# THE CAUSES AND AIMS OF YŎNGJO'S CHŎNGMIHWAN'GUK

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In the seventh month of 1727, Yŏngjo shocked his entire court by removing the Noron (the Old Doctrine) faction and restoring to power the Soron (the Young Doctrine) faction. What was shocking was that Yŏngjo removed a faction that was loyal to his rule, and restored a faction that had campaigned against him and in favour of his brother Kyŏngjong. In addition, within eight months of this Soron restoration or Chŏngmihwan'guk, rebels launched the largest military rebellion of the eighteenth-century against Yŏngjo's rule. This was the Musillan rebellion, and it was led by supporters of this same Soron faction, some of whom Yŏngjo had restored to office in the Chŏngmihwan'guk.

This study forms part of an ongoing investigation into the Musillan rebellion. In this paper, I aim to analyse the causes of the Chŏngmihwan'guk. What was the character of the political events and strategies that led Yŏngjo to restore to power the Soron? The answer to this question lies partly in the character of Chosŏn factional conflict that had developed over two centuries, and partly in the complex succession crisis that engulfed the reigns of three kings between 1689 and 1727, and these subjects will form the basis of this paper.

## The growth of late-Chosŏn factionalism

Chosŏn factions can be defined as 'political associations on a quest for power,'[1] and many histories see the start of institutionalised factionalism in a 1575 quarrel over appointments in the Ministry of Personnel between two officials.[2] Officials took sides in this dispute, and two factions, the Sŏ'in (Westerners) and the Tong'in (Easterners) grew as a result. Between 1575 and 1727 several different factions dominated the Chosŏn bureaucracy, including the Sŏ'in, Namin (Southerners), Noron, and Soron. Most factions took their names from the location of the capital residences of their leaders. Over the years these factions often subdivided into new factions that went on to contend power.

The splits of late-Chosŏn factions could provide the subject matter of many studies, but several points are salient to this discussion. Firstly, factions splintered

into smaller groups that operated within a unified factional shell, and sometimes these groups went on to form their own faction proper. Internal splits often occurred after personal quarrels amongst factional leaders, and new groups formed behind these different charismatic leaders. Of the different factions that feature in this study, the Sŏ'in split into Noron and Soron sub-factions between 1683 and 1701, after which they began to operate as separate and mutually antagonistic entities.[3] In addition, the Soron split into a hardline Chunso and moderate Wanso sub-faction in 1721, but never formed two fully independent factions. Secondly, splits often occurred after factions took control of the bureaucracy, and these dominant factions split over the severity of punishment for defeated factions.

There were some clear distinctions between the different factions. Often factions associated with philosophical schools of Confucian thought: for example, the Noron faction were associated with Song Siyŏl, and the Soron were associated with Yun Chŭng. There was also a geographical element to factions. Private Confucian academies followed the teachings of one particular scholar and, therefore, were associated with that scholar's faction. Supporters of some factions were concentrated in certain areas, like the Namin in Kyŏngsang province. Later factional allegiance was often transferred along educational, family and marriage lines, so fathers passed their allegiances on to their sons, who were educated in academies associated with their faction. Different factions dominated politics during different periods; for example, the Sŏ'in and the Namin dominated the political scene between 1591 and 1694. By the time of the Chŏngmihwan'guk and the Musillan rebellion two factions, the Noron and Soron, fought over power.

Starting points for conflicts were often important political issues, and early clashes dealt with various issues including personnel appointments, the selection of the Crown Prince, the capacity of individual kings to rule. Perhaps the most famous dispute was the rites dispute of 1659 and 1674.[4]

## Factions and the political decision-making process

It is important to understand the relationship between factionalism and the late-Chosŏn political situation, particularly the decision-making process of government. There was a discrepancy between official Confucian notions of the duty and loyalty of officials, and the practical administration of late-Chosŏn government. In philosophical terms, loyalty of subject and minister to the king was a cornerstone of Confucian political and social thought. 'Legitimacy and supreme authority' was vested in the king,[5] and bureaucrats in office were supposed to be completely loyal to the throne. The reality of Chosŏn government was significant competition between the monarchy and the *yangban* bureaucracy over power. In this situation, the power of the king was restrained by institutions of the bureaucracy, and the result was

fluctuations in the balance of power between the monarchy and bureaucracy over the course of the Chosŏn period.[6] Bureaucrats attempted to restrain the authority of the king by using government offices like the censorate (responsible for monitoring governmental conduct, and impeaching corrupt officials). Officials abused these offices to remonstrate over policy, hirings and firings. Major policy issues were generally discussed by bureaucrats headed by a Chief State Councillor, but proposals had to be approved by the king, and neither the important bureaucrats nor the Chief State Councillor could make decisions *instead* of the king.[7] For example in the area of appointments to the bureaucracy, generally the Board of Personnel gave nominations for candidates to the king, who could ignore these nominations and risk resistance from the censorate, but the king had the final say on decisions.[8]

This then was a system where the bureaucracy was in unofficial competition with a monarchy it claimed to follow unconditionally. James Palais (1984) describes this as one of the 'contradictory potentialities' of Confucianism. Palais' notions are particularly helpful for an understanding of the complex position of factions within the late-Chosŏn political system. He argues that Confucianism had both unofficial/ practical and official/ideal components, with practical Confucianism employed by those bureaucrats who took office, who adhered to an ideal Confucianism that preached absolute loyalty to the monarch, and at the same time, officials used ideal components of Confucianism to condemn opponents and restrain the power of the king.[9] This decision-making process is vital for an understanding of how factional conflict worked in practice, and Palais' notion of the contradictory potentialities of Confucianism is important for an understanding of how factionalism was tolerated in the political process.

## Late-Chosŏn factions: Goals, political culture, self-perception

Factionalism served as a practical/unofficial means of securing office, and shaping governmental policy. Rather than acting independently, officials organised into factions had a greater influence over the king and other officials in the political decision-making process. Factions helped protect their members' interests over the interests of competing groups,[10] and this battle was fought over positions in government. In practice, being in power meant members of a particular faction dominated the principal government offices, especially the censorate.

In a Confucian state, factions and factional conflict within the bureaucracy were stigmatised and considered subversive, because factionalism 'placed the private political interest of officials over the greater interests of the throne or state.'[11] In other words, factionalism stressed self-interest (*sa*, i.e., getting positions) over common interests (*kong*, serving the interests of state and society). Factionalism was by definition a phenomenon that should *not* exist in a government run along Confucian

principles. However, factionalism existed and its paradoxical existence helped shape a political culture of secrecy, insinuation and euphemism, and a specific method of intervention in the political process.

Late-Chosŏn factions differed from legal political parties in several ways. Everyone knew the factional affiliation of bureaucrats, most of whom were members of factions, and every official claimed to be non-partisan and above factional conflict. There were no official membership lists, no formal requirements for membership, no leadership contests, and the discussion of factional allegiances was taboo, so people referred to factional allegiance euphemistically.[12] For example, Yŏngjo's officials once referred to the Noron as 'one group' and the Soron as 'the other side.'[13] Affiliation was identifiable through kinship, political association, and education, and membership was fixed by external recognition. If people identified a bureaucrat as belonging to a certain faction, then that was his faction.[14]

Although at odds with prevailing Confucian orthodoxy, factions managed to justify their own existence and their impact on the government's decision-making process. In policy disputes, officials from different factions appealed to the throne for support, since the king had the final say on policy decisions. If one group of officials had the support of the king over policy, then these same officials were automatically right (*si*), and therefore acting for common-interest. In the eyes of the victors of policy disputes, opposing officials, whose policy recommendations had been rejected, were wrong (*pi*), and therefore, acting out of self-interest. The victors saw themselves as officials fulfilling their duty as Confucian scholars (*kunja*) to resist the actions of the defeated, selfish officials (*so'in*).[15] As a result, for the victors in policy disputes it was the defeated who were factions, engaging in factionalism. Members of factions saw themselves and their adversaries in the following terms: *right/wrong*, *working for self-interest/common-interest*, *Confucian scholars/selfish officials*;[16] and this binary *right/wrong* logic of factionalism had specific ramifications. Attacks on other members of factions were rarely made in political terms according to 'clearly defined rights and duties', but mainly according to 'abstract principles' or moral positions.[17] Accepting an opponent's position on a policy, or majority decisions, were not seen as pragmatic, political measures taken for the sake of the country. Compromise measures were seen as betrayals of personal morality. Factions believed they were engaged in a moral mission, and in order to fulfil their duty of creating harmony in both society and the soul of man, factions had to hold power.[18] Officials connected to factions fulfilled their obligations as moral, Confucian men by taking power, deciding on policy, and providing public service to the country.[19] Part of this moral mission of factions focussed on the removal of other factions. Once judged 'right' by the king, it was that faction's moral duty to remove the faction that had been judged 'wrong.' By removing selfish men who had worked against the public good, the victors were restoring harmony.

## Formulaic clashes, the involvement of the king, and mutual expectations

Factionalism followed patterns of behaviour that developed over a two hundred-year period. Factions took power by winning the king over to their side and against opponents. One way was to back a prospective candidate for the throne in the type of succession dispute that affected Sukchong's rule. Factions also took power by winning the support of the king on important policy matters, and then by encouraging him to remove the incumbent faction en masse. Another method used by factions to take or consolidate their power was to use their influence over the censorate to encourage the king to employ allies and dismiss foes. Naturally, such interference was contrary to the principles of the government. The Chosŏn political system was supposed to be a meritocracy where the examination system provided the best candidates for posts, and the censorate removed the rotten apples. However, in practice the system was abused by factions. Factions adopted a step-by-step approach to discredit and eliminate opponents. Initial attacks targeted incorrect protocol, incompetence or corruption, while later attacks might target the morality of opponents, thus inability to carry out public duty was a manifestation of a morally flawed character. Since the official's character was fundamentally flawed, the accusations followed him for the rest of his career. Royal approval for the removal of officials was followed by calls for exile, then severe interrogations, and so on. If factions were unable to get opponents removed on serious charges, then they went for minor infractions instead. In practice, elimination meant removal from office, but bloodshed was common. Once removed from office, the defeated faction attempted to regroup and regain its position in government, starting the cycle of conflict again.[20]

Factional conflict could run according to its own logic, regardless of national needs. With one faction out of office, and one faction dominant, the practical relevance of the original issue was often forgotten, and the loss or defence of moral positions became the issue. Increasingly, past grievances dictated policy making, and as the past dominated the present day thinking of the factions, their activities became less restrained. If a strong king was unable to settle problems, then factional conflict could take on a self-perpetuating character of vendetta politics, as 'factionalism itself' became the issue.[21]

The role of the king was another 'contradictory potentiality' in the character of late-Chosŏn factionalism. All legitimate methods of fighting had to go through the king, and were dependent upon winning over the king. This royal recognition meant the king was complicit in factionalism. Kings often had ambivalent attitudes to factions. Officially, kings condemned factionalism, which distracted from national affairs. Unofficially, factional fighting kept the focus on factions rather than the throne,[22] and kings used factionalism as an excuse to change administrations or

destroy opponents and strengthen their own rule when it was politically expedient.[23] There appeared to be a quid pro quo relationship between factions and the king. Kings used factions, factions could help the king, and factions expected their support to be reciprocated. If factions backed the king's policies, or protected him when he was in contention for the throne, then once in power, factions expected the king's help to consolidate their own position and eliminate opponents. Thus, both the king and faction were expected to behave in a certain way, once they had achieved power.[24] This practical/unofficial use of factionalism might explain how factionalism was apparently tolerated by successive kings over a two hundred-year period. As a system shaped by two hundred years of history, the culture of secrecy and euphemism, the quid pro quo politics, and the *right/wrong* binary logic of factionalism were likely to continue influencing the responses of the king and factions to political problems like the succession crisis that emerged during Sukchong's reign.

## The rule of Sukchong and Kyŏngjong and the succession crisis

In 1689, by naming Kyŏngjong as crown prince, Sukchong helped initiate a bloody cycle of factional conflict that led to the Chŏngmihwan'guk. This was a succession battle that raged over the reigns of three very different kings: Sukchong, his sons Kyŏngjong, and Yŏngjo.

## Succession, Sukchong, his royal consorts and the factions

One important role of any king is to ensure a smooth succession to his throne by producing as uncontroversial an heir as possible. The problem was that succession in Chosŏn was based on a vague area of the law, and there was room for both flexibility and controversy in equal measure. No fixed rules had been formalised and no precedent established by the founders of the dynasty. The Chosŏn kings practiced polygamy, and married both primary consorts and concubines. The status of the queen determined the status of the son or crown prince: if a royal prince was born to a primary consort, he was legitimate; if he were born to a concubine, he was illegitimate. Primogeniture was not essential, the 'consanguinous proximity to the main line of succession' was not a hard and fast rule for selection, and royal princes were not denied the throne because of their legitimacy.[25] The reason for this flexibility was that it was impossible to guarantee that the oldest son, because of intelligence, character or constitution, would be suitable to rule the country.

Within these rules for succession, there was also room for controversy. Officials distinguished between the primary consorts and concubines of the king, and between legitimate and illegitimate sons of incumbent kings. Officials (who had to be born

legitimate) looked down on crown princes born of secondary consorts.[26] There was an incentive for kings to choose sons by primary consorts to avoid controversy. In practice, the choice of crown prince was left to the discretion of the ruling monarch, and kings might select the sons of their favourite wives regardless of legitimacy. This subjective and affective element meant factions might try to influence the succession process. This was the complex background to the Sukchong succession controversy.

Different factions lined up behind two candidates for the throne, Kyŏngjong and Yŏngjo. Initially the Namin, and from 1701, the Soron backed Kyŏngjong's candidacy. Yŏngjo was backed by the Sŏ'in, and later the Noron. Factions fought to ensure their respective candidate ruled instead of candidates backed by factional enemies. These factions fought over many controversial issues concerned with the succession of both Kyŏngjong and Yŏngjo. The most serious problem was Kyŏngjong's poor health. It worsened as he grew older, and his suitability to rule was a source of controversy until his death. The second problem was that neither Kyŏngjong nor Yŏngjo were legitimate. Sukchong had tried for seventeen years to produce a legitimate heir with his primary consort, Queen Inhyŏn, who was unable to conceive. Kyŏngjong was born to Lady Chang Hŭibin, a concubine. Yŏngjo was born in 1694 to concubine Lady Ch'oe Sukpin, who had allegedly been a slave. Sukchong attempted to settle controversies about Kyŏngjong's legitimacy by making Lady Chang the primary consort and deposing the incumbent primary consort Queen Inhyŏn. The Sŏ'in opposed this move, arguing that Sukchong had time to produce a legitimate heir.[27] The Namin supported Sukchong and were restored in 1689, while the Sŏ'in were removed.[28]

A third problem was that the mothers of both men were involved in serious palace controversies. Both women attempted to guarantee power for themselves and their male progeny. When Queen Inhyŏn died in 1701, Lady Chang was accused of using black magic rituals to kill her. Further complicating matters, it was Yŏngjo's mother Lady Ch'oe who informed on Lady Chang, casting doubt on the veracity of these allegations. Was Lady Ch'oe establishing her own legitimacy by eliminating a rival to the affection of the king, and a rival future queen mother? The Chang Hŭibin controversy was the catalyst for the two Sŏ'in splinter groups, the Soron and Noron to form their own factions proper. The Soron urged clemency for Lady Chang and supported Kyŏngjong, and they were dismissed; the Noron urged firmer punishment, and they were left in office.[29] Lady Chang was made to drink poison.

One final problem concerns the actions of Sukchong, a man described by scholars as fickle and ruthless. Sukchong was fickle in his affections to both his consorts and also his sons, and whenever he changed his favourite, he demanded factional backing.[30] Sukchong was ruthless in his domination of the bureaucracy through a deliberate divide and rule strategy.[31] Evidence of these character traits emerged in the 1717 solitary audience (*Chŏng'yudokdae*) with Noron leader Yi Imyŏng. This

closed meeting caused a great controversy that plagued the next few years of the succession dispute. Royal audiences usually occurred in the presence of officials who documented proceedings. Naturally, because it was a closed meeting the content of the discussion could never be confirmed, but the Noron claimed Sukchong expressed extreme doubts about Kyŏngjong's ability to rule, and requested the Noron ensure that Kyŏngjong did not remain crown prince.[32] It is unclear what Sukchong wanted from this solitary meeting. There are two possible explanations. One is that Sukchong had cooled in his affections towards Kyŏngjong after the death of Lady Chang. The other is that Sukchong wanted to ensure the safety of Yŏngjo by making his intentions deliberately vague. Knowing that Kyŏngjong was sickly, Sukchong hoped to protect Yŏngjo from mortal enemies. Whatever Sukchong's intentions, Kyŏngjong remained crown prince, but this meeting sowed the seeds for further factional conflict during Kyŏngjong's reign.[33]

## The rule of Kyŏngjong

During the four-year period of Kyŏngjong's rule (1720–24), factional conflict intensified as both the Noron and the Soron sought advantage for themselves. The Noron tried to advantage the position of Yŏngjo, while Soron extremists sought the elimination of their Noron counterparts. After Sukchong died in 1720, and Kyŏngjong inherited a Noron bureaucracy from his father, the Noron quickly raised concerns about Kyŏngjong's successor. They were concerned that Kyŏngjong had not produced an heir, and he was sickly. The Noron administration urged that Kyŏngjong name Yŏngjo crown prince, inappropriate given Kyŏngjong had not been on the throne for long.[34] In 1721, Kyŏngjong acquiesced to the Noron, and named Yŏngjo crown prince. Having received one concession from Kyŏngjong, the Noron sought further concessions to advantage their side. Within two months of the proclamation of Yŏngjo as crown prince, a Noron memorial demanded the appointment of Yŏngjo as regent, an emergency measure only implemented when the king was incapable of ruling. This move would have made the Soron rule less secure, and empowered Yŏngjo. The main motivation of the Noron appeared to be cynical. By ousting Kyŏngjong and having their own candidate Yŏngjo installed as regent, this would safeguard the Noron's political position. Certainly the Soron considered the Noron action a brazen bid for power.

The Soron counter-attacked against what were seen as Noron attempts to weaken Soron power. Ten days after accepting, Kyŏngjong reversed the ruling approving the regency, and was clearly angered by what he saw as Noron brass-neck.[35] Soron Kim Il'gyŏng and others sent a memorial, accusing four important Noron ministers Kim Ch'angjip, Yi Kŏnmyŏng, Yi Yimyŏng, and Cho T'aech'ae of leading a plot to

overthrow the king. The four Noron ministers were sent into exile and fifty other Noron were punished. This was the 1721 Noron purge, and Soron restoration.

Now in the ascendancy, the Soron splintered over the Yŏngjo regency issue into moderates, the Wanso, and a dominant hardline group, the Chunso. This split in the spring of 1722 saw the Chunso led by Kim Il'gyŏng claim absolute loyalty to Kyŏngjong, and the Wanso take a line closer to that of the Noron.[36]

The Chunso sought further concessions that would tighten their grip on power. They looked for an opportunity to damage their opponents, and this opportunity presented itself very quickly when the Namin *nothoi* (the son of a concubine, therefore legally illegitimate and not privy to the same rights as primary sons) Mok Horyong claimed to have uncovered a palace plot to remove Kyŏngjong and enthrone Yŏngjo. Mok alleged the plotters, who included the sons of the four Noron ministers exiled in the 1721 purges, planned to have Kyŏngjong assassinated, poisoned, or forced to abdicate. This incident was steeped in ambiguity, and even after torture, the accused men never admitted their guilt, but the damage was done.

This second wave of attacks was a disaster for the Noron, and Yŏngjo. Over an eight-month period, thirty Noron, including the four Noron ministers, were executed, one hundred and fourteen were exiled, nine made to kill themselves and one hundred and seventy-three were jailed. Yŏngjo had already had attempts made on his life, and now his position as crown prince became more precarious.[37] By the end of this purge, the Chunso were in powerful positions in the Soron-led bureaucracy of Kyŏngjong. Sukchong and Kyŏngjong's reigns had intensified a cycle of factionalism driven solely by a desire for revenge over past grievances. This was a cycle of factional vendetta that continued into Yŏngjo's reign.

## The early reign of Yŏngjo, and the T'angp'yŏng policy: Problems of legitimacy and stability

When Yŏngjo took the throne in the eighth month of 1724, he was immediately jettisoned into a problematic relationship with the two main factions. While the activities of many Soron threatened the legitimacy of Yŏngjo's rule, the anti-Soron activities of the Noron threatened the stability of Yŏngjo's government.

Yŏngjo inherited a Soron bureaucracy that was partly antagonistic because it had campaigned for his brother Kyŏngjong, and Chunso like Kim Il'gyŏng questioned Yŏngjo's legitimacy. Serious allegations were raised against Yŏngjo, including the low status of his mother and even accusations of regicide. Kyŏngjong had died from food poisoning after eating dishes that had allegedly been sent to him by his brother. The threat from the Soron extremists could not be ignored by Yŏngjo.

Yŏngjo's relationship with the loyalist Noron was also extremely problematic.

With the death of Kyŏngjong and the enthronement of Yŏngjo, the Noron saw a more favourable environment for their anti-Soron activities, perhaps an opportunity to destroy their Soron enemies in revenge for the 1721–2 purges. The Noron thought Yŏngjo was in their debt, after all, the four ministers and many other Noron had laid down their lives to defend Yŏngjo's interests.[38] This meant that Yŏngjo would have to handle the loyalist Noron as carefully as any antagonistic Soron.

Yŏngjo had different aims from the factions. He wanted to strengthen his hold on the throne by removing threats and stabilizing his rule, but his options were limited by personal obligations. Yŏngjo needed to put an end to Soron attacks on his legitimacy. In addition, he wanted to prevent the type of destructive factional fighting that had raged under his brother's rule by strengthening the monarchy over factions. This meant while Yŏngjo was indebted to the Noron for their protection, he needed to control Noron political excesses, *and* at the same time retain their support in case of future attacks on his throne. These problems affected important aspects of Yŏngjo's rule, so it was clear that any solution could not be short-term.

## The T'angp'yŏng policy and its implementation

Yŏngjo proposed to resolve these problems through the T'angp'yŏng policy (or Policy of Impartiality). The term was used by Sukchong, but originated in the Confucian classic *Book of Documents* in which it was stated that:

> The path of a ruler will unfold clearly if there is no bias or favouritism towards a faction. If the ruler remains impartial, he will govern fairly.[39]

In this context, the notion of 'T'angp'yŏng' refers to a principle or ideal of good government to which kings and the bureaucracy should aspire. What is important for my argument is the practical implications of the T'angp'yŏng policy in the context of the early part of Yŏngjo's reign between 1724 and 1727. During this period, Yŏngjo and his officials made many references to the implementation of a T'angp'yŏng policy, and it was clear from the context of their conversations that it was meant to be a way of suppressing factionalism.[40] However, in this period it was not a policy in the sense of a coherent and clear cut set of measures formulated in response to events. In the *sillok*, there is little detail about the formulation or implementation of any specific T'angp'yŏng policy. As for the initial actions of Yŏngjo and his officials, it is probably more helpful to think of the T'angp'yŏng policy as a 'technique.'[41] Seen in this sense, Yŏngjo's T'angp'yŏng policy appeared to entail the king refusing to engage in quid pro quo politics.

There are several specific instances where Yŏngjo's implementation of the T'angp'yŏng policy can be seen. In his first actions as king, Yŏngjo promoted Wanso

Soron ministers, including Yi Kwangjwa, to central positions in government around the ninth month of 1724, and then to calm the fears of the Noron, he released a Noron exiled in the 1721–2 purges. Yŏngjo also gave equal punishment to infractions by the Noron and Soron. In the eleventh month of 1724, anti-Soron attacks began. The Confucian student Yi Ŭiyŏn had sent a memorial criticising Kim Il'gyŏng's role in the 1721–2 purges of the Noron and demanding the four Noron ministers be exonerated. The ruling Soron took great offence to Yi's charges, and 'fearing the effects of his charges,' they demanded his punishment.[42] Facing demands from both the Noron and Soron for the punishment of Kim Il'gyŏng and Yi Ŭiyŏn, instead of favouring one side or the other, Yŏngjo had both men tried and executed. By rewarding and punishing both sides in equal measure, Yŏngjo created a blockage to factionalism. This is confirmed by the Noron objections to this double punishment policy, such as a memorial sent by the Noron Sixth Counsellor of the Office of Special Counsellors that stated:

> "As for T'angp'yŏng, that was a legal regulation set up by the sage kings of yore. But it is essential that we first of all clearly distinguish between loyalty and evil, and only then can we hope for the beauty of harmony and respect. Your highness, first you have to distinguish between loyalty and treachery, virtue and evil, and even though you have done much to clarify a world divided into good and evil, when officials engage in factional behaviour, the best thing to do is punish them. Nowadays right and wrong are very mixed up, and the ways of dealing with these problems have been changing, so if T'angp'yŏng measures were suddenly introduced now, then trouble will be inevitable."[43]

The Noron objections are striking: the only way to remove factionalism is for the king to decide which faction is right and which is wrong, in other words, Yŏngjo should engage in factionalism to get rid of factionalism. By claiming that the Noron and Soron are at times equally right and equally wrong, Yŏngjo was refusing to cooperate with vendetta, and quid pro quo politics. The psychological effect of this was powerful. If neither the Noron nor the Soron were *right*, then that exposed the reality that both sides were factions engaged in factionalism. Neither side could count on the legitimising authority of the king to justify their actions.

This initial application of the T'angp'yŏng policy around 1725 appeared to help increase tensions in an already tense situation. The situation was exacerbated when it became clear that the king was not committed to a consistent but a sporadic use of the T'angp'yŏng policy. Yŏngjo reverted to the standard forms of factionalism to defeat his enemies when necessary. The 1725 Kim Il'gyŏng case gave him the opportunity to attack his enemies and allow the Noron to consolidate power. During his trial Kim Il'gyŏng made attacks on the legitimacy of the king, and alleged Yŏngjo's involvement in the death of his brother, and the Soron grudgingly supported Kim Il'gyŏng fearing this would be 'the beginning of a deluge.'[44] Now the Soron was backing a politician

who questioned the legitimacy of Yǒngjo and this made Soron rule untenable. In the new year of 1725, when Yun Pongjo sent up a memorial attacking the Soron, Yǒngjo used this as the opportunity to change the bureaucracy rapidly. Those associated with Kim Il'gyǒng and Mok Horyong were targeted for punishment, and the Chunso and senior Soron were sacked or exiled. According to many scholars, Yǒngjo had deliberately guided the attacks of the Noron, to remove enemies who attacked his legitimacy.[45] He continued in the same vein, and used the old patterns of factionalism to allow the Noron to consolidate their rule. When it was opportune and would benefit him, Yǒngjo had stood back to let Noron defeat the Soron.

From this stage, with the Noron in charge of the bureaucracy, Yǒngjo appeared to employ his T'angp'yǒng policy again, and once more his actions clashed with Noron expectations. With the Chunso exiled or dead, the Soron out, and the Noron firmly in control, the Noron sought to consolidate their power. They had received the backing of the king and were therefore *right*, so it was now the Noron's opportunity to suppress factions (the Soron) forever. However, Yǒngjo refused to cooperate with Noron demands for vengeance. The reasons why are unclear, but perhaps with his enemies removed, Yǒngjo felt he could restrict factional conflict and stabilise his rule by refusing to take part in quid pro quo politics.

Yǒngjo's attempts to restrain further attacks against the Soron only frustrated the Noron. Having previously followed the old patterns of factionalism, Yǒngjo now tried to apply his T'angp'yǒng policy and prevent the Noron from pursuing their *right/wrong* logic. The Noron went on the offensive, a move that led to political gridlock. They insisted on further action against the Soron perpetrators of the 1721–2 purges. In a series of memorials, the Noron wanted to refer to Kyǒngjong's illness, which Yǒngjo thought was unfilial. In addition, the Noron asked that the removal of the Soron be described as the 'subjugation of the rebels.'[46] In order to defuse the situation, Yǒngjo replaced Noron extremists with moderates who were viewed with suspicion by other Noron. In the end, the Noron bureaucracy refused to cooperate. Factional tensions had reached such a point that government had ceased to function.

Total breakdown in the functioning of government was clear evidence that Yǒngjo's initial attempt to repress factionalism through the T'angpyǒng policy was a failure. There are various opinions about the reasons for this failure. Chǒng Manjo (1983), for example, believes that the early attempts to introduce a coherent anti-faction T'angp'yǒng policy struggled to cope with a changeable political situation, and were nothing more than a patch-up 'policy'.[47] But the main reason for the failure of Yǒngjo's efforts appears to be his inconsistent application of the T'angpy'ǒng policy that only served to raise factional tensions. At times, Yǒngjo refused to engage in the factional fight, and exposed the lie of factional politics. At other times, when it suited him, Yǒngjo reverted to quid pro quo politics. Many scholars believe it would have been easier had Yǒngjo supported the Noron and done what was expected of him.[48]

## The aim, implementation and result of the Chŏngmihwan'guk

On the fifth day of the seventh month of 1727, Yŏngjo began a widespread transformation of the entire bureaucracy. As a result of continued gridlock, he dismissed over a hundred Noron and reinstated the Soron. Those Soron who had been deprived of office under the Noron administration were restored to office, and sixty exiled Soron were released. This was the Chŏngmihwan'guk, and while both Yŏngjo and Kyŏngjong had inherited administrations that were not entirely sympathetic towards them, this was the first time in this period that a king had willingly installed a faction that had previously campaigned against him.

The Chŏngmihwan'guk should be seen in terms of both short- and long-term aims. On one hand, it was a pragmatic move to make government work, since the Noron had refused to cooperate with the running of the government. In the short term the Chŏngmihwan'guk resolved political gridlock, and helped government function again.[49]

Yŏngjo was probably looking for more than just short-term political stability. One encounter between Yŏngjo and two Wanso, Cho Munmyŏng and Song Inmyŏng, just after the Chŏngmihwan'guk, gives some indication of Yŏngjo's longer-term aims:

> The councillor in the Board of Personnel, Cho Munmyŏng, said: "The key to the fate of the country depends completely on hiring people impartially, and having weighed things up, I wonder, amongst those Noron who have been thrown out, can there not be some men of talent? If we really want to promote impartiality, then we can't have a situation where only the Soron are employed."
>
> Song Inmyŏng said: "As for those sacked for their crimes, no matter how much we want to reemploy them, inevitably in the future some quarrels will break out and we'll be unable to suppress them. First of all, we should let a little time pass, and then it'll probably be more fitting to wait until after the situation in court has settled down, and then decide whether people are guilty of misdemeanours or not and talented or not, and it'll be proper to rehire them."
>
> The king said: 'What you said is right."[50]

The conversation with Yŏngjo gives an indication of the king's long-term aims from the Chŏngmihwan'guk. The comments of all three men appear to show the best way to ensure long-term stability was to hire men of merit from both factions in the future. This notion of a joint Noron-Soron administration has become a commonly accepted understanding of the overall aim of the T'angp'yŏng policy. The first step in creating such an administration was the reinstatement of moderate Soron like Song Inmyŏng and others who were antagonistic to factional politics and sympathetic to attempts to implement a T'angp'yŏng policy. Yŏngjo also needed a way to deal with the Noron. In the extract above, officials conceded that the Chŏngmihwan'guk was only a temporary exclusion of the Noron, and that this was not his long-term aim. His aim must have

been to break the Noron in, and make them more amenable to cooperation with the Soron. The pro-Yŏngjo Noron had refused to cooperate with Yŏngjo in the post-1725 period, so Yŏngjo had to prove he was serious about his policy of dampening down factionalism by teaching the Noron a lesson. Thus, the Chŏngmihwan'guk may have been a short-term means (a temporary exclusion of the Noron) to a long-term end (a joint Noron-Soron administration). With the Chŏngmihwan'guk, Yŏngjo may also have been making a clear sign to Soron who were less sympathetic to Yŏngjo and his T'angp'yŏng policy. Theoretically, Yŏngjo could not be accused of engaging in quid pro quo politics, of victimising the Soron, and backing the Noron because they had supported his claim to the throne. Hence, Yŏngjo probably also hoped to win the cooperation of the Soron, prevent attacks on his legitimacy, and stabilise his throne.

The extract above also points to some slight differences in the emphasis of the pre- and post-Chŏngmihwan'guk T'angp'yŏng policy. In the pre-Chŏngmihwan'guk period, the focus had been on occasional acts designed to deliberately frustrate the two factions by refusing to engage in the right/wrong binary logic of factionalism. After the Chŏngmihwan'guk, there was a more concrete goal of developing a joint administration, and there were also some hints about hiring people purely on the basis of talent, rather than factional affiliation. The implementation of the Chŏngmihwan'guk, then, should be understood in the context of an ongoing attempt by Yŏngjo to reduce factionalism. This was a rational attempt to make government function in both the short and long term, it was not the caprice of a king who changed administrations when he failed to get his own way.

## Conclusion

There was no single political event that led to the Chŏngmihwan'guk, rather an extremely complex interaction of factors surrounding the succession of Yŏngjo and Kyŏngjong, including bitter feuding amongst factions, the legitimacy issues concerning Kyŏngjong and Yŏngjo, and the mysterious death of Kyŏngjong. There were patterns to factional behaviour established over the years. By a certain stage in the crisis, most factional policy was decided according to past grievances, so although Kyŏngjong was dead, and Yŏngjo was the only candidate for the throne, the factional blood shed in the name of the two crown princes would always have to be answered for. Yŏngjo inherited this extremely fragile and unstable situation, and initially he attempted to break with the quid pro quo aspect of factionalism through his T'angp'yŏng policy. But his implementation of the T'angp'yŏng policy was inconsistent. Yŏngjo sought compromise from factions when it suited him, and used traditional patterns of factional conflict to destroy his enemies. There appeared to be widespread mistrust over his policy, and frustrated expectations.

The Chŏngmihwan'guk was Yŏngjo's attempt to implement the T'angp'yŏng

policy (a joint Noron-Soron administration), his long-term plan for stability. However, there was an unintended consequence of his restoration of the Soron. One small group of rebels including Yi Sasŏng, Nam T'aejing and Pak P'ilhyŏn were restored to power in the Chŏngmihwan'guk. This group of future fifth-columnists went on to play significant roles in the Musillan rebellion. The effect of these six fifth-columnists on the rebellion is a subject for further study.

## Glossary

Book of Documents 書經
Ch'oe Sukpin 崔淑嬪
Chang Hŭibin 張禧嬪
Cho T'aech'ae 趙泰采
Chŏng'yudokdae 丁酉獨對
Chŏngmihwan'guk 丁未換局
Chunso 峻少
Concubines 後宮
Kim Ch'angjip 金昌集
Kong 公
Kunja 君子
Ku Yangsu 歐陽脩
Mok Horyong 睦虎龍
Musillan 戊申亂
Nam T'aejing 南泰徵
Namin 南人
Noron 老論
Pak P'ilhyŏn 朴弼顯
Pi 非
Primary consorts 正妃

Queen Inhyŏn 仁顯王后
Sa 私
Si 是
Sŏ'in 西人
So'in 小人
Song Inmyŏng 宋寅明
Song Siyŏl 宋時烈
Soron 少論
T'angp'yŏng policy 蕩平策
Tong'in 東人
Wanso 緩少
Yi Imyŏng 李蓬命
Yi Kŏnmyŏng 李健命
Yi Kwangjwa 李光佐
Yi Sasŏng 李思晟
Yi Ŭiyŏn 李義淵
Yi Yimyŏng 李明誼
Yun Chŭng 尹拯
Yun Pongjo 尹鳳朝

## Notes

1   Haboush 1988, 119.

2   Yi Ki-baik 1984, 208.

3   The Sŏ'in splintered into the Noron and Soron in 1683, with the Soron following Yun Chŭng and the Noron supporters following Song Siyŏl. According to Palais (1996), Yun Chŭng was irritated by the arrogance of Song Siyŏl (539–540). Both splinter groups continued to cooperate together as the Sŏ'in against the Namin until 1701.

4   Setton 1992, 55. See Setton (1992) for an in-depth analysis of the rites issue.

5   Palais 1976, 3.

6   This may have been due to the relative strength of the *yangban* which dominated the Chosŏn

bureaucracy. The *yangban* were not completely dependent on the crown for power, since they drew wealth from land ownership (Palais 1976, 5).

7   Palais 1976, 14.

8   Yim 1976, 30 & 32.

9   Palais 1984, 458.

10  Han'guk Yŏksayŏn'guhoe 2003, 65.

11  Palais 1991, 46.

12  Yim 1976, 121 & 143.

13  Yi Chaeho 1994, 188.

14  Yim 1976, 143.

15  Han'guk Yŏksayŏn'guhoe 1992,136.

16  Sŏng Nak'hun 1979, 165. Sŏng also claims late-Chosŏn factions borrowed this Confucian scholar/petty-minded official justification for their existence from Ku Yangsu in the Sung period (168–9).

17  Reischauer 1960, 437–9.

18  O Kap'gyun 1977, 65.

19  Lankov 1990, 51.

20  Lankov 1990, 63.

21  Haboush 1988, 123 & Lankov 1990, 63.

22  Palais 1976, 15.

23  Sŏng Nakhun 1979, 168. Sukchong deliberately cultivated tensions between the Noron and Soron over his successor (Yi Sŏngmu 2000, 119).

24  Haboush 1999, 63.

25  Hahm 1971, 90–5.

26  For example, concubines were forbidden to enter the royal pantheon (Haboush 1988, 54) or die in the palace compound (Haboush 1988, 58–9). Illegitimate sons were given different titles and also given different listings in the royal genealogy, and were one degree lower than legitimate sons (Hahm 1971, 92).

27  The great Ming code stated that kings should keep trying to produce a legitimate heir to the throne, and not make any illegitimate son the heir, before the primary wife had reached the age of fifty (Yi Yŏngch'un 1994, 243).

28  The Sŏ'in had definite interests in the queen that produced an heir. Queen Inhyŏn was allegedly from a Sŏ'in background, so presumably her heir would be backed by the Sŏ'in.

29  Palais 1996, 539–40.

30  Palais 1996, 539–40.

31  Haboush 1988, 31.

32  Yi Yŏngch'un 1994, 259.

33  Haboush 1988, 122.

34  Yi Sŏngmu 2000, 128.

35  Haboush 1988, 121–3.

36  Yi Chongbŏm 2003, 191 & 231.

37  Haboush 1988, 31.

38  Haboush 1988, 127.

39  Yi Chaeho 1994, 183.

40  For example, in the tenth month of 1727, Song Inmyŏng requested the publication of Pak Sech'ae's 1694 political writings urging the destruction of factions, and Song declared such ideas might be borrowed for the current T'angp'yŏng policy. *Yŏngjo sillok* 3/10/13 (year/month/day) (ŭlmi) volume 13: folio 34a–b, p.675.

41  One of Yŏngjo's officials talked about a T'angp'yŏng technique. *Yŏngjo sillok* 1/1/17 (pyŏngjin) 3:26b–30a, p.463–5. For convenience sake, I use the widely recognised term T'angp'yŏng policy.

42  Haboush 1988, 126.

43  *Yŏngjo sillok* 1/2/2 (kyŏng'o) 3:36a, p.469.

44  Haboush 1988, 126–7.

45  Yi Sŏngmu 2000, 144–148.

46  Haboush 1988, 124–7.

47  Chong 1983, 64. Other scholars claim there was an inherent inconsistency in the T'angp'yŏng policy that meant a coalition of Noron and Soron, while other factions like the Namin were ignored (Yi Chaeho 1994, 229).

48  Haboush 1988, 118–120 & 133–5.

49  Haboush 1988, 135.

50  *Yŏngjo sillok* 3/7/1 (ŭlmyo) 12: 3a, p.641.

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