

Abstract

The Public Spirit of Sarim Politics in the middle Chosun Period: Its Ideology, Structure and Change

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This study aims at examining the ideological and structural traits, and the logic of change in the traditional Chosun society from a sociological point of view. This thesis focuses on the ideology and the structure of Sarim politics in the middle Chosun period in particular. The Sarim politics was a dynamic process of alliances and conflicts among numerous socio-political powers. However, on the basis lies the logic of 'Confucian public spirit' controlling the process of Sarim politics. 'Confucian public spirit' can be defined as an orientation toward practical morality of the ruling class to pursue the benefit of the commoners and the whole society rather than their immediate class interests according to general standards. The key point is that this very public spirit played a leading role as a measure of judging legitimacy even in the middle of tense power struggle. Thus Sarim politics was established in the course of struggle over the public legitimacy, and in the same vein it was institutionalized and changed through the dynamics of the struggle.

In Chosun's ruling order based on the ideology of Neo-Confucianism, there was a claim for moral social contract. The main point of this claim was that the privileged position of the ruling Literati could be justified only in case they pursued moral politics through the ruling according to the public

spirit. In other words, when the Scholar–Bureaucrat class ruled according to private interests and against public spirit, a serious criticism and responsibility were levied on them. This was the contractual and conditional characteristic of Neo–Confucian order, and the 'theory of Confucian revolution' was available in this very context.

Sarim appeared when the public ruling spirit was seriously threatened by the privileged ruling forces, Hungu. The Hungu, the ruling branch at that time, devoted themselves to monopolize the power and sought for their socio–economic interests. They strengthened the exclusive power structure through the project of power centralization and also intended to subordinate local areas to them. In this context, they can be defined as a 'state' power. On the contrary, Sarim was an alienated 'social' power of predominantly local and decentralizing characteristics. Furthermore, they were Confucian fundamentalists who thoroughly adhered to the public principle of ruling. From the point view of Sarim, the Hungu politics not only threatened their local foundation but also violated the Neo–Confucian norms of social contract. As Confucian fundamentalists, they did not ignore the breach of contract by the Conservatives, and actively strived with them according to the public principles. 'Sawha(the literati purge)' was a dramatic result from a friction between the criticism of Sarim and the counter–criticism of Hungu.

In spite of Sawha, Sarim eventually became the ruling power and they institutionalized the public principle of ruling in actual politics. The Sarim politics called the politics of public opinion was based on this institutional system. The characteristics of Sarim politics by public opinion were as follow: first, it was a system where the public opinion of Sarim as a whole was reflected in the actual politics to secure the public spirit, and second, it also was a system which institutionalized the check and criticism of the power. These characteristics were reflected in 'Bungdang system(Confucian literati party system)' and 'balanced division' between the central and local arenas. It was a strategic result of the Sarim politics to share the check and

support between the central Bungdang and local political organizations (private academy, local society, etc) to secure the public spirit. In this sense, politics through public opinion by Sarim was an ideological model for public ruling. Thus, Bungdang system can be said to be oriented toward the balance of power and political coexistence through competition for the public spirit at the institutional level.

However, Sarim politics by the public opinion quickly declined as the public principle they had believed in became formalistic with its meaning weakened. The public spirit at this time was assessed not by the practicalities such as the benefit of the society or the self-regulation of the rulers but by the outward observance of speculative theories and formal Ye(Confucian propriety). Accordingly, the power struggle transformed from a competition for public spirit into a contest for the observance of theories and Ye in the formalistic point of view. In this process, the public principle of domination as well could not but change into a doctrinal formal logics from the practical logics of public spirit. In addition, the fundamentalistic attributes of Sarim was changed into doctrinal energy unconditionally supporting the ruling Bungdang and showing unconditional hostility toward the opposition Bungdang. The increase of political participants through the politics based on public opinion lower the chance to become the ruling power, and the resultant power struggle nullified the logics of coexistence basic to Bungdang politics. As a result, the fundamentalism of Sarim was transformed into post-institutional energy which denied the logic of Bungdang system. As the 'Bungdang system' and 'balanced division' collapsed, the ideology of public ruling could not help but weaken in Chosun society.

This thesis is composed of six chapters. Chapter I presents the main question and explains the topics and methods of this study. Chapter II reviews the existing sociological theories on East Asian societies and then introduces the basic characteristics and ruling system of Chosun society. Chapter III examines Confucianism(Neo-Confucianism) as an ideological

basis of Sarim politics in the context of history. Chapter IV discusses the social structural stance and characteristics of Sarim as a main agent of politics in the middle Chosun period, and also evaluates the institutional cases of public-opinion political they had established and their significance. Chapter V closely examines the dynamics of Sarim politics of how it was established and modified, and also analyzes the characteristics in each period. Finally, Chapter VI summarizes the contents and implications of this study.

Key words: Sarim, public spirit, ruling, fundamentalism, Confucianism, Neo-Confucian social contract, public opinion, local sphere, literati purge, Confucian literati party, moral politics