

Yi Song-mi (Academy of Korean Studies)

Introduction to Chosŏn Dynasty's *Ŭigwe* Royal Documents

Abstract:

The Chosŏn dynasty's (1392~1910) documents, now commonly referred to as *Ŭigwe*, are official records of the superintendency, a temporary office set up to plan and carry out special state rites such as royal ancestral worship rites, weddings, funerals, the building and repairing of royal tombs, etc. Some of them contain illustrations. With the publication of the *National Law Code* (Kyŏngguk taejŏn) in 1484 and the *Book of the Five Rites of the Nation* (Kukjo oryeŭi) in 1474, the Chosŏn court firmly established the rules and regulations for the management of state rites according to the Neo-Confucian principles of government.

What can one expect to find in these *Ŭigwe* books that will further our understanding of the Chosŏn culture? Depending on one's area of interest, one might retrieve from them information on various aspects of the Chosŏn society -- politics, economy, rituals, literature, arts, music, royal cuisine and perhaps more. Of particular interest to art historians is the extensive description of the visual culture of the court. There is a seemingly endless amount of documentations along with illustrations of all the objects for an event such as ritual performances, court costumes, musical instruments, ceremonial utensils, and interior decoration consisting notably of screen paintings. This lecture highlights some of these features, drawing on several specific categories of the *Ŭigwe* Royal documents.