The Elusive Path to Sagehood: Origins of the Confucian Academy System in Chosón Korea

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The Confucian private academies or sŏwŏn of Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910) enjoy an imputed legacy of having been educational institutions of venerable age, serenely situated in rural locales in which Neo-Confucian metaphysics was studied and transmitted by wise masters. The reality was more dynamic and distinctly grittier: the academies were born in an age of growing political despair in the mid-sixteenth century and ended in wholesale violence as the sŏwŏn system was largely destroyed between 1868–1871 by the Taewŏn’gun. This paper examines the unlikely constellation of events that led to the creation of the first sŏwŏn in Chosŏn Korea, the Paegun-dong Academy in 1543 in the remote mountainous county of P’unggi, Kyŏngsang-do and its subsequent royal chartering in 1550 as Sosu Sŏwŏn. Chu Sebung (1495–1554) and Yi Hwang (1501–1570) were the pivotal figures in these events, as in separate ways they sought to comport their growing fascination with the social and moral implications of Southern Song learning from the twelfth century with their own trajectories of ambition and frustration as local magistrates. From the outset the sŏwŏn were less pristine academies dedicated to immersion in philosophy and more local institutions serving a diverse set of worldly interests in their locales.

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Introduction

Standing mute guard over the Korean countryside, overlooking lush rice paddies and green mountains, the remnants of private Confucian academies, the sŏwŏn, capture the eye and excite the historical imagination. The echoes of schoolboys droning out their daily portion of the *Four Books*, the animated philosophical discussions of their scholastic seniors, the dignified chanting—if in slightly quavering cadences—of elderly celebrants during the Spring and Autumn Sacrifices: these voices and many others seem to linger in the coolness of a late summer twilight. The academies maintain a quiet grandeur. Some are still honored places of ritual attention; others have become little more than museums; still others, lacking official patronage or wealthy supporters, have become storage sheds and cow barns.

What is less visible from such quaint architectural remnants is the power the academies once had to compel a vision of a finer moral order, an order based upon a resolute dedication to classical values deemed the key to the ultimate goal of becoming a moral exemplar to one’s community and to the ages, at once a savant at ease with erudite texts and a man of action fully engaged in service to the realm. One could become a sage.¹ Moreover, through the construction of shrines attached to the academies, one could celebrate the sagely as well as other worthy men of one’s community, and in the process narrow the gap between the grateful living and the honored dead. Sŏwŏn were sites that radiated special authority, and they proved highly attractive. Over the three centuries of their flourishing, more than four hundred academies were established in locales across the peninsula, garnering early respect, then the fear and contempt of a distant capital elite, who first sought to control them then to encompass their destruction.

This centuries-long conflict between a suspicious bureaucracy increasingly allied with hostile monarchs on the one hand, and, on the other, a loosely organized rural elite determined to protect the central institutions of its communities and class, culminated in the late nineteenth century with the wholesale destruction of all but a vestigial groups of 47 sites. In the end, an early commitment by the state to sagely learning had proved all too dangerous.

In contemporary South Korea, by contrast, images of the academies are

pervasive, even if the darker violence attendant on their demise has largely been forgotten: popular television dramas set in the Chosŏn period use them as backdrops, film renditions of the national anthem display them to rouse patriotic fervor, and even the basic unit of paper currency, the 1000-wŏn note, includes an engraving of an academy. Every South Korean schoolchild is likely to take a fieldtrip to Tosan Sŏwŏn, near Andong in the southeast, and to have memorized the name of Chu Sebung, the founder of the first academy. Lineage organizations, political parties, student clubs, Confucian associations, the popular press: all find in the sŏwŏn a potent legacy of the past, albeit one increasingly distant.

This careening reputation over the past century from a collection of largely degraded institutions deemed to merit reduction to woodpiles to valorized icons of moral grandeur provokes curiosity about how such a tradition began and developed. This paper will examine one of the major moments of this historical arc: the unlikely founding of the first sŏwŏn in P'unggi in 1543 by Chu Sebung, followed by the granting of a royal charter in 1550. Of particular interest is its choice of location—far from the capital in an obscure jurisdiction, P'unggi in Kyŏngsang province, best known at the time for its tradition of rebelliousness. As their final fate indicates, the academies, while fully partaking in the ruling ideology of Neo-Confucianism, maintained at best an uneasy balance with the central government, and at times served as sites of opposition to central authority; never fully tamed, they would maintain something of the obstreperousness of P'unggi right down to the late nineteenth century.

This spirit of regional dissatisfaction with the metropole was amply in evidence by the mid-sixteenth century. While the Chosŏn dynasty had attained unassailable legitimacy, having weathered numerous political crises, the center of moral gravity lay outside the ambit of officialdom. The martyrdom of Cho

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3. For a survey of the social and economic situation of the sixteenth century, see James Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 72–78. Palais’ somewhat bleak perspective on the period may be usefully compared with that of Yi Tae-jin [Yi T’aejin], *The Dynamics of Confucianism and Modernization in Korean History* (Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2007), esp. 93–120, which sees the period as economically expanding and vibrant.
Kwangjo (1482–1519) and his group had given their program of reform a cachet that resisted repeated attempts at vilification; the brief restoration of his reputation during Injong’s reign (1544–45), and its subsequent reversal, could only strengthen this sense of grievance. An important part of the effort to redress this situation took place outside Seoul, in the private studies of dozens of Neo-Confucian idealists around the country.

Discussion of the way in which the creation of the academy system was deeply influenced by this atmosphere of repressed frustration, which produced in response a heightened sense of idealism, is pervasive in scholarship on this topic. Yet, in the general rush to understand the academies of the sixteenth century as hallowed places of idealistic learning, certain other issues should not be overlooked at the risk of obscuring the process by which the academy system expanded so rapidly and came to gain such national popularity.

The most important of these themes is that the academies, from their outset, actively embodied the interests of two important (and overlapping) local constituencies: the local literati—i.e. local yangban—class, and local members of important metropolitan lineages. Indeed, as will be shown below, from their beginning, sŏwŏn cannot be understood as institutions without a consideration of these groups. The person of the founder of the first academy, Chu Sebung, may well provide the lens to bring these issues into clearer focus.

Life of Chu Sebung

The origin of sŏwŏn in the Chosŏn period is generally, and with considerable justice, attributed to the efforts of Chu Sebung (1495–1554), the founder of Paegun-dong Academy. Indeed, Chu would appear to be one of the quintessential sarim figures of the sixteenth century: a Neo-Confucian literatus who rose from humble circumstances and an obscure lineage to high official position, which he used to advance his educational ideals. This reputation has only gained luster with time. It is safe to assume that there is no schoolchild in South Korea who is not familiar with Chu’s accomplishments, and the standard biographies reflect this glowing assessment. Yet, a closer examination of Chu’s


5. See for example, Han’guk inmyŏng taesajŏn p’yŏnch’ansil ed., *Han’guk inmyŏng taesajŏn* (Seoul: Sin’gu munhwasa, 1967), 910. See also, Yong-ho Ch’oe, “Private Academies and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea,” in *Culture and State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, edited by JaHyun Kim.
life reveals more than a few shadows that undermine any casual attempt to cast him as a prototypical sarim, and by extension, to portray the institutions he helped found as solely sarim in character. Because of his central role in the earliest private academy, Chu is of considerable historiographical importance: his life is an ideal lens through which we can focus more clearly on the tensions and interests that lay at the heart of mid-sixteenth century cultural politics, and thereby understand better the complex origins of private academies.

Chu Sebung was born in the tenth month of 1495 in Hapch’ón, Kyongsang province, though when he was six years old the family moved to nearby Ch’irwón, where he appears to have stayed until he passed the munkwa (High State Civil Examination) in 1522, at the age of 27. His lineage, the Sangju Chu, was neither large nor powerful in the Chosón period, managing to produce, apart from Sebung himself, only five other munkwa licentiates, one of whom was his adopted son, Chu Pak (who passed the munkwa in 1568). The next Sangju Chu munkwa licentiate after Pak would not come until 1891.6

Although Sebung’s father, Chu Munbo, is referred to by the title ch’amp’an (Second Minister, Jr. 2), there is no evidence that he served in government or held rank. In fact the somewhat sketchy picture obtained from biographical information contained in the Chu Sebung literary collection7 tends to indicate that Chu Munbo was only barely managing to hold to his position in society as

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6. This was Chu Ponghan. The other successful candidates include Chu Chungmun (1460), Chu Yunch’ang (1480) and Chu I (1546), none of whom seemed to have attained any prominence in officialdom. Edward W. Wagner and Song Jun-ho, “Chosón Munkwa Project” (on this see Sun Joo Kim, “Edward W. Wagner and His Legacy: Toward New Horizons in the Study of Korean History,” paper available at http://ealc.fas.harvard.edu/files/ealc/files/wagner_lecture.pdf (accessed Nov. 30, 2013)); see also the biographic information on all munkwa passers available through the Academy of Korean Studies at http://people.aks.ac.kr/index.aks

7. Essentially, such biographical information is found in two separate documents, his biography, or haengjiang (Muruṅ chapko pyöłchip purok: 1a–13b, hereafter referred to as Haengjiang), written by his adopted son, Chu Pak, and his biographical chronology, or yŏnbo (Muruṅ sokchip 2:1a–28b, hereafter referred to as Yŏnbo), a chronological account of his life, apparently based on the Haengjiang but compiled later and providing more anecdotal material, for example, an account of Chu’s successful dealings with a ghost in an official guest house in Hwanghae province (2:22a–b). It is noteworthy that to date no scholar of the academies of this period appears to have examined Chu’s life and writings beyond those that touch directly on the creation of Paegun-dong Academy. All Chu Sebong’s main collections (Muruṅ chapko woñip 武陵雜稿原集, Muruṅ chapko pyöłchip 武陵雜稿別集, Muruṅ chapko pyöłchip purok 武陵雜稿別集附錄, Muruṅ sokchip 武陵續集, and Chukkye-ji 竹溪志) can be found in the standard edition of his ouvre, the Sinjae chŏnsŏ 慎齋全書 (Seoul: Sinjae Chu sŏnsaeng yujo sŏnyanghoe, 1979). Unless indicated otherwise, all references are to collections in this edition.
Chu Sebung was known for his filial piety, and one source for this may well have been his mother’s persistent illness during his youth. During her sickness in 1501, Sebung’s demeanor was so intense and serious that he won praise as a “filial child.” In 1510, the illness reappeared in a severe form for several years and Sebung “found food tasteless.” Sebung also needed to look after his father. In 1520, when his father could not fulfill his military service due to illness and was about to be indicted, Sebung argued his father’s case before the provincial authorities, including Kim Küksŏng who, “marveling at his words and moved by his sincerity,” dismissed the charges against Munbo.

One event not mentioned in the material, but which must have caused a great uproar in Ch’irwŏn in 1520, concerned the fate of the magistrate there, Ha Chŏng, who had become directly implicated in one of the most dangerous political issues of the day, the flight of Kim Sik, and the subsequent interrogation of all those allied with him. In the second month of 1520 Ha Chŏng hid Kim in the magistrate’s official residence for eight or nine days, provided him with new clothes and supplies, and then put him up in his parents’ home through the middle of the fourth month, when officers of the State Tribunal arrived in Ch’irwŏn searching for Kim, and found that Ha Chŏng had also fled. Eventually captured, Ha was taken to Seoul and tortured.

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8. See for example the account below indicating that Chu Munbo was considered liable for military service, from which yangban were exempt.

9. See, for example, his biography in the Sillok, provided below.


11. This is almost surely the same Kim Küksŏng (1474–1540) who would later rise to Chief State Counselor following the downfall of Kim Allo in 1537, having been previously banished by him to Hŭngdŏk along with Chŏng Kwangik. According to the Han’guk inmyŏng taesajo (84), Kim held a military post in Kyŏngsang province at this time, and there is a poem by Chu Sebung to Kim to be found in his literary collection, Murŏng chapko wŏnjip 1:28b–29a.


13. Ha Chŏng (?–1520) passed the mukwa (military) state examination, rose to the level of a town magistrate (Jr. 3), and was on several occasions considered for a post at the Royal Secretariat, but following the kimyo sahwa (literati purge of 1519) he was demoted and sent to Ch’irwŏn as the magistrate (Jr. 6). Yi Kungik, Yŏllyŏsil kisul (Kyŏngsŏng: Chosŏn kwangmunhoe, Taejŏng 3 [1914]) 8 (2:702).

14. Kim Sik (1482–1520) was a prominent reformer associated with Cho Kwangjo who attained fame for his first-place score on the 1519 Recommendation Examination. But after being banished to Sŏnsan, in the twelfth month of 1519 he fled from his place of exile, thereby provoking an intensive search. Eventually, Kim, in hiding at Chiri-san, with his friends and students under arrest, and having neither much food nor hope, hung himself. Yŏllyŏsil kisul 8 (2:700–701); Yi Hongjik, ed., Kuksa taesajo (Seoul: Chimungak, 1962–1963), 281; Wagner, The Literati Purges, 78–188 passim.
into a false confession then executed, and his family property was confiscated.\textsuperscript{15} Chu Sebung, resident of Ch’irwŏn at the time, and in his twenty-fifth year, could hardly have been unaware of these developments, particularly since his first wife (who had died in 1519) had been of the same Chinju Ha lineage as Ha Chŏng.\textsuperscript{16} Although Chu would, fortunately, never be placed in such a difficult situation as Ha Chŏng, it is interesting to speculate whether Chu’s behavior during 1546\textsuperscript{17} in the wake of the political turmoil of the 1545 ūlsa sahwa might not have been influenced by this brush with the 1519 kimyo purge.\textsuperscript{18} While the literati purges of 1519 and 1545 differed substantially in character—the first involved the fall of Cho Kwangjo and his reformist agenda, while the latter derived from a succession issue following the untimely death of Injong—they both resulted in great disruption to important networks of literati, including executions of major figures and wide-spread banishment of their associates.\textsuperscript{19}

The year 1522 marked a major transition in the life of Chu Sebung, as in the spring he passed the saengwŏn (Lower Classics Licentiate) examination\textsuperscript{20} and then in the eleventh month, the munkwa, placing a highly respectable third out of the seven passers of this Special Examination.\textsuperscript{21} Subsequently he was given

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\item[15.] The account in the Yölyŏsil kisul notes that he was given four hundred lashes of bamboo daily until he broke and issued a confession. In 1573, during the reign of Sŏnjo, his official status was restored at the request of Sin Cho˘m, an official in the Office of the Royal Lectures. Yölyŏsil kisul 8 (2:702).
\item[16.] Both husband and wife were ill that year. She died in the sixth month. Yŏnbo, 5b.
\item[17.] I.e., his supposed currying of favor with leading members of the “Small Yun” group, who came to power with Myŏngjong. See Chu’s biography from the sillok, below.
\item[18.] Happily for Chu Sebung, his friend, Song Insu—who might well have put Chu in the same position as Ha Chŏng had been in with Kim Sik, had Song determined to flee his exile—met his execution with complete equanimity. See below.
\item[19.] For a comprehensive discussion of the literati purges, see Wagner, The Literati Purges.
\item[20.] Only identified as sama, the joint designation for the twin lower exams, the saengwŏn testing classics, and the chinsa, testing literary composition, in the Haengjang, 3a. But Chu’s status listed on the munkwa roster is that of saengwŏn; see Wagner and Song, “Munkwa Project.”
\item[21.] Wagner and Song, “Munkwa Project.” The munkwa examinations comprised a complex system, but can be divided into the singnyŏn examinations, given triennially on a fixed schedule and the pyŏlsi or special munkwa examinations, given irregularly for a wide variety of reasons, including the celebration of felicitous events, the honoring of the king’s visit to the Sŏnggyun’gwan and National Shrine, and the honoring of specific regions, among others. It should be noted that Chu may have failed to pass the regular triennial singnyŏn examination given earlier in the year, hardly unusual given the difficulty of the munkwa. Or, alternatively, it may be that he was deemed unqualified to sit for the higher examination, not having spent the 300 days of residence in the Sŏnggyun’gwan required for those sitting for the munkwa. At any rate, it does seem plausible that Chu spent the eight months between his two exam successes in residence at the Sŏnggyun’gwan, for which he was qualified by his saengwŏn success. If so, he missed studying with Yi Hwang by only a few months. See Yi and Kalton, To Become a Sage, 15–16. For a comprehensive survey of
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his first post as a humble Third Copyist (Jr. 9) in the Sŏngmunwŏn, or Office of Diplomatic Correspondence, which he assumed after a triumphant return to his home in Ch’irwŏn.22

Chu’s activities during the next few years are something of a happy surprise. As a lowly young official from the provinces, with few or no family connections in Seoul, he was nevertheless able to make impressive headway in obtaining recognition for his talent. In the seventh month of 1524 he was selected by the Taejehak, Yi Haeng,23 for a period at the prestigious Hall of Reading (Toksŏdang or Hodang24), where he came to befriend men such as Song Insu25

the munkwa examination system see Song Chunho and Song Mano, Chosŏn sidae munkwa paeksŏ (Seoul: Samuban, 2008); and Yi Sŏngmu, Han’guk ûi kwagŏ chedo (Seoul: Chimmundang, 1994).

22. Yŏnbo, 6a-b.

23. This likely explains why Chu was later selected by the son of Yi Haeng to write a biography of his father. See below, note 76.

24. This was an institution first set up under Sejong in 1426, then suspended under Sejo, revived in the latter years of Sungjong’s reign, suspended under Yŏnsan’gun, and then revived by Chungjong. It was later destroyed in the Hideyoshi invasions of the 1590s, rebuilt by Kwanghaegun, then destroyed again in the Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1636 and never rebuilt. While the Hall of Reading has yet to be thoroughly studied, it seems clear that selection to it was a mark of high prestige. Not only were most of the famous cultural figures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries selected for this honor, from Sin Sukchu to Yu Sŏngnyong, including Yi Hwang and Yi I, but an examination of the respective lists of Taejehak and Hodang holders reveals that, with the possible exception of Yu Kwan, every Taejehak from 1453 to 1591 had first passed through the Hodang. Since the Taejehak appears to have been responsible for selecting the Reading Hall recipients, this connection seems reasonable enough. Yi, Kuksa taesajo’n, 426; Kim Sundong, Han’guk kosa taejo’n (Taejon: Hoesangsa, 1965), 471–82.

25. Song Insu, whose bo was Kyuam, and whose cha was Misu, was a member of the Ŭjin Song lineage. His first cousin, Kisu, his uncle, Sech’ung, his grandfather, Yŏgye, and his great-grandfather, Sunyŏn, all passed the munkwa. Song Insu’s education was guided by Kim An’guk, to whom he was very close. There is an apocryphal story that as Kim An’guk lay dying and was discussing national affairs with him, he told Insu, “In the future, you will be taking over the worries [for the nation].” However, Song Insu’s promising career featured sharp reversals, due first to his opposition to Kim Allo, resulting in his appointment as Magistrate of Cheju Island, and later outright banishment to Sach’ŏn. During the liberalization in 1537 following Kim’s death, Song reentered the bureaucracy and rose to Headmaster (taesasŏng) at the Sŏnggyun’gwan (Sr. 3), served as Governor of Cholla province, and went on a mission to China. As Second Magistrate of Seoul (chwayun, Jr. 2), he strongly attacked Yun Wŏnhyo’ng, and as a result in 1545 was stripped of his right to hold office after Myŏngjong became king. Subsequently, in 1547, he was falsely implicated in a supposed plot by one of Chungjong’s princes, Ponwŏn’gun, to seize the throne, and subsequently ordered (during the festivities at his birthday party, as it turned out), in standard fashion (sasa), to commit suicide by drinking hemlock. In the early years of Sŏnjo’s reign, at the request of the queen mother (likely InsunWanghu, Queen Sim) Song’s official position was restored, but a petition that he be given a posthumous title in the Office of Special Counselors was refused. Yi, Kuksa taesajo’n, 605, 778; Yŏllyo’sil kisul 10 (3:573–74); Ku Hŭsŏ, comp., Mansŏng taedongbo (Kyŏngsŏng-bu: Mansŏng taedongbo parhaengso, 1931), B183b [Harvard-Yenching...
In autumn of the same year he wrote an introduction to the important work *Essentials of the Great Compendium of Neo-Confucianism* (*Sŏngni taejŏn chŏryo*), by Kim Chŏngguk (1485–1541), who along with his brother, Kim An’guk (1478–1543), was one of the leading scholars and educators of the day.

It was likely at the Hall of Reading that Chu grew close to Song Insu. Song had passed the *munkwa* in 1521 and been named to the *Hodang* around the same time as Chu. During their lives they would exchange dozens of poems and letters. In the end, though, Chu would be in the painful position of having to copy with emendations and additions by Edward Wagner]; Wagner and Song, “Munkwa Project,” Kim Sundong, *Han’guk kosa taejŏn*.

26. Hŏ Cha (1496–1551) was of the Yangch’ŏn Hŏ lineage, son of Hŏ Wŏn and a disciple of Kim An’guk (1478–1543). He passed the *sama* (lower) examination in 1516 and the *alsŏng munkwa* (the special examination honoring the king’s visit to the Sŏnggyun’gwan) in 1523. The next year he received a Hall of Reading fellowship. Subsequently, he served as a county magistrate during Kim Allo’s ascendancy, returning after Kim’s death in 1537. In 1545, Hŏ was named a *wisak* merit subject (3rd class) during the *u˘lsa sahwa* purges of the Yun Im faction. At the time he was a political ally of Yun Wŏnhyang and he rose as high as Fourth State Counselor before falling out of favor in the late 1540s. In 1550, he was criticized by Chin Pokch’ang and Yi Mugang (Yi Ki sympathizers) and banished to Hongwŏn where he died (*Han’guk inmyo ˘ng taesajo ˘n*, 1013–14). Judging from Chu Sebung’s literary collection, the two had something of a literary friendship that likely began during their period together in the Hall of Reading.

27. Others selected by Yi Haeng included Yun P’unghyo˘ng, Hŏ Paekki, Min Chein, Hŏ Hang, Pak Hongnin, Ch’oe Yo˘ n, Ôm Hŭn, and Hong Ch’ungyŏng (Kim Sundong, *Han’guk kosa taejŏn*, 476).

28. Kim Chŏngguk was a member of the Ŭisŏng Kim lineage and younger brother of Kim An’guk. He studied under Kim Koengp’il and passed the *munkwa* in 1509. After his official career was foreshortened by the *kimyo sahwa*, he retired to Koyang, where he taught until his right to office was restored in 1537. He was especially well regarded for his service as Provincial Governor, first of Chŏlla province and later Kyŏngsang province. The expectations one might have concerning Chu’s future as a philosopher, given his prominent debut, were in fact not realized; in general his favorite pastime seems to have been writing poetry, and in his literary collection there is more evidence of friendship with leading naturalist poets of the day, such as Yi Hyŏnbo (1467–1555) and Song Sun (1493–1583), than with philosophers such as Yi Hwang (1501–70), So˘ Kyŏngdŏk (1489–1546), or Yi Ŭnjŏk (1491–1553). One exception was his acquaintance with Cho Sik (1501–1572), whom he visited on at least one occasion, in 1542. See *Yŏnbo*, 14b–15a.

29. Kim An’guk was the older brother of Kim Chŏngguk and also a student of Kim Koengp’il. He passed the *saenggwŏn* and *chinsa* examinations in 1501, the *munkwa* in 1503, and the *chungsı* in 1506. His tenure as Governor of Kyŏngsang province in 1517 came to be renowned for his enthusiastic printing and distribution of both practical works on agriculture, sericulture, and medicine, and the Neo-Confucian classics such as the *Xiaoxue*. Unable to obtain an official post between 1519 and 1537, Kim developed his many practical and philosophical interests. Following restoration he held a number of important posts, including the *Taejebak* (*Han’guk inmyŏng taesajo ˘n*, 131).

30. Chu Sebung’s *Sinjae chŏnsŏ* includes dozens of poems and letters to Song Insu, far and away the most to any single individual; there is even a poem memorializing Song’s mother. Among the
serve those who had put his good friend to death for political and personal retribution.31

Chu Sebung’s own first brush with political trouble came in 1530. Much of the previous year he had spent in his first provincial post as Kangwŏn Provincial Inspector (Jr. 5). Roaming widely, he wrote much poetry on the scenic wonders, and, it would seem, imbibed much wine, a practice in which, judging from the many poems he wrote on the topic over his lifetime, he frequently indulged.32 It was during this period that he wrote two poems in appreciation of An Ch’uk,33 whom he would later enshrine in the Paegun-dong Academy, along with Sunhŭng An kinsmen An Hyang34 and An Po.35

Appointed a Third Censor (Sr. 5) in the Office of the Censor General during the fifth month of 1530, Chu was immediately placed in a very awkward position. At the time Kim Allo (1481–1537)36 was preparing for his return to

much fewer total number of poems preserved in Song’s *Kyuamjip* there are eight poems to Chu Sebung, including two composed at the Hall of Reading.

31. While Yun Wŏnhŭng nursed a grudge against Song due to his strong attack against Yun, Yi Ki, whom historians portray as having personally ordered the execution, is said to have felt aggrieved by Song’s treatment of him decades earlier, when he had cut off relations with Yi on the advice of Kim An’guk. *Yŏllyŏsil kisul* 10 (3:573–740). See below for a discussion of a further terrible irony: the birth of the Korean system of royal charters for academies occurred in the context of this implicit betrayal of friendship.

32. To give a few indicative titles from among the many possibilities: “Reply to San’gok After 10 Days Without Drinking Due to Illness,” “Reply when Drunk to Sŏng Sim, the Son of Licentiate Sŏng,” “Drunken Words Offered to Cho Chamun,” and “Greatly Inebriated.” It was during his service in Kangwŏn province that Chu also wrote a short admonitory essay, “The Dangers of Alcohol,” presumably in response to the heavy imbibing required by the post. He ends it by declaiming: “How terrible [wine] is! In all sincerity it should be banned!” See Yŏnbo, 8b; Chu Sebung, *Muriung chapko* 8.10a.

33. An Ch’uk (1287–1348), of the Sunhŭng An lineage, often referred to by his posthumous title, Munjŏnggong, was a prominent Koryŏ dynasty official known both for his educational attainments, including the passing of the Yuan Chinese state examination (1324), and his poetry, most notably the famous work “The Song of Kangwŏn Province” (*Kwandong pyŏlgok*) (Yi, *Kuksa taesajŏn*, 886; Ki-baik Lee [Yi Kibaek], *A New History of Korea*, tr. Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Shultz (Seoul: Ilchogak Publishers, 1984), 168).

34. For An Hyang, see below.

35. An Po (1302–1357) was the younger brother of An Ch’uk, and was also to have an illustrious official career. He passed the Koryŏ *munkwa* at the age of 18, and later passed the Yuan state examination and served as an official in China, returning because of his mother’s ill health. His temple name is Mun’gyŏng (*Han’guk imnyŏng taesajŏn*, 437).

36. Kim Allo was a notorious official and political strongman. After being purged and banished in 1519 as part of Cho Kwangjo’s clique, he resumed his official career in 1522 only to be soon sent into exile again by Nam Kon, although he grew in influence behind the scenes. Released in 1529 and restored to office in 1531 he quickly gained power and by 1535 had become the Second State Counselor. By 1537 Chungjong was sufficiently in fear of him that he ordered his arrest,
officialdom (which would be accomplished in 1531) through the efforts of his political allies, the most active of whom was none other than the Censor General himself, Sim Ŭngwang.37 Chu had previously, in 1527, taken a public stand against Kim Allo by forwarding to the king a poem blaming Kim for an unseasonable thunderstorm, characterized as heaven’s response to Kim’s craftiness.38 The political differences between Sim and Chu came to a head when Sim seized an opportunity to attack Yi Hang,39 the Fourth State Counselor and an old opponent. In the process, Chu Sebung was criticized to the king by Sim, resulting in Chu’s dismissal from officialdom.40

After spending over two years back in Ch’ırwŏn, Chu Sebung was reinstated in an official post, albeit with a reduction in rank, as Librarian (Sr. 6) at the Sŏnggyun’gwan. Two months later events intervened—his father died, an experience that affected Chu greatly.41 Added to his propensity from youth for filial devotion was, perhaps, a measure of sorrow that as a son he had been unable to give his father a grandchild. Sebung’s adopted son and heir was the son of his older brother, and he was never to have any children of his own, with either of his two wives.42 As might be expected, Chu appears to have performed his ritual duties for the next several years with utmost care, even to the point of banishment, and summary execution (Han’guk inmyŏng taesajŏn, 131)

37. Sim Ŭngwang (1487–?) was of the Samch’ŏk Sim lineage and like his brother Sim Ŭngyŏng was a staunch political supporter of Kim Allo. As Minister of Personnel in 1529 he had obtained Kim’s release from banishment and he was now in the midst of efforts to help Kim regain an official post. Sim later broke with Kim in 1537 over Kim’s attempt to marry his granddaughter into the crown prince’s line and was banished. After Kim’s death later that year he made a brief return to power, but was later forced from office due to his prior efforts on Kim’s behalf (Yi, Kuksa taesajŏn, 858).

38. Yŏnbo, 8a.

39. According to the sillasok, Yi Hang had been active in leading the 1523 attack on Kim Allo that resulted in his removal from office. See Chungjong sillasok 1530/07/17 (kapchim).

40. For Sim’s attack on Chu, see Chungjong sillasok 1530/07/17 (kapchim). Sim accused Chu of being a willing, even eager, accomplice of Yi Hang in his supposed attempt to influence the censorate concerning a private matter. Chu’s own Haengjiang tells a different story. Sim Ŭngwang was attempting to use procedural niceties to block the submission of memorials critical of Kim Allo. Chu’s attempts to circumvent Sim in this matter led to Sim’s condemning Chu. Haengjiang, 3b–4b.

41. Legend has it that as Chu made the long journey south from Seoul to Ch’ırwŏn he was accosted by a band of thieves. However, when they saw him so obviously distraught over his father’s death (“weeping tears of blood”), they were moved at his filial spirit and let him pass unmolested (Yŏnbo, 9b).

42. His adopted son, Chu Pak, was born in 1524. Sebung had first wed a woman of the Chinju Ha lineage in 1511, but she died in 1519. His second wife, a daughter of a hundo (Instructor), An Yŏgŏ of the Kwangju An lineage, was taken the next year, in 1520.
occasioning criticism from those in the neighborhood at his exhausting the family’s finances in the construction of a wall around the family graveyard.\textsuperscript{43} He lived by the grave, making the twenty-li journey to see his mother once every three days without fail.\textsuperscript{44}

In 1536, Chu returned to his official career as an Auditor (\textit{P’an’gwan}, Jr. 5) in the Agency for State Sacrifices (\textit{Pongsangsi}), at the same rank he had held in 1529. In 1537, upon his request for a southern posting Sebung was given the position of Magistrate (\textit{Kunsu}, Jr. 4) of Konyang in Kyŏngsang province, south of Chinju. He felt, on the one hand, alienated from the Kim Allo clique in power at the time, and on the other, wished to be nearer his aging mother.\textsuperscript{45} This period in Konyang, lasting about a year, proved a mixed blessing. On the one hand, he was very near to Sach’ŏn, where his friend Song Insu was in exile.\textsuperscript{46} And another prominent figure in banishment in the vicinity around this time was An Chŏng (1494–1548), who would later prove pivotal in helping Chu Sebung establish the legitimacy of a shrine to An’s ancestors by providing a Koryŏ portrait of one of them.\textsuperscript{47} It seems very likely that An and Chu came to know each other at this time. Certainly the half-dozen or so poems found in Chu’s literary collection addressed to An Chŏng give evidence of an informal and cordial relationship that quite likely derives from this period.\textsuperscript{48}

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\textsuperscript{43} Even allowing for a certain amount of hyperbole, this seems yet another indication of the relatively perilous economic position of the Chu family. Sebung is reputed to have answered this criticism by saying, “Is there any son born of man who can stint on [the treatment of] his parents through fondness for property?” (\textit{Yŏnbo}, 9b–10a).

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Yo’nbo}, 10a.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Haengjiang}, 5a.

\textsuperscript{46} While it is not certain that their terms overlapped, \textit{Yŏllyŏsil kisul} notes that Song “was banished to Sach’ŏn and after [Kim] Allo fell, [Song] was called back and appointed Third Minister in the Board of Rites.” Since Kim Allo was put to death in the tenth month of 1537 (see Yi, \textit{Kuksa taesajo’n}, 1940), Song would have been in Sach’ŏn through most, if not all, of that year. See \textit{Yŏllyŏsil kisul} 10 (3:573).

\textsuperscript{47} An Chŏng was a direct descendant of An Hyang. As a student in the Sŏnggyun’gwan he was something of a radical, urging the canonization of Chŏng Mongju and Kim Koengp’il; since Chŏng had opposed the accession of Yi Sŏnggye, and Kim had been embroiled in the purges of 1498 and 1504, championing them so explicitly was to invite controversy. After passing the recommendation examination (\textit{byŏllyang-kwa}) of 1519, he was purged the same year, then exiled in the purge of 1521, first to Kilchu, then to Konyang. He remained in banishment until 1537. See Wagner, \textit{The Literati Purges}, 90–91; \textit{Han’guk inmyŏng taesajo’n}, 443; \textit{Yŏllyŏsil kisul} 8 (2:705). For an account of the importance of the painting, see below.

\textsuperscript{48} Some titles are illustrative: “Response to that of Recorder An Chŏngyŏn [Chŏngyŏn was the cha of An Chŏng], Thanking Him for Sending Watermelon From His Garden” (\textit{Muru’ng chapko} 16a); “A Poem to Recorder An Chŏngyŏn in Heartfelt Appreciation for the Food He Sent on a Mid-Autumn Day” (\textit{Muru’ng chapko pyŏlschip} 3a); “Two Stanzas Responding to Chŏngyŏn’s Gifts
On the other hand, Chu Sebung’s career as Magistrate in Konyang ended abruptly in disgrace for reasons that remain murky. Unlike the prior case in 1530 when Chu was dismissed from the censorate, where his biographer provided an extended discussion defending Sebung, here the *Haengjang* merely notes in laconic fashion, “In the [year] musul (1538), the sixth month, a difference [of opinion] arose over [Chu Sebung] pursuing an investigation into the excessive criminal matters in a neighboring [jurisdiction]. He was dismissed from his post.” 49 Charitable supposition would indicate that Chu was guilty of nothing more than over-zealousness in performing his duties, but the absence of details is somewhat odd. A few months later Sebung’s mother became seriously ill and died later in the year. This was likely one of the lowest points of his life. 50

His period of mourning finished, Chu returned to official service in the capital in early 1541, and after brief stints in the Sŏnggyun’gwan, the Board of Public Works, and the Office of Special Counselors, he was named the Magistrate of P’unggi county (kun) in Kyŏngsang province, where he would stay until 1545. Although P’unggi is quite picturesque, nestled at the foot of Sobaek-san, it was not necessarily considered a plum assignment. A national gazetteer of the sixteenth century, the *Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŏngnam*, says of the people of P’unggi, “They are by custom strong and fierce,” (kangnang 強狼)51 and, as one modern historian has noted, P’unggi had the reputation for being an “evil locality” (akhyang 惡鄕). 52 One historical basis for this reputation may be the failed rebellion of 1457, on the part of a prince resident in nearby Sunhŭng, that had sought the overthrow of Sejo. After its suppression, Sunhŭng was disbanded as an administrative unit and parceled out to surrounding counties, of which P’unggi received a share. 53

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53. The sixth son of Sejong, Prince Kŭmsŏng (1457), whose mother was Sohŏn wanghu (Queen Sim), had been sent to Sunhŭng in 1437 at the same time the deposed king Tانjong (subsequently known as Prince Nosan) was banished to Yŏngwŏl. Prince Kŭmsŏng plotted rebellion to restore Tانjong along with the local magistrate, Yi Pohŭm, but the plot was uncovered and the city was razed as part of the punishment for the disloyalty of its magistrate. *Sejo sillok* 1457/07/16 (kyesa) (quoted in Yun Hŭmyŏn, “Paegun-dong Sŏwŏn,” 61); Yi, *Kuksa taesajŏn*, 232.
While his tenure there is best known for his establishment of the Paegundong Academy, Chu appears to have been an activist magistrate in other ways as well. The local government school (hyanggyo) was in a sad state of disrepair and the students apathetic. He had the facilities rebuilt at a different location, and sternly admonished the students to apply themselves. In 1542 there was a major famine in the Yongnam area, with “corpses filling the fields.” The Special Inspector Yi Hae (1496–1550), assigned to survey the situation, sent a memorial to the throne praising Chu’s efforts at famine relief as the best in Kyongsang province. As a result Chu received an increase in rank as a reward from the king. A more apocryphal accomplishment is provided by a modern legend in P’unggi that Chu Sebung first began the trial planting of insam (ginseng) in the area, now one of the most important crops. Because of the commercial importance of insam, the Choson government prohibited such private planting, so that any such attempt by Chu would have been illegal; the possibility that it could have been kept secret seems remote. Furthermore, given his prior problems in Konyang, one wonders if Chu would have been willing to exceed his authority. The fact remains, though, that when he left in 1545, the local residents did put up a stele in his honor, an indication of the respect he had gained, from at least a portion of the population.

Chu Sebung returned to Seoul in the eleventh month of 1545. This was a politically turbulent period, as the purges and struggles associated with the ulsa sahwa were in full force. Injong had died in the seventh month and much of the...
eighth month had seen a power struggle between the P’ap’yŏng Yun in-laws of Injong and those of Myŏngjong. After the death of Yun Im (1487–1545), the “Small Yun” group, related to Queen Mother Munjŏng, Myŏngjong’s mother, was able to consolidate its rule and purge its enemies. A power struggle between two leading members of this group, the brothers Yun Wŏllo (?–1547) and Yun Wŏnhyŏng (?–1565), would lead to further strife early in the following year.

In the midst of this realignment of political forces, Chu Sebung, an obscure official from the provinces whose highest post had been that of County Magistrate, was not only able to survive, but to flourish. Holding a variety of posts, by the end of 1546 he was able to obtain the coveted tangsang, or ministerial level, as a First Counselor in the Office of Special Counselors, with a concurrent appointment in the Office of Royal Lectures. Through the remainder of the decade, he continued to hold posts at the Sr. 3/Jr. 2 level, and was named the Governor of Hwanghae province from 1549–50, where his most notable achievement was the establishment of an academy, the Suyang Sŏwŏn, in honor of Ch’oe Ch’ung (984-1068). His subsequent career ended up at the Jr. 2 level (kasŏn taebu), with supernumerary posts, such as that of Assistant Director of the Sŏnggyun’gwan and Fourth Minister in the Office of Ministers Without Portfolio (Chungch’ubu). A fitting moment near the end of his career came when he was one of the ninety honorees selected for their moral merit among officials.

59. Yun Im, a member of the P’ap’yŏng Yun lineage, was well-connected to the royal family. His younger sister was none other than Changgyŏng wanghu (1491–1515), the mother of the crown prince and future king, Injong. A passer of the military examination, he served in a variety of civil and military posts, including that of Ch’ungch’ŏng-do Naval Commander in 1523 when his forces were defeated by a Japanese vessel. In the 1530s, with the birth of the future Myŏngjong, political friction flared up with the young prince’s mother, Munjŏng wanghu, and her own brothers, Yun Wŏllo and Yun Wŏnhyŏng. This led in the 1540s to bloody feuding with Yun Im’s group, the “Great Yun” faction, holding power while Injong was still alive, but suffering political defeat followed by wholesale execution after his death. Han’guk imnyŏng taesajŏn, 567–68; Chungjong sillok 1523/06 (uŏch’uk).

60. Yun Wŏllo and his younger brother Yun Wŏnhyŏng were members of the P’ap’yŏng Yun lineage and leaders of the “Small Yun” faction, and older brothers of Munjŏng wanghu, the third queen of Chungjong. Both suffered banishment at the hands of their political rival, Kim Allo, in 1537, but were able to return after Kim’s death later that year. Their next political rival became Yun Im, who gained ascendancy during the reign of Injong but was politically defeated by the Yun brothers following the enthronement of their sister’s son, Myŏngjong. The two then contended for power, with Yun Wŏnhyŏng prevailing and sending his brother into exile, where he was later executed. Wŏnhyŏng remained powerful until Munjŏng wanghu’s death in 1565, rising to Chief State Counselor in the 1550s (Han’guk imnyŏng taesajŏn, 564).


How was such rapid promotion possible? How did Chu transform himself from a county magistrate into a provincial governor in four years? The official biography of Chu Sebung from the *Myöngjong sillok* provides some clues:

Sebung was a man of the Yôngnam [region]. He was broad and moderate in his heart, strove at scholarship and moral behavior, and took pleasure in doing good. Regarding himself as deficient, every time he came across an admonition or a well-turned phrase of prior worthies he would, as a matter of course, paste it on a window or wall and ceaselessly memorize them. Concerning funerals or rituals of family veneration as well, he always looked to *Zhu Wengong jiali* for the correct rules. Worried that his ancestral graveyard, located on the slopes of a low mountain, might in later ages become farmland, through great efforts he constructed around its perimeter a wall of stones and tile. His spirit of filial piety was pure and great.

He became the magistrate of several localities and the governor of a province. Thinking to encourage [the people] he esteemed enlightenment through education, and was not bound up in [following] to the letter precedents of the past. When holding official audiences with the people he instructed them in both the virtues of filial piety and agriculture and sericulture, and even provided for the livelihood of those bereft of family. Having discovered that P’unggi county was the home of An Yu, he founded a sŏwŏn and venerated him, together with An Po and An Ch’uk, and wrote a poem in *kasa* form in their honor. Assembling the local scholars, he had his words read there, and provided for the expenses necessary for the veneration [of these worthies]. Additionally, he founded a sŏwŏn in Haeju for the veneration of Ch’oe Ch’ung. In its institutional arrangements it was no different from the sŏwŏn in P’unggi. (Haeju was the home of Ch’oe Ch’ung.) As an official, he rose to agyŏng [i.e. *ch’amp’an*] and with a spirit like that of an impoverished scholar his clear mind and firm integrity never wavered.

However, early in his career on the recommendation of Ho Cha and Nam Kon he was named a Ninth Counselor in the Office of Special Counselors. When Nam Kon fell from power, Sebung was also stripped of his official warrant due to

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63. I.e., An Hyang.
64. For information on An Po, see above.
65. For information on An Ch’uk, see above.
66. This was 1526, first month. He was given a concurrent appointment to the Office of Royal Lectures as a Third Secretary; see *Yo’nbo* 7a (268).
67. See above for the biography of Ho Cha.
68. Nam Kon (1471–1527) was a member of the Ŭiryŏng Nam lineage and son of Nam Ch’isin, a Koksan magistrate. A renowned student of Kim Chongjik (1431–92), he passed both the *saengwŏn* and the *chinsa* examinations in 1489, and the *munkwa* in 1494. Exiled in 1504, he won advancement in 1506 by reporting on Pak Kyŏng’s conspiracy to rebel. He was a core member of the *buri’gup’a* faction that purged the Cho Kwangjo group and became Chief State Counselor in 1423. In 1558, he was stripped of his title and sibo (*Han’guk inmyŏng taesajŏn*, 208).
his discussion of the events of the day.69 When the ǔlsa literati purge [of 1545] arose Sebung [on the one hand] spoke words of anger at the state of affairs to the sarim, while [on the other hand] he bowed low to the powerful officials, fearing them. Going in and out of the homes of Yi Kī70 and Yun Wŏnh'yŏng, he served in various posts, and became a First Counselor in the Office of Special Counselors.71 After the tamje72 memorial ceremony for Injong, there was an order from the queen mother [Mun'jong wanghu] to perform a separate puje73 ceremony in the Yŏn'nŭn Hall, and criticism arose in the Office of Special Counselors. At this time Chin Pokch'ang74 held the post of Fourth Counselor and he wrote a memorial. Sebung perused this memorial carefully two or three times and with wide eyes said, “Even if this writing were to be passed down for ten thousand years how could there be anyone to regard it lightly?”75 Earlier when [Chu Sebung was]

69. This was in 1530. According to the account in the sillok Chu became caught up in a power struggle between the Censor-General, Sim Ŭn'gwang (1487–?), a proponent of the soon to be restored Kim Allo (1481–1537), and the Fourth State Counselor, Yi Hang, who in 1524, as the Inspector-General, had supported Kim's banishment. Chu was portrayed as taking advantage of his post of Third Censor to support Yi Hang in a private matter. Also, see above for a discussion of this incident. Chungjong sillok 1530/07/17 (kapcha).

70. Yi Kī (1476–1552) was a member of the Tŏksu Yi lineage and the son of Chief Censor Yi āimu. After passing the munkwa in 1501 he spent twelve years in Hamgyŏng-do as an army commander, returning in 1526. In 1533, he was sent to Kangjin by the Kim Allo faction, returning after Kim's fall in 1537. In 1545, as Third State Counselor and Minister of War, he sided with Yun Wŏnh'yŏng's group and was named a Poik merit subject, enfeoffed as P'ungsŏng-gun and made a Second State Counselor. In 1549, he rose to the position of Chief State Counselor. He retired in 1551 after suffering a stroke, and died a year later. Subsequently, in Sŏnjo's reign, he was posthumously stripped of all official titles, and even his grave stele was removed. Yi was considered, along with Yun Wŏnh'yŏng, to have been a prime instigator of the ǔlsa sahwa (Han'guk inmyŏng taesajŏn, 608).

71. According to the chronology of Chu Sebung in his collected works, he served in some eleven different posts (including concurrent positions) in 1546, including that of First Counselor (pujehak) at a ministerial (tangsang) rank. Yŏnbo 17b–19a (273–74). Note that Chu may have had particular reason to fear the wrath of the “Small Yun” faction, given his friendship with Song Insu, a fierce opponent of Yun Wŏnh'yŏng (Han'guk inmyŏng taesajŏn, 385).

72. This was a ceremony performed two months after the funeral to mark the change from mourning costume to lighter colored clothes (Yi, Kuksa taesajŏn, 374).

73. A ceremony performed after three years of mourning, at which time the spirit tablet of the deceased is positioned with those of the ancestors (Chang Samsik compiler, Tae Han-Han sajŏn (Seoul: Sŏngmunsa 1964), 1033).

74. Chin Pokch'ang (?–1563) was a member of the Yŏyang Chin lineage. He studied under Ku Sadam and passed the munkwa in 1535 in first place. A political ally of Yun Wŏnh'yŏng, through whose patronage he became Inspector-General, his aggressiveness earned him the sobriquet of “viper.” He later had a falling out with Yun and died in exile (Yi, Kuksa taesajŏn, 1491).

75. This story has an element of special poignancy in that it was Chin Pokch'ang who in 1550 would be one of the critical officials responsible for banishing Chu's political ally and friend from their Hodang days, Hŏ Cha. Chu's literary collection contains a number of poems to Hŏ. See Han'guk inmyŏng taesajŏn, 1013–14.
writing an official biography of Yi Haeng\textsuperscript{76} he praised him to an extraordinary degree, comparing him in loyalty to Liu Xiang,\textsuperscript{77} in probity to Kong Rong,\textsuperscript{78} and even in courage to Zhuge Liang.\textsuperscript{79} Those knowledgeable viewed this as vulgar.\textsuperscript{80} When news of [Chu's] death reached the king, he was deeply affected and sent an official to perform a memorial ritual; additionally, he had the coffin sent to his home [in the countryside].\textsuperscript{81}

Reading between the lines of this somewhat contradictory biography,\textsuperscript{82} when combined with other information from the chronology, it seems possible to sketch out a picture of Chu Sebung that explains his success. Intellectually highly gifted, with more a penchant for poetry and drink than philosophizing, Chu nonetheless seems to have been an exceptionally modest man, deeply concerned with demonstrating his filial piety. It must have been especially disheartening to one who valued familial ties so greatly that he himself never had children. Politically, Chu appears to have been distinctly a lightweight in

\textsuperscript{76} Yi Haeng (1478–1534) of the Töksu Yi lineage. The younger brother of Yi Ki, he passed the \textit{munkwa} in 1495 at the age of 17. Exiled in 1504, he returned in 1506. In opposition to the Cho Kwangjo group, his career languished until 1519, after which he rose quickly. By 1527 he was the Third State Counselor (\textit{Uu ˘ijo ˘ng}) and concurrently \textit{Taejehak}. The compilation of the \textit{Sinjëong yöji sëngnam}, which he superintended, was completed in 1529, and the next year he became the Second State Counselor. Kim Allo's return to power in the 1530s brought about Yi Haeng's banishment. He died in exile (\textit{Han'guk inmyöng taesajön}, 754).

\textsuperscript{77} Liu Xiang (77–6 BCE) was a Chinese Confucian scholar of the Former Han period, and member of the imperial clan (\textit{Tae Han-Han sajo ˘n}, 178).

\textsuperscript{78} Kong Rong (153-208 CE) was a notable scholar and political figure of the late Han Dynasty.

\textsuperscript{79} The famous warrior and military strategist of China's Three Kingdoms period.

\textsuperscript{80} For this \textit{haengjang} of Yi Haeng, see \textit{Muru ˘ng chapko} 8:16b–29a. The sarcasm likely derives not only from the fact that Yi Haeng was the brother of Yi Ki, but also, that in his own right he was a prominent target of the Cho Kwangjo group in 1517; thus any praise of his bravery and loyalty could be taken as well as an oblique criticism of the 1519 group. Yet, it should be noted in Chu's defense that Yi Haeng had been \textit{taejehak} in 1524 and was responsible for selecting him to the Hall of Reading. Furthermore, although Yi Haeng was the brother of Yi Ki, the request for the \textit{haengjang} came from Haeng's son, Yi Wönnok (1514–74), who came to be a bitter opponent of his uncle. For his criticism of Yi Ki, Wönnok was beaten and sent into close-confinement exile (\textit{anch'i}) on the northern frontier, and was only released in 1565 through the efforts of Yi Hwang and others (\textit{Han'guk inmyöng taesajön}, 691).

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Myöngjong sillok} 1554/07/02 (\textit{kyöngja}).

\textsuperscript{82} Smith, evidently following Yu Hongnyo˘l, quotes only the first paragraph, thus omitting the more negative material in the third (Warren Smith, \textit{16th Century Sŏwŏn: the Rise of Neo-Confucian Education in Korea} (Sŏwŏn: Kyönggi University Press, 2003), 76; this is the publication of the author's PhD diss., “The Rise of the Sŏwŏn: Literary Academies in Sixteenth Century Korea” (University of California at Berkeley, 1972)). Indeed, this section seems to have received no attention whatsoever from any scholar, nor has the question of Chu’s rapid rise in officialdom.
dangerous times, protected somewhat by the respect he was given for his sincerity, his Hall of Reading friendships, his fortuitous absence throughout much of the decade of the 1530s due to the deaths of first his father and then mother, and connections he made while in the countryside, such as those with the Sunhŭng An lineage members (e.g., An Chŏng, whom Chu met in Konyang). Nevertheless, he was able to flourish in the early Myŏngjong years—a period often regarded as corrupt and degraded due to the political ascendancy of Yun Wŏnhŏng's faction—and gain a reputation for decency and integrity. Clearly Chu enjoyed the favor of the Yun Wŏnhŏng group, including that of Yi Ki, the man who had ordered the death of Chu's best friend. And in a further dark irony, as discussed below, this accommodation of Chu Sebung to the power politics of the age laid the political groundwork for the successful royal chartering of Paegun-dong Academy.

The Founding of Paegun-dong Academy

Chu Sebung’s arrival in P’unggi as magistrate set the stage for his establishment of the first private Confucian academy in Chosŏn Korea, known as sówŏn in emulation of shuyuan in China. We are fortunate to have a detailed contemporary record, written by Chu himself, concerning the events surrounding this founding. His words from the introduction to his Chukkye-ji83 are worth quoting at length:

On the fourth day of the seventh month of autumn of 1541, I arrived at P’ung[gi] town. There was a great drought this year. The next year, 1542, there was a great famine. It was that year when I set up the shrine for An Hyang at Paegun-dong. In 1543, I had the [government] school halls rebuilt [on a site] north of the county [seat], and I separately established a sówŏn in front of the temple of An Hyang.

Some said: “This is excessive. You are wide off the mark. As for regular Confucian shrines, they are fine, but a shrine to An Hyang and a sówŏn, that is simply going too far. An Hyang is already worshipped in the official schools, all the way down to the local administrative levels, so why is it necessary to set up a shrine for him? We already have schools, so why must we especially establish sówŏn? At this time, when there is famine, it is inappropriate; and when [people] are in want, there will be no confidence [in such institutions]. There were formerly no shrines in our nation. If sówŏn are desired and initiated by us, would this not come close to wastefulness?”

I answered: “When we observe Zhu Xi at Nankang, during the period of one year he ordered the reparation of the Bailudong shuyuan; established a shrine to

83. Written in 1544, it comprises six kwŏn; see Chu Sebung, Sinjae chŏnsŏ, 315–412.
Confucius; set up a shrine to the five teachers and one to the three masters; and built an imposing pavilion to Garrison Officer Liu [Ningzhi]. This was the time when the Jin were plundering and attacking China. The world was at war. Furthermore, the area of Nankang had been suffering from repeated famines. Just then [people] were selling titles of nobility to obtain grain in order to keep alive the wandering and starving.\footnote{See Linda Walton, *Academies and Society in Southern Sung China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 25–36, for an account of Zhu Xi’s activities in shuyuan founding and restoration, including the Bailudong Shuyuan in Nankang in 1179. Chu Sebung’s frequent invocations here and elsewhere in the Chukkye-ji of Zhu Xi are implicit evidence of an important event in Sebung’s tenure in P’unggi: his reading of Zhu Xi’s collected works, Zhuzi dajuan (Kor. Chuja taejong), most likely printed for the first time by the Korean government in 1542, as Pae Chongho holds, or in 1543 as Yi Sangun believes. At any rate, by 1544, the year Chukkye-ji was published, Chu had certainly seen the work, as it is included in the catalog of books held by the Paegun-dong Academy. It is hard not to believe that the central impetus for Chu Sebung to construct a sowŏn next to the shrine he had already built in 1542 derived from the inspiration of this work. See Pae Chongho, *Han’guk yugyosa* (Seoul: Yonsei taehakhyo ch’ulp’anbu, 1974), 302; Yi Sangun, *Toegye u’i saengae wa bangmun* (Seoul: Yemun sowŏn, 1999), 134–135. For the importance to Yi Hwang of this work, see below.}

Those were the crises and the difficulties [he faced]. [Yet] Zhu Xi did not set up just one shuyuan and shrine. Why? Heaven has produced all people, but it is through cultivation that they become human beings. If man is without cultivation, then the father is not a father; the son is not a son; the husband is not a husband, and the wife is not a wife; nor does the elder act as the elder; nor the younger act as the younger; the three bonds of human society will be lost and the nine divisions will be destroyed; and the human race will perish forever. Cultivation must begin from veneration of worthies. This is the reason for setting up shrines to honor worthies. This is the reason for setting up shrines to honor virtue and for establishing sowŏn to esteem learning. Indeed, cultivation is more urgent in these troubled times than famine relief. One might say that in terms of the customary course of affairs, [cultivation] appears of little urgency, but viewed at the present time in terms of the human heart and the body politic, the consequences [of cultivation] cannot be taken lightly. Similarly, in steps taken for famine relief, practical measures and cultivation are as the inner and outer linings of garments, inseparable. Ah, Zhu Xi, would he have deceived us?

Now at the ‘old home’ of An Hyang, if one wishes to spread cultivation, one must begin with An Hyang. I am nobody, and this is a time of peace. However, I am in charge of an area. In this one county seat, I must assume responsibility and exert myself to the utmost. I have dared to set up this shrine and construct this sowŏn; to supply it with paddy fields and to collect books for it; all in accord with the example of the Bailudong shuyuan.”\footnote{Chu Sebung, in *Sinjae chŏnsŏ* 1:1a–6a (315–17). The translation here generally follows that of Smith (“The Rise of the Sŏwŏn,” 80–81), with some stylistic and substantive revisions.}

Here, Chu Sebung sets forth his grand justification for building this academy. It is unclear how widely he intended Chukkye-ji to circulate, but one may suspect
that the audience was meant to be local, rather than national, and that the rather strident and self-righteous tone may reflect continuing opposition to the academy. While Chu’s recapitulation of the arguments against him might well be rhetorical—designed more to indicate parallels to Nankang than reflecting the situation in P’unggi—it is also conceivable that some of the local elite found his desire to further glorify the An lineage irritating. Chu uses appropriately humble language in places (“I am nobody”), but it is also quite clear that he is explicitly comparing his role as a magistrate in fostering learning and self-cultivation with that of Zhu Xi, and that just as Zhu Xi strove to implement his vision of moral governance against difficult odds, so, too, will he, Chu Sebung.

Leaving this question of a disgruntled minority, this message likely had a powerful appeal to the local elite, coming as it did from a fellow Kyŏngsang province resident who understood their psychology only too well, and someone who had gained access to official power in spite of an obscure provincial background. Chu was implicitly holding out the prospect—largely realized, it turned out—to the local elite of P’unggi of their locale gaining eternal renown, even as Nankang had done, by participating in institution building of the highest moral order, as articulated by an esteemed philosopher. The heady mixture of moral rectitude and historical dignity he offered them understandably found genuine resonance, and enabled the sówŏn to come into being. Within a few decades, localities would compete to build sówŏn in honor of local worthies.86

It is interesting to note as well the absence of references in this passage to An Ch’uk and An Po, who were also honored in the P’unggi shrine. One may well speculate that by highlighting An Hyang, Chu Sebung was better able to portray the shrine and its associated academy in universalistic terms, and that an emphasis on the enshrinement of three major members of the Sunhŭng An lineage would tend to lead to an impression that the shrine was a lineage affair.87

86. Indeed, in a sense, Chu was too successful in providing a means for a burgeoning local elite to gain dignity through sówŏn construction. Within a century, there were so many academies that the government felt constrained to control their numbers. See Milan Hejtmanek, “Chosŏn chunggi sa’ak sówŏn ŭl tullŏssan kunsin’gan ŭi kaltŭng,” in Tongyang samguk ŭi wanggwŏn kwa kwallyoje, ed. Chosŏn sidae sahakhoe (Seoul: Kukhak charyowoŏn, 1999).

87. This tradition of neglecting An Ch’uk and An Po is one followed by most general accounts of the founding of Paegun-dong sówŏn (e.g., Yi Sangbaek, Han’guk-sa, kŭnsŏ chŏn’gi p’yŏn (Seoul: Chindan hakkho, 1968), 274; Ki-baik Lee, A New History of Korea, 207) in that they neglect to mention the enshrinement of An Ch’uk and An Po. The Kuksa taesajoŭn mentions them as having been added to the shrine in 1544 (no source is given). This is possible, but it was certainly no later, as they are mentioned in Chu’s Chukkye-ji, which he wrote that year. Sheer speculation might
Yet, inescapably, in this the first sŏwŏn, as in later ones, the connection with lineages, and their power and prestige, cannot be so easily dismissed. One indication of the concern and involvement of the Sunhŭng An lineage in Chu Sebung’s efforts was the bestowal to the shrine of a Koryŏ painting of An Hyang, done in the early fourteenth century. Today this is the oldest extant example of Korean portrait painting (see Figure 1),88 but even in the sixteenth century it must have represented an important family treasure, well over two centuries old. The portrait had been kept at a school in P’unggi, but after the school was closed in the mid-fifteenth century, and in the wake of the razing of Sunhŭng City following an unsuccessful rebellion in 1457, it was moved during Sejo’s reign to Seoul for safe-keeping at the home of the senior line (chongson) of the Sunhŭng An lineage.89 In Chu Sebung’s time, the holder of the portrait was An Chŏng. Chu gives the following account of how the portrait came to be taken to P’unggi:

The bequeathed portrait of An Hyang was formerly in the hyanggyo in Sunhŭng municipality. Due to the uprising in 1457, the municipality was destroyed, and the painting was transferred and placed in the dwelling of the senior branch [of the An] line in Seoul. I seized the chance to visit the home90 of An Hyang’s descendant [from this line], An Chŏng, former Recorder (chusŏ, Sr. 7) in the Royal Secretariat. Gazing at the picture [from a distance], it appeared stern, but on approaching it, it seemed friendly. Truly, this great man [An Hyang] had the countenance of a gentleman! It was as if I had received his personal welcome. I was startled to [the bottom of] my heart and will never forget it.

In the third month of 1543, the [former] Recorder [An Chŏng] heard I was setting up a shrine [to An Hyang], and he came south with the picture. It was reverently installed in a tower west of the county [seat]. On the eleventh day of the eighth month, for the first time we were able respectfully to settle the picture in the new shrine. An Hyang’s home had been located south of the destroyed municipality of Sunhŭng, where there were only broken tiles and crumbled walls remaining and nothing further to be found. The new shrine was north of Sunhŭng, on the old foundations of the Suksu [Buddhist] temple, only a stone’s throw from

have it that the An brothers were added to appease their influential descendants in P’unggi.

88. The portrait dated from 1318 (year 12 of Ch’ungsuk)—twelve years after An Hyang’s death—and was painted expressly at the king’s order. For a detailed discussion of this painting and its subsequent fate, see Cho Sŏnmī, Han’guk ch’osanghwa yŏng’gu (Seoul: Yŏrhwadang, 1989), 89–91.

89. It is interesting to speculate that the return of the portrait may have had the flavor of an anti-Sejo act, representing as it did part and parcel of the revival of an area strongly associated with a princely rebellion against him. Such a sentiment would be well in keeping with the views of revisionist historians such as Kim Ilson who had caused political difficulties in the 1498 muo sahwa with their somewhat unfavorable treatment of Sejo.

90. Likely after Chu Sebung returned to Seoul in 1541.
[An’s former home]. An had studied at this temple in his youth, so that I could not but be even more inspired [by the location]. “Bamboo Creek” meanders to the left, and to the right is the “Little White Promontory.” Clouds, mountains, plains, and water: indeed this place is the equal of Mount Lu (Lu-shan) [in China].

Alas! Two hundred and thirty-seven years after An’s death, we have built a shrine to him for the first time.91 Eighty-seven years after his portrait was taken north, it has returned to his birthplace. Is this not fate? When the portrait left the city gates of the capital, there were more than forty of his distant descendants in the government who spread out a farewell feast and ceremoniously dispatched it from the gate. [When the portrait arrived] and was placed reverentially in the temple, altogether over one hundred old and young from the village fasted and washed themselves and gravely welcomed it. It caused the onlookers to be overwhelmed and stirred. This was indeed a great affair for Confucianism. Later generations that succeed us certainly should not disregard what was built through my poor efforts, and should with one heart pay respect to An Hyang’s shrine. If we cause virtuous scholars all to take pleasure in secluded cultivation at the sówón, then there definitely will be those whose hearts will join with An Hyang, and this will make no small contribution to the encouragement of Confucianism.92

This account makes clear the considerable import given the transfer of the painting, from the gathering of the Sunhŭng An lineage in Seoul, to the religious manner (involving fasting and bathing) in which the local villagers welcomed it. Indeed it was the ultimate symbol of legitimation of the shrine by the An lineage.

The casual reader of this passage might well obtain the impression that the motivation for An Chŏng to allow An Hyang’s portrait, a valuable family heirloom, to be hung in the new shrine was largely out of a desire to assist Chu Sebung’s efforts to honor An Hyang, thereby helping to instill a Neo-Confucian spirit in the countryside. While not denying the possibility of such pristine motives, one may also wonder whether deeper and more complex considerations informed the gift.

An important dimension of the founding of Paegun-dong Academy that has been totally overlooked in previous scholarship is the presence of cordial relations between An Chŏng and Chu Sebung, dating back some six years to their period together in Konyang. As mentioned above, the extant poems of Chu to An give every indication that they were well-acquainted, and perhaps something approaching friends. It would be Chu Sebung who wrote An

91. Of course, An Hyang was already enshrined in the Munmyo, the National Confucian Shrine, in 1319. See Smith, “The Rise of the Sŏwŏn,” fn. 29, 203–204.

Figure 1. Portrait of An Hyang, 1318.
Cho ˘ng’s formal epitaph (myojimyo ˘ng).93 Indeed, one wonders if the inspiration for honoring An Hyang in P’unggi did not arise from his prior relationship with an esteemed direct descendant of the man, and whether An Ch˘ong’s assistance may not have helped win over members of the lineage to approving the project. Their personal bond may explain much.

Yet, as Chu also mentions in passing, “When the portrait left the city gates of the capital, there were more than forty of his distant descendants in the government who spread out a farewell feast and ceremoniously dispatched it from the gate.” Clearly, the transfer of this portrait was a matter of interest for a number of the Sunh˘ung An lineage members resident in Seoul. To understand more of the significance of this gathering, it is first necessary to examine the historical context of how the Sunh˘ung An lineage had fared in the period prior to the 1540s.

One rough, but valuable, measure of a lineage’s strength in the Chosos˘n period is the ability of its members to gain access to political power through success in the state examinations. By this standard, the Sunh˘ung An had done well. In little over a century, from 1417 to 1521, fully twenty-six members of the lineage passed the munkwa, eight of these in the last decade of the period. Such success was mirrored by access to high office: in the 1510s, Sunh˘ung An members held such powerful posts as Minister of the Board of Personnel (Ijo p’ans˘o, An Ch’im94) and Third State Counselor (U˘ijo ˘ng, An Tang). The latter is particularly of note, since he was one of the main officials who worked to recommend and promote the group of reformers led by Cho Kwangjo. An Ch˘ong was a youthful, but vocal, member of this group, and was the grandson of An Ch’im and a kinsman of An Tang (1461–1521).95 His direct line of descent from An Hyang was unassailably a scholarly one as well as patrilineal: from An Hyang down to An Ch˘ong, an unbroken line of 11 munkwa passers.96 He had first attained notoriety as a student in the S˘onggyun’gwan when he joined with other students in advocating entry into the National Confucian

93. Mur˘ng chapko py˘olchip 7.10b–12a (233).
94. An Ch’im (1445–1515) passed both the saengw˘on and chinsa in 1462, and then the Kos˘ong special munkwa exam of 1466. He served in a number of mid-level posts, rising eventually to Minister of Public Works, after a career setback due to the muo sahwa (Han’guk inmyo ˘ng taesajo ˘n, 446–47).
95. They shared common descent from An Ku.
96. At least if the genealogical information contained in the early twentieth-century compilation Mans˘ong taedongbo is to be believed for examination passing in the Kory˘o period. It can be verified that An Ch˘ong’s four immediate ancestors in the Chosos˘n period did indeed pass the munkwa: An Ch’os˘on (1497), An Ch’im (1466), An Chigwi (1432), and An Ku (1417). See Mans˘ong taedongbo, B131a; Wagner and Song, “Chosos˘n Munkwa Project.”
Shrine of Chŏng Yŏch’ang and Kim Koengp’il. Later he went on to pass the Recommendation Examination of 1519, as did his kinsmen, the three sons of An Tang, and his uncle, Song Hoji. 97 Thus, of the 28 successful candidates in this national examination, three were the sons of a State Counselor, and two more were closely related. 98

In light of the close ties of the An lineage—through An Tang, his three sons, An Ch'ông and in-laws—to the Cho Kwangjo reformist group, the fortunes of the An lineage declined precipitously after 1519, especially from 1521. In that year, Song Saryŏn (1496–1575), 99 the embittered offspring of an illegitimate daughter of An Tonhu, a member of the Sunhŭng An lineage and father of An Tang, collaborated with important opponents of Cho Kwangjo, such as Nam Kon and declared that the sons of An Tang—An Ch’ŏgyŏm (1486–1521) and An Ch’ŏgŭn (1490–1521)—were plotting rebellion. The subsequent Purge of 1521 (sinsa muok) resulted in the death of An Tang and his sons, and generally brought intense shame to the lineage. Only decades later during the reign of Sŏnjo would the onus of guilt be officially lifted from the Sunhŭng An family. In the period between 1521 and 1544, a year when the political climate became briefly more amenable following Chungjong’s death, there were just two Sunhŭng An passers of the munkwa, both only distantly related to the core group involved in the 1521 purge, and their careers appear to have languished. 100

Given the great reverses their lineage had suffered over the previous quarter century the Sunhŭng An stood only to gain through Chu Sebung’s efforts. The interests of the An lineage could only be advanced through the special dignity accorded them by the honoring of their ancestor as the enshrinee in the first Korean sówŏn.

On balance, Paegun-dong Academy owed its existence to an interlocking set

97. Song was a brother of An’s father’s second wife (who bore him no children); their father was Song Chagang. The two were also connected through Song’s second sister, who married into royalty (Tongsŏnggun Yi Sun) the only daughter of that union became An Ch’ông’s first wife. See Chosŏn wangjo sómwŏn-nok 2136, 3793–9b. My special thanks to Edward W. Wagner for this information.

98. As mentioned below, the three sons were An Ch’ŏgŭn, An Ch’ŏham, and An Ch’ŏgyŏm. Wagner and Song, “Munkwa Project.”

99. Song Saryŏn was known for his skills at prognostication as well as politics. He went on to have a well-regarded official career, and his son Song Ikp’il (1534–99) became one of the most famous sóngnuibak masters of his day, teaching such future philosophical luminaries as Kim Changsaeng (1548–1631) and Kim Chip (1574–1656). In 1586 his official status was posthumously rescinded. Han’guk imnyŏng taesajŏn, 378, 384. Yölyŏsil kisul 8 (2:704–07).

100. An Su passed in 1525 and An Kongsin passed in 1537. In 1544, there were two passers: An Ham and An Myŏngse. Wagner and Song, “Chosŏn Munkwa Project.”
of interests: those of an ambitious local magistrate inspired by fresh contact with the writings of Zhu Xi, those of a proud lineage attempting to reassert its dignity after a quarter century of political disfavor, and those of a community of local literati, whose locale had long suffered the onus of being backward and obstreperous. Neo-Confucian values strongly informed the process, but the impetus lay elsewhere.

Chartering of Paegun-dong Academy as Sosu Academy

Had Paegun-dong Academy remained a privately funded school in a remote county it might well have eventually lapsed into complete obscurity through neglect or financial difficulty. What prevented this from happening is the second half of the account of the founding of the first sŏwŏn in Korea: the attainment of a royal charter.

The groundwork for this attainment had been laid by yet another member of the Sunhuŏng An lineage: An Hyŏn (1501–60). As the Governor of Kyŏngsang-do for a year in 1546–47, he took an extraordinary interest in Paegun-dong sŏwŏn, using the considerable powers of his office to acquire resources from all over the province for the new academy, to include land, slaves, and a variety of articles needed by the sŏwŏn. By the time he left the province, the academy enshrining his ancestor had been put on a firm financial footing.

The third man responsible for supporting Paegun-dong sŏwŏn in the early years of its existence was none other than Yi Hwang (better known by his literary name of Yi T’oegye), the Neo-Confucian philosopher and official. Soon

101. A near kinsman of An Tang and An Chŏng, and an eleventh-generation direct descendent of An Hyang, An Hyŏn passed the munkwa in 1521 and managed to avoid the purge that enveloped so many of his relatives. Making slow progress up the official ladder, by 1546 he was named Governor of Kyŏngsang-do. In the 1550s he would ascend to the heights of officialdom, becoming the Minister of the Board of Personnel (1553), Third State Counselor (1558), and finally, Second State Counselor. A symbol, perhaps, of the reviving fortunes of his lineage, he became the highest-ranking official among members of the Sunhŭng An in the wake of the 1521 purge (Han’guk imnyŏng taesajŏn, 448).

102. Many of these were the wives of criminals who had absconded, rendering their spouses and children liable for government servitude. Thus when a commoner artisan in Huŏnghae fled after committing robbery and murder, his wife, daughter, and two grand-daughters were all made into government slaves and presented to Paegun-dong Academy. See Min Pyŏngha, “Sŏwŏn ūi nongjang,” in Han’guk saron [Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe] 8 (1980), 170.

after his posting to P’unggi, Yi in 1549 sent a petition to the provincial governor, Sim T’ongwŏn, to be forwarded to the court for approval.

Now the methods of education and guidance in Korea have all followed the Chinese system. We have had the Sŏnggyun’gwan and the Sahak at the capital, and the byangggyo in the countryside, which was a good [system]. It is only the establishment of sŏwŏn that has hitherto been unknown, and this is a major deficiency of our system […]

I believe that education must originate from above to reach those below. Only in this way does education have a foundation and can last for a long period and grow. Otherwise, it will be like a river without a source: in the morning there may be plenty [of water], but in the evening it is all gone. How can we make [education] endure? With leadership from above, those below will surely hasten to follow. What one man [the sovereign] esteems, a whole country emulates.

Now although I believe the accomplishments of Chu Sebung were magnificent, and what An Hyŏn did was extremely thorough, yet these accomplishments are but things done by one magistrate and one provincial governor. They have not received royal sanction and are not included in our official records. As it stands, I fear [the sŏwŏn] will not attract the attention of the world, nor lay at rest the misgivings of the people, nor become the model for the country, nor long endure […]

I ask that you please, in turn, make this request known to the King: that we follow the example of the Song dynasty, to grant books, bestow a name plaque, supplies, sustenance fields and slaves, in order to promote the capacity of this [sŏwŏn]. Furthermore, [have the court] command the provincial governors and county magistrates to investigate this [academy’s] means of support and supply it with tools, and simply to restrain it through strict rules and troublesome regulations […] In this way, [the institution of] the sŏwŏn will not simply become a place to learn for one village or province, but the place to learn for the whole country. In this way, cultivation will originate from the King above, scholars will gladly go to study there, and the sŏwŏn will be handed down and not decay. In this way, the sŏwŏn will be admired everywhere, and the people will strive to copy them.

If there are places in which there are remains of the exploits of former worthies, such as where Ch’oe Ch’ung, U T’ak, Chŏng Mongju, Kil Chae, Yi Saek, Kim Chongjik, and Kim Koengp’il resided, sŏwŏn should be established, either by royal order or through private construction.

I humbly observe today the nation’s schools. They are definitely places connected with worthy scholars. However, the schools in the counties and prefectures have become useless literary adornments, and the method of cultivation has greatly declined. Scholars, in fact, feel ashamed to frequent byangggyo. There is no way to remedy the extremity of the corruption of the [byangggyo], which is indeed disheartening. There is only the cultivation of the sŏwŏn available. If we make them prosper now, then probably it will be possible to remedy the deficiencies of educational administration. Scholars will have a place to go; the habits of the literati will follow and greatly change; customs will daily
In this famed petition, Yi Hwang forges the last link in the chain of interests for the creation of chartered academies: that of the state. He offers a host of arguments, from the predictable, yet ever persuasive, logic of the need to keep up with China: “...this is a major deficiency of our system,” to the sad state of hyanggyo—though it is quite amazing to find a sitting magistrate dismissing en masse the entire government education system in the provinces—which he maintained cannot be remedied, a situation requiring, he argues, the strong medicine of sŏwŏn. Perhaps most persuasive of all, however, is his challenge to the court to give itself dignity, even as the Northern Song emperor had done, by officially recognizing the academies. Just as Chu Sebung had done with the local literati in P’unggi, Yi Hwang now does with the highest officials in the land: he provides them a way to participate in a hallowed ritual that will reconfirm their exalted political and moral level, even as the state benefits.

The officials to whom Yi Hwang’s petition was addressed were certainly no sarim, by any definition. Governor Sim was a member of the illustrious Ch’ŏngsong Sim lineage and the brother of a member of the State Council; as such he had many powerful political connections, a fact almost certainly well known to Yi. The roots of the prestige of the Ch’ŏngsong Sim lineage in the Chosŏn period stretched back to the beginning of the dynasty, when the military figure Sim Tŏkpu (1328–1401) accompanied Yi Sŏnggye back from Wihwa-do in 1388 and in his subsequent seizure of power and founding of the dynasty four years later. For his loyalty he was named a Foundation Merit Subject (kaeguk kongsin), enfeoffed as Lord of Ch’ŏngsong, and given high official position. By 1399 (under Chŏngjong) he had risen to Second State Counselor. His son Sim On (?–1418) continued the prominence by rising to Chief State Counselor during the reign of T’aejong (1400–18). While his record of service to the throne was permanently interrupted by his execution in 1418 at the king’s behest, the fact that his daughter was the consort of the next monarch, Sejong (1418–50), eventually helped bring about his restoration. Sim On’s wife, the mother of the queen, was born into the Sunhŭng An lineage. Her father was


105. Usually known by her formal title, Sŏhŏn wanghu, she was born in 1395, two years before Sejong. When they were married in 1408 there could have been little indication that Prince Ch’ungnyŏng, as the third son of T’aejong, would later become king. She gave birth to eight sons and two daughters, and managed to survive the onus of her father’s execution in 1418 due to her favor with Sejong. See Yi, Kuksa taesajo, 762.
An Ch’ŏnbo (1339–1425), himself the Second State Counselor under Sejong. The lingering influence into the next century of this important marriage connection between the Sim and An lineages is difficult to gauge; however, given the great prestige of Sejong’s rule it seems safe to assume that both groups were not only aware of this connection, but took pride in it.

The next generation, best represented by Sim Hoe (1418–93), i.e. the younger brother of the queen, was able to flourish only after Sejong’s reign, perhaps due to the lingering shame of their father’s end. By 1469, however, Sim Hoe had earned a merit title in suppressing a rebellion at the outset of the reign of Yejong (1468–69), and under his successor Sŏngjong (1469–94) went on to become Chief State Counselor.

Thus, in three generations, spanning the first century of the Chosŏn dynasty, this one branch of the Ch’ŏngsong Sim lineage produced three members of the State Council (two of them Chief State Counselors), two royal merit subjects, and a queen to the most highly regarded king. Certainly, if any family seemed deserving of being counted among the established and conservative group of elite families it was the Ch’ŏngsong Sim.

This was a tradition that continued into the sixteenth century, with an unfortunate interruption in the case of Sim Sunmun (1465–1504), Sim Hoe’s son. Sunmun first attained some prominence by being arrested by the State Tribunal in 1492 as one of the students of the Sŏnggyun’gwan who participated in drafting a memorial that castigated Yun P’il-sang (1427–1504) for his position on major political issues of the day. After passing the munkwa examination in 1495, Sim Sunmun entered upon his official career, which was cut short less than ten years later, by the 1504 purge. He was accused of having once criticized the fit of Yŏnsan-gun’s royal robes and was beheaded for his

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106. Yi, Kuksa taesajŏn, 886.
107. Yi, Kuksa taesajŏn, 862.
108. Yun was a member of the P’ap’yŏng Yun lineage and a kinsman of Sŏngjong’s second queen, whose formal title was Chŏnghyŏn wanghu. After passing the munkwa in 1450, and the chungsi in 1457, he gained renown through military service in the suppression of the Yi Siae rebellion (1467) and a joint campaign by Chosŏn and Ming forces to pacify the Jianzhou region in China (1479). Twice a merit subject, he served in a variety of high posts, including eight years as the Chief State Counselor, from 1485. He was later to die in the purge of 1504. See Wagner, The Literati Purges, 33; Yi, Kuksa taesajŏn, 1076–77.
109. Yun was under attack for his support (shared by the king and his fellow members of the State Council) for the Northern Expedition of 1491 and for his position in 1492 on legislation concerning Buddhist monks. It was this latter issue, in particular, that prompted the drafting of the memorial on the part of the students, who were led by Yi Mok (1471–98). Their imprisonment resulted in vigorous protests from both sympathetic government officials and hundreds of students in the Sŏnggyun’gwan. See Wagner, The Literati Purges, 33–35.
crime, but not before he had married off his talented eldest son, Sim Yŏnwŏn, to the daughter of Kim Tang (1465–1527). This proved a fortuitous choice. Not only was Kim likely very sympathetic to the plight of Sim’s father, his own uncle Kim Sŏnggyŏng having also perished in the 1504 purge, but in his subsequent career and rise to power as Second State Counselor, as an opponent of the 1519 Cho Kwangjo group, he may well have been responsible for protecting the official career of Sim Yŏnwŏn. Unlike his brothers Sim Pongwŏn (1497–1574) and Sim T’ongwŏn (i.e., the very official to whom Yi Hwang addressed his petition), who passed the lower, sama exams in 1516 and 1519, respectively—but not the munkwa until 1537—Sim Yŏnwŏn passed the munkwa in 1522 and the difficult chungsi in 1526. His path in officialdom led in the 1540s to posts in the State Council; by 1551 he was Chief State Counselor.

Behind Sim’s rise to the highest post in the land lay not only his illustrious tradition of government service, but also important marriage ties that helped steer him through the murky political currents of the first half of the sixteenth century. Apart from his father-in-law Kim Tang, himself a State Counselor, there was Sim’s daughter, married to Yun Kŏn, a first cousin to Chungjong’s second queen, Changgyŏng wanghu (1491–1515), the mother of the crown prince and future king, Injong. Her older brother Yun Im was one of the most powerful political figures of the late 1530s and early 1540s, and Sim Yŏnwŏn could only have benefited from the connection.

After Injong’s death in 1545, the Yun Im group was thoroughly and bloodily purged. Sim Yŏnwŏn and his family might well have been at grave risk during this, the ǔlsa sahwa, but for yet another marriage connection: the daughter of Sim’s son, Sim Kang (1514–1567) was the queen of Myŏngjong, the wife of Injong.

110. At least in the Yŏnsan’gun ilgi version of the matter, as cited in Wagner, The Literati Purges, 61; the Yölyŏsil kisul account is a bit livelier: Sunmun had been involved with a kisaeng who subsequently became a favorite of Yŏnsan’gun, thereby provoking royal wrath. Yölyŏsil kisul 8 (2:649).
111. Kim Tang, of the Kyŏngju Kim lineage, was born the same year as Sim Sunmun and passed the munkwa the same year, in 1495. They may well have been childhood friends and studied in the Sŏnggyun’gwan together. Han’guk inmyŏng taesajŏn, 89. Note that Yi Mok (the top passer) and Yi Haeng also passed in this examination.
112. See above for a brief discussion of this event.
113. She died in 1515, shortly after giving birth to the prince.
114. See above for information on Munjong wanghu.
115. Reputed to have been an ardent scholar who had memorized all the Confucian canon by the age of nineteen. He passed the lower government examination in 1543 and studied at the Sŏnggyun’gwan, but his position from 1545 as the father-in-law of the king precluded an official career (Yi, Kuksa taesajŏn, 853).
Insun wanghu (1532–1575). Thus, the Sim lineage was exceptionally well placed, having strong marriage connections to both Injong and Myŏngjong, thereby allowing it to weather the stormy transition of 1545.

The career of Sim T'ongwŏn was distinctly slower in developing than that of his older brother, Sim Yŏnwŏn. Likely tainted by his associations with members of the 1519 reformers (he passed the lower, sama, examination in 1519) and unprotected by marriage ties, he and his older brother Pongwŏn appear to have languished for some eighteen years before both passing the munkwa in 1537, albeit in a manner that would later prove highly detrimental to T'ongwŏn's career. As accomplished as his brother Yŏnwŏn in the writing of examinations, he went on to pass the chungsi in 1546. His emergence on the official scene was likely not unconnected with the rising status of the family and its marriage ties in the waning years of the Chungjong reign. By 1550, as Governor of Kyŏngsang province, his career was well on its way to the position of Second State Counselor he would eventually attain in the 1550s.

In court, the petition of Sim T'ongwŏn was discussed in the second month of 1550 at the highest levels of government. According to the sillok account:

The Chief State Counselor Yi Ki, Second State Counselor Sim Yŏnwŏn, Third State Minister Sang Chin, the Minister of Rites Yun Kae, and the Third Minister in the Board of Rites, Sŏ Ko deliberated.

“Paegun-dong Academy in P’unggi was founded by the Governor of Hwanghae province, Chu Sebung, when he was the magistrate there. This was the very place

116. During the final, palace examination, phase of the test, when the rankings were to be determined, Sim T'ongwŏn (1499–?) is reputed to have written language that was highly flattering to the examiner, the powerful Kim Allo. T'ongwŏn's success in obtaining the top rank lent some credence to the story. Many years later, in 1567, this incident would come back to haunt him and he would be stripped of his status as an official. T'ongwŏn was very unlucky in this, since Kim Allo would be purged and put to death later the same month (i.e. the tenth month of 1537) (Yŏllyŏsil kisul 11 [3:603]). Although Sim later reached the State Council as Second State Counselor in 1564 and had married into the royal family, a descendant of Sejong, in the end it all came to naught (Han’guk inn’yŏng taesajŏn, 429). Thus, in yet another irony of the events surrounding the chartering of the first Confucian academy in Korea, one of the officials crucial for its success appears to have obtained preferential munkwa ranking through flattery to an arch-villain of the sarim adherents.

117. Sang Chin (1493–1564) was the only member of his lineage, the Mokch’ŏn Sang, to pass the munkwa during the Chosŏn dynasty. After launching his official career by passing the munkwa in 1519, he managed the extraordinary feat of serving in a number of posts in the central bureaucracy all the way to Chief State Counselor (from 1568), without once being exiled during the stormy political changes of his day. His grandson Sison was married to Sim T'ongwŏn's daughter (Han’guk inn’yŏng taesajŏn, 334–335; Wagner and Song, “Chŏsŏn Munkwa Project;” Munhwa Yussi sebo p’yŏnsu wiwŏnhoe p’yŏn, Munhwa Yussi sebo (Taejŏn: Munhwa Yussi taedong poso, 1976).
The Elusive Path to Sagehood

where Munsōng-gong, An Yu [his original given name was Hyang, but was changed due to royal taboo] once lived. In its operation and scope it generally seeks to model itself on the Bailudong Academy founded by Zhu Wengong [Zhu Xi]. Since rules for governing the academy have been established, books acquired, land and the means of supplying [its needs] have been provided for, it seems capable of producing talent. Yi Hwang (when Yi Hwang was the P’ungkin magistrate he regarded Chu Sebung’s intention as noble, and fearing that it would not be able to maintain itself long, as he was about to leave his post due to illness, he wrote up a petition giving the details, which resulted in the State Council and the relevant board being ordered to discuss this topic) requested that a signboard, together with books, land, and slaves be granted [the academy]. While all of this request cannot be granted, if it is specially ordered that two or three of these items, such as a signboard and books, be bestowed, then Confucian adherents [near and] far away will certainly be moved and have their spirits raised. In the case of land, that which Chu Sebung has already obtained is not insufficient, so if it is left the way it is, even though no more economic support be given, they should be able to obtain benefactors.

For reading a quiet place is the best. In the event that the provincial education commissioner and the local magistrate seek to control [the academy] and tighten control by instituting numerous rules, if anything those there will be unable to behave naturally, and it is to be feared that this will run counter to the path of cultivation. Accordingly, there is no better method than not to cause a disturbance.”

This summary of what was likely a lively debate is quite revealing, for the key issues brought up represent in summary form the future issues of contention over the approval of subsequent charters of sŏwŏn by the court: the worthiness of the enshrined for the honor requested and the appropriateness of the location to such a worthy; legitimation through comparison with events in Song China; the precise nature of the grant, especially those impinging on the royal purse, and the related issue of how well the academy is financed; and last, but not least, the nature and scope of official control over the academy. In particular, the decision of the State Council to recommend against direct supervision by officials of the central government proved to be a momentous precedent, one counter to the case of shuyuan in China. In practice this meant that even local magistrates could have no say in coordinating the educational activities of the academies with those of state schools, nor prevent possible abuses of the academies as places of corvée and military service avoidance. Although the

118. Myŏngjong sillok 1550/02 (pyŏngo).

119. There, as the system developed in the thirteenth century, a close relationship with the official school system developed, with official supervision permitted. See Walton, Academies and Society, 75–81.
court would later come to restrict severely the formation of new academies and legislate important limits on the scope of possible enrollment, it never interfered in the curriculum.

The final irony here is that Chu Sebung’s popularity among the ruling elite in the capital, including especially the Chief State Counselor, Yi Ki, was likely a vital component in the ready acceptance Yi Hwang’s petition met. Had Chu hewed closer to Neo-Confucian principle and chosen not to serve men who had ordered the deaths of his friends and colleagues, the academy movement might well have been stymied at the outset.

Having wandered down some of the heretofore unexplored byways of the founding of the first sŏwŏn we are now in a better position to understand its place in one of the central historiographical debates during the last few decades within the field of Chosŏn dynasty history: how to best understand the social background of the literati committed to a Neo-Confucian social and political agenda who emerged beginning in the late fifteenth century in Chosŏn Korea. This group, commonly and collectively referred to as the sarim, has been the focus of intense debate, which shows little sign of abating.\textsuperscript{120} Indeed there is no agreement as to even the basic definition of the term “sarim.”\textsuperscript{121} The standard interpretation of early Chosŏn social history as set forth in major survey texts such as Lee Ki-baik’s influential \textit{A New History of Korea} generally hews to a view of the sarim as a rural group mostly from Kyŏngsang province who gain entree to court in the late fifteenth century and, in a confrontation with the


\textsuperscript{121} Definitions range from that of Yi Sungmu, who viewed it as a term that came to represent the yangban class generally and uses the term sarim chŏngch’i (sarim politics) as a broad conceptual category for comprehending Chosŏn-era politics (see \textit{Chosŏn sidae tangaengsa} (Seoul: Tongbang media, 2000)), to that of Yi T’aejin, who views it as a rural literati class of small and medium landlords who centered their lives around Neo-Confucianism and rural institutions embodying it, such as the sŏwŏn (\textit{Han’guk saboesa yŏng’gu: nongŏp kisul paltal kwa saboe pyŏndong} (Seoul: Chisik san’opsa, 1986)). The definition this author finds most useful and in accord with his own understanding of Chosŏn dynasty history is that given by Yi I (and quoted approvingly by Chŏng Manjo in “Chosŏn sidae ŭi sarim chŏngch’i”): “In their hearts they revere the ancient way; with their body they strive to practice Confucianism; in speaking they use measured language and speak for the public good: these are known as the sarim.” In short, they were largely a self-selected group within the yangban class, whose membership could cut across lines of lineage, political faction, geographical origin, and wealth. Fervor for a Neo-Confucian lifestyle and political agenda rather than social background was the crucial factor. This group is not the same as that I term the “rural Confucian literati” in this work, although quite often the latter group may well be considered a part of the former one.
established “meritorious elite” (*hun’gup’a*), composed of capital-based official families who had prospered from the fifteenth century there, go down to defeat in the literati purges. Subsequently, goes the interpretation, they rebuilt their strength in the countryside through the construction of *sŏwŏn*:

All but crushed by the literati purges, the Neo-Confucian literati [*sarim*] found in the *sŏwŏn* the instrument with which they might lay the foundation for their revival and pave the way for their return to power.¹²²

Leaving aside the quibble that this “return to power” supposedly happened with the enthronement of Sŏnjo in 1567, only a generation after the first academy, and by which time only a handful had been built, any attempt to apply this understanding of the *sarim* role in establishing Paegun-dong Academy immediately confronts us with a set of problems, not the least of which is deciding whether Chu Sebung himself is to be considered a *sarim*. Certainly by the standard criteria he would seem a pure example: rural birth in Kyŏngsang-do, economic marginality, fascination for *sŏngnihak* (even going so far as to draft the preface for the *Sŏngni taejŏn chŏllyo*), efforts to purify rural mores along Neo-Confucian lines, and the founding of the first *sŏwŏn* in Korea. Yet, as his official biography in the *sillok* put it:

> When the *ŭlsa* literati purge [of 1545] arose Sebung [on the one hand] spoke words of anger at the state of affairs to the *sarim*, while [on the other hand] he bowed low to the powerful officials, fearing them. Going in and out of the homes of Yi Ki and Yun Wŏnhyŏng, he served in various posts...¹²³

Clearly, by the time of his death Chu was not considered a member of the *sarim*. This verdict was echoed by Yi Hwang himself, who in his *Onhaengnok*, compiled by his disciples, is presented as distinctly critical in his appraisal of Chu:

> Chu Sebung built the Paegun-dong Sŏwŏn, and later [after his death] there were those who wished to honor him in a *sŏwŏn* shrine. When the Master [T’oeuye] heard this, he said, “There was a movement in Haeju at Munhŏn sŏwŏn [dedicated to Ch’oe Ch’ung] to do this, as well, but angry opposition arose, so in the end they could not carry out their intention. There will be time enough after things settle down. Furthermore, if he is enshrined in a shrine he himself founded, would he be at peace?” Chu set foot in Yi Ki’s house, and his behavior was very

¹²³. *Myŏngjong sillok* 1554/07/02 (kyŏngja).
So, it would seem that Chu Sebung was not a *sarim*, at least by the standards of the day. An Chŏng, An Hyŏn, Sim Yŏnwŏn, Sim T’ongwŏn, and most definitely, Yi Ki, would also seem to be inappropriate candidates for inclusion in the *sarim* group. Of the major figures involved with the early history of Paegun-dong Academy, only Yi Hwang would seem to have unimpeachable credentials. Yet, as has been detailed above, in fact Yi Hwang’s role in helping further the interests of Paegun-dong Sŏwŏn, however influential, represent only a part of the story. The solid contributions of Chu Sebung, An Hyŏn, and Sim Yŏnwŏn, in particular, cannot easily be brushed aside. The conclusion seems inevitable: in large measure Korea’s first Confucian academy came into existence through the efforts and active cooperation of men who were not members of the *sarim* group, as commonly understood.

**Conclusion**

From their very origin in the mid-sixteenth century, *sŏwŏn* were complex institutions, the establishment of which required the active participation of Confucian literati, local *yangban* elite, lineage groups, and local and central government officials, each group with its own interests, but each sharing the unifying ritual of Zhu Xi in Nankang, newly revealed in the publication of his literary collection. This was in one sense a haphazard achievement, a coalition assembled through the idealism, ambition, and political savvy of an ambitious Chu Sebung and a world-weary Yi Hwang. As such, far from being solely a *sarim* institution of pristine moral attainment, the academies from the start embodied the patronage and influence of a broad range of the *yangban* class, up to the most powerful men in the land. The entangled interests that lay at the heart of the academies gave them wide appeal, fully realized in the next three centuries, but proved an impediment to the realization of the philosophical ideals of the *sarim*, particularly as the coalition began to unravel in succeeding centuries under the strain of the extraordinary growth in the academy system.