Shifting Political, Legal, and Institutional Borderlines between Koryŏ and the Mongol Yuan Empire

Lee Kang Hahn

The relationship between the Koryŏ Dynasty and the Mongol Yuan Empire was characterized by shifting, often interactive, dynamics in the realms of politics, law, and institutions. The peninsula was devastated by Mongol forces in the first half of the thirteenth century, and the Mongols soon thereafter established a dominant political presence in Koryŏ. But by the turn of the century the relationship between Koryŏ and Yuan had evolved, and while many things changed, Koryŏ customs and traditions were also well preserved. Examined in this article are the “conceptual borderlines” (political, legal, and institutional), that for centuries had distinguished the political, social, and cultural life of the Korean people from that of China, but came to fluctuate with the Mongol advent, and then were reinstated in a rather interesting fashion. At this time, politicians’ aspirations diverged and loyalties were split, while the political interests of Koryŏ and Yuan remained separated even during the reigns of the so-called “hybrid kings,” those Koryŏ monarchs of mixed Korean and Mongol ancestry. Barriers between legal authorities remained intact, while institutional mixing between Koryŏ and Yuan became a new trend in Koryŏ, which resulted in Korean conventions being infused with Mongol Yuan institutions and upgraded to resolve administrative problems of Koryŏ. Understanding the full extent of such a complicated relationship will prove vital in determining the nature of Koryŏ history in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in raising our understanding of the broader history of East Asia during this period.

Keywords: borderlines, Koryŏ, Yuan, political aspirations, governance, legal codes, coexistence, institutional mixing

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Introduction

The nature of the relationship the Koryŏ Dynasty cultivated with the Mongol Yuan empire has never been easy to define. In the early thirteenth century, the two fought as allies against a local Jurchen faction. Then a decade later, a Mongol invasion that continued for the next three decades turned them into blood enemies. The 1270s then marked the Koryŏ king becoming part of the Mongol imperial family.¹

All these events culminated in the first ever “hybrid” figure born between Koryŏ and the Mongols yet enthroned as the Koryŏ king,² and formed from this was a very close relationship that continued to expand in the fourteenth century. There is no word to adequately describe a relationship that went through such roller-coaster changes. Nor is there any easy way of determining just what changes Koryŏ society must have gone through over the course of two centuries.

There have been countless rounds of debate over the situation Koryŏ was put in under “Mongol dominance.” Some studies set out to examine the very mechanism through which Yuan sought to implement its interference,³ while others examined the side effects of such interference as they manifested themselves in Koryŏ politics (Kim Tangt’aek 1998).⁴ Some scholars set their eyes upon the issue of “preservation (of traditions),” determined to find out

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1. King Ch’ungnyŏl 忠烈王 (r. 1275–1307), before being enthroned, married the daughter of Emperor Qubilai in 1274.
2. This is none other than King Ch’ungsŏn 忠宣王 (1275–1325, r. 1298, 1308–1313), who was the son of King Ch’ungnyŏl and a Mongol princess. As he and his descendants who occupied the throne in the fourteenth century had not only Koryŏ but also Mongol blood in their veins, they are sometimes called “the hybrid kings.”
3. For example, we could cite the work of Chang Tongik (1994). Central to this study is an office called the Chŏngdong haengsŏng (Eastern expedition field headquarters), which was installed in Koryŏ around the beginning of the 1280s so that the planned Mongol campaign against Japan could be supervised by the Yuan, which wanted to ensure Koryŏ resources were made sufficiently available. This Chŏngdong haengsŏng went through a series of changes, becoming a place where Koryŏ and Yuan personnel interacted.
4. Like many other scholars, Kim Tangt’aek examines the reigns of Kings Ch’ungnyŏl, Ch’ungsŏn, Ch’ungsuk 忠肅王 (r. 1313–1330, 1332–1339), Ch’unghye 忠惠王 (1330–1332, 1339–1343), and Kongmin 恭愍王 (1352–1374), and then analyzes “internal conflicts” within the Koryŏ government, as well as how the kings wanted to rearrange the political arena to reinforce their leadership. Also examined is the fact that sometimes such efforts backfired and even cost kings their throne. Kim Tangt’aek is one of the scholars to state outright that this period was a “shameful” one for the Korean people, and one we should have the “courage” to examine more deeply.
what kind of discourses would have helped in such a task, or how the Koryǒ population would have been divided over the very matter. Intervention, resistance, and preservation have all been key concepts at the forefront of scholars’ minds for decades as they studied the Koryǒ-Mongol relationship.

In the meantime, efforts to define the relationship Koryǒ had with the Yuan empire, or to determine the “status” of Koryǒ under Mongol hegemony, have also been underway. Many studies have sought to characterize Koryǒ’s status in the context of Yuan policies towards areas inside and outside the empire. One Japanese specialist in Koryǒ history suggested the possibility that the Koryǒ Dynasty might have been designated an “enfeoffment” of the Koryǒ king, who himself became part of the Mongol royal family. Meanwhile, a prominent Korean scholar engaged in East Asian historical studies chose to view the Koryǒ king as an entity that was part of the Mongol order (as he was the son-in-law of Qubilai), yet at the same time on the “outside” of that order, as he was the leader of a subject state not under the direct rule of the imperial Yuan government (Kim Hodong 2007). Other interesting concepts were presented as

5. The most representative example here is the work of Yi Ikchu (Lee Ik-ju). Yi presents a very interesting concept: “the promise of Emperor Qubilai” (Sejo kuje 世祖舊制). Yi theorizes that the Koryǒ government utilized Qubilai’s past words, which referred to the Yuan imperial government’s primary stance concerning Koryǒ customs and conventions. In those words, Qubilai had announced (or sometimes insinuated) that he had no intention of changing them against the Koryǒ people’s, or the Koryǒ government’s, wishes. Such words were not always kept, as he did demand some Koryǒ traditions be altered, but according to Yi, the Koryǒ government created a notion around the emperor’s words, and developed them into a sort of “diplomatic agreement” that both Koryǒ and Yuan mutually concurred to respect. See Yi Ikchu (1996). In presenting this concept, Yi argues that Koryǒ was able to preserve much of its autonomy, despite having to suffer other kinds of intervention and interference, such as the replacement of its kings. Recently, Yi also presented a series of studies examining certain elements that have usually been featured in the traditional “appointment” system from the Koryǒ-Mongol relationship (Yi Ikchu 2011).

6. The work of Kim Hyǒngsu (2013) can be cited as relevant here. He suggests the possibility that the Koryǒ people (the governmental officials and elites to be exact) at the time could have had two different aspirations: the “preservation of old traditions” and the “embrace of new ‘universal’ [imperial] ways of life.” He also attempts to explain the dynamics between political factions with such notions as “divided aspirations.” Personally, I think both aspirations could have been held by a single individual and only surfaced selectively as situations required, but his suggestion is an interesting one nonetheless.

7. That person is Morihira Masahiko 森平雅彦 at Kyushu University in Japan. For his recent research volume on this and other topics, see Morihira (2013). His suggestion, which was made years ago, caused a bit of a controversy among Korean historians, yet for years served as a catalyst to discussions regarding the nature of the Koryǒ-Mongol relationship.

8. Kim comments upon the interesting situation in which the Koryǒ kings were placed by retaining their position as kings of Koryǒ while also being named as sons-in-law of the Mongol emperor or as other relatives of the Mongol royal family. He argues that Koryǒ came to harbor the status of a “subject state,” while also making the distinction that the status of the Koryǒ population was not
well. One scholar emphasized the Koryŏ king’s own power ("wangbu" 王府) granted to him only as he was part of the imperial order (Yi Kaesŏk 2013),\(^9\) while another scholar concentrated on examining the ever changing nature of the Koryŏ king’s authority itself (Yi Myŏngmi 2003).\(^{10}\)

As we can see, previous studies have shown a tendency to either view the Koryŏ situation of the 13th-14th centuries from a rather “traditional” angle, or tried to label the nature of the Koryŏ-Yuan relationship with a single conceptual term. Previous works in the vein of the aforementioned studies were legitimate efforts in the sense that the Koryŏ people were forced to endure horrible things. But keeping only that in mind while trying to analyze an entire society or century might unconsciously put the “aggressors” (the Mongols) at the center of such a history while unintentionally perceiving the Koryŏ people as the mere “victims,” thus creating an “us or them” or “good vs. evil” dichotomy that should have no place in serious historical inquiry. And even though I believe that works of the second trend have endeavored to maintain an open mind, I fear that using one or two words will never suffice to describe such a complicated dynamic as Koryŏ’s relationship with the Yuan. The concept of “relationship” is just that, only a concept, which can only be defined by the nature of the existence shared by Koryŏ and Yuan, and most importantly the “people,” who were “living” such an existence.\(^{11}\)

What we need is a new effort dedicated to determining what kind of “lives” the Koryŏ people lived since the arrival of the Mongols. The Mongol invasion, comparable to those who were directly governed by the emperor and the imperial government, as the Koryŏ people remained subjects of the “leader” of the [subject] state, namely, the Koryŏ king.

9. Yi Kaesŏk also presents his own assessment, which views Koryŏ as an entity forced to accept its status as a “subjugated state,” a status that only solidified as the marital relationship between Koryŏ kings and Mongol princesses continued. Yi also sets his eyes upon the wangbu 王府 of King Ch’ungnyŏl (which seems to have been established in the 1280s and 1290s), which he suspects was not established according to Yuan tradition.

10. Yi Myŏngmi discusses how marriage was arranged between the Koryŏ king and the Mongol royal family. She suggests the possibility that such an arrangement might have been accepted by a Mongol government needing to prevent the Liaodong forces from allying themselves with the Korean Peninsula. More recently she has published a book based on her doctoral dissertation which examines all the changes that occurred not only to royal status and title but also to the nature of kingly authority and leadership, with the superior authority (of the Mongol emperor) placed above him (Yi Myŏngmi 2016). Overall, this is an examination of the complicated status of the Koryŏ king, who was also governor of the Chŏngdong haengsŏng and son-in-law of the Mongol emperor.

11. So it becomes clear that future studies should escape the desire to come up with a “magic word” that would (unlikely) help us define the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship as this is not possible, and endeavor to break from the previous cognitive mold, which only viewed the Mongols as evil and Koryŏ as victim. For more on this, see Yi Kanghan (Lee Kang Hahn) (2010a).
which began in 1231 and ended in 1259, destroyed the Koryŏ economy beyond the government’s capacities for repair. The second half of the thirteenth century witnessed continued Mongol interference in internal Koryŏ affairs. But this was only the beginning. The economy was rebuilt, and politicians adjusted. Communities and society continued to adapt.

The biggest challenge for the Koryŏ people, not only the general population but also social elites and political leaders, as they were entering a new phase in the Koryŏ-Yuan relationship in the 1280s and 1290s, was the original (albeit diverse) Koryŏ ways of life being forced to change their courses in a direction they had never before gone. As interactions between the Koryŏ and Yuan people ensued, the relationship between them became more and more complicated, considerably more so than any other relationship the Koryŏ people had ever had with past Chinese dynasties. The Koryŏ people’s traditional customs, and their institutional way of life, were continuously challenged and considerably shaken, to the extent of forcing Koryŏ kings to devise new ruling models. For Koryŏ leaders, neither blindly embracing foreign institutions to replace existing ones, nor resisting them at all cost was going to work. The “Koryŏ way” had to be salvaged even as the new Mongol influence was embraced, and accepted foreign institutions had to be mixed with existing Koryŏ elements. It is an intriguing question as to what sort of society Koryŏ was becoming in this period.

Yet this is surely not a task that can be accomplished in a single article. The objective of this article is to remind us all that previous studies have only conveyed individual parts of the whole picture, and to suggest some new methodologies that might shed some light upon the question of what the Koryŏ people’s “life with the Mongols” was like. In this regard, I suggest that we should try determining some discernible “perimeters” of the Koryŏ people’s lives, which would have defined the Koryŏ people’s “realm of life” (not only spatially but mentally and institutionally), isolated from the outside world yet beginning to fluctuate since the Mongols’ arrival.

At the time of the Mongol rise, Koryŏ had been a sovereign country that stood apart from its neighbors (including China) for over three centuries. Then the Mongols came, and Koryŏ was compelled to form a relationship with Yuan that differed from any of its past commitments. The political barrier between Koryŏ and Yuan was breached, as the Koryŏ king became the Yuan emperor’s

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13. *Koryŏsa* 24 [Kojong 41/1254/12/last entry]. According to this record, more than 200,000 Koryŏ men and women were kidnapped, and countless souls killed, while wherever the Mongol soldiers went everything was put to the torch. It was reported that the situation had never been worse since the very first invasions decades earlier.
son-in-law, and the Koryŏ government’s authority was damaged when a Yuan provincial government was erected right by its side. Legal overtures were made by Yuan authorities, which left the Koryŏ government extremely concerned about the prospect of the Mongols forcing Koryŏ to abandon its legal traditions and accept Mongol law codes. Koryŏ individuals’ general sentiment (as well as loyalties, for that matter) started to diverge, while the Koryŏ governmental administration had to accommodate not one but two (indigenous and foreign) sets of administrative institutions. In other words, the Mongol advent caused certain traditional “borders” between Koryŏ and China, which had remained intact for centuries in political, legal, and cultural terms, to literally “shift.”

But while the “old borders” continued to become muddled, “new borders” were being formed, featuring an interesting mix of Koryŏ and Yuan politics, law, and institutions. “Political diversity” (in terms of diverging individual perspectives, and how Yuan imperial agendas were utilized in “solving” Koryŏ problems), “legal coexistence” (the Koryŏ public’s recognition of both Koryŏ and Yuan legal practices), and “institutional mixes” (combinations of Koryŏ and Yuan policies), will be the areas examined in this article.

Politics

In 1274, the soon-to-be Koryŏ king Ch’ungnyŏl married a Mongol princess and became not only the son-in-law but a direct subordinate of the leader of the Yuan empire.14 In the 1270s and 1280s, the installation of a Yuan imperial provincial government called the Chŏngdong haengsŏng (Eastern expedition field headquarters) on the Korean Peninsula to oversee the planned Mongol campaign against Japan, meant that the Korean peninsula was now (albeit symbolically) under the authority of the Yuan local administrative structure (as a region housing the office of a Yuan local provincial government).15 And during the 1290s, Mongol emissaries intervened in the Koryŏ government’s deliberations on all kinds of matters (Yi Kanghan 2015c, 136–141), compromising divisions between Koryŏ and imperial (and in regional terms, Chinese) politics. Koryŏ indeed practically became a part of the Mongol imperial order.

Human exchanges also increased exponentially. As Koryŏ and Yuan individuals furthered their relationships, people on both sides became bound together. Not only knowledge and ideas were transferred, but goals and

15. Koryŏsa 29 [Ch’ungnyŏl 7/1281/3/ǔdmyo day].
aspirations were “shared” as well. And the impact was greater on the officials of Koryo, because at first their position was more disadvantageous and as such they were more open to new suggestions. As a result, Koryo officials began to grow “multiple identities.”

One example of this was the change in titles Koryo officials personally harbored. Koryo officials began to receive imperial Yuan munsan ranks, “civil” positional ranks (not posts), and musan ranks, “military” positional ranks (not posts), from the Yuan emperor. Kim Panggyöng 金方慶 (1212–1300), a prominent Koryo official who was very instrumental in the formation of a diplomatic relationship between Koryo and Yuan, was granted a Zhōngfèng dàifu 中奉大夫 rank by the Yuan government, marking the first time a Koryo official received a “foreign” civil positional rank. As his case was followed by those of his colleagues, it became a new trend for Koryo officials to expect Yuan imperial ranks. Added to this, all the Koryo officials who joined the Japan campaign in 1275 or 1281, or those who were later appointed as manho万戸 commanders by Yuan, received Yuan musan martial ranks as well (Yi Kanghan 2015b). Bestowal of a musan rank would have been an even more sensational experience as Koryo military officers had never received them from their own government. These “Yuan ranks,” either civil or military, imposed another “identity” upon the Koryo officials, and literally made them harbor “dual identities.” Surely it did not mean that a Koryo official was automatically transformed into a Yuan imperial official. It was more like an individual Koryo official “evolving” and coming to hold multiple identities, of which one was recognized by the Koryo government, while the other indicated the individual’s “position” in the entire Mongol imperial order. As these bestowals accumulated in the ensuing years, Koryo officials may have actually come to

16. Here the term “post” refers to a governmental seat with an actual function, while “rank” refers to one’s own status (level) as acknowledged by the government and thus one’s eligibility to be appointed to a given seat (post).
17. Koryoṣa 29 [Ch’unghyol 6/1280/6/simmyo day]. A Zhōngfèng dàifu 中奉大夫 held the rank of 2B, which was quite high in the overall civil structure of Yuan.
18. For relevant examples, see Yi Kanghan (2013a). This is an examination of several cases which include that of Kim Panggyöng.
19. For example, we can consult some examples that reveal how the Koryo people’s habit of referring to someone with positional ranks was slightly changed during this period. The case of Wŏn Sŏnji 元善之 (1281–1330) is one such example, as it shows that he was casually called (even at the time of death) “Sir Sosin” (昭信[校尉]), a relatively low rank (6B) in the Yuan military ranks, even while having the highest Koryo civil rank (kwangjo[taebu]匡靖[大夫], “first rank”) at the time. Wŏn Sŏnji’s situation can be discerned from his burial epitaph included in Kim Yongsŏn (2001).
want them so that they might explore unchartered career possibilities and pathways in a new imperial arena that was much larger than the Koryó court. And in the wake of all this, diverging political aspirations of individual Koryó officials could have caused the “line of division” that had existed between both Koryó and China’s Mongol-dominated political communities to blur a bit.

But the individual activities of officials were not the only barometer of the level of political separation (or lack thereof) between Koryó and Yuan. For that we should discuss the matter of “policy agendas,” which generally indicate the political direction of the government, usually set by the leaders (kings) in those days. During this period, the Koryó government actively embraced Yuan policy agendas, and shared the political aspirations of the Yuan imperial government, but the efforts often led to unexpected results, in which “solutions” to some old Koryó problems were presented, or some original Koryó traditions which had earlier been suppressed at the urging of the Yuan government were even revived.

The most glaring example is the governance of King Ch’ungsón (r. 1298, 1308–1313). Being the son of King Ch’ungnyol (r. 1275–1307) and his Mongol bride and the grandson of Emperor Qubilai (Kublai Khan), Ch’ungsón was literally a “child of both worlds,” an anomaly whom Koryó officials might have been unsure how to deal with. He spent his youth in Yuan, stayed in Koryó for only a few years (in the 1290s), and in the fourteenth century spent most of his years in China. He had no meaningful ties to Koryó politics, except for a few young loyal officials he befriended during his brief stays in Koryó. He received his political training in China, and derived most of his political lessons from Yuan politics. Thus, one might assume his primary stance as a Koryó king would have been to “further the relationship” between Koryó and Yuan, even if it meant replacing certain Koryó traditions with Mongol-influenced Chinese counterparts. Records do indicate that as soon as he became the Koryó king, he decided to embrace certain Yuan policy agendas, especially in the areas of political reforms and revenue enhancements. But as a result of his efforts, instead of certain Koryó conventions starting to disappear, interesting things began to occur.

20. A number of studies dedicated to the examination of this very figure have been published in Korea over the past half-century. In the 1970s, he was considered to have been an “anti-Yuan” figure, as he was removed from the throne by the Yuan government after only eight months. Then in the 1980s and 1990s, his hybrid nature was highlighted and many scholars began to brand him as essentially a Mongol figure who was not much interested in ruling Koryó at all. Just as branding him the grandson of Qubilai and a son of a Mongol princess—as “anti-Yuan” was highly preposterous, so was discarding him as an “essentially Mongol” person. For the overall trend in studies of King Ch’ungsón, and a critical analysis of that trend, see Yi Kanghan (2010a, 127–130).
During the 1290s, the Yuan government was dealing with the fallout caused by the economic policy of its Muslim financial advisors.\(^{21}\) That policy, designed to extract as many resources as possible from existing Chinese households, severely disrupted the public peace and almost cost the Yuan imperial government its reputation and stability. So in 1291, after the last Muslim minister Sanggha 桑哥 had been expelled, officials who had newly seized control of the government initiated a very conservative policy. This new policy aimed at blocking all “ unofficial” royal orders from being requested or even issued, and dramatically reducing the size of the government (both central and local), while also establishing a very strong monitoring system to prevent future misconduct, illegal activities, and criminal offenses (Yi Kanghan 2007a, 106–111). This policy change led to the restoration of a degree of social stability and enhancement of the government’s integrity, yet also resulted in a steep drop in government revenues which progressed to become a monetary problem that would later affect the entire empire. Thus, during the first decade of the 1300s, Yuan Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 1307–1311) re-initiated an aggressive financial policy by reinforcing the salt monopoly initiative and resuming foreign trade in order to salvage the fledgling economy of the empire (Yi Kanghan 2008d, 130–133).

Koryŏ’s King Ch’ungson, during his twenty-plus-year stay in Yuan from 1290, had witnessed all these political initiatives discussed at the Yuan court just prior to being enthroned as the Koryŏ king in 1298, and had also been made well aware of the necessity of a new financial policy through his discussions with younger Mongol princes (later Emperors Wuzong and Renzong) when he stayed with them between 1298 and 1307 (they actually shared a residence for almost a decade) before he returned to power in 1308. Thus, it was only natural for Ch’ungson to base his own policies on elements that he had learned from or shared with his former Yuan associates.

But in reality, Ch’ungson had to adjust the methods he had learned in order to apply them to a Koryŏ-specific environment. For example, instead of blocking unofficial orders, as was done in Yuan, in Koryŏ he demolished the Chŏngbang 政房 (Personnel Authority) office which had been established by military leaders in the early thirteenth century and which had been disrupting the normal appointment processes of the Koryŏ government ever since. Instead of stripping down the government he established a hierarchical organization by grouping offices under a new structure, and then also “promoted” the existing monitoring office more drastically than the Yuan imperial government had ever done (Yi Kanghan 2008b, 269–276). Meanwhile, in the realm of finances

\(^{21}\) For this, see Otagi Matsuo (1969).
Ch’ungsŏn launched a new salt monopoly system, but instead of increasing salt producers’ submission amounts as Wuzong had done, Ch’ungsŏn had all the salt farms across the country registered by the government, while also harshly subduing offenders who had been abusing salt supplies. And while in order to boost foreign exports, he established a new office that would produce high-quality special textile items (something Wuzong also did shortly after), he also corrected the relationship between the government and the market, an effort which we can only spot in Koryŏ (Yi Kanghan 2008d, 124–126, 137–138).

As we can see, the Yuan government’s policy agendas, introduced to the Koryŏ government by a monarch who was half-Mongol by blood and more than ready to “infuse” Koryŏ governance with Mongol Yuan intentions, actually did not contribute to any sort of “homogenization” of the domestic governing styles of Koryŏ and Yuan. Instead, it helped the Koryŏ king solve some lingering Koryŏ internal problems, such as political corruption and monetary crisis. Under circumstances which would not allow them to refuse immediate acceptance of Mongol instructions, the Koryŏ leaders were “using” Yuan policies to further their own agendas, which was in the end solving Koryŏ problems.

And in some cases, Yuan ideas were even used to “revive” original Koryŏ traditions. In the 1260s and 1270s, inside the Yuan government there was a notion—not only raised by Chinese officials but supported by the emperor himself—that the “old [Chinese] ways” (jiuzhi 舊制) should be respected and revived. Such a notion was conceived after Emperor Qubilai decided to recruit the aid of a prominent Confucian scholar named Xu Heng 許衡, in order to establish a system that would enable the Mongols to effectively govern the Chinese population. Qubilai needed scholars and officials who had administrative knowledge that could serve such a goal, and the people who were recruited did infuse the new Mongol leadership with “traditional Chinese values,” elevating the notion of “respect for the old ways” to a prominent discourse in the process (Yi Kanghan 2008c, 98–102).

22. The fact that the Koryŏ salt management program launched by King Ch’ungsŏn was modeled after the Yuan salt monopoly system has already been discussed in previous studies (Kang 1985; Kwŏn 1985). This author has attributed such similarities to King Ch’ungsŏn and Emperor Wuzong’s shared experiences and methods (2008d, 129–130; 134–135).

23. The “efforts” of the Koryŏ kings who served the throne during this period have indeed been recognized in previous studies, as can be seen in the work of Pak Chonggi (2003). In such studies, however, these past efforts have often been cited as “usually insufficient” to fix old Koryŏ problems. Further, neither the Koryŏ king’s own intentions behind such plans, nor any probable relationship between these plans and Yuan influences (in terms of inspiration or shared experiences) that may have encouraged such efforts in the first place, have ever been duly discussed.
The Koryŏ leadership took notice of this, and apparently used it to its own advantage. We cannot be sure whether or not such efforts were intentional, as the king who displayed such efforts was again King Ch’ungsŏn. Considering his hybrid heritage, it seems rather unlikely that he would ever willingly jump on such a task in the first place, but in his first year on the throne in 1298, as well as in 1308 when he returned to the throne after a ten-year absence, he tried to return the Koryŏ governmental structure to the “old form,” or at least tried to revive some elements that echoed the original structure of the Koryŏ government (Yi Kanghan 2008c, 75–78, 79–83). The first and foremost reason he cited for this attempt was that “the current structure [the 1275 refit] of the Koryŏ government deviated from its original form, which in fact had been based upon “old and ancient Chinese traditions” (Yi Kanghan 2008c, 76). His attempts, at least the first one in 1298, were thwarted when he was forced to relinquish his throne (partially because of such governmental “retrofitting”), but in principle his actions were in fact commendable, as they were an effort in full alignment with the very notion the Yuan government had been claiming to uphold. As a result, the governmental structure newly designed (again) by King Ch’ungsŏn in 1308, which revived critical elements of the old Koryŏ structure (like the titles of officials, and in some cases the names of offices themselves), was neither rejected nor opposed by the Yuan government.

Political interference of the Mongol aggressors and the torn personal loyalties of Koryŏ officials do indicate that the Yuan imperial order managed to effectively “dissolve” former outlying perimeters of the Koryŏ political arena. Yet at the same time many of the imperial agendas that were introduced to the Koryŏ government through either “distracted” Koryŏ officials or “hybrid” Koryŏ kings provided unexpected methods, techniques, or even “political cover” for Koryŏ leaders to solve problems of their own. As the results of those problem-solving efforts had lasting repercussions in Koryŏ for years and decades to come, we can say that even as the “wall” between the political

24. According to Yi Ikchu (1994, 105–109, 110–118), when the very structure of the government had been changed in 1275 (reportedly) at the urging of the Mongol Yuan imperial government, King Ch’ungnyŏl decided to degrade all governmental offices “above the 5th grade,” while changing most of the office titles as well as the posts attached to them.
25. Koryŏsa 33 [Ch’ungsŏn 1/1298/5/sinmyo day].
26. His new design (of the government) was sustained partially because King Ch’ungsŏn deliberately designed other aspects of the Koryŏ structure completely differently from not only the original Koryŏ version but also the current Yuan system, as it was one of the Yuan imperial government’s wishes that the Koryŏ structure be clearly different from its own. King Ch’ungsŏn, endeavoring not to repeat mistakes from his initial attempt, appeased Yuan while also accomplishing what he had set out to do.
realms of Koryŏ and Yuan was seemingly being torn down, a new one was surreptitiously being built. The existing political barrier was disrupted, only to be replaced evidently with a modified one.

Legal Issues

In 1299, the Yuan imperial government decided to alter the nature of the Chöngdong haengsŏng, which was at the time serving more as a mere communications channel between Koryŏ and Yuan. The Koryŏ king was to remain as governor, but a previously absent second-in-command was dispatched to oversee Koryŏ governance. And the man who was assigned to that post, whose name was Giwargis, was quite aggressive. He first criticized the “harsh” nature of the original Koryŏ penal code (for not allowing multiple trials for capital offenders), then spoke negatively of the fact that there were too many local officials throughout the country when local areas were currently so scarcely populated, while also pointing out that some of the Koryŏ government’s ceremonial protocols were in fact “presumptuous” considering Koryŏ’s status as a subordinate to the imperial government. The last two voices of criticism were duly noted by the Koryŏ government and “properly” addressed, but we don’t know what happened to the first issue, which was actually a legal issue that Koryŏ must have had some difficulties to comply with, as such compliance would have required Koryŏ to drop its most time-honored penal practices.

And in the wake of all this, another legal issue quietly surfaced. A rumor circulated to the effect that in Giwargis’ oversight of some trial cases, in which people appealed to have their social status “enhanced” from a lowborn (slave, servant-for-life) to commoner, Giwargis in many cases granted those requests (supposedly permitting the petitioners to be officially acknowledged as commoners). Such cases were usually generated by couples formed between individuals from different social classes, and according to Koryŏ tradition any

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27. Koryŏsa 31 [Chʻungnyŏl 25/1299/10/kapcha day].
28. On the Chöngdong haengsŏng, Chang Tongik (1994) published a very enlightening study. In this, he provides readers with an analysis of how the nature of this body changed over the years, in terms of its functions, relationship with the Koryŏ government, and internal composition. Further, Yi Kanghan (2007a, 104–106) provides the background, nature and political meaning of the havoc wrought by the newly dispatched Chöngdong haengsŏng official named Giwargis (also called Gorgis by some).
29. Koryŏsa 32 [Chʻungnyŏl 27/1301/4/kichʻuk day].
off-spring of such a couple had to be—without exception—classified as lowborn. The Koryŏ government could not afford to make them commoners as it might send a wrong signal implying that the government was not determined to protect barriers between different social classes, which would be followed by unimaginable chaos. And according to the rumor, Giwargis was clearly trampling upon one of the most important Koryŏ traditions.\(^{31}\) At first, the Koryŏ government could not understand why he was doing this, but came to suspect that he was trying to dismantle old Koryŏ practices. Significantly disturbed, the Koryŏ king and officials filed a protest demanding his recall to Yuan,\(^{32}\) and that was what happened in 1301 he was ordered back to China for failure to fulfill his mission: maintaining order in Koryŏ.\(^{33}\)

But what really happened here? Was he actually trying to alter Koryŏ traditions at the risk of causing social upheaval or disruption which would not only destabilize Koryŏ but threaten the relationship between Koryŏ and the Mongols? A recent study indicates that would not have been the case, and instead, although he was indeed spewing out many rulings that would recategorize the petitioner as a commoner, results of individual cases may have varied, as even the Yuan government was not in favor of ruling all offspring of mixed-class unions as commoners, as in some cases like “illicit couplings” and also “forced marriages” they ruled otherwise (Yi Kanghan 2010c, 236–240). Thus, it is highly possible that the Koryŏ government was being a little bit paranoid at this point,\(^{34}\) which we can also see from the swiftness it displayed in rescinding all orders Giwargis had issued before his recall to Yuan.

But the Koryŏ government also had very good reason to be so concerned in the case of Giwargis, considering that a similar incident had already occurred in the early 1270s, when a Koryŏ individual (named Cho Sŏkki 趙石奇) made a plea to a visiting Mongol emissary (named Teteru 帖帖兀),\(^{35}\) coincidently only one or two years after the Yuan imperial government established rulings on the status of offspring from couples of different social backgrounds.\(^{36}\) Clearly this person Cho was aware of Yuan imperial legal codes, and wanted to raise his social profile (or his son’s, it is not specified in records) using the Yuan legal

\(^{31}\) This incident is primarily examined as an example of the Koryŏ government’s efforts (or refusal to conduct such efforts) to settle “ownership disputes” involving nobi servants. For an example, see Kim Hyŏngsu (1996).

\(^{32}\) Koryŏsa 31 [Ch’ungnyŏl 26/1300/10].

\(^{33}\) Koryŏsa 32 [Ch’ungnyŏl 27/1301/3/imin day].

\(^{34}\) Koryŏsa 32 [Ch’ungnyŏl 28/1302/1/musin day].

\(^{35}\) Koryŏsa 108 [Bibliography 21, Kim Chisuk 金之淑].

\(^{36}\) For details, see Yi Kanghan (2010c, 237–240).
code instead of a Koryo one, as it was abundantly clear that the Koryo code would not allow it, no matter how strongly one might pursue the case (Yi Kanghan 2010c, 240–242).

This incident from the 1270s was powerfully symbolic as it was the case of a Koryo person deciding he or she would no longer adhere to Koryo traditions, but rather resort to appealing to another source of legal authority, which happened to be the Mongol Yuan empire. This was more than an alarming turn of events for the Koryo government, as such a trend could severely undermine its authority. The line of division that had existed between the Korean Peninsula and China in legal and penal administrative terms could have collapsed right there. However, as there were no more similar incidents reported (with the 1299 scandal the only exception), we can see that such attempts were later successfully blocked. Nevertheless, the Koryo government obviously would not have been able to lower its guards for quite some time, and therefore demonstrated the overreaction of 1299 mentioned above.

And in the early half of the fourteenth century, the situation seems to have remained unchanged. A prominent Koryo scholar named Yi Kok 李穀 and a Yuan official named Jie Yizhong 掲以忠 who was serving in the Chöngdong haengsong provincial government at the time, revealed so in their conversation. Jie expressed frustrations over the fact that Yuan legal authority was not that much recognized or observed in situations that required legal actions based upon the penal code. Yi Kok’s response was essentially that “Koryo situations demanded Koryo codes to be applied, in order to be rightfully processed and efficiently closed.” Jie’s argument was in support of the “universal nature” of the Yuan legal codes that should be unilaterally respected, but Yi was saying that Koryo legal practices and Yuan legal directives were simply being used inside Koryo “together,” consulted side by side as deemed appropriate or necessary according to the situation at hand. From his remarks, we can see that Koryo was neither boycotting nor ignoring the Yuan legal codes. The incident of 1299 itself shows that the Koryo government did acknowledge the need to honor the Yuan law, and acquiesced to the implementation of Yuan imperial directives of a legal nature. But as also shown by that 1299 incident, while the Koryo government did recognize Yuan legal superiority in some areas, in others it certainly did not. It was simply not ready to abandon Koryo legal procedures in all areas. In other words, the area of legal deliberations, practices, and executions, was simply not an area in which the Yuan was able to subdue or replace existing Koryo practices as a whole. Both legal systems had to find a

37. Kajöngjip 9, Yi Kok, “Song Ke Limun seo” 送揭理問序 (Farewell letter to Imun Jie).
way to coexist.

Just how they coexisted is a difficult question to answer. In tense situations, concerning which law (Koryŏ or Yuan) should take precedence in a certain Koryŏ case, the Koryŏ government, or the Koryŏ officials in the field, may have won some and lost some. What should be noted is that while the Koryŏ legal system was left relatively intact, the public’s awareness of the Yuan system continued to grow as well. We can see that from the fact that even after one or two generations, during the 1380s and 1390s (ironically, long after Yuan was driven out of China), the Koryŏ government issued an order instructing local officials to “consult Yuan codes (至正條格) in penal hearings and rulings.” And a few years later, a prominent Koryŏ official suggested that “Translations of Yuan legal codes (議刑易覽) be deployed for local officials’ consultation.”

We can see that Yuan legal practices did leave a lasting impression in the minds of the Koryŏ people, and while the exact range of such an impression is hard to establish, apparently it was enough for the Koryŏ government to resurrect them (Yuan legal practices) even decades after the Yuan’s fall. Whether or not the Koryŏ leaders viewed Yuan law and the Yuan empire separately is neither clear nor very important. What we should note is that there was a notion, raised at the end of the fourteenth century in Koryŏ, that viewed the Yuan legal system as a possible legal platform for the future, and that alone suggests that such a view had been in the making in the early fourteenth century as well, as such notions could not have abruptly developed in a short period of time. We can see that in the late thirteenth and the entirety of the fourteenth century, while borders between Koryŏ and foreign laws did persist, Yuan imperial law continued to coexist with the indigenous Koryŏ law, to the extent of the former cultivating a formidable status in Koryŏ during that dynasty’s closing days.

Institutions

The Mongol Yuan government did not blatantly demand the implantation of “Mongol institutions.” If a particular Koryŏ institution went against Yuan’s political interests, it would have surely called for its abolishment or replacement,

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38. Koryo'sa 84 [Monographs (chi 志) 38, Penal Administration (公式職制) 1/1377/2 and 1388/9].
39. Koryo'sa 117 [Biography 30, Chŏng Mongju 鄭夢周]. Chŏng suggested in 1388 that the Ming law (大明律), Yuan law (至正條格), and Koryo law (本朝法令) should all be consulted in the process of creating a new law code for the country.
but such occurrences were rare. The only exception was the governmental structure, of which an alteration was demanded for ideological reasons.\textsuperscript{40} Yuan was more blatant in its political plotting, as it even directly challenged the sitting Koryŏ king’s authority by frequently replacing him.\textsuperscript{41} But interestingly, their quarrels with Koryŏ institutions were less than evident.

The Koryŏ people’s general appearance (in terms of hair style and attire) changed in 1278 because of a “strategic call” made by Koryŏ’s King Ch’ungnyŏl.\textsuperscript{42} Records do not clarify what kind of instructions followed to enforce the order’s implementation, nor do they specify the response of local residents or how much of the original Koryŏ attire was actually replaced. But several portraits from the early fourteenth century that feature Koryŏ scholars or officials wearing Mongol outfits, along with the story of King Ch’ungsuk having once scorned his own son (Ch’unghye) for supposedly wearing only Mongol garb, lead us to believe that at least in the upper levels of society Ch’ungnyŏl’s order would have led to some actual changes of attire, while the Koryŏ-wear was not completely abandoned and was still enjoyed by a large segment of the Koryŏ population.

What would have been the logic behind this seemingly radical order? It seems he had to maximize his negotiating power with the Mongols, in order to accomplish things that would bring greater good to the Koryŏ people, such as the Mongol government’s recall of its troops from the Korean Peninsula, which coincidently finally happened that same year of 1278,\textsuperscript{43} and the willful declaration of embracing Mongol outfits would have been considered a rather provocative yet effective way of showing the Yuan government the Koryŏ government’s willingness to develop an amicable relationship with the empire.

Such “strategic thinking” can be discerned in certain institutional changes engineered by his son King Ch’ungsŏn as well. Ch’ungsŏn has usually been blamed for “degrading” the dynasty’s competitive (civil service) examination

\textsuperscript{40} It was argued that the Koryŏ government, which was considered a vassal state to the Yuan empire, should not be allowed to have the same governmental structure as that of the Yuan imperial government. This was never verbally or openly uttered by the Yuan government, but King Ch’ungsŏn once mentioned it as a de-facto necessity. \textit{Koryŏsa} 33 [Ch’ungsŏn 0/1298/5/sinmyo day].

\textsuperscript{41} King Ch’ungnyŏl was replaced in 1298, but was again given the Koryŏ throne in 1299. Both incidents were arranged by Yuan authorities. King Ch’ungsuk had to relinquish his throne to his son Ch’unghye in 1330, only to be allowed to take it back two years later, also at Yuan’s order. King Ch’unghye, who was re-enthroned in 1339 following his father’s death, was ordered to step down in 1343 and was killed on his way to China.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Koryŏsa} 28 [Ch’ungnyŏl 4/1278/2/pyŏngja day].

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Koryŏsa} 28 [Ch’ungnyŏl 4/1278/4/musul day].
system, and newly establishing it as a “subordinate part” of the imperial examination program (Yi Kanghan 2010b, 147–150), in a clear and willful violation of existing traditions. But that was not the only thing he did during his reign, and what he did with the “dynastic shrine (T’aemyo 太廟)” now stands as a testament to his true intentions, as he chose to embrace the design of the newly built Yuan imperial shrine, yet preserved certain elements that had been embedded in the original layout of the early Koryŏ shrine. He had to reduce the number of chambers to five because he could not maintain the original seven (as usually observed in an imperial shrine), but also employed a total of four “flank chambers” (which were also part of the new Yuan system) so that he could maintain a total of nine ancestral tablets to be enshrined in the Koryŏ shrine, as had been the custom since the early days of the dynasty. And while moving the founder king’s tablet, which had been placed at the farthest western position of the shrine by Koryŏ traditions, to the center in accordance with new Yuan practices, he enshrined the tablets of much older and more honorable ancestral kings in the western flank chambers, so that the age-old “dignified west” principle might be preserved.44

This was clearly an example of “merging” the Koryŏ system with Yuan practices, by incorporating new Yuan elements into the existing Koryŏ design. Obviously Ch’ungsŏn was not at liberty to dismiss or disregard newly learned Yuan elements, but neither was it an option to eliminate all Koryŏ traces. Hence, an attempt to have the royal shrine be operated by two sets of rules, so that traditions and new orders could coexist in a ceremonial zone that was in itself the ultimate monument to Koryŏ heritage. In this, we can discern new dynamics that subsequently changed how things had usually been run in Koryŏ, but even in those cases Koryŏ institutions were rarely replaced, and more often than not they were either supplemented or asked to “coexist” with the Yuan system. And there are other traces of this merging of the “best of both worlds” in the Koryŏ government’s efforts to redesign the local administrative system and its military drafting policy.

The designers of the original Koryŏ local administrative system would have wanted to craft a model that could tie all regions together under a unified system (as the peninsula had been divided for almost a hundred years in the ninth century), by establishing a strong relationship between the central government and local areas. But such effort failed, as the government’s pool of human resources was insufficient to dispatch overseers to them all. As a result,

44. For details of King Ch’ungsŏn’s redesigning of the dynastic shrine, see Yi Kanghan (2010d, 91–96).
specific regions which were to receive local overseers had to be selected, and areas that were not had to be “indirectly” governed by the central government through nearby regions which did receive officials. These regions were essentially designated as “senior units” (chubyŏn 主縣), and had an additional mission to oversee situations in adjacent areas—or “junior units” (sokhyŏn 屬縣).

This was a sort of proxy system wherein the government had no direct tie with many areas throughout the peninsula, a system that had its share of flaws. Because there was no comprehensive hierarchical structure that could engulf all local areas, the government had trouble effectively managing all the senior units. That was where the mok 牧 units (traditional overseers of senior units), which were usually selected from among senior units, came in. At the end of the tenth century, twelve such mok were established, and in the beginning of the eleventh century the number was reduced to eight. These mok units were more than instrumental in ensuring the government’s control over senior units, and they were to later form the famous to 道 provinces.

As the peninsula’s population continued to grow, however, the mok units found themselves overwhelmed, as were the other senior units. Junior units (without governmental overseers) were not receiving proper care. The government’s control over local regions became increasingly unstable. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, kammu 監務 units (provisional overseers) were dispatched as quasi-senior units, but a larger shakeup of the system was evidently required. More local units with overseers dispatched, more mok units to handle them in the middle, and a comprehensive hierarchical structure to control them all, was what was sorely needed.

And it was the kings in the fourteenth century who reshaped the local administrative system by tackling these issues. Since the end of the thirteenth century, the Koryŏ government sought out officials within the government and local branches worthy of recognition, as well as renowned figures who were already recognizable by the public and could be “honored by the government too,” and even people who had strong ties with the Mongol Yuan empire and therefore should be “respected at all costs,” and most importantly, who originated from “certain areas” that were very important based on their location, size, or place within the economic network of Koryŏ and so had to be advanced (i.e., promoted) in order for the government to enhance local administration in the region. When such a place and a related figure were both secured, the government would then designate the area a senior unit (Yi Kanghan 2015a, 42–65).

And with all these new areas promoted to senior units, the next task would have been creating “more mok units” to place them under check. That was
what King Ch’ungsŏn did by combining methods displayed by Yuan local policy makers with traditional Koryŏ elements. In 1308, other than those areas which had already been serving as mok units, he chose an additional fifteen and designated them “new mok units.” However, they were renamed as “pu” 府 units, and demoted a little bit only two years later, probably because the population of the old mok units would have resented the fact that previously subordinate areas were now claiming the same status with them. This also might have occurred because the new mok units had trouble adjusting themselves to “larger shoes;” they still faced the daunting task of monitoring all the newly promoted senior units, and by doing so provided much needed security throughout the Korean Peninsula. With new pu units overtaking the mok units’ primary functions of overseeing senior units, it became possible for the old mok units to invest their resources and authority in larger issues, and to provinces, which had already begun to shape up in the previous century, were able to culminate in the concrete form we now have today. And as in the wake of such a metamorphosis, the to provinces needed more authority to serve the local system, the pu and mok units were sequentially placed under them, while the governor’s title was changed from anch’alsa 按察使 to chech’alsa 提察使 (Yi Kanghan 2012).45

The interesting thing to note is how such a massive local structural reconfiguration could have taken place during the five-year reign of King Ch’ungsŏn, and how much it resembled the methods of the local administration shakeup that had been employed by the Yuan government early in the 1290s. At that time, the Yuan imperial government decided to promote various heavily populated xiàn 縣 units to zhōu 州 units in order for them to serve as “local middle managers,” and as a result the number of zhōu units in China’s Jiangnan region increased exponentially. Yuan also launched suzheng lianfang shi 肅政廉訪使 officials to circulate around Xingshēng 行省 provinces and supervise zhōu units, a decision which placed the central government in a far better condition to relay orders and dictate obligations to local units directly. The expansion of middle-managing local units, and reinforcing provincial governing, were essential for the Yuan government to rule the recently obtained Jiangnan region.

Such methods must have been very inspiring to King Ch’ungsŏn, as these were the two elements that had been missing in Koryŏ’s past local system, but were effectively integrated into the new Koryŏ local system of the fourteenth century.

45. Local administrative changes in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have been examined in previous studies (Pak Kyŏngan 1990; Pak Chonggi 1994), which only interpreted such changes in status as “temporary” promotions or demotions intended to prevent similarities with the Yuan local structure.
century. Previous kings may have already been aware of the problem, but were probably without the means and knowledge to address them, while King Ch’ungsŏn, who was very much aware of things going on inside China, and especially the Jiangnan region, seems to have tried a formula similar to that of Yuan with the Koryŏ local system. Embracing a foreign method, while using Koryŏ traditional elements (mok, to), was the solution King Ch’ungsŏn devised, which represented a school of thought injecting a foreign policy direction into the reality of Koryŏ with the intention of fixing what had been wrong with former Koryŏ institutions by using a precedent featured inside Yuan-dominated China. Even the term chech’alsa 提察使, was coined with letters from the title of Yuan-designed, Chinese provincial overseers (tixing ancha shi 提刑按察使) which were predecessors of the suzheng lianfang shi.

Meanwhile, a similar evolution can be seen in the Koryŏ military drafting system. Since its early days, the Koryŏ government had maintained a principle of recruiting only commoners for dynastic services. Under no circumstances was a lowborn to be mobilized, as the government would have no grounds to pay for the services of those under the ownership of civilians. Only commoners who could receive land for their service, or owned land that could be exempted from taxation, were mobilized to serve the country in various functions, usually and most importantly the military. But as time went on, more problems emerged. With only a limited amount of land, securing land for commoners in need of compensation became increasingly difficult, while more and more exemptions on existing lands put a strain on dynastic revenue. And with the size of the commoner population fluctuating due to several circumstances, such as war, epidemics, or being privatized by powerful local figures, securing human resources for dynastic mobilization simply became harder and harder too.

And at the end of the Mongol invasion, the system was beyond broken. People had been killed, and lands torched. Commoner males and usable lands suddenly became an asset that was nowhere to be found. Then King Ch’ungsŏn arrived. In 1308, soon upon his re-enthronement, he ordered all nobi 奴婢 servants country-wide whose ownership was being legally disputed to be

46. A “commoner” in Koryŏ society would refer to someone who would submit taxes to the government, who was entitled to apply to the dynastic competitive exam, recognized by the government as a potential dynastic service provider and in such cases rewarded by the government with land. On the other hand, Koryŏ “lowborn” status referred to a slave or servant. These individuals were not required to pay taxes, could not apply for the governmental exam, were not mobilized for any dynastic services, and were certainly not compensated for any of their actions, either private or (in some limited cases) public.

47. These “nobi” were practically slaves, attached to public offices or private households. The ones who were mobilized by Ch’ungsŏn at this time were of course slaves owned by private
immediately gathered and sent to the capital. Then he ordered all military defense units in border regions that had been manning their posts for over thirty years to be summarily replaced and returned home. At the same time, Koryŏ reactivated the military household support system, which had been designed in the early days of the dynasty to provide every military household with a male individual exempted from all dynastic duties save one: to assume the economic activities of a military household while the head of that household (the mobilized soldier) was absent.

His sudden interest in disputed nobi servants was an odd one, but not so much when one considers the question of how in the world he was to secure the many commoner males required to replace border defense forces and provide countless households with extra individuals. The key to his solution was none other than pressing into military service all the lowborn nobi acquired by the government, an act that directly contravened the Koryŏ government’s earlier stance.48

The reason for his deviation from Koryŏ norm seems to have had something to do with the Mongol-style military administration that he must have witnessed during his stay in China. Mongol officials created a military system that operated on a virtual “pairing system,” which was composed of a primary household whose head would take on active military duty while the head of the other (secondary) household was put in charge of all preparations needed for its partner household. By having two households work in concert, the government was spared from having to use extra resources to ready its troops, and in cases of economic difficulties the two households could also switch roles. And later, in the early fourteenth century when it became increasingly difficult to secure commoner households, the Yuan government decided to have lowborn households join the pair, turning the previously commoner-based pair into a “hybrid.”

This practice must have drawn Ch’ungsŏn’s interest, as he himself reportedly wanted to bring in Yuan’s administrative methods and change the way the Koryŏ government had traditionally designated “soldiers” and “civilians.” His attempt was largely criticized (as an attempt to replace Koryŏ traditions with an “untested” foreign institution), and eventually was abandoned. But as the “commoner shortage” problem was not going anywhere, instead of importing the whole package (the Yuan policy as a whole), he apparently only borrowed the drafting of lowborns part, and used that as a platform to secure enough of a

48. For details of the discussion above, and the following discussion as well, see Yi Kanghan (2011b).
workforce for Koryŏ’s deteriorating military drafting system, while also salvaging ailing military households whose missing heads were causing them serious economic problems. So, in a sense, this case clearly resembles what he did with the local administrative system, as he selected and employed a Yuan imperial policy directive to operate Koryŏ traditional practices in a very different way, and in the process solve age-old problems plaguing Koryŏ institutions.

All the examples examined above—the redesign of the Koryŏ dynastic shrine, enhancement of the local administrative network, and employment of a new operating principle for the military draft system—represent either how Mongol institutions “melded” with Koryŏ traditions, or how Yuan policies were incorporated into Koryŏ governance in a very institutional way. And most importantly, these were not necessarily undertaken at the urging of Yuan, but rather by Koryŏ’s own will and in its own interests.

Of course, there were objections to these decisions, and there was also resentment regarding certain courses of action. But interestingly enough, opinions came from every direction, as there were those who believed the hybrid kings had gone too far, while others who felt that the kings were not doing nearly enough. Regarding the dynastic shrine, some scholar-officials—led by one Cho Ryŏm 趙廉—during King Ch’ungsuk’s reign wanted the New shrine (already built by Ch’ungso’n) to become more contemporary Chinese, and be modified to feature solely such elements, but were eventually stopped by Ch’ungso’n’s son Ch’ungsuk. On the other hand, concerning the Koryŏ military system, officials—including one of Ch’ungso’n’s most loyal vassals, Ch’oe Yuŏm 崔有澀—feared that the king was replacing all of Koryŏ’s traditional military principles with their Yuan counterparts, so they stopped him from importing the entire Yuan military program, and only allowed him to tinker with one principle.

Thus we can see there was indeed serious dissension over the issue of how much should be embraced, and what should be rejected, even inside the government and amongst the leaders of Koryŏ. Yet we can also see from the above examples that there were variant views of these changes among the Koryŏ people. In such an atmosphere, compromises would have been undoubtedly required, and that may have been the driving force behind the hybrid king charging ahead with reforms, engineered by endless rounds of discussions and debates, and the consensus that would have ultimately formed.

We can see that in an environment in which complete disregard of Yuan initiatives was simply not possible, the Koryŏ leaders as well as other elites in power embraced them, but only to an extent. This was done in a fashion that ensured the preservation of at least some of the Koryŏ traditions, or in a way that such new systems could be incorporated into the Koryŏ kings’ own efforts
to fix a society entering its fifth century and displaying ailments that could not be ignored. Such efforts resulted in all manner of institutional mixes emerging across the spectrum of Koryŏ governance. The institutional borderline between Yuan and Koryŏ was indeed in flux.

Conclusion

It would be an understatement to say that Koryŏ and the Mongol Yuan empire had a complicated relationship. Let us recapitulate some aspects that were discussed above. At this time, Yuan political intervention was a prevalent reality of Koryŏ. Koryŏ officials held dual identities and showed diverging aspirations. This kind of environment left members of the Koryŏ government much more susceptible to the notion or prospect of “advancing one’s career” through activities not only in Koryŏ but in Yuan as well. But individual diverging aspirations does not automatically mean the government was behaving in the same manner. The official aspiration of the government, which was usually survival and the protection of the public interest, betrayed a rather different attitude. The Koryŏ king’s resolve to utilize Yuan-originated notions and principles to advance some interests that were internal to Koryŏ (in the realms of political reform and revenue enhancement) was actually stronger than ever. We can say that the political barrier between Koryŏ and the outside was never obliterated, but certainly did not remain the same, as Koryŏ political entities were no longer operating with “singular” intentions, and also because, with the country forced open to the outer world, methods to protect and maintain Koryŏ interests had to become much more sophisticated than before.

In the meantime, the issue of legal systems was another matter. The Yuan government’s legal codes did not replace the existing Koryŏ ones, yet the legal systems of Koryŏ and Yuan had to find a way to coexist within Koryŏ. Later, the Yuan code even came to occupy a consulting status on the Korean Peninsula, even though the Yuan Empire was long gone. The legal barrier between Koryŏ and China was modified enough so that two sets of codes could exist side by side.

And in institutional terms, that coexistence assumed a much more complicated shape. A lot of policy-mixture models surfaced in this period in almost every area of dynastic governance: ritual protocols, the dynastic examination system, local administration, and military drafting. Sometimes Yuan and Koryŏ elements were housed inside a single institution (the dynastic shrine), in others a Koryŏ tradition would be integrated (or absorbed) into a Yuan institution as a
subordinate stage (dynastic competitive examination system), and in others Yuan policy models were embraced and fused with existing Koryó administrative elements so that they could be operated in a “new way.” Sometimes Koryó traditions could have been replaced, but in many cases the fusion and mixture were done at the will of the Koryó people with the intent of preserving traditional Koryó elements and at the same time fixing some Koryó problems that had never been properly addressed. The previous institutional demarcation between Koryó and China was gone, but a new one was devised to replace it.

Politics, law, and institutions, which were key areas that must have directly affected people’s lives, all reflected the dynamics of the Koryó-Yuan relationship. At the time, political aspirations were diverging and the loyalties of some were split, while political interests remained separated even during the reigns of the “hybrid kings.” Barriers between legal authorities remained intact, but institutional mixes between Koryó and Yuan became a new trend in Koryó, creating a complicated relationship between the two realms. And what made the situation more complex was the fact that the one area that enabled all these merges and coexistence in the first place through the continuous human and material traffic between Koryó and Yuan, which was of course the economy, showed that the Koryó market and the Korean Peninsula’s economic order clearly stood apart from those of Yuan, in terms of currency, taxation, and tariff rates. Simply speaking, both markets ran on different currencies with incompatible tax systems, and the Yuan harbor control treated Koryó ships as “foreign vessels.”

Thus, it would be safe to say that the determination of the full nature of such a complicated relationship is vital in determining the nature of Koryó history in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and may also contribute to raising our understanding of the history of East Asia of this period.

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