

Special Feature

# Trends and Prospects: Historical Studies on Koryŏ-Mongol Relationship in the 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries

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## Introduction

This paper aims to provide an overview of major achievements in historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol relationship made by Korean researchers so far, and explore proper approach for the researchers to take going forward. Koryŏ-Mongol relationship lasted for two centuries from 1219 (9<sup>th</sup> year of King Gojong's reign) when the two countries made a Brotherhood Pact 兄弟盟約 to 1388 (14<sup>th</sup> year of King U's reign) when the Mongol (Yüan) Empire collapsed. Up to now, focus of the historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol relationship has been heavily on the major historical events that happened during that time including the war between Koryŏ and Mongol, the conclusion of the peace treaty, the royal marriage between the two states, political intervention of Mongol (Yüan) in Koryŏ's domestic affairs, and the Anti-Yüan movement 反元運動 and so forth. However, this paper will concentrate more on examining the overall research trend those studies have shown than on each historical event mentioned above.

The trend of historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in Korea can be divided into following three periodical categories. The first period is during 1960s-80s when the emphasis on nationalistic historical consciousness was rampant in the overall Korean history academic world, and most of the researchers were absorbed in correcting the problems of previous studies recorded in distorted way by the colonial historians. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> period from the late 1980s to 90s, while criticism on the biased attitude of the nationalistic researchers in the previous period was aroused, the researchers started to make an effort to understand the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in structural perspective. Since 2000, the researchers have been trying to explain the relationship as objective as possible by actively adopting outputs of researches on Mongol history made both in Korea and in overseas. In sum, the historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in 1960s started their journey under the strong influence of nationalistic notion rampant in the academic world at that time, and have proceeded into the direction to overcome the nationalism and see the matter in structural or objective perspectives. Since the effort to understand the relationship in structural terms was made to eliminate the subjective elements embedded in the nationalistic approach, the trends of historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in the first and second period can be defined as “the rise of the nationalistic notion and the effort to

correct the problems the notion has.” In the same fashion, the latest studies categorized in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period can be briefly described as an effort to understand the relationship between the two countries in the most objective sense by apprehending the international status of Koryŏ in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries when Mongol took the control over the world, that is the effort to understand the relationship in world historical point of view.

In sum, the purpose of this paper is to categorize the various analytic frameworks of studies on Koryŏ-Mongol relationship since 1960s into two perspectives that try to understand the relationship: (1) the structural perspective and (2) world historical one.

## Understanding Koryŏ-Mongol Relationship in Structural Perspective: Overcoming the Nationalistic Approach

The researcher who studied Koryŏ-Mongol relationship for the first time after Korea's liberation was Byong-ik Koh 高柄翊. Koh (1961, 1962) tried to reveal the nature of relationship between the two parties by analyzing the nature of Chŏngdong Haengsŏng 征東行省 Provincial Government, a local administrative body of Yüan. He was mainly interested in figuring out how this body had influenced the sovereignty of Koryŏ while residing inside the State. He concluded that Chŏngdong Haengsŏng was different by its nature from other Yüan's local administrative bodies, given that it was established to define the status of Koryŏ in Mongol (Yüan) Empire and functioned as a communication center between the two, not to strengthen Yüan's dominancy over Koryŏ or supervise the state's domestic affairs. According to Koh, despite the existence of Chŏngdong Haengsŏng in Koryŏ, the body's distinctive nature differentiated from other local administrative bodies proves that Koryŏ had never lost its sovereignty as an independent state, although it is evident that Koryŏ was then under strong influence of Mongol and it was the time when the Korean peninsula was under the strongest influence of Chinese dynasty ever.

Koh continued his effort to prove that Koryŏ had different status from that of other subjugated states of Mongol. First of all, he emphasized the fact that “Brotherhood Pact between Koryŏ and Mongol” made in 1219 (6<sup>th</sup> year of King Gojong's reign) was a unique occasion which has not happened in

other subjugated states (Koh 1969). He insisted that even though it is clear that the status of two parties in the relationship was not equal given that the Pact was made to specify Koryŏ's duty to pay a tribute 歲貢 to Mongol on an annual basis, the inequality was relatively less compared to that from which the other subjugated states suffered.

Koh (1973) tried to illuminate the distinctiveness of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship once again in different research. Under the premise that Mongol's way of governing its subjugated states scattered in wide area was practically the same, he explained Mongol's way of governing specifically as following: "the first way the Mongol ruled its colonies was an indirect one that Khan of Mongol gave the subjugated states and their subjects to the members of imperial family and had them govern the states. The second way was to incorporate the conquered states into the Empire and govern their administrative affairs directly. The third way was to allow the subjugated states to remain as independent ones so they can operate the governing systems of their own, but to still leave them under the strong control of Darughachi accredited by Khan, at the same time. Koryŏ and Vietnam were governed by this third way." According to Koh, the subjugated states ruled by this third way were under relatively weaker control of Mongol compared to the others governed in different ways, because it guaranteed the sovereignty of the subjugated states so they can remain same, and allowed their kings to manage domestic affairs independently.

It is obvious that the argument of Koh was made under the influence of trends of historical studies on Mongol (Yüan) and Koryŏ at that time. Although by "the indirect ruling" he wanted to refer to the Mongol's way of governing Khanates 汗國 which were located in Middle Asia, East Europe, and Middle East, it is doubtful whether or not it can still be regarded as a way of indirect ruling in current point of view. What is more problematic is his insistence that Darughachi was accredited to Koryŏ and Vietnam, which turned out to be untrue because Darughachi was abolished in 1278 (4<sup>th</sup> year of King Chungnyeol's reign) and have never revived since then, and Vietnam has never been conquered by Mongol (Yüan) due to its successful defense. Despite that it is clear that Koh made mistakes in explaining some of specific facts, his analysis on the distinctive nature of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship—Koryŏ's special status in the world order centered around Mongol still sounds valid.

Under the premise that Koryŏ had maintained its sovereignty as an

independent state, Koh regarded Koryŏ-Mongol relationship as a part of the Korea-China relationship. There are two perspectives that underlie his research, one of which is to see Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship as the one built between the two different states in the context of international relationship, and the other perspective is to consider the relationship between Koryŏ and Mongol to be the one between Korea and China built by the latter's subjugation of the former. Koh insisted that the distinctive nature of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship was nothing but an aspect reflecting political milieu of the era, and rather a prototype of "serving the great" relationship built between Joseon-Ming, given that it rationalized Korea's submission to China. In sum, Koh highlighted Koryŏ's distinctive status in the world order centered around Mongol, but also admitted that Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship was just a varied form of "serving the great" relationship when it is examined in the context of Korea-China relationship diachronically.

Koh's analysis that revealed Koryŏ remained as an independent country albeit Yüan's political intervention can be considered as an important achievement which has influenced the following historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship for a long time. However, the most important value of his research has not been highlighted yet properly; his research provided the prototype of analytic framework to see Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship in the perspective of world history. The main reason Koh's research was not evaluated properly was that the studies adopting the world historical perspective were not welcomed compared to those adopting national historical perspective in 1960-70s, as theory of intrinsic development became prevalent in Korean history academic world in those days. In practice, while the historical studies on the Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship in 1960-70s became relatively slow, the focus of historical studies on the latter part of Koryŏ Dynasty was centered around the issues such as the appearance of Sinheung Sadaebu, the ruling Neo-Confucian elites and Anti-Yüan reforms.

It is unarguable that Woosung Lee's researches on Sadaebu 士大夫 is one of the most important achievements made by historical studies on Koryŏ in 1960s. His hypothesis that hereditary local elites 鄉吏 of Koryŏ who entered into politics through Kwagŏ (the Civil Service Examination 科擧) (Lee 1964), expanded their political and social influences since the end of the military regime, and eventually succeeded in establishing Joseon Dynasty, was highly influential in following studies on the latter part of Koryŏ Dynasty.

Also, as the studies on the latter part of Koryŏ focused more on the state's intrinsic development than on the Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship, the growth process of Sadaebu and reformative politics became most popular themes in history academic world. A quote adopted from an introduction part of a paper considered as one of the most representative researches on the reformative politics in the latter part of Koryŏ directly shows the academic atmosphere at that time: "Koryŏ faced the time of massive social transition after the collapse of the Military Regime. Nevertheless, the previous researchers focused mainly on Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship and ignored the importance of domestic social changes made in the latter part of Koryŏ" (Lee 1971, 55).

In spite of the poor condition in which the historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship was in 1960-70s, it was this period that the researchers succeeded in differentiating the 100 years of time during the late 13<sup>th</sup> century—the early 14<sup>th</sup> century both from the previous era of the Military Regime and from the following years of late Koryŏ Dynasty. Hyun-ku Min (1972, 1974) insisted that it was this 100 years of time when Koryŏ achieved its distinctive national status on the basis of Son-in-law State System 駙馬國 in political and diplomatic terms, and System of Land Distribution as a Salary Provision 祿科田 in social and economic terms. While Min's argument was accepted widely in academia, this "distinctive" period was named without any academic discussion as "Yüan Intervention period" 元干涉期. Presumably, the term "intervention" might have been chosen in the effort not to define Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship as the relationship between the subjugated state and the ruling empire, given the assumption that Koryŏ maintained its national status as an independent state. In my opinion, however, this term should be re-determined after enough academic debates to reach an academic consensus are made.

Getting back to Min's argument, Min strongly emphasized that kings of Koryŏ maintained their status as sons-in-law of Yüan's imperial family, to such an extent as to define Koryŏ's international politic system related to Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship as "Son-in-law State system." However, he did not go as far as to analyze the nature of Koryŏ and Mongol (Yüan) relationship based on the concept of the Son-in-law State system. He regarded the Son-in-law State system as just one of the factors that differentiated this unique period from others which shows the characteristics of the period evidently. In

this sense, Min's way of analyzing the Son-in-law State system is differentiated from that of recent studies which tries to reveal the very nature of Koryŏ and Mongol (Yüan) relationship with the status of Koryŏ king as the Yüan court's Son-in-law 駙馬高麗國王.

The dominant mood of studying Koryŏ and Mongol (Yüan) relationship based on the notion of nationalism in 1960-70s lasted by the end of 1990s. Min (1989, 1992, 1994) was especially absorbed in clarifying the background, progress, and the results of Anti-Yüan politics made by King Gongmin of Koryŏ in specific. A number of his researches including the one on the royal marriage between Koryŏ and Mongol (Yüan) (H. Kim 1989), the scheme to dismiss the existing Chŏngdong Haengsŏng and establish another Haengsŏng provincial government inside Koryŏ 立省策動 (Kim 1994), and the territorial dispute between the two states were evaluated as important achievements in Korean history academic world of his time (G. Kim 1989; Bang 1990). Besides, Dong-ik Jang (1994, 1997) collected and organized the articles related to Koryŏ contained in the collection of works written in Yüan and Ming dynasty, and made the most of them in researching private interchange between Koryŏ and Yüan as well as the official relationship between the two to suggest the possibility of private interchange history's existence out of the history of official relationship.

On the one hand, Ik-joo Lee (1996) tries to understand Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in structural perspective. His research was made on the assumption that Koryŏ-Mongol relationship was founded on a unique frame differentiated from the ground on which the Korea-China relationship was established in previous or later period of Koryŏ Dynasty, and Lee tried to find the very distinctive frame and how it was structured. In other words, he assumed that Koryŏ-Mongol relationship was built on the basis of certain principles completed under the agreement of both parties, and paid his attention to Qubilai's Edicts 世皇詔旨, Qubilai's Declarations 世祖皇帝聖旨, Qubilai's Promise not to alter Koryŏ's previous conventions 世祖皇帝不改土風之詔, Institutions established by Qubilai 世祖皇帝舊制, etc. which are discovered partially in *Koryŏsa (History of Koryŏ 高麗史)*. According to Lee, the existence of "Qubilai's Old Promise (that should be honored in all situations)" 世祖舊制 that Koryŏ suggested as a cause to maintain the status quo whenever the discussion or events that threatened its national independence such as the Imperial government's decision to increase

the number of staff inside Chŏngdong Haengsŏng (“Jeungchi Haengsŏng” 增置行省) or the aforementioned scheme to replace Chŏngdong Haengsŏng with another provincial government 立省 were made proves that certain principles established through the agreement of both states worked effectively at that time. Based on this assumption, Lee looked into the formation process and the contents of Qubilai’s Old Promise (that should be honored at all cost) as a framework to analyze Koryŏ and Mongol (Yüan) relationship.

First of all, Lee traced the negotiation process made between Koryŏ and Mongol (Yüan) since the peace treaty between the two states was concluded in 1259 (46<sup>th</sup> year of King Gojong’s reign). He paid his attention to the facts that Mongol promised Koryŏ that “the former will not force the latter to change its native customs” 不改土風 in 1260 (1<sup>st</sup> year of King Wonjong’s reign), and also noticed that Wonjong was appointed as a king from Mongol, and used an era reign name of Mongol, and was bestowed a calendar 曆 by Mongol.<sup>1</sup> Lee insisted that these were Chinese traditional measures followed by the process of appointment as king 冊封, which proves the relationship between the two was based on appointment-tribute relationship 冊封-朝貢關係 from the beginning. It is evident that Koryŏ which already had an experience of being engaged with Later Táng Dynasty 後唐, Later Jìn Dynasty 後晉, Later Zhōu Dynasty 後周, Sòng Dynasty, Khitan, and Jīn Dynasty through appointment-tribute relationships in its early days took the appointment-tribute relationship for granted or hopeful. What’s interesting is why Mongol accepted to have this kind of relationship with Koryŏ. Lee answered this question by citing certain policy changes made by the Mongol faction—which was supporting the “embracement of Chinese qualities”—after Qubilai’s enthronement. Furthermore, Lee reconfirmed that Mongol’s international politics were indeed changed at the time given that Mongol demanded Japan and Vietnam as well as Koryŏ accept appointment-tribute relationship. However, due to Japan and Vietnam’s refusal to accept the offer, Koryŏ was left as the sole state that agreed with building the appointment-tribute relationship with Mongol, which

explains why Koryŏ could hold its “distinctive status” which Byong-ik Koh was convinced that Koryŏ had held.

Lee also noticed that the Mongol’s accepting of the appointment-tribute relationship, the traditional Chinese way of building relationships with surrounding states, as an international policy does not necessarily mean that Mongol abandoned its nomadic tradition, which explains why conflicts broke out over the “Six Demands” 六事. “Six Demands” refers to the following six requests that Mongol asked Koryŏ to meet: (1) submission of high-ranking hostages 納質, (2) installation of postal stations 設驛, (3) dispatching of troops 助軍, (4) provision of grains 輸糧, (5) submission of census registers 供戶數籍, (6) acception of Darugachi monitors 置達魯花赤. Although some of the Six Demands were met by Koryŏ temporarily when Mongol’s influence was amplified due to ongoing political conflicts between King Wonjong and the Military Regime, they were eventually dropped and were no longer able to serve as means of maintaining Mongol control over Koryŏ, when major demands such as “submission of census registers” and “acception of Darugachi monitors” were withdrawn as a result of King Ch’ung’ryŏl’s visit (Chinjo 親朝) to the empire and negotiations with the imperial authorities, in which he had them drop the matter for good, in 1278 (4<sup>th</sup> year of King Ch’ung’ryŏl’s reign). Besides, as Yüan’s military forces previously stationed in Koryŏ were also withdrawn, there were no Yüan armies and officials left in Koryŏ. However, Yüan continued its political intervention by sending envoys frequently or taking substantial control over the appointment of Koryŏ kings.

In sum, Koryŏ kept its national status as an independent state by maintaining the appointment-tribute relationship with Yüan since 1278, while being under strong influence of Yüan’s political intervention at the same time. Lee also agreed with Koh’s opinion that Chŏngdong Haengsŏng provincial government established later in Koryŏ was just a formal organization in nature, and that the Mongol Empire established that kind of formal body because it needed to define Koryŏ’s distinctive status as its sole tributary state, while having it maintain its own normal form of a governing system. The main idea of Lee’s research is that the principles that framed the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship were completed by a series of policies newly introduced by Qubilai, which included the establishment of an appointment-tribute relationship between the two states, that was formed after the peace treaty and later led to the establishment of Chŏngdong Haengsŏng, and that it is why

1. For this, please see *Historical Records of Yüan and Koryŏ* 元高麗紀事 (Qubilai 世祖 Chung’ong 中統 1, June); *Wŏnsa (Official History of the Yuan Dynasty)* 元史 4 (Pon’gi 本紀 4, Qubilai 世祖 Chung’ong 中統 1, June); *Wŏnsa* 208 (Biography 95, Koryŏ 高麗 Qubilai 世祖 Chung’ong 中統 3, January); *Koryŏsa (History of Koryŏ)* 高麗史 25 (Sega 世家 25, Wonjong 元宗 1, April, Gyeongsin; August, Imja).



these policies were named “Qubilai’s Old Promise (that should be honored at all cost)” 世祖舊制 in the first place.

Lee also tried to redefine the nature of Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship which has been described as an “intervention” by Korean history academic world, on the basis of Byong-ik Koh’s opinion that Koryŏ kept its national status as an independent state and the relationship between the two states was distinctive in the world in which Mongol hold hegemony. Lee believed this approach might enable the researchers to overcome the risk of subjective interpretation the nationalistic approach to this matter might cause. By trying to understand the Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship from a structural perspective, Lee tried to minimize the risk of generating subjective interpretation. However, his research failed to go beyond the level of studies on Mongol history at that time. The limited nature of this research is the part where he explains that the change in Mongol policies made after Qubilai’s coming to the throne were made by the “faction supporting the embracement of Chinese qualities” 漢地派. It calls for a reexamination because following studies have been very skeptical of the existence of a “faction supporting the embracement of Chinese qualities” or a “faction supporting the preservation of Mongol qualities” 本地派 (Masaaki 1996). Another shortcoming of his research is that it treated Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship as a part of the history of Korea-China relationship, which should also be reconsidered in accordance with the progress of studies on Mongol history going forward.

### **Expanding the Vision of Studies: Seeking the World Historical Perspective**

It was the late 1980s when criticism on the nationalistic bias embedded in studies on the international relations of Koryŏ, including Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship, emerged. As the first step to solve this problem, researchers made an effort to get better understanding on the history of Yüan, but it did not work because the output of studies on Yüan or Mongol history made in those days was quite poor. However, the researches done by Chae-hyuk Joo in the end of 1980s were interesting enough to attract the attention of the Korean history researchers.

Joo (1989b) introduced a new approach of surveying Koryŏ-Mongol

(Yüan) relationship that analyzes it in the context of Mongol history, which means he tried to reveal the status of Koryŏ within the entire Mongol Empire. Judging by his arguments that the name of “Mongol” should be corrected into “Mongol,” and “Koryŏ-Mongol relationship” should be revised as “Mongol-Koryŏ relationship,” and by his way of calling King Ch’ungsŏn (r. 1298; 1308-1313)—which is much familiar to Korean researchers—by King Izirbuka 益知禮普花, Joo (1989a) always tried to explain the Mongol-Koryŏ relationship in the perspective of Mongol history, not of Chinese history. As far as Joo understood, the history of Mongol politics centered around the conflict between the faction supporting the preservation of Mongol qualities and the other one supporting the embracement of Chinese qualities. He argued that the appearance of the Great Khan from the faction supporting the embracement of Chinese qualities after Emperor Monke’s reign, and the changes in Mongol’s policies due to Qubilai’s triumph in his conflict with the faction supporting the preservation of Mongol qualities, had decisive influence on the Mongol-Koryŏ relationship. According to Joo, after Qubilai’s enthronement, Mongol changed its policy on China based on the ground rule that “Chinese land will be ruled by the law of China” 以漢法治漢地, and Mongol’s relationship with the neighboring states was redefined as a traditional Center-Periphery relationship in accordance with the newly changed policy, while Koryŏ held its status as a tributary state which was granted relatively higher independence of the king, who was allowed to rule the royal domain and subjects in it, just like the kings of Vietnam 安南·占城, Miyanma 緬, Thailand 暹, and Japan 日本 were. In sum, Joo defined the Mongol-Koryŏ relationship as a variation of the traditional Chinese Center-Periphery relationship, on the grounds of Mongol policies made by the faction supporting the embracement of Chinese qualities, while trying to draw a line between the Mongol-Koryŏ relationship and the other kinds of China-Korea relationship.

Furthermore, Joo put his emphasis on the meaning of royal marriage arranged between Koryŏ and Mongol. By being related by blood with the Mongol imperial family—as products of royal marriages—kings of Koryŏ were able to hold the status of the “king of a perimeter state” 藩王, in the line of other state leaders who were either Khanate heads, imperial princes, or even meritorious retainers, who all had enfeoffed states across the empire. According to Joo, this shows us that Koryŏ maintained a much closer relationship with Mongol as relatives tied in blood, than the others which were connected to

Mongol in a Chinese traditional Center-Periphery relationship, which means kings of Koryŏ maintained a political status as strong as that of the imperial princes of Mongol, as kings of Perimeter states 藩國 who were related with the Great Khan of Mongol in blood. Even though Joo agreed with Byong-ik Koh's opinion on the distinctive and superior status of Koryŏ compared to other neighboring states in the world order centered around the Mongol Empire, he had a different idea on why Koryŏ took such special status, and said it was caused by the dependent attitude the royal family of Koryŏ had shown in the process of concluding the peace treaty and the closer relationship between the two states cultivated through royal marriages.

According to Joo, the nature of the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship can be described to have had two facets; while the two parties were connected with each other through a traditional Center-Periphery relationship, Koryŏ was also identified as a Perimeter state inside the Mongol Empire. In other words, Koryŏ was both a tributary state of Mongol Empire tied with the Empire in a center-periphery relationship, and a Perimeter state which means it was also a land enfeoffed to a figure affiliated with the Mongol's imperial family. However, he failed to explain how these two identities of Koryŏ could coexist. Since defining Koryŏ as a tributary state of Mongol would be one thing while defining it as an enfeoffed state to Mongol would be quite another, Joo should have explained how they can be connected in reality to make his argument more persuasive. Besides, his overly Mongol-oriented notion shown in his thesis and the generally low level of interests in history of the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship weakened the overall influence of his works.

The historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in the Korean academic arena which had been at a standstill in the middle of the 1990s entered a new phase at the end of the decade. It was Morihira Masahiko's thesis published in Japan and the researches of Ho-dong Kim and Kae-Seok Yi that paved the way to attract the researcher's interest in the history of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship again. It was also this period that Ik-joo Lee's research on Qubilai's Old Promise (that should be honored at all cost) was reexamined. These researches can be categorized as the ones done in the perspective of world history, given that they tried to identify the national status of Koryŏ in the world order centered around the Mongol Empire.

Morihira (1998a, 1998b) introduced "the Theory of Delegated Realm" 投下領論 in which he insisted that Koryŏ should be defined as one of

the Delegated realms which belonged to respective Offices of the Local Lord (subordinate to the Emperor of Yeke Mongol Ulus), based on the assumption that Koryŏ-Mongol relationship was grounded on a unique Mongol enfeoffment system, and not on a traditional relationship that had existed between Korea and China. According to Morihira, king of Koryŏ earned the title of "the Koryŏ king and also the Yüan court's Son-in-law" 駙馬高麗國王 through royal marriages, and Koryŏ was granted a proper treatment by Mongol in accordance with precedents in which Yeke Mongol Ulus distributed land and subjects to imperial princes and princesses, Yüan court's sons-in-law and queens, in the form of "delegation." Morihira argued that, as Yeke Mongol Ulus can be defined as a complex of several "delegated realms," Koryŏ can also be considered as one of those units that were gathered and composed by the Yeke Mongol Ulus. According to this argument, the relationship between Koryŏ and Mongol was not one between two different states with equal footing, but instead one between Yeke Mongol Ulus and one of its internal factions. Morihira's argument was obviously contrary to Korean studies in those days, given that it explained the status of Koryŏ in the world order centered around Mongol, and did not acknowledge the national status of Koryŏ as an independence state.

Morihira's opinion attracted huge attention of Korean researchers. In particular, Korean researchers who have studied the history of Mongol seemed to expect that "the Theory of Delegated Realm" might introduce a new perspective that enables the researchers to overcome the Koryŏ-oriented perspective (Yi 2007; H. Kim 2007). It is true that his argument had strength as it intended to explain the status of Koryŏ within the Mongol Empire's general governing system, and not in terms of "Koryŏ's relationship with the Great Mongol (Yüan)." However, the question is whether he can prove that Koryŏ was really a "delegated realm" of Mongol. To regard Koryŏ as one of Mongol's delegated realms, the existence of Office of the Local Lord 王府 as a core office in the Koryŏ realm should be confirmed first. And what should be found next, would be several government posts that we can find in other Offices of the Local Lord (subordinate to the Emperor), including Chief of Staff (of the Local Lord's Office) 王傅, Supervisory officer 斷事官, Adjutant figures 副尉·司馬, which have not yet been confirmed, except for the existence of a Supervisory officer (H. Kim 2007, 112-13). Especially the Chief of Staff 王傅, who would have managed all the general affairs of an Office of the Local

Lord 王府, was a key post that is confirmed to have existed in Offices of the Local Lord which were meant not only for imperial family members but also for imperial sons-in-law of Mongol, but its existence in Koryŏ has not yet been confirmed. And in the meantime, there is no record to verify Mongol-imposed taxes on Koryŏ, while we know Mongol imposed taxes on other delegated realms, which makes the researchers question the credibility of Morihira's theory (ibid.).

Besides, as Morihira (1998a) himself admitted, Koryŏ was different in many ways from other delegated realms ruled by imperial family members and sons-in-law of Mongol. Normally, in the delegated realms ruled by imperial family members and sons-in-law of Mongol, royal shrine of the realm's own was not built, and the subjects were ruled by the officials appointed by Khan, and Darugachi 監郡 as well as other officials inside the Office of the Local Lord were appointed by the imperial court of Mongol. In Koryŏ, however, the royal family held the ancestral ritual for their own, and had the right to appoint government officials independently since its early days. Also, the rulers of other delegated realms were supposed to offer all the cloth taxes 五戶絲料, as soon as they were collected from subjects and get them returned at the end of every year, while Koryŏ collect the cloth taxes from its subjects without any intervention from Mongol. As Kae-Seok Yi (2007, 58) pointed out, assuming Koryŏ as a delegated realm while ignoring these critical differences is not different from insisting that Koryŏ was a provincial government of Mongol on the basis of the existence of Chŏngdong Haengsŏng provincial government and its officials in Koryŏ, which sounds extremely formalistic. Several features of delegated realms found in Koryŏ would not automatically mean that Koryŏ was a delegated realm of Mongol.

On the other hand, Ho-dong Kim suggested that the history of the Mongol Empire should not be regarded as part of the Chinese history, as done by many scholars who frequently use the term "history of the Yüan Dynasty" 元朝史. In order to overcome the China-oriented perspective generally exhibited in studies that were based upon the contents of *Wŏnsa* (*Official History of the Yüan Dynasty* 元史), he first introduced *Chipsa* (*Compendium of Chronicles* 集史) written by Rasid ad-Din as an alternative (H. Kim 2002), and clarified that the official title of the Mongol dynasty, "the Great Yüan," was a Chinese translation of "Yeke Mongol Ulus," which was the name of the Mongol Empire called by the natives of Mongol. He did so in order to criticize

existing studies which had regarded Yüan dynasty as a Chinese one with a lot of Chinese cultural elements (H. Kim 2006). His approach to the task of defining the nature of the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship with this perspective, was termed as the "Protectorate State, and the Protectorate Realm Theory" (H. Kim 2007).

First of all, Ho-dong Kim criticized the researchers who regarded the Great Yüan as yet another Chinese dynasty, or analyzed the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship as a mere chapter in the history of traditional Korea-China relations. Kim insisted that viewed from such perspective, the distinctiveness of the Mongol Empire could not possibly be recognized, and the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship would end up being defined by usual frames based upon familiar notions such as the Appointment system 冊封體制, a Tributary relationship 朝貢關係, and the Master/Subordinate relationship 事大關係, which have all been used to explain the nature of the Korea-China relationship for a very long time. Kim insisted that Koryŏ was a protectorate state 屬國 of Mongol. According to him, the Mongol Empire was made up of a number of Uluses directly governed by Khan and imperial family members, and outside the Empire, there were many "protectorate states" that were allowed to be ruled independently by their native kings, and Koryŏ was one of them. He also argued, "Koryŏ was able to hold its independent national status as a protectorate state (and an extensional entity of the empire), in accordance with Mongol customs which since the reign of Chingiz Khan allowed the state to be ruled independently by its own king if the state subjugated itself to Mongol voluntarily and admitted Mongol's suzerainty." In sum, Kim insisted that Koryŏ was a "protectorate state" that was located outside of Mongol Empire and kept its national independence, and according to Kim, the existence of "Koryŏ kings" supports this idea.

Kim also noted that because the kings of Koryŏ were also sons-in-law of Mongol, while they were indeed kings of a protectorate state (which was Koryŏ, outside the empire), they were also "internal" beings of Mongol, as they were part of the Mongol imperial family. Hence, according to him, Koryŏ ended up harboring "dual identities." They owned the right to rule the subjects of Koryŏ, as the Koryŏ State was regarded as a protectorate one (an example of Koryŏ's identity defined as a "protectorate state"), but there was also a room to interpret the status of Koryŏ as a realm "owned by an imperial son-in-law (an entity internal to the empire)," so in that case Koryŏ was also to be regarded



as a “realm that belonged to an domestic imperial figure,” which would be defining Koryŏ as a “protectorate realm (within the imperial realm)” as well. However, despite this kind of Koryŏ’s dual identity, Kim still stressed Koryŏ’s distinctiveness, given that Koryŏ was the only state that held both of them in reality; positioned as one of the empire’s protectorate states “outside” the Mongol Empire, while also being one of the Great Khan’s protectorate realms “within” the “Khan Ulus,” at the same time.

Kim’s argument is noteworthy as it offers a valid explanation on Koryŏ’s distinctive status inside the Mongol Empire, by focusing on its dual identity both as a protectorate state and as a protectorate realm. This is indeed an adequate framework to flexibly evaluate the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship. However, it is still doubtful how the dual identity of a protectorate state and a protectorate realm, which would have been very different in nature, could have worked in reality. He answered this question by suggesting sometimes Koryŏ was treated as a protectorate state lying in the outskirts of Yeke Mongol Ulus (Mongol Empire), while sometimes being regarded as region internal to the realm of Khan Ulus. However, further explanation seems to be in order, as Yeke Mongol Ulus and Khan Ulus would not have stood apart that clearly in reality.

Meanwhile, Kae-seok Yi (2013) defined the Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship with a concept called “Subjugated State System” 內屬國體制. According to Yi, the System was established when Koryŏ was allowed to keep its national status as an independent state, under the condition of accepting a royal “Chinjo” 親朝 obligation (Kings’ royal visit to the imperial court) as well as the Six Demands 六事, after the previous Sinocentric appointment-tributary system was modified with policy changes made by Qubilai. He also noted that as Koryŏ was exempted from some of the Six Demands in reward for being the Koryŏ king as the Yüan court’s son-in-law, the political identity of Koryŏ kings became much closer to those of the feudal lords of Mongol (imperial princes) 諸侯王, who were supposed to serve the Mongol Empire, and that meant Koryŏ actually becoming more strongly subjugated to Mongol. Yi’s argument offers a useful framework to analyze the Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship, given that it was drawn from scrutinizing the works of previous researchers very closely. However, follow-up researches should be made to scrutinize the major points of his own argument, such as the nature of the policy changes supposedly made by Qubilai, as well as Koryŏ’s admitted transformation into

one the Local Lord Offices 王府 as Mongol’s control over Koryŏ continued to strengthen.

Meanwhile, Ik-joo Lee (2006) further developed his previous argument that explained Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in terms of “Qubilai’s Old Promise (that should be honored in all situations)” and introduced a new hypothesis that “Qubilai’s Old Promise” can be regarded and categorized as another form of an appointment-tribute relationship. According to Lee, although it is true that kings of Koryŏ were sons-in-law of the Mongol imperial family and Mongol exercised its substantial authority by appointing kings of Koryŏ and intervened in the State’s domestic affairs, the very nature of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship can still be defined as the one made between two independent nations which were connected with each other in an appointment-tribute relationship. Furthermore, pointing out that Morihira or Ho-dong Kim’s researches only focused on highlighting the distinctive status of Koryŏ inside the Mongol Empire, which limited themselves in synchronic 共時的 approach, Lee (2009) suggested that the researchers should deal with the matter of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship from a diachronic 通時的 perspective, by bearing the history of Korea’s international relationship in mind. Lee’s suggestion can be regarded as a counter-argument for Morihira’s “Delegated Realm Theory” made in judgment that the theory denies Koryŏ’s national status as an independent state.

It is a well-known fact that the international relationship of Korea in premodern age was based upon an appointment-tribute relationship with the Chinese dynasties, from Goguryeo through Joseon. However, specific aspects of that appointment-tribute relationship varied by each period. For example, appointment-tribute relationship between Goguryeo and Northern Wèi 北魏 in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and that between Joseon and Qing 清 in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were quite different from each other. Lee argues that, as the existence of appointment-tribute relationships between two nations (in China and upon the Korean peninsula) cannot be denied given that the expressions of “appointment” and “tribute” are discovered in historical records in almost all periods, the concept of appointment-tribute relationship should be redefined so it can include all the various aspects. Under this assumption, Lee made comparisons among Goguryeo-Northern Wèi relationship in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Silla-Tang relationship in 7-8<sup>th</sup> centuries, Koryŏ-Khitan relationship in the 10-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, and Joseon-Qing relationship in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which have all

been proved as appointment-tribute relationships through researches on each period, and reached a conclusion that an appointment-tribute relationship means (1) international relationship between two different states, (2) which both acknowledge a hierarchy between them, and (3) exchange actions of appointing and paying tributes. And according to this definition, he stressed that Koryŏ-Mongol relationship can be clearly classified as another form of the appointment-tribute relationship. He also explained why Mongol accepted this kind of relationship, by saying that it was not because of the policy of the faction that embraced Chinese traditional ways, but because the Khan Ulus, established with the enthronement of Qubilai, was in need of Chinese ways, to more effectively rule and govern China (I. Lee 2007). He ultimately noted that it was part of the empire's overall attempt, which included other similar efforts, like naming the Empire the Great Yüan 大元, using Chinese era titles such as Chungt'ong 中統 and Chiwŏn 至元, etc., and adopting Chinese traditional governmental offices, such as Chungsŏsŏng 中書省, Ch'umilwŏn 樞密院, and Ŏsadae 御史臺.

Morihira (2008) made a counterargument on Lee's perspective. He agreed that Koryŏ maintained its independent governing system by following Chinese traditional ways of operating the dynasty, which included receiving kings' appointment, the royal seal 印章, and era title 年號, as well as calendars 頒曆 from China (the empire). He also admitted that it is likely that Koryŏ was controlled by Mongol in relatively an indirect way, given that it was not forced to impose taxes on its subjects based on census registers or accept Darugachi's permanent stay in the state as a supervisor, which means that Koryŏ was successful in maintaining the typical form of appointment-tribute relationship with Mongol. However, Morihira still argued that previous notions of "Civilized (China)–Unenlightened (nearby barbarians)" relationship 華夷秩序 or the "Master/Subordinate" relationship cannot explain the entire structure of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship, because all the unconventional systems and practices which had been applied to the relationship were designed in a Mongolian way, and not in a traditional Chinese way. Therefore, Morihira tried to emphasize the Mongolian elements in the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship, while ignoring the elements of an appointment-tribute relationship, which leaves a question on how the elements of an appointment-tribute relationship in Koryŏ-Mongol relationship should be explained from his standpoint.

The debate continued when Ik-joo Lee (2011) refuted Morihira's

counterargument once again. First of all, Lee divided several characteristics of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship into those which could be categorized to be indicating an appointment-tribute relationship, and those which had been regarded as not part of such relationship. In an effort to examine the former, and clarify characteristics of an appointment-tribute relationship, he examined real practices of appointing and paying tributes exchanged between the two states, and also how the subjects of Koryŏ thought of their relationship with Mongol. And in an attempt to examine the latter, he analyzed issues like the Koryŏ kings' Chinjo 親朝, changes that occurred in Koryŏ's national status preceded by the royal marriage arranged with Mongol, the existence of Chŏngdong Haengsŏng provincial government, and Six Demands, etc. Based upon his own analysis, he again argued the validity of his previous stance that Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship can be classified as appointment-tribute relationship, and concluded that other distinctive elements of the relationship, including Chinjo of Koryŏ kings or the existence of Koryŏ king as the Yüan court's sons-in-law, can also be considered as aspects of another varied version of an appointment-tribute relationship. Also, he insisted that Morihira's argument that Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship cannot be defined as an appointment-tribute relationship was resulted from the lack of understanding on the nature of an appointment-tribute relationship, and problems in his approach—analyzing Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship in the frame of a "stereotypical" appointment-tribute relationship.

In sum, it can be said that the debate between Lee and Morihira was caused by difference in their interpretation on general principles of appointment-tribute relationship and its Mongolian elements. Whereas Lee considered Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship can be included in the category of appointment-tribute relationship redefined in a wider sense, Morihira argued Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship cannot be considered as a part of traditional appointment-tribute relationship of China. Besides, while Lee regarded the "Mongolian elements" in Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship as "periodical aspects," Morihira sees the "Chinese elements" as superficial, decorative aspects, and a typical formality expected in building international relationships. It is doubtful whether Morihira's way of explaining the relationship of two states with the so-called "essence of the relationship," which could supposedly be separated from the "appearance of the relationship," is valid or necessary. In other words, he owes us an explanation on why Mongol

had to wear that kind of “Chinese skin,” if the relationship between Koryŏ and Mongol (Yüan) was not based on an appointment-tribute relationship, as he insisted.

## Conclusion

Since 2000, the number of historical studies of Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship in Korea has continued to grow.<sup>2</sup> It is partly because the trend of Korean oriental historical studies is heading into a direction that emphasizes the importance of relationship history 關係史, and also because the growing number of researchers are getting interested in the studies of Mongol history (Yook 2012). Furthermore, Korean researchers inspired by the achievements recently made in historical studies of Mongol are trying to overcome the existing notion on the history of Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship which has been regarded only as an extension of Korea-China relationship history. The studies made by those researchers seem to be successful in examining previous studies from a critical perspective and suggesting their own alternatives. However, there are a number of issues discovered in recent studies in common.

First of all, the recent historical studies of the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship are too much obsessed with changing the existing frameworks of analysis and developing new ones. Given the limitation of ascertaining historical truths with only scarcely remaining historical resources, it is of huge importance for the researchers to develop an analytic frame that would enable them to explain a phase of history in structural perspective. “Theory of Qubilai’s Old Promise (that should be honored in all situations),” “Delegated Realm Theory,” “Protectorate State and Protectorate Realm Theory,” and “Subjugated State Theory” were the results achieved from that kind of efforts. However, we have to remember that a framework for analysis is nothing more than a hypothesis, which should be proven by historical truths continuously. A framework for analysis isolated from truths can never exist, just like a map that does not reflect real land topography could not exist.

In this sense, a number of worrying features are found in recent studies. In a rush to introduce new framework for analysis, some researchers misinterpret or stretch the meaning of historical records, and what’s worse, there are some who make intentional misinterpretation of historical records.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that there are some parts that can be interpreted as China- or Koryŏ-oriented notion in historical records written in Chinese letters such as *Koryŏsa* (*History of Koryŏ*) or *Wŏnsa* (*Official History of the Yuan Dynasty*), whether it is written in that way consciously or not. However, it is a problem that should be solved by reading enough bibliographical notes on historical records to get better understanding of them, and not by interpreting them arbitrarily.

One more concern to discuss here is the one related to the approach that tries to analyze Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in the perspective of world history. It is pleasurable to see the appearance of this perspective generated from the effort to reveal Koryŏ’s status in the world order centered around the Mongol Empire, thanks to the progress of historical studies of Mongol starting from the 1990s. Researchers who support this perspective commonly criticize both Koryŏ-oriented and China-oriented understanding of this period’s history, under the assumption that Mongol was “not one of those” Chinese dynasties. This notion comes down to the conclusion that Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship cannot be regarded as an appointment-tribute relationship, which generates a problem to be discussed.

There is no doubt that the appointment-tribute system itself is Chinese, given that it was China’s traditional way of building international relationship since the Hàn Dynasty. However, Korea had been related to China in appointment-tribute relationship since the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and such relationship lasted until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In that sense, it does not seem fair to say that all of the appointment-tribute relationships made by Korean dynasties throughout the history were “solely Chinese” in nature. Koryŏ, for example, had built appointment-tribute relationships with the first five dynasties of China, as well as Sòng, Khitan, and Jīn, and planned to build such appointment-tribute relationship with Mongol as well from the beginning, when it established a Brotherhood Pact with Mongol (I. Lee 2016). Therefore, it was Koryŏ’s diplomatic achievement which enabled itself to maintain its own

2. The representative achievements are the ones made by Kyeong-lok Kim, Kang-han Lee, Jong-seok Choi, Myung-mi Lee, Myung-soo Koh, Eun-sook Yoon, and Yong-cheol Kwon. The specific titles of the researches are listed up in the section of references.

3. This problem stands out in recent studies on Anti-Yüan Reforms of King Kongmin and a Brotherhood Pact between Koryŏ and Mongol. For further detail, see I. Lee 2015, 2016.

status as an independent state, by building an appointment-tribute relationship with Mongol after making a ceasefire agreement at the end of the war that had lasted for a long time, an effort which culminated in “Qubilai’s Old Promise.” Thus, denying the existence of an appointment-tribute relationship between Koryŏ and Mongol given that the relationship is solely Chinese in nature can be an act of ignoring Koryŏ’s effort to plan and build such relationship, and should be criticized for its Mongol-oriented attitude in analyzing the matter.

It is obvious that recent historical studies of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship introduced new approaches that would enable the researchers to overcome the previously Koryŏ-oriented perspective, with a viewpoint based upon a world order that was centered around the Mongol Empire. However, it is time to examine recent studies to see if they are caught in another form of flaw forcing them to repeat previous mistakes which they have been criticizing, by taking only a one-sided stance (a Mongol-oriented point of view) in studying the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship. It is highly important to be careful not to make any biased interpretation on the international relationship that is always built together by two different countries. In studying the history of the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship, it is just as much important to examine Koryŏ’s response toward Mongol, as it is to examine Mongol’s influence on Koryŏ.

As an alternative to overcome Koryŏ- or Mongol-oriented perspectives, recent efforts and interests in East-Asian historical studies should be consulted. Although there is currently no academic consensus made between Korean and Chinese researchers as well as historians dealing with either premodern and modern history, on the concept and analytical approach that should be dealt with or employed in historical studies on East-Asia, East-Asian historical studies obviously have the potential to offer a new and objective framework for analysis that would enable researchers to overcome any biased attitude.<sup>4</sup> Given that it aims to overcome the Chinese-oriented interpretation as well as one-sided interpretation of history, it is different from “the East-Asian World Theory” suggested by Nishizima Sadao or John K. Fairbank. If the researchers see Koryŏ-Mongol relationship from this perspective, they could overcome either the limitation of home-biased interpretation or Chinese-oriented perspectives. It could also function as an effective framework in evaluating

the Koryŏ-Mongol relationship, with both the world order centered around Mongol and Koryŏ’s response in mind (I. Lee 2010).

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4. For discussions on East Asian history in premodern times in Korean history academic world, see H. Kim 2005; D. Park 2007; W. Park 2009, 2014.



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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review major achievements in historical studies of Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in the 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries made by Korean researchers so far, and explore the proper way the researchers should take in the future. The trend of historical studies on Koryŏ-Mongol relationship in Korea can be divided into three following periodical categories: (1) the period during 1960s-80s when the emphasis on nationalistic historical consciousness was rampant in the overall Korean history academic world, (2) the period from the late 1980s to 1990s when criticism on the bias embedded in the nationalistic interpretation of history was raised, and the effort to understand the history of Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship in structural perspective was made, and (3) the period since 2000 when the researchers tried to explain Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship in the most objective way by actively adopting the results of researches on Mongol history made both in Korea and in overseas. Among those categories, as “the effort to understand the relationship in structural perspective” was made to eliminate the subjective elements in the nationalistic perspective, the first two categories can be defined as “rise and fall of the nationalistic perspective,” and the third period can be defined as “the appearance of the approaches in world historical perspective” which tried to understand the nature of the relationship in the world order centered around the Mongol Empire in the 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. This paper examined the overall trends in historical studies made on Koryŏ-Mongol (Yüan) relationship inside Korea since the 1960s, and categorized them into two groups: studies which employed a structural perspective, and those whose notion were based upon global historical orders. Also added are a few comments on recent studies made since 2000 in the conclusion.

**Keywords:** Koryŏ-Mongol relationship, structural perspective, world historical perspective, nationalistic approach, appointment-tribute relationship, Qubilai's old promise 世祖舊制