Traditional Scholar-Officials on the Wings of Modern Law and Statecraft:
The Taedong Hakhoe and Its Vision for the Korean Ruling Class
in the Final Years of the Taehan Empire, 1907-1909

by

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Abstract

The Taedong hakhoe (Scholarly Society of the Great East) was an organization active from 1907 to 1909, founded by a group of politically elite, Confucian-educated scholar-officials with the grand objective of mobilizing Confucian literati across Korea to propel the traditional order of knowledge—or the so-called “old learning”—back into the realm of “usefulness” in early-twentieth-century Korea. The Taedong hakhoe has been uncritically cast as a pro-Japanese collaborator in modern scholarship, which caricatures it as a puppet created and controlled by colonial interests. This study argues that the organization displayed greater initiative of its own than previously acknowledged, behaving rather like a political activist; that is, it rendered assessments of the present and future of the traditional ruling class that it sought to represent—namely, the scholar-officials and Confucian literati—and made discursive claims and practical adjustments to preserve the political hegemony that the elite class had built and enjoyed since the Chosŏn dynasty’s (1392-1897) foundation. Perceiving the rise of the “new learning”—modern, specialized knowledge and practices from the West—and the deteriorating relevance of the old learning in the political discourse of early-twentieth-century Korea as a critical threat to the traditional ruling class’s survival, the Taedong hakhoe actively promoted in the pages of its organ, the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* (Taedong Hakhoe Monthly), the “usefulness” of Confucian erudition and Literary Sinitic (*hanmun*) in the project of civilization. It also strove to forge an equivalence between traditional Confucian statecraft and modern statecraft, thereby justifying the literati’s continued presence atop the changing sociopolitical hierarchy. Furthermore, the organization attempted to equip the literati with expertise in modern statecraft, operating the Taedong Specialized School (Taedong chŏnmun hakkyo), a private school that taught highly
specialized and technical courses on law and politics to students exclusively from literati families. If the ruling elites of Chosŏn can be characterized as an “aristocratic/bureaucratic” class whose political power was sustained by the balance of hereditary aristocracy and Confucian meritocracy, what the Taedong hakhoe envisioned for the scholar-officials of modern Korea can be characterized as an “aristocratic/bureaucratic/technocratic” ruling class whose legitimacy would derive additionally from expertise in modern statecraft.
Lay Summary

With the spread of modern, Western knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the traditional ruling elites of Korea, whose political legitimacy was based on their aristocratic lineage and their mastery over the Confucian intellectual, moral, and literary system of knowledge, began losing their once-absolute grip on power. This study examines the Taedong hakhoe (Scholarly Society of the Great East) as an expression of the ruling elites’ anxiety over this change and finds that the organization battled to sustain their centuries-old position of power mainly in two ways: 1) promoting their traditional knowledge base as relevant and useful vis-à-vis modern Western knowledge through its organ, the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo (Taedong Hakhoe Monthly); 2) attempting to fashion them into modern statesmen by establishing and operating a private law school, the Taedong Specialized School (Taedong chŏnmun hakkyo), which was open exclusively to those who belonged to the traditional ruling class.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Young Woo Park.
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The margins on every single page of this thesis brim with marks and scribbles of encouragement and support from my loved ones. My father who holds me steady through life’s ups and downs with his undying constancy and generosity, my mother who has never for single a moment lost faith in me and makes “sacrifice” her daily theme in supporting my well-being, my sister who thaws the hardest of my days with the kindest of hearts, and Loretta Lo who keeps me grounded and soaring at the same time with her unfailing loyalty and love—I am deeply indebted to and blessed by each and every one of them for accompanying me throughout the process as a faithful friend, steadfast supporter, cutting critic, and insightful advisor.

I owe many and special thanks to Dr. Ross King, my supervisor, who has guided me through my work in this field with invaluable advice and infinite understanding. Without his guidance, this thesis would have never materialized. I also wish to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Donald Baker and Dr. Bruce Fulton, for affording me their good will and helpful insights in reviewing this thesis. All of these mentors have left indelible marks in the way I read and appreciate Korean history, and it is my sincere hope that this thesis carries those marks in a way that honors their kindness and support.
In loving memory of my father, Kee Seon Park.

We miss you every day.
Chapter 1: Introduction

On December 27, 1907, the air in the Sŏnggyun’gwan (National Confucian Academy), the Taehan Empire’s highest and most prestigious official institution of learning, must have been quite heavy—not with the zeal of learning but with the combined weight of the “star power” carried in by the myriad government officials attending a special ceremony there. The roster of attendees was impressive, to say the least, featuring the “who’s who” of the political elite at the time: Emperor Sunjong’s father-in-law Yun T’aegyŏng 尹澤榮 (1876-1935), Prime Minister Yi Wanyong 李完用 (1858-1926), Minister of the Interior Im Sŏnjun 任善準 (1861-1919), Minister of the Military Yi Pyŏngmu 李秉武 (1864-1926), and Minister of Education Yi Chaegon 李載崑 (1859-1943), as well as senior officials from the top three ranks (both chŏng 正 and chong 從) headed by Kim Yunsik 金允植 (1835-1922), and even Japanese officials led by Vice-Resident General Sone Arasuke 曾禰荒助 (1849-1910). It was a proper ceremony, too, with all the traditional trappings: poetry was dedicated and recited by scholar representatives from the Sŏnggyun’gwan, ritual music (aak 雅樂) was played by court musicians, and refreshments were dispensed, followed by speeches delivered by high-ranking officials, both Korean and Japanese. The ceremony was not a royal event held in tribute to the prestige and authority of the monarch, nor was it a celebration of an important policy achievement in the Korean government; rather, it was held in honor of an ostensibly scholarly organization named the Taedong hakhoe 大東學會 (Scholarly Society of the Great East). Major newspapers of the time, like the Hwangsŏng sinmun (Imperial Capital Gazette) and the Taehan maeil sinbo (Korea Daily News), did not fail to notice

1 “12-wŏl 27-il Sŏnggyun’gwan kaehoerok,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 1 (Feb. 1908)
such an abundant display of eminence and ceremony, reporting shortly thereafter on the Taedong hakhoe’s special meeting at the Sŏnggyun’gwan.²

However, all the fanfare generated by the Taedong hakhoe that day seems to have failed to catch the attention of modern-day scholars. Despite the fact that the organization, composed of Confucian scholars and officials, was quite active from early 1907 to late 1909, publishing a monthly journal, the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 大東學會月報 (Taedong Hakhoe Monthly), writing prolifically in both *hanmun* (Literary Sinitic) and *kukhanmun* (Sino-Korean mixed script) on a wide range of matters including Confucianism, language and literature, law, hygienics, and botany, and even instituting and operating a private law school, the Taedong hakhoe and its activities have inspired little scrutiny and imagination, especially when compared with the attention garnered by organizations and publications from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that are often characterized as “nationalist,” “enlightening,” and “patriotic.” What little discourse has built up around the Taedong hakhoe is concentrated on painting it as a *ch’īnil* (pro-Japanese) collaborationist group, or, more specifically, a puppet created and controlled by the Japanese colonizers. Accordingly, the only place accorded to this organization of *hanmun*- and classics-wielding, socially and politically influential individuals in the historiographical landscape of Korea on the eve of its demise is that of archetypal treacherous “collaborator,” against which other “patriotic” individuals and groups from the period leading up to annexation can be contrasted.

It is not the aim of this study to rescue the Taedong hakhoe from accusations of collaboration; nor do I attempt to explore the definitions of “collaborator.” Instead, I propose to move away from limiting the Hakhoe to playing the role of “shameless” collaborator and foil or second fiddle to the vaunted “nationalist” types, to understand it as a real actor facing real problems, and thereby to take a step closer to gaining a more comprehensive and nuanced portrait of an organization that undoubtedly occupied an important place in the complexities that constituted early-twentieth-century Korea. How did the Taedong hakhoe perceive the political and cultural landscape at the particular juncture of its existence, and how did it identify itself in relation to the perceived context? Whose interests did the organization seek to represent and what threats and opportunities did it identify in promoting those interests? What visions did it have for itself and the Korean state, and what array of solutions did it bring to the table? How did it attempt to materialize those visions and solutions?

What emerges from exploring the Taedong hakhoe’s activities and writings published in and outside the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* with such questions in mind is a portrait of an organization with much more initiative than a mere puppet would show, with its own agenda in constructing the political reality of the Taehan Empire. The Taedong hakhoe, as I have discovered in this study, was an organization that behaved rather like a political activist with its own self-definations and claims contingent on the context of its time: it recognized the already compromised and ever weakening political hegemony of the traditional ruling class that it sought to represent—namely, the scholar-officials (*sadaebu* 士大夫) and the Confucian literati at large (*yurim* 儒林)—and battled to enhance and restore their hegemony by inserting its own particular views into the national discourse and, at the same time, making practical adjustments that could legitimate their claims to power.
To briefly anticipate the discussions that I will set forth in the following chapters, the Taedong hakhoe, as an organization created by and for members of the traditional literati ruling class that had dominated the Korean political scene for much of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897) and into the Taehan Empire period (1897-1910), reacted with a high—and even quite mortal—level of fear and anxiety to the increasingly deteriorating utility and relevance of the so-called “old learning” (kuhak 旧學)—a term often used by the Hakhoe’s contemporaries in reference to Confucian moral, scholarly, and literary concepts and traditions—in the Korean government, which took place just as the technical, specialized “new learning” (sinhak 新學) imported from the West was gaining recognition in the national discourse as the best vehicle to carry Korea to the front of the universal march toward civilization and progress. Believing that the shift would eventually bring about the dethronement of traditional scholar-officials from the top of the Korean sociopolitical hierarchy, the Taedong hakhoe acted with great vigor, rather than passively relying on the personal favor of Resident General Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文 (1841-1909) and Japan. The vigor manifested itself largely via two projects. First, the Hakhoe tried to fight and reverse the widespread perception of inadequacy toward the old learning by promoting its “usefulness” in twentieth-century Korea through its organ, the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo: in particular, the Hakhoe focused on constructing the narrative that the old learning and the new learning are essentially identical, especially with respect to notions and practices of statecraft—a reasonable area of interest for an organization of individuals who saw themselves as the rightful administrators of the state; and, instead of simply insisting on hanmun’s utility as the “language of the sages,” the Hakhoe also tried to distinguish the ways in which hanmun was useful in the modern context, presenting it as an essential component of Korean writing along with kungmun
(national script). Second, the Taedong hakhoe strove to justify the traditional ruling elites’ place in high officialdom by equipping them with what it viewed as the Western, contemporary equivalent to the ancient art of Confucian statecraft: studies in modern law and state administration. To this end, the Hakhoe, in addition to holding lectures and publishing articles on various topics in law and politics, instituted and operated a private school named “Taedong Specialized School” (Taedong chŏnmun hakkyo 大東專門學校), which offered, exclusively to students from literati families, a curriculum designed to produce legal and administrative officials equipped with specialized, technical knowledge in various academic subfields of modern law and politics but still distinguished by an inculcation of the old learning that presupposed the legitimacy of traditional scholar-official rulership.

Ultimately, what the Taedong hakhoe demonstrated is a somewhat paradoxical approach in its effort to secure power for the scholar-officials and the Confucian literati: they articulated a strong vision to preserve the ideological, cultural, and political formations of the old, while also displaying a strong willingness to re-appropriate those formations and add new, foreign ones to them in order to make that vision a reality. The basic structure of the sociopolitical hierarchy that the Hakhoe envisioned for Korea in the twentieth century was still derived from the native aristocratic tendencies and the Confucian ethos, with no essential difference from the one established in the Chosŏn period. It is on the basis of this paradox that I, borrowing from James Palais’s notion of the hybridity of the Chosŏn ruling class that was sustained by both aristocratic heritage and Confucian cultivation, argue that the Taedong hakhoe’s vision represents an effort

3 I borrow the notion of hybridity from James Palais who, as I will explain in more detail later, has characterized the Chosŏn ruling class, or the yangban, as an aristocratic/bureaucratic hybrid class, whose position in the upper echelon of Chosŏn officialdom was given by both high birth and excellence in Confucian knowledge in tandem. See
to refashion the traditional elites into a new type of hybrid class, whose basis for claiming the
highest positions in the modern Korean government consists of aristocratic heritage, Confucian
cultivation rooted in Literary Sinitic learning, and technical expertise in modern law and state
administration.

Before delving into such discussions, I will first provide an overview of the Taedong
hakhoe and its organizational makeup, goals, and activities for introductory purposes, as well as
an overview of the criticisms that the organization has received to date in modern scholarship, in
order to demonstrate the unbalanced attention paid to the aspect of “collaboration” and thus to
highlight the need to expand the scope of examination—this constitutes Chapter 2 of this study.
In Chapter 3, I will survey the political landscape of Korea leading up to the second half of the
first decade of the twentieth century, particularly as it pertains to the increasingly vulnerable
position of the scholar-officials and the literati, thanks in large part to the demotion of
Confucianism and the old learning from their former position of power and also to the various
changes that this demotion entailed. More importantly, Chapter 3 will examine the Taedong
hakhoe’s reaction to the deterioration of the traditional elites’ power base, identifying the
organization’s Social Darwinian fear and anxiety of the old ruling class’s extirpation from the
Korean political ecosystem. Finally, in Chapter 4, the Taedong hakhoe’s strategies and efforts to
combat the encroaching “political irrelevance” of the traditional ruling class will be explored,
with attention directed closely to (1) the discourse that the organization used in the Taedong
hakhoe wŏlbo to recast the old learning—and therefore the literati—as “relevant” in the context

of the national endeavor to elevate Korea to the realm of “civilization” envisioned by Western modernity; and (2) the educational effort that the organization carried out through the Taedong Specialized School in order to provide members of the traditional ruling class with specialized and technical skills and knowledge in modern law and state administration—a practical foundation for securing critical positions in Korea’s modernizing government.
Chapter 2: The Taedong Hakhoe—An Overview

2.1 Organizational Makeup, Goals, and Activities

The Taedong hakhoe, according to the timeline provided in the first issue of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, began operating in February 1907, with its nine “registered founders” (palgiin 發起人)—Sin Kisŏn 申箕善 (1851-1909), Min Pyŏngsŏk 閔丙奭 (1858-1940), Yi Yongjik 李容稙 (1852-1932), Hong Sŭngmok 洪承穆 (1847-1925), Pak Chebin 朴齊斌 (1858-1921), Yi Úng’ik 李應翼 (?-?), Sŏ Sanghun 徐相勛 (1858-1943), Hong Usŏk 洪祐哲 (1864-1926),4 and Cho Chungŭng 趙重應 (1860-1919)—and other members convening at the Kwangsŏng Vocational School (Kwangsŏng sirŏp hakkyo 光成實業學校), where they selected provisional executives and settled on the name “Taedong hakhoe.” Sin Kisŏn, Hong Sŭngmok, and Sŏ Sanghun soon shed the “provisional” in their initial titles and assumed full-fledged duties as president, vice president, and general manager (ch’ongmu 總務), respectively.5 In addition to those three positions, the top brass of the organization included accounting officers (hoegye 會計), record-keepers (sŏgi 書記), councilors (wiwŏn 委員), evaluation committee members (p’yŏng ŭiwŏn 評委員), and lecturers on the classics (kyŏngjŏn kangsa 經傳講師) and on “new publications” (sinsŏjŏk kangsa 新書籍講師).6

4 It is not clear at this time whether Hong Sŭngmok and Hong Usŏk—they were members of the vaunted P’ungsan Hong clan 豐山洪氏—were close blood relations. Little is known about the latter’s personal life, but it seems he was reasonably active in the public scene, given that his death during a trip to Jilin 吉林 was reported by the 6 October 1926 issue of the Maeil sinbo.

5 “Ponhoe kisa” (Records of Organizational Affairs), Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 1 (Feb. 1908).

6 “Ponhoe imwŏllok” (List of the Executives), Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 1, (Feb. 1908). The full list of the Taedong hakhoe’s executive staff as of February 25, 1908, was as follows:
A glimpse into the backgrounds of the nine founders provides a rough idea of the Taedong hakhoe’s organizational character. As the following table demonstrates, the founders for the most part had held some of the highest official positions at one point or another in their careers before the founding of the Hakhoe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Clan Seat</th>
<th>Position(s) within the Hakhoe</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Civil Service Exam</th>
<th>Official Career Highlights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sin Kisŏn</td>
<td>P’yŏngsan</td>
<td>President; Lecturer on the Classics</td>
<td>Private education (kasuk 家塾)</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1877</td>
<td>Minister of Industry (Kongmu taesin); Minister of the Military (Kunbu taesin); Minister of Education (Hakpu taesin); Minister of Justice (Pŏppu taesin); Chair of the Privy Council (Chungch’uwŏn úijang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Sŭngmok</td>
<td>P’ungsan</td>
<td>Vice-president</td>
<td>Private education</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1875</td>
<td>Second Magistrate of the Seoul Magistracy (Hansŏngbu chwayun); Member of the Privy Council (Chungch’uwŏn ch’an’u)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sŏ Sanghun</td>
<td>Taegu</td>
<td>General Manager; Member of the Evaluation Committee</td>
<td>Home education (kajŏng 家庭)</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1885</td>
<td>Member of the Privy Council (Chungch’uwŏn úigwan); Headmaster of the Sŏnggyun’gwan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Executives: President (hoejang) Sin Kisŏn; Vice-President (puhoejang) Hong Sŭngmok; General Manager (ch’ongmu) Sŏ Sanghun; Regional Managers (chibang ch’ongmu) Cho Pyŏnggŏn (Kyŏnggi), Kim Kyŏnggyu (Ch’ungch’ŏng), Pak Chebin (Ch’olla), Sin T’aehyu (Kyŏngsang), Chŏng Pongsi (Kangwŏn), Hong Usŏk (Hwanghae), Min Pyŏnghan (P’yŏng’an), and Chŏng Chinhong (Hamgyŏng); Accounting Officer Yun Chayong; Record-Keepers Yi Taeyŏng, Han Kisu, and Yun Ch’ŏnggu; Committee members Chŏng Yongjo, Yi Kyuhan, and Cho Ch’ŏlgu; Evaluation Committee Chair Min Pyŏngsŏk; Evaluation Committee members Kim Kajin, Cho Chungŭng, Cho Minhŭi, Yi Chungha, Sin T’aehyu, Min Pyŏnghan, Chŏng Insŏng, Pak Chebin, Kang Uhyŏng, Yi Ung’ik, Chŏng Inhŭng, Sŏ Sanghun, Cho Pyŏnggŏn, Kim Kyŏnggyu, Kim Kyosŏk, Kim Kyudong, Min Yongch’ae, Sim Yŏngsang, Yun Sangik, Kim Chunghwan, Yŏ Kyuhyŏng, Hong Usŏk, Yun Tŏgyŏng, Chŏng Pongsi, Chŏng Kibong, Sin Ugyun, Chŏng Chinhong, Song Chinok, Yu Hyŏngno, Kim Yŏngjik, Kim Chŏngmok, Han Ch’iyu, Kwŏn Posang, Yi Pyŏngmok, Yi Sunha, Pak Chehwang, Chŏng Kyo, Sŏ Sangmyŏn, Yun Ton’gu, Kim Tongwan, Yi Sŏnghyŏn, and Yŏ Chungnyong; Lecturers on the Classics: Sŏ Chŏngsun, Kim Hakchin, Nam Chŏngch’ŏl, Yi Chungha, Yi Tojae, Sin Kŏsŏn, Yi Yongjik, and Yŏ Kyuhŏng; Lecturers on New Publications: Cho Chungŭng, Yu Kilchun, Chang Pak, Han Ch’iyu, and Kwŏn Posang.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>氏</th>
<th>Position and Education</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Min Pyŏngsŏk</td>
<td>男</td>
<td>Chair of the Evaluation Committee</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Home education; Hansŏng Japanese Language School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Yongjik</td>
<td>男</td>
<td>Lecturer on the Classics</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Vice Minister of Personnel (Ijo ch’amp’an); Minister of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pak Chebin</td>
<td>男</td>
<td>Regional Manager; Member of the Evaluation Committee</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>Third Minister of Military Affairs (Pyŏngjo ch’amŭi); Third Minister of Public Works (Kongjo ch’amŭi); Member of the Privy Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho Chungŭng</td>
<td>男</td>
<td>Regional Manager; Lecturer on New Publications; Principal of the Taedong Specialized School</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Special Court Judge (T’ükpyŏl pŏbwŏn p’ansa); Minister of Justice; Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Commerce, and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi ûngik</td>
<td>男</td>
<td>Member of the Evaluation Committee</td>
<td>未知</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Usŏk</td>
<td>男</td>
<td>Member of the Evaluation Committee; Vice Principal of the Taedong Specialized School</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Member of the Privy Council; Supreme Court Justice (P’yŏngniwŏn p’ansa)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Backgrounds: the Founders of the Taedong Hakhoe

The information in this table, as well as in Table 2 found further below, has been compiled from the Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe’s Han’guk kŭnhyŏndaehoe inmul charyo (Database of People from Modern and Contemporary
In fact, the portrait of the founders arising from the table is that of the classic Chosŏn scholar-official: a Confucian-educated yangban man occupying a high position in the central government. A detailed inquiry into the founders’ clan seats and family lineages would be necessary to determine the exact height of their family prestige, but the fact that they were eligible to write the munkwa (文科) civil service examination, passed it, and rose through the ranks in the privileged realm of officialdom—except in the case of Yi Ŭngik, whose background is unverifiable at this point—speaks volumes of their elite, Confucian backgrounds. They were highly educated in the Confucian arts through traditional educational methods—in their own homes, in private schools, and in government institutions—while individuals like Min Pyŏngsŏk, a close relative of Queen Myŏngsŏng 明聖王后 (Lady Min 閔氏; 1851-1895) and Min Yŏngik 閔泳翊 (1860-1914),8 and Cho Chungŭng supplemented their Confucian education with a modern education, with the former attending the government-run Hansŏng Japanese Language School established in 1895 and the latter studying at the Komaba School of Agriculture9 during

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8 Min Pyŏngsŏk was born to Min Hanwi 閔漢緯 (?-?), into the Yŏhŭng Min clan who rose to great power in the Korean government thanks to Lady Min’s marriage to King Kojong. Min Hanwi himself does not appear to have been a prominent figure, but many of the cousins in his extended family were powerful figures in the political scene of late-nineteenth-, early-twentieth-century Korea, including Min Yŏngik 閔泳翊 (1860-1914), Min Yŏngwhan 閔泳煥 (1861-1905), and Min Yŏngwhi 閔泳徽 (1852-1935). See Kim Sugyŏn, “1880-nyŏnda Minssi ch’ŏchok chŏngkwŏn ŭi chŏnch’ijŏk sŏngkyŏk” (MA thesis, Ihwa University, 1991), 11-14.

9 The Komaba nōgakkō 駒場農學校, established in 1877 and later renamed the University of Tokyo College of Agriculture, was operated as part of the Japanese government’s initiatives to modernize agricultural technology. British agricultural instructors were brought in to teach the classes at first, but when their contracts expired, German scientists were brought in to teach German agricultural chemistry and soil science. See Yujirō Hayami and Saburō Yamada “Agricultural Research Organization in Economic Development: A Review of the Japanese Experience,” in
his exile in Japan from 1897 to 1906. Their *yangban* social status and command of the Confucian
canon surely would have provided the necessary resources for their rise through the official
ranks, with Sin Kisŏn and Min Pyŏngsŏk reaching the various top minister positions.

Another observation that speaks to the politically elite position of the Taedong hakhoe
literati is the fact that the Taedong hakhoe attracted a great amount of attention from other
political elites—both Korean and Japanese—from the earliest stages of its existence. As I have
listed in the opening vignette, some of the most powerful figures in the Korean government, such
as Emperor Sunjong’s father-in-law Yun T’aegyŏng, Prime Minister Yi Wanyong, Minister of
the Interior Im Sŏnjun, Minister of the Military Yi Pyŏngmu, Minister of Education Yi Chaegon,
etc., attended the meetings as non-executive-level members, and Resident General Itō Hirobumi
and Vice Resident General Sone Arasuke, on separate occasions, delivered speeches before the
Hakhoe. The crown prince himself was planning a visit, which was ultimately cancelled for fear
of ruining his health in the cold season just before leaving to study in Japan. Moreover, the
Taedong hakhoe drew financial contributions from both the Japanese and Korean Imperial
Households and from Itō Hirobumi.\(^\text{10}\) That hardly a week passed before Emperor Sunjong
matched the Resident General’s gift of 10,000 *hwan*, and that the total amount donated by the
Korean emperor and his crown prince (12,000 *hwan*) exceeded the total from the Japanese
Imperial Household and the Resident General (11,000 *hwan*) by just 1,000 *hwan* may even point
to the possibility that there was a degree of competition among the major players in Korean
politics for the Hakhoe’s favor. Whether there is substance to this speculation or not, it is

\(^\text{10}\) “Ponhoe kisa,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 1 (Feb. 1908).

\textit{Agricultural Growth and Japanese Economic Development}, Vol. 7, ed. Michael Smitka, 236-37. (New York:
difficult to think that the Taedong hakhoe could have drawn so much interest and participation from the most prominent power players in protectorate Korea if its own core had not been composed of members from the political elite.

Founded by individuals from the lofty scholar-official, or sadaebu, class, the Hakhoe was an organization of and for the larger Confucian literati (sa 士 or yurim 儒林) class as a whole that fed the highest-positioned of the traditional political elite. The Hakhoe’s official prospectus, written by Sin Kisŏn, makes the organization’s class and ideological orientation abundantly clear:

People of this age accept the Confucian Way as a rotten and useless doctrine and the scholar-official kind as worthless beings eating away at the world. Alas, as for their acceptance of this—how could it be the fault of the Confucian Way and of human nature’s simple maleficence? The true reason is that the Confucian Way has not been explicated. Nevertheless, renewing what is worn out depends on endeavoring vigorously to find again the lost ways of antiquity, and restoring the turbulence depends on how effort is applied—this is why we have created the Taedong hakhoe. Those clothed in the scholar’s robes, among and beyond us high-seated scholar-officials, unite the young and the elderly and contemplate the old and the new. The elderly review the old learning and bring forth new knowledge. The young establish a specialized school and undertake the task of creating its curriculum. Among the literati living in the mountains and valleys, those versed in Confucian scholarship gather to study the great principles in the classics and commentaries, thereby making our Way flourish; and they read books from overseas, thereby loosening hardened customs. We must establish the Essence of things and master their Function, preserve the original teachings of Confucius and Mencius, illuminate
things and affairs correct for our time, and practice correct virtue and beneficial use, and enrich lives, all in parallel and without abandoning any one of these. In so doing, we hope that Confucianism will again shed light on our people and avoid becoming useless, and that our twenty-million compatriots across the country will all rise to civilization and sit atop the five continents of the world.11

The Taedong hakhoe’s objective was to mobilize all literati—that is, all “[t]hose clothed in the scholar’s robes” (pongaek chi in 續掖之人), from the young to the elderly and from the high-seated scholar-officials (kyŏngdaebu 卿大夫) to the literati in the mountains and valleys (ama yumun 巖阿儒門)—in its effort not only to dispel Confucianism’s newly acquired reputation as “a rotten and useless doctrine” but also to propel the ideology back into the realm of “usefulness,” and back into the position of guiding light for all Koreans.

Interestingly, this insistence on Confucianism was quite visibly steeped in the discourse of capitalist modernity, termed munmyŏng kaehwa 文明開化, or “civilization and enlightenment,” which, as Andre Schmid has put it, “linked all matters however seemingly trivial or however seemingly grand . . . . to the nation’s health and wealth in a global order”12 and “emerged as the vocabulary of the era” that “offered a conceptual framework in which various


groups could come to terms with their recent integration into the global capitalist system.”

The Taedong hakhoe, an ostensibly Confucian group, was no exception in its commitment to participation in the contemporary global order constructed via a universal, linear vision of history that saw all nations, past or present, as progressing toward the goal of civilization and enlightenment, viewing the efforts made by individuals “clothed in the scholar’s robes” and steeped in the fundamental principles (chongji 宗旨 and taeŭi 大義) of Confucius, Mencius and the classics and commentaries as what would shape the fate of the Korean nation, namely its “rise to civilization” and to the position “atop the five continents of the world.” In fact, the logic of munmyŏng kaehwa is found all throughout the pages of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo. In one article, for example, the author Kim Munyŏn 金文演 (?-?) identifies the dearth of learning in Korean society as the one reason for the trouble it finds itself in the twentieth century and urges the reader to devote all available time to learning because “[it] is the foundation of wealth and power and the impetus for civilization, something that all the people of the nation should toil and strive in.”

Furthermore, the exhortation with which Kim concludes the article perfectly captures capitalist modernity’s conception of an order that integrated Korea into a universalized space operating in a linear progression of objectified, measurable time: “There surely will be a day when we will take strides forward in the grand theater. So let us cherish the ticking clock next to us—is it not the warning bell shakes us awake from our drunken dreams? The minutes

13 Ibid., 32.

and seconds of passing time—let us put them to work.”15 It seems that the modern ethic of 

munmyŏng kaehwa was as deeply rooted in the minds of the members of the Taedong hakhoe as 
the “traditional” ethic of Confucianism, with their ideological or conceptual friction points, if 
any, having already been smoothed out.

The Taedong hakhoe’s Confucian-centered character—to return to the subject after a 
brief but important digression—is also apparent in its activities. For instance, the Hakhoe held a 
seminar (kang’yŏnhoe 講硏會) every Sunday, where hundreds gathered to attend the lectures.16 

Given the two categories of lecturer position—Lecturers on the Classics and Lecturers on New 
Publications—one can easily surmise that topics in Confucianism constituted a good portion of 
the contents of the lectures; in fact, a regular feature in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, titled 
“Lecture Records” (Kang’ŭirok 講義錄), recapitulates the contents of the lectures on the 
classics, which indeed revolved around various topics from such sacred Confucian texts as the 
Analects, the Great Learning, the Mencius, and the Doctrine of the Mean.17 Those who served as 
Lecturers on the Classics included Sin Kisŏn, Yi Yongjik, Sŏ Chŏngsun 徐正淳 (1835-1908), 
Kim Hakchin 金鶴鎭 (1838-1917), Nam Chŏngch’ŏl 南廷哲 (1840-1916), Yi Chungha 李重夏 
(1846-1917), Yi Tojae 李道宰 (1848-1909), and Yŏ Kyuhyŏng 呂圭亨 (1848-1921).18 Even

15 “二十世紀 大劇場에 踐蹕前進 홀 其 日이 必有 혼지니 此 格格有聲 혼 座右의 時辰表가 我醉夢을 
掀撼는 警世鋏이 아난가 愛惜 혼지이다. 此 分寸の 光陰이여 勤勉 혼지이다.” Ibid.


17 The seventh issue of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, published on August 25, 1908, is the lone exception and does not 
contain the feature. Meanwhile, I have not been able to examine the contents of the “Lecture Records” feature in the 
seventeenth issue, as it is not included in the photoprint compilation of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo that was put 
together by Asea munhwasa in 1989. However, a copy of the missing issue is currently available in the Adan 
mun’go Collection, and the feature is listed in its table of contents available for viewing on the Collection’s website.

18 “Ponhoe imwŏllok,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 1, (Feb. 1908).
without considering their individual achievements as Confucian scholars, it is not difficult to
presume that they had varying degrees of “expertise” in the Confucian canon and ethics that
qualified them as lecturers, given the fact that every single one of them passed the munkwa civil
service examination in the 1870s and 80s and held important positions in the government:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Clan Seat</th>
<th>Position(s) within the Hakhoe</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Civil Service Exam</th>
<th>Official Career Highlights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sŏ Chŏngsun</td>
<td>Talsŏng</td>
<td>Lecturer on the Classics</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1871</td>
<td>Minister of Rites (Yejo p’ansŏ); Chair of the Privy Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Hakchin</td>
<td>Andong</td>
<td>Lecturer on the Classics</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1871</td>
<td>Minister of Punishments (Hyŏngjo p’ansŏ); Minister of Public Works (Kongjo p’ansŏ); Director of the Hongmun’gwan (Hongmun’gwan t’achaksa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam Chŏngch’ŏl</td>
<td>Ŭiryŏng</td>
<td>Lecturer on the Classics</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1882</td>
<td>Minister of the Interior; Minister of the Military; Magistrate of Hansŏng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Chungha</td>
<td>Chŏnju</td>
<td>Member of the Evaluation Committee; Lecturer on the Classics</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1882</td>
<td>Vice Minister of the Interior (Naebu hyŏpp’an); Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (Oebu hyŏpp’an)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Tojae</td>
<td>Yŏnan</td>
<td>Lecturer on the Classics</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1882</td>
<td>Minister of the Military; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce, and Industry; Ministry of Justice; High Court Justice (Kodŭng chaep’anso chaep’anjang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yŏ Kyuhyŏng</td>
<td>Hamyang</td>
<td>Lecturer on the Classics; Teacher at the Taedong Specialized School</td>
<td>Private education</td>
<td>Munkwa, 1882</td>
<td>Assistant Secretary, Ministry of the Interior (Naemubu ch’amūl); Member of the Privy Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Backgrounds: Lecturers on the Classics

Besides the “Lecture Records” feature, the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, whose first issue was published on February 25, 1908, and final, twentieth issue on September 25, 1909, is rife with articles dedicated to explain and promote—or, to borrow the term used by Sin Kisŏn in the organizational prospectus, to “explicate” (kang 讲)—the Confucian Way. The specific nature of this “explicating” will be discussed in detail later in this study, but the fact that Confucianism
was a dominant thematic strand pursued by the Taedong hakhoe becomes immediately apparent in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*’s overall organization. As Yi Sŏngmin has helpfully summarized, each issue of the journal consists of seven sections: 1) Editorial (Nonsŏl 論說), featuring essays of an argumentative nature, mostly on the importance of the “old learning”—studies in Confucian principles and literature in *hanmun*—and its compatibility with the “new learning” from the West; 2) Academic Knoll (Hagwŏn 學苑), featuring articles that introduce topics from a wide variety of the “new learning” disciplines, including politics, law, physics, physiology, chemistry, geography, economics, botany, and astronomy; 3) Literary Knoll (Munwŏn 文苑), featuring articles on the issue of writing (script—écriture) in Korea, specifically on the controversy over the use of *hanmun* and *kungmun* (national script); 4) Belles-Lettres (Sajo 詞藻), featuring Sinitic poetry (*hansi* 漢詩) composed primarily by Hakhoe members; 5) Stories (Tamch’ong 談叢), containing anecdotes about prominent scholars in Korean history; 6) Gazette (Hwibo 彙報), featuring snippets of news from the Korean government and from overseas; and 7) Records of the Hakhoe (Hoerok 會錄), reporting news from within the Hakhoe and recording the contents of the weekly lectures—as I have mentioned above, predominantly of the lectures on the classics. The articles in the journal were written either in *hanmun* or in Sino-Korean mixed script (*kukhanmun*), with those written in the latter mostly concentrated in the Academic Knoll section dealing with topics in the new learning. It is also evident from this summary of the journal’s organization that the Taedong hakhoe was keenly interested in—along with the new learning—Confucian ideas, as well as *hanmun* and *hansi* poetry, which, given the script and

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19 Yi Sŏngmin, “*Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo sojae hansi,*” 173-75.
literary genre’s close relationship with Confucian scholarship itself, further highlights the deeply Confucian character of the Hakhoe.

Given the initiative to mobilize the Korean literati under the banner of Confucianism, which was stated explicitly in the organizational prospectus, the backgrounds of its scholar-official founders, and the contents of the lectures and the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, it would be safe to assume that the Taedong hakhoe’s membership was composed exclusively of those with traditional literati backgrounds. It seems the membership was growing, at least during the first half of the Taedong hakhoe’s existence. Yi Sŏngmin has counted 247 names from the “List of Members” entry in the first issue of the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*; more names were added through similar, admittedly “incomplete” lists in Issues 3 (52 names), 7 (11 names), and 10 (2 names), with the entries in the latter two issues providing an additional, separate list of names registered through regional branches. The fact that the *Taehan maeil sinbo* reported, just two days after the publication of the “List of Members” entry containing 247 names in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, that the Taedong hakhoe’s members totaled over 2,200, creates some uncertainty in grasping the exact size of the membership during the initial stages, but the growing number of names attested in the journal suggests that it was growing both inside and outside the capital area.

A more reliable indication of the growing membership can be found in the sprawling regional branches associated with the Taedong hakhoe. The “Records of Organizational Affairs”

20 Ibid., 170. See also, “Hoewŏllok,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 1 (Feb. 1908).


feature in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* records numerous requests made over time by individuals in various localities outside Seoul, on which the Evaluation Committee deliberated before granting them. These localities include Ansŏng, Kanghwa, P’aju, and Chinwi (Kyŏnggi Province); Kilchu, Anbyŏn, Yŏnghŭng, Hamhŭng, and Pukch’ŏng (Hamgyŏng Province); Kŭmsan, Tamyang, Muan, Yŏsan, and Cheju (then Chŏlla Province); Ch’ungju, Chŏnŭi, and Yŏnsan (Ch’ungh’ŏng Province); and Sinch’ŏn (Hwangeo Province). The journal also lists the names and positions of the executives selected for nine of the regional branches, in Kanghwa, P’aju, and Chinwi (Kyŏnggi Province); Anbyŏn, Yŏnghŭng, and Pukch’ŏng (Hamgyŏng Province); Chŏnŭi (Ch’ungh’ŏng Province); and Muan and Cheju (Chŏlla Province). The fact that the requests to establish regional branches are recorded in each of the first seven issues and Issue 9 and that only one such request can be found in the rest of the issues—Issue 16, to be specific—suggests that the Taedong hakhoe enjoyed a healthy rate of organizational expansion at least during the first half of its existence.

One point of particular note from the Taedong hakhoe’s regional membership is the high number of regional branches set up in the northern region of Korea. Of the eighteen branches identified by the *Wŏlbo*, five were in Hamgyŏng Province and one in Hwangeo Province. That Hamgyŏng boasted the highest number of branches (matched only by Chŏlla Province) is quite surprising, given that the literati in the northern provinces (Hamgyŏng, Hwangeo, and

23 “Ponhoe kisa,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 1-7, 9, and 16.

24 “Hoewŏllok,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 7 and 10.

25 There is no record of a regional branch established in P’yŏng’an Province; but given that the Taedong hakhoe’s executive staff included a regional manager (*chibang ch’ongmu*) designated for P’yŏng’an, it seems that the organization had—or tried to cultivate—some presence in the northwestern province. “Ponhoe imwŏllok,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 1 (Feb. 1908).
P’yŏng’an), without blood ties to the hereditary aristocrats in the capital region, had faced severe social and political discrimination since the very beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty.\(^{26}\) This, however, does not mean that there was no culture of Confucian literary cultivation in Hamgyŏng and the northern region in general.\(^{27}\) As Kyung Moon Hwang has noted, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the northern literati had taken on the characteristics of their southern counterparts’ literati culture: “dedication to Confucian learning and ritual, organization into local gentry associations (hyangan), passage of the civil service examinations, large-scale landholding, and even disdain for military endeavors and military men.”\(^{28}\) In the case of Hamgyŏng Province specifically, several factors involving the throne stimulated the growth of literati culture (yup’ung 鄒風 or munp’ung 文風) among the provincial elites. Chosŏn monarchs in the late seventeenth century attempted to stabilize and develop the border region against incursions from the Qing, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they attempted to strengthen royal

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\(^{27}\) P’yŏng’an and Hamgyŏng Provinces’ literati tradition in the Chosŏn period has been demonstrated by Jang Yoo-Seung who traced the formation of the two provinces’ distinct regional identities in relation to the central scholarship and bureaucracy that discriminated against literati from the northern region of Korea. According to Jang, literati from the two northern provinces constantly tried to swim upstream, as it were, against the discriminatory politics of the central state, forging connections with the central elite and pursuing Confucian literary cultivation, and in the process produced several renowned families and scholars who resided in the region. For example, Yi Chaehyŏng’s 李載亨 (1665-1741) neo-Confucian scholarship was accomplished enough to earn a strong recognition by the central court and even the honorable title “master of Hamgyŏng Province” (關北夫子). In P’yŏng’an Province, Yi Sihang 李時恒 (1672-1736) was a representative literatus who actively produced neo-Confucian literary production, including the long 4000-character poem Sŏgyŏngbu 西京賦 (Song of the Western Capital), and his student Kim Chŏm 金漸 (1695-?) was another who in 1728 compiled 320 poems written by P’yŏng’an literati into Sŏgyŏng sihwa 西京詩話 (A Talk on Poetry from the Western Capital), which included numerous anecdotes of P’yŏng’an literati defeating their central counterparts with their excellent poetic talent. See Jang Yoo-Seung, “Regional Identities of Northern Literati: A Comparative Study of P’yŏng’an and Hamgyŏng Provinces,” in *The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture*, ed. Kim Sun Joo (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 62-92.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 261.
authority by establishing monuments and ancestral rites in the province dedicated to the legacy of the dynastic founder Yi Sŏnggye and his ancestors—natives of the Hamgyŏng region—and by opening bureaucratic recruitment to non-aristocratic literati outside the capital region. Such attempts brought economic prosperity, political relevance, and in turn cultural relevance, to the literati of the traditionally ostracized province.29 This growth would materialize in the increasing number of northern literati passing the civil examination in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty: according to Edward W. Wagner’s research, the proportion of successful high civil examination candidates residing in Hwanghae, P’yŏng’an, and Hamgyŏng Provinces rose from less than 5% of the total number of successful candidates during the first four centuries of the Chosŏn dynasty to 7.5% in the seventeenth century, 14% in the eighteenth century, 15.40% in the nineteenth century, and 22.8% during the final three decades before the abolition of the examination system in 1896; by the end of the dynasty, the proportion of northerners who passed the civil examination had come to match their proportion of the total Chosŏn population.30 Although province-specific numbers and trends would be more helpful, the large number of Taedong hakhoe branches in Hamgyŏng can be explained in this larger context of northern acculturation. The literati residing in the northeastern province, in the absence of the civil service examination abolished in 1896, may have judged joining the Taedong hakhoe’s network an alternate way to tap into capital-centered political power. At the same time, the Hakhoe’s willingness to include non-aristocratic, traditionally peripheral literati from the north speaks to its commitment to the


stated objective of rallying everyone “clothed in the scholar’s robes,” from the high-seated scholar-officials to the literati in the mountains and valleys, for the advancement of Confucianism and its role in modernizing Korea.31

The Taedong hakhoe, though clearly literati-centered, was a world apart from the so-called wijŏng ch’ŏksa 衛正斥邪 (defend orthodoxy and reject heterodoxy) literati of the previous generation, who rejected outright the influx of knowledge coming in from overseas. Instead, the Hakhoe embraced this “new learning” and aimed to propagate it amongst literati; that is, the members of the deeply Confucian Hakhoe worked not only to acquire the imported system of knowledge for themselves but also to pass it onto other Korean literati inside and outside the organization. As clearly stated in the organizational prospectus written by Sin Kisŏn, the Taedong hakhoe argued that the new learning was an indispensable component of bringing about the old Confucian values of correct virtue (chŏngdŏk 正德), beneficial use (iyong 利用), and enriched lives (husaeng 厚生) in Korea and reaching the height of civilization. As the Taedong hakhoe saw it, the old learning and the new learning were in a complementary relationship, in which the former, representing the fundamental principles taught by Confucius and Mencius, needed to be manifested through the latter, representing “things and affairs correct for the time” (samul chi siŭi 事物之時宜). This complementary relationship is also reflected in the Essence-Function framework that Sin Kisŏn adopted in the prospectus, summing up the charge of the Taedong hakhoe and the rest of the Korean literati as “establishing the Essence of things”—that is, investigating and illuminating latent Confucian truths and principles (i.e. the old learning)—

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and “mastering their Function”—that is, harnessing the truths and principles into practical manifestations (i.e. the new learning). To Sin and his fellow leaders of the Taedong hakhoe, “scholarship that focuses on Essence but neglects Function” (“學之體偏而用缺者”) was just as problematic as “scholarship that neglects Essence but unscrupulously pursues Function” (“學之體闕而用亂者也”). Sin also highlighted elsewhere the inseparable, complementary relationship between the old and the new learning via an analogy, comparing it to the way that the classics (kyŏngjŏk 經籍) need to be accompanied and explicated by annotations and commentaries (chuso 註疏).33

Some of the Taedong hakhoe’s activities also mirrored its appreciation of the new learning as a complement to the old Confucian academic pursuits. Alongside the lecturers on the classics, the Hakhoe employed lecturers on “new publications” who, presumably, spoke in front of a weekly gathering about topics from books and articles produced in the West on modern academic fields. The contents of these “new learning” lectures remain elusive because, unlike those of the classics lectures, virtually none were reproduced in the “Lecture Records” articles in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo’s “Records of the Hakhoe” section.34 Perhaps the Taedong hakhoe did not feel the need to sum up the lectures on the new learning, given the array of articles in the journal’s “Academic Knoll” section dedicated to introducing topics in Western academic

32 Ibid.
34 The only instance of a “new publication” lecture summarized in the “Lectures Records” feature in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo is Chŏng Kyo’s 鄭喬 (1856-1925) lecture on the origin and development of religion (especially that of Roman Catholicism) extending over two issues.
disciplines, such as law, politics, economics, physics, physiology, chemistry, and botany. If the lectures were designed to benefit the Hakhoe’s members and guests attending them, the articles in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, at the cost of 15 chŏn per issue, were published for the nourishment of member and non-member literati alike in various kernels of the new learning.

The Taedong hakhoe also instituted the Taedong Specialized School in February 1908, a private school that trained individuals from the traditional literati class in modern law and state administration. The school offered a three-year regular program and a one-year accelerated program, requiring students to complete courses in civil law, obligation law (ch’ae kwŏnpŏp 債權法), commercial law, criminal law, corporate law, constitutional law, marine law, and international law, as well as in politics, public administration, public finance, and taxation. Outside the specialized education in law and state administration, the school also required complementary subjects such as economics, accounting, history, mathematics, and foreign language. The curriculum, though so “modern,” came with a conspicuous stamp of the old learning, designating hanmun as a requirement: students in the regular program had to take it in all three years of their enrollment. According to a report by the Hwangsŏng sinmun, the school specializing in law and state administration also opened a surveying (ch’ŭngnyang 测量) program in June 1908, though not much else is known about this particular program at this time. The Taedong hakhoe’s embrace of the new learning, accompanied by its Confucian character, attests to an “eclectic” attitude embodied by the motto “Illuminate the orthodox and

36 “Hagwŏn mojip kwanggo,” Hwangsŏng sinmun, February 23, 1908.
37 “Taedong ch’ŭngnyang kaehak,” Hwangsŏng sinmun, June 3, 1908.
bring forth new knowledge” (闡明正學, 開發新知”) emblazoned on the cover of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo from Issue 2 and on.38

The Taedong hakhoe, after approximately two and a half years of robust activity in organizing lectures, publishing a journal, and running a private school, would meet its demise in October 1909, when the organization decided at its final general meeting that its name would change permanently to the Kongja kyohoe (Church of Confucius). It seems that the organization had been going through a period of organizational instability or even discord in the final months: the Taehan maeil sinbo reported that the Taedong hakhoe changed its name in June 1909 to “Sungjong kyohoe” led by Yi Yongjik as the president and assisted by Yi Wanyong and Cho Chungũng;39 the same newspaper, along with the Hwangsŏng sinmun, reported in September of the same year that another name change—to “Taesŏnghoe,” this time—took place, identifying Yi Yongjik as the president and Pak Chebin as the executive secretary;40 and finally, in the very next month, the Taedong hakhoe settled on the name “Kongja kyohoe.”41 It is hard to pinpoint what caused the instability within the Hakhoe and ultimately its demise. Yu Chun’gi has observed that the Hakhoe was weakened by the “critical public opinion against Sin Kisŏn and disharmony within the Hakhoe” and ultimately found itself on the verge of dissolution due to the


death of Sin, the president and one of the most prominent members of the Hakhoe, in February 1909. According to Kang Myŏnggwan, the Kongja kyohoe’s publication *The Past and the Future of the Kongja Kyohoe* (*Kongja kyohoe chi kiwang kŭp changnae*孔子敎會之旣往及將來) cites Sin’s death as the cause of the Taedong hakhoe’s demise, but the publication also suggests that the actual cause may have been Resident General Sone Arasuke’s taking exception to the Hakhoe’s interjection—in the form of two long letters about his office’s policy—into the affairs of the state; that is, the Taedong hakhoe, having offended the Japanese with its political activism, was forced to reduce itself to a purely religious organization with its political color bleached. Whatever the case may have been, the Taedong hakhoe’s demise and the Kongja kyohoe’s birth spelled the end of the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, the publication of which ceased without notice in the final issue published in the same month of the organizational change. The Taedong Specialized School managed to last longer, closing its doors as late as February 1912, due to financial difficulties.

From this overview of the Taedong hakhoe’s organizational makeup and activities, several characteristics that will be useful for this study’s purposes come to light. First, the organization was politically elite, led by a group of powerful scholar-officials who had occupied some of the highest positions in the Chosŏn and Taehan Empire governments at one point or another, and attracting the attention of other elite parties, both Japanese and Korean. Second, the organization was Confucian, in both the demographic and ideological sense of the term: it was

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42 Yu Chun’gi, *Han’guk kŭndae yugyo kaehyŏk undongsa* (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1999), 96.


created for the Korean literati in general and by prominent scholar-officials who had proven their knowledge and command of the Confucian canon and Literary Sinitic through the *munkwa* civil service examination before its abolishment in 1894; and it was deeply Confucian in its beliefs, aiming to explicate their meaning and relevance to Korea as the nation embarked on the twentieth century. Third, the organization was enthusiastic about learning and teaching the new knowledge, exposing its members to a wide range of modern academic disciplines and operating a school for the study of law and politics. My focus in the rest of this study will be to explore and connect these characteristics in order to construct a more informative portrait of the Taedong hakhoe.

Modern scholarship, on the other hand, has focused its attention almost exclusively on one aspect of the Taedong hakhoe that I have not discussed in the overview: namely, the Hakhoe’s proximity to the Japanese imperial, and later, colonial regime. Most studies involving the Taedong hakhoe or the Confucian literati of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Korea in general characterize the organization one-dimensionally as pro-Japanese and collaborationist. In the following section, I will survey the criticisms that the Taedong hakhoe has received and demonstrate their unanimity in representing it as an unabashed collaborator, in the hopes of highlighting the need to expand the scope of examination.

### 2.2 The Critics: Past and Present

#### 2.2.1 The *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*

By far the most vocal and caustic criticism of the Taedong hakhoe came from the *Taehan maeil sinbo*, a ruthlessly nationalist daily newspaper founded by the likes of Pak Ŭnsik 朴殷植 (1859-1925), Sin Ch’aeho 申采浩 (1880-1936), and Yang Kit’ak 梁起鐸 (1871-1938), some of
the most prominent nationalist figures in pre-annexation Korea. The newspaper was vigorous in its criticism of Japan’s involvement in Korean politics as well as Korean individuals and organizations who appeared to be sympathetic toward Japan, but it was able to avoid Japan’s ever-oppressive censorship for longer than other media outlets owing to the fact that it was registered under the name of Ernest Thomas Bethell (1872-1909), a British journalist (Japan and Britain were allies).\(^{45}\) In the eyes of the editors of the *Taehan maeil sinbo*, the Taedong hakhoe certainly qualified as one of those organizations, and the level of disdain that the *Taehan maeil sinbo* showed toward the Taedong hakhoe can easily be fathomed in the language employed in condemnation of the organization: as the editors of the newspaper described it, the Taedong hakhoe was “a demonic society” (*mahakhoe* 魔學會)\(^{46}\) and possessed “a fox’s intestines and a ghost’s stomach” (*hojang kwidu* 狐腸鬼肚).\(^{47}\) The main reason for this acrimony was the Taedong hakhoe’s close relationship with the Japanese. The *Taehan maeil sinbo* repeatedly brought up the the fact that the Taedong hakhoe received a donation of 10,000 *hwan* from Itō Hirobumi at the time of its founding as the prime example of its subservience to Japan,\(^{48}\) but the newspaper also reserved more scathing words for the organization’s other, more substantive activities.


\(^{48}\) Critical remarks against the Taedong hakhoe’s acceptance of Itō’s contribution can be found in: “Kŏwanmul ŭi taedūkk’ye,” January 12, 1908, mixed script edition; Miscellaneous News, January 19, 1908, Korean edition; “Ilbon ŭi samdae ch’ungno,” April 2, 1908, mixed script edition; and “Mahakhoe ŭi myŏngch’ing pyŏn’gyŏng,” October 8, 1908, mixed script edition.
In an article titled “The Grand Scheme of the Greatly Obstinate,”49 for example, the Taehan maeil sinbo reproduced two letters that the Taedong hakhoe had issued, one dated July 17, 1907, addressed to Itō Hirobumi and the other dated November 18, 1907, to the gentry (sinsa 紳士) of Korea. The first letter, dated only three days prior to Kojong’s (b. 1852-1919; r. 1897-1907) abdication, is a request signed by several top figures—Sin Kisŏn, Sŏ Chŏngsun, Min Pyŏngsŏk, Yi Yongjik, Kim Hakchin, Nam Chŏngch’ŏl, Yi Chungha, and Hong Sŭngmok—of the Taedong hakhoe that the Korean Imperial House be left alone. It downplays Kojong’s role in the Hague mission,50 placing the blame on “but a few individuals who think of the country but do not know the priorities of the times.”51 Toward the end of the letter, the signatories manifest a strong stance against any punitive measures that Japan might bring against Kojong, invoking the final clause of the Second Korea-Japan Treaty of 1905 that professed to protect the Korean Imperial Household, and threatened, “If an unjustified and indecent affair outside of what is expected and promised should take place, we all, feeble with age and nearing death though we may be, will certainly protest it with our lives.”52 The Taehan maeil sinbo writer comments on this letter with grudging approval: “The letter is rife with the attitude of a dog wagging its tail to


50 Kojong, on the advice of the American missionary Homer Hulbert (1863-1949), dispatched a secret delegation to the Hague Peace Conference of 1907 in order to make the case that the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905, which made Korea a protectorate of Japan, was signed under duress. Upon arrival, however, the delegation was refused diplomatic representation because Korea was a protectorate and therefore was not qualified to stand before other independent nations. For an excellent summary of Kojong’s dispatch of the delegation to the Hague and its aftermath, see Peter Duus, The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 207-211.

51 “此不過幾個人之徒, 懷國家之想, 不識時勢之宜.” Ibid.

52 “倘或, 有意外約外名不正言不順之事, 則僕等雖疲燧垂死, 俱當以一死抗之.” Ibid.
beg for mercy; however, beneath this guise it criticizes Japan’s oppression, making it clear that if an unexpected plight were to befall the Imperial House, the members of the Taedong hakhoe would respond with their lives.”53

By the time the Taedong hakhoe issued a letter titled “A Letter of Declaration from the Taedong Hakhoe to the Gentry across the Country” (“大東學會對全國紳士人民公布函”), its members’ rhetorical resolve to risk their lives to prevent a Japanese crackdown on Korean sovereignty had given way to a resolve to stop those actually risking their lives from doing so. In this letter, the Taedong hakhoe declares its disapproval of the Righteous Armies rising up across the country in response to Kojong’s abdication, arguing that Koreans need instead to focus on strengthening their learning and industries with Japan’s continued help and protection, because “the only way for Korea to transform its precarious condition into a state of well-being is to bond with Japan [kyŏril 結日].”54 Continued armed resistance, the Taedong hakhoe warns, would only spell an impending “burning of books and burying of scholars” (pun’gaeng 焚坑).55

It is possible that the Taedong hakhoe may have brought up the “burning of books and burying of scholars” because it was genuinely concerned that the literati class as a whole would receive retribution for an armed rebellion led by the more resistant members within the class.

53 “伊藤氏의계 公函 흀 文一度인즉 搖尾乞憐의 姿態 虽甚이나 假粧야 日本의 威壓을 諷責하며 万一皇室에 意外之變이 有혹면 一死로 自靖회사고 明言혀얏디니.” Ibid.

54 “我國之轉危為安, 惟有結日.” Ibid.

55 Pun’gaeng (Ch. fenkeng) or punsŏgaengyu (Ch. fenshu kengru) refers to the widely known and often cited stories recorded in Volume 6 of Sima Qian’s Shiji 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian). According to Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145-c. 86 BCE), Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝 (259-210 BCE), on the advice of his chancellor Li Si 李斯 (c. 280-208 BCE), ordered the burning of all books except those on medicine, divination, agriculture, and forestry; and the emperor also ordered the live burial of more than 460 scholars.
However, the *Taehan maeil sinbo* reads this warning as a vicious direct threat to all Korean Confucian literati, issued by those who “sing and dance about *poho* [protection] and bellow out the tune of *kyŏril*, with a bosom full of dependency.”\(^{56}\) To the editor of the newspaper, all the talk about securing a great future for Korea with the help of Japan is only a guise for the Taedong hakhoe’s real objective: for its members to fulfill their age-old passion for government posts by ingratiating themselves with the Japanese at the expense of their countrymen. This indictment appears evident in the final analysis that the editor offers at the end of the article:

> Alas! These obstinate and rotten things are bored in the days they have left to live and are guided by their old passion for government posts intertwined with evil habits. The signing of the Five-Clause Treaty and Seven-Clause Accord [the Japan-Korea Treaties of 1905 and 1907, respectively] was taken up by Pak Chesun, Yi Wanyong, and others before anyone else could claim it. Those led by Song Pyŏngjun and Yi Yonggu darted ahead and acquired the Self-Defense Army of the Ilchinhoe. As for those involved with the Taedong hakhoe, they, in their old age, had been roaming and seeking in every direction until they had the good fortune of meeting a lofty teacher like Ito Hirobumi and paid him obeisance as their master at his lecture on the *Great Learning*. It should be enough that they have received his teachings and become his exemplary disciples, but what evil heart have they harbored, threatening the literati across the country with an impending disaster like the burning of books and burying of scholars?\(^{57}\)

\(^{56}\) “不過是滿腔子依賴心으로 保護 歌舞며 結日을 力倡야.” Ibid.

\(^{57}\) “嗚呼라 頑固腐物이 餘生이 支離고 仕宦舊熱에 惡習이 牽纏대 五條約七協約은 朴齊純李完用等이 一鞭을 先着억اعتم스며 一進會自衛團은 宋秉畯李容九等이 疾足으로 先得埇갓스미 白首殘年에 彷徨四顧능 다가 多幸히 伊藤博文氏又俊 高師물 遇睹야 其大學講義席에서 北面執贄埇갓스니 自己나
Just as Pak Chesun and Yi Wanyong are responsible for opening up Korea to Japan’s political influence, and the Ilchinhoe for eliminating the anti-Japanese elements, the Taedong hakhoe’s charge is to pacify the literati involved in the Righteous Army movement by stoking fears of slaughter and retribution. As the Taehan maeil sinbo sees things, if the members of the Taedong hakhoe were indeed interested purely in the “Confucian” connection with Itō Hirobumi, they should be satisfied with becoming his disciples; but in their “old passion” for officialdom, they have latched onto Itō and offered to serve as the right hand to Japan’s ambitions.

In another article, titled “An Objection from a Scholar in Ch’ungch’ŏng,” the Taehan maeil sinbo furthers the association between the Taedong hakhoe’s prioritization of class interests and its servitude to Japan, by telling a self-professedly “true” story of an encounter between two scholars:

One day, in North Town [Pukch’ŏn], a high-positioned scholar-official urged a scholar from the Ch’ungch’ŏng region: “The Taedong hakhoe today is a community of us literati. Nothing would be as useful as learning about law and governance [from the Hakhoe] for a quick rise to officialdom. If you join the Hakhoe, [you will benefit because] it sustains the five-century-old literati class and all the distinguished officials and gentry are in our hands. But if you do not, you will surely regret it later.” The scholar burst into great anger. “The so-called Taedong hakhoe is a second Ilchinhoe. The Ilchinhoe’s declaration stated that it is acceptable for our country to receive protection from Japan, and the Taedong hakhoe declared to the literati all across the country that if we do not join forces

心法을 傳授하시야 高足弟子됨이 可할거늘 又何凶毒의 心腸을 抱한아 脅驅하노지

Ibid.

with Japan, a massacre like the burning of books and burying of scholars will be imminent. Its devious attempt is even worse than the Ilchinhoe’s declaration; how can we scholars submit to its threat and relish serving as the guiding ghosts for the foreigners?” he said, objecting strongly.59

Whether this is a representation of a conversation that indeed took place or not, how the Taehan maeil sinbo viewed the Taedong hakhoe is clear from the language oozing with class consciousness. From the perspective of the newspaper, the Taedong hakhoe was an organization of self-serving individuals who concerned themselves not only with achieving a quick rise through the official ranks but also with preserving the “five-century-old” literati class’s position in governance. Hence, in the article, the Seoul-dwelling, high-positioned scholar-official stands in as a straw man highlighting the Taedong hakhoe’s blatant greed for power, which immediately becomes associated—by means of the periphery-dwelling scholar’s censure—with the organization’s servile behavior, in particular its persuasion and intimidation of the more resistant Korean literati on behalf of the Japanese. This, for the newspaper, made the Taedong hakhoe an organization no different from the Ilchinhoe. Submitting to the argument of the Taedong hakhoe, in other words, was an act equivalent to being a “guiding ghost” (ch’anggwi 脹鬼) for the foreigners.

59 “日前北村某處에셔 一位兩班이 湖中一士人을 勸告ᄒᆞ야 曰今에 大東學會ᄂᆞᆫ 我輩兩班社會라 法政을 學得ᄒᆞ면 仕宦쳡경이 莫緊於此니 子若人會ᄒᆞ면 五百餘年兩班도 維持ᄒᆞᆫᄃᆡ 將來高官大爵이 我輩手中에 在ᄒᆞ지나 若不進而參會ᄒᆞ면 必有後悔ᄒᆞ리라ᄒᆞᆫᄃ槿 該士人이 勃然大怒ᄒᆞ曰所謂大東學會ᄂᆞᆫ 第二一進會라 彼一進會의 宣言書ᄂᆞᆫ 我國이 日本保護를 受ᄒᆞᆯ가 宣言ᄒᆞ얏거ᄂᆞᆯ 대東學會ᄂᆞᆫ 全國儒林을 對宣佈ᄒᆞ되 萬若日本과 結托지 아니ᄒᆞ면 墓坑屠戮이 只在目前이라ᄒᆞ얏스니 此其凶險手段이 一進會宣言書보다 殆有甚焉ᄒᆞ니 我等儒林에서엿지 彼輩威脅에 屈服ᄒᆞ야 外人の 腫鬼되기를 甘心ᄒᆞ리오ᄃ槿 大段反對ᄒᆞ럿다라.” Ibid.
It is important to note that the Taehan maeil sinbo did not directly attack the fact that the Taedong hakhoe was Confucian in nature. Even when the newspaper labeled the Taedong hakhoe and its members as “obstinate” (wan’go 頑固), the term is associated with their “old passion”—that is, the scholar-officials’ collective greed for the “five-centuries-old” social and political dominance—rather than with their Confucian character. In other words, the Taedong hakhoe, in the eyes of the editors of the Taehan maeil sinbo, was obstinate because of its class conservatism, not because it subscribed to the ideals of the old learning. Rather, the editors feared the potential destruction of Confucianism that might be brought about by the Hakhoe’s invocation of Confucianism:

The Taedong hakhoe—the organization that, with Confucius on its head, the Classics on its back, and the verses of the Great Learning on its lips, puts on the face of a Confucian to destroy Confucianism, like a hunter feigning the call of the pheasant to trick the bird—has suddenly changed its name and become the Kongja kyohoe [Church of Confucius].

The Taedong hakhoe’s Confucian banner was seen only as a guise worn in order to lure the literati into submitting to the Japanese and ultimately into destruction, like a hunter who makes a bird call to trick a pheasant into captivity.

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60 A prime example of this association between “obstinacy” and “greed for power” was presented earlier in the excerpt from the Taehan maeil sinbo article “The Grand Scheme of the Greatly Obstinate,” which states: “These obstinate and rotten things are bored in the days they have left to live and are guided by their old passion for government posts intertwined with evil habits.” See “Kŏwanmul ŭi taedŭkkye,” Taehan maeil sinbo, January 12, 1908, mixed script edition. For other Taehan maeil sinbo articles that make a similar association, see Miscellaneous News, Taehan maeil sinbo, January 19, 1908, Korean edition; and “Sinssi wan’go,” Taehan maeil sinbo, February 16, 1908, Korean edition.

61 “頭에 孔子를 戴고 背에 聖經을 負고 口로 「大學之道在明明德」을 講고 雉鳴을 假作しよう 치를 誘おう 口出し 儒敎徒의 面目을 假粧하고 儒敎를 滅亡코 얻는 大東學會가 今에 突然히 名을 變하고 孔子敎會가 되였도다.” “Mahakhoe ŭi myŏngch’ing pyŏn’gyŏng,” Taehan maeil sinbo, October 8, 1909.
In short, the Taedong hakkoe, as reported and portrayed by the *Taehan maeil sinbo*, was an unequivocally pro-Japanese group. This pro-Japanese aspect of the Taedong hakkoe was strongly associated with its conservative classism, and the newspaper accused the Hakhoe of being willing to betray its compatriots and side with the Japanese only to secure the interests of the literati class. The group’s Confucian character was attacked as nothing but a guise to persuade the Righteous Armies and other literati, on behalf of the Japanese, to put down their weapons and assist the foreigners. The *Taehan maeil sinbo*’s criticism, specifically with respect to the Hakhoe’s relationship with the Japanese, appears to have left a profound impression on modern-day scholarship. In fact, as I will demonstrate in the following section, scholars have directed almost all of their attention to the “pro-Japanese” aspect of the Taedong hakkoe, while leaving largely unexplored the “classism” aspect also highlighted by the newspaper.

### 2.2.2 Modern Scholarship

Chŏng Chinsŏk, in his overview of the history of modern Korean periodicals, includes an entry on the *Taedong hakkoe wŏlbo*, in which he introduces its parent organization with a very broad stroke of the brush:

The Taedong hakkoe was founded in December 1907, with its sights set on studying both “old knowledge” and “new knowledge,” and with Yi Wanyong and Cho Chungŭng as central figures. It was created on the basis of the 20,000-wŏn provided by Resident General Itō Hirobumi with the aim to turn the literati pro-Japanese.62

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The two features most characteristic of the Taedong hakhoe, as identified by this brief summary, are its “sights” set on both the old learning and the new learning and its collaboration with the Japanese. What is notable here is the level of exaggeration involved in the highlighting of the latter. First, Chŏng’s summary puts forth the claim that Yi Wanyong, undoubtedly the most infamous collaborator, was a central figure along with Cho Chungŭng in the Taedong hakhoe. While it is true that Yi Wanyong was a member of the Taedong hakhoe, there is no evidence to show that he was in fact a central member. There is no record of Yi taking part in the Hakhoe in a frontline executive capacity, and other than his speech at the Sŏnggyun’gwan ceremony in December 1907, nothing suggests that he made a substantive and consistent contribution to the organization. Even the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo identifies Yi as a “guest” (naebin 来賓) at the ceremony, suggesting his “outsider” status. Second, Chŏng’s summary contains the claim that the Taedong hakhoe was founded on the basis of 20,000 hwan donated by Itō Hirobumi. However, this amount is twice as large as the number given in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo and reported by the Taehan maeil sinbo. Moreover, as I have shown before, the Taedong hakhoe received 10,000 hwan from the Korean Imperial Household, too, around the same time of Itō’s contribution, rendering rather hyperbolic the claim that the organization was created solely on the basis of the Japanese donation. It is not surprising to see any brief on the Taedong hakhoe

63 On March 15, 1908, Yi Wanyong was selected as an advisor (komun) along with Kim Yunsik, Cho Chungŭng, and Yu Kilchun, but the exact nature of the role is unknown.

64 “Sŏnggyun’gwan ch’onghoe si kangšŏl,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 2 (Mar. 1908).

65 Meanwhile, Yi Sŏngmin claims that the Taedong hakhoe received 30,000 hwan from Itō Hirobumi in total. He cites the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo as the source for the 10,000 hwan but does not account for the remaining 20,000 hwan. See Yi Sŏngmin, “Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo sojae hansi,” 170.

66 Also, it should be noted that the Taedong hakhoe, according to the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, began operating in February 1907, approximately eight months before the Japanese Crown Prince’s 1,000 hwan donation in October.
suffer from such exaggeration; after all, most of the scholarship on the organization has focused disproportionately on portraying it as a product of Japan’s “aim to turn the literati pro-Japanese,” while no attention has been given to its other “sights.” In fact, in each of the studies I will examine below, the donation from Itō Hirobumi is cited as “Exhibit A” of the Hakhoe’s collaboration with and servility to Japan, but none even mentions the greater financial contribution made by the Korean Imperial Household.

The most scathing review of the Taedong hakhoe comes from Kang Myŏnggwan, who examines Korea’s “traditional intellectuals” (*ku chisigin*) and their pro-Japanese *hanmun*-literary activities in the 1910s and notices a revival in *hanmunhak*, or the study of literature in Literary Sinitic, in Korean society immediately after annexation. He characterizes the phenomenon as “conservative-reactionary” (*posu pandong*) and calls the organizations leading the revival—such as the Imunhoe (Society of Expanding the Mind with Culture), the Munye kurakpu (Literature and Arts Club), the Sinhae ŭmsa (Sinhae Poetry Company), and the Chosŏn munyesa (Literature and Arts Company of Chosŏn)—“products of an anachronistic and regressive consciousness;” in turn, he argues that these entities “served to garble the reality of colonization while affirming and praising Japan’s rule in Korea.”

Exploring the “nesting dolls” of teleological dichotomies—“collaborationist” vs. “patriotic”

1907 and ten months before Itō Hirobumi’s 10,000 *hwan* donation in December of the same year. This renders the claim that the Hakhoe was created on the basis of any one donation untenable. See the timeline provided in “Ponhoe kisa,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 1 (Feb. 1908).

67 See Kang Myŏnggwan, “Ilche ch’o ku chisigin ŭi munye hwaltong.”

68 Most likely *imun* 以文 is an allusion to a phrase in the “Zihan” chapter of the *Analects*, which reads: “[The Master] expanded my mind with culture/learning” (“博我以文”).

69 Ibid., 142.
underneath “conservative” vs. “progressive” underneath “Literary Sinitic” vs. “indigenous Korean”—apparent in the characterization of the post-1910 Literary Sinitic renaissance is beyond the scope of this study, but what is relevant here is that Kang traces the origin of this “pro-Japanese movement that constructed a conservative-reactionary phenomenon” back to the Taedong hakhoe.

Kang sums up his verdict on the Taedong hakhoe in the following fashion:

The founding mission of the Taedong hakhoe was to defend the traditional Confucian scholarship that was under fierce attack at the time. That is, the Taedong hakhoe was an organization established “for the great goal of preserving Confucianism,” and its concrete, practical principles were to “preserve the original teachings of Confucius and Mencius, illuminate things and affairs correct for the time, and practice correct virtue, beneficial use, and enriching lives, all three in parallel and without abandoning one.”

Founding an organization that adhered—in a situation where the nation was in a significant crisis due to Japan’s usurpation—to an old ideology whose historical usefulness had been exhausted was already an anti-national act; but the Taedong hakhoe’s real business was in “selling out its own country” under the mask of Confucianism.70 [emphasis added]

At first glance, Kang’s view of the Taedong hakhoe appears not so different from that of the Taehan maeil sinbo, identifying the organization’s “real business,” hidden under the guise of Confucianism, as betraying its own country in favor of Japanese rule. However, Kang complements it with a teleological attitude characterizing his overall argument on the

70 Ibid., 144.
“conservative-reactionary” literati in post-annexation Korea. Kang denounces the Taedong hakhoe’s Confucian ideology as a backward platform lacking any “historical usefulness,” going so far as to call it “anti-national” (pan-minjokchŏk). To Kang, being Confucian in protectorate Korea was automatically an anti-national act hindering the Korean nation’s “progress” and facilitating Japan’s imperial ambitions. This conflation of Confucianism and anti-Korean, pro-Japanese collaboration can also be seen in Kang’s listing of the pro-Japanese individuals in the Taedong hakhoe, at the end of which he brings up Yŏ Kyuhyŏng’s advocacy of Literary Sinitic, casts its as an example of his role as “vanguard of the conservative-reactionary phenomenon,” and reaches the unequivocal conclusion that the Hakhoe “had been a pro-Japanese organization from the very beginning.”

With respect to the Taedong hakhoe’s relationship with the Japanese, Kang’s criticism echoes that of the Taehan maeil sinbo in both content and causticity. First, Kang seizes on the two aforementioned letters that the Taedong hakhoe sent—one to Itō Hirobumi and the other to all Confucian literati in Korea—while highlighting the parts that come off as “pro-Japanese.” Second, he attacks the fact that the Taedong hakhoe received a financial contribution from Itō, while failing to mention—as is the case with other studies on the Taedong hakhoe—the fact that the organization also received funds from the Korean Imperial Household. Even the animosity that the Taehan maeil sinbo displayed against the Taedong hakhoe—calling it “demonic”—is reproduced in Kang’s strong language. At one point, he defines the Hakhoe’s “true color” as “a heinous [ch’uakhan] organization in a frenzy [kwangbun] to sell off wholesale the nation and the

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., 144-46.
I do not doubt the tremendous value of the Taehan maeil sinbo as a critical source for anyone studying early-twentieth-century Korea, but I question whether one should simply uncritically replicate the remarks made in the reports and editorials of a newspaper “known for its nationalist editorial policy” without placing them in context, thereby exposing one to the danger of perpetuating unfiltered biases.

Kang also reinforces the image of the Taedong hakhoe as an organization complicit in Japan’s colonization of Korea by generating a long list of the so-called “collaborators” among the members of the organization (and those of the Kongja kyohoe). The most infamous names, such as Yi Wanyong, Cho Chungŭng, and Yun Tŏgyŏng (1873-1940), are singled out and their pro-Japanese careers summarized, but with no exploration of the degree of involvement that these individuals had in the Taedong hakhoe’s activities. Cho Chungŭng did in fact involve himself profoundly in the activities of the Taedong hakhoe, giving speeches, contributing poems, and sitting as principal of the Taedong Special School. However, as for Yi Wanyong and Yun Tŏgyŏng, their activities as members of the Hakhoe appear only fleetingly in the pages of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, which record only their participation in the Hakhoe’s two most dignified meetings—one, a meeting on December 1, 1907, in which Itō Hirobumi visited and delivered a lecture, and the other, a special assembly on December 27, 1907, in which a great number of high officials gathered at the Sŏnggyun’gwan in celebration of the Hakhoe. Even if we assume that Yi and Yun did in fact attend every meeting (there are no attendance records), their absence

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73 Ibid., 145.

74 Andre Schmid, Korea Between Empires, 118.

75 Kang Myŏnggwan, “Ilche ch’o ku chisigin ŭi munye hwaltong,” 143-44, 146-47.
in the forefront of the Taedong hakhoe’s recorded activities as executives, lecturers, or writers makes it difficult to conclude that their individual relationships with the Japanese guided the entire organization’s. Without evidence of more profound involvement, one cannot ignore the possibility that Yi and Yun’s membership in the Taedong hakhoe may simply have been a political maneuver rather than a sign of sincere commitment to the organization’s cause.

This is also true of the other “collaborator” members whom Kang cites as evidence of the Taedong hakhoe’s “treacherous” nature. Without a detailed and close exploration of the extent of each individual’s involvement in the activities of the Taedong hakhoe, I find it difficult to justify superimposing individual members’ careers wholly onto the Hakhoe. Doing so not only lends itself to the danger of anachronism and revisionism but also must first account for the inconsistencies and counterexamples that it glosses over. If the mere fact that Yŏ Kyuhyŏng was bestowed with a medal after annexation, in the fashion of Kang’s argument, makes the Taedong hakhoe a collaborator, what does the fact that Sin Kisŏn, in response to the Japanese ambassador to Korea Inoue Kaoru’s (1836-1915) push to reform the provincial bureaucratic structure soon after the Kabo Reforms of 1894, offered up a memorial to Kojong and bemoaned that the motivation behind Japan’s “advisory” involvement in Korean reforms was to usurp Korea’s sovereignty,76 or the fact that Sin, on his deathbed in 1909, declared his desire for Korean independence and sovereignty,77 make the Taedong hakhoe? What does Kim Yunsik and Yi

76 Moriyama Shigenori, Kindai Nikkan kankeishi kenkyū (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1987), 42.
77 The exact words that Sin left behind before his death in January 1909 are as follows: “If heaven helps our imperial house and country, allowing the learning of the sages to take firm root and restoring sovereignty [to Korea], I will have no regret under the Nine Heavens.” Sin Hoyŏng, “Kajang,” Yang’wŏn yujip 18, 391, as quoted and translated in Paek Ch’ŏn, “Yangwŏn Sin Kisŏn ŭi saengae wa taeoe insik,” Honamsa hakhoe 61 (2016): 104. Moreover, there seem to have been objections to the Taehan maeil sinbo’s labelling him as “one of the three great loyal slaves” (samdae ch’ungno): “Some say, ‘Sin Kisŏn, originally a disciple of Im Hŏnhoe, is versed in Confucian studies.
Yongjik’s passionate plea for Korean independence in the “Tae ilbon changsŏ對日本長書” (Letter to Japan), as part of the March 1 Movement of 1919, make the Taedong hakhoe? Yŏ Chungnyong 呂中龍 (1856-1914) was part of the Righteous Army uprising in response to Empress Min’s assassination in 1895 and the plot to bomb the Japanese consulate, the latter leading to his imprisonment in 1906. Chŏng Kyo 鄭喬 (1856-1925) has been characterized as a fervent advocate for Korean independence and sovereignty for the enthusiastic activities that he led as part of the Tongnip hyŏphoe (Independence Club) and for his compilation of nationalist histories, the Taehan kyenyŏnsa (History of the Waning Years of the Taehan Empire) and the Taedong yŏksa (History of Korea). What does membership of such individuals in the Taedong hakhoe say about the organization?

Fair or not, Kang’s definition of the Taedong hakhoe as a malignant collaborator seems to have struck the tone for subsequent studies to follow: discussions of the Taedong hakhoe inevitably start and conclude with a remark on its pro-Japanese nature. Yi Sŏngmin’s study of the 130 hansi poems published in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, for example, strives to demonstrate how the common thematic threads running through the poems represent the }

Although his greed for government posts is strong, he fears public opinion, and thus it appears that such things as the Taedong Hakhoe’s declaration against the gentry across the country must have been ideas thought up by others in the Society. So if we list him as one of the three loyal slaves, would he not say that the accusation is unfair? But this is wrong. If we discuss this on the basis of the axiom, ‘The responsibility lies with the leader,’ Sin would not be able to offer a word of resistance even if he had a hundred mouths.” “Ilbon ŭi samdae ch’ungno,” Taehan maeil sinbo, April 2, 1908, mixed script edition.

78 Kim and Yi were arrested and imprisoned as a result of this involvement in the March First Movement. See Ch’oe Usŏk, “3-1 undonggi Kim Yunsik, Yi Yongjik ŭi tongnip ch’ŏnggwŏnsŏ yŏn’gu,” Sarim 38 (2011).


Taedong hakhoe’s pro-Japanese character. These threads include: (1) speaking for Japan’s colonial scheme under the guise of Confucian reform; (2) promoting transplantation of the Japanese brand of civilization; and (3) neglecting the dark reality surrounding Korea.81 Given the open-ended nature of poetry, the premise under which Yi operates in examining the Taedong hakhoe’s poems guides his interpretation, which in turn confirms and strengthens the premise itself. That is, based on the notion that the Taedong hakhoe was a collaborator acting entirely under the spell of Japan’s colonial ambitions, any sign of admiration toward Japan’s progress toward civilization, or even civilization itself, becomes a desire to transplant Japan in Korea; any indication of appreciation of beauty—literary, scenic, and natural—becomes an act of averting the eye from the dark realities on the eve of annexation. The possibility that a more subtle interplay between the Taedong hakhoe’s own ideological—namely, Confucian—formations and the discourses of reform, civilization and progress, pan-Asianism, and colonialism may be hidden behind the ambiguity of metaphors and motifs becomes engulfed by the all-consuming “self-fulfilling prophecy” of collaboration.82

Even in a study that focuses on such an interplay, the Taedong hakhoe cannot escape its collaborator mold. Pak Yŏngmi’s study on the Confucian intellectuals of Korea from 1905 to 1919 and their attitudes toward modernity and Japan sets itself apart from others by paying


82 In explaining modern Korean scholarship’s enthusiasm toward monochromatizing the Taedong hakhoe and other similar organizations as a malignant collaborator, Koen de Ceuster’s 2001 article is extremely helpful. De Ceuster argues that post-liberation Korean historiography converged with the state-sanctioned official history of the nation which, in the interest of promoting national cohesion and state authority, sought to ostracize collaboration and cast the Korean people as a “resisting nation” that merely fell victim to Japan and the collaborationist few. Even the collaboration publications that began to challenge the legitimacy of the South Korean military regime from the 1980s onward failed to break away from the myth of the resisting nation, continuing to “exorcise” collaborators with the purpose of undermining the dominant regime. See Koen de Ceuster, “The Nation Exorcised: The Historiography of Collaboration in South Korea,” Korean Studies 25, no. 2 (2001): 207-242.
extensive attention to the discourses subscribed to by the Taedong hakhoe as manifested in the
*Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*. Pak helpfully identifies and demonstrates the strong currents of modern
discourse—civilization and progress, Social Darwinism, pan-Asianism, etc.—internalized in the
Hakhoe’s insistence on the preservation of the Confucian moral order into the twentieth century.
However, guided by the “collaborator” identity of the Taedong hakhoe defined by previous
scholarship, the focus of Pak’s analysis remains largely fixed on presenting how those currents,
fused with Confucian notions, were absorbed by the colonizing logic that Japan advanced to
justify its subjugation of Korea and, in turn, allowed the Taedong hakhoe, along with other
Confucian intellectuals of the same mold, to concede to or even to support the colonial project.

The nature of the discourse of civilization and progress and other lines of logic derived from it
was indeed “dual” in that it provided a path for Korea to participate in and advance in the
capitalist world system as a sovereign nation while they, rendered part of the colonizing logic,
threatened paradoxically to destroy that nation. However, framing the Taedong hakhoe’s
appropriation of the civilizing logic exclusively within the colonizing logic ultimately makes any
mark of agency displayed by the organization “false;” that is, any and all actions that the
Taedong hakhoe undertook in the name of national attainment and civilization become mere
contributions to colonization, and any and all notions of autonomy that the Taedong hakhoe
possessed with respect to its role in nation-building become mere illusions and figments of self-
delusion.

83 See Pak Yongmi, “Ilche kangjŏm ch’ogi hanhak chisigin ŭi munmyŏnggwan kwa taeil ŭisik” (PhD diss., Tan’guk
University, 2005).

84 For an excellent discussion of the dual nature of the discourse of “civilization and progress,” or *munmyŏng
kaehwa*, and the consternation that this caused among Korean nationalist intellectuals, see Andre Schmid, “Engaging
a Civilizing Japan,” chap. 3 in *Korea Between Empires*. 
The Taedong hakhoe, reduced to nothing more than a collaborator, has made a useful foil for the more “patriotic” Confucian intellectuals of pre-annexation Korea in modern Korean scholarship. In her mapping of the Confucian ideological landscape in Korea from 1900 to 1910, An Oesun categorizes the Korean Confucians into three groups: 1) the “militant-resistant Confucians” who equated “defending sovereignty” with “defending Confucianism,” and rose up in armed resistance against the Japanese and modernity it represented; 2) the “extra-political, reclusive Confucians” who, valuing “defending Confucianism” more than “defending sovereignty,” rejected modernity altogether and went into reclusion, instead of taking up arms; and 3) the “enlightenment-resistant Confucians” who equated “defending sovereignty” with “defending Confucianism” but viewed the restoration of Confucianism as the solution for Korea’s predicament.85 Conspicuously excluded from any of the three categories is the Taedong hakhoe; from An’s perspective, the organization, as a collaborator characterized by non-response and non-action, lies entirely outside the scope of “Korean Confucians” between 1900 and 1910: 

Along with such measures to divest Korea of its sovereignty in the realm of foreign affairs, Japan simultaneously worked on its internal affairs. With regard to the Korean people in particular, Japan took measures on a variety of levels to pacify their sentiments, including the policy of turning the literati pro-Japanese or subservient to Japan. In other words, the strategy of assimilation targeted at the Korean Confucian literati was an important issue for the Japanese. At the time, it was these literati who, as agents of the traditional ruling ideology, influenced the direction of powerful public sentiments in both

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Seoul and the periphery and even formed the core of the anti-Japanese Righteous Army movement, after Japan’s encroachment had become plainly visible and “legitimated.”

Many of the maneuvers that the Residence General of Korea made to turn the Korean literati friendly to Japan at this time were specifically directed towards instituting an organization of pro-Japanese literati. The Taedong hakhoe, which was organized in March 1907, and its successor the Kongja kyohoe, which began to operate in October 1909, are representative of those maneuvers. These organizations formed a camp no less pro-Japanese than the Ilchinhoe.86

In other words, the Taedong hakhoe was a product of the Japanese scheme to manipulate the Korean literati into submission, simply a “maneuver” made by the Japanese rather than an organization that developed its own ideological sophistication, visions, and agenda fashioned in communication with discourses—old and new—available during the tumultuous period that was Korea from 1900 to 1910. As a mere “collaborator” group with no agency, it is assigned a category entirely of its own, labelled *ch’innil*, and fundamentally differentiated from the rest of the Korean literati. Under this view, it was just another Ilchinhoe, only wearing different—Confucian—spots. The Taedong hakhoe on her reading only exists outside of history as a foil to help highlight the features of the other, “real” Confucian literati who coped with the changing times to with their own initiatives.

This role of the foil is the extent of the attention that the Taedong hakhoe has garnered in modern scholarship, with its “collaborator” character exclusively and repeatedly highlighted. There is no doubt that the Taedong hakhoe and the individuals that comprised its leadership, to

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86 Ibid., 285.
the chagrin of the nationalistically oriented *Taehan maeil sinbo* and modern-day scholars, had a high degree of contact with the Japanese; but I also question if an organization like the Taedong hakhoe, with executives and members whose involvement at the center of the Korean political scene around the turn of the twentieth century ran long and deep, would have ever been able to exist without contact—voluntary and involuntary—with the Japanese interests that had, by the latter half of the first decade of the twentieth century, already deeply penetrated the economic and political structure of Korea. Whatever the final verdict—if such a thing exists—on the Taedong hakhoe may be, the accusation of *ch’ínil*—often a category unto itself in nationalist historiography—alone has been sufficient for many to deny the organization dimensions, complexities, and agency. Reduced monochromatically to another “Ilchinhoe,” the Taedong hakhoe has been cast as a puppet of the Japanese with no initiative of its own and even as a “backward” villain obstructive to progress and cancerous to the independence and prosperity of the “Korean nation.”

My aim in the rest of this study is to place the Taedong hakhoe outside of the patriot-collaborator framework and to invest more attention in the organization itself: specifically, the ideas and beliefs that the Taedong hakhoe subscribed to, the anxieties and visions that it harbored, and the activities in which it engaged in order to convert those visions into realities. Perhaps I may offer a clearer and more comprehensive portrait of the organization will emerge from behind the curtain of nationalist historiography that conceals from the audience all things
other than, in the words of Carter Eckert, “valorizations . . . bestowed, condemnations meted out, and heroes, traitors, victims, and perpetrators designated.”

Chapter 3: The Shifting Political Landscape and the Taedong Hakhoe

3.1 Confucians in Crisis

The Chosŏn state, which persisted for five centuries until the advent of the Taehan Empire and colonial rule, was structured and run largely on the basis of Confucian ideology. The Confucian ideals of proper virtue, righteousness, and ritual were prioritized as values that the government had to demonstrate and enforce for just rule and proper social order. This philosophy was reflected in Chosŏn’s institutions. Assisting the monarch in governance were the six Boards—Personnel (Ijo 吏曹), Rites (Yejo 戶曹), Tax (Hojo 戶曹), War (Pyŏngjo 兵曹), Punishments (Hyŏngjo 刑曹), and Public Works (Kongjo 工曹)—which were modelled after the six ministries from the Rites of Zhou; the Board of Personnel and the Board of Rites, which were responsible for providing the government with virtuous and wise men fit for just rule and for ensuring that proper Confucian rituals were performed in state and society, respectively, were given the highest status and authority; and such scholarly institutions as the Chiphyŏnjŏn (Hall of Worthies), the Sŏnggyun’gwan, and the Kyujanggak (Royal Library) studied and researched proper behavior in order to reinforce the Confucian ideological current flowing through Chosŏn’s institutions.  

The preponderance of Confucianism in Chosŏn statecraft was manifest in the powerful role that it played in determining who was suitable to occupy government posts and therefore had the right to rule alongside the monarch; as a result, Confucianism had a heavy hand in shaping the ruling class of Chosŏn. As James Palais has shown, the Chosŏn ruling class, or the

*yangban*, was an aristocratic/bureaucratic hybrid class: neither birth nor merit, on its own, guaranteed officeholding or high office. Instead, Confucianism effected the formation of a balance between birth and merit characterizing the ruling class. Confucianism as Chosŏn’s state ideology and as the subject of civil service examinations introduced the criterion of educational merit alongside blood-based aristocracy, thereby weakening the inherited social position of the older ruling class from Koryŏ. However, Confucian thought with its hierarchic notions of respect for status and social distinction, paradoxically also promoted the egalitarian notions of virtue and merit, providing the rationalizing basis for the *yangban*’s political and social domination. Access to examinations and office—in other words, upward mobility—was effectively closed off to those without a pedigree, but a *yangban* official’s power and prestige had to be maintained and renewed through his demonstration of Confucian learning in the examinations and achievement of high office. Even the economic changes in the late Chosŏn that blurred the status lines between classes were not sufficient to loosen the hold that this Confucian aristocratic/bureaucratic hybrid ruling class had on Chosŏn politics and society. In other words, the *yangban* literati’s legitimacy to rule at the top over the five centuries of Chosŏn Korea was almost entirely drawn from the wells of aristocratic blood and Confucian ideology and education.

In fact, the aristocrats/bureaucrats’ dominance in the government, legitimized by their aristocratic heritage and Confucian education, persisted into the twentieth century even after the civil service examination system, the primary means of government recruitment in Chosŏn Korea, was officially abandoned, along with the status system, thanks to the Kabo Reforms of

1894. There is no question that this year was a watershed moment in the change in the makeup of the Korean political elite; but while the abolishment of the traditional recruitment system based on status and the civil service examination did open up for non-
*yangban* individuals a path into officialdom and increased the number of such individuals employed in the government, it did not result in an overnight, revolutionary change. In fact, Kenneth Quinones’
’s study of the makeup of the government officials in Korea between 1884 and 1902 shows that success in both the traditional civil service (*munkwa*) and military (*mukwa*) examinations was still a crucial prerequisite for attainment of high official positions at least until the Japanese injected themselves directly into the governance of Korea in 1905. During the Kabo Reforms period (1894-96), the proportion of civil service and *sama* examination passers did decline by 14.1 percent; however, the Kabo Reforms did not effect a decisive shift in government policy away from using traditional examination success as a critical prerequisite for high officialdom, as evidenced by the increase of 3.1 percent in the number of civil service examination degree holders during the post-Kabo period from 1896 to 1902, in comparison to the Kabo Reforms

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90 One contributing factor to the persistence of *yangban* dominance in the post-Kabo governing structure, I suspect, may have been the practice of “recruitment by recommendation” (*ch’ŏn’gŏ* 薦擧) filling the void left by the traditional civil service examination system. It is doubtful that highly positioned *yangban* officials used their power to make recommendations in a way that fostered non-discriminatory recruitment across all levels of government. According to Chŏng Kusŏn, the role that *ch’ŏn’gŏ* played in post-Kabo government recruitment and internal promotion practices was powerful: the Kabo Reforms of 1894 introduced a modern examination system managed by the Bureau of Recruitment (*Chŏn’goguk* 銓考局) that tested candidates from all stations of society on Korean (*kungmun*), Literary Sinitic, transcription, mathematics, domestic policy, or foreign policy for qualification as civil servants and on civil law, commercial law, criminal law, international law, etc. for qualification as legal officials; however, to be able to take the new civil service examination, one first needed to be recommended by officials from the State Council (*Ŭijŏngbu* 議政府) or the various Ministries, and candidates who passed the legal official examination were absorbed into the judicial system on the basis of recommendations to the throne made by the Minister of Justice. Chŏng Kusŏn, “Kabo kaehyŏk ihu ch’ŏn’gŏje ŭi pyŏnhwa,” *Yŏksa hakpo* 178 (2003): 147-56.
period. Kim Yŏngmo, too, has found a similar trend in his study of the make-up of the ruling class in the Taehan Empire period, demonstrating that, although the proportion of yangban government officials entered a steep decline after the Kabo Reforms, they continued to occupy the top positions: those who passed the munkwa examination formed the biggest contingent of high-ranking officials—or those who belonged to what Kim calls the “bureaucratic ruling class” (kwallyo chibaech’ŭng)—and most of these high-ranking officials were also descendants of those who had held various positions in the central and regional government institutions in the late Chosŏn. The hybrid legitimacy of blood and ideology, cultivated for five centuries, was not about to go gently into the night.

While the persistence of the aristocratic/bureaucratic hybrid ruling class must be noted, there is no denying that the established status and hegemony of the class was increasingly under threat from the late nineteenth century onward. As Kyung Moon Hwang has noted, upon coming into increasing contact with the West and modernizing China and Japan, the Chosŏn central government began to reorganize itself in order to accommodate the new demands—especially in the realm of foreign affairs—of encroaching modernity; the Tongni kimu amun 統理機務衙門 (Management of State Affairs) organs of the 1880s were established “to bring Korea up to the levels of military, technological, and economic progress of its East Asian neighbors,” and soon they “took the commanding role in government” at the expense of other traditional government organs; and eventually, the Korean ruling system was overhauled with the Kabo Reforms of 1894 and 1895, which replaced “the Three Censorates, the Board of Personnel, the Board of


Rites, and the examination system” with institutions “rationalized according to new priorities and administrative needs” and employed “officials with talent in ‘practical skills’ (silchae 實才)” instead of those solely versed in things Confucian. The Korean-Confucian ethos—“[t]he proper dissemination of Confucian mores, government leadership through men well versed in the classical texts, and the maintenance of a social hierarchy that mirrored that of the bureaucracy”—was no longer uniquely central to governing philosophy and organization. The shifting focus in “how to govern properly” and the corresponding institutional changes could only mean that the aristocratic/bureaucratic balance, which had been attained by means of Confucian ideology and institutions and had maintained the hereditary yangban ruling class, was thrown into disorder.

Indeed, the weakened political position of the yangban literati translated visibly into class diversification within the state bureaucracy. As shown by Kyung Moon Hwang in his examination of the Chosŏn secondary status groups—the chungin (hereditary technocrats, such as interpreters, medical officials, legal specialists, accountants, copyists etc.), the hyangni (hereditary clerks who ran day-to-day administration in local government offices), the sŏŏl (yangban sons born to secondary wives), the Northerners (regional elites from the Northern provinces), and the muban (military officials)—their numbers in the central state bureaucracy and among the top echelons of the Chosŏn political hierarchy increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such that these semi-elite individuals increasingly parlayed their potential for socio-political leadership long accumulated through their technical knowledge in foreign languages, legal matters, and medicine, influence over local societies, access to

commerce, exposure to the new and foreign, and military expertise into bureaucratic prominence, which in turn served as a springboard for cultivating social prominence that had previously been the monopoly of the yangban literati. In the past, the secondary status groups’ access to prominence in officialdom and society had effectively been constrained by the politics of heritage and Confucian ideology, but individuals from these groups were able to take advantage of the philosophical and institutional changes that took place in turn-of-the-century Korea and rise to some of the highest government ranks by the time of the Kabo Reforms of 1894 and 1895 and continuing into the colonial period.94

The Kabo government collapsed in two short years, but the ensuing restoration of Kojong’s monarchical authority did not overturn the reforms. Kojong’s Kwangmu Reforms, which began with his imperial enthronement and the proclamation of the Taehan Empire in 1897 and continued more or less until his forced abdication in 1907, “did not push aside the new systematic reforms forwarded by the Kabo reformers; rather, even as they restored some aspects of the old system, they also kept intact most of the Kabo Reform proposals.”95 One area in which such continuity was on display was government recruitment. As Sŏ Yŏnghŭi has demonstrated, Kojong’s Kwangmu Reforms endeavored to strengthen the monarch’s absolute power and position atop the government, and for this purpose, he sought to hire and keep close those who not only possessed technical, specialized knowledge (i.e. foreign language skills) useful for government reform but also those who displayed great loyalty to him, rather than rely solely on


those raised and educated in established *yangban* families and who had passed the *munkwa* civil service examination. Many of these individuals were placed within the Ministry of the Royal Household (Kungnaebu) that had been created by the Kabo reformers to limit the monarch’s authority but had eventually grown powerful as Kojong’s main instrument of administration.\(^9^6\)

Some of these practically skilled “royalists,” compared to those who had attained the highest official posts through traditional means, hailed from modest—and in some cases, even downright ignoble—backgrounds and rose up through the official ranks by means of their practical skills and their personal connections and loyalty to Kojong. For example, Yi Yongik 李容翊 (1854-1907), whose prowess in financial matters earned him Kojong’s favor and thus the control of the finances in the Taehan Empire government, was from a *muban* family, as was Yi Kŭnt’aek 李根澤 (1865-1919), whose connection to Empress Min opened up a shortcut to high office and eventually gave him substantial power over all things military among the emperor’s endeavors. Kil Yŏngsu 吉永洙 (?-?), before he rose through various posts in the military and attained the position of Magistrate of Seoul, is said to have been a butcher (*paekchŏng*) occupying the lowest rung of the traditional sociopolitical hierarchy, while Yi Inyŏng 李寅榮 (?-?), whose skills in the French language enabled him to occupy various posts in the Ministry of the Royal Household and in the Ministry of Justice, was from a *hyangni*, or hereditary clerk, family. Kojong even tried to promote Hyŏn Yŏngun 玄暎運 (1868-?), the son of a *chungin* teacher who excelled at intelligence gathering, to the position of Minister of the Military, but fierce opposition from the

sadaebu officials who took issue with Hyŏn’s humble origins frustrated the attempt.97 On the one hand, this final example may indicate the sway that the traditional aristocrats/bureaucrats still held within government at the time, but on the other hand, the very fact that they needed to object, protest, and fight to prevent a chungin technocrat’s rise to their lofty ranks speaks to their weakened grip on the right to rule alongside the monarch.

Rising populism in early-twentieth-century Korea is another symptom of the sadaebu ruling class’s loss of ground in political dominance. When the Tongnip hyŏphoe was forcefully disbanded in 1898 by the order of Kojong, it seemed for a moment that the sadaebu were able to put the breaks on the call for more “open” political participation. The populist baton, however, was soon taken up by the Ilchinhoe. According to Yumi Moon, the Ilchinhoe, led by Song Pyŏngjun 宋秉畯 (1858-1925) and Yi Yonggu 李容九 (1868-1912), was an organization in pursuit of popular sovereignty, aiming specifically to “reinstate the reformist policies of the Kabo cabinet or emulate the political experiments of the Independence Club, including its open popular assemblies and its vision for a constitutional monarchy;” and in the process of realizing this aim, the group, vilified as the worst of the pro-Japanese traitors in Korean history, “claimed the people’s rights to address their material grievances, justified their collective intervention in the government administration with the new rhetoric of reform, and advanced the idea of the people’s ‘duty’ to engage in greater political participation.”98 Granted, Moon does show that the Ilchinhoe’s reform initiatives did not specifically target the yangban aristocracy or the landlord class but the officials of the Korean government in general, which the populist organization

97 Ibid., 33-36.
viewed as tyrannical. But to the aristocrats/bureaucrats of the Korean government, the Ilchinhoe’s populist claims and foray into national politics via its grip on local societies and association with Japan represented a significant challenge to the traditional elites’ hegemonic position granted by their aristocratic/bureaucratic idiosyncrasies.

Emblematic of the degree of threat that the traditional sadaebu class perceived from the populist movement is the response of Sin Kisŏn—the prime minister of the Korean government at the time—to the Ilchinhoe’s insistence on Western-style hair and attire, which the organization viewed as a way to “remove the visual marks of social hierarchy among Koreans and refashion its members as messengers of a ‘new civilization.’”99 Vexed by Ilchinhoe representatives’ hairstyle upon their visits to the government, the would-be president of the Taedong hakhoe expressed his disapproval by calling their appearance “improper,” pointing out that cutting off the topknot was only permitted, by imperial ordinance, to those in the police and the military, and questioning how necessary haircutting was to preserve the nation. In fact, this was not the first time that haircutting was at the center of the turn-of-the-century controversy over the issue of “liberating the people.” Several years before his debate with the Ilchinhoe, Sin had clashed bitterly with the Tongnip hyŏphoe over haircutting, arguing that having short hair turned “civilized people” into “barbarians;” in turn, the Tongnip hyŏphoe argued that Sin’s attitude was indicative of his contempt toward the people.100 As such, traditional aristocrats/bureaucrats like Sin—I will provide more on his scholar-official background later—found themselves in a battle

99 Ibid., 127.

100 Ibid., 121-23. As prime minister, Sin Kisŏn also clashed with populists and reformers over his attempt to revive the “guilt by association” (yŏnjwa) law as a means to neutralize their threat to Kojong’s imperial authority. For this effort, Sin, along with other high-ranking officials, became one of the targets of the bombings carried out in 1899 by former members of the Tongnip hyŏphoe. See Sŏ Yŏnghŭi, “Kwangmu chŏngkwŏn ŭi hyŏngsŏng,” 21.
to keep in check the populist ideas that had entered the political discourse of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Korea on the heels of the new civilization from the West.

The Confucian literati’s slipping grip on political and social dominance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was also manifested on a less conspicuous front than that of officeholding and political participation—that is, on the level of language. As Ross King has shown, with increased exposure to the West and the notion of “nation” in the late nineteenth century, Korean intellectuals began to ask what should be Korea’s official language and script, engendering a language debate in which some battled to raise the status of the indigenous Korean script to that of national symbol at the expense of the incumbent language and script of prestige, Literary Sinitic and sinographs, while others fought back to protect the incumbent.101 These “language entrepreneurs”—the term that King uses to refer to those who “[innovate] linguistically in order to create and manipulate linguistic symbols for the promotion of political interests” 102—like Yu Kilchun, Sŏ Chaep’il, and Chu Sigyŏng, argued for adopting kukhanmun (mixed script) or the indigenous script called kungmun (national script) as the official Korean writing. Rooting their language reform proposals in nationalist ideas like “national spirit,” “independence,” “civilization,” and “progress,” the language entrepreneurs in favor of kungmun promoted their new ways of writing Korean in official or prestigious situations, praising the authenticity, brilliance, and efficacy of the indigenous script, while criticizing hanmun in the process as difficult, backward, subservient (to China), and even diseased. This dichotomy would


102 Ibid., 35.
continue to be repeated, reproduced, and added to amongst the pro-\textit{kungmun} voices, and by 1908 there would emerge an explicit problematization of the association between \textit{hanmun} and the \textit{yangban} ruling class.\textsuperscript{103}

This issue of language—inasmuch as language contains a specific conception of the world\textsuperscript{104}—is immensely relevant in discussing the question of political power. What was contained in \textit{hanmun}, or Literary Sinitic, was a Confucian, Sinocentric conception of the world that operated in accordance with the Barbarian-Efflorescent order and the Fatherly Ruler-Filial Subject hierarchy. As the sole written vessel for formulating and propagating this dominant conception, \textit{hanmun} had monopolized cultural and political authority and prestige throughout the Chosŏn period until it began losing its cultural hegemony after Korea came into contact with “the other” and the notion of “modern independent nation” began to take root:

Writing before modern Korea was extremely clear and definite in its hierarchical demarcations; denied the aura of literature, texts written not in \textit{hanmun} but in \textit{han'gŭl} were considered marginal and subcultural. \textit{Hanmun} was believed to be the truth-language that penetrates the Way (logos), and especially for Chosŏn, a dynasty founded on the basis of Confucian ideology, it was the sole means by which the writing of the classics and the words of the sages were represented. The indigenous script created in the

\textsuperscript{103} As King notes, the first instance of such problematization and association of \textit{hanmun} with social class is found in an addendum to Yi Ki et al.’s criticism of Yŏ Kyuhyŏng’s defense of \textit{hanmun}, written by an individual named Hwang Hŭisŏng. In this piece, Hwang “rejects the notion of \textit{kungmun} as an appendage” to \textit{hanmun} or to any other language and “notes that without \textit{hanmun}, literati like Yŏ have no reason to exist.” Ibid., 59-60.

fifteenth century was in a position of ignobility as a low variety and “female” script; even in the best-case scenario it was considered as no more than a practical or edifying tool.

The mutually representative relationship between the notion of “the nation’s own language” [chagugŏ 自國語] and the conception of a nation grew more visible after the turning point that was the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 when Chosŏn’s incorporation as part of the global system began. Just as the attainment of a modern nation was designated as the totality of the political and economic mission of the time, the establishment of a national language was a crucial project in reorganizing the discursive order. This national language, which had not yet been discovered as “kugŏ 國語,” became, at last, the language of the state and the nation when the authority of hanmun, which had been dominating East Asian communication until that point, began to be relativized internally and externally. The modern order of international law where each language stood for each polity, relativized the authority of hanmun that had been tied fast to the Sinocentric order, and sinographic writing was now a symbol of subordination to China and cultural backwardness.

As Hwang Hodŏk articulates above, the opening of Korea to “the others” in 1876 placed Korea as one nation among many operating in the modern world order and relativized Literary Sinitic and the Confucian Sinocentric order that it embodied. The modern logic of “one nation = one national language” prompted the Koreans to question the place of hanmun as the script allowing them to imagine an “independent Chosŏn nation” and eventually to gravitate toward territorializing and ethnicizing it as the script of China, not of Korea. To the many who

subscribed to this logic, using Literary Sinitic represented dependence on and subordination to China, rather than recreating the sagely virtues of the Confucian past in the here and now. Furthermore, being a completely independent nation was to be civilized; finding a national script was the project of not only attaining nationhood but also moving forward along the linear path toward civilization and enlightenment. The more steam the discourse of nationhood and civilization gained in post-1867 Korea, the more criticism hanmun received “as the embodiment of the discursive order that needed to be reformed or abolished.” In this sense, the criticism against Literary Sinitic and promotion of the indigenous Korean script undertaken by the language entrepreneurs of turn-of-the-century, pre-colonial Korea represented a menace not just to the sacred script of the sages but also to the Confucian order and yangban way of life. This, in fact, was the reason that the Taedong hakhoe’s response to the changing political landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had to be not only ideological but also linguistic. As I will demonstrate below, the issue of writing Korean, specifically in hanmun and mixed script, indeed constituted a major dimension in the Taedong hakhoe’s defense and promotion of Confucianism.

In the end, a large part of what the scholar-officials and the Confucian literati, as the incumbent ruling elite, faced in the final years of Chosôn and the Taehan Empire before annexation was an erosion of the “cultural capital” on which they relied so heavily to sustain their position atop the sociopolitical hierarchy. That is, the Confucian system of knowledge in all its aspects—metaphysical, ethical, political, literary, etc.—was losing its long-held place as a

106 Ibid., 499.

source of legitimacy for the traditional ruling structure, as a new technical, specialized kind of knowledge, or the so-called “new learning” (sinhak), from the West gained more and more utility and approval in the intellectual and political realms. The ability to understand and appropriate the classics and hanmun and to implement the Confucian ethos, once unchallenged as the sole means of understanding and organizing the world but now relativized as the “old learning” (kuhak), was no longer the only precondition, alongside aristocratic blood, for entering the world of high officialdom. The increasing infiltration of the important government positions by individuals from the previously “lesser” stations of society reflected this shift, making the possibility of a future in which the traditional elite would be crowded out by lowborn, non-Confucian individuals armed with practical expertise and kungmun, more real by the day. In order for the scholar-officials of early-twentieth-century Korea to defend the way they believed Korean society should be organized and to avoid being banished from political power, something drastic had to be attempted. The Taedong hakhoe, as I will demonstrate below, represents one group of Confucian scholars and officials who sensed acutely the approach of that grim future and vigorously attempted to remedy the situation in their own way.

3.2 The Taedong Hakhoe’s Recognition of and Reaction to the Crisis

Sin Kisŏn, the president and arguably the most influential member of the Taedong hakhoe, was a thoroughly yangban-bred man. He was born into a P’yŏngsan Sin clan that had, as part of the Sŏin faction (the Westerners), figured prominently in Chosŏn politics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The peak of the clan’s glory came with Sin Hŭm (申欽 1566-1628), one of the most accomplished literary talents in the mid-Chosŏn period, whose eldest son married a daughter of King Sŏnjo (b. 1552-1608; r. 1567-1608). Sin Kisŏn’s grandfather,
however, was entangled in the political upheaval involving Prince Ŭnŏn (1754-1801) during King Chŏngjo’s (b. 1752-1800; r. 1776-1800) reign in the eighteenth century, and the ensuing accusations of conspiracy and persecution caused his family’s fortunes to wane precipitously. By the time Sin Kisŏn was born, his family had lost its yangban prestige and fallen off the margins of the political elite, but he still managed to study under the tutelage of Sin Ŭngjo 申應朝 (1804-99), a relative who rose to as high as to second state council (chwaijŏng 左議政) in the government, and Im Hŏnhoe 任憲晦 (1811-76), a Confucian scholar who had honed his literary craft under the prominent late-Chosŏn scholar Hong Chikp’il 洪直弼 (1776-1852) with the former. Sin Kisŏn, in the early part of his Confucian education, was flatly opposed to leveraging his literary knowledge into a position in politics and governance, but later changed his outlook on officialdom; in 1877, a year after Im Hŏnhoe’s death, Sin passed the government examination against his own, now-outgrown, creed and the wishes of his reclusive master and colleagues, and began his official career.¹⁰⁸

To a man of such background, Chosŏn’s hierarchical social and political organization based on the tenets of the Three Bonds and Five Relationships was absolute and timeless;¹⁰⁹ and


¹⁰⁹ Sin Kisŏn makes clear his absolutist belief in the Three Bonds and the Five Relationships, which he essentially defines as the Way, in the preface that he wrote in 1881 to Nongjŏng sinp’yŏn 農政新編, a book on modern agricultural techniques by An Chongsu 安宗洙 (1859-1896). Compared to other formal and instrumental things that may change across time, even in the fashion of “barbarian,” or Western, customs, what Sin saw as the crux of the Confucian Way was just as true and relevant as it had been in the mythical antiquity of Yao and Shun: “That which stretches to antiquity and to infinity and which can never change—this is the Way. That which changes with the times and cannot stay the same—this is the instrumental means. What is the Way? It is none other than the Three Bonds and Five Relationships and filial piety, fraternal respect, loyalty, and sincerity. As the Way of Yao, Shun, and the Duke of Zhou shines like the sun and the stars, one cannot abandon it even if one is in the land of the barbarians. What are instrumental means? They are none other than rites and music, punishment and government, clothing and adornment, and tools and their usage. Additions and subtractions were made even when the times changed from
the disintegration of a hierarchy that drew a clear distinction between the *yangban* and the non-*yangban*, or the governing and the governed, was not something that he could stand for. In a memorial to the throne written soon after the start of the Kabo Reforms, Sin offers up a criticism of the reform measures that makes clear his rigid view of social class:

> Not all of the provisions in the reform are undesirable in their intention. It is not yet known how to deal with today’s urgent task of unfettering our fortunes and advancing past our adversity, but would the answer really lie in such formalities, on the fringes of the issue? The provisions shattering the class system and abolishing the slavery system came with no commentary and annotation from the beginning and no explanation of the complexities at all. In the end, they have provided a pretext upon which the commoners fanning disorder can rise up. The stature of the plebeian and the lowly has grown more significant than that of generals and ministers, and the infamy of receiving a beating in bondage has extended even to the highest of the ministers. The dress code system has been turned upside down, and moral principles have disappeared to nothing. The imprudence of the reform—would we be able to catch up to it even with a four-horse chariot?110

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Sin was by no means a member of the “Reject the False and Protect the True” (ch’ŏksa wijŏng) Confucian intellectuals who called for total resistance to all things Western and “barbarian,” including government reform. In fact, Sin was one of the leading proponents of the “Eastern Way, Western Technology” (tongdo sŏgi) idea open to Western innovations for the purpose of protecting Eastern civilization. Western technology was useful, but the deterioration of the traditional sociopolitical hierarchy that accompanied it through the open ports must have been a major source of anxiety for Sin. The hyperbolic imagery of high ministers being tied up and bastinadoed by the lesser-born speaks to the severity of the anxiety that was coursing through Sin’s veins at the sight of the yangban literati losing their grip on power at the top of post-Kabo Korean society.

More than a decade after the Kabo Reforms, Sin Kisŏn’s angst over the scholar-officials’ increasingly tenuous position atop the Korean sociopolitical order would combine with that of other like-minded individuals and be voiced through the loudspeaker of the Taedong hakhoe and its organ, the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo. In the speech that Sin delivered as president during the aforementioned celebratory meeting that took place on December 27, 1907, at the Sŏnggyun’gwan, he provided quite a pessimistic prognosis on the future awaiting the traditional ruling class:

The scholar-officials from the days of yore strove hard toward practical endeavors; consequently, their virtuous deeds descended through generations and their descendants formed the clan of scholar-officials. The scholar-officials of today are guilty of muddying

111 For a detailed overview of Sin Kisŏn’s ideas and career as a tongdo sŏgi scholar, see No Taehwan, “19-segi huban Sin Kisŏn ŭi hyŏnsil insik,” 323-36.
the Way and ruining the state, and their race cannot avoid wreckage and ruination—how truly sad!112 [emphases added]

The contrast drawn here is crystal-clear: “the scholar-officials of antiquity” who strove toward “practical endeavors” (silch’ŏn) vs. “the scholar-officials of today” who are “guilty of muddying the Way.” Implicit in this contrast is the connection between practical endeavors and the true, pristine Way: compared to those from the olden days who strove to put their ideas into practice, today’s scholar-officials have muddied the Way by failing to do so. Furthermore, the consequence of this failure is not only the ruination of the Korean state but also the “wrack and ruin” of the scholar-official class as a whole. What stands out in this interlinking of the fates of the Way, the state, and the ruling class is Sin’s use of such “familial” terms as “clan” (chok) and “race” (chongjok), placing the emphasis squarely on the “blood and aristocracy” aspect of the ruling class, as he crafts a genealogy descending from the scholar-officials of antiquity to the “clan” of later scholar-officials and finally to the “race” of the scholar-officials of his time. By so doing, Sin highlights the exclusivity and collectivity of the scholar-officials and renders their potential demise a prospect shared class-wide.

Noticeable from the “familial” terms with which Sin packages his vision of the traditional ruling elites’ fate is a whiff of Social Darwinism. In fact, the Taedong hakhoe incorporated Social Darwinian notions in discussing the fate of the Korean nation,113 even making direct

112 “古之士大夫，猶能勉強實踐，故德業埀世而子孫為紳衿之族。今之士大夫，徒有壤道敗國之罪，而種族不免淪亡。寧不悲哉！” Sŏnggyun’gwan ch’onghoe si kangsŏl, Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 2 (Mar. 1908).

113 Pak Yŏngmi, “Ilche kangjŏm ch’ogi hanhak chisigin,” 18-21. Pak’s discussion is based on Kim Munyŏn’s article where Kim, reflecting back on the tumultuous events Korea experienced in recent decades, identifies Korea’s situation in 1908 as that of “a dinghy in the midst of a storm that cannot save itself without fighting for its life,” wonders whether the Korean nation is in the “age of children” or in the “age of old men,” and frames the possible outcomes for Korea as either the fate of sovereign powers like Britain, the United States, and France, or that of
references to quintessentially Darwinian terms like “competition for survival” (saengjon kyŏngjaeng) and “the strong preying upon the weak” (yagyuk kangsik). The Social Darwinian coloration of the Hakhoe’s Confucian constitution is not too surprising, given its connection to the discourse of civilization and enlightenment and the omnipresence of this discourse in the various voices of the Korean intelligentsia at the time. As Vladimir Tikhonov has shown, during the period covering the 1900s through the 1920s, Social Darwinism in Korea was “the scientific truth beyond any religion—a truth which religions simply had to accommodate”—and it “functioned as a common, unifying mode of thinking for almost all major groups and personalities of the modernization-oriented intelligentsia.” Even Confucian intellectuals had to negotiate a space for such notions as “endless competition” and “survival of the fittest” into their thought world, something “previously unthinkable in traditional Confucianism where competition was seen as a vulgarity befitting small-time self-seekers.” One such intellectual was Yu Kilchun (1856-1914), who framed his Social Darwinist ideas in a language palatable to Confucian intellectuals, essentially presenting the Confucian pursuit of self-cultivation—what gentlemen of wisdom (kunja君子) exhaust themselves doing in order to


114 Articles that conspicuously feature such notions as “the strong vs. the weak” and “competition for survival” include: Chang Pak, “Segye hangmun hamnon,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 1 (Feb. 1908); “Kukka ŭi sŏngjil,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 2 (Mar. 1908); Kim Sangyŏn, “Ilyu ŭi chŏngch’ŏjk saenghwal ĭl yohanŭn wŏnin,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 2 (Mar. 1908); Kim Munyŏn, “Podo chahang,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 3 (Apr. 1908); Pŏnnyul toksŏin, “Hyŏngbŏl e kwanhan pŏpchŏngjuŭi,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 3 (Apr. 1908); Kim Yunsik, “Sinhaek yugyesŏl,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 6 (Jul. 1908); Kim Munyŏn, “Chonggyo wa hanmun,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 19 (Aug. 1909).

115 Vladimir Tikhonov, Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea: The Beginnings, 1880s-1910s (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 8.

116 Ibid., 27.
nurture virtue—as the competitive spirit that contributes to the state’s competitiveness in relation to other states.117 The fact that this “Darwinian Confucian,” who not only honed his Confucian scholarship and literary craft under the tutelage of his grandfather and father, and later the accomplished scholar and politician Pak Kyusu 朴珪壽 (1807-77), but also learned Darwinian concepts, among many things, under American zoologist Edward S. Morse (1838-1925),118 was an active member who gave lectures and wrote for the Taedong hakhoe makes the organization’s appropriation of Social Darwinian ideas as part of its rhetoric all the more unsurprising.

What makes Sin Kisŏn’s incorporation of Social Darwinism in his speech stand out is that it was applied in a discussion of the Korean scholar-official class rather than the Korean nation as a whole. The anxieties that Sin had for the future of the traditional ruling class were “mortal” indeed, expressed through a language that framed the fate of a sociopolitical class as “wrack and ruin”—that is, extinction—of a “race.” The Taedong hakhoe’s appropriation of Social Darwinian notions in discussing the particularized identity that is the scholar-official or the literatus in early-twentieth-century Korea can also be seen in Sŏng Nakhyŏn’s 成樂賢 (?-?)119 editorial titled “Diligence Makes for the Rare Treasure and Good Medicine of Life.”120 As indicated by the title itself, the editorial emphasizes the importance of “diligence”—a concept

117 For a detailed examination of Yu Kilchun’s pioneering blend of Social Darwinism and Confucian ideology, see ibid., 21-35.


119 No biographical information is available on Sŏng Nakhyŏn, other than the fact that he was a member of the Taedong hakhoe and worked at the Kyŏnghagwŏn (previously the Sŏnggyun’gwon) as a lecturer from 1914 to 1935. He also held low-level, local-government jobs (mostly in the “sanŏp kisu” capacity, or “industrial technocrat”) in North Ch’ungch’ŏng Province from 1930 to 1940. Despite his relative anonymity, he appears to have been active within the Hakhoe toward the latter part of its existence, as he authored at least six articles in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo from Issues 16 to 20.

which corresponds neatly to the Confucian notion of self-cultivation (susin 修身)—for Koreans across all stations of life. Furthermore, Sŏng classifies his compatriots on the basis of the traditional “four divisions of people” (samín 四民)—literati (sa 士), farmers (nong 農), artisans (kong 工), and merchants (sang 商)—and envisions how exactly each division may play its part within the bounds of its occupational lot in order to bring individual and social gains. Of course, the lion’s share of the ink is spilled on the discussion of the literati division, especially those belonging to its upper echelon, the scholar-officials, and in so doing, he takes a significant chunk from the Yanshi jiaxun 顔氏家訓 (K. Anssi kahun), a sixth-century Confucian “family instructions” work by Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (c. 531-90), which not only enriches the Confucian hue of Sŏng’s discourse but also provides a fertile base into which to incorporate shades of Social Darwinism.

In the Yanshi jiaxun, Yan Zhitui provides a host of lessons and instructions intended for his descendants and others to follow within the Confucian framework of “cultivating the person” (susin), “regulating the family” (chega 齊家), “governing the country” (ch’iguk 治國), and “bringing peace to the realm” (p’yŏngch’ŏnha 平天下) from the Great Learning.121 The specific passage from which Sŏng draws his argument is found in the “Mianxue 勉學” (K. Myŏnhak; Scholarly Application) section of the Yanshi jiaxun, in which Yan warns against limiting oneself to studying only the classics and their exegeses and urges scholars instead to cultivate their

121 Chŏng Chaesŏ and No Kyŏnghŭi, “Haejae,” in Yŏkchu Anssi kahun [Yan’s Family Instructions] (Seoul: Chŏnt’ong munhwâ yŏn’iguhoe), 15.
scholarship widely so that they may excel also in practical matters of governance.\textsuperscript{122} The passage is rather long, but I provide it below for the sake of comparison with Sŏng’s appropriation:

Many scholar-officials are ashamed of involving themselves in agriculture and commerce and embarrassed to make endeavors in manufacturing and craftsmanship. They shoot but their arrows fail to pierce through armor; they write but can only produce their names. They eat and drink their fill, carrying on insouciantly without a thing to do. In this manner they spend their days and pass their years. Some latch onto the strings drawn by virtue of their families’ fortunes and land even half a title, and they are satisfied with this and neglect to cultivate their studies. When matters of importance—whether auspicious or dire—are at hand and gains and losses are to be discussed, they keep their mouths closed in a daze, as if sitting in the midst of cloud and fog. At festive gatherings—whether private or official—where stories of antiquity are told and poetry is composed, they lower their heads in silence, only yawning and stretching. If a man of knowledge were to see them, he would die ashamed for them. How can they try to spare themselves of working hard on their studies for a few years and, as a result, endure shame and humiliation for their entire lives? At the height of the Liang dynasty, many of the children of aristocratic families were not academically accomplished, and so there was even a saying, “If one does not fall down climbing onto a carriage, he is an editorial director [\textit{zhuzuo lang} 著作郞], and if one can write a greeting in a letter, he is a clerk in the Palace Library [\textit{mishu lang} 秘書郞].” They all perfumed their clothes and shaved, powdered, and painted their faces; they rode palanquins with long-drawn drapes, wearing

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 16-17.
high-heeled shoes, sitting on silk cushions with checkered embroidery, leaning against colorfully woven back supports, parading playthings to their left and right, and coming and going in no hurry. It was as if one were gazing upon Daoist deities. Seeking to pass the civil service examination, they paid others to answer the questions. Sitting with high officials in a feast, they presented poems composed by others. At that point, they were still “delightful” scholars. Once change and reform took place in the court after the rebellion [of Hou Jing 侯景], the recruitment officers were no longer their relatives, and they could no longer find members of their old factions among the highly positioned officials. They looked into themselves but there was nothing to be found; they administered to the people but there was no utility in their actions. They wore coarse clothes and lost their treasures; with their façade lost, their essence lay bare. They stood like wilted trees and lay like parched riverbeds. Alone in the hills during the turmoil of war, they fell dead in a ditch. At this point, they were truly inept people.123

The passage serves as a criticism against certain scholar-officials of Yan’s time and a cautionary mirror for his descendants to consult in their endeavors. In effect, Yan warns against neglecting one’s duties as a gentleman scholar. Instead of “coasting” complacently on his family’s prominence, a kunja should apply himself to self-cultivation in matters not only of literature and

history but also of agriculture, commerce, technology, and martial arts; otherwise, his uselessness in scholarly, political, and social settings will be exposed in times of upheaval, leading him to a disastrous end. Yan’s argument draws its persuasive effect from historicity, as he presents the case of the Liang (502-87) dynasty, the collapse of which he witnessed during his lifetime, as an example. The contrasting images of the sons of Liang scholar-officials, preened and carefree as Daoist deities one moment and dead alone in a ditch the next, serve as a powerful device cautioning the descendants of Yan and other literati against the temptation to slacken the reins of self-cultivation.

This dire imagery must have made a profound impression on Sŏng and the other members of the Taedong hakhoe who were deeply concerned with the fate of the Korean scholar-officials in an increasingly compromised political environment for the traditional ruling class. Instead of simply transplanting Yan’s passage word for word, however, Sŏng updated and repackaged it into a version more palatable and provocative to the literati audience living in early-twentieth-century Korea and conditioned by a unilinear narrative of history and progress and its attendant Social Darwinian notions. In his editorial “Diligence Is the Rare Treasure of and Effective Medicine for Life,” Sŏng first frames his discussion of “diligence,” or self-cultivation, in an ostensibly Social Darwinian context:

Today, [countries] interact with each other and stand on the verge of war; it is a time of “eat or be eaten” [yagyuk kangsik], in which the West is growing strong while the East grows weak. One must further open his eyes and take courage, focus his mind and exert his strength, and make use of even a moment’s time to do one’s utmost without end; only
then will his life and property be preserved. Thus, I have stated that diligence is the rare treasure of self-defense and the effective medicine for self-preservation.¹²⁴

In an environment defined by the law of “eat or be eaten,” where the weaker East, of which Korea was a member, was poised to be “eaten” by the stronger counterpart, the “treasure” and “medicine” that would enable Korea to survive in the universal race toward civilization and power was for its people to do their utmost to cultivate themselves.

This rhetoric of “national survival,” without qualification, becomes the framework for Sŏng’s discussion of the top “division of people” to which he and his fellow members of the Taedong hakhoe belong: the sadaebu. Re-deploying Yan Zhitui’s instructions that I have presented above, Sŏng paints a picture of how the Korean scholar-officials have failed to do their part and how this failure portends a grim outlook for the survival of the once-lofty division of people:

Those of us called scholar-officials are ashamed of involving themselves in agriculture and commerce and too embarrassed to make endeavors in manufacturing and craftsmanship, claiming that they are in pursuit of scholarship but failing to apply themselves from early on. What they have seen and heard since childhood are luxuries, and what they have accustomed themselves to as they have aged is the disposition to belittle others in arrogance. Though they read and fail to discern yin and yang, they do not blush in shame even a little. Though their writing skills only allow them to write their names, they are satisfied with themselves. They chase places of gaming and drinking and

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¹²⁴ “況乎今日은 梯航이 交通하고 千戈相尋하고 西勢東漸에 弱肉強食之時也ㅣ라. 尤當明目張膽하고 熱心奮力하고 分陰是競에 克勤不己라야 性命財産을 可得保全이니 故로 余嘗言勤之一字ㅣ為護身之奇寶ㅣ오 保命之良藥也라 노라.” Sŏng Nakhyŏn, “Kŭn wi insaeng chi kibo yangyak.”
frequent gardens of flowers and willows, carrying on insouciantly without a thing to do and swaggering in their sense of accomplishment. In this manner they spend their days and pass their years. As for taking the civil service examination, they submit compositions written by others. As for writing a letter, they hire others to draft and send it. Some latch onto the strings drawn by virtue of their families’ fortunes, while some borrow their relatives’ power, viewing official posts in the Hongmun’gwan [Oktang] and the Kyujanggak [Chikkak] as inherent to their status and accepting peerages [Chahŏn and Sungnok] as windfalls. The houses in which they live stand grand and spectacular in height and size; as for the food and drink that they consume, rare and bounteous delicacies are spread indiscriminately before them. Outside the gate, they ride on horses with silver saddles and in palanquins with embroidered screens, with their attendants shouting commands as fierce as a thunderstorm; inside the gate, they repose in the comfort of duvets stacked high and pillows grand, looking like Daoist deities. With their lives always like this, how can they not be verily delighted? But in the end, times have changed and laws have been reformed: the right person for a job is selected based only on talent, not on the nepotism of the past; as for judgement under the law, they can hardly avoid it if they have transgressed, and they are not shown mercy as they were in the past. With respect to arithmetic skills, they do not know how to multiply and divide, and so they cannot expect to work in accounting; with respect to linguistics, they cannot distinguish between voiced sounds and unvoiced sounds, and so they cannot even pretend to be an interpreter. When matters of importance—whether auspicious or dire—are at hand and gains and losses are to be discussed, they keep their mouths closed in a daze, as if sitting in the midst of cloud and fog. When speeches—whether private or official—are
delivered and decisions are to be made, they lower their heads in silence, only yawning and stretching. They look into themselves but there is nothing to be found; they administer to the people but there is no utility in their actions. They will surely reach the point where their families’ riches are squandered away and they themselves are scattered like leaves in the wind; the few kernels left over on the grain scales will run out and borrowing will be the only means; dry flour and cold rice will be the manifestation of the dearth of their possessions and efforts. As they reminisce, the days of their youth will seem as distant as a grave in a dream; as they futilely scratch their grayed heads, their lamentations will grow more desperate. By that time, it will be too late to avoid becoming ignoble and inept people.125

Sŏng’s adaptation—to note the conspicuous points first—brings Yan Zhitui’s narrative closer to “home,” making visible changes to render the sixth-century Chinese work relevant to his Korean contemporaries. The “Chinese-ness” of the narrative is bleached out and replaced by elements particular to Korea and the era: the allusion to the Liang scholar-officials is discarded, while the Chinese bureaucratic positions zhuzuo lang and mishu lang are ousted in favor of

125 “凡我士大夫見稱者ㅣ多般是耻涉農商 gameObject 畝時務工技 gameObject 難曰從事學問이 어느 공부는 노력이다.
自幼而見聞者은是奢華之物이요, 稀長而練習者은是驕傲之気니 文不辨事而少無愧赧gameObject 其筆記姓名原則自為滿足 gameObject 追逐於棋酒之場 gameObject 出沒乎花柳之園 gameObject 忽忽無事 gameObject 揚揚得意이라
以此而消日 gameObject 以此而終年 gameObject 科場試題은 假手製呈 gameObject 寒暄書札은 借人草送호미 或承家勢之餘緩 gameObject 或 藉姻戚之權力 gameObject 清卿之玉堂直閑은 視以分內之職 gameObject 品階之資憲崇祿은
認以儒來之物 gameObject 居處則層樓疊榭가 極其宏傑 gameObject 飲食則珍羞盛饌이 杂然前陳에 驕從之呵叱이 猛如風雷 gameObject 入則三層褥四方枕에 坐臥之便利가 望若神仙 gameObject 常伊之時 gameObject 爲 아
豈不誠快也哉아, 及夫時事變遷 gameObject 司法之審判은 有犯難逃(gameObject 不見昔日之容態아)
語學焉不分淸濁之音 gameObject 亦不可擬라, 吉凶大事에 論論得失則蒙然噤口에 如坐雲霧 gameObject 公私演說에 取決可否則默然低頭에 只自欠伸이라. 求諸身而無所存 gameObject 施之世而無所用 gameObject 畢竟所就 gameObject
回想靑春에 杳若夢墳이요, 空搔白首에 益切悲歎이리니 于斯時也에 未免為鄙夫也駑才이라.” Ibid.
Korean bureaucratic positions in the Hongmung’wan and the Kyujanggak; Sŏng’s mention of reform refers specifically to the more egalitarian changes made ostensibly to the government recruitment system (i.e. hiring officials “based only on talent,” rather than on personal ties) and to the criminal justice system (i.e. applying equal punishment regardless of class) since the Kabo Reforms; and the “practical” types of skill, like arithmetic and foreign language proficiency, are added and given a significant place in the narrative.

At first glance, it seems that the overall narrative, though “Koreanized” and “modernized,” remains essentially the same between Yan’s original and Sŏng’s adaptation: negligence of self-cultivation leads to irrelevance and obsolescence, and ultimately to destruction. However, compared to Yan who isolates a particular type of flawed scholar-officials and warns the rest not to follow in their footsteps, Sŏng identifies the entire sadaebu class—“those of us called scholar-officials”—in turn-of-the-century Korea as a class of individuals who are “ashamed of involving themselves in agriculture and commerce and too embarrassed to make endeavors in manufacturing and craftsmanship,” and who neglect to cultivate and adapt themselves in accordance with the political and cultural changes toward practicality and “usefulness;” Yan’s is a Confucian story of individual edification, whereas Sŏng’s is a Social Darwinian story of class-wide survival, of an entire sadaebu class’s failure and demise. Furthermore, while the outcome for Yan’s scholar-officials is to meet their physical deaths in a ditch in the midst of war, the final fate of Sŏng’s Korean scholar-officials is to become paupers who, with their inherited wealth squandered away, must scrape for leftover grains and borrow from others to sustain themselves. This “alternate” ending in Sŏng’s adaptation represents a typical “Darwinian Confucian” rhetoric—Yu Kilchun, a pioneering Darwinian Confucian and a member of the Taedong hakhoe, employed it himself—which “blends the Social Darwinist view
of poverty—and, more broadly, social inferiority—as an inescapable consequence of natural selection with the characteristically Confucian adoration of ‘gentlemen of wisdom’ (kunja), who exhaust themselves in cultivating their virtues, which are ultimately to benefit the state.”

To the group of scholar-officials whose thought world had been infiltrated by the Darwinian notions of “the strong preying upon the weak” and “competition for survival,” the elite’s precipitous fall to the level of an economically—thus, socially and politically—inferior class as a result of failing to cultivate the self was a prospect as dire as, if not direr than, a tragic and anonymous death in a ditch.

As such, members of the Taedong hakhoe were keenly and painfully cognizant of the threat that the technological, institutional, and ideological changes brought on from the West posed to the traditional sociopolitical order. Of course, members of the Taedong hakhoe were not

126 Vladimir Tikhonov, Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea, 26.

127 One could argue that Sŏng’s rhetoric is also redolent of Samuel Smiles’s (1812-1904) 1859 work Self-Help, in which Smiles contends, “National progress is the sum of individual industry, energy, and uprightness, as national decay is of individual idleness, selfishness, and vice.” According to U Namsuk, the discourse of self-help, along with that of Social Darwinism, had a powerful grip on Korean intellectuals and thoughts in the early twentieth century, after its introduction to Korea through the works of Nakamura Masanao 中村正直 (1832-1891) who translated Self-Help into Japanese in 1871 and Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873-1929) who wrote a partial summary of and introduction to Nakamura’s translation, published as part of his collection of writings Yinbingshi wenji 飮氷室文集 (1902). Korean translations also appeared on the scene: Liang’s Yinbingshi wenji was translated by Kim Hanggi 金恒基 (?-?) in 1903 and was used as a hanmun textbook in Taesŏng School (P’yŏngyang) and in Hyŏptong School (Andong); the Sŏu hakhoe wŏlbo published a selected translation (ch’oyŏk 抄譯) across two issues (December 1907 and January 1908); and various other selected translations were published by visiting students in Japan and by Ch’oe Namsŏn 崔南善 (1890-1957) as well. The term chajo 自助 (self-help), along with direct references to Smiles and his book, appeared frequently on the pages of such prominent publications as the Taehan maeil sinbo, the Choyangbo, and the Sŏu. The Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo quoted the iconic phrase “Heaven helps those who help themselves” (“天必助他自助”) from Self-Help on two occasions. U Namsuk notes that Korean intellectuals were especially receptive to Self-Help because of the affinity between Smiles’s idea of “self-culture” through diligence and the Confucian notion of “self-cultivation” (susin). For a discussion on Self-Help’s reception in Korea and its impact on modern Korean intellectuals, see U Namsuk, “Chajoron kwa Han’guk kŭndae,” Han’guk chŏngch’ihak hoebo 49, no. 5 (2015). For the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo’s quotation of Smiles, see Kim Munyŏn, “K’ŏwi tapsil,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 13 (Feb. 1909) and Usong hanin, “Ch’u’je ch’onghwaxa,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 14 (Mar. 1909).
the first Confucians in Korea to feel the same threat. The *ch’ŏksa wijŏng* movement, led in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the turn of the century by Yi Hangno 李恒老 (1792-1868) and his disciples, whose strict and inflexible adherence to the Neo-Confucian, “orthodox” tradition left no room to accommodate anything “heterodox”—i.e. ideas and practices from the West. The *ch’ŏksa wijŏng* Confucians, viewing the profit-pursuing, equality-seeking “things Western” as a mortal threat to their metaphysics and the traditional social order organized and legitimized by it, opted to completely reject the new and the foreign in favor of the orthodox.128

The *tongdo sŏgi* movement, on the other hand, represented the view that the Eastern Way could be and should be defended against Western domination by adopting Western instrumental means (*ki* 器), based on the belief that the material force of the West would not bring about any erosion in the Confucian moral and social order whose superiority was still unquestionable; and in fact, the contribution of Sin Kisŏn, a leading figure in the *tongdo sŏgi* movement, to the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* as president of the Hakhoe, has been explained as a modified continuation of the movement.129

One critical condition in the social and political environment that changed as the scholar-officials stepped deeper into post-Kabo Korea was the position that Confucianism—and thus the scholar-officials themselves—occupied as the ideology and knowledge system of and for the ruling elite. The *ch’ŏksa wijŏng* and *tongdo sŏgi* intellectuals, in their heydays, faced the challenge of the so-called “new learning” (*sinhak*) as defenders, with the Confucian ethos still in

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128 For more detail on the *ch’ŏksa wijŏng* scholars and their thoughts on orthodox Confucian metaphysics and social organization, see Chai-sik Chung, “In Defense of the Traditional Order: Ch’ŏksa wijŏng,” *Philosophy East and West* 30, no. 3 (1980).

the relative position of power and prestige. However, in the latter half of the first decade of the twentieth century, the Korean scholar-officials found themselves pushed into the challenger’s corner, as Confucianism continued “relinquishing any claims to the universal, absolute significance of what used to be ‘the sage learning’ of traditional Korea” and instead took on a new significance as a mere ethics system or religion.\textsuperscript{130} Also, the abdication of King Kojong, who had sought to “strengthen his royal authority by stressing the need for Confucian ideology,”\textsuperscript{131} removed the last significant thread of relevance for traditional Confucian intellectuals in the Korean government. Now, more than ever, the scholar-officials of Korea needed to seize the offensive in order to assert their position as the unquestioned, legitimate ruling elite of Korea; and that meant reinventing themselves as the kind of individuals equipped to rule modernizing Korea. This is the effort that the Taedong hakhoe, an organization founded by high-ranking scholar-officials and composed of Confucians across Korea, sought to spearhead, and the vigor with which the organization strove to do so will be the subject of the next section.

\textsuperscript{130} Vladimir Tikhonov, \textit{Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea}, 96.

Chapter 4: Battling the Crisis—Promoting the Old and Mastering the New

Martina Deuchler has characterized the sadaebu of early Chosŏn—fresh off the regime change from Koryŏ—as “political activists who aimed at creating a sociopolitical order that would sustain their claim to power” by means of monopolizing Neo-Confucian learning, designing a ritual program that distinguished them from the lower social classes, and institutionalizing an old native social value, heredity.\(^{132}\) By the early twentieth century, with those means to political dominance relativized, undercut, and destabilized, the ruling literati of protectorate Korea had to once again put on their best political activist hat, as it were, in order to put a stop to and reverse the erosion of their hegemonic power at the top of the sociopolitical order. Fearing that classwide demise would otherwise be inevitable, the Taedong hakhoe claimed the vanguard among such political activists and, as I will demonstrate in this section, strove actively in this quest. First, the scholar-officials-led organization promoted the so-called “old learning,” or kuhak, as a system of knowledge still relevant and useful in the age of the “new learning,” or sinhak, through the medium of its organ, the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo. To this end, the Taedong hakhoe attempted to establish a continuity and equivalence between the “enlightened” notions and practices of the Confucian past and those of the sinhak present, with a special focus on those pertaining to statecraft. The Hakhoe was also keen to promote hanmun, a critical aspect of the old learning, as a language and script no less useful than the Korean vernacular and kungmun, the native Korean script. By presenting the old learning as an effective and instrumental system of knowledge for Korea’s attainment of civilization and progress, the

Taedong hakhoe rendered the scholar-officials, the champions and masters of the old learning, indispensable participants and leaders in the project of civilization. Second, the Taedong hakhoe attempted to equip its members and the literati at large with a command of the new learning, especially its technical aspects in statecraft. If the Hakhoe’s promotion of kuhak was to improve the literati’s place in twentieth-century Korea conceptually, this educational effort was the means to ensure the literati’s participation and leadership in officialdom practically.

4.1 Condemning the Confucians in Defense of Confucianism

The Taedong hakhoe’s project of keeping scholar-officials from losing their grip on political power, of which they had had sole possession for centuries, began on the conceptual level. That is, Confucianism, which, along with birth, had been the lifeblood of the scholar-officials’ power, had to be promoted above all as a relevant and viable political ideology in an environment where it had been deposed from unqualified dominance and relativized as “old learning,” thanks to the “new learning” that involved specialized fields of study imported from the West and Japan, and where the latter was increasingly being privileged as a criterion for government recruitment and prestige. This was especially the case against the backdrop of increasing criticism of Confucianism for its lack of viability as a political ideology. The voice of criticism, which had constituted an important dimension in the Kapsin Coup of 1884 and the Independence Club from its foundation in 1896 until its forced disbandment in 1896, was growing louder and more strident after the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905 that relegated Korea to the status of a protectorate on the international stage and thus triggered a greater sense of urgency among intellectuals concerned deeply about the Korean state’s sovereignty and independence, who in turn blamed the “old learning” for Korea’s predicament and went so far as
to call for its total abandonment.\textsuperscript{133} It was not hard for the Taedong hakhoe to imagine the literati’s own relevance in the new sociopolitical order, with Confucian ideology no longer offering any value to Korea in its pursuit of “civilization.”

The first step that the Taedong hakhoe took in order to extend the relevance of Confucianism and, ultimately, the scholar-officials and the literati in general, into the era in which the new learning from the West and Japan was increasingly asserting itself as the vehicle of national survival, civilization, and enlightenment was—ironically but necessarily—to locate the root cause of Korea’s ailments entirely in the traditional elite, rather than denying their responsibility. In fact, throughout the \textit{Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo}, there are explicit and implicit instances in which writers admit the Korean scholar-officials’ failure to practice or enact the teachings of Confucianism and identify precisely that failure (rather than Confucianism itself) as what had led Korea to the verge of demise.\textsuperscript{134} Of those instances, none are more patent in the admission of guilt than Sin Kisŏn’s speech made on December 27, 1907, as part of the ceremony at the Sŏnggyun’gwan, in which he declares:

\begin{quote}
Since the passing of the sages of antiquity the worldly Confucians have not been able to truly see the Way of the sages and the worthies or to reach the true substance of their lessons, instead merely admiring the writings in the classics and commentaries, indulging in the truths that the texts elucidated a long ago and imitating their superficial form. The
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{134} Pak Yŏngmi has already observed this separation—between the failure of practicing Confucianism and that of Confucianism itself—made in the \textit{Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo}. Pak views this separation as the Taedong hakhoe’s effort to protect and preserve Confucianism, which she presents in turn as an expression of desire to achieve a Japan-led Pan-Asian union based on the ethical “common denominator” between Japan, China, and Korea that is Confucianism. See Pak Yŏngmi, “Ilche kangjŏm ch’ogi hanhak chisigin,” 67-71.
narrow-minded know to make only one sound and do not accept change, while the
talented pursue glory and seek cushy posts; in the end, there is not one thing followed
through in practice, and words and actions are but vain and insincere. Thus, the people
have withered away and broken down, the state has weakened, the Teaching has fallen,
the customs have collapsed, and bizarre talks have raged. This is the sole reason for
China and our Korea’s inability to cast off the accumulated ills, a case especially severe
in our country. Alas, how can this be the crime of Confucius and Mencius’s Way? The
crime is with our loss of the proper way to study their teachings, the destruction of our
Way, and the ruination of our state—and the responsibility lies with us the scholar-
officials.135

In the imagination of the Taedong hakhoe, as made explicit by Sin, the responsibility for the
fallen state of Korea fell squarely on the shoulders of the scholar-officials and the “worldly
Confucians” (seyu 世儒) at large since the time of the sages. Instead of delving into the “true
substance” (silch’e 實體) embodied by the sages of antiquity and illuminated by the likes of
Confucius and Mencius, the literati—both Chinese and Korean, but especially the latter—only
pursued the superficialities of the sacred texts, using them either to resist change or to land an
official post. The consequence was an abundance of vain words and actions and a dearth of
things implemented in practice, which in the greater scheme resulted in the crippling of the Way
and, in turn, the withering and weakening of the people and the state. This “mea culpa” moment

135 “自聖遠人亡，世儒不能實見聖賢之道，不能實體聖賢之訓，但慕經典之文字，噱其糟粕，而摸其皮毛。拘者，
膠瑟而守株，才者，趨華而聘藻，竟無一事踏實言行，皆虛假而已。故以人則委靡，以國則貧弱，教弛俗頹，異
言喧玁，支那及我韓之積獘，不振職此之由，而我邦尤甚焉。鳴呼，是豈孔孟之道之罪哉！乃學之失其方，而壞吾
道敗吾國耳。任其咎者，乃吾紳衿也。” “Sŏnggyun’gwan ch’onghoe si kangsŏl,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 2 (Mar.
1908).
in Sin’s speech did not mean that his literati organization was waving the white flag, signalling its acknowledgement of Confucianism’s incompetence and therefore dethronement in twentieth-century Korea. On the contrary, what Sin aimed to do was to exonerate Confucianism itself from any complicity in Korea’s inability to break away from the road to destruction, by assigning the blame to latter-day Confucians and them alone. A clear distinction between the Way and its upholders was drawn: if the downfall of Korea was brought about because high-positioned literati did not uphold Confucianism’s “true substance” of practicality, how could the downfall be “the crime of Confucius and Mencius’s Way?”

In fact, elsewhere in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, Sin goes to great lengths to ensure that the separation between the *true substance* of Confucianism and the way Confucians have *implemented* it is unmistakably clear. In an ambitiously lengthy article stretching over the first three issues of the journal, titled “The Origins of Neo-Confucianism,” Sin first establishes what attaining the true substance of the Way in fact means. According to Sin, there are three aspects to the Way: the “Way of personal relationships” (*illyun chi to* 人倫之道; i.e. relationships between father and son, ruler and subject, husband and wife, the old and young, and friends); the “Way of governing behavior” (*ch’ŏsin chi to* 处身之道; i.e. modest attitude, loyal words, clear perspective, alert ears, and proper undertakings); and the most elaborately named of the three, “the Way of using things beneficially, enriching lives, helping the people, and being in touch with things” (*iyong husaeng chese ŭngmul chi to* 利用厚生濟世應物之道). The Way is bound to become obscured by the materialistic desire in human nature; therefore, in order to truly implement the Way in its entirety, it must be illuminated (*myŏng* 明) by regarding it through exhaustive investigation (*kungni* 究理) and by materializing (*ch’e* 體) it with a correct mind
The inclusion of “iyong husaeng chese ŭngmul chi to” as part of the Way on equal footing with the other two aspects and the assertion on the imperative of exhaustive investigation and materialization highlights the importance of “practicality” in Sin’s definition of the “true substance” of Confucianism.

Sin’s portrait of Korean Confucians’ implementation of the Way, however, is far from a picture of “practicality.” Sin follows his definition of “true substance” with a historical survey combing through Chinese dynastic periods since antiquity and those of Chosŏn, identifying how the Confucians from each period erred from the “true substance” of the Way and concluding that the gradual accumulation of such errant ways over hundreds of years is the reason for Korea’s present predicament—and China’s, for that matter—in the twentieth century. In a move that reflects the Korean literati’s “Little China” (so chunghwa 小中華) pride in the belief that they, more than their Qing counterparts, are the true heirs of Neo-Confucian tradition, Sin draws a direct parallel between the Chosŏn literati and those of the Song. According to Sin, the Song period produced such great scholars as Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-85), and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) who saw through the Way and brought to light the teachings of


137 Another common way to frame the moral and practical aspects of the Way was to organize them in the Essence-Function (ch’e-yong) binary. In the preface to the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, Kim Yunsik defines “benevolence, righteousness, and morality” (in ŭi todŏk) as Essence, and “beneficial use and enriching lives” (iyong husaeng) as Function, while Sin Kisŏn himself engages in a similar classification in the Hakhoe’s mission statement. The Essence-Function frame accentuates the inseparable but hierarchical nature of the relationship between the moral and practical aspects of the Way, as opposed to the more “horizontal” definition of the Way in “The Origin of Neo-Confucianism.” See Kim Yunsik, “Sŏ,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 1 (Feb. 1908); and Sin Kisŏn, “Taedong hakhoe ch’iijisŏ,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 1 (Feb. 1908).
the sages and worthies, but as their so-called “study of the Way” (tohak 道學)—or Neo-Confucianism—became renowned, other Song scholars “did not think to return to the root and thereby nourish the fruit, and instead entangled themselves in the reciting of phrases and sentences;” in consequence, the vigor of the people and the order of the state slackened, ultimately inviting the dynasty’s demise at the hands of the Jin and Yuan dynasties.\textsuperscript{138} The Confucians of Chosŏn, Sin continues in the next issue of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, inherited the wisdom of the Song Confucians and thus enjoyed five hundred years without internal unrest; however, doing so meant inheriting their flaws as well,\textsuperscript{139} namely, the exclusive and superficial interest in reciting phrases and sentences rather than in nourishing the substance within them. The Chosŏn literati subsequently “multiplied” the severity of this flaw\textsuperscript{140} and, worse yet, also managed to add a few of their own:

As for matters of governance, our Confucians considered them vulgar affairs and did not investigate them from the beginning, and even the virtuously accomplished and great scholars criticized and opposed the Taedong Tax Reform . . . . As for matters of the military, the eyes of our Confucians did not look to military treatises and their hands did not draw close to weapons. Military men were excluded from court assemblies and their status was lowlier than that of slaves . . . . Our Confucians never read any books other than the classics and the commentaries, calling new books from overseas heretical and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{138} “不思反本懋實, 而繫繞於口耳章句之間 . . . . 始辱於金, 卒併於元, 而天下陸沈矣.” “Tohak wŏlyu,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 1 (Feb. 1908).
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{139} “故內亂不作民樂昇平者, 五百年苟究其本, 未嘗非宋學之效也. 雖然, 既有宋學之効, 則不能無宋學之弊.” Ibid.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{140} “我儒則其弊倍焉, 不思反本懋實, 而繫繞於口耳章句之間者, 宋儒之弊也.” Ibid.
\end{flushright}
not venturing a glance. So news from outside the country would not reach their ears, keeping them in the dark about the state of the world; they only relished being a frog in a well . . . . Since medieval times, the Confucians in our country have revered Zhu Xi like thunder and lightning and spirits. They would immediately repudiate any interpretations of the classics and discussion of principle different from Zhu’s as rebels against This Culture of Ours [斯文]. As a result, scholars have longed for false titles but lacked real understanding, contended for vain honors but been blind without far-seeing insight. Their actions with regard to the Way of illuminating morality and governing behavior have only occurred on paper, and as for the Way of providing beneficial use and helping the people, they have placed it entirely outside the realm of relevance.”

The Korean Confucians’ implementation of the Way, as Sin describes it here, was antithetical to how the practicality of the true substance of the Way was to be attained: they 1) superficially studied and recited the classics and commentaries for the sake of conservatism and career advancement, with no regard to the deeper truths and wisdoms contained in them; 2) entirely dismissed the technical matters of governance and war as vulgar and lowly from the purview of investigation and application; and 3) rejected various possible branches of investigation, originating from both foreign and domestic sources, into things and affairs, if they deviated from

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141 I have borrowed the term “This Culture of Ours” as a translation for samun 斯文 from Peter Bol, This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1992).

142 “政事而我儒則視為俗務，初不硏究，至以宿德大儒，而譏沮大同之法。武事而我儒則目不覩兵書，手不近戎器。武人擯於朝班，軍籍賤於奴隸。我儒則經傳之外絕不看他書，凡新書籍之自外國來者，目以異學。其於明倫檢身之道，則所行者文具而己。至於利用濟世之道，則全然置之膜外。” Each stated flaw is followed by the refrain “This is a failure that the Song Confucians did not have” (“此宋儒，所無之弊也”). “Tohak wŏllyu,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 2 (Mar. 1908).
the narrow interpretation of Zhu Xi’s thoughts, the one and only true course of scholarship. In
short, Confucian values were only manifested on paper but not in practice, because investigating
and applying the ways of benefitting and bettering people’s lives was entirely neglected.

   The great gulf between the Way of the sages and the way it was upheld by Korean literati
could not be stressed enough, and it was precisely this conceptual gulf created by the Taedong
hakhoe that served as a defense mechanism against attacks on the old learning:

   As the Way of Confucius and Mencius passed through a thousand ages to reach today’s,
its countenance has completely changed and its body slumped and shrunk. The Way is
immense, but we have made it small; the Way is with substance, but we have made it empty;
the Way is for the public, but we have made it private; the Way keeps to the
mean, but we have skewed it. The Way is no more than illuminating morality, governing
behavior, and providing beneficial use and helping the people; learning is no more than
investigating exhaustively and correcting the mind. But we have set down illuminating
morality and governing behavior on paper, while eschewing beneficial use and help, not
to mention exhaustive investigation and correcting the mind; in other words, we have
only talked about things and not put them into practice. Consequently, we have made
foreigners mistake the study of the Way of Confucius and Mencius to have always been
so and to laugh at it as a rotten and useless teaching.143

143 “孔孟之道, 更歷千秝而至於今日, 而面目全異, 貴賤顚撲. 道則大矣, 而我乃小之. 道則實矣, 而我乃虛之. 道則
公矣, 而我乃私之. 道則中矣, 而我乃偏之. 道則不過明倫檢身利用濟世, 學則不過窮理正心, 而我乃文具於明
倫檢身, 全拋於利用濟世, 至於窮理正心, 則但口談而實不為也. 遂使外國之人, 誤認孔孟道學本自如此, 而笑
By demonstrating that Korea’s social, political, and economic ills were solely the result of the Korean literati’s divergence from the Way, the Taedong hakhoe could invalidate as “mistaken” the accusation that Confucianism was “a rotten and useless teaching.” By extension, if the old learning was not rotten and useless in the first place, and the predicament of Korea at the turn of the twentieth century owed to inadequate implementation of the impeccable Confucian teachings, there was no need to abandon the ideology that had once created an enlightened society in ancient times and kept Chosŏn from implosion for five hundred years; the Korean Confucians simply needed to return to its true substance and put into practice—silch’ŏn—its virtues, in order for Korea to rejoin the grand march toward civilization and enlightenment.

By clearing Confucianism’s “culpability” in this way, the Taedong hakhoe cleared a path for the old learning, as well as for the scholar-officials whose position in the Korean sociopolitical hierarchy owed much to it, to reclaim “relevance” and “usefulness” in Korea’s national advancement. The true substance of the old learning had always been practical and beneficial; the scholar-officials now only needed to return to it in order to place Korea on the correct course to civilization. Condemning the Confucians while exculpating Confucianism, however, was but one step in the Taedong hakhoe’s campaign to justify and secure a place for the old learning and the old elite in the modern Korean political stratosphere. In fact, as I will demonstrate below, the Taedong hakhoe took its rhetoric much further in order to claim that the old learning was as “practical,” “beneficial,” and “relevant” as the new learning.

4.2 Old Is New, New Is Old

With the character of the Way condensed to its “true substance,” the Taedong hakhoe attempted to close the conceptual distance between Confucian learning and the scholarship of the
West, the two orders of knowledge widely perceived to be incompatibly different. While the “superficial” ways in which the Korean literati had practiced and upheld Confucian wisdoms and values belied comparison with the ways of the West, the “true substance” of Confucian learning, in its “practical” and “enlightened” glory, was easily comparable to the new learning. This rhetorical closing of the distance between the old learning and the new learning, in fact, was not unique to the Taedong hakhoe. Andre Schmid has shown that the “historical vision that linked the ancient sages and the richness and strength of the West”\textsuperscript{144} was rather commonly postulated during the Taehan Empire period, articulated most prominently by the \textit{Hwangsŏng sinmun}, as an attempt to “dispossess the West of any proprietary right on civilization by discovering in the Korean and East Asian pasts cases of enlightened practices.”\textsuperscript{145} The editors of the newspaper did so by establishing a conceptual continuity, identifying the notion of \textit{kyŏngmul} 格物, or “investigation of things,” from the Confucian classics as a characteristic that transcended and linked the old and the new and was shared by both the East and the West, as well as by rendering the enlightened practices from the Eastern past equivalent to the new practices from the West.\textsuperscript{146}

The Taedong hakhoe certainly made good use of this wide discursive pool, dipping into it in order to promote the proximity between the old learning and the new. For example, the Taedong hakhoe placed in the second issue of the \textit{Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo} an editorial whose title, “The Relationship between the New Learning and the Old Learning: Changhaksa No. 219,” indicates that it was reprinted from an elusive publication or organization named “Changhaksa”

\textsuperscript{144} Andre Schmid, \textit{Korea Between Empires}, 83.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 83-84.
In this article, the unnamed author, in addition to echoing the mantra of the Taehan Empire’s official reform policy, “old foundation, new participation” (kubon sinch’am 舊本新參), which “maintains that old foundations should be kept intact while taking reference of new ideas such as modern science and Western civilization,” declares that the old and the new, in essence, are not so different:

Confucius said, “Review the old and learn the new,” and this refers to how inquiring into the old and learning the new enlightens and flourishes. Zhang Zai said, “Cleansing the old view and engendering the new—this is appropriate,” and this, when applied to governance and once its crux is obtained, also refers to contemplating the new while imbued in the old. When these words are profoundly investigated, those we call “old” and “new,” even should one precede the other, are not, in essence, two different things.

None named “Changhaksu” could be identified among publications contemporary to the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo. There may have been a little-known publication or organization with that name, but one possibility is that “Changhaksu” is instead referring to the Changhakpo 奨學報, published monthly from January to May 1908 by Pak T’aesŏ 朴太緖 (1875-1940) and his company Changhak wŏlbosa 奨學月報社. The company held a monthly contest where a panel of highly qualified judges evaluated submissions (editorials, short stories, poems, academic articles, etc.) written on the broad topic of “education” and awarded them cash prizes depending on their ranking. Winning submissions (up to 234 per issue) were then published in the Changhakpo. Given that six (Nam Chŏngch’ŏl, Yi Tojae, Chŏng Inhŭng, Kim Yunsk, Yŏ Kyuhyŏng, and Chŏng Kyo) of the fifteen judges were “involved” members of the Taedong hakhoe concurrently, it is conceivable that the editorial submission “The Relationship between the New Learning and the Old Learning” caught the eyes of the Hakhoe-affiliated judges and was subsequently published in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo. Given how the Changhakpo published for only five months, the number assigned to the editorial in the title, “No. 219,” cannot be an issue number but may be referring to its ranking in the submissions contest. This possibility cannot be verified at this time, without access to the Changhakpo. For more information on the Changhakpo, see Chŏng Yŏngjin, “Hyŏnsang tanp’yŏn sosŏl mojip ŭi kiwŏn Changhakpo,” Han’gukhak yŏn’gu 42 (2016): 89-117.


The *kubon sinch’am* approach, as a philosophical basis that allowed the Taehan Empire
government to adopt extensive legal, political, and institutional changes in the fashion of a
foreign, non-Confucian model, was new. However, as the editorial presents it in the passage, the
notion of “contemplating the new while imbued in the old” was a continuation of what was
originated by Confucius and later passed on by Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-77); that is, it was a notion
whose validity had transcended millennia, from Confucius’s time in the sixth century BCE, to
Zhang Zai’s eleventh century, to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Korea. Confucius’s
and Zhang Zai’s words in and of themselves point to the close relationship that the author
promotes between the old and the new, and the diachronic continuity that the author establishes
between the notion from the Confucian past and that from the modern-day present only adds to
the promotion. What is particularly intriguing here is the way that the editorial “doctors” Zhang
Zai’s original statement: Zhang’s phrase *t’akkŏ* 濕去 (wash away) is reduced to and replaced
with a single sinograph *se* 洗 (wash/cleanse).150 By whitewashing the sense of “elimination”
denoted in Zhang’s original phrase, the Changhaksa author transforms the idea of jettisoning the
old into that of cleansing, or *renewing*, the old, making it consistent with the continuity that he is
attempting to create and rendering it useful as a “stepping stone” for the venerable Confucian
notion’s transcendence from antiquity to present. This “doctoring,” or the mere fact that he went

150 In both the *Zhang Zai wenji* 張載文集 (Collected Writings of Zhang Zai) and the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類
(Classified Conversations of Master Zhu), the line corresponding to the one cited by the Changhaksa author reads,
“義理有疑，則濯去舊見，以來新意。” The only other instance, among a dozen or so references to Zhang Zai’s words
that I have found via the *Han’guk kojŏn chonghap teit’abeisŭ* (Database of Korean Classics), where the sinograph *se*
is used in place of the term *t’akkŏ* 濕去 is in a letter written by Chŏn U 田愚 (1841-1922). Even in this case, the
sinograph *se* is employed in the sense of “washing away” rather than “renewing” the old. See Chŏn U, “Tap Ch’oe
Pyŏngsim” [Reply to Ch’oe Pyŏngsim], in vol. 10 of *Kanjae sŏnsaeng munjip chŏnp’yŏn*.
to such lengths, speaks to the eagerness of the Changhaksa writer and the Taedong hakhoe to establish conceptual continuity between the East Asian Confucian past and modernity.

The Taedong hakhoe also borrowed from the existing literature to promote the supposed equivalence between enlightened practices from the Eastern past and new practices from the West. For example, the Hakhoe reproduced in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* an article—titled “Discourse on the New Learning Being the Six Arts”—that had been written sometime earlier by its own member Kim Yunsik. In the article, Kim hails the Six Arts—rites (*ye 禮*), music (*ak 樂*), archery (*sa 射*), charioteering (*ŏ 御*), writing (*sŏ 書*), and mathematics (*su 數*)—as the foundations of learning during the Three Dynasties (*samdae 三代*) period covering the ancient Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties and, as the title conspicuously suggests, makes direct connections between the six skills required of a *kunja* and various facets of the new learning: 1) the contemporary academic disciplines of politics, law, and economics represent “good matters” (*sŏnmul 善物*) of rites; 2) the Imperial Academy (*T’ae hak 太學*) cultivated students’ character and thereby produced greatly talented individuals through music education, and the Westerners, understanding this power of music, have stressed the learning of the art and inspired in themselves the ideas of freedom and independence, which in turn have contributed to their governmental practices; 3) the ancients learned to shoot arrows just as men learn to shoot firearms now; 4) the ancients also learned to ride horses and drive chariots, just as people of

151 Although the exact date and context of its composition is unknown, the piece appears in the *Unyang chip* (Complete Works of Kim Yunsik) with the date “Chŏngmi,” indicating that it was originally composed sometime between 1907 and early 1908. Given that an edited version of the piece parsed into mixed script was also published in the 25 April 1907 issue of the *Taehan Chagang wŏlbo*, it seems safe to assume that the version in the sixth issue of the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, published on July 25, 1908, is a reprint included in the journal to reinforce Kim Yunsik’s speech at the Sŏnggyun’gwan on December 27, 1907, that closely follows the contents of “Sinhak yugyesŏl.” For Kim’s speech, see “Sŏnggyun’gwan ch’onghoesi kangŏl,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 2 (Mar 1908).
today, without a specialized education, cannot operate trains and steamships needed for engaging in global competition; 5) the ancients taught the Six Methods of Sinograph Formation (yuksŏ 六書) so that all of East Asia could have a common script, while learning foreign languages and scripts is indispensable today as myriad countries interact with one another; and 6) mathematics, as evidenced by the Han Dynasty’s Nine Chapters on Mathematical Procedures (Kujang sansul 九章算術), was an art embraced and proliferated by the ancients, just as mathematical techniques today are not only accurate but also advancing rapidly by the day.152 From the perspective of Kim Yunsik and the Taedong hakhoe, these direct correspondences made the Six Arts and the new learning—despite the vast spatial, temporal, and historical distance between them—essentially equivalent to each other.

Another interesting observation that can be made from the Changhaksa and Kim Yunsik articles is how significantly the theme of “governance and statecraft” figures in their establishment of continuity and equivalence. In the article “The Relationship between the New Learning and the Old Learning: From Changhaksa No. 219,” the author applies Zhang Zai’s idea of “cleansing the old view and engendering the new” specifically to the topic of governance (政). This is more conspicuous in Kim Yunsik’s “Discourse on the New Learning Being the Six Arts,” in that many of the correspondences of the “new learning” to the Six Arts that Kim presents in the article pertain to statecraft as a body of scholarship, policies, and practices. Rites are directly compared to contemporary politics, law, and economics. Music is framed as a means to inspire politically advanced notions that constitute the basis of Western governmental practices, rather

than purely as a form of art. The comparison between charioteering and modern transportation is established to emphasize the need for a specialized and practical education in the context of global competition between nations. The connection between the art of writing in the Confucian past and foreign language studies today is drawn on the basis of their common function in international diplomacy. It appears that the writers of these articles, not to mention the Taedong hakhoe that reprinted them, had a keen interest in making the continuity and equivalence between the old learning and the new specifically governance- and statecraft-oriented—an issue that I will revisit shortly in greater detail.

The Taedong hakhoe’s argument promoting this equivalence between the old learning and the new learning was most extensively and systematically articulated in an original article contributed to the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo by the president of the Taedong hakhoe, Sin Kisŏn. In an article whose title, “There is No New and Old in Learning,” plainly states its conclusion, Sin first reduces the so-called “old learning” into a long list of significant scholarly works in the Confucian canon and again into several sets of concepts contained within them:

The Classics of Yao, Shun, Yu, Shang, Wen, Wu, Zhou, and Confucius; the Documents of Yanzi, Zengzi, Zisi, Mencius, Zhou Dunyi, and the Song scholars Cheng Yi, Cheng Hao, Zhang Zai, and Zhu Xi; the Three Rites, the Three Commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals, and the Twenty-One Histories, as well as various texts written and compiled by the Confucians of the Han, Tang, Song, Ming, and our dynasty—are these not the stuff of the so-called “old learning?” Although they constitute a stack vast enough to reach the ceiling and a load heavy enough to make an ox break into a sweat, their crux, when examined, does not exceed the Great Learning’s Three Principles and Eight Items, the Doctrine of the Means’ Universal Paths and Universal Virtues, and the Book of
Sin immediately juxtaposes this with a reduction of the “new learning” into a similarly long list of Western academic disciplines, which he in turn crystallizes into principles, methods, and techniques that he believes have made the West economically, technologically, militarily, and politically advanced:

[Books on] astronomy, geography, physics, psychology, logic, philosophy, politics, economics, civil law, criminal law, constitutional law, international law, sociology, arithmetic, medicine, manufacturing, art, commerce, agriculture, and forestry, as well as the gazetteers and histories from the myriad countries of the world—are these not the stuff of the so-called “new learning?” Although these fill the shelves and their horizontally written lines billow like clouds, their culmination, when summed up, does not exceed the principles of heaven, man, affairs and things, the methods of daily use and supporting livelihoods, and the techniques of maintaining and advancing the state and the people.

With the “baselines” for the new learning and the old learning established thus, Sin proceeds to construct a connection between them, linking the “principles of heaven, man, affairs, and things” and “the methods of daily use and supporting livelihoods” of the new learning one-to-one to the


154 “天文、地理、物理學、心理學、倫理學、哲學、政治學、經濟、民法、刑法、憲法、國際法、社會學、箋學、醫學、工業、藝術、商業、農業、林業、與凡世界萬國之國誌、歷史，此非所謂新學問乎? 雖縹緗滿架，蟹字堆雲，而要其歸，則不過天人事物之理，日用需生之力，國家人民維持發達之法而已.” Ibid.
Confucian notions of “investigation of things and extension of knowledge” (kyŏngmul chi’ji 格物致知) and “beneficial use and enriching lives” (iyong husaeng 利用厚生), respectively:

Now, the principles of heaven, man, affairs, and things are enclosed in the notion of “investigation of things and extension of knowledge” from the Great Learning. As for the methods of daily use and supporting livelihoods, their essence has already been put forward in the notion of “beneficial use and enriching lives” from the Book of Documents and that of “food, wealth, and public works” from Kija’s Great Plan. A clear hierarchy between the new and the old, with the former being the greater original enclosing and preceding the latter, exists in his language, but it does not interfere with the continuity of essential principles from antiquity to the present that Sin is constructing here.

As with the Changhaksa author and Kim Yunsik that I have previously discussed, Sin displays considerable interest in statecraft as he makes connections between the old learning and the new learning. Specifically, he connects Western statecraft—that is, the “techniques of maintaining and advancing the state and the people”—to Confucian notions of ideal governance with a significantly increased level of vigor and detail:

Even in the case of techniques of maintaining and advancing the state and the people, many discussions on governance in the Analects and the Mencius and many on law in the Book of Documents and the Rites of Zhou all shed light on and impart them. A saying like “Born with such desires, people fall into chaos without a ruler” is the origin of today’s scholarship on state governance. Sayings like “Enrich the people and then teach them”

155 “夫天人事物之理, 大學格致門之所包括也. 日用需生之方, 禹謨之利用厚生, 箕疇之食貨司空, 已提其綱矣.” Ibid.
and “Let a homestead plant mulberry trees on its five-mu lot; and do not take away cultivating time from a farm of a hundred mu” are the beginning of today’s theories of wealth and economics. What has been laid out meticulously and repeatedly in the “Ministry of Justice” [Qiuguan sikou 秋官司寇] chapter in the Rites of Zhou and the “Announcement to Kang” [Kanggao 康誥] and “Lu on Punishment” [Luxing 呂刑] chapters in the Book of Documents—how is this not the root meaning of today’s penal code? The combination of assorted features extracted from the duties of the Minister of the Masses [sado 司徒] and the ceremonial rites set forth in Elder Dai’s Book of Rites [Da dai liji 大戴禮記]—how is this not the paradigm for the civil code of today? That appointing a man to an official position should be done together by the court and the masses; that punishing a man should be done by the citizens and the masses together; that when the people of the country all say, “It is worthy,” then it should be adopted; that when the people of the country all say, “It cannot be so,” then it should be rejected—how do these not constitute the core of what is now called constitutional law? Gathering people on a field so that they can learn together and teach one another—how is this not the operating principle of today’s [scholarly] societies? The policy of taking large and small axes to tackle wastelands when it is time to find good soil and to strive to till and cultivate, facilitating artistry, fostering commerce, amassing wealth, and pacifying the prices—how would this concede much to today’s undertakings in agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce? The teaching of poetry, literature, rites, and music through family schools, village schools, county schools, and the state academy, as well as
the decorum of reciting poetry and dancing—how would these be any lesser than today’s regulation of school education?\textsuperscript{156}

In contrast with his brief and simply declarative discussion of kyŏngmul chi’ji and iyong husaeng, Sin mobilizes a wide array of classical references, both attributed and unattributed, to substantiate, point by point, the equivalence between the ancient Confucian art of governance and the new techniques for maintaining and advancing the state and the people: contemporary economic policy is tantamount to the teachings of the Analects and the Mencius; criminal law to the teachings of the Rites of Zhou and the Book of Documents; civil law to the teachings of Elder Dai’s Book of Rites; and constitutional law to the teachings of the Mencius. Sin also identifies industrial policy and institutionalized education, though these do not appear to be tied to specific classical texts, as areas that were covered by sage ideas and practices of the Confucian past. In short, from the perspective of the Taedong hakhoe, the enlightened ideas and practices of statecraft imported from the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were nothing really new, as they had long ago been exemplified in the scholarship and actions of ancient Confucians.

In addition to the partiality of the anonymous Changhaksa writer and Kim Yunsik to the theme of statecraft, Sin Kisŏn’s disproportionate attention to some of the most critical aspects of governing a state—economic and industrial policy, law and constitution, and education policy—in his campaign to render the old learning equivalent to the new learning in terms of relevance...

\textsuperscript{156} “至於國家人民維持發達之法，論孟中許多政論，書禮中許多法規，蓋皆粲然而垂揭。如曰：‘生民有欲，無主乃亂’者，即今之國家政治學之本原也。如曰：‘富而教之’，如曰：‘五祀之宅，樹之以桑；百祿之田，勿奪其時’之類，即今之財產經濟說之權輿也。禮之秋官，書之康誥呂刑，織悉諄複者，豈非今之刑法之本意乎？司徒之職掌，戴記之節文間，見錯出者，豈非今之民法之類例乎？爵人於朝與衆共之，刑人於市與衆共之，國人皆曰，‘賢’，然後用之，國人皆曰，‘不可’，然後去之：豈非今之所謂憲法之益論乎？同人于野，麗澤講習，豈非今之所謂社會之原理乎？辨土壤而勸耕耨時，斧斤而征不毛，通工惠商，阜貨平市之政，豈多讓於今日農工商之務乎？” Sin Kisŏn, “Hangmu sin’gu,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 5 (Jun. 1908).
and utility, is particularly revealing, given the context in which the aristocratic/bureaucratic balance that had embodied Korean state governance for centuries was crumbling and the traditional scholar-officials, as a result, were losing their dominance as the ruling class. For the cadre of aristocratic, Confucian individuals dreading the possibility of losing a place to rest their heads in the upper political echelon increasingly infiltrated by non-aristocratic, non-Confucian elements, it was of especial importance to substantiate an equivalence between Confucian statecraft from antiquity and the “enlightened” political and legal scholarship of the West. The equivalence, if convincing, would dispel the common belief that the old learning was impractical, useless, and therefore irrelevant, compared to the new learning, in modern statecraft. Furthermore, by representing the new, Western art of statecraft as a continuation of the old, Confucian art of governance, the Taedong hakhoe was laying claim to the former as the latter’s—and therefore the literati’s—own. Conceptually speaking, the scholar-officials were now more qualified than ever to serve as the ruling elite in a government that ostensibly declared Confucianism as state ideology but was inundated—voluntarily and involuntarily—with the overwhelming ideological, institutional, and technological changes brought on by Western modernity. That is to say, with the new learning subsumed under the old learning, the Taedong hakhoe positioned the scholar-officials to become aristocratic bureaucrats who had the capabilities of legal and political technocrats: not only did their expertise in Confucianism continue to provide them with the moral-political authority of the traditional ruling class but it now gave them the practical-political authority that a technical and specialized system of government required of its elites. Realistically speaking, of course, the literati needed to investigate, learn, and master certain aspects of the new learning—or, as the Hakhoe called it, to return to the “true substance” of the Way—to actually fashion themselves into
aristocrats/bureaucrats with technical expertise in modern statecraft. The Taedong hakhoe was fully cognizant of this educational need for the literati and, as I will demonstrate later in this study, strove to fulfil this need. After all, that was what the sages themselves would have done if they had been alive in 1908:

Because Confucius and Mencius lived two thousand years ago, such works were not written by them. If they had been born in the ages of the Han, Tang, Song, or Ming, such works would have been produced on Asian soil long ago. If they were to be born in this generation, they would read these books themselves first and then instruct and lecture people on them. When this is the case, how can these books be distinguished from the “old learning” and called the “new learning”?157

4.3 Reimagining Hanmun’s Relevance in the Twentieth Century

The collective wisdom of the sages and worthies, contained and illuminated in the classics and commentaries, did not constitute the entirety of the old learning. Hanmun, or Literary Sinitic, as the “truth-language” penetrating the Way of the Confucian moral, social, and political order, represented one of the most salient pillars of kuhak to its detractors and defenders alike; accordingly, hanmun was a major topic through which the Taedong hakhoe’s defense of the old learning from the charges of inadequacy was manifested. Asserting Literary Sinitic as an “enlightened” way of writing in the face of the encroachment of the indigenous script held a huge stake in preserving not only the old learning as a whole but also the cadre of intellectuals

157 “孔孟在於二千年前，故此等書不出於孔孟之手也。使孔孟生於漢唐宋明之世，則此書之出於亞土久矣。使孔孟生於今世，則必躬先閱覽而教人講習矣。然則，何可以此等書籍謂之新學問，而區別於舊學問乎?” Ibid.
whose intellectual and political life depended on Confucian ideology and its written manifestations.

In fact, to the Taedong hakhoe, foregoing Literary Sinitic was no different from foregoing the Way itself, as plainly demonstrated in Yŏ Kyuhyŏng’s *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* article titled “Discourse on Hanmun and Kungmun,” in which he, in addition to characterizing *hanmun* as thoroughly *Korean* simply by virtue of its millennia of use on Korean soil, states:

Writing [mun 文] is the Way’s manifestation in words. It is said from antiquity, “The Ultimate Way has no writing,” meaning that the Way cannot be expressed in language.” Nevertheless, the Way cannot travel and must rely on writing to propagate. If one discards the ear, eye, mouth, and nose on the outside because of his pursuit of the substance in the heart, he cannot be thought human. The carved symbols created by Fuxi, the characters created by Cang Jie, the records from the Yu, Xia, Shang, and Zhou times, and the accounts of the words and actions from those since Confucius, all taken together, are called “writing.” Writing is the Way, and the Way is writing . . . . Therefore, those who wish to relinquish *hanmun* today are those who wish to relinquish the Confucian Way. If one is human, he possesses the heart along with the ear, eye, mouth, and nose; relinquishing the Confucian Way is the same as relinquishing the father-son and ruler-subject bonds. In other words, they can be called traitors to the king and subversive sons.158

The Way and *hanmun*, or simply “writing” (*mun* 文) as Yŏ puts it, with the former constituting the invisible core and the latter its outward manifestation, are inseparable, just as a person, without ears, eyes, mouth, and nose, cannot be whole. Thus, relinquishing *hanmun* meant relinquishing the Way, which in turn would result in a subversion of the traditional sociopolitical order based on the Confucian ethos. Although Yŏ includes in his article only the ruler-subject and father-son relationships as examples, his fear of subversion resulting from *hanmun*’s loss of relevance surely must have extended to the literati class and its politically empowered members, scholar-officials. In fact, the political character of *hanmun* rose to the surface in one of the responses to Yŏ’s article, where the author accused the infamous proponent of Literary Sinitic of being “a traitor to *kungmun* and a slave to *hanmun*” and, more importantly, declared that a literatus like Yŏ had no reason to exist outside of *hanmun*, marking the first time the association of the “old writing” and social class was problematized explicitly.\(^\text{159}\)

In order to preserve *hanmun*’s prestige, and therefore that of the Way, *kuhak*, and the literati, the role of the “old writing” needed to be reimagined—once again—as “useful” in twentieth-century Korea as *kungmun*. To this end, the Taedong hakhoe promoted *hanmun*’s practicality as a way of writing *Korean* and as a diplomatic tool. First, according to the Taedong hakhoe’s estimation, Koreans could not dispense with *hanmun* if they wished to write *Korean* conveniently. In a *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* article titled “The Distinction between Hanmun and Kungmun,”\(^\text{160}\) Chŏng Kyo demonstrates the convenience of *hanmun* on a lexical level, arguing that many commonly used words, when written in sinographs, require fewer syllables to be

\(^{159}\) Ross King, “Nationalism and Language Reform,” 59-60.

rendered into written characters than when written in kungmun only. Putting aside the fact that hanmun, broken up into phrases, words, and individual sinographs, is no longer hanmun as a complete system of literacy and writing, Chŏng’s logic becomes more comprehensible in his example involving the sexagenarian years, among which he picks the first year, kapchanyŏn 甲子年, for demonstration: “To explain [my point] in terms of the Way of Heaven, if one were to say kapchanyŏn in hanmun, everyone—young or old, male or female—would easily understand it; trying this in kungmun would yield kabot adŭl hae.” This crude-but-fascinating imagination that kungmun-only writing would involve converting each sinograph exclusively into the corresponding vernacular hun gloss or semantographic reading in Korean, as opposed to the corresponding ŭm or phonographic reading, is then applied to other Sino-Korean terms, namely geographical terms like tong-sŏ-nam-puk (east, west, south, north), kang-san (river and mountain), and ch’o-mok (grass and tree), as well as human-relations terms like pu-mo (father and mother), kun-sin (ruler and subject), hyo-ja (filial son), and ch’ung-sin (loyal subject).

Another way in which hanmun is “useful” in writing Korean, according to Chŏng, is its ability to distinguish visually between sinographs with the same ŭm or hun reading. That is, the Korean term pu, which can point to either “husband” or “wife” phonographically, becomes clear in meaning when written in hanmun. Similarly, the term pae, the homophonic vernacular hun for the sinographs 舟 and 梨, becomes clearly distinguishable in meaning—“boat” and “pear”—through sinographs. The logical inconsistency where Chŏng only considers the ŭm aspect in one point (i.e. kapchanyŏn = kabot adŭl hae) but both the ŭm and hun aspects in the next (i.e. pu = 夫

161 “如以天道言之，若曰，‘甲子年，’ 則是乃漢文，而老幼男女皆所易曉者也。試以國文為語，則箇適，彼亦，何。” Ibid.
or 婦; pae = 舟 or 梨), though undermining his overall persuasiveness, speaks to his resolve to highlight hanmun’s convenience and utility.

Second, hanmun, as the Taedong hakhoe painted it, was a useful tool in international relations, specifically for cultivating a peaceful relationship amongst the three Eastern nations: Korea, Japan, and China. In “Religion and Hanmun,” Kim Munyŏn argues,

The old writing is the script that extends across our three Eastern nations. We three Eastern nations stand connected around the sea like the legs of a cauldron. Only after connecting, interacting with one another and exchanging friendship and affinity, may we navigate this age of competition for survival and delight in the riches of peace in the East; and the way to connect, interact, and exchange friendship and affinity is found in unity. One need not consult a wise man to know that assimilating the differences in languages and customs with hanmun is an absolute necessity when it comes to the relationship of the three nations.162

To be sure, a “commitment to Literary Sinitic and sinographs” had traditionally bound East Asia into what Ross King has called the Sinographic Cosmopolis;163 but the active imagination of hanmun as a medium that ties Japan, Korea, and China into a community called “Asia” or “the East” in perpetual competition with the West was a novelty that arose as part of the advent of


Pan-Asianism, first promoted by Japanese groups in the 1880s and later accepted widely by Korean groups, in which “yellowness became the basis for several groups around East Asia to propose regional alliances as a means of resisting Western white imperialism.” The Taedong hakhoe certainly was one of those groups that subscribed to the Pan-Asian tongmun tongjong logic. In fact, Pak Yŏngmi, in her examination of Confucian attitudes towards the idea of civilization and Japan in post-1905, pre-annexation Korea, relies heavily on articles from the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo to show that hanmun, to many Korean Confucians, represented “the spirit and civilization of Confucianism and East Asia with which Korea, as the ‘little China’ nation, could counter Western civilization,” as well as the “impetus that made Asian unity possible.” The Taedong hakhoe, as Pak has noted through an editorial contributed to the journal by an author who called himself Usan kŏsa, even

164 For a more detailed examination of Pan-Asianism’s reception in Korea, see Yi Kwangnin, “Kaehwagi Han’gug in ŭi asi yŏndaeron,” Han guksa yŏn’gu 61 (1988).

165 Andre Schmid, Korea Between Empires, 87.

166 Pak Yŏngmi, “Ilche kangjŏm ch’ogi hanhak chisigin,” 59.

167 Kang Myŏnggwan has identified Usan kŏsa as Yŏ Kyuhyŏng, based on a statement in the article “Non amun sok” in the seventh issue of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo that reads, “I am continuing here what I started in the first issue of this journal and carried on through the fifth issue, after which I stopped for a while” (“不佞之自本報第一號起至第五號而暫止者,此又其續也”). However, I am not quite convinced by this attribution, given how Kang is operating under the assumption that the article that Usan kŏsa “started in the first issue” refers to Yŏ’s “Non hanmun kungmun.” This assumption, I believe, needs to be substantiated in order to make a more definitive connection between Yŏ and Usan kŏsa. Curiously, there is an editorial in the first issue of the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo written by Chang Pak 張博 (1848-1921), titled “Kasin kagu sŏl,” which declares at the very end “to be continued” but its namesake never appears in any of the later issues of the journal. Chang’s main argument in this article is that Koreans must look back on and critique their own past wrongs before they can transform anew and their country can prosper, which is consistent with what Usan kŏsa in large part does in his running feature titled simply “Nonsŏl” (Editorial) and published in installments from Issue 2 to 5 (Usan kŏsa transitions his editorial into discussing the topic of hanmun as Pan-Asian script in the installment in Issue 5 and furthers the discussion in Issue 7). This very cursory observation leads me to believe that Usan kŏsa is more likely to be Chang Pak than Yŏ Kyuhyŏng, but further substantiation is required to confirm this belief. For the purpose of this study, I simply refer to Usan kŏsa with the alias. See Kang Myŏnggwan, “Hanmun p’yejiron kwa aeguk kyemonggi ŭi kukanmun nonjaeng,” Han guk hanmunhak yŏn’gu 8 (1985): 229-38.
proposed to replace the terms hanmun 漢文 (writing of the Han) and komun 古文 (old writing; Ancient Style orthodox Literary Sinitic) with the term amun 亞文 (Asian writing) because the script was shared by Asians in Korea, Japan, and China.\textsuperscript{168}

The Taedong hakhoe’s active promotion of hanmun as a viable written code in twentieth-century Korea, however, did not mean that it was arguing for hanmun-only writing. The Taedong hakhoe, in fact, was quite open to kungmun’s inclusion, alongside hanmun, into “Korean writing:”

Upon reflection, our Eastern Land [Korea] was uncultivated in ancient times and had no writing, so we have used hanmun for the past thousands of years leading up to today. If hanmun is abandoned, there is no way to deliver official records and unofficial histories, literary and epistolary writings of both a private and public nature, and academics and education. Our King Sejong, with heaven-ordained sagacity, conceived a new type of knowledge and created kungmun, forming the letters based on sound and interpreting words based on meaning, so that those who do not understand hanmun can all decipher and explicate it. Kungmun and hanmun constitute the exterior and the interior, and therefore they, together, make up our country’s writing.\textsuperscript{169}

Locating the importance of hanmun in its millennia-long presence in all aspects of Korean intellectual life and that of kungmun in the brilliance of its creator and in its facility in

\textsuperscript{168} Pak Yŏngmi, “Ilche kangjŏm ch’ogi hanhak chisigin,” 58-59. For Usan kŏsa’s discussion of amun, see Usan kŏsa, “Non amun,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 5 (Jun. 1908) and 7 (Aug. 1908).

\textsuperscript{169} “惟我東方古代荒邈，無有文字，以漢文而為用，迄今千百載，朝野紀乘，公私文牘，學科敎育。皆捨此，則無由。我世廟，以天縱之聖，彰新智，製國文，因音成字，因義解語，漢文之所不能通者，悉可繹而釋之。與漢文相為表裏，則二文同為本國之文也。” Chŏng Kyo, “Hanmun kwa kungmun ūi p’aneyŏl,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 4 (May 1908).
“deciphering and interpreting” *hanmun*, Chŏng Kyo identifies the two systems of writing as two sides of the same coin, or the two components of “our country’s writing.” *Hanmun*, the “interior” of the Korean writing, is associated with the historical, literary, and academic wealth accumulated in the preceding millennia, whereas *kungmun*, the “exterior,” is assigned to a strictly supplementary role, helping those who are unversed in the older script explicate and understand it so that they may access the vast wealth of the accomplishments of the old learning. This, by extension, means that *kungmun* cannot exist independently from *hanmun*: existing as part of the *kukhanmun* mixed script—as particles, as verbal endings, and as lexical glosses—is the extent of its participation in writing Korean allowed by Chŏng.

As such, in the imagination of the Taedong hakhoe the two writing systems, though accepted as the two integral components of Korean writing, were not to be placed on an equal footing. The roles and associations that *hanmun* and *kungmun* receive from Chŏng, along with his interior-exterior division, indicate a hierarchy in place, privileging the former as the more prestigious system of writing. This hierarchy is also present in Yŏ Kyuhyŏng’s “Discourse on *Hanmun* and *Kungmun*” that I introduced earlier. In addition to stressing *hanmun*’s absolute significance as the embodiment of the Confucian Way, Yŏ employs the term *han'gungmun* 漢國文 instead of *kukhanmun* 國漢文, giving precedence to the traditional system of writing.170 As an organization that subscribed faithfully to the Essence-Function dichotomy of the old and new, the Taedong hakhoe was not about to let *kungmun*, or *kukhanmun* for that matter, overtake *hanmun*, the script embodying Essence, in importance.

It seems that the Taedong hakhoe attempted to put its Essence-Function conception of the *hanmun-kungmun* relationship into practice. In fact, the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* features a healthy number of mixed-script\textsuperscript{171} entries across its volumes and, when the journal’s entries are examined with regard to the type of writing employed, a pattern emerges. Most of the mixed-script entries are concentrated ostensibly in the “Academic Knoll” section that contains articles shedding light on various topics in the new learning, such as law, politics, chemistry, physics, physiology, geography, etc. *Hanmun-*only writing, on the other hand, constitutes the majority of articles on topics belonging to the old learning, including editorials and lecture summaries on Confucian teachings and texts.\textsuperscript{172} In other words, the Taedong hakhoe deployed Korean writing in the way it conceptualized how *hanmun* and *kungmun* could coexist optimally: in the pages of its organ, *hanmun* was firmly entrenched as the language of Essence, or the truth-language of the Confucian Way, while *kungmun* was given the role of supplementing the former to impart the technical knowledge of the new learning—the role of Function—to the traditionally educated Confucian literati. Usan kŏsa provides in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* the following rationale behind this *hanmun-kungmun* constellation:

> Some of our articles are written purely in *hanmun* so that the true form is pure and unadulterated like the way in which the scales and claws of a dragon, when it shivers, shift in place fluidly but the dragon remains uniform and refined in form. At times we mix *kungmun* into our articles so that every person, whether cultivated or vulgar, can

\textsuperscript{171} Of the 341 entries across the 19 issues I have examined (Issue 17 is missing), 130 (~38\%) were written in *kukhanmun*.

\textsuperscript{172} Other mixed script-dominated features in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* include the “Government News” (Kwanbo) and the “International News” (Oebo) sections. In contrast, virtually every single article in the “Records of the Hakhoe” section, which records the Taedong hakhoe’s activities, decisions, and news, is written in *hanmun* only.
easily understand them upon reading, as if to add to the marvelousness of the tiger by attaching a set of wings and helping its leap become flight.\textsuperscript{173}

To the Taedong hakhoe, using both \textit{hanmun} and \textit{kungmun} to write Korean—that is, in \textit{hanmun}-only style \textit{and} in mixed script—was more than appropriate, if the analogies of divine animals are any indication. Writing in \textit{hanmun} kept the “true form” of the dragon, or the true substance of the Way, “uniform and refined,” while writing in mixed script meant adding \textit{kungmun}-shaped “wings” to the “tiger” that was \textit{hanmun}, thereby turning the marvelous animal’s leap toward civilization into soaring flight. The leap-turned-flight represented the improved ease of understanding in technical, enlightened subjects of the new learning that mixed-script writing would bring to both the cultivated and vulgar—that is, those trained in the old learning and those who were not. As drawn up by the Taedong hakhoe, \textit{hanmun} was to continue to serve as the vessel of the old learning, while \textit{kungmun} was to supplement the traditional script’s mediation of the new system of knowledge from the West. In one sense, the Taedong hakhoe, by acknowledging the utility of mixed-script writing, was trying to reach a happy middle ground in the \textit{hanmun-kungmun} debate. At the same time, given the context in which the stars of the old learning were fading, it can be argued that the Taedong hakhoe was asserting and claiming a place for \textit{hanmun} in the twentieth-century intellectual discourse that increasingly favored the new learning and \textit{kungmun}. This claim was implemented not only rhetorically through its designation of specific provinces to \textit{hanmun} and \textit{kungmun}, but also practically through their deployment of writing styles in accordance with the designation in its official organ.

\textsuperscript{173} “吾社之說을 以純漢文為之者와 以為本來面目이 醉乎其醉兮야 如龍之振身에 東鱷西爪ㅣ
瀏灕變幻兮々 却只是渾然一色也 ㅣ 오 間或有以混合國文兮야 爲之者와 以為雅俗共賞에 人人易曉兮야
As the Taedong hakhoe’s usage of hanmun and mixed script indicates, the society of literati was willing to go beyond asserting the importance of the old learning on the rhetorical level. It recognized that, in order to restore the literati’s former glory in the new twentieth-century environment, simply promoting the old learning’s contemporary utility and relevance or its conceptual equivalence to the new learning was not sufficient. After all, doing so only conceptually reconciled the image of the outdated and useless scholar-official with that of the civilized, practical modern statesman and thus highlighted only the potential of the literati, as masters of the old learning, to double as masters of the new learning; it did not actually transform the traditional aristocratic/bureaucratic rulers of Chosŏn into the political elite of modern Korea as envisioned by the Taedong hakhoe: professional statesmen whose political legitimacy was to be built not only on the old cornerstones—lineage and Confucianism—but also on the new, undeniable pedestal that was expertise in various technical and specialized aspects of modern statecraft. The transformation was to be achieved through education—specifically, the kind of education that would exclusively target members of the traditional ruling class in equipping them with legal, political, and administrative skills and knowledge from the West, while maintaining the elitist erudition from the old learning. This educational effort of the Taedong hakhoe is the subject of examination in the following section.

4.4 New Tricks, Old Dogs: The Taedong Specialized School

The Taedong hakhoe’s aim to perpetuate the traditional sadaebu’s grip on political power into the twentieth century and to do so by enhancing their elite status with practical skills in leading the Korean state and society, is most evidently expressed in Cho Chungŭng’s article in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo. In the article, Cho distinguishes the scholar-official class, or, as he
puts it, the “society of government officials from the Confucian community,” as kwijok 貴族 (aristocrats), identifying it as the vanguard in leading and enlightening the masses.¹⁷⁴ The term kwijok was not simply a different label to call the same traditional scholar-officials. Instead, it represented a new category that was as universal as it was local:

As for the kwijok, it is the quintessence of the state and paradigm of the society; thus, various countries in Europe have buttressed and enrooted it, making it the fence around the monarchy and the center of patriotism. The kwijok of our country have the fame and status but lack in practical matters; this stems entirely from their boasting their clans’ prestige while not striving in practical studies.¹⁷⁵

That is, the scholar-officials of Korea were equated to the aristocrats of Europe, based on their shared position as the “quintessence of the state and paradigm of the society;” these special individuals were to make a protective fence around the monarchy and be the central force in all “patriotic” national efforts toward civilization by virtue of their prestige and expertise in practical studies. In this scenario, the sadaebu were no different from the senate of a bicameral constitutional monarchy, an institution “established for the kwijok.”¹⁷⁶

However, in the eyes of Cho, the sadaebu of Korea suffered from a significant deficiency compared to the universal kwijok modeled after the “civilized” aristocracy of Europe. The Korean scholar-officials, although rich in terms of fame and status and by virtue of their high


¹⁷⁵ “至若貴族者, 國家之精華社會之標準, 故歐洲諸國, 亦莫不扶植之, 以作王室之藩屏, 愛國之中心也. 顧我國之貴族徒, 有名位而乏於實事, 完縁於只以門地相高, 而不務實學故也.” Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ “故立憲之國, 亦莫不有上下議院, 而上議院, 則為貴族而設也.” Ibid.
birth and claim over Confucian knowledge and rituals, lacked mastery of “practical studies” or, in this context, the system of knowledge from the West that “extended to the farthest stretch of investigation,” brought forth “things growing more and more marvelous and novel,” and constituted “what Koreans urgently needed to study.”\(^\text{177}\)

Cho pointed out that the scholar-officials’ high-horse insistence that they “take the highest positions in the court” and “head the four divisions of the people” simply by virtue of the fact that they are “kwijok” invited criticism and aspersions from the “non-kwijok,” leading to fears that the growing clout of the critics would eventually “bring about the wreckage of the kwijok, as well as the destruction of the state’s dignity and social order.”\(^\text{178}\)

Ultimately, what Cho and the Taedong hakhoe were proposing was to equip the literati with the practical knowledge and skills from the new learning necessary to address this deficiency and fortify their position as “the head of the four divisions of the people”—that is, the “quintessential” and “paradigmatic” position atop the Korean sociopolitical order. Cho Chungŭng’s proposal would soon materialize in the most tangible way in the form of the Taedong Specialized School, officially established in February 10, 1908, with Cho himself selected to serve as principal.\(^\text{179}\)

An examination of the Taedong Specialized School and its curriculum reveals exactly what type of practical knowledge and skills from the new learning the Taedong hakhoe attempted to impart to the literati for its purposes.

\(^{177}\) "今之新學問, 窮極格, 愈出愈奇, 愈出愈新.... 吾人之所當急先講究者也.” Ibid.

\(^{178}\) "甚乃不識一丁, 而自驕於人曰: “我貴族也. 可以取公卿大夫矣. 可以首四民矣.” 於是非貴族者, 嫉而議之, 譁而攻之, 勢將至於貴族之淪胥, 而國體之尊嚴社會之秩序, 受其弊矣.” Ibid.

\(^{179}\) "Ponhoe kisa,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 2 (Mar. 1908).
4.4.1 A Specialized Institution for Modern Legal and Political Education

The most helpful resource that provides a telling glimpse into the Taedong Specialized School’s program, operation, and character can be found in the form of a student recruitment advertisement that began to run daily in the *Hwangsŏng sinmun* shortly after the school’s foundation. 180 According to the advertisement, the school offered two night-school options, the three-year Specialization Program and the one-year Accelerated Program 181 to students who were twenty years or older; applicants were required either to possess a diploma from a private or public primary (*pot’ong*) school 182 or to pass an entrance examination that tested them on their grasp of basic arithmetic operations, and domestic and foreign geography and history, as well as their command of reading and writing *kukhanmun*.

More importantly, the advertisement makes clear from the very beginning the mission of the Taedong Specialized School—“to teach law and politics.” 183 As demonstrated by the following table, the schedule of courses required for students to complete the school’s three-year Specialization Program embodies this mission quite unambiguously:

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180 This particular advertisement ran in the *Hwangsŏng sinmun* from February to March 1908, discontinuing several days before the first day of class, March 23, 1908. For the purposes of this study, I have consulted the first iteration of the advertisement published on February 23, 1908. “Hagwŏn mojip kwanggo,” *Hwangsŏng sinmun* (Feb. 23, 1908), 3.

181 According to the advertisement, the one-year Accelerated Program consisted of a selection of “necessary” courses from the longer curriculum. As to what exactly constituted the necessary courses, the advertisement offers no elucidation. Ibid.

182 The primary school threshold would later change, as the advertisement calling for the Taedong Specialized School’s next class of students that began to run in April 1909 informed that the entrance examination would be waived for those who had a diploma from a government or private high school. “Hagwŏn mojip kwanggo,” *Hwangsŏng sinmun*, April 20, 1909.

The schedule indicates an intense level of training designed to produce modern legal and public officials, requiring students to learn a variety of increasingly narrowing, technical fields of modern law—from civil and criminal law to maritime and international law—over three years, as well as other “new learning” subjects pertaining to state administration, such as “state studies” (kukkahak 國家學), public administration (haengjŏng 行政), public finance (chaejŏng 財政), political theory (chŏngch‘i wŏllon 政治原論), and taxation theory (choseron 租稅論). Also notable is the requirement of a practicum (silchi yŏnsŭp 實地演習) in the third year of study, suggesting that the school aimed to provide its students with a hands-on training that would better prepare them for careers as legal professionals and public officials.

Given the considerable attention that the Taedong hakhoe paid to forging connections between the old learning and the new learning, specifically with respect to the topic of governance and statecraft, in the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, it is hardly a surprise that what the Hakhoe chose for its own school to teach was the study of modern law and politics. In fact, most of the Taedong Specialized School’s course requirements correspond closely to the collective of fields that the Taedong hakhoe defined as the “study of law and politics” (pŏpchŏngghak 法政學),

184 Ibid.
or alternately as the “science of the state” (*kukkajŏk kwahak* 鄉家的科學), in a *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* article written by Kwŏn Posang 權輔相 (1879-?). Aiming to introduce the “new learning” concept of “science” (*kwahak* 科學) and the “entire body of sciences in a civilized society” (*munmyŏng sahoe úi kwahak chŏnch’e*) in the article, Kwŏn divides it into the two large categories of “natural science” (*chayŏn kwahak*) and “mental science” (*chŏngsin kwahak*), with the former predictably containing such disciplines as mathematics, chemistry, physics, geology, zoology, botany, medicine, etc., and the latter containing disciplines that are classified today as humanities and social sciences. One of the subcategories that Kwŏn assigns within the “mental sciences” is the “study of law and politics” or “science of the state,” which in turn encompasses law, international law, legal theory, history, and philosophy, politics (further subdivided into studies in the nature of the state, administration of imprisonment, policing, hygiene, judicial courts, and other domestic affairs, and domestic and foreign policy-making and legislation), economics, sociology, and morality (*todŏkhak*).\(^{185}\) The Taedong hakhoe, as an organization of individuals whose social class had traditionally, unquestionably, and—in the minds of the members of the Taedong hakhoe—“rightfully” constituted the ruling elite, could not imagine establishing and operating any other type of educational institution than one that provided the tools for organizing and governing a “civilized” society.

As for what was in fact taught in these courses, Yi Chongha’s article in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, titled “An Overview of Legal Studies,” proves an informative source, in which he introduces the law courses offered by the Taedong Specialized School and outlines their

\(^{185}\text{Kwŏn Posang, “Pŏmnyul yong’ŏ hae,” }\text{*Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 5 (Jun. 1908).}
contents. The lengthy article, running across three issues of the journal, cannot be reproduced here in its entirety, but the following excerpt provides a good representation of the high level of organization, detail, and technicality employed by the school in teaching law:

The lectures on obligation law are distinguished into three parts. Part One explains the general principles that apply to various types of obligation, investigating topics such as: characteristics of obligations; reasons why obligations arise; parties involved in an obligation; the requisite elements of obligation; delivery of specific real obligations; delivery of general real obligations; delivery of monetary obligations; . . . . transfer of registered bonds; transfer of bearer bonds; and discharge—that is, payment, compensation, novation, condonation, and confusion—of obligations. In Parts Two and Three, each topic receives a separate explanation. Sources from which obligations arise include a legal act, or an expression of the will of a party that becomes effective in private law, and a fact outside of legal acts. Legal acts can be classified into the cases of contract and testament, and facts outside of legal acts can be classified into the cases of administration, unjust enrichment, illegal activity, and family inheritance.186

The Taedong Specialized School’s course on law of obligations, as indicated by the excerpt, was organized into three parts following a general-to-specific pattern, from “general principles” applied to all topics in Part 1 to a “separate explanation” for each individual topic in Parts 2 and 3. It is not clear whether each of these three parts represented a single lecture or a series of lectures, but one thing is certain: the subtopics covered by the lectures were both numerous and technical, especially given the fact that for brevity’s sake I have omitted more than half of the subtopics that Yi lists. The Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo does not feature a similar outline for the rest of the courses offered by the Taedong Specialized School, but it would not be a stretch to imagine that the school displayed a similar level of commitment to specialized, technical training in teaching courses leaning more toward “political science” than “law.”

Another crucial piece of information that Yi Chongha’s article provides is the fact that the Taedong Specialized School, rather than limiting itself to holding lectures and classes, also engaged in compiling and publishing the contents of course lectures independently from the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo. What these published “lecture notes” (kangŭirok) exactly looked like cannot be confirmed in the flesh at this time, but the third installment of Yi’s article, in which he provides an overview of the eight parts comprising the school’s Civil Procedure course lectures, makes clear that they did indeed exist:

It has only been a year and a few months since our school opened its doors; therefore, there are still a number of undertakings that have not been fully brought to fruition. With respect to the lecture notes alone, we sorted the courses to prioritize the compilation and printing of the lecture contents that were shortly to be delivered in class; as for highly complex courses, there are some whose notes have only been compiled in parts. As such, we have finished compiling and printing the notes for the first part of the Civil Procedure
lectures and the rest are still under way, making it difficult to describe the contents of the course here. So I will provide a description based on the lecture notes commonly used in various law schools, domestic and overseas. The lecture notes from the law schools in our country are, in many cases, based on those from Japanese schools; and legal studies lectures, no matter what kind, feature very similar concepts, principles, and organization styles, regardless of which school, foreign or domestic, delivers them. Therefore, even if I describe the lecture contents here on the basis of other schools’ notes, there will not be much of a difference when compared with our school’s own finished version of notes.

Evidently, Yi based his descriptions of the Taedong Specialized School’s law courses on pre-existing lecture notes, for the most part. As indicated by his acknowledgment—the first and only such instance in all three installments of the article—that he had to resort to lecture notes from other schools to summarize the contents of the latter seven parts of the Civil Procedure lectures, which apparently belonged to some of the “highly complex courses” whose notes had not yet been compiled in their entirety. How exactly these notes were used outside of Yi’s purposes, however, remains unexplained. The fact that the school prioritized printing and compiling the notes from the lectures that were immediately to be delivered suggests that they served in the capacity of a teacher’s guide and/or a textbook for the students. Given how the Yangjŏng School

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187 “本校의 創設이 續히 一年有餘知乎라 故로 亟事가 向히 完成치 못ᄒᆞᆫ 者ㅣ 有ᄒᆞ오로 講義錄에 就ᄒᆞ야도 目前 急히 敎授ᄒᆞ는 者ᆞ물 先히 編續印刷기 爲ᄒᆞ야 敎授課目을 分配ᄒᆞ여 稍陵 ᄒᆞᆫ 者ᄂᆞᆫ 該 講義錄도 完結치 못ᄒᆞᆫ 者ㅣ 有ᄒᆞ니 政로 民事訴訟法 講義錄은 第一編ᄉᆡᆨ지 編續印刷ᄒᆞ얏고 第二編브터ᄂᆞᆫ 아즉 未成ᄒᆞ시믈ᄋᆞᆯ 為에 其 内容을 說明ᄒᆞ기 不能ᄒᆞ기 內外國 各 法律學校에서 敎授ᄒᆞᆫ 講義錄의 通例ᄋᆞᆯ 依ᄒᆞ야 説明ᄒᆞ셔 ᄂᆞᆫ 者ᄂᆞᆫ 我國 法律學校의 講義錄은 大槪 日本學校의 講義錄을 根據ᄒᆞ여 多ᄒᆞ고 且 如何ᄒᆞ法律講義이던지 其 原理 原則과 編章體裁를 內外國 何 學校ᄅᆞᆯ 勿問ᄒᆞ고 互相俌似ᄒᆞᆫ 者ㅣ라 然則 此編 他學校 講義錄의 内容을 依據ᄒᆞ야 説明ᄒᆞ지ᄅᆞᆯ 本校 講義錄 完成 後에 較合ᄒᆞ면  또ᄒᆞ大差가 無ᄒᆞ지ᄅᆞ다.” Yi Chongha, “Pŏmnıyulhak e kwanhan kaegyŏn sok,” Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo 20 (Sep. 1909).
(Yangjŏng ŭisuk 養正義塾), a private school established in 1905 that also offered a specialization program in law, published its lecture notes and made them available to the public for sale, the Taedong Specialized School may have had a similar commercial interest in publishing its own lecture notes. Although absolute conclusions cannot be drawn without examining these lecture notes in the flesh, Yi’s summaries make it easy to imagine the kangŭirok notes as a useful resource for the students and instructors alike in the Taedong Specialized School, in their effort to acquire and impart technical and specialized knowledge in various aspects of law and—assuming the school did the same with its non-law course lectures—state administration.

4.4.2 An Exclusive Institution for the Traditional and Privileged

Given the curriculum and the pedagogical effort invested in each of the courses offered, there is no doubt that the Taedong Specialized School was primarily an institution of modern education designed for students who desired to develop careers in and around state bureaucracy. However, if modern law and statecraft had represented the only aspect of the education offered by the Taedong Specialized School, then the Taedong hakhoe’s vision— as stated by Cho Chungŭng—to complement the traditional prestige of the kwijok, or the “society of government officials from the Confucian community,” with expertise in practical matters would have rung quite hollow. After all, it was in the interests of the Taedong hakhoe, an organization that sought to protect the literati’s political position by emphatically promoting the close and complementary relationship between the new learning and the old learning, to build distinctively Confucian and

even aristocratic elements into the Taedong Specialized School’s curriculum and operation—and
the Hakhoe did so.

The schedule of courses made available in the advertisement in the *Hwangsong sinmun*, once again, serves as the most helpful resource in this regard. According to the advertisement, the Taedong Specialized School required of its students to take a *hanmun* course every year throughout the three-year Specialization Program. Although details of the course contents are unknown, it becomes apparent that the Taedong Specialized School placed a special significance on inculcating the knowledge of *hanmun*—and the Confucian ethos contained within it—upon students being groomed to become lawmakers, government officials, and legal professionals, thanks to Yŏ Kyuhyŏng’s tribute to the school’s establishment:

*Hanmun* is for explicating translated texts on law, and language studies are for translating texts written in other foreign languages on law; because both subjects constitute the two wings of law, they cannot be called heterodox. Moreover, *hanmun* is the lifeblood and the handle of a rake by which all of East Asia can communicate and uphold the Great Way of Confucius; that is to say, *hanmun* is the Taedong hakhoe’s lifeblood and sword hilt.

Without *hanmun*, there is no Taedong hakhoe; without the Hakhoe, the school cannot function. Only *hanmun* is to be the number-one subject in the school.”

189 “Hagwŏn mojip kwanggo” (Student Recruitment Announcement), *Hwangsong sinmun* (Feb. 23, 1908), 3.

From Yŏ’s perspective, *hanmun* education’s inclusion in a school of law and politics had a practical benefit: it allowed for reading and explicating legal and political texts produced overseas—presumably in the West and then translated in China. In an environment where many of the imported texts in law and statecraft, in the absence of state-sponsored translation efforts, had to be translated secondhand from Chinese editions on an individual and institutional basis, proficiency in Literary Sinitic may have indeed been a useful skill. Although this line of justification for *hanmun*’s inclusion in the curriculum is helpful in highlighting the traditional written codes’s relevance in acquiring the modern system of knowledge, it also poses an inherent problem for the *kuhak* intelligentsia. That is, it places *hanmun* in the same category as the “foreign language studies” course, which also earned its spot as a required subject throughout the three-year program for its utility in reading and explicating foreign texts. Not only does this risk reducing *hanmun* to a mere “wing” to law and statecraft’s “body,” but it also otherizes the literary culture that the Taedong hakhoe was so keen to render native and central to Korean modernity. So Yŏ wastes no time setting the record straight, immediately articulating the centrality of *hanmun* as the essence (i.e. “lifeblood”) of and the means (i.e. “handle of a rake” and “sword hilt”) to upholding the Confucian Way across “all of East Asia” and identifying Literary Sinitic as the *raison d’être* of the Taedong hakhoe and therefore the Taedong


192 It is unknown which particular foreign languages were taught at the Taedong Specialized School. It is likely that Japanese was at least one of the languages taught, as Japan, in addition to being a near-colonial presence in Korea, was a major source of imported texts on law and statecraft. For more details on the significant role that Japanese texts played in legal and political studies for textbook purposes, see ibid. Also, the school seems to have created an accelerated Japanese-learning program somewhere along the way; at least one of its students, a man named Kim Chinyŏng 金振泳 (1877-?), is recorded in the *Taehan cheguk kwanwŏn iveryŏksŏ* to have taken it from 1908 to 1909 on his way to graduating from the Taedong Specialized School’s regular law and politics program.
Specialized School. The most prized and important subject in this ostensibly sinhak educational institution, Yŏ insisted, was hanmun and hanmun alone.

Another interesting “old school” feature of the Taedong Specialized School’s Specialization program is the third-year course on the Ming Code. The criminal code of the pre-annexation Taehan Empire, even with the series of reforms made since the Kabo Reforms of 1896, maintained numerous continuities from the traditional legal codes such as the Tae Myŏngnyul 大明律 (Great Ming Code) and the Taejŏn hoet’ong 大典會通 (Updated Great Code for Governing the State).193 Of course, in a transitional period from the premodern legal system to a modern system, teaching a course on the Ming Code would have had great merit. It is also likely that the Taedong Specialized School included the course as an assertion of its belief that the old learning—or the Confucian ethos saturating the old legal code—remained very much relevant in twentieth-century Korea. After all, the Posŏng Specialized School (Posŏng chŏnmun hakkyo) and the Yangjŏng School, two major private law schools in Seoul contemporary to the Taedong Specialized School, did not teach the Ming Code as a separate course.194 Kim Yŏng’u has found a total of eight private schools in Seoul, including the Posŏng Specialized School and the Yangjŏng School, that were established between 1905 and 1909 and that offered legal education as their primary program. Kim has identified the curriculum for seven of those schools, and of those seven, only the Taedong Specialized School offered Ming Code as a

193 For a detailed examination of penal code reforms in pre-annexation Korea since the Kabo Reforms, see To Myŏnhoe, “Kabo kaehyŏk ihu kündaejŏk pŏmyŏng chejŏng kwajŏng: Hyŏngsabŏp ŭl chungsim ŭro,” Han’guk munhw'a 27 (2001).

194 For the complete lists of courses required by the Posŏng Specialized School and the Yangjŏng School, see Chŏng Kungsik, “Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae pŏphak kyokwa kwajŏng pyŏneh’ŏnsa,” Pŏphak nonch’ong 36, no. 1 (2016): 303-5; and Kim Hyojŏn, “Yangjŏng ŭisuk ŭi pŏphak kyoyuk,” 54.
The only other law school that set up a separate course for the Ming Code and placed a heavy emphasis on teaching traditional legal codes was the Judicial Training School (Pŏpkwan yangsŏngso法官養成所). Since the Judicial Training School was established and run by a government chanting “old foundation, new participation” as its reform mantra, it is no surprise that the institution incorporated an “old learning” law course into its curriculum. The fact that the Taedong Specialized School, unlike other comparable private law schools of the time, implemented the study of the Ming Code indicates a conscious effort to balance its practical, sinhak education with markers of the old learning and order.

The most critical feature of the Taedong Specialized School’s “balancing act” can be found in the admission requirements. According to the advertisement, a prospective student, in addition to meeting the age and entrance examination requirements, needed the backing of a “guarantor” (pojŭngin), and this guarantor had to be a member of the Taedong hakhoe—a society that was “founded by officials and aristocrats among the literati” and maintained a membership so exclusive that certain members were reportedly expelled simply because they were not “known” in scholar-official circles. This requirement would have effectively served as a barrier against those outside the literati class, because it would have been difficult for a non-


196 For the complete list of courses, including several changes over the years, required by the Judicial Training School, see Ch’ŏng Kŭngsik, “Han’guk kŭnhyŏndaesë pŏphak,” 299. Also, according to Ch’oe Kiyŏng, the Ming Code was one of the subjects tested on the Judicial Training School’s graduation examination. See Ch’oe Kiyŏng, “Han’guk kŭnhyŏndaesëa yŏn’gu 16 (2001): 56-57.


198 According to the Taehan maeil sinbo, a man ranked in the government at junior second (chong 2-p’um) named Kim Kyosun was expelled because he was not known within the Soron Faction, while a man named Kim Sŏnggŭn was expelled because of his obscurity despite the fact that he was of the Andong Kim clan. “Yangssi ch’ulhoe,” Taehan maeil sinbo, March 16, 1907, mixed script edition.
literatus individual to obtain a “letter of guarantee” from a member of such an exclusive organization. According to a report from the *Hwangsŏng sinmun*, this was exactly the purpose of the requirement:

With regards to the matter of student admissions, Cho Chungŭng, the principal of the Taedong Specialized School, instructed that only those from gentle families [*hwajok* 華族] be selected. Certain members of the school’s executive staff objected but Minister Cho did not concede till the end, instructing to make only members of the gentle families eligible for the entrance examination. So the staff members were compelled to speak to Vice Principal Pak Sŭnghyŏk, threatening resignation. In turn, Pak went to Minister of Justice Cho’s private residence to inquire about the matter. As Cho adamantly insisted on his position, Pak responded, “There is not a single member in the Taedong hakhoe who is not a member of a gentle family. If we require that students, upon submitting their applications, designate a Hakhoe member as guarantor, all applicants, since people associate with those similar to themselves, will be from gentle families. So let us carry out the selection process based on this,” and this proposal was accepted.  

The anecdote, as reported through the critical eye of the *Taehan maeil sinbo*, serves to highlight the utility of the “guarantor” admission requirement. A clause that plainly and explicitly closed the door to non-*yangban* students would have triggered a full-force backlash from critics and the

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199 “大東專門學校校長趙重應氏가 학徒選擇하는 사에 對한 華族으로만 擇選하라능즉
該校任員中某某諸氏가 反對하고 趙大臣은 條不聽從하고 華族으로만 試選하라능으로 該任員들이
不得已하야 其辭意로 校監朴承熾氏에게 言하능즉 朴氏가 趙法大私邸에 進往하야 該事實을 問하능즉 趙氏는
決心로 華族으로 試選하자능으로 朴氏가 言할기름 大東學會會員은 無非華族이니 學徒請願을 領受한
時에 保証人으로 會員으로 立保계능면 類類相從으로 自然華族이 齊進恆것이니 此を 因하야 施行하자능즉
朴氏의 意見이 決議되었더라.” “Tansŏn hwajok,” *Hwangsŏng sinmun*, March 5, 1908.
public, with accusations of “obstinacy” already constituting a prominent stream of criticism directed at the Taedong hakhoe scholar-officials. By effectively limiting admission to its friends and family through exclusive guarantorship, the Taedong hakhoe could avoid the brunt of the backlash while keeping its aim true: to create a cadre of literati who would dominate the upper echelon of the Korean sociopolitical order by virtue of the Confucian, aristocratic status quo and empowered with professional expertise in modern law and statecraft. As long as the Taedong Specialized School was a chief means through which this aim was to be attained, the Taedong hakhoe, like Cho Chungŭng in the anecdote, had to insist adamantly on keeping the student body exclusively yangban.

This exclusionary educational effort, of course, did not go unnoticed by the Hakhoe’s contemporaries. From the beginning, there was chatter concerning the Taedong hakhoe’s class-conscious motivation behind establishing the School. In an article titled “Arising from Greed for Officialdom,” the Hwangsŏng sinmun reported:

The Taedong hakhoe has established a school of law and politics and organized a staff of executives. People say, “At present, our country’s academic capability is on the level of a child, so we are undoubtedly in need of primary education. This organization, however, has opened a school of law and statecraft ahead of a primary school. This is analougous to the way parasitic plants, missing a root, live off other plants. It is hard to call this an ‘obstinate education,’ but the Taedong hakhoe is an organization of the five-century-old yangban; its greed for official posts has accumulated to the marrow. Thus, with its
thoughts preoccupied with officialdom, it believes opening a school of law and politics to be the urgent priority."

The fact that the Taedong Specialized School taught modern academic subjects in law and politics made it hard for the Hakhoe’s contemporaries to call the organization “backward” in terms of its commitment to bringing Korea up to date with other “civilized” nations. However, there was a sharp—and accurate—awareness among them that the Taedong hakhoe was an aristocratic organization. In the eyes of the critics, the Taedong hakhoe was driven toward the objective of perpetuating the dominance of the yangban in Korean politics, and the organization’s institution of the school of law and politics—before facilitating the advancement of primary education for the benefit of the Korean nation as a whole—was understood as an instrument to attain that “greedy” objective.

In another Hwangsŏng sinmun article, titled “Great Competitiveness among Law Schools,” the perception of the school as a means for the traditionally privileged to secure its place in officialdom even takes on a “regional” dimension:

Minister of Justice Cho Chungŭng addressed in a speech the sons and students of certain families residing in North Town and South Town and reportedly said, “When I assess the state of students studying abroad in Japan, northerners excel over others, and within our borders, too, students from the north are superior; the political realm will surely fall to northerners in the future. Where are your heads? If you only study and master politics and

200 “大東學會에셔 法政學校를 設立하고 任員을 組織하얏다능디 世人이 言기를 現今我國學界程度가 幼稚하야 不可不普通敎育이 必要하거늘 此學會는 法政學을 先設하니 此는 根底가 無은 弁寄生과 見詫子와 如하야 完固한 敎育이라 謂기 難하나 然하나 此會은 五百年兩班社會라 仕宦心이 骨髓에 隱結하얏슨즉 汲汲思惟 仕宦界로 走하야 法政學校를 急先務로 知홍이라고말 훗더라.” “Ch’urŏ hwansim,” Hwangsŏng sinmun, February 16, 1908.
law, employment in officialdom will be in our lot’s hands, and if that is the case, we will not concede our place to northerners, will we?” It is said that Cho’s speech is responsible for the clan meetings recently called by so many great families, whereby their sons were sent abroad to study and law students in the Posŏng Specialized School were transferred to the Taedong Specialized School.201

There is no clear evidence in the pages of the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* that demonstrates the type of bias and discrimination that the aristocratic bureaucrats based in the capital area—or “families residing in North Town and South Town”202—employed against the literati and military elites from P’yŏng’an, Hwanghae, and Hamgyŏng Provinces to exclude these non-aristocratic, peripheral individuals from the ruling structure of Chosŏn.203 In fact, as I have noted earlier in this study, the Taedong hakhoe established regional branches and regional managers across the Korean peninsula, allowing Confucian literati from anywhere in the country to participate in the organization’s cause. The fact that Chang Pak 張博 (1848-1921), an active member who worked alongside Yu Kilchun as one of the lecturers on new publications and contributed several articles to the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, was originally from Kyŏngsŏng, Hamgyŏng Province, further...
suggests that the Taedong hakhoe did not actively or systematically discriminate against the traditionally ostracized literati of the northern provinces. At the same time, however, it would be a surprise if the Taedong hakhoe did not in fact feel even a slight degree of anxiety about the northerners. As Kyung Moon Hwang has demonstrated, the northwesterners of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Korea, on the back of their enthusiastic adoption of Protestantism and commitment to Western-style education, not only overcame the perception of inferiority but began to invert the old regional hierarchy from Chosŏn, establishing a disproportionately large number of private schools compared to their southern counterparts and thereby producing waves of prominent leaders across the social, cultural, and political realms of Korean modernity.\(^{204}\)

From the perspective of the capital-based traditional elite, like the core members of the Taedong hakhoe, who aspired to see the status quo extended into the twentieth century and from the center to the periphery, the emergence of the northern elite as the new center and vanguard of enlightenment would have been an unsettling sight. The regional rivalry between the aristocratic/bureaucratic intellectuals of the south—the Taedong hakhoe, for example—and the long-suffering Confucian intellectuals of the north—the Sŏbuk hakhoe (Northern Study Society), for example, which formed around the same time (1908) as the Taedong hakhoe—would be a fascinating topic to pursue in the future, but, to focus on the *Hwangsŏng sinmun* article for now, it is clear that the legal and political education offered by the Taedong Specialized School was perceived by some of its contemporaries as an aggressive attempt to ensure that “employment in officialdom [would] be in [the traditional central elite’s] hands,” not in the northerners’ or others’.

\(^{204}\) Ibid., 279-85.
Although the exact parameters of aristocratic exclusivity that the Taedong hakhoe used to determine who could enter the Taedong Specialized School and who could not, and more broadly, who qualified as a kwijok literatus and who did not, are unclear, one thing is certain: the Taedong Specialized School was an embodiment of the practical solution that the Taedong hakhoe imagined for its concerns and anxieties about the traditional ruling class’s hegemonic position in the Korean sociopolitical hierarchy. It was an institution that provided a specialized, technical training in modern law and statecraft, paired with inculcation in Confucian literary and legal-ethical knowledge, exclusively to members of the Confucian and aristocratic traditional ruling class, so that they could claim the modern “science of the state”—a “natural” match to Confucian law and statecraft—as their own. It was a practical means through which the literati were to reclaim their grip on political power that had been slipping because of their lack of participation in the new learning. In the twilight of the Taehan Empire, the Taedong hakhoe envisioned a Korean government whose top levels would be occupied by sons of the literati who, inculcated with an education in the old and equipped with a specialized training in the new from the Taedong Specialized School, would actualize the moral principles of Confucius and Mencius in the Korean social and political structure and at the same time fulfill a goal not unlike what Sŏng Nakhyŏn charged the school’s graduates in the preface to the alumni publication: to be the ones who “make all of Koreans reach the realm of civilization.”

Granted, there already existed in the Korean government Confucian-educated, aristocratic individuals who had parlayed their economic and political power into a modern education

through schools inside and outside Korea. As I have previously mentioned, Cho Chungŭng, Min Pyŏngsŏk, and Yu Kilchun of the Taedong hakhoe were themselves such individuals, who complemented their traditional education with a formal training in Japanese, agriculture, and various other “sciences.” However, it is perhaps a less recognizable name among the members of the Taedong hakhoe that provides the best approximation of the new literati envisioned by the organization: Kwŏn Posang, whose name I have introduced earlier in the study as the author of a *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* article defining law and politics as part of the “science of the state.”

As recorded in the *Taehan cheguk kwanwŏn iryŏksŏ*, Kwŏn, born in 1879 into a Seoul-residing family from the Andong Kwŏn clan and educated at home during his early years, obtained his literary licentiate degree (*chinsa* 进士) in 1894, the final year of the traditional civil service examination, when he was barely fifteen years old—an incredibly tender age to acquire any degree. He graduated in 1905 from the Chunggyo ŭisuk 中橋義塾, a private school with a curriculum that combined a classical Confucian education featuring subjects like “self-cultivation” (*susin*) and “Literary Sinitic composition” (*hanmun changmun*) and a “practical” education featuring subjects like Japanese, law, and economics. He pivoted the direction of his exploration of the new learning specifically toward modern law, leaving for Japan in the same

206 According to Kim Yŏngmo, fewer than 10% of those who studied overseas and subsequently found a position in the government were from families whose surnames were recorded in the *Mansŏng taedongbo* (Geneologies of Ten Thousand Surnames); Kim also identified a directive issued by the Minister of Education in 1904 that limited the eligibility to be sent to Japan to family and relatives of high-ranking officials. Of the Taehan Empire officials from pre-Kabo aristocratic families (e.g., the Chŏnju Yís, the Andong Kims, the Namyang Hongs, etc.), many had a domestic education from modern institutions (e.g., the Foreign Language School, the Judicial Training School, primary schools, etc.). Kim Yŏngmo, *Hanmal chibaech’ŭng yŏn’gu*, 305-310.


year to study in the law program at the Meiji University. This step in his education probably made Kwŏn one of the “expert” members of the Taedong hakhoe in the field of modern law, as suggested by the several articles that he contributed to the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* introducing the definition, characteristics, and significance of modern legal studies.\(^{209}\) His career highlights reflect the breadth of knowledge and skills—of the old learning and the new learning—that he acquired through such an educational path. As an accomplished scholar of the old learning, he was commissioned as a member of a special committee to compile the *Chŭngbo munhŏn pigo* 增補文獻備考, the expanded edition of the encyclopedic *Tongguk munhŏn pigo* that contains a vast array of entries in *hanmun* on Korean history, institutions, customs, geography, etc. His employment as a sŏgi (clerk) in 1904 at the Japanese Embassy indicates a proficiency in the Japanese language, which certainly would have been helpful to and enhanced by his education at the Meiji University. The fact that Kwŏn even worked as a member of the Kungmun yŏn’guso 國文研究所 (National Script Research Institute)\(^{210}\) indicates a high level of interest in and understanding of the native script. Although he himself, it appears, never attained a policy-making position within the Taehan Empire government before annexation, the Taedong hakhoe desired and anticipated a Korean government spearheaded by a cadre of blue-blooded, Confucian-minded, legally trained individuals like Kwŏn. The Taedong hakhoe’s work through numerous meetings and seminars, the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, and the Taedong Specialized

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\(^{209}\) In an article titled “Legal Studies,” Kwŏn Posang explains the “what,” “why,” and “how” of law as an academic discipline and traces the history of jurisprudence and its development in the East and the West, identifying the study of law from the West as a supreme pursuit that must be prioritized for Korea to attain enlightenment. See Kwŏn Posang, “Pŏmnyullak,” *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* 1 (Feb. 1908). Kwŏn also authored a series of articles under the title, “Glossary of Legal Terms” which solidify the place of law among all the other sciences.

\(^{210}\) For a detailed examination of the Kungmun yŏn’guso, see Yi Kimun, *Kaehwagi ŭi kungmun yŏn’gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1970).
School represents a concerted effort on the part of certain pockets of the traditional elites not only to produce—that is, indoctrinate and train—such a cadre domestically but also to assert and legitimize its leadership in the new political environment of Korea.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

On February 13, 1908, the Taehan maeil sinbo put Sin Kisŏn’s new hair-do under the spotlight and reported, “It is said that President of the Taedong hakhoe Sin Kisŏn, for some reason, sheared off half of his hair and plastered the rest with beeswax. There is clamor that this pitiful visage represents his half-obstinate, half-reform affiliation.” Sin Kisŏn had previously been an adamant opponent to adopting Western-style haircuts, only complying in tears to Kojong’s 1895 decree that forced Koreans to cut off their topknots after the king’s threat to chop off his head otherwise. In the eyes of the editors of the newspaper, the fact that Sin, over a decade after the tearful cutting of his topknot, voluntarily presented himself in his bizarre half-shorn, half-slicked look, was symbolic of Sin’s and the Taedong hakhoe’s halfway, and therefore “pitiful,” character in the context of early-twentieth-century Korea. Whereas this so-called “half-obstinate, half-reform” attitude employed by Sin and the organization that he helped found and led was a topic of interest to the editors of the Taehan maeil sinbo, it has been left largely untreated by modern scholars.

In fact, modern-day scholarship on the Taedong hakhoe so far has focused predominantly on its relationship with Japanese colonial ambitions, branding it as an unabashedly “pro-Japanese” and “anti-national” organization. Without a doubt, the Hakhoe itself provided plenty of kindling to this unflattering characterization; after all, the organization and its members, to the ire of the editors of the Taehan maeil sinbo, displayed a close relationship with Itō Hirobumi,


212 Hwang Hyŏn, Maech’ŏn yarok (Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, 1971), vol. 3, “Kwangmu 6-nyŏn imjin.”
received financial contributions from the Resident General of Korea and the Japanese Imperial Household, and attempted to pacify the anti-Japanese Righteous Army movement by writing a public letter to the literati across Korea. Even as it explained the significance of the Taedong Specialized School’s establishment, the Taedong hakhoe made sure to include an expression of gratitude to Japan for the financial support provided via Itō Hirobumi and the Imperial Household (in addition to thanking the Korean Imperial Household for the same reason). However, locating the Taedong hakhoe in a narrow “collaborator-or-patriot” narrative and focusing exclusively and at times unfairly on its “pro-Japanese” activities has yielded a monochromatic portrait of the organization as a puppet which, dependent on and exploited by the colonial interests of Japan, possessed no agenda or initiative of its own, thereby relegating the organization to playing no more than the role of a foil to other “patriotic” Korean nationalists.

The present study has been an attempt to suspend the concentration on the “collaborator” aspect and instead to unpack the Taedong hakhoe’s claims and activities in relation to the social and political context of Korea at the beginning of the twentieth century—an effort that sheds light on what the Taehan maeil sinbo may have meant precisely by its accusations of “obstinacy” toward Sin Kisŏn and the ostensibly Confucian scholarly organization. In fact, what the study has revealed is an organization that formed, adjusted, promoted, and put into practice its own visions for Korea in the best interests of its members and the traditional ruling class that they sought to represent. With the abolition of the civil examination as part of the Kabo Reforms of 1894 and 1895 and Kojong’s policy of employing government officials based on “practical” and “useful” skills in modern policy administration, foreign affairs, finances, military matters, etc.,

not to mention the rising prominence of the “new learning” that encompassed those skills in the national discourse of civilization and progress, the foothold of the Korean scholar-officials on the sociopolitical hierarchy, once unquestionably firm due to their aristocratic family backgrounds and their bureaucratic success granted through Confucian and Sinographic literary knowledge, was slipping fast. Their mastery of classical Confucian wisdom and hanmun, now relativized as the “old learning” and maligned as an obstacle to Korea’s attainment of civilization, was straddling the boundary between relevance and immateriality. The scholar-officials constituting the Taedong hakhoe, whose unabashedly Confucian ideology and membership nonetheless subscribed to the linear and universal imagination of civilization and progress and Social Darwinism, foresaw in mortal fear the demise of the scholar-official “race,” as the ultimate but imminent consequence of the increasing irrelevance of old-style social capital and the inability of the “race” to acquire the new. The Taedong hakhoe realized that, in order to save the Korean scholar-officials and the literati at large from this “extinction” and to protect their stake at the top of the sociopolitical hierarchy, something desperately needed to be done—something far removed from the wijŏng ch’ŏksa literati’s extreme conservatism and also more drastic than the tongdo sŏgi literati’s neatly compartmentalized handling of the old and the new.

As part of the solution to this problem, the Taedong hakhoe placed the responsibility for Korea’s falling behind on the march toward civilization and progress squarely on Confucian scholars. The Confucians of Korea, the Hakhoe theorized in its monthly-published journal Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, had long gone astray from the “true substance” of the Way once taught and practiced in its pristine, superior form by the sages of antiquity; that is, Korean Confucians only focused on the superficial aspects of the Way for the purpose of conserving the “orthodox” and advancing their personal interests in officialdom, dismissing the importance of “investigation
of things” and practical, technical matters—originating from both foreign and domestic sources—of governance and war and thereby failing to benefit the people and improve their lives. If the Way of Confucius and Mencius was substantial, practical, and beneficial to the public, the way of the Korean literati was superficial, abstract, and self-interested. This rhetorical strategy effectively exonerated Confucianism itself from culpability and therefore shielded it from accusations of irrelevance and obsolescence in the twentieth century. At the same time, it opened up the possibility for the old learning to return to relevance and materiality: the Confucian literati of Korea simply needed to abandon their misguided course and return to the root that had long been established by the sages of antiquity.

Through the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*, the Taedong hakhoe promoted the destination of this return as something that was truly “relevant” and “useful” in the now. One way this was done was to construct the notion that the civilized ideas and practices of the pristine Confucian past—or the “true substance of the Way,” as the Taedong hakhoe termed it—and those of the new learning were, in essence, one and the same. Reducing them to bite-sized essentialities, the Taedong hakhoe identified and established continuities and parallels between the two systems of learning widely perceived as disparate; for example, teachings from the old learning, such as “investigation of things” and “beneficial use and enriching lives,” were no different from what the Hakhoe identified as the practical and profitable characteristics—termed “principles of heaven, man, affairs, and things, the methods of daily use and supporting livelihoods” by Sin Kisŏn—of the new learning. Notably, the Taedong hakhoe directed extra effort toward substantiating the connection between the ancient Confucian art of law and statecraft and its modern counterpart imported from the West; the “techniques of maintaining and advancing the state and the people” taught in the new learning were tied directly to the teachings delivered
through such quintessentially Confucian texts as the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Rites of Zhou*, etc. As the Taedong hakhoe painted them, the wisdoms of the old learning, especially with regard to governing a state, were not really “old” and antiquated; they were still as valid and relevant in the twentieth century as they had been in sagely antiquity.

Another important dimension of the old learning was *hanmun*, which the Taedong hakhoe believed indispensable for explicating and understanding the sacred texts in the Confucian tradition because it was the written code in which teachings of the sages were embodied: the demise of this “truth-language” would mean the demise of the truth itself, and the Hakhoe could not allow *hanmun* to lose its place in the intellectual and political arena. Hence, the organization strove to highlight the utility of the “old writing” in the context of twentieth-century Korea through the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo*: first, *hanmun* was useful as a shared script that tied China, Korea, and Japan together into an imagined community called “Asia” or “the East,” which would in turn be an effective measure of protection against the encroachment of the West; second, the use of individual sinographs and sinographic terms, as constituents of *hanmun*, offered practical advantages that made writing Korean more efficient and convenient than *kungmun* alone would. The Hakhoe did acknowledge *kungmun* as part of the larger system of Korean writing. However, it imagined the script as supplementary to *hanmun*: it could not exist by itself but only as part of the *kukhanmun* mixed script. Accordingly, the native script was employed predominantly in the section of the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* that focused on topics from the new learning, using sinographs and sinographic terms—like “wings on a tiger”—to make the unfamiliar topics and concepts easier to explicate and understand for both the cultivated and the uncultivated.
Ultimately, what the Taedong hakhoe sought to accomplish by promoting the relevance of the old learning in twentieth-century Korea was to render the literati, as the consumers, producers, and guardians of the old learning, central to the political leadership of twentieth-century Korea. The Taedong hakhoe’s battle to secure the traditional ruling class’s place in the Korean sociopolitical order, however, extended far beyond the abstract realm and was also waged in the practical. With the old learning made relevant and its differences with the new learning conceptually elided or reconciled, the Taedong hakhoe engaged in various educational efforts to equip the literati with technical and practical knowledge in the new learning: it conducted weekly seminars in which lectures on “new publications” from the West, along with those on the Confucian classics, were delivered, published informative articles in the *Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo* on various fields of the new learning, such as law, politics, physics, physiology, chemistry, geography, economics, botany, and astronomy, and operated a modern school. However, the Hakhoe did not place equal weight on all fields of the new learning. In fact, just as it invested an exceptional amount of effort on substantiating the equivalence specifically between Confucian statecraft and its modern counterpart from the West, the Hakhoe dedicated a disproportionately large number of articles to topics relating to law and politics, subjects of study that the organization subsumed under the category “science of the state.”

The Taedong hakhoe’s special interest in law and politics stretched far beyond scholarly curiosity. In the imagination of the Hakhoe, it was through expertise in the study of modern law and statecraft that the literati would return to the true substance of the Way—that is, the practical and beneficial application of statecraft—and ultimately claim the sociopolitical position befitting the “quintessence of the state and paradigm of the society.” This plan is most conspicuously embodied by the Hakhoe’s establishment of a private institution of modern legal education in
1908, the Taedong Specialized School. Its three-year Specialized Program required its students to take courses in various aspects of civil, criminal, financial, and commercial law, as well as in the administrative aspects of statecraft, such as public administration, public finance, and taxation. Instructions given by these courses were complemented and enhanced not only by a third-year practicum course for hands-on training but also by the “lecture notes” that the School prepared and published. The exact form and content of these features remain elusive but taken together, these measures point to a curriculum geared toward producing specialized legal professionals and state administrators.

The Taedong hakhoe, however, did not intend to produce just any legal professionals and state administrators. These experts, for the Hakhoe’s purposes, needed to be of a yangban kind—as thoroughly Confucian and aristocratically endowed as they were professionally and technically trained in modern law and statecraft. Thus, required alongside the “new learning-oriented” courses were such “old learning-oriented” courses as the Ming Code and Hanmun, the latter of which was to be taken through all three years of the School’s Specialization Program and was singled out as the most valuable subject in the curriculum. In addition, the School required an incoming student to obtain a guarantor from among the members of the Taedong hakhoe, thereby effectively restricting enrollment to sons of prominent literati families—a policy decision that drew criticisms of “obstinacy” in the intellectual circles.

In the end, the Taedong Specialized School’s curriculum and policy devoted to teaching modern law and statecraft but at the same time bent on complementing it with an “old learning” cultivation targeted exclusively at students from high-positioned literati families, together with the Taedong hakhoe’s active promotion of the equivalence between Confucian statecraft and modern statecraft, represented an attempt to adapt to the changing cultural and political
environment and to reconfigure the traditional literati’s qualifications as members of the Korean ruling class. If the Chosŏn ruling class, as James Palais has demonstrated, was an aristocratic/bureaucratic hybrid, the new ruling class that the Taedong hakhoe envisioned and strove to legitimate was an aristocratic/bureaucratic/technocratic hybrid—that is, a class of literati whose aristocratic pedigree and Confucian literary excellence, made compatible with and enhanced by their technical expertise in modern law and statecraft, would perpetuate their traditional hegemony over any other groups in the modern Korean sociopolitical hierarchy. These “new scholar-officials” were to embody the old “true substance” of the Way as statesmen who would not only shed light on and uphold the traditional Confucian ethos but also investigate and endeavor in “practical” matters for the benefit and improvement of the state and the lives of the people. Such investigation and practical endeavors were to follow the ways of the West, or the new learning, which, in the Taedong hakhoe’s view, were essentially indistinguishable from and contiguous with the true, pristine teachings of Confucianism.

The portrait of the Taedong hakhoe, as painted by those who view the group only as a collaborator and nothing more, has been that of a puppet whose strings were deftly pulled by the Japanese for their colonial ambitions. However, as the findings of the present study suggest, the Taedong hakhoe showed much more self-interested initiative than a puppet would. It recognized with alarm the crisis that loomed over the traditional scholar-officials and the political and cultural capital that had once sufficed to legitimate their hegemonic position atop the traditional sociopolitical hierarchy. Through the loudspeaker of its organ, the Taedong hakhoe wŏlbo, the Hakhoe vigorously published and campaigned to render the new learning, especially its “law and statecraft” aspect, a manifestation of the Way of the ancient Confucian sages, equating it with and ultimately subsuming it under the old learning. Thus, the system of learning that had been
foreign to and divergent from the old was claimed as the literati’s very own. The Taedong hakhoe did not stop at establishing an equivalence between the old and the new and making the former and the traditional ruling class conceptually relevant in a drastically changed political environment; instead, the group studied and taught to equip the members of the traditional ruling class with a set of “wings”—to borrow the imagery used to describe kungmun’s relationship to hanmun—that were the new, Western discipline of law and statecraft, in order to refashion the traditional elites into Confucian scholar-officials who were also modern legal professionals and state administrators, the new “legitimate” and “proper” (aristocratic/bureaucratic/technocratic) rulers of modernizing Korea. Far from lacking in agency or initiative, the Taedong hakhoe was a politically activist organization that fought and struggled to secure for the wilting traditional ruling class a place at the top of the Korean sociopolitical order in the opening years of the twentieth century, by means of combining—both in theory and in practice—Confucian statecraft and modern, Western statecraft into the province of the aristocratic yangban.

Realistically speaking, the Taedong hakhoe’s ambition to refashion the scholar-official into a modern Confucian statesman and essentially to perpetuate the underlying power structure of Chosŏn Korea into the twentieth century may have been doomed from the start. In addition to the non-yangban intellectuals’ increasing infiltration of the central bureaucracy and political power, the traditional ruling class, by the time of the foundation of the Taedong hakhoe in 1907, had long witnessed the erosion of power brought on as the Residency-General system encroached upon Korean officials’ authority over foreign and domestic affairs through a series of treaties; the final nail in the coffin driven shortly thereafter into the sadaebu’s political superiority was Japan’s formal annexation of Korea in 1910. Perhaps for some members of the Taedong hakhoe, their desperation over the demise of the vision of newly empowered scholar-
officials in modern Korea lent itself later to abject collaboration. Perhaps the same frustration
drove some members toward a “cultural” outlet, constituting a dimension of the post-annexation
surge in *hanmun* literary scholarship and activities among the literati, centered around the
Imunhoe, the Munye kurakpu, the Sinhae ŭmsa and the Chosŏn munyesa, which began
avariciously providing *hanmun* education, publishing *hansi* poetry and other *hanmun* literature,
and holding literary contests almost immediately after annexation.²¹⁴ Perhaps it was that once-
frustrated vision of a united and empowered modern literati class and the revived hope for its
belated realization that contributed to Kim Yunsik and Yi Yongjik’s decision to issue their own,
Confucianism-steeped Petition for Independence (*Tongnip ch’ŏng’wŏnsŏ*) during the March
First Movement of 1919, separately and independently from the Declaration of Independence
signed by thirty-three religious leaders—representatives from Ch’ŏndogyo, and from Korean
Protestant and Buddhist communities.²¹⁵ Whatever the case may be, there is no question that the
ideas, visions, and activities of the Taedong hakhoe, the organization of traditional scholars and
aristocrats, should be considered a vibrant part of, not an exception to or a stain on, the
intellectual and political fabric of Korea in the final years before annexation.

²¹⁴ For an overview of the formation and activities of these *hanmun* literary associations, see Kang Myŏnggwan,
“Ilche ch’o ku chisigin ŭi munye hwaltong.”

²¹⁵ For more details on Kim Yunsik and Yi Yongjik’s Petition for Independence, see Ch’oe Usŏk, “3-1 Undonggi
Kim Yunsik, Yi Yongjik,” 180-92. The focus of Ch’oe’s article is to show that Kim Yunsik and Yi Yongjik’s
Petition for Independence is more assertive and forceful—and less servile and conciliatory—in its push for
independence than previously suggested. However, Ch’oe’s analysis also reveals in the Petition’s rhetoric a reliance
on Confucian notions. For example, Kim cites a conversation between Mencius and King Xuan of Qi emphasizing
the importance of heeding the will of the conquered, thereby urging the Japanese to heed the will of the Korean
people declaring independence in the March 1 Movement.
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