

## **King Yǒngjo's *T'angp'yǒng* Policy and its Orientation\* - The trio of the king, state, and people-**

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### **Introduction**

Faced from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards with chronic problems such as the rapid decrease in the population occasioned by widespread famine, economic fluctuations caused by the reorganization of the taxation system, the breakdown in the social order resulting from the emergence of displaced peoples, and the onset of political purges spurred by the excessive competition for political leadership, Chosŏn found itself with no other choice but to seek out resolutions to these various social problems.<sup>1</sup> Although various attempts were made to bring about reform during the period of factional (*pungdang*) politics, no political party was afforded the time needed to complete such an endeavor. The constant fluctuations in the composition of the prevailing political forces greatly impacted efforts to bring some degree of stability to politics.

The process of searching for measures to ease these problems eventually resulted in the advent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century of a blueprint for a political system that identified a more powerful focal point around which

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reforms would be implemented.<sup>2</sup> This policy, which was designed to reestablish the state system around the king, came to be known as *t'angp'yǒng* (impartiality).<sup>3</sup> The introduction of this notion of *t'angp'yǒng* into the political discourse, a development that led to the temporary termination of political purges during the latter period of the reign of King Sukchong, was also motivated by the presence of the above-mentioned circumstances. However, this period of political peace proved to be fleeting. The period spanning from the ascension to the throne of King Kyǒngjong until the early portion of the reign of King Yǒngjo was one marked by repeated reversals in political fortunes and purges. The briefness of King Kyǒngjong's reign resulted in the mission of stabilizing the political situation through the reproduction of the *t'angp'yǒng* policy being passed down to his successor King Yǒngjo.

Although various individual studies have been conducted on the subject of the *t'angp'yǒng* policy during the reign of King Yǒngjo, very few studies have attempted to conduct a general evaluation of this policy throughout the reign of King Yǒngjo. To this end, this study analyzes the general process related to King Yǒngjo's actualization of the *t'angp'yǒng* policy by dividing his reign into several stages. In addition, an analysis of the characteristics of the changes in the political situation that took place during each of these stages is also undertaken from the standpoint of the king, state, and people. Such an exercise, it is believed, will facilitate the carrying out of an evaluation of King Yǒngjo's reign as a whole.

### **The onset of the *T'angp'yǒng* Policy: Securing the legitimacy of the king**

During the reign of King Yǒngjo, it was generally acknowledged that the phenomenon of factional politics sanctioned since the reign of King Sǒnjo had run its course, with the latter in fact identified as the main cause of the state of ruin the country lay in.<sup>4</sup> In an instant, it became illegal for any individual to promote factionalism. Why did King Yǒngjo

decide to implement the *t'angp'yǒng* policy? Was it the above-mentioned social fluctuations that led to this *t'angp'yǒng* policy? Truth be told, these social fluctuations had occurred for well over a century and could not be expected to suddenly worsen significantly because of the enthronement of a new king. Rather, reform was in all likelihood perceived as being impossible under such circumstances in which, while cognizant of the prevailing problems, people had become complacent with regards to their existence. Here, we must also ask ourselves, were there any individual motivations that spurred Yǒngjo to dream of the advent of a new era of politics?

The ability to ascertain the truth with regards to this matter is in many ways linked to the development of a proper understanding of the process that led to Yǒngjo's enthronement. Yǒngjo rose to power following his stepbrother Kyǒngjong's sudden death after only four years on the throne. However the political complications surrounding his ascension did not end with the fact that he was replacing a king who had died young. Above all, records show the extent to which officials from the Patriarch's faction (*Noron*) pressured Kyǒngjong after his enthronement. A mere few months after his accession to the throne, officials from the *Noron* faction began to call for the installation of his stepbrother Yǒninggun (Yǒngjo) as the Crown Prince. Arguing that such an action was necessary because Kyǒngjong did not have a successor, these officials were ultimately successful in their endeavor.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of how sick and weak the king may have been, the taking of such an action a mere year after his enthronement can only be labeled as extreme. However, the *Noron* faction was not yet satisfied. They also called for a prince-regency to be established a few months after the installation of the Crown Prince. As such, the attitude they displayed was one that revolved around the pressuring of Kyǒngjong.<sup>6</sup>

Although his reign was a short one, King Kyǒngjong had, in his capacity as the prince-regent, in fact been active in the conduct of national affairs since the latter portion of the reign of King Sukchong.<sup>7</sup> The behavior of the *Noron* faction toward King Kyǒngjong can as such be

perceived as outrageous and bordering on treason. Yǒninggun, who had by then been installed as the Crown Prince, presented several memorials to the king in which he refused to accept the title of prince-regency. However, questions can be posed about Yǒninggun's true heart amidst this political pressure being applied by the dominant political faction of the day, the *Noron* faction, on the king. Nevertheless, Kyǒngjong appears to have understood Yǒninggun's position. More to the point, despite the fact that the king could easily have had his brother killed under the excuse that the latter was involved in acts of treason, Kyǒngjong always protected his brother.

This situation was the result of the lack of political clarity displayed by King Sukchong during the final period of his reign. Although Sukchong's adoption of the *t'angp'yǒng* policy did not bring about a direct change in the political power structure, his efforts to create a balance of power between the *Noron* and *Soron* factions nevertheless involved the political sacrifice of his son. While this push for impartiality proved to be beneficial to all the political factions, with the notable exception of King Sukchong, it also led to a split into two factions, namely Kyǒngjong and the *soron* faction, and Yǒninggun and the *Noron* faction. More precisely, these actions created circumstances under which the selection of the king became the domain of the retainers. This in turn eventually resulted in King Kyǒngjong's ascension to the throne during a period in which *noron* power was ascendant.

However, this political reality also placed a very heavy burden on the shoulders of the newly enthroned Kyǒngjong. The inability of the *Noron* group to solidify its support spurred the *Soron* faction to launch a political purge during 1721-1722 that had as its goal the removal of the majority of the *Noron* faction on the grounds that they were involved in a treasonous attempt to overthrow the king.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it was under such circumstances that the reign of King Kyǒngjong was established.

Although this purported act of treason motivated Kyǒngjong to act in a much more decisive manner than he had at any time in the past, he nevertheless went to great lengths to protect Yǒninggun. His actions at

this time run contrary to the image that has developed of him as a weak and powerless king. The simple fact of the matter is that Yōninggun would have been hard-pressed to save himself if Kyōngjong had not placed him under his direct protection. It was Kyōngjong's subsequent demise a year later that heralded Yōninggun's rise to the throne as King Yōngjo.

However, much as had been the case when Kyōngjong ascended to the throne, Yōngjo's rise occurred at a time when an opposing faction, in this instance the *Soron* faction, held the reins of political power. To this end, Yōngjo's ascension to the throne and the subsequent change in the political regime were made possible by King Kyōngjong and his loyal subject Yi Kwangjwa.<sup>9</sup> In keeping with King Kyōngjong's will, Yi Kwangjwa helped Yōngjo and the *Noron* faction seize political power.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, this incident and the actions of the *Soron* faction must have left an indelible impression on Yōngjo.

Yōngjo's selection as king carried a heavy political cost. Following the establishment of *Noron* power, officials from the *Noron sallim* faction such as Min Chinwōn and Chōng Ho began to, over a period of several months, call for the removal of the *Soron* faction.<sup>11</sup> They demanded that those who had been removed during the political purge of 1721-1722 be avenged by moving against the *Soron* faction that had been the ruling party at the time.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the *Noron* faction still at this point regarded King Yōngjo as belonging to their party.

Nevertheless, King Yōngjo clearly refused to accept the demands of the *Noron* faction.<sup>13</sup> Why, despite having agreed to the holding of several months of political hearings, did Yōngjo in the end not acquiesce to the demands of the *Noron* faction? Did he simply not like the demands that were being made by the meritorious retainers? Or did he have a change of heart?

In all likelihood, Yōngjo wanted to be king. However, he wanted to become king in an honorable manner. Despite the extreme choices made by the *Noron* faction, there was in fact no one else other than Yōngjo that could have ascended to the throne at this time. As a result of his rapid

ascension however Yǒngjo suffered the dishonor of being the first king openly associated with an act of treason. What's more, the *Noron* faction, which was consumed with a thirst for revenge, showed little interest in restoring the honor of the king.

On the other hand, the following question can also be posed: did Yǒngjo desire to become the leader of the entire state rather than the mere head of a political faction? Yǒngjo bestowed special patronage upon members of the *Soron* faction associated with Yi Kwangjwa, who as mentioned before had been responsible for successfully seeing through the wishes of Kyǒngjong regarding the political transition. At this point, Yǒngjo's ability to become the true leader of the state rested in large part on his emergence as the leader of the *Soron* faction. Conversely, Yǒngjo also needed the support of this faction, which he believed could help him to counter the unilateral and excessive demands of the *Noron* faction. It was against such a backdrop that King Yǒngjo handed the reins of political power back to the *soron* faction three years after his enthronement.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of King Yǒngjo (1727), a situation emerged that no one could have expected. Despite the fact that the king had not received any support from the *Soron* faction, he nevertheless oversaw the establishment of a *Soron*-centered regime.<sup>14</sup> The looming political turbulence was foreshadowed by the emergence of the so-called Political Reversal of 1727 (*chǒngmi hwan'guk*). Interestingly, Yǒngjo was able to bring about a change in the political regime several months before the emergence of the Political Disturbance of 1728 (*musinnan*). The Political Disturbance of 1728 (*musinnan*) was initiated by members of the *Soron* and *Namin* (Southerners) factions in outlying areas who desired to avenge King Kyǒngjong and overthrow the *Noron* faction. However, the fact that the *Noron* regime had already collapsed and a *Soron*-centered government had been established proved to have a negative impact on the mutineers' ability to raise an army, and also compelled many of the key participants to withdraw.

The national level uprising that began in Kyǒnggi, Ch'ungch'ǒng,

Kyöngsang and Chölla was promptly suppressed by the *Soron* faction within a week of its commencement. Not only did the Minister of Defense (*pyöngjo p'ansö*) take active part in the military suppression of the rebellion, but distinguished ministers were also dispatched as military generals. This uprising was perceived by the members of the *Soron* faction as a serious crisis in terms of their ability to control central politics. More to the point, the outbreak of this rebellion was perceived by the *Soron* not only as a threat to the opportunity they had been provided to seize political power, but also as having provided added moral justification to those who called for their removal. Faced with this unfavorable situation, the *Soron* faction quickly closed ranks and proceeded to suppress this national level rebellion. In this regard, King Yöngjo can be regarded as having been the party that gained the most from the Political Reversal of 1727 (*chöngmi hwan'guk*).

While the meritorious retainers who had helped Yöngjo ascend to the throne hailed from the *Noron* faction, the current meritorious retainers, who were fiercely loyal to Yöngjo and the preservation of his royal authority, emanated from the ranks of the *Soron* faction. Perceiving the value of these two factions, Yöngjo set out to further enmesh the notion of *t'angp'yöng* politics. Put differently, he can be said to have sought to establish the theoretical basis and justification for his use of the *noron-soron* factions.

The need to secure the theoretical basis and justification for the employment of both the *Noron and Soron* factions was necessitated by a political structure under which all political factions other than the one chosen by the king were expected to disappear from the political scene. This political structure had been further exacerbated by the political purge of four meritorious retainers from the *noron* faction during the reign of King Kyöngjong and the debate over the punishment of four meritorious retainers from the *sonon* faction following the enthronement of King Yöngjo. The transformation during the reign of King Sukchong of the main reason for changing the prevailing political faction from the traditional degree of satisfaction with policies to that of loyalty to the king

and state resulted in the *Namin* faction (Southerners) being forced to retire from politics. This new need to show unilateral support for the party line inevitably had significant side effects. Such arguments between the *Noron* and *Soron* factions were reignited during the reign of King Yǒngjo, when the main question became that of determining the identity of loyal and rebellious retainers.

King Yǒngjo was of course well aware of the value of the two parties and did not want to have to choose between them. Furthermore, things were greatly complicated by the intertwined nature of the death of King Kyǒngjong and his own rise to power. More to the point, Yǒngjo could not afford to unilaterally support the *Soron* faction that was now doing his bidding because he knew that his role in the intrigues launched by the *Noron* faction during the reign of King Kyǒngjong would eventually become a problem. Conversely, Yǒngjo could also not unilaterally support the *Noron* faction that had made him king as they were currently aligned against him. Thus, in the eyes of Yǒngjo, no one faction could ensure his past or present.

Under these circumstances, Yǒngjo opted for a third way that involved breaking with the traditional method of simply choosing one political faction over the others. The king sought to introduce a new political rationalization and paradigm as part of his efforts to achieve this end. In this regard, Yǒngjo made active use of the *t'angp'yǒng* policy introduced during the reign of the previous king, even going as far as suggesting that this represented a further concretization of an ideological orientation that was based on the politics of the Yao-Shun era.<sup>15</sup> For Yǒngjo, these attempts represented much more than mere political rhetoric.

Yǒngjo asserted that he would no longer accept political factions, and required that all retainers accept the new ideological values he was promoting. He believed that the ideal society of the Yao-Shun era could be ultimately realized when all the retainers abided by the rules equally. Yǒngjo's vision revolved around the touchstone of the king (*hwanggŭk*) ruled in accordance with the tenets of the *t'angp'yǒng* policy.

Ironically, similar calls had been made as a part of the pursuit of a sage



kingship by the *sarim* (士林) faction during the period of intense political factionalism. The *sarim* had required that the king immerse himself in the study of sage learning (*sŏnghak*) so he could become a wise king like Yao and Shun. In this regard, while the king was to serve as the student, they were to fulfill the position of teacher. In a strange twist of fate, the king of Chosŏn was now placing the political ideology of the *sarim* at the forefront. The king's promotion of the need to implement this long-called for universal Confucian value could not be objected to by any party. However, while calling for this Confucian value to be applied from now on, the king nevertheless regarded himself as already being the equivalent of Yao·Shun. In this regard, although the retainers regarded the king as someone who had to be trained in the ways of sage kings such as Yao·Shun, the king's labeling of himself as the equivalent of such sage kings meant that no retainer could challenge his royal authority.

In 1741(17<sup>th</sup> year of King Yŏngjo) Yŏngjo, in conjunction with the *Soron* and *Namin* factions, successfully abolished the list of those who had been accused of involvement in the plot to overthrow King Kyŏngjong that took place in 1721-1722, a list that included his own name, thereby cementing his own legitimacy. It is very likely that Yŏngjo followed the advice of his retainers. As a result of this action, the disputes over royal legitimacy ended and the conflicts between the factions weakened. Yŏngjo further strengthened his hand by releasing various royal decrees in which he clearly spelled out his position, the inspiration for his actions, and his basic policy for national governance. Yŏngjo even had the retainers read these contents during royal lectures (*kyŏngyŏn*) so that they could learn about his political construct.<sup>16</sup> Yŏngjo thus sought to establish his authority as both king and master. As such, the political landscape was altered from one revolving around political factionalism to a new structure centering on the king. Yŏngjo was thus able to move beyond the conflicts between the king and ruling class and establish the basis needed for him to turn his attention to the resolution of national issues.

### **Actualization of the *T'angp'yǒng* (Impartiality) Policy: Reorganization of the national system**

For the most part, the individuals involved in the early stages of the development of the *t'angp'yǒng* policy hailed from the *Soron* faction. While the *Soron* faction that had adopted the party line of unconditional support for King Kyǒngjong under the environment of political factionalism faced certain ideological problems in terms of now providing support to King Yǒngjo, they were able to justify their participation in the government under the new political atmosphere known as *t'angp'yǒng*.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, despite being critical of the *t'angp'yǒng* policy, the *Soron* faction found themselves with no other choice but to support the king's political management theory if they desired to ensure their continued involvement in government. Although the competition between these two factions continued until the third decade of the reign of King Yǒngjo, the latter was able to use this animosity to fulfill his national projects.

Yǒngjo was well aware of the presence of political phenomena that had not existed during the early Chosǒn era. More to the point, Yǒngjo understood that the reckless establishment of temporary government offices and bodies that lacked a legal basis that had taken place in the aftermath of the Hideyoshi and Manchu Invasions had been caused by a general lack of systematic organization. As such, he became interested in reestablishing a system of national law based on which such problems could be resolved.

During the reign of King Yǒngjo, policymakers focused on restoring the civilization of early Chosǒn. To this end, they concentrated on providing significance to the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn* (經國大典) as the fundamental code of laws of Chosǒn and the ideological basis upon which a new political system was to be pursued. The adoption of the politics of the Yao-Shun era provided an opportunity to focus on the values inherent in the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn* that served as one of the representative achievements of Chosǒn.<sup>18</sup>

While the majority of the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn* had been damaged, Yǒngjo

pushed for a return to the system of Chosŏn as an important national task, and made efforts to draw up legal principles that were drawn from the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*. To this end, much like all the retainers gathered around the king, who served as the supreme imperial being and architect of the notion of *t'angp'yŏng*, all legal books had to go through a codification process that revolved around the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*. Although the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* was the fundamental code of Chosŏn and regarded as the supreme law, the presence of many incongruent provisions made its application difficult during late Chosŏn. As part of efforts to compile a new version of the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, Yŏngjo sought to, while maintaining their original objectives, amend these incongruent provisions in order to bring them into line with reality.<sup>19</sup>

Under Confucianism, the reestablishment of existing laws and codes was perceived as one of the greatest feats that could be achieved in politics.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, only a sage was viewed as being capable of overseeing the establishment of such civilized structures.<sup>21</sup> In this regard, the king who achieved such an end could be hailed as being akin to great monarchs such as Yao and Shun. For Yŏngjo, who had already identified himself as the equivalent of Yao and Shun, this represented a golden opportunity to prove the veracity of his words. Meanwhile, the retainers sought to use this opportunity to not only show the king their respective factions' ability to engage in meritorious deeds, but also to increase their power. Thus, in keeping with the wishes of King Yŏngjo, the individual capabilities and capacities of each faction were pooled together to implement this national-level project.

The strident efforts to establish a code of laws made during the reign of King Sukchong had already wielded outstanding results in the form of the compilation of the *Sugyo chimnok* (受教輯錄) and the *Chŏllok t'onggo* (典錄通考).<sup>22</sup> The *Chŏllok t'onggo* included contents related to not only the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, but also the *Taejŏn songnok* (大典續錄), *Taejŏn husongnok* (大典後續錄), and *Sugyo chimnok*. Therefore, it could be used to ascertain the changes that had taken place in the legal system from the early period of Chosŏn onwards. To this end, the *Chŏllok t'onggo* became

the main work used to establish the new version of the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn*.<sup>23</sup> Attempts to incorporate new royal orders not included in the new version of the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn* were also made during the late reign of King Sukchong and early reign of King Yǒngjo. For instance, the *Sinbo sugyo chimnok* (新補受教輯錄) was compiled based on the *Sugyo chimnok* put together during the reign of King Sukchong. Meanwhile, the *Chǔngbo Chǒllok t'onggo* (增補典錄通考) effectively combined the *Sinbo sugyo chimnok* with the previous *Chǒllok t'onggo*.<sup>24</sup> As a result of these moves, the national code of Chosǒn was formally integrated into the *Chǔngbo Chǒllok t'onggo*.

However, Yǒngjo did not stop here. For a king who labeled himself as the equivalent of sage monarchs such as Yao and Shun, such mere compilations that combined the various national codes were not grand enough. He wanted to develop a supreme national code that could be compared with the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn*. Yǒngjo perceived this undertaking as a means to establish a clear link between himself, the kings of early Chosǒn, and the sage kings of China Yao and Shun. In the eyes of Yǒngjo, his ambition could be achieved through the undertaking of a monumental task. The above-mentioned codes and laws represented little more than a collection of individual legal situations and judgments. To upgrade them to the status of the legal provisions found in the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn*, it was essential to establish legal provisions which could apply to universal matters. In this regard, a long period of time would be needed to create such legal provisions.<sup>25</sup>

Yǒngjo also introduced a clear direction as far as the new laws that were to be included in his national codes were concerned. While the preface to the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn* revolved around the ideal society of the Western Zhou (西周) dynasty, the preface to the *Soktaejǒn* (續大典) was focused on the improvement of penal administration, which was regarded as a tool through which the people could view firsthand the benefits of the ideal society of the Western Zhou dynasty.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, while the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn* was focused on abstract concepts, the *Soktaejǒn* introduced the actual benefits of the Yao-Shun-based political ideology as

part of a penal code that included examples in which punishments were mitigated. This action on the part of Yǒngjo was in keeping with the high degree of importance attached to the *Hyǒngjǒn* (刑典, Criminal Code) within the legislative process during late Chosŏn.

Although the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn* introduced general strategies in terms of national management, it did not spell out how various exceptions not dealt with in the national codes should be handled during the actual management process. There were however cases of precedent included in the *Sugyo chimnok*, and these were subsequently combined with those found in the *Taejǒn songnok* and *Taejǒn husongnok*. In turn, these were included in the *Soktaejǒn*, at which time they became actual provisions. Desiring to meld these new contents with the *Kyǒngguk taejǒn* that served as the backbone of the national legal system, Yǒngjo found himself having to attach a clear significance to his *Soktaejǒn*. In this regard, he promoted the notion of the *Soktaejǒn* as being rooted in the ‘people’ (*paeksǒng*).

Once all of this had been carried out, King Yǒngjo was finally able to conduct the compilation of the *Soktaejǒn* in 1746 (22<sup>nd</sup> year of King Yǒngjo). As part of his efforts to become Chosŏn’s true answer to Yao-Shun through concrete civilizational and institutional contributions, Yǒngjo also ordered the compilation of the *Sok oryeŭi* (續五禮儀), which served as a supplement to the *Kukcho oryeŭi* (國朝五禮儀, Five Rites of State). Yǒngjo completed the establishment of the main national systems during the early years of the second decade of his reign; moreover, in a move that was seen as a major step towards setting out the royal succession, he established a prince-regency under Crown Prince Sado in 1749.

### **Result of *T’angp’yǒng* Policy: Reform of the public taxation system**

It took 17 years for King Yǒngjo to resolve the issues surrounding his

royal legitimacy. The stabilization of the political situation also created circumstances that made it possible for the monarch to use the competition between political factions as a tool through which to achieve great civilizational and institutional contributions such as the compilation of national codes. The resolution of the problems between the royal authority and ruling class, as well as of the matter of national systems, meant that the king was now able to turn his attention to public policy.

Yǒngjo, who had ascended to the throne at the age of 31, began from the second decade of his rule onwards to prepare for what he perceived as his imminent death. In this regard, he probably would not have launched a great reform if he had known that he would live for another 20 years. However, Yǒngjo was keenly aware of the average length of the reign of kings and of their average life expectancy; to this end, he was in a hurry to transfer a stable state system to his son, Crown Prince Sado. The last task which Yǒngjo undertook was the reform of the corvee labor system (*yangyǒk pyǒnt'ong*).

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, scores of proposed reform measures related to the corvee labor system were introduced. Nevertheless, no solution to the prevailing problems was found during the ensuing 100 years.<sup>27</sup> Despite the general increase in the population, the small and large-scale instances of famine that occurred over the period of 100 years resulted in a marked decrease in the able-bodied male population. The concurrent increase in military taxation further exacerbated the impact of this problem.

The system was however affected by even more fundamental problems. The taxation system during early Chosŏn consisted of the following three categories: land tax, which was paid in grain; corvee labor, which included military service; and tribute tax, which were usually local products. However, these three different taxes were unified during the late 16<sup>th</sup> – early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries under a new system where payment was to be made in kind. Under this new structure, the land tax was to be paid in grain, while the corvee labor could be paid in cloth. Meanwhile, the tribute tax was replaced by payment consisting of *taedongmi* (rice tribute).

As such, cloth and grain, became the major tools of taxation. This involved a complete overhaul of the previous circumstances under which taxes could be collected in the form of grain, labor, or local products, and within which one of the other two sources could be tapped when one particular source was not available.

The advent of a new system in which all taxation was in grain or cloth meant that the taxes levied from the public became the total sum of the financial resources available to the central government. While the land and tribute taxes reflected the gap between the rich and poor in that they were levied in accordance with the amount of land one possessed, the corvee labor tax was only imposed on the commoner class. As such, the corvee labor tax placed the heaviest burden on those who had a hard time eking out a living. Furthermore, the corvee labor tax accounted for the largest share of the national budget. This taxation system under which the amount of taxes to be collected fluctuated in accordance with the ebbs and flows of the population was inherently instable. Therefore, it became impossible to achieve stability both in terms of the people's lives and of the finances of the central government as long as the problem of the corvee labor tax remained unresolved.<sup>28</sup> The period marked by frequent changes in the political fortunes of various factions saw totally different policies consistently be raised and discussed.

The effective implementation of the various measures suggested by each political faction necessitated the establishment of a strong center. To this end, Yōngjo identified the reform of the corvee labor system as the main task he would tackle during the rest of his reign. At first, he contemplated the extreme measure of simply abolishing the corvee labor system altogether. In this regard, he held discussions on the adoption of a taxation method that, like the other forms of taxes, would be based on land. Furthermore, he also considered the possibility of having this tax apply to the yangban class as well. However, as can be expected, the scholar-gentry (*sajok*) in rural areas fiercely opposed the taking of such a step.

At this time, the king's retainers pointed out that the social upheavals

which had affected Chosŏn had resulted in creating socially alienated groups that included not only commoners but also fallen yangban households. As such, it was important for the king to understand that not all *sajok* were rich, and not all commoners were poor. They even went as far as to ask the king whether his intention was to abandon the *sajok* class that accounted for half of the population.<sup>29</sup> Although Yǒngjo preferred to launch a comprehensive reform, he could not abandon the *sajok* in favor of the commoners any more than he could have abandoned any political faction. Yǒngjo wanted to be a king who served all. Having survived the Political Disturbance of 1728, he was also keen to ensure the support of the *sajok*.

Nevertheless, the retainers also agreed with the king that the very existence of the state remained at risk as long as the *corvee labor system* problem was not resolved. To this end, Yǒngjo devised a plan that revolved around the launch of a public inquiry. More to the point, for the first time in Chosŏn history, commoners and *sajok* gathered at the front gate of the palace to make their opinions about the reform of the corvee labor system known. Thereafter, Yǒngjo pushed through a reform policy that was based on the results of this public inquiry.<sup>30</sup> The fact that the public inquiry was carried out in an improvisatory manner inevitably resulted in a wide range of responses being collected. This broad array of answers provided Yǒngjo with the cover he needed to justify his reforms. The strong will to see such reform through displayed by the king inevitably led to great anxiety amongst the *sajok*.

Upon the completion of a second public inquiry, Yǒngjo proclaimed that the cloth tax would henceforth be decreased.<sup>31</sup> While letting it be known that he had originally wanted to repeal the cloth tax altogether, he announced that he had ultimately decided to reduce it by half. While the drop from two bolts to one bolt as payment for the cloth tax may not have seemed like much, this step in effect resulted in cutting state revenue in half. Yǒngjo ordered the retainers to draw up measures to make up for this decrease in state revenue.

The retainers had no choice but to follow Yǒngjo's lead. They were,



however, well aware that the break down in the social class system would be further accelerated if they, as the king desired, decided to take the step of imposing taxes on the yangban. Well aware of the concessions that had already been made by the king, the retainers found themselves having no choice but to establish a policy that involved some economic losses for the *sajok*. The *Taedongbŏp* (大同法, Uniform Land Tax Law)-based system of imposing taxes in accordance with the amount of *kyŏl* of land one possessed was believed to be a step that could be taken without negatively impacting the social structure. Although the *sajok* initially resisted, the retainers knew very well that King Yŏngjo would implement even stronger reforms. It was based on this reality that they sought to reach an agreement with the aggrieved parties.

During this process, King Yŏngjo sought to gain the support of the *sajok* for his actions by making it clear that the royal family would also do its part by allowing such measures as the levying of taxes on the fish and salt produced by the *kunghang* (宮房, royal estates).<sup>32</sup> While embracing the rich commoner class, he imposed a new tax on the military officials (*sŏnmu kun'gwan*) selected to implement the *Kyunyŏkpŏp* (均役法, Equalized Tax Law). He even temporally included the finances of local administrative organs amongst the new taxation targets. Based on these methods, the king was able to establish the *Kyunyŏkpŏp* (均役法, Equalized Tax Law) in such a manner that while it decreased the amount of taxes imposed on the people, it only involved the collection of a minute amount of taxes from the royal family, *sajok*, rich commoners, and local government officials.<sup>33</sup> Thus he introduced a corvee labor system that encompassed all status groups. Opposition to the levying of this new tax was naturally virulent amongst those who had never had to pay such taxes before.<sup>34</sup> The resolution of this problem lay in the absolute power of the king. The implementation of policies designed to bring stability to the lives of the people that constituted the basis of the state and ability to target, albeit in a temporary manner, the vested interests of various other social groups was made possible by the emergence, after a century of political turmoil, of a king capable of exercising strong political

leadership. Hence, the reform measures undertaken by King Yǒngjo during the first 30 years of his reign were successfully implemented and produced concrete results. In many ways, King Yǒngjo had completed all the preparations for his eventual death by the time he reached the age of 60.

### **Evaluation of the *T'angp'yǒng* Policy: Actualization of the Yao-Shun era? Or advent of a Despotic monarch?**

Yǒngjo spent the first three decades of his reign (1754) managing state affairs as if he were walking on thin ice. Although he advocated the abolishment of political factionalism, the retainers always tried to ensure that their respective party lines were reflected in the *t'angp'yǒng* policy as well as in Yǒngjo's pursuit of a sage kingship such as that of Yao and Shun. Although he sometimes held his ground, even going as far as initiating a hunger strike to illustrate his point,<sup>35</sup> and was prone to using harsh language, Yǒngjo always eventually apologized and negotiated with the retainers.<sup>36</sup> Yǒngjo's ability to see the majority of the policy tasks he undertook through to fruition was based in large part on a willingness to patiently wait for the retainers to make concessions. He was able to not only actualize a monarchy-led national governance system by restoring the political legitimacy of the king, but also to establish a concrete national system through the reorganization of civilizational and institutional mechanisms. Moreover, he also strove to bring stability to the national finances and the people's lives by reforming the taxation system. As far as the royal succession was concerned, he established a prince-regency for Crown Prince Sado during the 25<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (1749). The establishment of a state system(國制) and *Kyunyōkpōp* (均役法, Equalized Tax Law) allowed King Yǒngjo to complete the reform of the social sector by the end of the second decade of his reign. By the time he reached the age of 60, he had enjoyed all the honors that could be bestowed upon a king.

However, a thorny problem soon emerged. Although all the steps had been taken to prepare for the succession after his death, the king did not pass away. He was destined to enjoy a long life. All the subsequent problems he encountered can be traced back to this simple twist of fate. Still wielding absolute royal power, Yǒngjo found himself unable to accept any challenges to his royal authority. Furthermore, the maximization of his political status over the past 30 years gradually led to replacement of a monarch akin to great sage kings such as Yao and Shun by a despotic ruler.

The first 30 years of Yǒngjo's reign appear to have been marked by the need to display patience. Lacking any concrete support, he found himself having little other choice but to champion the causes of fairness and impartiality during the Political Disturbance of 1728. It took a long time for his opinion on the need to establish the *Kyunyǒkpǒp* to be accepted. Several incidents in which posters defaming the government appeared on the walls of the capital were also recorded during his first thirty years on the throne. Nevertheless, Yǒngjo never lost his sense of balance and dealt with each of these incidents appropriately.

However, King Yǒngjo's level of tolerance decreased significantly from the 30<sup>th</sup> year of his reign onwards.<sup>37</sup> A clear sign of Yǒngjo's growing intolerance occurred during the 31<sup>st</sup> year of his reign as part of what came to be known as The Treason Case of 1755 or *Ŭlhae oksa*. The problem began when the political situation was thrown into open turmoil following the arrest of all *Soron* faction members who were known to be friends with Yun Chi.<sup>38</sup> However, contrary to the expectation that the whole situation would end with a simple investigation, the trial that followed a royal investigation process which resulted in the confirmation to Yǒngjo of the long-held theory that King Kyǒngjong had been poisoned to death was one marked by the unabated anger of the king. The situation became so heated that it became impossible to envision a rational trial process.<sup>39</sup> All in all, some 500 members of the *sonon* faction were purged, with the only ones exempted from this rampage being the retainers who had a close relationship with the king.<sup>40</sup> Punishment on

such a scale had not even been meted out during the national-level Political Disturbance of 1728 (*Musinnan*) that occurred during the early reign of King Yǒngjo. Thus, an incident involving a mere poster was allowed to expand and spread to the point where it for all intent as purpose became an act of treason.

This type of disaster could not have emerged if the national management system functioned appropriately, the press had been free to exercise its role, and the king had been unable to exercise absolute royal authority. A significant change emerged after this incident. It appeared that the Treason Case of 1755 would end with the revenge of the *Noron* faction on the *Soron* and the restoration of the honor of the executed *Noron* members. However, the situation did not develop in a manner that was advantageous to the *Noron* faction. The punishment meted out by Yǒngjo towards the *Soron* faction left the *Noron* keenly aware of the dangers of factionalism.<sup>41</sup> From this point onwards, the age-old concept of adherence to policy line was swept under the proverbial rug.<sup>42</sup> What emerged was a situation in which criticism of any form was no longer tolerated. Although definitely not impartial in any way, Yǒngjo's handling of the Treason Case of 1755 had the ironic effect of bringing political factionalism to an end in one big swoop.

There is reason to believe that the members of the *ch'ǒngnyu* (清流, Party of Expediency) branch of the *Noron* faction pinned their last hopes on Crown Prince Sado. However, their hopes were dashed by Yǒngjo's ability to hold on to power for a prolonged period of time. Much like Emperor Kangxi of Qing, who also lived a long life, purged his first son and the Crown Prince, Yǒngjo did not sit idly by and allow the Crown Prince to expand his political power.<sup>43</sup> In the end, the Crown Prince was himself purged.<sup>44</sup> The despotic ways of King Yǒngjo became even more pronounced after the death of Crown Prince Sado.<sup>45</sup> The death of the Crown Prince sent the strong message that the king would not allow any opposition to his policies, not even from his own family members.

Now, there remained no one who could restrain the king. King Yǒngjo pushed through any policy he desired, as long as these were not deemed

to be harmful to the people and state (*min'guk*). That being the case, can we regard King Yǒngjo's *t'angp'yǒng* (Impartiality) policy as having been a failure? Was Yǒngjo a despotic monarch? Did his subsequent actions throw a dark shadow over his civilizational and institutional achievements?

During his early reign, Yǒngjo drew his political legitimacy from the notion of Yao-Shun politics, or that of the ideal politics between the king and retainers. Using the absolute royal authority granted to him because of his status as a king akin to sage monarchs such as Yao and Shun, Yǒngjo sought to transform Chosŏn society into a Confucian-based ideal society. To this end, he identified the stabilization of the people's everyday lives as the main source of his legitimacy. Based on his powerful royal authority, Yǒngjo was able to complete large-scale projects directly and indirectly related to the people's lives. These included the reform of the penal system, establishment of the *Kyunyŏkpŏp*, abolishment of the female bond-servant tax (婢貢),<sup>46</sup> appointment of secondary sons (*sŏŏl*) to official positions,<sup>47</sup> and the compilation of the *Tongguk munhŏn pigo* (東國文獻備考).<sup>48</sup>

While Yǒngjo's despotism was perceived as a phase that marked the reaching of the acme of Yao and Shun politics, a strong emphasis was placed on the relationship between the people and state (*min'guk*). As such, with the notable exception of the *sajok*, no real damage was incurred because of Yǒngjo's actions. Yǒngjo believed that the Chosŏn dynasty had reached a level higher than that of the Western Zhou which had long been regarded as the ideal Confucian society.<sup>49</sup> The royal authority of King Yǒngjo reached its zenith during the latter half of his reign.

Yǒngjo projected a different image of himself as the equal of Yao and Shun to his retainers and people. While Yǒngjo strove to establish an image of himself amongst his people as a benevolent king seeking to bring about the ideal society of the Yao and Shun era, he used the authority of the king and master under the notion of a sage kingship to legitimize his tenure as a despotic monarch that demanded absolute obedience from his retainers. Thus, the evaluation of King Yǒngjo

becomes inherently different depending on what vantage point he is approached from.

## Conclusion

Previous studies on this monarch have either hailed him for his role in ensuring the beauty of the traditional era or taken him to task for his actions from the standpoint of modern democracy. However, is the use of such criteria appropriate for the analysis of the monarchy system of the 18<sup>th</sup> century? Reform would not have been necessary if this had in fact been a perfect society. Moreover, no matter how much they desired to bring about an ideal society, the traditional period was one marked by the presence of a monarchy system that was completely different from the system in place today. In this regard, there is no way that all the elements of a modern democracy could have been implemented. Evaluations based on prejudicial notions of Chosŏn as a 'feudal government or autocracy' that are rooted in the equation of the Chosŏn dynasty with the 'Ancient Regime' in place during the French Revolution or the military dictatorship in place in Korea in the 1980s can only lead to the reaching of conclusions that deviate significantly from the truth. While the achievement of ideal politics during this period would have been wonderful, it is important to remember that the outcomes produced during such traditional periods were in fact the result of the achievements of the people who lived at the time.

As such, any attempt to highlight the traditional period must be based on an in-depth analysis of the principles upon which the management of the society were based, and on an examination of how the prevailing contexts functioned. There is no need to try to further embellish the achievements of the monarchy system of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the results speak for themselves. The efforts made by policy makers to reform society provided hope to the people upon whose shoulders the preservation of the very society sat. Here, it becomes important to

evaluate not only the processes that occurred, but also the will and efforts displayed by the important actors of the day. It is from this very standpoint that this study approaches Yǒngjo's *t'angp'yǒng* policy.

**Keywords :** King Yǒngjo, *t'angp'yǒng* (Impartiality) policy, king, state, people, Yao, Shun, *Soktaejǒn* (續大典), *Kyunyǒkpǒp* (均役法, Equalized Tax Law)

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Notes :

- 1 Yi T'aejin, "*Chosǒn hugi yangban sahoe ūi pyǒnhwa –sinbun chigyǒkche wa hyangch'on sahoe unyǒng kujō pyǒndong ūl chungsim ūro* (Changes in Yangban society during late Chosǒn –with focus on changes in the status group occupation system and the structure of the management of local society)" in *Han'guk sahoe palchǒnsaron (Journal of Korean Society Development)*, (Ilchogak, 1992), 129-226; Hong Sunmin, "*Pungdang chǒngch'ūi tongyowa hwan'guk ūi pinbal* (The unrest affecting factional politics and frequent emergence of political purges)" in *Han'guksa*, Vol. 30, (National Institute of Korean History, 1998), 147-182.
- 2 Yi T'aejin, "*Chosǒn wangjo ūi yugyo chǒngch'I wa wangkwǒn* (Confucian politics and royal authority during the Chosǒn dynasty)" in *Han'guksaeron (Journal of Korean Historical Studies)*, Vol. 23, (1990), 225-227; Chǒng Manjo, "*Chosǒn hugi ūi yangyǒk pyǒnt'ongnon -chǒngch'I sanghwang kwa kwallyǒnhae pon hana ūi siron* (The reformation of the corvee labor system during late Chosǒn – theories related to the political situation at the time)" in *Han'guk kǔnse munhwa ūi t'ūksǒng: chosǒn wangjo hugi (12)-kunsā-oegyō pumun (The Characteristics of Korean Early Modern Culture: The Late Chosǒn Period (12) – Military and Diplomacy)*, Vol.26, (1996), 337-341.
- 3 Chǒng Kyǒnghŭi, "*Sukchongdae t'angp'yǒng non'gwa t'angp'yǒng ūi sido* (Discussion on and attempts to implement impartiality during the reign of King Sukchong)" in *Han'guksaeron (Journal of Korean Historical Studies)*, Vol. 23, (1993), 125-178; Chǒng Kyǒnghŭi, "*Sukchong huban'gi t'angp'yǒng chǒngguk ūi pyǒnhwa* (Changes in the political situation surrounding *t'angp'yǒng* during the late reign of King Sukchong)" in *Han'guk hakpo*, Vol.21-2, (Ilchisa, 1995), 162-196.
- 4 *Yǒngjo sillok* (英祖實錄, Annals of King Yǒngjo), Vol.30, November 12, 7<sup>th</sup> year of

- King Yǒngjo, 11<sup>th</sup> month, 12<sup>th</sup> day.
- 5 *Kyǒngjong sillok* (景宗實錄, Annals of King Kyǒngjong), Vol.4, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Kyǒngjong, 8<sup>th</sup> month, 20<sup>th</sup> day.
  - 6 *Kyǒngjong sillok*, Vol.5, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Kyǒngjong, 10<sup>th</sup> month, 10<sup>th</sup> day.
  - 7 *Sukchong sillok* (肅宗實錄, Annals of King Sukchong), Vol.60, 43<sup>rd</sup> year of King Sukchong, 10<sup>th</sup> month, 3<sup>rd</sup> day.
  - 8 *Kyǒngjong sillok*, Vol.9, 2<sup>nd</sup> year of King Kyǒngjong, 9<sup>th</sup> month, 21<sup>th</sup> day.
  - 9 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol.1, year of ascension of King Yǒngjo, 8<sup>th</sup> month, 30<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol.2, year of ascension of King Yǒngjo, 11<sup>th</sup> month, 19<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol.2 year of ascension of King Yǒngjo, 11<sup>th</sup> month, 24<sup>th</sup> day
  - 10 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol.3, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 1<sup>st</sup> month, 12<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol.3, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 1<sup>st</sup> month, 23<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol.3, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 2<sup>nd</sup> month, 2<sup>nd</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 4, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 3<sup>rd</sup> month, 2<sup>nd</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol.4, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 3<sup>rd</sup> month, 3<sup>rd</sup> day
  - 11 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 2, year of ascension of King Yǒngjo, 12<sup>th</sup> month 10<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 7, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 7<sup>th</sup> month, 6<sup>th</sup> day
  - 12 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 5, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 4<sup>th</sup> month, 2<sup>nd</sup> day
  - 13 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 4, 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 3<sup>rd</sup> month, 28<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 12, 3<sup>rd</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 7<sup>th</sup> month, 5<sup>th</sup> day
  - 14 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 123<sup>rd</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 7<sup>th</sup> month, 1<sup>st</sup> day
  - 15 Kim Paekchol, “*Chosǒn hugi Yǒngjodae t'angp'yǒng chǒngch'i ūi inyǒm kwa Churye* (The ideology of *t'angp'yǒng* (impartiality) politics during the reign of King Yǒngjo and the <*Zhouli* (周禮, Rites of Zhou)>)” in Han'guksaron, Vol. 51, (2005), 288-309
  - 16 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 63, 22<sup>nd</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 3<sup>rd</sup> month, 28<sup>th</sup> day.
  - 17 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 12, 3<sup>rd</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 7<sup>th</sup> month, 8<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 12, 3<sup>rd</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 7<sup>th</sup> month, 13<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 13, 3<sup>rd</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 10<sup>th</sup> month, 13<sup>th</sup> day.
  - 18 Kim Paekchol, *ibid.*, (2005), 301-309
  - 19 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 28, 6<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 12<sup>th</sup> month, 28<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 37, 10<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 2<sup>nd</sup> month, 5<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 38, 10<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 4<sup>th</sup> month, 9<sup>th</sup> day.
  - 20 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 19, 4<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 9<sup>th</sup> month, 5<sup>th</sup> day
  - 21 *Zhong yong zhang ju* (中庸章句, Chapters and Phrases of the Doctrine of the Mean), Chapter 28; *Sǒngjǒngwǒn ilgi* (承政院日記, Daily Records of the Royal Secretariat), January 19, 4<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo
  - 22 Kim Paekchol, “*Chosǒn hugi Sukchongdae sugyo chimnok p'yǒnch'an kwa kǔ sǒngkyǒk -ch'eye punsǒk ūl chungsim ūro* (The compilation of the <Collection of Royal Orders> during the reign of King Sukchong in late Chosǒn and the characteristics thereof—with a



- special focus on the analysis of the structure)” in *Tongbang hakchi*, Vol. 140, (2007); Kim Paekchol, “*Chosŏn hugi Sukchongdae kukpŏp ch’egye wa chŏllok t’onggo ūi p’yŏnch’an* (The national legal system during the reign of King Sukchong and the compilation of the <Comprehensive Collection of Legal Codes>)” in *Kyujanggak*, Vol. 32, (2008)
- 23 *Yŏngjo sillok*, Vol. 28, 6<sup>th</sup> year of King Yŏngjo, 12<sup>th</sup> month, 26<sup>th</sup> day
- 24 Kim Paekchol, “*Chosŏn hugi Yŏngjodae pŏpchŏn chŏngbiwa soktaejŏn ūi p’yŏnch’an* (The establishment of national codes during the reign of King Yŏngjo and the compilation of the <Supplement to the National Code>)” in *Yŏksa wa hyŏnsil* (*Quarterly Review of Korean History*), Vol. 68 (2008), 197-204
- 25 Kim Paekchol, *ibid*, (2008), 217-233
- 26 Kim Paekchol, “*Chosŏn hugi Yŏngjodae Soktaejŏn wisŏng ūi chae kŏmt’o – hyŏngjŏn p’yŏnch’an ūl chungsim ūro* (The status of the Supplement to the National Code during the reign of King Yŏngjo – with a special focus on the compilation of the *The Criminal Code*)” in *Yŏksa hakpo* (*The Korean Historical Review*), Vol.194, (2007), 85
- 27 Chŏng Manjo, “*Yangyŏk pyŏnt’ong ūi ch’ui* (Trends in the reform of the corvee labor system)” in *Han’guksa*, Vol. 32, (National Institute of Korean History, 1997), 125-131
- 28 Kim Paekchol, “*Chosŏn hugi Yŏngjodae ‘min’guk’ nonŭi wa pyŏnhwa toen wangjŏng sang* (Discussions about the advent of a ‘people’s state’ during the reign of King Yŏngjo and the changed image of the monarchy)” in *Kukwang, ūrye, chŏngch’i* (*the King, Rites, and Politics*), (Taehaksa, 2009), 108
- 29 *Yŏngjo sillok*, Vol. 71, 26<sup>th</sup> year of King Yŏngjo, 6<sup>th</sup> month, 22<sup>nd</sup> day; Chŏng Manjo, “*Kyunyŏkpŏp ūi sŏnmu kan’gwan – hanyuja munje wa kwallyŏn hayŏ* (The selection of military officials responsible for implementing the Equalized Tax Law – with a special focus on the problem of those individuals from whom the military cloth tax was not levied)” in *Han’guksa yŏn’gu* (*The Journal of Korean History*), vol. 18, 1977, 90-91; Chŏng Yŏnsik, “*Chosŏn hugi yŏkch’ong ūi unyŏng kwa yangyŏk pyŏnt’ong* (The management of the comprehensive labor system and the reform of the corvee labor system during late Chosŏn)”, PhD dissertation, Seoul National University, (1993), 191-192, 194
- 30 Kim Paekchol, “*Chosŏn hugi Yŏngjoŭi t’angp’yŏng chŏngch’i – Soktaejŏn ūi p’yŏnch’an’gwa paeksŏng ūi chae insik* (King Yŏngjo’s Politics of Impartiality during Late Chosŏn – The compilation of the <Soktaejŏn (續大典, Supplement to the National Code)> and the new perception of the public)”, PhD dissertation, Seoul National University, (2009), 178 (please refer to <Table 19. Participants in the public inquiry>.)
- 31 *Yŏngjo sillok*, Vol. 71, 26<sup>th</sup> year of King Yŏngjo, 7<sup>th</sup> month, 3<sup>rd</sup> day
- 32 *Yŏngjo sillok*, Vol. 71, 26<sup>th</sup> year of King Yŏngjo, 5<sup>th</sup> month, 19<sup>th</sup> day
- 33 Kim Paekchol, *ibid*, 2009, 188 (please refer to <Table 20. The social groups included in

the Equalized Tax Law)>)

- 34 Kim Paekchol, “*Chosǒn hugi Yǒngjodae paeksǒnggwan ūi pyǒnhwa wa ‘min’guk*” (The change in the perception of the people and notion of the ‘people’s state’ during the reign of King Yǒngjo)” in *Han’guksa yǒn’gu*, Vol.138, (2007), 126-130
- 35 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 45, 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 8<sup>th</sup> month, 9<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 45, 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 8<sup>th</sup> month, 11<sup>th</sup> day
- 36 *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 34, 9<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 6<sup>th</sup> month, 9<sup>th</sup> day; *Yǒngjo sillok*, Vol. 38, 10<sup>th</sup> year of King Yǒngjo, 4<sup>th</sup> month, 26<sup>th</sup> day
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〈Abstract〉

## King Yǒngjo's *T'angp'yǒng* Policy and his Orientation – The trio of the king, state, and people–

*Kim Paekchol*

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Chosŏn searched for various reform measures to overcome factionalism and mitigate the damage caused by the Hideyoshi and Manchu Invasions. However, no political faction was allotted enough time to complete such reforms. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a blueprint for a political system through which sweeping reforms could be implemented based on the strong power of the king emerged in the form of *t'angp'yǒng* (Impartiality) policy.

The evil practices associated with political factionalism reached a boiling point during the early reign of King Yǒngjo. The political situation became so bad that even the king was no longer exempt from the clutches of political factionalism. In this regard, King Yǒngjo introduced a third way that would allow him to move beyond the prevailing political structure under which only one political faction could be in power at a time. This third way took the form of the king-led *t'angp'yǒng* (Impartiality) policy. During this process, the king established himself as the equivalent of sage kings such as Yao and Shun and, based on the authority that he drew from this status, proceeded to grasp the reins of political leadership. Once Yǒngjo had justified his status as the 'king of the state', he compelled the political factions to participate in projects designed to reestablish the national institutions, and implemented these national projects amidst a structure characterized by beneficial competition. Several state-level efforts to achieve civilizational and institutional improvements, including the *Soktaejŏn* (續大典), were carried out as part of this process. Once these projects to bolster national institutions had been completed, King Yǒngjo devoted himself to reforming the taxation system. The development of policy measures centering on

the 'people' reached its zenith with the establishment of the *Kyunyŏkpŏp* (均役法, Equalized Tax Law).

Yŏngjo desired to become a king for all the people, be they *sajok* or commoners. To this end, while he ruled over the privileged classes in a despotic manner that saw him require sacrifices and concessions on the part of the latter, he approached the socially weak commoner class as a benevolent king akin to Yao and Shun. As such, the king that brought us *t'angp'yŏng* policy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century created a complicated image of himself as both a despotic monarch and a benevolent king akin to Yao and Shun.

〈국문초록〉

## 朝鮮後期 英祖의 蕩平과 그 지향 -國王·國家·百姓의 삼중주-

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17세기 이래 조선은 양란이후 후유증을 해소하기 위해서 봉당정치가 다양한 각도에서 更張案의 모색이 이루어져 왔으나, 어느 봉당도 경장을 완수할 수 있을 만큼 충분한 시간을 확보하지는 못하였다. 18세기가 되면 강력한 구심점을 바탕으로 大更張을 추진할 수 있는 정치체제에 대한 청사진이 탕평정치로 나타나게 되었다.

영조초반에는 黨習이 극에 달하여 국왕조차도 봉당에서 자유롭지 못한 정국이 연출되었다. 이에 국왕은 양자택일의 구도를 해소하기 위해서 제3의 길을 제창하고 이를 군주주의의 탕평으로 제시하였다. 이 과정에서 국왕은 堯舜이 되었고 그 권위를 바탕으로 국정주도권을 장악하였다. 이러한 '국왕'의 정치명분을 획득하자, 각 봉당을 국가제도의 경장사업에 참여시켜 상호경쟁 속에서 '국가'의 사업을 추진하도록 하였다. 이 과정에서 『속대전』을 비롯한 국가의 문물제도가 정비되었다. '국가' 제도의 정비사업이 일정한 궤도에 오르자 이제에는 보다 근본적인 稅制의 개편에 몰두하게 되었다. '백성'을 중심으로 하는 정책개발이 이루어지면서 균역법으로 최종 귀결되었다.

영조는 사족과 양민들을 아우르는 모든 백성들의 군주가 되고 싶었기에 기득권층에게는 양보와 희생을 요구하여 전제군주로서 군림하였으며, 약자였던 양민들에게는 한없이 자애로운 요순군주로서 다가가고자 했다. 이에 18세기 탕평군주는 전제군주와 요순의 자애로운 이미지를 복합적으로 지니는 국왕으로서 자리매김하게 되었다.