The system of *saga toksŏ* 賜暇讀書 in Chosŏn Korea, which might be explained in modern terms as sabbatical leave, ongoing training and even an induction program that was bestowed from time to time by a few Chosŏn kings upon some of the most successful candidates of the highest civil service examination, was without any equivalent in China or Japan. Although often little-known, the system could still be regarded as one of the most salient Korean attempts to put into practice all together the ideals of Confucian kingship, officialdom and Learning. The study of this particular practice, a theoretical symbol of the ideal balance of power between the kings and the bureaucratic elite, provides some interesting insights into the multifaceted reality of the culture, sociability and ideology of that time.

This talk will first examine the broad lines of this selection of the crème de la crème of Chosŏn scholar-officials from the 15th century to the late 18th century, and will then briefly focus on the emblematic remaining text of the saga toksŏ, the Tongho mundap (Questions and Answers at the Eastern Lake), written during a monthly exercise and submitted to the young king Sŏnjo in 1569 by Yulgok, Yi I (1536-1584), one of the most outstanding Neo-Confucians of the Chosŏn period.

***

Dr. Isabelle Sancho is a specialist of Chinese and Korean Confucianism. She earned her Ph.D. in East Asian languages and Civilizations in 2006 from INALCO, Paris. After completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the Korea Institute of Harvard University (2007-2008), she worked as a research assistant for the Chair of Chinese Intellectual History of the Collège de France (2008-2009). In 2009, she became a tenured researcher at the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) and joined the Centre of Korean Studies of the EHESS (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) with a long-term research project on Confucian elites of the first half of the Chosŏn period. In 2011, she published a translation of Yulgok’s *Kyŏngmong yo’gyŏl* 撼蒙要訣 in a bilingual and annotated edition in the newly-created “Bibliothèque Chinoise” of Les Belles Lettres – the reference publisher of translations of Latin and Greek texts in France. She is also currently preparing a book manuscript in English on Yulgok Yi I, an English translation of the Complete Works of Hwadam, Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk (1489–1546), and a French translation of some political texts of Chŏngam, Cho Kwangjo (1482-1519).