

Post-Koryŏ History of the Kaesŏng Wang: A Research Note

Eugene Y. Park
University of Pennsylvania
epa@sas.upenn.edu

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This paper presents some preliminary observations from my new book project on how the royal house of Koryŏ Korea, the Kaesŏng Wang, fared during the Chosŏn period (1392–1910). This project is just nine months old. During the last winter break when my long-standing hobby of tracing genealogy spurred me to construct a genealogical chart of the Koryŏ royal house and the post-Koryŏ Wangs documented in primary sources, emerging patterns made me reflect on a story of human interest as well as the nature of Chosŏn society.

In the last twelve centuries or so, the Kaesŏng Wang transitioned from a local strongman (*hojok*) family to the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392) to a descent group recovering from a population bottleneck.¹ Wang Kŏn, the dynastic founder and King T'aejo (r. 918–943), posthumously honored three generations of his patrilineal ancestors as kings, but lingering, conflicting explanations of the relationship between his grandfather and great-grandfather reflect relative obscurity of the Kaesŏng Wang as a family on the rise in the late ninth century. In the Koryŏ period, most of the Kaesŏng Wang descended from the cousins of T'aejo, who evidently had no brother, led more mundane existence as hereditary local functionaries (*hyangni*) residing in the vicinity of Kaesŏng, the dynastic capital.² Even among the direct male descendants of T'aejo, those farther removed from the lines of royal succession received a spotty coverage in the royal kinsmen (*chongch'in*) section of the *History of Koryŏ* (*Koryŏ sa*) completed by the Chosŏn court in 1451.³ And reflecting the population bottleneck, more than ninety percent of South Korea's Kaesŏng Wang, numbering 19,808 as of 2000 in South Korea,⁴ descend from a lucky survivor of the 1394 massacre who was a descendant of T'aejo's fifteenth son.⁵

Other than the 1394 massacre and the events leading up to it, post-Koryŏ history of the Kaesŏng Wang has received little attention among historians, and the veracity of various claims coloring popular discussions remains untested. For example, a well-known account relates that many Wangs assumed other surnames, especially those using an ideograph requiring just one or two additional strokes to Wang ("king") such as Ok ("jade") and Chŏn ("field").⁶ Another popular claim is that even after the persecution ended in 1413, the Chosŏn state kept watchful eyes on the Wangs, making it difficult for them to enter officialdom, and that the Wangs did not bother.⁷ Moreover, many stories and customs of the people of Kaesŏng have expressed resentment toward Yi Sŏnggye, the founder of the Chosŏn dynasty and King T'aejo (r. 1392–1398).

My research so far has entailed consulting primary sources, conducting interviews, and making site visits. Much of the information on the post-Koryŏ Wangs derives from court histories, supplemented by other primary sources such as literary collections (*munjip*), town gazetteers (*ŭpchi*), local *yangban* registers (*hyangan*), household registers (*hojŏk*), land registers (*yangan*), examination rosters (*pangmok*), army registers (*kunjŏk*), and genealogies (*chokpo*). Also important are "unofficial histories" (*yasa*), including interviews with the present-day Wangs. After all, written sources other than unofficial histories tend to comply with, if not promote, the official line of the Chosŏn dynasty which justifies the anti-Wang persecution and stresses the benevolence of the court in rehabilitating the surviving Wangs for the position of ritual heir (*pongsason*) of the Koryŏ dynasty. Moreover, visits to various sites associated with the post-Koryŏ history of the Wangs have helped me tell a more vivid story.

This paper argues that the Kaesŏng Wang who survived the persecution assumed roles as loyal servants of the Chosŏn monarchy and negotiated a new social terrain while engaging subversive narratives sympathetic to the Koryŏ. Once the persecution ceased in 1413, the Wangs won the patronage of the court for whom they performed ancestor veneration rituals (*chesa*) in honor of Koryŏ

kings, passed the government service examinations, attained prestigious offices, and constituted local elite lineages in the provinces, as well as probably profiting from expanding commerce. As such, the most privileged among the Wangs were no different from the general aristocracy, the *yangban*, vis-à-vis attainment of classical Chinese education and upholding the Confucian moral norms, including the subject's loyalty (*ch'ung*) to the ruler. All the same, an emerging body of subversive narratives, written or oral, expressed sympathy toward Koryŏ and its progeny as victims of politicicide. The Wangs themselves refrained from an open expression of this sentiment until the end of the Chosŏn dynasty.

Narrating the plight of the Wangs allows a presentation more or less chronological and also topical. Reflecting the current chapter organization of my book manuscript, the main-body sections of this paper examines (1) the 1394–1413 persecution, (2) the court's subsequent search for ritual heirs of Koryŏ, (3) overall standing of the Wangs in terms of office holding, examination success, and local elite status, and (4) emerging subversive narratives. What I hope to present is a dialogue between a story of human interest and a social history of Chosŏn Korea.

I. The Persecution, 1394–1413

For nearly two decades from 1394 to 1413, the Chosŏn state sought to exterminate the Kaesŏng Wang. During the preceding sixteen months, a raging debate on what to do with the Wangs consumed the court, and official accounts portray King T'aejo, that is Yi Sŏnggye, as being pressured by the officials to dispatch the Wangs—a depiction that many previous studies have found problematic. After killing the Wangs divided up at three internment sites, the state continued to hunt down any remaining Wangs and kill those apprehended. In 1413 when T'aejo's son and the dynasty's third ruler, King T'aejong (r. 1400–1418), released a Wang in custody, in effect the decision ended the persecution.

During the sixteen months following the Koryŏ-Chosŏn dynastic change, the court took a series of actions before exterminating the Wangs. On August 8, 1392, that is three days after T'aejo ascended the throne, the Inspector-General (*Taesahŏn*) and other officials petitioned the throne for relocating the Wangs outside the capital. In response, T'aejo ordered that all—except the brother of the last Koryŏ ruler King Kongyang (r. 1389–1392) and the former's two sons as well as another Wang and his son—sent to Kanghwa or Kŏje islands.⁸ In the following month, the court reduced the number of slaves possessed by the Koryŏ Wangs.⁹ Ten months later in July 1393, the court divided up the Wangs at Kŏje into three groups, dispersing them to Wansan, Sangju, and Yŏnghae—all in the southern part of mainland Korea.¹⁰ Seven months later in February 1394 after investigating a report that two individuals had asked a fortuneteller about the fate of the last Koryŏ king and other Wangs, the court moved some Wangs back to Kŏje.¹¹ Citing the incident, four days later the Censorate (*Taegan*) and the Ministry of Punishments (*Hyŏngjo*) petitioned T'aejo for exterminating the Wangs.¹² A month later on March 23, the two agencies petitioned that four particular Wangs, all personally close to Kongyang, moved to the islands, followed by the memorials on the following day and the day after seeking punishment of all Wangs, but T'aejo refused.¹³ Three days later when a memorial pleaded for (1) subjecting Kongyang and his immediate kinsmen to the law, (2) expelling the four aforementioned Wangs to the islands, and (3) banishing the Wangs on Kanghwa to more remote islands, again T'aejo refused. When the officials of the Censorate and the Ministry of Punishments protested by refusing to perform their duties, T'aejo ordered the four Wangs in question banished to Kongju, Anbyŏn, Yŏnghŭng, and Happ'o.¹⁴ On the following day on March 29, T'aejo ordered the Office of the Inspector-General (*Sahŏnbu*) to look after the old and the infirm among the Wangs residing on Kanghwa,¹⁵ but this was the lull before the storm. On May 1 and May 10, the king received memorials urging him to kill the Wangs.¹⁶ Upon receiving such a memorial yet again four days later on May 14, T'aejo ordered that the Wangs put to death.¹⁷

A sizeable body of scholarship has examined the above series of events, but no consensus has emerged. As well known, T'aejo reigned not so much a powerful king as the *primus inter pares* surrounded by powerful scholar-officials and military commanders who had enthroned him. Evidently taking the court's discussions as documented in the veritable records (*sillok*) at the face value, some scholars view T'aejo as a monarch who begrudgingly consented to putting the Wangs to death after resisting his officials' demand for almost three months.¹⁸ Reading between the lines, other scholars

see in T'aejo a more pragmatic political player who went through the motions of being compassionate before finding an opportune moment to issue the inevitable ultimate order.¹⁹

The massacre commenced on the following day. On May 15, 1394, the Wangs on Kanghwa were thrown into the sea from a harbor.²⁰ Possibly confusing the event with what would take place later at Kōje, some oral traditions claim that the government offered to send them to a better place,²¹ possibly the nearby Kyodong island to the northwest, put the Wangs on ships, and then sank the ships on course. Two days later on May 17 in Samch'ōk, the former monarch Kongyang and his household members met their doom,²² though I am yet to come across any account on the manner of their deaths. Then on May 20 the Wangs interned on Kōje died when, again, the troops sank the ships transporting them.²³ Later accounts claim that waiting soldiers dispatched those who managed to swim ashore.²⁴

During the massacre, at least 135 Wangs died if the alleged list of victims that a Reformed Confucian (*Sirhak*) scholar, Sōng Haeūng (pen name Yōn'gyōngjae, 1760–1839), analyzed is reliable. Conducting a source criticism on the *Tonghak-sa hon'gi* [Tonghak temple record of perished souls], a source otherwise unknown, Sōng analyzed the victim list in light of other sources. Given the Buddhist ritual of *suryuk hoe* performed especially for salvation of the creatures inhabiting the most painful domains of *samsara*,²⁵ as well as the *suryuk hoe* that, in 1395, T'aejo ordered the temples near three internment sites to hold every spring and autumn for the Wangs who had perished,²⁶ it seems that one or more versions of the victim list existed after the massacre. Sōng correctly points out two out of three Wangs on the list who actually did not die during the massacre.²⁷ The error in the original source seems to suggest a corrupt text after repeated copying.

If the *Tonghaksa hon'gi* is indeed a reliable source, then the court seems to have divided the Wangs into three groups for reasons. To Samch'ōk, the court banished at least ten Wang males, that is the former king Kongyang, his immediate kinsmen, and others who had special ties to the king, including slaves.²⁸ Though not an island, the court must have deemed the location remote enough to keep the former royal household in isolation. As for Kanghwa, perhaps the court could tell at least fifteen Wangs sent there that it was a special accommodation for them since the island was a former capital—even though the island was exposed to *Wakō* raids.²⁹ Perhaps mindful of its proximity to the capital, the court evidently sent there mostly the Wangs of more advanced age. Out of fifteen that the *Tonghaksa hon'gi* records, at least five had an adult son if not a grandson at the time.³⁰ Kōje, which accommodated the largest group of internees, at least 113,³¹ is a large, distant island located off the southern coast of Korea, and the internees there most likely were younger—probably in their twenties, thirties, or forties. Kōje too was vulnerable to *Wakō* raids to the extent such that earlier the Koryō government had to relocate the administrative seat from the island to the mainland.³²

It is not easy to determine whether the victim list of 135 (excluding the three erroneously recorded) that the *Tonghaksa hon'gi* records is complete. The number seems too small if we were to presume that the total population of Kaesōng Wang at the time—after half a millennium of recorded existence as a descent group—must have been in thousands. If this were the case, then the list is either somehow highly selective or the Koryō court had applied strict criteria in defining the royals entitled to special privileges. Considering that during the Koryō period the Kaesōng Wang living outside the Kaesōng city proper continued to perform duties as hereditary local functionaries³³ and the state did not treat them as royals (not to even mention their exclusion from royal kinsmen section of the *History of Koryō*), the Chosōn state most likely targeted only the bona fide royal Wangs—perhaps numbering in hundreds.

The court was determined to exterminate all royal Wangs as well as banning the usage of the surname itself. On the day of Kōje massacre, May 20, the court also launched a mass hunt that would last almost two decades, seeking out the Wangs throughout the country and killing those apprehended.³⁴ Perhaps T'aejo's aforementioned order to three temples to hold the *suryuk hoe* for the perished Wangs stemmed not so much from compassion as a fear of vengeful spirits. Merciless agents of the state typically strangled or beheaded the apprehended Wangs. Recorded cases as a whole suggest that the Wangs who did not die at the three internment sites in 1394 tended to be illegitimate sons or descendants of such Wangs.³⁵ On May 26, that is six days after commencing a nationwide hunt, the court even ordered those who had received the surname Wang from the Koryō court (and the descendants of such Wangs) to assume their original surnames, and other Wangs, even if not of royal descent, had to go by their maternal surnames.³⁶

The court spared the lives of Kongyang's brother, Wang U (n.d.–1397), whose daughter was married to T'aejo's seventh son, and U's two sons Wang Cho (n.d.–1398) and Wang Kwan (n.d.–1398), and their positions remained precarious. On the day of his accession on August 5, 1392 and again nine days later, King T'aejo reaffirmed the status of U as the ritual heir of the Koryŏ dynasty and gave him a land in Majŏn, although condescendingly giving him a new enfeifment title, Kwiŭi Kun, literally meaning the "prince restoring the righteousness [of Chosŏn?]."³⁷ In May 1395, a Censorate official requested that the father and the two sons banished to Kanghwa, holding them responsible for a recent natural disaster, but T'aejo refused.³⁸ Upon U's death in January 1397,³⁹ evidently the court was not in a hurry to fill the position of ritual heir. The court took seven months to promote the elder son, Cho, in rank as well as ordering him to inherit the father's title of Kwiŭi Kun and thus the position of the ritual heir.⁴⁰ Cho also regained the surname Wang,⁴¹ as presumably in May 1394 per order from the court, he and his brother must have assumed their mother's surname, No. The brothers did not outlive their father long. Ten months later in July 1398 when T'aejo's ambitious fifth son, the future King T'aejong, killed two half-brothers, both favored by their father, and all those supporting them, both Cho and Kwan too died as their sister was married to one of T'aejong's half-brothers.⁴²

It was also T'aejong who would later set a precedent by releasing an apprehended Wang and in effect ending the persecution. For two weeks in December 1413, officials repeatedly requested that Wang Kŏuro mi (n.d.), an illegitimate son, put to death, but King T'aejong was firm in upholding his decision to release him.⁴³ Three years later in November 1416 when the authority apprehended two brothers of royal descent, Wang Sangu (n.d.) and Wang Hwasang (n.d.), and interrogated them, T'aejong released the brothers.⁴⁴ Along with his decision in September 1416 posthumously promoting the last Koryŏ ruler from a prince (*kun*) to a king (*wang*),⁴⁵ T'aejong's decisions to release the apprehended Wangs reflect the overall political stability and the monarch's own sense of security. By then, not only was a Koryŏ restorationist effort out of question, he had defeated all other challengers potential or real, including Cho Saŭi (1402) and the in-laws (1410). Also, as the Chosŏn court was coming to terms with the human legacies of Koryŏ, T'aejong began honoring the scholar-officials who had resisted his father, such as Chŏng Mongju (1338–1392), as loyal subjects of Koryŏ.⁴⁶ With hardly any Wangs around, T'aejong could afford the luxury of granting clemency to the progeny of vanquished royal house. In this milieu, the court would eventually begin searching for a new ritual heir of Koryŏ.

II. Search for Ritual Heir

Seeking to bolster dynastic legitimacy as well as perhaps fearing the wrath of anguished spirits, the court's effort to secure a line of ritual heirs of Koryŏ faced illegitimacies, false claims, and overall dearth of surviving Wangs. T'aejong's successors searched for a Wang to perform ancestor veneration rituals in honor of Koryŏ monarchs, but the best candidate that the court could identify by 1452 claimed an eleventh-century Koryŏ king as his most recent royal ancestor. When in 1540 the third heir from the line died without a legitimate son, the court decided to search for another descent line. The effort took almost five decades, and this time the family's most recent royal ancestor was King T'aejo of Koryŏ. Most of the Kaesŏng Wang today belong to this line, which continues to provide ritual heirs to this day.

Even while an official ritual heir was unavailable, the court nonetheless was mindful of an edifice for rituals. On the land that Wang U had earlier received in Majŏn, in 1399 the court erected a shrine to venerate a select group of Koryŏ kings.⁴⁷ During the reign of T'aejong's son and successor, King Sejong (r. 1418–1450), most of the recorded actions of the court concerning the Wangs have to do with the wellbeing of the surviving female members of last Koryŏ monarch's family, such as the widow (n.d.–1449) of the half-brother that T'aejong had killed, or upkeep of the shrine in Majŏn.⁴⁸ Formally naming the shrine "Sungŭijŏn" (literally "Hall of Venerated Righteousness"), in 1451 King Munjong (r. 1450–1452), the son and scholarly successor of Sejong, had four Koryŏ kings and sixteen loyal subjects of Koryŏ honored there.⁴⁹ In November, Munjong ordered a search for a Wang to perform proper ancestral veneration rituals.⁵⁰

In the following year in April 1452, the court finally found someone, the man's life changed

suddenly. A descendant of an eleventh-century Koryŏ king, Hyŏnjong (r. 1009–1031), and an illegitimate son,⁵¹ a certain Wang Uji (later renamed Wang Sullye, n.d.–1485) was hiding out in Kongju when he happened to get into an argument with a neighbor over the boundary of their plots. When the neighbor reported him to the authority and the report reached the throne, Munjong honored him with gifts.⁵² Due to the king’s death, the royal command that Uji bestowed with land and slaves was carried out in June after Munjong’s son and successor, King Tanjong (r. 1452–1455), ascended the throne.⁵³ In July, the court put him in charge of the shrine, Sungŭijŏn, as well as bestowing him with a name, Wang Sullye (“in accord with propriety”)—thus initiating a line of court-appointed Sungŭijŏn caretakers.⁵⁴ Other than a stretch of three years (October 1459–January 1463) during which he was out of office after being dismissed for favoring a concubine over his wife,⁵⁵ Sullye continued to enjoy royal patronage, especially during the reign of Tanjong’s uncle and usurper, King Sejo (r. 1455–1468). The veritable records mention seven occasions when Sejo or his grandson King Sŏngjong (r. 1469–1495) invited him to a royal banquet or granted food and drinks.⁵⁶ On more than one occasion reminding Sullye of his special status as the heir of the Koryŏ dynasty, Sejo went as far as declaring that he was a “guest” (*pin*) rather than a subject (*sin*).⁵⁷ Until his death in 1485 during Sŏngjong’s reign,⁵⁸ Sullye continued to enjoy the throne’s special attention, but he must have known better than taking advantage of it. Even without Sejo’s admonition to carry himself with caution,⁵⁹ Sullye had to be wise enough to understand that the all-too-powerful meritorious subjects (*kongsin*) whom the throne had been rewarding repeatedly since Sejo’s usurpation were the power holders, and any newcomer seeking the king’s special attention would do so at his own risk.

Two generations after Sullye, in 1540 his line of ritual heirs ended when the grandson died leaving behind only illegitimate sons,⁶⁰ and it took the court of King Chungjong (r. 1506–1544), the second son of Sŏngjong, forty-nine years to find another Wang.⁶¹ Although in 1485 the court had allowed Sullye’s illegitimate son to assume the father’s position since there was no legitimate son,⁶² it seems that by the mid-sixteenth century the aristocratic notions about inheritance had come to exclude illegitimate sons even in the absence of a legitimate son. In the following months, the court considered various candidates, seeking a Wang of *yangban* status living in Seoul with many sons, and eventually eliminated from further consideration a physician’s unmarried son, Wang Inwi (n.d.), making an unverifiable claim of descent from King Ch’ungyŏl (r. 1274–1298, 1299–1308), as well as others descended from illegitimate sons.⁶³ In July 1541, Chungjong appointed Wang Hŭi (1496–1561), reportedly a *yangban* with many sons, living in Sinch’ang in Ch’ungch’ŏng province.⁶⁴ Nearly five decades later in August 1589, however, the court of King Sŏnjo (r. 1567–1608), a grandson of Chungjong, had to investigate an allegation that Hŭi was not of royal descent.⁶⁵ Reportedly, the military examination roster recording Hŭi’s son indicated the latter’s ancestral seat (*pon’gwan*) as Chŏnju,⁶⁶ whereas Hŭi’s own household register document showed his ancestral seat as “Chuch’ŏn.”⁶⁷ Centuries later in 1918 the comprehensive Kaesŏng Wang genealogy would admit Hŭi and his line as the descendants of the Duke of An’gyŏng (n.d.), the second son of King Kojong (r. 1213–1259) of Koryŏ. In 1589, however, the court saw Hŭi’s family as unqualified and ultimately stripped Hŭi’s successor’s successor, the grandson, of the position as the caretaker of Sungŭijŏn.⁶⁸ Using the earlier search criteria as well as making sure that the candidate’s advanced age did not compromise his overall mental acuity, Sŏnjo appointed Wang Hun (ca. 1520–ca. 1590).⁶⁹ Compared to the earlier Wang Sullye line descended from King Hyŏnjong, Hun was an even more distant scion of the main line of Koryŏ royal succession. He was a descendant of a certain Wang Mi (1365–n.d.), another lucky survivor of the 1394–1413 persecution and a descendant of the fifteenth son of Koryŏ King T’aejo, Grand Prince Hyoŭn (n.d.).⁷⁰ The court’s decision proved to be far more fortunate: not only would Hun’s direct descendants continue to fill the position of Sungŭijŏn caretaker almost all throughout the remainder of the Chosŏn period, more than ninety percent of the living Kaesŏng Wang in South Korea are direct descendants of Mi.

After securing a new line of ritual heirs, the court had other concerns vis-à-vis Sungŭijŏn as well as Koryŏ royal tombs. Illegal use of the land surrounding them for private graves, cultivation, or the lumber persisted.⁷¹ Evidently the presence of government personnel as headed by the court-appointed Sungŭijŏn caretaker was inadequate—even with the Kaesŏng magistrate (*yusu*) occasionally reporting local conditions to the court.⁷² In the reign of King Injo (r. 1623–1649), a grandson of King Sŏnjo, the court began paying more attention to the upkeep of Sungŭijŏn and Koryŏ royal tombs,⁷³ but what most likely aided better maintenance was the growing population of Hun’s

descendants living in the area, Majön.⁷⁴ Other than a brief crisis in 1876–1878 when a descendant of aforementioned Wang Hüi, Wang Sahüi (1848–1885), got himself appointed as the ritual heir before the court sacked him as a false Kaesöng Wang,⁷⁵ the descendants of Hun have continued to perform the role to this day. Although the Sungüijön caretaker post was hardly a central office of political power at national level, its status as that held by state-approved heirs of Koryö dynasty made the difference. What follows is a consideration of links among the state, birth, and status in local society for the Kaesöng Wang.

III. Standing in Chosön Society

Contrary to the seemingly popular notion that the Kaesöng Wang were marginalized in Chosön society, they maintained presence in central officialdom as well as achieving local elite standing. Available comments on how the Wangs fared in the Chosön society tend to be anecdotal if not myths. As a whole, they claim that even after the persecution the state did not give offices to the Wangs, and that the Wangs did not want them anyway. My own preliminary research, however, suggests that the Wangs not only achieved elite standing in many locales in the provinces, a good number even achieved significant positions in the central government.

The overall examination success of the Kaesöng Wang were not impressive but certainly not insignificant. Their success was more limited in the *munkwa* examination, which was the most prestigious competition of all and critically important for the *yangban* aspiring to attain the highest, politically meaningful civil offices, and also the licentiate examinations, the participant pool of which significantly overlapped with that of the *munkwa* examination. In comparison, the Kaesöng Wang fared better in the *munkwa* examination, the participation pool of which became more socially diverse in the late Chosön period. Among the descent groups of population size between 10,000 and 19,999 as of 2000 in South Korea, the Hamjong Ö (13,321) were the most successful vis-à-vis the *munkwa* examination. Whereas the less populous Hamjong Ö produced 24 *munkwa* passers in the entire Chosön period, the Kaesöng Wang (population 19,808 as of 2000 in South Korea) account for 9.⁷⁶ The Hamjong Ö also produced 16 *mukwa*, 1 technical, and 58 licentiate examination graduates, whereas the Kaesöng Wang put out 21 *mukwa*, 1 technical, and 27 licentiate examination passers.⁷⁷ Neither descent group produced a late Chosön specialist *chungin* line of Seoul, as each produced in the mid-Chosön period lone technical examination passer.

The above patterns of examination success more or less reflect difference in the degree of presence in central officialdom. Almost all of Hamjong Ö examination passers resided in the so-called “*yangban* crescent” comprising Seoul and Kyönggi province as well as northern Ch’ungch’öng, western Kangwön, and southeastern Hwanghae regions.⁷⁸ In fact, most of the late Chosön Hamjong Ö hailed from a *yangban* lineage of Patriarch (*Noron*) faction. Not only did the Ö’s achieve high-level civil offices such as the Second State Councillor (*Chwa üijöng*), the Sixth State Councillor (*Chwa ch’amch’an*), and the Minister of Taxation, they also produced a queen, who was the second wife of King Kyöngjong (r. 1720–1724). Compared to the Ö’s, the presence of the Kaesöng Wang in officialdom was far more modest, mirroring their more limited *munkwa* examination success. The most important offices achieved by the Wangs include the Third Minister of War (*Pyöngjo Ch’amüi*), the First Counselor (*Pu chehak*) of the Office of Special Counselors (*Hongmun’gwan*), and the Third Inspector (*Changnyöng*) of the Office of the Inspector-General (*Sahönbu*). From the seventeenth century onward, kings occasionally commanded that the descendants of the Koryö dynasty appointed to offices as well as reconfirming that they are not to drafted as common soldiers.⁷⁹ Since this was true for most *yangban* lineages in the late Chosön period, we can surmise that the royal commands were gestures of special grace toward the descendants of the previous dynasty rather than an indication of their unusually disadvantaged position in society.

As is true with Chosön *yangban* as a whole, by the late Chosön period the Kaesöng Wang living outside Seoul had to be content with their inherited status, at best that of local *yangban*. After the seventeenth century, most provincial *yangban* were not earning an examination degree, a court rank, or an office.⁸⁰ The northwestern regional enjoyed impressive success with both *munkwa* and licentiate examinations,⁸¹ but the pattern typifies not so much an exceptional group of local *yangban* as the upward social mobility of some sub-*yangban* families from the middle tier of late Chosön

social pyramid. In fact by the end of the eighteenth century, about a dozen Seoul-based *yangban* lineages—predominantly members of Patriarch faction—were monopolizing the most important civil offices in central officialdom.⁸² What follows is a survey of four Kaesŏng Wang lineages that maintained local elite standing in Chosŏn society.

Among them, the Kaesŏng Wang lineage based in Ch'ŏngju in eastern Ch'ungch'ŏng region was the flagship lineage in terms of political prominence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Descended from Mi's great-grandson, Classics Licentiate (*Saengwŏn*) Wang Chongŭi (n.d.), the lineage produced three *munkwa* examination passers as well as at least three *mukwa* examination graduates and five licentiates. Their most prominent member, Wang Hŭigŏl (1505–1553), was not only the first among the Kaesŏng Wang to pass the *munkwa* examination but as a scholar of fame for his prose and calligraphy he became the First Counselor of the Office of Special Counselors, a prestigious senior third rank civil office.⁸³ Once the lineage members began leaving the capital for Ch'ŏngju, the lineage's political fortune faded within a generation or two. For sure, in late Chosŏn society, a *yangban* family's relocation from Seoul typically led to detachment not just from central officialdom but also examination success. What also seems to have worked against the Wangs of Ch'ŏngju is a population bottleneck. Far too many members of the lineage had trouble continuing their lines to the extent where the increasingly common elite practice of adoption was unable to keep up with an evidently high number of males dying without an heir. By the time the lineage survived the bottleneck by the seventeenth century and the population began increasing steadily, the damage presumably was irreparable.

In the mid-Chosŏn period, the Kaesŏng Wang residing in Kaesŏng replaced their Ch'ŏngju kinsmen as the standard bearer vis-à-vis examinations and office holding. Descended from Wang Chang (n.d.), a senior third rank official of the Royal Stable Administration (*Saboksi*) and a second cousin of the father of the progenitor of the aforementioned Ch'ŏngju lineage, the Wangs based in Kaesŏng produced some *mukwa* examination passers and minor officeholders in the early and mid-Chosŏn periods. In the late Chosŏn period, however, the lineage enjoyed greater success in terms of putting out more licentiates, more significant officeholders, and even five *munkwa* examination passers. The first of the five *munkwa* examination graduates, Wang Chŏngyang (1824–1894), somehow won the attention of King Kojong (r. 1864–1907) as a descendant from the “vanquished state” (*sŭngguk*) harboring lofty ideas. Even though Chŏngyang had just earned his degree, the king appointed him as the Third Minister of War.⁸⁴ I am yet to examine any source that can shed some light on any economic foundation of the family's examination successes in the nineteenth century, although as well known the city occupied a prominent place in an increasingly commercialized economy of late Chosŏn. Perhaps the family was able to convert their accumulated economic capital to cultural capital, ultimately the *munkwa* examination success. Evidently reflecting the status anxiety of a relative social newcomer, eight-generation genealogies (*p'alsebo*) of nineteenth-century *munkwa* and *mukwa* examination passers from the lineage consistently—and wrongly—claim direct descent from aforementioned Wang Hŭigŏl, the most prominent Kaesŏng Wang of the Chosŏn period, even though they were descended from a fourth cousin, Fifth Minister-without-Portfolio (*Ch'ŏmji Chungch'ubu sa*) Wang Hŭiji (1516–1600).⁸⁵

Compared to the kinsmen of Kaesŏng and Ch'ŏngju, the Kaesŏng Wang of Kurye in Chŏlla region constituted a more typical local *yangban* lineage in Chosŏn society as they enjoyed local elite standing with minimal ties to court politics. Other than a few early to mid-Chosŏn licentiates, *mukwa* examination graduates, and minor officeholders, the Wangs of Kurye were detached from officialdom.⁸⁶ In 1804, the lineage secured the court's official recognition of their mid-Chosŏn ancestors who had fought as “righteous army” (*ŭibyŏng*) leaders against the Japanese. Such an effort as well as publishing literati collections of celebrated ancestors helped the Kurye lineage solidify its standing as a local elite family—as indicated by the local *yangban* register (*hyangan*) which records ten members of the lineage. Their local *yangban* status was not just about honors or birth, as the lineage also owned much land and a large number of slaves.⁸⁷

Unlike the local elite Kaesŏng Wang lineages examined above, the Majŏn lineage was unique in that it bore the state-sanctioned responsibility of performing proper rituals in veneration of the Koryŏ dynasty for generations. As mentioned, the Sungŭijŏn caretaker position was coveted among the Wangs. In October 1659, King Hyŏnjong (r. 1659–1674) approved the proposal that a caretaker serving fifteen years or more promoted.⁸⁸ Two centuries later, when the court downgraded the rank of

caretaker (1870) and fixed the term to sixty months (1878),⁸⁹ it became increasingly common for a kinsman other than the previous caretaker's son to assume the position, although except for aforementioned Sahūi, all were direct descendants of Hun.⁹⁰ Compared to the Kurye lineage, the Kaesŏng Wang of Majŏn enjoyed even less success in the government service examination or obtaining offices. Producing no known examination passer, the Majŏn lineage nonetheless enjoyed local elite status, with the Sungūijŏn caretaker commanding respect—with the locals addressing him as “mister caretaker” (*ch'ambong nari*) even during the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945). During the colonial period, many Wangs not only possessed servants (*hain*) but women from the local Hong lineage, with whom the Wangs intermarried for generations, generally brought personal servants (*momchong*) with them when marrying into the Wangs.⁹¹

Whereas the aforementioned Kaesŏng Wang enjoyed elite standing in Chosŏn society, others were social newcomers made problematic genealogical claims. To begin, even the purported genealogical tie between aforementioned Wang Mi, from whom more than ninety percent of the living Kaesŏng Wang claim descent, and King T'aejo of Koryŏ is not without problems. Not only does the 1377 licentiate examination roster leave out his ancestral seat information, (1) the *Origins of Descent Groups* (*Ssijok wŏllyu*), a highly reliable mid-seventeenth-century genealogy which rightly records virtually all *yangban* families of the time as descendants of local functionaries (*hyangni*), and (2) the oldest extant Kaesŏng Wang genealogy, the 1798 edition, do not fully agree on the number of generations between Mi and T'aejo's son as well as their names.⁹² In 1589, however, Sŏnjo and his officials searching for a new line of ritual heirs presumably found no problem with the notion that Hun, through Mi, was a descendant of King T'aejo's fifteenth son, Grand Prince Hyoŭn, while regarding other Wangs' claims of royal descent unreliable or baseless, as discussed above.

Throughout the Chosŏn period, many Wangs made far-fetched genealogical claims. Two of the unsuccessful candidates mentioned during the court's search for a new heir in November 1540 are aforementioned Wang Inwi (n.d.), a son of a physician, claiming to be a thirteenth-generation descendant of King Ch'ungyŏl, and Wang Sunson (n.d.), a Seoul-resident Confucian scholar (*yusa*) who also claimed to be a descendant of the same late Koryŏ king but without knowing the number of intervening generations.⁹³ Various Wang families continued to make problematic claims in the remainder of the Chosŏn period, and since 1881 the comprehensive Kaesŏng Wang genealogy has added four descent lines claiming descent from, respectively, (1) King Ch'ungjŏng (r. 1348–1352) (1881); (2) the Duke of Yangyang (n.d.), the second son of King Sinjong (r. 1197–1204) (1881); (3) the Duke of An'gyŏng, the second son of King Kojong (1918); and (4) the Duke of P'yŏngyang (1021–1069), the fourth son of King Hyŏnjong (1974). In all four cases, the claim is through a son unrecorded in the royal kinsmen section of the *History of Koryŏ*, and the alleged son of King Ch'ungjŏng is especially problematic. Not only did the Yuan court depose the child-king when he was just 14 *se* old and banished him to Kanghwa, the Koryŏ court put him to death less than three months thereafter. Also, the son supposedly attained the post of Supreme Chancellor (*Munha Sijung*), but he does not appear in the *History of Koryŏ*. It is inconceivable that a high-level official such as a supreme chancellor could have escaped mention in the source.

IV. Subversive Narratives

Compared to the material discussed above, subversive narratives require far more research, as history of memory about the Kaesŏng Wang is complex. In public sources such as court histories and town gazetteers, the Wangs appear no different from others in terms of prescribing to Confucian cardinal virtues, especially loyalty to the ruler and thus the Chosŏn dynasty. All the same, a wide range of unofficial sources, that is private writings and oral histories, suggest that both a keen awareness of the early Chosŏn state's systematic effort toward exterminating the Kaesŏng Wang and subsequent resentment among the victims and their sympathizers gained strength in the society.

The Kaesŏng Wang who achieved prominence embodied and manifested commitment to the cardinal Confucian virtue of loyal to the ruler, and among them aforementioned Wang Hūigŏl was a neo-Confucian scholar-official par excellence. Not only was he close to the neo-Confucian scholars of fame at the time such as Yi Hwang (pen name T'oegye, 1502–1571), during the 1545 Literati Purge he, as a secret royal inspector (*Amhaeng ōsa*), dutifully reported to the throne that a prince implicated

in an allegedly treasonous plot was hiding out under the protection of Monk Pou (1515–1565) who enjoyed the patronage of powerful Queen Dowager Munjǒng (1501–1565) and her brother, Yun Wǒnhyǒng (1509–1565). Initially the court dominated by Munjǒng was unable to act, but after her death when the court banished Pou, Hūigōl’s report served as the critical evidence in the case against Pou. The provincial *yangban* among the Kaesǒng Wang, too, produced those honored for loyalty to the throne, as exemplified by the aforementioned ancestors who lost their lives fighting against the Japanese in 1597. Given that the Wangs of social standing had no choice but to remain loyal to the system, only after the end of the Chosǒn dynasty the Kaesǒng Wang genealogy dared to even record kings U (r. 1374–1388) and Ch’ang (r. 1388–1389)—both condemned as false Wangs and executed in 1389 by the founders of Chosǒn.

Compared to, for example, sympathetic narratives on the fate of King Tanjong and his loyal subjects, however, those expressing a similar sentiment toward the Kaesǒng Wang are less numerous. Understandably so, oral traditions outnumber written accounts. Three distinct types of subversive narratives sympathetic to the Wangs have survived: (1) tales of purported survivors; (2) alleged accounts of victims; and (3) outright expressions of anti-Chosǒn dynasty sentiment.

According to various stories of Wangs who survived the early Chosǒn persecution, they changed their surnames to Ok (“jade”), Chǒn (“all”), Chǒn (“field”), or even Kim (“metal”).⁹⁴ Writing the four surnames require adding, respectively, one, two, two, or four strokes to Wang. As Oks, Chǒns, or Kims, the survivors are said to have left the capital to become farmers or merchants. Other than an Ok lineage that “reclaimed” the surname Wang in 1918⁹⁵ and a claim by some Namyang Chǒn (written with the character meaning “field”) that they are descendants of a Wang who had been banished to Kongju,⁹⁶ I am yet to come across any verifiable case of Wang assuming a different surname during the period of persecution. Whereas I still need to investigate the circumstances in which an Ok lineage reclaimed the surname Wang, chronological discrepancies enable us to dismiss the Namyang Chǒn claim.⁹⁷

In comparison, alleged accounts on victims express outright sympathy toward the Wangs, and a classic is that purporting to describe the final moment of King U, the first royal Wang to die as a victim of the founders of Chosǒn dynasty. According to the account, when Ch’a Sik (1517–1575) became the magistrate of Kosǒng in Kangwǒn province, Yi Sich’un (n.d.), who was the father-in-law of Yang Saǒn (1517–1584), was seventy *se* in age. Yi often mentioned a story he heard from his great-grandmother who was more than ninety *se* old at the time and once lived in Kangnǔng. Twelve *se* old, upon hearing that the former king will be executed she went over to the place of execution. According to her, the king declared: “We Wangs are dragon’s descendants. Because every Wang has three pieces of scale under the left armpit, this has served as our mark for generations.” Afterward he removed his cloth, revealing that under his left armpit were indeed three pieces of scale, each of shining gold in color and coin-sized. All those present were awed and saddened.⁹⁸ Thus the people of Kangnǔng knew that official historians had lied when portraying U as a false Wang, claims the account.⁹⁹

Even more numerous are subversive stories directly challenging the legitimacy of the founder of the Chosǒn dynasty, and many from Kaesǒng and its vicinity express resentment toward Yi Sǒnggye as a treasonous subject. For example, various versions of the story of the literati of Tumun-dong in Kaesǒng claim that seventy-two scholars refused to serve in the new Chosǒn government, instead choosing to lock themselves up in Tumun-dong and ultimately dying when the court set the neighborhood ablaze. In the same way the name “Tumun-dong” has become proverbial description of anyone secluding himself, other place names such as Pujo-hyǒn (“Hill of those not serving”) and Katkōl-chae (“Hill of hung hats”) allegedly refer to the scholars who refused to serve the Chosǒn dynasty by removing their hats or hiding beyond a hill.¹⁰⁰

In another story that is openly critical of Yi Sǒnggye, the Koryǒ loyalists confront the usurper in a dramatic fashion. On August 4, 1392 [sixteenth day of seventh lunar month of 1392] when Yi Sǒnggye led a coup and proclaimed himself king, he summoned the royals and officials of the Koryǒ dynasty. Stating that the Heaven raised him to the throne as the fortunes of Koryǒ declined, he commanded them all to become his subjects. When the various loyal subjects loudly responded in unison, asking how they can bend themselves to become subjects of Koryǒ’s enemy with whom together they cannot bear above their heads the Heaven, enraged Yi banished all Wangs and Koryǒ loyalists to Kanghwa, Samch’ōk, and Koje where all were killed.¹⁰¹

In various legends, enraged King T'aejo of Koryŏ strikes back. In one story, he appears in the dream of King T'aejo of Chosŏn after the 1394 massacre and declares: "Even though I benefitted our people by uniting the Samhan, you have exterminated my descendants. Before long there will be the revenge. I command you to be aware." T'aejo of Chosŏn woke up scared, and shortly thereafter he pardoned the Wangs appearing on one page of their genealogy.¹⁰² In another story, King T'aejo of Koryŏ, with a blazing gaze, appears in a dream of King T'aejong, and the latter knelt down, begging for his life. Shooting forth fire from his eyes, T'aejo commanded: "If it were your father Yi Sŏnggye, I would have decapitated him in one stroke. It took me thirty years to visit the Jade Emperor, and in the interim your father turned treasonous, vanquished Koryŏ, and as if that is not enough, he butchered my descendants. I am on my way back after casting the demon-like spirit of Yi Sŏnggye in the hell fire. If you do not stop murdering the Wangs, then I shall strike you with even greater calamity." After waking up, T'aejong took no action, and about a month later hundreds of army horses on Cheju island died from an unknown sickness. Before long the disease spread to Chŏlla region where the livestock died en masse.¹⁰³

Besides accounts portraying Yi Sŏnggye in a bad light, various customs of Kaesŏng and its vicinity reflect sentiments against him. For example, the Kaesŏng Wang of Majŏn traditionally did not marry a Chŏnju Yi, according to a contemporary informant.¹⁰⁴ Also, *chorang ttŏkkuk*, a soup of sticky rice cake indigenous to Kaesŏng, traditionally is said to have been prepared by local women who squeezed or cut a lump pretending that it is Yi Sŏnggye's neck.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, when offering sacrificial food to Ch'oe Yŏng whom Yi Sŏnggye executed after defying King U's order to attack Ming China and took over the government, the residents of Kaesŏng, as well as P'yŏngan region, boiled a pig or a wild boar in whole. Referring to the sacrificial animal as "sŏnggye meat" (*sŏnggye yuk*), mindful of the fact that Yi was born in the year of boar, when the sacrificial ritual was over, the locals cut up the whole body. And the residents referred to a pork soup as "sŏnggye soup" (*sŏnggyet'ang*).¹⁰⁶

Final Thoughts

In summary, a critical post-Koryŏ history of the Kaesŏng Wang is a story of the progeny of former royal house as well as a study on the Chosŏn society. Reflecting its own sense of insecurity, from 1394 to 1413 the Chosŏn court massacred the Wangs. After the persecution ceased, not surprisingly the court found it difficult to identify a true Wang to perform ancestral veneration rituals for the vanquished dynasty. After appointing as the ritual heir and the caretaker of Sungŭijŏn a descendant of an eleventh-century Koryŏ king, the grandson died without a legitimate son. After another round of search, the court settled for a line descended from the fifteenth son of the founder of Koryŏ. Accounting for more than ninety percent of the living Kaesŏng Wang, the members of this line, descended from a lucky survivor of early Chosŏn persecution, spread out, and many attained status as central officials or local *yangban* while other Wangs made questionable genealogical claims. The Wangs enjoying elite social standing served the Chosŏn dynasty with loyalty, but various types of subversive narratives expressed sentiments sympathetic to the victims, if not outright hostile toward the Chosŏn dynasty.

Again, my observations are based on a preliminary research that began less than a year ago, and hence I characterize this paper as a research note. To begin, while believing that I have the big picture vis-à-vis Kaesŏng Wang local elite lineages in central and southern Korea, I still know little about a sizable population of Wangs in northern Korea. Also, I must consider the extent to which, if at all, the Kaesŏng Wang of residing in Kaesŏng accumulated significant wealth in the increasingly commercialized economy of late Chosŏn—as I suspect that such a wealth could have contributed to their impressive success in the *munkwa* examination during the final decades of the Chosŏn period. Perhaps the most challenging questions for my project to consider: do various subversive narratives contain kernels of truth? Regardless, can we at least estimate the period when they began circulating? Are some post-Chosŏn constructs?¹⁰⁷

The post-Koryŏ plight of the Kaesŏng Wang is full of drama and may impress many as a story of human interest, but perhaps for historians, the subject would take on more meanings if discussed from a comparative perspective. For sure, the 1394–1413 persecution of the Kaesŏng Wang

was unprecedented in the sense that Korean history features no documented case of an earlier mass killing of the members of a vanquished dynasty. All the same, comparing the early Chosŏn case with the rise of various conquest dynasties of Eurasia at the time, such as the Ming dynasty of China, the Timurids of Persia, and the Ottoman Turks, may yield additional insights on how victors dealt with human legacies of a vanquished dynasty in the early modern era. Moreover, how the Wangs fared in the Chosŏn society not only requires analyzing social change in early modern Korea from the fifteenth to the late nineteenth century but also provides material for a macroscopic perspective on the meaning of “early modern” for Eurasia as a whole.

Notes

¹ Date citations in this paper are according to Gregorian solar calendar unless noted otherwise. In Korea, the East Asian lunar calendar was the official standard until the seventeenth day of the eleventh lunar month of 1895, the Gregorian New Year’s Day of 1896, when the government went solar. This study uses the format of, for example, “January 1, 1800” for Gregorian dates and “1800.1.1” for lunar ones. Also, according to the lunar calendar and now the Gregorian, customary Korean age count regards a person at birth to be one *se* (Ch. *sui*) in age, gaining a year upon each New Year’s Day. Thus, one’s age in *se* is either one or two years more than the age according to Western practice.

² Yi Sugŏn, *Han’guk chungse sahoesa yŏn’gu*, 142–43.

³ *Koryŏ sa*, 90.1a–91.19b.

⁴ On South Korea’s population as of 2000 by surname and ancestral seat, this paper cites data from T’onggyech’ŏng, “Ch’ong chosa in’gu (2000): sŏngssi, pon’gwan,” *Kukka t’onggye p’ot’ŏl*, http://kosis.kr/abroad/abroad_01List.jsp.

⁵ The 1974 edition of the comprehensive genealogy (*taedongbo*) of the Kaesŏng Wang devotes approximately 813 out of 900 pages to the members of this descent line. *Kaesŏng Wang-ssi taedongbo*, 1.15–2.828.

⁶ “Yi Sŏnggye sŏrhaeng,” *Han’guk minjok munhwa tae paekkwa sajŏn*, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0039192.

⁷ Interview of Wang Yŏngnok on August 5, 2014, Yŏnch’ŏn, South Korea.

⁸ *T’aejo sillok*, 1392.7.20.

⁹ *T’aejo sillok*, 1392.8.20.

¹⁰ *T’aejo sillok*, 1393.5.26.

¹¹ *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.1.17.

¹² *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.1.21.

¹³ *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.2.21, 2.22, 2.23.

¹⁴ *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.2.26.

¹⁵ *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.2.27.

¹⁶ *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.4.1, 4.10.

¹⁷ *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.4.14.

¹⁸ For example, see Han Sanggil, “Chosŏn chŏn’gi suryuk chae sŏrhaeng ũi sahoejŏk ũimi,” 676–77.

¹⁹ For example, see Kang Hosŏn, “Chosŏn T’aejo 4 nyŏn kukhaeng suryuk chae sŏrhaeng kwa kŭ ũimi,” 206–207.

²⁰ *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.4.15.

²¹ Nam Hyoon, *Ch’ugang naeghwa*, as cited in Yi Kŭngik, *Yŏllyŏsil kisul*, 1.116–17.

²² *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.4.17.

²³ *T’aejo sillok*, 1394.4.20.

²⁴ Nam Hyoon, *Ch’ugang naenghwa*, as cited by “Chosŏn ũn wangjo kigan naenae Koryŏ wangjok (Wang-ssi) ũl t’anap hago myŏljok sik’yŏssŭlkka?” http://cluster1.cafe.daum.net/_c21_/bbs_search_read?gpid=18chZ&fldid=QGUX&datanum=483&contentval=&docid=18chZQGUX48320110105104413.

²⁵ Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 813.

²⁶ *T’aejo sillok*, 1395.2.24.

- ²⁷ Söng Haeüŋ, *Tonghaksa hon'gi sök*, in *Yön'gyöngjae chönjip: Oejip*, 37.103b–c.
- ²⁸ Söng Haeüŋ, *Tonghaksa hon'gi sök*, in *Yön'gyöngjae chönjip: Oejip*, 37.103b–104a.
- ²⁹ Kang Hosön, “Chosön T'aejo 4 nyön kukhaeng suryuk chae sörrhaeng kwa kü üimi,” 216.
- ³⁰ *Koryö sa*, 90.5b–12b, 91.1a–4a; and Söng Haeüŋ, *Tonghaksa hon'gi sök*, in *Yön'gyöngjae chönjip: Oejip*, 37.106d–107c.
- ³¹ Söng Haeüŋ, *Tonghaksa hon'gi sök*, in *Yön'gyöngjae chönjip: Oejip*, 37.104a–106d.
- ³² Yun Kyöngjin, “Koryö mal Chosön ch'o Kyogun üi sölch'i wa chaep'yön,” 182–89.
- ³³ Yi Sugön, *Han'guk chungse sahoesa yön'gu*, 142–43.
- ³⁴ *T'aejo sillok*, 1394.4.20.
- ³⁵ *T'aejo sillok*, 1397.12.1, 1397.12.8; *T'aejong sillok*, 1413.11.15, 1413.11.26, 1413.11.29, 1413.12.1; and *Söngjong sillok*, 1482.1.18.
- ³⁶ *T'aejo sillok*, 1394.4.26.
- ³⁷ *T'aejo sillok*, 1392.7.17, 1392.7.26.
- ³⁸ *T'aejo sillok*, 1395.4.25.
- ³⁹ *T'aejo sillok*, 1397.2.24.
- ⁴⁰ *T'aejo sillok*, 1397.10.10.
- ⁴¹ *T'aejo sillok*, 1397.10.10.
- ⁴² *T'aejo sillok*, 1398.8.26.
- ⁴³ *T'aejong sillok*, 1413.11.15, 1413.11.26, 1413.11.29, 1413.12.1.
- ⁴⁴ *T'aejong sillok*, 1416.11.1, 1416.11.5.
- ⁴⁵ *T'aejong sillok*, 1416.8.5.
- ⁴⁶ *T'aejong sillok*, 1401.1.14, 1401.11.7, 1402.4.3, 1403.6.5.
- ⁴⁷ Majön is located near the point of Imjin River up to which the full tide reaches. Interview of Hong Sunmin on August 4, 2014, Yönc'h'ön, South Korea.
- ⁴⁸ *Sejong sillok*, 1421.1.13, 1423.6.29, 1431.7.30, 1442.5.10, 1449.7.19.
- ⁴⁹ Hong Ponghan, *Tongguk Munhön pigo*, as cited in *Koryö Sungüijön sa*, 112; and Hō Pong, *Haedong yaön*, as cited in *Koryö Sungüijön sa*, 112–13.
- ⁵⁰ *Munjong sillok*, 1451.11.1.
- ⁵¹ *Söngjong sillok*, 1482.18.
- ⁵² *Munjong sillok*, 1452.3.18.
- ⁵³ *Tanjong sillok*, 1452.5.19.
- ⁵⁴ *Tanjong sillok*, 1452.7.2.
- ⁵⁵ *Sejo sillok*, 1459.9.19, 1463.1.10.
- ⁵⁶ *Sejo sillok*, 1465.6.2, 1466.1.3, 1467.1.3, 1467.9.24, 1471.7.29; and *Söngjong sillok*, 1476.8.10, 1477.1.1.
- ⁵⁷ *Sejo sillok*, 1465.6.2, 1467.1.3.
- ⁵⁸ *Söngjong sillok*, 1485.6.10.
- ⁵⁹ *Sejo sillok*, 1467.1.3.
- ⁶⁰ *Chungjong sillok*, 1540.10.21.
- ⁶¹ Evidently neglected sometime thereafter, Wang Sullye's grave was re-discovered during a road construction, with an old Chosön era grave stone indicating the person buried. Interview of Wang Kyusik on August 4, 2014, Yönc'h'ön, South Korea. The grave stone is of eighteenth-century style. In contrast, two columns flanking the grave mound are contemporary additions, using sharp lines and simple designs resulting from machine-cutting rather than hand-cutting which is more expensive. Interview of Hong Sunmin on August 4, 2014, Yönc'h'ön, South Korea. Since no descendants of Sullye are known, private donations funded redecorating the grave area. Interview of Wang Kyusik on August 4, 2014, Yönc'h'ön, South Korea.
- ⁶² *Söngjong sillok*, 1485.6.14.
- ⁶³ *Chungjong sillok*, 1540.10.21, 1540.10.22, 1541.6.21.
- ⁶⁴ *Chungjong sillok*, 1541.6.21.
- ⁶⁵ *Sönjo sillok*, 1589.7.4.
- ⁶⁶ XX.
- ⁶⁷ *Koryö Sungüijön sa*, 172.

- ⁶⁸ *Sŏnjo sillok*, 1589.7.4; and *Koryŏ Sungŭijŏn sa*, 172.
- ⁶⁹ *Sŏnjo sillok*, 1589.7.4, 1589.7.5.
- ⁷⁰ Post-Koryŏ Kaesŏng Wang genealogy as discussed in this paper is based on a database that I put together using the *History of Koryŏ (Koryŏsa)*, the Chosŏn veritable records, and the 1974 edition of comprehensive Kaesŏng Wang genealogy, the *Kaesŏng Wang-ssi taedongbo*.
- ⁷¹ *Hyŏnjong sillok*, 1662.10.7; *Hyŏnjong kaesu sillok*, 1660.9.4, 1662.10.7; *Sukchong sillok*, 1681.12.28; and *Sunjo sillok*, 1818.2.24, 1818.3.8.
- ⁷² *Sŏngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, 1870.8.28; *Hyŏnjong sillok*, 1670.10.23; *Hyŏnjong kaesu sillok*, 1670.10.23; *Yŏngjo sillok*, 1727.10.21; *Chŏngjo sillok*, 1796.6.3; and *Sunjo sillok*, 1818.3.8.
- ⁷³ *Sŏngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, 1637.8.4, 1727.12.26, 1789.12.10, 1868.9.14, 1902.9.24; *Hyŏnjong sillok*, 1673.2.28; *Hyŏnjong kaesu sillok*, 1673.2.28; *Sukchong sillok*, 1675.10.2; *Yŏngjo sillok*, 1727.10.21; and *Sunjo sillok*, 1818.2.24, 1818.3.8.
- ⁷⁴ Descended from one of the sons of Wang Hun, the Kaesŏng Wang in Majŏn currently number about 20 households. In the early twentieth century there used to be as many as 100 households. Interview of Wang Kyusik on August 4, 2014, Yŏnch'ŏn, South Korea; and interview of Wang Yŏngnok on August 5, 2014, Yŏnch'ŏn, South Korea.
- ⁷⁵ *Sŏngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, 1876.2.26, 1878.3.9, 1878.7.19, 1878.10.1.
- ⁷⁶ On the number of Chosŏn *munkwa*, technical, and licentiate examination passers by surname and ancestral seat, this paper cites data from Han'gukhak Chungang Yŏn'guwŏn, *Han'guk yŏktae inmul chonghap chŏngbo sisŭt'em*, <http://people.aks.ac.kr/index.aks>.
- ⁷⁷ *Mukwa* examination data derive from my own personal database of 35,053 degree holders, accounting for about a fifth of all Chosŏn *mukwa* examination graduates.
- ⁷⁸ Quinones, "The Prerequisites for Power in Late Yi Korea," 144–47; and Quinones, "Military Officials of Yi Korea," 697–700.
- ⁷⁹ *Hyŏnjong sillok*, 1660.9.4; *Yŏngjo sillok*, 1727.10.21; *Chŏngjo sillok*, 1792.8.21, 1796.6.3; and *Sunjo sillok*, 1818.2.24.
- ⁸⁰ Park, *Between Dreams and Reality*, 88.
- ⁸¹ On the region's success in the *munkwa* examination, see Wagner, "The Civil Examination Process as Social Leaven," 22–27.
- ⁸² Han'guk yŏksa yŏn'guhoe 19 segi chŏngch'isa yŏn'guban, *Chosŏn chŏngch'isa, 1800–1863*, 1.165.
- ⁸³ Unless noted otherwise, all biographical information presented in this paper comes from Han'gukhak Chungang Yŏn'guwŏn, *Han'guk yŏktae inmul chonghap chŏngbo sisŭt'em*, <http://people.aks.ac.kr/index.aks>.
- ⁸⁴ *Sŏngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, 1867.1.14.
- ⁸⁵ For example, see *Munbo* [Academy of Korean Studies K2-1744], 3.73a.
- ⁸⁶ Kim Ŭnyŏng, "Chosŏn hugi Kurye Kaesŏng Wang-ssi ka ũi ko munsŏ," 172.
- ⁸⁷ Kim Ŭnyŏng, "Chosŏn hugi Kurye Kaesŏng Wang-ssi ka ũi ko munsŏ," 169–84.
- ⁸⁸ *Hyŏnjong sillok*, 1659.9.10; and *Hyŏnjong kaesu sillok*, 1659.9.10.
- ⁸⁹ *Sŏngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, 1870.8.28, 1878.6.22; and *Koryŏ Sungŭijŏn sa*, 173.
- ⁹⁰ *Koryŏ Sungŭijŏn sa*, 173–74.
- ⁹¹ Interview of Wang Yŏngnok on August 5, 2014, Yŏnch'ŏn, South Korea.
- ⁹² *Ssijok wŏllyu*, xx; and Han'gukhak Chungang Yŏn'guwŏn, *Han'guk yŏktae inmul chonghap chŏngbo sisŭt'em*, <http://people.aks.ac.kr/index.aks>.
- ⁹³ *Chungjong sillok*, 1540.10.21, 1541.6.21.
- ⁹⁴ "Yi Sŏnggye sŏrhwa," *Han'guk minjok munhwa tae paekkwa sajŏn*, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0039192.
- ⁹⁵ Wang Chegu, as cited by "Kaesŏng Wang-ssi," *Wikipedia*, http://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%EA%B0%9C%EC%84%B1_%EC%99%95%EC%94%A8.
- ⁹⁶ "Waegoktoen Namyang Chŏn-ssi sanggye ssijok sa rŭl paro insik haja," <http://blog.daum.net/namyangjhun/7>.
- ⁹⁷ "Waegoktoen Namyang Chŏn-ssi sanggye ssijok sa rŭl paro insik haja," <http://blog.daum.net/namyangjhun/7>.

- ⁹⁸ *Han'goltong*, as cited in Yi Kŭngik, *Kugyŏk Yŏllyŏsil kisul*, 1.59.
- ⁹⁹ An oral tradition from southeastern Korea.
- ¹⁰⁰ “Yi Sŏnggye sŏrhwa,” <http://utoo.me/0atvLz>.
- ¹⁰¹ *Tonghakchi*, as cited in *Kaesŏng Wang-ssi taedongbo*, 2.purok.56.
- ¹⁰² *Ch'uksup'yŏn*, as cited in Yi Kŭngik, *Kugyŏk Yŏllyŏsil kisul*, 1.117.
- ¹⁰³ Chŏn Sun'gu, “Kaesŏng Wang-ssi 500 nyŏn wangŏp i munŏ chigo myŏlmun ŭi sunan,” http://www.hcmunhwa.or.kr/bbs/board.php?bo_table=sub9_1&wr_id=358.
- ¹⁰⁴ Interview of Wang Yŏngnok on August 5, 2014, Yŏnch'ŏn, South Korea.
- ¹⁰⁵ “Yi Sŏnggye sŏrhwa,” *Han'guk minjok munhwa tae paekkwa sajŏn*, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0039192.
- ¹⁰⁶ “Yi Sŏnggye sŏrhwa,” *Han'guk minjok munhwa tae paekkwa sajŏn*, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0039192.
- ¹⁰⁷ I would like to thank Boudewijn Walraven for raising this question. Conversation on August 6, 2014, Seoul, South Korea.