


Under the Mandate of Heaven: A Historical Study of Omens and Executives

 April 8, 2026 (Wednesday)

 4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

 Rm 966, 9/F, The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus, HKU

Speaker:



Dr. Christopher Paik

Program Head of Political Science
Associate Professor of Political Science
Global Network Associate Professor of Politics
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Biography:

Christopher Paik's research focuses on international politics, political geography, and economic history. The papers in his research portfolio consider the role of geography in explaining long-term outcomes related to political and economic development; the origins of states and state stability; the causes and effects of historical global encounters, including colonialism; and the politics of ethnic identification. Together, his research brings a global, comparative, and historical perspective to the study of fundamental questions in the social sciences related to states and governance. A recurring feature of his work involves the use of analytic empirical methods, particularly related to the study of space and spatial dynamics. Christopher also makes extensive use of archival data with the goal of uncovering yet unknown historical patterns.

Abstract:

In this paper, Christopher explores extraordinary natural occurrences as omens and their historical influence on legitimacy concerns. Natural disasters and anomalies have long been interpreted as divine interventions to challenge the legitimacy of the ruling body. In order to understand how ruling executives responded to these challenges, he utilizes 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 a dynasty known in the world, the annals document daily decisions made by the rulers and their councils. Under Joseon's Confucian belief system, they also record in detail various extraordinary natural phenomena as omens signalling weakened legitimacy. We find that the omens provided both performance and belief-based legitimacy shocks to the royal court, and led to meaningful changes in how the executives made decisions.

Moderator:

Professor Enze HAN
Associate Professor
Department of Politics and Public Administration
The University of Hong Kong



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