

A Review of Recent Developments and the Future of Goryeo History Research: *A Look Back into the History of the Goryeo Dynasty from the Perspective of the 21st century* by the Korean Medieval History Society

Project Background and Objective

2018 was the 1,100th anniversary of the foundation of Goryeo (918-1392). Since its 1,000th anniversary fell during the Japanese colonial period, this was the first year in which Korean historians were able to plan a proper event. Although Goryeo was founded in the far past, the commemoration was not unfamiliar to Koreans, thanks to the special position held by the Goryeo dynasty's history and culture.

Since its unification of the Later Three Kingdoms, the Goryeo dynasty persisted for nearly 500 years on the Korean peninsula. Compared to Silla's earlier unification, Goryeo's was achieved autonomously without the intervention of foreign powers. It also achieved more advanced unification by executing its policy to regain old Goguryo territories and incorporating many of the migrants of Balhae. There had been in fact a growing need for a pluralistic political vision and action to gather and integrate the demands of various powers since Later Silla and the Later Three Kingdoms period, as society became increasingly divided. In response to such demands of the times, Goryeo established a dominant order promoting pluralism and integration. Accordingly, in the Goryeo era, no single political power, ideology, or religion could maintain monopolistic dominance over the society for any extended period. Society was flexible and open to changes.

History is a mirror of the present. Looking at the reality of today, it is urgent to heal the suffering and wounds from South Korea's and North Korea's 70 year-long separation and preparation for unification to bring peace and prosperity. Another task at hand is to establish a system in which coexistence becomes possible, in response to those on the social and economic margins and the increasing number of foreigner and multicultural families. In addressing

these issues, it is crucial to commemorate and reflect on Goryeo's foundation and history, a dynasty that unified the Late Three Kingdoms and established a social order in which pluralism and integration were ensured.

The Korean Medieval History Society planned the commemoration project from March 2017 and tried to publish an academic textbook as part of the event. For the following year, the Society extensively worked on writing, reviewing, and editing the text, which finally came into publication on July 25, 2018, the very day Goryeo was founded 1,100 years ago. This book's objectives are as follows. The first objective is to faithfully record the latest research accomplishments and bring together as many contributors as possible, to revitalize the relatively stagnant field of the Goryeo era among the research areas of Korean Studies. The second is to reinvent the field in its subject matters and trends in response to recent changes in societal and intellectual paradigms. In other words, it is to introduce new lenses and tools through which scholars of Goryeo history can explore new questions of the 21st century, where pluralistic values are prioritized and societies have become increasingly connected and globalized. Third, it is to expand research topics of Goryeo studies by introducing emerging fields of these days such as interstate relations, transportation, cities, natural environment, and science and technology.

Structure of Table of Contents

This book is an introductory text, with a comprehensive view on Goryeo's history with its politics, economy, society, interstate relations, and culture being at the center. It consists of six chapters in total, along with an introduction.

Introduction: Social Characteristics of the Goryeo Era and Its Historical Status

[Supplement 1] Research Materials and New Research Prospects

Chapter 1: Political Power and State Administration

1. Founding and Centralization Process
2. Development of the Munbeol (Prestigious Family) Society and Reform Politics
3. Rise of the Military Regime and the Crisis of Monarchy

4. Political Powers and Administration under Yuan Influence

5. Rise of Neo-Confucian Literati and the Fall of the Dynasty

Chapter 2: Constitution and Change of the Governing System

I. Politics and Economy

1. Central Political System and Monarchial/Bureaucratic Authority

2. Land Ownership and the Land Tax Granting System

[Supplement 2] Characteristics and Changes of the Military System

II. Center and Region

1. Organization and Operation of the Local Administration System

2. City and Rural Society

3. Transportation and Freight

[Supplement 3] Finance Operations and Taxation System

Chapter 3: Social Order and Lifestyle

I. Social Order and Its Operation

1. Education and Official Recruitment

2. Social Stratification

3. Family and Relatives

[Supplement 4] Laws and Social Policies

II. Life and Uprising of Ordinary People

1. Natural Conditions and Clothing, Food, and Shelter

2. Agricultural Productivity and Management

3. Manual Industry and Commerce

4. Resistance to Social Injustice

Chapter 4: Interstate Exchanges and Wars

1. Interstate Relations and Exchanges of Early Goryeo

2. War and Exchange with the Mongols

3. Yuan/Ming Transition, Red Turban Bandits' and Japanese Pirates' Invasion

[Supplement 5] Characteristics and Changes of Goryeo's Interstate Relations

Chapter 5: Ideology and Religion

1. Buddhism and Buddhist Rituals

2. Confucianism and Confucian Rituals

3. Taoism and Indigenous Religion

[Supplement 6] Compilation of Tripitaka Koreana

Chapter 6: Intellectual and Artistic Culture

1. History Texts and Historical Consciousness
2. Development and Characteristics of Art Culture
3. Perceptions of Nature and Scientific Technology

The table of contents is characterized by the following. First, topics are divided into main and supplementary discussions. Three to five topics are assigned to each chapter, totaling up to 27. The second and third chapters, dealing with Goryeo's governing system and social order, respectively, are both divided into two parts, given their length. For supplementary discussions, six topics are chosen. However, it would have been more appropriate for military system and taxation to be covered in main discussions, considering their importance.

Second, the contents of the book are largely arranged taxonomically rather than chronologically. Only some parts of Chapters 1 (Goryeo's political history) and 4 (its interstate relations) are presented in chronological order. But the rest of the topics are also explored with a focus on changes by time period.

The ways in which societal changes in Goryeo's history are explored in this book are not unified. In Chapter 1, its political history is divided into five time periods: its founding and centralization process until King Hyeonjong's reign, the development of the *munbeol* (prestigious family) society and the reform politics from the mid-11th century to King Uijong's reign, the Military Regime and the crisis of monarchy during approximately one century from 1170, its endeavor to maintain autonomy under Yuan influence, and the rise of neo-Confucian literati and the fall of dynasty. However, in Chapter 4, Goryeo's history of interstate relations is divided into three time periods: the 10th to the early 13th centuries when Goryeo had diplomatic ties with the Five Dynasties, Song, Liao, and Jin, the mid-13th to the mid-14th centuries when Goryeo was faced with Mongol's interference, and lastly, the late 14th-century when the Yuan dynasty was replaced with the Ming dynasty. Certain topics are divided into two periods before and after the Military Coup of 1170, or divided the 12th and 13th centuries into the mid-Goryeo period. Such lack of unity may be the consequence of having many contributors, or insufficient editing. However, it is best to interpret this as the book showing the diverse and dynamic aspects of

Goryeo society in choosing the most appropriate method of period division for each topic.

Third, more space is devoted to Goryeo's social history and cultural history. Topics such as social order, human relations, natural conditions and lifestyle, religion and rituals, and thoughts and arts are covered in-depth to challenge the traditional historiography where the ruling class and their regime are placed at the center. Also, in equally attending to the issues that had undergone fast and relatively slower or little change during Goryeo's 500-year history, the book attempts to holistically delineate the life and consciousness of people of the time.

Attention to the Pluralistic History and Culture of the Goryeo Era

The overall outline of the book is described in the introduction. Scholars of the Goryeo era have tended to analyze its history from the lenses of social formation or characteristics of the ruling class. From the perspective of the former, Goryeo was a feudal society. Yet, some scholars regarded it as a slavery society, given that farmers' land ownership didn't exist, and that the state's exploitation of farmers was labor-oriented. On one hand, these contending views might be due to the shortage of historical records about the force of production and ownership of land. On the other, they evidence the extent of Goryeo society's pluralism and fluidity. Since the 1960s, whether Goryeo's ruling class was aristocratic or bureaucratic has been a key topic. From the viewpoint of the *munbeol* aristocracy, Goryeo was a society where aristocrats monopolized power and inherited privileges, although opportunities to join the ruling class had expanded compared to the Silla era. Yet, if Goryeo were to be solely defined as an aristocratic society, this would undermine its achievement of surmounting Silla's aristocracy. Obviously, Goryeo developed the bureaucratic administration system, and the view that sees Goryeo as bureaucratic has gained support recently. Nonetheless, it is difficult to settle on either of these viewpoints since both provide valid proofs. This difficulty to clearly side with either viewpoint also suggests Goryeo society's complexity and diversity.

Social formation and ruling class characteristics theories are methods of analyzing a specific era and its historical development with a unitary criterion. Within the framework of both theories, individual elements that exist within

and mark the society are thus inevitably subordinated to one central constituent, even when they conflict each other. Both theories tend to focus on the internal history of a particular state rather than holistically considering its interstate relations. Although Korean historians have largely dismantled “theory of stagnation and heteronomy” by tackling the Japanese colonial historiography, it is not without its own limitations. It was incapable of promoting historical consciousness other than envisioning “the historical image of Korea as a nation-state,” in its sole emphasis on Korea’s internal capabilities of and drive for development.

This book focuses on Goryeo’s pluralistic aspects in its attempt to overcome such limitations and suggest renewed historical perceptions. Recent studies have shown that Goryeo is characterized by pluralism where diverse or heterogeneous elements were brought together not into exclusive contention but into coexistence. According to these studies, these individual elements were in competition with one another, and yet at the same time, they mutually coexisted and benefitted one another. Indeed, since Goryeo was largely a society operated by the status system, both horizontal pluralism and vertical hierarchy existed together. Seen from this context, diverse existing forms of its local communities, its implementation of the *bon-gwan* system (system of governing people by registered residence) based on local autonomy, its pluralistic local administration system, its division of scholars/generals/clerks, its coexistence of aristocracy and bureaucracy, its coexistence of land ownership and *sujogwon* (right to collect and utilize tax over land allotments), its legalization of social division of labor, its consciousness of the Three Kingdoms’ descendants, its coexistence of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Feng Shui, its pluralistic interstate environment and exchange, etc. all require critical attention.

This book thus attempts to foreground the following in Goryeo’s history. From its outset, Goryeo tried to bring the Later Three Kingdoms into unification and achieve social integration through conciliation and compromise policies, rather than with force, responding to its need to integrate politically and socially diverse groups of people. Then, it implemented the *gwageo* (civil examination) system and reorganized its bureaucracy, expanding social mobility. Although *munbeol* did become more rigid and stricter in mid-Goryeo, new groups were consistently able to gain power and influence. From the second half of the 12th century, there was a prevalence of lower classes advancing their social position and power. For effective local administration, Goryeo implemented

the *gun-hyeon* (local administrative prefectures) and *bon-gwan* systems, systems that were both horizontal and hierarchical in nature, in consideration of its regional diversity and the local ruling class’ desire for autonomy. Goryeo also enforced taxation based on land ownership, and partly distributed *sujogwon* to bureaucrats and government agencies. Its financial resources were distributed and the power of central government was bound to be limited. In religion and ideology, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Feng Shui coexisted, satisfying the various needs of society. In this social environment, communication and interaction within the state were facilitated, which made it possible to fluidly cope with changing interstate relations. For instance, in response to the pluralistic interstate order of East Asia in its early and middle periods, and then to the world order led under the Mongol Empire in its late period, Goryeo maintained its security and imported advanced cultures.

Introduction of Recent Research and New Prospects

The book focuses on introducing critical debates in academia, rather than providing detailed explanations of each topic. It also attempts to suggest the direction of future research, based on the latest research achievements.

Chapter 1 deals with the political history of the first half of the 12th century, with a focus on the reform in response to the social changes. This is different from the earlier research trend which tended to attend to the division and agitation of the *munbeol*. In respect to the Military Regime, emphasis is placed on the persistence of the traditional political order rather than on the demise of the *munbeol* aristocracy. And it is explained that the long-term regime of the Choi families was justified under the pretext of king’s aides.

In addition, the chapter responds to the recent criticism from political history studies regarding the legitimacy of certain terms such as *hojok* (local magnates), *munbeol* aristocrat, and *sinheungsadaebu* (neo-literati, or scholar-bureaucrats). Some contributors thus use “local powers” in place of the term *hojok*. Others use *munbeol* simply and *sinheung-yusin* (neo-Confucian literati) in place of *munbeol* aristocrat and *sinheungsadaebu*. Recent research achievements also made possible a more elaborate categorization of political powers during the Yuan influence period: royal crony group and pro-Yuan group, etc. However, these terms are not consistently used throughout the book, due to a lack of

consensus among the contributors. This lack of unity on the terms itself reflects the current situation of the academia.

Chapter 2 deals with Goryeo's ruling systems, particularly its power structure and decision making process as well as its political institutions. In terms of the local administration system, the chapter covers the following topics: the establishment of *bon-gwan* and *toseong* (native surname) system to absorb the local powers that had strengthened during the late Silla period, the autonomy of native local clerks and the dispatch of local officials to the main-prefecture, and the operation of special administrative districts such as *hyang*, *bugok*, and *so*, and pluralistic province system such as 5-Do, Yanggye, and Gyeonggi. Also discussed in the chapter in detail are the transport systems and the road networks to ensure effective central governance. Supplement 2 illustrates Goryeo's pluralistic military system of central and local armies with Juhyeon-gun and Jujin-gun constituting the latter. Supplement 2 then turns its attention to the debate—whether *bubyeong* (farmer soldier) system or *gunban* (hereditary professional soldier) system—regarding the status of soldiers in the central army.

It has been widely believed that *munbeol* aristocrats seized control of government administration, shaping the bureaucratic systems to serve their interests with a strong grip on the monarch, and also that the local administration system was not unified due to insufficient centralization. Yet, this book attempts to address recent researches that highlight the monarch's pivotal role in mediating multiple powers' interests and the pluralistic local administration system based on local communities' autonomy.

This book criticizes the theory of the Japanese colonial historiography that land ownership all belonged to the king, and points out that private ownership of land was developed and that 1/10 of production was patriated to the central government, with the ruling class partly being given *sujogwon*. As there is not much research to suggest otherwise, the book explores *yangjeonje* and *jeonpumje*, land tax granting systems from the perspective that private ownership of land and *sujogwon* developed in coexistence. The book also explains in a supplement how government agencies were managed independently in the financial aspect, based on the implementation of a divisional financial management system.

Chapter 3 describes Goryeo's social order and life of ordinary people. The *gwageo* examinations, *eumseoje*, and the school system were the central focus of the scholarly debate on whether Goryeo was maintained by aristocratic or

bureaucratic system. *Gwageo* was the civil service examination which measured candidates' ability of writing and knowledge of the Confucianism Classics, while *eumseoje* was a system that allowed one to enter the official career thanks to one's ancestor. Determining which was the major form of appointing government officials, therefore, affects how we understand the nature of the ruling class at the time. The very existence of this debate, in my view, illustrates Goryeo's characteristic pluralism. In terms of its status hierarchy, scholars also disagree about whether it was the two-levels status system that consisted of *yangin* (good-born people)/*cheonin* (low-born people, mainly slaves) or the four-levels status system that consisted of *yangban* (aristocrat)/*jung-in* (middle status)/*yangin* (commoner)/*cheonin*. This book primarily follows the two-levels status system, but nonetheless acknowledges that within *yangin*, there were multiple classification such as *sajok* (the ruling class)/*seoin* (those without public office), *jeongho* (those of official obligation)/*baekjeong* (taxed farmers), or manufacturers/merchants/*japcheok* (inhabitants in special administrative districts). The book also explains family systems according to new theories that interpret kinship as bilateral, emphasizing that the husband-wife relationship was equal, that inheritance was evenly shared between sons and daughters, and that kinship terminology was based on gender and blood relational distance with no distinction between paternal and non-paternal relationships.

This book is the first history textbook that touches upon natural conditions and food, clothing, and shelter of the Goryeo era. These topics have not been extensively studied, but are included in this book in accordance with its objective of emphasizing the importance of Goryeo's life-history. Currently, there is a heated discussion on whether agricultural productivity at that time was at the stage in which the annually repeated cultivation was possible, or whether land fallowed biennially or triennially. There is also disagreement among scholars on the issues of land ownership and agricultural management. These differences in perspective are due to either a lack of data, or Goryeo's pluralistic and dynamic characteristics. The book also focuses on Goryeo's manual industry, which took the multiple forms of professional handicraft/farmer-driven cottage handicraft/*so* (special administrative district) handicraft. Goryeo's commerce is characterized by its dual system of ruling class-centered and laborer class-centered forms of commerce.

Regarding the peasant uprisings, the book reflects current research concerned with various strategies analyzing their differences and developments.

This is a move away from the standardized view that tended to see them as a class struggle. The development of the peasant uprisings into the restoration movement of the Three Kingdoms during the Military Regime can be understood as a consequence of the central government weakening and losing its social integration, ultimately leading to the rise of the decentralized local powers that claimed their roots in the Three Kingdoms.

Chapter 4 examines Goryeo's interstate relations and wars, and then offers an overview of the pluralistic interstate relations of East Asia and Goryeo's Haedongcheonha (the world reigned by the Goryeo Emperor) consciousness in a supplementary section. "Historical image of the nation-state" describes interstate relations at the time as individual one-on-one relationships between two interacting nations, or through the dual criterion of independence versus *sadae* (subordinate to the powerful empire) and idealism versus practicality. However, as interest in the history of interstate relations has recently increased, a new perspective that views interstate relations as pluralistically connected exchanges among multiple states has emerged. Responding to this new critical perspective, this book attends to the aspects of interstate relations where there was no hegemon and exchanges were promoted in East Asia in the early Goryeo period, and where there were increased diplomatic and cultural exchange and commercial trade in and beyond East Asia under the world-wide Mongol Empire.

Chapter 5 revolves around Goryeo's religions, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and indigenous religions, with a focus on their political and social roles, as well as what they functioned religiously. The chapter describes how these religions influenced individuals' mentality and lives, and how they were promoted as social and political ideologies. It then attends to Goryeo's project of compiling the Tripika in its aspiration to defeat foreign forces by virtue of Buddha's favor.

Chapter 5 pays special attention to Buddhist and Confucian rituals as the state ceremonies. It deals with not only their religious meanings but also their significant roles in integrating diverse social groups within the Goryeo dynasty. Goryeo established the Buddhist administration system and regularly performed Buddhist rituals such as Yeondeunghoe (Lotus Lantern Festival) and Palgwanhoe (Festival of the Eight Vows). In addition, Goryeo took Confucianism as a principle of reorganizing the royal rites and aligning the government operation with its ideal. *Chorye* (Taoist ritual) was also performed

as a ceremony for God's blessing the kingdom from the outset. In particular, the construction of Bokwongung Temple in mid-Goryeo laid the foundation for Taoism to blossom. In summary, Goryeo was very open to all religions, considering each of them to have essential utility values. This pluralism in religion is the very epitome of the pluralism inherent in the Goryeo era.

The history cannot be fully understood without a consideration of its thoughts and arts. Chapter 6 explicates historical consciousness, perceptions of nature and science/technology, and the characteristics of arts and culture. The chapter pays special attention to the coexistence of mystic historical view and Confucian historical view, the dualistic historical identity regarding whether Goryeo was the successor of Goguryo or Silla, and finally, Goryeo's claim of Dan-gun Joseon as its historical roots during its series of wars with the Mongols. Apart from these issues, the chapter also attends to not only differing perceptions of nature due to the Goryeo people's pluralistic beliefs and religions, but also its calendrical calculation system, shipbuilding technology, and medical treatment by domestic medical stuffs, areas on which recent progress in research has been made. Lastly, the chapter points out that the development of arts in Goryeo was attributed to the rise of the new aesthetically refined classes such as the local powers, *munbeol* class, and neo-Confucian literati as well as the flourishing of Confucianism and Buddhist culture. The book also explains that arts and culture developed because Goryeo accepted new elements well in open interstate exchanges.

Afterword

This book was published as a textbook for university students majoring in history. Therefore, it aims to cultivate more advanced knowledge rather than popular knowledge. To meet this objective, the book attempts to summarize and introduce recent researches.

Specifically, the editorial policy to highlight Goryeo's pluralism, integration, and openness holds merits in the present context. First, in the 21st century characterized by pluralism, elaborate network, and globalization, there is an increasing need for mutual dependence while autonomy is still an asset for individual entities that constitute society. In responding to such a need, it is crucial to cultivate the pertinent cultural competences through studying

history. Second, Goryeo's experience of bringing the Later Three Kingdoms into unification and later social integration can be a vehicle to achieve unification between South and North Korea and establish peace on the Korean peninsula. It also offers useful modes of thinking through which intense social conflicts can be resolved. Third, with a growing need for multiculturalism within Korea due to the remarkably increasing number of foreign immigrants, Goryeo's history will enable us to seek for ways to make coexistence possible and prosper together.

As I pointed out earlier, however, the participation of more than thirty scholars in the book makes the unified usage of the historical terms impossible. There are also many places in the book where Goryeo's pluralism and openness are not clearly addressed as initially intended. The type of period division also depends on each contributor. While this can be justified by the fact that Goryeo history is marked by pluralism and dynamics, such a lack of unity reveals itself as a weakness of the textbook for students.

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