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The Role of the Protected Appointment (Eumseo, 蔭敍) within the Ruling Structure of Goryeo.

In the proclamation opening his reign, king Taejo of Goryeo stated that "in establishing governmental offices and assigning functions, it is most important to appoint men of ability".¹ From the perspective of this lofty ideal of government the Eumseoje (蔭敍制), or the Protected Appointment System², at first glance seems to have had a strongly contradictory character to the intended talent-based government, as it allowed the advancement on the base of status, rather than scholarly achievement. Next to the Gwageo examination system, the Protected Appointment was an important element of the civil official recruitment. The assessment of its scope is rather difficult, as most of the public documentation from the Goryeo period has been missing. The most reliable source is "Goryeosa" (高麗史), the history of the Goryeo dynasty written during the Choseon period, which includes, among others, "The List of Official Examination Passers", giving some picture on the course of careers of the public officials.

There are incomparably more research works written on the Civil Examination System (Gwageo) than on the Protected Appointment. In most of these studies the dichotomy between the talent-based Gwageo and status-based Eumseo is considered as the core of the fight for power between the central government with the king as its centre and the aristocratic lineages. Consequently Goryeo is defined as an aristocratic society in which wealthy landowners were able to get the control of the government via the Protected Appointment System. In my paper I am going to analyze the role of the Protected Appointment in the power structure of Goryeo.

1. Establishment of the Protected Appointment and its basic characteristics.

¹ Sourcebook of Korean Civilization, 1993, ed. Peter H. Lee, Columbia University Press, New York, Vol. 1, p. 260

² "Protected Appointment System" is the most common English translation of Eumsoje. Yi Söng-mu translates it as "Special Employment System".

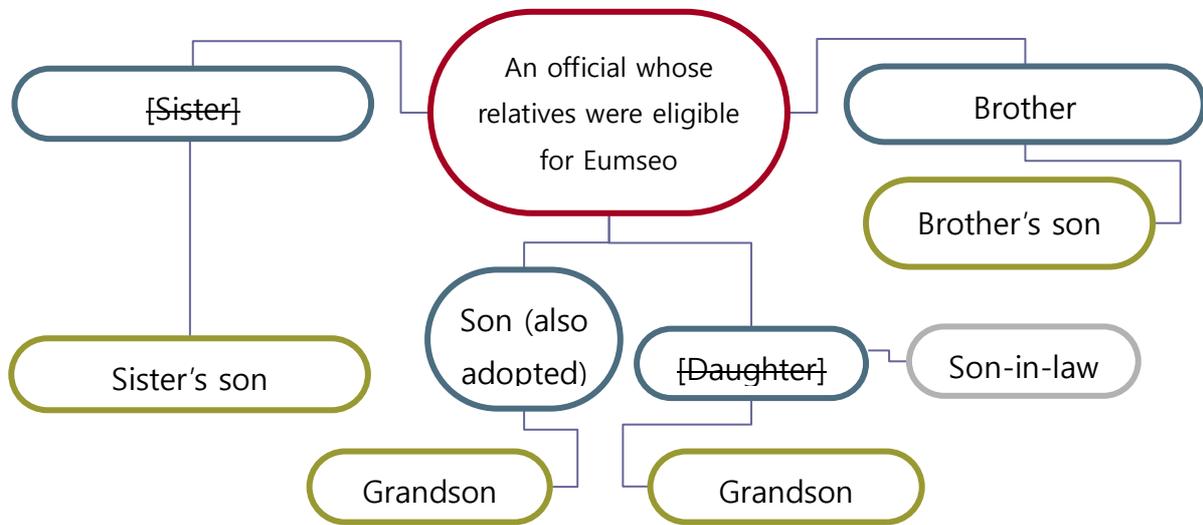
The appointment of officials to governmental posts based on lineage was practiced much earlier than Goryeo period in the Korean history. In fact, during the Unified Silla period, such a type of recruitment was prevalent and deeply embedded in the Silla's Bone-Rank System, to the extent that the Gwageo-preceding Dokseosampungwa (讀書三品科, Triple Class Reading Examination for civil officials) passers never could break through the net of influential aristocratic clans holding power. The Protected Appointment was established during the Seongjong's reign (981-997), when through the king's reforms the bureaucratic system expanded and became the political and social backbone of the state.³ There were nine ranks for the civil officials (in the central government), established during king Gwangjong's reign (949-975)⁴ and the Protected Appointment was as a rule allowed in the upper five ranks. The eligibility for the Protected Appointment fluctuated, however, and since the Sukjeong's reign (肅宗, 1095-1105) the privilege was rarely given to officials below the 4th rank. At the end of the period the availability of this favor was limited to those of the first three ranks, and at the beginning of the Joseon dynasty only those belonging to the 1st and 2nd rank could advance via the Protected Appointment. Looking in the records of the 201 officials whose names were recorded as Eumseo beneficiaries, one may notice that most of those appointments were anyways granted within the three first ranks.⁵ It was a matter of importance, as well, who among the relatives was to receive Eumseo. Officials with the lower ranks rarely could expect to have anybody but their immediate relatives (a son or grandson) chosen for government posts.

In the Protected Appointment system the son, grandson and also other male relatives of an eligible rank official were allowed to receive a government post without the necessity to pass the civil examinations. The China-embedded patrilineal political principles had not permeated yet into the society and male descendants from the sister's and daughter's side could also benefit from the law. In the graph below, the relatives eligible for the appointment are as follows:

³ Yi Söng-mu, Kwago System and its characteristics. Centering on the Goryeo and Early Choseon Periods, Korea Journal, Vol.21 No.7 July 1981

⁴ 박용운, 1997, 高麗時代 官階·官職 研究, 고려대학교 출판부, p. 12

⁵ Most of the information on ranks and positions of the appointees can be found in the 75th and 76th volume of the Goryeosa (高麗史); a table presenting ranks eligible for Eumseo has been included in "고려의 과거제도"("The Gwageo System of Goryeo") by Heo Hong Sik, p. 268



The Eumseo in records carries different titles, and the form depends, among others, on what member of a family it was bestowed.

Relative	Title
Son	Bueum 父蔭
Grandson from the son's side	Joeum 祖蔭
Grandson from the daughter's side	Wejoeum 外祖蔭
Son-in-law	Chobueum 妻父蔭
Brother	Hyeongueum 兄蔭
Brother's son	Baekbueum 伯父蔭 Sukbueum 叔父蔭
Sister's son	Saenggueum 甥舅蔭

Among various titles related to Eumso which can be found in documents, there are such as Muneum (門蔭), Gaeum (家蔭), Munja (門資), Mungong (門功)⁶ etcetera. The titles in the table above indicate the family status of the recipient. The most important terminology, however, is the

⁶ 김용선, 高麗蔭敘制度研究, 財團法人 韓國研究院, 1987, pp. 6, 24

one that indicates whether the Protected Appointment was bestowed as a “regular” or “special” favor.

The Protected Appointment given in a regular manner and to a regular post was recorded as a Muneum (門蔭). Muneum constituted the majority of appointments and in the original documents it is usually recorded along with names of officials with the highest ranks. The second group of appointments constitutes Gongeum (功蔭), given on the base of a special merit. The number of Gongeum increased in difficult times and circumstances, when officials were able to distinguish themselves in their service to the king and gain his esteem along with additional favors. In the case of Gongeum the monarch was apparently more liberal with ranks, as it appears that some appointments were given to people below the 5th rank and in general it operated on more irregular terms.⁷ Moreover, Gongeum could be bestowed on an official who retired or died. Another difference between the two kinds of appointment was that officials were chosen for Muneum year-round, while Gongeum appointments were announced during special functions and festivals. Gongeum should not be confused with honorary posts; these had their own function and status within the bureaucratic system. There is a number of appointments which cannot be ascribed to either of the two kinds.

There is a question whether an official could obtain an appointment only for one member of his family or more or be given the privilege twice for the same member. Certainly a principle existed on one appointment per an official (one person per a family, Il-In-Il-Ja, 一人一子), although sources indicate that there were exemptions to this rule. First of all, the regular appointment, Muneum, was given only once to a person.⁸ Gongeum, however, as a special favor depending on a person’s merit as well as extraordinary circumstances was exercised more liberally. Kim (1987) did a research into 83 cases of Protected Appointments’ holders and their personal data and came to a conclusion that 13 officials were able to obtain governmental posts for at least two members of their families, while five descendants (usually sons or grandsons) received appointments twice.⁹ This would indicate that the institution of Eumseo was pretty flexible and that in special cases a high rank official could make it easier for more than one of his relatives to enter the bureaucracy.

The table below presents a summary of appointments, based on the available data of Eumseo beneficiaries enclosed in the Goryeosa:¹⁰ In the brackets I put the closest relatives selected through the Protected Appointment.

⁷ 김용선, op.cit. pp. 59-64

⁸ 박용운, op.dit. pp. 290-291

⁹ 김용선, op.cit. pp. 84-89

¹⁰ The table is based on more detailed tables of the 201 appointees by Kim Yong Seon (김용선), op. cit. pp. 97, 70-71

Kind of Protected Appointment/ period	1009-1170	1170-1274	1274-1351	1351-1392	Total
Muneum	33 (Son: 14, grandson: 17)	5 (Son: 3, grandson: 2)	5 (Son: 5)	0	43
Gongyeum	35 (Son: 17, grandson: 1)	2	1 (Son: 1)	3 (Son: 2, grandson: 1)	41
Other appointments	47	24	24	22	117
Total	115	31	30	25	201

It is quite apparent that the sons and grandsons were given priority in the system, although we are not able to identify what relatives were granted with posts in the unspecified appointments, which make quite a large part of Eumseo. It requires more study to define precisely their character and function. Moreover, toward the end of the Goryeo period the number of chosen officials is visibly shrinking. It is obviously possible that there were more appointments executed during the Goryeo dynasty period, on which original sources have been lost, but even judging by this "sample" the scope of Eumseo does not seem large. It might mean that the Protected Appointment not necessarily was the most sought-after career path, but on this topic I will elaborate in the next chapter.

2. The Protected Appointment and the Gwageo System.

The Gwageo system was introduced during king Kwanjong's reign, in 958, following the example of the imperial examination system of Tang China. The examinations were developed in China at the beginning of the 7th century and Korea was pretty late with accepting it into its own political system. At the end of 9th century Korean scholars, educated in Tang, became strong supporters of abolishing the Silla rank system which strongly prevented the upward movement of rank-ascribed individuals in the society and obtaining higher positions in the government by the lower ranks; the political power was trapped within a small group of the privileged elite. The creation of the examination system in 958 was supposed to become the base for a government led by talented and highly educated public servants, but also to help in the centralization of power. The major threat for the state's unity and the stability of the new dynasty were local aristocratic clans, which accumulated wealth and land in the provinces and thus were able to exert

considerable pressure on the central government or at least evade its control. The countermeasure was to keep the local aristocrats close to the capital and the king, and the examination system became an instrument bounding them to the central bureaucracy.

At the beginning the number of examination passers was rather small. The significance of Gwageo rose during king Seongjong's reign, when the system became more diversified and several kinds of exams for governmental functionaries put in force. Candidates for examinees were selected through the Hyanggeoriseon(鄕舉理選) system, in which applicants had to receive recommendations from the local offices before going to the capital to sit for examinations. Prior to this a candidate for Gwageo attended the National Academy or one of the private schools to receive adequate education.¹¹ Preparations for the examinations were decidedly more time and resource-consuming than the Protected Appointment. Gwageo had been in operation for over a half of century when Eumseo was established and it was the examination system that became the foundation of Goryeo's administration. As it was mentioned already, due to the scarcity of original documents the estimation of the exact number of those who obtained governmental positions through the Official Examination (Yebusi) and those who advanced through the Protected Appointment is pretty difficult. We lack, for example, the code of law related to the recruitment for government posts which must have existed in those times. In the comparison of the two recruitment systems the outcome is as follows:

a) The number of appointments.

In the case of Gwageo passers their number fluctuated from merely five in the year when the examination system was introduced (958), reached 100 at the end of king Seongjong's reign, 400 during king Yejong's reign, over 500 during king's Gojong's reign and fell to around 300 at the end of the dynasty.¹² Obviously not all of the successful passers were recruited into the government, but at least half of them received posts. The selection of the Eumseo appointees was made rather regularly, but still the number is smaller than the examination passers. Toward the end of the Goryeo period the rank of those eligible for the Protected Appointment underwent limitation and also the number of appointees seemed to shrink.

b) Age.

The average age of appointees entering the bureaucracy through Eumseo was 15.4, while the candidates for examination naturally spent longer time studying before they could sit for an exam, and thus the average is estimated at approximately 26.¹³ According to regulations an Eumseo appointee was supposed to be at minimum 18 years old, but this rule apparently was not kept very strictly.¹⁴ Due to their younger age they might have been forced to wait till receiving a more

¹¹ 허흥식, 2005, 高麗의 科擧制度, 일조각, p. 181

¹² 허흥식, op. cit. p. 323

¹³ 허흥식, op. cit. pp. 320-321

¹⁴ 김용선, op. cit. p. 78

responsible function.

c) Eligibility.

Individuals eligible for Gwageo were either candidates chosen within the Hyanggeorison system in the provinces, the students of the National Academy in the capital or those who already were government functionaries.¹⁵ The examinations, therefore, were available for those who, by the social position and wealth, were able to give their sons adequate education. There were provinces inhabited by the commoners and the lowest class people, from where no Gwageo applicants came at all. No formal requirements were imposed on those selected via the Protected Appointment beside the rank of their progenitors and – perhaps – their special achievements in some peculiar circumstances. We may conclude, however, that status was important in both recruitment systems.

d) Availability of government posts.

For the successful passers of the Civil Examinations the highest, literary posts were available. Therefore those officials enjoyed a high esteem as well-educated and holding distinguished functions. They were selected from among the older candidates. The Protected Appointees could receive posts in administration, but to achieve a literary post some percent of them (around 40%) nevertheless took the examinations, too.¹⁶ Most of the appointees used Eumseo as a stage in the governmental career, as those already holding offices were allowed to sit for examinations. There was no guarantee, however, that a son or grandson of a high official would achieve a high position himself and transmit the privilege to the next generation. Consequently, although a certain number of the Protected Appointees chose to sit for the Civil Examination, there is not a single case known of a Civil Examination passer who would receive a Protected Appointment. Some even decided to turn down the offer of an appointment because of its relatively low prestige.

In the atmosphere of fierce competition for power and social acclaim the Gwageo passers had the upper hand thanks to the general conviction on the superiority of the examinations over an easy advancement through the appointment. The connections between the candidates studying for Gwageo and the schoolmasters, examiners and the examinees, along with other invisible on the surface but vital sociopolitical ties within clans might be the reason for the demise of Eumseo at the end of the Goryeo period.

3. The Protected Appointment and its sociopolitical background

¹⁵ Yi Söng-mu, *op.cit.*, p. 11

¹⁶ 김용선, *op.cit.* p. 102

3.1. The dispute over the character of Goryeo's political system

Goryeo is usually defined as an aristocratic society, in which influential families were first brought to the central bureaucracy and then obtained power through the Protected Appointment and the Stipend Law System.¹⁷ Indeed, many local power-holders (hojok, 豪族) at the end of Silla managed to enter the central government and become the aristocratic stratum of Goryeo.¹⁸ The conditions which were crucial to achieve political influence included wealth, usually in the form of land free of state taxes, a high rank and a high office in the public administration. In the background, however, there were the kinship and social connections that ensured the dominance in the political structure of the state. The marital ties with other powerful families or – ideally – with the ruling dynasty – were one more gate to achieving the elite status.¹⁹

For the founders of the new dynasty the point was to break the transmission of power and privileges within the hereditary lineages, as well as to overcome the influence of the wealthy landowners who gained the position of local quasi-rulers, as they were able to turn the grounds they owned in a private property beyond the control of the state. The core of the discussion among the academicians was the extent of power the aristocratic families held and whether the political system should be described as aristocratic or bureaucratic. Moreover, the proponents of defining Goryeo as an aristocratic state suggested that the Eumseo system was the key instrument (or one of the key instruments) for the aristocrats to keep the political influence within their own circle and that it consequently stood against the wishes of the Gwageo establishers to enable the talented and educated public servants to participate in the government. To put it simply, they argued that the Protected Appointment allowed the advancement through the rank of the ancestors, while the passing of the civil examinations was a matter of skill and intellectual effort, and consequently the latter was fairer and more open to the society. Their conclusion was that the two systems, based on different principles of selection, were in opposition. Such a point of view is highly one-sided and does not take into account all social and political forces that existed during the period. The political influence of feudal lords was never completely subdued by the dynasty, and at the end of the Goryeo period the royal authority eroded and the aristocratic lineages again managed to assume a strong position in the central government as well as in the provinces. This was not, however, due to the Protected Appointment that the aristocratic clans became so powerful. It was rather a set of factors working against the throne, among others the abuse of examination system. At the beginning of the Joseon period the main target of criticism by the reformers became the cliques formed by the Gwageo passers and the officials conducting

¹⁷ 김운태, 高麗 政治制度와 官僚制, 博英社 2005, pp. 201-202

¹⁸ 김운태, op.cit. pp. 7-10

¹⁹ Deuchler, Martina, 1992, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea. A Study of Society and Ideology*. Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, pp. 82-87

the examinations.²⁰ A strong royal authority could win the Gwageo competitors against each other; in the wake of its deterioration during the Mongol invasions and military coups the group of officials bound together by the examination system had inclinations to support each other in obtaining influential posts.

3.2. The Protected Appointment's role estimation.

The Protected Appointment is brought forward as one of the main culprits of the state's erosion and it is often said that through its introduction the dynasty failed to prevent the transmission of power and privileges within the aristocratic lineages. The aristocratic clans, however, had made an effort long before the Eumseo system was established to secure their social standing, positions in the bureaucracy and property within the lineage. There are a few points which I believe are crucial in the assessment of its role.

First, although the Gwageo and Eumseo were the main tools for recruitment of government and administration members, Gwageo had incomparably a bigger scope and constituted the frame of the ruling system in Goryeo. During the Seongjong's reign, when Eumseo was introduced, also the examination system became enlarged and more diversified. It is probable that both systems were intended to be complementary to each other, i.e. the talented examination passers who achieved high governmental posts were further granted the privilege to promote their offspring. It is possible, also, that the kings might want to have some influence on the appointments themselves. Secondly, Eumseo allowed obtaining only an administrative position; the most lucrative literary posts were reserved solely for those who passed the Literary Examinations. The elites of Goryeo valued the examination as an infallible proof of one's talent, and although administration employees recruited through examinations and the Protected Appointment were basically treated equally, the society hold the Gwageo passers in much higher esteem. Finally, the aristocrats of Goryeo repeatedly made attempts to secure power and influence in their hands not through enlarging the scope of Protected Appointments, but rather via creating close ties between the examiners and the passers in the form of influential coteries.

This may be a minor example, but in the "New History of Korea", translated by the Academy of Korean Studies into English, the Protected Appointment is given a very strong role in preserving the power within the aristocratic circles, on par with the Stipend Land Law.²¹ The authors argue that the two tools allowed the wealthy landowners to accumulate power and pass their privileged positions to their offspring. The Stipend Land Law certainly helped the first kings of Goryeo to accumulate power and gain support from the most influential social circles. According to the

²⁰ 허흥식, op.cit. pp. 405-412

²¹ Lee Hyun-hee, Park Sung-soo, Yoon Nae-hyun, 2005, New History of Korea, Korean Studies Series No. 30, Jimoondang, pp. 300-303

regulation the whole land under the dynasty belonged to the state and was formally re-distributed by the rulers. Later, however, the influential clans were able to restore their wealth and rebuild their position. I would not overestimate the role of the Protected Appointment in the concentration of political power in the hands of aristocrats. It is certain that the Gwageo passers began forming themselves into the elite of Goryeo early on and the examination recruiters, the examination candidates and the officials conducting the exams tended to form a group of common interest throughout the Goryeo period. Therefore those chosen via the Protected Appointment had a very good reason to turn down the offer and sit for the examination in hope for a better post as well as a better social position. The examinations were not all about "talent", as much as Eumseo was not exclusively a matter of "status".

There is no doubt that it was the examination system that became the main instrument for recruitment of government officials. Not only is the number of candidates, chosen among examination passers, but also the history of the tug of war between political factions over the control of the system indicating the importance of Gwageo. Moreover, the fluctuation of power among factions made the Protected Appointment an insufficient instrument in obtaining a lucrative position for a lifetime and assuring its continuance in the next generations. Had Eumseo turned out to be the perfect instrument to secure political influence within the aristocratic circle, the number of appointees would rise or at least would be at a similar level throughout the Goryeo period. At the end of it, however, when the grip on power by the landowners was strongest, the number of the Protected Appointments is rather insignificant. Also, the rise of Eumseo's role in recruitment would inevitably reduce the importance of Gwageo. From the perspective of an effortless advancement the Eumseo appointees would have little reason to sit for an examination. However, Gwageo passers were granted not only with higher governmental offices, but enjoyed higher prestige than the recipients of the Protected Appointment. The latter also lacked what we would call, in present-day terminology, the social net formed of examiners and colleague-examinees. There also might have been cases of a civil official's offspring not talented enough to pass the examination, but instead having to satisfy himself with a lower-level position being offered on the grounds of his progenitor's merit. To know this, however, we would have to find sources concerning the personal histories of the civil servants. In any case the role and function of the Protected Appointment is interesting as a part of study on the peculiar socio-political character of Goryeo

More research must be done concerning this topic. In many publications Goryeo period seems to be considered as a transitory/preparatory to Choseon, with the latter portrayed as a "classical" example of Korean socio-political system with a strongly bureaucratic character. Such a picture was undoubtedly enhanced by the derogatory comments on Goryeo made by Choseon chroniclers, as well as the scarcity of original sources. Within the present-day Korean academia Choseon receives incomparably more attention than any other historical period, but even Silla or

the Three Kingdoms seem to be better covered than Goryeo. Decidedly there is a need for more comparative research on the nature of governmental systems of Goryeo and Choseon, ideally including a study on the Chinese bureaucracy, too. Also the Western scholarship has yet to make its own interpretation of the character of Goryeo as a state and society.

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