The Emergence of the 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati' in 19th-Century Japan: Rethinking the Meiji Restoration in the East Asian Context

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Abstract | The history of the Meiji Restoration has been studied primarily from a Eurocentric and modernist perspective that stresses the 'Western impact.' Yet a closer inspection of Japan during the early and mid-19th century illuminates a different and significant trend, namely the growing influence of Confucianism. This trend suggests a necessity to reconsider the political history of *Bakumatsu* (late Tokugawa Shogunate) Japan and the Meiji Restoration. From the late 18th century to the early 19th century, Japanese society witnessed the rapid increase of schools, study groups, and private academies that heightened the fever for Confucian education among samurai. Lower- and middle-class samurai, who had hardly been involved with politics, became interested and participated in it. I call this phenomenon as samurai's 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati (*shika*)' in the sense that ordinary samurai became similar to the Confucian literati (*shidafu*) of China and Chosŏn. Samurai's political participation coincided with the proliferation of the practice of writing appeal letters to the ruler and the growth of academic networks and factions. These phenomena were characteristics of what I conceptualized as the 'political culture of Confucian literati (*shitaifuteki seiji bunka*)' that emerged in Song China and prevailed in Ming China and Chosŏn. The unexpected rise of this culture in 19th-century Japan politicized ordinary samurai, who used to be merely the warriors and functionaries of the garrison state, thereby shaking the Tokugawa system. Samurai's 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati' and their activities based on the 'political culture of Confucian literati' provoked the Meiji Restoration. Despite the rapid Westernization after the Meiji Restoration, they left indelible traces and an enduring legacy.

Keywords | Meiji Restoration, Confucian literati (*shidafu/shitaifu*), political culture, Confucian politics, factional strife

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Introduction: Methodological Problems in Historical Research of the 'Early Modern'[1] Era

Historians have tended to study pre-modern East Asia while assuming modern Europe as the value standard. Scholars of the 'early modern' era or the transition period from the 'early modern' to modern era in particular, found it difficult to avoid this tendency. They regarded theories or models that deviate from modern European experiences as exceptions to the universal rule or a sign of backwardness. Therefore, historians from non-European regions have devoted themselves to finding the modern (European) elements in their fields of study in order to prove that their histories are not peculiar, but universal and not always backward but indicative of some characteristics of advanced societies.

For example, scholars of Korean history discovered 'managerially rich farmers' and conceptualized the class as the equivalent of yeoman farmers of Europe in order to demonstrate the possibility of Korea's indigenous development toward capitalism. This is the famous theory of 'internal development'. Historians of China and Japan respectively made similar research tracks by formulating 'embryonic capitalism' and 'manufacturing in its strict sense (*gen manyu*)'.

This tendency is also evident in the field of history of thought. Maruyama Masao incessantly sought modern (European) elements from the Tokugawa period, which he found in Ogyū Sorai's logic of invention (*sakui*). Reducing the orthodox Neo-Confucian values to the ideology of order and discipline, Maruyama ended up closing possibilities for further research. We can see a parallel between Maruyama and Korean historians who intensely studied *Silhak*, or the Practical School of Confucianism. In a similar way, the left wing of the Wang Yangming School and Li Zhi (often known by his pseudonym Zhuowu) came under the spotlight in the Chinese history of thought.

Is it, however, justifiable to presuppose the modern era as the historical stage or goal for early modern East Asian societies to reach as if they were wandering around in a maze when the exit (i.e. Western modernity) was right before their eyes? Was it inevitable for East Asian societies to enter into the modern era in the 17th and 18th centuries, or even in the 19th century? Historians consider the history prior to the advent of modern Europe as a transition from 'early modern'

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1. There is no consensus on the periodization that encompasses East Asia. This paper uses the term early modern according to the periodization that is in wide use in Japanese academia. In this case, 'early modern' refers to the period that followed Song China, early Chosŏn, and the Warring States period in Japan, respectively. However, this is only for the sake of convenience. Therefore I shall use early modern in quotations throughout the paper.

to modern, or a path toward the modern era. Does this framework reflect the historical reality? It is difficult to speculate how East Asian societies would have progressed if modern Europe did not reach East Asia. Yet we can imagine that these societies could have appeared quite different from modern Europe. East Asia and Europe (and other societies) in their 'early modern' periods had developed their own systems. Around the late 18th century, however, Europe saw an unprecedented leap, which was modernization. Modern Europe soon began to surpass other existing civilizations in terms of military force, wealth, and attraction. Although Western modernization may have become a superior and universal path at present, it was not a self-evident process to the 'early modern' East Asians. Therefore, it is problematic to assume the progress of Western modernization as universal, normative, and superior, thereby applying it teleologically even to history prior to the modern period. Historical studies on 'early modern' East Asia need to avoid applying the concepts and models that were derived from the historical experiences of modern Europe.

To prevent misunderstanding, I must note that I do not deny or underestimate the achievements of modern Europe and their significance. Rather, I consider that modern Europe brought more epoch-making changes than any previous periods in world history. In this light, I am skeptical about the recent tendency to juxtapose the 'early modern' period of East Asia with the modern era of Europe by calling the former the 'proto-modern' period or the 'Confucian modern' period. I also have reservations about the claim that the historical transformation toward the 'early modern' era brought greater changes than modernization because early modern elements such as village communities and the family system remained strong into the late 19th and 20th centuries (Miyajima 2011). I define the term modern era narrowly to describe the particular phenomena that evolved rapidly due to a number of factors, including coincidences and Europeans' fierce determination during this specific time period in European history.

However, acknowledging the epochal achievements of the modern period is one thing and approving the research methodology that applies Western standard of modernity to East Asia is another. Considering my evaluation of the modern era as a modernist view is acceptable, since I indeed value the historical achievements and the significance of European modernity. Nevertheless, we should avoid maintaining this modernist approach to pre-modern East Asian history.

Within the history of research mentioned above, the political history of 'early modern' East Asia is in a slightly peculiar position. In the political history of the 'early modern' era, parliamentarianism, democracy, and constitutionalism

are the counterparts to embryonic capitalism in economic history and the logic of invention in the history of thought. Yet these concepts are far removed from the political history of early modern East Asia, and efforts to derive a parallel connection have not properly begun. In other words, compared to other fields of research, there was little room for modernist interpretations in the political history of 'early modern' East Asia. It is true that some scholars attempted to compare the factional politics in the Chosŏn dynasty to modern party politics and to prove the formation of a civil society in late imperial China. However, these studies had only limited influence compared to the theory of embryonic capitalism and the in-depth studies on Ogyū Sorai in Japan and on scholars of the Practical School of Confucianism in Korea. As a result, while relatively free from the modernist bias, the field lagged behind in the effort to offer a comprehensive historical account that covers the entire political history of 'early modern' East Asia. In other words, the political historians of 'early modern' East Asia have focused too much on individual fields of specialty to create a common language in which conversations across specific periods and national borders can occur.

In order to overcome this situation, we first need to create an explanatory framework by carefully examining the political development of 'early modern' East Asia. Then we should establish a comprehensive political history of 'early modern' East Asia on the basis of the framework, instead of the modern European model. Of course, given that history as a discipline is premised upon modern concepts and languages of the West, this may be a seemingly impossible task. Nevertheless, I decided to take this challenge, although it is far beyond my ability, with a hope to provide even a small clue to this academic pursuit.

What would happen if we apply the aforementioned methodology to the political history of the late years of the Shogunate (hereafter, the *Bakumatsu* period, 1850s-'60s) and the process of the Meiji Restoration? Until recently, political historians of the Meiji Restoration have usually adopted the aforementioned modernist approach that stresses the unilateral Western impact. Yet the empirical studies of the samurai class in the 19th century indicate the notable Confucianization of the samurai class rather than the emergence of modernity. According to contemporary historical sources, Japan in the 19th century fell into the golden age of the Zhu Xi school of Neo-Confucianism. This implies that prior to the Western Impact, the Confucian influence had already shaken and transformed the Shogunate regime, a military state not suitable to the civilian rule advocated by Confucianism. Thus, this study intends to explain this process in light of the emergence of the political culture of Confucian literati (*shitaifu* in Japanese, *shidafu* in Chinese).

This article provides a comprehensive frame of reference that positions the political history of the Meiji Restoration within the political history of East Asia. To this end, it expands and refines the ideas and questions raised in my two earlier works (Park Hun 2010b, 2012) published in Japanese. In this study, I propose the concept of the 'political culture of Confucian literati (*shitaifuteki seiji bunka*),' by developing the 'Confucian political culture,' the concept I formulated in my previous study. In so doing, I attempt to offer an integrated understanding of the political history of 'early modern' East Asia and that of the Meiji Restoration.

Political History of 'Early Modern' East Asia and Political Culture Theory: Evaluation and Criticism of the Theory on Confucianism-Based Political Culture

In a similar approach to mine, Fukaya Katsumi, a scholar of 'early modern' history in Japan, has suggested the theory on East Asian political culture and the theory on Confucianism-centered political culture.[2] While consciously relativizing modern concepts, Fukaya has endeavored to analyze East Asia, including Chosŏn, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Ryūkyū, from a comparative and comprehensive perspective. He has researched a wide range of topics, such as political history, the history of village communities, and the history of peasant movements. My study primarily deals with his work on the political culture of Tokugawa Japan. Fukaya's argument can be summarized as follows.

The rulers of the Tokugawa Shogunate established after the long warring states period promoted the core of Confucian political thoughts—people as the base of the state and a benevolent government to achieve the stability of their rule. At the time, small farm holdings flourished in rural communities as a result of epoch-making productivity increases, and social reorganization. Relying on the principles of Confucian ruling, small farmers maintained a stable reproduction system and paid taxes. According to Fukaya, these small farmers were public individuals (*kōmin*) who should be protected or who were entitled to request their protection under the ruling principle of 'people as the base of the state' and 'benevolent government,' as long as they fulfilled their duties of diligent labor and tax payment. He called this system a 'mutual contract (*sōgo yakutei*)' between the rulers and the ruled. During the Tokugawa era, there was a social climate, or 'political culture' in which if one party violated the contract,

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2. I have consulted Fukaya (2000, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2012).

the other party could demand correction. Thus, when a ruler forcibly engaged in excessive exploitation, the ruled could justify their protest by evoking the Confucian principle of 'people as base of the state' and 'benevolent government,' or the mutual contract between them. And what fundamentally regulated this political culture was the 'East Asian political culture' that had Confucianism as its nucleus. In this regard, Japan in the Tokugawa era became homogeneous with other East Asian countries such as Qing China and Chosŏn Korea.

Fukaya's study is unquestionably intriguing in several aspects: It is a rare attempt to introduce the concept of 'political culture' in order to assess the political situation in the Tokugawa era from a long-term and comprehensive perspective.[3] It also attempts to subvert the approaches of Marxist historians that emphasize the rulers' unilateral exploitation of people and the people's fierce resistance against it. However, there are a few points in his theories which need to be reexamined.

First, there are considerable differences in how the concept of 'political culture' is understood in both his study and mine (Park Hun 2012). In Fukaya's discussion, the political culture focuses on overarching governing ideologies that underpin the rule of the dynasty, such as a benevolent government by a virtuous ruler, a people-based state, prosperity of the people as a priority, people as public individuals, and the mandate of heaven as a transcendent power beyond the state. Also, Fukaya focuses on the ruler-people relations, as he basically considers the reactions of the people to the rulers and the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in terms of their mutual contract. In contrast, political culture in my study primarily refers to the political norms and conventions and the means of political actions that fundamentally regulate a range of activities such as decision-making processes, power struggles, political organizations, and expression of political views. Applying a much more limited definition than Fukaya, it concentrates on the relationship between the ruler and his officials/Confucian literati (*shin/shi*) rather than the relationship between the ruler and the common people, and especially on the political actions of officials and samurai. (Of course, the boundaries of Confucian literati were fluid, as is explained later, and even government functionaries (*ri*) and people began to assume the role of Confucian literati towards the *Bakumatsu* period.)

Fukaya's discussion of political culture in East Asian countries warrants serious attention, since it clarifies the fundamental differences of the 'legal

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3. Cho Kyŏng-dal (2008, 2009) and Pae Hang-sŏp (2010) examined the political history of Chosŏn by using the concept of 'political culture.'

civilization of East Asia' from other parts of the world and the basic characteristics of East Asian political culture from a broad perspective. However, there are some problems with his definition. First, if we follow his reasoning, the 'early modern' period, ranging from the early to late Tokugawa era, is uniformly characterized by this concept of 'Confucianism-based political culture.' This neglects the changes made in the 'early modern' centuries.[4] In other words, early and late 'early modern' periods are treated uniformly. The second half and the end of the 18th century were more important eras than the early Tokugawa period in terms of the spread of Confucian influences in Tokugawa society. An observation of the political community of samurai, in particular, reveals that there was a major change in the transition period from the late 18th to early 19th century. In order to understand such change within the East Asian context, this paper suggests a new concept, 'the political culture of Confucian literati.' The 'political culture of Confucian literati' is effective in explaining the changes and differences between the early Tokugawa period and the *Bakumatsu* period. Similarly, if we apply Fukaya's theory to Chinese political history, we cannot demonstrate the differences between Ming and Qing, thereby overemphasizing the continuities and uniformity between Ming and Qing.[5]

Second, Fukaya underestimates the differences among Chosŏn, China, Japan, and Vietnam. The overemphasis on their basic commonalities (basic elements of political culture common to East Asia) prevents us from capturing the dynamism of the political history of each country/religion. The dynamism varied according to the degree of the basic commonalities' influence and to the resistance, rejection, and separation from the supposedly common political culture. As a result, it will be hard to explain the coexistence and competition of diverse political cultures that existed in East Asian countries, along with the presence of different political systems, and their replacement and transformation. This results from his attempt to re-interpret the Tokugawa era with the intention of highlighting the commonalities within East Asia. However, the blanket generalization of the commonalities only undermines the credibility of his arguments.

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4. In his recent book, Fukaya (2012) tries to explain the ancient and medieval history of Japan by applying his concept of 'Confucianism-based political culture.' In that case, the concept becomes a trans-historical concept and might lose its usefulness as an analytic tool.

5. Miyajima's 'Confucian state model' also has the same problem. The New Qing History, which emerged as the popular view in Chinese studies, made us cautious about framing Qing China as a 'Confucian state' and its political culture as Confucian. Sugiyama's recent work convincingly discussed the similarity between Qing China's ruling system and Tokugawa Japan's *bakuhan* system (Sugiyama 2008). Fukaya and Miyajima share this problem because they neglect the influence of northern races by overemphasizing 'the superiority of Confucianism' (Kishimoto 2011, 236).

Third, Fukaya's theory of political culture renders ruler-people relationship as the main axis. Thus it does not properly assess the political leadership of samurai. This is perhaps due to the fact that he has primarily researched people's protests (*ikki*) and village communities rather than samurai society or political activities of the elite. It is imperative to analyze the political activities of the samurai and their relationship with the ruler in order to shed light on the politics of the time. This study applies the concept of political culture to samurai, as will be discussed in more detail below.

The 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati' as a Conceptual Tool for Understanding the Political History of 'Early Modern' East Asia

1. Historical Position of the 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati'

If we define the concept of 'political culture' rather narrowly, as described above, the political culture that existed throughout the history of East Asia can be divided into several types. Hypothetically, political culture can be classified into Confucian political culture, Legalist political culture, Buddhist political culture, nomadic political culture, and warrior political culture. These various types mutually influenced one another, and in many cases, a political system maintained itself by skillfully blending and utilizing multiple political cultures. Of course, Confucian political culture was dominant, compared to the others.

I have defined 'Confucian political culture (*Jukyōteki seiji bunka*)' as 'a political thought, structure, and behavior' that earlier Confucian classics or present Confucian politicians consider as ideal. I incorporated factions, which had consistently impeded the ideal state of politics and thus had been a subject of criticism, as the main feature of the political culture of a Confucian state (Park Hun 2012). The 'Confucian political culture,' however, can cover a wider range of systems and activities according to different views. For example, a regime with a powerful monarch that did not allow letters presented to a superior or any form of factions (e.g. Qing Dynasty) can be Confucian. Even if a political system weakened or banned the activities characteristic of Confucian political culture such as writing letters presented to a superior, serving as remonstrators, and founding schools of thought and factions, it is still possible to render the system as 'Confucian.' In other words, the 'Confucian political culture' defined in my earlier paper is just one of the subcategories of broader 'Confucian political culture.' In this light, it is necessary to divide this concept

into several subcategories in order to explain the systems more efficiently. Therefore, this paper hypothetically divides it into the political cultures of a despotic monarch, a coalition between monarch and aristocrats, power holders, and Confucian literati.[6]

Even when one subcategory held a dominant position, there were tensions and conflicts with the others. The subcategories coexisted in various combinations, depending on power relations and the time period. However, the culture of Confucian literati was most desirable for the majority of Confucian intellectuals. In China, we can find some elements of 'the political culture of Confucian literati' since ancient times. Yet in order for these elements to continuously affect society and establish a political system, several preconditions were necessary, as I shall discuss in the following section. These preconditions were fulfilled only after the Song period.

2. Contents and Characteristics of the 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati'

This paper defines the contents and characteristics of the 'political culture of Confucian literati' as follows:

(1) Confucian literati who took 'academic capability' as their political asset, actively engaged in politics, and expressed political opinions while priding themselves as joint rulers, together with the monarch.[7] The civil service examination enabled fair recruitment of these elite, and they utilized appeal letters to the monarch and lectures as means of making political claims. Regardless of their duties, the most critical concerns were 'the important matters of world and state.' It was their duty and right to have concerns with political affairs beyond their immediate office duties and expressing their opinions of them. As will be discussed later, this was a decisive difference from the majority of samurai who were just assigned the role of petty officials in the Tokugawa

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6. When following this classification, the political culture under the Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing Dynasty can be defined as the combination of despotic monarchy and nomadic political culture.

7. After the Song dynasty, the Confucian literati class of China and Chosŏn was no longer a hereditary social status, as was the case for the aristocracy in Europe. Also, it is widely known that the Confucian literati were highly dependent on the state in terms of land management. The sole basis of their social and political power came from their academic authority. The samurai class during the Tokugawa era remained a hereditary social status, but they were excluded from land management through the separation of military and agriculture (Miyajima 1994, 2003, 2006). The sole basis of their power came from their military art and virtue.

era. When samurai wanted to 'assume the role of Confucian literati,' going beyond the role of functionaries, a new type of political agent was formed in Japan.

(2) Sovereign-subject relationship was based on righteousness, not on blind loyalty to the sovereign. The subject actively counseled, guided and checked on the sovereign to achieve this righteousness. In this sense, the sovereign in the 'political culture of Confucian literati' was neither a tyrant nor an absolute monarch. It may not be a proper analogy, but just as a constitutional monarch can exercise his power only within the boundaries of constitutional provisions, ideally, the monarch was not supposed to exert his power in an arbitrary manner beyond the norms dictated by Confucian righteousness and principle. An extreme expression of subordination of monarch power to righteousness was the doctrine of rightful coup d'état. Of course, this was an extreme and exceptional case even in 'the political culture of Confucian literati.'

(3) Confucian literati used remonstrance (especially remonstrators), appeal letters to the monarch, and lectures in schools and royal courts as a primary means of expressing their political opinions. Writing an effective appeal letter to the monarch required superb literary qualities such as relevance of content, extensive references to classical precedents, and elegant composition styles. Therefore, academic ability was crucial for expressing political opinions. In order for appeal letters to exercise political power, they needed to be connected with the 'public discussions.' The appeal letter to the monarch could then have far-reaching political power through self-justification that it reflected 'public discussions.' Of course, the 'public discussions' implied the orthodox value of reasonable arguments (*seiron*), but it often meant the majority opinion. Therefore, politics based on 'public discussions' had features characteristic of politics based on public opinion, and appeal letters functioned as a communica-tion channel for majority voices to reach the monarch.

(4) Confucian literati was not a status given by birth, but attained by accumulation of learning. Therefore, it was common to form relationships, networks, and organizations centered around learning. This included various patterns: forming an school of thought around an academic leader (masters and disciples formed academic relations for generations and they tended to hold exclusive attitudes to other schools, as seen especially in Chosŏn); creating connections through educational institutions such as schools (public schools in the capital city, local schools attached to Confucian shrines, privately-owned lecture halls); building a loose academic network around study societies, like those in late Tokugawa Japan. I refer to all of these cases as an 'academic network' (Park Hun 2012, 31-32). In other words, this academic network formed

the base for Confucian literati's political activities and, in many cases, for political discussions. This is the most important feature of the 'the political culture of Confucian literati,' which distinguishes the politics of East Asia from that of other civilizations.

(5) Various political forces (factions) in this academic network continuously competed against one another, which led to factional politics. Political struggles among factions created strife. Under the influence of the Confucian aphorism 'gentlemen ought not to create factions' ("The Chapter of Transmission [*Shuer*]" of *The Analects of Confucius*), forming factions had been the subject of criticism. However, towards the 'early modern' era when the 'political culture of Confucian literati' was formed, Confucian literati became active in politics, which naturally caused factions. Accordingly, political discourses emerged to justify these divisions. "The Theory of Factional Politics" of Ou Yangxiu legitimized a single righteous faction composed of Confucian gentlemen (*junzi*). Although it did not favor strife among different groups, it is still remarkable that the Ou Yangxiu justified the faction of Confucian literati. Factional strife actually prevailed in Chosŏn. In 17th-century Chosŏn, multiple factions coexisted, and they were even ideologically justified (O Su-ch'ang 1985).

However, as represented by "The Imperially Commissioned Discourse on Factions" by the Yongzheng Emperor, negative and cautious approaches towards factions dominated the political discourse. Confucian literati faced a dilemma, as they naturally formed factions in their political actions while condemning factions in their discourses (Yoshida Shōin and Yokoi Shōnan in the late Tokugawa era criticized factions but they ended up joining one [Park Hun 2012, 32]). In order to escape from this dilemma, sometimes Confucian literati had to give in to the monarch's demand to dissolve factions, and other times they tried to defend their factional affiliation by invoking the theory of single righteous faction composed of Confucian gentlemen. However, the political discourses of these groups could not evolve into a theory that would advocate peaceful co-existence among multiple parties.[8]

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8. This phenomenon may be ascribable to the Confucian conception of the principle (*li*) as the sole truth. Under the influence of this idea, the Liberal Party (*Jiyūtō*) designated itself as the righteous faction of Confucian gentlemen and insisted on 'the elimination of false parties' during the early Meiji era. The Constitutional Reform Party (*Rikken Kaishintō*) also set turning itself into the sole political party as its goal in its party platform. This single party affinity might be an essential element of the present East Asian political culture/system if we consider the following: the aversion to party politics in Taishō Japan and the replacement of political parties by the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (*Taisei Yokusankai*); the Liberal Democratic Party's decades-long single party rule based on democratic elections in postwar Japan; the current aversion to political parties in Korea and Japan; the general approval of 'the beneficent rule by wise men' in China

(6) Factional politics played an important role in strengthening the public nature of the political process by allowing a larger number of community members to participate and publicizing political agendas through mutual control and competition. Thus, factional politics in East Asia had a great historical significance when compared to the politics of other cultures. However, the failure in creating a system for peaceful coexistence among multiple factions caused excessive competition, which led to strife and violent retaliation against opponents after taking power (e.g. the multiple turn of the state [*hwanguk*] that drove losing factions completely out of power with executions and exiles and the relentless factional strife in the domain of Mito in the *Bakumatsu* period). The violent nature of these conflicts and the privatization of the faction by a few hands provided a plausible excuse for the forces that tried to suppress the 'political culture of Confucian literati'.

(7) When fierce power struggles and foreign threats took place under the 'political culture of Confucian literati,' the number of people 'assuming the role of Confucian literati' increased dramatically. This does not imply a change in social status. Rather, it refers to the politicization of politically inactive intellectuals (particularly local literati) and also to the phenomenon in which lower functionaries and commoners assumed the role of Confucian literati and acted as such. 'Assuming the role of Confucian literati' in this light is a category of political behavior.

This phenomenon of 'assuming the role of Confucian literati' spread throughout the country in the formation of 'national politics' (Kim Sang-jun 2011, Ch. 10).[9] Such examples are the *Donglin* Faction, the Restoration Society (*Fushe*) Movement, and the people's uprisings from the late Ming dynasty to the early Qing dynasty, as well as the Ritual (*yesong*) Disputes that led to heated politics in the 17th-century Chosŏn. However, the clearest example is Japan's samurai class in the *Bakumatsu* period.

(8) Supporters of 'the political culture of Confucian literati' officially approved the monarch's direct rule as a norm. This was because they believed that their political ideal, namely righteousness, could be achieved only through the

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(Yokoyama 2000) as seen in Sun Yat-sen's concepts of military rule (*junzheng*) and political tutelage (*xunzheng*), and the continued rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

9. Kim Sang-jun (2011) suggests that Confucian national politics had the potential to develop into modern democratic politics. Yet I do not agree with this perspective. As the term 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati' implies, political participation was granted to literati, not the general people. It is possible to hypothetically discuss the greatest degree of political participation in political systems other than democracy. Yet a closer examination is necessary, as there is a gap between such political participation and democracy.

sovereign's direct rule. Apart from this principle, they also worried that the absence of the monarch's direct rule might entail an 'abnormal' power structure against which they cautioned. Politics by the king's maternal relatives, eunuchs, or figures of authority exemplified this abnormal power structure. Of course, in reality it was common that incompetent and lazy monarchs neglected their duties of direct rule. Still, the monarch's direct rule remained as an ideal for the advocates of the 'political culture of Confucian literati' and an important cause in the power struggle to restore this political culture against the 'abnormal' power structure.

(9) The virtuous ruler was crucial for the monarch's direct rule. Therefore, the ruler was called to study. This idea can be rarely found in other civilizations. It was not uncommon, as seen in Chosŏn, for the king to have to attend royal lectures (*kyŏngyŏn*) supervised by his subjects, and imperial tutors urged him to study even before his enthronement.[10] Interestingly, direct rule by the virtuous ruler was closely related to the 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati.' Insofar as the 'assumption' did not mean democratization, the politicized Confucian literati's loyalty remained with the virtuous ruler. Many literati actually politicized themselves under the slogan of removing from power the treacherous individuals around the ruler. In other words, the monarch's direct rule is a representation of a wide range of politicized agents.[11] In this regard, it would be misleading to consider the politicization of Confucian literati simply as a sprout of democracy.

This section has discussed the contents and the characteristics of the 'political culture of Confucian literati.' In reality, only a few time periods witnessed the realization of this culture. Nevertheless, a wide range of Confucian literati tried to realize this particular culture to make politics public and to achieve greater political participation. While competing with and compensating other political cultures, the 'political culture of Confucian literati' had remained as an antithesis to different political models.

Among the different types of politics that existed in East Asia, the 'political culture of Confucian literati' allowed for the most extensive range of political participation. In this cultural milieu the political participation was extended to the lowest levels of intellectuals, to government functionaries, and even to commoners who 'assumed the role of Confucian literati.' I would argue that the 'political culture of Confucian literati' enabled the greatest degree of people's

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10. In the *Bakumatsu* period, lecturers or tutors for the feudal lords frequently made political expressions. This reached its peak with the royal advisors led by Motoda Nagazane who argued for the emperor's direct rule in the early Meiji era.

11. I owe this idea to Professor Park Hwan-Moo at Kunkook University.

participation in East Asia and in world history, with the exception of democracy with universal suffrage.

The Trajectory of the 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati' in China and Chosŏn

1. Trajectory of the 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati' in China

The above section discussed the implications of the 'political culture of Confucian literati'. This culture had existed in ancient and medieval China. Yet its formation as a coherent and systematic political model dates only back to the Song dynasty. Scholars have often explained the fall of the aristocracy and the rise of imperial autocracy with regards to the Tang-Song transition. Yet we need to take the parallel rise of the 'political culture of Confucian literati' into consideration.

Hypothetically speaking, the following are the conditions that contributed to the formation of the 'political culture of Confucian literati': the revival of Confucianism and the birth of the Zhu Xi school of Neo-Confucianism in the Song dynasty, as opposed to Buddhism's domination; the formation of a large, Confucian intellectual class that had little control over land with scholarship as its ultimate base for political and cultural authority; the establishment of civil service examinations; the dissemination of books and schools fostering Confucian scholarship and education (through the development of the printing industry and local economy); the formation of a nation-wide political network enabling national politics (based on the commercial network and the post station network); the growth of Confucian literati's population and its nationwide dispersal.

However, the 'political culture of scholar officials' did not always dominate the East Asian politics since its formation. Japan's samurai society was reluctant to accept it. Its trajectories in China and Korea varied. In China, the 'political culture of Confucian literati' was perhaps most prevalent during the Ming dynasty. The supervisory officials (*kedaoguan*) served as remonstrators (*yanguan*). The Confucian literati's academic networks were also in active operation. Appeal letters to the emperor played a political role despite various regulations. In this regard, the *Donglin* Faction and the Restoration Society Movement, which denounced eunuchs' political power in the late Ming dynasty, clearly demonstrate the presence of the 'political culture of Confucian literati.'

However, throughout Chinese history, powerful emperors and conqueror

dynasties frequently constricted the influence of these intellectuals. Particularly during the Qing dynasty, in many regions, except for the eighteen internal provinces of the Han Chinese, this style of politics rarely existed. And even within the eighteen internal provinces, the 'political culture of Confucian literati' was not so vital, due to the emperor's autocratic power. The literary inquisition (*wenziyu*) of the conqueror dynasty suppressed the vitality of the Confucian literati from the late Ming dynasty to the early Qing dynasty. According to the classification of political culture used in this paper, the Qing dynasty had a mixture of despotic monarchy (a subcategory of Confucian political culture) and nomadic political culture.

Decision-making in the Qing court was initially made at the assembly body, consisting of the Manchu princes and imperial aristocrats belonging to the eight banners. However, they were not Confucian literati, and the assembly inherited the decision-making structure indigenous to the Manchurians (Sugiyama 2008). The Office of Military Affairs soon replaced it. Yet the Office was still close to an advisory board or a staff organization consisting of the members appointed by the emperor's arbitrary will. Therefore, it is difficult to see the organization as a deliberative body of Confucian literati.[12] And it was difficult to balance the power of the emperor under this system. Inspectors' authority (*douchayuan*) did not function properly. In the Qing dynasty, it was hard to significantly criticize the emperor and the court through remonstrators (Ch'a Hye-wŏn 2004).

Confucian literati rarely wrote appeal letters to the emperor. Unlike the Royal Confucian Academy's (*Sŏnggyun'gwan*) students in Chosŏn, the Imperial Academy's (*Guozijian*) students in Beijing rarely made political expressions. Provincial Confucian literati (gentry) also rarely wrote to the emperor, the central court, or the governor-general and governor-provincial rulers. Instead, palace memorials (*zouzhe*) prevailed. However, the palace memorial was a closed-communication route between the official and the emperor, which was designed to exchange thoughts over specific issues in a one-to-one communication scheme. It was totally different from appeal letters. In addition, the remonstrators were excluded from these palace memorials (Ch'a Hye-wŏn 2004). Confucian literati could not organize factions. Also, it was difficult to find a meaningful objection to the Yongzheng Emperor's "Imperially Commissioned Discourse on Factions." Of course, given that civil service examinations played an important role in recruiting government officials and that the gentry class was active in local affairs, the 'political culture of Confucian literati' was partially in operation. Yet this culture dramatically weakened in the Qing dynasty. This condition

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12. On this point, I followed the suggestions of Professor Koo Bumjin at Seoul National University.

continued until the reformers of the late Qing dynasty in the 19th century, including Kang Youwei, reactivated the 'political culture of Confucian literati.'

2. The Trajectory of the 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati' in the Chosŏn Dynasty

The most vibrant 'political culture of Confucian literati' can be found in Chosŏn. The group called '*sarim* (prefectural literati)' was the agent of this political culture. In the 16th century, the entrenched ruling elite made a harsh response to the challenges of the 'political culture of Confucian literati' and inflicted a series of bloody intellectual purges. Nevertheless, Chosŏn's 'political culture of Confucian literati' firmly established itself in the national politics of the 17th and 18th centuries. Of course, there was also a movement to curb the excessive growth of this culture. "If the public opinion resides with the king, then the country will be in peace; if it exists among people, then the country will be in chaos." This maxim reflected the concerns with the influence of intellectuals. Another good example is the Policy of Impartiality (*T'angpyŏng*) adopted by monarchs in the 18th century.

However, the 'political culture of Confucian literati' took the lead in Chosŏn's politics in the 17th and 18th centuries. There existed schools based on sophisticated learning systems and the master-student relationship. Political factions built on these schools continued to compete with one another. The noble class, students in Seoul, and the Confucian students across the country engaged in political debates about current affairs in lecture halls and actively voiced opinions about central politics by writing appeal letters to the king. These opinions had great influence as the public voice of the prefectural literati. To great surprise, even to modern readers, remonstrators of the Three Censoring Organs (*Samsa*) backed by the Confucian literati sharply criticized the king and his court.

The ritual disputes developed over the proper etiquette of mourning attire in the 17th century, in particular, turned the whole country into an arena for severe political debates. The debate spread throughout the country over the issues of proper mourning procedure rites, and tens of thousands of appeal letters to the king arrived at the capital. It took only one month for the feedback letters to arrive in Seoul after the debate broke out. It is what we call the 'realization of national politics' (Kim Sang-jun 2011, 438-39). The ritual disputes spread political discussions to every corner of the country and even encouraged commoners who desired to participate in politics to 'assume the role of Confucian literati.' This level of political participation may be found in the cases

of the *Donglin* Faction and the Restoration Society Movement during the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty and the political movement during *Bakumatsu* period in Japan, whose slogan was "revere the emperor, expel the barbarians," which will be discussed later.

The nationwide expansion of the 'political culture of Confucian literati' caused chronic and intense factional strife (e.g. *hwanguk* or the multiple 'turn of the state'). Practices to maintain the 'political culture of Confucian literati,' represented by the coexistence of multiple factions, were temporarily on the rise in the 17th century. Yet attempts to exterminate rival factions banished these practices. The Policy of Impartiality attempted by King Yŏngjo and King Chŏngjo intended to counterbalance this trend. However, after the death of King Chŏngjo, the oligarchic politics by a few powerful noble families in the capital (*sedo* politics) replaced the pluralistic politics based on Confucian literati in Chosŏn.

Under the *sedo* politics, the 'political culture of Confucian literati' weakened dramatically. Written appeals to the king were limited in number and even the submitted ones were not properly processed. Factions became weak and the oligarchic politics by a few powerful families became the rule of the day. The activities of remonstrators also greatly shrank and political participation by the Royal Confucian Academy's students withered. The important fact here is that this new development eventually dismantled national politics. Families of the *sedo* system were generally based in Seoul and Kyŏnggi Province, the nearest area to the capital. Residents living in other regions than the capital lost their opportunity to participate in national politics, or they did not even try to engage with it (Park Hun 2010b). It is often said that factional strife was the demise of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Yet in the 19th century, when Chosŏn became weak, appeal letters, factional politics, and factional strife were, in fact, on the decline. In other words, when the 'political culture of Confucian literati' greatly contracted or disappeared, Chosŏn declined.

In the 19th century, when the 'political culture of Confucian literati' withered in Chosŏn, as much as in China, the same culture unexpectedly emerged in late Tokugawa Japan, the land of warriors. This brought unprecedented political dynamism to Japan, rocking the Tokugawa system to decline and ushering in a new political order.

Unexpected Emergence of the 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati' in Japan: The *Bakumatsu* Period

1. Spread of Confucianism, Education, and Changes in Samurai Society

Japan's postwar scholars, including those of the Lectures School (*Kōzaha*) have indiscriminately applied concepts extracted from the unique experiences of Europe, such as the bourgeois revolution, absolutism, and class alliances, to explain the political history of the *Bakumatsu* period. They used a similar methodology as that used in the theory of embryonic capitalism in the field of economic history or in the discussion of the logic of invention in the history of thought, as previously mentioned. It is a well-known fact that this research approach has many problems and has reached its limit. Scholars have been seriously challenging the frame of the Lectures School since the 1980s. Yet they have failed to provide a new interpretative framework that comprehensively explains the political history of this era. I intend to provide one in this paper by conceptualizing the 'political culture of Confucian literati.'

It may be unconvincing to attempt to find this culture in samurai society. However, the historical documents on the activities of the samurai class since the late 18th century reveal a significant influence of Confucianism. The domain (*han*) governments founded domain schools (*hankō*) and encouraged learning. The private academies (*shijuku*) spread throughout the country attracted young samurai. It was still important for them to practice military skills in the training grounds. Yet Japan had been a strict status society where wars and domestic riots had not occurred for a hundred years, which was a rare case compared to the other parts of the world. Therefore, learning eventually became a more effective way to improve one's status than mastering war skills. Likewise, the Confucian maxim "Do not neglect learning" can be found all over the historical documents of this period. While the conditions of their social status did not change, samurai during this period became a different type of samurai from those that had existed since the Kamakura Shogunate. I referred to this new type of samurai as 'well-read samurai' or 'Confucian literati bearing swords' (Park Hun 2012, 24).

The vassal organizations in the Tokugawa era inherited the remaining military organizations since the warring states period. Therefore, they maintained a strong militaristic tradition. Even if administrative positions (*yakukata*) held real power, military positions (*bankata*) retained socially acknowledged authority. Due to these characteristics, only a small number of

oligarchic superiors could take part in making policy decisions. Both in domains and in the shogunate, it was customary for select, high-ranking officials, including the council of elders (*rōjū*), to make decisions. They seldom had heated discussions in meetings. It was rare for them to collect a wide range of public opinion. These circumstances denote a 'freezing of politics.' Government officials were not supposed to go beyond their own official duties. When civil servants took their positions, they had to pledge not to disclose any information about their duties to other officials with different duties and even to their family members and relatives. They were hardly involved with 'matters of nation-wide or domain-wide concerns.' In other words, they were not 'Confucian literati' but 'functionaries.' Of course, their 'warrior' characteristics faded in the warless society.

The lower-rank samurai, whose salary did not exceed 100 *koku* and who accounted for 80-90 percent of the whole samurai population, had mainly 'clerical duties' such as gate guarding, procurement of *tatami*, and bookkeeping.

Table 1. Domain Schools Built[13]

Era	Number of Domain Schools	Number of New Domain Schools Built per Year
Kanbun – Jōkyō (1661-1687)	4	0.15
Genroku – Shōtoku (1688-1715)	6	0.22
Kyōho – Kanʼen (1716-1750)	18	0.53
Hōreki – Tenmei (1751-1788)	50	1.35
Kansei – Bunsei (1789-1829)	87	2.18
Tenpō – Keiō (1830-1867)	50	1.35
Meiji 1 – 4 (1868-1871)	36	12.00
Period Unknown	4	
Total	255	
Domains with an Unknown Number of Schools	21	

* I used and modified the table in Ishikawa (1977, 263).

* I rounded off the numbers to the nearest hundredth for the 'Number of New Domain Schools Built per Year.'

* The number of domain schools in 21 domains was left out of count as it is unknown.

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13. Table 1 was also featured in Park Hun (2012, 22).

Since these jobs were inherited positions, it was unlikely for them to expect to achieve a better status through their own skills and efforts alone. With no opportunity to distinguish themselves in war, those samurai had few means of escaping from their 'clerical duties.' Caught between their pride as 'warriors' and their reality of 'clerical duties,' their anxiety and dissatisfaction increased. Under the circumstances, the rapid spread of education and Confucianism toward the end of the 18th century provided them with a major breakthrough.

Table 1 shows the change in the number of domain schools that were founded as public schools. The number of domain schools started to rapidly increase around the 1750s and reached its peak between the late 18th and early 19th centuries. From then until the Meiji Restoration, the fervor for building domain schools continued. This table only shows the trends for these schools, but private academies or village schools attached to Confucian shrines (*kyōkō*) similarly grew in numbers.

The samurai and their children studied and built personal networks by attending various educational institutions or learning facilities such as domain schools, private academies, and study groups.[14] The main texts used in these institutions and facilities were Confucian books, in particular the books on the Zhu Xi school of Neo-Confucianism. The Confucian knowledge of good government naturally led to a wide range of discussions on current issues and politics. The government authorities tried to control this new development. Yet this wave of change only grew stronger when Japan's internal and external crises gradually increased. The samurai who were merely government functionaries gradually turned into politically conscious Confucian literati as they began to discuss the affairs of domains and other national issues.

2. The Spread of the 'Political Culture of Confucian Literati' and Ordinary Samurai's Political Participation

The historical trend discussed above eventually facilitated the politicization of the samurai class. The ordinary samurai, who learned Confucianism and formed personal networks through the intellectual communities, began voicing their opinions on political issues, and they became involved in political struggles. They became aggressively active in politics during imminent external

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14. In the rural areas, the enrollment in village schools increased. Students included upper-class farmers, village doctors, religious priests, and so on. Also, it is true that village schools were centers of 'assuming the role of Confucian literati' by commoners (Seya 1976). Since this paper does not consider the 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati' by common people as a main object of analysis, it will not discuss this subject further.

crises. Unprecedented political conflicts took place in each domain. When the ordinary samurai jumped into politics, they used means derived from the 'political culture of Confucian literati.'

We can find key indicators of the 'political culture of Confucian literati' in the late *Bakumatsu* period, such as the remarkable emergence of the 'academic networks,' the formation of factions based on these networks, frequent factional strife, an increase in political contents of appeal letters, and the demand for the monarch's direct rule, as I discussed in my earlier study (Park Hun 2012). In the following section, I will summarize the findings of my earlier study.

As mentioned above, ordinary samurai built new personal networks (academic networks) by attending institutions of learning, such as domain schools, private academies, and study groups. Originally, samurai belonged to duty shifts or bands, both of which originated from military organizations, and they had to obey their immediate superiors' orders. In this situation, they were not allowed to form a horizontal alliance across duty shifts or bands, and they were strictly forbidden to even transmit their opinions by bypassing the chain of command. However, as activities in learning institutions increased, samurai came to obey their academic masters, rather than their superiors, and networks began to form around their masters. In the conventional samurai-vassal organizations, such as duty shifts or bands, status distinction was strict. Yet the 'academic networks' made this hierarchy relatively less strict, and it valued academic skills and leadership.

This arena for learning also became a venue for political debates. The widespread reading clubs, in particular, exemplified this.[15] In reading clubs, the participants interpreted a text in turns, and the others responded with their individual opinions, which often turned into heated debates. Everyone had an equal footing regardless of status and rank, and it was relatively open to discuss political issues. Through this activity, the learning space gradually came to possess a political nature, and the 'academic network' also turned into a political organization.

In the *Bakumatsu* period, a number of factions proliferated in each domain. Most factions were based on their 'academic networks,' and factional strife between them aroused social concerns. The political disturbances during the *Bakumatsu* period were closely connected to these factions, and this heightened the concerns.

The factions during this time were quite different from those of the Chosŏn

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15. I once mentioned that the role of reading clubs was important when the Mito samurai were forming political networks (Park Hun 2002, 227-34). Recently Maeda (2006, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2012) highlighted the role of these reading clubs in greater detail.

dynasty in many ways. In Japan during the *Bakumatsu* period, there were strong coalitions and confrontations among different schools of thought, as seen in Mito Domain. Yet because factions in Japan were based on shared learning experiences in scholarly institutions, these groups were less exclusive and mutually porous, while their cohesiveness may pale in comparison to the rigid schools of the intellectual class found in Chosŏn. I avoided using the word 'school' here and instead used 'academic network' for this reason. During the Tenpō period (1830-1844), there were 'factions' whose members often overlapped between groups such as the Tsuboi Group and Sufu Group of Chōshū Domain; and the Sufu Group and Yoshida Shōin were not mutually exclusive all the time. Therefore, it is worthy to pay attention to Ueda Junko's criticism that the analyses of Tanaka Akira and others had limits, as they viewed *Bakumatsu* politics as confrontational and antagonistic.[16] However, even if the factional strife in Japan demonstrates different characteristics from its counterparts in Chosŏn and China, it is still true that the samurai's grouping was an unprecedented phenomenon prior to the *Bakumatsu* period; this new phenomenon has an important implication. Samurai possessed a sense of political mission that could be found among Confucian literati. And they came to be proud and confident enough to call their own political group the 'righteous party' and the others as the 'parochial party.'

For decades, a number of factions spread throughout the country and expressed their concerns and opinions. These factions initiated certain actions regarding the politics of the shogunate and domains. While the political power of provincial elites of Chosŏn and Qing China during the same period had shrunk, local samurai of Japan who had been previously prohibited from political participation started to be active in politics. An example of this was the outside lords' (*tozama daimyō*) participation in the politics of both the shogunate and Kyoto. An even more dramatic fact is that ordinary samurai of local provinces were initially involved in domain politics and eventually started to participate in central and national politics, including in both the shogunate and Kyoto, as well as foreign affairs. These samurai activists included the 'men

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16. I followed the suggestions of Ueda Junko. Refer to Ueda (2008, 2010) for details. Ueda has made a counterargument against the conventional view that perceives low-rank samurai as the main actors of the *Bakumatsu* period by introducing the role of mid- and upper-rank samurai. The concept of the samurai's 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati' can make a meaningful intervention on this point. For instance, Masuda Uemonnosuke of Chōshū and Yamanobe Yoshimi of Mito were upper-rank samurai, who joined either reformer groups or loyalist groups. Their activities exemplify the samurai's 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati.' Similarly, the massive political participation of mid- and high-rank commoners during the Meiji Restoration can be understood as the 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati' at the grassroots level.

of purpose (*shishi*)' in the *Bakumatsu* period and the supporters of the doctrine of 'revering the Emperor and expelling the barbarians.' This process established national politics in *Bakumatsu* Japan, thereby displaying and unifying the political energy of a significant proportion of the population. Taking account of the long-term political phenomena during the *Bakumatsu* period will contribute to an understanding of the formation of numerous political societies and political parties, as well as the prompt and easy organization of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in the immediate aftermath of the Meiji Restoration.

The next important point is that the samurai who 'assumed the role of Confucian literati' used appeal letters and councils as the means for their political struggles (Park Hun 2010b, 202-7). Making the most of their profound Confucian knowledge and refined and elegant writing skills, leaders of ordinary samurai frequently wrote appeal letters on political affairs. What is important here is that the main audience was usually the lords of domains. Considering that it was almost impossible for ordinary samurai to write letters to express their own opinions to the lords of domains in the Tokugawa system, this was a truly dramatic change. This shows that the 'prohibition of bypassing the chain of command in making appeals' became ineffective in reality. This, in turn, stimulated the politicization of the lords of domains, who had been previously political inactive.

On the other hand, the role of councils in the policy-making process became increasingly important. The previous system of agreements by senior retainers (*karō*) decided policies through the discussion and coalition of senior retainers, the council of elders, and relevant government officials. However, decision making required more and more councils attended by an increasing number of government officials. An increasing number of councils made policy decisions on matters of grave importance after intense discussions among numerous government officials with the presence of the lord of the domain (Inoue 1983; Ueda 1998, 1999; Mitani 2006). At this council, although status or rank still mattered, expertise, public speaking skills, or abilities to run councils were the main sources of influence. Those who emerged as influential political leaders despite their lower status were, in many cases, those who distinguished themselves in writing appeal letters or in running political councils.

Another interesting fact is that the voices demanding the establishment of a remonstrance office for governmental affairs became louder. The Tokugawa political system had no remonstrance office for the government, while the Chosŏn dynasty had Three Censoring Organs, and the Ming dynasty had supervisory officials. The role of superintendents (*metsuke*) was inspection and the transmission of the lord's orders, as its name suggested. In some cases,

superintendents played a partial role in delivering public opinion. Yet such cases were rare. Moreover, they seldom criticized the domain government or their lords. In the 19th century, however, influential reformers such as Yoshida Shōin and Fujita Tōko demanded the transformation of superintendents into remonstrators. They insisted that superintendents should collect public opinion to deliver it to the lord of the domain or the domain government, and also that they should be able to criticize their rulers if necessary. They even referred to the remonstrance office of ancient China to support their claim. They demanded a new political system with appeal letters and a remonstrance office, which is reminiscent of 17th- and 18th-century Chosŏn.

The last characteristic was the demand for the monarch's direct rule (Park Hun 2010a). As mentioned earlier, appeal letters sometimes targeted top government officials. Yet the lords of domains were the main targets. The lords of domains in the Tokugawa era, especially after the mid-Tokugawa period, rarely intervened in general administrative affairs. There were few cases in which the lords of domains intervened in the decision-making process. The lords of domains, who were originally military commanders, were not supposed to participate in politics or administration.

Instead, senior retainers or the council of elders took charge of politics. The main tasks of lords of domains were to visit the Edo Castle and to become acquainted with other feudal lords (*daimyō*) while residing in Edo. In their domains, presiding over ritual ceremonies was their main task (Kasaya 1993). However, the idea of the monarch's direct rule gained currency from the late 18th century when the 'political culture of Confucian literati' began to spread. At this time, the so-called 'wise rulers' appeared. The demand for the monarch's direct rule was one of the major components of the 'political culture of Confucian literati.' In Japan, this demand originated from the power relationship in real politics. In other words, ordinary samurai urged the lords of domains to intervene in politics by asking for their direct rule. For ordinary samurai to engage in politics, they had to replace the senior retainers-governed system with the lord's direct rule. The request for the lord's direct rule aimed at securing power in order to realize the goals defined by the 'political culture of Confucian literati.' In doing so, samurai attempted to narrow the distance between the lords of domains and themselves, and to neutralize the apparatus of hierarchy as much as possible. During this period, the 'direct relationship between one lord and ten thousand people (*ikkun banmin*)' was a commonly-used phrase. Yet, in reality, it is more accurate to interpret this phrase as the desired, close relationship between the lord and the samurai (*ikkun banshi*) who assumed the role of Confucian intellectuals. To my understanding, this demand for the lord's direct

rule possibly presaged the call for direct rule by the emperor or by the sagacious shogun, such as Yoshinobu, supported by the Hitotsubashi Group.

3. The Samurai's 'Assumption of the Role of Confucian Literati'

Through this process, a large number of samurai 'assumed the role of Confucian literati.' According to Watanabe Hiroshi, the majority of Japanese samurai took on administrative duties of government functionaries, unlike the Chinese Confucian literati (Watanabe 1985, 104). In fact, many of the tasks conducted by low- and mid- rank samurai were done by petty officials in Chosŏn and China. These petty or clerical officials could not truly be called Confucian literati and they did not have the pride and identity as such. Instead, they had to face the Confucian literati's displeasure. The political phenomenon called 'the emergence of low-rank samurai' was a process in which a large number of samurai, who used to be mere government functionaries, began to assume the role of Confucian literati. A large population of the samurai class abandoned their duties as government functionaries and chose the self-assumed role of Confucian literati. This politicization of the samurai thus foreshadowed the 'political fever' of the *Bakumatsu* period.

Furthermore, samurai lived in groups in small and big cities. Within cities, they resided in proximity with each other to learn together and practice fighting skills. They did not become Confucian literati simply on an individual basis, but rather they became so en masse. This probably further stimulated the samurai's assumption of this role. Also, it was not only the samurai class that assumed the role of Confucian literati, but importantly, so did the common people. The massive advent of Confucian literati that included both government functionaries and common people was the core of the major political turbulences of the *Bakumatsu* period.

As their identity as Confucian literati grew stronger, it came into conflict with the complex hierarchy and the status system of the samurai society. There was also hierarchy between Confucian literati, for they had their own order of ranks. Yet as far as they were concerned with national affairs, there was a possibility of reducing or resolving differences in social status. The political history of the *Bakumatsu* period is characterized by the spread of political consciousness through the ordinary samurai and by its conflict and confrontation with the existing order of rank and status.

As analyzed above, the spread of the 'political culture of Confucian literati' destabilized the Tokugawa system that had the militaristic elements of the

'garrison state' (Maeda 1996).[17] The fundamental principle of this political system prohibited people from making appeals which bypassed the chain of command and from establishing cliques. However, the practice of appeal letters challenged the former prohibition and factions challenged the latter. The samurai's 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati' shook up the strict hierarchy of the samurai-vassal organizations. The spread of the 'political culture of Confucian literati' blurred the distinction between high and low rank samurai that had used to be strict.

This paper has repeatedly stressed the significance of 'political culture of Confucian literati' that emerged in Japan. However, this is not to argue that Japan had a more intense 'political culture of Confucian literati' than Chosŏn or Ming China. Needless to say, there was still a large gap in politics and society between Chosŏn and Ming China, and between samurai and Confucian literati. Late Tokugawa Japan maintained the *bakufuhan* system until its very end, and the ruling class maintained samurai identity. It is not my intention to deny this fact.

The biggest difference between Japan and Chosŏn/Ming resided in the attitude towards the military. The Japanese 'Confucian literati bearing swords' venerated scholarship and studied hard. Yet they never despised or rejected the military. The catchphrase "The dual paths of literary and martial arts" demonstrated that the military remained a powerful rallying point throughout the period. Samurai established networks not only through learning institutions, but also martial arts halls. Many representative Confucian literati were also outstanding swordsmen. Self-immolation was still an honorary behavior and Yokoi Shōnan, a prominent Confucian scholar politician, suffered political damage when he laid down his sword and ran away. Having a militaristic attitude was still the first priority in foreign encounters. Japan's Confucian literati saw the threat from the West as the greatest crisis of national defense and maritime defense against foreign invasion as the most important policy agenda.

Also, even if the 'Confucian literati bearing swords' largely embraced and tried to realize the 'political culture of Confucian literati,' it does not mean that they thoroughly internalized Confucian teachings. Among the various aspects of Confucianism, including philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and governance, they primarily accepted the governance ideology of Confucianism. For them, Confucianism was a mere tool that they could abandon or modify at any time according to changing political situations. They needed Confucianism

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17. Takagi Shōsaku and Maruyama Masao used these concepts, but I followed the account of Maeda Tsutomu.

only to discipline the subjects (*shutai*) who would carry out political missions. This was why one person could simultaneously embrace the Zhu Xi school of Neo-Confucianism, the doctrines of Wang Yangming, Mito Learning, and Dutch Learning (*Rangaku*), or move from one school to another.[18]

The 'Confucian literati bearing swords,' who dominated the political world of early 19th-century Japan had a striking difference from their counterparts in Chosŏn or Ming China. It is not my intention to argue that *Bakumatsu* samurai had become identical to the 'Confucian literati' of Chosŏn or China. Rather, I aim at illustrating that samurai, warriors who supposedly had nothing to do with Confucian literati, were becoming like them.

By the same token, I do not wish to argue that the 'political culture of Confucian literati' established itself in *Bakumatsu* Japan. Rather, my point is that it is important to note the sites and the process by which it penetrated into the *bakuhan* system and samurai culture, causing disturbances and changes. During this period, the 'political culture of Confucian literati' was a new force and a challenger.

Conclusion

The Meiji Restoration took place amidst the nationwide spread of the 'political culture of Confucian literati.' Even though the elements of the garrison state still clearly remained, the political system of Meiji Japan was a vibrant demonstration of this culture which had developed since the *Bakumatsu* period. Under the unique circumstances of the time, Meiji Japan confronted Western political culture. Under the mediating influence of the Confucian literati, Japan adopted Western political culture through the complex process of acceptance, modification, and even distortion. The former samurai who 'assumed the role of Confucian literati' throughout the tumultuous decades of the *Bakumatsu* period led this process. They produced numerous written proposals and appeal letters. This fervor for written appeals facilitated the explosive growth of newspapers (Park Hun 2003). The whole country was divided by factions. Amidst the fad of these rising factions, even common people rapidly 'assumed the role of Confucian literati.' A broad range of people joined public debates and protests for their rights or patriotic causes. The 'academic networks' formed by affiliated schools of various civic societies, including private academies by Saigō Takamori and

18. In other words, the term 'Confucian literati' is not a comprehensive concept that includes various aspects of samurai such as their economic life and their way of being in the status system. I used this term simply to capture the political history of the *Bakumatsu* period.

the Society of Free Thinkers (*Risshisha*) of Tosa, played an important role in this process (Masumi 1965).

However, democracy was not born, despite the flourishing 'political culture of Confucian literati.' Japan adopted democracy only by importing Western political ideas. In East Asia, the political participation had increased as people and government functionaries 'assumed the role of Confucian literati.' Nonetheless, no one came up with the idea of granting political rights to the people. Until the late 19th century, many intellectuals still accepted the saying of Confucius, "The people should be guided to follow, not to know" (*The Analects of Confucius*). It is imperative to approach the popular political movements, such as the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in Japan, and the Eastern Learing (*Tonghak*) Movement and the People's Assembly (*Manmin Kongdonghoe*) in Chosŏn, from the perspective of people's 'assumption of the role of Confucian literati,' before applying the concept of Western democracy. The fact that most of these movements endorsed the monarchy may be related to this.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is necessary to break away from the 'modern standards' and 'modern values' in order to understand various phenomena in the political history of 'early modern' East Asia and the 'realities' of the modernization process. We need to understand modernization in East Asia by appreciating the thoughts and behaviors of political reformers and activists as such, adhering to the primary historical sources and records of them. This may be an extremely hard task for the researchers living the modern times, who only have modern languages and concepts. This study is a bold attempt to undertake such a task with Japan's political history from the *Bakumatsu* period to the Meiji Restoration as its subject.

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