In this volume, we are devoted to the way in which the text, the *Rituals of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), was constructed, critiqued, and used by scholars and politicians of different regimes and historical periods with different objectives and results. The point of departure is the geographical and temporal origin of the text—Zhou 周 dynasty (ca. 1046–256 BCE) China in the ancient period. For those of us whose primary interest is in an East Asian realm other than China, the *Rituals of Zhou* offers a site to observe the complex elements, both in parallel as well as in conflict, that constituted East Asia and the way in which they were negotiated and reconciled.

The Classics associated with Confucius and China provided texts for a pan–East Asian textual community, and they offered a discursive field to the educated elites of the region. As a part of the Classics, the *Rituals of Zhou* was read by a transnational East Asian textual community without borders. Simultaneously, the *Rituals of Zhou* is a text that purports to delineate the structure and governance of the Zhou state. Hence, it is one of the most “political” of the classical texts, and it is devoted to a polity with borders. How was the *Rituals of Zhou* with its strong dual implications interpreted and used by Koreans? Did an interpretive community of the *Rituals of Zhou* emerge in Korea, and if so, did it form an independent lineage?

*The Different Reading Traditions of the Rituals of Zhou in Chosŏn*

Although the *Rituals of Zhou* was part of the curriculum of a standard education and was among texts studied for the civil service examination during Koryŏ 高麗 (918–1392), there is scant evidence that it was singled out for special attention. When the Chosŏn 朝鮮 (1392–1910)
began, the text’s influence was felt from the start. Chông Tojôn 丁若镛 (1342–1398), one of the most powerful advisors to its founder, Yi Sônggye 李成桂 (1335–1408, r. 1392–1398), relied heavily on it in his Statutes for the Governance of Chosôn (Chosón kyŏngguk chôn 朝鮮經國典), which was written as a blueprint for the new state.¹ As Chông acknowledged, his work was organized in six parts like the Rituals of Zhou.² It mapped out a central state organization in which the capital, located in the center, was surrounded and supported by outlying counties and districts.³

What marked the Statutes for the Governance of Chosôn as a radical and complete departure from the Koryŏ, however, was its prime minister–centered government and its vocal commitment to a meritocracy. This emphasis on merit over birth led to a system which divided symbolic and administrative power, the throne possessing the former and the prime minister the latter. Since Chông advocated that the government choose officials through a civil service examination and promote them on the basis of performance, the post of prime minister was attainable to those who exhibited the most ability. Thus, Chông upheld the tenets of a hereditary monarchy, but he reserved the power of administration for those whose abilities were tested and proven. Chông thus attempted to impose his own vision of government while drawing structural elements from the Rituals of Zhou.

Chông Tojôn’s radical vision did not please the proponents of a strong monarchy. He was killed by Yi Pangwŏn 李芳遠 (1367–1422), who would become T’aejong 太宗 (r. 1400–1418), the third king of the Chosôn. Despite Chông’s reputation as the “architect” of the Chosôn state, his Statutes for the Governance of Chosôn did not directly impact the Great Code of Governance of the State (Kyŏngguk taejong 經國大典). The preface of this work, however, attributed its six codes and the general structure of six ministries of the Chosôn bureaucracy to the Rituals of Zhou.⁴ This use of the Rituals of Zhou by Chông and by the compilers of the Great Code of Governance of the State in the early Chosôn set the pattern for its rival appropriations either for radical reform or for defense of the regime. The text was frequently referred to in court discussions concerning government

¹ For a discussion of Chông Tojôn and his Statutes for the Governance of Chosôn, see Chung 1985; Deuchler 1992, 108–128.
² Kim Inho 2002.
³ Deuchler 2006, 4–5.
⁴ Pak Hyŏnmo 2003.