Subversive Ming Loyalist Narratives in Late Chosŏn Korea*

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During the reign of Sukchong (1674-1720), two narratives employing the figure of the Ming loyalist migrant as a symbol of hostility to the Chosŏn court were recorded in the transcripts of treason investigations. The first narrative, in 1696-7, was a rumor of an anti-dynastic movement led by a monk who claimed to be a Ming loyalist fugitive of distinguished lineage. The second narrative originated in an anti-Qing letter, purportedly written by Ming remnants, which was posted to a city gate. The authors of the letter were not found but a false accusation was made which linked Ming loyalism with the unstable borderland world of the Yalu region. Although the Ming loyalist remnants described in these two narratives did not exist, the fact that such Ming loyalist narratives were produced by seditious people of low or marginal status suggests that Ming loyalism was not exclusively an ideology of the court and yangban elites but was also a tool of resistance for the marginalized.

Keywords: Ming loyalism, Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910), geomancy, lies and rumors, foreign affairs, frontier contact

*The work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2007-361-AL0013). I also received financial support from the Academy of Korean Studies departmental grant and the Korea Foundation post-doctoral fellowship. I am grateful for many useful suggestions and critical comments, especially those of Andre Schmid, Vincent Shen, Robert Binnick, Pamela Crossley, Timothy Brook, Isabelle Sancho, Dane Alston and the anonymous readers of the paper.

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Introduction

The Sino-Korean relationship underwent a substantial transformation between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By 1683, the Qing empire had eliminated all significant Ming loyalist or Ming revivalist politics within China proper. As a result, the lingering loyalty which the Chosŏn court and yangban elites\footnote{Yangban were the political and social elite status-group of Chosŏn Korea. Literally, yangban means “both orders” (兩班) – that is to say, military and civil officials. In fact, the category of yangban extended far beyond those who held political office to include the descent-groups of office-holders. The right to hold office was determined by the ability to pass a challenging series of exams, but bureaucratic positions were monopolized by people with proper yangban ancestors on both male and female lines, as opposed to the growing number, in the late Chosŏn, of people who purchased yangban status to obtain exemption from taxes. See James B. Palais, “Confucianism and the Aristocratic/Bureaucratic Balance in Korea,” 
Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 44, no. 2 (1984): 427-468. For a more recent discussion of the subject in English see Eugene Y. Park, Between Dreams and Reality: The Military Examinations in Late Chosŏn Korea, 1600-1894 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 86-142.} felt for the Ming was redirected domestically towards ritual commemoration of the Ming and ideologically towards the claim that Chosŏn was the last true inheritor of the Ming mantle. On Chosŏn’s northern frontier, both Chosŏn and Qing courts jointly traced the Yalu and Tumen boundary between the two politics, resulting in a clarification of the previously uncertain frontier region between the two states. Although Chosŏn’s yangban elites continued to be hostile to the Qing domestically, this period saw the end of all anti-Qing military plots on the part of Chosŏn officials and the beginning of a new era in which hostility to the Qing and loyalty to the Ming became primarily a cultural and ideological statement of the superiority of Chosŏn’s yangban elites and the Chosŏn monarchy.

However, Ming loyalism was not exclusively an elite phenomenon and it did not exclusively function to legitimate the Chosŏn state and status system. Indeed, there were two treason investigations during the reign of King Sukchong (1674-1720) in which Ming loyalism was expressed by the plotters in the form of narratives of Ming migrants who had fled the Manchu armies for Chosŏn and were hostile not only to the Qing empire but also to the Chosŏn monarchy. The first narrative, in 1696-1697, was comprised of rumors of a conspiracy to establish dynasties under new royal houses in both Chosŏn and China. The supposed leader of this movement was a monk, much skilled in geomancy, who was believed to be a Ming loyalist fugitive of distinguished lineage. The second narrative began with an anti-Qing letter which was posted
in 1711 in front of the Yŏng’un 迎恩 Gate in the capital. The text was purportedly written by a Ming migrant, but the culprit was not found, despite vigorous attempts. In the process of the investigation, however, the false confessions – in one of which a criminal awaiting execution attempted to save his life by providing false testimony concerning a band of stateless bandits in the Yalu River region – reveal popular understanding of Ming loyalist migrants as a source of hostility to the Chosŏn state.

In neither of the two incidents did the Ming loyalist remnants actually exist. In both cases, they were fictional characters, primarily produced by the plotters themselves as a tool of their plot, but to a certain extent also forced through torture out of the mouths of suspected plotters by the court officials investigating the conspiracies. Yet the fictional nature of the Ming loyalist remnants that appear in the interrogation transcripts\(^2\) does not make these narratives any less significant for understanding the late Chosŏn. Rather, the appearance of such fictions, in a form broadly understood by both the Chosŏn court and by people hostile to the Chosŏn court, suggests that Ming loyalism should be understood not as the exclusive preserve of the Chosŏn court and yangban elites but as an ideological field contested alike by all status groups\(^3\) and by both loyal and subversive element.

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3. In addition to the yangban (who made up approximately 5% of Chosŏn’s total population), Chosŏn people were divided into four main status groups. Below the yangban were the chungan 中人 (“middle people”) who in the narrow sense were those from families who passed the miscellaneous examinations (chapkwa 錄科) in foreign languages, medicine and other technical fields, and in the broader sense included hereditary administrative functionaries and the sŏol 嫡孽 (the illegitimate sons of yangban fathers and concubines). The next and largest group were the commoners (yangmin 良民) who were generally farmers and were responsible for most tax and corvée duties. The final group, comprising some 30% of Chosŏn’s population during the seventeenth century, were the base or lowborn (ch’ŏn 蕃), in which group were included slaves, who were the possession of either yangban masters or government offices, and the hereditary participants in various base professions, including butchers (paekch’ŏng 白丁), female entertainers (kisaeng 嫁生) and shamans. See Eugene Y. Park, *Between Dreams and Reality*, 6-7.
Chosŏn within East Asia

Earlier approaches to Chosŏn relations with the outside world have often categorized Chosŏn as a closed and racially-homogeneous state, entirely and inflexibly sinocentric in its relations with the Chinese overlord, and otherwise encountering the rest of the world mostly as the victim of invasion by outsiders. Such a view, however, seriously distorts the range and diversity of Chosŏn’s interaction with the outside world, as may be seen not only in its ever changing diplomatic relations and cultural exchanges with China, but also in Chosŏn’s interactions with diverse peoples – Jurchen, Japanese, Chinese and Ryukyuans – on its borders. The resulting picture has revealed late Chosŏn’s foreign affairs to be far more diverse and complex, and far less monolithic and unchanging, than has previously been thought. Notably Sukchong’s reign (1674-1720) – during which both of the events discussed in this paper occurred – was a period of significant transformation in Chosŏn’s relations with the vast Qing empire to Chosŏn’s west, as the last remnants of the Ming were eliminated, and the previously vaguely drawn border between Chosŏn and the Qing empire was clarified.

Although in the past the Chosŏn-Qing relationship has been described as a model example of the sinocentric tribute system, the reality is much less simple. As Chŏng Okcha has discussed, following the Qing defeat of Chosŏn in the Pyŏngja Invasion (pyŏngja horan 丙子胡亂) of 1636-1637, the Chosŏn court and yangban elites publically submitted fully to the Qing hegemon, faithfully sending tribute-bearing embassies to the Qing in much the same way as they had to the Ming, while domestically maintaining a pose of Ming loyalty and hostility to the Qing. As there continued to be Ming loyalist holdouts against the Qing in China for much of the seventeenth century, with one notable Ming loyalist polity, the Zheng family in Taiwan, resisting until 1683, Chosŏn’s Ming loyalism was expressed at first with what Hŏ T’aeyong refers to as the “Zhonghua Restoration Consciousness” (Chunghwa hoebok ūisik 中華回復意 識), which involved actual plans (never actually put into effect) to invade the Qing and then unite militarily with pro-Ming rebels in China. Following 1683, this Zhonghua Restoration Consciousness was gradually replaced by what Hŏ

refers to as “Zhonghua Inheritance Consciousness” (Chungwha kyesīng ësik 中華繼承意識), by which the Chosŏn court and yangban elites saw themselves as the last remaining outpost of the legitimate dynastic tradition which began with the Xia 夏, Shang 商 and Zhou 周 of China’s deep antiquity and continued in China until the fall of the Ming. This Zhonghua Inheritance Consciousness was expressed in Chosŏn through the establishment of a Ming loyalist altar called the Altar of Gratitude (Taebodan 大報壇) within the Chosŏn palace complex in 1704, in which the Chosŏn monarch first honored the Wanli 萬曆 Emperor. By 1749, during the reign of Yŏngjo (1724-1776), the rituals at the Altar of Gratitude were expanded to include the Hongwu 洪武 Emperor, the founder of the Ming, and the Chongzhen 崇禎 Emperor, the last Ming emperor before the Qing conquest of northern China in 1644. Additionally, Chosŏn’s yangban elites gave their Ming loyalty textual form with their continued use, in private documents unlikely to be seen by the Qing, of the reign name of the Chongzhen Emperor. That is to say, broadly speaking Chosŏn’s yangban elites distinguished the historical and cultural Zhonghua (of which they saw themselves to be the only true heirs) from the Manchu Qing masters of China, who they saw as usurpers. Yet even this greatly simplifies the views of yangban elites concerning China and the Qing, as regular exchange with Qing subjects – Chinese, Manchu, Mongol and Muslim – during Chosŏn embassies to the Qing resulted in ever-changing attitudes concerning the Qing empire, China and Chosŏn’s cultural position within broad Sinitic cultural and historical traditions.

Yet Chosŏn’s interaction with the outside world should not be understood to have occurred exclusively between officials or as part of the formal system of the exchange of envoys and the offering of tribute. Rather, late Chosŏn foreign affairs may profitably be understood by focusing on the experience of

6. Hŏ Taeyong, Chosŏn bugi Chungwharon kwa yöksa insik (Seoul: Ak’anet, 2009). In accord with Hŏ Taeyong’s general approach, I leave “Zhonghua” untranslated, although it may be translated as China, to avoid confusing the late Chosŏn concept with later national identities.
7. This translation follows Saeyoung Park, “Sacred Spaces and the Commemoration of War,” 34.
marginalized people on the frontiers. As Seonmin Kim has argued, border communities in northern Hamgyŏng and P’yŏngan provinces engaged in extensive cross-border economic and social interaction, to the extent of contracting cross-border marriages, despite the displeasure of both Chosŏn and Qing courts. At sea, as Hoon Lee has shown in her study of Chosŏn castaways in Japan, fishing communities on the coast interacted in ways which the administrations of Edo Japan and Chosŏn Korea could never completely control. In fact, interaction on the borderlands among the marginalized has even left its trace in literature – for instance, the “Tale of Kim Yongch’ŏl” (Kim Yongch’ŏl chŏn 金英哲傳) describes the life of a Korean from P’yŏngan Province who was brought by the vicissitudes of war in the early seventeenth century into both Manchu territory and Ming Shandong, and into cultural and marital connections with both Chinese and Manchu. As Kim Chŏngsuk has argued in her discussion of literary representations of Ryukyu, popular novels and miscellanies reflect a much more positive view of Ryukyu than do more formal writings, partly because popular novels were written based on the experience of Korean castaways in Ryukyu, whereas more formal writings tended to be based upon the literary knowledge of Chosŏn envoys dispatched to Beijing. Moreover, as with the elite ideological and ritual developments discussed above, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were an important period of transition. In 1712, the Chosŏn and Qing courts traced the source of the Tumen River, beginning the long process of bringing this volatile border under control, while as James B. Lewis has argued in his study of prostitution occurring around the Japan House in Tongnae, the line between Korean and Japanese had to be imposed through vigorous court activity occurring primarily between 1690 and 1711.

Indeed, late Chosŏn popular interaction with the outside world went

15. Seonmin Kim, “Ginseng and Border Trespassing.”
beyond cultural interaction. As a number of scholars have recently pointed out, Chosŏn received a significant number of refugees from the wars which overwhelmed East Asia during the period between the Imjin War (1592-1598) and the wars of the Ming-Qing transition in Liaodong in the early seventeenth century. During the Imjin War, soldiers deserted both from the invading Japanese armies and from the armies of Chosŏn’s Ming ally and stayed in Chosŏn. During the rise of the Manchu khanate, Chosŏn’s Jurchen allies in the Tumen River area fled assimilation into Manchu banner armies by retreating south into Chosŏn-proper, while during the Manchu invasion of Ming Liaodong and Liaoxi (1618-1644), a great many Ming Chinese took refuge in Chosŏn. Within Chosŏn all these groups were administered as submitting-foreigner (byanghwain 向化人), a hereditary category that marked them as outsiders submitting to the Chosŏn monarch in exchange for edification, and that, as a tax category, freed them and their descendants from most obligations except for a tribute, often in fish, to the Board of Rites (Yejo 禮院). Thus, more than a century after the initial arrival of the refugees in the early seventeenth century, the descendants of these migrants were still treated by the Chosŏn state as foreigners in need of the particular care and concern of the Chosŏn state. In the case of submitting-foreigners of Ming-Chinese origin, however, the rise of Zhonghua Inheritance Consciousness in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries resulted in a gradual improvement of their status, culminating, in the 1750s, with their reclassification under the more prestigious category of imperial subject (hwangjoen 皇朝人), through which they continued to enjoy tax exemptions but were newly granted the right to participate in Ming loyalist rituals in the presence of the Chosŏn monarch.

17. Han Munjong, Chosŏn chŏn’gi byanghwua suijik Waein yŏn’gu (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 2001), 133-192.
18. Han Myŏnggi, Imjin waeran kwa Han-Jung kwan’gye (Seoul: Yoks wa pip’yŏng, 1999), 152-156.
20. Han Myŏnggi, Imjin waeran kwa Han-Jung kwan’gye, 281-286.
21. By the term “imperial subject” I refer to the descendants of Ming migrants whose presence in Chosŏn was seen as a being the result of their unending loyalty to the fallen Ming. Thus the empire referred to is the Ming, although, of course, by the eighteenth century the only legitimate heir to the Ming from the perspective of the Chosŏn court was the Chosŏn court itself. See Adam Bohnet, “Ruling Ideology and Marginal Subjects: Ming Loyalism and Foreign Lineages in Late Chosŏn Korea,” Journal of Early Modern History 15 (2011): 477-505.
Although scholars are turning their attention to international contacts among marginalized people on Chosŏn’s frontiers, Ming loyalism, as approached by such diverse scholars as Jahyun Kim Haboush, Kye Sungbŏm, Han Myŏnggi, Hŏ Taeyong, Yu Ponghak or Chŏng Okcha, has generally been seen as an aspect of court ritual practice, factional politics and literary production by yangban and chungin. While scholars debate the extent to which late Chosŏn officials were sincere in their Ming loyalism, and the extent to which it should be seen as a Korea-centric or even protonationalist ideology, Ming loyalism is not generally understood as a popular ideology posing a threat to the Chosŏn state. Yet, as the following discussion will reveal, Ming loyalist sentiment did exist beyond the court and the Chosŏn bureaucracy. During the period of transition of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, two fictional narratives appeared as rumors recorded in treason investigations. These narratives suggest connections between the popular consciousness of the outside world originating in frontier contact and the elite consciousness of China derived from canonical texts and the authorized exchange of the embassies.

The Ming Loyalist Prophet

The first of these narratives came to light in 1697, when the Chosŏn court investigated a serious accusation by two residents of the capital, Yu Sŏn’gi

24. Kye Sungbŏm, Chŏnggi toen sigan.
25. Han Myŏnggi, Imjin waeran kwa Han-Jung kwang’gye.
27. Yu Ponghak, Yŏnam il’pa pukhak sasang.
29. Although he deals mostly with the early Chosŏn period, in a recent article Chŏng Taham explores some of the theoretical problems involved. See “Sadac’ wa ‘kyorin’ kwa ‘sojunghwa’ ran’un t’iul ŭi ch’osigan’gipin kŭrgo ch’ogongganjŏg’inn maengnak,” Han’guk sabakpo 42 (2011): 287-323.
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against Yi Yongch’ang 李榮昌, a geomancer from Kūnhwa in Kangwŏn Province who was then residing in Seoul. Yi Yongch’ang’s accusers claimed that Yi had been following the commands of a Ming migrant monk and skilled geomancer known as Grand Preceptor Unbu (Unbu Taesa 雲浮大師) who had begun preparations for an uprising against first Chosŏn and then the Qing. As recorded in the transcripts of court confessions, the accusers claimed that a successful uprising by the plotters in Chosŏn would be followed by overthrowing the Qing and the establishment of a new dynasty in China as well, with the new monarchs in both Chosŏn and China to be “the authentic ones” (chinin 真人) of popular geomantic prophecy. The story of the Unbu conspiracy – set in Seoul and the Kŭmgang Mountains – brought together slaves, monks and geomancers into a grand if largely fictional conspiracy oriented towards establishing a new authority aiming to overthrow both the Chosŏn and the Qing dynasties. The ideology which drove the fictional conspiracy was a mix of Ming loyalism and geomantic messianism, with a putative Ming loyalist migrant playing the role of chief conspirator.

The seventeenth century was characterized by angry and often bloody factional disputes. Hereditary factions among the yangban elites struggled to dominate the bureaucracy and disputed with each other on a range of subjects, including court ritual, family ritual, relations with the Qing empire, Confucian metaphysics and historiography. Sukchong himself made these factional conflicts worse by deftly playing factions off against each other for his advantage. Thus, in 1689, over the objections of the Sōin 西人 (Westerners) faction, he deposed Queen Inhyŏn (Inhyŏn wanghu 仁顯王后, 1667-1701) because of her childlessness and raised Chang Hŭibin 張禎福 (?-1701) in her place with the support of bureaucrats of the Namin 南人 (Southerners) faction to whom he granted dominance over the Chosŏn court. In 1694 he reversed course, deposing Chang Hŭibin even though she had given birth to a son, restoring Queen Inhyŏn and returning the Sōin faction to dominance. When the Sōin regained power, however, they were already collapsing into the two hostile subsfactions called the Soron 少論 and the Noron 老論, who disputed with each other concerning a range of subjects, including the question of punishment of the purged Namin officials (the Soron tended to advocate a relatively magnanimous policy which was seen as treachery by the Noron). In 1701 these factional disputes even revealed a supernatural aspect when Chang Hŭibin was executed after being accused of using sorcery to kill Queen Inhyŏn.30

30. On factional conflict during Sukchong’s reign, see Yi Hŭihwan, Chosŏn hugi tangjaeng yŏn’gu (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1995).
A mere three years after the restoration of Sŏn control, in an atmosphere of factional hostility and conspiracy, the Chosŏn court was informed of another conspiracy focused on a mysterious Ming migrant, Grand Preceptor Unbu, who, as a Ming loyalist, planned first to conquer Chosŏn and then to use Chosŏn as a base to invade the Qing empire.\(^ {31}\) In the past, some scholars have taken this to be a real conspiracy, part of the general unrest and social turmoil of the seventeenth century\(^ {32}\) — and indeed there were serious uprisings during Chosŏn, both successful, such as Injo’s 仁祖 (1623-1649) coup in 1623, and unsuccessful, such as the immensely destructive uprising by Yi Kwal 李浩 (1587-1624) in 1624. However, as Han Hūisuk has shown, Grand Preceptor Unbu, along with much of the conspiracy, was entirely fictional, the result of both false accusations and confessions obtained through torture. Indeed, even the Chosŏn officials investigating the incident concluded as much, and declared the majority of the people fingered by accusers to be without guilt.\(^ {33}\) That being said, Yi Yongch’ang’s accusers Yu Sŏn’gi and Yi Chŏl, along with Yi Yongch’ang and a number of others, were executed or killed as a result of torture,\(^ {34}\) and indeed, even allowing for the distortions caused by the use of torture, it would seem that a number of the strange stories reported during interrogation had in fact been discussed and believed by some of the plotters before the interrogation. Thus, Yi Yongch’ang, in his confessions, certainly admitted to considerable skill in geomancy and to the existence of some seditious talk and wild prophecies, although he also claimed to be an innocent bystander exposed to sedition that originated with Yu Sŏn’gi and Yi Chŏl.\(^ {35}\)

Yi Yongch’ang’s later confessions, when his story of the mystical monks became much more elaborate, were presumably fleshed out to avoid the repeated bouts of torture to which he was exposed, and so must be used with considerable caution. For instance, it is notable that by the end of the accusation, Yi Yongch’ang informed the officials, who were primarily of the Soron subfaction of the Sŏn, that, indeed, his earlier confessions had been false. In exchange he invented a new confession which implicated both Yi Hyŏngjing 李衡敬, a member of the Namin faction, and Kim Ch’unt’aek 金春澤 (1670-
1717), a member of the Noron. To be sure, it seems that Yi Yongch’ang may have had some factional links; early in the interrogation he denied that he was a spy for the Namin faction (namin kich’al 南人谍察) while Yi Yongch’ang’s two accusers, Yu Son’gi and Yi Chol, both were described by Yi Yongch’ang as being connected to factional conflict, having, however failed to profit following the restoration of Soin control in 1694. However, Yi Yongch’ang’s confession of ties to Yi Hyongjing, which was made at the end of the investigation, should be seen as originating more with the political aims of the Soron officials investigating him than with Yi Yongch’ang himself.

The original accusation made by Yu Son’gi and Yi Chol is found at the beginning of the “Interrogation of Yi Yongch’ang and Others” (Yi Yongch’ang ting ch’uan 李榮昌等推案) while their narrative is fleshed out slightly differently in the four interrogations that follow the original accusation. Within these texts, Yi Chol and Yu Son’gi describe themselves as having met with Yi Yongch’ang, a skilled geomancer, during the fall of 1696, originally with the intention of consulting him concerning grave sites. Their discussion, however, soon moved in a subversive direction. In the tenth month of 1696, Yi Yongch’ang was staying with Yi Chol. In the midst of leisured discussion, suddenly Yi Yongch’ang said:

If you want to find a correct grave site, you need to visit my teacher in the Kumgang Mountains. My master is a monk called Unbu. He is 70 years of age and is the descendant of Song dynasty official Wang Zao. He fled to our country after the fall of the Ming. After shaving his head, he entered the Kumgang Mountains. He penetrates the heavens above, investigates the earth below and observes human affairs in between. In skill he does not fall behind Kongming 孔明 or Liu Ji 劉基. He instructed monks in the Buddhist canons, choosing from among them the most superior, including Ogyo, Iryu, Myojong, Taesong and Pyoju and about a hundred others. He passed on his geomantic skills and united in alliance the monks of all eight provinces [of Choson], also forming an alliance with Chang Kilsan’s group [of brigands]. He also has obtained the so-called Authentic Ones, both

36. Sukchong sillok 31:3a [1697/01/10]; CKK 11: 878-882 [1697/02/16].
37. CKK 11:757-758 [1697/01/11].
38. CKK 11:725 [1697/01/10]: “矣身等俱有求山之計，相如交結之際。”
39. Kongming is another name for Zhuo Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234), a famous official of the Three Kingdoms period (220-280) of Chinese history.
40. Liu Ji (1311-1375) was a mathematician, geomancer, astrologer, military strategist and political theorist who played a vital role in the rise of the first Ming emperor. A significant popular tradition developed concerning him after his death, and a number of works on geomancy were falsely attributed to him. See L. Carrington Goodrich, ed., Dictionary of Ming Biography (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 1: 932-938.
Ch'ong and Ch'oe. Having first conquered our country, he will place Ch'ong as the leader, and after that he will attack the central plain and raise up Ch'oe as emperor.”

Yi Ch'ol passed this story to his nephew Yu Sŏn'gi, who also heard it separately from Yi Yongch'ang outside of the Lesser West Gate (Sŏsomun 西小門) in the capital. In response, Yi Ch'ol and Yu Sŏn'gi claimed, they agreed to remain within the conspiracy solely for the purpose of later reporting everything to the authorities. In his confession, Yu Sŏn'gi claimed to have said to Yi Ch'ol that “today’s world is not like ancient times. Since we cannot now clean our ears, we must investigate the evidence for the conspiracy in detail, and after that look for ways to bring it under control.”

As self-appointed secret agents, they described themselves as enduring no end of inconvenience at the hands of Yi Yongch'ang and his faction, maintaining their cover even when Yi Yongch'ang had them agree to blood brotherhood with two of Yi Ch'ol's slaves, Ch'oe Sangjung and Ch'oe Sangsŏng. Yi Ch'ol, Yi Yongch'ang argued, should arrange for their manumission in moral preparation for great deeds to come. Yi Ch'ol and Yu Sŏn'gi claimed that they were shocked at the perversion of morality involved in accepting as blood-brothers those who had previously been slaves, but justified this immoral act as it allowed them to receive documentary evidence. This document being still insufficient, they brought in friends connected to the Board of Military Affairs (Pyŏngjo 兵曹), Kim Kyŏngham and Kim Chŏnyŏl to provide early reconnaissance with the authorities, and continued their independent investigation. By doing so they claimed that they were able to witness another bout of prophetic utterances concerning Unbu when Yi Ikhw'ya 李翊華, another associate of Yi Yongch'ang, asked Yi Yongch'ang to tell him the year, month, day and hour of birth (saju 四柱) for both Unbu and Ch'ong the Authentic One:

Yi Yongch'ang said, ‘Unbu was born in the chŏngmyo 丁卯 year, and the Authentic One was born on the mujin 戊辰 hour of the kisa 己巳 day of the mujin month of the kisa year.’ Ikhw'ya responded, ‘According to the secret prophecy (pigyŏl 祕訣), the Chinese General (Tangjiang 唐將) will be born in the Rabbit year (myŏn 卯) year. He will come from China, and having established himself in the eight provinces, will rise up! This is clearly referring to Unbu.’ Furthermore, Yi Ikhw'ya said, ‘according to the secret prophecy, his birth will be during the mujin hour of the kisa day of the

41. CKK 11:725-6 [1697/01/10].
42. CKK 11:726 [1697/01/10]: “李翊曰: … 人身聞此言, 諸何以處之. 命選基曰: “當今之世, 異於上古, 其不能洗耳, 逢遇則事, 當辨時而興, 然後自有處置之道也.””
43. CKK 11:727-8 [1697/01/10]: “昨日奴子今為兄弟倒側倫敗敗莫此為甚.”
In the month of the kisa year. This is the very point at which the snake becomes the dragon. The Chongzhen Emperor’s birth date and hour also included that of a snake turning into a dragon, and he became emperor. Yet he only had one, while this man has two! This is truly a birth hour of extremely good fortune!” Then clasping his hands together and prostrating himself, he considered the birth time carefully. He said, ‘according to the secret prophecy, the sage is born in the Dragon (chin 辰) and Snake (sa 巳) years, while in the Horse (o 午) and Sheep (mi 未) years there will be great joy! This is also referring to the Authentic One.’

Eventually, however, the self-appointed secret-agents Yi Chŏl and Yu Sŏn’gi, claiming that they feared that the plans had come to a head, had Yi Yŏngch’ang and several other members of the conspiracy imprisoned, while they themselves gave a full report of events to the authorities.

How should this story be interpreted? Fictional though it was, Yi Yŏngch’ang, like Yu Sŏn’gi and Yi Chŏl, seems to have been familiar with the narrative to a limited extent at least, although he also claimed to have had a relatively minor role, barely knowing what was actually happening and acting as a spy and agent provocateur. In the official description of the trial in the Veritable Records (Chosŏn wangjo sillok 朝鮮王朝實錄), the court considered it likely that Yu Sŏn’gi and Yi Chŏl had been part of a conspiracy with Yi Yŏngch’ang, but had been frightened into leaving by fear of detection. One fairly minor figure, the mendicant monk Hyech’al, claimed that he was tricked by Yi Yŏngch’ang into making hints to the other conspirators to make the conspiracy more credible. Only the two slaves, Ch’oe Sangju and Ch’oe Sangsŏng, denied all knowledge or connection to any of the events, maintaining their denial despite repeated, and ultimately fatal, torture. The conspiracy thus seems to have had some limited existence, and Yi Yŏngch’ang does seem to have spun part of this fascinating yarn on his own volition. Possibly Yi Yŏngch’ang was so deluded as to think that he could lead a revolution against the Chosŏn monarchy. Alternately, it may have been at root merely a confidence scheme for Yi Yŏngch’ang, with some of the more extreme elements added by Yi Chŏl and

44. CKK 11:728-30 [1697/01/10].
45. CKK 11:730-32 [1697/01/10].
46. Yi Yŏngch’ang’s first confession is found in CKK 11:747-761 [1697/01/11].
47. Sukchong sillok 31:33a [1697/01/10].
48. CKK 11:762-3 [1697/01/11].
49. The deaths of Ch’oe Sangju and Ch’oe Sangsŏng are reported on CKK11:864 [1697/02/22]. Before their deaths, repeated requests had been made to increase the torture on the two brothers as they did not provide the desired confession. For instance, CKK11:847 [1697/01/17]: “崔尚成崔
尚仲不服請併加刑.”
Yu Sŏn’gi to please the interrogators. Although the fingering of Yi Hyŏngjing, a member of the Namin faction, should be seen as largely designed to please the interrogators, the argument Yi Yongch’ang put in Yi Hyŏngjing’s mouth sounds plausibly like something that Yi Yongch’ang might have thought to himself as he set up shop as a geomancer: “Though you may claim to be operating in the world after having had a spiritual experience (以接神行世), people will definitely not believe your empty talk. ... I have a plan. You should let it be known that you have studied under a spiritual monk, then people will believe you. ... the actions of monks float like the clouds (Sŏngjŏk yŏ unbu 態跡如雲浮), you should make the monk’s name Unbu (雲浮, ‘a cloud floats’) and falsely claim to have studied under him.”

Though Unbu did not exist, and though we may never understand the actual purpose of Yi Yongch’ang’s story, it is interesting, although well in accord with the humble status of submitting-foreigners of Ming origin before their re-categorization as imperial subjects, that an imaginary Ming migrant monk was described as being the mentor to a group of subversives of marginal status. According to Chŏng Sokchŏng’s analysis, Yi Chŏl, Yu Sŏn’gi and the other key conspirators were sŏol or slaves, while Yi Yongch’ang made a living from geomancy. Indeed, in one confession by Yi Chŏl, Yi Yongch’ang was described as having been told by the monk Unbu to seek allies with talented members of the sŏol, not with prominent yangban elites, while Yi Yongch’ang, in one of his confessions, described Yi Chŏl and Yu Sŏn’gi as being full of resentment for the discrimination they had suffered, with Yu Sŏn’gi explicitly lamenting the discrimination that his talented sŏol uncle had experienced. Yet while Yi Chŏl, Yu Sŏn’gi and Yi Yongch’ang were certainly not of the rank to be confused as yangban by officials in Seoul or even by members of prominent lineages in the countryside, the mendicant monk Hyech’al regarded them as yangban, and referred to Yi Yongch’ang as “Yi the classics licentiate” (Yi saengwŏn 李生員). Yi Chŏl’s two slaves, Ch’oe Sangjung and Ch’oe Sangsŏng, were described by Yi Yongch’ang in his counter-accusation as two soldiers (muin 武人). Although we may well wish to avoid Chŏng Sokchŏng’s description of this as a genuine class war or as the product of social change fuelled by changing economic

50. CKK 11:878 [1697/02/16].
51. Chŏng Sokchŏng, Chosŏn hugi saboe pyŏndong yŏng’gu, 154-6.
52. CKK 11:738 [1697/01/11]: “勿往幸相家, 宜於衆流中得有義氣多才能者。”
53. CKK 11:757 [1697/01/11]: “吾叔有才, 皆以爲徒學而不用於世.”
54. CKK 11:762-3 [1697/01/11].
55. CKK 11:753-4 [1697/01/11].
conditions, it is significant that Yi Yongch’ang, Yu Son’gi and Yi Ch’ol acted as yangban when dealing with commoners or base people, but were by no means yangban in the sense that they had access to official positions or fulfilled prominent roles within village associations. While we are not given a clear description of their social status, it is quite likely, as Ch’ong Sŏkch’ong suggests, that they were members of secondary-status groups such as sŏol or chungin, or alternately fallen yangban who had suffered downward mobility.

Even though actual Ming migrant lineages did not present themselves, the social context of the conspiracy was very much in accord with Ming migrant submitting-foreigner communities as they had existed in Chosŏn during the seventeenth century. Grand Preceptor Unbu was described as a geomancer of unusual capabilities, rivaling both Zhuge Liang and Liu Ji. This was very much in accord with the reputation of Ming migrants in general during the seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries. Famously, in many editions of the Record of the Imjin War (Imjinnok 十七世), the Ming general Li Rusong 李如松 (1549-1598) is supposed to have wandered about Chosŏn at the end of the Imjin War severing the mountain ranges to prevent heroes from appearing again in Chosŏn. Several Ming migrants, according to O Kyŏngwŏn’s 吳慶元 (1764-?) Unofficial History of the Lesser Zhongbu (Sohwa oesa 小華外史), established themselves in the region of the Kŭmgang Mountains, the very region in which Unbu was supposed to have operated. These include “Fortune Teller Yu” (Yu Poksul 柳卜術) and Chinese Wang (Wang Tangin 王唐人), both of whom settled in Kŭmhwa, Yi Yongch’ang’s hometown, and are known today only by their profession and ethnicity. A prophecy concerning the Imjin War preserved by Yi Sugwang 李沐光 (1563-1628), while often attributed to a Korean prophet, is in other versions attributed to a Ming geomancer.

The stereotype of the Ming migrant geomancer and fortune-teller also seems to have had some basis in reality, as skill in geomancy and fortune-telling are

56. Ch’ong Sŏkch’ong, Chosŏn hugi saboe pyŏndong yŏn’gu, 145-164.
57. For instance, Ch’ong Sŏkch’ong, Chosŏn hugi saboe pyŏndong yŏn’gu, 157.
58. This story is found within the Kwanunjang family of editions of the Record of the Imjin Year. See Ch’oe Munjong, Imjin nok yŏn’gu (Seoul: Pak Ijong, 2001), 379-381. Peter H. Lee translated this account in his Record of the Black Dragon Year, 94-6 (Seoul and Honolulu: Institute of Korean Culture, Korea University Center for Korean Studies). Concerning Li Rusong himself, see the entry for “Li Jusung” in L. Carrington Goodrich, Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1:830-835.
60. See Yi Kŭng’ik, “Nanjung sisa ch’ongmok,” “Sŏnjoio kosa ponmal” in Kugyŏk Yŏllyŏsil kisul (Seoul: Minjok munhwah ch’ujinhoe, 1967) IV:338. After the description of the prophecy, a note records the theory that a Ming Chinese fortune-teller had made the prophecy. (一說朝鮮數名為福我國).
frequently mentioned in descriptions of historically verifiable Ming migrants, including Kang Shijue 康世傑 (1602-ca.1685)61 and Hu Keji 胡克己.62 A number of Ming geomancers, including Shi Wenyong 施文用 (1572-1623), gained prominent positions in court during the early seventeenth century.63 Especially notable here is the later circulation of texts attributed to Ming migrants, including The Secret Prophecy of Tu Sach’ong (Tu Sach’ong pigyŏl 杜師聰秘訣), which was attributed to the Ming geomancer Du Sizhong 杜思忠 an undoubtedly real Ming migrant geomancer around whom an extensive posthumous tradition has developed.64 In this text Du is explicitly described as an outsider, “touring the mountains and rivers of Chosŏn looking for a place to hide during times of crisis.” Indeed, in the preface to the presumably nineteenth or early twentieth century Kyujanggak edition of The Secret Prophecy of Tu Sach’ong, Du is described clearly as a Chinese (Chinain 支那人)65 who had entered Chosŏn and who travelled through all eight provinces investigating it geomantically, also choosing appropriate graves for Chosŏn people.66 Thus, Yi Yongch’ang, in

62. Huangjojin sajok, Kyujanggak #2542, 42.
63. Kim Tugyu, Chosŏn p’ungsu hagin ui saeng’aewa nonjaeng (Seoul: Kungni, 2000), 318-343. There are numerous references to Shi Wenyong in the Veritable Records, especially during the reign of Kwanghwa-gun (r. 1608-1623). For instance, see Kwanghae-gun ilgi (chungch’ŏnbon) 97:1a [1615/11/01].
64. Du Sizhong (Tu Sach’ung in Korean) was a Ming soldier who stayed in Chosŏn after the Imjin War and made the acquaintance, among other prominent bureaucrats, of Yi Sibol 李時殷 (1569-1626), who wrote two poems concerning him (for instance, see Pyŏgo sŏnsaeng yugyo 碧梧先生遺稿, in the Minjok munhwa ch’ŏnghoe 1991), 74:404 and 74:418. Du’s name was not always rendered with the same characters, although generally the pronunciation of his name in Korea remained the same. His real name was probably 杜思忠 as used by Yi Sibol, but other Chinese characters were used for his name in texts attributed to him, including 杜師聰 in The Remnant Prophecy of Master Longing-for the-Ming (Momnyŏng sŏnsaeng yugyo 墓明先生遺詣, Taegu: Hong’ik ch’ulp’ansa, 2004) and 鄭思忠 in the Classic of the Round Jewel (Wŏnju-gyŏng 圓味經), an undated handwritten text preserved in the Korea University Rare Books Library. The Secret Prophecy of Tu Sach’ong is unusual in changing the pronunciation of the name to Tu Sach’ung 杜師聰, but is otherwise just one example of the diverse renderings of Du Sizhong’s name.
65. The use of China 支那人 suggests a Japanese colonial date for the compilation of the text, for although China (Japanese Shina) was used in both Chinese and Japanese texts before the twentieth century, it became especially widely used within the Japanese empire during the twentieth-century. See Stefan Tanaka, Japan’s Orient: Rendering Pasts into History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
66. Tu Sach’ong pigyŏl, Kyujanggak #2377, 2: “師聰—作思忠世傳明末支那人轉入朝鮮以相地術著述八道, 言朝鮮人基地云.”
claiming to have received instruction from a mysterious Ming migrant geomancer, was conforming to an already established stereotype. Grand Preceptor Unbu, as Ming castaway, geomancer and strategist, would have made excellent sense during the late seventeenth century, when Ming migrants were reputed to have particular skills in geomancy and divination, and when a number of Ming migrants had established themselves prominently as geomancers.

Of course, what disturbed the court, and caused it to investigate the conspiracy so thoroughly, was probably the reference to Chŏng the Authentic One as ruler of Chosŏn and Ch’oe the Authentic One as ruler of China, for this narrative was associated with a tradition of banned geomantic writings which predicted the imminent fall of the Chosŏn dynasty. Yu Sŏn’gi, in one interrogation, provided a more precise identification of the lineages of the two authentic ones – Chŏng the Authentic One, he claimed, would be a descendant of Chŏng Mongju 鄭夢周 (1337-1392), the Neo-Confucian reformer who was martyred for his loyalty to the Koryŏ dynasty,67 while Ch’oe the Authentic One would be the descendant of Ch’oe Yong 鄭榮 (1316-1388), the Koryŏ general who clashed with Yi Sŏnggye, the founder of the Chosŏn dynasty, concerning the 1388 expedition against the Ming army in Liaodong and was subsequently purged when Yi Sŏnggye turned his armies against the Koryŏ capital of Kaesŏng.68 Although neither Ch’oe Yong nor Chŏng Mongju were invariably linked with the authentic ones who would replace the Chosŏn monarchy,69 the idea of a new monarchy in Chosŏn under Chŏng the Authentic One (chinin Chŏngsŏng 真人鄭姓), replacing the Yi lineage that had passed its life-span, was very common indeed.70 It was at least as old as the Chŏng Yŏrip 鄭俐立 (1546-1589) uprising during the reign of Sŏnjŏ,71 and characterized, notably, the 1688 Yŏhwan uprising and the 1812 Hong Kyŏngnae 洪景來 rebellion.72

68. L. Carrington Goodrich, entry for Yi Sŏnggye, Dictionary of Ming Biography, 2:1598-1602.
69. Ch’oe Yong, who is still honored in shamanistic practices in present-day South Korea, was mentioned in a number of anti-state conspiracies that preceded the supposed Unbu conspiracy. See Chŏng Sŏkch’ŏng, Chosŏn bugi saboe pyŏngdong yŏn’gu (Seoul: Ichogak, 1983), 22-78. Also see a recent article which briefly mentions the role that Ch’oe Yong plays in exorcisms in Seoul. Ch’oe China, “Sŏul kut ūi mugu yŏn’gu,” Han’guk musokhak 12 (2006): 177-229.
70. CKK 11:725-6 [1697/01/10]: “又得所謂鄭姓，崔兩姓，先平我國，立鄭姓後，攻中原，立崔姓為帝云云。”
72. Sun Joo Kim, Marginality and Subversion in Korea: The Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion of 1812
tradition, beginning, perhaps, in the late seventeenth century, gained regular textual form with the circulation of texts under the title of Record of Chŏng Kam (Chŏnggammok 崇簡錄) beginning in 1739 and mentioned numerous times afterwards along with other similar prophetic writings attributed to such figures as the late Silla monk Tosŏn 道誇 (827-898), the late Koryŏ-early Chosŏn monk Grand Preceptor Muhak 無學 (1327-1405) or the early Chosŏn geomancer Nam Sago 南師古 (1509-1571).

The social class associated with this tradition was what Paek Sùngjong describes as the wandering learned – that is to say, those people who were literate but whose ancestry made any assertion of yangban status inconceivable, and who were often associated with geomancy. To a substantial extent, Yi Yŏngch’ang’s self-description accords with that of the wandering literate described by Paek Sùngjong. Thus, he described himself as having married a woman from Kŭmhwasa in Kangwŏn Province, just south, as it happens, of the Kŭmgang Mountains where the conspiracy was supposedly based, and as having established himself in Seoul in order to ply his trade as geomancer. The interrogation documents even quote prophecies later incorporated into the textual tradition of the Record of Chŏng Kam. For instance, a comment that Yi Chŏl and Yu Sŏn’gi attribute to Yi Ikhwa, that the Chinese general was born in the Rabbit year (唐將卯生人) and would establish himself in the eight directions, and that the sage would be born under the Dragon and Snake and that good fortune would occur under the Horse and the Sheep (辰巳聖人出, 午未樂堂堂), is echoed almost word for word in “Secret Record of a Retired Scholar of the Three Han” (Samhan sallim pigi 三韓山林秘記), which speaks of a Chinese general born in the Rabbit year who would lead 100,000 soldiers and establish himself on the Yalu River for ten years (唐將卯生人, 奉十萬兵, 佔黑渓江十年), and also that good fortune would occur under the Horse and Sheep (午未樂堂堂).

As the quotations from the “Secret Record of the Retired Scholar of the Three Han” and The Secret Prophecy of Tu Sach’ong both suggest, the

73. Paek Sùngjong, Han’guk ü yeŏn munhwasa (Seoul: P’urin yöksa, 2006), 77-106. The Secret Prophecy of Tu Sach’ong, mentioned above, was also part of this tradition of texts.
75. CKK 11:877 [1697/02/16].
geomantic tradition of the Record of Chŏng Kam had a world-view which extended beyond Chosŏn to include China. The imagined Unbu conspiracy participated extensively in this aspect, most notably because it was led by a supposed Ming migrant monk, and included plans to overthrow China as well as Chosŏn. Despite the references to the Koryŏ general Ch’oe Yŏng, who was purged partly because of his inability to compel Yi Sŏnggye to attack the Ming army, it was a notably Ming loyalist conspiracy. Unbu was not only a Ming migrant geomancer, but also supposedly was a Ming loyalist. This aspect is most clearly apparent in a confession made by Yi Yŏngch’ang after he had already endured two sessions of torture, but which was otherwise largely consistent with earlier statements. There he described Unbu as having plotted out his grand plan to restore the Ming:

Unbu said, ‘I, as the descendant of Wang Zao, official of the Board of Rites of China, often think back on the Imjin year [1592], when Chosŏn suffered from the Japanese invasion. Then the Great Ming Emperor moved the armies of the entire world, ultimately bringing the war to an end. The fact that the Great Ming has become barbarian territory always makes me extremely angry. Even though I die, I will be buried on the other side of the Yalu River.’

.....

For three days the many monks did not speak. On the fourth day all the monks said, ‘We all say that when the four monks attack China, Chosŏn must also suffer hardship. Chosŏn is our parent country. What should we do about that?’

Unbu said, ‘If you want to pursue this great action with me, how can you concern yourself with other matters? Chosŏn has survived for more than three hundred years. If a great task is to be achieved, Chosŏn will need to be ruled by someone with a different surname.’

Despite the somewhat suspect value of this confession, which was obtained through torture, it is very much in accord with other early statements provided by Yi Yŏngch’ang and other people caught in the investigation. Ultimately, Unbu is described as a military man concealing himself in Chosŏn while waiting for the day to restore the Ming. This is clearly a subversive version of the Northern Expedition (pukpŏl 北伐) – the plan discussed during the reigns of both Hyojong (1649-1659) and Sukchong (1674-1720), whereby Chosŏn would lead the attack against the Qing to restore the Ming. As with the Northern Expedition, a key reason for Unbu’s planned invasion was the kindness of the Wanli Emperor in saving Chosŏn from Japan during the Imjin War. 78 This

77. CKK 11:796-7 [1697/01/13].
78. CKK 11:796-7 [1697/01/13]: “每恨壬辰之年朝鮮被倭亂，則大明皇帝勤天下兵，終至平正。”
emphasis on transformation within Chosŏn as the necessary first step to invading the Qing empire resembled the Ming loyalism of the great progenitor of the *Noron* faction Song Siyŏl 宋時烈 (1607-1689), who argued in his secret discussion with Hyojong for a general moral transformation of Chosŏn as necessarily preceding the invasion of the Qing empire.⁷⁹ Unbu’s plan differed with the official Northern Expedition primarily in that it called for an actual changing of the ruling family, not simply moral transformation.

Notably, Yi Yongch’ang claimed that Unbu sailed in from south China via an island in the sea. Arrival from the sea is an aspect of other famous stories (historical and fictional) of Ming Loyalists, most notably in the famous case of the arrival in Cheju in 1667 of a crew of partisans of the Zheng family in Taiwan.⁸⁰ While Yi Yongch’ang’s confession of arrival by sea was made well into the investigation, and was quite probably coerced, at the very least it reveals that, even in 1697, the interrogators still considered the possibility of Ming loyalists from the south sailing to Chosŏn and concealing themselves in Chosŏn, and that Yi Yongch’ang, a man of an undistinguished background, was sufficiently aware of such a stereotype as to admit to it under torture. Only a decade before the establishment of the Altar of Gratitude, the image of the Ming migrant geomancer continued to have power to either inspire or frighten.

During the early beginnings of Zhonghua Inheritance Consciousness, marginalized people in the capital were employing Ming loyalism to further their own power, with methods related to, but different from, the court and *yangban* elites. The key image characterizing this subversive Ming loyalism was that of the Ming migrant geomancer—a figure clearly part of the world of the wandering literate, and an apt leader for a grand, Ming Loyalist, anti-dynastic conspiracy.

**Ming Loyalist Outrage at the Capital’s Gates**

In the early summer of 1711 there was a second subversive appearance of the Ming Loyalist migrant narrative, this time recorded in an anonymous letter.⁸¹

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⁷⁹. For a survey of scholarship on this plan, see Kye Sungbŏm, “Chosŏn sidae Asia chilsŏ wa Han-Jung kwan’gye,” in *Han-Jung-Il kakkye in Han-Jung kwan’gyesa û yŏng’gu wa chaengjŏm* (Tongbuga yŏksa chaedan, 2009), 125-186; for Song Siyŏl and the Northern Expedition, see Chŏng Tuhŭ, *Chosŏn sidae innul û chaebalgŏn* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1997), 92-104.


⁸¹. The letter is referred to in the original as a *kwæsŏ* 批書, which may be translated as “hanging
During a period of tense negotiations with the Qing concerning the shared border in the north, an anonymous and inflammatory letter was posted to the Yong’un Gate (Yong’unmun 迎恩門), the location at which the envoys from the Qing empire entered the Choson capital. The text of the letter spoke on behalf of a fictional Ming loyalist outpost under a fictional Ming emperor with a fictional reign name, and attacked Choson passivity vis-à-vis the Qing empire. This was taken very seriously by the court – with some briefly wondering if it might even be a message from a real Ming outpost – and an extensive but futile investigation was launched. The investigation brought out a number of false leads which linked this fictional Ming outpost with a late Choson rogue’s gallery of swindlers, Yalu River pirates, and geomancers. As with the previous narrative, the idea of a Ming restoration and Ming remnant subjects was bound up not with the Choson court and the yangban elites but with criminals and trouble-makers. The anonymous authors’ rejection of the official Qing era name in favor of a fictional era name was similar to standard practice among the Choson court and yangban elites but also a challenge to it, while the island outpost mentioned in the letter may have been modeled on the Ming Loyalist outpost in Taiwan, but was interpreted in one false confession as being connected to a revival of the early seventeenth century Mao Wenlong 毛文龍 (1576-1629) outpost at the mouth of the Yalu River.

The authors of the pamphlet wrote under the name of a high official of China (Ch’ŏnjo 天朝) and dated the letter to the third year and second month of the “Later Hongwu reign” (Hu Hongmu sammyŏn iwŏl’il 後洪武三年二月). The title of the letter was “admonition to Choson” (koryu Chosŏn’guk 告諭朝鮮國). They used a style of calligraphy characteristic of the Correct Rhymes of the Hongwu Reign (Hongwu zhengyun 洪武正韻) and wrote on Chinese paper. The text – which was liberally sprinkled with references to current affairs and Chinese history – began by berating the Choson court for forgetting that “driving off barbarians and eliminating evil men is a great royal duty and not

82. In the Veritable Records the gate is referred to as the Yŏnun Gate (Yonunmun 延恩門), an alternate name. See Yi Sangbæ, Choson hagi ch’ŏngch’i wa kwaeosŏ (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1999), 57, note 72. In 1896 the gate was torn down and replaced by the Independence Gate (To’ngmunmun 獨立門) which still stands.

83. Sukchong silleok 50:22b [1711/04/30]: “未端書後洪武三年二月日，天朝大元帥檄，紙用唐紙，字用‘洪武正韻’體，以紅印，謹貼天下大元帥章六字篆印矣.”
one which can be declined. No monarch may omit the sacred responsibility of first declaring war and then leading the troops into battle.” Furthermore, the authors of the letter described the Qing “as having passed their 100 years of luck,” and of having in any case only briefly “borrowed the strength of cows and sheep” to steal a country with cultural achievements stretching through 100 generations.” The authors of the letter praised some member of the Zheng family, the former rulers of Taiwan, as being the equal of Zhuge Liang, attacked the Chosŏn court for being insufficiently vigorous in its opposition to the Qing, but praised the Chosŏn court for remembering the Ming with the Altar of Gratitude. They then called upon the Chosŏn court to remember “our Wanli Emperor’s boundless grace [during the Imjin War] in marshalling soldiers, chariots and supplies to the aid of Chosŏn” and called upon Chosŏn to abandon its servility to the Qing and launch an attack, in the company of the Ming remnants, against the Qing empire.

Only fifteen years after the investigation of the Unbu conspiracy, and only seven years after the establishment of the Altar of Gratitude, the Sukchong court was faced with new pretenders to Ming loyalism, although in this case the pretenders did not call directly for the overthrow of the Chosŏn dynasty. If the element of prophecy was not very strong, it was also not entirely absent, as the prediction that the Qing had almost finished their century of power makes clear. As with the Grand Preceptor Unbu conspiracy, the plotters behind the letter were people with some education. Indeed, as Yi Sangbae argues, at least one person involved in putting up the letter must have had the ability to use rare calligraphy styles, cite obscure historical references and purchase Chinese paper, all suggesting someone with considerable education and resources.

Initially disturbing to some members of the Chosŏn court was the possibility that the letter had some external link with a remnant band of Ming loyalists –

84. Sukchong sillok 50:22b [1711/04/30]: “差閣撤夷狄而除民熱，天時之不吉而所不得而辭者也；先告諭而後甲兵，王者之盛節，而所不可以忽者也。”

85. Sukchong sillok 50:22b [1711/04/30]: “晉今師命，值百年之窮，皇圖屬再昌之運，譬如日月晝夜而旋明，神器有創而必復。彼清胡者，負一時牛羊之力，闢百代文物之邦，夷我宗社，（）我皇統。”

86. Sukchong sillok 50:22b [1711/04/30].

87. The best known member of the Zheng family is Zheng Chenggong (1624-1662), who is commonly known in English as Coxinga 國姓爺. For a recent account of Zheng Chenggong’s conquest of Taiwan, see Tonio Andrade, Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China’s First Great Victory over the West (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011). Of course, as one anonymous reviewer pointed out, Coxinga’s surname Zheng is the Chinese pronunciation of the Korean Chŏng, of “Chŏng the Authentic One” fame. It is possible that the two were connected in popular imagination.

88. Yi Sangbae, Chosŏn hugi chŏngch’i wa kwaesŏ (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1999), 64.
almost thirty years after the fall of the Zheng family stronghold in Taiwan, the possibility of such a connection still needed to be considered. However, the officials eliminated this possibility after a brief discussion. For one thing, despite the fact that the calligraphy followed the style of the Correct Rhymes of the Hongwu Reign, neither the writing style nor the calligraphy seemed to the officials to be Chinese. Otherwise, it was considered most unlikely that, should Ming loyalists have revived to such a considerable level of strength that they could post such a letter in the first place, they would have passed secretly through the southwest coast of the country, evading detection, only to post a letter on a gate in Seoul. Moreover, the opinion of the State Council and of Sukchong himself was that the considerable knowledge of Chosŏn’s internal affairs revealed within the letter (for instance, knowledge of the recent construction of the Altar of Gratitude) all suggested a local troublemaker.\(^{89}\) If anyone considered the possibility of involvement from the submitting-foreigners of Ming Chinese origin in the capital, they did not express this opinion openly.\(^{90}\)

While Sukchong was no doubt correct to discount the possibility of a real Ming outpost hiding behind this letter, it is quite clear that the authors of the letter were writing as if they did represent such an outpost. Kim Ch’angjip (1648-1722), no doubt correctly, interpreted the comment in the letter that “General Zheng’s strategy is equal to Guan Zhong 管仲 (c. 720-645 BCE)\(^{91}\) and Zhuge Liang, while General Zhang’s strategy is like that of a present day Han Xin 韓信 (?-196 BCE) or Peng Yue 彭越 (?-196 BCE),”\(^{92}\) as referring to the descendants of anti-Qing pirate Zhang Feihu 張飛虎 (concerning whom Chosŏn envoys in Beijing heard many unverifiable, unreliable and contradictory rumors)\(^{93}\) and Taiwan-based late Ming strongmen Zheng Jing 鄭經 (1642-1681), the son of the famous Coxinga. That is to say, the authors of the letter were hinting strongly that they were part of some revival of the Zheng family outpost. Moreover, they claimed that they were preparing, once more, for an invasion of Qing which Chosŏn was also supposed to assist, as may be seen

89.  *Sukchong silla*kk 50:22b [1711/04/30].
90.  However, Yi Sangbae, *Chosŏn bugi chŏngch’i i wa kwaesŏ*, 65, does suggest this possibility.
91.  Guan Zhong was the Chancellor of the State of Qi during the Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE).
92.  Han Xin and Peng Yue were military leaders who played important roles in the establishment of the Han 漢 dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE).
93.  The first reference in the Veritable Records to this pirate who, along with his son, was supposed to be challenging Qing authority of the coast of Shandong, is in the *Sukchong silla*kk 39:25b [1704/03/27]. There was even a report in 1712 of successful defeats of the Qing at sea off the coast of Guangdong by a descendant of Zhang Feihu. See *Sukchong silla*kk 51:45 [1712/07/26].
from the fact that they reminded the court of the Wanli Emperor’s assistance to Chosŏn during the Imjin War and told the court not to miss the opportunity to take revenge against the Qing empire.94

Beyond merely asserting a rival claimant to Ming loyalism, they also claimed, through time inscription, an alternate legitimacy that rivaled both Chosŏn and the Qing. As Yi Sangbae correctly argues, the reign date Hongwu 3 corresponds to no known date except 1370, which is self-evidently incorrect. A further possibility he suggests, and then dismisses, is that Later Hongwu refers to a dynasty assumed to come into existence after the fall of the Yongli Emperor in 1662,95 which would also be 50 years earlier than the time in question, leading Yi Sangbae to suggest that “the date is an error caused in the process of the appropriation of Hongwu’s reign name by the authors of the letter.”

If his broad considerations are correct, Yi fails to consider the possibility that Later Hongwu 3 was not so much an error as a deliberate fabrication. That is to say, the authors of the letter were engaged in propaganda, pretending to be representatives of a Ming outpost that maintained separate time-inscription in much the same manner as the Chosŏn court did with the Chongzhen reign. As Haboush points out, the Chosŏn court’s decision to control both time and the calendar through their appropriation of the Ming reign name was a domestic assertion of Chosŏn’s independence from the Qing and of the supremacy of Chosŏn court and yangban elites.96 This assertion of control over the calendar, however, was tempered by persistent uncertainty on Chosŏn’s part concerning the possible continued existence of other of time inscriptions by legitimate Ming regimes. In 1667, for instance, when a ship filled with Ming traders from Taiwan landed in Cheju, it caused a significant political controversy because of their possession of a Yongli calendar – although the Chosŏn court had heard rumors of the Yongli Emperor previously, this was their first actual contact. The arrival of Ming subjects in possession of a Ming calendar caused considerable excitement, followed by anger when the Chosŏn court forcibly returned the sailors to the Qing. However, as gradually became clear, the Yongli Emperor had already died by the time the sailors had been shipwrecked off Cheju Island, and, as the officials discussing the ship at that time had suspected, the Zheng

94. Sukchong sillok 50:22b [1711/04/30]: “眷兹藩邦，皇朝之禮待不薄，念我萬曆皇帝，命將安撫，惠此東方，恩澤圖極，宜爾三韓君臣，銘骨銘心，至于後昆，感戴無疆，而大柯固植於固叢之庭，甘心於臣妾之屬？”
95. The Yongli 永曆 Emperor, also known as the prince of Gui, ruled a rump Ming state in southern China from 1646 to 1661, after which he retreated to Burma. The Burmese handed him over to be executed by the Manchu in 1662.
family’s outpost in Taiwan had very little to do with the Yongli Emperor.  
Although the calendar played an important role in later historiography, notably in a popular history of China widely distributed in the eighteenth century called the Anthology of Key Passages of the Histories (Sayo ch’wisŏn 史要叢談), at the time of the arrival of the castaways the significance of a calendrical reconnection between Chosŏn and the Ming was rejected by Song Siyŏl himself, who scoffed at the suggestion that such an informal connection could be equivalent to the formal exchange of envoys. Indeed, for both the Chosŏn court and Song Siyŏl’s Noron faction, the existence of rival Ming remnant employing a rival system of time-inscription can hardly have been welcome, undermining as it did their own pretence to exclusive inheritance of the Ming mantle.

Not surprisingly, considering the disturbing nature of the documents, the Chosŏn court demanded a thorough investigation to discover the authors of the letter, also attempting to establish the source of the Chinese paper, and offering large awards for information, as well as amnesty or freedom for informants with criminal or servile backgrounds. The promise of rewards certainly encouraged informants, but brought the officials no closer to discovering the original author. Instead it resulted in a series of false accusations, in each case linking the Ming loyalist interlopers represented in the letter with a subversive world of geomancers and smugglers. Yi Sangbae refers to several different false accusations, including one by Chang Ch’ollyŏn 張千運, a forger, who fingered a prisoner he was acquainted with known for his skill in writing, one by Yi Un 李源 of Yangju, who claimed yangban status and reported a relative with whom he was feuding, and one by Sŏ Chongch’ŏl, a resident of the capital who accused a rival and fellow resident of Seoul of engaging in wild geomantic fantasies related to this letter. Not discussed by Yi in detail is the case of Chŏng Yŏm 鄭儂, a man of Kanghwa Island, who accused a fellow prisoner and

97. Sun Weiguo, “Yili yu xianshi de chongtu.”
100. Yi Sangbae, Chosŏn hugi chŏngch’i wa kwaesŏ, 66-71.
geomancer from Pyŏngan Province.¹⁰⁴

All of the false accusations are interesting because of the status tensions which they reveal, but it is the false accusation leveled by Chŏng Yŏm that is especially significant here, as his accusation clearly pointed the finger towards Chinese bandits with a grudge against the Chosŏn state. In 1712 Chŏng Yŏm of Kanghwa Island, a convicted swindler awaiting execution, informed the court that the culprits were known to a fellow prisoner called Kim Yŏngsŏng 金英成, a geomancer from Kanggye in North Pyŏngan Province who, as the Veritable Records informs us, “claimed to have a good understanding of geomancy,” wandered about Kanghwa and vicinity, and would “shout out Manchu phrases and engage in disturbing behavior.”¹⁰⁵ According to Chŏng’s representation of the conversation he had with Kim, Kim had spent three years on the other side of the Yalu River in an eight banners (p’algosan 八高山) village¹⁰⁶ and was thus aware of all the affairs on that side of the river. He was also in close touch with a community at Iman Flats (利滿坪) inhabited by outlaws from both Qing and Chosŏn. According to Chŏng, these outlaws had extensive contacts in Chosŏn and also with the “sea wolves,” a community of pirates outside of the authority of both Qing and Chosŏn.¹⁰⁷ Most importantly, Chŏng accused Kim of saying that the Yong’in Gate letter strongly resembled the work of those outlaws.¹⁰⁸

Kim Yŏngsŏng made short work of the accusation, in the meantime confessing to an intimate knowledge of the other side of the Yalu. He admitted that the barbarians (Qing subjects) on the riverside included many who spoke Korean well, suggesting that they most likely existed as a result of Chosŏn lawbreakers

¹⁰⁴ “Chŏng Yŏm tung ch’ŭan,” CKK81-116. It is briefly mentioned by Yi Sangbae, Chosŏn hugi chŏngch’i we kuwasŏ, in footnote 114 on page 74.

¹⁰⁵ Sukch'ong silleok 51:2a [1712/01/04]: “儒廢胡語，行止荒唐．”

¹⁰⁶ The eight-banners, or jakim gisa in Manchu, were the primary military structure of the Qing dynasty. They were formed initially by Nurhaci (1559-1626) of Jianzhou as a means to bringing the various tribal groups into a centrally-controlled military during the last decade of the sixteenth and the first two decades of the seventeenth century. Eight Hanjun 漢軍 banners (mostly made up of Liaodongese Chinese) and eight Mongol banners were also formed during the 1630s and 1640s. The individual nireu, originally temporary hunting parties which were transformed under Nurhaci and Hong Taiji (r. 1626-1643) into permanent military companies subordinate to a banner, had their own villages which provided their basic material needs. See Mark E. Elliott, The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 56-88.

¹⁰⁷ Sukch'ong silleok 51:2a [1712/01/04]: “織雲門掛書印信，似彼國印信，必是利滿坪賊人之所為．”

¹⁰⁸ Sukch'ong silleok 51:2a [1712/01/04]: “織雲門掛書印信，似彼國印信，必是利滿坪賊人之所為．”
who fled from Chosŏn authorities and submitted to Qing authority. While admitting the existence of a culturally ambiguous community north of the river, Kim dismissed the possibility of pirate involvement, suggesting that pirates who travel by sea would have no reason to sneak into Seoul, and that if Qing subjects had been involved with the letter, it must have been with the support of Chosŏn subjects. Ultimately, Chŏng recanted under torture, saying that his statement had “only been a desperate attempt to save himself in the face of certain death.”

Chŏng Yŏn, in other words, had seen in the Yŏng’ŭn Gate letter what a fair number of Sukchong’s officials also saw— a hint at a revival of the culturally ambiguous pirate strongholds of the early seventeenth century. Although the Yŏng’ŭn Gate letter seemed to hint at Zheng Jing of Taiwan and the rumors of Zhang Feihu, Chŏng Yŏn’s description of “sea wolves” living outside of both Chosŏn and Qing control hints at a different set of a concerns. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was significant discussion concerning smugglers’ colonies in the no-man’s-land between Chosŏn and Qing territory in the lower Yalu. Beyond that, the reference to sea wolves may also have suggested the Liaodongese maritime power of Mao Wenlong. After 1621, the Ming military official Mao Wenlong moved his remnant armies first to Zhenjiang �𫮀江 in Liaodong on the Yalu River, then across the Yalu to northern P’yŏngan in Chosŏn territory, and then finally to Ka Island off the Chosŏn coast. Positioned outside the control of the Ming and dependent for food on Chosŏn, Mao Wenlong and his roving bands of hungry soldiers became a serious burden for northern P’yŏngan society and economy; Mao Wenlong himself acted generally not as a subordinate to the Ming court but as the leader of a semi-independent polity.

In any case, it is significant that the Chosŏn court took the accusation against Kim Yŏngsŏng so seriously that, despite finding Kim to be innocent of the main accusation, declared him guilty of a far too extensive knowledge of the north bank of the Yalu, and a far too expansive geomantic imagination, and punished him with 100 blows and exile to a location three-thousand li away.

109. CKK 13:92 [1712/01/01]: “劍萬劒懿在事任近來江邊往來華人多有為朝鮮語者，意以朝鮮有犯罪逃亡者，先託於彼而然也。”
110. CKK 13:95 [1712/01/01].
111. Sukchong sillok 51:27a [1712/01/04]: “皆是死中求生之計。”
113. Han Myŏnggi, Imjin waerae kwa Han-Jung kwan’gye, 281-6.
114. CKK13:115 [1712/01/04].
115. Sukchong sillok 51:27a [1712/01/04]
The authors of the letter were never caught and for this reason it is now impossible to discover who they were, and nearly impossible to identify their reasons for posting this fraudulent letter asserting the existence of a Ming outpost that did not exist. Yet the letter does reveal to us a great deal about the worldview of Chosŏn officialdom and marginalized people. Chosŏn officials themselves initially considered the possibility of the survival of a hostile outpost of Ming migrants. Otherwise, when Ch'ŏng Yŏm accused Kim Yŏngsŏng of knowing the Ming Chinese who had posted the letter, he chose a person who, among his many other characteristics, was a geomancer and a literate man, yet most certainly was not in any way a member of the yangban elite. As a denizen of the border, Kim actually spoke Manchu and was believed to have lived in an eight-banners village, seemingly unusual qualifications for contact with supposed Ming loyalists. Well after the establishment of the Altar of Gratitude, Ch'ŏng Yŏm evidently considered Ming loyalism, Ming migrants and angry scolding about Chosŏn’s betrayal of the Wanli Emperor’s grace more closely associated with pirates, smugglers and geomancers than with the Chosŏn court and the yangban elites.

Conclusion

In the two incidents described above, a fictitious story of a Ming loyalist migrant was crafted by swindlers or malcontents who were literate but otherwise disempowered. The figure of the Ming migrant, and especially Ming geomancer, was a subversive one, and fit easily into the world-view of these marginal people. This suggests a different aspect to Ming loyalty than that normally considered. Generally, Ming loyalty is seen as a tool of the Chosŏn court, not of those likely to stage a revolt; continued protestations of loyalty to the Ming are usually seen as a response to Qing hegemony and an assertion of Chosŏn independence and superiority. The two cases above confirm that Chosŏn superiority to the Qing was accepted by these literate but marginal people who called for Chosŏn to overthrow the Qing, even though they were clearly not supporters of the Chosŏn monarchy as it was then constituted.

Late Chosŏn Ming loyalty – especially to the extent that it is understood as an aspect of the toadying tendency of late Chosŏn yangban culture – is often treated as a particular characteristic of the yangban, imposed by either the court or the yangban themselves. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, criticisms of sinocentric toadyism have often been accompanied by attacks on the yangban as a group. For instance, Sin Ch’aeho (1880-1936) traced the origins
of such sinocentrism to what he saw as the intellectual forbears of sinocentrism, the pro-Silla civil officials of eleventh century Koryŏ, and traced opposition to such sinocentric understandings to the defeated popular religion of Myochŏng of Pyŏngyang. The two cases above, however, suggest a very different development of late Chosŏn Ming loyalism. The subversives brought to light by the investigations of Yi Yongch'ang and the Yong'un Gate letter seem to have understood demands for gratitude for the Wanli Emperor’s intervention during the Imjin War and the importance of time inscription. Of course, just as the Ming loyalism of the court and among yangban elites was more concerned with Chosŏn’s legitimacy than with any deep-seated submissiveness to China, so Yi Yongch'ang and his fellow conspirators imagined Chosŏn armies, not Chinese, overthrowing the Qing. Yet even while the narratives produced were focused on Chosŏn, they encompassed a wider world both in time and in space.