

SUNGKYUNKWAN

ASIA'S OLDEST UNIVERSITY PRESERVES CONFUCIAN TRADITION

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Schools are institutions for developing the talents of men. Yet this is not their only function. Schools should teach methods for governing all matters, and should teach their students how to determine right from wrong in all matters." These words are from the *Ming-i-dai-fang-lu*, a work written by Huang Tsung-i, a Chinese thinker of the late Ming and early Ch'ing periods. Centuries before Huang, similar sentiments were expressed by Korea's Ch'ong To-j'ŏn (pen name Sambong, 1337-1398). Ch'ong, a political figure and scholar, wrote the *Chosŏn kyŏnggukchon* (*Chosŏn Canon on Governing the Nation*). In this work, he defined schools as "basic institutions for edification which serve to clarify morality and develop man's talents"

These two views on education have been presented here in order to shed light on the societal role played by Sungkyunkwan. Originally founded 600 years ago in 1398 on the present site of Sungkyunkwan University, Sungkyunkwan was created as a national institute of higher learning for the training of individuals so that they could effectively serve their nation. However, the college had an even more important mission. Although national political ideology centered on moral edification, the college sought to "enlighten and develop the common people." In other words, it served as the standard-bearer of social reform. It was also the leading institution for promoting social consensus. In sum, Sungkyunkwan served three basic functions: moral edification, promotion of social consensus and development of human talent.

At Sungkyunkwan, Confucian moral edification was focused on Munmyo, a shrine where rites are held for Confucius and other ancient sages. Opinions of the college students played a leading role in forming consensus on the determination of which Korean Confucian figures would be honored at the shrine. In this sense, the

college played a decisive role in the shaping of the Chosŏn Dynasty's Confucian tradition. This tradition is often referred to as simply *Tohak* (Study of the Way). The political aspects of Tohak include the Confucian doctrine on duties and moral obligations. As an ideology based on the welfare of the common people, Tohak also emphasizes righteousness over personal gain.

The designated lineage of illustrious Confucian scholars actually began with the Koryŏ-period minister Ch'ong Mong-ju (pen name Po'un) and was sustained until Cho Kwang-jo (pen name Ch'ong-am) of the Chosŏn Dynasty. This line of Confucian sages had generally encouraged the free discussion of ideas, academic research and logical explanation of the principles underlying phenomena.

During the Chosŏn period, the principle that a loyal minister "does not serve two sovereigns" was an important criteria in deciding which Koryŏ scholars were worthy of special rites. The respect for the loyal minister Ch'ong Mong-ju made him worthy of this special honor and elevated this principle to a key political cornerstone. Sungkyunkwan students also paid homage to Ch'ong and thus played an influential role in leading to his inclusion in the Munmyo rites in 1517.

Ch'ong Mong-ju was venerated in the Munmyo rites for a century. In 1610, the memorial list came to include five notable sages: Kim Kwang-p'il (pen name Hanhwondang), Ch'ong Yŏ-ch'ang (pen name Ildu), Cho Kwang-jo (pen name Ch'ongam), Yi Ŏn-jŏk (pen name Hoejae) and Yi Hwang (pen name Toegyŏ). In 1681, the seventh year of the reign of King Sukchong, Yi I (pen name Yulgok) and Sŏng Hon (pen name U-gye) were also included. In this particular case, Sungkyunkwan students played an active role in shaping public opinion.

The increased interest in neo-Confucian theory was also reflected in proclamations concerning the Munmyo

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*Taesŏngjŏn, the main shrine of Munmyo, the Temple of Confucius (opposite page)
From the top: Chonggyonggak, a repository for books used in the academy; Myŏngnyundang, the principal lecture hall; a hanging name plate bearing the word Myŏngnyundang, which means Hall of Illuminating Ethics.*

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Sungkyunkwan University's history is noteworthy, not only in Korea, but within the general context of East Asian development as well. After all, among the educational institutions in East Asia, one would be hard pressed to find many universities that can boast a history of 600 years. Throughout its long history, Sungkyunkwan has made significant contributions to the advancement of East Asian culture.

In a re-enactment on the grounds of Ch'anggyŏnggung Palace, Sungkyunkwan students sit for the kwagŏ, the examination required to become a government official (above). A re-enactment of a ceremony to elevate a prince to crown prince, one of the events held to commemorate Sungkyunkwan's 600th anniversary (below).



LEE JOOHO

memorial rites. In addition, actions such as *kwondang* (boycotting) and *konggwan* (voluntarily quitting the college) were used as a collective form of protest against the government. Such protest was based on Mencius who said, "When the sovereign is at fault, one remonstrates repeatedly, but if the sovereign does not listen, one should depart from him." Mencius also said, "If one remonstrates repeatedly and the sovereign does not listen, he should be replaced." Although this more radical approach could not be applied, Sungkyunkwan students did engage in active protest. On some 125 occasions between the reign of King Sejong and King Ch'ŏlchong, Sungkyunkwan students resorted to *kwondang* and *konggwan* to protest against the monarchy. Through such activism, the students played a significant social role during this period.

Sungkyunkwan's history can generally be divided into two phases: the classical and the modern. The classical phase begins with the school's founding in 1398 and concludes with the Kabo reforms of 1894. During this phase, Confucian studies accounted for the major portion of the curriculum. The classical phase can in turn be divided into three phases. During the foundation phase from 1398 to 1494, the school's institutions and administrative policies were established so that it could serve as Korea's national college. The second phase, 1495 to 1724, was a time of stagnation as the school weathered the Yŏnsan-gun's reforms and the 1592 to 1598 invasions of Japanese warlord Hideyoshi Toyotomi. The third phase, from 1725 to 1894, was characterized by resurgence. Following King Yŏngjo's and Chŏngjo's revival of Chosŏn political institutions, art and literature, the college regained its former standing as the nation's preeminent educational institution. During this phase, scholars of the new *Shirhak* movement also proposed a number of reforms. When viewed in its totality, the classical phase represented the

foundation-building of an exceptional intellectual tradition in Korea. At this time, Korean scholars formulated the most creative Confucian tradition in all of East Asia.

The modern phase runs from 1895 through today. The Confucian ideal of this phase can be summed up in the traditional motto: "Cultivate one's self and govern people." With the introduction of a diverse range of academic disciplines from the West, Sungkyunkwan evolved into a university. Like the classical phase, the modern phase can be divided into three phases. The first, from 1895 to 1910, begins with the school's emergence as a modern college and ends with the Japanese occupation. Through a royal edict of 1895, the school was transformed into a three-year institution which offered courses in history, geography, math and other subjects. At this time, a system for the appointment of professors was inaugurated along with entrance examinations and a comprehensive examination system. A semester system with a set number of annual lecture days and weekly lecture hours was also instated. During the second phase from 1910 to 1944, the school encountered numerous difficulties due to the Japanese occupation. In 1910, the Japanese colonial government founded Myōngnyun Hagwon on the school's campus. This later became Myōngnyun Technical Institute and then Myōngnyun Technical College in 1939. By 1944, the college's name had changed again to Myōngnyun Yōn-sōngso. Thus in a relatively short time, the school had gone from being Korea's top educational institution to a minor school. During the third phase from 1945 to the present, Sungkyunkwan developed into a large-scale institution with all the trappings of a modern university. During this time, the university established itself as a leading force in the preservation and development of traditional Korean culture. In 1945, the school, with Kim Ch'ang-suk (pen name Simsan) as its



first president and Yi Sōk-ku (pen name Hakpong) as a professor, was formally designated a university. In the years that followed, a graduate school was founded, graduate school divisions were created and various restructuring efforts were carried out. To keep up with the school's growth, facilities were continually upgraded and expanded. Through affiliations with elite universities around the world, Sungkyunkwan University presently stands out as a truly distinguished international institute boasting an ancient heritage.

Sungkyunkwan University's history is noteworthy, not only in Korea, but within the general context of East Asian development as well. After all, one would be hard pressed to find many universities in East Asia that can

boast a history of 600 years. Throughout its long history, Sungkyunkwan has made significant contributions to the advancement of East Asian culture. At the same time, it has been an active force in the establishment, preservation and development of traditional Korean culture. As is commonly known, the frantic push toward modernization has overwhelmed Korean society along with the rest of East Asia. Within this process, most schools have abandoned their traditional curriculums while adopting Western educational systems and academic disciplines. Sungkyunkwan University has also been a part of this general trend. Yet it has managed to preserve and advance the spirit of the Korean people. This accomplishment warrants Sungkyunkwan a special place within Korea's intellectual history.

In spite of its keen focus on traditional Korean culture, Sungkyunkwan University is by no means a nationalistic institution. The school does not embrace a narrow conservatism by which all things foreign or new are to be shunned. To the contrary, the university operates from a premise that Western and modern cultural elements have their own intrinsic value and unique identity, just as Korean culture and traditions have their own unique flavor and significance. By preserving and building upon Korea's unique cultural heritage, the university is confident that it has much to contribute to the advancement of humankind.

As Sungkyunkwan University greets its 600th anniversary this year, it is preparing for a new leap into the future. As a worldly university representing Korea, it is mobilizing all its available resources in its push to become a leading educational institute of the 21st century. In the years to come, Sungkyunkwan is sure to remain a repository of the Korean spirit as it takes its rightful place among the ranks of international universities working for the mutual prosperity of all people. ♦