Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture, Vol. 36 (August 2021): 5–23
DOI: 10.22916/jcpc.2021..36.5

Scholar's Corner: Confucianism in and for the Modern World

The Impact of Confucianism on the Korean Kinship System – A Reconsideration

Martina Deuchler*

Abstract

After providing a brief description of a few distinct features of Goryeo society (918-1392), this essay outlines the major stages of Korea's Confucianization during the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910): the restructuring of the bilateral Goryeo descent groups, the introduction of Confucian institutions such as ancestor worship, inheritance practices, the changing status of women, and the ensuing development of patrilineal descent groups. It emphasizes that in spite of the fact that a strict Confucian socio-political order eventually emerged, remnants of Goryeo bilaterality survived sufficiently clearly to make it problematic to speak of a full Confucianization of Korean society. It concludes with briefly considering developments in the present-day Republic of Korea.

Keywords: Confucian ritualism, bilaterality, patrilineal transformation, Goryeo, Joseon

*Martina Deuchler is a Prof. em. of Korean Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. E-mail: martina.deuchler1@gmail.com

**This contribution is the transcript of a keynote speech prepared for the Conference on Women, Family and Korean Confucianism, held at Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, on October 30, 2020. It is based on the author's major works on Korean social history: *The Confucian Transformation of Korea—A Study on Society and Ideology* (1992), and *Under the Ancestors' Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea* (2015). Both works were translated into Korean.

What I am going to talk about today is not absolutely new, but it is still largely ignored by historians and social anthropologists alike. It is the story of a process of change that turned Korea's indigenous bilateral society into a patrilineal society, starting with the dynastic transition from Goryeo (918-1392) to Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). Transition processes are the most complex and at the same time the most exciting subjects of study. Indeed, it is this subject that has kept me exploring the historical record and doing fieldwork in South Korea for over 40 years. As far as I know, no other example of a social transformation as comprehensive and compelling as Korea's exists anywhere in or outside of East Asia.

I. Goryeo Society

A few words on Goryeo society, that is, Korea's pre-Confucian society, are in order.

From at least the fifth century, Korean society was organized into graded status groups that gained participation in government and society through their social credentials, namely through birth and descent. High social status depended on belonging to an officially recognized ranked descent group, and such ranking determined the extent to which an individual could take part in politics. In short: one's *social standing* conditioned one's chances of taking part in the *political* process. This narrowly-defined descent "ideology" put a small social elite in power and, significantly, formed the foundation of aristocratic rule in Goryeo (and throughout Korean history).

A Goryeo aristocratic descent group included paternal, maternal, and affinal kin. This meant that a man's kin embraced a multilaterally connected and flexible group, and descent was traced through both male and female links. In other words, descent was *not* unilineal, and both descent rules were used to keep as many people as possible within the kin group. The larger the group, the greater its potential to hold property, provide social status, and gain political influence. A minimal formula for identifying a male's social status was to trace his *four* ancestors (*sajo*), namely, the father, paternal grandfather, paternal

great-grandfather, *and* maternal grandfather. This formula clearly shows that lineal thinking was alien to Goryeo descent reckoning. While its origin may go back to Tang law, the inclusion of the maternal grandfather was typically Korean.

A Goryeo kin group was inclusive: all members, male and female, of the same generation enjoyed equal rights and duties. Equality among siblings had important consequences for the succession of office-holding and inheritance of property. Jural equality of brothers meant that succession to aristocratic status and government office was not confined to one son: it extended, in the absence of sons, to agnatic and non-agnatic nephews, to sons-in-law, adopted sons, and to agnatic and non-agnatic descendants. Even though sons were the preferred heirs, collateral agnates and even non-agnatic and affinal kinsmen were potential successors. This demonstrates that succession was flexible and non-lineal.

Inheritance to the aristocracy's *private* property (land and slaves) followed customary rules, making *all* of an owner's offspring—sons and daughters—his (or her) heirs. This molded the Goryeo elite households. Brothers and sisters were co-heirs in a double sense: they each inherited an equal share of the patrimony, and, under certain circumstances, they could expect to inherit from each other. This motivated siblings to stay together as long as possible in the same household, and thus the *brother-sister bond* was especially strong. The larger the household, the more land it could bring under cultivation to enhance its wealth. People were scarcer than land, and therefore, households made every effort to keep as many members as possible.

The Goryeo kin group's special cohesiveness is also reflected in the *custom of close kin marriages*. Consanguineous marriages were not only customary in the royal house but were also widely practiced among the upper class. Unions with patrilateral and matrilateral cousins were frequent, and there were even marriages between half-brothers and half-sisters (siblings with different mothers) during the uncertain times at the beginning of the dynasty. In later times, however, exogamous marriage with other elite members became a more important vehicle for consolidating and advancing high social status. Beginning in the eleventh century, the state, which came

under the influence of the ritual values and legal norms reflected in Tang law, began to regulate the radius of marriageable partners for the office-holding elite. First, in 1058, unions with patrilateral parallel cousins were outlawed; this was followed by successive laws prohibiting hitherto marriageable relatives within the patrilateral kin group. Matrilateral cousins remained largely unaffected until the end of the dynasty.

Another particularity of Goryeo's social life was the marriage institution itself. The wedding ceremony took place in the bride's house, and after the wedding, the bridegroom usually took up residence in the bride's house. Consequently, the children and often even the grandchildren were born and grew up under their mother's roof. The most convincing motivation for *uxorilocal residence* was a Goryeo woman's high economic status. A woman owning her own property was not only a desirable bride, but she was also economically independent from her husband. Uxorilocal marriage did not, however, exclude the possibility that at a certain point, a married woman would move into her husband's house and end her life there.

An interesting additional aspect of the Goryeo marriage arrangement was the fact that a man often had several wives. He may have started out with an uxorilocal living arrangement, but after becoming successful he could have established his own group. This was not detrimental to his wife because she commanded her own wealth. If plural marriage was indeed a plausible arrangement, how did it work? I found a possible answer in the *Kagero nikki*, the tenth-century diary of one of Fujiwara Kaneie's wives. This precious document describes in great detail the "visiting-husband"-solution in which the husband rotated between his different wives. On the Korean side, the documentary base is too small to determine how prevalent the visiting-husband-solution was, but the wife-husband bond in Goryeo was described as a rather loose one. A wife did not fear separation; she even could leave her husband at her own discretion because she and her children were always welcomed back by her natal family.

In short, the core of the Goryeo's kinship system was the cognatic descent group focused on a common ancestor; descent was bilateral

and could thus be traced through a male *or* a female line. These groups lacked a common corporate basis, but ancestral consciousness kept the group together through generations. Proof of descent from a recognized descent group was essential for a man to be recognized as a member of the ruling aristocracy.

These characteristics, I believe, stand out clearly enough to substantiate the fact that Goryeo's society was a *bilaterally/cognatically* structured society. It is from this premise that we have to consider the mechanisms of change that were set in motion by Korea's encounter with Neo-Confucianism that ushered in the patrilineal transformation of Korean society in the first two centuries of Joseon dynasty.

II. Stages of Change

The fact that the Cheng-Zhu version of Song Neo-Confucianism, known as the Learning of the Way (*daoxue* 道學), was introduced to Korea during a period of sociopolitical crisis presents a unique set of circumstances. In late Goryeo, the capital-based civilian aristocracy was first challenged by a line of military dictators and later, during the last decades of the fourteenth century, by a non-elite. Under the tutelage of the Mongols (who had extended their lordship into Korea) non-elite elements began to push into government, amassed landed wealth, and used Buddhism as a spiritual prop. In short, a power struggle between the old ruling elite and the newcomers plunged the country into a deep crisis until 1392, when Yi Seong-gye (1335-1408), a military man, finally ended the chaos by founding a new dynasty, the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910).

During the Mongol period, when the connections between the Mongol court and the Goryeo court were close, some high-placed Korean scholars would go as members of royal retinues to Beijing, take the civil examinations there, and serve for a few years in the Yuan bureaucracy before returning to Korea. During their time in the Yuan capital the Koreans actively engaged in scholarly exchanges with Chinese Neo-Confucians and thus became aware of the civilizing power of the Learning of the Way. Looking at the malaise

in their home country, they strove to use their newly won knowledge to renovate the state and society in Korea. In other words, these new converts availed themselves of Confucian learning to try to end the misrule of the non-elite and win back for the old elite their earlier dominance at the center. Through active partnership with the military, represented by Yi Seong-gye, a group of Confucian-trained scholars grasped the chance to usher in, on Neo-Confucian premises, a socio-religious restoration process of epochal consequence.

For the intellectual architects of Joseon, the kind of Confucianism they adopted blended two strands of thought: "idealistic-moral" and "pragmatic-practical." Both were thought to be equally relevant to the revitalization of state and society. The pragmatists became the legislators who put "ordering the state" above self-cultivation and derived their inspiration and blueprints for action principally from such ancient Chinese works as the *Rituals of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮) and the *Records of Rituals* (*Liji* 禮記). They believed that if they enforced the rules and models of China's classical literature, explicated by Neo-Confucian commentaries, they would be able to eliminate the socio-political and economic causes of Goryeo's disintegration and create an ideal Confucian society.

Then, what steps did the early Joseon Confucians think to take to initiate Confucian reform? I shall illustrate their course of action by discussing the restructuring of the Goryeo descent group, ancestor worship, inheritance practices, and the changing status of women.

III. Implantation of the Agnatic Principle

One of the most challenging tasks the reformers had to tackle at the outset was to disentangle the undifferentiated descent lines of the native Goryeo descent group and order them according to a clear lineal descent paradigm laid out in China's classical literature and the *Family Rituals of Zhu Xi* (*Zhuzi jiali* 朱子家禮). Both propagated a strong agnatic ideology that found its practical expression in a tightly organized unilineal descent group. For Zhu Xi, there was a clear inter-dependence between agnation and stability of the state.

The ideal patrilineal descent group was lineally *subdivided* into a superordinate descent line, headed by the eldest son and various *subordinate* lines headed by his younger brothers. The eldest son functioned as the ritual heir of the main line and was responsible for conducting the ancestral rites for at least three generations of patrilineal antecedents, whereas his younger brothers had only minor ritual obligations. In short, what bound the descent group together and provided it with a kind of corporateness was ancestor worship. Ancestor worship is one of the four domestic rites outlined in *Family Rituals of Zhu Xi*, and it was this ritual handbook that gave the Koreans the rules to initiate and conduct the cult.

The early Joseon legislators recognized that ancestor worship was an effective method for implanting agnatic consciousness and demanded that each elite family construct an ancestral shrine as the locus of the common ritual act. This was not, however, a popular policy. The office-holding elite, initially the main target of the reform program, simply did not cooperate. The lineal concept was alien to them because they were used to flexible descent and fraternal equality. It took a whole century of legislative efforts to overcome the elite's resistance and to win their collaboration.

One of the most controversial issues, for instance, was the distribution of ritual rights and obligations among brothers who held different office ranks or were differently wealthy—an issue that was especially contentious in Korea's status-conscious society. The question of which of the brothers was fit to become the ritual heir, that is, the head of the major descent line with its ritual prerogatives was fraught with potential strife since the choice of one brother to that position inevitably meant the demotion of the others to heads of minor lines. Even when, in accordance with the lineal principle, one son, usually the eldest, eventually was established as ritual heir, his standing continued to be challenged by competing brothers. What if a younger brother climbed higher in the official hierarchy? Would he not represent the descent group better than his low-level elder brother? Moreover, the lineal principle was also challenged *across* generations whenever a successor to a deceased lineal heir had to be chosen. Here, the tradition of fraternal succession stood in the way of

primogeniture as postulated by the ritual handbooks.

The allocation of lineal heirship also had economic implications. A legally recognized heir of an agnatic descent group enjoyed special economic benefits. He was to receive the main residence to which the ancestral shrine was attached and was in control of the slaves and fields set aside to finance the ancestral rites. Although these assets were not to become his wealth and had to be handed on to future generations, they did give the ritual heir economic advantages over his brothers.

Solutions to such tricky problems were grappled with throughout the fifteenth century until, finally, the first comprehensive law code, the *Gyeongguk daejeon* (State Code or the National Code 1471-85), formulated a definitive rule. As prescribed by the Confucian agnatic principle, the eldest son was to be the preferred heir. This was milestone legislation that shifted Korean society away from Goryeo tradition of fraternal or collateral succession and introduced primogeniture in succession matters. Laws, however, needed a long time to be fully accepted and implemented, and heirs were arbitrarily chosen far into the sixteenth century.

IV. Inheritance Practices in the Light of Agnation

In Goryeo, equal inheritance among sons and daughters was customary, but in the light of agnatic succession, the group within which the patrimonial property was to be divided up had to be newly defined. The early legislators introduced, on the basis of a potential heir's *socio-ritual* position, a *differential* scheme by which they not only narrowed the outer boundaries of the group of heirs, but also ranked the members within the group hierarchically.

The inheritance law of Joseon was laid down in the *Gyeongguk daejeon*. The lawmakers were sensitive to the fact that if lineal inheritance was to be accepted, a compromise between tradition and innovation had to be found. They, therefore, followed tradition and confirmed equal inheritance of sons and daughters. However, they firmly implanted the lineal principle by revoking horizontal

inheritance by collaterals. The ritual heir was to receive an extra share for fulfilling his ritual duties. Even secondary offspring, though not bona fide members of the descent group, were allotted reduced shares. Clearly, the legislators wanted to make the patrimony—the land and slaves that were to be transmitted from generation to generation—the mainstay of the descent group, and with additional laws and regulations, they sought to prevent it from being scattered through lack of heirs or greedy speculations.

V. Women as Obstacles to Change

The role of women created the greatest obstacle to speedy implantation of the agnatic principle. How could the various wives a Goryeo man may have had be brought into line with the lineal principle? After all, only *one* wife could be the mother of the lineal heir. Therefore, a law promulgated in 1413 sorted the wives into two categories: primary wives and secondary wives and forced husbands to categorize their wives accordingly. Not surprisingly, this bold law was not a popular piece of legislation. Decades of altercations and conflicts in the women's quarters followed because this new law affected wives and their offspring. In the early days of the dynasty, the sharp separation between "primary" and "secondary" was therefore rarely followed, but with the government's persistent enforcement of the lineal principle, the first-born son of a wife, who was declared primary, clearly enjoyed an elevated position over the rest of her offspring. In addition, this meant social degradation for the other wives and their offspring. In later times, secondary wives (also called concubines) no longer came from the elite. As a consequence, their sons (and daughters) were marginalized in crucial respects. They were no longer recognized as full-fledged members of their elite father's descent group and were denied a ritual role. They were also economically deprived as they received smaller amounts of the patrimony than their primary half-siblings. Moreover, they lost out socially and politically because they were barred from taking the civil service examinations.

The legal differentiation between "primary" and "secondary" descent in 1413 thus introduced an incisive dividing line into Korean society that created disillusionment and alienation and gave rise to countless conflicts among primary and secondary sons until the end of the dynasty.

Needless to say, the law of 1413 also had practical implications for women's lives. The primary wife assumed control over the household and enjoyed even some ritual prerogatives early in the dynasty. She demanded absolute obedience from the secondary wives her husband may have brought into the household and their offspring. Elite households were large, and they united people of a variety of social backgrounds under the same roof, usually also including a considerable number of house slaves. It was the primary wife's task to maintain peace and commonality among all household members. After her death, a primary wife was mourned for a specific length of time and, as a mark of her status, her spirit tablet was installed in the ancestral shrine, making her an ancestress. Secondary wives were not given such honors.

The reorganization of the inheritance system affected elite women's traditional economic independence and made women generally more dependent on their husbands' families. This was underscored by the demand for virilocal residence, which separated a woman from her natal family and broke her bond with her brothers. Gradually, married women even lost their inheritance rights as the law allowed husbands to gain greater stakes in their wives' properties. A woman's inheritance, initially only loosely attached to her affines, was eventually turned into a weighty contribution to an inalienable conjugal fund. In short, a woman's social bonds were shifted away from her natal family to her affinal family.

Despite all the emphasis on linearity and Confucian etiquette, the wedding ceremony in Joseon retained traditional features. It was conducted in the bride's residence, *not* in the groom's home. This arrangement preserved an aspect of Korean uxorilocal custom and, more importantly, was a public demonstration of the bride's high social position confirmed by her father's elite status. Only if the bride possessed such a certified pedigree could she later bestow the elite

status upon her offspring. Her father, her future children's maternal grandfather, therefore figured as one of the "four ancestors" who conferred upon them membership in the elite.

This is an eminently important point: even though *descent* came to be reckoned through the father (i.e., was determined patrilineally), social *status* continued to be transmitted bilaterally, giving the wife's side the same social weight as her husband's side. In other words, a part of Goryeo's bilateral tradition was preserved in the way social status continued to be handed down from one generation to the next. For this reason, the wedding ceremony had to take place in the bride's home.

In Joseon, this bilateral tradition was upheld—against the dictates of Confucian agnation. Social legitimacy, that is, affirmation of status, continued to derive from social rather than from *legal* criteria. This juxtaposition of genealogical and cultural values is uniquely Korean and has defined the Korean upper class until recent times.

VI. Developments in Late Joseon: The Emergence of Lineages

How did the "Confucian transformation" proceed in the second half of Joseon? This was linked mainly to the further development of the country's political and economic situation. From roughly the early sixteenth century, the government's fiscal system slowly deteriorated to the point at which the government could no longer guarantee officials' salaries. Landed property in the countryside gained more significance ever. Government officials began to move in large numbers from the capital to the countryside and established new settlements there. At that time, land was plentiful, and the government was still only weakly represented at the local level—ideal conditions for the reclamation of virgin land, especially in the two provinces, Gyeongsang and Jeolla.

Throughout the sixteenth century, newcomers built up landed estates that turned for many elite descent groups into lasting economic strongholds. This development was temporarily disrupted by the Imjin War (Hideyoshi invasions, 1592-98), but after the country

had recovered from the war devastations, new land was again brought under cultivation, and plentiful harvests led to population increase. The seventeenth century was thus the time when pressure on land started to peak, forcing the landed elite to look for new modes of group organization and economic production.

Once they had consolidated their estates, the landed elites turned into avid learners of Confucianism and began to absorb Confucian ritualism into their daily life. Around 1500, the patrilineal consciousness was still weak, but a century later, a number of Confucian-educated elite members began to pioneer the use of the *Jiali* in their ritual life. Recognizing the pivotal ritual role of the eldest son, they began to give him a special allowance to bolster his status as ritual heir. Remarkably, it was economic factors that eventually prepared the ground for far-reaching ritual innovations that eventually climaxed in the creation of patrilineal lineages.

The traditional equal division of the patrimony between sons and daughters, which had been confirmed in the dynasty's first law code, gradually led to a critical fragmentation of land, hampering productivity. Halting economic decline called for stringent countermeasures, the most incisive of which was the curtailment of daughters' inheritance shares. Even though concerned fathers often regretted such drastic measures, they justified them with ritual arguments found in the *Jiali* that gave ritual and economic preference to the eldest son, the ritual heir. Daughters, thus, lost their standing as heirs. Moreover, by that time most women, upon marriage, moved away to become members of their husbands' households, and thus severed their bonds to their brothers and to their patrilineal ancestors—a further important argument for excluding daughters from being heirs of the patrimony. In short, women were gradually deprived of their inheritance rights, and male heirs came to absorb the entirety of ancestral wealth.

The events I have just summarized took place over a period of over 100 years. The direction of change was toward reducing the property-sharing group. By the same token, the ritual group, too, narrowed. Ancestral property was no longer the concern of individuals but came to be transformed into the inalienable asset of a

corporate group. Women fared worst, and it is clear that sisters were in reality disinherited by their own brothers for the sake of serving the ancestors.

By 1600, then, the Confucian principle of agnation had taken root through ritual practice. Indeed, the ancestral cult had profoundly reorganized the structure of the traditional descent group. Bilaterality was replaced by the principle of agnation, with women being ritually and economically excluded from the group. The consolidation of the eldest son as ritual heir climaxed with the full implementation of primogeniture. These were the preconditions for the formation of full-fledged patrilineages.

But was there no opposition to such drastic changes that were forced upon native tradition in the name of Confucian ritualism? Could indigenous tradition so easily be undermined by a foreign value system, especially since the introduction of primogeniture into the Korean descent group went far beyond the extent to which the Chinese were using the *Jiali*?

In fact, in reaction to the adoption of Confucian-style reformed rituals, a uniquely Korean institution was created that was to mitigate the conflicts and frustrations caused by primogeniture. It is the emergence of this institution that throws doubt on whether we can speak of a full Confucianization of Korean society.

VII. Lineage and *Munjung*

The shift to primogeniture that privileged the eldest son over his brothers and elevated the shrine rites to the major ritual event of a descent group did not only undercut traditional *fraternal equality* but also clashed with the widely popular customary *grave rites.*

Worshipping at ancestral graves on the four customary holidays was widespread since early Goryeo and persisted into Joseon. Grave services usually rotated among both male and female, and even non-agnatic, descendants. To support the activities at gravesites of high-standing persons, special memorial halls were built. Although they did not contain spirit tablets, these halls were prestige objects, and

their popularity came to compete with the Confucian-style ancestral shrines.

In contrast, the ancestral cult based on the *Jiali* took place in front of the domestic shrine (*sadang*) in which the spirit tablets of three or four generations of lineal ancestors and their wives were placed. On the four seasonal holidays, their agnatic descendants would gather in front of the shrine and participate in the ceremonies conducted by the ritual heir inside the shrine. I call this gathering of agnates, who were cousins up to the eighth degree, the "ritual" or "domestic-shrine" lineage. The duties of the ritual heir of such a lineage were exacting. He had to lead a ritually pure life because he impersonated the vital link between the patrilineal ancestors and their agnatic descendants; this was a distinction that endowed him with unusual symbolic as well as practical power and authority over his kinsmen. Living in close proximity of his ancestors, he was the chief officiant at the domestic shrine and at ancestral graves; in addition, he had to celebrate the rites on the death anniversary of each lineal ancestor and his spouse. For fulfilling his manifold tasks, the ritual heir received a sizable income from land that was expressly set aside for ritual purposes. Although his duties were heavy, the ritual heir led a privileged life and received the respect of his descent group as well as of the community at large.

The switch from traditional grave rites to Confucian shrine rites was slow. Even reform-conscious elite leaders were often reluctant to press for change. Nevertheless, the shrine rites were gradually given ritual priority and conducted on the customary holidays (most notably on New Year and Chuseok), followed by tending the graves.

While canonical pressure eventually forced the change from grave rites to domestic-shrine rites, the exclusive role of the primogeniture heir at the domestic shrine incited persistent resistance. The principal objection lay in the fact that the domestic rites elevated the ritual heir's status over that of his younger brothers and cousins and demoted them to passive onlookers. Such degradation not only bruised the indigenous sense of fraternal equality, it also had economic consequences. As contemporary inheritance papers show, younger sons stood to lose land and slaves to the ritual heir.

This caused resentment that was expressed by lukewarm interest and reluctant cooperation in Confucian-style rituals. In short, ritual reformers were forced to come up with a solution that would overcome their kinsmen's unreceptive mood and win their collaboration lest the Confucian reformist venture should fail.

Rite-conscious leaders of their descent groups came to realize that only by ritually involving *all* male members of their patrilines would they be able to save their reform project. It seems—and this is my reconstruction—that they found in a vague passage in the *Jiali* the model of a worshipping group that was *broader* than the ritual lineage and included *all* agnatic descendants of an ancestor. Thus, from the late sixteenth century a new type of agnatic organization emerged. Called *munjung* (a term of uncertain origin), this new group included *all* agnatic kinsmen of a focal ancestor beyond the four ancestral generations venerated in the domestic shrine. In contemporary documents, *munjung* appears as a group that held corporately owned property and financed the grave rites for an outstanding ancestor. It also seems to have assisted the main line economically, for instance, if the lineal heir's residence had to be rebuilt after a fire. In short, *munjung* recruited to an equal degree the agnatic descendants of a focal ancestor on a "contractual" basis.

What, then, was the *munjung*'s relationship to the shrine lineage? The two clearly differed in their intention: while the domestic-shrine lineage emphasized *vertical* kin relationships dictated by the Confucian concept of lineal descent, *munjung* satisfied *horizontal* aspects of kinship reminiscent of the native tradition of fraternal equality. Unlike the domestic-shrine lineage, which was financed by patrimonial wealth, *munjung* depended on fund-raising among its members, who were interested in exploiting the prestige of a specific ancestor. By the eighteenth century, many *munjung* had grown into well-endowed corporations whose focus often was the descent group's apical ancestor and thus embraced a membership of dozens if not hundreds who attended the yearly rites at the ancestral grave. Indeed, some *munjung* came to grow into powerful organizations that took charge, besides ritual activities, of semijudicial and economic functions. Because the *munjung* came to represent the lineage to the

outside world, *munjung* is often erroneously viewed as "the" lineage. Although they *reinforced* each other, the "domestic-shrine lineage" and the *munjung* were two *separate* entities; together, they formed the mature lineage system that emerged in late Joseon.

VIII. Conclusions

In sum, the Confucianization of Korea was a unique socio-religious engineering feat that gave Korean society the reputation of being the most ritualized society in East Asia. Its limitations should, however, not be overlooked. Korean society *remained* a descent-based, hierarchical society built upon a long *bilateral* tradition. For this reason, it *did* resist complete conformity to ancient Chinese rites and Zhu Xi's prescriptions. While Chinese canonical patterns were minutely followed in key rituals, in particular in the ancestral cult, the elite's status consciousness prevented the locus of the wedding ceremony from being shifted to the groom's home. The emergence of *munjung*, moreover, was surely the most patent assertion of nativism.

Patrilineality with clear primogeniture was the striking result of Korea's Confucianization, but native bilaterality remained a persistent social feature. Indeed, the combination of adopted patrilineality and native bilaterality typifies the socio-religious distinctiveness that set Joseon dynasty society clearly apart from society in contemporary Ming and Qing China.

At the beginning, I said that there is no other example of an equally comprehensive and compelling social transformation in or outside of East Asia. To substantiate this claim, I want to conclude by briefly putting the Korean case in perspective by comparing it to a few features of dynastic transitions in China. While during the Tang-Song transition around the year 1000 the old Tang aristocracy collapsed and new social elements emerged, supported by social and economic progress, in Korea the transition from Goryeo to Joseon did not result in large-scale demographic or economic changes or a socio-political rupture. On the contrary, it was distinguished by a great deal of continuity in the ruling stratum. Both later transitions

from Song to Yuan and Yuan to Ming, again, were regime changes accompanied by social and economic developments (for instance, by the growing importance of market economy), but neither one was initiated by Confucian trained intellectuals who intended to reform the country's socio-religious matrix with a new rites-based agenda.

Interestingly, the sixteenth century saw the emergence of localized elites in Joseon Korea as well as in Ming China. But there, again, are clear differences. Whereas in Ming China, localized elites began to build lineages in response to the exertion of state authority, in Korea, lineages were formed *because* of the state's overall weakness. In both countries, lineages were intended to safeguard the survival of the elite. Yet, while in Ming and Qing times, the ritual prescriptions of the *Jiali* were generally disregarded because *economic* contributions secured a man a place in the lineage, in Korea, it was a man's *genealogical* standing that made him a lineage member. While the Chinese never attempted to implement primogeniture, the Koreans successfully adopted primogeniture, albeit only because they also bowed to tradition and supplemented the domestic-shrine lineage with the more inclusive *munjung*. Thus, in contrast to the Chinese who revised the ritual code to fit contemporary society, the Koreans endeavored to change their society's structural premises to conform to Zhu Xi's ritual prescriptions and made the "correct" performance of Confucian-style rituals a crucial hallmark of elite culture.

Let me conclude by asking: what is happening to the patrilineal lineage system in present-day South Korea? Interestingly, the vigor with which social and legal changes have recently been introduced by decisions of the Constitutional Law Court is reminiscent of the reform spirit the Confucian legislators exhibited in early Joseon. Today, the source of inspiration is no longer Confucianism, but *Western* legal concepts. Western principles of individual rights, equality, and rights to property, among others, have informed new legislation that is gradually undoing the patrilineal features of the Joseon lineage and re-introducing *bilateral* elements into modern society. Women are the beneficiaries of these changes; they have regained full membership in lineage affairs, are entitled to perform ancestral rites, and once again enjoy equal inheritance rights. Likewise, the household headship

system was abolished, and the earlier prohibition of marriage between lineages with the same surname and ancestral seat (*bongwan*) was declared obsolete. Surely, these are strong signs of a society in motion that in due course will lose its former patrilineal character and come full circle by reinstituting "indigenous" social norms such as bilaterality and sibling equality—norms that in early Joseon the Confucian legislators had tried so hard to eradicate as outdated features of Goryeo tradition.

REFERENCES

Deuchler, Martina. 1992. *The Confucian Transformation of Korea—A Study on Society and Ideology*. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 36. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1dnn8zj

_____. 2015. *Under the Ancestors' Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.