Deconstructing the Official History of Koryŏ in Late Chosŏn: The Discovery of the Un’gok sisa and the Refutation of the Theory that Sin Ton Sired Kings U and Ch’ang*

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This article investigates how a new way of interpreting the history of the Koryŏ dynasty that differed from the state-sponsored Koryŏsa emerged in the seventeenth century by focusing on changes in how King U and King Ch’ang were treated in historiography. In the Koryŏsa, it is said that the son and grandson of King Kongmin, King U and King Ch’ang respectively, were in fact the descendants of the monk Sin Ton. As such, they were not legitimate kings and were considered usurpers to the throne and labeled traitors. This historical evaluation, in suggesting that Koryŏ’s legitimate line of succession had ended before King U and King Ch’ang, was created as a political pretext to legitimize the founding of the Chosŏn dynasty. This assessment in the Koryŏsa greatly influenced the people of Chosŏn, but it was strongly challenged in the early seventeenth century with the discovery of the Un’gok sisa, written by Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk. This text, representing the voice of a man of Koryŏ, recognized King U and King Ch’ang as King Kongmin’s descendants. Among those who saw these writings, there were several who concluded that the Koryŏsa’s narrative, which saw King U and Ch’ang as Sin’s descendants, was unfounded. At first, the number of people who thought this way was but few. However, by the eighteenth century, historical works that treated King U and King Ch’ang as legitimate Koryŏ kings emerged. An Chŏngbok’s Tongsa kangmok was a culmination of this trend. An Chŏngbok understood the historical past in terms of state and monarchical absolutism. An extension of this thinking was his affirmation of King U and King Ch’ang as Koryŏ kings. Afterward, by the end of the eighteenth century, historical interpretation of the Koryŏ period in Chosŏn changed from that of the Koryŏsa to that of An’s Tongsa kangmok. One can say that with the twentieth

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Introduction

Historical interpretation and narrative have an inextricable influence on the political and cultural thought of an era. They are processes that monopolize power for the present through a presentist organization of the past. Interpreting and evaluating history always happens in the present progressive tense. How the history of the Koryo dynasty (918–1392) was treated in the Choson period (1392–1910) is one case where this process is evident.

The Choson dynasty began work on the history of the Koryo from immediately after its establishment. It finally printed the results of this work under the title of *Koryosa* [History of Koryo] in 1452.¹ This text emphasized the inevitability of Koryo’s demise and Choson’s subsequent establishment. At the center of this reasoning was the notion that Koryo’s legitimate dynastic transmission (*wangt’ong* 王統) had ended with the reign of King Kongmin (1351–1374). According to the authors of the *Koryosa*, the kings that acceded to the throne after Kongmin, namely King U (1374–1388) and King Ch’ang (1388–1389), were the son and grandson, respectively, of the monk Sin Ton, and therefore, could not be recognized as legitimate kings. As such, they were treated as traitors in the *Koryosa*.² Embedded in this narrative was the idea that the establishment of the new Choson dynasty by Yi Sŏnggye fulfilled the expectations of popular sentiment after the extinction of the Koryo dynasty’s legitimate bloodline. This evaluation, of course, reflected the movement to “depose the false [king] and restore the real” (*p’yega ipchin* 廢假立眞), i.e.

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¹ The state-sponsored compilation of the *Koryosa* began in 1394 and continued to undergo many revisions before it was finally completed in 1451. The reason for the delay was the numerous contending opinions regarding how the history of the Koryo should be evaluated. For a study of the various contentions that informed the compilation of the *Koryosa*, see No Myo’nhŏ, “*Koryosa* – *Koryosa* yŏlchŏn,” in Han’guk ū ŭ yŏksaga wa yŏksahak (Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 1994).

² In the explanatory notes of the *Koryosa*, it is recorded, “Sin U and his son were the secondary offspring of the rebel Sin Ton and they sat on the royal throne for sixteen years illegally. Following the ‘Biography of Wang Mang’ in the *Hanshu*, [we] record them in the section reserved for subjects in order to clarify the ‘Great Righteousness’ (*taeu* 大義) of punishing rebels.” *Koryosa*, pŏmn̄ye 2a–2b. See *Koryosa* fascicles (*kwŏn*) 133–137 for the sections relevant to “Sin U” and “Sin Ch’ang.”
remove the Sin pretender and return a Wang ruler to the throne.

The Koryŏsa determined how people in Chosŏn understood the history of the Koryŏ. Later historical compilations, such as the general national history, the Tongguk t'onggam 東國通鑑, sponsored and printed by the Chosŏn state in the fifteenth century, and the mid-sixteenth century Tongguk saryak 東國史略 written by Pak Sang 朴祥 (1474–1530), followed the Koryŏsa’s perspective. Even though there were those that maintained reservations regarding the Koryŏsa’s narrative, it was difficult for the people in Chosŏn to deviate from the historical image produced by this text.

However, after the seventeenth century, there was a shift. One group of scholars from this period tried to move away from the framework of historical interpretation established by the state-sponsored Koryŏsa. A central issue in this shift was the evaluation of King U and King Ch’ang. They raised suspicions over their purported descent from the monk Sin Ton, which was the perspective of the Koryŏsa, and by the eighteenth century, they recognized them as legitimate kings of Koryŏ and reflected this in their historical narratives. An interpretation and narrative of history that broke free from the Koryŏsa had emerged.

An important factor for bringing about these shifts in perspective was the discovery of the Un’gok sisa 耘谷詩史, the literary anthology of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk 元天錫, who lived at the end of the Koryŏ dynasty. After the establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty, Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk retired to Wŏnju and refused to take office in order to demonstrate his loyalty towards the Koryŏ.³ His descendants held on to his writings in secret. Among them were many poems that recognized King U and King Ch’ang as members of the Wang royal house. After these texts had become known to the world, a group of people in Chosŏn began to compile historical works that incorporated revised interpretations based on this new knowledge. This move in scholarly circles to compile historical works that differed from the Koryŏsa, however, was extremely dangerous politically, being a direct rejection of public historical interpretation in the Chosŏn. Nevertheless, the internal changes that had by then taken place in Chosŏn were so strong that they could not be contained.

Besides Yu Yŏngok’s study, there have been nearly no other scholarly works that have examined this shift in how Chosŏn scholarly circles came to reject the Koryŏsa’s evaluations and narrations of King U and King Ch’ang’s reigns.⁴ Yu

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³. For the most recent study of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s life and his Un’gok sisa, see Yi Injae, Chibang chisigin Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk úi sam kwa saenggak (Seoul: Hye’an, 2007).

⁴. Yu Yŏngok, “P’yega ipchin e taehan Chosŏn hugi sadaebu úi pip’anjŏk insik,” Yŏksa wa
Yŏngok’s study first explores the criticisms laid against the *Koryŏsa* and reveals how these changes in thinking were reflected in non-official (*min’gan* 民間) historical compilations. Yu also discovered the reason for the positive transformation of how the Koryŏ kings U and Ch’ang were appraised in the growing emphasis on loyalism (*chŏrŭi* 節義) in late Chosŏn scholarly circles. Yu’s study provided us a new understanding of how late Chosŏn understood the history of the Koryŏ dynasty. However, this study has its limitations. It does not substantively examine how these shifts in historical evaluation had come into being in the first place, nor does it examine the process by which they occurred.

The critical shift in the evaluation of King U and King Ch’ang in the seventeenth century was based on new evidence that came with the discovery of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s *Un’gok sisa*. The discovery and circulation of the *Un’gok sisa*, and the text’s scholarly influence, occurred within a specific social network. At the same time, the process by which these new perspectives came to be reflected in historical works developed in several stages. In revealing this development, this study will provide a clearer picture of how the historical interpretations of the *Koryŏsa* were replaced in favor of a new historical perspective created by the activities of late Chosŏn scholars. This study will place the discovery of the *Un’gok sisa* and its gradual spread in scholarly circles within a temporal sequence and investigate how the history of the Koryŏ was reevaluated in the late Chosŏn scholarly world. By doing so, it will illustrate the process by which a state-sanctioned historical framework was rejected in favor of a new way of thinking.

The Discovery of the *Un’gok sisa* in the Early Seventeenth Century and Its Spread

1. The Discovery of the *Un’gok sisa*: Seeing U and Ch’ang as Wang Kings

The *Un’gok sisa* was discovered in 1603 by Pak Tongnyang 朴東亮 (1569–1635) who was then serving as the governor of Kangwŏn province. It was Pak who introduced the text to the outside world. Pak Tongnyang had collected the extant poems and short prose pieces of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk into a compilation he titled the *Un’gok sisa*. In his own preface to these collected writings he evaluated them positively. Although the existence of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk writings

had long been known, they emerged in concrete form through Pak’s discovery and owed their subsequent transmission to his introduction. Thus, Pak Tongnyang should be given foremost credit for bringing this text to the attention of Chosŏn’s learned circles.

In the *Un’gok sisa*, there are several poems and short prose pieces revealing that King U and King Ch’ang were not descendants of Sin Ton, but were in fact legitimate scions of the Wang family. These were facts that would have caused a great ripple in Chosŏn society. Accepting King U and King Ch’ang as Wang rulers would also mean rejecting the narrative of the *Koryŏsa*, which had cast them as traitors. This would also greatly damage the legitimacy of the Chosŏn dynasty, which had justified its establishment on the basis of the expiration of the mandate of the Wang rulers: if U and Ch’ang had been illegitimately sired by Sin Ton, the Koryŏ dynasty had effectively expired. Though Wŏn’s position was suggested merely by a few short poems and prose pieces, the message was strong. The relevant passages in the *Un’gok sisa* are as follows:

I: [Poems written] on the 15th day of this month, upon hearing that the state had the Prince of Chŏngch’ang accede to the throne. [It was claimed] that the former king and his father were the descendants of Sin Ton, and were deposed and made into commoners.

The former kings, father and son, are now separated
By a myriad leagues, east and west, each in a corner of heaven.
Though a body can be made into that of a commoner,
Proper names shall never change, even after a thousand ages.

King T’aejo’s covenant resonated with heaven;
His lingering dew flowed on for several hundred years.
Why did they not distinguish between “true and false” long before?
By azure heaven’s mirror, all has become clear.

II: The state ordered the former kings, father and son, to commit suicide.

That your rank is high, enjoying bountiful life, was all the ruler’s munificence;
Instead, you turned against them, and with hatred harbored destroyed their clan.
How could great fortune come down upon this country?

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5. Pak Tongnyang compiled the *Un’gok sisa*, but was unable to have it printed. He only showed the text to a select few in his circle. Even his grandson Pak Sech’ae was only able to acquire a copy of this work by borrowing it from another. See “Sŏ Un’gok sisa hu” 書耘谷詩史後 in *Namgye chip* 南溪集 69. It was printed as a book much later; it was published in 1858 after his descendants had reorganized the materials.
A great unspeakable grievance it has become, unreleased even in the underworld…

These two sets of poems above show that Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk had considered King U and King Ch’ang to be Wang kings. From Wŏn’s assessment, it is clear that King U and King Ch’ang were the descendants of King Kongmin. When Pak Tongnyang came across these poems, he was very excited, because the poems effectively shattered the preexisting suspicion that King U and King Ch’ang were Sin Ton’s offspring. Although Pak does not make it clear how these poems exactly dissolved his earlier suspicions regarding authentic royal pedigree, he already indicated that, based on the circumstances surrounding King U’s accession, U could not have been a child of Sin Ton. Pak Tongnyang writes in his preface to the collection:

When King U acceded the throne, esteemed officials like Ch’oe Yong, Yi Saek, and Chong Mongju were still at court; therefore, no one suspected that King U was the [son] of Sin [Ton] […] Only after King Ch’ang had been deposed was it said that “King U and his son were the descendants of Sin Ton” in order to find a pretext for deposing him. If King U and King Ch’ang were Sin’s, it would mean that the Wang house had no more descendants after King Kongmin, but what then would be the reason for people to have given up their lives for Koryŏ? Moreover, at this time the court was ordered and had yet to fall into disarray. All the affairs of state were in the hands of these few officials. And so, if either King U or King Ch’ang had been pretenders, they would have deposed them ahead of anyone else.

According to Pak, there were several reasons why King U and his son could only have been scions of the Wang house. For one, Yi Saek had said upon King U’s death that “the son of the former king should be established as the new ruler.” The notion that King U and his son were descendants of Sin Ton only emerged to provide a pretext for deposing them. Furthermore, since the Koryŏ court had yet to fall into disarray, and government was in the hands of capable officials, these kings been pretenders, they would not have been accepted as rulers by these men. From Pak Tongnyang’s perspective, turning U and Ch’ang into Sin descendants had only been an excuse; based on the circumstances of the time, he concluded that there was no way U and Ch’ang could have been Sin’s descendants.

Moreover, Pak Tongnyang criticized the compilers of the Koryŏsa who covered up this affair with assertions that King U and King Ch’ang were Sin Ton’s descendants. He lamented that “even though they had originally received

7. “Un’gok sisa sŏ,” 耘谷詩史序 in Un’gok sisa 1.1a–1b.
their official salary from the Wang house, they were unable to preserve their integrity through death.” At the same time, Pak emphasized that, using the Un’gok sisa, one could not only confirm that U and Ch’ang were indeed Wang scions, but could pinpoint the errors in the Koryŏsa, with all its “prevaricated words” and “frivolous passages:”

I cannot tell whether it is true that King U was the son of Sin Ton […] If it were not for [Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s] words, the erroneous records would surely have persisted with the long passage of time. If this were to happen, can it be said that our country [truly] has a history? This is the benefit of having righteous scholars. Those like Yi Saek and Chŏng Mongju could be at court; and though the Mandate of Heaven and the hearts of men had departed from the dynasty for decades, they could still preserve it. Those who hid themselves as recluses, such as [Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk], left true records of the times in their writings, with each word and each character inspired by their passionate loyalty. Not only did [his writings] preserve the truth of [King U and Ch’ang’s] Wang pedigree, they also became the basis from which the prevaricated words and frivolous passages of the Koryŏsa could be challenged and revised.8

The fact that Pak recognized the Un’gok sisa’s value and appended such a preface in order to introduce it to the world is very significant. There were others who had already seen Wŏn’s manuscripts, but none shared Pak’s attitude towards them. Kim Siyang 金時讓 (1581–1643), an official during the reign of King Sŏnjo (1567–1608), had also seen Wŏn’s original manuscripts. He had procured them directly from Wŏn’s descendants in Wŏnju, but in his case, he had approached the question of King U and King Ch’ang’s authentic pedigree cautiously, even though he had read those passages.9

The Wŏnju literatus Yi Hŭi 李埈 (1522–1604) had also seen Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s writings. In his Songwa chapsŏl 松窩雜說, Yi not only recounted Wŏn’s life and career, but also introduced his poems that recounted the allegations surrounding King U and King Ch’ang’s pedigree that led to their deposition, their subsequent exile to Kanghwa, and their deaths in Kangnŭng. Writing that “Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk treated U and his son Ch’ang as the ‘former kings’ and wrote poems to lament their deaths,” he indicated that Wŏn had indeed seen these rulers, not as Sin pretenders, but as scions of the Wang house.10 Yi Hŭi’s statement, then, is the

9. Kim Siyang, Chahae p’iltam 紫海筆談 5a: “When I was twelve, I hid in Ch’iak Mountain in Wŏnju in order to escape the Japanese invaders. [There], I met a descendant of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk. He showed me Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s manuscript and it recorded the affairs of U and Ch’ang, saying that ‘the kings, both father and son, were made into the children of Sin Ton.’”
10. Yi Hŭi, Songwa chapsŏl 松窩雜說 1a–1b.
first recorded instance where Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s defense of U and Ch’ang’s authentic pedigree was introduced, but he did not intend to make Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s manuscript widely known. In this manner, Yi’s attitude was clearly different from Pak Tongnyang’s. Pak, in the seventeenth century, then, can be seen as the first figure to treat the narrative in the Koryŏsa as problematic.

By becoming aware of the Un’gok sisa, Chosŏn scholars acquired a stunning piece of evidence to support the notion that King U had indeed been a Wang ruler. There had been claims of King U’s authenticity as a Wang scion drifting about, but they were not based on Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s records. Such claims did not cite any clear evidence to testify to their reliability. The Un’gok sisa, then, was an extraordinary documentary source that transmitted the truth of the matter. Through this text, many developed a new understanding of the last years of Koryŏ’s history.

2. King U and King Ch’ang as Wang Scions: The Circulation and Diffusion of the Discourse

Seeing King U and King Ch’ang as members of the Wang house directly conflicted with the state’s public historical interpretation. If such a position became a part of public discourse, it could cause political shockwaves. This factor made it difficult for the Un’gok sisa to be published. Pak Tongnyang collated the poems into a book and appended his own preface to the manuscript, but he was in the end unable to print the work. The dangers that could arise with the public distribution of such a text can be inferred from the experience of Pak Sech’ae (1631-1695), Pak Tongnyang’s grandson, who had tried to compile the Un’gok sisa once again.

In 1677, Pak Sech’ae put together another edition of the Un’gok sisa. In addition to collecting the manuscript collated by Pak Tongnyang, he also

11. There remains the question of whether there were those who might have seen Wŏn’s manuscript before Kim Siyang, Yi Hŭi and Pak Tongnyang. According to what was recorded by Chŏng Hongik (1571–1626), both Yi Hwang and Chŏng Ku had said that “there is trustworthy history in Wŏnju.” It is very likely that either Yi or Chŏng would have known this information, but neither figure touches upon the matter in writings that are in their collected works. See the sajo section in the appendix to the Un’gok sisa (耘谷詩史附錄, 事蹟).

12. In the mid-sixteenth century, the statement “The works left in Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s manuscript contained material that said King U was King Kongmin’s real son” appears in Im P’osin’s Pyŏngsin chŏngsa nok 丙辰丁巳錄 9a. A similar statement appears in the Kyŏngŏn ilgi of Yu Huich’un. See Miam chip 眉巖集 5.17b: “There are those who staunchly argued that King U and King Ch’ang were in fact descendants of King Kongmin, and that Chŏng Tojŏn had defamed them as the illicit offspring of Sin [Ton].”
included two poems that his maternal grandfather Sin Hŭm 申欽 (1566–1628) had read, and several other pieces of related writing in his new, one volume, compilation. At that time, others dissuaded him from undertaking this work, mentioning its danger. Although the work was commended as a continuation of his grandfather’s legacy and a demonstration of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s loyalty, because it revealed the personal and political flaws of the men who had played important roles in establishing the Chosŏn dynasty and compiling national history, its dissemination would derogate the hallowed “Way of the Ruler and Subject” (kunsin chi to 君臣之道) of the dynasty’s founding fathers. The idea of the “Way of the Ruler and Subject” at the dynasty’s inception pointed to the newly formed relationship between ruler and subject following the establishment of Chosŏn. This notion, then, insisted that a person who lived through the dynastic transition ought to have transferred his loyalty to the new dynasty, an understanding of loyalty that the contents of the Un’gok sisa directly challenged. For these reasons, Pak was warned to approach this matter carefully.

Even though Pak Tongnyang did not publish the Un’gok sisa, its contents were beginning to be shared among acquaintances close to him. Among those who had seen the text, some expressed their agreement with the contents of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s poems. Pak Tongnyang’s friend Sin Hŭm was an example of someone who completely trusted its account. While recounting Wŏn’s activities during the last years of Koryŏ in his reflections on Wŏn’s manuscript, Sin praises Wŏn’s statement “that U was King Kongmin’s son” for being “a representative example of honest writing” (chikp’il chi uja 直筆之尤者). He then also introduced the poems where Wŏn revealed the authenticity of King U and King Ch’ang’s descent from the Wang kings.

From his perspective, Wŏn’s poems were rough in diction and not necessarily beautiful, but because they spoke the truth without attempting to conceal it, their value far surpassed the Koryŏsa. He concluded that, “with regard to the affairs of King U and King Ch’ang, one should rely on Wŏn’s records and examine them,” pointing to their documentary significance.

Sin Hŭm’s son, Sin Ilksŏng 申翊聖 (1588–1644), also positively appraised the

15. Pak Tongnyang only made the book he compiled known to a few in his immediate circle. Even his grandson Pak Sech’ae was only able to acquire a copy of this work by borrowing it from another. See “Sŏ Un’gok sisa hu” 書耘谷詩史後 in Namgye chip 69.
Un’gok sisa, stating that there should be no doubt that King U was in fact King Kongmin’s son. Sin Hŭm’s friend Yun Kŭnsu 尹根壽 (1537–1616) also confirmed King U as a Wang and blamed the surname alteration on “evil officials” who used it to slander him.

The case of Han Paekkyŏm 韓百謙 (1552–1615) differed slightly from the previous examples. He did not clearly state whether he trusted the contents of the Un’gok sisa when it came to King U and King Ch’ang’s pedigree, but he nevertheless evaluated Wŏn’s career highly. This point can be seen in the Tongsa ch’anyo 東史纂要 of O Un 呉濬 (1540–1617), a general national history. According to O, when he was compiling the Tongsa ch’anyo, Han Paekkyŏm had sent to him a detailed biography (haengnok 行錄) of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk and other pieces about Wŏn’s times that he had written and requested that his assessment of Wŏn be included in the compilation. In the account produced from the hands of O and Han in the Tongsa ch’anyo, Wŏn is portrayed as a loyal subject of Koryŏ. Judging by his praise of his loyalty to Koryŏ, it is also likely that Han agreed with the contents of Un’gok sisa.

In much the same way, with the appearance of the Un’gok sisa in the early seventeenth century, Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s name became more widely known, and the opinion that King U and King Ch’ang were Wang descendants again spread through Chosŏn society. It is not easy to confirm how far the notion that U and Ch’ang were Wang scions spread in Chosŏn scholarly circles after the re-emergence of the Un’gok sisa from only a couple of individual cases. What could explain their support of the notion that U and Ch’ang were Wang scions?

Stating that Koryŏ’s demise was because heaven’s mandate (ch’ŏnmyŏng 天命) had been exhausted and the feelings of the people (insim 人心) had departed, they did not denounce the dynastic transition from Koryŏ to Chosŏn. Nevertheless, they believed that the evaluation of King U and King Ch’ang in official historiography contorted history. They saw U and Ch’ang as Wang rulers and considered it absolutely impossible for a pretender to have acceded to the throne in light of the conditions of the time. Their position can be clearly seen in Pak Tongnyang’s reasoning.

manufactured to justify deposing King Ch’ang. Their attitude towards the roles of these late Koryō officials was that of unconditional approval. On the other hand, their attitude can be seen as related to their own political position as royalists (ch’imwang 親王) who emphasized the preservation and protection of the dynastic house above all else. Pak Tongnyang and Sin Hŭm were among the seven officials who were favored by King Sŏnjo. Moreover, their children also became sons-in-law of King Sŏnjo. From their perspective, the protection of the royal house and the preservation of the state were inextricable. They did not differentiate between the Koryŏ and the Chosŏn dynasty, and treated them in the same manner. They thought that there was no reason to morally repudiate King Kongmin, King U and King Ch’ang.

On the other hand, the discourse of King U and King Ch’ang’s pedigree functioned as a catalyst for a subtle transformation in the intellectual circles of that time. The statements of Chang Yu 張維 (1587–1638) are a poignant indication of this shift. Chang Yu found it incomprehensible that a supposedly loyal official like Chŏng Mongju did nothing to prevent King U or King Ch’ang’s deaths and yet were still able to receive the moral adulation of later generations, thus expressing serious skepticism over Chŏng Mongju’s loyalist credentials.22 If King U and King Ch’ang were in fact descendants of Sin Ton, there would have been no problem, but if they were actually Wang scions, how could one still consider Chŏng an official who “exhausted his loyalty” for the Koryŏ? It was only possible for Chang to formulate this serious critique, if he had accepted the notion that King U and King Ch’ang were Wang descendants. Evidently, Chang had accepted the narrative in the poems of the Un’gok sisa. In addition, one can see his critique as a rejection of contemporary judgments of Chŏng Mongju, who was lauded as a progenitor of Chosŏn Neo-Confucianism.23 This contemporary appraisal of Chŏng had begun with the sarim 士林 scholars of the Chungjong period (1506–1544), who had constructed their own genealogy of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy by tracing it from Chŏng Mongju to Kil Chae 吉再, Kim Chongjik 金宗直, and finally Kim Koengp’il 金宏弼.24 Afterwards, in accordance with the desires of the sarim, Chŏng Mongju came to be venerated by the state and enshrined in the Confucian temple and Chŏng Mongju’s adulation became even more widespread. Chang Yu was thus critical of these developments.

22. Kyegok manp’il谿谷漫筆 2: “Both Chŏng Mongju and Kim Chongjik are greatly renowned for civil culture, but there are significant points of doubt regarding both of them”圃隱畢齋皆有重名於斯文而皆有大可疑處.
23. Chungjong sillok 中宗實錄 27 [1517/02/kyŏngsin].
24. Chungjong sillok 103 [1544/05 /pyŏngin].
In the seventeenth century, the discourse of King U and King Ch’ang’s authentic pedigree did not only have implications for the history of late Koryǒ. This notion, connected to criticism over Chŏng Mongju and his veneration, was a matter of great controversy that fundamentally disturbed the foundations of the intellectual community of the time. As such, it was natural that contending opinions also emerged. Ch’oe Sŏkchŏng 崔錫鼎 (1646–1715), who disagreed with Chang Yu’s reasoning, made his own scathing critiques at the time.25

Ch’oe Sŏkchŏng strongly rebutted the notion that King U and Ch’ang were Wang scions because Chang Yu’s skepticism over Chŏng Mongju emerged from his recognition of the authenticity of U and Ch’ang’s pedigree. Ch’oe firmly believed that King U was indeed the son of Sin Ton.26 In his view, King Kongmin was infirm and could not sire any offspring, and so he selected healthy young men and had them copulate with his harem, hoping to acquire a son in this way. He selected the offspring of Sin Ton, U, and treated him as his own son, investing him as heir apparent. According to Ch’oe, everyone in the late Koryǒ knew these facts, but merely avoided discussing them openly.27

Ch’oe’s rebuttal of Chang Yu was nothing short of a rejection of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s Un’gok sisa. He did not believe the Un’gok sisa, which was the fountainhead from which the idea that U and Ch’ang were Wang scions had spread. For him, the account in Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s manuscript that claimed U to be a Wang was to be treated merely as a story that led people astray. He raised the following question: how could a figure like Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk, out of power and in retirement, know the secrets of the palace?28 Ch’oe’s opinion was derived from what his father Ch’oe Huryang 崔後亮 (1616–1693) had transmitted to him. Ch’oe Huryang, who had devoted considerable efforts to historical study and was deeply versed in late Koryǒ matters, always insisted that King U was Sin Ton’s son. Ch’oe Sŏkchŏng’s friend Cho Chongjo 趙宗著 was of the same opinion.29 Cho and Ch’oe’s opinions on this historical problem were identical.30

The opinions of Ch’oe Sŏkchŏng, his father Ch’oe Huryang, and his friend Cho

25. The opinion of Ch’oe Sŏkchŏng is detailed in his “Non P’o’ŭn yusa” 論圖隱遺事 in the Myŏnggok chip 明谷集 11. It is not known exactly when this text was written. However, the text contains information that shows he discussed the matter with Cho Chongjo 趙宗著 and shared each other’s opinions. From the fact that Cho died in 1690, it can be seen that Ch’oe already discounted the possibility that U and Ch’ang were Wang family in the seventeenth century.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
Chongjô stood in stark contrast to those of figures who raised new propositions regarding the history of the late Koryô through their reading of the *Un’gok sisa*. In this manner, as soon as the notion that King U and King Ch’ang were not Sin scions but members of the Wang house had spread through Chosôn scholarly circles with the *Un’gok sisa*, within these scholarly circles formed rival camps, one that agreed with this position and another that opposed it. If one believed that it was impossible for a Sin to have taken the throne given the political circumstances of the time, then one would have tended to agree with the positions in the *Un’gok sisa*. Among them, there were also those who displayed skepticism toward the moral credentials of Chông Mongju, who was the key linking figure for the transmission of Neo-Confucianism in Chosôn. Those who rejected the new information presented in Wôn’s writings, such as Ch’oe Huryang or Ch’oe Sŏkchŏng, considered the notion that U and Ch’ang were actually Wang scions to be nothing more than rumor that had circulated among common people. They wanted to move away from a perspective that had tried to understand late Koryô society on the basis of claims of U and Ch’ang’s authentic pedigree.

### Development of the Controversy and Changes in the Historiography of Koryô

1. *Seventeenth Century Historiographical Compilations and the Un’gok sisa*

The back and forth debate over King U and King Ch’ang was connected to the evaluation of historical reality. Deciding whether to accept them as legitimate kings raised a historiographical question over how the legitimacy of Koryô and Chosôn should be understood. As such, it is natural that the contents of the *Un’gok sisa* came to occupy an important place in debates on the historiography of Koryô. It became a key element in all the various historical narratives that emerged in this period, yet one that proved hard to defuse.

After the seventeenth century, there emerged two distinct types among the many histories of Koryô that Chosôn intellectuals composed. One sort of work was the general national history, in which the history of Koryô was one portion of the narrative; the other sort were works that dealt exclusively with the history of Koryô. The former include *Tongsa ch’anyo* by O Un,31 Im Sangdŏk’s

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As for examples of the latter, these include Hong Yóha’s 洪汝河 Hwich’an yósa 彙纂麗史,33 Yu Kye’s 俞棨 Yósa chegang 麗史提綱,34 among others.35 These works were all undertaken by private scholars working in a private capacity. As such, the appearance of these historical works is significant, in that they were new treatments of Koryó’s history in a context where the Koryósa and the Tongguk T’onggam already provided state-sponsored narratives of this history.

Historical information related to Wón Ch’ŏnsŏk first came to be recorded in O Un’s Tongsa ch’anyo from the early seventeenth century. The Tongsa ch’anyo, after its initial publication in 1606, was reprinted in 1614 after a set of revisions and additions.36 With these many changes implemented in such a short period of time, it appears that its publication had an enormous influence on Chosŏn scholars.37 Even while covering the period from Tan’gun Chosŏn until the end of the Koryó, the Tongsa ch’anyo is remarkable for focusing on the lives and deeds of court officials and scholars, instead of exclusively on the activities of the ruler. The first five of its eight kwŏn deal with the lives of officials and scholars.38

As mentioned above, O Un included Wón Ch’ŏnsŏk in the Tongsa ch’anyo because of Han Paekkyŏm’s encouragement. As he tabulated the activities of famous officials, he also discussed the life of Wón Ch’ŏnsŏk, describing many aspects of Wón’s career. According to the account Wón retreated to Wŏnju yŏn’gu 24 (2002): 393–420; Pak Inho, “Tongs ch’anyo yŏlchŏn e nat’anan O Un ŭi yóksa insik,” Toegyehak kwa Yugyo munhwa 50 (2012): 265–306.

32. For key studies on An Chŏngbok’s historical research and his Tongsa kangmok, see Kang Segu, Sunam An Chŏngbok ŭi Tongsa kangmok yŏn’gu (Seoul: Sŏnggyungwandae ch’ulp’anbu, 2012); Yi Usŏng et al., Sunam An Chŏngbok ŭi yóksahak (Seoul: Sŏnggyungwandae ch’ulp’anbu, 2012).

33. For a recent study of the Hoech’an yósa see To Hyŏnch’ol, “Mukchae Hong Yóha ŭi yóksasŏ p’yŏnch’an kwa Koryósa insik,” Han’guk sasang sahak 43 (2013): 51–83.


35. Han Yong’u, Chosŏn hugi sahaksa yŏn’gu (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1998).

36. The Tongsa ch’anyo was revised many times and was finally completed in 1614. This process is described in detail in Kim Sunhŭi’s study mentioned above (“Tongs ch’anyo ŭi sŏjihakhŏk yŏn’gu”). The revised edition of 1614 reflects the influence of the author’s exchange with Han Paekkyŏm.


38. Regarding this, see Han Yong’u, Chosŏn hugi sahaksa yŏn’gu, 36–37.
during the political turbulence of the late Koryo. There, he severed his relations with the rest of the world. Although he had passed the civil service exams, he refused any official posts. He had interactions with many famous officials of the late Koryo period, including Yi Saek, but after the founding of Choson he refused the summons of King T'aenjong. The many poems he left behind, along with his other writings totaling six kwôn, were secretly preserved by his descendants. It appears that all the information available about Won at the time had been recorded in O Un’s account.

However, the Tongsa ch’anyo made no mention of Won Ch’onsok’s opinion regarding King U and King Ch’ang. When discussing the reigns of King U and Ch’ang, O used the names Sin U and Sin Ch’ang to describe them. Its position was no different from preexisting attitudes. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Koryo, it did not treat these rulers as traitors or rebels. Furthermore, in his biography of Won Ch’onsok, O made no mention of Won’s poems about U and Ch’ang. Though he mentioned that out of the six original kwôn of Won’s manuscript, only part one and part three had survived, O completely avoided discussing their contents. It appears that the extraordinary information in Won’s poems greatly conflicted with O Un’s historical interpretation. He laments at the end of his entry on Won Ch’onsok that because much of the manuscript of the Un’gok sisa, which was concerned with the history of the late Koryo, had disappeared, its contents could no longer be transmitted to posterity.

40. Figures discussed along with Won Ch’onsok in this book included other Koryo loyalists such as Ch’oe Yong, Pak Sangch’ung, Yi Saek, Ch’ong Mongju, Kil Chae, Sö Kyon, Yi Yangjung, and Kim Chu. The 1667 edition of the Yosa chegang emulates the Tongsa ch’anyo in briefly tabulating their activities at the end of records for King Kongyang’s reign. One can conclude that the introduction of these Koryo loyalists in the two books by Yu Yongok and Pak Inho strongly reflected the moral ideas of Neo-Confucianism.
41. The Tongsa ch’anyo organized the history of the pre-Three Kingdoms in the following order: Tan’gun Choson, Kija Choson, Wiman Choson, the Four Commanderies, the Two Prefectures, and the Three Han of Chinhan, Mahan, and Pyönhans. The history of the Three Kingdoms was dealt with in the “Annals” of each of the kingdoms and the “Silla Annals” for the Unified Silla period. Koryo was addressed in the “Koryo Annals,” beginning with King T’aenjo and ending with King Kongyang.
42. Yu Kye’s Yosa chegang followed the practice in the Tongsa ch’anyo. This is mentioned especially in the explanatory notes.
43. Tongsa ch’anyo 7.44a: “In his remaining manuscripts, he recorded the political events in detail until the end of the Koryo period. Once the dynasty changed, he referred to Choson as the ‘new state’ rather than the ‘country.’”
44. Tongsa ch’anyo 7.44b: “It is truly a pity that Won Ch’onsok’s original manuscripts have largely disappeared and the history of the last years of Koryo have not been transmitted to later
How the *Tongsa ch’anyo* discussed Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk was bold for its time, but it organized the events of King U and King Ch’ang’s reigns in the same format as had the *Koryŏsa*, which placed them under the “Annals of Sin U” and “Annals of Sin Ch’ang.” At least on this point, the *Tongsa ch’anyo* made no changes. These organizational and narrative practices in this text became a model for later authors who studied Koryŏ history.\(^45\)

The *Hwich’an yŏsa* of Hong Yŏha (洪汝河 1621–1678) did not depart in any particular way from earlier historical works when it came to how it treated the reigns of King U and King Ch’ang. This work abridged the *Koryŏsa*, organizing the history of the Koryŏ dynasty from King T’aejo to King Kongyang. In addition to their entries in the “Royal Annals” (*sega*), it narrates the activities of thirty-two successive monarchs of the Koryŏ dynasty from King T’aejo to King Kongyang. In addition to their entries in the “Royal Annals,” King U and King Ch’ang also received separate treatment in the “Biographies of the Sin Commoners” (*Sin sŏin chŏn* 辛庶人傳).\(^46\) Although this work departed somewhat from the practice in the *Koryŏsa*, where U and Ch’ang were listed as traitors and rebels, in that it still saw them as members of the Sin family and did not recognize them as kings, it was identical to the *Koryŏsa*.

The *Yŏsa chegang*, compiled by Yu Kye, narrates a chronological history of Koryŏ. In twenty-three *kwŏn*, Yu Kye treated the accomplishments of the Koryŏ kings from T’aejo to Kongyang. Because the *Koryŏsa* was a single work combining the history of rulers, court officials, and various other areas, it was a difficult text to peruse. For this reason, the *Yŏsa chegang* championed the collation of one of these three areas of history in one text.\(^47\) As for the *Yŏsa chegang*’s attitude toward King U and King Ch’ang, it was ambiguous. In treating their reigns, it followed the *Koryŏsa*’s form, placing them under “The Annals of Sin U” (*kwŏn* 22–23) and “The Annals of Sin Ch’ang” (*kwŏn* 23). However, he included contradictory entries regarding the birth of King U. He

\(^{45}\) Among the most representative works was the *Yŏsa chegang*. Its explanatory notes state, “Regarding the history of King U and King Ch’ang, [this text] follows, without amendment, the example of O Un’s *Tongsa ch’anyo*.” From this it is clear that the *Yŏsa chegang* made great use of the *Tongsa ch’anyo*.

\(^{46}\) In the *Koryŏsa*, the records of U and Ch’ang are treated in the traitors’ biographies (*pannyŏk chŏn* 叛逆傳).

\(^{47}\) According to the explanatory notes (*pŏmnye* 例) of the *Yŏsa chegang*, the text was printed in 1667. A characteristic feature is that it follows Zhu Xi’s historiographical perspective in its treatment of Koryŏ history. Yu Kye felt that existing historical works, such as the *Samguk sagi*, *Koryŏsa*, *Tongsa ch’anyo*, and *Tongguk t’onggam*, had many limitations that he hoped to overcome in his own work.
recorded that “[A child named] Monino was born of the wife of Sin Ton, Panya, and King Kongmin treated him as his own offspring and the child was U,” and that “King Kongmin had become close with a palace maid and sired a son [i.e. U], and he was then seven years of age.” Of these two pieces of information, Yu wrote that their reconciliation shall “await the investigation of future men.” It is possible that Yu Kye had become suspicious of the Koryo’s account, where King U and King Ch’ang were represented as Sin’s descendants. Nevertheless, he still avoided refuting this position in his narrative.

The kind of conviction regarding U and Ch’ang’s authentic Wang pedigree that one can see from Pak Tongnyang and Sin Hŭm is difficult to find in Yu’s writing. On the other hand, Yu Kye directly repeated the appraisals of figures like Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk, Yi Saek and Chŏng Mongju in the Tongsa ch’anyo in his Yŏsa chegang. It appeared to have actively embraced the historical problematique of the Tongsa ch’anyo, which sought to elevate historical personages who had preserved their integrity through loyalty to the Koryo dynasty.

Although the Yŏsa chegang was a private work by Yu Kye, after his death it received considerable political attention from the Westerners faction. The Westerner Song Siyŏl had organized its printing, written a preface, and wrote in great detail of the work’s significance, all the while praising its contents. In 1681, he proposed that the Yŏsa chegang be used as part of the royal curriculum. After a few years, the king approved its inclusion and publication, after which the text spread through the entire country.

In this manner, many historical works that dealt with the Koryo period were compiled in the seventeenth century. The question of King U and King Ch’ang’s pedigree was a central problem for narratives of Koryo history. Most historical

48. Yŏsa chegang 21 [King Kongmin, year 20].
49. The Yŏsa chegang states clearly in its explanatory notes that it followed O Un’s example in dealing with the chronology of the U and Ch’ang reigns. From this it can be seen that he was skeptical of seeing U and Ch’ang as of the Sin line, yet remained unconvinced of its error. Or, it was because he wished to avoid the potential danger of recognizing U and Ch’ang as kings.
50. Yu Yŏngok saw the Yŏsa chegang as having contributed to disrupting the Koryo narrative, which had seen King U and King Ch’ang as Sin scions, by emphasizing loyalty, much as the Tongsa ch’anyo had done. However, it is difficult to accept this interpretation, since both the Tongsa ch’anyo and the Yŏsa chegang treated U and Ch’ang as “Sin U” and “Sin Ch’ang.” Yu Yŏngok, “P’yega ipchin.”
51. Song’s preface to the Yŏsa chegang did not make special mention of King U and King Ch’ang. If Song Siyŏl had disagreed with Yu Kye’s opinion, he would have clearly mentioned it. See Song Siyŏl, “Yŏsa chegang sŏ” 麗史提綱序 in Songja taejŏn 宋子大全 137.
52. “Yŏ Kim Kuji” 呉金久之 in Songja taejŏn 55.
53. This affair is mentioned in the Sukchong sillok 肅宗實錄 11 [1685/02/ulmi]; [1681/03/kapcha].
works maintained the earlier opinion over their pedigree and organized the history of their reigns under sections titled the “Annals of Sin U” and the “Annals of Sin Ch’ang.” Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s affirmation of U and Ch’ang as Wang scions was not reflected in these works. However, when compared to the Koryŏsa, some differences did appear. O Un’s Tongsa ch’anyo actively introduced Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk’s loyalist activities. Yu Kye’s Yŏsa chegang included evidence that supported the notion that King U was in fact King Kongmin’s son, leaving the question of authenticity to posterity. One might say that when it came to their understanding of King U and King Ch’ang, the various historical works from the seventeenth century were in the end still operating within the narrative framework of early Chosŏn.

2. Transformations in Narratives of Koryŏ History in the Eighteenth Century: King U and Ch’ang as Wang Scions, an Expanding Discourse

Even in the eighteenth century, it was not easy to change the view of King U and King Ch’ang as propounded by the Koryŏsa. We can see from the statements of Han Wŏnjin 韓元震 (1682–1751), a master of Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian learning, that the perspective of the Un’gok sisa did little to alter this intellectual position. Han Wŏnjin was convinced that King U and King Ch’ang were Sin descendants, and could not possibly have been the descendants of King Kongmin.54 In his judgment, the records in the Un’gok sisa were derived merely from stories that spread amongst the people at the time, and did not derive from an understanding of the complex affairs inside the palace.55

At this time, a group of scholars emerged to compile historical works that affirmed the notion that King U and King Ch’ang were in fact Wang scions. The Tongsa hoegang 東史會綱 of Im Sangdŏk 林象德 (1683–1719) and the Tongsa Kangmok of An Chŏngbok 安鼎福 (1712–1791) were historical texts that reflected these changes.

At this time, the most important figure to affirm the authenticity of the pedigrees of King U and King Ch’ang was Ch’oe Sŏkchŏng’s son, Ch’oe Ch’angdae 崔昌大 (1669–1720). Calling the matter of U and Ch’ang’s family identity to be a “historical question that had not been resolved for a long time,” he placed tremendous significance on it. Ch’oe Ch’angdae, having consulted

54. “Chapchik, oe pyŏn (ha)” 杂識, 外篇 in Namtang chip 南塘集 38: “In this world, there is no one who [can] clearly say whether U and Ch’ang were Wang or Sin. However, I believe that they were Sin and not Wang.”
55. “Chapchik, oe pyŏn (ha)” in Namtang chip 38.
various sources, was convinced that the two rulers were in fact King Kongmin’s sons.\textsuperscript{56} On this matter, he departed from the opinions of his father and grandfather.

Ch’oe Ch’angdae’s understanding came out of a new reading of the records in the \textit{Koryŏsa}. Although the \textit{Koryŏsa} reveals that U was the offspring of Sin Ton and his mother was Panya, the records it contains could also be interpreted to support the idea that U was Kongmin’s son. Ch’oe Ch’angdae actively affirmed that these records could be interpreted in this manner. Here is one example in which he makes his case:

Panya was originally the female slave of Sin Ton. King Kongmin often visited Sin Ton’s house and a child was born out of their affection. How could it be said that this was impossible? In the \textit{Koryŏsa} it is said that U was Sin Ton’s offspring, but the \textit{Koryŏsa} also contains the following story. When Sin Ton was exiled, the king said to his attendants, “I went to the house of Sin Ton and I acquired a child through a liaison with a female slave, please protect him well.” After Sin Ton died, the King had the child Monino [the childhood name of King U] reside in the palace. Afterward, he said to the Chancellor Yi Inim, “I have an heir; I have no worries.” And then, [he said], “I heard that in Sin Ton’s residence there is a beautiful woman, [with whom] I could certainly conceive a child. I went there and begot a child.” The official historian recorded this [affair] honestly based on the king’s words, how can we take them for lies and not believe them?\textsuperscript{57}

Ch’oe Ch’angdae concluded that this information in the \textit{Koryŏsa} was the official historian’s faithful record of the King’s words, and as such, should be trusted. Ch’oe, more than anyone else, relied on the words of King Kongmin. In addition to these records, Ch’oe Ch’angdae made use of the poems and short historical accounts in the \textit{Un’gok sisa} of Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk as evidence to support his new interpretation. In particular, the two sets of poems that discuss the paternity of U and Ch’ang translated above, and the short account entitled “Taking our king’s son to be the son of Sin Ton,” Ch’oe Ch’angdae considered to be first-hand documentation from someone who had witnessed these affairs. As such, he did not see them as inadequate evidence, but rather definitive and trustworthy accounts that demonstrated U and Ch’ang’s Wang pedigree.\textsuperscript{58} In sum, it is possible that Ch’oe’s new interpretation, which actively accepted the notion that U and Ch’ang were Wang scions, was a judgment that was devoid of any political intention that had intervened in historical interpretation, but an

\textsuperscript{56} “Sŏ yŏsa U Ch’ang sa, tap Im Iho” 書麗史禑昌事答林彛好 in \textit{Konnon chip} 昆侖集 14.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
objective observation of reality.

Im Sangdŏk’s *Tongsa hoegang* directly reflected Ch’oe Ch’angdae’s understanding of King U and King Ch’ang. Although he was of a young age, Im Sangdŏk had compiled a provocative, new historical work. In the process, he readily received input from his friend Ch’oe Ch’angdae, including Ch’oe’s definitive positions on King U and King Ch’ang’s Wang pedigree. In the end, the *Tongsa hoegang*’s treatment of King U and King Ch’ang followed Ch’oe’s interpretations and was in complete accordance with them.59

The *Tongsa hoegang* examined each of the preexisting historical works and made its own assessments of their strengths and weaknesses, bringing its own, distinct interpretation to national history.60 The text began with the first year of the Silla founder’s reign and continued until the time of King Kongmin. It did not deal with the reigns of the last three Koryŏ kings—U, Ch’ang, and Kongyang. However, Im Sangdŏk presented his own distinct interpretation of King U and King Ch’ang at the end of his narrative. He concluded his history with the reign of King Kongmin, stating, “after King Kongmin was assassinated, the Prince of Kangnŭng, U, acceded to the throne.”61 Afterward, however, he attached an annotation in small characters, “…1375 was the first year of the deposed king U’s reign. In the 11th month of 1388, King U was deposed and his son Ch’ang succeeded him to the throne. 1389 was the first year of the reign of the deposed King Ch’ang. In the 10th month of Ch’ang’s reign he was deposed and the Prince of Chŏngch’ang, Yo, became ruler; he was King Kongyang,” briefly describing the affairs that followed King Kongmin’s death. That he used the term “deposed king” to describe U and Ch’ang is worthy of our notice. This term only reflected the actual circumstances of their deposition and did not apply a judgment over either their bloodline or consider them to be rebels. Thus, it was quite distant from their treatment in the *Koryŏsa*, where their bloodline was connected to Sin Ton and they were identified as traitors.

The exclusion of history predating the Three Kingdoms period and a narrative that continued only until King Kongmin’s reign was a main characteristic of the *Tongsa hoegang*. Im Sangdŏk did not mention the history of either Tan’gun Chosŏn or Kija Chosŏn because there were not enough

59. These two individuals exchanged many letters during the time the *Tongsa hoegang* was being compiled. Documents relevant to this are as follows: “Tap Im Iho Sangdŏk,” 答林彝好象德 in *Konmon chip* 11; “Sŏ yŏsa U Ch’ang sa, tap Im Inho,” in *Konmon chip* kwŏn 14; “Tap Ch’oe Puhak” 答崔副學 in *Noch’ŏn chip* 老村集 7.
60. “Sŏ Tongsa hoegang hu,” 書東史會綱後 in *Noch’ŏn chip* 4.
reliable historical sources that dealt with those periods.  

That he only narrated the history of Koryo until the reign of King Kongmin and omitted later history was because of the inadequacy of reliable historical sources. Im Sangdok hoped that later scholars would search thoroughly for secretly preserved sources in order to restore a reliable history of this period. Im Sangdok, believing that the history of King U and Ch’ang reigns was not trustworthy, left the treatment of this period to posterity.

Im had compiled his history carefully. His attitude toward history writing was to remain faithful to his duty of recording history with basis in reality. He concluded that because the records in preexisting historical texts could not be trusted, secretly preserved sources must be collected to write a trustworthy history. Only by doing so could one avoid corrupting the principle of fairness in historical writing. Im Sangdok believed that the Koryo’s treatment of U and Ch’ang as Sin U and Sin Ch’ang was a politically motivated distortion.

Im Sangdok’s Tongsa hoegang is extremely significant. More so than anything, it is noticeable for being the first work that opened the door to a new understanding of Koryo history, one that based its treatment of the history of King U and King Ch’ang’s reigns with the understanding that they were Wang descendants, and not the offspring of Sin Ton, as was the case with earlier historical writing. This was a feature that was absent in even the new historical works produced in the seventeenth century, but it emerged with the Tongsa hoegang.

An Chongbok’s Tongsa kangmok offered the conclusions of the Tongsa hoegang its greatest approval in its interpretation of Koryo history. According to An Chongbok, the Tongsa hoegang was the most remarkable historical work of its time. An Chongbok paid particular attention to the Tongsa hoegang because it had concluded its history of Koryo with the reign of King Kongmin. An Chongbok believed Im’s decision to stop at King Kongmin was due to the difficulty of speaking of a matter taboo to the state. Accounting for these

62. “Tongsa hoegang sô” 東史會綱序 in Noch’on chip 3: “There is no evidence [for the history of] Tan’gun and Kija’s time. As such, they will not be treated here.”

63. “Sô Tongsa hoegang hu,” Noch’on chip 4: “This book shall only deal with [the history] of Koryo up until King Kongmin’s time. As for [the history] after King Kongmin’s time, [we will] await those who have the ability to gather together the documents hidden all around the country and compile a trustworthy history.”

64. “Sang Sŏngho sŏnsaeng sô” in the Tongsa mundap section of the letters (書-東史問答) in Sunan chip 10: “In recent years, Im Sangtok diligently compiled the Tongsa hoegang. In this book, only [the period] up to King Kongmin’s reign are dealt with, because it is difficult to talk of the history afterward. Writing that the Prince of Kangnונג U acceded the throne, he showed that King U was not Sin Ton’s descendant.”
difficulties in writing plainly, An approved of Im’s attitude. In his view, the 
affairs of King U and King Ch’ang would have to await the “just brush”

(公筆 kongp’il) of posterity.65 He also concluded that the accounts such as these 
in the Tongsa hoegang contained significant implications. He saw the statement,

“the Prince of Kangnŭng, U, acceded to the throne” to be a clear indication that 
U was not the son of Sin Ton.66 He also saw the indication of the years of King 
U and King Ch’ang’s accession and deposition in the commentary to mean that 
it was correct to treat U and Ch’ang as “deposed kings” in narratives of Koryŏ 
history, and that treating them as “Sin U” and “Sin Ch’ang” was not.

The Tongsa kangmok was compiled with this sort of understanding. If it 
had actively made use of these contents and narrated the history of King U and 
King Ch’ang, there would have been potential for many practical problems. An 
Chŏngbok compiled his Tongsa kangmok with this knowledge. In his 
discussion of “the affairs of U and Ch’ang” with his teacher Yi Ik, An expressed 
the following concerns:

No matter how people of latter days raise the question of U and Ch’ang, this 
historical problem is connected with our Chosŏn [dynasty]; as such, it would be 
best to not establish dissenting opinions and follow the narrative in the Koryŏsa.67

From Kija Chosŏn until King Kongyang of Koryŏ, the Tongsa kangmok 
organized history in twenty kwŏn.68 The history of Koryŏ began in kwŏn 5 and 
continued for thirteen kwŏn until kwŏn 17, occupying a considerable portion of 
the total work. Borrowing Im Sangdŏk’s treatment of King U and King Ch’ang’s 
reigns, he organized them under the labels of “Annals of Former Deposed King 
U” and “Annals of Latter Deposed King Ch’ang.” Although he could not treat 
them like other rulers by including their temple names, their reigns were not 
treated just as those of deposed kings, but rather as distinct and integral parts of 
the history of the Koryŏ dynasty.69 The principle for treating U and Ch’ang in

67. In the “Tap An Paeksun munmok,” of the Sŏngbo chip 星湖集 25, Yi Ik does not deny that 
King U was of Sin Ton’s bloodline. Instead, he emphasized the fact that because he had acceded to 
the throne, his biography should not have been included among the biographies of the traitors. See 
the section on Sin U in the “Kyŏngsa mun” 經史門 of the Sŏngbo sasŏl 星湖僿說 25.
68. See Kang Segu, Sunam An Chŏngbok iŭi Tongsa kangmok yŏn’gu; Yi Usŏng et al., Sunam An 
Chŏngbok iŭ yŏksahak.
69. An Chŏngbok said that because the Koryŏsa was created by the state, to write a history of the 
U and Ch’ang reigns that went completely against the Koryŏsa would require permission from the 
state. In this manner, he recognized the practical limitations to his own historical work. This is his
the *Tongsa kangmok* was clear. They were not seen as Sin descendants but were merely Wang kings who had been deposed. In the *Tongsa kangmok*, this reality was explained clearly, appearing in the explanatory notes (*pömnye*).70

The *Tongsa kangmok* was able to reconstitute a version of Koryŏ history that differed in contents from the view established by the *Koryŏsa*. One reason this became possible was the favorable reception of the *Un'gok sisa*’s position on King Ch’ang and U since the text’s discovery at the beginning of the seventeenth century. This shift for An Chŏngbok came as a result of his own distinct historical perspective for understanding the historical past, which viewed the positions of the state and the king in absolute terms. An Chŏngbok rejected an approach towards royal legitimacy rooted in the notion of blood succession. The reason the *Koryŏsa* treated U and Ch’ang as rebels was because they exercised the political prerogatives of king while being the blood descendants of Sin Ton. By treating them as of the Sin lineage and not members of the Wang royal house, the compilers of the *Koryŏsa* understood the life of the Koryŏ dynasty to have ended. In contrast, An not only saw them as Wang scions, but also treated them as kings simply because they acceded to the throne, obviating any reason for determining whether or not they were Wang or Sin. King U and King Ch’ang acceded to the throne according to normal protocol and ruled Koryŏ for a certain period of time, and so their ancestry became a matter of lesser import:

To obstruct the upright stances of the chief minister Yi Saek and the recluse Wŏn Ch’ŏnsŏk regarding King U and King Ch’ang from that time is difficult and our Chosŏn scholars such as Yu Hŭich’un, Yun Kŭnsu, Sin Hŭm, and Yi Tŏkhŭng all thought the *Koryŏsa* to have lied. Furthermore, King T’aeko of Chosŏn received the throne after the last ruler of the Wang family abdicated. They did not distinguish between them as Wang or Sin at the very beginning. However, Chŏng Tojŏn, Cho Chun, Yun Sojung, and their group promoted the notion that they were not Wang rulers as a way to control the old [Koryŏ] officials. In this manner, everyone in the country came to be in agreement with them. On the basis of whether they accepted this notion or rejected it, one can distinguish between the loyal and treacherous officials [...] However, even if the surname of the kings were different, one cannot write a historical narrative in the manner of the *Koryŏsa*.71

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70. See the explanatory notes (*pömnye 凡例*) in the preliminary chapter (*sukwŏn 首卷*) of the *Tongsa kangmok*.

One can say that considering the ruler’s position in the national system to be absolute was a characteristic feature of An’s thinking. In this manner, his thinking greatly emphasized the regulation of ruler-subject relations. This was an essential element that ran through his Tongsa kangmok. For example, because the Koryo founder, King T’aejo Wang Kŏn, had established the dynasty while the Silla dynasty still existed, An judged him to be a “thief who stole the country.” His position could not approve of an action that denied the authority of the preexisting Silla ruler. Observed from this perspective, An recognized King U and King Ch’ang as rulers who were legitimate successors of King Kongmin and of the Koryo dynasty.

Conclusion

The seventeenth century discovery of the Un’gok sisa launched a reconsideration of Koryo’s history. In this text, there were several poems and a short prose section that revealed King U and King Ch’ang to be the descendants of King Kongmin and not the offspring of Sin Ton. This text, the voice of someone who had lived during the Koryo-Chosón transition was a direct challenge to the state-sponsored Koryoja, which did not recognize King U and King Ch’ang as Koryo kings. These writings also threatened to damage the legitimacy of the Chosón dynasty by challenging the political pretexts that informed its establishment.

The people who first reaffirmed the contents of the Un’gok sisa were Pak Tongnyang and his associates who initially introduced the collection. They thought that with able and loyal officials such as Ch’oe Yong and Yi Saek in power at the time, it would have been impossible for a Sin to have acceded the throne. In their view, it was clear that the reason for Koryo’s demise was that the dynasty exhausted its Mandate of Heaven and lost the support of the people, but the question of the king’s bloodline had not been the definitive cause for Koryo’s destruction. They thought that the account in the Koryoja, which saw King U and King Ch’ang to be of Sin Ton’s bloodline, was manufactured by those who sought to bring an end to Koryo.

On the other hand, there were many people who dismissed the claim by the Un’gok sisa that U and Ch’ang were Wang scions as mere rumor, and believed, without suspicion, the accounts of the Koryoja. Among them were those who hesitated because accepting U and Ch’ang as Wang scions could potentially challenge the stature of Chŏng Mongju and other Neo-Confucian masters. If U and Ch’ang were in fact legitimate rulers, then for Chŏng Mongju and others to
have done nothing when they were killed would mean that they were unable to fulfill the loyalty required of them as dutiful subjects.

Meanwhile, most of the historical works compiled during this time followed the narratives of the Koryŏsa. The T'ongsa ch'anyo, and other works such as the Yŏsa chegang and the Hwich'an yŏsa that consulted it, followed the model of the Koryŏsa and used the names “Sin U” and “Sin Ch'ang” when discussing the history of King U and King Ch'ang’s reigns. They were yet unable to accept the antagonistic position presented by the Un'gok sisa.

A new shift occurred in the eighteenth century. The person who opened this floodgate was Ch’oe Ch’angdae, who firmly believed through his reading of the Un’gok sisa that U and Ch’ang were King Kongmin’s descendants. This conviction was also reflected in the Tongsa hoegang of his friend, Im Sangdŏk. Im’s history of Koryŏ ended with King Kongmin, leaving the treatment of the subsequent history to later generations. He did not deal with U and Ch’ang directly but called them the “former deposed king” and the “latter deposed king,” respectively. Refusing to understand them as “Sin U” and “Sin Ch’ang,” their attitude was to maintain their own historical evaluation regarding their legacies.

Since the Un’gok sisa, it was An Chŏngbok’s Tongsa kangmok that completely accorded with its notion that U and Ch’ang were in fact Wang. In his explanatory notes, he showed that King U and King Ch’ang were not Sin and instead recorded their affairs under the names of “former deposed King U” and “latter deposed King Ch’ang.” In the Tongsa kangmok they were squarely treated as rulers who had succeeded to the legitimate line of Koryŏ rulers. The Tongsa kangmok’s reconstitution of the history of Koryŏ with contents and material that were completely different from the historical perception of Koryŏ that had been established by the Koryŏsa was decisive.

The historical restoration of King U and King Ch’ang as legitimate kings of Koryŏ by late Chosŏn historians was a process intimately tied to the emergence of new historical understandings of Koryŏ history. At the time, this was an effort that involved creating a way of thinking that could break free from historical interpretations established by the state during the founding years of the Chosŏn dynasty. These historians believed in securing objectivity in historical interpretation that was firmly based in reality and not subject to historiographical distortion motivated by political ends. Their historiography also recognized the history of the Koryŏ dynasty to be a normal history of a state that proceeded without break from King T’aejo to the last ruler, King Kongyang. This dovetailed with an affirmative attitude toward kings who ruled the country. They thought that even if these kings were inadequate rulers who
had many problems, once a ruler-subject relationship was established, it was difficult to retract that relationship.

Their efforts, in creating a new historical perspective that broke away from the dominant, state-sponsored historical treatment of the Koryŏ, were momentous in transforming a many centuries old understanding of the past and creating a new set of values. In Chosŏn, the two ways of interpreting the history of Koryŏ, opposing positions taken up by the Koryŏsa and the Tongsa kangmok respectively, continued to contend with one another until the end of the Chosŏn dynasty. Entering the twentieth century, studies of Koryŏ history have tended to follow the interpretation of the Tongsa kangmok in their treatment of King U and King Ch’ang.

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