

EXCERPTS FROM PREFACE TO THE GENEALOGY OF THE ANDONG KWŎN
By Sŏ Kŏjŏng

Introduction

Chosŏn dynasty Neo-Confucianism placed a new emphasis on patrilineal descent, which led to the compilation of written family genealogies (*chokpo*), at first by powerful aristocratic clans and then, eventually, more widely. One of the first clans so to document their own historical lineage was the Andong Kwŏn (Andong is a place name that differentiates this Kwŏn clan from others). The first genealogy of this family appeared in 1476, and carried a preface by a scholar-official named Sŏ Kŏjŏng (1410-1488), excerpted here, that explained some of the rationale of compiling such documents.

Selected Document Excerpt with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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In Korea, however, there was of old neither clan law nor genealogy; even big families and great descent groups did not have family records. Thus, after several generations the names of the ancestors in the four ascending generations were lost, and their descendants consequently became estranged from each other, looking at one another like strangers in the street. Do they wait until after the mourning obligations are over and kinship has ended to become distant and remote? Would it not be difficult then to wish to stimulate filial and brotherly behavior among them and to achieve mutual courteousness? For this reason Kwŏn Che and Kwŏn Nam tirelessly compiled the genealogy, and I made an effort to bring their intention to completion.

[Translated by Martina Deuchler]

Question:

1. Why did Sŏ Kŏjŏng, Kwŏn Che, and Kwŏn Nam work to compile a genealogy?

Longer Selection

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Since Kwŏn Haeng first was enfeoffed, six hundred years have passed. His descendants are proliferating, and the tradition of reciting the *Book of Documents* and the *Book of Songs* had long been uninterrupted. Only if the roots are deep are the branches luxuriant in growth; only if the source is distant is the stream long: this is a compelling principle.

Alas! Since antiquity the famous clans and prominent descendants have been quite numerous. Who of those in high office and brilliant positions were not looked up to and respected? Why, then, have they, after only a few generations, declined and disappeared? It is because the foundation of the earlier generations was not firm, and the descendants lost it by sudden arrogance and extravagance.

The Kwŏn have maintained their house over generations with honesty and have made loyalty and filiality their central concern. Could it be that the descendants are not mindful of the efforts with which their ancestors have built up their house? Could it be that they do not think about the way to continue it? The *Book of Rites* says: "The human way consists of recognizing one's relatives. If the relatives are recognized, the ancestors are honored. If the ancestors are honored, the line of descent is respected. If the line of descent is respected, the kin is in harmony." If it is possible to begin with "recognizing one's relatives" and to extend this to the nine generations of the family, would there be any deficiency in the way of nurturing the basis and consolidating the branches? Poem 235 in the *Book of Songs* says: "Ever think of your ancestor, cultivating your virtue." With this I would like to admonish again the descendants of the Kwŏn.

[Translated by Martina Deuchler]

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1. Why did Sŏ Kŏjŏng, Kwŏn Che, and Kwŏn Nam work to compile a genealogy?

Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on

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2. What do they feel is in danger of being lost in the absence of such documents?
3. What sort of social effects do you think the compilation of genealogies might have had? What sort of families do you expect would have been among the first to create *chokpo*?