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Speech Topic:

At the King’s Command:
A Historical Study of Extraordinary Natural Occurrences and Executive Orders with Jin Yeong Bak and Eun Been Son (Department of Artificial Intelligence, Sungkyunkwan University)

Date: Wednesday 24 July 2024
Time: 11:00 - 13:00 (PM)
Venue: Suseon Hall 61907

Abstract: In this paper we explore how extraordinary natural occurrences influenced executive decisions across different reigns in history. We utilize the Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty of Korea, the official daily accounts of the kingdom’s various affairs recorded between 1413 and 1865 CE. Covering the longest continual period of any single dynasty in the world, the annals provide an invaluable historical case study of daily decisions that were made by rulers and their council. Under the Confucian tradition the annals also record in detail various uncommon natural phenomena, interpreting anomalies and disasters (천변지異 [天變地異]) as heavenly signs of the ruler’s weakening legitimacy.

We find that these phenomena led to meaningful changes in how decisions were made by the governing body. Subsequent to the events the royal court took on a greater executive role and witnessed more cohesion between the king and his council, i.e., more decisions were made under the king’s direct orders and with less disagreement between the ruler and the council. These changes reflect concerted effort by the ruling body to strengthen their position in society and address legitimacy concerns.

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