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정치학석사 학위논문

**The Correlation between Government  
Reforms and the Power of the Joseon State  
during the Late Eighteenth Century: An  
Inquiry into State Power and Domination**

18세기 후반 조선 정부 개혁과 국가 권력 간의 상관관계:  
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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the capacity of the eighteenth-century Joseon state to penetrate local society: its ability to commit individuals of the society to the goals of the state rather than the goals of other social groupings. Existing literature on Joseon state power has argued that the eighteenth-century Joseon state exercised exceptional power over local societies. The absence of institutional check on monarchical power and the vagueness of law which allowed considerable leeway for its interpreter allowing the kings, as the supreme judge of the realm, to do as they please. Also, during the late Joseon dynasty, it is claimed, the collapse of the local gentry associations has placed the state as the sole unchallenged authority of the realm. Against this backdrop, this paper reexamines various concepts of state and how the king and state officials perceived problems of governing related to the magistrates.

The question of state power is important because the concept of state allows the scholars to conceptualize interests and phenomena that otherwise cannot be reduced to interests of social actors and groups. However, inadequate conceptualizations of state could mislead scholars to compound various aspects of state power that could obscure rather than illuminate insights on phenomena under consideration.

To answer this question, this thesis analyzes the concepts of state employed by existing literature and the *Daily Revelation Records* (日得錄). First, inadequate conceptualizations of state employed by previous studies have led scholars to mistake evidence for a possible increase in one aspect of state power for an overall increase of power. By reviewing concepts of state employed to understand and articulate Joseon state, this study illuminates the theoretical problems of these concepts that misled scholars. As an alternative, Michael

Mann's framework of state power will be employed to analyze Joseon state power. The framework illuminates that the evidence forwarded by previous studies is independent of the capacity of the state to penetrate local societies.

Second, This study analyzes the *Daily Revelation Records* (日得錄). The *Daily Revelation Records*, a work compiled under Jeongjo's supervision, illustrates how the king and the state officials understood and reacted to the problems of governing during an era when the state purportedly exercised extensive power to control local societies. There are two advantages to analyzing the Daily Revelation Records. First, the records deal with a period when the state is considered to have had greater control over local society. Therefore, previous studies provide clear arguments as to what political and social phenomena caused or manifest greater state power. It becomes easier to capture what these studies have meant by state and power. Second, As records of conversations and words by the king and state officials of the highest echelon, the Daily Revelation Records illuminates how state agents have perceived and reacted to the problems of governing the realm.

Based on Mann's framework and the analysis of the text, the study reveals that a. the state was well aware of its infrastructural weaknesses to control local societies, b. the state had no intention of acquiring greater power to tightly administer the society, and c. the absence of independent sources of authority did not lead to the increased power of the state to dictate society. Therefore, this paper argues that the Joseon state, despite evidence provided by previous studies, the Joseon state had limited capability to control local societies. The argument implies that the causes for the observed prominent role of the government during the late Joseon dynasty were social rather than governmental.

**Keyword:** Joseon (朝鮮), Power, State, Daily Revelation Records (日得錄),  
Despotic Power, Infrastructural Power,

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

This paper explores the capacity of the eighteenth-century Joseon state to penetrate local society. More specifically, it questions the capability of the magistrates to control the local societies during Jeongjo (正祖, 1752 – 1800, r. 1776 – 1800) 's reign. To answer the question this paper examines arguments in support of greater state power along with concepts of state utilized by existing literature to explain Joseon society. The concept of state is required for certain conceptualizations lead scholars to exaggerate state power by confounding different aspects of state power. A review of the concepts demonstrates the strengths and inadequacies of various concepts of state. From these conceptualizations, this paper adopts Michael Mann (2012a)'s concept, one among other previously employed models, to explain the Joseon state's capacity to control the local society during Jeongjo's reign. This paper argues that the strength of the Joseon state did not lie in its ability to penetrate the local society: it had limited capacity to commit the individuals of the society to the goals of the state over goals of various social groupings. Rather, the strength of the Joseon state rested in its monopoly over the centrality of the society. In short, while the arguments for greater power of the state *could* claim an increase in the despotic power of the state, further evidence and arguments are required to link the absence of local autonomous rule with the ability of the state to govern local society effectively. This study implies that the causes leading to the observed prominent role of the government during the late Joseon dynasty were social, that is, voluntary actions of the social actors, rather than by the state.

The argument of this paper is not unprecedented. The argument for limited social penetration of the Joseon state has been forwarded by previous studies (Lee Hakyung, 2018; Lee Heekwon 1999; Kim Youngmin, 2018; Palais 1991).

However, this paper builds on previous works in two manners. First, this paper concentrates on a period when the state is considered to have exercised greater control over the society. By examining the evidence purported to support greater state power, this paper clarifies in the manner in which the state was strong and weak. Specifically, the paper reexamines previous arguments for ‘government lead domination of periphery’ during Jeongjo’s reign.

Second, this paper brings new course material into consideration. This paper analyzes *Daily Revelation Records* (日得錄), aided by *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* (朝鮮王朝實錄). As a text recording conversations among key political players and as a text personally oversaw by Jeongjo, the text gives additional information as to how Jeongjo and state officials understood the problems of the day and how they tried to manage it.

The following sections of this chapter will articulate the puzzle of this paper and elaborate on the theoretical causes behind this puzzle. Next, Mann’s concept of state and power are explained. The second chapter will consist of reevaluating and reorganizing previous studies by related cases and the argument will be supported by excerpts from the *Daily Revelations Records*. The last chapter summarizes the arguments.

## **1. A Puzzle: An Absolute but Impotent State**

Currently, various models of state compete to correctly interpret the Joseon state power. From certain perspectives, the state had complete control over the society or the kings exercised arbitrary power (Kuk Minho 1998; Lee Haejoon 2000; Lee Jeongkyu 1996; Lee Taejin 1993; Lee Younghun 1988; Jin Dukkyu 2000; Steinberg 1997). From the early days of Joseon’s existence, judicial and

military authority was centralized, negating other centers of organized military power or judicial authority (Steinberg 1997, 150). There were no aristocrats capable of acting as political and military centers of power possessing independent sources of wealth and armies. While there were disobediences and oppositions to the ruling, no other agent or a group of agents claimed judicial authority for themselves as the supreme judge (Lee Jungkyu 1996). Furthermore, there were no institutional mechanisms to check the arbitrary power of the kings (Kuk Minho 1998; Jin Dukkyu 2000). Acting as an extension of these despotic kings were an elaborate system of bureaucracy stretched throughout the realm connecting the center to the remote island of Jeju. Furthermore, the Confucian ideology induced the population to conform to the authority of their superiors and accept the status quo (Steinberg 1997). A more extreme argument is forwarded by Lee Haejoon (2000, 185). From Lee's perspective, Whatever autonomy existed during the Joseon dynasty, it was not 'autonomy' in the strictest sense. Such a rule was impossible during the Joseon dynasty. The state had absolute superiority over the social actors and such 'autonomy' existed under the implicit permission the state (Lee Haejoon 2000, 185). Apparently, Joseon state was absolute in principle: single unified authority over the military, administrative, and judicial power.

From another perspective, the Joseon state was weak and the kings' power was far from despotic (Cho Hein 1997; Duncan 2000; Palais 1991; Hahm Chaihark 2008; Lee Hakyung 2018; Lee Heekwon 1999; Kim Youngmin 2018. Kim Youngsoo 2007; Park Gangoo 2004). Contrary to the arguments supporting arbitrary judicial power of the kings, there was a due process and it was adhered to during the Joseon dynasty (Park Gangoo 2004). Furthermore, a 'Confucian Constitutionalism' effectively checked the arbitrary power of the kings (Hahm Chaihark 2008; Lee Sukhee and Gang Jungin 2018). Also, there existed a

separate group of social elites acting as local leaders with authority independent from the state (Cho Hein 1997). In addition, a culture of propriety (禮) limited the scope of kings' arbitrary power (Kim Youngsoo 2007). Even in the area of ideology, Lee Hakyung (2018) persuasively demonstrates that 'Confucian' ideology did not support the arbitrary power of the kings. Rather, it provided a language through which other social actors could check the power and authority of the kings. Also, the bureaucracy was not simply an extension of monarchical power: bureaucrats had their own interests independent from the kings. This cleavage divided the leadership and debilitated the state's ability to implement policies necessary for its survival (Palais 1991; Duncan 2000). Low level of social division and the inability of either the king or the aristocrats to over-power the other paralyzed the state. While centralized bureaucracy existed, it was inadequately centralized and it 'masked' the limitations of state power (Palais 1991, 10). Furthermore, the state had no intention to penetrate into the society; as long as the tax quotas were being met, the state was willing to leave the local societies as they please (Palais 1991, 13-4).

However, a general consensus exists among history-oriented scholars that the ability of the state to control society increased during the eighteenth century (Han Sangkwon 1995; Korean History Research Association Joseon Era Social History Research Team 2000; Lee Taejin 2008; Lee Younghun 2014; Oh Youngkyo 2005; Park Hyunmo 2001). First, during the eighteenth century, District and Village System (面里制) became more systematic and local agents became subordinate to the magistrates (Oh Youngkyo 2005; Han Sangkwon 1995). Second, Border Defense Council (備邊司), de facto the state apparatus of the greatest authority, absorbed various government functions related to ruling the periphery (Han Sangkwon 1995, 243 - 245). Furthermore, the authority of the censors increased greatly, enabling them to better monitor the mismanagements of

local magistrates (Han Sangkwon 1995, 248). Previously, the censors' inspection was limited to a randomly selected region. In cases, censors were punished for inspecting an undesignated region even when a magistrate was convicted of wrong-doing. However, during the eighteenth century, a censor's inspection was expanded to include regions en route to a randomly selected region. Through these means, Han argues that the eighteenth-century kings were able to rule their subjects *directly* (Han Sangkwon 1995, 150).

It could be argued that employing foreign concepts, such as state, is the cause of confusion. However, doing away with the concept of state is easier said than done. For example, one of the most influential studies on state domination of the society starts with the following introduction.

In addition to [studying] the methods of controlling the periphery, it is necessary to ask the fundamental question "what is state" ... to study the state's domination of the periphery. However, problems such as these are left as future tasks (Korean History Research Association Joseon Era Social History Research Team 2000, 6).

This statement evinces two important issues in studying Joseon society. First, it demonstrates that the concept of state was poorly controlled throughout the field. Despite their awareness of the need to control this concept, and the importance of doing so, they were unable either to find an adequate concept or to reach a consensus on the precise definition of the concept. Second, and more pertinent, their application of the concept demonstrates the utility of the concept, however vague. Despite the absence of a clear definition, and their acknowledgment of its importance, they felt the need to employ the concept to understand and explain the political and social phenomena of the Joseon dynasty.

Also, studies avoiding the concept of state inevitably find themselves using an alternative designation to name an entity distinct from society that authoritatively coordinates various resources of the society from a center. Palais



(1991), for example, avoids employing the concept of state. The reason for such evasion, whether intentional or a consequence of the theoretical framework employed, is uncertain. However, throughout the work, an entity with its own interest and agency is continuously summoned to explain or articulate certain phenomena.

... Korea's capacity to adapt ... was hindered by those factors responsible for the extraordinary stability of the Yi dynasty (Palais 1991, 4)

What is 'Korea' that has 'capacity' and that can 'adapt'? Therefore, these scholars found great utility, so much so that they would bear conceptual vagueness, in employing the concept of state to understand Joseon society.

What were the theories employed to explain these 'state' phenomena? Five different models can be discerned: Oriental Despotism, Patrimonial State, Bureaucratic state, Absolutism, and Historical Bureaucracy. Also, another model, a militarist state model, commonly employed to explain 'state' will also be examined. These theories have their merits but are ill-suited to explain the political and social phenomena of the Joseon society.

## **2. A Literature Review 1: Conceptualizing Joseon State**

To understand the distribution of power within Joseon society, various theories of state were employed. Four models will be discussed in this section: oriental despotism, patrimonial state, militarist state, and historical bureaucracy. Absolutism and bureaucratic state will be discussed as an anti-thesis to oriental despotism and patrimonial state. Based on the theory employed to explain political phenomena during the Joseon dynasty, scholars' judgment on the power of the state vary. The following section explains how each theory could portray

Joseon ‘state’ as either strong or weak. This paper argues that such confusion derives from their vague treatment of the power of state. These theories fail to distinguish different aspects of state power: despotic and infrastructural (Mann 1984).

### **i. Oriental Despotism**

Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* (1963) or simple despotism is perhaps the most commonly employed concept of the state when articulating the Joseon state. Kim Youngmin (2018)’s analysis demonstrated how easily this model was assumed by scholars to explain the influence of the Joseon state toward the society.<sup>1)</sup> State, according to this model, is a coordinator and an organizer of social resources, personified by the ruler and her officials, in service of a certain mode of production. The state, and ultimately the ruler, exercises *total* power over the society for the dominant method of production requires large scale coordination and organization which only the state could offer.

The mode of production in the Orient, according to Wittfogel, required large-scale irrigation. Such extensive project required the coordination of various resources. To accomplish such a feat, an organizer and coordinator were needed to keep track of the vast resources scattered throughout the society and to employ them effectively, that is, authoritatively. The absolute necessity of the state in the mode of production is what gives the state its total power.

The ‘total’ power described by Wittfogel has two different aspects. One, the state can make arbitrary decisions without having to heed to the demands of other social actors. Second, total power means that the state can authoritatively coordinate and mobilize various resources within a society to achieve its goal.

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1) According to Kim’s analysis, Jeong Beungseul (2016), Song Hokeun (2011), Kim Myungho (2015), and Park Heebyung (2017) adhere to this model.

States had an exact account of the available resources in society and was able to mobilize these resources authoritatively to realize its goals. Wittfogel confuses these two related but distinct powers. Wittfogel argues that the need for ‘total power,’ in the second sense, for the mode of production gives a state its ‘total power’ in the first sense: the need for total mobilization gives the state its arbitrary decision-making power. This is not necessarily so. Modern states have an unimaginable capability to mobilize various resources within their societies and the need for such mobilizing function is fundamental to maintain societies. However, states do not enjoy ‘total power’ (Mann 1984, 114).

Inadequacy of Wittfogel’s model for explaining Joseon society is apparent. Joseon rulers never enjoyed the ‘total power’ Wittfogel attributes to the rulers of hydraulic society. Joseon rulers were known more for their relative weakness than their strength (Palais 1991). The officials had their independent sources of power such as birth and land ownership. Furthermore, the Joseon state was far from a grand organizer. The centralization of the bureaucracy was limited and the state was indifferent to the petty details of governing the local society (Palais 1991, 13). Also, the large scale irrigation was never central to the mode of production in Joseon. Although large-scale irrigation projects conducted by the state were not absent, these projects were limited in number and were conducted near the capital region. The vast majority of the irrigation projects were conducted by local agents on a smaller scale.

## **ii. Patrimonial State**

Weber (1978, 1006-69)’s patrimonial state is another model employed to explain the Joseon state. The state, in this case, is synonymous with the ruler, and the subjects’ function is to satisfy their ruler’s desires. This does not mean that the rulers are always self-interested. Interests are socially constructed and it

could be the interest of a ruler to be benevolent. Whatever the interest of the ruler may be, the subjects exist to satisfy that interest.

What is the foundation of the power of the state? Patrimonial state, as Weber defines it, is a community of rulers based on patriarchy. Patriarchy is a form of domination based on personal loyalty founded on customs and traditions. The foundation of power in this relationship is the willingness of the dominated to accept the power of the master as prescribed by customs. The analogy of an authoritative father and obedient son is the model of this relationship. When this relationship is formed among masters, that is, when masters pledge allegiance to a single master, a patrimonial state is formed. As such, the ruler can exercise arbitrary power over his subjects as a master would his slave. However, the power is not 'total' as in Wittfogel's model. This loyalty is conditional. It is conditioned on the premise that rulers abide by the customs. The ruler can wield arbitrary power where the customs remain silent. Therefore, the power of a ruler seems both strong and weak. The ruler is strong in that the ruler can exercise arbitrary power over his subjects. However, the ruler does not control the resources of his realm directly. He rules through other masters who are rulers in their own right, having their own subjects loyal to them and not to the king.

Kuk Minho (1998), Jin Dukkyu (2000), and Steinberg (1997) have applied this model to explain Joseon state. They argue that the officials of the Joseon bureaucracy were subservient to the wishes of the kings (Kuk 1998, 200; Jin 2000, 206). The officials did not enjoy any prerogatives or rights independent from the kings. In the absence of legal or institutional mechanisms to check the monarchical power, the officials were subservient to the wishes of the kings. Also, these scholars emphasize the role of ideology (Kuk 1998, 202; Jin 2000, 205; Steinberg 1997, 120). The nature of this ideology allowed the ruling strata

to justify their prerogatives and powers based on their superior morality and have induced the population to conform to the status quo.

The key weakness here is the assumption that the ruler and the officials shared a common interest. This assumption is based on, again, two other assumptions: the absence institutional means to check the arbitrary power of the kings; the ideology favored conformism. It is assumed that the officials were at the whims of the rulers. Personal loyalty was the most important factor for they existed to serve the interests of the ruler and the customs that could have checked the arbitrary power of the rulers according to Weber also favored arbitrary power of the rulers.

However, the personal loyalty of the Joseon officials to the kings is highly questionable. Historical studies of the Joseon dynasty have emphasized the relative independence of the state officials vis-à-vis the kings, designating the state as ‘centralized Yangban bureaucracy’ (Kim Untae 2001; Oh Jongrok 2005 ).<sup>2)</sup> Lee Taejin (1985) and Park Honggab (2001) have argued that the real protagonists of the Joseon politics were the bureaucrats and that the kings were mere symbols. Palais (1991) also highlights the tension between the bureaucrats and the kings as the principal reason for Joseon’s demise. Personal loyalty was not the foundation upon which the Joseon state stood on.

### **iii. Militarist State**

The third model is that of the militarist state. Although the explicit application of this model is absence, as one the most common model employed to support the autonomy of the state and its power, it must be analyzed as to explain why this model was not used in this study. The crux of this model is that the state exists in interstitial social space, between the domestic and the

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2) See Lim Minheuk (2003) for details.

international. This interstitial social space is crucial for two reasons: first, it allows the scholars to explain how a state can be autonomous; and second, the state can be demystified and be located at a specific human agent or a group of human agents.

The state, in militarist perspective, acquires its autonomy from social interests because the agents of the state are placed in-between the domestic social interests and other polities outside this society. While agents of the state are from society, thus embodying interests of the particular social group they belong to, agents acquire a particular interest that cannot be reduced to any other interests that exist within it because these state agents are, unlike social actors, ever so mindful of other communities outside their society. Whether to conquer outside entities or to defend their own from them, state agents acquire an interest independent from the society by the virtue of their need to reorganize the various resources in the society for the project of conquest and/or defense. By describing how particular actors in a particular position can acquire an interest distinct from those of society, the militarist perspective can explain how the state can acquire autonomy. By locating the state as agents placed in-between the domestic and the international, the state is no longer formulated in a vague notion of the people, but concrete state elites with independent interests due to their unique position in the society.

While this theory explains the autonomy of the state, there are two problems in applying this model to analyze the Joseon state. First, the foundation of state power is difficult to explain based on this model. While the theory excels in explaining how state distinct from society could exist, it does not explain how state acquires its power. The autonomy of the state is based on the social utility the state provides to coordinate various resources for the defense of the society. However, the utility exists for all states independent of its power. Some societies

throughout history have failed to create a state powerful enough to authoritatively mobilize various resources from society despite imminent threats.

The second problem with this approach to the state is that, like other statist approaches, it is impossible to locate the 'state elites' that embody state interests distinct from those of society. Who are these individuals that embody the interests of the state? Should all government officials be considered as state elites? Or should they be limited to higher echelons of the government? How high is enough? Or should they be more exclusive, limited to the president and his immediate cabinet members? How about the military and the intelligence institutions that act at the forefront of domestic and international? While various answers to these questions have been forwarded, these researches only made it clear that it was impossible to delineate the line between social and state elites.

#### **iv. Historical Bureaucracy**

Contrary to studies advocating strong state power, Palais (1991) and Duncan (2000) have employed Eisenstadt (1963)'s historical bureaucracy model and argued that the Joseon state had limited power. Palais (1991, 12-6) argues that the bureaucracy of the Joseon state was weak. Despite the existence of a centralized state apparatus, the control over the realm has 'never been complete or thoroughly effective' (Palais 1991, 12). First, the original model of Joseon bureaucracy, the Chinese bureaucracy, was 'incompletely centralized' to begin with (Palais 1991, 12). Second, the Joseon state elites had no intention to expand its control over the population (Palais 1991, 13). Instead of having the realm conform to a strict uniform rule, local diversity was allowed to continue and considerable latitude was given to the magistrates to fill the details of governing. As long as tax quotas were fulfilled and order was maintained, the state was content to let things be. Third, the institutions of local governance

weakened the magistrates' power. The collection of tax and maintenance of order were the responsibility of some 330 magistrates who were dispatched throughout the realm to rule over a population of ten million (Palais 1991, 13). A single magistrate had to provide all the government services to approximately 30,000 people on average. No other state officials were dispatched from the center to aid these magistrates. Therefore, the magistrates were forced to rely on local clerks and influential families, effectively giving power to those with no tenure limit and better knowledge of local societies. Further still, these magistrates were rotated frequently and were not allowed to govern his native area (Palais 1991, 13).

One thing to note is that the historical bureaucracy model is not a theory of state *per se*. As the title of Eisenstadt's book hint, *The Political Systems of Empires*, the historical bureaucracy model follows a larger trend in political science literature in the 1950s and the 60s that tried to do away with the concept of the state altogether (Mitchell 1991, 78-80). The institutional analysis of state was considered inadequate by the scholars for explaining the political phenomena of society. The traditional understanding of the state as an institution was too narrow to adequately answer the political questions of the day (Mitchell 1991, 79). More importantly, the concept of the state was perceived as too vague, more of a myth than reality (Mitchell 1991, 78). It was argued that a theory of society consisting of multiple systems would be better suited to understanding social phenomena.

However, in place of 'state,' Palais frequently uses 'Korea' to denote an entity in possession of its capability. For Palais, the vague entity called Korea suffered from 'the weakness of [its] capacity for reform' (1991, 4). The lack of such capacity is attributed to the lack of an agent or a group of agents able to function as a leader. Again, while Palais does not use the word 'state,' the



problem of 'Korea' is that it lacks the autonomy necessary to formulate its own interest and to act accordingly. Although it has not been named, a word that denotes a center functioning as an authoritative center coordinating various resources of the society exists in Palais's writing.

The autonomy of state, or 'political system', is acquired differently in this model. Like the militarist theorists, Eisenstadt claims that there is a unique social space that 'political system' occupies. While the militarist state's place was in-between the domestic and international, Eisenstadt's state is placed within the society, a unique space created by the needs of society arising from social differentiation. While traditionally, various functions, be it farming, making clothes, etc, were satisfied within an ascriptive group, due to the division of labor, the needs of individuals can no longer be satisfied within ascriptive groups. People of similar function form independent groups and escape the grips of ascriptive groups. Therefore, a need for coordination arises among different groups. This need for mediation and coordination is the foundation of state autonomy. The state performs an indispensable function for society. The increase in social differentiation is paralleled by the increasing necessity of state for the existence of society. The state acquires additional allies, new groups formed from division of labor, against the ascriptive groups that pose the greatest challenge to its power. Contrary to militarist state, state does not exist between societies; the state exists within society, between various functions of society.

The inadequacy of this model mirrors that of Wittfogel's model: it assumes that the state's ability to formulate its interests will lead to an increase in its ability to authoritatively mobilize resources within a society. A greater division of labor begets a greater need for coordination. This increasing demand not only confers greater autonomy to state but also its power to mobilize social resources. However, as the militarist state example has shown, the utility itself does not

confer any real power to states. Power of state, although related, is analytically different from its utility: greater utility does not mean greater power of the state.

Through these examinations, one common problem can be found. State power is not unitary. Power can be categorized into two different aspects. First, a state can be powerful in that it is autonomous from the interests of the society; it can formulate its interests and decide its policies accordingly. Second, a state can be powerful in that it can authoritatively coordinate various elements of society to realize its goals. Wittfogel's Oriental Despotism assumes that the second guarantees the first. Patrimonial state only concerns the first. Eisenstadt's historical bureaucracy assumes that the utility of state automatically increases state power. Lastly, militarist state is unable to explain what makes a state powerful. The following section explains a framework that distinguishes these two aspects of state power.

As Lee Hakyung (2018) and Kim Youngmin (2018) have argued, Mann's distinction of state power captures these differences. The next section provides a more controlled definition of state and power suited for analyzing the political and social phenomenon of Joseon dynasty. This paper does not claim to be providing a universal definition of state. Rather, as a conceptual variable, the definition is employed as a conceptual tool for better understanding and explaining the historical experiences of the Joseon dynasty.

### **3. Concepts and a Framework**

This section introduces the concept of state and power explicated by Michael Mann (2012). First, the concept of state and power are explained. Next, a framework better suited to analyze Joseon state is elucidated.

## v. Concepts: State and Power

### a. State: A Conceptual Variable

Michael Mann defines state as “differentiated set of institutions and personnel, embodying centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate outwards from a center to cover a territorially demarcated area, over which it exercises a monopoly of authoritative binding rule-making” (Mann 2012, 112). The concept of state used in this paper is based on this definition. However, by adopting Mann’s concept, the paper does not argue that this definition of state is definitive: state is not identical irrespective of time and place. Rather, this paper considers the concept of state as a *conceptual variable* with different ‘state’ found in different societies.<sup>3)</sup>

The concept is employed for its utility in conceptualizing certain Joseon phenomena. The concept of ‘state’ makes it possible to imagine an entity distinct from society as an *institution* embodying interests and goals otherwise irreducible to any social actor coordinating various personnel over a limited territory with a *center* where information is collected and commands radiated outward.

Authoritative coordination of social resources can be observed during the reign of Jeongjo. This aspect is most vivid in matters related to grain redistribution during famines. *Daily Revelation Records* (日得錄) is replete with examples of famine relief efforts by the political actors through a hierarchically organized body of personnel with a clear center. The following excerpts report famine relief efforts to Tamna, modern-day Jeju Island, by and through agents of hierarchical organization with a clear center.

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3) For detailed discussions on state as a conceptual variable, see Nettl (1968).

This year [there was] famine in Tamna. The magistrate requested famine relief grain. As the report arrived [at the court], the request was immediately granted [by the king]. [The famine was] relieved by transporting 10,000 seok of Honam<sup>4)</sup> grain [to Tamna].<sup>5)</sup>

There was famine in Tamna. The magistrate [of Tamna] requested that 50,000 po of grain be acquired to relieve [the famine]. Honam governor reported. “Grain of the coastal villages are recently severely depleted. Also, Tamna is [just] one island with merely 30,000 [reported] number of families. To relieve the whole island [of famine] would not require so much as this. I request that [Tamna magistrate’s] request be granted by reducing the amount to half.” The King spoke. “Starving people of that island awaits, day and night, to be fed. If [they] hear that the amount [to be sent] is reduced to half, would it not be lacking? If the situation of the coastal towns is as the [Honam] governor reports it to be, harm must not be caused to the people of the coastal villages as a result of the suffering of the people of the island. Have [them] send [the grain] quickly [to Tamna] within the limit of 30,000 po as the governor suggested. The remaining should be managed from the Royal coffer.<sup>6)</sup>

Tamna is just one island, that is, a land like a bullet.<sup>7)</sup> What the state acquires [from Tamna] only amounts to few po of tangerine and horses offered [to the state]. However, from past until now, famine and bad harvest [in Tamna] was frequent. [I] am unsure, but perhaps tens of millions of po of grain were transported through ships [to relieve famines in Tamna].<sup>8)</sup>

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4) Modern day Southern and Northern Jeolla Province.

5) 是歲耽羅饑。守臣請賑穀。狀到卽允所請。移湖南粟一萬石以賑之 (弘齋全書 168 日得錄 8 政事 3)

6) 耽羅饑。守臣請得五萬包穀以賑之。湖南伯啓言沿海穀簿。近甚枵然。且耽羅一島。戶不過三萬。雖使全一島賑救。不應若是夥多。請減其半而許之。教曰。彼島中顛顛之民。日夜望哺。若聞半減之令。寧不缺然。沿邑事勢。旣如道啓。則不可以島民之故。貽害於沿民。依道臣狀辭。限三萬包。亟令輸送。餘則當以內帑錢出給也。(弘齋全書 169 日得錄 9 政事 4)

7) Survey of *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* reveals that Jeongjo used the analogy of a bullet to denote something small or insignificant.

8) 耽羅一島。卽一彈丸地。國之所需用。不過包橘貢馬。而自昔最善饑荒。船粟往哺者。前後不

First, a clear hierarchy of institutionalized organization of personnel can be observed. From the king to the magistrate, there is a clear line where information and command are transmitted. This institution connects agents from the center, the court, to the frontiers of Joseon society, the southernmost land, an island in the middle of a sea. In the first excerpt, a magistrate of a remote island reports of famine and requests for grain to relieve the situation. Thus, information of the local flows upward to the center where a decision is made and command flows downward.

Second, coordination of economic distribution can be observed. Information and command do not simply flow through this institution. This institution also coordinates how resources in one region within its control gets to be redistributed to another region also within its purview. In the second excerpt, a request is made by a magistrate in Tamna of 50,000 po of grain for famine relief. Another personnel of that institution, a governor of Honam, in a different region responsible for acquiring and transporting that resource argues that the requested amount is unnecessarily large and that the region under his management would have difficulty allocating such an amount to another region. The king than coordinates among different regions and have the governor of Honam burden half of the required amount and the other half taken from the royal coffer which is collected from various royal estates throughout the realm. The third excerpt also illuminates the state's function in coordinating economic redistribution. Not only were there extensive efforts to relieve the island of famines, but the island also provides materials exclusive to the island such as tangerine and horses. As these examples show, a considerable level of coordination took place at various levels of the institution to supply materials a

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知幾千萬。(弘齋全書 169 日得錄 9 政事 4)

region or the state required.

The third and the most important conclusion from these excerpts is that they demonstrate a clear center coordinating different regions to perform a function a single or several regions cannot resolve. As the definition of state expounded at the beginning of this section claims, centrality is the most important aspect of state. Centrality is the foundation upon which this specific institution depends on to carry out its various functions and to maintain its authority. In the absence of this centrality, relief grain from various regions of the realm, grain from Honam and other provinces through the royal coffer, could not have reached a 'bullet-like' island far off the coast of the mainland. Centrality provides authority states need to coordinate and command economic redistribution (Mann 1984, 122-3).

Note that this redistribution is different from those based on economic exchange and customs. Economic exchanges are decentered and occur voluntarily among different actors if and only if the exchange is mutually beneficial (Mann 2012a, 24-5). Here, in the absence of any command structure, a ruler or a representative of Honam would have had no interest in providing relief grains to a small island off its coast, especially if their granary reserve was low. Also, customs could be vague when acting as a guiding principle for famine relief. For example, a custom of mutual support among different regions may exist but it may not be so apparent as to how much and in what way that help might be provided. Customs are most suited to routine interactions. Every accident of the world cannot be codified into a convention (Mann 1984, 119-120). In emergencies, such as famine, decisions have to be made quickly for any relief to be effective. In the above excerpts, decisions and actions are taken "immediately" and contributions to relieving this emergency are distributed authoritatively from the center. The centrality of the state is its source of power

and allows the state to perform socially necessary functions authoritatively.

By defining state as an entity distinct from society as an *institution* embodying interests and goals otherwise irreducible to any social actor coordinating various personnel over a defined territory with *a center* where information is collected and commands radiate outward, this paper will analyze how Jeongjo's reforms aided the capacity of this institution to further penetrate the society, that is, to coordinate and control various resources, including human resources, to attain its goals, whatever it may be. This paper does not define what the Joseon state was. Rather, it employs the concept of state as a conceptual variable, an operational definition of a sort, to a better understand and explain how power was organized and exercised during the Joseon dynasty.

#### **b. Power**

From Mann's theory of power, this study defines power as "the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment" (Mann 2012, 6). This definition has an advantage over a more common definition of power. It allows scholars to imagine various aspects of power by distinguishing distributive power and collective power. The common definition of power captures only one side of the picture.

Weber defines power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" (Weber 1968, 1; 53). Based on Weber's definition of power, an agent is powerful only at the expense of another agent. Weber's definition forces scholars to perceive power as a zero-sum game (Mann 2012, 6). This is a distributive aspect of power: an agent is more powerful when that agent can subdue the actions of another agent. However, there is an aspect of power that Weber's definition fails to include.

Another aspect of power is collective power. Power is not always zero-sum and can increase for all parties involved through cooperation. Cooperation of individuals can enhance the involved individuals' chance of overcoming their environment (Mann 2012, 6; Parson 1960, 199-225). This can be seen in military organizations when a small number of organized individuals can defeat a much larger number of unorganized but more physically powerful individuals. It can also be observed in factories where a fewer number of workers can produce a greater number of products than a greater number of workers producing individually.

Stable reproduction of “routine collective goals” requires institutionalization (Mann 2012, 7). Therefore, organizations are important for stable reproduction of certain interactions. These organizations become the means to power; they are the venue through which power can be exercised. The creation of an organization produces both distributive and collective power. Through the organization, all members of that organization acquire a better chance of “mastery of one’s environment”. However, the need for coordination requires the creation of a point where information is gathered and coordination is planned. This point of coordination acquires distributive power over the rest of the organization. When an organization successfully performs a collective goal of a group of individuals, these individuals, while benefiting from the collective power of the organization, are controlled by others who are favorably positioned within the organization. The dominated individuals comply because they are “organizationally outflanked” (Mann 2012, 7).

## **ii. A Framework: Despotic and Infrastructural Power**

State power can be distinguished into two different types: despotic and infrastructural. Despotic power refers to “the range of actions that the ruler and



his staff are empowered to attempt to implement without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups” (Mann 2012, 169-70). Infrastructural power refers to “the capacity to actually penetrate society and to implement logistically political decision” (Mann 2012, 170). Increase in the despotic power allows an agent to make arbitrary decisions. To dictate the goals and actions of the organization itself is power. However, the ability to make an arbitrary decision does not automatically lead to the execution of that decision. A despotic ruler can command his destitute subjects to persevere in the times of hardship and to carry out his order to the best of their abilities. However, for that command to reach his vast subjects, the ruler requires infrastructures that can deliver those commands and enforce them.

Infrastructural power requires additional explanation. What does it mean to ‘penetrate society’? To ‘penetrating society’ is to ‘mobilize and coordinate commitments from’ individual actors of society over other social commitments (Mann 2012, 146). Individual actors have various commitments to various groups. It could be family, friends, a group of similar occupation, regional cooperation, etc. A slave has a commitment to his/her master. A guild member has a commitment to their occupational group. These commitments force an individual to act in certain ways and to perform certain functions within society. To ‘penetrate society’ means that the state can overcome these commitments and to have the individuals, either voluntarily or compulsorily, to act according to its policies. In short, infrastructural power is the capacity of the state to mobilize various resources by having, either coercively or voluntarily, individual actors to commit themselves to the goals of the state over goals of other social groups (Mann 2012, 512).

In an agrarian society, there are six obvious ‘logistical techniques’ of infrastructural power: a division of labor within its institution, literacy,

standardized measures, celerity of communication and transportation, intense ritual penetration of everyday life, and monopoly over a certain socially useful knowledge (Mann 1984, 116-7; Mann 2012, 361-2). A division of labor effectively coordinated allows state institutions to function more effectively through specialization. Literacy enables the accurate transfer of information from both ends of the institution. A standardized measure facilitates exchange. Celerity of communication and transportation allows the center to more effectively monitor and control periphery. Without effective means of communication and transportation, it would be near impossible, although not improbable, for the center to attain any effective means of control beyond its adjacent surroundings. Rituals, not just massive public rituals but everyday rituals, such as how to greet strangers, provide predictability to individuals' actions. Also, monopoly of socially needed knowledge, such as knowing how to pray to gods for rain, reinforces infrastructural power.

However, these means of infrastructural power are not prerogatives of the state. Any social institution can utilize them to increase their control over their members and those outside it. A religious organization can claim to have a monopoly over a certain knowledge demanded from society. Literacy and standardized measures can empower economic groups to expand their control over society. Therefore, it is important for the state to either employ these techniques better than any other social group or maintain a monopoly over these techniques or to have these social groups to voluntarily commit their infrastructure to the goals of the state.

The following chapter will reevaluate previous discussions on the increasing state power and examine whether the evidence presented support arguments for increased infrastructural power of the state. Have Jeongjo's reforms improved a division of labor within the state institutions? Have the reforms improved the

celerity of communication and transportation? Have the reforms aimed at intense penetration of everyday rituals? Overall, have the reforms been able to commit the population to the authoritative cooperation lead by the state institution? This paper argues that Jeongjo's reforms could not and did not intend to increase the infrastructural power of the state. This argument implies that the reasons for increased infrastructural power of the state during the eighteenth century, if there was any, were social and not governmental.

## **4. A Literature Review 2: Increasing Power of the State during Jeongjo's Reign**

This section reviews previous attempts to explain the relationship between Joseon state and society. First, arguments by previous studies in support of greater state power are reviewed. The review demonstrates a flawed assumption in previous literature: they assumed that the absence of competing centers of authority will automatically lead to an increase in both aspects of state power, both despotic and infrastructural. Second, previous applications of Mann's distinction of state power are reviewed. This review clarifies how this paper builds upon previous studies.

### **i. Greater Power of the Joseon State**

Although the exact period when the state began to play a greater role in organizing the society is under dispute<sup>9)</sup>, there is a general agreement that the state exercised greater control over the rural area during the late Joseon dynasty (Han Sangkwon 1995, 237-44). This trend toward greater state control over the

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9) Some argue as early as the sixteenth century and others as late as late seventeenth century. For detail, see Han Sangkwon (1995).

society is frequently labeled as ‘government lead domination of the periphery’. Then, under what evidence is ‘government lead domination of the periphery’ supported?

Survey of the literature reveals two analytically distinct connotations to ‘government lead domination of the periphery’: better control over the dispatched agents of the state and better control over the various resources of the society, both material and human. The first category includes the extensive application of the secret censors (暗行御史, Lee Heekwon 1999; Han Sangkwon 1995; 2001) and greater control over the regional officials by the Border Defense Council (備邊司). The second category includes the expanding the power and authority of the magistrates (Lee Heekwon 1999; Han Sangkwon 1995; Park Hyunmo 2000; Lee Haejoon 2000) and efforts to acquire accurate information of the periphery (Lee Haejin 2001, Park Hyunmo 2000, Yang Bokyoung 2000). Of these reasons, this paper concentrates on analyzing arguments for expanding the power and authority of the magistrates. By doing so, the relations of other reasons to Joseon state power will also become apparent.

The most important and frequently stated reason for the argument is that the authority and power of the magistrates increased (Lee Heekwon 1999; Han Sangkwon 1995; Park Hyunmo 2000; Lee Haejoon 2000). Several evidence and arguments are related to the increasing power of the magistrates. The first evidence is the changing function and authority of the local gentry associations (鄉廳, Lee Heekwon 1999; Han Sangkwon 1995). The second evidence is the favorable judicial rulings for the magistrates by Jeongjo (Lee Heekwon 1999 176; Park Hyunmo 2001, 348, 359). Third evidence relates to changing method of taxation (Lee Haejoon 2000, 195-8). Lastly, partnership with newly rising social strata in place of traditional social elites is argued to have given magistrates greater power (Lee Haejoon 2000, 194-5; 197).

The causes and the process of the first reason need not be discussed in detail for this paper. By the time of Jeongjo, the process of its functional transition was complete (Lee Heekwon 1999, 174; Han Sangkwon 1995). The local gentry associations are considered to be the hallmark of local autonomy. The head of association (座首) had independent judicial and administrative authority (Lee Heekwon 1999, 166-7). However, beginning from the seventeenth century, members of the associations were relegated to magistrates' aide (Lee Heekwon 1999, 174). The changes in the location of association buildings are cited as one evidence. Although records on the locations of early local gentry association buildings are rare, they tended to be located on a position with a view to great scenery. However, beginning with the seventeenth century, these associations were placed near magistrates' office. Second, the agents responsible for its creation changed. During the early years of the dynasty, local social elites convened to create these associations. However, after the seventeenth century, it was the magistrates who actively formed these associations. Third, the organization of the associations expanded. New positions were created to accommodate the expanding functions of the associates. Fourth, the finance of the associations changed. These are 'indisputable evidence' for the greater authority and power of the magistrates (Lee Heekwon 1999, 167-173).

What is important in this argument is that magistrates no longer had to vie for authority and power with another institution. Local gentry associations no longer functioned independently from the magistrates in executing their judicial and administrative functions. They were strictly under the control of the magistrates. Therefore, in the absence of a competing institution with independent judicial and administrative power, the state began to exercise greater power.

## **ii. Previous Applications of Mann's Distinction of State**

## Power

Contrary to the arguments above, other scholars have claimed that no such increase in state power occurred during the eighteenth century. Lee Hakyung (2018) analyzes Joseon state power through careful reading of the *Interrogation Records* (推案及鞫案). By adopting Mann's frame, Lee (2018, 2) counters previous assumptions of Joseon state as despotic. Lee (2018, 51; 147) argues that the kings had limited despotic power. One of the most crucial contributions of Lee's research is the demonstration of an abstract idea of a polity being used to counter the power and authority of the kings (Lee 2018, 51; 70). The political actors of the Joseon dynasty did not justify their political participation based on their personal loyalty to a ruler. However, Lee's evaluation of the state's infrastructural power is ambivalent. On the one hand, Lee (2018, 101; 110; 122; 133) claims that the state did not attempt to correct the institutional causes that led to the interrogation cases in the first place. On the other hand, the actors of the interrogation held strong confidence in the capability of the political center to resolve social and political problems (Lee 2018, 110-1; 117; 122; 133; 145; 147). In certain cases, this belief was strong enough for an actor to feign treason to gain an audience of a king (Lee 2018; 117). Therefore, Lee (2018, 147) concludes that the infrastructural power of the state was strong enough to effectively resolve the cases at hand.

Kim Youngmin (2018) explores the Joseon state by analyzing the assumptions of the Joseon state within the scholarly discourses on the circulation of Hangul novels during the late Joseon dynasty.<sup>10)</sup> The scholars reviewed in Kim's work assume that the Joseon kings wielded despotic power—to make

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10) Although the work is not reviewed in this paper, Kim (2012b) also applies Mann's distinction of state power to review discourses on civil society during the Joseon dynasty. However, the application is brief and this paper examines Kim (2018) which employs the frame more extensively.

arbitrary decisions—and that they had the necessary infrastructural means to censor the contents and the distribution of the novels (Kim 2018, 196; 205; 207-8; 227). Kim argues that there were two dimensions to the ‘power’ of the state within the discourse: despotic and infrastructural. Kim distinguishes these two aspects of power and counters their argument by demonstrating the not-so-despotic power of the kings, the absence of intention by the ruler to censor Hangeul novels, and the lack of infrastructural means of the state to curb the distribution of these novels.

Kim (2018, 224) argues that there is a cornucopia of studies arguing the exact opposite. First, in regards to the despotic power of the kings, Kim presents Lee Hakyung’s study mentioned above: kings’ authority and power were constantly challenged, requiring them to stage special judicial processes to protect their authority. Kim (2018, 224) accepts that there are examples of kings making arbitrary decisions. However, such decisions are aimed at individual officials and not the bureaucracy as a whole. As Etienne Balazs (1964) argued, while a ruler may be absolute to an individual actor, they were quite powerless in the face of the bureaucracy as a whole (Kim 2018, 224). Second, based on excerpts from the *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty*, the state elites had no intention of censoring Hangeul novels (Kim 2018, 230-1). Hangeul novels were not an object of suppression. Furthermore, the state elites had no intention of censoring the reading materials of the common people and women. The opposite sex and the commoners were, to the ruling elites, not subject to moral education (Kim 2018, 230). Third, Kim claims that the state had insufficient infrastructural means to control the distribution of Hangeul novels. In one of Kim’s example, Jeongjo argues that it would be ‘too burdensome’ ‘to go door-to-door’ to cultivate the people (Kim 2018, 231). In conclusion, Kim argues that the state had weak despotic and infrastructural power.

While this work builds on these previous studies, this paper contributes to better understanding of Joseon state in two respects. First, this paper analyzes Jeongjo and state officials' utterances from *Daily Revelation Records*, new material in this regard. Lee (2018)'s paper analyzes the *Interrogation Records* and Kim (2018)'s work analyzes the *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* supplemented by other studies. Based on their respective source materials, Lee specifically analyzes judicial processes and the manifestation of state power through the speech-act of the relevant actors. Kim covers a broad range of phenomena. In addition to these materials, this paper analyzes *Daily Revelation Records*, a work personally edited by Jeongjo. Second, this paper concentrates on a specific period and specific phenomena: this paper concentrates on how the state elites perceived the problems of governing the local societies during Jeongjo's reign. More specifically, this paper examines state power through the magistrates' capability to penetrate the local society. In these manners, this paper further supports the argument that the state during the late Joseon dynasty had limited infrastructural power.

## **5. Material: *Daily Revelation Records* (日得錄)**

To maintain a viable scope of research, this paper primarily concentrates on Jeongjo's reign. There are two advantages to studying this era. First, the state is argued to have been relatively strong during Jeongjo's era. It is argued that the Joseon state exercised greater control over the society during Jeongjo's reign (Park Hyunmo 2001, Han Sangkwon 1995, Lee Taejin 1994, Lee Hunchang 2017). To argue as such, researchers must submit specific evidence as to why the state became more powerful. Therefore, it is convenient to examine the reasons Joseon state appeared stronger in the eyes of the scholars. By analyzing



the effects of the evidence offered, it will be possible to evaluate the precise meaning of 'greater state power.' Second, Jeongjo was one of, if not the most, prolific writer amongst Joseon kings. A plethora of materials exists to reconstruct how key state officials perceived social problems of the day. Easy access to clear reasons for stronger state and materials make Jeongjo's reign as an ideal case for reevaluating the strength of Joseon state.

Of the materials available, this paper primarily analyzes *Daily Revelation Records* (日得錄). *Daily Revelation Records* consists of short passages spoken by Jeongjo or dialogues between Jeongjo and key state officials. It is included in the *Collected Works of King Jeongjo* (弘齋全書). Unlike the *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* which recorded words and deeds spoken in public, *Daily Revelation Records* include words spoken not only in public but also words spoken during private studies and conversations with key officials. Therefore, it could be a better guide to understanding how the state elites understood and reacted to the social problems of the day.

## **Chapter 2. Reevaluating the Power of the State**

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the strength of the Joseon state to penetrate Joseon society: its ability to commit individuals to the goals of the state over goals of other social groupings. Reasons given by previous studies for the growing power of the Joseon state concerns mostly with the despotic power of the state. The expansion of the despotic power results from the disintegration of local gentry associations and the judicial and administrative authority they had independent of the magistrates: other centers of authority in the local arena to challenge the state as the center of judicial and administrative authority no longer existed. However, this increase in the despotic power of the state does not translate into the infrastructural power of the state to implement its decisions. The organizational means to carry out everyday government functions were not incorporated into the state apparatus. Rather, these functions were delegated to social actors who had a questionable commitment to the goals of the state.

The extensive use of secret censors and the greater interest of the Border Defense Council also support this argument. These endeavors by the state were not to increase its infrastructural power but to better control the state agents dispatch from the center. Jeongjo and key state officials seem to have believed that an honest and able magistrate was *sine quo non* to local order. In fact, they were more interested in decreasing the number of magistrates than increasing their number.

### **1. Limited Infrastructural Power of the State**

How did the absence of competing institutions of power, the local gentry

associations as an independent judicial and administrative institution, affect the power of magistrates? There is no doubt that the absence of other powerful players increases the power of another. In this case, the distributive power of the magistrates increased, the relative power of the magistrates, vis-à-vis other social actors. However, this increase in the distributive power of the magistrates does not automatically lead to the increased collective power of the magistrates, the power of the magistrate that increases due to cooperation with others. Collective power is essential if a magistrate endeavored to expand his power outside of his immediate compound. To increase his collective power, the mere absence of competition is inadequate. He requires an extensive body of personnel to execute his orders. In other words, an absence of challenge did not increase the ability of the magistrates to implement the policies of the state.

Although the local gentry associations have lost their power, magistrates were not capable of effectively implementing the policies of the state (Duncan 2000; Lee Hakyung 2018; Lee Heekwon 1999; Kim Youngmin 2018; Palais 1991). On the contrary, the records support weak infrastructural power of the magistrates. The records display the limited ability of the magistrates to control various resources of local societies.

[The king spoke] Nowadays, abuses by slash-and-burn field increases daily. [I will] forego [practices] violating laws that prohibit [such activities] above the hillsides. Everywhere, the summit is raised and farmed [through slash-and-burn cultivation]. To see [such site] is disturbing and, rightfully, the law should forbid and stop [such activities]. However, nowadays the population increases and the land is limited. If fields on the mountains are not cultivated how would [the people] make a living? If the magistrates of valley villages wish to initiate [his government duty], this is the only source [that magistrates] can rely on. If slash-and-burn farming is made completely forbidden now, there would be severe methods [of extraction by the magistrates] leading to a loss [for the state]. Under such a condition, how could the

people endure the pain? For these reasons, even if [I] know that the policies of tree and ginseng are related to this, I cannot forward my intentions and forbid it.<sup>11)</sup>

These words were recorded in 1789, late eighteenth century and the thirteenth year into Jeongjo's reign. The 'government lead domination of the periphery' was well underway. However, this example documents the limited infrastructural power of the Joseon State. First, the state fails to routinely enforce its laws: the state fails to bind the people to the land and police the people from cultivating forbidden lands. People move about freely or are willing to risk moving beyond their designated area of living to cultivate additional land. Also, the state is unable to police the people from cultivating lands forbidden to them. Second, it demonstrates the dire situation of the local state institutions' revenue. The king acknowledges that a. such activities are illegal b. related to other matters of the state such as acquiring lumber and ginseng<sup>12)</sup>. However, despite knowledge of the harms caused by slash-and-burn cultivation, the King reluctantly permits such activities because it is one of the main sources of income for regional government institutions: it is the 'only source' magistrates have to finance their government duties. If slash-and-burn cultivation were to be suddenly regulated with intensity, the magistrates would have to find other sources of revenue. Furthermore, the calamity to the people will be twofold: they lose an additional source of grain crucial to maintaining their livelihood when the population is increasing and the land is limited; they must also suffer other severe methods of extraction by the magistrates to finance their government duties. The picture is chaotic: no single actor is in control of how the situation

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11) 近來火田之弊。日甚一日。山腰以上犯禁。姑勿論。截耕山頂者。在在皆然。所見甚不好。法當禁斷。第今生齒漸繁。土地有限。若不起墾山田。何以資活耶。又况峽邑守令。著手聊賴。只此一條。今或切禁火田。則必有剝割之術。以代其所失。如是之際。小民何以堪苦乎。以故雖知松蓼兩政之可闕。而不得生意禁止耳。(弘齋全書 167 日得錄 7 政事 2)

12) Ginseng is important because it is one of the primary means of financing emissary missions to China. (弘齋全書 169 日得錄 9 政事 4)

will play out and that a move by one party will lead to other troubles that could compound, rather than mitigate, the problems. However, the political center is, for now, willing to acquiesce: uncontrolled but permissible chaos.

As is well known, only one official, a magistrate, was dispatched from the state to rule over the entire county or prefecture. The Joseon state created elaborate institutional devices to limit other social interests from infiltrating its agents. By law, magistrates served limited terms and were not permitted to serve in their hometowns. Censors and provincial governors were dispatched to oversee the magistrates. Through these means, the state endeavored to limit the influence of other social groupings, such as family and local associations, that could diminish the commitment of the magistrates to the state (Palais 1991, 13). Nevertheless, a magistrate was the only agent of the state dispatched to rule the entire county or prefecture. Lee Younghun (2014, 377) claims that during the eighteenth century, a population of roughly eighteen million were governed through 332 administrative districts.<sup>13)</sup> Therefore, a single magistrate was solely responsible for providing all the government services, including land survey, tax collection, judicial processes, etc, to a population of approximately 56,000.

As a result, magistrates had to rely heavily on other social actors to perform routine government functions. Diligence was not the problem. Extensive body of local clerks, between 50 to 200, aided a magistrate per district (Lee Younghun 2014, 377). By the National Code (經國大典), magistrates had to report their performances on the seven duties (Lee Heekwon 127). Of the seven, promoting agriculture was one of them. Related to promoting agriculture, a magistrate had to facilitate lending of cows to plow the land, survey the fallow land and promote cultivation, report almost weekly on the progress of crop growth,

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13) The exact number of population during the late Joseon dynasty is highly controversial. Palais (1991, 64), for example, claims that the population was around ten million.

measure the amount of rainfall, report flood damage and the conditions of the reservoirs, hold ritual for rain during drought, etc. This is only part of one of seven duties of a magistrate. Other major duties included holding judicial processes and acting as a judge and maintenance of mountain fortresses in their jurisdiction. Adequate performance of even one of these duties would require an extensive organization of personnel. However, no such state apparatus existed to perform these functions and the magistrates were forced to rely on local actors. Therefore, most of these duties were delegated to the clerks.

There were additional institutional causes that handicapped the magistrates. Not only were the functions of the magistrates vast, but local clerks also were better informed of the local area and the functions of the local government. These clerks were recruited from the local area from the families of clerks who lived and served for generations. As clerks performing the same function for years, they had a better knowledge of the actual practices, way of doing things, required to execute the duties of the magistrates. Also, this practical advantage local clerks had over the magistrates was compounded by their better knowledge of the region as local residents living in the area for generations.

Also, these local clerks as agents of the provincial governors, who were only marginally better equipped than the magistrates, were responsible for evaluating the performances of the magistrates (Lee Heekwon 1999, 126). Local clerks to the provincial governors are reported to have colluded with other regional clerks to relieve magistrates of their position.

## **2. Limited Efforts to Solve the Institutional Problems Debilitating the Infrastructural Power of the State.**

## **i. Limited Efforts to Acquire Further Commitments from the Social Actors**

Despite the crucial functions these clerks, no attempt was made to increase the level of commitment these clerks had to the state. There were no reforms to insulate them from other social commitments by either dispatching them to serve in areas other than their place of birth or by setting term limits. On the contrary, they were not compensated by the state for their services and could not rise through the government ranks. This made them prone to extra-legal means of compensation, mostly through extortion. In the absence of economic or social compensations from the state, and institutional means of insulating them from other social commitments, their commitment to state interests were limited.

The institutional problems of the local clerks were well known during Jeongjo's times. In one instance, Jeongjo laments over the poor performance of his officials by saying, "proverb has it that Joseon is local clerks' Joseon and this incident is an example.<sup>14)</sup>" Also, lack of experience and knowledge of the magistrates and the advantages local clerks enjoyed from it were well known. Jeongjo bemoans, "Truly, in recent years, provincial governors and magistrates do not read the laws and also the clerks interpret and apply laws as they please."<sup>15)</sup>

However, there were no reforms to alleviate these institutional problems. The local clerks were not incorporated into the state apparatus to be sent to other regions nor were they given a term limit. Also, there were no reforms to increase the number of state officials dispatched to the local arena. On the contrary, central political actors were much more interested in decreasing the number of officials.

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14) Jeongjo's grievance toward state officials in this case was that the officials blindly reported to him as they were told by local clerks on matters of the state.

15) 誠以近年以來。監司守令。多不讀律。吏又弄法舞文。(弘齋全書 168 日得錄 8 政事 3)

Royal lecture official spoke about integrating dwindling towns. [The king] spoke, “Why wouldn’t I, also, have such thought? It is only that one thing is difficult. [I] am unsure as to how many thousands serve as civil, protected, and military officials. [We] rotate, dispatch, and send [them] with 360 prefects, [I am] always worried about congestion [of official positions]. If [these prefects were] integrated, positions will also decrease. Previous congestions that were ten years will become twenty years. Congestions that were twenty years will be thirty to forty years. If it is as such, the whole officialdom will tirelessly pursue a position when there is a vacancy, and if they acquire a position by chance they will worry that they will not be able to acquire it again. [they will] certainly think to the utmost about extortion. This is making a content one into an impatient one [and] changing a [righteous] official into an extorting official. Therefore, where is the good in integration?<sup>16)</sup>

Jeongjo and the state officials perceived no problems in maintaining social order, at least to a level they considered to be permissible. On the question of decreasing the number of magistrates, Jeongjo replies that he also has such intentions. This mutual understanding betrays the inclination of Jeongjo and the state officials to decrease than increase the number of magistrates. Although Jeongjo disagrees to such reform, the reason for his disagreement is not due to a problem of losing control of local societies. Rather, it is a problem of providing government posts to all officials. The problem of providing a sufficient number of positions for state officials was a real problem. Yoo Kwangchun (柳匡天, 1732-1799) submitted a memorial in December of 1787 discussing the severity of the shortage of positions and its detrimental effects.<sup>17)</sup>

Related to this issue is the curious absence of any *mention*, not the actual practice, of resistance from the society to the resource extraction by the state. In

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16) 筵臣嘗以殘邑合并爲言。教曰。予亦豈無此意。第有一事甚難者。文蔭武仕宦者。不知幾千數。以三百六十邑。輪回差送。常患積滯。今若合并。則窠又窄矣。昔之滯十年者。將爲二十年。滯二十年者。將爲三四十年。如此則一窠出。舉世當奔競。雖或得差者。慮其來頭之難於再得。必極意貪黷。是使恬者反爲躁者。循吏變爲墨吏也。合并之效安在。(弘齋全書 167 日得錄 7 政事 2)

17) 正祖實錄 11/12/20.



the *Daily Revelation Records*, the king and the state officials do not mention any resistance to state extraction of resources. Of course, the social actors did not adhere to every detail of state control. However, there were no explicit challenges. Resistance was more likely minuscule; that is, not a direct challenge to the state but through abusing its commands such as extortion, embezzlement, and negligence.<sup>18)</sup> One support of this view is that the *Daily Revelation Records* are littered with the king's lament over the squandering of state resources and extortion by officials and the clerks. Therefore, to Jeongjo and state officials, controlling the local society, at least to a level they were willing to accept, could be maintained with even less number of state agents dispatched to local societies.

Jeongjo and state officials seem to have held a belief that righteous and able magistrates were the answer to their problem.

[The king spoke] "Some say the greedy tendencies of the local clerks have decreased recently compared to several years ago. I imagine that although [they] are not as chaotic as [they were] rude and act without reluctance as [they did] several years ago, the harms of [their] abjectness and vulgarity, severely extorting the people have worsened over the years. Because of this, every time [I] dispatch magistrates, my mind becomes perturbed and cannot remain aloof. Because [the people live] in places that [I] cannot see and hear, and if even one place does not receive a right man, [I] wail, for the sufferings of the people will be as if I have made them suffer.<sup>19)</sup>

If the provincial governors and the magistrates lead by example by being strict with themselves and sincerely love the people than [something] as petty as local clerks' extortions will disappear even if [the magistrate] do not try to do so ...<sup>20)</sup>

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18) For greater detail on minuscule resistance, see Scott (1987)

19) 或以爲近來長吏貪風。比年前稍戢。予則以爲雖不能如年前之肆行無忌憚。若其鄙瑣剝割。爲小民切己之弊。則比年前反有甚焉。以是之故。每當守令差遣。此心憧憧。不能放過。而若於所不覩所不聞之地。一或不得其人。則唉彼填壑之民。何異於若己推納乎。(弘齋全書 168 日得錄 8 政事 3)

20) 先從道臣邑倅嚴於律己。誠於愛民。餘外下屬之些少誅求。惟當不期祛而自祛。(弘齋全書 170 日得錄 10 政事 5)

In these two excerpts, the virtues of the magistrates are presented as a solution to counteracting the local clerks' commitment to other social interests. Overall, Jeongjo and state officials display very little interest in finding institutional solutions to institutional problems.

## **ii. Limited Efforts to Acquire Further Commitments from the Magistrates**

This leads to additional problems for the state. The state's capacity to penetrate the society relies on the state's ability to have individuals, either voluntarily or compulsorily, to commit to the interests of the state over other commitments they have toward other social groupings. However, the state, according to Jeongjo and Yoo Kwangchun, was unable to provide sufficient means of livelihood, not only to the local clerks but also to its agents.

The people's well-being depends, only, on the integrity or corruption of the magistrates. However, from the time of Qing dynasty, China had 'Silver to Foster Integrity' in addition to regular salary for the magistrates. If the born nature [of a magistrate] is not corrupt, [a magistrate] can care for their body and honor, a little, and not covet too much. However, in our state's salary [for magistrates] of dwindling towns, a monthly payment in grain is barely enough to maintain a livelihood and is no different from a small salary of the government institutions in the capital. Nevertheless, [the magistrates] wish to perform ancestral rites and provide hospitality to their guests. Also [they] are concerned for [possible] future hunger and cold. [They] fore plan [where to] depend [on to fill] their coffer and if there is nowhere to lay [their] hands on, they plot to wrong the state grain, lend the grain at interest to embezzle [themselves], and trade beyond the standard. [The things they do] are surprising and [there is] nothing that they do not do. In severe cases, [they] do not look after the life and death [of the people] and chaotically extort and use [from state granary]. At last, when it is discovered and [the state] again fills what is lacking [from state coffers], [the state, to fill what was lost] collect, without justification, from the people who have no one to appeal to and have the flesh and bone [of the

people] rot and do not allow them to live in peace.<sup>21)</sup>

In addition to an insufficient number of offices available to the officials, the state could not sufficiently support the livelihood of its officials. Therefore, it was difficult for the state to acquire a higher level of commitment even from its agents. State officials had to 'beg' for their positions through personal networks of patron and client, and even when the position was acquired, the legal income itself was not enough to maintain a lifestyle fit for Yangban. The paucity of income and difficulty of attaining even that income would have incentivized the magistrates to heed other interests.

The purpose of extensive use of secret censors can be better understood under this context. These censors were not designed to acquire greater infrastructural power, but to maintain a level of compliance from the state officials dispatched to various regions. Furthermore, direct control over the affairs of the magistrates, including their control over state personnel, is aligned to overseeing and controlling the magistrates than to add any substantial institutional means of governing to the magistrates.

### **3. Greater Despotic Power and Stagnant Infrastructural Power of the State**

Therefore, there is a limited sense that the absence of other social institutions gave greater power to the state. It gave the state greater despotic power: it allowed the magistrates to make decisions unhampered by routine

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21) 民生休戚。專係守令廉貪。而大國則自皇朝時。爲守令者官廩之外。又有養廉銀。自非天生墨性。則稍能自愛身名。不甚貪饕。而我東殘邑。所謂月廩。僅僅糊口。無異京司斗祿。猶欲奉祭祀接賓客。又慮其將來飢凍。預營歸囊而無處著手。則遂以反弄國穀爲事立本那移。加分換色等種種駭舉。無所不至。甚者直不顧死生。狼藉盜用。及其覺發之後。又欲充納。則白徵無告小民。剝膚椎髓。使不聊生。(弘齋全書 167 日得錄 7 政事 2)

negotiations with other social groupings. One interesting case related to this issue is analyzed by Lee Hakyung (2018, 118). In one of the cases, a local clerk contrives to falsely accuse a magistrate to hide his crime. While Lee concludes that this case exemplifies the limited infrastructural power of the state, it could also be argued that it demonstrates the despotic power of the state. First, to escape the consequence of his crime, the local clerk does not rely on an alternative source of authority independent from the state. Local clerks do not build an alternative entity to challenge the centrality of the state and the magistrates embodying this center. The power of the clerks is not independent of the state: it derives from their service to the state. Second, the local clerk refers to the center to which the magistrate is a part. Instead of replacing the existing authority, the local clerk involves a body closer to the center to resolve this issue. This conscious choice to include a body closer to the center than an alternative source of authority demonstrates that in the minds of the local clerk, the state was the supreme source of authority. In other words, the state no longer had to routinely negotiate the matters of governing with other institutions with independent authority. In their absence, in principle, all authority rested with the magistrates.

However, the expansion of the despotic power of the state did not increase the infrastructural power of the state. Extensive use of secret censors betrays how state agents were prone to ‘disappear into society.’ The state did not greatly expand the infrastructure power of the state for the state did not absorb the organizational means to implement its policies. Greater interests by the Border Defense Council also demonstrates the state’s effort to control its agents, the magistrates. It does not prove greater effort by the state to expand its organizational means to implement its policies.

Rather, implementing the policies of the state were delegated to social actors

who were deeply embedded in local societies. Furthermore, the lack of economic and social compensations for these actors by the state debilitated the state's control over these actors. That is, it was unable to acquire greater commitment from the social actors to the goals of the state.

In conclusion, Joseon state was despotic in that it could do away with routine negotiations with alternative institutions of authority. Other institutions did not challenge publicly, in principle, the centrality of the state and their oppositions and resistance remained minuscule in practice such as extortion, embezzlement, and negligence. However, this despotic power did not translate into infrastructural power of the state, the capacity of the state to commit social actors to the interests of the state. The organizational means of its social penetration was out-sourced to social actors with a questionable commitment to the interests of the state. Also, despite the knowledge of the institutional problems of its limited infrastructural power, the state was unwilling to change the institutional causes of these problems. Therefore, the state can be both strong and weak: strong despotic power and weak infrastructural power.

### Chapter 3. Conclusion

This paper explored the capacity of the Joseon state to penetrate the local society. To do so, this paper adopted Michael Mann's definition of state and power: state as an entity distinct from society as an institution embodying interests and goals otherwise irreducible to any social actor coordinating various personnel over a defined territory with a center where information is collected and commands radiate outward; and power as the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment. Such a definition had the analytical advantage over other definitions of state: it can distinguish two distinct definitions of state power, despotic and infrastructural.

This definition has been employed by Lee Hakyung (2018 and Kim Youngmin (2018) to clarify previous confounding explanations of state power. Previous definitions of state had theoretical problems that lead scholars either to equate these two distinct powers or to assume that one power automatically led to the other. Based on this framework, this paper analyzed previous arguments for greater state power during Jeongjo's reign. More specifically, their arguments for greater power of the magistrates. Based on a reading of *Daily Revelation Records*, this paper elucidated how the perceived 'increase in state power' was not found on greater infrastructural power of the state. *Daily Revelation Records* document stagnant infrastructural power of the Joseon state: despite knowledge of the institutional problems that hindered greater social penetration by the state, limited efforts were given by Jeongjo and state officials to find institutional solutions and increase the ability of the state to acquire greater commitment from the social actors. The local clerks who were central to the penetration of the Joseon state into the society were left with a questionable commitment to the interests of the state. This supports previous arguments by Lee Hakyung

(2018), Kim Youngmin (2018), and Palais (1991) that the demise of the local autonomous rule did not increase the infrastructural power of the state. It also reinforces Lee Heekwon (1999)'s argument that magistrates had limited influence over the society even during the late Joseon dynasty.

Therefore, the Joseon state was powerful in that there were no other institutions with independent judicial and administrative authority since the disintegration of the local gentry associations. However, the infrastructural power of the state was limited due to its inability to acquire greater commitment from the social actors to the interests of the state.

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# 18세기 후반 조선 정부 개혁과 국가 권력 간의 상관관계: 국가 권력과 지배에 관한 고찰

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김 서 현

본 논문은 18세기 조선 국가의 사회 침투 능력을 분석한다. 기존 연구는 18세기 조선 국가가 사회에 대하여 강력한 권력을 행사했다고 주장한다. 기존 연구에 따르면 조선에는 왕권을 견제하는 제도가 부재하였을 뿐 아니라 왕이 법의 해석에 있어서 상당한 재량을 발휘할 수 있었고, 이를 토대로 왕은 자의적으로 권력을 행사하였다. 또한 조선 후기 향청(鄕廳)이 붕괴됨에 따라 국가는 유일한 권위체가 되었다. 본 논문은 이러한 관점에 의문을 제기한다. 먼저 기존 연구가 차용하고 있는 다양한 국가의 개념을 분석함으로써 이러한 국가 개념이 어떤 이론적 문제를 야기하는지 밝힌다. 그 다음으로 「일득록(日得錄)」을 분석하여 당시 왕과 관료들이 수령과 관련된 사회 통치 문제를 어떻게 인식하고 그에 대응하였는지 분석한다.

구체적으로, 본 논문은 기존의 연구가 전제하고 있는 국가 개념이 국가 권력의 다양한 면을 구분하지 않는다는 점을 지적한다. 이로 인해 기존 연구는 국가 권력의 한 가지 측면이 강화되는 것을 마치 국가 권력 전체가 강화되는 것처럼 오해한 측면이 있다. 본 논문은 그 대안으로 마이클 만(Michael Mann)의 국가 권력 분석틀을 활용할 것을 제안하며, 이 분석틀을 바탕으로 기존 연구의 ‘관 주도’ 주장이 제시하는 근거들이 반드시 국가의 사회 통제력을 입증하지 않는다고 주장한다.

다음으로 본 논문은 「일득록」을 분석한다. 먼저 정조의 지도 아래 편집된 「일득록」은 왕과 관료들의 언사를 기록한 사료로, 당시 국가 지도층이 통치와 관련된 여러 문제를 어떻게 인식하고 그에 대응하였는지 확인할 수 있다. 또한, 기존 연구가 국가 권력이 특별히 강한 것처럼 보이는 정조 시기를 대상으로 하여 강력한 국가 권력의 근거를 비교적 명확하게 밝히고 있다는 점을 고려할 때, 일득록의 기록을 분석하여 기존 연구의 주장을 검증함으로써 기존 연구에서 활용하고 있는 국가와 권력의 개념이 내포한 문제를 더 명확하게 밝힐 수 있다. 결론적으로, 본 연구는 만의 분석틀을 이론적 체계로 활용하여 일득록을 분석함으로써 조선 후기 국가가 사회에 매우 제한적인 통제력만을 행사했다는 점을 논증한다.

주제어: 조선(朝鮮), 권력, 국가, 일득록(日得錄), 전제 권력, 기반 권력

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