

Confucian Tradition in Rural Society during the Late Chosŏn Dynasty: Changing Elite Perceptions of Community Administration [居鄉觀]

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1. Understanding tradition in historical terms

There seem to be few words that have spawned such radically different reactions as the term “tradition.” While some people refer to “tradition” in a negative way as an object to overcome, others idealize it as something valuable to inherit and improve upon. The word “tradition” was actually created during the time when modernity was being developed throughout the world. According to who was using the term, “tradition” could mean vastly different things.

The leading thinkers of the Western modern world who supported scientific approach and rationalism, considered ‘tradition’ to be a very negative concept, and deemed the word identical to those of “superstition”

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and "obtuseness."¹ However, they were not wholly aware of the contents of such 'traditions,' and hesitated to face them directly. Moreover, anthropologists or historians seem much more interested in the traditions of non-Western societies over those of their own. A similar situation was going on in China as well, as severe social criticism launched against the 'traditions' in the process of constructing a new society over one that has been feudal-based.² Most Chinese speakers who supported the concept of modernization considered traditional society and modern society to be completely different. However, as some traditions somehow survived the modernization process,³ we now know that such views are not only untrue but inappropriate

There was no big difference in Korea's situation. As the establishment of an independent modern society was being delayed, the task of criticism and the succession of tradition had to be halted. During the 1960s, the subject of tradition managed to garnish academic interest, but back then tradition was still an object to be overcome, or surmounted in some way.⁴ Of course there were also dissenting

1 Edward Shils *Tradition* The University of Chicago Press, 1981

2 Koh, Byong-ik "Geundae jungguk-eseou yugyo-ui donghyang" [The Situation of Confucian Qualities inside Modern China] *Dong-asia-sa-ui jeontong-gwa byeonyong* [The Traditions and Changes Occurred throughout the East Asian History] Seoul Munhak-gwa jseongsa, 1996, pp.270-273

3 S N Eisenstadt *Modernization Protest and Change* Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1966; "Transformation of Social, Political, and Cultural Orders in Modernization." *Comparative Perspectives on Social Change* Ed Eisenstadt Boston. Little, Brown and Company, 1968, pp 256-279

4 Lee, Man-gab. "Hyeondae-e saneun jeontong sahoe" [The Traditional Society in the Contemporary Days]. *Jeontong-gwa hyeondaeseong* [Traditions and Contemporaneity]

voices who argued that certain traditions actually contributed to modernization, although it is also true that the traditions themselves were changed and distorted in the process of modernization.⁵

In fact, there were debates among Korean historians on the matter of traditions and the preservation of national culture in the late 1950s.⁶ In these discussions, tradition was defined as an inheritance from the past with a potential to serve the present day's cultural development. Tradition was no longer considered to be an object of derision or blind praise. As Professor Lee Ki-baik stated, objective analyses of traditions could help them flourish again in today's society. However, as debates regarding issues of the task of modernization or governmental policies related to modernization gained momentum and heated up, such discussions did not go forward.

Since the 1970s, social efforts and arguments supporting the positive nature of traditions have managed to continue, but, in most cases, such efforts were blamed as being connected to some sort of political agendas. There were also few cases based on appropriate perception of cultural qualities. However, scholars continued to reflect upon the matter of appropriate understanding of national traditions. Professor Lee Ki-baik⁷ and Professor Han Wu-geun⁸ stated that

Seoul Chunchusa, 1965, p.19.

5 Lee, Hae-yeong "Han-guk nongchon-ui jeontong-gwa byeonyong" [The Traditions and Changes inside the Korean Agricultural Society] *Han-guk-ui jeontong-gwa byeoncheon* [The Korean Traditions and the Changes] Seoul Asea munje yeon-guso in Korea University, 1973

6 Lee, Ki-baik "Minjok munhwa-ui jeontong-gwa gyeseeung" [The Tradition of National Culture and Its Preservation] *Idae hakbo* 1958 11 15

7. Lee, Ki-baik "Jeontong munhwa-wa hyeondae munhwa" [Traditional Culture and

tradition or traditional culture should be perceived and understood in the context of contemporary society and the concept of re-imagining, in order to bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary qualities. This flow of thought was a result of the scholars' efforts to counteract many problems such as the distorted image of Korean traditions created under the Japanese occupation of the peninsula, and the flooding of foreign cultures into this country. In other words, the scholars were aiming to construct a new, healthy, independent version of tradition.

As further academic research was conducted, our understanding of Korean tradition was enhanced. Yet in some cases, efforts to link the traditions and the construction of a new society and culture, tended to be stretched too far, to the point of arbitrarily 'choosing' a particular subject from the vast pool of traditional qualities without the proper understanding of those qualities in historical terms. At the same time, there were cases in which the traditional qualities were not understood or perceived in the context of past societies' cultural environments. Traditions were understood or perceived superficially in the context of current concepts and trends. Those understandings or perceptions have left the public to blindly uphold such traditions in the most shallowest terms. Korea's so-called 'Confucian tradition' has been exposed to these problems.

Professor Koh Byong-ik fairly criticized the general belief or preconception which argued that Confucian ideologies and traditions

Contemporary Culture] *Sogang immun nonchong* Vol 7 1997

8 Han, Wu-geun "Jeontong-ui olbareun jaeguseong" [The Proper Re-imagining of Traditions] *Minyoksa-ui jeonmang* [The Prospects regarding the Future of the Korean people] Seoul Ilchokak, 1997

either practically blocked the modernization process or actually fueled it.⁹ Yet, he is able to grasp the concept of 'Confucian traditions,' such as "Confucian style" memorial services for ancestors at home or at their grave sites. This kind of approach is also shown in group research¹⁰ which tends to define Korean traditional society as a 'Confucian Society,' and considers every conceivable type of Confucian quality currently present as an inheritance from the days of the Chosŏn Dynasty. The problem is that this kind of general understanding is neither accurate nor appropriate in historical terms.

These days, re-imagining Confucian traditions has become a trend and is being connected with general discussions on overcoming the 'modernity' of East Asia. Thus, the Confucian background of the Donghak movement became a subject of argument,¹¹ the theory of 'the Continuation of Yangban-based customs' was raised,¹² and even

9 Koh, Byong-ik "Confucianism in Contemporary Korea" *Confucian Traditions In East Asian Modernity*. Ed Tu Wei-Ming Harvard Univ Press, 1996

10 Sahoe minsok yeon-gusil "Yugyo-jeok jeontong sahoe-ui gujo-wa teukseong" [The Structure and Characteristics of a Confucian Traditional Society] *Han-guk-ui sahoe-wa munhwa* [The Korean Society and Culture] Vol 21. The Academy of Korean Studies, 1993

11 Jo, Hye-in "Donghak-gwa jujahak Yugyo-jeok jonggyo gaehyeok-ui maekrak" [Donghak and Jujahak. Religious Reformations in Confucian Terms] *Han-guk sahoe-sa yeon-guhoe nonmunjip* Vol 17 1990, Yu, Yeong-ik "Jeon Bong-jun ugeo-ron Gabo nongmin bonggi-e daehan tongseol bipan" [Jeon Bong-jun's Heroic Deed Critically Analyzing the Generally Accepted Preconceptions toward the Gabo-year Peasants War] *Lee Ki-bak seonsaeng gohui ginyeom Han-guk sahak nonchong*, Vol 2, 1994

12 Jeong, Jun-yeong "Chosŏn hugi hyangchon yangban sahoe-ui jusokseong-gwa byeonhwasang" [The Continuing Qualities and Changed Ones of the Local Yangban Society during the Chosŏn Dynasty's Latter-half Period] Chap 1, 2 *Daedong munhwa yeon-gu* Vol. 35 36, 1999 2000

the theory on the changing of the stratification system during the latter-half of the Chosŏn dynasty is being questioned.¹³ In fact, these disputes occurred because the perception of traditions was not properly handled in historical terms.

If we pay attention to so-called European traditions, we will notice that, unlike the ordinary customs in usual situations, European traditions were actually created in the late 19th century. They were especially widespread in the 30 or 40 years before World War I in 1914.¹⁴ Regarding this fact, we should, then, perceive the concept of tradition as changeable and revisable just as Professors Lee and Koh have commented,¹⁵ instead of something that is fixed and locked down. So the important questions here are "What should we take as our true traditions?" and "How should we re-imagine them?" Shun Chae-ho once stated that choosing to believe in the Confucian philosophies was not what rendered Koreans weak, but selecting the wrong way of maintaining the belief was.¹⁶ His perception on this matter can be very helpful in understanding the Confucian traditions of the Chosŏn dynasty.

13 Im, Hak-seong "Chosŏn hugi gongnobi sinbun byeondong-e daehan ilyeon-gu" [The Changes Occurred in the Social Status of the Office-stationed Nobil Workers during the Chosŏn Dynasty's Latter-half Period] *Guksagwan nonchong* Vol 86, 1999.

14. Eric Hobsbawm "Mass-Producing Traditions Europe, 1870-1914" Ed E Hobsbawm, and T Ranger *The Invention of Tradition* Cambridge Univ Press, 1983, pp.263-307

15 Koh, Byong-ik, "Jeontong-ui jsok-gwa danjeol" [The Continuation and Discontinuation of Traditions] *Dong-asiasa-ui jeontong-gwa byeonyong* [The Traditions and Changes Occurred throughout the East Asian history] Seoul Munhak-gwa juseongsa, 1996

16 Shin, Chae-ho "Yugyogyee daehan ilnon" [Commenting upon the Confucian Society] *Daehan maeil sinbo* 1909.2 28

2. Is Yangban society of the late Chosŏn dynasty still very much alive?

During its transitional phase to a modernized nation, Korea failed to establish an independent national state. The Korean peninsula was occupied by Imperial Japanese forces when Koreans should have been trying to re-imagine traditional concepts. During thirty-six years of occupation, a distorted colonial version of tradition and images of traditions were created, becoming a new burden for the Korean people to dismantle. However, in the process of overcoming these burdens, historical and holistic perspectives were somehow lost. Additionally, as a result of such a lack in the appropriate criteria, an extremely critical point of view toward the general Confucian culture and the Chosŏn dynasty's Yangban culture was formed.

After liberation in August 1945, for a few decades, Koreans' perceptions of their culture were either filled with nothing but utter disrespect and contempt or with blind praises. The major preconception toward the Chosŏn society was that its leading figures, namely the Yangban figures, were those who corrupted society and led it to its eventual demise. Thus, in the public's eye, the idea of trying to learn something from the Chosŏn Dynasty period would simply seem ridiculous, thanks to the distorted images created and planted among the public during the Japanese occupation.¹⁷ After the Korean war, however, Korean historians attempted to overcome these negative ideas. The historians' efforts and theories were generally labelled as

17. Kim, Yong-seob. "Ilje gwanhakjadeul-ui Han-guk sagwan" [The Government-hired Historians' Perspective upon Korean History] *Sasanggye* February, 1963

'the Theory of Internal Developments.'¹⁸

As research continued, most distorted images and understandings of the Chosŏn dynasty period were rectified and recovered. Yet some issues are still open to debate, such as the disturbances and collapse of the Yangban society in the late Chosŏn period. While most of historians of Korean history believe that social order based on stratification began to collapse during the latter-half period of the dynasty, some historians argue that the traditional authorities in the form of the Yangban were still intact during those days, and that it should be considered as one of the Chosŏn society's important characteristics. Studies in the vein of the former have modified its conclusions, made during the 1960s, to reflect the new findings that were announced since the 1980s.¹⁹ On the other hand, studies in the vein of the latter have become much more prominent these days, when historians criticize the 'internal developments theory' for being based on Western models of modernity.

It is undeniable that East Asian communities clearly had different histories compared to those of the Western world. During the Chosŏn Dynasty the authority of the King or the Yangban figures was never

18. Kim, In-geol "1960-70s' 'naejae-jeok baljeonnon'-gwa Han-guk sahak" [The Formation of the Theory of 'Internally Staged Developments' during the 1960s and 70s, and the Korean History in General] *Kim Yong-Seob gyosu jeongnyeon ginyeom nonchong*, Vol 1 Han-guksa iron-gwa yeoksa insik [Perceiving Korean History and Historical Theories] *Jisik saneobsa*, 1997

19. Yi, Tae-jin "Chosŏn hugi yangban sahoe-ui byeonhwa Sinbunje-wa hyangchon sahoe unyeong gujo-e daehan yeon-gu-reul jungsim-euro" [The Changes Occurred inside the Yangban Society during the Chosŏn Dynasty's Latter-half Period Examined through Examples in the Areas such as Social Stratification and Local Society's Ruling Mechanisms] *Han-guk sahoe baljeon saron* Seoul Ilchokak, 1992, pp 129-226

dismissed or nullified. While the Yangban figures did not directly participate in the government's decisions, they still had some influence. Even after the fall of the Daehan Empire, the Yangban figures were the main targets of the imperial authorities to draw to their side to rule Korean society. The Yangban figures were thus allowed to maintain their previous positions and authority. However, one cannot simply say outright that Yangban society continued to exist during the Japanese Occupation period based merely on these facts.

As a matter of fact, the Yangbans' authority was defined by the relationship among the government [國家], the Yangban figures [士族] and the general public [民], and was certainly not immune to changes. Some scholars argue that considering the fact that the Yangban figures (the local elites which will be referred to as 'Sajok' from now on) of the 19th century established consanguinity villages and close relations among the clan members, the authority of the Yangban figures continued through the changes of the time,²⁰ while others argue that such Yangban traditions were all created after the 17th century.²¹ There is a flaw in both these positions and it rises

20 Song, Jun-ho "Chosŏn-ui yangbanje-reul eotteoke ihaehal geosin-ga" [How to Understand the Chosŏn Dynasty's Yangban-administration] *Jeolla munhwa nonchong* Jeonju. Jeolla munhwa yeon-guso in Jeonbuk University, 1986, "Jinju-eseo jaehwagun-doeneun Chosŏnjo sahoe-ui jsokseong" [The Continuation of Chosŏn Dynasty's Tradition Confirmed in the Example of the Jinju Area] *Jonggyo,ingan, sahoe* [Religion, Humans, Society] Seo Eui-Pil seonsaeng hoegab gnyeon nonmunjip ganhaeng wwon-hoe, 1988

21 Miyajima [宮嶋博史] *Yangban—The Privileged Gentry Class of the Chosŏn Society*. Japan. Juwau gowron-sha [中央公論社], 1995; "The Establishment of the Chosŏn Traditional Society, The Era of Ming, Chung and Chosŏn" *Sekai-no Rekishi* Vol 12

from the risk of over-evaluating some partial characteristics of the latter periods of Chosŏn and magnifying them as being completely representative of the dynasty.

In this article, the author will try to assess the continuations and discontinuations in Confucian Traditions, by examining the local elite's perspective upon the matter of a person's own behaviors and actions regarding social matters inside the local societies, the so-called Geohyanggwan [居鄉觀].

3. The deterioration of ethics for community administration, and the prevalence of family ethics

During the early days of the Chosŏn dynasty, the Yangban was still under the control of the King,²² and was experiencing difficulties in gaining any autonomous authority. Then after the 16th century, the local elites began to establish autonomous leading bodies. According to the author's research, there were dual presences of authorities established in each region. One form was that of the administrative authority who were dispatched and assigned to the areas as prefects or magistrates by the central government, the other was an autonomous leading body established by the local Sajok members. Their autonomous authority could be called Hyanggwon [鄉權].²³

Juwau gowron-sha, 1998, pp 244-291

22. Yi, Tae-jin "Sarimpa-ui Yuhyang-so bokrip undong" [The Sarimpa Members' Efforts to Restore the Yuhyangso Offices] *Han-guk sahoesa yeon-gu*. Seoul Jisik saneobsa, 1986

23. Kim, In-geol "Chosŏn hugi hyangchon sahoe byeondong-e daehan yeon-gu" [The Changes inside the Local Societies during the Chosŏn Dynasty's Latter-half Period]

Hyanggwon, the local authority, referred to the authority of recommending or appointing people for the local council or other administrative bodies, and access to the local administration especially in terms of taxation. The main source for this kind of authority and accessibility was provided by the Hyang-an [鄉案] and the Hyanghoe [鄉會], or the Donggye [洞契] and Dongyak [洞約] gatherings.

The Sajok figures not only had substantial authority and autonomous ruling bodies, but also an inner logic underlying such operations. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Sajok figures, as the leaders of the local communities, considered the moral obligations regarding a person's own behavior when he was stationed in a governmental office [居官], with his own family [居家], or inside his local residing society [居鄉], to be very important. Among those was the issue of Geohyang [居鄉] which was deemed with the utmost importance.²⁴

The concept of 'Geohyang' literally meant staying inside the local society, and the word Geohyangjudo [居鄉之道] referred to the moral obligations which should be known by anyone who was in social position to maintain a positive behavior and rightful actions inside local societies. The most typical use of the word in this sense can be found from the words of Lee Ih [李珥] in his character-building

Doctoral dissertation Seoul National University, 1991

24 Kim, In-geol "Chosŏn hugi jaeji sajok-ui geohyanggwan byeonhwa" [The Changes Made to the Local Sajok Figures' Sense of Obligation Regarding the Issue of Geohyanggwan] *Yeoksa-wa hyeonsil* Vol. 11. 1994; "16-17 segi jaeji sajok-ui geohyanggwan" [The Local Sajok Figures' Sense of Obligation Regarding the Issue of Geohyanggwan during the 16th and 17th Centuries] *Han-guk munhwa* Vol 19 Institute of Korean Studies in Seoul National University, 1997

manual *Gyeokmong yogyeol* [擊蒙要訣].²⁵ During the 16th and 17th centuries, however, when compared to the meanings of the other words like *Geoga* [居家] or *Geogwan* [居官], we can see, through people's personal anthologies and other chronologies, that the word *Geohyang* was beginning to harbor a more particular meaning.²⁶

This means that the local elites began to consider the sense of moral obligations regarding behavior and actions inside local societies to be a clearly different from other customary ethics that could be applied to the relationships between family members or in one's own study or behavior or even when managing economy and businesses. This kind of thought can be well confirmed by the words of Lee Yu-tae [李惟泰] who hailed from the Hoseo [湖西] region. Independent chapters of his *Jeonghun* [庭訓] are dedicated to the subjects of *Geohyangjido* [居鄉之道],²⁷ so one can deduce that Lee Yu-tae was specifically addressing those issues.

It was the Sajok figures' increasing local authorities and their deepening involvement in the local administrations that established this way of thinking as generally being the accepted form. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the *Geohyang* matter became an issue whenever there were troubles or conflicts between the local magistrates and the Sajok figures. Details of such clashes were documented in

25 Lee, Ih [李珥, 1536-1584] *Gyeokmong yogyeol* [擊蒙要訣] Jeobinjang [接人章] Chap 9

26 Jeong, Yeom [丁焯, 1524-1609] *Manheon seonsaeng munryp* [晚軒先生文集], Vol 4 Myoji [墓誌], Lee, Jeong-hyeom [李廷禧, 1562-1637] *Seokcheon seonsaeng yugo* [石泉先生遺稿], Jitodang seonsaeng haengrok [知退堂先生行錄, 參判兄 李廷馨], Gwak, San-jin [郭山晉] *Dangokryp* [丹谷集], Vol 5 Saurok [師友錄]

27 Lee, Yu-tae [李惟泰 1607-1684] *Choryeo jeonyip* [草廬全集], Vol 1, sang [上] *Jeonghun* [庭訓]

the Hyanggyu [鄉規] for the Hyanghoe, and Hyangso gatherings, which addressed issues such as evaluating the magistrates' administrative actions, or cooperating in local taxation in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts with them.

The Sajok figures' actions and behaviors became constant political issues, and frequently the objects of criticism. A Sajok figure named Yu Shik [庾軾, 1586-1650] was commended by Song Shi-yeol for the reason that no incorrect behavior was ever noted during his stay at the local society for half a century²⁸ Then a man named Lee Gi-bal [李起淳] was criticized as well as impeached for his wrongful conduct during his tenure at the central government in 1653 at the local community.²⁹ The charges against him interfered in the proceedings of the local court and some misconduct involving the local authorities. However, these charges were all based on circumstantial rumors, and considering that he was one of the few figures who were actually praised for honorable actions in the local society,³⁰ it seems pretty clear that the charges against him were engineered based upon mere hostile political intentions.

The concept and moral obligations regarding Geohyang, was first suggested by Lee Hwang [李滉] and Lee Ih [李珥], where they were expressed in a number of forms and meanings. The concept established by an 18th century scholar An Jeong-bok [安鼎福] (1712-1791), who

28 Yu, Shik [庾軾, 1586-1650], *Deokgok seonsaeng munjip* [德谷先生文集], Vol 4 Myopyo [墓表] written by Song, Shu-yeol [宋時烈]

29 *The Chronicles of the Chosŏn Dynasty* [Chosŏn wangjo sillok, 朝鮮王朝實錄] Reign of King Hyojong [孝宗], 4th year, May Mujun [戊辰] day

30 Jo, Hwang [曹煥, 1600-1665] *Gubong yujip* [九峯遺集], Vol 3 Sasil juprok [事實輯錄]

authored the *Geohyang jabui* [居鄉雜儀],³¹ which comprised of 15 chapters, is worth examining. The book contains Geohyang samples of 6 Chinese and 3 Chosŏn figures of which two were from the Dong-in faction, and only one—Lee Ih—was from the Seoin faction. The primary criteria for evaluating the actions of these figures were moral obligations for the local community members [Hyangdang; 鄉黨] dictated by Confucius, Mencius and Ju Hui, of which the first was most consulted.

What An found particularly important in the episodes regarding Lee Hwang were the recommendations such as the following: 1. Cooperate in taxation and avoid unnecessary conflicts with the authorities; 2. Do not insult the local officials or administrators; and 3. Pay proper respect to the magistrate. He also criticized the scholars of the Yaeon county for their apparent reluctance to be named Pungwan [品官] officials and argued that in the local communities one's own age was an important factor. Therefore, it is clear that he is suggesting a linkage between Geohyang moral obligations and the local communities.

Regarding the episodes involving Kim Seong-il, An examined the fact that Kim required others to show proper respect to influential figures whether they are representing members of the administrative authority or the local council. From the episodes involving Lee Ih, the dictating recommendations that examined with particular attention were to forego any unnecessary or unwarranted visits to the administrator's office as well as to resist asking for personal favors.

31. An, Jeong-bok [安鼎福, 1712-1791] *Sunamŭp* [順菴集], Vol. 15 *Geohyang jabeui* [居鄉雜儀]

What An was trying to say with the above examples, was that the intentions of those three were to make sure that the local elites fully cooperate with the administrative authorities in ruling the community, concurrently keeping a certain distance in their relationship with the magistrate while maintaining their status and the dignity as local elites. These guidelines were also instrumental in guarding the best interest of the local elites from the authorities' unfair requests as well as solidifying their position inside the local societies. This Geohyang issue, and the elites' perspective on this matter, namely the Geohyanggwan, was indeed very political in its nature.

Then coming into the 19th century, there were changes made to the whole concepts. The existing moral obligations seem to have been rendered rather obsolete, and several concepts which were being discussed in the context of Geohyang [居鄉] issues were now being discussed in the context of the Geoga [居家]. Cases in the vein of the former included an episode involving a person named Park Shi-won who hailed from the Yeongcheon county in the early 19th century. General comments about his life³² and his attitudes toward other people reveal that he, at least on Geohyang-related issues, differed in his dealings. While his ancestors were adamant and even aggressive in determining whether someone's actions and attitudes were deemed as being acceptable, Park Shi-won seems to have been quite modest and reserved. His case, then, clearly mirrors a changed situation.

Latter cases of the same vein prove to be more interesting. Isolated discussions of Geohyang issues are hard to find, and they are

32 Park, Shi-won [朴時遠, 1764-1842] *Ipoyp* [逸圃集], Vol. 5. Geohyang-yeo cheojajseol [居鄉如處子之說], Kim cheomchu yeong-ik noesa [金僉樞永翼誄辭], Vol. 6. Jogo cheosagong bugun haengjang [祖考慮士公府君行狀]

discussed in texts like *Geoga jabui* [居家雜儀] or *Geoga japrok* [居家雜錄] in which family issues are mainly discussed. In typical fashion, a man named Lee Ga-jin from Andong county, raised and commented upon such Geohyang matters, such as taxation.³³ Discussing a Geohyang matter in the context of Geoga [居家] issues clearly shows that the meaning and implications of such issues began to be perceived differently than during earlier periods, and that Geohyang matters were being practically absorbed into the area of Geoga matters. It also meant the de-politicalization of the local communities' moral ethics and obligations.

The 19th century text *Geohyang jabui* [居鄉雜儀] follows in a similar fashion. A man named Seon Shi-gye [宣始啓] from Jangheung county had authored *Geohyang jabui Sipgujo* [居鄉雜儀十九條]³⁴ but only addressed general matters and other minor issues such as education. He never raised the issue of relationships with the administrative authorities or the issue of taxation. Other people like Im Heon-hoe [任憲晦]³⁵ or Lee Myeong-wu [李明宇]³⁶ did not comment upon the issue of consensus of the local community or the Hyanghoe gatherings as well. These examples all show that the local elites' perception of community administration was permanently losing its political color.

33 Lee, Ga-jin [李可振, 1832-1886] *Pyeongdam munjip* [平潭文集], Vol 4 *Geoga Jabui* [居家雜儀], Gyejason [戒子孫]

34 Seon, Si-gye (宣始啓, 1742-1826) *Juajae yugo* [知吾齋遺稿], Vol 3 *Geohyang jabui Sipgujo* (居鄉雜儀十九條)

35 Im, Heon-hwae [任憲晦, 1811-1876] *Gosanjip* [鼓山集], Vol 8 *Geohyang palgye* [居鄉八戒]

36 Lee, Myeong-wu [李明宇, 1836-1904] *Mugo yugo* [默吾遺稿], Japjeo [雜著] section *Geohyang palgye* [居鄉八戒]

The local elites, then, namely Sajok figures, had to compensate for their lack of say in Geoga-related matters, ethics and obligations. Some may argue that it could be considered another form of continuation of the Sajok figures in their attempt to uphold traditional Confucian values in their lives. Yet considering the significant difference of Geohyang related issues, attitudes, nature, and those related to the Geoga, assessing the situation shows that an actual discontinuation from the original traditional local values might be truer to the nature of this situation

4. Conclusion

As considered above, the political aspect of the local elites' Geohyang obligations which was very strong during the 16th and 17th centuries practically disappeared with the advent of the 19th century. It appears that, the detachment of Hyanghoe, which was the ruling body of local societies led by their local elites, from them and its falling under the jurisdiction of the administrative authorities during the latter-half period of the 18th century, had something to do with this change. During that time, the local consensus was shattered and the inner bindings of the provincial elites were weakened, losing them the authority and positions as equal partners with the administrative authorities in ruling their local societies. In addition, we can see in Jeong Yak-yong's own notes³⁷ that the Hyanghoe which stood for the interests of the local elites now became a mere

37 Jeong, Yak-yong [丁若鏞] *Mokmun simseo* [牧民心書], Vol 6 Pyeongbu [平賦] Hojeon [戶典] Item 5 [第五條]

consultative body for effective taxation.³⁸

The Hyanghoe of the 19th century was witnessing the participation of not only the local elites but also the normal citizens who had interests in the administration, especially taxation, of the local society.³⁹ The nature of the local council's membership, or what was being discussed and argued during council sessions during the time period, clearly show that the activities and orientations of the Hyanghoe have changed and deviated from the original Confucian principles. This was also vividly demonstrated by the major gathering, organized by the Donghak members of the Boeun county, during the beginning of the 1894 Peasants War. Here the gathered participants announced that their demonstration was similar to that of the Western world's conference,⁴⁰ such as congress or parliament.

Surely, then, there was some influence of the local elites left inside the local council, for when the provincial administrative authorities began to show clear signs of heavy corruptions, the local elites' critical view of the authorities sharpened, and led to some expressions of view in 1862 when major peasant uprisings broke out. The role that Kim In-seob and his father Kim Ryeong played in the Danseong uprising which was a prelude to the 1862's peasant uprisings is a good example. It shows that the local elites still had

38 Kim, In-geol. *Chosŏn hugi hyangchon sahoe byeondong-e daehan yeon-gu* [The Changes inside the Local Societies during the Chosŏn Dynasty's Latter-half Period] Doctoral dissertation. Seoul National University, 1991

39 An, Byeong-uk *Sipgusegi hyanghoe-wa munnan* [The Hyanghoe Councils of the 19th Century and Peasant Insurrections] Doctoral dissertation Seoul National University, February 2000

40 "Seonmusa jaecha janggye, Eo Yun-jung gyeomdae" [宣撫使再次狀啓, 魚允中兼帶] *Donghakran grok* [東學亂記錄], p 123

some influence upon the events of the local society. Another highlight to this situation is Park Gyu-su, who dispatched to subdue the 1862 Jinju uprising, stated that the local elders and influential figures [士民父老] were at least partially responsible for the breakout of the insurrection.⁴¹

Recent studies of Jangseong County show that even during the Japanese occupation the local elites, namely the Sajok figures, still had some influence within local communities.⁴² This research suggests that after the Sajok figures' traditional influence weakened, organizing a new social system to oversee the management and consensus of the local society with the inclusion of new members from other social classes was unsuccessfully attempted. In this process, traditional local society leaders, the Sajok figures, were practically recalled to assume their original duties. In that Jangseong county, during the Daehan Empire period, the ancien regime was still operating under the joint effort of the administrative authorities and the local elites, and the Hyanghoe was more of a local consultative body for the administrative authorities, rather than a council standing for a strong voice or interest of the general public.

At present, there are not enough case studies to make any decisive assessment, but even past studies maintained that after the local elites lost their previous authorities and position, they were still struggling

41 "Do-jinju-haenggwan-gakeup" [到晋州行關各邑] *Imsulrok* [壬戌錄]. Ed. The Institute of Korean History Han-guksa jaryo chongseo, Vol 8 Tamgudang, 1974, p 5

42 Yoshikawa Tomotake [吉川友丈] "Reform from 'Above' and Local Society Integration of Local Society and the Elite Stratum from the Period of the Gabo Reforms to the Proclamation of the Great Korean Empire" *Josen-shu Genkyu-gai Rombun-jib* [朝鮮史研究會論文集] Vol 37 1999

to maintain their voice and authority through efforts of collaboration.⁴³ For example, the Dongyak [洞約] Hyangyak [鄉約] gatherings were being restored and renewed during the 19th century.⁴⁴ The local administrative authorities were also still trying to control them, or use them in their ruling of the local societies. Yet, the conflicts between the 'Hyanghoe jogyu' [鄉會條規] and eventual failure of the 'Hyangyak jangjeong' [鄉約章程] which were all designed to serve as regulations that would help shape the general public's consensus, simply show us that the Confucian traditions of the Chosŏn rural societies were clearly being discontinued.

In today's reality, the authority of the so-called 'Yangban' is still strong, and the bond among the conservative members of the society, who are, in fact in many cases the descendants of the Sajok figures of yesteryears, are solid. So we can say that even today the Sajoks' social influence remains powerful. But the influence they have today does not suggest that the cultural traditions which were surrounded them also survived past decades. Whether the Confucian traditions upheld and embraced by local elites have survived or not is a matter which should be approached and examined through a historical point of view, rather than taking the present situation and projecting it into

43 Lee, Hae-jun Chosŏn hugi munjung seowon yeon-gu [The In-House Seowon Schools of the Chosŏn Dynasty's Latter-half Period] Doctoral dissertation Kookmin University, 1993

44 Inoue [井上和枝] "The Changes Occurred in the Local Control during the Latter-half Period of the Chosŏn Dynasty and the Local Scholar-Influentials—The case of Gyeongsang-do Danseong-hyeon Area" *Josenshi Gyengyugai Robbun'yū* Vol 28 1991, The Local Elites during the Danseong Public Insurrection Period—In the case of Kim Ryeong and Kim In-Seob" *Choshagenkyuhokoku* [調査研究報告], Vol 27 Gakushūin daigaku [學習院大學] Toyubunkagenkyūsho [東洋文化研究所], 1991

the past

The local elites of rural societies in the latter-half period of the Chosŏn Dynasty failed to actively respond to the central government's policies of local control, so they failed in maintaining their positions and authority. There are many reasons for this. The government failed to establish any concrete and solid policy for rural societies. The local elites could not bring forward any options better than the government's. They should have seen the changes around them, assessed them and absorbed the newly rising interest groups inside the local societies to establish a more desirable environment for the ruling system. Instead they were just comfortable with their previous deal with administrative authorities, and enjoyed their already acquired rights and privileges without realizing that their own attitudes would lead them to their downfall. Such a downfall can be evidenced by the discontinuation of Confucian traditions demonstrated by the severe weakening of obligations and the sense of duty regarding Geoga [居家], Geohyang [居鄉] and Geogwan [居官].

We would only be able to speak of the continuation of early Confucian tradition or 'Yangban society' in the true sense if local elites were able to devise new guiding principles for community life. In other words, if they were able to extend the right principle to the realm of individual morality, and use them for managing governmental affairs, the continuation of Confucian tradition in Korean history could have been assured.

Glossary

Donggye	洞契	village association
Donghak	東學	Eastern learning [the Donghak learning]
Dongyak	洞約	village compacts
Geoga	居家	one's life, behavior and personal duties at home
Geoga jabui	居家雜儀	a collective ethical codes for the home
Geogwan	居官	one's life, behavior and public duty during one's tenure as an official
Geohyang	居鄉	one's life, behavior and social duty inside the local community
Geohyang jabui	居鄉雜儀	comprehensive ideas for the local community administration
Hyang-an	鄉案	register of local elites/sajok register
Hyangdang	鄉黨	local community
Hyanggwon	鄉權	local power
Hyanggyu	鄉規	local regulations
Hyanghoe	鄉會	local council
Hyangso	鄉所	local agency
Jeonghun	庭訓	a text addressing behaviors and duties required of family members
Min	民	the general public
Pungwan	品官	local officials
Sajok	士族	local elites/influential persons
Yangban	兩班	gentry