

EMPIRE'S TWILIGHT
Northeast Asia Under
the Mongols

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least equally plausible that the Koryō king had learned of Darma's appointment long before he arrived in Liaoyang to take up his new duties. In any case, Darma declined to accept either the correspondence or the gifts.

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Koryō in the Great Yuan Ulus

The Ties That Bind: Marriage and the Great Khan's Guard

Among those who paid minute attention to events in the Mongol empire was Wang Ki 王祺, or, as he is better known to history, King Kongmin 恭愍王 (r. 1351-74).² Twenty-two-years old in 1351, the year he formally took the Koryō throne, he did not look like a Korean in many ways, or at least not one that the dynastic founder would have recognized immediately. He and most of his court plaited their hair in Mongol fashion³ and wore Mongolian felt caps. Many donned tight-fitting riding tunics with pleated robes and sleeves that narrowed at the wrist and left the bow-arm free for action.⁴ Formidable equestrian skills were esteemed and on frequent display: polo matches were common in his capital.⁵ Like the Mongols, the Koryō court valued the matches as entertainment, military training, and a way to strengthen elite cohesion. The king frequently viewed archery contests, including events that featured shooting at small targets while mounted on horses galloping at breakneck speeds. Kongmin enjoyed watching members of his body-guard wrestle, again both as entertainment and as a test of prowess.⁶ Even the king's "throne" was the platform that could seat several people (the so-called barbarian bed 胡床) commonly used by rulers throughout the Mongolian empire.⁷

Like nearly all the Koryō kings during the Mongol period, the young monarch used both Mongol and Korean names, depending on the context.⁸ In his interactions with the empire (and on occasion with the founder of the Ming dynasty), Kongmin was known as Bayan-Temür, a solid if common Mongol name. In 1349, as a member of the Koryō royal family, he married a young Mongol woman, Budashiri. Her title was the Huiyi Luguó Imperial Princess 徽懿魯國大長公主. Her father was Bolod-Temür, the Wei Prince 魏王.⁹ The princess's family was part of the imperial clan, but more distant from the throne in terms of blood and political influence than the families of earlier Mongol princesses married into the Koryō royal family during the thirteenth century.

During the 1350s, the Koryō court followed developments in the Great Yuan *ulus* with keen interest. It was well positioned to track the growing severity of social unrest there. As Chapter 1 noted, during the mid-fourteenth century, tens of thousands of people from Koryō resided in the main capital of Daidu and as many as a quarter million Koreans may have lived scattered throughout the Yuan as a whole. They included successive generations of the Koryō heir apparent, his sometime rival the Sim Prince, scholars, monks, merchants, and thousands of women, who served at court and mingled with the Mongolian elite. Accurate, timely information was invaluable to all these groups.

On occasion officials in the Mongolian bureaucracy found Korean intelligence networks disturbingly efficient. In 1333, Darma 答里麻, a Gaochang 高昌 Uyghur, had just taken up his post as second privy counselor of the Liaoyang Branch Secretariat. Among the first to meet with him was a royal Koryō envoy en route to Daidu from Kaegyōng. The envoy presented four bolts of fabric and an official diplomatic communication to officials in the secretariat. Darma was doubtful about the envoy's motives and methods.

Darma observed, "When you left Koryō, I was still in the capital and was not yet an official in the Liaoyang Branch Secretariat. How could [the king] have a letter for me?" Although it is entirely possible that the Koryō envoy engaged in some form of duplicity (perhaps adding Darma's name to what should have been a sealed letter), it is at

A well-established strategy for forging strategic alliances on the steppe, marriage ties linked the Yuan imperial family to many leading Mongol lineages.¹⁰ Koryŏ's status as a "son-in-law" country began late in the 1260s and signaled a critical shift in Yuan-Koryŏ relations.¹¹ In 1269, the Koryŏ heir apparent (better known later as King Ch'ungnyŏl) requested the hand of a Mongol princess; this act changed the Yuan court's attitude about Koryŏ's loyalty. Up to this point, court ministers in Daidu had debated several options for dealing with the Wang royal family in Koryŏ. One was extermination. The Koreans had after all resisted the Mongols for decades and had murdered more than a dozen high-ranking Mongol officials during a revolt in 1240.¹² The Yuan court viewed Ch'ungnyŏl's gesture as evidence of Koryŏ's new commitment to loyalty.

The Mongols' decision to interpret Ch'ungnyŏl's behavior positively owed much to the larger geopolitical conditions of the empire. Qubilai was still engaged in his mighty conflict with the Chinese Song dynasty. His Chinese ministers, such as Ma Heng 馬亨 (1207-77), counseled that improved relations with Koryŏ would prevent a damaging alliance between the Song and the Koreans. Ma Xiji 馬希驥, another official, also argued that Koryŏ's men and material could be profitably turned to the planned conquest of Japan. Both men held that the Yuan court should seize on Ch'ungnyŏl's apparent change of heart to bind the Koryŏ throne to the Yuan. Renewed war with Koryŏ would prove a dangerous and expensive distraction from the Mongols' strategic aims.¹³ Qubilai probably also saw the Koryŏ royal family as a useful check against the powerful Eastern Princes of the Liaodong region. If convinced of the congruence of its interests with those of the Yuan court, the Koryŏ throne would be more inclined to resist the princes' overtures and threats.¹⁴ Finally, in the succession struggle with his brother Ariq-Böke, the submission of Koryŏ bolstered Qubilai's credentials as Great Khan and removed it as a potential source of manpower and material to his rival.¹⁵

What did Ch'ungnyŏl hope to gain? The marriage alliance promised benefits to Koryŏ's ruling family, the Wangs. When Ch'ungnyŏl's distant forefather, Wang Kŏn 王建 (r. 918-43), established the Koryŏ dynasty early in the tenth century, he had attempted to strengthen the power of the monarch vis-à-vis the aristocracy, in part by forging ties

with local elites (*hyangin*). However, by the 1260s, the monarch's power had been under siege for centuries. During much of the first half of the thirteenth century, military officers controlled the government, reducing the Wang family to little more than figureheads. Political infighting and the ghastly toll of decades of fighting against the Mongols eventually helped end the military dictatorship.¹⁶ The king's position, however, remained tenuous. Increasingly powerful and self-aware, aristocratic families who owned extensive tracts of rural land but held bureaucratic posts in the capital challenged both the throne and its principal institutional ally, the *hyangin* "on whom the dynasty relied to maintain order and collect taxes, corvée, and local tribute."¹⁷

As the most powerful regime in Eurasia, the Mongols presented an invaluable opportunity for the Wang family and its supporters. In 1269, King Wŏnjong 元宗 (r. 1259-74) lost his throne in a coup d'état led by the military general, Im Yŏn 林衍. The king's desperate son, Ch'ungnyŏl, hit on the idea of reviving family fortunes through a marriage alliance with the Mongol imperial family. As noted above, the request matched Mongol strategic interests. In 1270, as a Mongol envoy at the Koryŏ court led Im Yŏn to believe that such a marriage was imminent, the Yuan dispatched troops to ensure Wŏnjong's return to power. The first Mongol princess did not actually arrive in Koryŏ until 1274, after the Wangs had restored a modicum of order at home and assisted in preparations for the invasion of Japan. They had demonstrated that they were worthy of a Mongol princess and Yuan commitment.

Even with Yuan support, the Wang house faced considerable challenges from aristocratic families who held important posts in the central government and enjoyed the status of ascriptive titles. Further complicating tensions between the throne and this central aristocracy, as John Duncan has termed it, was the emergence of families and individuals with ties to the Mongolian ruling elite. This helps explain why King Ch'ungnyŏl would make the arduous three-week trip between Kaegyŏng and Daidu more than a dozen times during his reign.¹⁸ Early in Ch'ungnyŏl's reign, Koryŏ's elite military units, the Sambyŏl-ch'ŏ 三別抄, rejected his authority (partly in response to his new alliance with the Mongols), established a pretender on their provisional island capital off the southern coast of Koryŏ, and continued the struggle against the Mongols. The Sambyŏl-ch'ŏ were put down only when royal Koryŏ

troops and Mongol forces launched a joint campaign against them.¹⁹ The Wang family needed the Yuan ruling house, and the Yuan khan needed the Wangs.²⁰ Marriage cemented the bond. The young Kongmin was heir to nearly a century of such close relations.

As noted above, Kongmin's Mongol bride was not from the most influential branch of the imperial family. This general trend became increasingly pronounced over the course of the fourteenth century. One senior Korean scholar, Min Hyŏn-gu, has argued that the match reflected the Great Yuan *ulus's* enfeeblement. With the Yuan's obvious decline, he reasons, a marriage to a princess closely related to the throne was no long imperative to the interests of the Koryŏ throne.

More recent research draws a different conclusion. At least in the case of Kongmin, the choice of marriage partner was shaped by past ties between the Koryŏ and Yuan ruling houses. Kongmin's new Mongolian bride was the granddaughter of Amuga (Chin. Amuge 阿木哥, d. 1324). Amuga was the elder brother of emperors Haisan and Ayurbarwada.²¹ In 1324, one of Amuga's daughters married King Ch'unguk 忠肅王 (r. 1313–30), Kongmin's father.²² Marriage ties to the close relatives of the imperial Yuan throne may well have become less critical for Koryŏ interests. In one sense, however, the Koryŏ ruling house had become so tightly intertwined with the house of Qubilai that it formed marriage ties without regard to the imperial throne itself.²³

Mongolian women at the Koryŏ court made their presence felt and seen in many ways. Women in steppe societies often played a more visibly powerful role in politics than was common in many sedentary cultures. Such women as Chinggis khan's mother and his principal wife and, more recently, Qubilai's mother and his principal wife were powerful figures in the empire. Mongolian princesses who married into the Koryŏ royal house wielded great influence at the Koryŏ court and with their male and female attendants immediately formed alternative nodes of political power in Kaegyŏng.²⁴

Their tastes in cuisine, clothing, music, and religion also shaped court culture. Like many women at the Koryŏ court, Kongmin's queen favored Mongolian fashion. Among these was the striking *baqla* (Ch. *guyi*), an elaborate Mongolian woman's hat. Worn by married Mongolian women, *baqla* for elite women could be as tall as one foot in height and were commonly adorned with precious stones or peacock

feathers.²⁵ When in 1311, the Yuan empress dowager bestowed a *baqla* on one of Ch'ungsŏn's 忠宣王 (r. 1308–13) consorts, all understood it as evidence of the king's favored status at the Mongol court; a banquet with all Koryŏ officials in attendance was held to mark the occasion.²⁶ We do not know whether the queen made use of the *gyr* or felt tents that King Ch'ungnyŏl had built for his Mongolian queen in 1296 on the platform of the Such'ang Palace 壽昌宮 in Kaegyŏng.²⁷

King Kongmin and his queen were deeply attached. When she died in childbirth in 1365, the loss cut the king deeply. At a time when the country was experiencing severe privations, he lavished vast sums to construct a new hall in her memory and had Mongolian music played when her death was commemorated. Some scholars have argued that her death plunged the king into a long period of depression, withdrawal from affairs of state, and an interest in comely young men.²⁸

Their marriage had been arranged during the king's decade-long sojourn in Daidu. Through its marriage alliances to the imperial Yuan family, the Koryŏ royal house vaulted into the ranks of Eurasia's true elites. Although many, particularly Korean scholars, emphasize the compromising consequences of the tie, Koryŏ kings' position as *küre-gen*, or "son-in-law kings," nearly immediately raised their status at home and abroad. Observers as far away as the Il-khanate knew of Qubilai's Korean son-in-law.²⁹ These advantages explain at least in part why elite Tibetans, Uyghurs, Öngüt, Kereyid, Qipchaq Turks, and others proved eager to marry into the imperial Mongolian family.³⁰ Morihira Masahiko has argued that the status as son-in-law king put the Koryŏ ruling house on a par with Mongolian and Central Asian princes with comparable privileges and responsibilities. The valued status of Chinggisid "son-in-law" outlasted the empire. As Beatrice Forbes Manz has observed, Tamerlane (d. 1405) would later use his status as *küre-gen* to legitimate his rule in the post-Mongolian world.³¹

Put in other words, the Koryŏ ruling house was integrated into the larger political structures of the Mongol empire. Administrative posts associated with princely establishments elsewhere in the Mongol empire had their counterparts in Koryŏ. Just as the Great Khan bestowed appanages on Mongol princes and other favorites, so Koryŏ kings received similar lands. Koryŏ was regarded as the king's appanage, and smaller communities in southern Liaodong were organized as a way to

support the king's progresses from Kaegyōng to Daidu and Shangdu.³² The Koryō royal family served an analogous function to Qubilai's sons and grandsons, who were invested in strategic border regions to defend the interests of the Yuan throne.³³

Another critical feature of the Mongols' system of political and military control that deeply influenced the Koryō ruling house was the practice of holding hostage the sons of influential leaders throughout the empire. At one level, this practice was designed to ensure the loyalty and cooperation of men who might otherwise ignore or challenge the Yuan ruling house. Yet, the system performed a far more important function. Incorporating these elite hostages into the Great Khan's bodyguard, the *kesbig*, bound these future leaders of the Mongol empire to the imperial family and its interests.³⁴ Enjoying privileged access to the Great Khan's charisma, hostages who served in the *kesbig* were marked as the empire's elite.³⁵ They also gained access to an exclusive world of power and connections, a world rooted in the Yuan ruling house. Through participation in this system, young elites throughout Eurasia were encouraged to view themselves as the select few who would rule over their own lands and peoples but also be part of the ruling stratum of the wider Mongol empire. Elites from as far away as Tibet and Central Asia traveled to Daidu.³⁶

Beginning late in the thirteenth century, young males from the Koryō royal family traveled to Daidu as hostages and served successive generations of Great Khans.³⁷ Through their years in the Yuan capitals, young Koryō elites gained access to what must have been an intoxicatingly rich cultural world. Daidu and Shangdu were far from spartan military outposts—they boasted towering walls, lavish palaces, exquisitely appointed living quarters, entertainment quarters, and a full panoply of services—from chefs, courtesans, doctors, and silver artisans to leather workers, carpenters, professional scholars, artists, and religious specialists.³⁸

The capitals were also the sites of the week-long state-sponsored "Colors Banquets," which featured sumptuous foods, fine serving vessels, munificent gifts to guests, and abundant quantities of alcohol.³⁹ As Sugiyama, Allsen, and others have noted, establishing personal bonds, developing political consensus, and forging potential alliances among the empire's elite were the principal aims of these lavish feasts.⁴⁰ The

political dimensions of the banquets may have eluded some contemporary Chinese. As Frederick Mote has observed, "Although the Chinese recognized some crude analogies to their own formalized etiquette in aspects of Mongol behavior, they could not accept Mongol ritual and ceremonial as more than curiosities from the steppe way of life. The great Mongol ceremonial banquets were displays of barbaric splendor in their eyes."⁴¹ However, to judge from the lovingly detailed descriptions of opulent clothing and the attention to the participants' exalted political and social status contained in numerous "palace poems," the underlying significance of Mongolian banquet culture did not completely escape fourteenth-century Chinese literati.⁴² King Ch'ungnyōl was fully alive to his privileged status as he took his place in 1300 among other princes of the Great Yuan *ulus* at a Colors Banquet in Shangdu.⁴³

His successors also circulated among the empire's well-connected elite. In the 1330s, the dethroned King Ch'ungnye (忠惠王, r. 1330–32, 1339–44) passed his days of detention in Daidu drinking with young Mongol supporters of his former patron. His love affair with a Uyghur girl in the capital proved so bewitching that on occasion he failed to report for duty at the Great Khan's *kesbig*.⁴⁴ He also pursued such favored Mongolian pastimes as hunting, drinking, and dancing with the most powerful ministers of the day. Ch'ungnye and El-Temür, a Qipchaq Turk who was among the most dominant figures at the Mongol court, hunted together with falcons at Hichetü (Ch. Liulin 柳林), southwest of Daidu where the Mongol court spent the late winter and early spring.⁴⁵

Koryō Court Politics and Daidu

One member of the Koryō royal family developed into an important patron of Buddhism and Confucian scholarship during his sojourn in the capital. In fact, Kongmin's grandfather, Wang Chang 王璋 (1275–1325, who reigned as King Ch'ungsōn), was loath to leave the sparkling world of Daidu to take up his duties as king in Kaegyōng. In 1984 workers discovered three different Buddhist sutras stored within the body of a statue of the Tathagata Buddha in Beijing's Zhihua Temple 智化寺. Produced by exquisitely crafted woodblocks on expensive

paper, the sutras bear Wang Chang's official seals as both the King of Koryō and the Sim Prince.⁴⁶ The discovery reflects the cosmopolitan nature of Buddhism in Daidu during the early fourteenth century and Wang Chang's role as a religious patron.⁴⁷

Wang Chang's refusal to leave Daidu, however, arose most fundamentally from his conviction that the Yuan capital was the ultimate source of political power in Asia.⁴⁸ Even after his enthronement, Wang Chang remained in Daidu, transmitting his orders to trusted ministers who supervised daily governance in Koryō. Both the Yuan throne and many Koryō officials pressured Wang Chang to return to Kaegyōng. Instead, he yielded the throne to his son, who ruled as King Ch'ungsuk (r. 1313–30, 1332–39).

From Daidu, Wang Chang continued to wield great power in Koryō, controlling the critically important personnel administration and the royal fisc. He also attempted to limit his son's authority and rule as Koryō king by investing his nephew Ko with the title Shen Prince (Sim Prince). This Sim Prince became a potential candidate for the Koryō throne, complicating political power in Korea and engendering considerable political intrigue throughout Northeast Asia. For his machinations, intransigence, but most especially for his political ties to the recently deceased emperor Ayurbarwada (r. 1312–20, Chinese temple name Renzong 仁宗) and perhaps more important Ayurbawada's mother, the Empress Dowager Targi (Ch. Daji 答己, d. 1322), the newly enthroned Shidebala (Chinese temple name Yingzong 英宗, r. 1321–23) exiled Wang Chang to distant Turfan.⁴⁹ He also dethroned Kongmin's father, King Ch'ungsuk, and kept him in Daidu under house arrest for several years. Wang Chang was right about the ultimate source of power in the fourteenth century.

In 1341, the twelve-year-old Kongmin began his service in the Yuan *keashig*, where he would experience the capital's rich cultural offerings and its hard-edged politics. He did not make the journey alone. Several score of trusted civil officials, lower-level military officers, close attendants, eunuchs, and other servants accompanied the young prince. Korean scholars tutored him in classical learning and the histories of Korean and Chinese dynasties. He may have absorbed the "Confucian atmosphere" from Chinese Confucian scholars who taught at the Hall of the Upright Root (Duanbentang 端本堂), an academy founded for

the heir apparent, Ayushiridara (d. 1378; born of a Korean mother, Empress Dowager Ki).⁵⁰

Whatever scholarly interests Kongmin may have pursued, he was still a teenage boy at the time. He developed a deep affection for one member of his entourage who was strong enough to lift him with one arm.⁵¹ He almost certainly hunted with Mongols of royal blood, met Central Asians from elsewhere in the Mongolian empire, and mixed with the large Korean expatriate community in Daidu.

The international circle of acquaintances made at the Mongol court would survive Kongmin's return to Koryō. The Uyghur scholar Xie Xun 偲遜 (fl. 1345), who served as the Yuan heir apparent's tutor at the Upright Root Academy, was among Kongmin's companions in the capital. During the Red Turban rebellions of the 1350s and 1360s, Xie would seek refuge at the Koryō court, where Kongmin received him warmly.⁵² Korean scholar Mŭn Hyōn-gu has argued that Kongmin owed his crown to Toqto'a, the powerful Yuan prime minister who had supervised the Hall of the Upright Root while Kongmin had been in the capital.

In Daidu, Kongmin gained his education in Eurasian politics and developed ties with the men who would later attain high office at his court.⁵³ During these years he became acquainted with a wide variety of other Koreans who enjoyed independent ties to the Great Khan and his court. These included Koryō scholars, translators, eunuchs, palace women, and imperial in-laws. The young Kongmin witnessed up close the complexity of Koryō politics under Mongol domination.

Consider the case of Kongmin's older brother, King Ch'ungnye.⁵⁴ In 1341, the year that Kongmin arrived at Daidu, King Ch'ungnye was in the second year of his second reign. The Yuan court had removed him from the throne in 1332 and replaced him with his father, Ch'ungsuk, who in turn the Mongols had deposed in 1330 after his initial reign of seventeen years. To what did Ch'ungnye owe the dubious honor of being twice deposed? The question provided rich food for his young brother, Kongmin, and his circle of advisors.

Like Kongmin, Ch'ungnye's political odyssey began at the Yuan court, as required by his status as the Koryō heir apparent. Dissatisfied with the Koryō king, in 1330 the Mongols persuaded Ch'ungsuk to yield the throne and replaced him with the young Ch'ungnye. At one point,

Ch'ungnye appeared before his father in Mongolian clothing to offer a Mongolian-style salutation. Ch'ungsuk exploded, "Both your parents are Korean. Why, when you see me, do you observe Mongolian etiquette? Further, your gown and headgear are too lavish. How do you [have the face to] see people? Hurry up and change your clothes." The father's stern upbraiding reportedly shook his son, who left the former king's presence in tears.⁵⁵

The competition for the Koryŏ crown throws into relief the intricacies and international complexion of politics under the Mongols. To regain his position as king, Ch'ungsuk assiduously lobbied Mongols, Koreans, and Chinese with ties to the Yuan throne, forged an alliance with the Sim Prince, and promised important posts in the Branch Secretariat for the Eastern Campaigns to Koryŏ officials who supported his cause. Due partly to the fall of his Turkic patron, El-Temür, and the rise of Bayan (who was trying to eliminate all El-Temür's allies), Ch'ungnye eventually was forced to return the scepter to his father.

When his father died in 1339, Ch'ungnye immediately began a campaign to regain the Koryŏ throne. His envoy requested the Yuan emperor to allow him to succeed his father as king. The most powerful man at the Mongol court, Bayan, brushed away the plea. Undeterred, Ch'ungnye next dispatched two generals to Daidu to spread gifts of cash among important Yuan officials. This strategy was not unique to Ch'ungnye. The costs of securing positions of leadership within the Mongol empire, including the Yuan *ulus* throne, inflated rapidly throughout the fourteenth century.⁵⁶ Ch'ungnye's actions were completely in keeping with the proven practices of the day. He also convinced ranking Koryŏ ministers to petition the Yuan throne on his behalf. Within a year of his father's death, Ch'ungnye had regained the crown, despite ugly accusations of illicit sexual relations with his father's Mongolian bride, Bayan-Qutuq (known also as Princess Qinghua/Kyŏnghwa 慶華公主 in Chinese and Koryŏ sources).⁵⁷ Again, Ch'ungnye owed his reversal of fortunes in part to changes at the Yuan court. After meticulous preparation, Toqto'a had engineered the removal of his uncle Bayan, who had alienated much of the court.⁵⁸ Toqto'a was apparently less opposed to Ch'ungnye.

If Toqto'a and other senior Mongol ministers had hoped for a pliable vessel in the new king, they were mistaken. Ch'ungnye imple-

mented a series of measures designed to strengthen the power of the Koryŏ throne. One of his first steps was to bolster significantly the size and strength of his personal entourage. Some of these men, described disparagingly in Korean court annals as "young ruffians" (K. *akso* 惡少), had formerly served as guards in the Directorate-General of Hunting and Falconry (K. *ŏngbung horjŏk* 鷹坊忽赤). As Kim Tang-t'ae has observed, other contemporary criticisms of Ch'ungnye—his excessive interest in such apparently frivolous activities as hunting, polo, and wrestling—should be understood in terms of the king's effort to recruit and train a body of personally loyal retainers sufficient to offer a modicum of physical security.⁵⁹ Ch'ungnye's methods were inspired by the example of the Great Khan's own personal bodyguard, the *keshig*.

Ch'ungnye strove to expand royal control in other directions. For instance, he attempted to improve both the royal fisc and general socioeconomic stability within Korea. He abolished the royal salary lands (*sa'kūpjon* 賜給田), attempted to bring temple lands (*saewŏnjŏn* 寺院田) and meritorious subject lands (*keungjŏn* 功臣田) under more effective royal control, invested money from the Royal Privy Purse in commercial trade in China, and attempted to establish a levy on officials' salaries (*chikse* 職稅). Although the details of its functions are unclear, Ch'ungnye established the Directorate-General for the Evaluation of Statutes to Benefit the People. One Korean scholar characterizes it as primarily an instrument to keep powerful ministers in check and to raise funds for the throne through confiscation of elites' properties.⁶⁰ Perhaps out of a desire to clarify lines of jurisdiction and responsibility, he also petitioned (unsuccessfully) the Yuan court to repatriate Chinese, Jurchen, and Koreans from the complex and overlapping administrative zones of southern Liaodong.

Kim Tang-t'ae explains Ch'ungnye's actions as anti-Mongolian. During the past century, anachronistic notions of nationalism have often colored historical research produced in areas that were once under Mongol domination.⁶¹ In its most extreme form, such a perspective renders all Koreans tied to the Yuan as traitorous, conniving, small-minded people who pursued selfish personal ends at the expense of a vaguely defined Korean people or nation. Even such evenhanded scholars as Kim occasionally fall victim to this tendency. In the case of Ch'ungnye, Kim observes that the king was an exceptionally bright man

and thus acutely aware of the Yuan's oppression.⁶² Ch'ungnye's own father had been detained in Daidu for four years and then exiled to distant Turfan. These factors, according to Kim, account for Ch'ungnye's "anti-Mongolian" stance. Kim interprets Ch'ungnye's development of a personal bodyguard, taxes on his officials, greater control over economic resources, and the construction of lavish new royal palaces as evidence of the king's desire to reduce his reliance on the Mongol court. Conflict with the Yuan was thus, he concludes, "inescapable."

Ch'ungnye's actions were, however, guided more by the desire to strengthen the throne against threats at home and abroad than proto-nationalism.⁶³ In his efforts to forge a more secure position within Koryŏ, King Ch'ungnye, like all ambitious political players in Eurasia at the time, had to come to terms with the Mongols. Certainly his domestic rivals (aristocratic members of the civil bureaucracy, *amirists* who owed their rise to marriage ties to the Mongol elites, and others) did. In attempting to regain the throne, Ch'ungnye made repeated overtures to the Mongol emperor and high-ranking Mongol ministers. Ch'ungnye also attempted to exploit various Koreans who enjoyed special influence at the Mongol court. The most dominant political and military presence in Eurasia, the Mongols constituted a critical resource to be manipulated in the pursuit of family rather than "national" ends.

In the end, domestic rivals at the Koryŏ court persuaded the Mongols that Ch'ungnye should be replaced. Ch'ungnye's various reforms challenged the economic and political interests of many elites within Koryŏ. Among the most vocal of the king's critics was the Ki family. That the Ki family owed its special prominence to marriage ties with the Mongol imperial family did not predetermine its opposition to King Ch'ungnye. It does, however, explain why its efforts to remove the king proved so efficacious. One member of the Ki family, Ki Ch'öl 奇株, complained to the Yuan throne that the king was "lascivious and unrighteous." A final indication that the central tension of the day was the distribution of power within Koryŏ rather than nationalism is the relative apathy with which the Korean bureaucracy greeted news of Ch'ungnye's final fall. Few tears were shed when Yuan officials dragged him off.⁶⁴ Later Korean historians portrayed him as a vainglorious, morally suspect, and ineffective ruler who preferred the company of ill-mannered wastrels to men of proper breeding and lineage.

King Ch'ungnye's saga unfolded during young Kongmin's formative teenage years in Daidu. The political jockeying, the international lobbying, the secretive efforts to forge alliances for and against the king, tensions between the throne and the aristocratic elite, and Ch'ungnye's ultimate death in exile drove home the importance of cultivating a broad network of support throughout Northeast Asia. Among the most critical of these potential backers (or dangerous enemies) was the Ki family noted above. Its most influential member was Empress Ki, favorite of the emperor and mother of the heir apparent. The empress would play a critical role both in Kongmin's accession to the throne and in later Yuan efforts to depose him.

In summary, like his brother, father, and grandfather before him, the young Kongmin spent much of his youth under the careful eyes of the Mongol court in Daidu. Privileged as a member of the *kerbig*, it was hoped the Koryŏ youth would develop loyalty to the Mongol Great Khans and come to see himself as an elite member of the cosmopolitan pan-Eurasian Mongolian empire. Koryŏ was a "son-in-law" of the great Mongol empire, a subordinate but privileged member of the Mongols' sprawling imperium.⁶⁵

Wavering Fortunes and Royal Autonomy

Given such extensive and deep ties with the Mongol empire, at first blush it might seem surprising that from the earliest days of his reign, King Kongmin sought to assert greater autonomy for the Koryŏ throne. Less than a month after his return to Koryŏ in 1351 to take the throne upon the death of his nephew, King Kongmin lavished praise on a senior official's remonstrance. The official argued, "Plaited hair and barbarian raiment are not [in accord with] the ways of former kings. I would that Your Majesty not emulate [these barbarian ways]." Pleased and impressed, the young monarch "promptly undid his plaits."⁶⁶

The new ruler's willingness to distance himself from his Mongol overlords even in this small way owed much to the growing perception that the once-great Great Yuan *ulus* was in decline. The dizzying speed with which emperors fell from the throne in Daidu during the early fourteenth century, the paralyzing factional battles that hobbled effective governance in the Great Yuan *ulus*, and the hydra-headed revolts

raging through the central and southeastern provinces suggested that the Mongols' best days were already in the past.

The Koreans quietly registered more subtle but no less fundamental signs of Yuan decline. By the fourteenth century, the marking of time had constituted a critical element of political legitimacy in East Asia for more than two millennia. Astronomy's significance for the Mongols was if anything greater than for Chinese dynasties. Mongol courts considered astronomy a variety of divination, a way to predict meteorological phenomena, and a method to influence such vital enterprises as military campaigns. Contemporary western observers like Roger Bacon believed the Mongols' success derived from their talented astronomers.⁶⁷ Having assembled a pool of men and astronomical techniques of unprecedented variety from across Asia, the Yuan court at its height had established new levels of precision for the prediction of lunar and solar eclipses.⁶⁸ The Great Yuan *ulus* demanded that all subjugated states use its calendar in official documents and diplomatic communications.

However, in the fourth month of 1352, less than half a year into young Kongmin's reign, the Koryŏ court noted in official records that the Yuan's official predictions for an eclipse proved false.⁶⁹ Just months later, the court again noted a similar lapse.⁷⁰ It was not merely a technical or scientific mistake. The broader political and charismatic significance of such an error would not have been lost on contemporaries. The Great Yuan *ulus* was slipping, and Koryŏ was watching.

However tempted King Kongmin and his advisors may have been to assert greater autonomy, the Mongol empire was still a daily reality, a presence rendered more pressing by the lack of any absolute borders between domestic and international affairs. Marriage, government service, and place of residence bound many leading Koryŏ families to the ruling Mongol elite in China. These families wielded tremendous power and influence in Koryŏ and ranked among the young king's most formidable rivals (and potential allies). A 1352 controversy surrounding efforts to recruit Koryŏ troops for the Yuan armies illustrates the importance of links to the Yuan throne for domestic Korean affairs.

In the third lunar month of 1352, several Korean residents of Daidu, including Ch'oe Yu 崔濡, proposed to the emperor, Toghhan-Temür,

that he recruit a staggering 100,000 troops from Koryŏ to assist Yuan troops in restoring order within China. Ch'oe was far from a disinterested party. His father had served in the Koryŏ government as an administrator in the Bureau of Military Affairs, and Ch'oe himself held a string of military posts in Koryŏ beginning in the 1340s. For his role in suppressing an abortive coup d'état,⁷¹ Ch'oe was named a merit official of the first degree. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed a censor at the Yuan court. Despite repeated charges of rape,⁷² he accompanied the heir apparent (Kongmin's nephew), later invested as King Ch'ungjŏng 忠定 (r. 1349–51), to Daidu. After taking the throne in 1349, Ch'ungjŏng rewarded Ch'oe's service, investing him with the title Lord of Ch'wi-sŏng 葛城君.

Despite these new titles and status, or perhaps because of them, Ch'oe and his brothers grew increasingly dissatisfied under the young new king. After a series of clashes with the throne, in 1350 Ch'oe and his brother left Koryŏ to seek refuge at the Mongol court in Daidu. Ch'oe did not, however, sever ties with his native land. In fact, while at the Yuan court, he apparently cultivated relations with the reigning king's uncle, the future King Kongmin. Their relationship is unclear, but Ch'oe accompanied Kongmin on the return trip to Korea to take the throne in 1351. At the last minute, however, Ch'oe thought better of his decision to return home. When the royal entourage reached Liaoyang, midway between the Yuan and Koryŏ capitals, Ch'oe returned to Daidu. Again we know little of his motivation, but according to the *History of the Koryŏ Dynasty*, upon his arrival in the Yuan capital, Ch'oe began to "conspire" against the Koryŏ throne.⁷³

Toghhan-Temür's decision to use Koryŏ troops met with vociferous opposition from a second group of Koreans resident in Daidu, those apparently more closely tied to the Koryŏ throne. They argued that Koryŏ was "small, suffers from Japanese piracy, and furthermore is too distant" to supply troops.⁷⁴ Persuaded by their protests, the emperor canceled the order for Koryŏ soldiers and recalled Ch'oe to Daidu. This would prove only a temporary setback. During the next fifteen years, military conditions in China would provide Ch'oe with ample opportunity to increase his influence at both the Yuan and the Koryŏ courts.

Initial Koryŏ Involvement with the Red Turbans

Late in June 1354, an embattled senior Koryŏ official, Ch'ae Ha-jung 蔡河中, Lord of P'yŏnggang 平康府院君, returned to Kaegyŏng with important news from Daidu. The Great Yuan *ulus*'s powerful prime minister Toqto'a wanted the Koryŏ king to dispatch elite troops to fight in the imperial host that Toqto'a was assembling against the Red Turbans in Huainan.⁷⁵ Ch'ae had proposed the use of Koryŏ military personnel to Toqto'a, recommending the names of generals known for their bravery and battle sense.⁷⁶ Many of these men had served previously in the emperor's *kaehŭg* and fought against Japanese marauders along Koryŏ's coasts.⁷⁷

As shown in Chapter 2, by the early 1350s, revolts wracked much of the Great Yuan *ulus*, compromising local control and reducing the flow of grain and taxes to the central government. Toqto'a's expedition was a critical part of the Mongol court's efforts to restore military and administrative strength in China. The throne ordered wealthy Muslims and Jews (Ch. *chuhu* 諸忽) throughout the realm to report to the capital for duty. Skilled archers from as far away as the northwestern province of Ningxia were also summoned.⁷⁸ A week later, diplomatic envoys from the Yuan arrived at Kaegyŏng. They announced that the Koryŏ contingent was to assemble in Daidu by the tenth day of the eighth lunar month (August 28, 1354)—that is, in less than two months.⁷⁹

One scholar has argued that "politicians consumed with desire for political power" had engineered this military assistance to the Yuan to advance their selfish personal ends and that Kongmin was forced to acquiesce to their pressure.⁸⁰ Be that as it may, the military ties between the ruling houses of the Great Yuan *ulus* and Koryŏ were nearly a century old by this time. Kongmin's forefathers had repeatedly contributed troops, commanders, and grain to Mongol campaigns. Later, in 1362, Kongmin himself would propose joint action in Liaodong against Red Turban forces. This particular instance of military cooperative was the rule rather than the exception.

In the context of the Great Yuan *ulus*, it was axiomatic that a major rebellion in southern China was a matter of concern to all members of the empire's elite, including the king of Koryŏ. The Mongol court took pains to ensure that, as a member of the extended imperial family,

Kongmin was informed of important developments regarding the Great Yuan *ulus*. When Ayushiridara was invested as heir apparent, the Yuan court issued a pardon for "all under heaven." It dispatched an envoy to Kaegyŏng with an imperial proclamation announcing this critical decision, which had implications for all members of the Great Yuan *ulus*'s ruling elite. In accord with protocol, Kongmin welcomed the envoy at the Guests' Hall and issued a pardon for criminals within his kingdom.⁸¹ Soon after Kongmin had assumed the throne in 1351, he had greeted a Yuan envoy at the offices of the Branch Secretariat in Kaegyŏng who brought news of Yuan victory against a "Henan rebel leader" and general empire-wide pardon to celebrate the triumph.⁸² Rebellion in China directly touched Kongmin's family. At one point, the father of Kongmin's queen was seized in the field by Red Turbans in southern China.⁸³ The Yuan would continue to send periodic updates on important victories and campaigns.

Preparations began immediately. An official from the Yuan Ministry of Works soon arrived with 60,000 *ding* in paper currency to be distributed among the Koryŏ troops as rewards.⁸⁴ King Kongmin granted titles to many of his leading generals as encouragement for the coming battles. Titles and honorary positions figured prominently in court efforts to rally military resources throughout the country to the dynasty's defense.⁸⁵ He also ordered his court officials and the religious clerics of the capital to make horses available to his soldiers at reasonable prices. Perhaps in reaction to extortionate prices, Koryŏ soldiers preparing for the campaign in China had been forcing residents to sell horses at reduced prices. In some cases, they had seized them outright.⁸⁶

On July 23, 1354, King Kongmin personally reviewed the 2,000-man crack unit before it left for China under the command of Yu T'ak 柳澤 (1311–71), Yŏm Che-sin 廉愼臣 (1304–82), and three dozen other elite commanders.⁸⁷ Whether through previous service in the Koryŏ heir apparent's household in Daidu or through marriage ties, most of these Koryŏ military officers were linked to the Yuan court.⁸⁸ Ch'oe Yu, the man who had failed to incorporate Korean troops into Yuan forces in 1352, was now appointed by Toghhan-Temür to oversee the army's progress to Daidu.⁸⁹

The men did not go willingly. Just before crossing the Yalu River, the cold, fearful, and frustrated force nearly ran amok. The men plotted

to send a small elite group of riders back to Kaegyŏng to cut down the officials responsible (primarily Ch'ae) for sending them to die in distant China. Only after one of the commanding generals warned that there could be no escape from royal justice did they abandon their plans for assassination.⁹¹

During these years, Chinese unrest would repeatedly complicate intra-Korean political competition. For his role in brokering the joint Korean-Mongol expedition, early in August 1354 the Koryŏ court appointed Ch'oe finance commissioner (*sama usa* 三司右使) and then invested him with the aristocratic title Lord of Yongsŏng 龍成府院君.⁹² The court also granted titles to members of the Kŭ family.⁹³

By the end of the year, General In An 印安 had returned from the Great Yuan *ulus* with information about the debacle at Gaoyou 高郵. Although the Koryŏ court was undoubtedly well aware of the political intrigue surrounding Toqto'a, In concentrated on how the disaster at Gaoyou related to Korean interests. According to In, the 2,000-man elite unit from Koryŏ and more than 20,000 other Koreans resident in Daidu served as the vanguard of Toqto'a's massive host. Rather than focus on the court's fears of Toqto'a's growing power, In stressed Mongol jealousy of Koryŏ military prowess. Rebel forces ensconced within the walls of Gaoyou were on the brink of collapse. "Senior Tatar military men" (*dadan shijuan laozhang* 達旦知院老長), In reported, "resented that our men would monopolize the military credit [for the triumph]" and thus intentionally stalled the attack for a day.⁹⁴ This allowed the Red Turbans sufficient breathing room to firm up the city's defenses.⁹⁵ More important for the fate of the Yuan, the court removed Toqto'a from command.⁹⁶ As noted in Chapter 2, this greatly weakened the Yuan. Rebel forces gained critical time to regroup, while the dynasty's most effective military force collapsed. From this time on, the Yuan court would find itself increasingly beleaguered throughout East Asia.

The Koryŏ court continued to track developments in China closely. Late in January 1355, the Yuan court notified Kongmin that the Red Turban leaders Han Shantong 韓山童 and Han Yao'er 韓咬兒 had been executed and that Toqto'a had been pardoned.⁹⁸ Han Yao'er was among a half dozen or so men who had been spreading word in the Huainan and Henan regions that the Red Turban leader, Han Shan-

tong, was a direct descendant of the Song dynastic house and should assume the throne of China.⁹⁷

Although Toqto'a had been stripped of his posts and his forces had begun to disintegrate, the Koryŏ contingent continued to fight in China. Sometime during the fifth lunar month of 1355, the Southern Campaign Myriarchs Kwŏn Kyŏm 權謙 (d. 1356), Wŏn Ho 元顥, and In Tang 印瑤 returned from China with reports that "the southern rebels grow stronger by the day." More positively, they informed the king that Koryŏ troops had taken the city of Luhe 六合 and that they had just been transferred to defend the Huai'an Circuit.⁹⁸ As the Yuan campaign against the Red Turbans in southeast China devolved, members of the Koryŏ contingent began to return home with firsthand accounts of the spreading chaos.⁹⁹

Intensifying disorder within the Great Yuan *ulus* affected the Koryŏ ruling house in others ways. Perhaps in an effort to shore up support within the Koryŏ ruling stratum, in 1354 the Yuan throne invested a new Sim Prince. The title had been vacant since the death of Wang Ko in 1334.¹⁰⁰ The Yuan court now invested Wang Ko's grandson, Toqto'a-Buqa 脫脫不花, as the new Sim Prince.¹⁰¹ Like previous holders of the title, Toqto'a-Buqa was a member of the Koryŏ royal house. Born and raised in the Mongol capital, however, he seems to have identified strongly with the Yuan. In 1350, he had begun service in the Yuan heir apparent's *keshig* (*Donggong qiezuoguan* 東宮怯薛官), where he developed a close relationship with the heir apparent, Ayushiridara, the son of Toghhan-Temür by his Korean wife, Empress Kŭ.¹⁰² Whatever the Yuan throne's initial motivation for investing him as the Sim Prince, Toqto'a-Buqa did not participate in the military campaigns of the 1350s or 1360s. He did, however, figure in the increasingly tumultuous relations between the Koryŏ and Yuan courts (see Chapter 7).

Kingly Ambitions

Early in January 1356, the Yuan court recognized King Kongmin's contributions to the war against the Red Turbans, bestowing on him an impressive string of titles.¹⁰³ Granting such titles was a well-established way to maintain unity within the empire and to encourage loyalty to the emperor. The Yuan's declining fortunes, however, struck the king and

others at the Koryō court as an opportunity to reassert royal authority. In mid-June 1356, the fifth year of his reign, the king moved boldly on a number of fronts in what scholars have almost universally characterized as "anti-Yuan" or nationalistic policies intended to gain greater autonomy for Koryō.¹⁰⁴ In fact these measures constituted one facet of the Koryō throne's periodic efforts to consolidate its domestic control.¹⁰⁵

The first strike was directed against the powerful Ki family and others who enjoyed special status in Koryō through their links to the Yuan throne and Mongol aristocracy. On the eighteenth day of the fifth lunar month of 1356, the king held a banquet to which he invited many high-ranking officials. Taken unaware, Ki Ch'öl, three other Ki males, and another prominent Korean with ties to the Yuan, Kwön Kyöm (noted above as the Southern Campaign general who fought against Chinese rebels), were executed on the spot. Another to meet his end was Ch'ac Ha-jung, the senior Koryō official who in 1354 had suggested dispatching Korean military personnel to the Yuan to suppress Chinese rebels. During the next two days, Kongmin authorized the executions of nineteen men. He exiled many more, charging them with threatening the dynasty.¹⁰⁶

By any standard, the purge was audacious. Many of those killed held titles granted by either the Yuan or Koryō throne. No Ch'ack's 戚碩 daughter was a consort to the Yuan emperor, Kwön was father-in-law to the Yuan heir apparent, and Ki Ch'öl was Empress Ki's elder brother.¹⁰⁷

Empress Ki

Born and raised in a Koryō family with a long history of government service, Empress Ki (her Mongolian name was Öljei-Qutuq 完者忽都) was the most powerful woman in Eurasia at the time.¹⁰⁸ Early in the 1330s, she began her remarkable career within the imperial Yuan household. She started as a lowly serving girl responsible for the emperor's tea. She quickly gained the favor of the newly enthroned Toghantemür. Only fifteen years old, under the thumb of his senior ministers, and regarded with disdain by his wife, the domineering Empress Danashiri 答納失里 (?-1335, the daughter of El-Temür), the beleaguered emperor was immediately drawn to the beautiful and sympathetic Ki.

Unlike most Mongol emperors, Toghantemür was not a heavy drinker. He found solace instead in painting, poetry, and astronomy. Blessed with beauty, Ki was also a woman of artistic and educational accomplishment. Worried that this young Korean servant might gain dangerous influence over the Mongol Son of Heaven, the empress abused Ki. On one occasion, Danashiri is said to have tortured Ki with a white-hot iron brander.¹⁰⁹ In time, she might have removed the girl altogether. Fortunately for Ki, political change at the court intervened. In 1335, the powerful minister Bayan removed the empress's father, El-Temür, from power and purged most of his relatives. Danashiri was put under house arrest and later executed.¹¹⁰

Immediately following Danashiri's death, Ki secured investiture as an official escort. Although this rank represented an enormous leap for Ki, it fell short of the emperor's hopes. Instead, following past precedent and bowing to the political counsel of Bayan, in 1337 Toghantemür selected a young Mongol girl from the prestigious Qonggirad tribe as his primary empress. Her name was Bayan-Qutuq 伯顏忽都 (1324-65). Contemporary observers and official court annals describe her as a retiring woman free of jealousy. She did not openly begrudge Ki's favored status with the emperor.¹¹¹ There was a sense within the empire, however, that Ki's position was still unfinished business. When Bayan fell from power in 1340, new opportunities arose.

Among the quickest to seize the moment was the Koryō throne. One month after Bayan fell, the Koryō throne appointed Ki's older brother, Ki Ch'öl, to head the diplomatic mission to offer birthday felicitations to Toghantemür. The Koryō throne wished to exploit the emperor's fond feelings for Ki and anticipated that, with Bayan's death, Ki might rise to even higher status.¹¹² The Koreans were right. One month later, Ki was invested as second empress. The decision was not popular in all quarters. In 1348, a Chinese censor complained that Ki wielded too much power at the Mongol court. In classic fashion, he justified his criticism through reference to abnormalities in the cosmic order. "The Yellow River has burst its dikes and earthquakes have occurred; bandits increase without end. All these are signs that *yin* dominates and *yang* is weak." If the emperor reduced Empress Ki's status to that of a consort, that is, if he diminished the *yin*, "the disasters would end," promised the official. Toghantemür ignored his plea and those of others.¹¹³

Befitting someone who enjoyed the emperor's favor and the rank of second empress, Ki oversaw a considerable establishment in Daidu. In 1340, a new administration, the Empress's Bureau (*Ziqhengyuan* 資政院), was established to supervise the empress's financial resources. Revenues flowed in from various appanages throughout the empire, especially the rich agricultural lands of affluent Jiqing circuit 集慶路. In 1359, at Empress Ki's request, the emperor increased her holdings.¹¹⁴ He placed the lands of the Chaghan-na'ur Pacification Office (*Chaghan-na'er xuanweisi* 察罕腦兒宣慰司) in present-day Inner Mongolia under the control of her administration.¹¹⁵ Throughout most of the fourteenth century, various empresses had drawn revenue from these lands.¹¹⁶ The additional revenue may have been intended to offset the loss of properties in Jiqing (present-day Nanjing), which in 1356 had become an administrative center of the rebel Song regime under the control of Zhu Yuanzhang.¹¹⁷ It seems likely that Empress Ki, like her predecessors, also derived income from investment in international maritime trade.¹¹⁸

To survive the constant and often brutal competition of the Mongol court, Ki cultivated supporters within the palace, the most prominent of whom were Korean-born eunuchs who held posts within the Empress's Bureau.¹¹⁹ Among those closest to her was Pak Buqa 朴不花 (?–1364), who hailed from her hometown in Koryŏ. A longtime intimate, Pak would receive prestigious court honors and serve in the Empress's Bureau.¹²⁰ She also increased the number of Korean palace women. According to one well-informed observer of the time, "Empress Ki maintained many Koryŏ beauties in her palace. When great ministers grew powerful, [she] would send them one of these women."¹²¹ As a poet intimately familiar with affairs of the Mongol court put it:

During the previous dynasty, of Korean women

admitted to the palace,

More than half all claimed to be relatives of the

Ki family.

Most trying was the difficulty of assigning female officials [throughout the palaces],

The Overseer sent them to serve as attendants to the two empresses.¹²²

昨朝迺得高麗女

大半咸稱奇氏親

最苦女官難派散

他教送作二宮嬪

Her strategy succeeded. One of these Korean palace women would eventually gain the favor of her son, Ayushiridara.¹²³

Empress Ki's hopes and energies revolved around Ayushiridara, born in 1339. She ensured that her son received an education that would prepare him for rulership. He studied the Uyghur script used to write Mongolian. Later he would take up classical Chinese and works from the Sinic canon. One well-known anecdote regarding his education involved the Dynastic Teacher, the leading Buddhist cleric in the Great Yuan *ulus* (a Tibetan monk). The Dynasty Teacher protested to Empress Ki, "Up until now, the Heir Apparent has studied the Buddhist *dharma* and has gradually reached some measure of enlightenment. Now, however, he receives instruction in the teachings of Confucius. I fear that this may harm the Heir Apparent's true nature." Empress Ki responded that although Buddhism was a fine moral foundation, Confucian teachings were essential for the heir apparent's ultimate calling, "ruling all under heaven."¹²⁴ As part of this education, in 1349, Confucian scholars prepared a primer that drew upon political history, Confucian texts, and biographies. Patterned after Zhen Dexiu's 眞德秀 well-known 1229 *An Explanation of the Great Learning* (*Da xue yan yi* 大學衍義), the primer was put in the heir apparent's study hall for his instruction.¹²⁵ Thus, the heir apparent was literate in both written Chinese and Mongolian and had a grounding in Confucianism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Chinese statecraft.

Ki's first major victory for her son came in 1353, when Ayushiridara was invested as the heir apparent.¹²⁶ On at least two occasions late during the 1350s and early during the 1360s, Empress Ki attempted to force her husband into retirement and to turn the reins of power over to Ayushiridara. Toqto'a's fall may have owed something to his opposition to Empress Ki's hopes for the heir apparent.¹²⁷

Simply put, Ki was a pivotal figure at the Yuan court, whose influence extended to military and political decisions of the day. When one of her supporters, a military officer, was captured by the powerful Chinese warlord Fang Guozhen, she intervened, arranging a special imperial amnesty for Fang in exchange for the release of the officer.¹²⁸ When the emperor's primary consort, the retiring Bayan-Qutuq, died in 1366, the emperor would finally declare Lady Ki his legal consort; he bestowed on her the family name of Solongqa 肅良合, Mongolian for

"Korean."¹²⁹ When in 1368 the Yuan court fled Daidu before the fast-approaching Ming armies, Empress Ki accompanied her husband and son into the steppe. To this day, when, where, and how she died remain a mystery.

Like many other female members of the Yuan imperial family, Empress Ki was an important religious patron, funding temples, rites, prayers, and art.¹³⁰ What distinguished Empress Ki was that her munificence extended to Koryō. In 1343, 1344, and 1345, she made sizable contributions to refurbish the Chang'an Temple 長安寺 on the holy Korean Buddhist mountain of Mount Vajra (Kūmgangsān 金剛山).¹³¹ The monks were to pray for the prosperity of the emperor and Empress Ki's son, the heir apparent. In 1346, she dispatched (duly authorized by the emperor's order) members of her household staff to Koryō with copper coins to have a bell cast at a temple on the same mountain.¹³² King Ch'ungsuk's Mongol queen Irinjibal (Chinese Yīnzhēnbān 亦憐真班) felt that some gesture in kind was required.¹³³ Addressing court officials, the queen said, "Mount Vajra is located within our territory. Now the sagely Son of Heaven has in this way dispatched a trusted official in order to invigorate the Buddhist faith and spread it without end. However, we have done absolutely nothing to repay Him."¹³⁴ The queen approved her courtiers' suggestion to recast the temple bell of Yōnboksa Temple 演福寺. Inscribed on four square panels on the bell's upper register in Chinese characters are the following set of parallel constructions: "The Wheel of Dharma ever turns; long life to the Emperor; Buddha increases in brilliance daily; long live the King" 法輪常轉，皇帝萬歲，佛日增輝，國王千秋. The phrases highlight parallels and links between the Yuan emperor and the Koryō king as well as between the two temporal sovereigns and the eternal and limitless realm of Buddha. Passages from the Buddhist magical formula *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya dharanī* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼 written in Lan-tsha script and the True Word Dharanī 真言陀羅尼 written in a neat Tibetan script also adorn the bell.¹³⁵ As Yuyama Akira 湯山明 has noted, these same Buddhist texts were inscribed on the famous Juyong Pass north of Daidu at just about this same time. Other inscriptions on such Buddhist religious objects as incense burners from this period offer similar wishes for the long life of the Yuan emperor and the Koryō king.¹³⁶ At least in elite circles, dynastic borders did not impede the flow of religious merit.¹³⁷

Empress Ki's religious patronage was also a boon to the local economy. In 1346, Mount Kūmgang's neighboring counties suffered from famine. Competition to work on the casting project was keen, and the food given as wages often meant the difference between life and death.¹³⁸

Empress Ki's largesse extended to the Mongol capital of Daidu, where she was a prominent sponsor of Buddhist rites and welfare measures. In 1358, famine and disease struck the bloated population of Daidu. In an effort to escape the growing military chaos of the time, refugees from much of eastern North China streamed into the capital. In the name of Empress Ki, Pak Buqa coordinated a philanthropic effort to care for the sick and bury the dead. He first sought and received permission from the throne to purchase lands for burial sites. The emperor, the two empresses, the heir apparent, and the heir apparent's consorts contributed gold, silver, cash, and goods. The Yuan central bureaucracy also "made donations beyond calculation."

The project's scale suggests the severity of the crisis. Deep trenches stretched from Daidu all the way to Lugou Bridge (Lugou qiao 盧溝橋) several miles to the west. Men and women were buried separately.¹³⁹ Cash was distributed to those who carried the corpses to the burial grounds. Once the trenches were filled and covered with earth, the court commissioned the Wan'an shouqing Temple 萬安壽慶寺 (the present-day White Pagoda Temple) to hold a Panca(varsika)parisad 無遮大會. This ceremony stressed the essential equality of all, lay and clergy, without regard to relative social status or wealth. A central feature of the festival was the distribution of alms to participants. According to an account in the *Official History of the Yuan Dynasty*, from 1358 to spring 1364, 200,000 were buried. Costs surpassed 27,090 *ding* of cash and 560 piculs of rice. Later, for three days and nights the Great Compassion Temple 大悲寺 would hold a "festival of water and land" (*shuiluhui* 水陸會), a memorial mass for the souls of the deceased.¹⁴⁰

Ki's rising star meant honor and titles for her family.¹⁴¹ As the talented Ming imperial prince, Zhu Youdun 朱有燬 (1379–1439), wrote:

Woman Ki's family resides east of the Yalu.

Only in her mature years did she gain the status of empress.

奇氏家居鴨綠東

盛年纔得位中宮

Yesterday the Hanlin scholars newly drafted an edict.

翰林昨日新裁詔

Three generations [of her relatives] were graced with imperial favor; exalted titles and emoluments [were theirs].¹⁴²

The parents of Empress Kī enjoyed extraordinary prestige within Koryō.¹⁴³ Not only did they receive aristocratic titles from the Yuan throne (in the case of her father posthumous titles), from the 1340s on Koryō kings demonstrated their respect for Empress Kī's mother, Madame Yi, through official visits to her residence in the capital. King Kongmin, for example, marked the beginning of the new lunar year of the second year of his reign by calling on Madame Yi at her residence.¹⁴⁴ As an elite member of greater Mongolian empire, Madame Yi enjoyed banquets hosted by both envoys of the Yuan and the Koryō king and queen. For instance, in September 1353, King Kongmin petitioned Toghian-Temür to hold a "betrothal feast" (Mongolian *bu'uljar*, Chinese *beizhuoyan* 李兒扎宴) on behalf of Madame Yi.¹⁴⁵ The emperor dispatched two envoys to Koryō, where they first held a *bu'uljar* at Yi's home and then days later at the royal palace, with Kongmin and his queen in attendance.¹⁴⁶

I have heard that among the practices of the August dynasty is something called a *bu'uljar*. The joy of assembling relatives joined by marriage and the celebration of progeny, in antiquity it was already so; how could it be otherwise now? If I were granted [permission] by Your Highness to hold on behalf of Wife of the Grand Master, Madame Yi 大夫人李氏, the lavishness of a grand ceremony; to demonstrate the harmony and joy of the extraordinary benevolence [shown us by the throne], our entire [royal] clan would feel the principle of harmony and friendship among kin by blood and marriage [and we] would swear an oath of generations everlasting and never forget [these ties]. The entire country would offer praise with complete sincerity and offer wishes for longevity and long life.

竊聞，皇朝之法，有所謂李兒扎者，合姻亞之推，為子孫之慶，古既如是，今胡不然，若蒙陛下為大夫人李氏，舉盛禮之優優，示殊恩之衍衍，則九族感睦親之義，誓永世而不忘，一邦殫歸美之誠，祝後天而難老。¹⁴⁷

Officials at the time inveighed against what they painted as the unconscionable extravagance of the banquets. Some Korean scholars today may bristle at the apparent self-abasement demonstrated in Kongmin's petition to the Mongol throne, offering the Mongol envoy

alcohol on his knees, or the fawning attitude taken toward Empress Kī's mother. The Koryō king in fact knew exactly what he was doing—playing Mongolian banquet politics, politics that were all about personal relationships, loyalty, and conspicuous consumption. Empress Kī's son, Ayushiridara, had just been formally invested as heir apparent, and Yuan envoys had arrived in Kaegyōng to announce the event.¹⁴⁸

By hosting the *bu'uljar*, Kongmin asserted the Koryō royal family's place within the larger Mongolian empire.¹⁴⁹ The banquet was emphatically Mongolian: it featured Mongolian music, song, dance, meat-eating competitions, and the distribution of gifts.¹⁵⁰ The right to attend such events as the Colors Banquets and the *bu'uljar* marked one's privileged status within the *ulus*. To host such an occasion for the empress's mother, the heir apparent's grandmother, was an even more emphatic statement of status and family ties. To express his gratitude for this honor and to remind Toghian-Temür of Koryō's ties to the Great Yuan *ulus*, Kongmin dispatched an envoy to Daidu with a formal declaration of thanks shortly after the banquet.¹⁵¹

Empress Kī's brothers aggressively exploited her influence at the Yuan capital to pursue family interests. Early in 1345, the Mongol court promoted Kī Bayan-Buqa 奇伯顏不花 to Minister of the Left of the Liaoyang Branch Secretariat (*Liaoyang xingsheng* 遼陽行省左丞) and Manager of Governmental Affairs (*pingsheng* 平章政事).¹⁵² Slightly more than a year later, he gained further honors, being named Grand Minister of Education (*dasitu* 大司徒).¹⁵³ In 1353, Kī Ch'öl would also serve as a manager in the Liaoyang Branch Secretariat.¹⁵⁴

Carried to excess, such efforts to improve family fortunes were counterproductive, incurring the resentment of the Koryō throne and, one suspects, aristocratic families with better pedigrees. As a canny politician, the empress was aware of such dangers and attempted to forestall disaster for her clansmen. In 1344, she issued an edict to the new king, Ch'ungmok 忠穆王 (r. 1344–48), in which she ordered: "None of my clansmen are to abuse their position to seize people's lands. If there are violations, [you] must punish them. [You] also should punish those judicial officials who know of such abuses but ignore them."¹⁵⁵ Her efforts proved futile.

In 1351, one of Empress Kī's younger brothers, Kī Sam-man 奇三萬, was charged with misusing his influence to seize lands and with other

unspecified crimes. The Koryŏ court executed him. Pak Mun-bo 白文寶 (d. 1374), an eminent scholar-official then serving in the recently established Directorate for Ordering Politics, a government bureau created to check the power of *aristocrats*, especially those who associated with the Yuan court, played a critical role in Ki Sam-man's prosecution. Perhaps as a way to deflect any demand for vengeance against the throne itself, the Koryŏ court punished and imprisoned Pak. In 1352, one of Kongmin's senior ministers (likely with the king's tacit approval) attempted to assassinate several members of the Ki family and others with ties to the Yuan throne who appeared to threaten the young king's position. The plot failed, but the conspirators did seize and kill one of Empress Ki's brothers.¹⁵⁶

On the other hand, whenever possible, King Kongmin tried to use the Ki family in his relations with the Yuan. Each year, he sent gifts to Empress Ki on her birthday.¹⁵⁷ He appointed the empress dowager's elder brother, Ki Ch'ŏl, to head the Branch Secretariat for the Eastern Campaigns. This effort to capitalize on the Ki family's influence at the Yuan court was a consistent policy through much of the first half of the fourteenth century.¹⁵⁸ Late in 1347, King Ch'ungmuk had dispatched Ki Ch'ŏl to offer New Year's felicitations to the emperor on behalf of the Koryŏ court. The king had honored Ki with a farewell banquet.¹⁵⁹ As noted above, Kongmin used formal banquets in honor of Empress Ki's mother to renew his own family ties to ruling Mongolian aristocracy.¹⁶⁰

Through strategic marriages to other established elite families in Korea, the Ki family tried to bolster its status and prestige. Ki Ch'ŏl married one of his daughters to the son of Wang Hu 王煦, one of the young king's most influential supporters. Ki Ch'ŏl's nephew was married to a granddaughter of Yi Che-hyŏn 李齊賢 (1287–1367), a prominent aristocratic scholar official and key Kongmin backer.¹⁶¹

Thus, during the entirety of Kongmin's sojourn in Daidu, Empress Ki and her family were among the most important personages in the Great Yuan *ulus*. As noted above, they held important posts in Daidu, Liaoyang, and Kaegyŏng. While at the Yuan court, Kongmin attended the empress dowager's son, Ayushiridara, the Yuan heir apparent, thus forging a personal bond to the Ki family.¹⁶² Empress Ki had initially rejected the future King Kongmin as a candidate for the throne. However, when in 1351 the empress dowager offered her critical support for

Kongmin's enthronement, she hoped that her young protégé would remember his obligation. Having put him on the throne, the empress dowager clearly expected Kongmin to reciprocate by cementing the Ki family's position at his court. Instead, he executed her elder brother, seized a portion of his slaves to fill out the ranks of the Koryŏ military, and distributed his assets to his eunuchs and high-ranking ministers.¹⁶³

Simultaneous with the purge of the Ki family, Korean military forces clashed with Yuan troops. The Koryŏ general In Tang, just returned from fighting Chinese rebel forces, seized eight imperial relay stations along the western bank of the Yalu river.¹⁶⁴ Koryŏ forces also took control of Ssangsongbu Directorate-General, an administrative territory directly subordinate to the imperial Yuan throne and strategically located in northeastern Koryŏ with access to Jurchen communities.

Tensions among the leading military families of Ssangsong made possible King Kongmin's dramatic assertion of royal authority. As Min Hyŏn-gu has shown, by the mid-1350s, conflict over the succession to the post of myriarch of Ssangsong had riven the Cho family. Although the man who secured the post, Cho So-saeng 趙小生 (?–1362), remained tied to the Yuan throne, the Koryŏ court emerged as a possible ally for potential rivals. For King Kongmin, the fissiparous nature of power in the northeast opened a path to greater control from the center.¹⁶⁵

Similarly, succession struggles within the Yi family to the post of myriarch of Hamju 咸州 meant new opportunities for the Koryŏ court. Related through marriage to a branch of the Cho family frustrated in its attempt to win Yuan backing for the post of myriarch of Ssangsong, Yi Cha-ch'ŏn 李子春, myriarch of Hamju, also began to reconsider the balance of power in Northeast Asia. In 1355, Yi met with Kongmin in Kaegyŏng to discuss the nettlesome question of population registration in Ssangsong. Like many of his predecessors, Kongmin wanted more control over his subjects who fled Koryŏ territory. Late in 1355, the Yuan throne relented and ordered officials from Koryŏ, the Ssangsongbu Directorate-General, and the Branch Secretariat for the Eastern Campaigns to hold talks. During the spring of 1356, Yi would meet again with the king. The encounters convinced each man that their interests might converge. The king hinted at future clashes with the Ki family (Ki Cho'l had been appointed manager of Liaoyang Branch Secretariat in 1355) and urged Yi to "obey my commands."¹⁶⁶ Clearly, the

Koryŏ king did not take the obedience of his military officers for granted, especially in Ssangsŏng.

During the sixth lunar month of 1356, Koryŏ military forces seized Ssangsŏng with little effort, in part because officers garrisoned there were divided. Some transferred their loyalties to the Koryŏ throne, and others such as the commander Cho So-saeng fled northward into Jurchen lands. Cho and his followers remained a nagging problem for the court for much of the next decade. Cho Ton 趙墩 (1308–80) contributed to the Koryŏ recovery of the Ssangsŏng area, for which he received a series of appointments. His sons continued to hold high offices throughout the rest of the Koryŏ and into the Chosŏn dynasties.¹⁶⁷ Yi Cha-ch'ŭn also remained allied with the Koryŏ throne. His son Yi Sŏng-gye 李成桂 (1335–1408; future founder of the successor Chosŏn dynasty) would gain his first fame fighting for the Koryŏ throne against the Red Turbans later in the decade. By offering itself as an ally in family succession struggles and claims for local domination, the Koryŏ throne gained the initial support of key military families in the northeast. Given his limited political, economic, and military resources, King Kongmin was forced to achieve his ends—greater autonomy for the throne (both domestically and internationally)—through constant negotiation, manipulation, and strategy.

Kongmin attempted to bolster control in other ways at this time. To reassert more effective control over the Korean military, he demanded that all military officers turn in their credentials 牌. Typical of the Mongol empire in which lines of command and loyalty transcended national or dynastic borders, many officers had received their credentials from the Yuan court rather than the Koryŏ court.¹⁶⁸ Kongmin presumably planned to confirm the posts of only those military men he felt had demonstrated proper loyalty to the Koryŏ throne. Deeply concerned about threats to royal authority both at home and abroad, during the summer of 1356 Kongmin announced plans to reinvigorate the Koryŏ central army. He focused on reviving the economic foundations of hereditary military households, increasing manpower levels, and improving command structures.¹⁶⁹

Finally, late in July 1356, the Korean throne abolished the use of the Yuan's Zhizheng reign period to mark time. This was tantamount to a declaration of independence from the Great Yuan ulus.¹⁷⁰

The Yuan court reacted angrily to Kongmin's actions. Learning of the purge of her relatives, Empress Ki went wild with rage. She attempted to remove Kongmin from the Koryŏ throne and to replace him with the newly invested Sim Prince, Toqtŏ'a-Buqa, also a member of the Koryŏ royal family.¹⁷¹ After imprisoning a Koryŏ envoy, a Yuan spokesman in Liaoyang announced that "800,000" troops were on their way to chastise Koryŏ. The Koryŏ military commander of the northwest, In Tang, was not cowed. He instead urged the throne to expand the Koryŏ army.¹⁷² Over the next six months, diplomatic communications flew back and forth between the Koryŏ and Yuan courts.¹⁷³ In the end, the practical limitations of Kongmin's brash efforts to assert royal authority became apparent. King Kongmin did the politically expedient thing, appeasing the Yuan throne and removing a potential political rival. He ordered the execution of In and ended Koryŏ's openly aggressive military and political posture vis-à-vis the Yuan.¹⁷⁴ In exchange, the Yuan court pardoned "the crimes of executing the Ki family and attacking the border."¹⁷⁵ Although each viewed the other with some suspicion,¹⁷⁶ larger developments in Northeast Asia reminded both courts that the fates of the Yuan and Koryŏ were still inextricably intertwined.