On the Construction Process of the Surname/ Ancestral Seat Descent Groups in Korea as seen through Genealogies

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ABSTRACT

The uniform application in understanding the characteristics of Korean surname/ancestral seat descent groups of the current concept of ‘clan’ and ‘lineage’ when tracing descent from a common ancestor ignores their respective historical construction process. This paper highlights some misleading results of research based on such a uniform application and suggests that certain categories be used rather than one single concept to accommodate the highly particular and complicated construction process of Korean surname/ancestral descent groups.

Keywords: surname/ancestral seat descent groups, clan, lineage, genealogy, first ancestor, later prominent ancestor

Introduction
The surname/ancestral seat descent groups in Korea are known to comprise patrilineal kinsmen tracing their descent from one common first ancestor (sijo始祖). The immense importance descent groups have had in Korean society past and present has promoted ample surveys and research on them. Unfortunately some misconceptions regarding such descent groups continue to hamper research.

From a historical point of view, the most problematic understanding of the Korean surname/ancestral seat descent groups stems from ignoring the fact that these descent groups are the outcome of a historical process. This paper points out the problems such a misconception has caused in understanding the Korean surname/ancestral seat descent groups (sŏng gwan chiptan姓貴集團), and it illustrates the unique features of these descent groups by tracing the historical process of their construction.

Misconceptions about Korean Surname/Ancestral Seat Descent Groups
It is misleading to apply retrospectively such English terms as ‘lineage’ and ‘clan’ to the earlier forms of Korean surname/ancestral seat (hereafter S/A) descent groups based on later developments. John B. Duncan in his The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty for example fails to redefine the term ‘lineage’ when analyzing the central yangban descent groups that showed a great deal of continuity during the Koryŏ-Chosŏn dynastic transition.
Duncan's top ten S/A descent groups include the Hwangnyo Min (the Yohung Min), the Andong Kwon, the P'ap'yong Yun, the Munwha Yu, the Andong Kim, the Chonju Ch'oe, the Chuksan Pak, the Kyongju Yi, the P'yongyang Cho, and the Ch'ongju Han. He treats each of these descent groups in the beginning of the dynasty as the established lineage they became in the later years of the dynasty, thus leading to a misunderstanding of their historical development.

According to Duncan, the Chonju Choe (全州 崔氏) lineage comprises segment A and segment B, each descending from Kyun (均, a civilian official prominent after the military coup of 1170) and Sunjak (純爵, a contemporaneous military officer) respectively (Duncan 2000, 131-32). But the two segments have separate first ancestors (sijo 始祖). Hence, they cannot be subsumed under a single lineage. Similarly, he sees two separate groups of the Andong Kim (安東 金氏) as one lineage (Duncan 2000, 128-27). Thus, the so called 'old' Andong Kim which produced a number of the highest munhwa (文科) examination passers in the early Choson, and the 'new' Andong Kim which became politically prominent in the nineteenth century are recognized as one single lineage despite the fact that they worshiped separate first ancestors and thus do not fit the current concept of 'lineage,' tracing descent from a common first ancestor.

The Andong Kwon (安東 權氏) and the Kyongju Yi (慶州 李氏) are also recognized to have had two distinct segments respectively in the early Choson (Duncan 2000, 122-24, 128-29). But, it was not until the later years of the dynasty that each segment came to have a sense of common ancestry through a common lineage founder. Segment B of the Andong Kwon as designated by Duncan is in fact the Chwayun kong branch line (佐尹公 派), which worshiped Chijong (至正) as a later prominent ancestor (chungsijo, 中始祖), and which appeared as the descendants of the Andong Kwon's daughters in the first edition of the Andong Kwon genealogy (Songwha po, 成化譜) published in 1476. Therefore, at the time of the genealogy compilation, this branch was not recognized as descendant from Haeng (亨), the founder of the Andong Kwon. It was only in the 1794 genealogy (Hu kabin po, 後甲寅譜) that this branch was incorporated into the lineage.3 The two segments A and B in the early Choson as subsumed under a single lineage in later years did not share the same lineage consciousness as demonstrated in the later years of the dynasty. Similarly, the earliest extant genealogy of the Kjongju Yi compiled in 1684 lists segment B of Duncan's account, without a mention of segment A. It was not until after the eighteenth century that both segments A and B were connected within this lineage.

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2 For the publication of the genealogies, see Miyajima Hiroshi, “Andong Kwon ssi songwha po rul tonghaesŏ pon Hanguk chokpo uii kujojek t'usong,” [Structural characteristics of Korean genealogy seen through the 1476 genealogy of the Andong Kwon] Daejong munhwa yong'gu 62 (2008).

3 This genealogy is preserved at the National Library of Korea.
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The above are some examples of late Chosŏn attempts to connect hitherto distinct lines of descent. Still, there were also earlier attempts in the early Chosŏn. For example, Duncan points out that two major segments of the Hwangnyŏ Min (黃氏閔氏) with many powerful officials in the early Chosŏn central bureaucracy had descended from the brothers Sik (洌) and Konggyu (公桂) respectively. But, it seems that the two branch lines of the Min were connected for the first time only in the 1478 genealogy. The Hwangnyŏ Min (the Yŏhŭng Min) in the early Chosŏn are believed to have compiled their genealogies in 1417, 1477, and 1478, among which the first two may well have been compiled upon the instigation of two prominent female figures from the Min. Indeed, it is highly probable that the 1417 genealogy was compiled upon the urging of Queen Wŏn’gyŏng (元敬 王后, King T’aejong’s queen, and a descendant from Konggyu), while the 1477 genealogy was compiled thanks to another prominent Min wife (the wife of a political giant, Han Myŏnghoe, mother of King Sŏngjong’s Queen Konghye 恭惠 王后, and a descendant from Sik). It is possible that on the occasion of the 1477 genealogy the connection between the two lines of descent, from Sik and Konggyu, was first established and was henceforth continued in the subsequent genealogies including the 1478 one. It is therefore misleading to assume that two major segments of the Hwangnyŏ Min lineage existed prior to 1477, when the relation between them had not even been established.

The above instances offered by Duncan as established segments and lines in the late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn were in fact a projection of the lineage organizations as they were constructed in later years. These are just a few instances. For almost all descent groups, however, except perhaps for the Andong Kwŏn whose genealogy appeared the earliest, all the segments and lines that were so clearly known in later years of the dynasty, had remained quite obscure in the late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn periods. This is because the first attempt of any S/A descent group to compile a genealogy was fraught with difficulties in tracking down the relations between differing lines of descent. Some came to be known only during the process of compilation, and others were plainly reconstructed on the basis of meager evidence indeed.

There is another problem in using such terms as ‘lineage’ and ‘clan’ when referring to Korean S/A descent groups. In the process of construction, Korean S/A descent groups are so diverse as to defy the uniform application of such terms as ‘lineage’ and ‘clan.’

Currently, it seems that the term ‘lineage’ is used in general to denote those descent groups which have definitive relations with first ancestors, whereas the term ‘clan’ is used to denote any other descent groups. The term ‘segment’ is used to indicate a sub-category of a lineage. Edward W. Wagner uses ‘lineage’ and ‘clan’ in a separate way, but he does not mention the criteria for such separate usage.¹

¹ Sŏngsi uii hohyang [Homes of Korean surnames] (Seoul: Chung’ang ilbo sa, 1989).
² For the difficulties encountered by each S/A descent group, and the materials used for compiling first genealogies, see Miyajima, “Andong Kwŏn ssi sŏnghwa po.”
Although the term ‘lineage’ has been gaining general currency in denoting Korean S/A descent groups, it still remains hard to fit the current concepts of ‘lineage’ or ‘clan’ to such groups in any uniform way. This is because each Korean S/A decent group has its own specific historical process of construction. As a result, it is doubtful that such a single term as ‘lineage’ based on the later developments can have a universal application to all Korean S/A descent groups. As suggested below, we may define distinctive categories of Korean S/A descent groups, which could well reflect the fact that Korean lineages as we now know them have undergone a process of historical construction.

The misconceptions about Korean S/A decent groups have led to another instance of problematic research results in Korean academic circles. A notable example can be seen in research that examines the passers of government examinations (kwagō 科舉), using the S/A decent group as a unit of analysis. Such research aims to discover the concentration level of examination passers for given S/A decent groups, thereby measuring their prominent position in Chosön society.

To indicate the level of concentration of examination passers, the top 10 or top 30 S/A decent groups are examined for their number of passers and for their proportion to the total number of passers. Likewise, Wŏn Ch’ang’ae’s research counts the overall number of the highest munkwa passers from each of the top 30 S/A descent groups throughout the Chosön dynasty. The top 10 of munkwa passers for the entire Chosön dynasty reads as follows: 847 for the Chŏnju Yi, 358 for the Andong Kwŏn, 339 for the P’ap’yŏng Yun, 322 for the Namyang Hong, 310 for the Andong Kim, 284 for the Ch’ŏngju Han, 258 for the Milyang Pak, 257 for the Kwangsan Kim, 242 for the Yŏn'an Yi, and 233 for the Yŏhŭng Min.7

It is highly debatable that each of these S/A descent groups constituted a single integral entity throughout the dynasty (1392-1910). The assumption that each descent groups existed as single unified organization throughout the dynasty, without giving consideration to its own respective process of construction is particularly problematic. As mentioned before, among Wŏn Ch’ang’ae’s descent groups, the Andong Kim (安東 金氏) were not a unified descent group in a genealogical sense, as the ‘old’ Andong Kim and the ‘new’ Andong were worshiping separate first ancestors. Certainly, each group produced more than 100 munkwa passers, but the combined total has no statistical meaning. The same is true of the Namyang Hong (南陽 洪氏) munkwa passers that Wŏn examined. The Namyang Hong had two separate descent groups identified as “Tang Hong” (唐洪) and “To Hong” (土洪) indicating respectively Chinese and Korean origins. It is true that the former produced more than 200 munkwa passers, while the latter produced more than 100 passers. Nonetheless, the combined total of two groups, again, carries little meaning.

In cases of the Milyang Pak (密陽 朴氏) and the Yŏn'an Yi (延安 李氏), each had a common first ancestor, but was divided into many branch lines derived from later prominent ancestors (chungsijo 中始祖). The connection of these later

7 Wŏn Ch’ang’ae, Chosön sidae munkwa kupjeja yŏn’gu [Study on the munkwa examination passer during the Chosön dynasty] (Sŏngnam: Hanguk chŏngsin munhwawŏn’guwŏn, 1997).
prominent ancestors to the first ancestors remained unclear. Thus, although the Yŏnan Yi, unlike the Andong Kim and the Namyang Hong, did have a common first ancestor (named Mu 茂) they included three lines descended from three later prominent ancestors whose connections to the first ancestor were unclear. All three lines produced many munkwa passers. But it was only in the 1729 genealogy that the three groups were for the first time incorporated into the extended Yŏnan Yi. Hence, the extended Yŏnan Yi was a construction of the eighteenth century; certainly not from the beginning of the dynasty.

The Milyang Pak belong to the same category as the Yŏnan Yi in terms of genealogical structure. The Milyang Pak shared a first ancestor named Ōnch’im (彥就), but was divided into 12 branch lines, which respectively worshiped 12 later prominent ancestors, and were only connected for the first time in the 1742 genealogy. Therefore, the statistical figures that account for the Yŏnan Yi or the Milyang Pak as a whole prior to the early eighteenth century carry little meaning.

The Andong Kwŏn (安東 權氏) second only to the Chŏnju Yi regarding the total number of munkwa passers did not have the same lineage as we now know it. At present, the Andong Kwŏn is comprised of 15 branch lines, among which only three appeared in the first 1476 genealogy, the rest being newly incorporated into later editions. All the Andong Kwŏn’s 12 later prominent ancestors had obvious links to the first ancestor (named Haeng 宸), unlike the Yŏnan Yi and the Milyang Pak. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that all links are genuine. Seven branch lines out of 12 accounted for one or more munkwa passers. Thus, the progressively extended branch lines are responsible for such a large number (385) of munkwa passers in Wŏn’ s calculation.

The Ch’ŏngju Han (淸州 韓氏) and the Kwangsan Kim (光山 金氏) fit the same genealogical structure category as the Andong Kwŏn. These two descent groups also accrued new branch lines in new genealogy compilations, resulting in the extended lineages we see today. The Ch’ŏngju Han in particular has expanded by incorporating not only new branch lines identified as the Ch’ŏngju Han, but also the Pyŏngsan Han and the Hanyang Han which had different ancestral seats (pon’gwan 本貫).

In short, it is hard to believe that all the top ten S/A descent groups with large numbers of munkwa passers existed as unified lineage organization as we know them today from the very beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty. Future inquiries into whether and when given S/A descent group can be defined as lineage organization should begin by accumulating data gained from reviewing individual S/A descent group. In analyzing the genealogical pattern of individual S/A decent group, the following hypothetical categories of S/A descent group may serve as a preliminary rationale.

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8 This genealogy is preserved at the National Library of Korea.
9 This genealogy is preserved at the Specialized Library of Korean Genealogy at Puch’ŏn City (Puch’ŏn cholpo chōnmun tosŏgwan, www.jokbo.re.kr).
Categories of Korean S/A Decent Groups

In terms of construction process, the following categories can be deducted from Korean S/A descent groups. The first category includes the S/A descent groups that have the same surname (sǒngsi 姓氏) and the same ancestral seat (pon’ gwan 本貫), but multiple first ancestors (sijo 始祖), such as the Andong Kim (安東 金氏) and the Namyang Hong (南陽 洪氏). The Kyŏngju Kim (慶州 金氏), the Kimhae Kim (金海 金氏), the Yŏnil Chŏng (延日 劉氏), the Chinju Kang (慶州 姜氏), the Chinju Yu (慶州 柳氏), and the Kyŏngju Ch’oe (慶州 次氏) also belong to this category. It is out of the question to define each group as a single clan or lineage tracing descent from one common ancestor. As for individual branch lines that had their own respective first ancestor, their genealogical pattern should be further examined to place them into one of the other categories mentioned below.

Among the S/A descent groups that have the same first ancestor, one category includes such S/A descent groups as the Yŏnan Yi (延南 李氏) and the Mihyang Pak (密陽 朴氏), which show a loose solidarity as a single descent group, yet exhibit a strong independence among their respective branch lines. This category of S/A descent groups could well be understood as a ‘clan,’ while their respective branch lines can be seen as a ‘lineage.’

The other category includes the Andong Kwŏn (安東 權氏), the Ch’ŏngju Han (慶州 韓氏), and the Kwangsan Kim (光山 金氏), which as time passed formed progressively larger groups by incorporating new branch lines. Pending the result of further research, such outstanding S/A descent groups as the P’ap’yŏng Yun (坡平 尹氏) and the Yŏhung Min (慶興 閔氏) may also belong to this category. It is highly probable that so many prominent S/A descent groups in Korea belong to this category that it could well represent the typical pattern of descent group construction. Still, many relations between newly-incorporated branch lines remain dubious. In its characteristics, this category is not far removed from to the category that includes the Yŏnan Yi.

In contrast to the above two categories, there is another category of S/A descent groups, which has authentic relations between branch lines, such as the Ch’ungsong Sim (青松 沈氏), the Pallam Pak (潘南 朴氏), the P’ungsan Hong (普山 洪氏), and the Haep’yŏng Yun (海平 尹氏). These descent groups all have authentic first ancestors originating from the late Koryŏ or the early Chosŏn, and all produced many munkwa passers among their direct descendants. These groups, therefore, became very powerful in the late Chosŏn. Remarkably, within the above two categories with the same ancestry, some branch lines demonstrated the same characteristics as this category of S/A descent groups. For example, the Ch’umilgong branch line (樞密公 派) of the Andong Kwŏn, and the Yanggan’gong branch line (良簡公 派) of the Kwangsan Kim produced more than 100 munkwa passers. Thus, this particular category is of great significance, when one attempts to examine the family background of the ruling elite of the Chosŏn era. Also, it is meaningful to trace the similar prominent branch lines like the Ch’umilgong and the Yanggan’gong among other categories of S/A descent groups.¹⁰

The categories offered so far are the major ones, but there remain many minor but remarkable categories of S/A descent groups that have a complicated
construction history. For example, the Munhwa Yu (文化 柳氏) share an awareness of a same ancestry with the Sōsan Yu (瑞山 柳氏), the Chōnju Yu (全州 柳氏), the Chinju Yu (晋州 柳氏), and the Sōnsan Yu (善山 柳氏), though they all have their respective ancestral seats. Moreover, the Yōnan Ch’a (延安 車氏) and the Munhwa Yu, despite different surnames and ancestral seats, worship the same first ancestor. As for these descent groups, further study on how to delineate their lineage organization and when lineage consciousness emerged is needed in order to better understand them.

**Future Research**

Taken as a whole, this brief survey of Korean S/A descent groups suggests that they have undergone varied and complicated construction processes. Hence, the uniform application of the terms 'clan' or 'lineage' based on specific experiences may well be misleading. Therefore, further research needs to be devoted to individual S/A descent groups, examining their respective construction processes, and illustrating their origins and characteristics as lineage organizations. Needless to say, such a task demands a huge amount of work to be done on extensive individual descent groups, but is imminently necessary in bringing precision to our understanding of such critical topics as the sustainability of the Chosŏn ruling elite, and the role of present-day S/A descent groups in Korean society.11 (Translated from Korean by Cheolbae Son)

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10 For the core S/A descent groups in the late Chosŏn ruling stratum, see Miyajima Hiroshi, “Chosŏn hugi chibae kyech’ung úi chaesaengsan kujo: pigyo yon’gyu rul wihan ch’obojŏk t’amgu,” [Regeneration structure of the late Chosŏn ruling stratum: a preliminary research of comparative studies] Hanguk sahakpo 32 (2008).

11 It is proper to quote here late Professor Edward W. Wagner’s emphasis (in “The Korean Chokpo as a Historical Source,” 149) on the studies on individual S/A descent groups; “There is another vital use to which the historian may put the chokpo. This is as a primary and principal source for the study of Korean social and political history. Such efforts must begin with intensive studies of individual clans, leading ultimately to a set of postulates generalized form an extensive array of individual studies.”
Duncan’s top 10 descent groups in the early Chosŏn

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<td>Chosŏn</td>
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REFERENCES


