**Some notes on the Sŏnggyun’gwan**

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**SOME NOTES ON THE SŎNGGYUN’GWAN**

The beginnings of an ancient academic institution are not always clear, so one can only hint at a probable date or year in which, for instance, the University of Oxford began. Although authorities tell us that Balliol came into existence as a corporate college sometime between 1261 and 1266, and Peterhouse in 1284 at Cambridge, it is safer merely to say that the oldest English universities as universities started towards the end of the thirteenth century. Now, towards the end of the thirteenth century, when flocks of somewhat disgruntled clerks, as they were called, of English origin were migrating from Paris to Oxford, Korea too had its clerks gathering at the capital city of the Kingdom of Koryŏ to be trained in the classics of Confucius and his disciples. These confucian scholars were perhaps more secular than their English contemporaries, but had reasons to be even more disgruntled, for the dominant fashion of the day was Buddhism and their own learning and idols had been grossly neglected.

Where, as in this country, chronological precedence matters a great deal, it is indeed gratifying to recall that Korea began institutionalizing her higher learning far ahead of many of the Western nations. It would seem that the idea of an academic institution being requisite to the foundation of a monarchy was very early established in this country. As early as in the year 372，when the country was divided into three rival kingdoms, Koguryŏ had the Taehak (太學) or Great School; in 682, King Sinmun (神文) of Silla opened the Kukhak (國學) or National School; then again the founding monarch of Koryŏ had his school in what is now Pyŏngyang, which one of his successors, King Sŏngjong, in the tenth century reorganized into a national seat of learning after the T’ang model. By this time, the capital and the school had moved to Kaesŏng and stayed there until the founder of the Yi [page 70]Dynasty chose this city of Seoul as the capital of the new kingdom.

To go back to the waning days of Koryŏ or towards the end of the thirteenth century in Korea with its unhappy clerks, the state of affairs was extremely unsettling, or at least seemed so to our youthful confucian scholars and their teachers. High matters of state were heavily interfered with by corrupt buddhist monks; the number of buddhist temples in the country far exceeded the need for the people’s spiritual care; then, on top of all that, the kingdom was visited by ravages of repeated war both at home and abroad. However, the cause of confucian learning was not without some able champions. An Hyang (安珦) was one of the them; Nodang (露堂)，supposedly the author of the old collection of Chinese maxims called Myŏngsim Pogam (明心寶鑑) or the *Precious Mirror of the Pure Heart*, was another. These and others of high aademic repute at the time lamented the situation and were convinced that it could only be mended by a vigorous revival of confucian learning. Their sentiments are nowhere better shown than in these moving lines of An Hyang:

香 燈 處 處 皆 祈 佛

絲 管 家 家 競 祀 神

惟 有 數 間 夫 子 廟

滿 庭 秋 草 寂 無 人

Buddha is prayed to in every lighted house,

Ghosts are served with drums and flutes.

But, lo! the shabby shrine of Confucius stands

Untended in its yard rank with autumn weeds.

It may be of historical relevance to recall here that in China, by the time the Sung dynasty came to an end, confucianism had seen a renaissance in the monumental achievements of Master Chu (朱熹) and his circle, or the neo-Ju rationalist revival. It too had not been without rivals; a deep ingress had been made by [page 71] buddhism into the metaphysics of the traditional confucianism and it died very hard indeed. Only by incorporating the best there was in its rivals could the Sung confucianism assert its full force as a new moral, social and metaphysical system. It was this form of confucianism which eventually became the orthodoxy of Korea.

So, to come back to Koryo, in the memorable year 1304 An Hyang and his colleagues succeeded in refounding the national school and, at the same time, contrived to send one of the teachers to China to procure portraits of Confucius and his many disciples, together with ceremonial and musical instruments to be installed at the Taesongjon (大成殿) or Hall of Great Sage, which was duly completed in June of the same year. This in fact was the beginning of what succeeding gererations have known to this day as the Sŏnggyun’gwan. Thus rekindled as the confucian candle was, it flickered for too short a time. The real revival of the traditional learning had to have an absolute support from the state, which came only when Koryŏ finally collapsed, and the founder of the new monarchy decided to do away with monks and to establish the supremacy of confucianism as the moral and philosophical foundation of his kingdom. This was in 1392, and some thirty years before, China had also seen a change in dynasty, namely from Yuan to Ming.

Whether confucianism is a religion or not is largely an academic question. If indeed it is one, it was firmly ‘established’ by the Yi Dynasty. With this dynasty, confucianism was perhaps something more important, certainly more comprehensive, than the English word ‘Establishment’ would suggest today. It was not only the state-established religion—again if it was a religion—not merely did it develope its own elaborate rituals and ceremonies observed under the supervision of state-appointed officials, but every single civil servant of any importance, from a Prime Minister to a district- [page 72] governor, was invariably drawn from its ranks. The ancient system of civil service examination of Chinese origin had been transplanted into Korea during the previous dynasty, and it was formulated mainly to test the proficiency of each candidate in the mastery and interpretation of set confucian classics. Now the importance of the Sŏnggyun’gwan obtained from the fact that all these supreme functions of the state were either centred on it or performed within its premises.

First, the rituals and ceremonies. A visitor to the Sŏnggyun’gwan University today, on entering its precincts located immediately next door to the Secret Garden (秘 苑)，will be deeply impressed by a group of well-preserved old buildings to his right. Marred and destroyed by war or fire, and rebuilt or repaired over the centuries, these quaint but stately structures have stood there to serve the cause of confucianism in this country. And none of them is more important than the largest and the most magnificent of the group, that is, the Hall of the Great Sage. At the moment, the shrine contains the ceremonial tablets of twenty-four sages and wise men of all ages besides, of course, that of the Great Master. The number of tablets enshrined in the Hall has varied, and during the Koryŏ and Yi periods, the preponderance of Chinese sages over native confucian scholars was hardly questioned. Since 1945 however, this has been changed: of the twenty-four, besides Confucius, only six Chinese masters now have their places in the Hall, including Mencius and Master Chu, and all the rest are taken up by Koreans. The more prominent of the eighteen Koreans thus honoured and commemorated are: Ch’oe Chiwŏn(崔致遠), the greatest literary figure of Silla; An Hyang, the founding father of the Sŏng-gyun’gwan; Chŏng Mongju(鄭夢周) the last defender of Koryo; Yi Toegye (退溪), and Yi Yulgok (栗谷), the most eminent pair of native philosophers.

Then, here was, and still is, the very core of the entire institution, a Confucian shrine, where for the last [page 73]six and half centuries, the great seasonal rites of the *Sŏkchŏn* (釋尊), have been performed twice a year with few interruptions. *Sŏkchŏn* means literally to display, that is, to display those commemorative tablets to the souls of the deceased sages and masters. The *sŏkchŏn* ceremonies used to be a grand affair. Preparations for a proper *sŏkchŏn* would start at least three days before the actual service, and these involved a thorough cleaning of the premises, organizing officials and the Sŏnggyun’gwan resident scholars into multifarious duty-groups, receipt and inspection of offerings, which consisted of rice and other grain, fruits and beef, dried meat and cow’s heads. Then, there was to be a grand rehearsal on the afternoon before, complete with music and dancing. In the meantime, the government would carry out administrative formalities by appointing various officials to preside over and assist at the service. Theoretically, the king himself was to head the list, but the duty of Grand Master of the Ceremony, so to speak, usually devolved on the Minister of *li* (禮), or Ceremonies and Education, of the day.

The *sŏkchŏn* proper started in the early hours of the appointed day with drums and musical performance in the fullest glow of enormous torch-lights lighting the stairs leading from the front garden up to the sacred depository of the sages’ tablets. Then, in the nine prescribed and well-rehearsed stages of the rite, a great pageantry would unfurl itself. Throughout the ceremony, incense was profusely burned, varieties of stately ceremonial dances were introduced, addresses and invocations were rendered, and finally, traditional instrumental music, designed to fit each succeeding stage of the ceremony and played by court musicians, completed the solemnity of this great state occasion. When at last the service was over and all the dignitaries retired from the scene, the grain and fruits and meat that had been offered to the sages were shared between the royal household and the resident scholars of the Sŏnggyun’gwan. [page74]

As was mentioned before, this seasonal rite of the *sŏkchŏn* performed as a sign of respect for great men of the past has persisted to this day, with, of course, various modifications. In 1949，the Congress of the Korean Confucian Association (韓國儒道會), decided to observe it once every year on the Great Master’s birthday but to retain every essential detail of the age-old ceremonial tradition.

It is significant that the *sŏkchŏn* and every other confucian ceremony held within the premises of the Sŏnggyun’gwan were actively participated in by the scholars residing there. Indeed, their active attendance at the ceremonies was part and parcel of their education. Then, at times. the reigning monarch of the day himself would come to the *sŏkchŏn* to pay his homage. At these times, something more immediately exciting to the scholars took place, for the top-level civil service examination, the ‘Great’ (大試), was often administered in the royal presence. To pass the Great, preferably with honours, was the sole object of each of the scholars of the Sŏnggyun’gwan. That alone gave meaning to their studious life in the institution and hope for their future career.

At this point, perhaps, a brief survey of the educational system of the Yi Dynasty is in place. The underlying philosophical foundation of the system, which had been practised since even before the Yi Dynasty, was scarcely different from that of its Chinese prototype. The ideals and objectives of the confucian education in this country as in China are neatly summed up by the name of the institution under review: *sŏng* of Sŏnggyun meaning ‘to perfect or develop human nature’, and *kyun* ‘to build a good society’. In other words, Confucian education was aimed at developing human nature and bringing about a good, morally well-balanced society; and this was possible through diligently learning and following the precepts laid down in the teachings of the Masters. The author, whoever it may be, of the [page 75]Great Learning (大學), one of the so-called ‘Four Books’, wrote that ‘the way of Great Learning is to illustrate illustrious virtue, to renovate the people, and to abide in the sovereign good.’ In practical terms, however, it served as a means to obtain governmental appointment. Confucius himself taught his pupils “*li* or the ceremonial arts, his main subject, as well as writing, numbers, and oratory.” He thought that these were enough to qualify his boys for government positions. Since his time, one of the cardinal principles of confucian philosophy had been to maintain that only qualified men should rule, and the logical way of selecting future officials was to institute the kind of civil service examination that was set to the Sŏnggyun’gwan scholars. The Sŏnggyun’gwan was not the only government school that there was in Yi dynasty Korea. Seoul alone had, besides the Sŏnggyun’gwan, four intermediary schools that went by the names of their respective localities within the city. East, West, North and South; counties and townships in the provinces had their own public schools of varying size and level. These latter ones were called *hyanggyo* (鄉校). Then, every village had at least a *sŏdang* (書堂)，or private village school where a fierce-looking old teacher used to teach the village urchins the rudiments of reading and writing. Technical schools of various sorts too had a place in the system, but only a very minor place, for technical skills as distinct from the pursuit of the orthodox learning were largely relegated to the people of less fortunate or humbler origin. At these, were taught foreign languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Mongolian, medicine, astronomy, geomancy, augury, accounting, law, painting and music.

Now, how would a boy of eligible family go about working up to the royal presence in which he sat for the Great Examination? A typical course open to a boy of seven or eight (Korean age) was to join his playmates at the village school to learn the rudiments. Then, at the age of fifteen or so, he would move on to one of the provincial public schools or one of the four [page76]schools in the capital where he would wrestle with the famous Four Books of the Analects, the Great Learning, the Book of Mencius, and the Doctrine of the Mean. It would take him normally five or six years to master the set classics and to get himself ready to take the Primary Examination. When he passed the Primary, that is, the second of the two stages of which the Primary consisted and which usually took place at the Sŏnggyun’gwan, he was awarded a *chinsa* (進士) or bachelor’s diploma and made eligible for the coveted entry into the Sŏnggyun’gwan.

The Sŏnggyun’gwan was a great place for a high-minded youth to set his mind on, because not only did it accomodate the very cream of the intellectual crop of the nation and provide them with instruction of the highest order, but it was there at the Sŏnggyun’gwan that the final stages of nearly all the examinations were given. Advantages accruing from membership of the Sŏnggyun’gwan did not end there. In theory, the Great examination was a three stage selection. At the first stage, the number of the places to compete for was 230, of which no less than fifty places were more or less permanently reserved for the scholars who fulfilled the residental requirements at the Sŏnggyun’gwan. Moreover, the Sŏnggyun’gwan scholars of better academic records were altogether exempted from the first ordeal and could go straight way to the second but practically final examination which selected 33 successful contestants. At the third stage, or the so-called Court Selection (殿試), nobody failed but the thirty-three men were summoned before the royal presence, either at the court or again at the Sŏnggyun’gwan, merely to be graded.

What was the life of the scholars like? What were the residential requirements? It seems that by the end of the sixteenth century the daily life of the scholars at the Sŏnggyun’gwan had been clearly established. From the beginning of its existence, the Sŏnggyun’gwan was meant to be a residential college with a lecture-hall [page 77]and two wings of dormitories, East and West, the Hall of Great Sage in front, and a quadrangle behind not unlike that of any typical Oxford college. These buildings and the garden with the two gingko trees as old as the institution have been preserved intact and the area today is the most pleasant and beautiful spot in the Sŏnggyun’gwan University precincts. This part of the establishment, the Myŏngnyundang (明倫堂)，or lecture-hall, being its centre, served the educational part of the mission given to the Songgyungwan and therefore was rightfully the precursor of the modern University.

The books set for the scholars to study were all the canonical classics. Then there were countless commentaries, expositions, etc., to assist the scholars in acquiring a better understanding of the basic literature of confucian philosophy. On the other hand, books not to be read and not to be possessed were equally clearly defined, namely, anything that had anything to do with buddhism or taoism. Heresies of any persuasion were never left unchecked, the orthodoxy being Sung confucianism. It was in fact unimaginable that scholars with the life-or-death state examination in view had the leisure or inclination to dally with a hundred flowers. They had no other business to be there than to prepare themselves for the examination and the civil service career to follow, which was about the only way open to any confucian to realize the highest ideals of his scholarship.

The instruction in *li* or the ritualistic sciences as initiated by Confucius was an immense improvement on the teaching of the six arts or the Chinese trivium and quadrivium practised in ancient China for the benefit of the sons of overlords and aristocrats. Then it was further improved in the later stage of the Master’s pedagogical career when he introduced into his curriculum history and poetry, thus widening its scope which had previously been restricted to ethics and politics. A [page 78]Chinese authority tells us that poetry played a vital part in diplomatic intercourse, in which ancient odes were often quoted not only to show the speaker’s good breeding, but also to illustrate and support by subtle implication the argument to be advanced. Especially among his younger students, both these subjects were studied with increasing interest, and the literary tradition of K’ung school was thus established.

And true to this tradition, our scholars at the Sŏnggyun’gwan were encouraged to study histories, and to read and compose poetry. The classics in this connexion were: the Book of Changes, the Book of Poetry, the Book of History, and the Spring and Autumn Annals. In point of fact, a tutorial system of a very rigorous sort spiced with various forms of punishment, including flogging, was in full play, something which their modern successors do not enjoy. Scholars at the Sŏnggyun’gwan, rather as the undergraduates at English universities, were required to turn out essays of imposing length and substance regularly, and these would be individually subjected to severe criticism by their tutors. To one who had the audacity to present his work to the tutor written in disorderly or grass writing (草書), or who came up with nothing better than a mere, last minute patch-work, proper punishment was meted out. It would seem that the middle ten days of each month were exclusively dedicated to purely literary exercises. So those future contestants for civil service prizes were made to produce a solid amount of poetry—verses of varied length, rhyme, and metrical scheme. The Muse was fairly regularly strained while they laboured to copy the best in the vast corpus of the Chinese classical poetry. Succinctness and clarity of expression were meritorious; any show of eccentricity or vulgarity was fatal.

Essay-writting was equally important, for this, with poetical composition and textual exposition of confucian classics, made up the three papers of the [page 79]Great Examination.

A visitor to the Myŏngnyundang, which, besides being the main lecture-hall of the Sŏnggyun’gwan, served as the hallowed site of the state examination, will see a picture hanging on one of its walls, which depicts the scene of the selection at work. The lecture-hall on these occasions was the place where the judges sat and so was partitioned off by a white curtain from the courtyard where the scholars of the Sŏnggyun’gwan among the other contestants would exert their last full measure of scholarship. Here again, the men of the Sŏnggyun’gwan played the game on their own home ground, as it were, and the psychological advantage resulting therefrom must have been considerable. The handicap thrown on an aspirant who worked up his way tortuously from an obscure provincial fringe to this final contest was as considerable in this respect as indeed in any other.

The discipline imposed on the residents of the Sŏnggyungwan was by any standard severe even without the rigours of the playing field. Their working day began at about four o’clock in the morning and breakfast was served at the Yanghyŏn’go (養賢庫), or Hall for Nourishing Wisdom, only after the scholars had dressed themselves properly and done a set portion of early morning reading. In the nature of the confucian philosophy, whose disciples they were meant to be, the least infraction on their part of the ethical code propounded by the Masters was simply intolerable and was met by expulsion. The number of unhappy souls ‘sent down’ from the college in this way is not known, but the code of conduct (學令) preserved to this day in a written form would suggest that what was required of the resident scholars of the Sŏnggyun’gwan was hardly less than a well-regulated, monastic life. Regulations governing the conduct outside the school-work would bear some striking analogy to any standard set of mediaeval, Western monastic rules: no [page 80] hunting or fishing, no gambling or archery exercises, no arrogance towards superiors, no extravagance in clothing and other habit, no horse-riding, no excess amount of leave, and finally, no violation of curfew. Wearing prescribed uniforms during working hours was strictly enforced and the eighth and twenty-third days of each month were designated as the scholars’ washing days. These uniforms, a sample of which is displayed at the President’s office of the Sŏnggyun’gwan University, were inevitably closely imitative of their Chinese prototypes—broad-sleeved robes, with silk girdles, originally of red but later of blue colour. Hence, a scholars’ classlist was called a ‘Blue Robe Book’ (*Chŏnggŭm Nok* 靑矜錄). What was missing from the imposing list of ‘dont’s’ was one on keeping pets, but then this habit which seems to have been widely cultivated within the mediaeval monasteries and convents in the West very much to the chagrin of high ecclesiastics, has never thrived in this country. Wine-drinking, unless excessive or habitual, was tolerable, for kings would grant their favourite scholars jugs of wine in token of encouragement, but women had no more place here than in a monastery or indeed in Oxford or Cambridge colleges before their reformation in the last century.

After all, the classics and commentaries on them on the one hand, and the amount of literary exercises on the other, that there were before the scholars demanding most studious labour of them, that is to say, the serious work to do and to do both quickly and superbly, was too enormous to allow them any idle and wayward thoughts or habits. Moreover, the institution was in the most strict sense a government one, the modern equivalents existing in this country today being the military service academies only. The institution depended upon the initiative and support of the government of the day for its sheer existence: the faculty was provided, the students fed, housed and clothed, by the government. [page 81]

The greatest offence a scholar could commit or the severest punishment he could thereby incur upon himself, which could often amount to denying him the chance to take the examination, was to make any disparaging remark about the Masters or to fail to show due respect to them. Irresponsible criticism of the government, involvement in party politics, of which the Yi Dynasty had more than its proper share, or open flattery of authority or courting men of influence for government positions—these were anathema second in iniquity only to an open avowal of heresy.

Notwithstanding the unusual stringency of the discipline imposed on the conduct of individual scholars, the society of scholars collectively was neither completely divorced from, nor above, politics. In fact, the corporate life of the scholars was not without moments of excitement and agitation. Those were the precious occasions when the future rulers exercised their collective critical conscience with respect to the actual conduct of the affairs of the state, to put their collective moral integrity and courage to the test and to present to the authorities their collective will and judgment on particular matters in unmistakable terms. In the light of the best teachings of their masters, for them not to do so would have been unjust. So, they had the right to protest, and not infrequently exercised that right, and more often than not obtained what they wanted either from the Crown or from its functionaries.

The governmental structure of the Yi dynasty had an administrative provision within its framework by which the reigning monarch was subjected to advice, criticism, and even correction by a learned body of high-ranking officials. *Saganwŏn* (司諫院) was the title of the office. Then, whenever the government went against the popular judgment of the people or ran counter to the established principles of good government, virtually any confucianist in the country was free to present his case in writing to his ruler. The lot of such [page 82]a petitioner was not always an easy one. In a number of known cases, petitions failed miserably and the petitioners, individually or *en masse*, suffered various forms of persecution, from disqualification for civil service examination to death.

It is not surprising that of all the written protests and petitions, none drew more governmental attention than those presented by the Sŏnggyungwan scholars, and no small number of cases in which the whole school marched to the court with petitions (*yuso* 儒疏) are proudly recorded in the annals of the institution. The records describing these marches to the court would show that they were manifestations in each instance of a laudable *esprit de corps*, an admirable sense of organization, and an excellent unity of purpose freely displayed by each member of the society.

In the ninth year of his reign, or 1631, King Injo (仁祖) decided to dedicate to his deceased father, a mere prince, the monarchal title of Wŏnjong (元宗), which, in spite of the famous doctrine of filial piety, was going a bit too far and, in the collective judgment of our scholars, inimical to the ideals of confucianism. Consequently, without much ado, they struck. When one considers the substance and context of the scholars’ stand against their king, to all intents and purposes an absolute monarch, a person who has been brought up in the mildest of modern, political climates should shudder at the disasters they were inviting on themselves.

The Myŏngnyundang, the lecture-hall, served on such an occasion as an assembly hall in which the scholars held their full-dress debate, passed resolutions, and organized the details incident to their petitioning Above all, the petition had to be drafted, discussed, and copied in a proper form. Into its composition, presumably, went the scholars’ collective literary excellence. Any decision reached at such meetings was binding on every member of the assembly, and, although [page 83] at certain times when the country ran wild with political factions the Sŏnggyun’gwan did share the misfortune within its walls, deviationary action by any member of any faction was simply unthinkable. If there was any case of this sort, the records do not show it.

Now, the march to the court; but prior to the departure of the marching force, they had the street leading to the court cleaned by the villagers residing in the neighborhood of the Sŏnggyun’gwan. It may not be too far from truth that the Sŏnggyun’gwan had a certain, undefined jurisdiction over the area and the people under its wings, and when the orderly procession of the petitioning scholars left their school for the court, it was preceded by a front-guard force composed of the same villagers. Behind the Sŏng-gyun’gwan scholars would follow their juniors, the pupils of all the four preparatory schools of the capital. By now the protest march was a stirring event to the entire population of the metropolis, so the shops throughout the city closed up for the day and awaited the court’s response in suspense. When the petition and the main body of the procession arrived in front of the main gate of the palace, the box which contained the petition was deposited on a pre-arranged platform, the court was notified of their arrival, and after due formalities, the petition was sent in. The petitioners then waited there for the royal response; if the court failed to reply on the same day, they set up a tent for the headquarters group in front of the main gate and dispersed to government offices and private homes to pass the night. In the morning, they would come back to form the waiting ranks.

When in the year 1780 a royal mission to the court of Ch’ing brought back with them a gold image of Buddha, of all things, the scholars appealed to the Crown in the same manner. When King Ch’ŏlchong (哲宗) failed to show in his ceremonial proceedings equal [page 84] marks of ancestor-worship to the posthumously canonized king Ikchong (翼宗), who had died before being crowned, the royal deviation from the teachings of the Masters invited the same reaction from the men of the Sŏnggyun’gwan. Now what if the royal response failed to satisfy the moral conscience of the petitioners? Such was the case with each of the three foregoing protests. Then they would elect a new group of officers and repeat their petitions. It seems that the scholars were in no adverse case at their wit’s end nor at the end of their fortitude. First, they could, as they did in all the three cases, refuse to take meals in the Sŏnggyun’gwan dining-hall. This was what they called *kwŏndang* (捲堂). If the authorities continued to procrastinate, the dormitories were deserted. Now, the Crown or the government would be in a desperate position, for the form of the scholars’ protest to follow was to leave the Sŏnggyun’gwan *en masse*, thus creating a situation of grave consequences. This last step, which the scholars resorted to in a number of cases, amounted to forcing on the Crown or the government of the day the onus of proving that they did not choose to see the highest and unique confucian institution of the country virtually disestablished.

This happened in 1611 and again in 1650 when the eminent teachers and philosophers, T’oegye and Yulgok were in turn criticized by their rival factions and the slanderers got away with it. Then in 1667, when crown ministers disowned the responsibility for their diplomatic failures in dealing with China, the Sŏnggyun’gwan scholars stood up to demand their dismissal, and finally left the Sŏnggyun’gwan as they failed to achieve their end.

So here was an aspect of the life at the Sŏnggyun’gwan which would lead one to realize the extent to which, under a confucian, monarchical system of government, at least the intellectually enlightened part of the population could demand moral or political [page 85]satisfaction from their rulers. What is perhaps of supreme importance was that the right to put up the kinds of protests that the scholars at the Sŏnggyun’gwan did put up rigorously and fearlessly whenever they decided that the country was ill, the right to subject the doings of the rulers to a popular test in the light of the moral or philosophical principles in current force was never denied to the government-supported aspirants for governmental career. Moreover, both sides behaved decorously, and it seems to have been the duty as much of the government as of the scholars to see that the actual proceedings were utterly undisturbed or in no case left to deteriorate into panics.

Another feature of the scholars’ life at the Sŏnggyun’gwan which is of some analogical interest was its point-system. It began in the early days of the Yi dynasty and the idea was that each scholar had to take certain number of meals or earn certain number of points before he was qualified to take the Great examination. This should have a familiar ring to one who has lived or heard of the old collegiate life at either of the ancient English universities, but, at any rate, there was there an ingenious system of defining the residential requirements. On the strength of this, with the tutorial system of teaching mentioned before, one might draw a happy analogy between the Sŏnggyun’gwan and the older European universities.

But the Sŏnggyun’gwan did not preserve the even tenour of its ways unbroken through the centuries, even apart from the occasional demonstrations of its students. Within three years of its building it was destroyed by fire, and again it was burnt when the Japanese armies left Seoul in flames at the time of their rout in the unsuccessful invasion by Hideyoshi at the end of the sixteenth century. After the war, it was rebuilt in 1602, and it is from this building that the present buildings date. The functioning of the school had also been interrupted earlier by another [page 86]calamity. The notorious King Yŏnsan-gun, (燕山君) at the end of the fifteenth century dismissed the professors and turned the place into an entertainment hall. His successor, Chungjong, (中宗), restored it to the pursuit of learning.

So far, in so many words, the history of the Sŏnggyun’gwan has been traced from its early days to the beginning of this century. Towards the end of the Yi dynasty, which ended in 1910, some modifications were made in the curriculum of the institution to accomodate modern learning, but the the crux of the matter or the study of confucian classics remained to preponderate. Then came the Japanese occupation. Under the Japanese rule, the institution was first reorganized into *Kyŏnghag-wŏn* (經學院) or the Confucian Institute, then changed its title and scope of interest more than once, until in it began to bloom into the fully fledged modern university that the Sŏnggyun’-gwan University is today. The revival of the ancient title of Sŏnggyun’gwan represents the ancient, confucian heritage handed down through the centuries to the university which purports to be completely secular and modern, yet has a unique department specializing in the confucian learning. Part of the ancient rites and ceremonies has also been inherited by the university. The residential feature of the Old Sŏnggyun’gwan too, in part, is scheduled to revive in the immediate future to accomodate confucian students in the two wings of the very dormitory which in the old days housed their worthy predecessors.

If it is agreed that the highest objective of confucian scholarship is to develope human nature and render service to society and the people, as Sonnggyun means, both the moral impact and the intellectual contributions that the Sonnggyun’gwan University may bring to the republic and her people should, be both great and enduring.

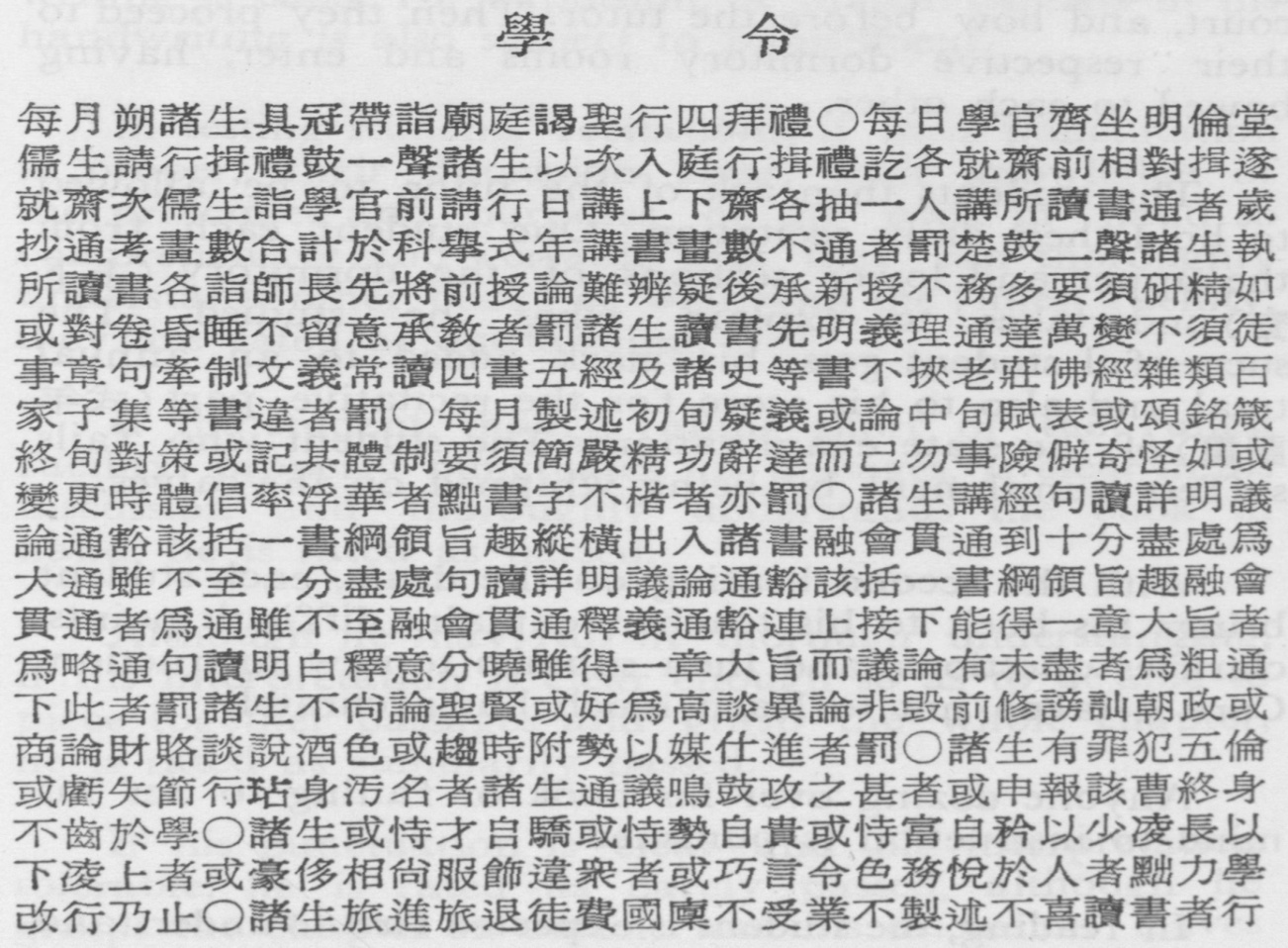
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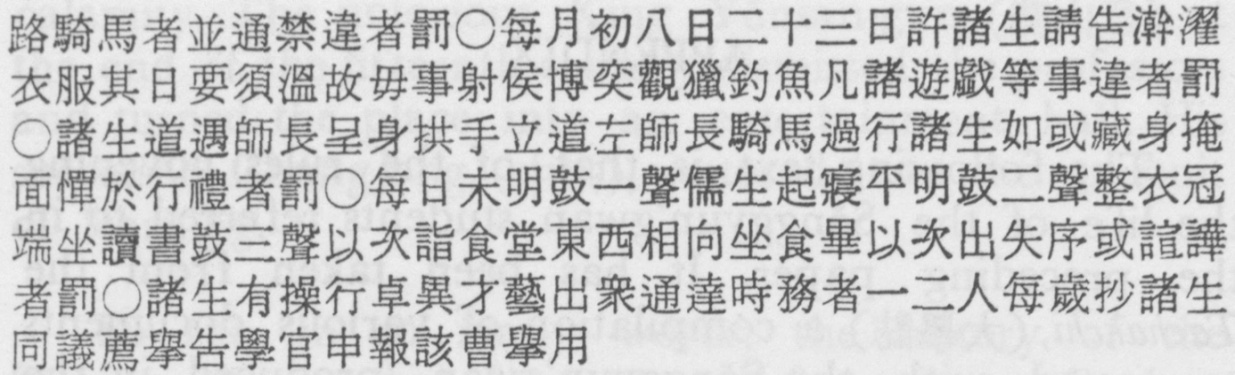
**APPENDIX**

The following text is that of the rules govening the life of the Sŏnggyun’gwan students referred to in the preceding paper. It has been taken from the *Taehakchi*, (大學誌) a compilation of various documents connected with the Sŏnggyun’gwan, produced in the reign of Chongjo (late eighteenth century). Two copies were made, one deposited in the college and one in the royal library (Kyujang-gak 奎章閣). The latter is now in the library of Seoul National University.

The *Hangnyŏng* (學令) given here is certainly of much older date, and is traditionally believed to come from the first reign of the Yi dynasty.

The English translation has been prepared by Mr Yu E. Sang (柳宜相).





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On the first day of each month all students, properly dressed, repair to the courtyard of the Temple (廟庭) to pay homage to Confucius by bowing four times.

Each day when the official tutor is seated in the hall of the Myŏngnyundang (明倫堂) the confucian students request (permission) to conduct ceremonial greetings. At the first drum-beat they file into the court, and bow before the tutor. Then they proceed to their respective dormitory rooms and enter, having bowed to each other.

The students then ask of the tutor to be allowed to hold their daily recitation. One student each from the upper and lower sections of the dormitory (上下齋) undertakes to explain what he studied. The successful student gets his mark added to an annual total and also to his score for the recitative part (式年講書) of the state examinations. The student who fails suffers punishment by being whipped on the calves.

With the second beating on the drum, each student brings his book to his teacher, explains difficult points, clarifies questions, and then submits to new instruction. Care is taken not to learn much but accurately.

Anyone dozing over his book or failing to set his mind to instruction is punished.

In reading, the student is expected first to understand [page 89] meaning and grammar, then obtain mastery in all aspects and varieties. Idle tinkering with passages or rigid adherence to textual meaning is to be avoided.

The Four Books (四書) and the Five Canons (五經) are for constant reading, but avoid Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu, buddhist writings and the hundred schools. Violators are punished.

Writing exercises are done each month: during the first ten days, dissenting criticisms or essays; during the middle ten days, writing in verse and other styles (賦, 表, 頌, 銘, 箴); during the last ten days, government plans or descriptive writing. The style should be terse and austere, apt ana accurate; suffice it to carry the point. Do not indulge in being wild, eccentric or bizarre. Alteration of accepted style or advocating flippant writing is cause for expulsion. A student careless in his handwriting is also subject to punishment.

In testing students’ recitations, if their punctutation is proper, their discussion clear, their knowledge of the principles and purposes of the book in hand so comprehensive and versatile that they can thoroughly understand other books as well with the fullest facility, they are rated as outstanding.

If the student, though falling short of the fullest facility, properly punctuates his passages, is clear in his discussion and thoroughly understands the book in hand, he is rated as passed.

Although he may fail in thorough understanding, if his interpretation is clear enough so as to be able to piece together passages and grasp the whole chapter, he is rated as summarily passed.

If his punctuation is clear and his interpretation tolerable, he is rated as barely passed, although he grasps the chapter in outline and his discussion leaves [page 90]room for improvement. Lower ratings call for punishment.

If any student fails to speak in praise of the sages or indulges in highflown talk or heretical views in order to criticize past events and to detract government policies; or if he discusses plans for bribery, lapses into talk of wine and women, or seeks appointment by siding with the influential, he shall be punished.

Any student guilty of violating human obligations (prince and minister, father and son, husband and wife, brothers, or friends), of faulty deportment, or of damaging his body or his reputation, will be denounced, with drum beats, by the other students. Extreme cases may be reported to the Ministry (of Rites) (禮曹) and barred from academic circles for life.

Grounds for expulsion are: being conceited over one’s talent; being arrogant by presuming upon one’s connections; being haughty because of wealth; insubordi-nation of junior to senior, or subordinate to superior; competing in luxury and dressing differently from the common fashion; attempting to curry favour by artful words and insinuating countenance. If he reforms by serious application he is forgiven.

Those students who go out frequently in groups at state expense, who absent themselves from class, who neglect writing exercises, who do not love their studies, who ride horseback in traveleing, and who violate curfew are punished.

Each month, on the 8th and the 23rd, the students are authorised to take leave of absence and wash their clothes. On that day they should review. Archery and gambling, hunting and fishing， and other games are not allowed. Violators are punished.

When a student happens upon his teacher in the [page 91] street he should present himself and salute him with the hands folded. Standing meanwhile on the left side of the street, he will wait for the teacher to ride by. If any student, reluctant to greet his teacher, should hide himself or turn away, he will be punished.

Each dawn, all students rise at the first beat of the drum; at the second drum beat they dress properly, sit upright and read their book; at the third drum beat they file into the dining hall, sit in two rows, east and west, facing each other. After the meal they file out. Punishment is administered to any one falling out of line or making a clamour.

Each year, one or two students whose deportment is outstanding, whose achievement and talent excel others, and who have mastered routine duties are selected through recommendation by all the students. These are reported to the official tutor and submitted to the Ministry (of Rites) for appointment.