

**COLLUSIVE OLIGOPOLISTIC POLITICS: *SEDO* AND THE POLITICAL
STRUCTURE OF EARLY-NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHOSŎN KOREA**

by

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Abstract

In contemporary Korean historiography, the reign periods of King Sunjo (r. 1800-1834), King Hŏnjong (r.1834-1849), and King Ch'ŏlchong (r. 1849-1863) are generally called “The Era of *Sedo* Politics” in Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910). In contemporary Korean historiography, the political theme of *sedo* predominated after the death of King Chŏngjo (r. 1776-1800), when national politics was exclusively led by a few powerful royal in-law families, most notably the Andong Kim and P'ungyang Cho clans, for sixty-three years. Obviously, those two major clans enjoyed extensive political authority and high social status in the nineteenth century. However, the negative images and common misconceptions in previous research on *sedo* politics have prevented scholars from understanding the period of *sedo* politics from a balanced angle and driven them to emphasize its unique features too much. This thesis rather paints the mainstream view of the political history of late Chosŏn Korea with a different brush. Starting off with a discussion of the definition and origin of the historical terminology *sedo* (世道 or 勢道), this paper questions more deeply the structure of *sedo* politics and re-examines previous research on characterizations of *sedo* politics. In addition, based on some statistical data and extensive research in genealogy records, this thesis will identify many points that cannot be illustrated or that are only partially explored in existing literature in the context of the 1800 to 1863 era of *sedo* politics. Through this re-examination, this research project will contribute to enlarging the vision of the political history of Korea in the first half of the nineteenth century, which has not been a major research topic among political historians of Korea, who have mainly dealt with struggles and conflicts for political power among various historical agents.

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To My Beloved Family in South Korea

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the first half of the nineteenth century, in Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910), male relatives of the Queens emerged as the leading group of bureaucrats, given *carte blanche* by the Chosŏn kings. Previous (including the most recent) research on the politics during this period implies that the style and substance of politics was dominated and controlled by a few royal in-law families, such as the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans.¹ In the standard historiography, the reign periods of three Chosŏn kings between 1800 and 1863 are generally periodized as the Era of *Sedo* Politics (*Sedo chŏngch'igi* 世道政治期) in Korean historiography.² As one of the assumed major characteristics of nineteenth-century Korea, the term *sedo* is widely used to indicate an undesirable political system led by a few family groups that were closely associated with the royal families by marriage.

The Era of *Sedo* Politics, which typically involves the specific period between 1800 and 1863, has been negatively conceived and relatively ignored in Korean historiography.³ First, some nationalist historians in the early twentieth century, especially Pak Ŭn-sik, Hwang Hyŏn, and An Hwak, had a critical viewpoint of that specific time based on their own nationalist self-reflection and need to assign responsibility for the fall of the last Korean kingdom in 1910. Second, some Japanese colonialist historians and some Korean historians who were educated by them projected negative images of that period to support the notion that the fall of the Chosŏn

¹ James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1991), 24-27. Palais used the specific term 'consort clans' to specifically refer to royal in-law groups. Ibid., 43-46

² Yun Chŏng-ae, "Chŏngch'isa yŏn'gu ŭi tonghyang kwa kwaje [정치사 연구의 동향과 과제 A Literature Review of Studies of Political History]." In *Chosŏn chŏngch'isa, 1800-1863* [조선정치사, 1800-1863 The Political History of the Chosŏn Dynasty, 1800-1863], ed. 19-segi Chŏngch'isa Yŏn'guban [19th-Century Political History Research Group], Han'guk Yŏksa Yŏn'guhoe [Association for Korean History], Vol. 1 (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Ch'ŏngnyŏn, 1990), 39.

³ Throughout this paper, all of the historical dates are based on the traditional Korean lunar calendar system.

dynasty in 1910 was inevitable. Even during the contemporary period, some Korean historians such as Yi Yi-hwa, Chŏng Ok-ja, Yi Sŏng-mu, and Yi T'ae-jin have viewed the political history of the early nineteenth century of Korea with critical eyes.

Intermittent persecution of Catholicism, the arrival of Western steamships, a series of months of severe famine and diseases followed by long droughts and massive floods, local government officials' exploitation of villagers through fabrication and embezzlement, and subsequent civil uprisings have been the main topics used to depict the first half of the nineteenth century in Korea among those scholars.⁴ All of the topics coincide with events in the last stage of the Chinese dynastic cycle which indicates the rise or approach of a new power. Constant rebellions and uprisings, and corruption among officials and royal in-laws are seen as the warning signs of the fall of each Chinese dynasty, though how much Korean historiography has been affected by Chinese historiography is not that clear. However, there are many points that cannot be explained from such a viewpoint of fin-de-sicle unrest over the history of Korea in the nineteenth century.

One of the common features exhibited by the scholars described above is that, like many other contemporary historians, in their research on the late Chosŏn period, particularly between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, they seem to pause at the time when King Sunjo succeeded his father King Chŏngjo in 1800, and then skip to the enthronement of King Kojong in 1863, or to the historical turning point of Korea in 1876 (when the three major ports of Chosŏn were forcefully opened by the Japanese). Then, modern Korean history started all over again with the new periodization of the beginning of modern Korea. As some historians say, though the importance of the early nineteenth century has been increasingly noticed in recent

⁴ According to the *Annals [sillok]*, during the two summers of the twenty-first and twenty-second reign years of King Sunjo, Cholera was prevalent throughout the country and more than one hundred thousand people died.

years, actual scholarly examinations of that period have been minimal. To fill the historical gap between the premodern and modern eras in the nineteenth century, further research is required.

Continuity and discontinuity in history are huge topics, but they are not always sharply distinguished and as a result the fine line between continuity and discontinuity is blurred. Most scholars, however, talk about the discontinuity of Korean history in 1800 as though there were a sharp break with the political patterns of the past at that point. By re-examining the historical theme *sedo* and the political structure of early nineteenth-century Korea, this thesis rather tries to understand Korean history in the early nineteenth century as an extension of eighteenth-century Chosŏn and as inextricably linked to the final decade of nineteenth-century Korea. In other words, *sedo* can become a historical bridge which connects the two consecutive centuries, as well as the two different periods, distinguished as premodern and modern, in the nineteenth century.

Except for those who have focused on Catholicism or civil uprisings in early nineteenth-century Korea, social and political historians have focused their attention on a few royal in-law families, most notably the Andong Kim and P'ungyang Cho clans, in the same period. However, their research commonly has a couple of substantial problems in terms of historiography. They often comprehend political history imperfectly with a narrow meaning of politics based on political struggles and conflicts to seize and maintain power. However, politics also involves political tolerance, cooperation, coalition, and the peaceful process of persuasion. Based on a broader meaning of politics, this thesis addresses two major problems in Korean historiography from a different angle throughout the thesis. First, the powerful royal in-law families were the leading politicians, but did not represent all of the bureaucrats. They also looked for political partners and their support and cooperation. Second, the fact that the dominant aristocratic

officials were from the same clan did not mean that they had acted as a single body or were working together when pursuing the same goal. To each political agent, politics could mean a recurring process of communication, persuasion, compromise, and agreement for personal political interests. Consequently, the negative images and misconceptions of *sedo* politics and of the Andong Kim and P'ungyang Cho clans have prevented scholars from understanding the specific period between 1800 and 1863 from a balanced angle and driven them to emphasize its unique features too much in Korean historiography. Therefore, to draw a more comprehensive understanding of the political history of nineteenth-century Korea, it is necessary to approach events from a different angle.

Instead of supporting the widely accepted thesis of the monopolization of Chosŏn politics by a few powerful loyal in-law families, including the Andong Kim and P'ungyang Cho clans, this thesis, assuming historical continuity, examines more specifically how they colluded with each other or with other distinguished family groups in the capital region in the nineteenth century. To support this new interpretation, stereotyped images of *sedo* politics in contemporary Korean historiography will be mainly analyzed and reshaped through a careful analysis of data and texts.

Chapter Two examines primary resources to determine how the specific term *sedo* was created and evolved in Korean historiography to represent the development and structure of the early nineteenth century. The conceptual history of *sedo* can contribute to Korean historiography because it can also portray the evolution of Korean historiography in nationalist and colonialist historical contexts between the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chapter Three briefly introduces court history and analyzes the development and characteristics of the reign period of each of the three Chosŏn kings in the first half of the Chosŏn dynasty to help to capture some

general images of the *sedo* period. Chapter Four analyzes the ongoing debate over why and how *sedo* politics emerged and states some problems in periodizing *sedo* politics in Korean historiography. Chapter Five illustrates how and by whom political power was divided, shared, or centralized and reviews problematic historical assumptions, which have hindered the emergence of more substantial studies of the political history of late Chosŏn. Chapter Six discusses how individual social and political power was geographically centralized and how the two most distinguished family groups penetrated into the core of the *sedo* politics through case studies of political cooperation or coalitions based on blood and school lines and personal politics. Chapter Seven describes the influence of *sedo* politics after 1863 to substantiate the idea of historical continuity. The conclusion, in addition to summarizing this thesis, will also mention some possible limits, meaning, and contribution of this thesis.

1.1 Previous Research on the Political History of the Early-Nineteenth-Century Korea

When one of the key words in this thesis, *sedo* (세도), is typed in the search engine of the online database of itemized collections of journal articles, monographs, and dissertations on Korean history (*Han'guksa yŏn'gu hwibo* 한국사연구회보), only twenty items containing *sedo* in their title appear.⁵ Of course, this does not necessarily mean that there have been only twenty pieces of published research on *sedo* in Korea. When Pak Hyŏn-mo compiled his articles into a book that was published in 2011, though it is one of the most recent academic publications on *sedo*, he relied heavily on no more than ten articles on *sedo* written between 1959 and 1998. In

⁵ “*Han'guksa yŏn'gu hwibo* [한국사연구회보]”, National Institute of Korean History [국사편찬위원회], accessed February 27, 2012, <http://db.history.go.kr/front/report/reportFrameSet.jsp>.

other words, as Ch'oe I-don and Yun Chǒng-ae have stated, the political history in the first half of the nineteenth century has been consciously and unconsciously ignored because of its negative images, though it is crucial for understanding and describing the historical moments before and after the beginning of the twentieth century in Korean history.⁶ Consequently, these authors shared the idea that this lack of attention toward this period created a huge historical gap between the death of King Chǒngjo in 1800 and the appearance of the Great Regent Prince Hǔngsǒn (*Hǔngsǒn taewǒn'gun* 興宣大院君 hereafter he will be referred simply as *Taewǒn'gun*), the father of King Kojong, in 1863. Furthermore, previous research tended to characterize the political regime through social phenomena in the nineteenth century instead of analyzing it systemically or structurally.

In Yun Chǒng-ae's literature review of research on *sedo* in 1990, she categorized the previous research into mainly two groups: research on the background and development of *sedo*, and research on characteristics of *sedo*.⁷ Twenty years later, Pak Hyǒn-mo conducted an extensive literature review of previous research on *sedo*. In his review, there are four major topics within research on that topic: the origin of the political system of so-called *sedo*, characteristics of it, political relationships between political agents, and foreign policies during that time.⁸ In his introduction, Pak summarized and organized well previous research on *sedo*. However, his book on *sedo* actually devoted only one short chapter to *sedo*.

Outside Korean academia, there has been some research in English on civil uprisings, and the spread of Catholicism in nineteenth-century Korea. However, they barely touched upon

⁶ Pak Hyǒn-mo, *Chǒngjo sahu 63-yǒn: sedo chǒngch'igi (1800-63) ŭi kungnaeoe chǒngch'i yǒn'gu* [정조 사후 63년: 세도 정치기 (1800-63) 의 국내외 정치 연구 Sixty-three Years after the Death of King Chǒngjo: A Study of the Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy of Korea between 1800 and 1863] (P'aju-si, Kyǒnggi-do: Ch'angbi, 2011), 15.

⁷ Yun Chǒng-ae, *Chǒngch'isa yǒn'gu ŭi tonghyang kwa kwaje*, 35-70.

⁸ Pak Hyǒn-mo, *Chǒngjo sahu 63-yǒn: sedo chǒngch'igi (1800-63) ŭi kungnaeoe chǒngch'i yǒn'gu*, 13.

the political state of the country during that time period.

1.2 Research Methodology

In addition to secondary sources on the political history of late Chosŏn both in English and in Korean, primary sources such as web-like genealogy records of the royal family and politically renowned clans, records of hundreds of the highest-level civil service examination graduates from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, collected writings of individual scholars, official records of the Chosŏn dynasty, personal letters, and some excerpts from Confucian classical texts or commentaries on them will be used for this research project.

Selected, collected, and classified data and quantitative analysis will be also used in this thesis. For instance, the number of civil service examination graduates each clan produced will be classified and compared to look at which clans had more opportunities to get into the core of court politics, and when they enjoyed such opportunities. Of course, the pass rate of certain family groups in the exams did not necessarily and always coincide with a ranking of politically powerful families. However, it can, at least, show the basic background information about why a certain family group emerged within the core of the Chosŏn politics in a certain time period. Furthermore, by examining in which region civil service examination graduates were based, this thesis will further test the hypothesis that renowned clans in the capital region enjoyed more opportunities to produce more civil service examination graduates than other clans, those in rural regions.

Historical periodization is a never-ending debate topic in Korean historiography since it

involves many political and ideological issues. By looking at a process of historical periodization, this thesis will determine whether it implies historical discontinuity between historical eras and what further issues related to periodizing the time between 1800 and 1863 as the Era of *Sedo* Politics can be discussed.

There are relatively well-established records on royal genealogy. Through the Genealogical Records of Chosŏn Queens' Relatives (*Tonnyŏng poch'ŏp wanghu p'yŏn* 敦寧譜牒 王后篇), family trees can be drawn showing the intermarriage between distinguished family groups. By doing so, the roles and characteristics of marriage among the family groups can be examined. In addition, drawing on secondary sources, what kind of role the ties aristocratic bureaucrats had with their fellow alumni played in marital and political affairs, as well as how distinguished family groups became socially and politically renowned and enjoyed high status, will be illustrated by means of research on school ties during the late Chosŏn period.

Through some historical descriptions of political events in the Annals of the Chosŏn dynasty, this paper will implicitly use some terms in political anthropology, such as kinship and nepotism, to question the assumption of political homogeneity among the historical figures from the same blood line, especially the Andong Kim or the P'ung'yang Cho clans, who became involved in such events.

Chapter 2: The Conceptual History of *Sedo* (世道 or 勢道)

Sedo (세도) can be written with Chinese characters in two different ways in contemporary Korean historiography 世道 or 勢道.⁹ According to a dictionary of classical Chinese characters, the first syllable *se* may be written with 世 (*se*) which means universe, world, year, generation, and harvest. Sometimes it can be written with another 勢 (*se*) which has the meanings of influence, tendency, authority, and power. Furthermore, in conjunction with *do* 道 which implies the meanings of way, principle, direction, method, truth, or sometimes as a verb to speak, the term *sedo* could have various meanings, depending on its context.

An interesting point discovered in an examination of historical terminology is that in the Annals of the Chosŏn dynasty, the term *sedo*, written in Sino-Korean characters as 勢道, which often indicated the specific era between 1800 and 1863 in Korean historiography, does not appear during the first half of the nineteenth century at all. In addition, during the same time, 世道 was used in the annals mainly in the meaning of ‘the way of the world.’ That is to say, the basic or general meaning and concept of *sedo* (勢道), which implies negative images, was created at the earliest in the late nineteenth century. For instance, some Japanese historians during and after the colonial period between 1910 and 1945 used the term *sedo* (勢道) and

⁹ 世道 and 勢道 are two different words which are pronounced the same and overlap in meaning. John Duncan also paid attention to the different Chinese characters used for *se* when he indicated *sejok* (世族 hereditary families or 勢族 strong families). He views the two *sejok* as two different words, not the same word spelling differently. Depending on the Chinese characters 世 and 勢, words that are pronounced the same can have different nuances or even entirely different meanings when they are written with different Chinese characters.. John B. Duncan, *The Origins of the Choson Dynasty* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2000), 86. Duncan also preferred using the specific term ‘Power Descent Group’ to indicate the most frequently used term in this thesis ‘distinguished clan.’

defined it in a negative way as nepotistic politics (*chŏkjak chŏngch'i* 戚族政治).¹⁰

It is hard to draw a clear distinction between the two versions of *sedo* in Chinese characters because even contemporary historians use them interchangeably. Regarding 世道 and 勢道, however, it is commonly accepted that the latter term was invented or devised to criticize the control of the government by powerful families in nineteenth-century Korea, as the word had a literal meaning of ‘the way of the powerful’ or ‘the way in which power dominates’, liberally translated as ‘rule by royal in-law families.’ By contrast, the former term can be more neutral, not only since it mainly had a meaning of ‘the way of the world’ and ‘responsible politics,’ as applied to the responsibilities of the most trustworthy and reputed officials who operated as proxies of kings, but also since it may be used in several other ways.¹¹ In some cases, it also means affairs of state. Significantly, *sedo* is an example of the way Sino-Korean terms can be both descriptive (the way things are) and normative (the way things should be). It also is an example of the way a specific Sino-Korean term can be both a noun and a verb (to implement the Way the world should be).

The usage of *sedo* can be further elaborated by some examples in some primary sources. According to the record of Sim Hwan-ji’s death in the Annals in 1802¹²:

¹⁰ Ishii Hisao (石井壽夫) was one of them. He was a Japanese historian whose research focused on the political history of the Chosŏn dynasty. Interestingly, a nationalist, and somewhat anti-Japanese, historian Yi I-hwa also used a similar term *chŏkjak sedo* (戚族世道) in his book. Yi I-hwa, *Chosŏn hugi ūi chŏngch'i sasang kwa sahoe pyŏndong* [조선 후기 정치사상과 사회 변동 Political Thought and Social Change in the Latter Half of the Chosŏn Dynasty] (Sŏul: Han’gilsa, 1994), 69.

¹¹ 世道 (*sedo*) can be positive, as in “the moral principles that should prevail in the world” and negative, as in “the ways in which the ways of the world depart from the Heavenly Way.” More specifically, it sometimes has the negative connotation as the ways of this world rather than the way of the true way (*do* 道), the eternal way.

¹² *Sunjo Sillok*, Sunjo 2 (1802), 10. 18 (*pyŏngjin*): 領議政沈煥之卒。煥之，青松人，國舅綱後也。……擢兵判，遂入相，爲一邊領袖，自任以世道之責。 *Chosŏn Veritable Records* (*Chosŏn wango sillok*) is cited as follows: Title, followed by the reign date, with C.E. dating in brackets, month and day by lunar calendar, with the day in the sixty year cycle in brackets. The Annals, *the Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty* (*Chosŏn wango sillok*) is available online. <http://sillok.history.go.kr/main/main.jsp>

The Prime Minister Sim Hwan-ji died. He was born into the Ch'ōngsong Sim clan and was a descendent of Sim Kang, a father-in-law of King Myōngjong (r. 1545-1567). Sim Hwan-ji was promoted to the position of Minister of Military, and finally became the Prime Minister and the leader of one group of officials, and 'personally assumed responsibility for affairs of state' (自任以世道之責).

King Chōngjo's political rival, and sometimes political partner, Sim Hwan-ji was described as a historical figure who was responsible for *sedo* (世道), as the leader of court politics.

Another example of *sedo* 世道 (one that appeared more commonly than the previous meaning) could be found in the messages of regent queens, typically issued at the end of their regencies in the first half of the nineteenth century. All three of the kings during the first sixty years of the nineteenth century in Chosŏn were under the regency of dowager queens in the early part of their reigns. Since the three edicts of the queens announcing the transfer of power to the king were almost identical, only one of the three royal instructions is translated here. In the lunar year of 1840, Dowager Queen Sunwŏn withdrew from regency and issued an instruction to court officials¹³:

Since ancient times, there has been great misfortune in the country when queens or consorts were in charge of court affairs. As a widow of great misfortune, it has been seven years since I faced this situation of great misfortune. Considering my tepid virtue and lack of knowledge, how could I dare to compare myself with the wise queens of old? Up to now, based on the precedents of sagacious queens in our dynasty in the past, and facing a situation in which the future was unclear, and with all of the

¹³ *Hōnjong Sillok*, Hōnjong 6 (1840), 12. 25 (*sinsa*). The other two almost identical edicts could be found in *Sunjo Sillok*, Sunjo 3 (1803), 12. 28 (*kich'uk*) and *Ch'ōlchong Sillok*, Ch'ōlchong 2 (1851), 12. 18 (*kiyu*): 從古后妃之臨聽朝政，乃有國之大不幸也。未亡人，以萬萬不幸之人，處萬萬不幸之地，居然爲七年之久矣。自顧涼德淺識，何敢彷彿於古昔哲后？暨我列朝聖母古事，而當天地罔極之會，諸臣涕泣而請之，予亦涕泣而許之，實出於萬不獲已，苟且維持之計。五六年來，歉荒荐臻，憂虞溢目，滄弊日甚，百度俱紊，無內無外，莫可收拾，是皆由予否德，冒當不當之重務。上不能克享天心，下無以振勸世道，駸駸然至於此，豈不凜然而懼哉？予自勉從之初，已有所定，無踰此歲，日夜顙祝，只在於主上之成就。今則春秋既鼎盛矣，聖質天縱，睿智日就，可以摠萬幾而親庶政，是誠宗社臣民莫大之慶也。主上知予意有定，縷縷勸挽，情理辭意，雖甚惻怛，權是一時之宜，經乃萬世之法，予豈可拘於至懇，一向黽勉，不思所以亟正國體乎？敬天愛民，勤學親賢，守我先王家法，主上其勉之。同寅協恭，納君無過，以輔我永年洪業，深有望於大臣諸臣，其自今日撤簾。

officials begging me with tears in their eyes to act as regent, though I, too, had tears in my eyes, I have reluctantly done what was asked of me. Truly, I only did what had to be done in order to maintain the dynasty. Over the last five or six years, the county has suffered a series of crop failures, and this has kept me greatly concerned. Cases of corruption have been growing more frequent, and there is chaos in the way the government is being run. There is no place to turn to restore order. This was all caused because I dared to assume a heavy responsibility I could not handle, given my lack of virtue. Since I was unable to take into account the will of heaven above or promote ‘the proper moral principles’ (*sedo* 世道) below, we ended up in this terrible mess. How do not I get the chills and feel terrified when I see the situation we are in? Since the first moment from when I had to work hard as regent, I already had made up my mind that my regency would end before the end of this year. I have done nothing day and night, other than wish for King Hōnjong’s success.

Now, the king has become an adult. As he was naturally born with heavenly sagacity, and his sagacity has increased every day, he can directly manage and deal with all of the affairs of state as a king. Truly, this is an occasion for the royal house, subjects, and the people to celebrate. Though the king, knowing that I have made up my mind, over and over again has asked me to reconsider withdrawing from the regency, though I regret having to say no to him I recognize that a regency is just a temporary expedient and rule by the king is the norm. How can I accept his generous request? I cannot let his kindness keep me from doing what is proper. Shouldn’t I, while continuing to do all I can for our dynasty, keep in mind the way the government should be run? I would like King Hōnjong to endeavour to sustain the royal tradition of previous Chosŏn kings by venerating heaven, loving the people, being devoted to his studies, and keeping the wise by his side. It is my desire that ministers and other subjects cooperate and respect each other in order to assist our king so that there will be no mistakes in carrying out our country’s on-going major projects.

When the queen regent handed over sovereign power to the almost-grown-up king, and specifically asked the officials to work hard for their king and the country, she looked back to her regency period and explained the huge burden of responsibility she bore while falling short in her performance and promotion of ‘the proper moral principles in the affairs of this world’ (*sedo* 世道) for the Korean people.

In contemporary Korean historiography, the first use of *sedo* in the meaning of royal in-law politics is still contested. U Kyŏng-sŏp and Pak Hyŏn-mo try to find the root of the word in Confucian classics. The latter argues that the first use of *sedo* (世道) was in Pak Se-dang (b.

1629-1703)'s commentary on the Canon of Documents (*sōgyōng* 書經 or *sangsō* 尚書).¹⁴

When the Duke of Zhou faced the fall of 'the prevailing ways [世道],' [he realized] statesmen should change based on the customs of the time. Therefore, he managed the current affairs following the customs.

However, it seems like the *sedo* he specifically cites from the Confucian classic is not necessarily the same as the concept of *sedo* as a political ideology in the early-nineteenth-century of Korea in the sense of rule by the official representative specially appointed by the king. Besides, the term *sedo* doesn't actually appear in that ancient Classic. Instead it appears in commentaries on that Classic from the mid-Chosŏn dynasty on.

U Kyōng-sŏp, on the other hand, basically argues that the use of the term *sedo* could be found in many different texts, not only in Korea but also in China, and pays attention to other Confucian texts such as Mencius, though this specific term does not appear in the Mencius. In his PhD dissertation, he points out that the term *sedo* can be also found in the political and Confucian thought of Song Si-yŏl (b. 1607-1689), a leading Confucian literati official.¹⁵

There is nothing special in the responsibility for *sedo*. All you have to do is investigate things by reading books and foster a moral character by maintaining an attitude of mindfulness and then apply what you have achieved in actual practice. If you grow more sincere every day and extend your sincerity farther every day, then, before you know it, it will embody the Way. When that happens, even if you are asked to shoulder a heavy responsibility, you will not be able to decline. Not only will you not be able to decline, you will have to accept that responsibility.¹⁶

¹⁴ As cited in Pak Hyŏn-mo, 117.: 周公當世道方降之時 ... 爲政者因俗變革 故周公 ... 皆由俗爲政者... (書經 周書 畢命). Pak's footnote is not precise. This is not originally from the *sōgyōng* but rather is from Pak Se-dang (b. 1629-1703) and Pak Mun-ho (b. 1846-1918)'s commentaries on it. The commentaries can be found at <http://koco.skku.edu/content/bunmain.jsp> (Complete Collection of the Korean Study of Confucian Classics).

¹⁵ U Kyōng-sŏp, "Song Si-yŏl ŭ i *sedo* chŏngch'i yŏn'gu [송시열의 세도 정치 연구 A Study of Song Si-yŏl's Politics of Managing the Ways of the World]" (PhD Dissertation, Seoul National University), 15-18 & 27-28.

¹⁶ Ibid.27.; Collected Works of Song Si-yŏl (*Songja taejŏn* 宋子大全), 46: 25a-b in 한국역대문집총서, Vol. 109, p 422. This is from a letter in response to Yi Un-gŏ on the last day of the fifth month in the lunar year of 1677 (丁巳五月晦日); 世道之責恐無別事 只是讀書以窮格持敬以涵養使其踐履日益篤擴充日益遠則其所謂道者忽不自知在我矣 如此則其責雖重而亦不得辭矣非惟不得辭而亦不必辭矣; In his collected works, Song Si-yŏl further argued that there must be a person in charge of *sedo* who could prevent human beings from falling into the status of barbarians or beasts.

Song Si-yŏl started his explanation of the responsibility of *sedo* on the basis of investigating things and cultivating mindfulness. What he meant by *sedo* here was the “ways of the world” with the positive connotation of the way things should be in the world. That is why a person who had cultivated a moral character would not be able to refuse to accept responsibility for setting things right in the world.

Some other scholars argue that the first use of the term *sedo* (勢道), which was invented and used relatively later than the other *sedo* (世道) ‘the prevailing ways’, could be found in the writings of the Korean historian and politician An Hwak’s *History of Korean Civilization* (*Chosŏn mungmyŏng sa* 朝鮮文明史) during the 1920s.¹⁷ Many scholars viewed An’s book as the indicator of the transformation from *sedo* (世道) to *sedo* (勢道) to impose negative images on the early nineteenth-century political regime. However, when looking at *Memoirs of Hwang Hyŏn* (*Maech’ŏn yarok* 梅泉野錄), written sometime in the 1900s, and Pak Ŭn-sik’s *Comprehensive History of Korea* (*Han’guk t’ongsa* 韓國通史), written in 1900, it can be noted that *sedo* (世道) had already been used in a negative sense to depict the early-nineteenth-century political regime led by a few distinguished royal in-law families.¹⁸

Other historians argue that Pak Che-hyŏng’s *Corrective Reflection of Early Modern Korea* (*Kŭnse Chosŏn chŏnggam* 近世朝鮮政鑑), written in 1886, already used the terminology *sedo* (世道) with the similar meaning of ‘royal in-law politics’ (勢道).¹⁹ According to Kenneth Quinones, some Japanese and Western scholars who were interested in Korean history before and

¹⁷ Yun Chŏng-ae, 39.

¹⁸ Pak Ŭn-sik, *Han’guk t’ongsa* [韓國通史 A Comprehensive History of Korea], trans. Kim Sŭng-il (Sŏul-si: Pŏmusa, 1999), 92-94. *Sedo* often means ‘the prevailing ways,’ which is why it can be used to refer to rule by in-laws in the 19th century.

¹⁹ U Kyŏng-sŏp, 16.

after the 1900s heavily relied on Pak's depictions of nineteenth-century history in his book. He further states that, influenced by Pak Che-hyŏng, "one of Korea's earliest advocates of Westernization," Yun Ch'i-ho (b. 1864-1945) even described *sedo*, or "road to power", as "a peculiar institute in Korean politics" even before the publication of *the Corrective Reflection of Early Modern Korea*.²⁰

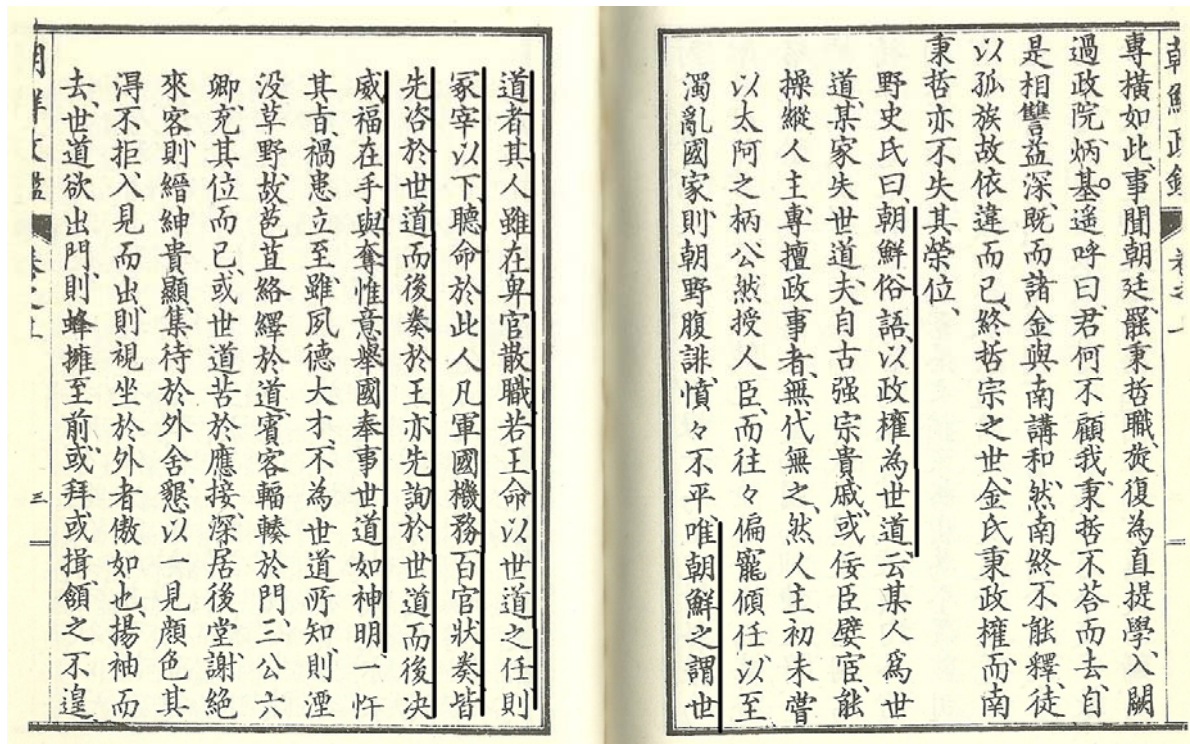


Figure 1 Corrective Reflection of Early Modern Korea - 01

As you can see from the highlighted lines in his book, *Corrective Reflection of Early Modern Korea*, Pak Che-hyŏng specifically and radically defined the meaning of *sedo* (世道). In this book, he spells out *sedo* with 世道 instead of 勢道, though some scholars mistakenly argue that he actually first used the latter Chinese characters after reading the Korean version of

²⁰ Kenneth Quinones, "The Kunse Chosŏn Chŏnggam and Modern Korean Historiography", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40. 2 (Dec., 1980), 512-519

Corrective Reflection of Early Modern Korea. In the translated version, *sedo* (세도) was supplemented throughout with 勢道 instead of 世道. He explains the term in Figure 1:

According to ordinary usage in Korean, wielding political power is called *sedo* (世道)... only in Korea is the term *sedo* usually to refer to a person being in charge of the responsibility for overall political affairs by royal order. Even if he is a lower ranking official, the Chief Minister of State [冢宰] and on down have to follow his orders. National military and administrative affairs of importance, and reports from all of the officials, should be first presented to the person who is in charge of *sedo*, and then later reported to the king. Also, a final decision will be made only after asking that person's opinion first. Because authority and good fortune are in his hands, and he has power to do as he wishes with the entire nation and all affairs of state, wielding *sedo* is like being a god.

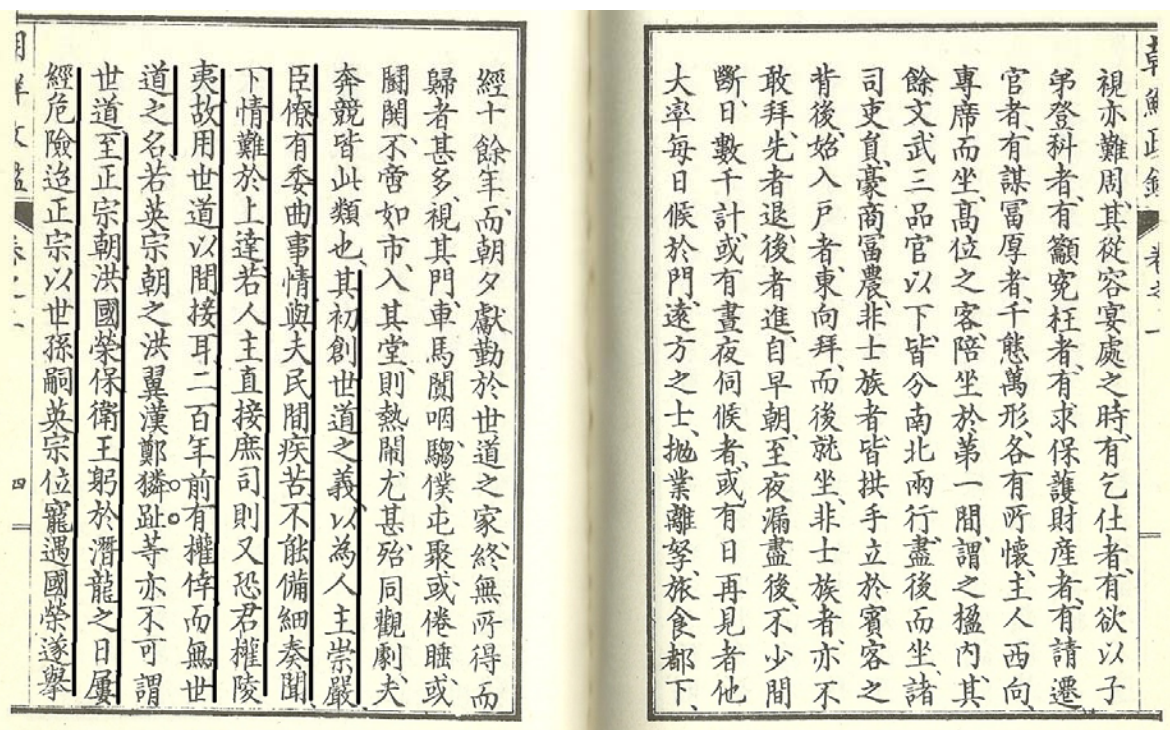


Figure 2 Corrective Reflection of Early Modern Korea - 02

The initial intention of the creation of *sedo* (世道) was that, because the king sits on

such an exalted and dignified throne, when the officials have some very complicated situations to report on or there are serious problems among the people, it is not possible to give detailed reports to him.²¹ Thus, it is difficult for reports from below to reach the monarch at the top. If the king gets in touch with lower-level office directly, it is to be feared that will damage his aura of authority. Therefore, the king indirectly governs by adopting *sedo* (世道), and that is all. Two hundred years ago, there were some officials who were favoured by the king, but the term *sedo* (世道) was not used..

...

During the reign of King Chǒngjo (r. 1776-1800), there was a royal favourite named Hong Kuk-yǒng (b. 1748-1781), who had protected him and saved him several times from dangerous moments before his enthronement. After King Chǒngjo succeeded King Yǒngjo and assumed the throne, he treated Hong Kuk-yǒng as a favourite.

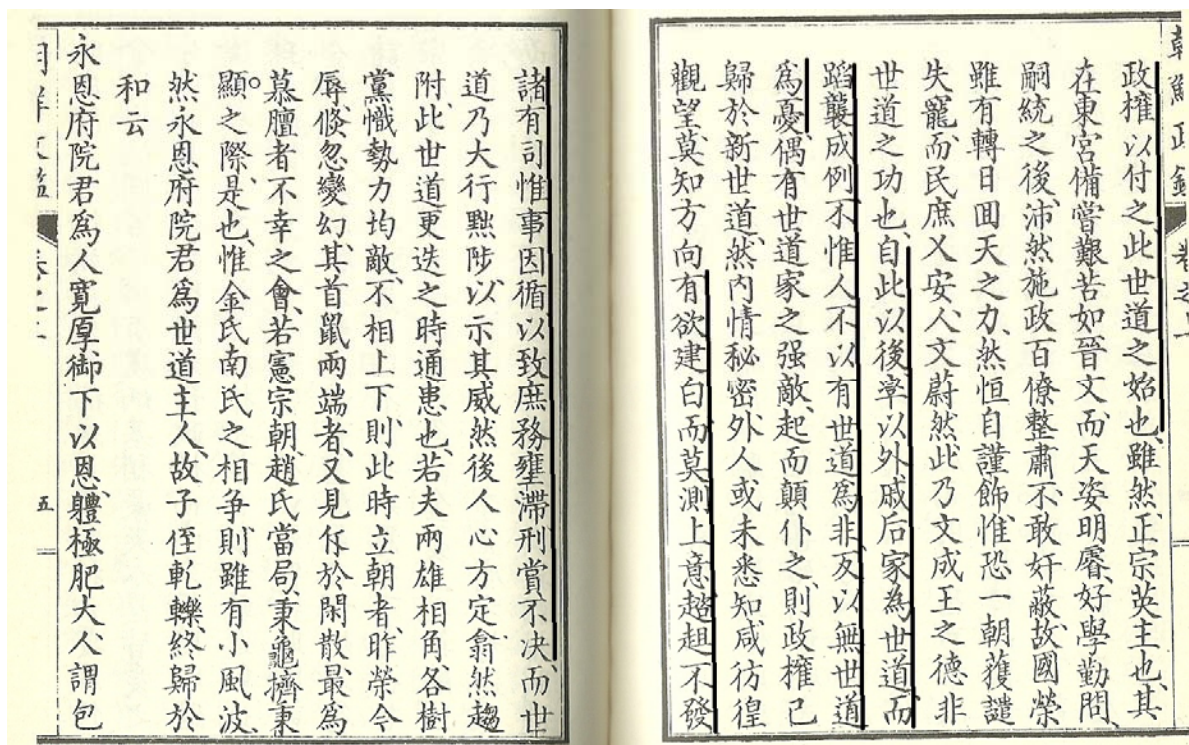


Figure 3 Corrective Reflection of Early Modern Korea - 03

At last, the king entrusted all of the political affairs to him. This was the start of *sedo*

²¹ 疾(disease) and 苦 (pain) are often metaphorical depending on each context.

(世道). After this time, generally, the court relying on in-law families of the king began to be called *sedo* (世道), and that established a precedent for *sedo*(世道). People do not regard this *sedo system* (世道, royal in-laws wielding political authority) as inappropriate, but are only concerned if they are not able to benefit from *sedo* (世道). ... Even if a subject wants to appeal to the king or propose an appointment, because no one yet fathoms the king's thought, officials hesitate and do not speak out. As the various lower-level officials hesitate to take care of the matters they are supposed to take care of, the basic work of government slows to a crawl, and decisions that need to be made about justice and promotions are left undone.

Pak Che-hyŏng thought that the time of Hong Kuk-yŏng (b. 1748-1781), one of the most favored subjects by King Chŏngjo, was the beginning of *sedo*. However, as royal in-law families led politics later, *sedo* started to be more widely conceived as politics dominated by 'royal in-law families' (*oech'ŏk* 外戚). Pak Che-hyŏng was more concerned about the fact that there was lack of communication between the king and his subjects as a few distinguished aristocratic officials were favoured and allowed to take a larger role in overall court affairs than the king. Regardless of which combination of Chinese characters Pak picked, *sedo* started to develop a more narrow meaning or reflect a slightly negative view of royal in-law politics.

Hwang Hyŏn also used the term *sedo*, though with a slightly different Chinese character. It looks like the word is in a transition period between 世道 and 勢道.

勢塗稱號

自洪國榮專權以來，凡戚畹當路者，謂之勢塗。其指勢塗也，必舉其所居坊洞之名，如明世宰輔之舉地以號而曰，長沙江陵分宜貴溪之類，故金氏稱典校洞，趙氏稱磚洞，至大院君居雲峴，故稱雲峴。

The Origin of So-called *Sedo*

From the time that Hong Kuk-yŏng monopolized power, royal in-laws wielding power has been called *sedo* (勢塗). When people talk about *sedo* (勢塗) [dirty politics], they inevitably refer to the places where those power-holders live. For example, well-

known high-ranking officials are called by the name of their residential areas such as Changsa, Kangnŭng, Punŭi, Kŭigye, and so on. Therefore, the Andong Kim clan is referred to as *Chŏn* (典) district and *Kyo* (校) district; the P'ung'yang Cho clan is known as *Chŏn* (磚) district; and when it comes to Taewŏn'gun, the regent of King Kojong, he lives in *Unhyŏn* (雲峴); consequently, he is known by that district name.

Hwang Hyŏn's definition of *sedo* in the 1900s shows well the transformation of the transcription of the term from 世道 (*sedo*) to 勢道 (*sedo*). Throughout Confucian texts, in '勢塗 (*sedo*)', '塗 (*do*)' is often interchangeable with '道 (*do*)' since both have the same sound and similar meanings. However, because 塗 (*do*) basically means mud in addition to the meaning of 'road', 勢塗 (*sedo*) looks a little more negative than 勢道 (*sedo*).²²

There are some common themes of *sedo* that Pak Che-hyŏng and Hwang Hyŏn illustrated and shared. First, they looked at the appearance of Hong Kuk-yŏng as the origin of *sedo*. Looking at the left five vertical lines in Figure 3, it can be seen that the Andong Kim and the Pu'ng'yang Cho clans were identified by Pak as the major historical or political agents in the structure of *sedo*. Hwang Hyŏn shared that evaluation. In addition, both focused on royal in-law families as the major agents of *sedo*.

To sum up, there are three terms that sound the same as *sedo* in Korea but have slightly different nuances:

- 世道 means, in its primary meaning, the ways of the world. According to some Korean scholars, it came from Chinese Confucian texts and meant the wielding of power in the world,

²² Like 道 (*do*) and 途 (*do*), 塗 (*do*) has several different meanings depending on texts. For instance, in Buddhist texts, 三塗 (*samdo*) can refer a negative meaning of road or way such as the three ways or roads to hell. According to an excerpt from *the Daily Records of the Royal Secretariat* (*Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi* 承政院日記) for the eleventh day of the sixth month in the seventeenth reign year of King Kojong, it can also mean three ways to become a government official. Furthermore, depending on each context, 三塗 can mean three basic principles to serve parents, three military skills or techniques, and so on. However, it still appears that 塗 (*do*) has a more negative meaning than 道 (*do*) in that it always refers to things of this world.

and, by extension, those who wielded that power in the late Chosŏn period.

- 勢塗, first used by Hwang Hyŏn around the 1900s, means “power in the mud,” or dirty politics.

This *sedo* had a more negative nuance than the first one.

- 勢道, most widely used during and after the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), means, in its primary meaning, the way of power (in contrast to the way of virtue). It critically represented the raw exercise of power in the first half of the nineteenth century in a way that appears illegitimate.

By examining in chronological order, the transformation of the three *sedos* into a more negative meaning the conceptual history of the term reveals that some nationalist historians in the late nineteenth and the very early twentieth centuries had a critical view of central-government politics in the first half of the nineteenth century because they had their own nationalist concerns and needed to assign responsibility for the fall of the last Korean kingdom in 1910. Then, during the Japanese colonial period, some Japanese colonialist historians and some Korean historians who were educated by them further projected negative images of that specific period to support or justify the notion that the fall of the Chosŏn dynasty, more precisely the Japanese Annexation of Korea, in 1910 was inevitable. Examining the term *sedo* itself, thus, has significance for the study of Korean historiography as it reveals the evolution of Korean historiography in nationalist and colonialist historical contexts.

It might be still difficult to say who initially created the word and when, because there is not yet a general concept of *sedo* in Korean historiography, though a lot of research has lightly touched upon it. However, at least it can be noted that the transformation of the meaning, or just the literal change, of *sedo* (世道) from something more like ‘the responsible politics of a political leader’ to ‘royal in-law politics’ took place in the late nineteenth century. And then the newly

changed or created word or concept started to be widely accepted by Korean and Japanese historians between the 1900s and the 1920s. By looking at some writings on *sedo* by two Korean historians, Pak Che-hyŏng and Hwang Hyŏn, the terminological transformation process could be sensed to a certain degree.

For the remainder of this thesis, regardless of transcription, *sedo* will be used in the meaning of the court politics highly influenced by a few distinguished family groups. This is because the use of *sedo* in that way is more generally accepted by most Koreans and historians. Furthermore, the narrow meaning of *sedo*, which is close to the meaning of 勢道, has been closely associated with historical periodization between 1800 and 1863 in Korean historiography. As mentioned earlier, this specific period is often called the Era of *Sedo* Politics. It can be further noted that, in his research on *sedo* in 1985, Kim Hŭng-su also argued that *sedo* 世道 was more likely a sociological term that was more collective and conventional.²³ Thus, he further argued that, to describe the politics in the nineteenth century, *sedo* 勢道, instead of 世道, might be more appropriate for characterizing the historical era between 1800 and 1863. The use of the key term *sedo* in this thesis will be generally based on the definition and interpretation used by Kim Hŭng-su.

²³ Kim Hŭng-su, *Sedo chŏngch'i yŏn'gu: kŭ yongrye ŭi kŏmt'o wa ŭimi ŭi kumyŏng* [세도정치연구: 그 용례의 검토와 의미 구명 A Study of Sedo Politics: Review of the Usage and the Examination of What it Means] (Sŏul: Samyŏngsa, 1985), 222-234.

Chapter 3: Reconstituting the Political History of Nineteenth-Century

Chosŏn Korea

This chapter briefly introduces family trees of royal families and analyzes the development and characteristics of the reign period of each of the three Chosŏn kings in the first half of the Chosŏn dynasty to capture some common images of the three reign periods. This is drawn primarily from the Annals of the Chosŏn dynasty.

3.1 King Sunjo



Figure 4 King Sunjo's Genealogy²⁴

²⁴ Chi Tu-hwan, *Sunjo taewang kwa ch'ininchŏk* [순조 대왕과 친인척 King Sunjo and his Relatives] (Sŏul-si:

King Sunjo succeeded his father, King Chǒngjo, at the age of eleven. However, it was the last queen of King Yǒngjo, Dowager Queen Chǒngsun, originally from the Kyǒngju Kim clan, who acted as regent. Dowager Queen Chǒngsun's father and brothers were mainly from the Intransigent Faction (*pyǒkp'a* 僻派). As soon as she assumed power as regent, she appointed men from her paternal line to high office and furthermore brought men from the Intransigent Faction to the core of Chosŏn politics for the first couple of years of the reign years of King Sunjo.

Since Crown Prince Sado, the father of King Chǒngjo, was put to death by King Yǒngjo, court politics had been largely divided into two factional groups, the Intransigent Faction (*pyǒkp'a* 僻派) and the Flexible Faction (*sip'a* 時派). The former used to speak ill of the Crown Prince at every chance and supported King Yǒngjo's order which led to the Crown Prince starving to death in an empty wooden rice chest. The latter supported King Yǒngjo's so-called Equalization Policy (*t'angp'yǒng* 蕩平) and felt pity for the death of the Crown Prince, feeling he had been unjustly accused.²⁵

During the regency of Dowager Queen Chǒngsun, individuals from her Kyǒngju Kim clan, Kim Kwan-ju, Kim Il-ju, Kim Yong-hu, and some other officials belonging to the Intransigent Faction, were appointed to major government posts. They executed some political rivals from the P'ungsan Hong clan of Lady Hyegyǒng (also known as Queen Hǒn'gyǒng). There was a constant veiled enmity between the two clans during the early reign period of King Sunjo.²⁶

Yŏksa Munhwa, 2009), 70.

²⁵ Regarding the Equalization Policy and the death of the Crown Prince, see Chapter 4 'Yǒnjo's Court: Magnificent Harmony' and Chapter 5 'Yǒngjo's Tragedy: The Prince of Mournful Thoughts' in JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Confucian Kingship in Korea: Yongjo and the Politics of Sagacity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

²⁶ O Su-ch'ang, "Chǒngguk ŭi Ch'ui [정국의 추이] The Way the Political Situation Unfolded]," in *Chosŏn chǒngch'isa, 1800-1863*, 74-75.

When the Intransigent Faction seized leadership over court politics, that political group constantly checked Kim Cho-sun from the Andong Kim clan. First, he was the person who was one of the most trusted subjects of King Chǒngjo, since he was closely associated with the Flexible Faction. Second, Kim Cho-sun's daughter was almost selected as a queen of King Sunjo when King Chǒngjo was still alive. Some officials associated with the Intransigent Faction tried to block that marriage. However, they all failed to overturn the preceding king's decision. In the end, in the second year of King Sunjo's reign, Kim Cho-sun became the king's father-in-law.

At the very end of the third year of King Sunjo's reign, the regency of Dowager Queen Chǒngsun ended. As the young Korean king was now able to directly rule the country, Kim Cho-sun gradually took up leadership of court politics while closely working together with the P'ung'yang Cho and the Pannam Pak clans. The P'ung'yang Cho and the Andong Kim clans shared common academic traditions based on their school ties. In addition, since the biological mother of King Sunjo was from the Pannam Pak clan, Pak family members could establish political partnerships with the Andong Kim clan. When King Sunjo suffered from smallpox, Kim Cho-sun, Pak Chun-wŏn, Pak Chong-bo, and Pak Chong-gyŏng were the only ones called to work in the royal palace by his side. Needless to say, they were all from both the Andong Kim and the Pannam Pak clans.²⁷ Furthermore, one of the leading members in the Intransigent Faction, Kim Tal-sun, was attacked and executed by Cho Tŭk-yŏng from the P'ung'yang Cho clan.²⁸

When Crown Prince Hyomyŏng married a daughter of Cho Man-yŏng, a relative of Cho Tŭk-yŏng, it certainly represented the close political partnership between the two clans. More

²⁷ *Sunjo Sillok*, Sunjo 5 (1805), 02. 18 (*imsin*).

²⁸ Interestingly, Kim Tal-sun, who was also from the Andong Kim clan and a somewhat distant relative of Kim Cho-sun, supported the Intransigent Faction and attacked the Flexible Faction, including Kim Myŏng-sun. This point will be examined in greater detail later to question the universal presumption among major Korean scholars of political homogeneity within the same clan among major Korean scholars.

importantly, they were closely tied to each other by intermarriage. Cho Man-yŏng's younger brother, Cho In-yŏng, married a daughter of Kim Se-sun from the Andong Kim clan. In addition, Cho Pyŏng-gi, who was a son of Cho Man-yŏng, and was later adopted by his uncle Cho In-yŏng, was married to a daughter of Kim Yu-gŭn, who was one of the relatively close nephews of Kim Cho-sun. For generations, these two politically distinguished groups were closely tied based on complex intermarriages in the nineteenth century. However, some historians argue that a daughter of Cho Man-yŏng was specially and strategically selected by King Sunjo as a wife of the crown prince because King Sunjo wanted to entrench some political partners who could offset the political power of the rising Andong Kim clan.

In the twenty-seventh year of King Sunjo's reign, Crown Prince Hyomyŏng administered affairs of state on behalf of his father. The prince tried to check the power of the Andong Kim clan by appointing and promoting some officials related to the P'ung'yang Cho by marriage. However, because of the sudden and early death of the Crown Prince in the thirtieth year of King Sunjo's reign, his efforts to weaken the power of the Andong Kim officials did not produce any results in the end, and the Andong Kim clan regained their political predominance.

Corresponding to the rise of Kim Cho-sun's family and the Flexible Faction, which resulted in the fall of the Intransigent Faction, factionalism became relatively less meaningful in the early nineteenth century compared to earlier periods. The extent to which their lineage was distinguished instead became one of the main factors that determined the future of aspiring government officials when it came to court politics.

3.2 King Hŏnjong

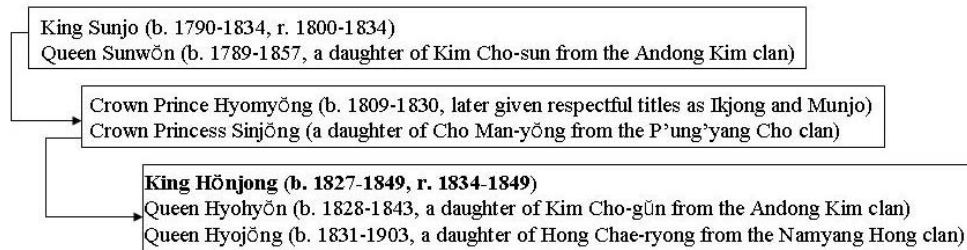


Figure 5 King Hŏnjong's Genealogy²⁹

When King Sunjo's son Crown Prince Hyomyŏng died in 1830, the king's young grandson became the crown prince and then, when King Sunjo died in 1834, assumed the throne as King Hŏnjong. Because King Hŏnjong was only eight years old when he took the throne, his grandmother, Dowager Queen Sunwŏn, a daughter of Kim Cho-sun, acted as regent. In addition, in the third year of King Hŏnjong's reign, one of Kim Cho-sun's nephews, Kim Cho-gŭn's daughter, was selected as the Queen of King Hŏnjong. At least in the first half of the reign period of King Hŏnjong, the Andong Kim clan actually started enjoying leadership in court politics, as well as high status. The eldest son of Kim Cho-sun, Kim Yu-gŭn, and other Andong Kim members such as Kim Hŭng- gŭn, followed in the footsteps of Kim Cho-sun.

However, during Queen Sunwŏn's regency, Chosŏn suffered constant social turmoil due to a series of droughts, floods, and epidemics, a major persecution of Catholics, and the appearance of Western ships in coastal regions, though the regent blamed her own lack of virtue

²⁹ Chi Tu-hwan, *Hŏnjong taewang kwa ch'ininch'ŏk* [헌종 대왕과 친인척 King Hŏnjong and his Relatives] (Sŏul-si: Yŏksa Munhwa, 2009), 22.

when she declared her intention to end her regency. Another interesting point here is that she later acted as regent again during the first two years of King Ch'ölchong's reign, even though King Ch'ölchong was not that young. In addition, Queen Sinjŏng, the mother of King Hŏnjong, also acted as regent during the first two years of King Kojong's reign. All of the Chosŏn kings who were enthroned in the nineteenth century had a period of regency under queens. One of the major characteristics of nineteenth-century Chosŏn politics is the regency of queens, though the level of their political power and influence is still debated and needs to be further researched.

In addition to the end of Dowager Queen Sunwŏn's regency, the death of Kim Yu-gŭn in 1840, as well as the early death of Queen Hyohyŏn from the Andong Kim clan in 1843, caused the rise of their political rivals, the P'ung'yang Cho clan. This was not only because King Hŏnjong's mother, Crown Princess Sinjŏng, came from the P'ung'yang Cho clan, but also because of King Sunjo's special request to Cho In-yŏng, a brother of Cho Man-yŏng to assist his young grandson. Consequently, for the second half of King Hŏnjong's reign period, Cho In-yŏng, Cho Pyŏng-gu (a son of Cho Man-yŏng), and Cho Pyŏng-hyŏn (a son of Cho Tŭk-yŏng) became deeply embedded in the core of court politics.

The Namyang Hong clan, which produced the second queen of King Hŏnjong, is another interesting factor during the reign of King Hŏnjong. Most scholars in Korean history have characterized—more specifically, periodized—the first sixty-three years of nineteenth-century Korea as the era of the politics dominated by royal in-law families. However, none of them have looked at the significance of the Namyang Hong clan. Even though King Hŏnjong lived with Queen Hyojŏng from the Namyang Hong clan for only about five years, this was not too short a period for her father, Hong Chae-ryong, and his relatives to set down roots in the core of Chosŏn politics. The Namyang Hong clan is key to re-establishing a relationship between periodization

issues over the early nineteenth century and defining the meaning of so-called Sedo Politics, depending on how the clan is situated in Chosŏn politics.

Some Korean scholars such as O Su-ch'ang and Yi Sŏng-mu state that King Hŏnjong intentionally favoured and used relatives from his mother's side to maintain political balance either between the Andong Kim clan and the king or between the Andong Kim clan and the other aristocratic officials within the court.³⁰ However, since the king died at an early age, he did not wield much influence on Chosŏn politics.

3.3 King Ch'ŏlchong

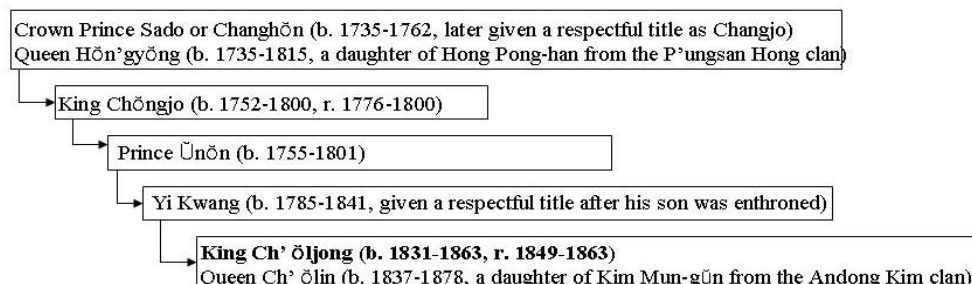


Figure 6 King Ch'ŏlchong's Genealogy³¹

During the reign of King Ch'ŏlchong the Andong Kim clan enjoyed political and social privileges to the fullest extent. As King Hŏnjong had died at an early age without any heir, one

³⁰ O Su-ch'ang, *Chŏngguk ŭi ch'ui* [정국의 추이 The Way the Political Situation Unfolded], 115-117.; Yi Sŏng-mu, *Chosŏn sidae tangjaengsa* [조선시대 당쟁사 A History of Factionalism in the Chosŏn Dynasty], 1st ed., Vol. 2 (Sŏul-si: Tongbang Mido, 2000), 280.

³¹ Chi Tu-hwan, *Ch'ŏljong taewang kwa ch'ininch'ŏk* [철종 대왕과 친인척 King Ch'ŏljong and his Relatives] (Sŏul-si: Yŏksa Munhwa, 2009), 24.

of the princes from a cadet line living on Kanghwa Island was chosen to succeed King Hŏnjong. He became King Ch'ölchong without any proper training to become a king of the country. Though he assumed the throne as the direct successor to King Hŏnjong, King Ch'ölchong was later put on the register of the royal family as the son of King Sunjo and the Great Dowager Queen Sunwŏn—in other words, as an uncle of King Hŏnjong. That meant another regency of the Great Dowager Queen Sunwŏn for the first six reign years of King Ch'ölchong, who was not ready to act as a monarch in the country because he had never been trained in how to act as a king.

The newly enthroned king married a daughter of Kim Mun-gun from the Andong Kim clan. Consequently, for the three consecutive reign periods of the Chosŏn kings the Andong Kim clan produced three queens in a row. After the generation of Kim Cho-sun, who was often regarded as the founder of the era of *Sedo* politics in the nineteenth century, his sons, nephews, and other relatives, such as Kim Chwa-gŭn, Kim Mun-gŭn, Kim Pyŏng-gi, and Kim Pyŏng-p'il, from the Andong Kim clan played a leading role at the centre of Chosŏn politics. After all, it is common knowledge that the reign period of King Ch'ölchong was the heyday of the Andong Kim clan. How politically dominant the Andong Kim clan was during that specific reign period will be further questioned and described in a later chapter.

3.4 Summary of the Court-centered History of the Nineteenth Century

During the reign of King Sunjo, aristocratic officials from the Andong Kim clan formed and framed a preparatory base for the domination of Chosŏn politics. The next step was the rise

and threat of their political rivals, such as the P'ung'yang Cho clan. The Cho family preserved relatively superior positions within the court during the reign of King Hŏnjong. Afterwards, Andong Kim officials could beat off their competitors and gain constant political cooperation from queens, mostly born into the Andong Kim clan. The era of the Andong Kim clan finally concluded during the reign of King Ch'ŏlchong.

The common element of the sixty-three-year sedo era of Chosŏn politics is that it was based heavily on the influence of queens' male relatives. The authority of Chosŏn kings at that time could be partially reinforced through the help of their uncles, cousins, nephews on their mother's or wife's side—mainly, the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans.

The following chapters will discuss possible historiographical problems that might be raised when the reign periods of the three Chosŏn kings in the first half of the nineteenth century are simply characterized by politics being heavily dominated by a few royal in-law family groups.

Chapter 4: The Emergence and Development of *Sedo* in the Nineteenth Century

As seen in the examination in an earlier chapter of several possible meanings of *sedo*, in Confucian texts or according to some Confucian Korean officials, such as Song Si-yŏl, *sedo* was a political model that was specifically designed to give more opportunities to Confucian scholars or leaders in the country to participate in court politics. More specifically, Song wanted a government in which the king was almost nothing more than a figurehead and instead the most virtuous Confucian scholars were given responsibility for “the ways of the world” (世道). However, the original meaning became transformed into denoting a political system monopolized by one or a few distinguished family groups, including royal in-laws.

4.1 The Debate over Why and How *Sedo* Politics Emerged

Each scholar who has studied court politics in 19th-century Korea has a different view on how a few renowned family groups closely associated with each other or with the royal family could monopolize power in the core of court politics in nineteenth-century Chosŏn. In his *Comprehensive History of Korea* (Han’guk tongsa 韓國通史), Pak Ŭn-sik argued that as the power of bureaucrats, primarily from just one political faction, increased, the monarchy became weakened because of jostling for power between the monarchy and the aristocratic bureaucracy. Consequently, in order to enhance his own power, the king had to select the most trustworthy

subject from the list of all the candidates for appointment to high office. The subject chosen was granted special authority to act on the king's behalf.³² This led to the rise of certain powerful individuals. His description is very close to Pak Che-hyŏng's definition of *sedo*. However, to a certain extent, he focused mostly on describing conflict between monarchs and their officials. In other words, Pak gave a one-sided analysis of the political situation, basing his analysis too much on the concept of a power struggle between the king and his officials. As a result, to a certain extent, he seems to neglect the point that officials were basically recruited and required to properly function as a part of monarchical government and were a group of people who mostly accepted and bolstered the strong monarchical system, which was highly idealized by most Confucian literati and bureaucrats in Chosŏn.

In Yi Ki-baek's *New Discussion of Korean History* (*Han'guksa sin ron* 韓國史新論) and Pyŏn T'ae-sŏp's *Comprehensive Discussion of Korean History* (*Han'guksa t'ong ron* 韓國史通論) and *History of the Korean People* (*Han'guk mingjunga* 韓國民衆史), it is often stated that, in addition to the regency of the dowager queen, the enthronement of a young king was the main cause of the beginning of *Sedo* Politics.³³ However, this was not the first time in Korean history that a young king had appeared.

³² Pak Ŭn-sik, *Han'guk t'ongsa* [韓國通史 A Comprehensive History of Korea], trans. Kim Sŭng-il (Sŏul-si: Pŏmusa, 1999), 72.

³³ Yun Chŏng-ae, *Chŏngch'isa yŏn'gu ŭi tonghyang kwa kwaje* [정치사 연구의 동향과 과제 A Literature Review of Studies of Political History], 44. According to Hong Sun-min, Yi Sŏn-gŭn also mentioned the same reason for the rise of royal in-law politics in one of Yi's articles published in 1959. More recently, O Su-ch'ang put forward the same idea. See O Su-ch'ang, *Chosŏn sidae chŏngch'i, t'ül kwa saramdŭl* [조선시대 정치, 틀과 사람들 Chosŏn Politics, its Frame and People] (Ch'unch'ŏn-si, Kangwŏn-do: Hallim Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 2010), 72-73. Coming from the field of political anthropology, Kwŏn O-sŏng stated that the rise of the century of royal in-laws came about because there were not many reliable princes and male royal relatives in the last Chosŏn. See Kwŏn O-sŏng, *Han'gugin ŭi kukka wa chŏngch'i: Chŏngch'i illyuhakchŏk chŏpkŭn* [한국인의 국가와 정치: 정치인류학적 접근 The Nation State and Politics of Koreans: A Political Anthropological Approach] (Taejŏn Kwangyŏksi: Mun'gyŏng Ch'ulp'anbu, 1998), 119.

Earlier in the Chosŏn dynasty, after the death of King Sejo (r. 1455-1468), Queen Chŏnghŭi (b. 1418-1483), originally from the P'ap'yŏng Yun clan, became the regent of her son, King Yejong (r. 1468-1469), and her grandson King Sŏngjong (r. 1469-1494), because she thought they were both too young to act as king. In addition, Queen Munjŏng, originally from the P'ap'yŏng Yun clan, became the regent of her young son, King Myŏngjong (r. 1545-1567) after the death of King Chungjong (r. 1506-1544). Though the two regent queens had the same lineage root, none of their regent periods are referred to as *Sedo* Politics. Moreover, King Ch'ŏlchong was not young when he succeeded King Hŏnjong, though King Ch'ŏlchong was not yet ready to act as the king of Chosŏn.

Yi T'ae-jin explained the rise of royal in-law families as partially due to both the enthronement of young kings and the political conflict between the two major factional lines in late Chosŏn, the Intransigent Faction and the Flexible Faction. In the triangular structure of Chosŏn politics, with the three political groups of monarch, officials, and royal in-laws vying for power, the royal in-law groups often found that they could play the other two sides off against each other or that they could shift the balance of power to the king or to the bureaucracy as they wished. On the one hand, the royal in-law groups basically supported the monarchy, since it was their tie with the monarch that gave them their power; at the same time, they used the political divisions at court to enhance their own political prospects and raise their political voice within the court while working together with other officials or eliminating potential political rivals.³⁴

Unfortunately, Yi T'ae-jin did not provide enough specific case studies to show how the royal in-laws groups were able to stay on the tightrope between their two major roles: 'officials' and 'the king's close relatives.'

³⁴ Yi T'ae-jin, *Chosŏn hugi ūi chŏngch'i wa kunyŏngje pyŏnch'ŏn* [조선후기의 정치와 군영제 변천 The Politics of Late Chosŏn and Change in Military System] (Sŏul: Han'guk yŏn'guwŏn, 1985), 301.

Kang Man-gil, for his part, understood *sedo* as a form of conservative politics. In his view, it emerged out of reactionary sentiment against the rise of Catholicism and the influx of Western civilization.³⁵ However, he does not seem to consider the historical point that in the nineteenth century there were many reform-minded intellectuals or Catholic laymen, such as Kim Chŏng-hŭi and Kim Yu-gŭn, from conservative party factions or families.

Neither the weakened royal authority following the enthronement of young kings nor the abuse of power by conservative officials can completely explain the emergence of *Sedo* politics in the nineteenth century. Any dynasty or state could encounter problems coping with the power of royal in-law families or conservative authorities, not only in East Asian history but also in European history. Therefore, a more substantial study of Chosŏn politics during the first-half of the nineteenth century requires questioning who the actual agents of Chosŏn politics were.

More recently, Yi Sŏng-mu, Yu Mi-rim, Yu Pong-hak, and others have posited that the stronger monarchy and the adoption of the Factional Equalization Policy during the reigns of King Yŏngjo and King Chŏngjo resulted in the rise of the political power of royal in-laws.³⁶ Yu Pong-hak specifically argued that the rise of court politics dominated by a few royal in-law families could have occurred as an extension of the past. After the death of King Chŏngjo, what faction officials belonged to became less meaningful after a long-term implementation of the

³⁵ Kang Man-gil, *Han'guk kŭndaesa* [한국근세사 The History of Early Modern Korea] (Sŏul: Ch'angjak kwa Pip'yŏngsa, 1984).

³⁶ Yu Pong-hak, *Kaehyŏk kwa kaltŭng ūi sidae: Chŏngjo wa 19-segi* [개혁과 갈등의 시대: 정조와 19세기 The Era of Reform and Conflict: King Chŏngjo and the Nineteenth Century] (Kyŏnggi-do Sŏngnam-si: Sin'gu Munhwasa, 2009), 171; Yu Mi-rim, *Chosŏn hugi ūi chŏngch'i sasang* [조선후기의 정치사상 Political Thought in the Later Half of the Chosŏn Dynasty], (Sŏul-si: Chisik Sanŏpsa, 2002), 153; Yi Sŏng-mu, *Chosŏn Sidae Tangjaengsa*, 256. The same argument could be found in Cho Kwang's *Chosŏn hugi sahoe ūi ihae* [조선 후기 사회의 이해 Understanding Late Chosŏn Society] (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Kyŏngin Munhwasa, 2010), 6-9. Another historian who specially focused on the rural history of Chosŏn Korea also shared the same idea. Ko Sŏk-kyu, *19-segi Chosŏn ūi hyangch'on sahoe yŏn'gu: Chibae wa chŏhang ūi kujo* [19세기 조선의 향촌사회 연구: 지배와 저항의 구조 Research on Rural Society in Nineteenth-century Korea: The Structure of Rule and Resistance], (Sŏul: Sŏul Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 1998), 48-49. Also see O Yŏng-gyo, *Sedo chŏnggwŏn'gi Chosŏn sahoe wa taejŏn hoet'ong* [세도정권기 조선사회와 대전회통 Chosŏn Society and the Comprehensive Collection of National Codes during the Era of *Sedo* Politics], (Sŏul-si: Hyeon, 2007), 93-102.

Factional Equalization Policy, the goal of which was to appoint and promote officials regardless of their political orientation. Consequently, noble aristocratic official groups that enjoyed a high academic reputation and high social status even within the upper-tiers of the ruling class could have a chance to take an active role in court politics. Additionally, according to Yu, in the political struggle between two major political lines, the Intransigent Faction (*pyŏkp'a* 僻派) and the Flexible Faction (*sip'a* 時派), in the nineteenth century, the latter could win over the former because royal in-law groups worked together with the Flexible Faction. Moreover, the Flexible Faction had been kept out of power for quite a while, was more vulnerable and needed to find partners to stay in government. Similarly, the royal in-laws needed to find a group of officials they could work with.

In his book published in 2011, Pak Hyŏn-mo tries to find the reason of the emergence of *sedo* in the weakness of royal censors and inspectors. First, King Yŏngjo and King Chŏngjo promoted a more powerful monarchy by decreasing somewhat the authority of royal inspectors and censors, who had not only regulated and watched over the behaviour of officials but had also been known to judge the behaviour of the king. Thus, Pak draws a conclusion that this created an absence or weakness of inspection activities over illegalities or abuse of political authority among a few royal in-law groups, which, in turn, made possible the rise of the Andong Kim clan in court politics.

All of the reasons given for the emergence of royal in-laws in the court politics of the nineteenth century might sound plausible. However, if the political history of nineteenth century Korea is to be understood and analyzed only through political struggles and conflicts—most scholars have tried to examine the reason for the rise of *sedo* based on this narrow understanding of politics—, this does not contribute much to providing a comprehensive portrait of nineteenth-

century politics. The following sub-chapter will discuss possible historiographical problems when using *sedo* to characterize and periodize the period between 1800 and 1863.

4.2 Periodizations of *Sedo* Politics

Periodization of Korean history has been a huge issue in Korean historiography. There are several ways historians divide Korean history into distinct periods. Based on which periodization system is adopted, certain historical prejudices unconsciously apply to each historical description. One of the historical questions raised in the present thesis is related to the periodization of the so-called ‘Era of *Sedo* Politics’ in contemporary Korean historiography. The present chapter deals with some periodization issues, which might be caused when “Era of *Sedo* Politics” is used as a label for the period between 1800 and 1863. For instance, where to put the starting point and the endpoint of this particular historical era is still debated by Korean historians.

Some historians regard Hong Kuk-yŏng as the beginning of *sedo*. In that case, the era of *Sedo* politics is seen as actually starting from the late eighteenth century. Other historians think that Kim Cho-sun was the founder of the Era of *Sedo* Politics. Their periodization of the *sedo* era generally starts at the point when King Sunjo was enthroned in 1800. Some scholars state that the era of *Sedo* politics ended with the death of King Ch’ŏlchong and the appearance of the Taewŏn’gun in 1863. Other scholars pay special attention to the Yŏhŭng Min clan in the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century when describing *sedo*. There have been many such

discussions on the beginning and end of *sedo* politics, so there is not yet general agreement on the length of the *sedo* period.

1 st Stage	1800 ~ 1805 (the fifth reign year of King Sunjo)	Trilateral power sharing: Andong Kim, Pannam Pak, Kyŏngju Kim (clans)
2 nd Stage	1806 ~ 1818 (the eighteenth reign year of King Sunjo)	Bilateral power sharing: Andong Kim and Pannam Pak
3 rd Stage	1819 (the nineteenth reign year of King Sunjo) ~ 1849 (the fifteenth year of King Hŏnjong)	Bilateral power sharing: Andong Kim and P'ung'yang Cho
4 th Stage	1850 (the enthronement of King Ch'ŏlchong) ~ 1863 (the succession of King Kojong)	A monopoly by one clan: Andong Kim
5 th Stage	1863 ~ 1873 (the tenth reign year of King Kojong)	Monopolistic political regime: Taewŏn'gun
6 th Stage	1873 ~	Monopolistic political clan: Yŏhŭng Min

Table 1 Yu Pong-hak's Historical Division of Nineteenth-century Korean History³⁷

One of the scholars who paid attention to the periodization of *sedo* and identifying various stages in the development of *sedo* is Yu Pong-hak. Yu specifically divided the political history of nineteenth-century Korea into six stages based on the stages in the development of *sedo*. However, it can be questioned whether there were such clear boundaries between the various transitions of power over the course of the entire nineteenth century. In addition, his books did not much discuss the relationship of the royal family members, and the Taewŏn'gun

³⁷ Yu Pong-hak, *Yŏnam ilp 'a pukhak sasang yŏn'gu* [연암일파 북학사상 연구 A Study of Northern Learning Thought and the Pak Chi-wŏn School] (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Ilchisa, 1995), 144-152. Yu Pong-hak, *Kaehyŏk kwa kaltŭng ŭi sidae: Chŏngjo wa 19-segi*, 230.

with *sedo*. Taewŏn'gun actually tried to make some efforts to strengthen the monarchy and appoint officials from various family and political backgrounds. Instead of defining the structure or characteristic of each stage, Yu simply divided the whole century based on the rise and fall of certain distinguished clans, as well as based on the types of political coalitions among some politically distinguished clans, after looking at historical incidents described in the Annals. However, his research has value because of the fact that he focused on continuity between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century histories instead of emphasizing the historical discontinuity that the periodization of *sedo* might imply, a problematic approach.

Chapter 5: *Sedo* as the Political Structure of Chosŏn Korea in the Nineteenth Century

A study of the political structure of Korea in the early nineteenth century does not have to be limited to an analysis of how the government ruled the common people. It can also mean how and by whom political power was divided, shared, or centralized. The common people had little to do with the government because it was a government of the elite. Most of this thesis is allocated to answering the second question rather than the first question. Most scholars have mainly focused on the first question by examining the socio-economic turmoil of society and a general presumption of the political incompetency of the Chosŏn court. In this chapter, previous and recent research on early nineteenth-century Chosŏn politics will be analyzed and discussed to review their problematic shared historical assumptions, which have hindered the emergence of more substantial studies about the political history of late Chosŏn.

5.1 Entering *Sedo* Politics through the Highest-level Civil Service Examinations

A useful gauge of socio-political power—“potentially a key factor determining the surname sequence in the composite genealogies”—could be drawn from the number of state examination graduates various clans produced.³⁸ Details of more than 1,700 of the highest-level civil service examination graduates between the reign periods of King Chŏngjo and King Kojong

³⁸ Qitao Guo, "Genealogical Pedigree Versus Godly Power: Cheng Minzheng and Lineage Politics in Mid-Ming Huizhou," *Late Imperial China* 31, no. 1 (June, 2010): 43.

have been collected for this thesis. Analyzing them according to their family origin (*pon'gwan* 本貫) reveals which clans flourished or diminished in the Chosŏn period. In addition, how the Andong Kim and P'ung'yang Cho clans optimized their chances to get into court politics through the civil service examination system will be further illustrated. Furthermore, several statistical tables from previous research on the civil service examination system during the Chosŏn period are borrowed to supplement statistical data personally created for this thesis.

As already mentioned in the research methodology section, the number of civil service examination graduates each clan produced does not necessarily explain the level of authority of each clan at court politics. It is also important to remember that passing the exam and holding a powerful government post are two different things. Many people from the northern half of the peninsula passed the exam, for example, but few of them held high-level government posts. In addition, two major clans, the Yŏnan Yi and the Talsŏng (or Taegu) Sŏ clans, also had a significant portion of the highest-level civil service examination graduates in the nineteenth century, as the National Records of Civil Service Examination Graduates (*Kukjo pangmok* 國朝榜目) shows, yet they did not wield much power compared to the Andong and P'ung'yang Cho clans. However, it can, at least, be very useful to trace the basic background information in order to show why a certain family group emerged within the core of the Chosŏn politics in a certain time period.

Clan	Chǒngjo	Sunjo	Hǒnjong	Ch'ǒlchong	Total	Percentage
Chǒnju Yi	56	66	29	24	175	6.35
Yǒnan Yi	14	21	5	11	51	1.85
Hansan Yi	11	15	10	7	43	1.56
Kyǒngju Yi	7	13	9	3	32	1.16
Andong Kim	17	29	14	22	82	2.98
Pannam Pak	11	28	7	13	59	2.14
P'ung'yang Cho	16	23	13	13	65	2.32
Namyang Hong	14	29	11	13	67	2.43
P'ungsan Hong	14	13	3	7	37	1.34
Taegu Sǒ	10	28	7	11	56	2.03

Table 2 Yi Yi-hwa's Table of the Highest-level Civil Service Examination Graduates from Ten Powerful Clans ³⁹

Yi Yi-hwa created and used the above table to illustrate how a small number of distinguished family groups had dominated opportunities to enter the center of Chosŏn politics and how the civil service examination system became corrupted for and by the most influential family groups. He said:⁴⁰

Along with the royal Chǒnju Yi clan, and the royal in-law group Andong Kim clan, the Pannam Pak, P'ung'yang Cho, and Namyang Hong clans outstripped other clan members in the number of civil service examination graduates. During the Era of Sedo, this number increased even more.

Yi, however, distorted the statistical information to create negative images of the nineteenth-century Chosŏn politics of *sedo* itself. First, he does not present the total number of civil service examination graduates during each reign period. The number of graduates from the

³⁹ Yi I-hwa, *Munbǒl chǒngch'i ka nararūl hūndūlda* [문벌정치가 나라를 혼들다 The Politics of Distinguished Families Destablizes the Country] (Sŏul: Han'gilsa, 1998), 99. “종친인 진주 이씨와 척족세력인 안동 김씨를 위시하여 반남 박씨, 풍양 조씨, 남양 홍씨가 순조 재위 이후에 압도적 다수를 차지하며 세도를 누리 는 기간에는 더욱 신장세를 보였다.”

⁴⁰ Ibid., 98

ten family groups could have naturally increased as there were more examinations offered by the government. When we look at the reign period of King Hōnjong, we can see that the number of the graduates each clan produced sharply declined. Moreover, except for the Chōnju Yi clan, the percentage of graduates from specific clans relative to the total number of graduates during the reign periods of the four Chosŏn kings seems very small. It is between one and three percent. On the other hand, other families such as the Yōnan Yi, the Hansan Yi, and the Kyōngju Yi were all well-known for producing competent officials and became a recognized family group of aristocratic bureaucrats. Yi could have used another quantitative method to bolster his argument.

	~1500	~1550	~1600	~1650	~1700	~1750	~1800	~1850	~1894
1	Andong Kwōn (59)	Kwangsang Kim (28)	Chōnju Yi (85)	Chōnju Yi (96)	Chōnju Yi (106)	Chōnju Yi (107)	Chōnju Yi (169)	Chōnju Yi (103)	Chōnju Yi (153)
2	Kwangsang Kim (33)	Andong Kwōn (24)	Andong Kwōn (34)	Ch'ōngju Han (37)	Andong Kwōn (52)	P'ap'yōng Yun (49)	Namyang Hong (56)	Andong Kim (45)	Andong Kim (68)
3	Munhwa Yu (32)	Kwangju Yi (22)	P'ap'yōng Yun (32)	Namyang Hong (34)	P'ap'yōng Yun (41)	Namyang Hong (47)	Yōnan Yi (56)	Namyang Hong (45)	P'ap'yōng Yun (68)
4	Chinju Kang (31)	Chōnju Yi (21)	Namyang Hong (30)	Andong Kwōn (32)	Miryang Pak (33)	Andong Kwōn (45)	Ch'ōngju Han (48)	Andong Kwōn (42)	Yōhūng Min (66)
5	Miryang Pak (30)	Andong Kim (21)	Ch'ōngju Han (27)	Andong Kim (32)	Yōnan Yi (28)	Pannam Pak (40)	Andong Kim (45)	Ch'ōngju Han (40)	Namyang Hong (55)
6	Ch'angnyōng Sōng (30)	Chinju Kang (21)	Chinju Kang (24)	P'ap'yōng Yun (31)	Kwangsang Yi (27)	Ch'ōngju Han (39)	P'ap'yōng Yun (44)	P'ung'yang Cho (39)	Yōnan Yi (48)
7	Chōnūi Yi (29)	Kyōngju Kim (20)	Andong Kim (23)	Miryang Pak (29)	Ch'ōngju Han (25)	Miryang Pak (32)	Miryang Pak (40)	Pannam Pak (38)	P'ung'yang Cho (48)
8	Yōhūng Min (26)	P'ap'yōng Yun (19)	Kwangsang Kim (21)	Chōnūi Yi (27)	Yōhūng Min (25)	Hansan Yi (32)	Andong Kwōn (37)	Yōnan Kim (37)	Kwangsang Kim (47)
9	Kwangju Yi (26)	Yōhūng Min (18)	Yōhūng Min (18)	Yōnan Yi (25)	Pannam Pak (25)	Kwangsang Kim (30)	Ch'ōngsong Sim (34)	Taegu Sō (36)	Pannam Pak (46)
10	Kyōngju Yi (26)	Chōnūi Yi (16)	Tongnae Chōng (18)	Kwangsang Kim (20)	Ch'ōngsong Sim (25) & Chōnūi Yi (25)	Andong Kim (29)	P'ung'yang Cho (34)	P'ap'yōng Yun (34)	Ch'ōngju Han (45)

Table 3 Top Ten Clans in Terms of Highest Number of Highest-level Civil Service Examination Graduates by Half Century⁴¹

Looking at the above two tables, readers can see that during the reign period of King Kojong, the number of the highest-level civil service examination graduates from the Andong Kim clan rapidly increased. According to Yi Yi-hwa's statistical data, the Andong Kim clan produced sixty-five civil service graduates during the three reign periods between 1800 and 1863.

⁴¹ Yi Wōn-myōng, *Chosōn sidae munkwa kūpcheja yōn'gu* [조선시대 문과급제자 연구 A Study of Civil Service Examination Graduates in the Chosōn Dynasty] (Sōul-si: Kukhak Charyowōn, 2004), 36.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Andong Kim clan produced one hundred and thirteen civil service graduates. In other words, during the reign of King Kojong, especially from 1863 to the year of 1894 when the civil service examination was abolished, the Andong Kim clan produced forty-eight civil service examination graduates. The number of graduates during the reign of King Kojong is even larger than any other number of graduates from the Andong Kim clan for any other two decades, even though the first sixty years of the nineteenth century were often regarded as the heyday of the Andong Kim clan.

A similar situation existed for the P'ung'yang Cho clan. According to Yi Yi-hwa's statistical data, for the first three reign periods in the nineteenth century, between 1800 and 1863, the Cho family group produced forty-nine civil service examination graduates. Before the abolition of the civil service examination in 1894, the P'ung'yang Cho clan produced eighty-seven graduates in total in the entire nineteenth century. In other words, according to Yi Wŏn-myŏng's additional statistical data including the number of the highest-level civil service graduates the Cho clan produced during each of the three reign periods between 1800 and 1863, the Cho clan produced its highest number of the highest-level civil service graduates, thirty-eight graduates, after 1863—during the reign period of King Kojong.

According to John Duncan's *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, the Andong Kim clan, however, did not suddenly penetrate into the core of the Chosŏn politics in the nineteenth century, and neither did the P'ung'yang Cho, as Table 3 shows. The former was already one of the most distinguished family groups during the dynastic transition period from the Koryŏ to the Chosŏn between the fourteen and fifteenth centuries in Korea, although in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty the clan became even more visible by providing three queens, two royal son in-laws, and

fifteen ministers to the court.⁴² In addition, the latter also gradually produced many talented civil officials from the eighteenth century on after the generation of Cho Ŏm (b. 1719-1777), who acted as a competent bureaucrat and preeminent scholar, introducing sweet potatoes from Japan to Korea. Cho Man-yŏng (b. 1776-1846) and Cho In-yŏng (b. 1782-1850) were well recognized as grandsons of Cho Ŏm.

Academically, ethically, and politically highly praised families gradually grew into renowned groups in Chosŏn society. Naturally and consequently, daughters from such renowned family groups were selected as queens of the country. However, the general assumption that royal in-law families became privileged groups solely because of their in-law status might not be always accurate in nineteenth-century Korean history. As the two tables indicated, the Andong Kim, the P'ung'yang Cho, and many other distinguished groups in the late Chosŏn did not emerge suddenly. Rather, they had already attained socio-political and academic fame and had been producing a large number of the highest-level civil service examination graduates for quite a while. Even after the end of the Era of *Sedo* Politics, the two distinguished groups were still influential in exercising their political power in the country. This is one of the historiographical problems that might arise when historians characterize the specific time between 1800 and 1863 as the Era of *Sedo* Politics and focus only on the two major royal in-law groups in their research.

Applying the term *sedo* to the period between 1800 and 1863 cannot explain the large number of civil service examination graduates from the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans before and after that specific time period. Though *sedo* politics is often assumed to be the explanation for their rise to prominence in officialdom in the first half of the nineteenth century, these two clans had already produced many civil service graduates and competent officials in the preceding four centuries of the Chosŏn dynasty.

⁴² Duncan, *The Origins of the Choson Dynasty*, 126-127.

5.2 *Sedo* as a Synonym for Corruption in the Civil Service Examination System

One of the socio-political functions of the civil service examination was the production and reproduction of the ruling class. Aristocratic officials and their descendants wrote the extremely competitive examination to maintain and increase the social and political status of their lineage. According to the Annals, in civil and military service examinations held in the capital city in 1739, about sixteen thousand people entered the exam site, though the number of entering people does not necessarily mean the total number of exam-takers since exam-takers were allowed to bring their servants to the exam site.⁴³ After about sixty years in 1800, in another civil service examination held in the capital city, more than thirty-two thousands people submitted answer sheets.⁴⁴

As the competition grew more heated, many exam-takers cheated on the exam. The corruption of the civil service examination in the nineteenth century has been constantly magnified in almost all of the socio-political histories of that specific time. Creating a controversy, there has been a continuous argument raised by historians such as Yi Yi-hwa and Yi Wŏn-myŏng that the renowned royal in-law groups monopolized civil service examinations in

⁴³ *Yŏngjo Sillok*, Yŏngjo 15 (1739), 3. 19 (*ŭrch'uk*); In the end, more than ten thousand people submitted their answer sheets. Ten exam takers including Yi Hŭi-gyŏm passed the final-round civil service examination called *alsŏngsi* (謁聖試) and were given a red colour certificate (*hongp'ae* 紅牌) and awarded special flowers (*ŏsahwa* 御賜花) in the presence of the king. This ceremony was called *pangbangrye* (放榜禮). On the same day, there was only one military exam taker who passed the exam. However, these large-scale exams did not produce graduates who could compete with the children of capital-based aristocratic families. They appear to have been intended to give the impression that Korea allowed the same sort of social mobility China allowed, and even to massage the egos of some from less powerful families by granting a few of them examination degrees.

⁴⁴ *Chŏngjo Sillok*, Chŏngjo 24 (1800), 3. 22 (*kapsul*); This was not a final-round civil service exam. Rather this was a preliminary exam, one step below the final-round exams. Many applicants just took the exam to maintain their *yangban* (aristocratic social class) status. Most of the people who passed such exams were not really eligible for higher civil service posts. However, if they came out on top after such fierce competition they could advance towards the next round of civil service examination. Kim Su-jong and Yi Nam-ik were the only two exam takers who were allowed to advance towards the final round of civil service examination the so-called *chŏnsi* (殿試).

illegal ways.⁴⁵ It is obvious that the royal in-law clans produced a number of civil service examination graduates. However, the official recruiting system did not become corrupted by them. Rather, corruption in civil service examinations was not a big issue only in the nineteenth century. Chosŏn Korea constantly experienced the same problem of cheating in the system of civil service examination.⁴⁶ Moreover, China experienced the same problem all the time. Furthermore, as seen by the above two statistical tables, cheating did not allow one or two families to monopolize the recruiting system.

Instead, researchers should look at how officials from the distinguished royal in-law groups got promoted and secured important government positions if they still want to shed negative images of *sedo* in the political history of nineteenth-century Korea. They could have also looked at the economic and academic background and history of politically powerful family groups. Preparing for civil service examinations required a huge amount of time and money, so only the people in the upper class, who could afford it financially, or those who got substantial academic support from their family wrote the national examination. That, not corruption, could explain why those clans produced so many graduates.

⁴⁵ Yi Wŏn-myŏng, *Chosŏn sidae munkwa kŭpcheja yŏn'gu*, 265.; Yi I-hwa, *Munbŏl chŏnch'i ka nararŭl hŭndŭlda*, 97-98.

⁴⁶ Cho Chwa-ho, *Han'guk kwagŏ chedosa yŏn'gu* [한국과거 제도사 연구 A Study of the History of the Civil Service Examination in Korea] (Sŏul-si: Pŏmusa, 1996), 333-337. Yi Sŏn-yŏp and Kim To-hyŏn, "Kwagŏ chedo e kwanhan pip'anchŏk sŏngch'al: Chosŏn ŭi "munkwa sihŏm" ŭl chungsim ŭro [과거제도에 관한 비판적 성찰: 조선의 "문과시험"을 중심으로 The Critical Reflection of State Examination System: Focus on the Civil Service Examination in the Chosŏn Dynasty]," *Han'guk Haengchŏng Sahakji* [한국행정사학지] 21 (2007): 9-11.

5.3 Historical Agents of *Sedo* Politics and their Political Homogeneity

Another common problem of previous and recent research on *sedo* is that they all ignore inter-personal politics and presume political homogeneity within each renowned royal in-law clan. Politically active members of the same clan did not all pursue the same political goals all the time. For instance, the P'ung'yang clan fell into decline because of discord within the clan.⁴⁷ In addition, in the earlier period of King Sunjo's reign, Kim Myōng-sun and Kim Tal-sun, who were both relatively distant relatives from the same Andong Kim clan, attacked each other politically.⁴⁸

Hong Sun-min suggests six factors that affect the formation of political groups in the Chosŏn dynasty.⁴⁹ First, family background and marital relationships. Second, geographical background and regionalism. Third, school line and alumni. Fourth, the relationship with existing power groups. Fifth, political interests. Sixth, political logic. When it comes to how the six different factors actually worked out in reality, it is necessary to research basic personal information and each person's political personality or motivation to better understand the political history of the Chosŏn dynasty. Depending on each political factor, ties through political alliances could be enhanced or weakened.

The range of a clan is also extremely controversial.⁵⁰ Is it necessarily to think of all of the descendants from the same politically decent group as one social and political unit? Members from the original Andong Kim clan that remained and resided in and around the region of

⁴⁷ Kim Pyōng-gi, *Chosŏn myōngga Andong Kim ssi* [조선 명가 안동김씨 The Famous Andong Kim Clan in the Chosŏn Dynasty] (Kyōnggi-do P'aju-si: Kimyōngsa, 2007), 158.

⁴⁸ Yi Sōng-mu, *Chosŏn Sidae Tangjaengsa*, 263-266.

⁴⁹ Hong Sun-min, "Chōngch'i chiptan ūi sōnggōk [정치집단의 성격 The Characteristics of Political Groups]," in *Chosŏn chōngch'isa, 1800-1863*, Vol. 1, 228-229.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 242-243

Andong for hundreds years were Southerners, one of the four major political factions in the Chosŏn dynasty. On the other hand, the Andong Kim families in the capital region who were the main political agents in the Era of *Sedo* Politics were politically members of the Old Doctrine, another of the major factions in the late Chosŏn period. Therefore, sometimes, there is a limit to determining each official's personal politics or political faction simply by their family background. In other words, all of the men from the Andong Kim clan did not necessarily share the same political orientation. At the same time, *sedo* was not extensively associated with the entire Andong Kim clan.

According to Ch'oe Chae-sŏk, in traditional Korean society, a kin group started to be based on the paternal line from the sixteenth century.⁵¹ From the seventeenth century on, the range of the clan expanded to the distant relatives who had the same great-great-grandfather. However, it is still difficult to conclude that a group of distant relatives who are from the same clan could constitute a single political group and share the same political ideology. Nevertheless, some popular Korean historians have often condemned the Andong Kim clan for the monopolization of government posts in the nineteenth century, even including within that blanket condemnation their cousins forty times removed.

⁵¹ Ch'oe Chae-sŏk, *Han'guk kajok chedosa yŏn'gu* [한국 가족 제도사 연구 A Study of the History of the structure of the Family in Korea] (Sŏul: Ilchisa, 1983).

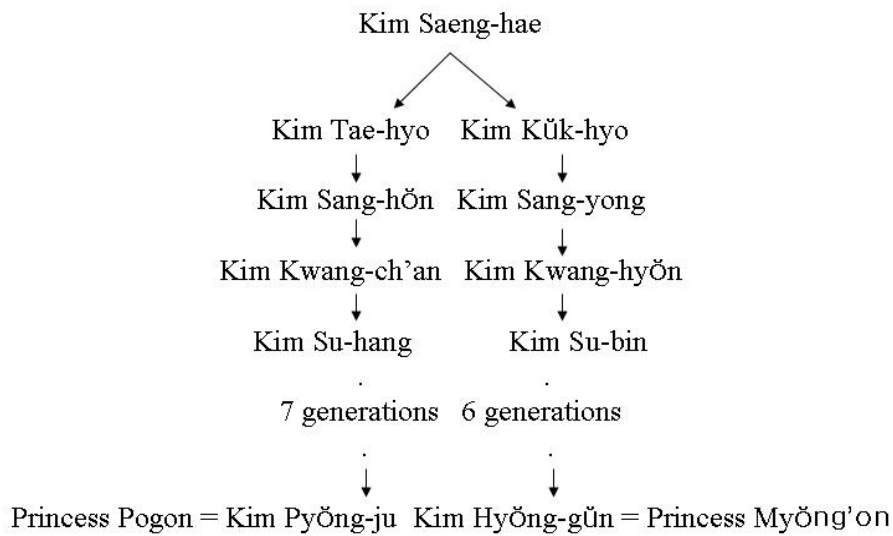


Figure 7 Genealogy Records of Two Sons-in-laws of King Sunjo⁵²

There were, however, some cases in which distant relatives were not regarded as members of the same clan. For instance, during the reign period of King Sunjo, Kim Pyŏng-ju and Kim Hyŏn-gŭn, two young sons from the Andong Kim clan, married princesses of King Sunjo. They did not even have the same great-great-grandfather. The parental line of each royal son-in-law had been divided for more than ten generations. That is why they both could be the husbands of the two daughters of King Sunjo, whose father-in-law was Kim Cho-sun also from the Andong Kim clan. In other words, although Kim Cho-sun and the two royal sons-in-law were technically from the same clan, they were not seen as close blood relations.

In the eleventh month of 1842, Dowager Queen Sunwŏn from the Andong Kim clan grieved for her brother, Kim Yu-gŭn, and one of her close relatives, Kim Hong-gŭn, after they died. The two Andong Kim officials had been at the center of court politics and had bolstered her.

⁵² Chi Tu-hwan, *Sunjo taewang kwa ch'ininchŏk* [순조 대왕과 친인척 King Sunjo and his Relatives] (Sŏul-si: Yŏksa Munhwa, 2009), 286-287. & *The Genealogy Records of Chosŏn Queens' Relatives*

After the death of Kim Yu-gŭn and Kim Hong-gŭn, their positions and roles were assumed by other close Andong Kim relatives, Kim Hŭng-gŭn and Kim Chwa-gŭn. However, Dowager Queen Sunwŏn was not satisfied with those replacements and expressed her concern that she could not rely on the two new substitutes as much as she had on Kim Yu-gŭn and Kim Hong-gŭn.⁵³ Despite being members of the same clan, some Andong Kim members had a profound distrust of their siblings and relatives.

In the spring of 1855, Dowager Queen Sunwŏn wrote a letter to congratulate the sons of her siblings and relatives, Kim Pyŏng-p'il, Kim Pyŏng-si, Kim Pyŏng-ju, Kim Pyŏng-gi, and Kim Pyŏng-dŏk, who all successfully passed the civil service examination.⁵⁴ However, she also indirectly expressed her concern about the constant rise of her family group members in Chosŏn politics, and especially emphasized their duties to serve impartially as government officials. As the Andong Kim clan took advantage of opportunities to wield political power, bringing more and more of the government under their control, not all of the members of the Andong Kim clan were happy about that development. Dowager Queen Sunwŏn expressed concern about her paternal line becoming openly powerful. The same concern can be found in several other letters.⁵⁵ In addition, she fundamentally opposed selecting a queen for King Ch'ŏlchong from among young daughters of the Andong Kim clan when other Andong Kim political activists

⁵³ Sunwŏn Wanghu [Queen Sunwŏn], *Sunwŏn wanghu ŭi Han'gul p'yŏnji* [순원왕후의 한글 편지 Queen Sunwŏn's Letters in Vernacular Korean], trans. Yi Sŭng-hŭi (Sŏul-si: P'urŭn Yŏksa, 2010), 120-129 & 243-247. Regent Queens of Chosŏn Korean, in particular Dowager Queen Sunwŏn, might need to be researched further in light of the political anthropologist Roger Keesing's argument. "In a patrilineal system both political direction and replacement of members are managed through men. A patrilineal corporation can lose control of its women when they marry out; they are not structurally crucial, because a corporation's men provide them and perpetuate the corporation." See Roger M. Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 63.

⁵⁴ Sunwŏn Wanghu [Queen Sunwŏn], *Sunwŏn wanghu ŭi Han'gul p'yŏnji*, 260-267.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 140-153 & 277-284.

made attempts to do just that, and she did not even hesitate to punish one of the sons from her family group.⁵⁶

Thus, because sometimes political homogeneity was not consistent with clan homogeneity, characterizing the sixty-three-year of *sedo* period as ‘the Era of the Andong Kim clan’ is somewhat problematic not only because it is unclear who were from the Andong Kim clan and who were not, but also because they often showed intra-clan conflicts or disagreements. Furthermore, a common explanation for why the P’ung’yang Cho clan could not succeed in surpassing the power of the Andong Kim clan and rise to the number one political group is discord within the Cho clan.

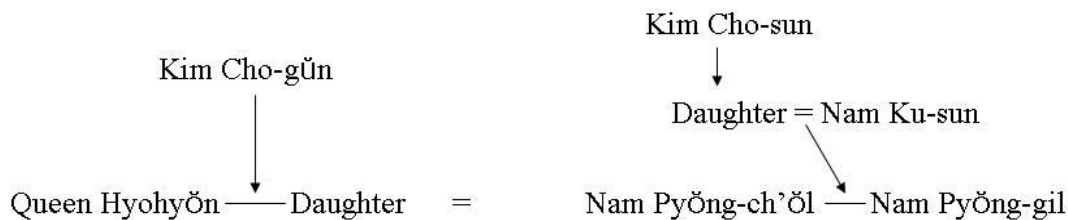


Figure 8 The Relationship between the Ŭiryŏng Nam and the Andong Kim Clans

In addition to the above-mentioned conflict between Kim Tal-sun and Kim Myŏng-sun, two members of the same clan, during the reign of King Sunjo two brothers from the Ŭiryŏng Nam provide another good example to challenge the notion of political homogeneity within the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 56-59 & 293-297.

same family group or within a group of people closely tied by marriage. Nam Pyŏng-ch'ŏl and Nam Pyŏng-gil, who were well-known for their expertise in mathematics and astronomy, enjoyed a close relationship with the Andong Kim clan. Their mother was from the Andong Kim clan, and Nam Pyŏng-ch'ŏl's wife was a daughter of Kim Cho-gŭn, who was the father of Queen Hyohyŏn. The two brothers were favoured by most members of the Andong Kim clan. However, Nam Pyŏng-ch'ŏl often criticized the politics dominated by his relatives on his wife and mother's side according to Pak Che-hyŏng's *Corrective Reflection of Early Modern Korea*. Because of their criticism of the rise of the Andong Kim clan, they were later checked and repressed by the Andong Kim clan in their old age.

Another interesting case was that two brothers, Yi Chi-yŏn and Yi Ki-yŏn, from the Chŏnju Yi clan had a close marital relationship with both the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans, though they worked more closely with the P'ung'yang Cho clan. However, each of the two brothers often individually and separately worked with either the Andong Kim or the P'ung'yang Cho clans, depending on their political interest. Moreover, the well-known calligrapher and epigraphist Kim Chŏng-hŭi, from the Kyŏngju Kim clan, was politically oppressed by the Andong Kim clan, though he was a relatively close relative of Kim Cho-sun, who was regarded as the founder of the political dominance of the Andong Kim clan.

Clearly, blood ties did not always guarantee a close political alliance. We can find several examples of intra-clan conflict that require disregarding the assumption of political unity within the same family group and instead direct us to focus on each individual's personal politics. We need to keep in mind that a clan was not a single political unit even though there were some

conflicts between renowned clans.⁵⁷ The next chapter will illustrate how political individuals, instead of political groups or clans, created political units in court politics.

⁵⁷ Yi Ki-myŏng, *Chosŏn sidae kwalli imyong kwa sangp'ije* [조선시대 관리 임명과 상피제 The Appointment of Officials and the Law of Avoidance in the Chosŏn Dynasty] (Sŏul-si: Paeksan Charyowŏn, 2007), 200-201.

Chapter 6: *Sedo* as Centralized Power

One of the conspicuous characteristics of the socio-political history of the latter half of the Chosŏn era was the rise of ‘powerful aristocratic family groups based on the capital city’ who were called *kyŏnghwa kŏjok* (京華巨族) or *kyŏnghwa sajok* (京華士族). This chapter will discuss how social and political power was geographically centralized and how distinguished family groups in the capital penetrated into the core of *sedo* politics through case studies of how the Andong Kim and the P’ung’yang Cho clans emerged and rose as capital-based powerful aristocratic family groups.

6.1 The Foundation of Geographical Centralization

According to Nam Chi-dae’s research on civil service examination graduates during the late century of the Chosŏn dynasty, the civil service examination was still performing a fundamentally important role in producing and reproducing the ruling class, despite some problems with corruption in the civil service examination system.⁵⁸ One noticeable point is that as the number of civil service examination graduates gradually increased and the average age of exam passers became lower, the capital-city-based graduates dominated the list of civil service examination graduates.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Nam Chi-dae, "Chung'ang chŏngch'i seryŏk ŭi hyŏngsŏng kujo [중앙정치세력의 형성구조 The Formation and Structure of Political Power in the Court]," in *Chosŏn chŏngch'isa, 1800-1863*, Vol. 1, 129-130.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 163-164.

Rank	Clan	Seoul-based graduates / Total # of civil service examination graduates	~ 1500	~ 1550	~ 1600	~ 1650	~ 1700	~ 1750	~ 1800	~ 1850	~ 1894	Seoul-based graduates %
1	Chŏnju Yi	508 / 847	1	11	59	61	76	75	89	53	83	60.0 %
2	Andong Kim	188 / 310	10	14	14	15	15	21	14	37	48	60.7%
3	Namyang Hong	187 / 322	10	12	23	21	15	39	18	22	27	58.1%
4	P'ap'yŏng Yun	181 / 339	15	16	25	22	19	33	9	15	27	53.4%
5	Yŏnan Yi	167 / 242	3	5	6	18	26	19	40	19	31	69.0%
6	Yŏhŭng Min	131 / 233	13	10	6	11	19	16	13	7	36	56.2%
7	Ch'ŏngsong Sim	128 / 188	0	4	6	13	25	37	7	16	20	68.0%
8	P'ung'yang Cho	123 / 181	5	3	9	5	7	17	10	30	37	68.0%
9	Kwangsan Kim	122 / 257	16	19	8	7	12	24	4	6	26	47.5%
10	Tongnae Chŏng	120 / 192	3	10	10	14	8	22	12	18	23	62.5%

Table 4 Top Ten Clans in Terms of the Highest Number of Seoul-based Highest-level Civil Service Examination Graduates⁶⁰

According to Yi Wŏn-myŏng, when he surveyed the total number of graduates of the highest level civil service examination over the course of the Chosŏn dynasty, he found that of the total of 11,774 graduates, 5,393 were based in the capital city. In other words, 45.9% of the civil service examination graduates were from the capital city.⁶¹ Moreover, the percentage of the capital-city-based graduates in each of the top ten clans is higher than the total average of Seoul-based civil service examination graduates. In addition, as seen in Table 4, though the number of civil service examination graduates increased as time passed, this table also reveals that none of those top clans produced more examination graduates in every fifty-year period than it had in the previous fifty-year period.

⁶⁰ Yi Wŏn-myŏng, *Chosŏn sidae munkwa kŭpcheja yŏn'gu*, 194.

⁶¹ Ibid., 188.

Clan	Seoul-based graduates / Total # of civil service examination graduates	~ 1500	~ 1550	~ 1600	~ 1650	~ 1700	~ 1750	~ 1800	~ 1850	~ 1894	Seoul-based Graduates %
Andong Kwŏn	114 / 358	8	11	14	13	26	21	3	15	3	31.8%

Table 5 The Number of Seoul-based Civil Service Examination Graduates from the Andong Kwŏn Clan⁶²

Here is a different example that supports the thesis of the growing domination of the capital in the civil service examination. The Andong Kwŏn clan is well known for their long history in the region of Andong, located in the southeastern province of Korea. The major members of the Andong Kwŏn clan have resided, and were still living, in and around the region of Andong for hundreds of years. As John Duncan points out, this clan was one of the most distinguished family groups in early Chosŏn, and the number of its civil service examination graduates increased during the first half of the Chosŏn dynasty.⁶³ However, as the civil service examination became more capital-based, the Andong Kwŏn clan produced fewer and fewer civil service examination graduates during the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty.

It is hard to draw a conclusion as to why such geographical centralization of the civil service examination took place in the late Chosŏn period. Probably, on the one hand, it naturally resulted from the centralization of economic, academic, and political activities in the entire country. On the other hand, another possible answer could be drawn through looking at how the educated elite in the local regions responded to the politics dominated by royal in-laws or powerful aristocratic family groups in the capital city.

⁶² Ibid., 194

⁶³ Duncan, *The Origins of the Choson Dynasty*, 122-124. Ko Sŏk-gyu further stated that the main social problem in rural areas of the late Chosŏn period was the appointment of descendants of Seoul-based distinguished aristocratic bureaucrats to local government positions and the resulting fall of local political groups. Ko Sŏk-kyu, *19-segi Chosŏn ūi hyangch'on sahoe yŏn'gu: Chibae wa chŏhang ūi kujo*, 145.

Sallim (산림 山林) could give another answer to the decline of renowned local family groups in terms of court politics. Highly respected Confucian scholars who did not write a highest-level civil service examination and lived and taught in rural areas were called *sallim* (산림 山林) in the late Chosŏn period.⁶⁴ They were often brought to the court and gave lectures to the king and officials. Some of them were even given a government post. By serving in the government, *sallim* from the rural regions could influence court politics. However, as powerful aristocratic family groups mainly resided in the capital city and dominated the politics there, they did not consider *sallim* as their political partners. At the same time, some Confucian scholars in the rural areas did not much care about politics in the capital, tending instead to focus on their village or town. Sometimes, some other local Confucian scholars bought the royal in-law's patronage with flattery. Ultimately, *sallim* in the local regions gradually lost their social position and political function as an educated group in the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Consequently, local intellectuals gradually became alienated from the capital region, as well as central government politics.

⁶⁴ In Korean historiography, *sallim* is different from *sarim*. According to Seoul National University Historian O Su-Ch'ang, *sallim* were a group of Confucian literati who did not write the highest-level civil service examination and were given certain government posts for them by the king. For instance, Song Si-yŏl, one of the most notable representatives of *sallim*, did not write the highest-level civil service examination, but he had been favoured by several Chosŏn kings in the court. However, the actual political distance between the politics of *sallim* in the rural areas and the court politics in the central region as well as the level of the political participation and interest of *sallim* in the central politics are still questionable.

⁶⁵ U In-su, *Chosŏn hugi sallim seryŏk yŏn'gu* [조선후기 산림 세력 연구 A Study of the Confucian Literati Group in the Late Chosŏn Period] (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏls: Ilchogak, 1999), 206-216.; O Su-ch'ang, "Kwŏnllŏk chiptan kwa chŏngguk unyŏng [권력집단과 정국 운영 Politically Powerful Groups and the Management of Politics]," in *Chosŏn chŏngch'isa, 1800-1863*, Vol. 2, 596.

6.2 Academic Relationships and Intermarriage among the Notable Family Groups in the Capital Region

In political anthropology, marriages can represent the formation of political alliances. In particular, exogamy and alliances might contribute to reducing conflicts, though they cannot guarantee total peace. Moreover, alliances established by marriage often help lay the groundwork for strategies based on extended kinship that might be useful for gaining a political advantage.⁶⁶

Using some available genealogy records of the royal families and royal in-law group members, it is possible to make a preliminary effort to delineate the relationship between nepotism and Chosŏn politics. By drawing some family trees of the socio-politically distinguished family groups from the Andong Kim and P'ung'yang Cho clans which relate them to other politically powerful clans in the capital region, as well as by looking at their marital ties with Chosŏn kings, it can be shown that, during the *sedo* period, there were political coalitions among the politically or bureaucratically distinguished family groups in the capital region based on intermarriage, school ties, regional ties, and civil service examination graduation classes.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Donald V. Kurtz, *Political Anthropology: Power and Paradigms* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001), 88-89. Kwŏn Ki-sŏk has done extensive research on intermarriages between political powerful families in the 1850s and 1860s in Korea. See Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, "19-segi sedo chŏngch'i seryŏk ūi hyŏngsŏng paegyŏng (Sang): Chosŏn hugi chipkwŏn seryŏk ūi t'onghon kwan'gyemang punsŏgŭl chungsim ūro [19세기 세도정치 세력의 형성 배경 (상): 조선 후기 집권세력의 통혼관계망 분석을 중심으로 The Background of the Establishment in Nineteenth-Century Sedo Politics (1): Focus on Intermarriage between Leading Officials in Late Chosŏn]," *Chindan Hakbo* [진단학보] 90 (2000): 123-157.; Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, "19-segi sedo chŏngch'i seryŏk ūi hyŏngsŏng paegyŏng (Ha): Chosŏn hugi chipkwŏn seryŏk ūi t'onghon kwan'gyemang punsŏgŭl chungsim ūro [19세기 세도정치 세력의 형성 배경 (하): 조선 후기 집권세력의 통혼관계망 분석을 중심으로 The Background of the Establishment in Nineteenth-Century Sedo Politics (2): Focus on Intermarriage between Leading Officials in the Late Chosŏn]," *Chindan Hakbo* [진단학보] 91 (2000): 163-184.

⁶⁷ Pak Kwang-yong, "Chŏngch'i unyŏngron [정치운영론 A Theory of Political Administration]," in *Chosŏn chŏngch'isa, 1800-1863*, Vol. 2, 693.; 19-segi Chŏngch'isa Yŏn'guban [19th-Century Political History Research Group], Han'guk Yŏksa Yŏn'guhoe [Association for Korean History], "Kyŏllon: 19-segi chŏnb'an chŏngch'isa ūi naeyong kwa sŏnggyŏk [결론: 19세기 전반 정치사의 내용과 성격 The Substance and Characteristics of Political History in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century]," in *Chosŏn chŏngch'isa, 1800-1863*, Vol. 2, 752.

[illegible]

Figure 9 A Sample Page from the Genealogy Records of Chosŏn Queens' Relatives (*Tonnyŏng poch'ŏp wanghu p'yŏn* 敦寧譜牒 王后篇)

After carefully examining the marriage history of the royal house of Chosŏn, it can be noted that the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans had a very close relationship through marriage. The single page reproduced in Figure 9 indicates that a daughter of Kim Yu-gŭn from the Andong Kim clan married Cho Pyŏng-gi from the P'ung'yang Cho. Both men were leading members of their respective clans when it came to clan politics within the court. Drawing on several pages of genealogy records, other similar marital relationships can be found, as shown in Figure 10. Brothers Cho Man-yŏng and Cho In-yŏng were the leading aristocratic officials from

the P'ung'yang Cho clan. Notably, again, Cho Man-yŏng was the father of King Hŏnjong's mother, Queen Sinjŏng. Even Cho In-yŏng, the father of Cho Pyŏng-gi, married a daughter of Kim Se-sun from the Andong Kim clan. Kim Se-sun was Kim Cho-sun's very distant cousin.

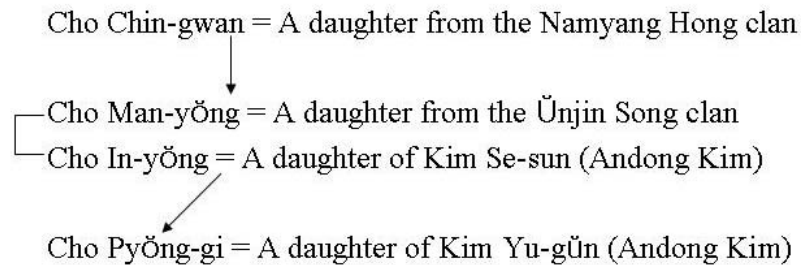


Figure 10 Genealogy of the P'ung'yang Cho and their Marriages⁶⁸

The close relationship between the P'ung'yang Cho and the Andong Kim clans can be confirmed further in Figure 11. Kim Cho-sun and Cho Man-yŏng, who were the leaders of their respective clans, shared a common bloodline. Cho Man-yŏng married a direct patrilineal descedant daughter of Song Pyŏng-wŏn, who was a grandson of the famous Confucian scholar and official Song Chun-gil (b. 1606-1672). Kim Cho-sun's great-grandfather, Kim Che-gyŏm, was married to a daughter of the same Song Pyŏng-wŏn.

⁶⁸ This family tree was drawn based on the Genealogy Records of Chosŏn Queens' Relatives, and Chi Tu-hwan, *Sunjo taewang kwa ch'ininchŏk* [순조 대왕과 친인척 King Sunjo and his Relatives] (Sŏul-si: Yŏksa Munhwa, 2009).

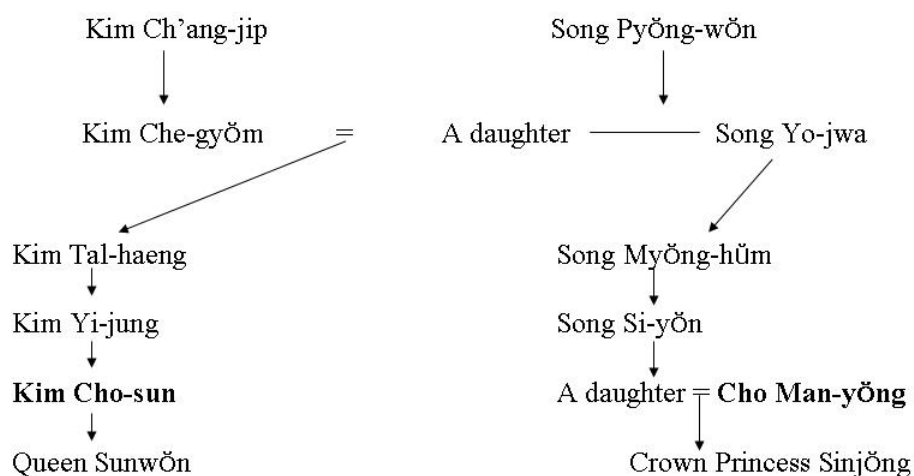


Figure 11 The Blood Relationship between Kim Cho-sun and Cho Man-yŏng⁶⁹

As these graphic depictions of genealogy records show, the two most representative family groups in the first half of the nineteenth century had very close ties through marriage. Their close marital ties should be taken into consideration by historians who posit constant conflicts and the rivalry between the two family groups. Their marital ties could have played a significant role as a buffer zone between the two clans. The two worked together more closely than any other family group, especially during the reign period of King Sunjo. Sometimes, there were some conflicts between them, but it was more individual conflicts based on each individual's personal politics.

In addition to the close marital relationship, the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans also shared the same long academic history. The Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans could all gain fame because of their highly respected tradition of contributions to

⁶⁹ This family tree was drawn based on the Genealogy Records of Chosŏn Queens' Relatives, and Chi Tu-hwan, *Sunjo taewang kwa ch'ininchŏk* [순조 대왕과 친인척 King Sunjo and his Relatives] (Sŏul-si: Yŏksa Munhwa, 2009).

Confucian studies and performance. Cho Mun-myŏng was the father-in-law of Crown Prince Hyojang and was born into the P'ung'yang Cho clan. He studied under Kim Ch'ang-hyŏp from the Andong Kim clan and married a daughter of Kim Ch'ang-ŏp, who was a bother of Kim Ch'ang-hyŏp. Cho Sang-gyŏng, the father of Cho Ŏm, was also a student of Kim Ch'ang-hyŏp. As mentioned earlier, one of the daughters from the offspring of Song Chun-gil, who was Song Si-yŏl's political and academic partner, married Cho Man-yŏng.

One of the strategic and effective ways to increase and maintain the social status of a clan was through intermarriage with other powerful clans. When looking at genealogy records, especially in the late nineteenth century, it seemed like marriages were considered and made based on several conditions. The school line, which refers to with which Confucian scholar students studied before becoming a government official, and the academic reputation of the family of the future spouse, in addition to what political faction they belonged to, were considered important factors in selecting a marriage partner. However, this does not mean that they shared the same political goals, or at even that there was no inner conflict within the same clan. More significantly, the complex selection criteria might have contributed to the accumulation and centralization of social and political privileges by notable families in the capital region.

6.3 Military Directors

Throughout most of the Chosŏn dynasty, civil and military officials formed separate groups within the ruling elite. They were recruited on the basis of different exams and received

their official appointments through different channels. However, interestingly, some leading members of powerful royal in-law family groups who were civil officials took high military positions and served in such posts for certain periods of time while holding high civilian positions concurrently. Cho Man-yŏng, who was the father of Queen Sinjŏng, served in high military positions for seventeen years, though he was originally a civil official. Kim Cho-sun (the father-in-law of King Sunjo) and Hong Chae-ryong (the father-in-law of King Hŏnjong) held military positions for a while, as did many relatives of theirs. Then, what was their intention for doing so? They must have calculated that would give them some political advantage. Some contemporary popular historians have pointed out that the high military positions occupied by a couple of royal in-laws are another characteristic of politics in nineteenth century Chosŏn Korea. This section tries to test such popular assumption.

Name	Clan	Period of Service		Military Agency	Relationship
Kim Cho-sun	Andong Kim	7 years	3 months	CNR, RGG, MTC, CG, RGC	The father-in-law of King Sunjo
Pak Chun-wŏn	Pannam Pak	6	7	RGC, RGG, CG	The father of King Sunjo's biological mother
Kim No-ch'ung	Kyŏngju Kim		5	CNR	A nephew of Dowager Queen Sunwŏn
Kim Sa-mok	Kyŏngju Kim	1	4	CNR	
Pak Chong-gyŏng	Pannam Pak	4	4	CNR, MTC, RGC	A son of Pak Chun-wŏn
Kim Ki-hu	Ch'ŏngp'ung Kim	11	1	CNR, CG	
Cho Man-yŏng	P'ung'yang Cho	17		CG, RGC, MTC	The father of King Hŏnjong's mother
Pak Chu-su	Pannam Pak	4	8	CNR	A grandson of Pak Chun-wŏn
Cho Pyŏng-gi	P'ung'yang Cho	-	-	CNR	A son of Cho Man-yŏng
Kim Yu-gŭn	Andong Kim	3	2	RGC, MTC	A son of Kim Cho-sun
Kim Cho-gŭn	Andong Kim	5	9	CNR, RGC	The father-in-law of King Hŏnjong
Cho Pyŏng-gu	P'ung'yang Cho	2	9	CG, CNR, MTC	A son of Cho Man-yŏng
Hong Chae-ryong	Namyang Hong	7	10	CG, CNR, MTC, RGC	A father of King Hŏnjong's second queen
Sŏ Hŭi-sun	Taegu (or Talsŏng) Sŏ	2		CNR	A nephew of Prime Minister Sŏ Yong-bo
Kim Chwa-gŭn	Andong Kim	2		CNR, CG, MTC	A son of Kim Cho-sun
Kim Mun-gŭn	Andong Kim	5	11	CG, CNR, MTC	The father-in-law of King Ch'ŏlchong
Kim Pyŏng-gi	Andong Kim	5	8	CNR, CG, MTC, RGC	An adopted son of Kim Chwa-gŭn
Hong Chae-gil	Namyang Hong		4	CNR	A relative of Hong Chae-ryong
Kim Pyŏng-guk	Andong Kim	5	5	RGC, MTC	A nephew of Kim Mun-gŭn

CNR: Command of the Northern Approaches (Ch'ongyungch'ŏng)

RGG: Royal Guards Garrison in Suwŏn (Chang'yongyŏng)

MTC: Military Training Command (Hullyŏn togam)

CG: Capital Garrison (Kŭmwiŏng)

RGC : Royal Guards Command (Ŏyŏngch'ŏng)

Table 6 List of Non-military Officials who Served as the Head of a Military Agency⁷⁰

⁷⁰ 19-segi Chŏngch'isa Yŏn'guban [19th-Century Political History Research Group], Han'guk Yŏksa Yŏn'guhoe [Association for Korean History], *Chosŏn chŏngch'isa, 1800-1863*, Vol. 2, Vol 2, 774. Reorganized from Index 22.

All of the civil officials holding military positions could avoid attracting too much attention because they were holding a relatively low position compared to their privileged political and social status, although they could have held a higher civil position. More possibly and realistically, they could wield military power. Military power was often regarded as essential for establishing and maintaining a political regime.

More significantly, seats on the Border Defense Council (*pibyŏnsa* 備邊司), which was the highest-level decision making government agency, were allocated to the heads of some military agencies. In other words, without even holding a high-ranking civil position, they could exercise political influence on important affairs at court while avoiding the application of the Law of Avoidance (*sangp'ije* 相避制). This specific law was designed to prohibit nepotism, and was still effective to a certain degree.⁷¹ In the Chosŏn dynasty, officials who were brothers or cousins were not allowed to work together in the same rural region or in the same government agencies in the capital.⁷²

Consequently, they could further avoid any overlap with aristocratic officials from the same family background in the process of appointment and promotion within the court. At the same time, the Law of Avoidance was not applied to the positions in the Border Defense Council.⁷³ As a result, the pairings of Kim Cho-sun and Kim Yu-gŭn, Pak Chun-wŏn and Pak Chong-gyŏng, Cho Man-yŏng and Cho Pyŏng-hyŏn, and Yi Ki-yŏn and Yi Chi-yŏn could hold seats in the Border Defense Council at the same time. Moreover, during the reign of King Ch'ŏlchong, the king's father-in-law, Kim Mun-gŭn, and his siblings and relatives (such as Kim

According to Ha Chŏng-sik, Sŏ Hŭi-sun (in Table 6) was favoured and trusted by the Andong Kim clan for dealing with military and diplomatic affairs as one of the leading members from the Taegu (or Talsŏng) Sŏ clan.

⁷¹ Yi Ki-myŏng, *Chosŏn sidae kwalli imyong kwa sangp'ije*, 53-62.

⁷² In the next section, the specific case of Nam Pyŏng-chŏl will be mentioned as a source for the Law of Avoidance.

⁷³ O Chong-nok, "Pibyŏnsa ŭi chŏngch'ijŏk kinŭng [비변사의 정치적 기능 The Political Function of the Border Defense Council]," in *Chosŏn chŏngch'isa, 1800-1863*, Vol. 2, 547-548.

Pyŏng-p'il, Kim Su-gŭn, Kim Pyŏng-hak, Kim Pyŏng-guk, Kim Pyŏng-un, Kim Yŏng-gŭn, Kim Kyo-gŭn, Kim Pyŏng-jo, Kim Pyŏng-kyo, Kim Chwa-gŭn, and Kim Hŭng-gŭn) could all participate in the affairs discussed and dealt with in the highest-level decision making agency, thanks to their military positions.⁷⁴ Therefore, holding military positions was a great strategy for the leading members of each distinguished royal in-law group to maintain and expand the range of their political influence at court.

These cases were, however, considered common practice though some historians have paid special attention to this tradition of appointment. The close relatives or father-in-laws of each king were often given full-time or concurrent military positions in the capital region throughout the Chosŏn dynasty even though they were civil officials. That was because they were among the officials the king could trust the most. Though holding the top military positions was obviously an important political strategy for the royal in-laws, it was not particularly unusual that throughout the period between 1800 and 1863, some civilian officials were favoured and trusted by the monarch based on their special ties with the kings and appointed as heads of military agencies in the capital regions.

6.4 Nomination for Government Posts

The Border Defense Council, as the highest-level policy making agency in the latter half of the Chosŏn era, played an important role in dealing with certain types of personnel affairs.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid., 547-548

⁷⁵ Yi Chae-ch'ŏl, *Chosŏn hugi pibyŏnſa yŏn'gu* [조선후기 비변사 연구 A Study of the Border Defense Council in the Late Chosŏn Era] (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Chimmundang, 2001), 143-144.

The nomination process was called *ũich'õn* (議薦). The nomination committee recommended three candidates to the king, who usually selected one of those three.

Clan	Number of Times Attending Meetings of the Nomination Committee	Major Figures (Number of Times in Attendance)
Andong Kim	339	Kim Cho-sun (34), Kim Yõng-sun (33), Kim Hũng-gũn (33)
P'ung'yang Cho	218	Cho Man-yõng (50), Cho In-yõng (39), Cho Pyõng-hyõn (39)
Chõnju Yi	180	Yi Chi-yõn (34), Yi Sõ-gu (30)
Namyang Hong	106	Hong Chong-yõng (43), Hong Ki-byõn (25)
Pannam Pak	84	Pak Chong-hun (43), Pak Chong-gyõng (15)
Yõnan Yi	74	Yi Chon-su (31), Yi Man-su (17)
Taegu (or Talsõng) Sõ	64	Sõ Nũng-bo (20), Sõ Hũi-sun (19)
Yõnan Kim	52	Kim Wi (32), Kim Ro (20)
Kyõngju Yi	52	Yi Kye-jo (37)
Hansan Yi	39	Yi Kyõng-jae (22)

Table 7 Top Ten Clans in the Nomination Committee and Major Figures⁷⁶

According to O Chong-nok, between 1800 and 1863, during the reign periods of three Chosõn kings, a few politically distinguished family groups monopolized personnel affairs. Especially, Kim Cho-sun, Kim Yõng-sun, and Kim Hũng-gũn, from the Andong Kim clan, and Cho Man-yõng, Cho In-yõng, and Cho Pyõng-hyõn, from the P'ung'yang Cho clan, actively participated in the nomination process. However, it does not seem that they truly monopolized personnel affairs. First, the participants, depending on the individual and varying according to the clan, might not have the same candidates in mind. In addition, Yi Chon-su, Kim Wi, Kim Ro, Yi Kye-jo, Yi Kyõng-jae, Sõ Nũng-bo, and many other bureaucratic officials participated in the

⁷⁶ O Chong-nok, *Pibyõnsa ũi chõngch'ijõk kinũng* [비변사의 정치적 기능 The Political Function of the Border Defense Council], 564.

nomination process as often as the Kim and Cho family members did. Still, it is uncertain how much the other officials cooperated with the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans.

Rank	Clan	Number of Officials
1	Andong Kim	56
2	Taegu (or Talsǒng) Sǒ	35
3	P'ung'yang Cho	34
4	Pannam Pak	30
5	Yǒnan Yi	27
6	Namyang Hong	21
7	P'ungsan Hong	20
8	Tongnae Chǒng	17
9	Pyǒngsan Sin	15
9	Hansan Yi	15

Table 8 Top Ten Clans in Terms of Highest Number of Border Defense Council members higher than Senior Third Rank⁷⁷

The Border Defense Council members who were higher than senior third rank were called *pibyǒnsa tangsang* (備邊司 堂上). Selected high-ranking officials in the Border Defense Council were in charge of the process by which major decisions were made regarding national revenue, defense, and diplomacy. The data in tables 7 and 8 at first glance suggest that aristocratic officials from a few politically distinguished groups, especially the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans, might have led the decision-making process in the Border Defense Council because they held a numerical advantage. However, that is not necessarily the case.

⁷⁷ 19-segi Chǒngch'isa Yǒn'guban [19th-Century Political History Research Group], in *Chosǒn chǒngch'isa: 1800-1863*, 324. Reorganized from Index 6. The original statistical table was also cited by Yi I-hwa. Yi I-hwa, *Munbǒl chǒnch'i ka nararŭl hŭndŭlda*, 100.

First of all, there were many families who supplied high-ranking bureaucrats, such as Taegu (or Talsŏng) Sŏ, Yŏnan Yi, Tongnae Chŏng, Pyŏngsan Sin, and Hansan Yi, besides the two most distinguished clans of aristocratic officials closely tied with the royal families. The Yŏnan Yi and the Talsŏng Sŏ clans were often characterized as families of bureaucrats.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the names of the individuals involved in this committee indicate that many officials from such bureaucratic families participated in the nomination process, as many as major figures from royal in-law family groups. The Andong Kim and P'ung'yang Cho officials might have had to get the consent or meet with the other officials' approbation.

Second, the term 'the exchange of two government officials' (*sanghwan* 相換) is often found in the Annals. That means the Law of Avoidance (*sangp'ije* 相避制) was still effective to a certain degree.⁷⁹ They could not always nominate the officials they wanted because of the system prohibiting nepotism within the government. For instance, according to the Annals, because of the Law of Avoidance, proposed appointments for Nam Pyŏng-ch'ŏl, whose mother and wife were from the Andong Kim clan, and who was favoured by the Andong Kim families, were often withdrawn and his name was replaced by that of another official when he was proposed for appointment to an important government position outside the capital.⁸⁰ Moreover, very interestingly or ironically during the reign of King Kojong, Kim Pyŏng-hak, one of the leading officials from the Andong Kim clan, was even keen not to erode the Law of Avoidance.⁸¹

Third, the nomination process was used mostly to nominate officials for government posts outside the capital. Government posts nominated through *ŭich'ŏn* (議薦) in the Border

⁷⁸ Hong Sun-min, *Chŏngch'i chiptan ŭi sŏnggŏk* [정치집단의 성격 The Characteristics of Political Groups], 246-247.

⁷⁹ Yi Ki-myŏng, *Chosŏn sidae kwalli imyong kwa sangp'ije*, 300-306.

⁸⁰ *Ch'ŏlchong sillok*, Ch'ŏlchong 4 (1853) 3. 11 (*ŭlmyo*)

⁸¹ *Kojong sillok*, Kojong 2 (1865) 9. 1 (*kyehae*)

Defense Council were largely limited to provinces and cities that had important military, trade, or diplomatic functions, though powerful council members often used their influence to determine the appointments to important government positions within the palace. For instance, provincial governors, magistrates, military commanders in the northern provinces, the Commander-in-Chief of the Naval Force of the South, magistrates of militarily strategic cities near the capital and of border areas, such as Kwanghwa, Kaesŏng, Suwŏn, and Kwangju or Ŭiju, Tongnae, Cheju, Kanggye, and Hoeryŏng, were positions for which the council members could nominate a competent person.⁸² The available positions were not the government posts within the court in the capital city that most officials always dreamed of. However, this could also mean that a few politically privileged groups could influence military, trade, and diplomatic performance in Chosŏn by exerting a lot of influence over the nomination process.

Fourth, as seen in Table 8, the percentage of the Border Defense Council members who were higher than senior third rank (*pibyŏnsa tangsang* 備邊司 堂上) from the top six clans was not that high, though some historians argue that most positions in the Border Defense Council were occupied by a few privileged clans.⁸³ During the first sixty-three years of the nineteenth century, the Andong Kim clan had fifty-six *pibyŏnsa tangsang* posts. This was 8.3% out of a total of 675 *pibyŏnsa tangsang* during that time. The Taegu Sŏ clan produced thirty-five *pibyŏnsa tangsang*, which meant 5.2% of all *pibyŏnsa tangsang*. Including 5.0% from the P'ung'yang Cho clan, 4.0% from the Yŏnan Yi clan, 3.0% from the Nam'yang Hong clan, and 4.4% from the Pannam Pak clan, the *pibyŏnsa tangsang* from the top six clans occupied only slightly less than 30% of the total number of *pibyŏnsa tangsang* between 1800 and 1863.⁸⁴

⁸² O Chong-nok, *Pibyŏnsa ŭi chŏngch'ijŏk kinŭng*, 553-558.

⁸³ Pan Yun-hong, *Chosŏn sidae pibyŏnsa yŏn'gu* [조선시대 비변사 연구 A Study of the Border Defense Council in the Chosŏn Dynasty] (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Kyŏngin Munhwasa, 2003), 106-108.

⁸⁴ Hong Sun-min, *Chŏngch'i chiptan ŭi sŏnggŏk*, 241.

Though a few politically powerful groups in the Border Defense Council dominated the selection process of officials for important positions outside the capital city, this did not necessarily mean that they could control almost all of the national affairs and ignore the king's authority or the basic structure of Chosŏn bureaucracy. They often had to seek written approval from others as part of the selection process.

6.5 Constantly Offering Respectful Titles to the King

In addition to the constant production and reproduction of civil service examination graduates, the establishment of ties through marriage, and participation in the nomination committee, what else could the powerful royal in-law groups do to maintain and increase their political authority? In the *Annals*, their use of symbolic action to gain the trust of the king can be found.

The original temple title of King Sunjo (純祖) was King Sunjong (純宗). His posthumous title was changed during the reign of King Ch'ŏlchong following a request by officials closely tied to the Andong Kim clan. There were only a few cases of changes in the temple names of kings over the course of the Chosŏn dynasty. All of the name changes were from -jong (-宗) to -jo (-祖), like from Sunjong to Sunjo. According to the *Annals*, "*kongjo tŏkjong*" (功祖德宗) was used to justify the reason for the name change. "*kongjo tŏkjong*" (功祖德宗), originally from the Book of Rites, meant that the kings who made significant contributions to the country would be given names with -jo (-祖) and the kings who displayed great virtue would be given names with -jong (-宗) after their deaths.

Although some people argue that there was no clear distinction between -jo (-祖) and -jong (-宗), the former seemed to be often regarded as superior to the latter. There were only seven Chosŏn kings called -jo (-祖), including the founder of the Chosŏn dynasty, King T'aejo (太祖). Some of them had had the -jong (-宗) in their name replaced with -jo (-祖). This process was called *ch'usang* (追上). *Sang* (上) here had a meaning of raising something. Thus, replacing -jong (-宗) with -jo (-祖) in a king's posthumous name symbolically increased the level or quality of his recorded contributions to the country. More significantly, there was not a single case of a name change from -jo (-祖) to -jong (-宗).

By giving respectful titles to previous kings, subjects could ostensibly enhance the dignity of the Chosŏn kings and royal family. On the other hand, those who had special ties with the royal family, such as the Andong Kim clan, could be 'simultaneously' further privileged symbolically and politically by increasing the symbolic status of their royal relatives.⁸⁵ Therefore, there was quite obviously a lot of synergy between the royal house and the Andong Kim clan through the renaming process. Furthermore, during the reign periods from King Sunjo to King Ch'ŏlchong, the politically influential aristocratic officials constantly added respectful titles to not only the previous and current kings but also queens. Offering respectful titles to the royal family members might be seen as a form of political flattery. However, that was the nature of politics, which was always full of schemes and plots.

To sum up the present chapter, it seems more feasible to say that *sedo* politics emerged and was maintained as the politically and bureaucratically distinguished family groups in the

⁸⁵ Ha Chŏng-sik, *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏn'guk kwa Chosŏn wangjo* [태평천국과 조선 왕조 The Taiping Movement and the Chosŏn Dynasty] (P'aju-si, Kyŏnggi-do: Chisik Sanŏpsa, 2008), 182-186. In addition, to raise the dignity of royal family members, royal tombs were constantly reconstructed and re-decorated at the request of powerful aristocratic officials.

capital rose, especially through their cooperation with each other, including the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans. For instance, the two major clans became more privileged in late Chosŏn through intermarriage, school alumni connections (whom Confucian students studied under was often related to the formation of political and academic identity), regional ties, possession of military authority, and shared political interests for generations, while working closely with other capital-based powerful aristocratic family groups (*kyŏnghwa kŏjok* 京華巨族). In this sense, *sedo* rightly signifies 'collusive oligopolistic politics' among the powerful aristocratic officials in the capital region instead of political monopolization by the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans. In other words, it should be recognized that there were more than just two powerful families involved.

Chapter 7: The Influence of *Sedo* Politics in the Later Half of the Nineteen Century

After King Ch'ölchong died without an heir, the second son of the Prince Hŭngsŏn was enthroned and became King Kojong. While acting as regent during the first decade of King Kojong's reign, the Great Regent Prince Hŭngsŏn, usually known as Taewŏn'gun, tried to strengthen the dignity and power of the royal house. He started to recruit and promote people from the political factions that had been kept away from central government posts for a while in order to lift the throne above factional politics, as well as to weaken the power of the Andong Kim clan, which had increased remarkably. Consequently, the year of 1863 has often been regarded as the end of the heyday of the Andong Kim clan.

This chapter, however, argues that the last couple of decades in the nineteenth century were not that distinct from the previous decades in the same century. By examining the Andong Kim descendants as well as family backgrounds of other participants in a political event that had a huge impact on Chosŏn politics in the late nineteenth century, this chapter will try to substantiate this idea.

7.1 The Year of 1863, the End of the Andong Kim Clan?

Although the Taewŏn'gun revived the Faction Equalization Policy, many members from the Andong Kim clan managed to hold onto important government positions. Some of them had a good relationship with the regent. In other words, the Andong Kim clan was still one of the

political groups leading court politics during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Many of them played a significant role in the transition period between the Kanhwa Treaty of 1876 and the beginning of Japanese colonization in the early twentieth century. Even the P'ung'yang Cho clan produced more first-ranked officials, including the prime minister during the reign of King Kojong (r. 1863-1897), than in any previous reign period.

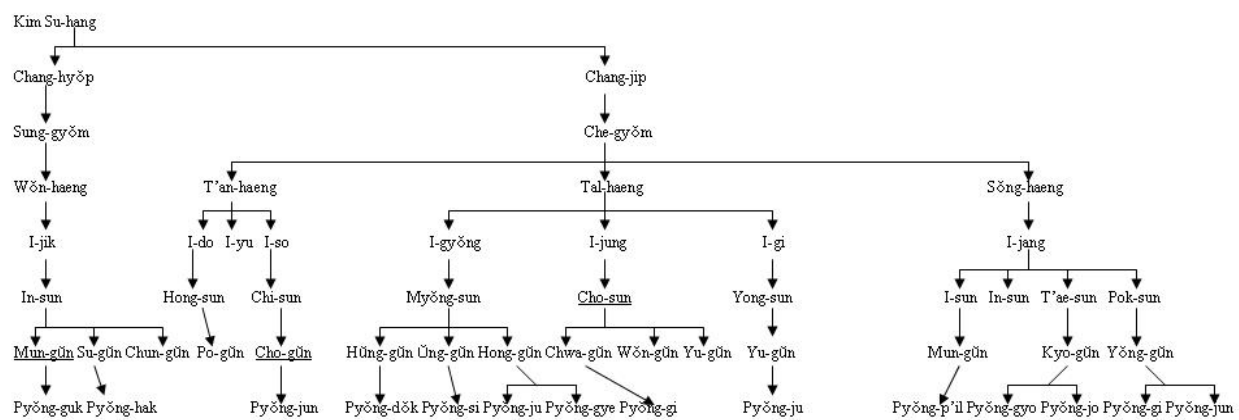


Figure 12 The Genealogy of the Andong Kim Clan in Late Chosŏn⁸⁶

After Kim Cho-sun put the Andong Kim clan at the top of political hierarchy in the early nineteenth century, two of his sons, Kim Chwa-gŭn and Kim Yu-gŭn, maintained the high political profile their father had enjoyed, and had some significant influence on court politics. Kim Mun-gŭn, as the father-in-law of King Ch'ŏljong, was also one of the major political figures in the 1850s. In the next generation, Kim Pyŏng-hak served as a prime minister during the reign period of King Kojong, and strongly opposed the Kwanghwa Treaty of 1876 between

⁸⁶ This family tree is reorganized based on genealogy records of Chosŏn Queens' relatives and Kim Pyŏng-gi, *Chosŏn myŏngga Andong Kim ssi*, 98-99.

Chosŏn Korea and Japan. Assisting the Taewŏn'gun, he also argued against making peace or having diplomatic relations with foreign forces.

Kim Pyŏng-guk maintained a good relationship with Taewŏngun, unlike other Andong Kim family members. He also served as a prime minister between the 1870s and 1880s and contributed to turning Korea's foreign policies in a new direction, playing a significant role in establishing diplomatic ties with foreign countries, unlike Kim Pyŏng-hak.

During the King Kojong period, Kim Pyŏng-dŏk successfully filled various important government posts, including one at the Ministry of Personnel. Kim Pyŏng-si, who also served as prime minister for a while, was a strong royalist bureaucrat. He was right in the centre of a maelstrom of sudden changes in late nineteenth-century international politics. In addition, Kim Pyŏng-ju, Kim Pyŏng-gi, and Kim Pyŏng-gyo were all appointed to important government posts in the late nineteenth century.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ See Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. He mentions many important historical figures from the Andong Kim clan throughout his book.

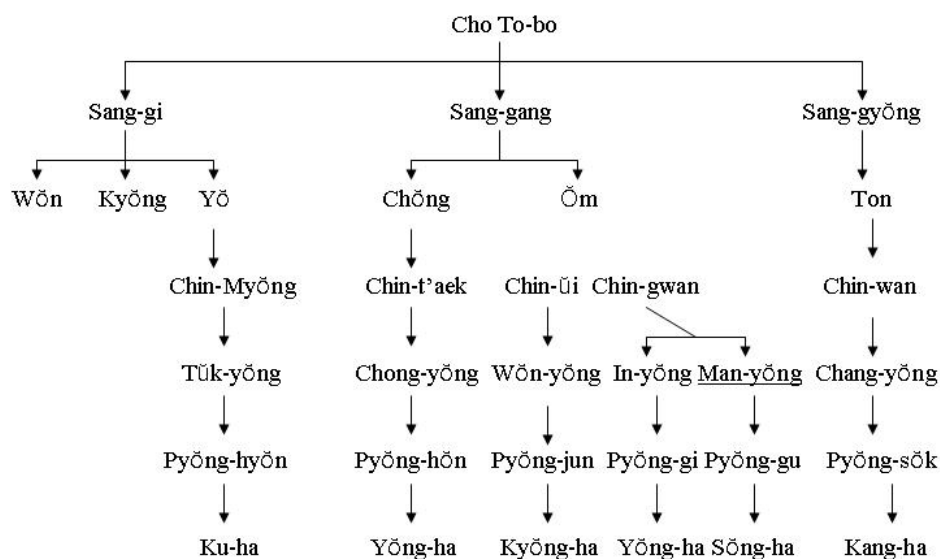


Figure 13 The Genealogy of the P'ung'yang Cho Clan in Late Chosŏn⁸⁸

After the generation of Cho Man-yŏng and Cho In-yŏng, and the next generation, that of Cho Pyŏng-gu, Cho Pyŏng-hyŏn, and Cho Pyŏng-gi, Cho Ku-ha was assigned to important government positions during the reign of King Kojong. Cho Yŏng-ha established and maintained a good relationship with the Yŏhŭng Min clan, which had produced Queen Myŏngsŏng, the primary queen of King Kojong. Until he was killed in the Kapsin Coup of 1884, he held various important government posts, including establishing diplomatic ties with Germany and the United Kingdom. Cho Kyŏng-ha and Cho Kang-ha also held several important government positions during the reign of King Kojong.

Even though it is common in Korean historiography to say that the Era of the *Sedo* Politics ended in 1863, many descendants of the *sedo* families, such as the Andong Kim and the

⁸⁸ This family tree is reorganized based on Kim Pyŏng-gi, *Chosŏn myŏngga Andong Kim ssi*, 157.; Chi Tu-hwan, *Sunjo taewang kwa ch'ininchŏk*

P'ung'yang Cho clans, remained in the center of court politics. The influence of *sedo* in the first half of the nineteenth century was still strong in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

According to recent research in the twentieth century on descendants of the Andong Kim clan, about nineteen marriages between the Andong Kim and the Yöhhung Min clans can be identified in the later half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁹ Their close marital ties with King Kojong's in-laws contributed to maintaining the socio-political influence of the Andong Kim clan. In other words, after 1863, the Andong Kim clan did not fall at all. Labeling the period between 1800 and 1863 as the Era of *Sedo* Politics clearly created an artificial historical discontinuity. Rather, readers can find even more points of continuity linking the periods before and after 1863.

7.2 The Kapsin Coup of 1884: The Still-Effective Influence of *Sedo*

In 1884, some descendants of politically powerful families mounted a coup, though they only managed to hold on to power for three days. The masterminds of that coup were influenced by the Meiji Restoration in Japan. The coup faction members were often called the Enlightenment Party (*kaehawdang* 開化黨).⁹⁰ When researching their family backgrounds and the features of the written declaration of their goals for the coup, some influence from *sedo* politics can be detected, though they seemed quite different from their ancestors.

⁸⁹ Nam Kūm-ja, "Taehan chegukki ch'ungju taejiju Kim Kap-kyu ūi kagye wa kyōngje kibān [대한제국기 충주 대지주 김갑규의 가계와 경제기반 A Great Landlord in Ch'ungju" Kim Kap-kyu, His Family and Economic Base between 1897 and 1910]" 한국사연구회 281차 연구발표회 [Han'guksa yōn'guhoe 281-ch'a yōn'gu palp'yohoe] (Sōul, April, 2011).

⁹⁰ Kirk W. Larsen, *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850-1910* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2008), 20.; Pak Ŭn-sik, *Han'guk t'ongsa*, 118-125.

Discussing the possible influence of *sedo* politics on the eruption of the coup in 1884 does not pose a fundamental challenge to the claim that that coup was motivated by a hunger for reform. Rather, it suggests that clan membership still mattered when it considers family connections, political backgrounds, and blood ties among the major coup members such as Kim Ok-gyun, Pak Yŏng-hyo, Sŏ Chae-p'il, and Sŏ Kwang-bŏm.

The leading members of the Enlightenment Party and the Kapsin Coup of 1884, Kim Ok-gyun, Pak Yŏng-hyo, Sŏ Chae-p'il, and Sŏ Kwang-bŏm, were closely connected not only in their reform ideologies, but also in blood lines.⁹¹ Needless to say, Kim Ok-gyun was born into the Andong Kim clan. Pak Yŏng-hyo was from the Pannam Pak clan, which was a group of important political partners of the Andong Kim clan in the early nineteenth century. Sŏ Chae-p'il and Sŏ Kwang-bŏm were both from the Taegu (or Talsŏng) Sŏ clan, which was famous as a respected group of competent bureaucrats. The wife of the elder brother of Sŏ Chae-p'il's father was from the Andong Kim clan. Thanks to the help of his aunt, he could study with other noble children of the Andong Kim clan. That's how Sŏ Chae-p'il could become well educated. And Sŏ Kwang-bŏm had a mother from the Andong Kim clan.

⁹¹ Chŏng Ok-cha, *Chosŏn hugi yŏksa ŭi ihae* [조선 후기 역사의 이해 Understanding the History of the Latter Half of the Chosŏn Dynasty] (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Ilchisa, 1993), 226. Chŏng briefly introduced the family background of each leading member.

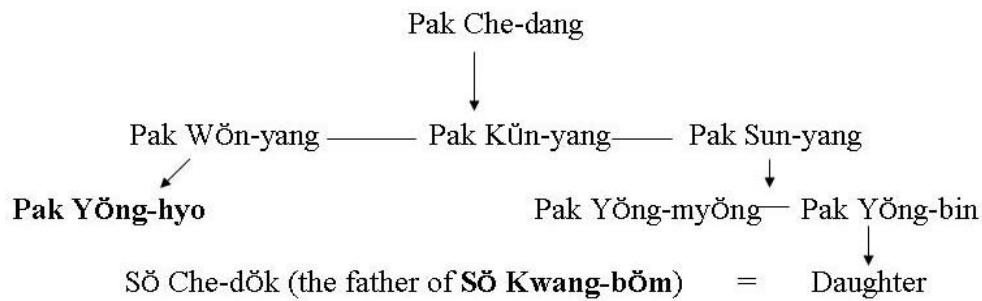


Figure 14 The Relationship between Pak Yŏng-hyo and Sŏ Kwang-bŏm⁹²

Pak Yŏng-hyo, who was born into the prestigious Pannam Pak clan, married a daughter of King Ch'ŏlchong though she died at an early age. A daughter of his female cousin married the father of his coup partner, Sŏ Kwang-bŏm. Kim Ok-gyun, Pak Yŏng-hyo, Sŏ Chae-p'il, and Sŏ Kwang-bŏm were all closely related to each other through blood lines, though it is still unclear how much the blood ties affected their political organization.

From their public announcements after the success of their coup, it can be seen that one of the announced goals of their coup was that the Taewŏn'gun should be reinstated.⁹³ However, there was nothing said about giving him actual political authority. By simply and symbolically respecting and accepting a role for the royal family without granting them any further political authority, their initial goal was very similar to how their ancestors had constantly bestowed respectful titles on the kings in the first sixty-three years of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the coup members might have simply wanted to attract the common people's favour, as

⁹² This family tree was specially drawn from Chi Tu-hwan, *Kojong hwangje wa ch'ininch'ŏk* [고종 황제와 친인척 King Kojong and his Relatives] (Sŏul-si: Yŏksa Munhwa, 2009).

⁹³ Sin Yong-ha, *Ch'ogi kaehwa sasang kwa Kapsin chŏngbyŏn yŏn'gu* [초기 개화사상과 갑신정변 연구 A Study of Enlightenment Thought and the Kapsin Coup of 1884] (Sŏul-si: Chisik Sanŏpsa, 2000), 238-240.

well as other official's cooperation, by acting as though they did not intend to change Korea's centuries-old monarchical system.

According to their announcements, except for the six ministries of Personnel, Finance, Rites, Military Affairs, Justice, and Public Works, most government agencies were deemed unnecessary and were to be abolished. The heads of the six ministries, and a few other high-ranking officials, were supposed to discuss national affairs every morning and come to a decision on them before they asked the king for his opinions. This administration system was not that different from the policy making process of the Border Defense Council in the era of *Sedo* politics, when aristocratic officials from a few well-recognized royal in-law groups held many positions in the highest-level decision making agencies.

The most important issues dealt with in the Border Defense Council were usually related to financial matters. Royal in-law officials in the Border Defense Council monopolized the policy-making process, especially in regard to finance. Similarly, after the coup, Kim Ok-gyun was named the second minister in the Ministry of Finance (*hojo ch'amp'an* 戶曹參判). The coup group announced that all of the national financial matters would be managed by the Ministry of Finance. When Kim Ok-gyun was named the second minister, there was no first minister in the Ministry of Finance. Kim Ok-gyun from the Andong Kim clan assumed primary responsibility for financial matters in the country. This shows another remnant of so-called *Sedo* Politics in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

None of these points require that the Kapsin Coup of 1884 be reconsidered, with the family backgrounds of the leading members suggesting they had a conservative agenda. They were not filled with nostalgia for the glory of their clans in the first half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, this does not mean that the coup was an initiative by the descendants of

politically powerful groups in the first half of the nineteenth century to restore their social and political authority, which had been relatively weakened because of the appearance of the Taewŏngun and the rise of the Yŏhŭng Min clan as another royal in-law force. Rather, this subchapter is written to explore the fact that the *sedo* politics, more specifically the descendants of it, was still influential in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as well as to indicate one of the problems in limiting the era of *sedo* only between 1800 and 1863.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Chosŏn politics cannot be considered as divided into four, or even two, different directions at various times during the dynasty according to which faction was in charge. There were certain points in which personal politics as well as non-factional politics were germane. One nationalist historian, Hwang Hyŏn, made some positive comments about Kim Cho-sun and Cho Man-yŏng, though he criticized the political situation in which many royal in-laws held several important government positions. This is another problem in how the early-nineteenth-century Chosŏn politics should be characterized and defined: should it have an overall positive evaluation or a negative one?

8.1 Summary

Hitherto, the political structure of nineteenth-century Korea has been intensively discussed based on the key term *sedo*. There are many points which cannot be fully explained when *sedo* is used to characterize a specific period in time. Before and after the rise of a few powerful royal in-law families in the nineteenth century, they were already notable groups of aristocratic officials. In addition, a debate on the periodization of *Sedo* Politics is still going on among Korean scholars. Moreover, there is much still to be explored in the history of the period 1800 and 1863, since there has not been enough historical research on that period. Besides, as intensively analyzed in the introduction, a clear distinction between *sedo* 世道 and *sedo* 勢道 might be required in Korean historiography since the second word was created in Korea to

specifically describe politics greatly influenced by a few royal in-law family groups. In particular, the two terms were used differently for most of East Asian history and have somewhat different meanings that might affect images and views of the specific period between 1800 and 1863 in Korean history.

Under the political label of *sedo*, nineteenth-century Korean history is often characterized as consisting of the constant persecution of Catholicism, the turmoil of a series of national disasters and civil uprisings, and the unsettling appearances of Western steamships in the coastal regions. Away from the shadow of the history of decline, the fundamental political frame of the country has been examined in the thesis. The transmission of political authority among political agents was specifically analyzed with statistical data to prove historical continuity in the late Chosŏn period. In a broader theme of politics, many genealogical records were also used help to prove the existence of political alliances and cooperation based on blood and school lines and personal politics.

The politics of nineteenth-century Korea was not heavily dominated by a few selected royal in-law families, at least in terms of who held high-level government posts. Such a mistaken assumption has not helped us understand the whole picture of late Chosŏn society and politics, since the emergence of politically strong royal in-law families was not something unique to late Chosŏn (rather, it was somewhat universal in almost all of the dynasties in global history). Instead, by looking at how they structurally led and guided Chosŏn politics through their government positions, political coalitions, and intermarriage status, it became crystal-clear as to how they became more privileged as time went by in the nineteenth century and what influence they could have on Chosŏn politics after the year of 1863 in terms of historical continuity.

8.2 Limits of this Research

This MA thesis is heavily based on genealogical records and personal information on historical figures. Genealogical records were very useful for drawing specific family trees and determining marital ties between clans. However, the accuracy of genealogical records has been questioned. As Edward Wagner has already pointed out, there were many attempts by families to buy their way into genealogical records or to change some information in those records.⁹⁴ In addition, as a by-product of the reproduction and reprint of genealogy records, there is the potential for errors when they are published. However, the high level of accuracy in the genealogical records closely examined in this thesis is somewhat guaranteed because the specific genealogy records are mainly from the most notable clans in the Chosŏn dynasty, including the genealogical records of the royal house.

One of the notable features of the family name system in Korea is the mention of the home of the original ancestor (*pon'gwan* 本貫). However, family origin and clan name do not necessarily coincide, since *pon'gwan* stays the same, but different lineages purportedly sharing the same ancient ancestor operate independently of each other. Thus, simply sharing a *pon'gwan* and a distant ancestor doesn't imply a sense of being part of the same family. Unfortunately, which sublineages the various Andong Kim and P'ung'yang Cho figures belonged to was not identified in detail. Equally, unfortunately, political anthropology is not widely used in Korean studies. As a result, there are few resources available to supplement the often weak methodological and theoretical frameworks. It might be better to talk of clan politics or the relationship between politics and kinship by using some theories or case studies in political

⁹⁴ Edward W. Wagner, Yi Hun-sang and Son Suk-kyŏng, *Chosŏn wangjo sahoe ūi sŏngch'wi wa kwisok* [조선 왕조 사회의 성취와 귀속 Achievement and Ascription in Chosŏn Dynasty] (Sŏul-si: Ilchogak, 2007), 209.

anthropology. And family origin could be better discussed in terms of the relationship with clan and lineage.

Negative images of central government politics in the early nineteenth century of Korea have been often used in claiming a positive role for factionalism among the aristocratic officials and scholars. Whether the relationship between factionalism and nepotism was supplementary or contradictory should be more deeply discussed since one of the major characteristics of the late Chosŏn politics was factionalism. Both are usually brought forward as primary factors contributing to the demise of the Chosŏn dynasty.

Because of the lack of available sources, the Nam'yang Hong clan has not been researched enough, unlike the other two royal in-law groups, the Andong Kim and the P'ung'yang Cho clans. The second father-in-law of King Hŏnjong, Hong Chae-ryong, and his relatives also showed some characteristics of *sedo* similar to those of the two major clans. Hong Chae-ryong held military positions for a while, and many of his relatives also had seats in the Border Defense Council. In addition, the Nam'yang Hong clan was one of the well-recognised clans because of its high number of civil service examination graduates in the late Chosŏn period. Research into the Nam'yang Hong clan might have helped to increase the consistency of arguments in this thesis.

There is very little research and very few sources available on Chosŏn politics in the early nineteenth century in the English-speaking world. It was somewhat difficult to survey this research topic in the English-speaking world and bring various viewpoints to bear on this specific research topic. This thesis has brought to bear as many critical views on previous research as possible. However, it did not bring many refreshing perspectives on the research

topic. In this respect, the limited variety of secondary sources might be another significant limit of this thesis.

8.3 Meaning and Contribution

Most of the historical research focusing on the late Chosŏn period, generally starting from the late seventeenth century, has examined social and political changes in traditional Korean society based on contested historical terms such as ‘the sprouts of capitalism’ and ‘the gradual dissolution of the traditional social hierarchal system and norms.’ However, to grasp the important characteristics of a society, an understanding of how its politics was shaped and how it functioned, and what and who were the historical agents or agencies, is crucial. In this sense, *Sedo* Politics as one of the major characteristics in the political history of the last one hundred years of the Chosŏn dynasty has been chosen for this research project.

This research paper substantially tackles the concept of *Sedo* Politics, as the political system mainly led by a few royal in-law family groups. However, royal in-law family groups such as Andong Kim and P’ung’yang Cho clans did not emerge suddenly in the early nineteenth century. In the late Chosŏn period, politically respected family groups, mostly based in the capital region, gradually dominated court politics based on school line, geographical association, political faction, personal politics, and paternal and maternal line. In other words, theoretically, instead of historical discontinuity the continuity of political history in the late Chosŏn has been the main focus of this thesis. It can be concluded that to understand the socio-political history of nineteenth-century Chosŏn Korea, the understanding of personal politics and macro-level

political structure is key to describing historiographical issues regarding *sedo*, especially the discontinuity and continuity manifest in early nineteenth-century Korea.

Leaving aside the self-reflection of nationalist Korean historians and the rationalization of Japanese colonialist historians, this thesis has made efforts to take a more objective historical view than is seen in their negative historiography and interpretation of the early nineteenth century of Korea. Most of all, this has been done concerning the contested term *sedo*, which has tended to be an umbrella label for all of its negative aspects. This paper does not give full answers to the historiographical problems raised in previous research on this subject. However, it points the way forward toward another approach necessary for drawing a larger picture of the late Chosŏn era, as well as suggesting another direction for further research in future.

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