

## Joseon Scholars Interpretations of 'Royal Perfection' (皇極) in <Great Plan (洪範)>

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The nine divisions of Great Plan (洪範九疇), included in the *Book of Documents* (書經), signified the ideal model for the government of an ancient nation, which was widely studied not only as a historical records but also as a moral-cosmology embodied in politics. Among nine divisions, the fifth division 'Royal Perfection' (皇極) had been particularly influential in Korea during the late Joseon period after King Young (英祖 1694-1776) and Jeong (正祖 1752-1800) actively adopted it as their main political schema.

Zhu Xi's interpretation of 'Ji (極)' as the summit of human ethical relations and 'Huangji (皇極)' as such a moral standard exemplified by the king (君主) himself, had been challenged by major factions of Joseon scholar-officials. Zhu Xi's understanding of the Great Plan, with 'Royal Perfection' at the center, was that of an ultimate administrative system in which both the king in the middle and the scholar-officials surrounding him effectively engaged in sagely governance. Joseon scholars, however, construed this picture with different emphases. While Noron faction stressed the concrete role of scholar-elites and portrayed 'Royal Perfection' as an abstract, utopian ideal, Southern faction recognized the supreme authority of the king himself and considered 'Royal Perfection' as the moral power of the king that mediated and harmonized the various roles of scholar-officials.