynasty”, Choe examines the aristocratic nature of Yangban society during the Chosŏn Dynasty. Although this paper chiefly treats the early Chosŏn Dynasty, it helps to broaden our understanding of the status hierarchy as it existed during the Chosŏn Dynasty. Yi
Hae-jun, in his paper "Scholar Households of the Chinju Area in the Late Choson Period", points out certain faults in the previous analysis of household registers. He casts doubt on "the conclusion that 40~70% of the whole house holds during the middle of 19th century were yangban, or the view that these yangban actually moved up the social latter and eventually received a share of privileges.

This period of research significantly showed future scholars the possibility of transcending, through new finds and the reinterpretation of previously existing materials, the limitations of previous research on social stratification. However, this research continued to be piece-meal, failing to achieve a comprehensive examination of the Choson Dynasty status hierarchy.

Thirdly, this period's research tended to make use of the concept of social dynamics (social classes) as a round-about way of overcoming the limitations of previous research. In short, this period's research is characterized by its search for the formation, development and direction of the revolutionary dynamism effecting the dissolution of the Medieval Ages. Research by Kim In-geol (1981, 83), Ahn Byong-uk (1981, 86), Yi Hae-jun (1982), Chong Sok-chong (1983b), Yi Se-young (1985), Shin Yong-ha (1985a, b), and Pak Ch'an-sung (1985), and Kawashima Fumya (1985, 87), together with the above-mentioned research on chungin class and yijok by Jung Ok-ja and Yi Hun-sang exemplify this trend.

Of course, the above studies do not exhaust the full scope of research in this area, moreover, these studies did not all give a direct treatment of the status hierarchy. Nevertheless, these studies did provide the basis for a new level of research by determining the actual character and tendency of social classes. This, in turn, added a new level of significance to descriptions of the character and "instability" of the status hierarchy.

In this regard, we might mention Ahn Byong-uk's work. Ahn examines the attitudes of the peasants (mm) and the 'Wealthy house-holds (yoho)' who had arisen from amidst the peasants. Ahn says that traditional delination of status into the yangban, yangin and ch'onmin is unable to explain the changed economic relationships of the 19th century. However, Ahn fails to explain the character and position of the yoho class. Treating the same period, Kim In-geol shows how the sajok, who were the ruling strata of rural society, attempted to preserve their special privileges amidst the upheavals and changes in the power structure. However, this attempt ultimately fails, and the sajok are ostracized from rural authority; henceforth, they become a
conservative force. According to Kim, the friction between the new social force and the previous ruling class erupted into Hyangjŏn (rural struggle). Once more, we find a lack of clarity in his treatment of the new social force’s class-character and the determination of their social position.

The above points are confirmed in other works too. For example, Yi Se-young, in his paper “Land Management under the Yangban t’ohŏ (Proprietors) of the 18th and 19th Century” (1985), attempts to examine the yangban land in relation to political and economic changes. In this way, Yi hopes to cast light on the nature of the landed class as part of the status hierarchy. Yi’s study contains many latent suggestions, yet it still fails to treat the status hierarchy as an organic aspect of the period; consequently, the study fails to clearly indicate the historical character of social forces during the dissolution of the medieval ages. Due to the differences in opinion concerning the societal organization of the Late Chosŏn Dynasty, the descriptions of the dynasty’s character are hopelessly at odds with one another. This serves to confirm the chaotic state of present research.

In his paper, Kawashima exhibits a different methodology for understanding the position and characteristics of local elite kin groups in Chosŏn Dynasty. Kawashima analyses the hyangan (list of local yangban) in order to understand how the character and attitude of the elite kin group changed. He looks at the group in terms of its influence and role consciousness within the bureaucratic system. Kawashima says that the members of this group, serving the yangban families in an unofficial capacity, were able to remain in existence up until the latter half of the 18th century. Even if such conclusion are to be accepted, his statement that the increase in the population of the yangban made the hyangan’s efforts ineffective needs further scrutiny.

Lastly, let us take a look at Shin Yong-ha and Pak Ch’an-sŏng’s research on the characteristics and attitudes of the peasant soldiers during the peasant uprisings. Both researchers agree in their theoretic approach which takes into account the peasant soldiers’ class status and social position. Even if the overall success of their efforts is denied, their research is to be commended for the way it has made us reflect on the fact that class characteristics in pre-modern society are to be understood in terms of social status.

In addition to the previously mentioned research, the following studies and their theoretical approach deserve our attention; namely, Yŏ ēl (1980) for his anthropological approach, and Ch’oe Hong-gi’s for his so-
ciological approach (1981, 83) and his analysis of household registers. The scholars of this era continued to conduct research on Nobi class and Kogong. These researchers began to take an interest in hyŏpho (laborers), yet, with the exception of the aforementioned studies on Nobi class by Ch'ŏng Sŏk-ch'ong and Ch'ŏn Hyŏng-t'aeak and Pak Yong-suk (1983, 87) and Han Yŏng-guk's research (1985) on kogong and hyŏpho, the research of this period shows little progress in research methods.

In general, this period made much progress in its methodology and treatment of materials dealing with concrete problems. In addition, many new questions arose at this time. However, most of the questions which were posed dealt with only a particular aspect of the subject, and these questions could not be conclusively solved because of the lack of research materials. As an example of the general tendencies in the research of the period, we might note the inability to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the previous period's so-called "theory of class mobility".

At this point, at comprehensive examination of the previous research, from its basic theoretical premises to its understanding of historical materials, is necessary. The basis for such an undertaking should come from the rectification of our views concerning the Chosŏn Dynasty's social structure. Yet, such research will be largely ineffectual if it is not conducted in an atmosphere of cooperation between scholars. Indeed, the trend towards group research presages a new direction in this field. Needless to say, this new research must establish, in concrete terms, the contradictions in Late Chosŏn Dynasty society; moreover, it must elucidate the growth of the prime force motivating changes directed towards overcoming these contradictions.

3. Conclusion

As seen in the above examination, research conducted after the 1960s using the developmental theory confirmed that there had been an enormous change in the status hierarchy during the Late Chosŏn Period. These changes were understood to have been inextricably connected with the constant process of societal change affecting the dynasty. In addition, they were considered to be a result of the development of Chosŏn society. These conclusions disproved the idea of a "decaying feudal society". In spite of their achievements, the research of this period failed to find answers to many of the key theoretical problems. What did these scholars mean by "progress"?
What was the actual manifestations of "progress?" Was their concept of progress open to scientific verification?

Yet, the research of this period ultimately played an important role in the overall development of studies in this area. The excavation of new research material along with a marked increase in conclusive, verifiable research helped to shed light on the previous misinterpretations of materials. Hence, the new research showed us how we must modify our understanding of the previous research in recognition of its limitations. Critical analysis of historical documents and clarification of their theoretical approach to research.

The first methodological problem that can be pointed out is the antihistorical "class theory" (class mobility theory) which has formed the bases of research since the 1960s and 1970's. The nature of human groups can, to some extent, be explained by categorizing societies into certain social classes according to certain characteristic (i.e., wealth, social position, influence, education, etc.). However, such an analysis cannot be used to explain group consciousness or a certain groups historical character. These researchers also commit a methodological error when they fail to take into account the manner in which social strata and the structure of social strata relate to social classes in pre-modern society. This problem is aggravated by the complete absence of research on the history of social institutions. This sort of research should form the foundation for any study of the history of social status during the Late Choson Period. However, the most basic problem lies in the absence of a detailed examination of research focused on the history of social hierarchy during the pre-modern era. Until this problem is dealt with, this research has little hope of getting off the ground.

The Choson Dynasty's regulations governing the status hierarchy were established in accordance with the class perspective and the historical character of the ruling class (the sadaebu). The scope of these regulations was limited by the regulation defining occupational status (shimbun jigyok-che). Furthermore, the ruling class, in an attempt to maintain their advantageous position amidst social upheavals, developed various regulatory apparatuses. In light of these facts, research on the history of the status hierarchy of the Late Choson Period account for the way in which changes in the class structure influenced the status hierarchy. This research must also uncover the societal contradictions stemming from the ruling class's firm defense of the status system. In relation to this, researchers must discover the significance of household registers and
point out the changes that household registers have undergone

In light of the above points, we can conclude that research treating the various social strata is still riddled with problems. Even though the present research on status hierarchy is still in its initial stages, we should maintain a sense of the relationship between status hierarchy and social class. To fully develop this relationship, the present research should go hand in hand with social economics research on the Chosŏn Dynasty social structure and the changes that structure underwent. This point may also be applied to research done in this area since 1980 that attempts to explain social dynamics. The problems discussed above can be summed up in the following manner.

Firstly, we must develop a scientific understanding of the social structure of the Chosŏn Dynasty during the collapse of feudalism. This will require a deeper understanding of the structure of Korean feudal society.

Secondly, we must consider the status hierarchy to be an intrinsic aspect of pre-modern social structure. In other words, we must develop an accurate understanding of status as the concrete mode of existence of a class in pre-modern society. This will necessitate a re-evaluation of previous methodology.

Thirdly, we must increase the amount of research materials available and perform more case studies using this material. In addition, we must intensify our critical analysis of historical materials. Such an endeavor must, of course, be supplemented with studies on the history of institutions. General research on household registers is an example of an area which might serve as an intermediate link between these two areas of research.

Lastly, we must explain in concrete terms the way the status hierarchy functioned and was managed. To do this, we will need to take into account relevant findings from political history, economic history, the history of ideas and the history of mass movements. The study of social status during the Late Chosŏn Dynasty must not develop independently. Only by developing a broad perspective, can this field of study grow to maturity.

GLOSSARY

Ahn Byŏng-uk 安秉旭  Chinju 晉州
chigyŏk 職役  Chi Sung-jong 지승종
Ch’ilban ch’ŏnyŏk 七班賤役  Ch’oe Chae-sŏk 崔在錫
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