Once rural scholars began to raise their voices collectively, most scholar-officials remained reluctant to acknowledge these new political actors for fear of losing their sway over court debates. They institutionalized oppressive review processes for nonofficial scholars’ memorials to keep their political ambitions under control. The diminished effects of joint memorials led the petitioning scholars to add performative aspects to their collective mobilization. Nonofficial scholars focused on visualizing their worthiness, unity, number, and commitment in the public space. They also elevated the political texts into objects to be respected and venerated rather than merely communicative tools delivering their ideas. This spectacular visualization of activism and texts related to it intensified their political messages. The contentious performances targeted not only the political elites in the royal court but also bystanders at the margins of politics. Successful performances could “turn sympathizers into participants, neutralize opponents, and turn indifferent onlookers into sympathizers.”

Even if collective activism did not achieve the intended political goals, it could at least disturb the stability of everyday life. The public space of Chosŏn society frequently became the political stage where these scholars performed their protests and tried to attract attention from the general populace.

The mode of contentious performances, the invention of mid-sixteenth-century Yŏngnam literati, developed into the repertoire of collective activism used for the rest of the dynasty. The mobilization of regional scholars...
through social epistolary genres and face-to-face meetings in local academies gave rise to petition drives through joint memorials to the throne. Their travel to and stay in Seoul to present their memorials to the king exhibited their political determination in the forms of such well-organized performances as street marches, wearing matching colors, and sit-ins. The details of all these practices were meticulously chronicled in the form of daily records, which later scholars could scrutinize and use as models for more political protests. Consequently, this mechanism of political activism was inherited and repeated.

When this mode of political mobilization took hold as a protocol for collective activism, most nonofficial scholars tended to use a very few existing claim-making techniques, even when they were no longer effective. Unless there were drastic changes in social life or political conditions, most of them did not abandon the traditional mode of protests. In this respect, the sixteenth-century repertoire of collective activism persisted until the collapse of the Chosŏn dynasty, when Japanese colonial rule uprooted the pre-existing political structures.

Finally, nonofficial scholars added some variations to these existing political performances bit by bit. The most common method was increasing the number of participants, which subsequently enlarged the size of material texts due to the added signatures. The colossal physical form of the memorials along with the massive number of participants applied the traditional repertoires of contentious performances under discrete sociopolitical circumstances. Overall, the changes in political culture that entailed the rise of new epistolary practices in the sixteenth century fashioned the distinctive ways the state and educated elites interacted and negotiated throughout the late Chosŏn period.

THE INVENTION OF CONTENTIOUS PERFORMANCE: THE JOINT MEMORIAL CASE OF 1565

Confucian literati in Chosŏn society played an active role in sociopolitical realms by putting forward their opinions to both the state authorities and the public, even without holding official positions. Their political role was, however, neither granted to them from the beginning of the dynasty nor inclusive of all the lettered population. As discussed, it was only in 1492 that the Chosŏn court allowed nonofficial literati to join in political debates through the memorial system. This new political avenue was mainly
dominated by scholars enrolled in the Royal Academy who had passed the preliminary civil service exams and thus were considered potential officials. The proliferation of local academies did provide both institutional settings and communicative measures for the political mobilization of nonofficial scholars. Motivated by the new political environment demanding the implementation of Confucian moral norms, rural scholars ventured onto the national stage with a powerful political tool—joint memorials. Despite attempts to disenfranchise them, their memorials began to outnumber those produced by Royal Academy scholars in the late sixteenth century.

The decisive example of collective contention using joint memorials took place in 1565 and fundamentally transformed the political performances of late Choson literati. A group of scholars from the Yŏngnam area presented a series of joint memorials to request the execution of a Buddhist monk, Pou (1515–1565). Pou had attempted to propagate Buddhist doctrines under the auspices of Queen Dowager Munjong (1501–1565), against the will of most Confucian literati. Upon the death of the queen dowager, voices calling for Pou’s punishment were raised both inside and outside the royal court. Scholars led by T’oeogy’s disciple Kim Ugoeng (1524–1590) intensified this issue by instigating scholars from the Yŏngnam area. About three hundred scholars from forty-four prefectures (of the seventy-one in Yŏngnam) eventually joined Kim’s group. They submitted joint memorials to King Myŏngjong (r. 1545–1567) a total of twenty-two times over twenty-three days. Scholar groups had presented joint memorials to the throne on political issues previously. However, this was the first time the collective action of nonofficial rural scholars effectively influenced the political discourse of the capital. The systematic writing practices used in mobilizing rural scholars, the ritualistic and spectacular display of texts in public, and the meticulous recording of the production and presentation of joint memorials distinguish this case.

Kim Ugoeng’s diary about this particular political event, *The Daily Record of the Journey to Seoul* (Sŏhaeng ilgi), starts from the third day of the seventh month of 1565. It reads that Kim and his colleagues passed around a circular letter to various scholar groups in the Yŏngnam area beyond his hometown, Sangju, when they decided to express their opinion about Pou’s case. On the twenty-third day, about three hundred scholars from all around Yŏngnam got together in Sangju and signed the joint memorial that they had just produced. Although at first many were reluctant to sign it for various reasons, they finally agreed that they shared the same wish to punish Pou. One day after the production and signing of the joint memorial, the
twenty-fourth day, ten scholars, including Kim, headed for Seoul to present the joint memorial to the throne. Before setting out, they reported their departure to the magistrate. They were sent off with a splendid banquet thrown at the riverbank. They arrived in Andong the next day and met the magistrate and local scholars there. Due to heavy rain, they were forced to stay there for two more days and finally entered Seoul through the Eastern Great Gate (Tongdaemun) after disembarking at the ferry point called Tumop’o in the afternoon of the thirtieth day of the seventh month. On the next day, the first day of the eighth month, they received Seoul scholars as guests, including the famous scholar-official Yi I, while preparing for the presentation of their joint memorial.

From the fifth day of the eighth month on, scholars from various towns in the Yŏngnam area began to arrive in Seoul one after the other in support of Kim’s group. Kim’s group sent out circular letters to these joining scholars to promote efficacious communication and coordinated group action in Seoul. Until these scholar groups disbanded to return to their hometowns on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, Kim’s group led organized actions through epistolary communication either by having scholars demonstrate outside the royal palace while waiting for the royal response or by arranging the submission of multiple joint memorials simultaneously. Several scholars residing in Seoul, including Kim’s father, supplied the rice, paper, and brushes for Kim’s group. On the eighteenth day of the month, these scholars from various parts of Yŏngnam elected two administrative staff members, because their number had multiplied to the extent that they needed more coordinated actions. The scholars continued to present joint memorials until the twenty-fifth day of the eighth month of 1565, but the king persisted in his decision not to change the punishment for Pou, sending him into exile at Cheju Island.

When their consecutive submissions of joint memorials turned out to be in vain, the scholars made a plan for continued rallies after returning to their hometowns. On the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month, one day before they were to leave Seoul, the Yŏngnam scholars vowed to continue to protest by not taking the upcoming civil service examinations. Each group was asked to spread word of this decision to other scholars who had not joined their actions in Seoul. They also agreed to send out circular letters if they found scholars going against this decision, so that all the groups of the Yŏngnam area could ostracize them from their community. After Kim’s group left Seoul, some Royal Academy scholars continued the petition drive
for about two weeks on a daily basis, and Pou was finally executed by the governor of Cheju, Pyŏn Hyŏp (1528–1590), in the same year.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{The Language of Protests}

The need to rally together as a group affected the ways scholars produced their memorials. In principle, participating scholars joined their voices and jointly drafted memorials.\textsuperscript{13} In the case of Kim Ugoeng’s group, Kim as a leader wrote only five memorials out of twenty-two, and other members contributed the rest. Joint authorship also influenced the language and rhetoric through which the scholars claimed their political authority. Their modes of collective action were closely intertwined with their discursive strategies.\textsuperscript{14} The existing drafts written by Kim legitimized their collective activism as representing the Confucian moral norm. One memorial argued that the scholars’ political action stemmed from public and impartial opinion (\textit{kongnon}) supported by the whole nation, while labeling the king’s reluctance to execute Pou as his private and biased emotion (\textit{sajŏng}). Kim made clear that if the king ended up losing the people’s hearts by insisting on his prejudiced decision, the destiny of the dynasty would be at risk.\textsuperscript{15} In another memorial, Kim argued that the scholars had come to Seoul not simply to request Pou’s execution but also to alert the king, who had lost the ability to discern the guidance of Heavenly principle (\textit{ch’ŏllii}). The Confucian rhetoric stressed the collective worthiness and thus could nullify skepticism about the political activism of rural scholars as inauthentic. More significantly, these terms associated with Confucian classical tradition resonated with the cultural norms that governed the lifestyle of educated elites. Their familiarity with this contentious language made it easy for diverse scholar groups to adopt and repeat it for their various political mobilizations. In this way, the vocabulary for protests, derived from Confucian tradition, maintained durability under disparate political circumstances due to its “symbolic resonance” and “strategic modularity.”\textsuperscript{16}

The emphasis on and frequent usage of \textit{kongnon} indicate two very significant characteristics of contentious politics in late Chosŏn society. First, nonofficial literati did not invent this political rhetoric in the mid-sixteenth century. Scholar-officials had used it in court debates from the beginning of the dynasty. Rural scholars adopted this political lexicon and modified and ritualized it for their collective activism. Remarkably, a keyword search of online \textit{sillok} with this term indicates that about 60 percent of its usage was
in the period from the reign of Sŏngjong to that of Sŏnjo. The usage of kongnon suddenly increased during the reign of Sŏngjong when new groups of scholars educated in Neo-Confucianism made their way into court politics. This term was also frequently used during the reign of Chungjong, when it was highlighted that the king and ministers should rule the state together due to his ascension to the throne under the aegis of scholar-officials after deposing his half-brother Prince Yŏnsan (r. 1494–1506). Kongnon best expressed the political ideas that new scholar groups brought into the court debates in this period. This term was most suitable to unite, mobilize, and rally scholars as a powerful political group while suppressing the existing groups. Considering the circulation of court newsletters and subsequent formation of a political forum in the social epistolary interactions among the Confucian literati, nonofficial male elites must have been exposed to and saturated with this language. They appropriated and utilized the rhetoric derived from court politics rather than creating their own terms challenging state authorities. Their political imaginaries were framed by the existing rhetoric and lexicons readily available to them.

However, it is misleading to consider that the adoption of political elites’ rhetoric made the rural literati’s activism a simple replica of court debates. The key characteristic of enduring contentious words rests upon their “ambiguity.” “Words for contentious politics,” Sidney Tarrow explicates, “are polysemic... [T]heir ambiguity is part of what makes them modular and therefore available for repetition.” In other words, kongnon was widely applicable because it could convey many different, sometimes contradictory, connotations. Moreover, this ambiguity fostered political coalitions among groups with diverse backgrounds and goals. Kongnon in the Chosŏn political culture was vague enough to be modular, so diverse that political actors could co-opt it for their disparate agendas. The ambiguity of this term was embedded in the conditional nature of its definition. Opinions could be legitimized as kongnon only when the public regarded them as impartial and harbored no suspicion about the claimants’ hidden calculations. If the claimants gained certain profits, however meager, through making their opinions accepted by the state authorities, these opinions did not qualify as kongnon. The number of people involved did not guarantee that a given opinion would become kongnon. Many people could have championed a certain opinion for the sake of the common good, but it was also possible that they supported it because it would serve their group interests. This is why the king as a single person could sometimes claim his viewpoint as
kongnon while denouncing the opinion of a group of scholar-officials as partisan. As it was generally considered that kongnon was derived from all Confucians (yuja) irrespective of their official positions, nonofficial scholars might have already considered themselves part of national political discourses even before their collective activism in the mid-sixteenth century. Court ministers, likewise, felt obliged to lead the kongnon of the period. Yi I even asserted that the state is ruled when the kongnon is in the court; the state is in jeopardy when it comes from the streets. For Confucian literati, not to speak out about political problems was self-betrayal, even if speaking out was a crime in the eyes of the state authority. Scholar-officials and nonofficial literati thus competed over the domination of kongnon, which became the keyword of political debates.

Contentious Performances

In addition to using the political rhetoric appropriated from court debates, Kim Ugoeng and his cohorts physically manifested their collectivity by systematically presenting two performances. The local scholarly community placed political texts at the core of their contentious performances rather than regarding them simply as the means for delivering political messages. The send-off banquet thrown for Kim and his associates shows well how Kim’s group made use of performative elements to boost the political effects of their collective action. For this event, they set up tents to accommodate all three hundred or so participants. Kim placed the joint memorial on a high table in one tent. All of them matched their garments by wearing white gowns and white scholar caps, and they stood in two lines, arrayed east and west, facing each other. All these scholars prostrated themselves four times to the memorial, and Kim and the nine scholars who would travel to Seoul placed the joint memorial on a cart. Two slaves pushed this cart forward, and all the scholars bowed to the cart as it passed in front of them. Several local elders advised Kim’s group not to use harsh terms while demonstrating their opinions to the throne. Some participants sent them off by composing poems on the spot.

The embarkation of the text on its journey brought a festive atmosphere to the local scene, and the number of people and the ritual they performed created extraordinary spectacles. We can assume that the gathering of this large number of scholars on a rural riverbank attracted the attention of the local population. The participants focused on visualizing their number,
unity, and commitment through carefully planned ceremonies. Wearing the same color maximized the visual manifestation of solidarity. The choreographed ritual brought together their opposition to the court decision and authorized their actions. Here, the joint memorial as a political object played the central role. This ceremonial send-off of the text and scholars symbolically transformed the given text into something to be venerated and respected rather than simply a communicative vehicle expressing political dissent. Such special events expanded the connotation of texts beyond objects to be written and read to objects to be performed, watched, and enjoyed. This ritual spectacle designed to dignify the joint memorials elevated textual practices as an integral component of the political culture. The display of political texts, if not of their contents, made public that some literati contended over state political issues and mobilized to make their opinions heard.

Considering that Kim’s group notified the local magistrate of their departure for Seoul to present their joint memorials, the royal court could have been informed of the planned presentation as well as the rituals preceding their departure. The king and court ministers could not have ignored the rituals because they displayed both the moral energy of participating scholars and the socioeconomic resources that the local scholarly community had invested in their collective activism. The royal court could also have considered the reaction of local people who had seen the performative rituals. In this way, contentious performances and the dissemination of news about them reinforced the message that the political texts delivered. The addressees had to give a second thought to the political ramifications of the rituals related to joint memorials rather than only directly responding to their rhetoric and contents.

Once the group arrived in Seoul, street marches and demonstrations in urban spaces comprised significant elements of its political performance. According to Kim Ugoeng’s daily record, the group took advantage of their procession to the royal palace as an opportunity to create a visual spectacle in public to display their worthiness and commitment. They had an errand boy of the guesthouse, Ongnam, carry the box containing the joint memorial on his shoulders. Two slaves were to hold the box on Ongnam’s shoulders, one on each side. Four other slaves drove away those who would block their way with wooden sticks. All the scholars in Kim’s group wore black scholar caps and white gowns. In this formation, they marched to the Honghwa Gate of Ch’anggyŏng Palace. This ritualistic parade through the
streets of Seoul must have attracted people’s eyes; the presentation of joint memorials by local scholars thus became an issue not only for the king and royal ministers but also for the civilians in Seoul. In this way, although the joint memorials were to be submitted to the throne, the actual interactions bearing on their presentation did not simply take place between demonstrators and the state authority. The onlookers at the margins of protests became more aware because of the political performances that they witnessed. Successful street demonstrations hence induced sympathizers to participate in the proposed political causes, nullified the opposition, and turned indifferent spectators into sympathizers.24

Kim, moreover, sent out circular letters encouraging the group’s regional cohorts to come up to Seoul and join the demonstrations. Kim’s record mentions about forty towns from which scholar groups went to Seoul, each dispatching about six to seven scholars, but Sŏngju was exceptional in sending seventy scholars.25 The approximate calculation gives about three hundred scholars, so the group was not of a negligible size. Besides presenting joint memorials along with Kim’s group, these countryside scholars increased the head count for demonstrations held outside the royal palace while Kim’s group presented their memorials and awaited the royal responses. For example, Kim’s account on the sixth day of the eighth month reads that scholars from Yonggung, Ch’ŏngdo, and Hamch’ang staged sit-ins outside the royal palace together with Kim’s group. This kind of claim-making performance is called pokhap or kyuhon, which respectively mean prostrating and crying out at the palace gate. The Yŏngnam scholars stayed in Seoul for about twenty days, and their presence and visibility incited concern from both royal ministers and Seoul residents. One comment added by an official historian in the sillok entry for the twenty-fifth day of the eighth month articulates that many people became concerned about the agitated situation, because these scholars filled the area outside the royal palace day by day with wrath and rancor.26 As this sillok entry indicates, the vehement expression of emotion in public became the centerpiece of demonstrations. Although controlling the public display of emotion offered very effective leverage for male elites to reinforce the social stratification and gender hierarchy, the expression of “just” emotion, such as resentment, immensely enhanced their performances in the political arena.27 The public display of strong emotion shaped the contentious politics, which subsequently prompted other emotions driving the episodes of protests.28 The performative elements combined with the
textual practices increased the chances that the local scholars’ presentation of joint memorials would warrant serious review rather than simply being ignored in the bureaucratic structure. The close interaction between the intratextual and extratextual factors that the rural scholars skillfully manipulated empowered them to speak up on state political issues.

**Recording the Protests**

It is possible to reconstruct the petition drive led by Kim Ugoeng only because he left a meticulous daily record about this particular case. Besides chronicling the progress and the central issues of this mobilization, Kim’s record fulfilled various functions under discrete circumstances. By providing a reliable reference, record keeping could help the participating scholars iron out various problems that might arise during the extended period of their collective activism. The record included detailed information about meetings and participants, the main issues they discussed, the resources they mobilized, and plans and actual execution of political performances. It sometimes incorporated drafts of circular letters and joint memorials. This intertextual composition enhanced its reference function.

The recording of protests also historicized the collective activism of rural scholars. Successful political actions would be recorded in the *sillok* by official historians and disseminated across the country through court gazettes. If their political claim did not make its way into the court debates, however, their political rallies would find no place in official history writing. The practice of self-recording made their own political activism indelible, at least in the clan networks or on local levels. This creation of a local history of literati activism also allowed the participants to use their records as political weapons. Some attempted to earn more enthusiastic support from lukewarm participants with their accounts. They sometimes threatened their aloof collaborators that their indifference would be denunciated by later scholars who would read their records.29

Besides their utility as political weapons, these records fulfilled quite pragmatic political functions. Such daily records did not simply evoke memories about the ancestors or regional predecessors; they became the manuals for political activism for later scholars. Readers could imitate how their predecessors rallied regional literati for their political causes. In fact, the usage of multilayered political epistolary genres, which Kim’s group adroitly manipulated, was immediately adopted by contemporary scholars for
different kinds of claim-making practices. Furthermore, the detailed descriptions of ritualistic gatherings, the interactions with local literati during the travel to Seoul, street marches, and demonstrations in the capital all could become very concrete templates for later political protests. The practice of recording collective activism itself also became an essential political ritual for later scholars, who meticulously studied, copied, and restaged these past precedents for their own purposes. The new mode of political activism developed by Kim Ugoeng’s group in the sixteenth century continued to influence collective claim-making practices of nonofficial literati throughout the late Chosŏn period.

**LEARNING THE TECHNIQUES OF PROTEST: Imitating Kim Ugoeng’s Case**

Kim Ugoeng’s case holds significance in that it was the first occasion when rural scholars’ activism had meaningful impact on state politics. His contemporaries thus regarded the ways Kim rallied rural scholars and contended with the state authorities as a precedent for their future political actions. In a letter to Yongch’ŏn scholars, Kim Puryun, one of T’oegye’s leading disciples, explained that the Yongnam scholars’ inclination to pass around circular letters and subsequently present joint memorials to the throne stemmed from the success of Kim Ugoeng’s group in 1565. Kim Puryun, however, described this political measure negatively, stating that many scholar groups did this whenever people did not accept their opinions. This letter demonstrates that the case of 1565 established collective textual practices as an efficacious political mode for Yongnam scholars, but not all of them favored it. As other regional scholars restaged this mechanism of claim making for their own causes, it developed into a routine strategy for expressing political opinions.

Established political elites remained skeptical about the rise of nonofficial rural scholars in the national political discourse. Kim Ugoeng’s teacher, T’oegye, expressed his concern about the political participation of local scholars. He thus discouraged scholars in his hometown, Yean, and adjacent Andong from participating in Kim’s rally. Still, a new kind of activism by nonofficial scholars developed around the local academy network that T’oegye promoted beginning in the late 1540s. This caused suspicion among court ministers. One of T’oegye’s letters to his grandson Yi Ando (1541–1584) reveals how scholar-officials understood his new political agenda: “The
letter that I received from Chŏng T’ak reads that one state councilor said, “T’oegye easily contacts young scholars in an inappropriate way. The royal court is turbulent nowadays with innumerable memorials because he agitated these scholars to present them.”31 The fact that the young scholars got together as a group around local academies aroused the ministers’ concern about the possibilities for collective political action. T’oegye defended himself by emphasizing that he had not encouraged young scholars to engage in political affairs.32 He might have thought that such direct political involvement would cripple his local strategy as a whole.

More significantly, T’oegye considered rural scholars unqualified to participate in state political discourse. One of his letters to Kim Pup’il (1516–1577) commenting on joint memorials by Kim Ugoeng’s group reveals his view:

I cannot determine the opinion of Yŏngnam scholars on the issue of presenting memorials to the throne. If I may express my erroneous idea, I must emphasize that even all the royal ministers failed to persuade the king, although their account is credible because they clearly understood the course of the event by witnessing and hearing it in person. If this is the case, how can the rural scholars [who cannot see and hear what happens in the royal court in person] know more about the political events [than royal ministers] and thus move the mind of the king? This is why I, as an old official, remain silent on this issue, even though this inactiveness appears inappropriate. However, people thought that I was wrong when I discouraged the scholars of my hometown from joining the petition drive condemning Pou.33

T’oegye thought that local scholars could not make strong and credible arguments. Their opinions could easily become unsophisticated, impulsive, and inept because they had limited access to information about court politics. He understood negotiation between the king and bureaucrats in the royal court as the only authentic mode of deciding state political issues. Scholars engaged in academic projects in remote localities had nothing to do with the state political discourse.34 However, T’oegye’s seemingly passive mode could barely convince even his close disciples. T’oegye’s letter to Yi Ando, written in 1565, demonstrates that his disciples, including Yu Chungnyŏng and Cho Mok (1524–1606), were enormously encouraged by Kim Ugoeng’s initiative and therefore exasperated by T’oegye’s admonition not to join this affair.35 It was clear that the massive thrust of political voices
through joint memorials could influence the king and ministers to redirect their court decisions, and the effectiveness of this seemingly illegitimate mode of political participation empowered scholar groups outside officialdom to claim their political opinions as just and impartial.

**JOINT MEMORIALS RULE!**

As the scholarly communities confirmed the effectiveness of joint memorials, they used this means of political participation habitually from the late sixteenth century. In particular, the debates on the issue of enshrining past Confucian worthies in the Royal Confucian Shrine (Munmyo) brought together nationwide scholars to raise a unified voice for over four decades, which culminated in honoring five past scholars in 1610. The appropriation of the existing political rhetoric and persistent voices imposed historicity and moral superiority upon the collective activism of the Confucian literati.

Nonofficial scholars had good reason to unite against the state about ritual issues. From the beginning of the dynasty, Confucian rituals generated crucial symbolic powers to which both the state and the Confucian literati had access. The problem was that the Chosŏn state and the scholarly community shared the same language and rhetoric embedded in Neo-Confucianism but used them for different purposes. For the state, Confucianism offered efficacious ideological devices through which to set social norms dictating people’s behavior according to the value system legitimizing the state authority. In tandem with the civil service examination system, the state schools, and legal institutions, state rituals bolstered the Confucian ideology, which was to trickle down to the lower strata of society. The scholarly community, however, had not docilely trained themselves with state-version Confucian norms. Starting in the late fifteenth century, local scholar groups promoted the embodiment of Confucian knowledge as a way of life while presenting multiple interpretations of the Confucian classics, challenging the state orthodoxy. Thus the literati both in and outside of officialdom joined the process of defining the sociopolitical functions of Confucian knowledge. Korean literati were undertaking the task of Confucianization during the first half of the Chosŏn dynasty, in which setting ritual norms held vital significance.36

To make matters more complex, the state and the scholarly communities each had their own ritual sites. The Chosŏn state had enshrined past...
Confucian worthies, both Chinese and Korean, at the Royal Confucian Shrine since the beginning of the dynasty in order to reinforce the guiding role of the state in propagating the Confucian culture. The state rituals also aimed to maintain the social order and promote the state ideology. Meanwhile, local academies, besides their educational purpose, functioned as sites of Confucian rituals. Academy rituals were designed to inspire scholars to model themselves after the moral and academic virtues of past Confucian worthies. Participation in the rituals, moreover, fostered the sense of community. As in the cases of Yŏngbong and Sŏak Academies, deciding who should be enshrined frequently caused conflicts between local scholars and magistrates because each of them had disparate evaluations of and interests in the given worthy. For this reason, the ritual institutions of the state and the scholarly community did not develop in accord. Worshipping the same figures and using the same Confucian rhetoric for rituals could mean that one side encroached on the legitimacy of the other. The royal court therefore had always kept a close eye on academy rituals by screening the academic and ethical qualifications of those enshrined. The state persistently claimed that the enshrinement of disqualified scholars was one reason for regulating the uncontrolled propagation of academies throughout the late Chosŏn period. Likewise, the scholarly community did not let the state freely judge and define the Confucian ritual norms on its own terms.

Competition with the state authority on ritual issues thus led diverse scholarly communities to unite and raise unanimous opinions. The coalition of nationwide scholars continued until 1610, when the Five Confucian Worthies (Ohyŏn) were finally enshrined in the Royal Confucian Shrine. Ever since the sarim scholars made their way into court politics, ritual issues had become the site where the king and the scholars debated the sociopolitical role of Neo-Confucian scholarship. These scholars aimed to legitimize their authority by authenticating their academic lineage in the state ritual space. They first distanced themselves from the late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn scholar-officials whom their predecessors had honored in the state rituals. Instead, they exalted Chŏng Mongju (1337–1392), who did not give up his loyalty to the falling Koryŏ, as the progenitor of Korean Neo-Confucianism. They succeeded in honoring Chŏng in the Royal Confucian Shrine in 1517. Afterward, they tried to fill the temporal and discursive gap between Chŏng and themselves by creating an elaborate academic lineage. They developed the idea of the Four Worthies (Sahyŏn)—Kim Koengp’il, Chŏng Yŏch’ang (1450–1504), Cho Kwangjo (1482–1520), and Yi Önjŏk. T’oegeye was active in
this movement by writing the records of conduct for Cho and Yi and championing their moral way of life. When he died in 1570, the scholarly community added him to the Four Worthies and called them together the Five Worthies.

The movement to enshrine the Five Worthies in the Royal Confucian Shrine demonstrates how the scholarly community learned and repeated the successful mode of political participation devised by their contemporaries. As in Kim Ugoeng’s case, the memorials to the throne functioned as the main claim-making apparatus; the rhetoric of *kongnon* was extensively used for a variety of purposes; and the scholars historicized their own political actions through meticulous record keeping. The unanimous voice over this issue across the country did not require petitioning scholars to organize political performances as much as Kim had. And yet, the signs of coordinated actions abounded.

Although scholars of the Royal Academy and several scholar-officials consistently argued the need to enshrine the Five Worthies, mostly in the 1570s, King Sŏnjo remained lukewarm. He justified his reluctance by claiming that the enshrinement could not be easily decided. However, after the Imjin War, the restoration of the destroyed Royal Confucian Shrine triggered renewed attention to this issue. The controversies on ritual issues occur when the existing rituals do not provide the symbolic meanings that the society needs. In postwar Chosŏn, likewise, the ruling elites tried to iron out the state rituals for the past Confucian worthies in order to set a new moral standard. The students of the Royal Academy collectively presented a series of memorials requesting the enshrinement of the Five Worthies in 1604. Sŏnjo, in response, questioned the eligibility of Yi Ŭnŏk by criticizing his collaboration with court ministers whose political scheme had instigated the Literati Purge of 1545. In response, these scholars claimed that the king did not construe the history correctly. Their memorial reads, “Because the words and deeds as well as the accomplishments of the Five Worthies are well explicated in both the historical records of the state and the unofficial history, Your Majesty must have well recognized the truth about their [noble] dispositions.” While giving equal credibility to official and unofficial historical accounts as the grounds to refute the king’s criticism of Yi, these scholars accentuated that political achievements, which the king emphasized, could not be the sole criterion for enshrinement.

This petition also made use of *kongnon* to legitimize their collective action. These petitioners, however, legitimized their opinion as *kongnon*
because the scholarly community had requested that the same issue be addressed over the years: “We wonder whether Your Majesty would not regard our opinion as the *kongnon*. Then, does Your Majesty think the presentation of [numerous] memorials by Confucian scholars for about thirty years since 1568 is their adulation [only] for the past scholars whom they like? The propensity for moral virtue belongs to the mind and heart of everyone and thus cannot be stopped. Then, how could it be possible to reduce [our request for enshrining the Five Worthies] to only our prejudice? Also, how could it be possible to say that this request is not *kongnon*?”

The historicity of their own opinions made their voices legitimate and impartial. More significantly, these scholars avoided offering their view about Yi’s political conduct in 1545 with this emphasis on the unanimous voice that had been sounding for several decades.

The Royal Academy scholars presented three more memorials on this issue to debunk the king’s criticism of Yi. Although Sŏnjo did not give up his original stance, he could not completely turn away from the collective opinion of the scholars. In response to the last memorial, the king stated:

> I have examined your memorials. I have already replied that I cannot make a hasty judgment on this issue. There is nothing wrong with deciding this issue later. Also, I do understand that you have your own understanding about Yi Ŭnjŏk. [However,] how can only your opinion be credible? There might be no one who could discuss this issue [in a way to satisfy everyone]. Upon receiving your request to enshrine [the Five Worthies], I did want to clear up people’s doubts about Yi through writing several lines. I would [be willing to] abandon Yi rather than enshrining a disqualified scholar in the Royal Confucian Shrine. I am saying this to advocate and promote the Confucian Way. . . . You got angry and startled after listening to my opinion without studying this issue even once. . . . Wait until another day to bring up this issue again. I will write my opinion on this issue someday, and we will be able to tell right and wrong then.

This quotation exhibits the complicated power relation between the monarch and the scholarly community in deciding Confucian ritual norms and turning the past into history. Although the king occupied the pinnacle of political power, he could not spurn the collective voices of Confucian scholars. Their political opinions voiced in unity could not be invalidated solely through the political hierarchy.
The requests of the scholarly community to enshrine the Five Worthies continued, and intensified in 1608. The restoration of the Royal Confucian Shrine was being completed, and Kwanghae (r. 1608–1623) ascended the throne. Confucian literati from all over the country presented joint memorials in this year, in concert with the students of the Royal Academy and the royal ministers. Kwanghae remained unenthusiastic about this issue until 1610, when the nonofficial literati and government officials requested the enshrinement of the Five Worthies on a daily basis from the late fourth to the late fifth month. On the first day of the sixth month, Kwanghae, at long last, ordered royal ministers to discuss the procedures required for the enshrinement. On the fourth day of the ninth month, he issued an edict to publicly promulgate the enshrinement of the Five Worthies in the Royal Confucian Shrine. Four days later, Kwanghae personally performed the sacrificial ritual at the Royal Confucian Shrine with the crown prince.

The grand goal that the nationwide scholarly community unanimously demanded was achieved. In this process, the Confucian literati confirmed that their collective activism through joint memorials could yield decisive political effects. One difference between this case and Kim Ugoeng’s is the near absence of performative elements. When scholarly communities raised unanimous voices, they did not have to worry about their opinions being neglected in the already established bureaucratic structure. Their joint memorials focused more on rhetoric and content than on contentious performances to attract attention from the general public.

**THE DECLINING EFFECTS OF COLLECTIVE ACTIVISM IN THE AGE OF FactionALISM**

Now that their academic heroes were officially sanctified in the state ritual space, Confucian literati needed another common goal to bring nationwide scholars together again. However, this climax of collective activism coincided with the rise of factionalism in court politics, which subsequently affected the political culture of the nation as a whole. It did not take long for the rural scholarly communities to align with political factions in the court. The political system and bureaucratic structure, moreover, became much more stable and rational than during the earlier period when the sarim scholars first entered officialdom. In this situation, the rural scholars began to use their powerful mechanism of political mobilization for much more minor purposes—to reinforce their positions in the factional competitions.
Their joint memorials proved effective in impeaching their factional enemies or political opponents. The brawls between scholarly groups significantly reduced the legitimacy of their political voices. Joint memorials of nonofficial scholars could no longer generate meaningful impacts on the state political discourse after this period.

The rise of factionalism from the late sixteenth century caused convergence among regional, academic, and political identities. Academics’ identities, formed in different regions based upon their own intellectual traditions, shaped their political stance and decided their factional affiliations. Other political and regional considerations entered in; the Confucian norms no longer composed the dominant identity for rural scholars from the early seventeenth century. Consequently, their political voices diversified; scholar groups abused political epistolary practices for their own interests on the national stage; and the political effects of their collective activism atrophied rapidly. The state authority dismissed the abundant joint memorials expressing contentious views as a reflection of the conflicts of self-interest among different factions allied with scholar groups.

The influence of factionalism began to appear right after the enshrinement of the Five Worthies. This event prompted the academic traditions bracketed in various localities to unfold at the state level as a promising source of political power. In particular, Chŏng Inhong openly argued against the enshrinement of Yi Ĭnjk and T’oegeye in his memorial to resign his recent appointment as fifth state councilor in 1611. Chŏng, a leading figure in the Pugin faction, underlined the rigid will of his teacher, Cho Sik, to stay outside officialdom as the authentic option for Confucian scholars living through political turmoil, while problematizing the high offices held by Yi and T’oegeye, especially during the Literati Purge of 1545. Chŏng further explained that T’oegeye had defamed Cho without knowing his genuine scholarship and morality. Considering this issue in conjunction with the honoring processes for Cho Sik that he led afterward, it does not seem that Chŏng brought this up simply to argue against the defamation of his teacher. It appears that he feared the rise of T’oegeye’s disciples in court politics and intended to create his own academic brand as the source of political power. Local scholars in Chŏng’s hometown, Hapch’ŏn, began to present joint memorials requesting the enshrinement of Cho from 1613. The royal court posthumously conferred the honorific title of Munjŏng upon Cho in 1614, for which Chŏng’s power in court was essential. Now, collective activism was geared toward the interests of a very specific scholarly group in the
central government. This was completely different from the past, when collective actions were taken to achieve such lofty goals as eradicating Buddhist influences or instilling Confucian norms in the state discourse.

Almost all scholar-officials criticized Chŏng for his slander of the Confucian worthies. For instance, Kim Sanghŏn claimed to be surprised because only Chŏng went against the unanimous respect of the scholarly community for Yi and T’oegye.35 The collaboration of scholar groups from different regions made the enshrinement of the Five Worthies possible, against the rigid skepticism of Sŏnjo and Kwanghae. Chŏng’s opposite view, therefore, could undermine the legitimacy of political participation by the scholarly community. To rephrase Kim’s words, Chŏng’s criticism might encroach on the new sociopolitical role of Confucian scholars that they had attained through opposing the monarch’s preference to impose the role of guardians of the state system upon them. Echoing this sentiment, students of the Royal Academy removed Chŏng from their roster of Confucian scholars.

The political contention caused by his diatribe shifted the nature of the debates over the canonization of past Confucian scholars from contention between the monarch and the scholarly community to that among different scholar groups. This changed the political function of the collectivity of scholar groups.

About two months after Chŏng’s presentation of his memorial, the royal court began to receive joint memorials delivering diverse views on this issue presented by local scholar groups. Each group came to regard the state ritual institution as the effective source of their own political authority, and consequently, requests for attention to minor local interests abounded in these memorials. The need to unify scholars at the state level no longer existed. Chŏng’s pupils from the southern Yŏngnam area presented a couple of memorials defending Cho Sik and Chŏng. Their accounts underscore the localism-oriented academic tradition as their self-identity. Pak Kŏn’gap (d.u.), for instance, states in his memorial: “Your subject was born in the town where Cho Sik lived, and studied under Chŏng Inhong. Your subject has not learned a lot but respects the pureness of [their] morality. After learning of the [groundless] criticism of Chŏng, your subject could not help writing some words to ask Your Majesty to distinguish right from wrong.”356 When politically used, the combination of geographical proximity and the master-disciple relationship boosted the cohesiveness among members of a local scholar group, transforming them into a decisive political group. Three criteria—localism, academic lineage, and political identity—would together
mold the topography of the political culture of Chosŏn Korea in the period to come.

In the northern Yŏngnam area, meanwhile, the intellectual heirs of T'oegye collaborated to debunk Chŏng's criticism of their master and Yi, whom T'oegye had particularly eulogized. In the fourth month of 1611, one month after Chŏng's presentation of his memorial, Kŭm Ŭnghun (1540–1616) and Kim Chungch'ŏng (1567–1629) circulated a letter to T'oegye school scholars, organizing a meeting at Tosan Academy to discuss how they would react to Chŏng's defamation of their academic tradition.57 Early in the sixth month, scholars led by Kim Pongjo (1572–1630) presented a series of five joint memorials to the throne to criticize Chŏng. There remains no detailed record of how this group of scholars was mobilized and by what process they produced and presented their memorials. However, the collection of Kim's writings includes the five joint memorials presented by his group from the fourth day to the fourteenth day of the sixth month of 1611. Kim's group argued that making a distinction between right and wrong would be essential to promote the Confucian Way, and this would not be possible without punishing Chŏng, who had intentionally confused right and wrong.58 Kwanghae's responses display an unfavorable reaction to joint memorials produced by scholar groups. In the fourth joint memorial, Kim again stressed that the king did not make a clear distinction between right and wrong; although Kwanghae had enshrined Yi and T'oegye in the Royal Confucian Shrine, he did not exactly know why the two scholars deserved this honor. Although Kwanghae was not fully influenced by heterodox discourse, Kim continued, he did not precisely understand why these two worthies were not to be blamed; right and wrong coexisted in the king's logic.59 To this memorial, Kwanghae responded that because different people can have different opinions, he did not think it right for Kim's group to collectively support one particular opinion.60 He defended Chŏng by arguing that he had inadvertently criticized T'oegye and Yi while honoring his teacher. Kwanghae here particularly expressed his disapproval of using collectivity as a political tool. He made it clear that he could not tolerate the collective action of Kim's group expressing their rage in invidious terms.61 In the last joint memorial, Kim argued that denouncing other scholars was not the right way to respect one's teacher. He thus claimed that his group presented memorials not to canonize T'oegye and Yi but to safeguard the Confucian Way and the national morale. The king replied to this memorial by ordering these scholars to just return to their studies.62
The negative response of the monarch to these joint memorials raises a question about the political effectiveness of the collective textual practices. As discussed earlier, the enormous thrust of joint memorials by scholars both inside and outside officialdom made the enshrinement of the Five Worthies possible. The situation in 1611 was completely different from that of the year before in that the scholarly community no longer spoke with a unanimous voice. This provided the monarch with leeway to reinforce his political sway by deepening the conflicts between scholar groups. In this context, their collectivity did not bring about either a perception of moral superiority or impressive publicity, as their predecessors had enjoyed, but came to be seen as their selfish pursuit of power in national politics. Therefore, it was not enough for local scholar groups to simply rely on their collectivity to create political effects at the state level. They needed a more sophisticated agenda to overwhelm both competing groups and the state authority. The political participation of diverse scholar groups in the period to come, therefore, evolved into either very elaborate cooperation between the scholar-officials in the court and their cohorts at the local level or novel projects to tweak existing perceptions about the academies.

Sticking to the Existing Claim-Making Method

As the conflation between academic schools and localism developed into exclusive factionalism, the rise and fall of different factions characterized the late Chosŏn political culture. In particular, the competition between the two major political factions, the Namin and Sŏin, shaped the discourses on academic lineage and the enshrinement of past Confucian worthies. Whereas Namin scholars claimed their inheritance of T’oegeye’s scholarly tradition based upon their local scholarly network in the Yŏngnam area, the Sŏin faction, which sprawled around the capital and in Ch’ungch’ŏng and Chŏlla, identified themselves as the intellectual offspring of Yi I and Sŏng Hon. The belated attempt of the Sŏin faction to enshrine these two founding figures in the Royal Confucian Shrine beginning in King Injo’s (r. 1623–1649) reign caused clashes with Namin scholars. The destiny of these two Confucian worthies in the state ritual space fluctuated widely depending on whether or not the Sŏin faction dominated court politics. Yi and Sŏng were initially enshrined in the Royal Confucian Shrine in 1682 during King Sukchong’s (r. 1674–1720) reign, when the Sŏin faction was dominant. However, this was undone in 1689, when the Namin faction retook the leading role in
the royal court. Five years later, in 1694, the state reenshrined these two Confucian worthies, as the Sŏin faction regained dominance in court politics. The contention between the two factions continued throughout the seventeenth century. Despite the significance of this particular issue, the joint memorials submitted by the factions did not create any decisive breakthrough in court debates. The scholarly communities, nonetheless, continued to use the joint memorial system. When the social structure was stable and there were no major changes in the political system, social actors tended to replicate preexisting political performances, irrespective of their effectiveness.

The first request to enshrine Yi and Sŏng appeared in 1635, when the Sŏin faction dominated court politics during Injo's reign. Song Sihyŏng (d.u.), with about 270 colleagues in the Royal Academy, presented a joint memorial for this purpose. It triggered some discussion in the royal court, but Injo brushed it aside, in spite of his dependence on the Sŏin faction. This issue did not appear in the sillok again until the end of Injo's reign. However, it was revived when Hyojong ascended in 1649. Responding to this, Yu Chik (1602–1662) presented a joint memorial objecting to the enshrinement of Yi and Sŏng in 1650, which was signed by about nine hundred scholars from forty-four of the seventy-one prefectures of the Yŏngnam area. The record of conduct of Yu Chik illustrates how the impact of collective political actions by local Confucian scholars had dwindled in court politics, and how risky it was to take the role of leader of a joint memorial. This record reads that the scholars of the Royal Academy requested several times to enshrine Yi and Sŏng in the early days of Hyojong's reign, and this renewed discussion prompted Yu's group to prove their disqualification as enshrinees. Yi Simyŏng (1590–1674), one of the leading figures in the Yŏngnam T'oegye school, drafted an early version of the joint memorial. In it, he argued that if Yi I's criticism of T'oegye represented the “right,” which was an attempt to rebuke T'oegye's argument highlighting the supremacy of the Confucian Way (i) over material power (ki), the scholarship of both T'oegye and Zhu Xi fell into the “wrong,” because T'oegye had inherited Zhu Xi's Confucian theories. He continued that Yi I should not be enshrined because he had censured T'oegye, whom the state had already honored as a Confucian worthy. The presented version of the joint memorial, drafted by Yi Ku (1613–1654), also stressed the academic disqualification of Yi and Sŏng. Yi Ku particularly criticized Yi I's theory on the relation between the Four Beginnings and the Seven Chŏng. Kwŏn Sangil later commented on this
memorial, saying that Yi Ku’s extensive discussion of Neo-Confucian theory academically rationalized the objection to enshrine Yi I and Sŏng Hon beyond the political consideration of this issue.\textsuperscript{67}

Around two months later, some forty scholars, also from the Yŏngnam area and led by Sin Sŏkhyŏng (d.u.), presented a joint memorial to demonstrate the falsehood of Yu Chik’s memorial.\textsuperscript{68} The antagonistic opinion brought up by the scholar group from the same region critically undermined the political authenticity of Yu’s group. Hyojong’s response to this memorial shows that the conflicts between different scholar groups distracted the king from the main points of the given issue. The king stated: “I understand what you intend to say in your memorial. I see that you scholars conflict with each other and cause trouble all the time. In my opinion, what you are doing does not differ at all from distinguishing a superior one in a flock of [detestable] crows.”\textsuperscript{69} The king bypassed the major point of the discussion and underscored the negative effects of contention among scholar groups, reducing them to self-interested rabble rather than trying to understand the two competing opinions. The organization of scholar groups into political factions and the competition among them empowered the monarch to deny the political perspectives of the scholarly community by highlighting the evil effects of the political unrest that their competitions stirred up. Moreover, one discussion between the king and royal ministers reveals their suspicion about the number of signers of the joint memorials. Because the number of local scholars who went to the capital to present their joint memorials amounted to only about eighty or ninety, there was no way to verify who had indeed signed them.\textsuperscript{70} The collectivity inscribed on the texts could not guarantee the political empowerment of the local scholarly community.

Royal Academy scholars also reacted to this joint memorial by removing Yu from their roster of Confucian scholars. They went on to punish him by defaming him through a parade stigmatizing his name written on a piece of yellow paper as an immoral felon.\textsuperscript{71} Although Yu’s record of conduct simply states that he lost interest in sociopolitical issues and devoted himself to scholarship from this time on,\textsuperscript{72} it appears that he personally suffered from this punishment. In his letter written in 1650 to a group of local scholars, Yu expressed his worry about the recent decision of Yŏngnam scholars not to take the civil service examination to protest the punishments imposed on him. As Yu thought it might worsen his situation, he asked these scholars to find different ways to help him.\textsuperscript{73} Also, his reply to a scholar named Pae Tögŏn (d.u.) requested that Pae not instigate local scholars to boycott the
civil service examination because it would be too much as an expression of sympathy for him.\textsuperscript{74} Yu later advised his nephew, Kim Kyegwang (d.u.), who would become the leader of joint memorials requesting an official charter for Samgye Academy in Andong, not to take this position. He warned that it could invite disastrous outcomes, just like the one that he had undergone.\textsuperscript{75} Nonofficial Confucian literati had to consider the possible risks from their collective actions as Chosŏn politics became malicious due to the rise of factionalism.

As shown, divided voices, geared toward their group interests, mitigated the effects of their collective political actions. However, Chosŏn scholars persisted in expressing their opinions with existing methods of political participation. When the bureaucratic structure and social system were stable, political actors did not find motivation to abandon old claim-making methods and invent a new one.

**Defining Scholarly Identity through Political Participation**

Why did Chosŏn Confucians stick to the joint memorial system, even after it became ineffective? In the changed political environment in both Chosŏn and northeast Asia, the political participation of scholarly communities delivered completely different connotations in the seventeenth century. To quote Samuel Huntington, “People use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity.”\textsuperscript{76} Chosŏn scholars in this period were willing to join the state political discourse to figure out their role within the regime or civilization. Participation in the political process allowed them to publicly confirm that they deserved the rights and respect that their identities entailed.\textsuperscript{77} Therefore, they had no reason to bother innovating new claim-making repertoires. They could repeat old methods of collective activism, effective or not, because what they anticipated from these hackneyed performances had completely changed.

The desire to define self-identity closely resulted from the drastic changes in the East Asian political order after the Imjin War and two Manchu invasions. The collapse of the Ming and the subsequent establishment of the Qing dynasty in 1644 led Korean literati to redefine the place of the Chosŏn in the region both politically and culturally. Although they reluctantly accepted the political hegemony of the “barbarian” Qing, Korean Confucians strongly disavowed the cultural leadership of this Manchu regime. Chosŏn literati considered themselves the legitimate heirs of the fallen
Ming, and Korea the last bastion of Confucian civilization. To be loyal to the already dead Ming dynasty featured the symbolic claim that the Chosŏn dynasty was its authentic heir and thus that the center of Confucian civilization had shifted to Korea. The literati developed discourses on respect for the Zhou tradition (chonjuron) and the difference between the civilized and barbarians (hwairon). The scrutiny of the Zhou origin of East Asian Confucian tradition manifested the foreignness of the Japanese and Manchu invaders and subsequently intensified the distinction between the civilized and barbarians in political discourse. This binary frame helped Korean Confucians dilute the recent national disgrace—the Chosŏn, as the center of Confucian civilization, had been neither defeated by Japan nor subjugated to Manchu culturally. This visceral reaction triggered an aggressive political agenda calling for revenge on Manchu on behalf of the fallen Ming—the Northern Expedition (Pukpŏllon)—during the reign of Hyojong, which lingered until the end of the dynasty in relation to the revulsion toward Western imperialism and Japanese colonialism.

This idea of Chosŏn as Little Middle Kingdom (Sojunghwa) did not simply remain a political metaphor. Some individual Confucian literati embodied it, which subsequently changed their way of life. Yi Simyŏng, a leading figure of the Yŏngnam T’oegeye school in the seventeenth century, studied under Chang Hŭnghyo (1564–1634), who had learned under first-generation T’oegeye school scholars such as Kim Sŏngil and Yu Sŏngnyong. Yi passed down this scholarship to his sons, Yi Hwiil (1619–1672) and Yi Hyŏnil (1627–1704). His grandson, Yi Chae, also led the Yŏngnam T’oegeye school by inheriting this family academic tradition. It is remarkable that Yi Simyŏng decided to withdraw from normal life upon hearing of the fall of the Ming and the establishment of the Manchu Qing dynasty. He led his family onto the isolated Subi Mountain of Yŏnghae prefecture in 1653. He seems to have lived there for an extended period, as Yi Chae was born there in 1657. Yi Hyŏnil’s biography of Yi Simyŏng tells us that right after the fall of the Ming, Yi intended to circulate an open letter (kyŏngmun) to call for united resistance against the Qing in concert with the Ming revivalist movement in China’s Shandong area. This way of life in this specific period holds vital significance in that a prominent scholarly family, leaders of the regional Confucian tradition, willfully distanced themselves as far as possible from the political center. This did not hinder them from mobilizing regional scholars. To the contrary, this positioning reinforced their ideological purity as academic and political leaders. The changes in the East Asian political
order caused Korean Confucians to redefine their notion about space and its relation to power.

The domestic political discourses also reflected this changed world order. Hyojong’s death in 1659 sparked debates on the propriety of the mourning ritual practices for the Chosŏn king and the royal family, which continued until 1674, when Hyojong’s queen died. The ritual controversy focused on how to construe the Chosŏn king’s death in terms of Confucian classical protocols. When Hyojong died in 1659, deciding the level of the mourning garment for Injo’s widow, Queen Dowager Chaŭi (1624–1688), surfaced as a problem, because there were different interpretations of Hyojong’s status in relation to his father. Hyojong was Injo’s second son and was appointed as crown prince upon the death of his elder brother. Whereas the Sŏin faction led by Song Siyŏl and Song Chun’gil argued that the queen dowager’s ritual level for Hyojong should be decided based upon his filial status as the second son of Injo, the Namin faction, headed by Hö Mok (1595–1682), Yun Hyu (1617–1680), and Yun Sŏndo (1587–1671), claimed that the queen dowager’s ritual level should be the same as for the ruler, irrespective of the biological filial rank. Whereas the former group emphasized the universality of Confucian ritualism, the latter group put more emphasis on the political supremacy of Chosŏn kingship. Queen Dowager Chaŭi ended up wearing the mourning garment for Hyojong for one year, following the Sŏin scholar-officials’ argument, although the Namin group continued to cast doubt on this decision. However, the issue reheated upon the death of Queen Insŏn (1618–1674), Hyojong’s widow. Again, it concerned the ritual level of mourning garment that Queen Dowager Chaŭi had to wear for her daughter-in-law, which the relationship between Hyojong and Injo would ordain. Unlike the debate fifteen years previously, in 1674 the Namin overwhelmed the Sŏin faction; thus, the queen dowager’s relation to Hyojong was redefined as that toward the ruler. This controversy delivers more condensed connotations than truncated explanations of the ritual scholarship or factionalism in several respects, if considered in the context of diverse attempts to search for a new self-identity in seventeenth-century Chosŏn Korea. This ritual controversy should be interpreted against the backdrop of a shifted political and cultural order in East Asia—the fall of the Ming and the rise of the Qing—entailing a claim of Chosŏn intellectuals about their role as the sole guardians of Confucian culture. In this regard, the mourning for the Chosŏn king represents “the redefinition of the Korean state, its relationship to [Confucian] civilization, and its role in a changed world order.”84 The participation
of rural scholars in this ritual controversy thus conveyed a symbolic meaning of their cultural and political identity in the changed world order.

Yu Sech’öl (1627–1681) led the presentation of joint memorials on this ritual issue signed by about 1,100 Yŏngnam scholars in 1666. Yu left a daily record detailing how these scholars produced and presented their joint memorials. It covers from the twelfth day of the twelfth month of 1665, when Andong scholars sent out the first circular letters mustering local scholars to all prefectures and academies in the Yŏngnam area, to the fourteenth day of the fourth month of 1666, when Yu returned to Andong from Seoul after submitting the joint memorials to the throne. Although the Sŏin scholar-officials dominated the decision on the mourning for Hyojong after his death, the Namin faction scholars remained adamant about rectifying Hyojong’s status as the eldest son who succeeded to the throne legitimately. The joint memorial of Yu’s group was an attempt to reverse the political decision made under the domination of the Sŏin faction.

The Yŏngnam scholars, from the beginning of their collective actions, sensed that their joint memorials would not produce any immediate political effects. They must have intended some consequences other than the correction of ritual protocols for the late king. Besides implementing an already familiar repertoire—wearing the same color, marching in formation, and ritualizing their gatherings—the scholars were desperate to include as many literary licentiates and classics licentiates as possible to legitimize their opinion and stress their worthiness, because “this case is very different from past cases.” Moreover, they were concerned that local offices had been checking on the mobilization of the group. Yu’s account records that one clerk of the Andong district reported what the local scholars were doing for this joint memorial to the local office, and the information was even forwarded to the governor of Kyŏngsang. Moreover, the slaves in the Andong state school, where Yu’s group gathered and discussed various issues, mostly belonged to the local officials. They informed their masters of what these scholars were doing. Thus, the scholars decided to move their meetings to the local state school in Yech’ŏn. The investigative gaze of the state authority put the rural scholars’ collective activism under pressure from the beginning of their mobilization.

According to Yu Sech’öl’s record, he thought it highly possible that the state would punish all participating scholars, due to the sensitivity and significance of this ritual issue. The discussion about whether or not Song Siyŏl’s name had to be specified in the joint memorial shows that some
participating scholars had serious concerns about punishment from the royal court. They heard that one Namin scholar-official had been removed from the roster of Confucian scholars because the censoring organs staffed with Sŏn officials condemned his letter sent to Song Siyŏl, in which he criticized Song’s ritual theory. After hearing this news, some scholars preferred to indicate Song indirectly as “the official who discussed the ritual” (ůiryesin) in fear of possible punishment for pinpointing the powerhouse official to be blamed. But Yu persisted in specifying Song’s name to make their point clear. As Yu Chik’s reaction to the punishment from the court reveals, the removal of scholars from the roster and the prohibition against taking the civil service examination traumatized Confucian scholars because they could not fulfill their expected role in society with this kind of stigma. Many remained reluctant to sign joint memorials. The circular letter sent out on the fifth day of the third month in the phase of collecting signatures from scholars all around the Yŏngnam area actually warned signers of possible punishment. Also, on the twenty-third day of the third month, when Yu’s group was discussing the submission of the second memorial, Yu reminded the participants that he would not be responsible for any punishment from the court.

Having perceived the political ineffectiveness of the joint memorial and potential punishments, Yu proposed to append their annotations of excerpts on the mourning ritual from various Confucian classics to their joint memorial. Following Yu’s suggestion, the scholars began to edit and annotate excerpts from Confucian ritual classics. They titled the resulting text *The Evidential Research on the Mourning Garments* (Sangbok kojŭng) and presented it to the throne along with their memorial. The politicization of classical knowledge in part reflects the academic atmosphere of the seventeenth century, when Confucian scholars manipulated the study of the classics for partisan interests in the name of orthodoxy. The beginning of *The Evidential Research on the Mourning Garments* demonstrates this pivotal function of textual studies in the political debate:

After looking up the debates on the mourning ritual of 1659, your subjects learned that the ritual theory put forth by Song Siyŏl does not correspond to the Confucian ritual classics. So, it has already marred the ceremonies and rituals of the state and made people perplexed. [It is the reason that] we cannot help discussing this issue [again]. Thus, your subjects dared to produce elaborated explanations [on this issue] for the review of Your
Majesty by excerpting essential parts from *The Comprehensive Explanation on the Ceremonies and Rituals* (Ŭirye t’onghae) and also by widely quoting diverse theories of past scholars.95

Because an erroneous understanding about the Confucian classics caused the political problem, supremacy in scholarship would guarantee political domination. Under the changed power relation in East Asia, the cultural and political domains had converged in a new self-definition of the Chosŏn as the only guardian of Confucian civilization. Chosŏn intellectuals therefore had to redraw “the territorial and conceptual boundaries of civilization and barbarity” to acquire symbolic superiority over the “barbarian” Qing to which Korea was politically and ritually subservient.96 Because this symbolic self-elevation rested upon confirmation of the superiority of Korea in Confucian culture, the academic discourse directly shaped the political concerns. Thus, the discourse on Confucian scholarship that the local scholarly community scrutinized, at least rhetorically, became the central discourse of the civilization.

The rumor about the joint memorial of Yu’s group had already spread to the capital among leading figures of the Sŏin faction even before its presentation. Yu Sech’ŏl’s record on the eighteenth day of the third month in 1666, one day after the submission of the joint memorial, explains that the Sŏin officials had heard that this joint memorial would pinpoint one specific official to be executed.97 It is understandable that the mobilization of this large number of local scholars from all around the province for about three months was big news for political elites in the capital. The Sŏin faction had been working on ways to nullify this collective activism by Yŏngnam scholars.98 The spiral letter that Yi Tansang sent to Hong Chuwŏn (1606–1672) in 1666 decried this joint memorial as groundless gibberish (figure 6.1, top).99 However, the Sŏin did not simply denounce it but also rallied their collective opposition to torpedo the Yŏngnam scholars’ political ambition. Another letter sent to Hong shows that Sŏin officials shared political information with nonofficial members of their faction through extensive epistolary interactions. Although Yi was not serving the court at the moment, he was informed of the court discussion of this political event that was actually developing while he was exchanging letters with Hong. Yi mentioned that he knew what the king discussed with his ministers during the royal lecture because Hong Myŏngha (1608–1668), the second state councilor, closely described it in his letter. Kim Suhang and his brothers also conveyed the
news about court debates on this particular issue. Yi’s letter also mentioned the memorials presented by students at the Royal Academy and officials at the Royal Secretariat, which he denounced as false interpretations of Confucian rituals that took into account only the present situation. He argued that even the king’s order was corrupted with these claims, which is exactly opposite to the claim made by Song Siyŏl. Yi suggested that this point should constitute the main claim in the memorial to be submitted to refute the Yŏngnam scholars. In fact, the Sŏin scholars from Ch’ungch’ŏng were working on a joint memorial disclaiming Yu’s group, a copy of which Yi received from Hong Chuwŏn. He discussed its contents with such political dignitaries as Hong Myŏngha and Kim Suhang before it was actually submitted to the throne. The scholars belonging to the same political faction coordinated effective epistolary networks connecting the officials in the capital with scholars in the countryside, so the Sŏin officials were ready to champion the joint memorials to be presented by their cohorts in the countryside.

Here, it is also notable that Yi Tansang’s letter to Hong Chuwŏn bears spiral form. Yi applied this form to indicate the private and informal nature of this correspondence. This signal might have affected how widely Hong would share the letter. The same letter included in the collection of Yi’s writings had been extensively edited in the course of shifting to the public realm, and the spiral effects had been straightened (figure 6.1, bottom). The usage of spiral forms as the marker of the communicative vernacular facilitated the orchestration between private correspondence and sociopolitical epistles in the political mobilization of scholar groups. Unlike this case, however, most letters written by elites have survived only in printed forms, although the status of the original manuscripts is unknown. The usage of the vernacular spatial layouts seems to have added one more layer of sophistication in political communication among male elites.

The coordination of Sŏin scholars turned out to be very effective in discouraging the Yŏngnam scholar group. The royal ministers and the king raised questions about the political authenticity of the collective actions of the local scholarly community, as observed in the previous cases. Yu Sech’ŏl’s record tells us that 103 scholars including himself went to Seoul and presented the joint memorial on the seventeenth day of the third month of 1666. However, Hong Myŏngha discounted these scholars as hired and argued that more than half of them ran away within several days after arriving. Hong urged the king not to treat them as Confucian scholars. In response to this joint memorial, King Hyŏnjong (r. 1659–1674) made it clear that he
Figure 6.1. Yi Tansang’s letter to Hong Chuwŏn. The original letter in spiral form (top) was straightened up when it was printed as part of Yi’s writing collection (bottom right). Image of the original letter from Han’guk koganch’al yŏng’guhoe, ed., Yet munin t’ul ŭi ch’ŏsŏ kanch’al, 122–23. Photo courtesy of Taunsaem. Image of the printed version from Ch’ŏnggwanjae chip, 8:2a. Outline added by the author. Photo courtesy of the Institute for the Translation of Korean Classics.
would not accept opinions on this already settled issue, even if many scholars relied on their collectivity to justify the legitimacy of their opinions. The court actually punished Yu with prohibition from taking the civil service examination and did not lift it until 1674. Nevertheless, the group’s insistence on presenting the joint memorial clearly inscribed their political role. In the political culture of eighteenth-century France, for instance, political expressions made opinion holders organize the present by rocking old certainties. Likewise, rural scholars’ collective activism in Chosön “created new forms of alterity” by turning away from the given political situation. Whereas the previous collective political actions of the local scholarly community were mostly concerned with regional and sectarian issues, such as requesting or opposing the canonization of specific scholars, this joint memorial reveals the attempt of provincial scholars to redefine their role in the national discourse bearing on Korea’s place in Confucian civilization. In this vein, Yu’s taking the leadership position, despite the likelihood of punishment from the court, evinces that his authority as a legitimate Confucian scholar offset his loss of reputation and privilege in the existing political system. The presentation of joint memorials might be punishable but conferred no infamy upon participating scholars.

Although the presentations of joint memorials did not have immediate and decisive effects on state policy, this kind of collective action of the scholarly community came to function as the preliminary process for political debates in the royal court. When these political actions were recorded and referenced later, they could influence the actual decision-making process. In fact, the joint memorials presented by Yu’s group, which the king and Sŏin ministers had decried as erroneous in 1666, functioned as the reference guiding the decision-making process on the mourning level of Queen Dowager Chaŭi for her daughter-in-law in 1674.

MODIFYING THE TEMPLATES OF COLLECTIVE ACTIVISM

Even if the primary goal of political participation was not to promote the self-interest of scholarly communities, its diminished effects triggered the revision of the existing repertoire of collective actions. Moreover, it had become more difficult to have memorials reviewed by the king, due to new administrative hurdles such as the künsil system. King Yŏngjo ordered this system implemented in 1773 to prevent too many memorials being submitted by nonofficial scholars. It required the head scholar of the Royal
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Academy (changŭi) to preliminarily review all memorials presented by non-official literati to decide whether or not they should be forwarded to the Office of the Royal Secretariat.108 Yŏngjo originally intended to guide petitioners to be more prudent with their memorials by sharing responsibility with the Royal Academy. However, the Royal Academy scholars manipulated this system to exclude scholar groups supporting political factions other than their own.109 From the late eighteenth century, nonofficial scholars, particularly from the Yŏngnam area, focused on increasing the number of participants to bypass the kŭnsil system as well as to increase their political authority. Ultimately, King Chŏngjo received a joint memorial signed by 10,057 Confucian scholars of the Yŏngnam area on the twenty-seventh day of the intercalary fourth month of 1792. The engagement of such a large number took place only seven times and prompted the coinage of a term, maninso, meaning a memorial signed by ten thousand people.

The 1792 maninso reprimanded court ministers who had criticized Chŏngjo’s devotion as a way to honor his father, the late Crown Prince Sado (1735–1762).110 It also promised Chŏngjo that they would support him to uphold his royal authority. Considering the sensitivity of the subject matter and the intensity of factional strife in this period, it must not have been easy to draw the consensus of more than ten thousand rural scholars in order to produce this joint memorial. According to Ryu Ijwa’s (1763–1837) daily record on the production and submission of this maninso, the Yŏngnam scholars relied on well-developed kinship networks. In a meeting held at Pyŏngsan Academy to rally regional scholarly communities, representatives from about thirty lineage groups were urged to encourage their clan members to join this cause. The participants were also expected to commit financially, as the signers were supposed to make monetary contributions to support this collective political action. To expedite the process, the leaders went to Seoul first, and the representatives of each town followed them to the capital with the signs that they collected. When everyone had gathered in Seoul, the group exceeded two hundred scholars, and they produced the draft to be submitted to the throne. In this process, the group decided to change their leader from Sŏng Őnjip (1732–1812), a retired ex-official, to Yi U (d.u.), a nonofficial scholar, in order to emphasize that their opinion represented the voices of nongovernmental sectors. However, Royal Academy scholars refused to forward the memorial to the court in their kŭnsil review. Yi U and his group decided to bypass the kŭnsil process and tried to submit it directly to the throne by staging a demonstration in front of the palace. However,
they were again turned down by the gatekeepers. As an impromptu measure, they asked a Namin court minister, Kim Handong (1740–1811), to notify the king of the existence of this maninso. Upon hearing this, Chŏngjo ordered them to be given an audience immediately.\textsuperscript{111}

Chŏngjo ordered Yi U and his group to read the memorial aloud in his presence. Yi had not completed reading half of the memorial when the sun set. Eight candles were lit, and he continued to read. Reading the memorial aloud must have enhanced the delivery of the message, as it allowed oral improvisations for embellishment, emphasis, and explanation. The oral performance and writing skills thus equally affected the reception of the given text.\textsuperscript{112} After the reading, the king praised the loyalty and integrity of the Yŏngnam scholars and directed that the details of this memorial should be recorded. The summary of the memorial was included in the sillok, and the names of all 10,057 scholars were included in \textit{The Daily Record of the Royal Secretariat}. Five days later, Chŏngjo appointed Yi the guard of Royal Tombs as a reward and granted some portions of rice to his group for their travel expenses back to their hometown.\textsuperscript{113} On the seventh day of the fifth month, Yi again presented a joint memorial to urge the king to promulgate the innocence of the late crown prince to the nation, the signers of which increased to 10,368.\textsuperscript{114} Although the king did not honor his father publicly as the joint memorial suggested, this political case marked a watershed moment after which Chŏngjo dominated state politics over the Noron faction.

Considering that the population of Korea in 1790 was about 7.4 million and the elite class made up only about 5 percent of the total,\textsuperscript{115} this level of political participation by nonofficial scholars was phenomenal. Chŏngjo admired this mobilization and asserted, “The opinion of the ten thousand scholars amounts to that of the whole nation” (manyŏ changp’o chi ron, ch’uk kugin chi ron).\textsuperscript{116} The moral property of kongnon did not correspond to the number of people championing it. When the number of involved people exceeded a certain tipping point, however, the masses could generate political power that generated the new definition of kongnon.

The more signers the maninso included, the bigger its physical form became. We can obtain material information only from two existing maninso produced respectively in 1855 and 1884. The former was simply returned to the presenters by the king after its submission\textsuperscript{117} and has been preserved in Tosan Academy since then; the latter was not actually submitted because the court decision to adopt Western attire, against which the maninso rallied, was revoked due to the failed Kapsin coup. The coup took
place while the scholars were on their way to Seoul to submit their maninso; and as they did not need to submit it, they stored the text at Oksan Academy of Kyŏngju. The former maninso, a joint memorial presented by 10,094 Yŏngnam scholars in 1855. It is about 325 feet long and weighs about sixty-six pounds. For this single document, 130 sheets of paper were glued together. The contents occupy only about seven feet, and the rest is filled with participants’ signatures. One sheet of paper includes the signatures of about eighty scholars. The number and unity of the participating scholars were visualized and embodied in the megasize maninso; this reinforced the political authority of nonofficial rural scholars in the national discourse. The production and handling of this monumental text might have required not only a substantial investment of resources but also the involvement and collaboration of many skilled hands for transcribing the contents of the memorial and names of participants, trimming and gluing together many sheets of paper, rolling and unrolling the text, making a box to hold it, wrapping the box with a cloth, and so on. The task of transporting this mammoth political document to the palace must have been very arduous, but it would have attracted attention from the general public. In a similar vein, the massive size of the maninso must have affected the ways the king and court ministers interpreted the political message that the text conveyed. Even before reading it, they would have been awed by its size and imagined the effort and resources put into its production and delivery. We can assume a symbolic impact of the collective textual practices, if only from the colossal physical form of joint memorials.

Just as nonofficial scholars in the late sixteenth century immediately emulated the techniques of collective activism devised by Kim Ugoeng’s group, there were six more maninso following the 1792 case before the end of the Chosŏn dynasty. Unlike the previous joint memorials, however, it was not easy to rally more than ten thousand people for the same political cause. As shown in the 1792 maninso, political mobilizations of this size drew upon existing social networks such as kinship organizations and local academies, for which the systematic usage of diverse social epistolary genres was essential. As shown in table 6.1, several cases involved fewer than ten thousand participants, although modern scholars have categorized them together as maninso. However, the later scholars considered the 1792 case as the template to be studied and restaged. For instance, the 1855 maninso clearly invokes the 1792 case. It asserts that the petitioning scholars were biological and academic heirs of those who had submitted the maninso in 1792.

The
1871 maninso case, which called for the annulment of the court’s decision to abolish most academies nationwide, also reveals how strictly petitioning scholars tried to follow the precedents in their mobilization. The circular letter explaining how many signers should be assigned to each town asserts that the decision was made based upon “old examples of scholars’ memorials” (yuso chi kurye). Just like the 1792 case, this mobilization utilized the existing kinship organizations. The clan elders were responsible for getting both signatures and monetary donations from the kinsmen. Moreover, the departure of the petitioning scholars was graced with a spectacular send-off banquet. On the second day of the sixth month of 1871, scholars from the Yŏngnam area gathered at Tonam Academy of Sangju. The memorial was read aloud and wrapped in red cotton cloth, then put in a wooden box. The box was again wrapped with paper on which “Memorial by Yŏngnam Scholars to Call for Restoration of Academies” (Yŏngnam yusaeng ch’ŏng poksol sawŏn sangso) was written in big characters. Then all the scholars prostrated themselves to the north four times. A slave carried the box containing the memorial on his shoulders, and the scholars followed him in one line. The scholars sending them off filled the street and followed them as far as four kilometers, which many bystanders observed. The sighs and groans of the scholars filled the streets with uproarious noises. All these descriptions strikingly resemble what was observed in Kim Ugoeng’s case in 1565. The descriptions of these two different cases about three centuries apart also show similar narrative strategies. The practice of recording the political mobilization was modeled after the past precedents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1792</td>
<td>Restoring the honor for Crown Prince Sado</td>
<td>10,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>Abolition of discrimination against the secondary sons</td>
<td>9,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Restoring the honor for Crown Prince Sado</td>
<td>10,094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Objection to the abolition of local academies</td>
<td>10,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Calling for the return of Grand Prince Hŭngsŏn Lord Taewŭn</td>
<td>About 10,000 (not specific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Expulsion of foreign influences</td>
<td>About 10,000 (not specific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Objection to the introduction of Western fashion</td>
<td>8,849</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The dramatic return of Yŏngnam scholars in court politics in 1792 through maninso was not repeated by their successors. Although scholars from this region studied and imitated this particular case, the political effectiveness of maninso decreased almost immediately. Six later maninso cases neither yielded the meaningful political effects that the scholarly communities intended nor attracted much attention, despite the strenuous process of mobilizing rural scholars and resources. The innovative political performances had lost their edge very quickly, and later followers found their claim-making methods ineffective. However, political actors tended to stick to existing modes of political participation rather than innovating new performances. The maninso tradition continued until the collapse of the Chosŏn dynasty and the introduction of a modern form of governance under Japanese colonial rule. Only the total change in the mode of interaction between the society and the state made the joint memorial system obsolete in Korea.

The development of the joint memorial system in the late Chosŏn period shows the unique ways politically marginalized rural literati interacted with the state authority. The appropriation of well-developed local networks through diverse epistolary practices enabled them to participate in state discourses as legitimate political actors. They learned how to politicize their collectivity as well as how to visualize it in both epistolary and public spaces. In this context, political epistolary texts always occupied the center stage of claim-making performances. Those who mastered how to orchestrate the rhetoric of political texts and the performances dramatizing these messages ruled the national discourse of the period. In late Chosŏn Korea, the contents of political texts shaped the modes of political participation, and vice versa. The convergence of kongnon discourse and political activism of rural scholars through collective epistolary practices, which emerged in the late sixteenth century, characterized the Chosŏn literati’s decisive choice of a radical political lifestyle focused on epistolary practices.