Separation of Powers?
The power relations between king and bureaucracy in Chosŏn Korea during the reigns of Kings Kwanghae and Injo (1608-1649)



Alban Schmid

Word Count: 84,582

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Oriental Studies

Trinity Term, 2022

Abstract

This thesis examines the constitutional framework of early seventeenth-century Chosŏn Korea and how power was shared between key actors and relevant institutions at court as well as the question of how these institutions related to and interacted with each other. Previous research has shown that the power of the Chosŏn monarch was not absolute. Court officials and bureaucrats could exercise control over the monarch, but their control remained limited. The main research objective of this study is to determine which factors influenced or determined whether the king could sway the court on individual policy decisions and vice versa.

Court debate stands out as a method of peaceful conflict resolution. King and court officials engaged in what can best be described as legal debates in order to determine whether a policy would be in accordance with precedents, ethical treatises, and various other sources of law. This study also examines the role of heretofore ignored further political actors with the power to influence or determine policy decisions, namely the Queen Dowager as head of the royal household, and the Ming court.

The thesis provides a series of case studies outlining instances of dispute between the monarch, top-level bureaucrats, members of the royal family, and representatives of the Ming court. In chronological order the case studies include King Kwanghae's family politics, namely his fratricides, the posthumous promotion of his mother, the imprisonment of the Queen Dowager, his foreign policy of non-alignment in the Later Jin-Ming conflict, as well as the dethronement of King Kwanghae and the development of royal authority under the rule of King Injo.

It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to a deepened understanding of Chosŏn statehood and shed more light on the Kwanghae-Injo period.

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Acknowledgements

This project could never have been completed without the efforts of those scholars before me that have made available to me not only the magnificent sources, which I have had the privilege to work with over the last four years, but from whose insights and scholarship I have profited immensely.

I will be eternally grateful to the National Institute of Korean History whose painstaking labour of digitalising my most important source, the *sillok*, allowed me to work in sunny cafés in Tokyo rather than the basement of the Oriental Institute at Oxford for months during the earlier stages of this project. More importantly, however, (and here I would like to extend my gratitude also to the staff of the Bodleian Library) this digitalisation ensured this project could continue rather smoothly through a global pandemic.

This project owes a lot to my teachers and professors in France, China, and the United Kingdom. I have profited immensely from the guidance of Dr Jay Lewis. Even when weathering the pandemic in separate countries, I could count on Dr Lewis to gently nudge me in the right direction, all the while encouraging me to develop and follow my own ideas. Without this guidance, I would in fact have despaired. I am also grateful to Dr Chard, Dr Harrison, and Dr Karlsson, whose constructive criticism has been greatly helpful.

I have been very fortunate to have been able to count on the wonderful support of my friends and family along this long road. They know who they are, but I would like to highlight my Balliol friends, Rob and Phil, for their critical listening of my ideas as they were developing. I would also like to thank my friends Jihong and Elise, whose genuine interest in my findings were always a great source of motivation. And Julian, for his invaluable, uplifting companionship through some of the harder times of these past four years.

Most of all, I have my family to thank. Uli, from whom I have learned so much over the years, and who has spent so much time listening to me that he may just have turned into an expert in the field involuntarily. Lastly, I would like to thank Kilala who has not only stayed by my side during this mad undertaking, but miraculously even agreed to marry me. She has supported me unwaveringly and in countless ways. This road would have been incomparably harder to walk had she not walked it with me.

Stylistic conventions

Korean terms, names of historic persons, and locations are all rendered in accordance with the revised McCune-Reischauer system. Where I have been aware of them, I have followed Korean authors' preferred romanisation of their names. In the few cases where I felt romanisations to be not quite intuitive, I have added hangul renderings to bibliographical notes.

In rendering Chinese terms, places, and names of historic persons, I have followed the *pinyin*-system. Where authors have different preferences, I followed preferred romanisations.

Japanese names are all rendered in the standard Hepburn system.

Chapter 1: Introduction

There is a long tradition in scholarship on early seventeenth-century Korean history to praise King Kwanghae (1575-1641, r. 1608-1623) for his intelligently devised foreign policy that kept Korea out of harm's way and to blame King Injo (1595-1649, r. 1623-1649) for the Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1636-1637 that he was unable to forestall.[1] While this view has been challenged by recent scholarship arguing that there was no fundamental difference between the foreign policies of the two kings,[2] one assumption still goes largely unchallenged: the assumption that the kings were the main authors of Chosŏn foreign policy.

This study will focus on instances of policy-making processes at court to analyse the relationship between the king and his court officials. Since the power relations between the monarchs and their bureaucrats were very dynamic, very eventful, and well-documented during the reigns of Kwanghae and Injo, it becomes possible to describe the political tools used by both to enforce their will on the other. This approach will not only highlight the role of deliberation and discourse in the political life of the Chosŏn dynasty, but it will also cast a different light on foreign policy formulation, the relative role foreign policy issues played in court politics and describe the use both kings and court officials made of foreign policy to advance their domestic agendas.

Previous studies have highlighted the role of factionalism during this period and some have even alleged that Chosŏn failed to adapt to the changing international

[1] A view first presented by Inaba Iwakichi in Inaba Iwakichi. *Kōkaikun jidai no Man-Sen kankei,* (Manchurian-Korean relations in the era of King Kwanghae). (Osakaya goshoten, 1933), 242-261.
[2] Han Myŏnggi, *Imjin Waeran kwa Han-Chung kwan'gye* [The Imjin War and Sino-Korean relations], (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 1999), 253-406.

environment because of factionalism.[3] I will argue the contrary, because I believe there is sufficient evidence to hold that King Kwanghae's policy, which adapted to changing circumstances, would have been enabled by a division of officialdom into factional conflict. The reverse also held true. When factions aligned to present a united opposition against the king, the power of the monarch was successfully challenged.

This study will be based on two major hypotheses: (a) while there was, naturally, a vertical separation of power, or the necessary sharing of power that happens within hierarchical structures, the kings' power was not absolute, as evidenced by the many instances of bureaucrats successfully challenging the king's position. At the same time, (b) bureaucrats were unable to exercise full authority over the king. Both hypotheses will be used to frame selected case studies. Despite the clear ritual hierarchy, the hypotheses suggest that actual power relations between king and bureaucracy remained ambiguous. The main research objective of this study is to determine which factors influenced or determined whether the king could sway the court on individual policy decisions and vice versa. Because the Chosŏn state was a highly bureaucratised, rational state, in the Weberian sense, conflict was not determined by wealth or the presence of private armies but played out as institutional disputes between king and bureaucrats. Institutional disputes arose when two or more institutions within the Chosŏn state, the king and the top-level bureaucrats, followed conflicting agendas over policy issues and argued their cases from precedent.

The study will test two, secondary, working hypotheses. Firstly, that there was no established process to settle disputes between king and bureaucracy based in Chosŏn's constitutional convention. Chinese constitutional convention left ultimate authority in the Emperor's hands; Japanese constitutional convention was to decide issues according to

[3] Choi Suk. 'The Factional Struggle'. *Koreana Quaterly*, Vol 7 (Spring 1965): 61-97.

the distribution of private military forces. In Chosŏn Korea, each dispute between king and bureaucracy required its own unique solution. For the time being, I will call this lack of established mitigation between king and bureaucracy the 'missing link'.

The second working hypothesis concerns the nature of one important form of interaction between king and bureaucracy: court debates. In an earlier study by Sohn Pokee on institutional conflict surrounding King Yŏnsan (1476-1506, r. 1494-1506) and his bureaucracy, the conflict was analysed as if both king and bureaucracy were part of one and the same constitutional order, and they engaged in debates that can be characterised as 'ideological' (which will be discussed below).[4] In contrast, this study proposes to look at conflicts between kings and their bureaucrats as legal debates, which used a variety of specific precedents to promote certain positions over others, thereby creating binding solutions to specific political conflicts between king and bureaucracy. If legal debates were the method for conflict resolution, then this would either build on Sohn Pokee's model of institutions as actors, all the while providing an answer to the question of how the relations between these institutions were able to evolve, or present a diachronic comparison between the fifteenth century and the seventeenth century: institutions in formation compared to established institutions. In either result, the prominence of legal debates in the seventeenth century appears to have been the primary peaceful tool to produce solutions to institutional disputes.[5] Not every debate at court involving both the monarch and high officials can be characterised as a legal-type debate. In regard to policy making there were frequent consultations as well as deliberative debates. What I will call legal debate here strictly refers to the frequent scenario of court officials taking the initiative of starting a debate by fielding precedent or referring to

[4] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty: The Functional Aspects of Governmental Structure, 1392-1592.* (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications, 2000).
[5] A constitution is here defined as an unwritten, yet commonly accepted, legally binding, set of rules that shape or describe the interactions of powers within the state.

codified ethical standards or canonical works with the intention of censoring or restricting the monarch and thereby demonstrating the discrepancy between the monarch's current or proposed actions and these sources of law.

Edward W. Wagner's model of a tripartite state structure including the king, the *yangban*, and the bureaucrats is an important starting point for the study of Chosŏn's state. However, the present study will demonstrate that there are additional factors to consider. Namely, the royal family and the Ming court should be included. Unlike the cases of other Confucian states, such as the Chinese Ming state, the kings of Korea were not necessarily automatically heads of the royal household. Instead, the queen mother often occupied this ritually important and powerful position making her a valuable source of authority. Additionally, the king's male relatives could be considered candidates for the throne, placing them in a situation of concurrence with the kings. These factors could be ignored if it were not for the fact that many of the members of the royal family pursued political goals independent of those of the kings, and more importantly had their own private relations to parts of the court. As they could exercise influence on political opinion, and became rallying points for opposition, the royal family needs to be considered as one of the essential pillars of the Chosŏn state.

A second actor that deserves more consideration is the Ming state. While this external factor did not usually get involved with the day-to-day politics of the Korean court, the Ming state nevertheless decided important policy questions. Occasionally, they weighed in on policy questions, either out of their own self-interest, or as a response to being urged to respond by one of the domestic actors. In such situations, the Ming state quite literally laid down the law. Accordingly, the Ming court played an important role not only for the foreign policy of the Korean kingdom, but also for the power relations at the Korean court.

Introducing these additional actors will make a systemized answer to the question of how each of the governing institutions related to each other considerably harder to find. The

role of the Chosŏn monarch and his family depended to a great extent on the personalities of individuals. The role of the Ming state cannot necessarily be understood without an understanding of the contemporary needs and interests of the Chinese state. *Yangban* and bureaucrats have already been described as adaptive to political pressures and capable of re-grouping with changed political agendas in Wagner's *Literati Purges*. All this means that the relations between the shareholders of power at the Korean court were a matter of constant negotiation and re-negotiation. A unidirectional check on monarchical power as described by Sohn can therefore not adequately represent the mutual control exercised by the actors involved. This systematic institutional flexibility is mirrored in the running of the administration where councils and departments were quickly set up or disbanded to meet needs and policy designs, a practice that contributed to the resilient nature of the Chosŏn state. Determining what tipped policy debates in whose favour is one of the key questions of this research.

Although not many scholars have explicitly discussed Chosŏn's constitutional law, it has implicitly featured in many studies. Broadly defined by Turpin and Tomkins as 'all the rules, conventions, and practices that describe or regulate the organization, powers, and operation of government and the relations between private persons and public authorities,'[6] constitutions are part of every analysis that examines the political processes involving more than one political institution of the state. Over the past few years the study of Chosŏn law has received increased attention. A large variety of legal issues ranging from households[7] to tax

[6] C. Turpin and Adam Tomkins, *British Government and the Constitution*, 6th edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

[7] Kim Seongsook 김성숙, 'Chosŏn sidae honinbŏp ŭi ch'inchokkan kŭmhon pŏmŭi e kwan han yŏn'gu: *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* ŭl chungsim ŭro 조선시대 혼인법의 친족간 금혼범위에 관한 연구 - 조선왕조실록을 중심으로 (A Study on the Range of Prohibition on Intermarriage in the marriage law of Joseon Dynasty － Focused on the Annals of the Joseon Dynasty),' *Pŏphak nonch'ong* 法學論叢 31:2 (2011): 253-281.

law,[8] from gender to performance of law,[9] have been explored. Constitutional law, the law governing political institutions and shaping the institutions of states, has also become the object of study. The studies undertaken by Sohn Pokee, who first worked on the relation between king and high bureaucrats for his 1969 doctoral dissertation,[10] and Edward W. Wagner,[11] who published his doctoral thesis in 1974, led the way in Anglophone scholarship, first showing the extent to which Chosŏn monarchs had to share power with high bureaucrats and courtiers. More recently we have seen the attempt to theorise the historical Chosŏn constitution by legal and political theory experts. Particularly, the question of whether Chosŏn can be said to have adhered to a framework of Confucian constitutionalism (*yugyojŏk hŏnjŏngjuŭi*) has been debated. Hahm Chaihark, who first developed a theory of the Korean Confucian constitutionalism[12] has since been both supported and criticised by other scholars. The following passages will outline the development of the study of Chosŏn constitutional law, before discussing the merit and possibilities of further study in the field. First, we should highlight two of the most important aspects of Sohn Pokee's study on the functional aspects of Chosŏn's governmental structures and then consider Edward Wagner's system of institutional agents.

Checks and Shared Power

Sohn observed that the Korean monarchy could not be described as absolute. In too many instances kings were forced to abandon their policy designs and had to bow to the

[8] Lee Uk, 'Financial Management and Fishery & Salt Policy in Late Chosŏn,' *International Journal of Korean History*, 16, no. 2 (2011): 125-152.
[9] Kim Jisoo M., *The Emotions of Justice: Gender, Status, and Legal Performance in Chosŏn Korea*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015).
[10] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty: The Functional Aspects of Governmental Structure, 1392-1592.* (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications, 2000).
[11] Edward Willett Wagner. *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).
[12] Chaihark Hahm 함재학, '*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*-i Chosŏn ŭi hŏnbŏb in'ga 경국대전이 조선의 헌법인가, Is the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* the constitution of Chosŏn', *Pŏpch'ŏrhak yŏn'gu* 법철학연구 7:2 (2004): 263-288.

power of their courtiers.[13] The courtiers, Sohn explained, had the possibility of checking their kings based on 'ideology.' If the king's policy designs violated the dominant 'ideology' at court, courtiers were in the position to halt them, stopping them from implementation. Interestingly, Sohn also noted a difference between 'strong' and 'weak' monarchs. [14] According to him, 'strong monarchs' were able the resist the courtier's checks to a varying extent, while 'weak monarchs' were swayed more easily. A monarch's strength cannot in itself be considered a legal category, but there is something to be learned from this observation: the constitutional framework of Chosŏn must have been flexible enough to adapt to different monarchs' leadership styles.

While the importance of Sohn's work for any study of Chosŏn's constitution remains undisputed, some concerns remain: The vague nature of the term 'ideology' limits the persuasiveness of the argument and the exact means by which the 'checks' on the monarchs were performed remain unexplored, a concern that this study will seek to address. Additionally, although there are hints about King Sejong using 'ideology' to promote his policies against opposition at court, the idea of the 'ideology check' is still described as largely unidirectional: the court uses it to control the king. By now, there have been too many examples from too many eras of Chosŏn for said unidirectionality to be upheld.[15] I will elaborate this argument further below.

In his book *The Literati Purges* Edward W. Wagner drew a somewhat more complex picture of Chosŏn governance: the government essentially rested on three pillars, the first one being the near-absolute king, the second one being a small collective of powerful *yangban* courtiers, with the third one consisting of often younger and lower-ranking bureaucrats.[16] In a

[13] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty*, 2000, 4.
[14] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty*, (2000), 19-24.
[15] Not only King Sejong (1397-1450, r. 1418-1450), but also King Kwanghae (1575-1641, r. 1608-1623) and King Yŏngjo (1694-1776, r. 1724-1776) each provide examples from different eras of Chosŏn history, that demonstrate how monarchs could put checks on court officials.
[16] Edward Willett Wagner. *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 5-22.

mixture of genuine belief in the value of Confucian virtues for governance and a drive to further their careers, especially the younger bureaucrats would use the tool of remonstrance to point out inconsistencies between actual governance and ethical or ideological standards, thus checking both other pillars of Chosŏn's government. The *yangban*, on the other hand, would have the advantage of better access to the king, wealth, and military significance that could matter to the king. Lastly, the king would have the power to employ or dismiss bureaucrats at will, thereby effectively checking the power of the bureaucrats. This tripartite structure is described as somewhat conflict-prone as disputes periodically escalated into 'literati purges' during which the king would forcefully reshuffle courtiers, exiling or even killing many of those opposing his policies.

Wagner's study presents not only a valuable insight into the governance of sixteenth-century Chosŏn, but it also employs the right methodology to learn about constitutional law: that is, by observing the political practice of the era in detail, the method I will elaborate below. The tripartite structure, however, neglects factors with the potential of greatly influencing the political scene, including the royal family with its intricate hierarchy that differentiated between the king's legitimate wives and concubines, and their progeny: a pool of powerful, usually well-connected actors with often diverging interests. It also oversees the often dormant but nevertheless considerable influence the Ming state could exercise on Chosŏn politics. A new approach to the constitutional law of Chosŏn would need to find a way of including these factors and explain how they relate to each other and how they share the power to rule the country.

The Theory of Confucian Constitutionalism

The studies by Sohn and Wagner also contributed to an increased interest in the field, leading scholars from other disciplines to partake in the debate with attempts at theorising the

constitutional framework of Chosŏn and introducing the notion of Confucian constitutionalism. Although a complete theory of Confucian constitutionalism may be a work in progress, it is already possible to describe some of the defining characteristics based mainly on the writings of Kim Bihwan and Hahm Chaihark. The core premise and the motivation to study Chosŏn constitutional law, in the case of Kim Bihwan, can be said to be the existence of 'checks' that Chosŏn court officials were able to put on their monarchs. Already pre-existing research, namely Sohn Pokee's work on the 'ideology check,'[17] suggests that checks were indeed possible, and Kim Bihwan interprets checks to mean that political power, especially the kings' power, was controlled by various constitutional elements and mechanisms.[18] Seeing that there are limitations to the power of the monarchs, Kim Bihwan takes the stance that relations between monarch and bureaucrats were characterised by 'dynamic power relations' (*chŏngch'ijŏk yŏkhakkwan'gye*),[19] allowing Kim to liken the Korean monarchy to Western constitutional monarchies that, for him, are characterised by a balance of powers.[20]

While Kim Bihwan and Hahm Chaihark agree on the content of Chosŏn's constitutional law, they disagree on the sources of law. That is, they disagree on what explains what they describe as a separation of powers: Hahm Chaihark explores primarily the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典[21] as a potential written constitution, as the document appears to

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[17] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty*, 2000, 8.

[18] Kim Bihwan 김비환, 'Chosŏn chogi yugyojŏk riphŏn chuwi ŭi cheyoso wa kujo – hŏnbŏb yoso ŭi hwayungsin ŭrosŏ ŭi kunju wa kwŏllyŏk kujo ŭi sangho chagyong 朝鮮 初期 儒敎的 立憲主義의 諸要素와 構造 - 憲法要素의 化肉身으로서의 君主와 權力構造의 相互作用 (Elements and Structure of Confucian Constitutionalism in Early Chosun Dynasty: with Special Emphasis on the Interaction of King as Incarnated Constitutional Elements and Power Structure),' *Chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu* 정치사상연구 14:1 (2008): 21-22.

[19] Kim Bihwan 김비환, 'Chosŏn chogi yugyojŏk riphŏnjuwiŭi cheyosowa kujo - hŏnbŏbyosoŭi hwayuksinŭrosŏŭi kunjugujuŭi sanghojagyong 朝鮮 初期 儒敎的 立憲主義의 諸要素와 構造 - 憲法要素의 化肉身으로서의 君主와 權力構造의 相互作用 (Elements and Structure of Confucian Constitutionalism in Early Chosun Dynasty: with Special Emphasis on the Interaction of King as Incarnated Constitutional Elements and Power Structure),' *Chŏngch'i Sasang Yŏn'gu* 정치사상연구 14:1 (2008): 21-22.

[20] Kim Bihwan, 'Elements and Structure of Confucian Constitutionalism,' (2008), 8.

[21] The *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* is compendium of Chosŏn state law providing administrative regulations. Its compilation was commissioned by King Sejo (r. 1455-1468).

provide a basis for common practice at court, which limited the freedom of the king and granted court officials rights to audiences and remonstrance. Kim Bihwan goes the opposite way and states that all 'written constitutional law, constitutional practices, and other materials that have constitutional meanings or implications' need to be considered.[22] On top of a descriptive approach, Kim Bihwan goes on to explain that indeed there was a purpose to Confucian constitutionalism, and that Chosŏn government agencies cooperated in a joint effort to work for the well-being of the common people of Chosŏn. This principle of *anmin* 安民, he argues, could be applicable to modern liberal constitutionalism as well.[23]

Looking at Chosŏn as a whole, both Kim and Hahm's studies incur historical imprecisions, rendering their comparisons with Western monarchies or systems of liberal constitutions to be superficial, and in the case of the *anmin*-principle, Kim does not represent Chosŏn's political realities accurately. Kim and Hahm, despite all criticism, deserve credit for being among the first to actually write about the constitutional framework of Chosŏn in legal terms, which takes us in a more functional direction than Sohn and even Wagner.

Critique of Confucian Constitutionalism

Critics of the proponents of Confucian Constitutionalism have not usually doubted the premises of Hahm Chaihark and Kim Bihwan, but rather the historicity and coherence of their argumentation. Park Hong-kyu and Song Jae-hyeok, for example, agree that checks on Korean monarchs were possible and that Korean monarchs' powers were not unlimited. At the same time, they insist that, for a genuine separation of powers to have existed, there would need to have been a parity of power of the actors involved.[24] Additionally, they point out that

[22] Kim Bihwan, 'Elements and Structure of Confucian Constitutionalism,' (2008), 7.
[23] Kim Bihwan, 'Elements and Structure of Confucian Constitutionalism,' (2008), 26-28.
[24] Park Hong-kyu 박홍규, Song Chae-hyŏk (Song Jae-hyeok) 송재혁, 'Yugyojŏk hŏnjŏng chuŭi' chaegŏmt'o - Chosŏn ch'ogi wanggwŏn ŭi chŏngsanghwa wa 'hŏnjang chuŭi 유교적 헌정주의' 재검토

monarchs, at the beginning of the dynasty, ruled in a rather absolutist fashion, while the role of remonstrance that came to limit the power of Korean kings appeared later in the dynasty.[25] Remonstrance only became a prominent political factor when the *sarim*[26] rose to prominence at the Korean court from the latter half of the sixteenth century.

In terms of the sources of law, Park and Song also disagree with Hahm and argue that documents, such as the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn,* did not in actuality serve the purpose of limiting the powers of the king. Instead, they argue that documents referenced by political actors were merely used to teach the monarch about the virtues of good governance,[27] and they point to the fact that the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* did not come into existence at the same time as the dynasty. Most of the political institutions were already in place when its compilation was completed in the second half of the fifteenth century.[28] The first components on tax regulations were issued in 1460, the completed document comprising sections on personnel, tax, rituals, military, and punishments was not issued until 1485.

Finally, Park and Song came to the conclusion that Confucian constitutionalism, such as it has been laid out so far, does not contribute much to the understanding of the Korean past. Supporting cases are chosen from different periods of Chosŏn history and circumstances that do not fit in with the preferred explanations are largely ignored.[29] I agree with their attack on ahistoricity and wish to propose methods and cases to address Park and Song's concerns.

- 조선 초기 왕권의 정상화와 '헌장주의(憲章主義) (Review on 'Confucian Constitutionalism' The Normalization of Royal Authority and 'the Principle of *hŏnjang* in the Early Joseon Dynasty Period)' *Asea yŏn'gu* 아세아연구 (The Journal of Asiatic Studies), 55:3 (2012): 126.

[25] Park Hong-kyu 박홍규, Song Jae-hyeok 송재혁, 121.

[26] The politics of the *Sarim* are explained in: Chan Sik Song, 'The Power Structure of *Sarim* (士林) Politics in the Chosŏn Dynasty.' In *The Institutional Basis of Civil Governance in the Chosŏn Dynasty*. Translated and compiled by John B. Duncan, Jung Chul Lee, Jeong-il Lee, Michael Ahn, and Jack A. Davey. (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies), 122.

[27] Park Hong-kyu, Song Jae-hyeok, 'Review of Confucian Constitutionalism', (2012), 124.

[28] Park Hong-kyu, Song Jae-hyeok, 'Review of Confucian Constitutionalism', (2012), 124.

[29] Park Hong-kyu, Song Jae-hyeok, 'Review of Confucian Constitutionalism', (2012), 125.

A new take on Chosŏn constitutional law

The Chosŏn state was by no means a liberal democracy where a constitution safeguarded the rule of law. Since there was no single document that laid out the way the components of the state interacted, the question of how the Korean kingdom was constituted can only be answered through a historical analysis of how its government functioned. Considering that the constitution, as a derivative of observed political practice, was liable to change over time, a macro-analysis spanning the entirety of Chosŏn history must wait until we have a precise understanding of how the constitution's evolution and development unfolded in the span of the dynasty. First, we must closely examine a number of case studies, and that is the project of this thesis. Within the case studies chosen for the present study, the most important questions to answer are: (1) who are the actors or which are the institutions that determined or influenced the government's policies, (2) how do these institutions or people relate to each other, and finally (3) which customs, laws and regulations were relevant to their relations or interactions? Whereas (1) and (2) can be answered though data gleaned from the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* and the *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, (3) will only be addressed insofar as customs, laws, and regulations are expressly discussed in the source material.

But what of the 'ideology' that Sohn considered to have been the essential tool to control the Korean monarchs? What of the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* that Hahm Chaihark sees as the administrative blueprint and attributes so much importance to? While I will refrain from referring to ideology, both these factors were sources of law that contributed to the structuring of the Korean court and helped establish a generally accepted framework of reference for all involved actors. Other sources of law may be found in customary law, in precedents from both Korean and Chinese dynasties, in classics of Confucianism and the Cheng-Zhu School, in the *Ming Code*, in ordinances from the Ming Emperor, and in other related documents. While these sources of law did not necessarily determine the actions of political actors and may not have been cited in debates, they remain significant. Violating commonly accepted

rules did lead to adverse political consequences. In cases where sources of law contradicted each other, debates were used to solve the issue. Although these debates were not always free and open, their outcomes were still politically significant, but we have to give preference to historical case studies, wherein parts of the government, the royal family, and the Ming state played roles.

Following the example provided by Wagner's *Literati Purges*, this re-assessment of Chosŏn's constitutional order will use a close examination of the political histories of a king, who was denied a temple name, and his successor, to expand Wagner's description of the political system. Like in the case of King Yŏnsan's reign (1476-1506, r. 1494-1506), which is discussed in Wagner's study, the reigns of King Kwanghae and Injo are characterised by considerable domestic tensions. The sheer volume of disputes at the highest levels of the Chosŏn state provide a great wealth of suitable case studies necessary to research the functioning of the government at the time in detail.

It should also be noted that this is not the first study into the Kwanghae-Injo period in English. Particularly, Seung B. Kye[30] deserves credit for making this history more accessible and offering a detailed English-language account of the court politics during the reign of Kings Kwanghae and Injo. This project has benefitted from Seung B. Kye's research and makes frequent mention of his findings. Nevertheless, the more institutional approach to government employed in this thesis opens up different perspectives that at times add to, but at times also directly contradict previous research. Whether my argumentation in the case of these contradictions is compelling, I will leave to my readers to decide. Cumulatively, these contradictions have led the findings of this thesis to diverge quite significantly from those of Seung B. Kye.

[30] Kye Seung B, 'In the Shadow of the Father: Court Opposition and the Reign of King Kwanghae in Early Seventeenth-Century Chosŏn Korea' (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2006).

Research aims

Across times and cultures, the state has been one of the principal forms for societies to organise themselves. Despite the large diversity of systems implemented in non-European societies, current scholarship in political theory concerned with states is still largely based on the rather limited European experience. Following the appeal by Alexander Woodside expressed in his work *Lost Modernities*, [31] this study seeks to contribute to overcoming Eurocentric traditions. East Asian history, in general, and Korean history, specifically, offer an incredible wealth of case studies that could greatly advance the scholarship on statehood and bureaucracies. However, because many Western scholars of politics have not undertaken a study of East Asian history, this study examines Korean political history in the seventeenth century and hopes to make that more accessible by using a terminology that will resonate with the Anglophone social science community, thereby drawing more attention to the study of Korean history. Naturally, this cannot mean that foreign concepts and terms will supersede Korean historic terms and concepts, but rather that political theory terminology will be used to contextualise and explain Korean history and historic concepts to an audience that may have otherwise overlooked this history or find it to be rather inaccessible.

Much of Western scholarship on the Korean state has been following the narrative of the Great Tradition, meaning that Korean statehood has been seen through the lens of Confucianism.[32] Often scholars with backgrounds in either Chinese or Japanese studies have placed stress on the common elements of Confucianism shared among the states of the greater East Asian region. However, explaining the behaviour of individuals within institutional frameworks through such grand ideas can be misleading, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the 'Confucian tradition' struggles to explain the many local features

[31] Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea and the Hazards of World History*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1.
[32] Anders Karlsson, 'Beyond the Great Tradition - Recent European Scholarship on the History of Chosŏn Korea,' *Yŏksa wa hyŏnsil* (역사와현실, Quarterly Review of Korean History) 90 (2013): 386.

of East Asian states. Therefore, this study will seek to follow Martina Deuchler's suggestion to analyse Korean political history by paying close attention to political practice rather than overarching theories of Confucianism.[33]

While Western scholarship on the constitutional structures of Chosŏn has been limited so far, there has been an ongoing debate about the nature of a possible constitution of Chosŏn within Korean scholarship, and this study also seeks to make a contribution to that debate. Unlike some Korean-language scholarship, this study will not argue that Chosŏn can be likened to Western constitutional monarchies,[34] but instead it will seek to make out patterns of behaviour as they appeared, again based on political practices rather than resorting to normative treatises on statehood and governance.

As such, the method of this study could potentially be applied to any period of Chosŏn history. What makes the Kwanghae-Injo period particularly suitable, however, is the abundance of conflict between the monarchs and top-level bureaucrats and the high number of important strategic decisions that provide a large variety of suitable case studies within a time frame that is short enough to account for the inevitable change of constitutional structures and practices over time. Most importantly, these case studies are extensively documented through the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄.

In capturing the ever-changing dynamics of power shares held by Kings Kwanghae and Injo and their court officials, this study will follow a chronological approach. Using several case studies I will describe the government's response to crises during what one could call the rise and fall of King Kwanghae as well as the new situation at court after

[33] Martina Deuchler, 'Is Confucianization of Korea a Valid Concept of Analysis?', *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 7:2 (2007): 3-6.
[34] Other studies have done this, such as: Ham Chaehak (함재학, Hahm Chaihark), '*Kyŏngguktaejŏn*-i Chosŏn ŭi hŏnbŏb in'ga (경국대전이 조선의 헌법인가, Is the *Kyŏngguktaejŏn* the Constitution of Chosŏn)', *Pŏpch'ŏrhag Yŏn'gu* (법철학연구) 7:2 (2004): 263-288.

what is commonly known in Korean historiography as the 'Injo Restoration' (*Injo panjŏng* 仁祖反正).

The case studies can be outlined roughly as the following:

(1) The political situation at the time of Kwanghae's enthronement and its immediate aftermath. The rivalry between the young monarch and his late father as well as the Ming court's initial refusals to grant Kwanghae investiture undermined Kwanghae's authority at court from the very beginning. This case study will explore the reasons and consequences of these particular circumstances. Additionally, the role of the queen dowager in facilitating King Kwanghae's succession will be examined. This case study is addressed in Chapter Two.

(2) The posthumous promotion of the king's mother is also illustrative. In this remarkable episode, the king pressurised the court into accepting the ritual superiority of his mother over his father's second wife. This not only illustrates the importance of the hierarchies within the royal household, but more importantly it shows the primacy of domestic policy over international relations, as the king used his leverage with the Ming court to get his court officials to agree with his position regarding the ritual supremacy of his natural mother. This case study is addressed in Chapter Three.

(3) In the months between the Later Jin attacks on the Ming market town of Fushun in the fourth month of 1618 and the dispatching of Chosŏn troops in the twelfth month of the same year, the king argued against Korean involvement in the Later Jin-Ming conflict. His court officials united in opposition to the king's position. Paralleling his strategy in the posthumous promotion of his mother, King Kwanghae again sought to use the authority of the Ming in his favour by saying that he would only send troops, if he were expressly ordered by the Ming to do so. To his consternation, the Ming did issue such an order and the king, staying true to his word, reluctantly sent troops (12/1618). This case study is addressed in Chapter Four.

(4) After the failure of said intervention, Kwanghae squarely refused to send any more troops, which led to an escalation in the conflict with the vast majority of his court officials as well as representatives of the Ming court. It is this struggle that reveals the true power of the Chosŏn bureaucratic apparatus that used constant remonstrance, absenteeism, and disobedience as ways of stopping the king's policy designs from implementation. It is important to note that bureaucratic obstruction was not a factional issue but shows bureaucrats of various factional affiliations having stood united. Had the king had any form of meaningful factional support, it would have been possible to avoid a standstill of government. This case also offers valuable insights into the institutional relations and hierarchies between the Ming Empire and the Kingdom of Chosŏn as the Ming side attempted to sway Kwanghae to dispatch troops once again using a variety of methods ranging from financial subsidies, and formal requests, to intimidation. This case study is addressed in Chapter Five.

(5) After the once dominant Kwanghae had been dethroned (1623), King Injo took power. However, given the circumstances of his ascension to the throne, Injo struggled to emancipate himself from the coalition of members of the extended royal family and court officials that sat him on the throne, leading to a completely different distribution of power at court. The Queen Dowager, Injo's step-grandmother, can almost solely be credited with the legitimisation of the coup and thus deserves more attention than previous research has granted. To illustrate the role of the Queen Dowager, the case of King Yŏnsan's dethronement is discussed here as a precedent. This case study is addressed in Chapter Six.

(6) King Injo is often said to have shifted towards a radical pro-Ming approach to foreign policy. This last case will examine the discrepancies between rhetoric and action in the reign of King Injo and trace the changes in the relations of institutions relevant to

Chosŏn governance in the wake of King Kwanghae's dethronement. This case study is addressed in Chapter Seven.

This step-by-step analysis of the relations between the kings and their top bureaucrats and court officials will highlight the instances where policy designs or preferences differed between the kings and their top-level bureaucrats, how these instances of dispute were solved, what methods were employed by which side to sway the other, and thereby clarify the power relations between king and court officials.

Reassessing the policy decision-making processes will also allow me to contribute to a number of ongoing debates on Chosŏn political history and the Kwanghae-Injo period in general. In the question of whether Kwanghae's foreign policy designs were particularly far-sighted, I will argue that while King Kwanghae's attempts at establishing diplomatic ties with the Later Jin may well have been far-sighted, his reticent stance toward the Ming court was at least partially motivated by his desire to retain his authority over the Korean military and defensive potential against a Ming court that aggressively sought Korean assistance against their Manchurian foes.

In regard to the question of what led to the coup against Kwanghae, I will highlight the importance of the rivalry between the king and his stepmother, the Queen Dowager Inmok, who played an important role in legitimizing the coup.

In the discussion of debate and deliberation in Chosŏn, I will also apply the notion of *kongnon* ('public opinion', 公論).[35] Political discourse can only be meaningful if it can achieve clear effects. On top of playing an important role in interactions between king and court officials, debate was also used to achieve consensus among the top-level bureaucrats.

[35] This concept is discussed in Thomas Quatermain. 'Socio-Political Identity in Chosŏn Korea during the Japanese and Manchu Invasions 1567-1637: Barbarians at the Gates.' (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2016).

Controlling the 'public opinion' at court was an essential political tool, which could help mobilise a more effective and complete opposition against the throne. While some scholars in the past have stressed the role of factionalism in this process, I would argue that, while certain cliques could gain privileged access to the throne, the effectiveness of governance was not immediately affected by cliquish behaviour. Only opposition that spanned all factions, as was achieved by court officials disagreeing with Kwanghae's diplomacy and foreign policy designs, could effectively block the policy-making process, whereas factional divisions, in fact, benefited royal power by dividing bureaucratic opposition to the king.

In discussing power relations between king and court officials, this study is indebted to the work of Sohn Pokee. Sohn first described in English the mechanisms of the 'ideology check', by means of which the court officials reined in the king. The idea of the ideological check on kings has often been described as a unidirectional institutional process: only court officials used it to control kings, with very few exceptions (i.e., Sejong and Yŏngjo). The ideological check was also unidirectional politically: checks were possible on the grounds of ideology, but this tactic led to an ever more conservative and orthodox court as bureaucrats became hemmed in by their own idealistic rhetoric. One aspect of the 'ideology check' was the bureaucratic use of the idea of Ming censure to check their kings and to question the nature and legitimacy of the king's rule.[36] I will argue that invoking the Ming was indeed an instance of debate and deliberation working in favour of court officials, but that kings could equally use the same argumentative tools to sway court officials. I will also examine the active role of the Ming state in Chosŏn politics. One example of this was the case of Kwanghae's foreign policy in the earlier stages of his reign: the king attempted to manipulate the Ming into serving his personal goals, and he did so with some success. Other examples of kings successfully using ideologically charged arguments in order to win over opposition can

[36] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty: The Functional Aspects of Governmental Structure, 1392-1592.* (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications, 2000), 8.

be found in the eras of Sejong (1397-1450, r. 1418-1450) and Yŏngjo (1694-1776, r. 1724-1776),[37] but Kings Sejong and Yŏngjo's successful deployment of ideology was highly unusual, and Yŏngjo's ultimate success is debatable.[38]

Part of our analytical problem may just be the lack of a clear definition for the potentially all-encompassing term 'ideology'. Even with a clearer definition of ideology, however, the 'ideology check' still appears to be attributing the behaviour of individuals within the governing institutions of Chosŏn to abstract ideals. Like many other historians working on political institutions, Sohn implicitly based his arguments on historical institutionalism, which in political theory is known as the school that argues that institutions and decisions taken by institutions are largely governed by what is called institutional inertia, or 'path dependency'. The meaning of 'path dependency' is that, even in the moment when established procedures become counter-productive and contradict important policy goals, bureaucrats will not change habits developed from experience.[39] Historical institutionalism is also characterised by a strong stress on ideas. To exemplify this view, the resistance against Kwanghae was seen as a conservative resistance against a change in relations with the Ming, since court officials stressed the idea of Ming ritual hegemony. While court officials may have stressed Ming ritual hegemony, relying exclusively on historic institutionalism to summarise their tactics is overly simplifying the situation. To address this concern, this study will attempt to explain court officials' positions without resorting to rationales inspired by the 'logic of appropriateness',[40] meaning the type of behaviour that leads to institutional inertia.

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[37] As laid out in JaHyun Kim Haboush. *The Confucian Kingship in Korea – Yŏngjo and the policts of sagacity*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
[38] Yŏngjo was criticised by his daughter-in-law for being a terrible father and driving his son, Prince Sado, mad. The result was that Sado developed psycho-pathetic behaviour, murdered people at random, and was eventually locked in a rice chest to die by his own father, King Yŏngjo. As laid out in JaHyun Kim Haboush. *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegong: The Autobiographical Writings of a Crown Princess of Eighteenth-Century Korea*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 30.
[39] B. Guy Peters. *Institutional Theory in Political Science — The 'New Institutionalism'*. (London: Continuum, 1999), 62-64.
[40] B. Guy Peters, *Institutional Theory*, 114-143.

Instead, the bureaucrats will be analysed as rational actors trying to advance their interests within given frameworks.[41]

[41] This new normative institutionalism was pioneered and promoted by Johan P. Olsen and James G March in Johan P. Olsen and James G March. *Rediscovering institutions: the oraganizational basis of politics*. (New York: Free Press, 1989).

Chapter 2: Approaching kingship (1590-1608)

I. The multiple roles of the King
   a. The King and the celestial order
      i. Imperial investiture
      ii. Kingly virtues
   b. The King and his officials
      i. Composition of the officialdom
      ii. Factional divisions
   c. The King and his family
      i. Hierarchies and rivalries
      ii. Divisibility of royal authority

II. An exceptional Crown Prince
   a. Kwanghae's unusual rise
      i. Petitions of support
      ii. A separate court
   b. A precarious position
      i. The son as a rival
      ii. Ming disapproval
      iii. The Queen Dowager's moment

Across cultures and times, governments have relied on narrative to justify their rule over the governed. Stable regimes require authority, which in turn implies the acceptance of their exercise of power by the governed party. Establishing a justifying framework or narrative greatly helps gaining acceptance and authority. Regimes, then, are subjected to sets of expectations, requiring them to make use of their power only in certain formats and with certain goals that are accepted as legitimate. Modern states have established intricate rules and mechanisms of enforcement to ensure that governing parties do not exercise power beyond their legitimate mandate or competence. We are used to legal frameworks curtailing the power and institutions of the state. While such intricate written constitutions are a relatively recent product of the European and American tradition, older forms of statehood similarly knew constitutional frameworks. Even in the absence of written laws denoting the exact contours of authority, state institutions operated within sets of expectations and would face adverse political reactions when in breach of the confines of their roles. The aim of this thesis is to add to the discussion on the constitutional framework of the Korean Kingdom of Chosŏn by exploring case studies from the Kwanghae-Injo period (1608-1649).

Any study into the political and constitutional framework of Chosŏn must start with the centrepiece of the Korean monarchy: the role of the kings themselves. Often said to have been formal absolutist monarchs,[42] the Chosŏn kings enjoyed varying degrees of authority throughout the long duration of the Chosŏn dynasty. They had to vie for power with a confident officialdom, with the external powers of the Ming and Qing dynasties, and not least with their very own relatives. Much of this thesis will be concerned with the question of how

[42] The idea of a 'formal absolutism' features in a variety of works on the Chosŏn state and is often introduced to highlight the existing limitations on the kings and their attempts to secure elite cooperation. The differences with European 'absolutism' are great. European 'absolutism' involves the overcoming of limitations placed on royal power by the estates of the realm, whereas the Chosŏn 'formal absolutism' rested on an elaborate bureaucratic regulatory and legal framework. For elements of comparison see: Christopher Lovins, *King Chŏngjo: An Enlightened Despot in Early Modern Korea,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 9.

the pivotal role of the king was filled and interpreted by King Kwanghae during his tumultuous reign in the early seventeenth century.

Twenty-six men are commonly listed as having legitimately ruled as kings over Chosŏn. Each of them entertained their own –and therefore unique– relations with their court. Yet, despite the extraordinary length of the dynasty (twice that of any Chinese dynasty of the imperial period except for perhaps the Han), the general confines of their role remained surprisingly constant. In order to add to a greater appreciation of the typicality and uniqueness of King Kwanghae's rule and the case studies presented in this thesis, this chapter will be dedicated to a general overview of Chosŏn kingship, before exploring the extraordinary circumstances that led to Kwanghae's ascension to the throne as the fifteenth king of the Chosŏn dynasty.

The multiple roles of the king

The institutional arrangement of the Chosŏn monarchy was a unique combination of custom and imported statecraft. This uniqueness can be seen in an adaptation of certain ideas of 'patrilineal ideology'[43] in an intellectual configuration often called 'Confucian', or an adaptation of external ideas to buttress a native lineage system as embodied in descent groups, which Martina Deuchler believes are something of the permanent bedrock of Korean society from antiquity perhaps even to the present. At the micro level, lineage and patrilineality interpreted through 'Confucian' rationales can help us to understand social organisation, or at least to understand how patriarchs explained themselves. But, at the pinnacle of the state, can we see lineage in the operation of kingship? It is worth noting that neither 'Confucianism' nor 'ideology' were concepts that originated from Korea nor are they translations of Korean

[43] Martina Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors' Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 3.

historical notions. As Confucianism also shaped other states with different constitutional frameworks, an abstracted set of ideas cannot by itself explain why the Chosŏn monarchy operated in the way it did. Similarly, 'ideology' does not by itself offer a clear explanation. The term 'ideology' has been described as 'octopoid',[44] as defying of definition, but despite its inherent vagueness, most of those who have attempted its definition agree that an ideology should be partial to a 'subject', be it a social class, a political grouping, or even an individual.[45] For most of its existence, however, the constitutional framework of the Korean kingdom was held up by a very large consensus shared among virtually all relevant actors and this 'logic of practice'[46] had no significant competitor. What we are left with, then, are the terms used by the subjects of the Korean monarchs themselves in their discussions of what would be permissible for a king. Key among these terms were '*ye*' 禮 which takes on the meanings of 'propriety', 'custom', or 'ritual', 'common practice' (*sang* 常), 'precedent' (*ye* 例 or *kosa* 故事), and 'law' (*pŏp* 法). At the level of the village patriarch, the source and content of these terms could be drawn from the Confucian canon, but at the level of the king, the Confucian canon had to be augmented by the codes of the bureaucratic state. All those abstract terms could restrict the behaviour of a patriarch and they could also restrict the behaviour of state institutions in a way that can best be described as 'legal'. Legal, in this sense merely means normative. Historical precedent and classics required exegesis, interpretation, and often provided evidence to argue cases from various angles, giving rise to political, even what I will call legal, debates at court.

[44] John Gerring, 'Ideology: A Definitional Analysis.' *Political Research Quarterly* Vol. 50, no. 4 (Dec. 1997): 961.
[45] John Gerring, 'Ideology: A Definitional Analysis.' *Political Research Quarterly* Vol. 50, no. 4 (Dec. 1997): 967.
[46] The merits of this approach were debated by Martina Deuchler in Martina Deuchler, 'Is Confucianization of Korea a Valid Concept of Analysis?', *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 7:2 (2007): 4.

Just as is the case in a modern state, Chosŏn monarchs were not simply constrained by mere ideals, but rather they should be understood as one institutional actor in a framework of institutions that were in the position to check each other and balance each other's power. Likewise, the patriarch was also constrained even in his own house. In many ways, the monarch's constraints are far more transparent, because his government recorded its activities so well. The case studies in the following chapters will shed additional light on just how the king operated in a framework of institutions by examining selected institutional disputes of the early seventeenth century. A more general overview follows below.

The King and the celestial order

Imperial investiture

Many of the institutional relationships of Chosŏn kings can be traced back to the form in which the monarchy was conceptualised. In most of its institutions, the Kingdom of Chosŏn was modelled after the inspiringly successful Ming dynasty –which in turn drew largely on ancient Chinese traditions. Even before the First Emperor of Qin first unified the warring states of China and fashioned the new title of 'emperor' (*huángdì* 皇帝)[47] for himself, the kings of the Zhou dynasty had already thought of themselves as intermediaries between the celestial and the earthly realms. This role of the emperors as sons-of-heaven was subsequently passed down imbuing the imperial throne with a unique charisma. In this ancient political theology,[48] the unique role of the sons-of-heaven placed the Chinese emperors at the

[47] The new title comprised elements of the names of the first of the three mythical 'sovereigns' as well as of the first of the 'five emperors' of Chinese pre-history. Thus, the title carries strong connotations of the divine.

[48] The phrase 'political philosophy' may be more common now. Here I have borrowed the phrase 'political theology' from Ernst Kantorowicz. A comparison with medieval European kingship is not implied, the phrase is merely employed to highlight the element of the divine. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

centre of the universe, unable to recognise any peers and equipped with the sole authority to engage in direct rituals for heaven.

For Yi Sŏnggye, the founder of the Chosŏn dynasty, a peaceful arrangement with the Ming dynasty was a priority.[49] The previous Koryŏ dynasty had entertained close ties with the Mongol Yuan dynasty to the point of becoming a 'son-in-law-country' (*pumaguk* 駙馬國).[50] Despite some initial tensions between the two emerging dynasties, peaceful relations could be established under the condition that Korea recognise the suzerainty of the Ming emperors and be part of the Ming tributary system.[51]

This framework has received increased scholarly attention in recent years and is notable for the extent of inter-state peace it was able to ensure among the key participating states within the framework –particularly in comparison with the war-prone early modern states of Europe.[52] Indeed, despite occasional tensions and suspicions between the Ming and Chosŏn, the two states did not once resort to martial means to resolve their differences. The security that arose from Chosŏn's participation in the Ming tributary system came with a set of advantages and costs. Official relations with China gave Korea access to valuable trade opportunities with the central empire, as well as the chance to partake in official exchanges that enabled a stimulating exchange of material and immaterial culture. At the same time, while Chosŏn Korea copied many of the Chinese state's institutions,[53] the position of the emperor remained unique to the Ming. As the emperor was seen as the sole mediator between

[49] Donald Clark, 'Sino-Korean tributary relations under the Ming.' In D. Twitchett and F. Mote, *The Cambridge History of China*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 276.
[50] Im Sanghun 임상훈, 'Myŏngch'o Hongmuje ŭi mal Kangyo wa Yŏmyŏng Gwan'gye 명초(明初) 홍무제(洪武帝)의 말 강요(强要)와 여명관계(麗明關係) [On Emperor Wudi of the early Ming dynasty and coercion in Ming-Koryŏ relations].' *Chungguksa Yŏn'gu* 중국사연구 (Journal of Chinese History), 99 (Dec. 2015): 136-144.
[51] Donald Clark, 'Sino-Korean tributary relations under the Ming.' In D. Twitchett and F. Mote, *The Cambridge History of China*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 279.
[52] David Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 84.
[53] Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 113-114.

heaven and earth, the Korean kings, too, needed to rely on the son-of-heaven's mediation. While this had some implications for the Kingdom of Chosŏn as a whole, such as the fact that Chosŏn started using the Ming calendar in recognition of the Ming emperor's cosmic role, the impact of the suzerainty of the Ming emperor mostly concerned the Chosŏn royal institution.

Chosŏn kings were barred from sacrificing to heaven, as this was seen as an imperial privilege. Despite some controversies about this ban during the earlier stages of the dynasty – King Sejo believed direct communications with heaven to be within his rights as a Korean king, as it had been for the kings of the previous Koryŏ dynasty– this ban was generally upheld.[54] More crucially, however, essential roles of the Chosŏn state required Ming investiture. Generally, kings, queens, and crown princes were invested by the Ming after they had been accepted into their functions domestically. In some instances, however, the Ming court took displeasure with Korean court proceedings and delayed or withheld investitures, which could put a significant amount of pressure on the Korean royal family.[55] But, not all members of the Korean court were in agreement on just how much authority the Ming court had over the Korean court, and today, the exact contours of Ming imperial authority over the affairs of the Korean kingdom are still subject to scholarly debate. Chapters IV and V will offer further clarification on the diverging views on Ming authority at the Korean court during the reign of King Kwanghae.

Kingly virtues

Buddhism had reached its height of influence in Korea during the Koryŏ dynasty. The Chosŏn dynasty very quickly and strongly denounced Buddhist philosophy and by extension Buddhist wealth and turned towards political Confucianism. Chosŏn monarchs, however,

[54] Sohn, *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty,* 23.
[55] Lee Ji-Young, 'Diplomatic Ritual as a Power Resource: The Politics of Asymmetry in Early Modern Chinese-Korean Relations.' *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13 (2013): 323.

devoid of the religious charisma of the Chinese emperors, were seen as 'mortal men'.[56] Their role, though, burdened them with a responsibility only the greatest of mortals would be equipped to shoulder. Central to political Confucianism in Chosŏn was the idea that rulers needed to perfect their own virtues. Indeed, self-cultivation and perfection of virtue was a pre-condition to being able to rule.[57] Morally correcting the self should lead to a morally improved order in the real world. Conversely, natural phenomena that ran contrary to the 'natural order' of the universe, such as floods, droughts, and famines or adverse social phenomena such as rebellions, could be attributed to a ruler's lack of virtue. As even the greatest sages could generally not fully perfect their virtues, the world's 'natural order' and social harmony were often fragile. This link between the well-being of the inhabitants of the state and kingly virtue gave rise to high expectations and placed considerable pressures on Chosŏn monarchs and their court.[58] These were pressures of a personal nature that Ming emperors apparently deflected.

Due to their implications for the wider world, perfecting kingly virtues was not a private task, but instead a major concern for the entire court and indeed the entire country.[59] To aid their monarchs in attaining higher levels of virtue, court officials offered lectures, instructed princes and monarchs on the content of the Confucian classics, and offered discussion sessions. Ideally, monarchs were meant to attend lectures of this nature thrice daily, although conflicting duties often made it impossible for a sitting monarch to dedicate

[56] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 4.
[57] '*Ruò ān Tiānxià, bì xiān zhèng qí shēn* 若安天下，必先正其身.' See: *Gushiwen* 古詩文, *Zhen Guan Zheng Yao* 貞觀政要. Last accessed July 1, 2021. http://www.gushiwen.org/GuShiWen_083a5572d0.aspx.
[58] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 9.
[59] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 10.

such a large proportion of their days to studies.[60] In reality, even monarchs that did not shirk at the prospect of being lectured by the very same officials in the afternoon who had been arguing with them over policy in the morning, often ended up cancelling lectures.[61] Yet, monarchs who displayed too little enthusiasm in their studies were sure to face the remonstrance of their officials –after all, the well-being of the country was partially contingent on the perfection of kingly virtue.

The implications of this preoccupation with royal virtue far exceeded concerns over the scheduling of lectures, even though, of course, the fact that court officials were seen as tutors of kings is in itself already quite significant. Two sets of expected virtues had particularly far-reaching consequences. First among them is the idea of 'filial piety' (*hyo* 孝). At its origin this concept refers to the deference and obedience children owed their parents. The concept also included piety towards elders and ancestors. In the context of Korean kingship, it is clear that this concept was not only applicable to immediate parents, it also linked incumbent kings to their royal predecessors, even if that predecessor was not the king's father. In the most common of circumstances, this meant that a sitting king was meant to honour his dead father by careful observance of the mourning rites, and by following in his footsteps as closely as possible. That same behaviour was expected even when the previous king had not been a parent, but a brother of the king.[62] Hence, this very private virtue of devotion to a parent became a pillar of the Chosŏn state. Filial piety bound kings to the precedents set out by their ancestors and attempts to deviate from their examples could easily be viewed as subversive, as illegitimate, and ultimately as a potentially dangerous deviance from virtue. Filial piety within the royal family was both a private and a public virtue and in

[60] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 63-73.
[61] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 63-73.
[62] Yŏngjo's treatment of Kyŏngjong may serve as an example of this.

some cases the question of where piety should be directed became hotly contested. Implications of this understanding of virtue in familial relations will be discussed in greater detail below.

The royal quest for sagacity coincided with an important right –and indeed duty– of court officials: remonstrance. When a king appeared to be lacking in virtue, be it in his public or private functions, court officials were entitled and, in fact, were meant to make use of their right and duty of remonstrance in order to contribute to the moral improvement of the monarch. The acceptance of council or remonstrance was in itself an essential Confucian virtue to which a ruler was to aspire. Remonstrance, then, was a central feature to Chosŏn politics. It contributed to various positions being heard, reduced the chances of a king being monopolised at court by a small number of councillors, and it crucially contributed to the formation of 'public opinion' at court.[63] Chosŏn bureaucrats were notoriously difficult to coerce. Remonstrance gave courtiers a tool to rally opposition and as officials often feared becoming the target of their peers' remonstrance, since the sword of remonstrance cut both ways, kings would struggle to outflank courtiers and even find supporters for policies that were not obviously 'virtuous'. While it would be an overstatement to describe the resulting situation as a rule of law, it is clear that Chosŏn monarchs were held accountable by the court's 'public opinion' often expressed in remonstrances that pointed to abstract norms and quoted Confucian canonical literature, and there was a considerable pressure to obey precedent, easily available in codes, edicts, and the records of the bureaucracy.

The King and his officials

Policy decisions at the state level in Chosŏn were to be taken or mandated by the monarch. Usually, such decisions followed reports provided by officials as well as discussions

[63] As discussed in Thomas Quartermain. 'Socio-Political Identity in Chosŏn Korea during the Japanese and Manchu Invasions 1567-1637: Barbarians at the Gates.' (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2016).

on the matter at court. High-ranking officials had the opportunity to offer their insights and often suggested possible solutions to the problems they reported to the throne themselves. When views diverged, the king was meant to listen to all sides before taking an informed decision. In this way, officials contributed significantly to the policy-formulation process. Once decisions were taken, it was up to officials to carry them out.

Over the course of the Chosŏn dynasty, the composition of the court underwent a series of changes. In early Chosŏn, the so-called merit subjects, or *kongsin* 功臣, played an important role.[64] The *kongsin* were a collective of a king's close personal retainers who were granted privileges for their merit in facilitating their king's succession, as well as men who had held this status since the last succession. While the pattern of closer relations between a monarch and those who had stood by his side before his ascension to the throne was maintained throughout the dynasty, the role of the *kongsin* diminished over time. By the sixteenth century, the bulk of the central administration of the country was made up by scholar-officials and bureaucrats of *yangban* origin.[65]

Composition of the officialdom

In many ways the Chosŏn administration was remarkably modern in a meritocratic sense.[66] Vacancies in the higher levels of the bureaucracy were filled from a pool of candidates who had passed the *munkwa* 文科 civil service examinations. Comparably, *mukwa* 武科 examinations qualified candidates for higher offices in the military command structure. Particularly in the early stages of the dynasty, concerted efforts were made to set up state

[64] This concept is explained in Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 13-16.
[65] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 14-15.
[66] This understanding of modernity is based on Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea and the Hazards of World History*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1-15.

schools that prepared candidates for the examinations, and in turn ensured a high quality of laureates. Over time, Confucian scholars and retired bureaucrats set up their own Confucian academies, also called *sŏwŏn*, that served as private schools and prepared candidates for the examinations, while increasingly developing as bases for networks of scholar-officials with similar political outlooks.[67] Examinations were meant to be held at regular intervals; it was quite possible for kings to schedule additional examinations and there was generally a higher number of laureates than posts to be filled in the central bureaucracy.

This *per se* meritocratic examination system that ensured a high level of Confucian scholarship among those admitted to office in the central bureaucracy in the capital as well as in elevated positions in the provinces, had been imported from China. Tracing back to as early as the Han dynasty, the three-tiered imperial examination system had been an important feature of the Song dynasty, proving its value to the point that even the Mongol Yuan dynasty re-established a modified examination system. Quite naturally, the Ming dynasty relied on it, too. In Korea, the examination system had already been in use during the Koryŏ dynasty.[68] There were, however, some adaptations that can be understood as a concession to the strongly entrenched and astonishingly resilient Korean nobility.

Korean history is notable for the astounding retention of elites throughout a period of over a millennium, from the Unified Silla Period (668-935), through the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392), and into the Chosŏn dynasty. Commonly, the Chosŏn nobility is referred to as *yangban* 兩班, literally meaning 'the two sides'; this term refers to the bureaucratic and military elites of the country who took their seats on two opposite sides at court.

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[67] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 17.

[68] For details see: Park Yong-Woon 朴龍雲, 'Koryŏ Sidae kwagŏ ŭi kosi wa ch'egye e taehan kŏmt'o 高麗時代 科擧의 考試와 體系에 대한 檢討 [On the Classes and Procedures of the Public Service Examination in Koryŏ Dynasty].' *Han'guksa Yŏn'guhoe* 한국사 연구회 (Society of Korean History), 61-62 (Oct. 1988), 89-157.

In Ming China the imperial examination system was technically open to all, although –there too– candidates were by and large offspring of wealthy families. In Chosŏn Korea, candidates were obliged to provide the names of their parents, as well as their paternal and maternal grandparents in a way of proving their *yangban* heritage.[69] Children born to concubines were not usually eligible to take the examinations or to fill official posts. Such injustices were occasionally critiqued by scholar officials and even kings[70] who felt compassion for their less fortunate half-brothers, but with few exceptions, these bans were upheld until the late nineteenth century by the very group who profited the most from this discrimination– the *yangban* officialdom.

Over the course of the dynasty, membership of the tax-exempt *yangban* class grew.[71] While this technically enlarged the pool of candidates for posts in the central bureaucracy, studies into the background of examination laureates have revealed that on top of the restrictive background checks on examinees, a large proportion of those who passed the examinations in fact came from a relatively small proportion of the *yangban* elite itself.[72] What this means is that the officials themselves almost attained a similar dynastic legitimation as did the monarchs. Councillors to kings often advised as their fathers before them, and the councillors' sons would go on to inherit similar central roles in the capital's bureaucracy. Naturally, this arrangement contributed to the confidence of those serving in the proximity of the throne and made it harder for kings to emancipate themselves.

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[69] Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1995), 297.
[70] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 37.
[71] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 87-88.
[72] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 16.

Factional divisions

Officially, Chosŏn's highest-ranking bureaucrats fell into official categories of service, working in different ministries and agencies with the most distinguished among them holding posts in the State Council, or as ministers. These posts, however, tended to change hands relatively often, and unofficially many bureaucrats held additional loyalties as members of factions. Although faction membership was not in fact lawful and some kings went to great length to discourage any kind of faction activity,[73] it was often widely known who belonged to which faction.

Scholars are greatly divided both in their descriptions and in their assessment of the importance of this particular phenomenon of the Chosŏn court. Factionalism has been viewed by some as a key political problem, hampering Korean 'advancement', a common allegation by pre-war Japanese scholars. More specifically, Chosŏn's lack of preparedness in the face of Hideyoshi's invasion, for example, was explained as the result of factionalism.[74] Others have reckoned that factions, as organisations of men who shared certain political convictions and goals, were rather comparable to the political parties in modern democratic systems.[75] There is evidence, however, that some kings relied on factionalism. King Sukchong, for example, is said to have pursued a divide-and-conquer policy. In such cases, rather than preventing efficient governance, alliances between the throne and certain factions ensured that the throne could count on allies among the bureaucrats to do their bidding.[76] In this sense factionalism could have actually contributed to royal authority.

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[73] Yŏngjo's *T'angp'yŏng* policy is one example. See: Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 129-143.
[74] Samuel Hawley, *The Imjin War: Japan's sixteenth century invasion of Korea and attempt to conquer China*. (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 2005), 87.
[75] Choi Suk, 'The Factional Struggle.' *Koreana Quarterly*, Vol 7 (Spring 1965): 61-97; Yi T'aejin, 'Taejaeng ŭl ŏttŏk'e pol kŏsin'ga? 당쟁을 어떻게 볼 것인가? [How should factional politics be viewed?]' in Yi T'aejin ed. *Chosŏn sidae chŏngch'isa chaejomyŏng* 조선 시대 정치사 [Revisiting the Chosŏn period's political history] (Seoul: Pŏmjosa 범조사, 1985): 13-25.
[76] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 30.

Part of why factionalism has been understood in such a myriad of ways might be attributable to the fact that the composition of factions, the lines of conflict, and the alliances between members of the royal family and factions were by no means constant. And factional arrangements that might have appeared as a blessing to a king might have appeared as a nightmare to his successor.[77] While conflicts between factions may have been acrimonious at times, their divisions were not written in stone, and individuals could free themselves from their factions, or whole factions could align themselves with former rivals, depending on circumstance. Factional membership also certainly mattered insofar as proximity to the throne and access to coveted posts was concerned, and successful members of one network would do their part to advance the careers of their associates.

Traditionally, scholarship dates the emergence of factionalism *en force* to 1575, the year when King Sŏnjo sought to counterbalance the increasing influence of his in-laws by attracting talent from Confucian students in the provinces, leading to a polarisation at court between entrenched interests and young fundamentalists of Confucian ethics.[78] During the reign of King Kwanghae, factionalism remained a considerable feature of the court –although the boundaries of factions were not impenetrable and factional support of or opposition to Kwanghae was not absolute. As factionalism did not interfere with the institutional build-up of the court, nor with the institutional framework as such, factionalism will only be treated *en passant* in this thesis.

[77] King Yŏngjo, for example struggled to appease the faction that had endorsed his brother, King Kyŏngjong, but continued to oppose him even after his ascension to the throne. See: Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 30.
[78] James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty*. (Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 1996), 63.

The King and his family

Although the royal family features implicitly in most studies on Chosŏn statehood, its exact role in the framework of Chosŏn state institutions is often treated superficially. Understandably, studies that focussed on policy making have neglected royals other than the king for the simple reason that the king –for the most part– remained the sole person responsible for policy. Studies that have placed their focus on politics and governance of Chosŏn during the reign of any single king mostly describe the events at court and occasionally make mention of the personal relations and tensions within the royal family. Relations within the royal family were public, but also private, and this may have been the source of the reticence of researchers. While studies that have explored certain unique relations, such as the familial relations of Yŏngjo with Prince Sado, for example, have provided scholarship with valuable case studies, there is a lack of systematic studies into the hierarchies and power dynamics within the royal family.

This study seeks to add to the discussion on the systematic roles and hierarchies inherent in the royal family, specifically by further exploring the role of queen dowagers. These women held an elevated and particularly prestigious role at court. As many of the policy debates discussed in later chapters can only be understood in the context of the Chosŏn royal family, a short description of some of the key elements of Chosŏn royal family politics is provided below.

Hierarchies and rivalries

Confucian ethics played an important role in the hierarchisation of the royal family. This is evident not only from the fact that the *chongmyo* 宗廟, the ancestral shrines containing the spirit tablets of past kings and queens, was the most important holy site to the royal family; as to be expected in a Confucian context, the royal family was also hierarchised along

lines of seniority. Interestingly, and in contrast with Chinese customs, seniority was prioritised over gender discrimination, leading the royal family frequently to be headed by queens of late monarchs. Only once these elder stateswomen passed away –and if they did so before the sitting monarch– would the role of head of the royal household pass to a king. In terms of policy-making, this did not have a direct impact, as the women of the royal family lived in the inner palace and did not come into contact with the bureaucracy or partake in court debates under normal circumstances. This generally upheld rule of 'inner' and 'outer' could be adapted in cases of regency, when the reigning queen dowager would attend court sessions while being shielded by a curtain.[79] Nevertheless, queen dowagers held considerable power over matters of the royal family, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI.

If honouring royal ancestors was one central concern of the royal family, ensuring the continuance of the dynasty was another one. A Chosŏn king would wed a single royal consort from among the higher rungs of the nobility. Marriages were often arranged for crown princes at a young age, and young queens-to-be would move into the palace of the crown prince where princes were housed separately from their royal parents, often from a tender age.[80] If a king's royal consort died before him, he was expected to choose another woman from the nobility to fill the role. The longevity of the dynasty, however, was too important a matter to gamble on the health of the children originating from one single relationship and so kings were at liberty to take concubines. While many of these other women came from the lower rungs of the nobility, concubines were just as often chosen for their beauty and some of them

[79] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 27.

[80] In some cases, crown princes were set up in separate establishments along with nannies, tutors, and servants before their first birthday. Crown Prince Sado, an extreme example, was only three months old when he was sequestered in a separate compound. Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 174.

even had been *nobi*[81] 奴婢 of the *musuri* (palace maid, 무수리) social class. King Yŏngjo's mother, for example, is said to have been a *nobi*.[82]

As was the case of children of bureaucrats and other patriarchal *yangban*, there was a strict hierarchy between sons born to royal consorts, the eldest of whom was usually to inherit the throne, and sons of concubines, who were not usually considered for kingship. Indeed, King Kwanghae, the fifteenth monarch of the Chosŏn dynasty was the first monarch whose mother held the status of concubine at the time of his birth. This case elicited considerable unease among the officials and caused ceaseless conflict at court. While some of these tensions can be attributed to officials' disdain for Kwanghae's perceived humble origins, there was also the question of private filiality. After all, a king was meant to be bound to the ancestral shrines by filial piety. Could a king whose mother was neither alive nor enshrined in the ancestral shrines have the same commitment to his royal forefathers and to the dynasty? To avoid the awkward situation of having a sitting king be devoted to a mother who was ineligible for the role of head of the royal household, kings born to concubines had to be adopted into legitimate unions between previous kings and queen consorts –an arrangement that often aggravated the men, since it disallowed them from showing devotion to their 'private parent' (*sach'in* 私親) or 'personal mother' (*ch'inmo* 親母).[83] King Kwanghae forcefully rebelled against this understanding of his role within the family and met catastrophic consequences.[84] Others, such as King Yŏngjo, may have learned from his negative example and trod very carefully around the issue of showing devotion to their birth mothers. Yŏngjo, perhaps due to his own character, his ethical outlook, or his knowledge of

[81] The *nobi* constituted the lowest social class in Chosŏn Korea. Their social status has been likened to that of serfs but also that of slaves in European history.
[82] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 57.
[83] Kwanghae was not the only one to have to face this issue. King Yŏngjo faced the same struggle. See: Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 54.
[84] Discussed in greater detail in Chapter III.

history, made it a point to show particular piety towards his stepmother, Queen Dowager Inwŏn, who had been queen consort to King Sukjong (1661-1720, r. 1674-1720). Yŏngjo even offered deference to the wife of his brother Kyŏngjong (1688-1724, r. 1720-1724), while moving very carefully to honour the memory of his birth mother –after he had been on the throne for decades and his stepmother had passed away.[85]

While there were considerable pressures associated with the path towards kingship, life for those princes whose late birth made them unlikely candidates for succession was markedly different. As royal children, they would enjoy an education in the Confucian classics and were entitled to parcels of land and their own palaces. However, they were also limited in that they did not usually have a chance to get involved in court politics to any meaningful extent, nor were they usually eligible to take the officials' route of entering the examinations to serve as bureaucrats. There were, however, some attempts made to make a governmental career path accessible to members of the royal family in the later stages of the dynasty.[86] The princely condition of finding it hard to engage in meaningful political activities and being doomed to preside over the waning of not just their own importance but also the likely decline of their children's importance and wealth, frustrated quite a few of these candidates to the royal position. Perhaps then, it does not come as a surprise that some of the most notable rebellions against the throne could count on the support of disgruntled members of the royal family.[87]

[85] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 53-63.
[86] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 37.
[87] Yi Kwal's rebellion of 1624 and the rebellion of 1728 are two examples. Yi Kwal's rebellion will be discussed in greater detail in chapter VII.

Divisibility of royal authority

Although it is fair to describe the Chosŏn royal family as prone to conflict, there were many instances of positive relations and cooperation within the royal family. One particular phenomenon of cooperation within the royal family is deserving of some additional attention. For the purpose of this discussion, I have decided to call this phenomenon the divisibility of royal authority. On several occasions in the course of the dynasty, powers and responsibilities traditionally associated with the throne were in fact shared among two or even three members of the royal family.

The most common pattern of a sharing of royal authority was the case of a king passing some of his duties to his crown prince. King Sŏnjo had Prince Kwanghae ensure the security of the ancestral tablets during the Imjin War; Kings Sukjong and Yŏngjo both declared regencies and passed on most of the court duties to their sons for some time, retaining oversight only over crucial state matters and matters involving the military.[88] As such a sharing of responsibilities between father and son could ease succession, and at least towards the later stages of the dynasty regencies followed clear precedents, such arrangements were usually welcomed or at least accepted by court officials.

The sharing of royal authority between fathers and sons came with a set of advantages; namely it provided a first-hand ruling experience to future kings, and it could relieve the pressures of court duties on aging monarchs. Despite these advantages and even though these arrangements did not occur automatically and had to be set up actively by sitting monarchs and sometimes against court opposition, there were quite a few instances of these arrangements turning sour. Crown princes were housed in separate palaces from their fathers. In cases of crown princes gaining access to royal duties and responsibilities, their quarters developed into alternate courts. Servants, retainers, and officials at these separate courts often

[88] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 177.

understood crown princes to be the primary object of their loyalty –a reasonable choice considering the potential long-term advantages of attaining close relations with a crown prince. With officials gravitating towards crown princes, rivalries and suspicions between fathers and sons easily arose. The starkest example of such tensions and conflicting loyalties at court is the case of Crown Prince Sado. Ordered by his father to commit suicide at court, the Crown Prince attempted to strangle himself only to be resuscitated by his tutors and servants –whose duties were to him and not to King Yŏngjo, who was actually giving the orders.[89]

A more successful example of divided royal authority can be found in the nineteenth century, when a regency was established for the young King Kojong. In this case, royal authority was shared by Queen Dowager Sinjŏng, Kojong's father, Hŭngsŏn Taewŏn'gun, and the young king himself, who over time was able to grow into the role for which he was chosen.[90] The case of Kojong's regency is unusual in that –for lack of an obvious candidate for the throne– the three dowagers at the time jointly decided on Kojong, a young boy with relatively distant relations to the throne. During Kojong's youth, Queen Dowager Sinjŏng acted as formal regent. As the Hŭngsŏn Taewŏn'gun had moved to the capital along with his son, he too acted as a councillor, and in many cases moved policy along quite independently, while the young Kojong was initially reduced to the more ritualistic duties associated with the throne. James Palais' description of this royal triangle reveals that while there were occasional confusions about who was to take decisions, the arrangement produced some tactical gains for the throne, at least for a time.[91] As Kojong was filially attached to the Hŭngsŏn Taewŏn'gun, it seemed obvious, and indeed virtuous, that he would heed much of his advice, which could

[89] This scene is described in Yi Kwanghyŏn's diary. Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 219-224.
[90] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 27.
[91] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 29-30.

be used to enhance the executive power of the throne during Kojong's minority up until he asserted his authority more independently.[92]

Although the court could be physically separated and the individual members of the royal family could attract their own loyal supporters, even in the cases of the royal authority being *de facto* divided, this authority continued to emanate from the kingly position. Although some tactical advantages could result from such divisions, the executive power of the throne cannot be said to have been systematically enhanced. Nevertheless, this divisibility of royal authority was an important recurring feature of Chosŏn's constitutional set-up and could allow royals other than kings to formulate policy.

[92] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 195.

An Exceptional Crown Prince

While this study is predominantly concerned with cases of institutional disputes during the reign of King Kwanghae, the introductory remarks above will be complemented by a short overview of the political and institutional conflicts surrounding Kwanghae's role during his father Sŏnjo's reign as well as the question of his succession to the throne. Kwanghae's road to kingship was in many ways exceptional and owed much to coincidence and the circumstances facing Korea during the Japanese invasions of the 1590s. In part due to these exceptional circumstances, Kwanghae's time as a prince and acting crown prince were politically highly conflictual. These conflicts provide a wealth of case studies into the behaviour and relations of Chosŏn state institutions in themselves. A short overview of relevant instances of institutional disputes during this era is included below.

From 1592 to 1608, a time period almost as long as his reign, Kwanghae held the position of acting Crown Prince of Chosŏn. Born as the second son of Lady Kim, a concubine to King Sŏnjo, Kwanghae had not been a natural candidate for the throne. The inability of Queen Ŭiin, Sŏnjo's royal consort and Queen of Chosŏn, to conceive children,[93] as well as the dubious character of his elder brother Imhae,[94] provided the initial condition that would ultimately result in Kwanghae, Chosŏn's fifteenth monarch, to be the first child to ascend to the throne, despite having been born to a Chosŏn dynasty concubine.

Kwanghae's tenure as acting crown prince is unusual for the extent of authority and responsibility with which the young prince was entrusted during the first years following Sŏnjo's announcement of his succession. Equally unusual, however, was the fact that the Korean court was unsuccessful in its attempts to secure Ming investiture for the crown prince. While usually, this was meant to be a mere formality, the Wanli emperor had domestic

[93] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 12.
[94] Seung B. Kye points out that even in the *Sŏnjo sujŏng sillok*, compiled during the reign of King Injo, Imhae is accused of serious crimes. Imhae's unsuitability appears to have been a shared consensus. Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 23.

reasons not to set a precedent of allowing second sons to inherit the throne.[95] Kwanghae incurred a humiliating five refusals to the Korean requests for investiture.[96] Accordingly, his position remained precarious throughout Sŏnjo's reign. The insecurity of his position was greatly increased, when Queen Ŭiin, Kwanghae's adoptive mother, died and Sŏnjo was at liberty to remarry. The later Queen Inmok was chosen to be Sŏnjo's *kyebi* 繼妃, his second queen consort.[97]

The young queen was the daughter of an influential court official, Kim Chenam. She was thirty-three years younger than Sŏnjo and even nine years Kwanghae's junior, and yet she was to be regarded as his mother, and he was to treat her with the appropriate filiality. Two years before King Sŏnjo's death in 1608, the young queen gave birth to a Grand Prince whose claim to the throne would have theoretically exceeded the legitimacy of Kwanghae's claim. Sŏnjo had never showed any inclination towards settling the question of succession, and so it remained unresolved until after his death. Chosŏn ministers went on to pressure the then twenty-four-year-old Queen Dowager Inmok to acquiesce to Kwanghae's ascension to the throne, after they determined that the decision of how to settle the succession was legally hers to take, according to precedent.[98] As the rivalry with Queen Dowager Inmok was a crucial feature of Kwanghae's reign, a short examination of Inmok's say in Kwanghae's ascension to the throne –such it was represented in the *Kwanghaegun ilgi*– will be included below.

Kwanghae's unusual rise

Neither Kwanghae's nomination as crown prince, nor the extent of authority he was temporarily able to wield in this position, could be explained without the exceptional

[95] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 59-61.
[96] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 43.
[97] For her imperial investiture see: *Sŏnjo sillok* 161: 9b-36b [1603/4/27].
[98] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 2b (己未 day, second article) [1608/2/2].

circumstances facing Chosŏn in the 1590s. Following his unification of Japan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi launched an invasion of China by way of Korea.[99] Chosŏn's military, with its decentralised command structure and its conscription system that allowed for people to buy their way out of military service,[100] proved no match for the battle-hardened Japanese troops. Particularly, the early stages of the war were militarily disastrous for the Korean defenders. King Sŏnjo had not adequately readied the country for an attack following conflicting intelligence reports from his envoys to Japan in 1590.[101] Within days of a Japanese bridgehead being established at Pusan, the rivalling Christian and Buddhist *daimyō* from Kyushu and their armies were threatening the Korean capital of Hansŏng, modern-day Seoul. Before the tide of the war would be turned by the Korean winter, Ming troops, disease and Japanese logistical difficulties, the Chosŏn navy, and local resistance groups organised by Korean *yangban* and commoners, the court evacuated the capital, fleeing north towards the border with the Ming province of Liaoning.[102]

Albeit deeply unpopular,[103] the king's flight from Hansŏng was a wise choice. The momentum of the Japanese invaders could not be broken at this point, and the Japanese conquerors under the command of Konishi 'Agostinho' Yukinaga, rampaged through the capital city burning down a significant part of the city, including royal palaces.[104] Nevertheless, the flight put the king and the court into a difficult position: what was to be done in this dire situation?

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[99] See Stephen Turnbull. *Samurai Invasion: Japan's Korean War 1592–98*. (London: Cassell & Co, 2002).
[100] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 86-91.
[101] Samuel Hawley, *The Imjin War: Japan's sixteenth century invasion of Korea and attempt to conquer China*. (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 2005), 87.
[102] James B. Lewis, *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International relations, Violence and Memory*. (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2015), 262.
[103] Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*. (Norman: U of Oklahoma, 2009), 98.
[104] Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*. (Norman: U of Oklahoma, 2009), 98.

Petitions of support

King Sŏnjo, understandably pessimistic about the tide of the war at this stage, came to the conviction that the Japanese invasion could not be halted. He proposed to seek asylum in Liaoning. Surely, the Japanese would not be able to reach him there. Rather than dying at the hands of the barbarian invaders, he preferred the uncertainty he was going to face in Manchuria. Even if he were to meet his end, he still preferred to do so in the land of the Son-of-heaven.[105] The prospect of the king leaving the country, however, shocked the officials and debate over the possible implications broke out. Chosŏn monarchs rarely left their palaces; trips beyond the capital were carefully planned and often limited to avoid placing additional burdens on the rural population.[106] A king leaving the country was entirely unheard of and could be interpreted as an abdication, perhaps even a surrendering of the country to the Ming.[107]

Although the scenario of the king crossing into Manchuria never materialised, the possibility was certainly looming as Sŏnjo and his court had to evacuate P'yŏngyang, which also fell to Konishi's troops. Only once they reached Ŭiju, a town on the Yalu River, in sight of Ming territory, King Sŏnjo no longer needed to retreat further north. The great uncertainty caused by the speculation concerning the possible consequences of a sitting king leaving the country, however, fuelled the sense of urgency regarding a reliable settlement of Sŏnjo's succession. Not atypically for a Chosŏn monarch, Sŏnjo had not at all been eager to discuss his succession, even though the many years of Queen Ŭiin not getting pregnant had already caused some anxiety over the question among the officialdom prior to the Japanese attack. In

[105] *Sŏnjo sillok* 27: 7a [1593/6/13] and Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 30.
[106] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 104.
[107] James B. Lewis, *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International relations, Violence and Memory*. (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2015), 263-264.

this situation –as Prince Imhae was widely considered unsuitable to succeed to the throne– court officials petitioned the king to name Kwanghae crown prince. Finally, King Sŏnjo consented to name the 'bright and studious' Kwanghae crown prince.[108]

A separate court

Following the designation of Kwanghae as crown prince and still during the time King Sŏnjo held on to his idea of seeking refuge on Ming territory, the court split. Sŏnjo and a number of his retainers continued north to Ŭiju. Crown Prince Kwanghae and a sizable portion of the officialdom remained in the proximity of P'yŏngyang. In this situation, Kwanghae was charged with the 'affairs of the state'[109] and given the responsibility of protecting the ancestral tablets. Even though division of royal authority, as explained above, was not an uncommon feature of Chosŏn kingship, this meant an extraordinary transfer of power to a relatively inexperienced prince. Kwanghae, not having been born into the role of a crown prince, had not previously lived in the residence of the crown prince, nor had he received the training that would usually accompany this position.

Prince Kwanghae quickly rose to the challenge. His splinter court set up camp outside P'yŏngyang from where operations against the Japanese advance parties were organised. Kwanghae's achievements also appear to have gained the recognition of the common people, at least the historians of the *sillok* recorded that Kwanghae was becoming like a 'parent to the people'[110] –yet another kingly attribute.

Regardless of Kwanghae's success, the arrangement of the division of royal authority between father and son became obsolete almost as soon as it was set up, because Sŏnjo's initial plan of crossing the border into China was not destined to be realised. Firstly, the Ming

[108] *Sŏnjo sillok* 26: 2a-2b [1592/4/28].
[109] The terms used for this role were either *kwŏnsŏp kuksa* 權攝國事 or *kwŏnji kuksa* 權知國事.
[110] *Sŏnjo sillok* 29: 5b-6b [1592/8/5].

side did not extend a welcome to the Korean monarch,[111] and secondly, the Japanese invasion force pushing furthest into north-western Korea under the command of Konishi Yukinaga got bogged down in the proximity of P'yŏngyang.[112] Thus, Sŏnjo's court was not under immediate military pressure to flee beyond Ŭiju, and the splitting of the court became somewhat unnecessary as a tactic to preserve the continuity of the dynasty. Sŏnjo's hasty retreat and the splitting of the court now worked against the king's authority. Sŏnjo's attempt of fleeing into Liaoning was frustrated by the resistance of the Ming and by the resistance of his own officials; the country suffered an invasion and serious devastation under Sŏnjo's watch, and the king had surrendered much of his authority to his son, who was rapidly gaining the favour of the officialdom and, as it appeared, the favour of the population, too. By the sixth month of 1592, the king had reached a low point of humiliation and loss of authority. In the remaining sixteen years of his rule, re-establishing his position at the expense of his son's unprecedented power became one of Sŏnjo's key priorities. As a result of Sŏnjo's efforts, Kwanghae's position became increasingly uncertain to the point that the succession could only be settled upon his father's death.

A precarious position

Due to the circumstances of the Imjin War, Kwanghae had not only been named crown prince by his father, but he also attained an unusual degree of authority when his separate court was first established. By 1608, when he finally ascended to the throne, however, he had lost his father's support; he had been unable to secure Ming investiture for his role as crown prince –meaning he remained acting crown prince for that entire time. After

[111] James B. Lewis, *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International relations, Violence and Memory*. (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2015), 262.
[112] Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*. (Norman: U of Oklahoma, 2009), 153.

the death of Queen Ŭiin, Sŏnjo remarried. For Kwanghae this meant that he lost a supporter in a vital position of the royal family, gaining a rival instead. When Sŏnjo's second wife, Queen Inmok gave birth to a son, Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang, Kwanghae's position was at its most uncertain. There were some precedents in Korean law ruling in favour of sons of concubines in the *yangban* class in comparable cases. If Ming law was applied correctly, however, it was clear that the claim of the young Grand Prince to the throne carried more weight than that of the man who had been acting Crown Prince for over a decade at that point in time.

The son as a rival

Rivalries between fathers and sons were a recurring theme in the Chosŏn ruling family. Furthering the dynastic line was an important duty of a king and not having an heir could be a serious problem. Having an heir, however, could equally become a problem for a sitting monarch. The existence of an heir could weaken a monarch's control over the court, as younger officials would invest into their own futures by trying to maintain positive relations with heirs –potentially at the expense of their loyalty towards the monarch. In cases of princes having a different political profile to a monarch, this tactic by officials could become a great source of frustration. At worst, having an heir could make a king expendable. Asserting dominance over a crown prince was not an easy undertaking for a Chosŏn monarch, even though princes were meant to be filial in thought as well as in action. Once a crown prince had been named, there was also no institutionalised form of stripping a prince of this position. Under these conditions, rivalries between fathers and sons could escalate to the point of potential parricide and actual filicide, as was the case with King Yŏngjo's son, Sado, and most likely also the case with King Injo's firstborn, Crown Prince Sohyŏn.[113] The rivalry

[113] Crown Prince Sohyŏn spent much of his youth at the Qing court in Beijing where he was exposed to foreign –including Christian– influences. King Injo strongly disapproved of Sohyŏn's interests. The Crown Prince died in the royal quarters bleeding from his head under circumstances that likely

between Sŏnjo and Kwanghae did not turn to violence, yet –despite the Injo and Yŏngjo cases being from later stages of the Chosŏn dynasty– such rivalries would have been understood as a potential life-or-death matter at this time already, and the developing animosities were most likely fuelled in part by mutual fear. In 1594, a rebellion rose up in Ch'ungch'ŏng Province under the leadership of a certain Song Yujin. The rebels had the ambition of taking the capital and transferring royal power to the crown prince, because that would be 'to the advantage of the people'.[114] For Sŏnjo this meant that his position and life were threatened by pro-Kwanghae rebels; for Kwanghae the association with rebels could be extremely dangerous, too –it placed him at the mercy of his father and reinforced the need for Kwanghae to appear particularly filially attached to Sŏnjo.

In the wake of the war, the split court did not reunite immediately. Instead, Kwanghae's court set itself up temporarily in Chŏngju, while Sŏnjo's court set camp in Kasan.[115] Ritually, however, normalcy slowly returned to court life. Crown Princes, usually housed in a separate residence in the Eastern parts of the royal palace grounds, were expected to pay courtesy visits to the reigning monarch twice daily. Despite the geographical separation, Kwanghae was expected to keep up this schedule. The travel of some ten miles every day started occupying a considerable part of his days.[116] The visits where nevertheless necessary to demonstrate Kwanghae's continued loyalty and filiality towards his father. Although the *sillok* records countless visits, Kwanghae was not always able to present himself at his father's court and cited bad health as a reason he could not make the trip on various occasions. Bad health also became an excuse for not spending his time studying –which

involved poisoning, as detailed in: Kim Hoon 김훈, 'Sohyŏn Seja ŭi sain e kwanhan koch'al' 昭顯世子의 死因에 관한 考察 (The Research of the crown prince So-Hyeon's death cause)' *Taehan Hanŭihak Wŏnjŏn Hakhoeji* 대한한의학원전학회지 (Journal of Korean Medical Classics), 19:3 (2006): 210-227.

[114] *Sŏnjo sillok* 47: 22a-24b [1594/1/25].

[115] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 35.

[116] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 35.

incurred Sŏnjo's displeasure.[117] So long as Kwanghae was physically able to comply with his duties of filiality, falling short of them could have easily been interpreted as a lack of virtue, if not something worse. Appearing to be lacking in loyalty could be dangerous, and King Sŏnjo made sure to probe the loyalty of those around him. In relation to court officials, Sŏnjo even employed an astucious tactic: he would threaten abdication, forcing courtiers to publicly plead with him to stay in office or risk being attacked for their lack of loyalty later.[118] King Yŏngjo was among those to copy this technique of governance in the eighteenth century.[119]

Sŏnjo, who had lost so much of his authority and prestige in the course of the war, was eager to assert his hegemony at least over his rather too independent son. The courtesy visits can be understood in this context as well, as they underlined Kwanghae's subservience to the king. The king, however, also took care that Kwanghae's status was not enhanced any further. Kwanghae had been named crown prince under desperate circumstances, and the rites of his ascension to this role had not been completed: the Ming investiture was still lacking. While investiture was usually a mere formality, the lack of official recognition posed a major problem for Kwanghae. King Sŏnjo, who had not been all too interested in discussing the matter of his succession while he was 'alive' and in good health,[120] started pursuing a twofold strategy towards Kwanghae's recognition even before the end of the Imjin War. First, he would block any proposition that might be interpreted as an enhancement of Kwanghae's status –citing the lack of recognition. One example of this was that Sŏnjo staunchly refused that Kwanghae be handed the seal of the crown prince. Instead, any edict, ordinance, or correspondence of Kwanghae, even during the time when he was technically in charge of the country, could only be stamped in the name of 'Prince Kwanghae', without any further

[117] *Sŏnjo sillok* 42: 8a-8b [1593/9/3].
[118] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 305-306.
[119] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 154.
[120] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 25.

title.[121] Second, Sŏnjo undermined Kwanghae's chances of securing investiture. Repeatedly, Sŏnjo would disallow or delay embassies to the Ming asking for the crown prince's investiture.[122] When it became clear that the Ming court had reservations, since Kwanghae was not the eldest son and they sought a clearer proof of Imhae's inability to succeed to the throne, Sŏnjo would be sure that a healthy-looking Prince Imhae was present at the reception of the Ming ambassadors in Hansŏng.[123] While it is clear that the Ming side had domestic reasons for not wanting to provide a precedent of second sons ascending to the throne, it is equally clear that King Sŏnjo quite skilfully made sure to manipulate the relations with the Ming to serve his domestic goal of placing a check on the acting crown prince.

Despite the continued loyalty of the great northerner faction, Kwanghae's support basis wavered, particularly after the birth of Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang in 1606. In 1608, less than a month before his passing, King Sŏnjo still had the following note handed to the Royal Secretariat in response to Chŏng Inhong,[124] a bureaucrat who suggested formalising Kwanghae's status. The note reads:

> Chŏng Inhong wishes to name the crown prince, and quickly confer the position. He was making plans himself, and he believes that he is exceedingly loyal to the Crown Prince. But in fact, it is his disloyalty that is excessive. The crown princes must receive their mandate from the Son-of-heaven as must all lords. Only after that they can be called crown princes. Now, the Crown Prince has not received investiture. This [suggestion by Chŏng Inhong] is something that the Son-of-heaven does not allow, and the All-under-heaven does not recognise. If [Kwanghae] were to suddenly be invested [by me], what if the heavenly court found out about it and asked me: "As for the so-called crown

[121] This arrangement was controversial. The royal secretariat argued that even the Ming Ministry of Rites in fact called Kwanghae Crown Prince. King Sŏnjo overruled the royal secretaries. *Sŏnjo sillok* 45: 50a [1593/intercalary 11/19].
[122] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 307.
[123] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 45. *Sŏnjo sillok* 70: 16b-17a [1595/12/16].
[124] Kwanghae would not forget Chŏng Inhong's loyalty and Chŏng rose to head the State Council during the later stages of Kwanghae's reign.

> prince of your country, the heavenly court has not accepted his investiture. You, king, have privately conferred the position. There is the duty of you, king, and there is the duty of the Son-of-heaven. You, king, how do you presume to [claim this authority of investing the crown prince], and how can a crown prince selfishly accept this? […]" If we were to unreasonably confer a title on the Crown Prince, and [the Ming] were to investigate the ministers, what end would that take? Because of my sickness, I wish to retire, but the minister is making plans for the country.[125] But how rash and ignorant are his considerations? Could it be that the minister just cannot bear the old lord to retire? Now, because of Inhong's memorial, my mind is uneasy, and I cannot find sleep at night. In daytime, however, I cannot eat. Below, ministers, censors, and retainers are all unsure about their duties. This can be said to be an unprecedented revolt (變).[126] The royal secretariat is [now] fully aware of this.[127]

The attitude expressed by King Sŏnjo in this note to the royal secretariat in the forty-first year of his reign is the main reason his succession remained unsettled until the day of his death. Interestingly, Sŏnjo himself referred to Kwanghae as either Crown Prince (*seja* 世子) or as Eastern Palace (*tonggung* 東宮), which fell short of using the title of Crown Prince, but nevertheless strongly implied the position to the point where it could almost be taken to be a synonym. This means that while Sŏnjo was steadfast in preventing Kwanghae from gathering any additional authority, he remained ambiguous, and he did not openly attempt to demote Kwanghae.

[125] The term *moguk* 謀國 can mean to make plans for the country, but it can also mean to plot to take over the state, implying treasonous intent. King Sŏnjo hinted at a dangerous accusation here.
[126] The term *pyŏn* 變 used here implies a change, or rebellion, against the natural order. While a variety of English translations are plausible, a clear lack of legitimacy is implied.
[127] *Sŏnjo sillok* 220: 14b-15a [1608/1/22].

Ming disapproval

Under the exceptional circumstances of the Imjin War –and again from 1618, when Nurhaci launched has attack on Ming territory– the dual role of the Ming court in relation to Chosŏn became particularly clear. This dual role consisted on the one hand of a strictly political role, in which the Ming and Chosŏn courts remained separate political entities with, at times, diverging political interests. On the other hand, there was the ritual level that linked the two. Through state rituals, such as the formalities surrounding official recognition and investiture, the Ming court was deeply involved in the constitutional framework of the Chosŏn state and could exert strong pressures that had an impact on the relationships between domestic political actors. In the case of the dispute between the Chosŏn and Ming courts regarding the investiture of Kwanghae as crown prince, both types of Ming-Chosŏn relations were relevant.

Not only King Sŏnjo but also the Ming court sent mixed signals regarding Kwanghae's status. On the one hand, they repeatedly denied the young prince the investiture that would have formalised his admission to the position of crown prince, on the other hand they recognised de facto his elevated role within the Chosŏn state framework at the time of the Imjin war. In the third lunar month of 1595, Prince Kwanghae even received an imperial decree –clearly an indication that the Ming court saw a legitimate interlocutor in him– even though the decree made no mention of his role. Instead, it simply read:

> The Emperor issues [the following] decree to Prince Kwanghae, [personal name] Hon, of the Kingdom of Chosŏn. As is reported to me by the military commissioner and officials, the Wo [Japanese] are fleeing and retreating, and the tributary state has already been restored. Prince Kwanghae, [you are] young and of heroic bearing; ministers and commoners heed your commands. Appropriately, [I] order [you], Hon, to select a number of loyal and righteous retainers and take up your duty in the Chŏlla and Kyŏngsang areas to manage

> the defence. […] I order you to supervise military matters in Chŏlla and Kyŏngsang [Provinces]. Gather and store land taxes, bestow titles to the brave, ready all the necessary defence structures, train the soldiers, and hold key points. Everything necessary for these efforts is authorised. Kwŏn Yul[128] is ordered to accompany you as a minister; he will do his utmost to assist you. You will use the extent of your physical ability and will power to continue your father's enterprise of ensuring the continued existence [of your dynasty].
>
> Inwardly, cure the wounds of the war, outwardly, build a war readiness. Wisely prepare perfectly sound plans, and always carry out plans of beneficial consequences. Solidify our wall [of defence] and bring tranquillity to your ancestral shrines. If you are successful, it will be to your advantage. Do not transgress the Ming mandate and do not waste this good moment. If you were to miss this opportune moment, would you not come to regret it? Carry this out respectfully. Here concludes the decree.[129]

This imperial decree is an extraordinary document. During normal times, edicts would be addressed only to the King of Chosŏn himself. The detail in the instructions is equally unusual, as Korean monarchs were for the most part free from Ming interference in domestic affairs, such as the question of who oversaw tax collection in which part of the country. Nevertheless, the Ming court held considerable authority over Korean military affairs, and occasionally weighed in on the state of the military even during peace times. Despite the admonishing tone, the fact that Prince Kwanghae was privileged enough to receive personal instructions from the emperor speaks to the Ming court's understanding of his relevance for the Chosŏn state at the time. At the same time, it should be noted that the primary intention behind the Ming court's interaction with Prince Kwanghae at this time was not to grant him recognition, it was much more likely to ensure that the Korean government regain its

[128] A Korean *munban* official.
[129] *Sŏnjo sillok* 61: 24b [1595/3/27].

capability of tax and resource extraction –which was an important element in the upkeep of Ming troops stationed on the Korean peninsula.[130]

At the same time, King Sŏnjo's worries that Ming envoys might investigate the matter of him, a king of a tributary nation overstepping his authority in the naming of a crown prince, and embarrass him, were not unfounded. As stated above, the Ming court had an interest in preventing the establishment of a precedent of a second son ascending to the throne. By and large, established law and precedent were on the side of the Ming court. Even among sons of concubines, exceptions to the rule of primogeniture were by no means common practice. Accordingly, it was up to the Chosŏn court to argue the case of why Kwanghae had been chosen as crown prince. The factual reason, that Kwanghae had the favour of the officialdom and Imhae was known to have engaged in immoral activities, was not likely to convince the Ming side of the lawfulness of naming Kwanghae crown prince. To argue their case Chosŏn officials represented Imhae to Ming envoys as having a 'disease of the mind' (*simbyŏng* 心病).[131] Interestingly, the Ming court was not completely dismissive of the Korean pleas to make an exception for Kwanghae. Instead, a diplomatic exchange ensued. The Ming court officials listened to the Korean arguments, weighed them, and discussed conditions under which an investiture of Kwanghae would become possible.

The statements of the Korean representatives let on that they were concerned about how their requests might be perceived by the celestial power. They assured Ming officials that 'the little state might be crude at guarding propriety and righteousness, but how would we not be aware of the principle of establishing the eldest [son]?'[132] and that 'asking for investiture is

[130] The presence of Ming troops in Korea placed an additional strain on the Korean population as food was scarce in the wake of the first Japanese invasion. See: Hur Nam-lim, 'The Celestial Warriors: Ming Military Aid and Abuse during the Korean War, 1592-8' in *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, violence and memory*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 236-255.
[131] *Sŏnjo sillok* 67: 35a-37a [1595/9/25].
[132] *Sŏnjo sillok* 67: 35a-37a [1595/9/25].

an important matter, [so] how could we dare to deceive the heavenly court?'[133] Regardless of the Korean assurances, Ming officials established two criteria necessary for the emperor to grant Kwanghae's investiture. First, it would need to be clearly established that Imhae was unable to assume the title. The Ming side was not convinced by the Korean argumentation on this account and demurred that 'even if he suffers a disease of the mind, his illness could be cured, and he could become crown prince.'[134] The second criterium they established was the necessity of the second son to have 'demonstrated (or illustrious) merits' (*xiǎn gōng* 顯功, kr. *hyŏn'gong*).[135]

One debate on the question of Kwanghae's 'merits' took place in the ninth lunar month of 1595, half a year after Kwanghae had been sent south by the emperor to take charge of military affairs there. The Korean side claimed that Kwanghae doing his duty in the southern part of the peninsula should qualify him in terms of merits.[136] The Ming side, however, found the criterium not to be met to their satisfaction. The diplomatic exchange, recorded in the *Sŏnjo sillok,* reveals that the concept of a prince's 'merits' was not clearly defined. Indeed, both criteria set out by the Ming court in this exchange do not appear to have a precedent or other legal basis originating from Confucian texts clear enough to determine exactly how to proceed in this case. Instead, the court of the Wanli emperor evaluated the situation and ultimately took their decisions unilaterally and with considerable implications for Chosŏn's domestic politics. They denied investiture to Kwanghae.

[133] *Sŏnjo sillok* 67: 35a-37a [1595/9/25].
[134] *Sŏnjo sillok* 67: 35a-37a [1595/9/25].
[135] *Sŏnjo sillok* 67: 35a-37a [1595/9/25].
[136] *Sŏnjo sillok* 67: 35a-37a [1595/9/25].

The Queen Dowager's moment

On the first day of the second lunar month of 1608, 'the sound of crying could be heard from within [the royal palace]. His majesty had passed away.'[137] Sŏnjo's death came at a time when the two institutions responsible for the naming of a crown prince and heir to the throne had refused to do so. Since no heir had legally been named, court officials determined it was now up to the Queen Dowager to settle the question of succession.[138] Queen Inmok, however, was not partial to Prince Kwanghae, either. The disputes recorded for the day that ended in Kwanghae's ascension to the throne, present an interesting case study of the powers and limitations of a queen dowager in debating against court officials. The exchanges between court officials and Queen Dowager Inmok were initiated, when a large group of officials approached the residence of the queen dowager.

> [They] explained at the Palace of the Queen Dowager: "Your servants have studied the veritable records of the previous courts: Great King Yejong passed away in the *mi* hour [between one and three o'clock in the afternoon], on the eighteenth day of the eleventh month in the *ki'chuk* year of the *sŏngwa* era [1469]. He was mourned. That same day in the *sin* hour [three to five o'clock in the afternoon], the Great King Sŏngjong ascended to the throne. The precedent from the previous court is such. Today, after we have wept, the Crown Prince should ascend to the throne. This is what we dare to explain." [Queen Dowager Inmok] responded: "We should proceed according to this [precedent]."[139]

The next entry, however, records a different response by the Queen Dowager, saying:

[137] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 1b (戊午 day, fifteenth article) [1608/2/1].
[138] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 2b (己未 day, second article) [1608/2/2].
[139] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 2b (己未 day, second article) [1608/2/2].

> In the midst of my mourning, I am faced with this discourse. I cannot bear to see it. According to the *sillok*, when Yejong died, the position of the heir had not been settled. Therefore, Queen Chŏnghŭi granted investiture to Sŏngjong. This affair is different from today.[140]

There were good arguments for both positions. When King Yejong died, his son was deemed too young to ascend to the throne. As having children occupy the throne was not deemed acceptable in early Chosŏn, the throne passed to a man later called King Sŏngjong, a grandchild of King Sejo and nephew to Yejong. Fielding the Yejong-Sŏngjong precedent strongly implied that court officials were not ready to accept two-year-old Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang as king. However, Kwanghae was not the teen-age grandson of a king, and not born into a union between a crown prince and a consort to a crown prince as had been the case of Sŏngjong. Accordingly, the applicability of the Yejong-Sŏngjong precedent was debatable.

Following the above statement by Queen Dowager Inmok, more courtiers entered, further pressing her to follow the precedent of Sŏngjong's ascension to the throne.

> Again, the ministers said: "Since antiquity, no emperor or king could avoid carrying out these rituals. This is due to the gravity of the ancestral shrines. It cannot be omitted because of feelings of grief. The emotions of the masses are all pressing. We therefore plead that you restrain your emotion and carry out the great ritual." [The Queen Dowager] replied: "At this time, [*he*] has not yet tied up his hair. If you speak like this, I feel extremely grieved, I cannot follow your request."[141]

[140] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 2b (己未 day, third article) [1608/2/2].
[141] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 2b-3a (己未 day, fourth article) [1608/2/2].

This passage reveals a fundamental misunderstanding between the Queen Dowager and the court officials. People who did not yet have their hair tied up were still boys and not yet men. Obviously, Inmok was not referring to Prince Kwanghae but to Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang, her infant son, whom she clearly viewed as the legitimate heir to the throne. The following entry of the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* again records the officials urging that the 'great position could not be temporarily empty even for a day.'[142] Inmok, however, only repeated that the officials were adding to her grief, resisting their demands.[143]

After this point, unfortunately, the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* no longer gives details of the continued debate between officials and Queen Dowager Inmok. Around sunrise, it had started raining. Around eleven o'clock in the morning, it started pouring. The *ilgi* notes that the officials waiting outside the inner palace were wailing at the rain.[144] Perhaps, the stenographers took cover from the rain? Or, perhaps, they took cover from the controversy? This side note may offer some indication of the duration of the lengthy exchange that must have taken place. Ultimately, the *ilgi* only reveals that

> …ministers, the royal secretariat, and nobles addressed [the queen dowager] five times. Then [their request] was permitted. Afterwards, they asked her to swiftly come out from the inner palace. Again and again, she refused. But ultimately, she acquiesced. The Crown Prince donned the [royal] head gear and robes and ascended to the throne. […][145]

By the time Kwanghae claimed the throne it was around five o'clock in the late afternoon. It is unfortunate that the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* remains so elliptical in its records for this important day in the history of the Chosŏn dynasty. Significant uncertainty remains

[142] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 3a (己未 day, fifth article) [1608/2/2].
[143] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 3a (己未 day, fifth article) [1608/2/2].
[144] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 3a (己未 day, sixth article) [1608/2/2].
[145] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 3b (己未 day, nineth article) [1608/2/2].

regarding the arguments that ultimately swayed Queen Dowager Inmok. Was she persuaded? Did she feel coerced by the officialdom? Did she really voice her consent? The records claim she acquiesced to Kwanghae's ascension, but it is uncharacteristic that no direct quote was recorded from the Queen Dowager rescinding her previous refusals. Some certainties, however, can be deduced from the exchanges between the officials and Inmok on that day. Ignoring Inmok's objections was not an option. The role of the head of the royal household had passed onto her as the wife of the late king, even though Kwanghae was *de facto* her senior. In this role, it fell to her to ritually settle the question of succession. Despite the eminent importance of her role, it is also clear that her preferred course of action did not involve making Kwanghae king, and she was made to signal consent despite herself, or she was ultimately overruled.

On top of the mere institutional analysis of the importance of the queen dowager's role in settling this case of succession, there was of course a personal element to this episode as well. Inmok was hoping for support for her own son and took considerable risks by stubbornly opposing Kwanghae's ascension. After all the years of uncertainty, Kwanghae had grown anxious about his position. Inmok's threatening opposition added to his growing resentment towards Inmok. The enmity between the king and the queen dowager became a defining element of King Kwanghae's reign, and Inmok would later lose her father and son to this rivalry before being in the position to claim her revenge fifteen years after she had to acquiesce to Kwanghae's enthronement.

Conclusions

The circumstances that led to Prince Kwanghae's admission to the role of acting Crown Prince as well as his accession to the throne were exceptional in many ways. Had Queen Ŭiin been able to bear children, had Hideyoshi's invasion force not advanced through

the southern parts of the peninsula at such alarming pace, Kwanghae may never have been named Crown Prince. Had his father not succumbed to illness in 1608 and lived another decade instead, Kwanghae may have never ascended to the throne. And yet, the mechanisms and state rituals by which Kwanghae advanced to the 'great position', the throne of the Korean kingdom, worked reliably according to custom and precedent even during these exceptional times.

Rituals have played a central role in statehood across times and cultures and the same rituals that may appear as mere routine exercises in one moment may take on a highly political nature at another time. Usually, naming an heir was not a controversial moment for a king. In the case of Kwanghae, Sŏnjo required persistent encouragement from the court, but ultimately it was Sŏnjo who took the decision of naming Kwanghae Crown Prince, as it was the king's right. Usually, Ming investiture for a crown prince was to be taken for granted. Their denial to grant the investiture in this case, however, reveals the close relation between ritual and power as the investiture became a bargaining chip and a pressure point –albeit not a particularly effective one, as King Sŏnjo did not care to see Kwanghae's status elevated anyhow.

In settling the question of King Sŏnjo's succession upon his death, the importance of the role of the Queen Dowager as head of the royal household is evident from the events that took place the day of Kwanghae's coronation. The Queen Dowager was identified as the sole party with the formal authority of naming the next king according to established precedent. Nevertheless, this right and duty of hers did not come unqualified: precedents and customs at that time forbade naming an infant king. Court officials here can be said to have acted as the guardians of due process, as they reminded the Queen Dowager of her duties and pressured her to accept Kwanghae, even though she clearly favoured the idea of her own son succeeding her husband to the throne. Naturally, those court officials who stood up for Kwanghae may have also weighed the risks and benefits of their actions. After all, many had invested much of

their political careers fostering positive relations with the man who had acted as Crown Prince for over a decade.

Considering the pivotal role of the Queen Dowager in the matter of succession and the authority of the Ming court, not only in the matter of investiture, but also in terms of their apparent authority to command a Chosŏn royal to take on certain duties within the Korean kingdom, it is clear that both these institutions had an important role to play in essential state rituals of the Chosŏn Kingdom. The constitutional framework of the dynasty would not be complete without either of these two institutions. The exact nature and extent of their authority within this framework will be the key concern of the case studies laid out in the following chapters. The cases outline important institutional disputes during the reign of Kings Kwanghae and Injo chronologically. Chapters III and VI will discuss family politics and the role of the Queen Dowager, whereas Chapters IV and V are concerned with disputes between the Ming court and King Kwanghae.

Chapter 3: The Royal Family, the King, and the Bureaucracy — Separated Powers? (1608-1618)

I. The family constellation

II. The Imhae question

III. The initial 1610 debate on Lady Kim's posthumous promotion

IV. The court official's prisoners and the King's *argumentum ad hominem*

V. Petitioning the Ming for Lady Kim's posthumous promotion: the first debate

VI. The accusations of treason and witchcraft of 1613

VII. Petitioning the Ming for Lady Kim's posthumous promotion

VIII. Conclusions

In a political system that places at the centre a hereditary monarch, himself the incarnation of executive power,[146] the royal family has always been an object of special consideration. For the monarch of Chosŏn, the private was truly the political. When dealing with fellow members of the royal family, Chosŏn monarchs had to deal with a dilemma sometimes difficult to manoeuvre: the survival and the well-being of the dynasty was of primary concern to the monarchs, and yet the royal family could also be the source or the vehicle of great political troubles. Building on the findings in Chapter II concerning the importance of Queen Dowager Inmok in the question of royal succession, this chapter will enlarge the scope of enquiry, further examining the rivalry between the king and the queen dowager as it unfolded during the first ten years of King Kwanghae's reign.

Along with his foreign policies, Kwanghae's terrible reputation that he enjoyed for most of Chosŏn history, which was the reason for him to be one of only two Chosŏn monarchs not to receive the posthumous honour of a temple name, has its roots in the decisions the king took in the domain of family politics.[147] The results of these decisions include the deaths of his elder brother by the same mother, Prince Imhae, the death of his younger half-brother Yŏngch'ang, the imprisonment of his stepmother Lady Inmok, and a number of executed, exiled, or dismissed court officials within the first ten years of Kwanghae taking the throne.

The timing of these acts of violence against his own family suggest that Kwanghae was not motivated by passion, but that he instead acted in accordance with what he saw as

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[146] Kim Bihwan 김비환, 'Chosŏn chogi yugyojŏk riphŏnjuwi ŭi cheyoso wa kujo – hŏnbŏb yoso ŭi hwayuksin ŭrosŏ ŭi kunju wa kwŏllyŏk kujo ŭi sangho chagyong 朝鮮 初期 儒教的 立憲主義의 諸要素와 構造 - 憲法要素의 化肉身으로서의 君主와 權力構造의 相互作用 (Elements and Structure of Confucian Constitutionalism in Early Chosŏn: with Special Emphasis on the Interaction of the King as Incarnated Constitutional Elements and Power Structure),' *Chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu* 정치사상연구 14:1 (2008): 7.

[147] I am using the phrase 'family politics' to refer to any policy or political manoeuvre that interfered with the ritual hierarchy or composition of the royal family or has changes in the family hierarchy or composition for a goal. This domain of policy largely fell under the authority of the head of the royal household.

politically necessary. In his actions, the king could rely on support from some of his courtier-bureaucrats, just as he was attacked by others. The debates around the king's family politics present an important case study, as they help determine the liberties the monarch enjoyed as well as the limitations under which he chafed. For a better understanding of the exact nature of the threat to the authority of the king presented by a number of royal family members, a short explanation of the family constellation will be added at the beginning of this chapter. Then, I will discuss several instances of dispute at court on the topic of family politics, focussing on the reasons the controversies arose, the content of the opposite opinions, the means by which the disputes were resolved, and the end-result of the conflicts.

The family constellation

Whether families harmonise can depend on the personal characteristics of their members, but also on the constellation of these characteristics. Family relations, always both natural and socially constructed, are prone to conflict. This will be particularly true for royal families, where relations are additionally burdened by political roles that are often, but not always, assigned by birth. While family politics were a frequent source of tension in the Chosŏn dynasty, Kwanghae's double fratricide still stands out.[148] While his ruthlessness may only be explained by his personal character, the particular family constellation helps to identify the motives.

The father, King Sŏnjo (1552-1608, r. 1567-1608)

[148] King T'aejong (1367-1422, r. 1400-1418) is also blamed for the murder of one of his brothers, exiling others, and killing many of his in-laws. The case of Kwanghae may therefore not be described as unique.

Previous studies, such as the one undertaken by Seung B. Kye, lays a lot of the blame for the turbulent first decade of Kwanghae's reign at the feet of the king's father.[149] At first, Sŏnjo had been hesitant to name Kwanghae crown prince. Later he sabotaged Kwanghae's recognition as Crown Prince by the Ming. In the last years of Sŏnjo's reign, this wavering support for Kwanghae led to court officials speculating on whether he would really become king, choosing instead to strengthen their ties to Kwanghae's younger brother Yŏngch'ang. Such speculation led to a relatively low level of support at court, when Kwanghae finally assumed power.

The biological mother, Lady Kim (1553-1577), a royal concubine

Chosŏn marriage law can be explained as a dual track system of monogamy and polygamy. This means that while a single man could marry only one legitimate wife, depending on his social status and financial needs a man could take a number of concubines. While both unions were legal, Korean law differentiated between the status of wives and concubines, with wives enjoying a status that was protected by law. The Laws on Revenues in the Ming Code detail that 'the order between wives and concubines' must not be lost, and husbands illegally treating wives as concubines could be punished by one hundred strokes with the heavy stick.[150] This distinction was hereditary, meaning that the sons of wives also enjoyed a higher status than sons of concubines, again treating the one as the other was prohibited. [151] This differentiation is reflected in titles of royal offspring: sons of wives were referred to as 'Grand Prince' (*taegun* 大君), whereas sons of concubines bore the title

[149] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006).
[150] *Taemyŏngnyul chihae* 大明律直解. Seoul: Pŏpchech'ŏ (서울: 法制處), 1964, 216.
[151] *Taemyŏngnyul chihae* 大明律直解. Seoul: Pŏpchech'ŏ (서울: 法制處), 1964, 196. This articles states that it was illegal to treat a son by a concubine as a legitimate, unless the legitimate wife was over fifty years old and had no sons. Additionally, not choosing the eldest son by a concubine as heir was also illegal. Had these laws been applied to the Royal Household, naming Kwanghae Crown Prince would have needed to be considered a criminal offence.

'Prince' (*kun* 君). For sons of *yangban,* this meant that only those of legitimate lineage were admissible to take the state examinations, which could open up a career in the higher layers of the bureaucracy. Sŏnjo's legitimate first wife, Queen Ŭiin, was barren, therefore, for a long time the sons of Lady Kim—Imhae and Kwanghae—enjoyed the highest status among King Sŏnjo's issues.

The elder brother, Prince Imhae (1572-1609)

Son to King Sŏnjo and Lady Kim, Imhae was Sŏnjo's eldest son. The *Veritable Records* describe his character as unstable and prone to violence. Given his reputation, court officials urged Sŏnjo to name Kwanghae as Crown Prince rather than the violent Imhae.[152] The lack of trust the prince enjoyed at court could never be recovered and despite being the eldest son he remained politically isolated. He was accused of treason and died in exile soon after King Kwanghae ascended to the throne.

The stepmother, Queen Dowager Inmok (1584-1632)

When King Sŏnjo's wife, Queen Ŭiin, died in 1600, the king was at liberty to remarry and take a new legitimate queen consort. He chose to wed a daughter of one of his most prominent court officials, Kim Chenam. The young lady, Sŏnjo's junior by thirty-two years and nine years younger than Kwanghae, gave Sŏnjo two children: Princess Chŏngmyŏng in 1603 and Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang in 1606.

Sŏnjo had a total of two wives and nine concubines, but after the death of Queen Ŭiin, only Queen Inmok, the second legitimate wife of the king could be considered Kwanghae's stepmother. Some court officials even argued that Kwanghae should consider the new queen his only mother, as it would be natural for a new king to consider the late king's wife his

[152] *Sŏnjo sillok* 26: 2a-2b [1592/4/28].

mother. Kwanghae himself did not subscribe to this view. Regardless of Kwanghae's reluctance, as the queen of the late king, Queen Dowager Inmok became the ritual head of the royal household after Sŏnjo's death. This role gave her considerable influence at court and meant that Kwanghae had to pay her frequent courtesy visits.

Limiting the influence of Queen Dowager Inmok was one of the principal political concerns for Kwanghae. The primary way for him to do so was to seek the posthumous promotion of his mother. If Lady Kim could be liberated from the blemish of concubinage and be considered Sŏnjo's first wife, then she would outrank Queen Dowager Inmok by virtue of seniority. Then there could be no talk about Kwanghae needing to be adopted into a legitimate marriage between a king and a queen, he would have effectively freed himself from the dominance of his stepmother at family councils. Such at least was Kwanghae's ploy. Legally speaking, both the posthumous promotion and the subsequent change in hierarchy were up for debate, as will be discussed below.

The younger brother, Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang (1606-1614)

When Yŏngch'ang was born, his half-brother Kwanghae had been Crown Prince for over a decade. Yŏngch'ang, however, was King Sŏnjo's only son born to a legitimate wife, meaning that he enjoyed the highest rank among his half-brothers. *The Veritable Records* also note that Sŏnjo was very fond of his young son.[153] This politically relevant fondness fuelled speculation that Kwanghae might not become the heir to the throne after all. Two-year old Yŏngch'ang then became a figurehead for officials opposed to Kwanghae's rule and Kwanghae's most important rival. In his dissertation, Seung B. Kye argues that Kwanghae planned to eliminate Yŏngch'ang as soon as he took power in 1608 but held off until 1614, when he was sure that the political repercussions were manageable.[154] There is, however, little

[153] *Injo sillok* 1: 1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[154] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 57.

evidence to support Kye's claim that Kwanghae had this intention all along. Although Yŏngch'ang was the most dangerous rival for the throne, his claim also hinged on the supremacy of his mother, Queen Inmok, over Kwanghae's mother, Lady Kim. When Kwanghae realised just how difficult his court officials would make it for him to posthumously promote his mother, only then did Kwanghae resort to his second fratricide.

This list could be continued to include royal in-laws that could hold considerable influence, especially considering that they were well connected both within the royal family and the *yangban* and often held high positions within the government itself. For the sake of brevity, however, persons that are not themselves at the heart of family politics-related conflict will be introduced below. After ascending to the throne Kwanghae started to move quickly by attacking his older brother, Imhae. His endeavour to limit the influence of Queen Inmok and her son Yŏngch'ang, however, stretched over years. Both conflicts and the series of events will be explored separately below.

The Imhae question

Kwanghae ascended to the throne on the first day of the second month of 1608. On the fourteenth day of the same month Third Inspector Yun Yang, Minor Inspector Min Tŏk'nam, a Member of the Chancellory Yun Hyosŏn, and the Fourth Censors Yi Sagyŏng and Im Chang presented the following memorial at court:

> Prince Imhae has long held divergent ambitions[155]. In private he stores weaponry, in secret he fosters men ready to [fight and] die. From the tenth month of the last year, when the Great King [Sŏnjo] was gravely sick, he did

[155] The term *iji* 異志 employed here implies Imhae was harbouring ambitions that were in contradiction with the normal Confucian world order.

> not only frequently mingle with thieving gangs, but he also connected with famous generals and drafted soldiers. Day and night, he secretly planned the unlawful, as is evident to all of the nation's people. When it came to [Sŏnjo] ascending to heaven, before Imhae even started his mourning, he openly just left [the palace]. At a later time, he stormed back. In terms of emotions, he was far from being sentimentally attached [to his late father] and he gave off the impression of ordering around men of his private soldiery. Now he is producing iron hammers and swords nearby and hiding them in depots in great numbers. An immeasurable calamity is drawing closer day and night! We request a great plan for the protection of the Ancestral Shrine. Urgently command the high officials and the Ministry of Military Affairs to settle this affair without delay, and exile [Imhae] to a secluded island. Do this to maintain his majesty's most genuine affection and to calm the suspicion and fear of everybody here and elsewhere.[156]

It is worth noting that this memorial represents the first mention of Imhae in the *Kwanghaegun ilgi*. While it is no longer possible to say with certainty whether Imhae presented a genuine threat to the throne, the charges against him are revealing. Within the same day, officials from a large variety of government agencies came forth to accuse Imhae of various crimes. Some, such as a First Advisor of the Office of Special Advisors mirrored the accusations above, while an accuser from the Ministry of Military Affairs descended into a full character assault on Imhae, recounting an incident when the prince covered his face with cloth and walked around leaning on others, as well as an incident when Imhae dressed up as a woman. Cross-dressing was not in itself prohibited in any way, but it did not fall into the range of expected behaviours for a prince. Most likely the desired interpretation was that it made Imhae look like a jester in a society in which entertainers were held in low regard.[157] Officials then suggested that soldiers be ordered to guard the king's elder brother. Before the

[156] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 22a (辛未 day, eighth article) [1608/2/14].
[157] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 23a (辛未 day, forteenth article) [1608/2/14].

end of the day, Imhae's apprehension was ordered. Considering the number of courtiers speaking out against Imhae on the same day, there can be no doubt that the prince had been the target of a coordinated political attack that was set up almost as soon as Kwanghae ascended to the throne. On this first day of the Imhae question, no-one came forth in defence of the prince.

The first accusation against Imhae in itself already contains some of the most crucial elements necessary to condemn someone or to ruin their reputation at the Chosŏn court. Hoarding weapons and drafting soldiers can be construed as treason, the most serious crime against the state. The *Ming Code*, the key document of Chosŏn criminal law, also criminalises the mere plotting of treason,[158] meaning that political adversaries could be arrested and charged before any tangible crime had occurred. The second point of the accusation concerns Imhae's alleged lack of filial piety, one of the most highly valued ethical principles in Chosŏn. As if being disrespectful of his deceased father was not bad enough, Imhae was also accused of clearly disregarding very important mourning rites. The mourning rites, well defined in the Korean annotated version of the *Ming Code*, have been at the heart of many political conflicts in Chosŏn. Indeed, King Yŏnsan's (1476-1506, r. 1494-1506) disregard for them were one of the core reasons for court officials to oppose and eventually dethrone him.[159] Summing up the accusations, one can say that Imhae had been charged with the gravest crime against the state as well as the gravest violation of ethical conventions, and generally unsuitable behaviours.

King Kwanghae, presiding over the court sessions where these accusations were first voiced, reacted in a seemingly ambiguous way. Whether falsely or genuinely, he even appeared to stay his hand, publicly refusing court officials' requests to punish Imhae

[158] Jiang Yonglin, trans., *The Great Ming Code*. (大明律) (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), p. 18.; *Taemyŏngnyul chihae* 大明律直解. Seoul: Pŏpchech'ŏ (서울: 法制處), 1964, 50-53.
[159] *Chungjong sillok* 1: 2b-4b [1506/9/2]

according to the law.[160] While Kwanghae himself expressed his grievance over his brother's lack of principles,[161] he also explained that 'righteousness may weigh heavy, but the divine order of human relations also weighs heavy.'[162] Despite his initial display of unwillingness to punish his elder brother, however, Kwanghae soon gave in to repeated demands and sentenced Imhae to exile where he should have been kept and guarded.[163] Just about a year after his initial confinement, Imhae died of poisoning. The *sillok* records that no-one could understand the death, nor knew when he had passed away.[164] Execution by a guard after being sent into exile, however, was not an unusual occurrence in Chosŏn, as it allowed the king to keep the illusion of benevolence while at the same time eliminating a threat. What is remarkable about the death of Imhae, however, is the absolute lack of controversy over his fate in the *sillok*. If Imhae had had any supporters at court, they were smart enough to understand that defending the king's disgraced brother, who, in the popularly shared narrative at court, had become a traitor was a very serious and possibly deadly undertaking. Many in the bureaucracy seem to have seen Imhae's death as necessary or as trivial, because even in later years this first fratricide of Kwanghae's was rarely held against him.

Conclusions on the Imhae question

The Imhae question may not reveal much about debate culture at the Chosŏn court, but it does tell us something about relations between king and court. Seung B. Kye points out that Kwanghae cleverly kept a distance throughout, as it was not he himself who unfilially

[160] Starting from *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 2(2): 82b 壬寅 day, first article) [1608/5/17] until *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chŏngch'obon*) vol. 2(5): 13a (辛巳 day, fifth article) [1608/6/26] with occasional later references, the phrase *Imhae anyul* 臨海按律 or 'Imhae according to the law' became the standard phrase to characterise this political stance.
[161] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 22a (辛未 day, nineth article) [1608/2/14].
[162] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 2(2): 89a (己酉 day, first article) [1608/5/24].
[163] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 1(1): 22b (辛未 day, eleventh article) [1608/2/14].
[164] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 6(6): 106b (己酉 day, fifth article) [1609/4/29].

attacked his brother, but instead his allies among the bureaucracy carried out these deeds.[165] While this observation holds true, there is more to this episode: Kwanghae, whose interest it was to have his brother killed, borrowed the legitimacy for his policy of fratricide from the public opinion at court (*kong'non* 公論). What Kye describes as a good piece of propaganda actually reveals the king's weakness. Kwanghae depended on support from court officials to legitimise his actions and sought to remain immune from accusations that could lead to an unfavourable turn in the public opinion at court.

The initial 1610 debate on Lady Kim's posthumous promotion

After the death of the isolated Imhae, there was still the question of Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang, who similarly to Imhae had a higher status among Sŏnjo's children than Kwanghae had, according to established conventions of primogeniture and primacy of children to legitimate wives. The infant boy, born only two years before King Sŏnjo's death, was at the same time much more dangerous for Kwanghae and much harder to eliminate. The young boy had powerful connections at court, including his grandfather Kim Chenam, who over the years had filled many influential roles at court, and his mother, Queen Dowager Inmok, who filled the role of head of the royal household. The fact that King Sŏnjo had also taken an obvious liking to the boy[166] had led to speculations at court that resulted in powerful actors, such as Chief State Councillor Yu Yŏnggyŏng, backing the young boy's claim to the throne.[167] Although Yŏngch'ang, like Imhae, is most famous today for having been murdered by Kwanghae, initially, it was arguably not Kwanghae's intention to have the young boy murdered. Instead, he sought to remove the threat by means of a subtler political manoeuvre:

[165] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 63.
[166] *Injo sillok* 1: 1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[167] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 50. This episode can also be seen as the beginning of very positive relations between Kwanghae and members of the Senior Northerners (大北, Taebuk) faction, such as Chŏng Inhong, who spoke up against Yu Yŏnggyŏng.

Kwanghae proposed to promote his late mother to the rank of a legitimate wife of Sŏnjo's, thereby promoting himself to become the eldest living and legitimate son of the late king.

Kwanghae first brought up this ploy in the winter of 1610. After the mourning period for King Sŏnjo had come to a close, Kwanghae proposed the posthumous promotion (*ch'usung* 追崇) of his mother, Lady Kim.[168] In the first days of the second month, the young monarch put forward the idea of following the precedent given by the case of the Ming emperor Hongzhi,[169] who also posthumously promoted his mother. The Hongzhi emperor's mother, Lady Ji, had been murdered by the Emperor's jealous wife, Lady Wan, and the unjust murder served as a justification for her posthumous promotion in ritual rank. While Kwanghae emotionally professed that during both his waking and sleeping hours he was saddened by the fact that the promotion had not yet occurred,[170] court officials found that the precedent of the Ming was insufficient in this case, as the customs of Korea were different,[171] and no suitable precedents in earlier periods were to be found.[172] Given the lack of precedents admissible to the court officials, they claimed that it would be inappropriate to posthumously promote Lady Kim. Kwanghae's argument that propriety (*ye* 禮) was initially based on feelings of bonding in human relations (*chŏng* 情)[173] also failed to convince.

While Kwanghae's argument might be interesting from a philosophical perspective, it remains safe to assume that his intentions were of a political nature, and this was not lost on the court. While court officials may have been genuinely concerned about Confucian propriety, they were also worried about the political consequences. It was not in their interest to see the king emancipate himself from any control the Queen Dowager might have had over

[168] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 9(9): 49b-51a (戊子 day, fourth article) [1610/1/11].
[169] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 9(9): 103a (戊午 day, first article) [1610/2/12].
[170] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 9(9): 95b (甲寅 day, fourth article) [1610/2/8].
[171] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 48b-49a (己亥 day, fourth article) [1610/3/23].
[172] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 48b-49a (己亥 day, fourth article) [1610/3/23].
[173] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 16b (甲申 day, fourth article) [1610/3/8].

him, and they did not want to witness the creation of a precedent that blurred the strong distinction between wives and concubines. After all, this distinction contributed vastly to the shaping of the composition of the *yangban* elites. Especially, young members of the court, who generally had the tendency of being stricter about the rules of propriety,[174] had no interest whatsoever in lowering the privilege that came with the fortune of being born to a legitimate wife. Starting from the late fourteenth century, the Chosŏn court had pitched battles over favouring sons of wives over sons of concubines, and their decision to exclude the sons of concubines from examinations hindered social mobility and privileged the elite *yangban* families, especially the sons of a union between a *yangban* man and a *yangban* woman.[175]

According to the stance of many of the officials, Queen Ŭiin, Sŏnjo's first wife, should be considered Kwanghae's legal mother, since he succeeded his father to the throne. Queen Inmok should accordingly be considered his legal stepmother,[176] leaving no room for his biological mother. Given the stubbornness of the king, however, they were ready to strike a compromise with Kwanghae and offered the following solution: in order to appease the king's desire to elevate his biological mother, they suggested promoting Lady Kim to the rank of *bi* 妃 or royal consort. This title, corresponding to the wife of a prince, implied legitimacy and yet fell short of naming her a queen, thus keeping up the distinction between wives and concubines. Naturally, to Kwanghae 'just giving her the title of *bi*, [was] equivalent to renouncing the ceremony of posthumous promotion.'[177]

[174] Chan Sik Song, 'The Power Structure of *Sarim* (士林) Politics in the Chosŏn Dynasty', (2009), 147-149.
[175] Martina Deuchler. *The Confucian Transformation of Korea.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 40.
[176] This stance is taken by Magistrate Hŏ Sŏng in *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 24b-29a (庚寅 day, fifth article) [1610/3/14].
[177] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 16b-17b (甲申 day, fifth article) [1610/3/8].

Frustrated, the king accused his court officials of being unjust, stating that 'all other kings and emperors were allowed [to do this], so why would [he] alone be banned from it.'[178] As opposition mounted, the increasingly bitter king asked officials 'why only for this matter, do you have to bring up the Three Eras for your lofty speeches?,'[179] and went on to shut down opposing bureaucrats by saying, 'I find it laughable; do not bother to respond.'[180] Within weeks from Kwanghae's initial proposal to promote his biological mother, the king was completely isolated on the issue at court and responded to the flood of daily remonstrance against his plans by a spectrum of statements that usually comprised one or several of the components 'no,' 'as discussed,' 'inadmissible,' and 'stop this nuisance.'[181] Given this initial blockade by court officials and the fierce opposition that he was unable to sway by argumentative tools alone, Kwanghae took the initiative.

Seeing that he would fail to convince the court officials with a stubborn argumentative approach, Kwanghae went on suggest a compromise of his own. He proposed to promote his mother to the rank of queen, but he would uphold some degree of discrimination between wife and concubine by not demanding that her tablet be moved into the Ancestral Shrines.[182] Apparently, the king took the wind out of his critics' sails with this proposal, and he still found a solution that satisfied his need to promote his mother beyond the rank of his

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[178] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 16b (甲申 day, fourth article) [1610/3/8].
[179] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 21a-22a (丙戌 day, third article) [1610/3/10]. The Three Eras of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties of China are here used as refer to the origins of Confucian thought. Precedents taken from the classical period of Chinese history often carried more weight in the eyes of court officials who considered later Chinese dynasties to fall somewhat short of the ethical standards set in the classical period.
[180] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 21a-22a (丙戌 day, third article) [1610/3/10].
[181] There are several instances of the king shutting down debate in *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 11(11): 15a (癸丑 day, first article) [1610/5/9] and *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 11(11): 33a (丁卯 day, sixth article) [1610/5/23]. In total there are well over two-hundred instances of the king being recorded choosing the phrase *hyubŏn* 休煩 (meaning 'stop this nuisance'), excluding the many variations thereof. King Sŏnjo, the king with the second most usage of this phrase, used it about fifteen times in the forty-one years of his reign.
[182] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 47a-48a (己亥 day, second article) [1610/3/23].

stepmother. Once this solution was established, Kwanghae moved quickly to set up a government agency for posthumous promotion and to organise festivities.[183]

The peace between the throne and court officials this compromise could have brought did not last. When inspector-general Kim Nŭk pointed out that the festivities the king had planned should really only be held for a true queen, and therefore it would be improper to hold them for Lady Kim, now also referred to as Queen Kongsŏng, Kwanghae was enraged and halted the festivities.[184] He dismissed the insolent inspector-general and his political allies,[185] and eventually he broke his promise of not moving Lady Kim's tablet into the Ancestral Shrines.[186] For a short while it looked as though the king would have his way, even though he alienated large parts of the higher bureaucracy. However, eventually, Kwanghae's confrontational approach failed. The officials he sought to bring into the government to replace disgraced members of the court either refused to take up office or took up office just to continue the remonstrance against the throne that had cost their predecessors their posts.[187] Under such circumstances the king was eventually forced to back off his ambitious plans and withdrew the order to move his mother's tablet to the Royal Temple.[188]

The king's first attempt at settling the Inmok-Yŏngch'ang question thus resulted in failure as he was unable to overcome the general opposition among court officials against the posthumous promotion of his mother. Unlike in the case of the Imhae question, a vivid debate took place at court. Both sides were argued and the king himself engaged in the debate. Kwanghae comes across as sufficiently well-read to argumentatively compete with his bureaucrats, using precedents taken from Chinese history to underline the subjective legality

[183] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 10(10): 63a (癸卯 day, second article) [1610/3/27].
[184] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 11(11): 51b-52a (己卯 day, sixth article) [1610/6/6].
[185] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 11(11): 53b-54a (庚辰 day, sixth article) [1610/6/7].
[186] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 100.
[187] This situation continued for about a month until the king relented.
[188] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 11(11): 53b (庚辰 day, sixth article) [1610/7/6].

of his policy. It became clear that the king really depended on the support of his court officials to secure the core of his policy: raising the ritual rank of his mother.

The court officials' prisoners' dilemma and the King's argumentum ad hominem

The initial dispute and confrontation on the topic of Lady Kim's posthumous promotion suggests that, while Kwanghae demanded loyalty and could be harsh and unpleasant, he was willing to allow remonstrance and did not shut down the opposition. He clearly showed that he was well versed in the Confucian classics and the legal precedents relevant to his case, even though he was motivated by concerns of *realpolitik*. For his court officials, this episode is the first case of them demonstrating strength through unity and eventually forcing Kwanghae to retreat on the way to his goal of becoming the head of the royal household. After this initial failure, however, Kwanghae was not ready to let go of his goal and changed his strategy when he brought the topic of promoting his mother back on the agenda in 1612.

The court officials' strength was also their weakness. Establishing a united front against the monarch was their most effective tool of restraining the king's formally near-absolute power. Unfortunately, for those who wished to oppose the throne, the dynamics that resulted from this tactic can be compared to the prisoners' dilemma. Although a united opposition might be most desirable as a strategy for all those united, it required a number of self-interested rational actors to collaborate and thereby potentially renounce the promotion of their immediate interests. In the case of the opposition against Lady Kim's posthumous promotion the unity lasted for about two years, when the king's methods became more cunning and the unity began to break down.

In 1612, accusations were brought against Kim Nŭk, the former inspector-general, whose critique of Kwanghae's planned festivities in honour of his birth mother had him

demoted to a mere magistrate in the provinces.[189] A letter was intercepted that stated a member of the Southerner faction at court harshly criticised the posthumous promotion. After undergoing torture, the Confucian student with whom the letter had been found, eventually identified the author of the letter as Kim Nŭk. Naturally, the king used the incident as an opportunity, not only to banish the perpetrator even further[190] but also to settle some accounts with other dissenters whom he could now link to the conspiratorial activities of Kim Nŭk.[191]

For a second time after the Imhae question the king had thus been able to use accusations to damage political adversaries' standing at court and to influence the public opinion at court. As in the first case, the accusations helped him push his agenda, but this time at the cost of polarising the court officials. This royal *ad hominem* attack forced court officials to distance themselves from Kim. Following these events, leaders of the Northerner faction, such as Yi Ich'ŏm and Chŏng Inhong, switched sides and aligned themselves with the throne in the queen dowager debate, leading to a great power shift in favour of the throne's plans of posthumous promotion and to a further favouring of the Northerner faction. The Northerner faction had brought Kwanghae to the throne and now helped him in securing his domestic policy goal. For the next decade, up to the Injo Restoration, they would remain the most influential faction.

Petitioning the Ming for Lady Kim's posthumous promotion: The first debate

The accusations against Kim Nŭk and his subsequent punishment resulted in court officials begging Kwanghae for forgiveness in an attempt to distance themselves from the conspirators.[192] This spectacle created a great opportunity for Kwanghae to cast himself in a

[189] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 11(11): 54b-55a (庚辰 day, eighth article) [1610/7/6].
[190] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chŏngch'obon*) vol. 13(52): 11b (甲戌 day, third article) [1612/4/10].
[191] One of the court officials dismissed along with Kim Nŭk was Hŏ Sŏng, who had previously argued for Kwanghae to accept his stepmother as his only legal mother.
[192] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 18(18): 75b-76a (癸酉 day, tenth article) [1612/4/9].

positive light. The king knew just how to make use of this new atmosphere at court. In pushing for the next step in the onerous posthumous promotion process, he suggested to petition the Ming for an official recognition of Lady Kim as Queen of Chosŏn.[193] Given Kwanghae's personal experience with the Ming, it can be assumed that this was not his favourite option,[194] but the potential gains outweighed the risks. Already in the first stages of the promotion, court officials had hidden behind the argument that only the Ming had the authority to invest a Queen of Chosŏn, which in return meant that, in case the Ming actually consented to the promotion, the court officials would have lost the basis for their opposition. Realising the dangerous potential of the king's petition, court officials therefore remonstrated against him sending the petition in the first place.[195] Allies of the throne, such as Chŏng Inhong also cautioned the throne that there were no precedents for such a petition,[196] but at the same time encouraged the king to go on with his plans, saying:

> I do not know what would be proper — there is no way of knowing whether [the situation of] one lord having three queens has occurred before. But our dynasty serves the Great, we are of the same family [as the Ming], and we have no secrets. Now [Queen Kongsŏng] has already been posthumously promoted, it seems we cannot conceal it. To petition in the name of one's own mother, how could that go against propriety?[197]

When Kwanghae, who had had his share of bad experiences when it came to Ming investiture, noted that this case differed from precedents, leaving open the possibility of a Ming denial of the petition, Chŏng Inhong reiterated his argument of basing the petition on

[193] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 21(21): 1a (辛卯 day, second article) [1612/11/1].
[194] During his time as Crown Prince, Kwanghae had made the experience that it was quite possible for the Ming to deny such requests, leading to unfavourable developments at court.
[195] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 21(21): 43a (丁未 day, second article) [1612/11/17].
[196] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 21(21): 1a (辛卯 day, second article) [1612/11/1].
[197] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 21(21): 1a (辛卯 day, second article) [1612/11/1].

Kwanghae's genuine personal affection for his mother, while other *munban* supporters such as Yun Yang argued that, since the posthumous promotion has already happened, not sending out the petition would really cause uncertainty.[198]

Court officials opposing the king's plans of sending a petition to the Ming did not have many arguments left, except maybe pointing out that Chosŏn would be disgraced should the petition be declined. Since they were very aware of the political consequences of Lady Kim's posthumous promotion, however, they were not ready to back down, either. The office of the inspector-general, for example, commented in a rather aggressive tone:

> As for the special mission [of petition], although it is the result of your majesty's most honest feeling, any official who is to engage in this affair will inevitably regret it. We will add here that once your majesty has ordered it, there has not been remonstrance; [but there is] extreme opposition to it. Hence, the guilt of your silent ministers weighs heavily; we request you to change your ministers' posts.[199]

The court opposition did not leave the argument at a rhetorical level but also managed to subvert the process of petition by foiling attempts at naming a head of the special mission to Ming.[200] Kwanghae did not give up on the promotion of his mother, but it was not until the following year, in 1613, when the atmosphere at court had undergone another important change, that Kwanghae was able to move forward with the petition. The significance and role of the Ming in this case of institutional dispute between king and court officials will be further discussed below.

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[198] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 21(21): 1a (辛卯 day, second article) [1612/11/1].
[199] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 21(21): 79a (丙子 day, first article) [1612/intercalary 11/17].
[200] One way of doing so was to resign for their posts or ask the king to dismiss them. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 18(18): 79a (丙子 day, first-third articles) [1612/4/12].

The accusations of treason and witchcraft of 1613

In the fourth month of 1613, the Chosŏn court was shaken by a series of explosive accusations. Paralleling the cases outlined above, Kwanghae was the final beneficiary of debates that discredited the officials standing in his way. On this occasion the targeted trio consisted of Kim Chenam, father to the Queen Dowager, the Queen Dowager herself, and the young Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang. The case of 1613 began when several robbers were apprehended, who were recorded as having submitted 'without a single beating with the wooden stick.'[201] The same day he was detained, the group's leader Pak Ŭngsŏ presented a memorial from his prison cell. He stated that the silver the thieves had gathered was in fact meant to serve a great rebellion.[202] The goal of said rebellion was to replace Kwanghae and have his younger brother take the throne in his stead. Only a few days later, Kim Chenam, 'the country's uncle' (*kukku* 國舅), was implicated in the case, when his 'name came out of the traitor's mouth'.[203] Kim Chenam was immediately released from his duties at court and executed soon thereafter.[204] Plotting treason is included in article three of the *Ming Code* as one of the Ten Abominations.[205] One cannot possibly overstate the impact these events had on the relationship between King Kwanghae and his stepmother, Queen Dowager Inmok. The king was clearly very personally invested and conducted interrogations himself.[206] The following scene recorded by court historians, reveals why the year 1613 in a way marks a point-of-no-return in the rivalry between the King and the Queen Dowager:

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[201] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 22(22): 102a-102b (癸丑 day, fifth article) [1613/4/25].
[202] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 22(22): 102a-102b (癸丑 day, fifth article) [1613/4/25].
[203] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 23(23): 8a-8b (辛酉 day, eighth article) [1613/5/4].
[204] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 24(24): 10a (辛卯 day, sixth article) [1613/6/4]. Kwanghae had superficially resisted the punishment for a while; Kim Chenam's three sons and his son-in-law all 'died under the stick'. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 24(24): 2a (戊子 day, seventh article) [1613/6/1].
[205] Jiang Yonglin, trans., *The Great Ming Code*. (大明律) (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), p. 19.; *Taemyŏngnyul chihae* 大明律直解. Seoul: Pŏpchech'ŏ (서울: 法制處), 1964, 196.
[206] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 24(24): 1a-2a (戊子 day, first article) [1613/6/1].

> [Kim Chenam's] wife, Lady No, walked barefoot outside the Queen Dowager's palace. Loudly crying and calling the Queen Dowager's personal name. "Daughter, daughter, how are they killing your father and how are you not saving him?" [All who] heard this felt grieved. The king had ordered her to be imprisoned in her house. There was not a single thing in that house, […][207]

As in the case of Imhae before, once accusations were voiced, others soon followed completing King Kwanghae's full-on assault on the person of the Queen Dowager: before long, the Queen Dowager herself was implicated in a case of dark magic. A number of court ladies stood accused of producing a representation[208] of Kwanghae's first stepmother, Queen Ŭiin. They also had a servant write down the queen's taboo name, and they cursed her. This ritual was said to have taken place at a royal graveyard.[209] Acts of witchcraft allegedly had also led to the untimely death of Queen Ŭiin. As for witchcraft, article 181 of the *Ming Code* on the prohibition of sorcery reads as follows:

> In all cases where wizards or witches pretend to be mediums of heretical spirits; draw magical signs or recite incantations over water; invoke spirits by sand-writing séance; call themselves 'proper lord' [*duangong* 端公], 'grand guardian' [*taibao* 太保], or 'grand instructress' [*shipo* 師婆]; recklessly claim to be [members of] societies such as the Buddha Maitreya, the White Lotus Society, the Light-Honoring Sect, or the White Cloud School, all of which are heterodox teachings that create disturbances; conceal images [of heretical gods]; burn incense and gather crowds; gather at night and disperse at dawn; or pretend to practice virtuous deeds but actually incite and mislead people, the

[207] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 24(24): 1a-2a (戊子 day, sixth article) [1613/6/1].
[208] The term *kasang* 假像 used to describe this 'representation' could mean image, but is more likely to refer to a doll.
[209] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 23(23): 38a-39a (酉子 day, thirteenth article) [1613/5/16].

> principals shall be punished by strangulation; the accessories in each case shall be punished by 100 strokes of beating with the heavy stick and life exile to 3,000 *li*.[210]

For Kwanghae, this meant that if he were to proceed according to the law, as court officials had asked him to do in the case of Imhae, he should exile the Queen Mother and have her father executed. We may assume that not the entirety of the court was ready to believe that the Queen Dowager, her servants, along with other ladies of the royal harem had engaged in black magic –their rational Confucian worldview, however, did not preclude the plausibility of the accusations. In fact, when things went awry in the royal harem thoughts often turned to the possibility of black magic being involved. [211]

The accusations brought forward in 1613 gave Kwanghae everything he needed to get his stepmother's father, the stepmother herself, and her, by then, seven-year-old son out of the way. The King, however, proceeded very differently on each of the cases, reflecting the differences in relations between the accused parties and the throne. As previously mentioned in the case of Kim Chenam, Kwanghae acted swiftly.[212] Although the Queen Dowager's father was a powerful political actor, he had no formal connection to the throne and could be considered a regular member of the *yangban* elite to whom the King did not owe filial piety.

The case of the young Grand Prince was naturally quite a different matter. The major obstacle for the king was his half-brother's innocence as a child. Yŏngch'ang, despite being potentially the biggest threat to the king, was only a boy, and it was impossible to even

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[210] Jiang, *The Great Ming Code*, 113-114.; Taemyŏngnyul chihae (大明律直解). Seoul: Pŏpchech'ŏ (서울: 法制處), 1964, 294-5.

[211] A comparable incident occurred in 1729, following the death of King Yŏngjo's only son at the time, Prince Hyojang. Jahyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings: One Man's Monarchy in the Confucian World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 148.

[212] Just about a month lie between the initial accusation and the execution of Kim Chenam, the Lord of Hamhŭng.

consider he had actively committed treason. Therefore, although Kwanghae proceeded with the punishment of the boy, he did so in the least direct way possible: he publicly refused to punish Yŏngch'ang.[213] The king's announcement that Yŏngch'ang would go unpunished, however, allowed for court officials loyal to the throne to flood the royal audiences with petitions to penalise the boy who had become the centre of a treason case.[214] After listening to the repeated requests for punishment and waiting for just over two months from the beginning of the treason case, the king then followed 'popular opinion' and finally agreed to exile Yŏngch'ang to Kwanghwa Island mirroring the verdict against Imhae in 1609.[215] Although one can safely assume that Kwanghae wanted to rid himself of the threat posed by Yŏngch'ang's mere existence from the beginning, this indirect way of first refusing punishment, then giving in to 'popular demand,' and finally having the boy killed by a local guard offered several advantages. It allowed the king to cast himself in the light of a pious man who wished never to harm his younger brother, as well as a sage ruler who listened to his court officials and accepted their remonstrance, reflecting both the Confucian virtue of humaneness (*in* 仁) and the ideal of the wise ruler.[216] Conveniently, it also allowed Kwanghae to assess who would remain loyal to him through this political and moral crisis. Whoever spoke out against the punishment of the boy or remained silent was not likely to be a friend of the crown.

Despite this rather subtle proceeding it remained obvious that the King was planning to have his infant brother disposed of. It does not take a scholar of Confucian principles to

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[213] One such instance is recorded in *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 23(23): 19a (乙丑 day, tenth article) [1613/5/8].
[214] An instance of the Bureau of Special Advisors demanding the punishment of Yŏngch'ang can be seen in *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 23(23): 31a (辛未 day, thirteenth article) [1613/5/14].
[215] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 24(24): 117a-117b (癸未 day, first article) [1613/7/27].
[216] The virtue of accepting remonstrance was already extolled in Tang China, as laid out in the *Zhen Guan Zheng Yao*, an influential text on Confucian statecraft dating from the Tang dynasty. *Gushiwen* 古詩文, '*Zhen Guan Zheng Yao*' 貞觀政要. Last accessed May 31, 2018. http://www.gushiwen.org/GuShiWen_083a5572d0.aspx.

find murdering little boys morally objectionable, and indeed some court officials, among them Chŏng On, a disciple of Chŏng Inhong and a Senior Northerner,[217] found harsh words to criticise the actions taken by the king. 'You could not help but to resort to the hands of a local official,'[218] reads a passage from a memorial the dissenter initially planned to present to the court. Although not presented, when these words surfaced, the king became enraged and immediately relieved Chŏng On of his duties at court.[219] The controversy that ensued contained many of the elements typical for court debates in the Kingdom of Chosŏn at the time. Memorials on both sides of the argument filled up the royal audiences and led to a heated moral debate about piety and loyalty.

For the king, these debates were nothing to take lightly, given that losing the debate could shake his standing at court and make governing the kingdom effectively impossible for him. Although like the assassination of Imhae the killing of Yŏngch'ang was completely politically motivated, but Imhae was seen as a moral reprobate, while the obvious innocence of the Grand Prince lowered the degree of the *yangban*'s acceptance. Given his morally precarious position in the debate, Kwanghae eventually decided to fight the entire controversy and took heavy-handed measures to shut down the debate. Chŏng On and all those who came forth in defence of the boy, as well as Confucian students from the provinces, were purged from their positions. Kwanghae then proceeded to place his supporters in important positions on the censorate.[220]

Control of the censorate was a powerful tool to keep court officials in check. Censors, in charge of checking on the appropriateness of fellow court officials' actions and policy suggestions and endowed with the power of remonstrance before the king, were, in most

[217] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 78.
[218] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 27(27): 59a-59b (甲辰 day, first article) [1614/2/22]; Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 78.
[219] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 27(27): 87a (壬戌 day, first article) [1614/3/10].
[220] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 79.

cases, relatively junior officials who nevertheless held a great deal of power over even the highest officials at court.[221] Additionally, the sanctity of the censorate was boosted also by the fact that most senior officials had once served as censors and most young Confucian students sought to maintain the moral purity required of censors. Many had the ambition to rise to powerful positions.[222] With the help of the censorate, Kwanghae was therefore able to put an end to the debate concerning the death of Yŏngch'ang and to disperse his opposition for the time being. Seung B. Kye concludes that Kwanghae dominated his court after purging Chŏng On and reshuffling the censorate.[223] Nevertheless, the threat of discontented *yangban* naturally did not vanish overnight. Kwanghae merely succeeded in controlling his officials and removing his detractors from office. However, given their *yangban* status, they remained in the pool of candidates for political office in which the number of supporters of the king had not grown, but had, in fact, diminished. Thus, Kwanghae succeeded merely in turning an obvious threat to his authority into a latent one and many of those purged in the course of the disputes of 1613 would end up working towards King Kwanghae's dethronement ten years later.[224]

Unlike in the case of Yŏngch'ang, Kwanghae did not press the accusations of witchcraft against the Queen Dowager. On the contrary, he seemed to actively attempt to shut down any attempt of court officials to bring up the case of the Queen Dowager. Superficially, the accusation of witchcraft was politically almost as useful to the king as the treason accusation against Yŏngch'ang, given that the Queen Dowager was a political problem for him as well. Unlike the Chinese case where the emperor retained an ultimate level of

[221] Chan Sik Song, 'The Power Structure of *Sarim* (士林) Politics in the Chosŏn Dynasty'. In *The Institutional Basis of Civil Governance in the Chosŏn Dynasty*. trans.&comp. by John B. Duncan, Jung Chul Lee, Jeong-il Lee, Michael Ahn, and Jack A. Davey. (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies, 2009), 147.
[222] Chan Sik Song, 'The Power Structure of *Sarim* (士林) Politics in the Chosŏn Dynasty', (2009), 149.
[223] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 85.
[224] See chapter VII for greater detail.

authority, the kings of Korea still owed filial piety to their mothers who, in case they were still alive, were considered the head of the royal household due to their seniority over the kings. In Kwanghae's case it is obvious that these rules had become quite abstract, and he owed filial piety to a woman who was neither biologically his mother, nor older than him. However, since she occupied this ritually significant role in the royal household, the king was nevertheless obliged to pay her visits of courtesy.[225] This hierarchical set-up within the royal family along with the expectation that a king display filial piety drew the king's authority to punish his stepmother into question.

With the court already riled up over the question of Yŏngch'ang's innocence, we can assume that Kwanghae hesitated to push the case against the Queen Dowager simply for the reason that it would have caused endless debate and, regardless of its outcome, would have further diminished his authority at court. Indeed, he was enraged when court officials brought the accusation back up and asked for punishment of the Queen Dowager, and the controversy resurfaced.[226] Kwanghae reacted swiftly and fiercely by dismissing anyone who contributed to the controversy either by demanding punishments or by demanding punishments for those who had the audacity of impiously suggesting the Queen Dowager could deserve punishment for a case in which the degree of her actual guilt was impossible to determine. Though superficially the accusation of witchcraft remained unsolved, King Kwanghae still succeeded in temporarily isolating the Queen Dowager. Her house arrest would only be lifted on the day King Kwanghae in turn became a prisoner.

[225] The very family-centred rituals of Chosŏn dictated two daily visits of courtesy by the king to the queen dowager.
[226] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 72.

Petitioning the Ming for Lady Kim's posthumous promotion

After the treason case of 1613 was brought to a conclusion, Kwanghae had achieved most of his family policy-related goals. Other pretenders to the throne had been taken care of, his stepmother was confined to her quarters and politically marginalised, and the opposition at court had turned silent. Seung B. Kye argues out that Kwanghae reached the zenith of his power after 1613.[227] While this is true, his heavy-handed policies against the opposition and the blood that he had spilled within his own family was not forgotten, and the king faced a large yet silent opposition within the *yangban*. One political goal, however, still remained: the posthumous promotion of his mother had not been concluded. Kwanghae still needed to get the official recognition from the Ming. From the twelfth month of 1613 until 1617, achieving this personal goal of Kwanghae's became one of the most important foreign policy objectives of the Chosŏn Kingdom.

Following the treason cases against Kim Nŭk and the accusations against Queen Dowager Inmok, an increasing dichotomy between Kwanghae's birth mother and the Queen Dowager took hold in court debates. Increasingly, court officials did not dare to hold up their defence of the status of the Queen Dowager nor continue their opposition against the posthumous promotion of Lady Kim, for fear of being associated with traitors. In this atmosphere, Kwanghae could score an important victory and was able to set up a special mission to Beijing to formally petition for his mother's promotion. The Northerner loyalist Pak Honggu was chosen to head the mission.[228] The letter sent to the Ming read as follows:

> My humble self is grieving. When I was only two years old, my benevolent mother deceased and I was orphaned. Her death has grieved me for over thirty years. My mother, of the Kim clan, was the daughter of First Minister of the Office of the Royal Clan Kim Hŭich'ŏl. My late father was your loyal subject.

[227] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 152.
[228] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 26(26): 76a-78a (甲午 day, eighth article) [1613/12/11].

Initially, she was accepted as a royal concubine and served in the inner palace. She was of great virtue. Unfortunately, she passed away early. My late father, ignoring my unworthiness, petitioned the Heavenly Court to make me his heir. So, to this day, for years, I have gratefully borne the Imperial spirit and followed in the footsteps of my father. Often, I praise your benevolence and glory, I make every effort to be a good ruler for my country, and yet the mother who gave birth to me has no [worthy] name. When she was born, she did not have a splendid upbringing, and when she passed away, she was not given a marvellous and illustrious title. So, I have no way to repay the immeasurable kindness I received as a child. When speaking about this, I feel as though my insides have been cut out. Since my humble self lives in a far and lowly foreign land, I dare not trespass against Heaven's might over trivial, selfish feelings, so for a long time I have been tacit and melancholic. But then I remembered how the Heavenly Court views our little country as one family. Our little country reveres the Heavenly Court like our fathers and mothers. So, if there is anything we desire, we must let our parents know. There are no big or small matters, so there is nothing that should not be petitioned. Posthumous promotions are a common ceremony at the Heavenly Court, and your insignificant subject would truly be honoured. Moreover, just like a mother treasures a child, it is the child's most human emotion to want to elevate the parent. We looked to the past emperors and kings and found several instances of posthumous promotion in the imperial dynasty. It does not stop at one or two, but my humble self does not dare to overstep my authority and will only speak of those cases in which our little country has already received the Heavenly Court's permission. My forefather, your loyal subject, King Kangjŏng [Sŏngjong] petitioned in the eleventh year of the Xianzong[229] emperor's reign [1475] for the posthumous promotion of his father and mother. Graciously, this was permitted by Emperor Xianzong himself, so his father by birth was named King Tŏkchong, and his birth mother, Lady Han, was named queen [*wangbi*].[230] Moreover, the corresponding robes were bestowed upon the subject Kim Chil, and others, upon their return. And again, in the sixteenth

[229] Xianzong here refers to the Chenghua emperor (1447-1487, r. 1464-1487).
[230] King Sŏngjong was the nephew of the predecessor King Yejong; his father had been Crown Prince, but never actually reigned in Korea. While superficially comparable, this case arguably differed significantly from Kwanghae's.

> year of the Xianzong emperor's reign, he asked to establish his concubine, Lady Yun, as his spouse. Again, this was permitted by the Emperor Xianzong himself and the corresponding robes were bestowed upon the subject Han Myŏnghoe, and others, upon their return. If the Heavenly Court were to allow the request brought forth by our little country to elevate a concubine, we will hold a great ceremony of gratitude. It is known that there is more than one precedent. Although your humble subject is shallow and lowly, the traditional ways still originated from heaven. Will the honesty of the devotion to the mother, whether it is in the old days or today, not incline you to accept this appeal? For the sake of my only mother, of the heaven's and earth's fathers and mothers, please observe your humble servant's feelings and give your orders, as has been done in past and present precedents and give us the special permission to elevate Lady Kim to the rank of Queen, and bestow the corresponding robes, in order to promote the principle of filial piety.[231]

The argumentative strategy of this letter serves as an indicator for the value the king placed on his advisor Chŏng Inhong, as the letter very much stresses the personal, emotional motivation for the posthumous promotion. At the same time, Kwanghae re-enforced his petition with precedents that both in the Korean and Chinese context were used in a way that can be compared to the usage of Common Law in the Anglo-Saxon legal system, that is, precedents were not absolutely binding but always offered a solid argumentative basis. The king also explicitly asks the imperial court to send them a queen's robe as it would usually be part of the ritual investiture, and he surely did not want to give the opposition at court any reason whatsoever to continue differentiating between his mother and 'real queens'.

The Ming court, with its political institutions centred around an emperor who, in the case of the Wanli emperor during his later years on the throne, was not all that interested in

[231] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 26(26): 76a-78a (甲午 day, eighth article) [1613/12/11].

governing,[232] was a slow-working political apparatus. Understandably, promoting a late Korean king's deceased concubine was not a Chinese priority. Ten months after Pak Honggu's mission, the *sillok* records the *munban* member Chŏng Rip also left for the Ming court, bearing silver and gold 'in order to petition together with Pak Honggu and the others'.[233] Despite this attempt at using bribery as diplomacy, it would still take years for Kwanghae to be satisfied by the Ming court. The Ming initially discussed Chosŏn's petition at court and chose to base their decision on the *Ming Code*, which states that 'in the case the natural mother died earlier than the legal mother, she could be promoted [to the legal mother] posthumously'.[234] The Ming verdict not only shows the fluid notion of law in both China and Korea at the time, but it also constituted a major political success for Kwanghae, who celebrated this very welcome decision by generously rewarding the head of the special mission, Pak Honggu, as well as his deputy.[235] At the same time, the Ming yet again disappointed Kwanghae, since they did not immediately offer him the robe that would typically be sent as part of the formal investiture. Pragmatically, the Ming court was of the impression that since nobody would actually wear the robes anymore, the robes would also no longer be required. Kwanghae, however, was of a different opinion and redoubled his diplomatic effort to obtain this token of royalty. After worrying about the robe for almost one and a half years, the decision was made that a renewed 'mission to petition for the robe of Queen Kongsŏng (*Kongsŏng wanghu kwanbok chuch'ŏngsa* 恭聖王后冠服奏請使) could not be avoided, and the Board of Rites was ordered to set up the mission.[236]

[232] The *munban* member Yun Bang reports the emperor had not attended court sessions in over ten years. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 33(33): 47a-47ba (己酉 day, second article) [1615/intercalary 8/5].
[233] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 30(30): 6a-7a (乙酉 day, fifth article) [1614/10/6].
[234] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 107.
[235] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 31(31): 88a-89a (戊辰 day, first article) [1615/3/22].
[236] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 37(37): 17a (庚戌 day, sixth article) [1616/8/12].

In the ninth year of his reign, in 1617, Kwanghae finally received the robe. His reaction can only be described as very emotional, when he called the emperor's *ŭn* 恩, his grace, as great as the ocean.[237] He also dispatched another mission to the Ming to show his gratitude.[238] The reception of the gown marks the zenith of five years of diplomatic efforts and almost a decade of Kwanghae stabilising his rule against members of his family who could threaten his authority at court. Following the treason case of 1613 and the now completed posthumous promotion of his mother, nothing seemed to stand in Kwanghae's way anymore. He had reshuffled the court officials and reached the pinnacle of power. This moment of total satisfaction also marks the sole high point in Korean-Chinese relations during the reign of Kwanghae just one year before further exchanges were mostly focused on the clouds of war rising over Manchuria. Conflict came back into relations between China and Korea, but conflict was even more apparent in the relations between the Korean king and his court. They were largely unable to agree on a single foreign policy in the crises to come.

Conclusions

King Kwanghae spent the first ten years of his reign paying close attention to matters that can be summed up as family politics. Both the intensity and the duration of the disputes regarding the hierarchy of members of the royal family dead and alive reveal just how central a place family politics occupied in the minds of Chosŏn royals and court officials alike. Hierarchies and relations within the Chosŏn royal family were largely governed by established practice, ethical expectations, and precedent. Although, there are many examples of family relations within the Chosŏn royal family taking dramatic and tragic turns, the family

[237] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 40(40): 65b (丁巳 day, third article) [1617/6/24]. The term *ŭn* 恩 does not have a direct equivalent in English. It refers to the active benevolence of a superior towards an inferior. It is meant to be repaid in loyalty. To reflect the voluntary and hierarchical nature of the term, I translate it as 'grace'.
[238] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 40(40): 65b (丁巳 day, third article) [1617/6/24].

politics during King Kwanghae's reign still stand out as unusual. Partially, this may be explainable by the fact King Kwanghae, the fifteenth man to occupy the Chosŏn throne, was the first son of a concubine to occupy the throne. The extent of the hostility between the King and the Queen Dowager is also easily attributable to their personal characters. This, however, should not distract us from what can be learned about Chosŏn institutions from the above case study in terms of (1) the nature of family politics in Chosŏn generally, (2) the patterns of institutional conflict between king and court, and (3) the significance of family-politics related matters of the latter years of King Kwanghae's reign.

(1) Most domains of Chosŏn policy making involved only two principal actors: the king as the author of policy, and the officialdom in the roles of advisors and in the implementation of policy. Even in cases of discord between these two agencies, other institutional actors were not involved. The king and his officials would debate and compromise among themselves. In family politics, however, the king and his court officials were not the sole actors with the authority or power to determine or influence political outcomes. Royals other than the king entertained independent relations with parts of the court and the officialdom potentially undermining royal authority. Queen Dowagers held a high degree of authority that concurred with that of kings, in some cases might have even exceeded the authority of sitting monarchs. Once personal decisions within the higher rungs of the monarchy were decided, the Ming court would also get involved. Usually, the Ming side simply sanctioned the domestic Korean decisions and formalised them through imperial decrees and rituals of investiture. In cases were the Korean court deviated from established practice, however, the Ming side would ask uncomfortable questions with serious implications for the legitimacy of domestic Chosŏn family politics. Or they could –as in the above case– license an, at least in Chosŏn history, arguably unprecedented proceeding. The position the Ming court would take in such instances was scarcely clear and predictable for Chosŏn courtiers. This multitude of institutional actors with legitimate claims to various

degrees of authority over the hierarchy and composition of the Chosŏn royal family made family politics one of the most complex fields of policy in the Chosŏn kingdom. Direct implications to other fields of policy appear to have been limited, but challenges to a king's authority in this field could easily translate into a more general challenge to his legitimacy, which explains the energy King Kwanghae devoted to family politics between 1608 and 1618.

By 1618, King Kwanghae had had his elder brother and his half-brother killed, and he had his stepmother stripped of her position and placed under house arrest. The threat that had emanated from each of them had been a different one. Prince Imhae and Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang could have replaced Kwanghae on the throne. The Queen Dowager rivalled his authority in matters of family politics. In the case of Prince Imhae, King Kwanghae acted swiftly. Did Grand Prince Yŏngch'ang still pose a serious threat to the throne when he was killed? In 1626, in the reign of King Injo, censors suggested openly that the grand prince was slain 'in order to get to the Queen Dowager'.[239] Other records from that period equally seem to suggest that the killing of the boy was a vicious act that targeted the Queen Dowager. While King Injo's censors could not speak for King Kwanghae's motivations, it is nevertheless interesting that such an interpretation would have appeared plausible.

(2) Court officials, too, were heavily invested in family politics. The debate over the queen mother's status reveals most of the tools available to the king of Chosŏn when it came to policy implementation. Over the years, Kwanghae argued in both legal and philosophical terms, aggressively shifting the discourse with baseless *ad hominem* arguments, while incentivising his courtiers with a combination of carrots and sticks to abandon their opposition against his policies. He reshuffled posts and banished those who spoke out all too clearly against his plans. He threatened their sympathisers and eventually reached a point where, for a short time, all his domestic troubles seemed solved. No-one spoke out against

[239] *Injo sillok* 14: 45b [1626/12/4]

him, but the opposition remained latent, and the resentment he had caused with his heavy-handed and unpopular measures had not yet come back to haunt him. Most interestingly, however, Kwanghae also engaged in a targeted foreign policy, essentially manipulating and bribing the Ming into fighting his domestic battles for him, thus making perfect use of emphasis the court officials put on the Ming Emperor's words. What has been described as an ideology check[240] —meaning the possibility for courtiers to hold the king to the standards set by the Confucian texts, the *Ming Code*, past precedents, and the authority of the Emperor— was proven to be a two-edged sword, here used by Kwanghae to rein in his court officials.

At the same time, even these episodes that document the rise of Kwanghae to his most powerful position at court show the power of the court officials. Their opposition allowed for a policy that Kwanghae might have implemented on his first day on the throne to be dragged out over nine years. On certain issues they were also able to make Kwanghae reconsider. Again, it is noteworthy that the throne depended on the cooperation of at least a part of the court officials, since bureaucrats would rather remonstrate or even retire from their posts in protest than carry out orders that contradicted their political convictions. Therefore, much of Kwanghae's interactions with his officials must be understood as an attempt to seek allies among the powerful bureaucratic class.

The *sillok* historians recorded a seemingly never-ending amount of debate among court officials and the throne, which confirms the importance of deliberation and discourse in Chosŏn politics. However, in the case of Lady Kim's posthumous promotion, it is clear that both the throne and the opposition entered the debate with a clear political motivation of either expanding or limiting the authority of the king at court. As can be seen from the case of Kwanghae's family politics, however, these debates were sometimes rough. Both the king and

[240] The idea of an ideology check as a means for court officials to control the king was first discussed in Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty: The Functional Aspects of Governmental Structure, 1392-1592.* (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications, 2000), 8.

the opposition would readily shut down debates and intimidate the other side when possible to do so. The Chosŏn court debates did not contribute to the creation of political will: all involved entered debates with clear goals in mind. Losing the debate did not mean changing one's mind but retracting a policy design in the case of the king, or dismissal, demotion, exile in the case of court officials. Instead, Chosŏn court debates fulfilled a restrictive function that allows a comparison to the role of law in modern politics in two ways: they showed the king there were concerns that his policy design may violate norms, and they provided a link that helped solve conflicts between the two main pillars of the state, namely the king and the bureaucracy.

The interaction with the Ming can be seen in a similar light. Obviously, King Kwanghae sought the confirmation for his policy from the Ming, because the Chinese verdict would enjoy a higher degree of legitimacy at court than his own. Given that the Ming court was able to make such an important decision instead of the Korean court, means that any serious work on the constitutional framework of the Chosŏn Kingdom needs to account for the source of law presented by the Chinese court.

The comparison with law can also be extended to the fact that arguments were based on either canonical texts or precedents that were considered worthy of imitation. Most interestingly, however, is the fact that the king could not fully escape these debates, and in case he was unable to sway opposition, his political agenda was blocked. In other words, the king was not above the law in Chosŏn, and it was up to the court officials to ensure it would remain this way. One could refer to this as a case of the vertical separation of powers, or in terms Chosŏn observers used, the situation was a case of *sangha sangje* 上下相制, meaning the upper and lower echelons controlled each other.[241]

[241] This concept was laid out in the *T'aengniji*. For details refer to Chan Sik Song, 'The Power Structure of *Sarim* (士林) Politics in the Chosŏn Dynasty', (2009), 158.

(3) In 1618 Kwanghae's handling of family politics must have appeared very successful. The heavy-handed and obviously immoral actions of the king, however, alienated a large proportion of the elite stratum of the country. Superficially, King Kwanghae could free himself from the control of his detractors by removing them from office, banishing them, and replacing them by his loyalists. Dismissed court officials, however, often retired to Confucian academies in the countryside known as *sŏwŏn* 書院, where they would influence students who would become examination passers and carry the political and philosophical convictions of their dismissed tutors.[242] This latent opposition could become dangerous for the king, when the *yangban* aligned, making it impossible for the king to recruit bureaucrats who would actually carry out his policies. Governance can only be effective where there are enough willing administrators to carry out policies. Crucially, however, these dismissed bureaucrats would hold on to their grudges. In the case of King Kwanghae, many of those that he dismissed over disputes regarding his handling of family politics would later join the ranks of those supporting Kwanghae's dethronement.

[242] This is discussed in Man Jo Jung, 'The Political and Social Role of the Sŏwŏn in the Chosŏn Dynasty.' In *The Institutional Basis of Civil Governance in the Chosŏn Dynasty*. Trans.&comp. by John B. Duncan, Jung Chul Lee, Jeong-il Lee, Michael Ahn, Jack A. Davey. (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies), 35-50.

Chapter 4: Chosŏn's Military Intervention in Manchuria (1618-1620)

I. Strategy and Duty – The War Debate at Court

   a. Historical context of the 1618-1619 war debate

      i. Ming-Jurchen-Chosŏn relations

      ii. The beginnings of the Later Jin-Ming war

   b. The War Debate Proper

      i. Stage I: News of the War in Manchuria (intercalary fourth month of 1618)

      ii. Stage II: The generals' orders (intercalary fourth month of 1618)

      iii. Stage III: Under pressure (seventh month of 1618)

      iv. Stage IV: The imperial decree (late 1618 to early 1619)

      v. The institutional approach

   c. Conclusions

II. Chosŏn's Military Intervention and the Separate Peace in Manchuria

   a. The Korean intervention up to the Battle of Sarhu

   b. The separate peace

   c. The aftermath of the intervention

During the first ten years of his reign, King Kwanghae's focus undoubtedly remained predominantly on domestic politics, as he struggled to consolidate his rule against his detractors within the royal family and the bureaucracy. Today, however, his renown as an extraordinary Chosŏn monarch stems mostly from his supposedly unconventional foreign policy. The king was tasked with the challenge of finding an adequate answer to the Later Jin invasion of the Ming empire starting in 1618. Despite the involvement of the Chosŏn Kingdom in the Later Jin-Ming war that saw the Chosŏn court dispatch an expeditionary force in aid of the Ming Chinese defence efforts, King Kwanghae was first credited by scholars in the 1930s, such as Tagawa Kōzō and Inaba Iwakichi, with a cleverly devised policy of neutrality that kept Korea out of harm's way,[243] all the while angering the traditionalist pro-Ming court officials to the point of dethroning their king. King Kwanghae's renown thus has derived from the idea of him managing events outside of his power.

This thesis, though, has been concerned with King Kwanghae's efforts at promoting his domestic goals by means of diplomacy with the Ming, rather than addressing his management of events that were outside his power. This chapter will turn to those outside events and discuss Chosŏn's reaction to the new international situation from the outbreak of conflict in 1618 to the point when Korean forces are dispatched to aid the Ming cause in 1619. The focus will be laid on the question of how Chosŏn's foreign policy was formulated during the crisis of the Ming-Qing transition and the role the Ming court played in influencing Korean decision making.

The first part of this chapter will cover what I will call the war debate at court, concerned with the question of whether or not Korea should send troops to assist the Ming war effort. Special attention will be given to the question of what swayed the initially

[243] See Tagawa Kōzō, 'Kwanghaegun no Kang Hongnip ni taisuru misshi mondai ni tsuite' (On the issue of Kwanghaegun's confidential ordinance to Kang Honghip), *Shigaku kaiho* v. 1, (1931), 8-16; and Inaba Iwakichi, *Kōkaikun jidai no mansen kankei*, (Keijō: Ōsakaya goshoten, 1933), 242-261.

reluctant king to eventually consent and order troops to be sent. Past studies of this debate in the 1930s have characterised the king's hesitation as a question of neutrality[244] or as a tactic in the king's waiting game to sit out the conflict.[245] Previous research, however, has neglected the institutional background of the war debate as well as the active role of the Ming court in influencing Korean policy. The second part of the chapter will be concerned with Korean foreign policy in the aftermath of the 1619 Battle at Sarhu, Chosŏn's only active involvement in the Later Jin-Ming war during the reign of King Kwanghae.

Strategy and Duty — The War Debate at Court

There is a strong tradition in political theory to make sharp distinctions between the international and the domestic spheres of politics. Realist thinkers describe the international realm as anarchical and decentralised, in contrast to the centralised state characterised by clear-cut institutions and rule through legitimate authorities.[246] In the case of Ming-Chosŏn relations, such theories fail to capture both the very real decentralised distribution of power within the Korean kingdom as well as the somewhat hierarchical relationship between the institutions of the Ming emperor and the Chosŏn king. Their international realm cannot be described as anarchical.

Confucian terms offer some degree of explanation: the king owing loyalty to the superior emperor; the emperor in return being morally obliged to repay the king in kindness and humaneness. Definitions of such a broad nature may be valuable as a general guideline, but they do little to explain the real interaction between the two institutions. In the case of

[244] Tagawa Kōzō, 'Kwanghaegun no Kang Hongnip ni taisuru misshi mondai ni tsuite' (On the issue of Kwanghaegun's confidential ordinance to Kang Honghip), *Shigaku kaiho* v. 1, (1931), 8-16.
[245] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 171.
[246] Helen Milner, 'The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique,' *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991): 67-85.

relations between the Chosŏn monarch and his court officials, it is clear that the discrepancy in rank between king and official did not translate into absolute monarchical power. As evidenced by the very fact that Kwanghae had acted as crown prince despite Ming disapproval for years, a similar discrepancy in rank held true for the relations between the king and the emperor. Given that there was a sharp difference between the two monarchs concerning the hopes and expectations towards the outcome of the Chosŏn war debate (Kwanghae did not want to engage on the side of the Ming, while the Ming court strongly wanted an ally on the battlefield), the war debate is not only a good case study in the relations between king and court, it is also a valuable case study to examine the relationship between the Ming and Chosŏn courts in general; it offers insight into the extent to which the Ming Emperor could exercise his authority inside Chosŏn. In other words, this chapter raises the question: to what extent can the Ming court be considered a part of the Chosŏn constitutional framework?

As the war debate was forced on the Korean Kingdom by the tumultuous developments in Manchuria, this chapter will provide a rough introduction to the history of Ming and Chosŏn policies towards Manchuria and some of the attitudes in Korea held towards the armed conflict unfolding in Manchuria. This contextualisation will also help us to understand the arguments brought forth by the different sides of the debate. On one side was the ever more isolated Kwanghae arguing against a military involvement, and on the other was the Ming court ordering Chosŏn to send troops to assist the defensive efforts of the empire. In the debate, the Korean court officials sided with the Ming court and urged their monarch to comply with the Ming requests for troops.

Historical context of the 1618-1619 War Debate

The period between 1618 and 1619 marks the beginning of a great period of international tensions as the later Jin attacked the hegemonic Ming dynasty of China.[247] Domestically, King Kwanghae had been struggling to assert his authority against the powerful Queen Dowager and the court officials who distrusted him.[248] His heavy-handed family politics had helped him stabilise his rule superficially, all the while alienating large numbers of his court officials and the *yangban* in general. Given this relative stability of the kingdom at the beginning of the Later Jin-Ming war, the 1623 coup d'état that ended Kwanghae's rule has often been linked to the disagreements on foreign policy that preceded the coup.[249] While this interpretation is debatable, it nevertheless underlines the importance of the events during the last few years of King Kwanghae's rule. The alleged policy of neutrality pursued by the king is also an object of ongoing academic dispute as researchers debate whether his policy can really be considered one of neutrality, considering that the result of this first debate ended with the dispatching of Chosŏn troops. Some researchers argue that Kwanghae was playing a waiting game, seeing which side would end up victorious.[250] Others suggest that his policy was not fundamentally different to that of other Korean kings.[251] This part of the chapter will explore some of the pre-existing patterns in Chosŏn-Ming relations and offer a context for the debate on Chosŏn neutrality.

[247] These conflicts marked the beginning of the Qing conquest of the Ming dynasty, that was completed in 1644.
[248] Seung B. Kye, '*In the Shadow of the Father: Court Opposition and the Reign of King Kwanghae in Early Seventeenth-Century Chosŏn Korea,*' (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2006), 77-95.
[249] This interpretation has first been discussed in Han Myŏnggi, *Kwanghaegun tae ŭi Taebukseryŏk kwa Chŏnggug ŭi tonghyang* [Senior Northerner Power and Political Movements during the reign of King Kwanghae], (Seoul: Hanguk Saron, Vol. 20, 1988), 326-337.
[250] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', 2006, 170.
[251] Han Myŏnggi, *Imjin Waeran kwa Han-Chung kwan'gye* (The Imjin War and Sino-Korean relations) (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 1999), 253-406.

Ming-Jurchen-Chosŏn relations

Relations between states evolve as the needs and interests of these states change over time. The relations between Chosŏn and Ming started off in the fourteenth century in an atmosphere of mutual distrust, as the young Chinese dynasty suspected Korea of allying with the Mongol enemies of Ming China.[252] Even when these initial misgivings were resolved and the Korean court eventually aligned itself with Chinese policy on essential matters, interests continued to diverge over Manchuria.[253] Chosŏn expected to fall heir to some of the lands of inner Manchuria, as the Mongol empire collapsed. The Ming thought otherwise. Chosŏn entertained close relations with a number of Jurchen tribes: traded with them, sought to establish tributary relations with them, invested in Jurchen chieftains, and even had Jurchen clansmen in the ranks of their troops. The Ming viewed the entirety of these connections with suspicion and eventually put to Chosŏn a choice of loyalty between Chinese and Manchurian interests. The Ming court did this when they issued an imperial decree outlawing direct connections between tributary states.[254] Jurchen chieftains who accepted investiture from the Ming were now no longer allowed to deal with Chosŏn directly and vice versa. At the same time, the Ming pushed the Chosŏn court to abandon its Manchurian ambitions by sponsoring Jurchen chieftains and to stop interfering with the Ming divide and rule policy in Manchuria.[255] By the early seventeenth century, this imperial decree of the Ming had been transformed into Chosŏn common practice. Nurhaci (1559-1626)[256] had little regard for these rules and openly sent letters to Kwanghae, the king of Chosŏn. The Korean side, however,

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[252] Donald Clark, 'Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming'. In *The Cambridge History of China,* ed. D. Twitchett and F. Mote. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 274.
[253] Donald Clark, 'Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming', (1998), 285.
[254] Wei Zhijiang (魏志江), 'Lun Houjin Nuerhachi Zhengquan yu Chaoxian Wangchao de jiaoshe jiqi yingxiang (论努尔哈赤政权与朝鲜王朝的交涉及其影响, Diplomacy Between Later Jin under Nurhaci and Kingdom of Chosŏn and Its Effects.)', *Minzu Yanjiu* (民族研究) 2nd issue (2008), 56.
[255] Wei Zhijiang, 'Lun Houjin Nuerhachi Zhengquan', (2008): 57.
[256] The founder of the Later Jin dynasty, Nurhaci had unified the Jurchen tribes in a series of military and diplomatic victories starting in the 1590s. Following their successful campaign against in the Ming, the House of Aisin-Gioro went on to rule over Qing China until 1912.

was acutely aware that Nurhaci's letters constituted a breach of protocol, or indeed a breach of international law as can be seen in some *sillok* entries.[257] Replies were therefore sent in the names of lower officials and even this turned out to be difficult, as even the magistrate of the border town of Manp'ojin, Chŏng Ch'ungsin, seemed more concerned about the possible damage to relations with the Ming than convinced of the possible success of his mission. This circumvention was meant to conveniently serve both the purposes of showing the Jurchen that Korea was above a common Jurchen chieftain, and should have allowed for sufficient deniability, in case the Ming were to find out about the clandestine interactions. Any hope of keeping such interactions secret, however, needed to be abandoned, when Chŏng Ch'ungsin reported his visit to Ming refugee forces in Northern Korea before returning to the capital. For later exchanges, another bureaucrat of the same rank from another border town, the magistrate of Ŭiju was chosen to fill his position.[258]

The prohibition of relations between secondary states within the Ming's tributary system, which later appeared in Chosŏn courtiers understanding of legality, was clearly motivated by Ming strategic concerns. The prohibition allowed the Ming to expand their influence into Manchuria without Korean interference, and it made sure that Manchurians and Koreans would not band together to defy the Ming hegemony. For Chosŏn, there were few negative consequences that would have mattered during peaceful times, but this policy certainly played to the Ming's strategic advantage and limited Korea's foreign policy options. The prohibition of direct relations between secondary states thereby demonstrates both the high legal value within Korea of the imperial decree and the self-interested nature of at least part of the Ming policy towards Chosŏn.

[257] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 126a-126b (丙辰 day, third article) [1618/5/29]. The passage employs the term 'rites', *ye* 禮.
[258] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 191-193.

The Beginning of the Later Jin-Ming War

Following the Jurchen attack on the market town of Fushun in early 1618, the focus of the Chosŏn court shifted towards international affairs and the containment of the threat building up at the northern frontier. The dispute about the question of how Chosŏn should rise to the challenge is easily the best-known historical controversy in the Kwanghae-Injo period. Militarily and economically, Chosŏn was still seriously weakened by the Japanese invasions of the 1590s.[259] For the Ming court, that had responded to a Korean call for aid, and helped repel the Japanese invasions, the war had also taken a high, but by no means fatal toll, as illustrated by the fact that the Ming were able to muster a considerable military force to quell domestic unrest in Sichuan in the immediate aftermath of their intervention in Korea.[260] While the war effort on the Korean peninsula occupied the minds and materiel of the Ming court, Nurhaci, a Jurchen chieftain, was able to unite the Jurchen tribes. Employing an intelligent mixture of diplomacy and strategic warfare, Nurhaci built up a formidable power base in Manchuria that culminated in his founding of the Later Jin dynasty in 1616. There is a tradition in scholarship to blame the Ming for looking the other way, thus tacitly enabling Nurhaci's expansion. Kenneth Swope, however, makes the point, that the Ming were very much aware of the developments on their Manchurian frontier, but ultimately remained unable to thwart them.[261] Nurhaci chose a name that took after the Jurchen Jin dynasty and thereby sent a clear message. The Jurchen Jin dynasty in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries occupied vast stretches of Manchuria and northern China and included modern-day Beijing, the Shandong peninsula, and extended westward all the way to modern-day Gansu Province. Nurhaci's message was that, almost three hundred years after the Jurchen Jin had been

[259] Jun Seong Ho, James. B. Lewis, and Han-Rog Kang, 'Korean Expansion and Decline from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: A View Suggested by Adam Smith." *The Journal of Economic History,* Vol. 68, No. 1 (March 2008): 262.
[260] Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*. (University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 294.
[261] Kenneth M. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-44*. (Routledge, 2013), 15-19.

destroyed during the Mongol conquest of Asia and after a long period of being split up into groups of rivalling tribes under various levels of influence of the Ming empire, the Jurchen were back on the world stage.

The new Jurchen state formation was a direct threat to the Ming order right from the beginning. This became clear when Nurhaci refused to accept tributary status.[262] But already before then, his envoys made clear that the Jurchen were not in the slightest afraid of the Ming Empire, when they openly complained that the gifts the emperor had repaid their tribute seemed insufficient to them, thus dealing a serious insult to the Ming court.[263] For Chosŏn the picture looked somewhat different. Nurhaci and his successors did not hold any grudge against Korea and signalled at various times that they were understanding of Chosŏn's debt and allegiance owed to the Ming, inviting them, nevertheless, to join their side in the campaign against the Ming.[264] Looking at Chosŏn from the Manchurian perspective, it thus seemed perfectly possible for Korea to abandon their allegiance with the Ming and join a new world order. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the Ming court itself also contemplated the possibility that Chosŏn might switch sides to avoid a Manchurian invasion.[265] The question of why Chosŏn ended up with the retrospectively unfortunate choice of maintaining its loyalty to the Ming has since been a major point of academic interest. While the topic of Kwanghae's diplomacy has been discussed at some length by other authors, looking at the war debate from the angle of constitutional law, or the relations between the state institutions at play, opens up new perspectives.

The relationship between the Korean court's constitutional arrangements and the Ming court was first discussed by Sohn Pokee in his doctoral thesis in the 1960s. Challenging the

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[262] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 4(4): 108b (辛未 day, first article) [1608/12/18].
[263] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 4(4): 108b (辛未 day, first article) [1608/12/18].
[264] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 126a-126b (丙辰 day, third article) [1618/5/29].
[265] As evidenced by this Ming letter to the Korean court: *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 46a-50a (丙子 day, seventh article) [1618/6/19].

idea of the Korean kingdom as an absolute monarchy, Sohn Pokee pioneered research on the 'ideology check' in Chosŏn politics.[266] 'Ideology check' refers to the idea that court officials of the Korean kingdom could reign in their monarchs by alluding to the wishes and orders of the Ming emperors, who occupied a ritually superior position in the international order. The 'ideology check' implied that court officials could place checks on monarchs in situations, where the monarch's policy designs, or indeed their behaviour, seemed to violate norms otherwise commonly accepted in court tradition, or, in other words, violate customs that had developed to conform to the express or inferred wishes of the Ming emperor. Sohn thus described the Ming court as important, yet passive. In other places, I have criticised Sohn's approach for being overly unidirectional, arguing that not only the court officials, but also the kings of Chosŏn could use the relations with the Ming to domestically win an argument by claiming or by being able to demonstrate they had Ming support. Additionally, Sohn's observations are based on the Ming relations of the fifteenth century, when the Chinese very rarely got involved directly in Chosŏn state affairs. In short, Sohn never addressed in detail the question of how the Ming court related to Chosŏn institutions. Just after the successful fight against the Japanese invasions and faced with the threat of renewed invasion, however, the Ming had very clear-cut interests, and indeed sent envoys and generals to order Chosŏn to join the Ming war effort against the Later Jin.[267] The fact that a foreign country could issue orders that Korean institutions paid attention to, that were discussed and considered at the Korean court, makes it necessary to consider the role of the Ming court as an external and yet integral part of the Korean constitutional framework.

[266] Sohn Pokee, *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty: The Functional Aspects of Governmental Structure, 1392-1592.* (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications, 2000), 8.
[267] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 46a-50a (丙子 day, seventh article) [1618/6/19].

The War Debate proper

The Jurchen sacking of the Ming market town of Fushun triggered a variety of reactions at the Chosŏn court. Some court officials called for immediate retaliation against Nurhaci, as his troops had dared to infringe upon the territory of the Heavenly Court.[268] Others cautioned that Nurhaci would be difficult to defeat.[269] King Kwanghae famously took a reluctant stance towards open aid for the Ming cause.[270] This has been linked back to his personal experience with Ming generals during the war against the Japanese, when Kwanghae temporarily acted as regent of Chosŏn and experienced first-hand the condescending attitudes the Ming generals held towards Korea.[271] Additionally, his experience as a Crown Prince, when the Ming denied him investiture on several occasions, is often quoted as a reason for his reluctant stance towards the Ming. While these arguments certainly hold a degree of validity, they ignore the fact that King Kwanghae ruled Korea for ten years before the Jurchen attacks began and during this time entertained positive relations with the Ming that aided his domestic standing. Yet, it appears that Kwanghae, perhaps due to his personal experience fighting in war, took a more strategic view of international affairs than many of his court officials. Accordingly, Kwanghae was acutely aware that Korea did not stand much of a chance in the case of an open confrontation with the Manchurian troops. With most of the court officials leaning towards a pro-Ming policy, the court entered a period of heated debate. The result was the dispatch of a Korean expeditionary force that joined the Ming side to fight at the battle of Sarhu in 1619, a battle that resulted in a crushing defeat of the Ming-led side. Sarhu remained the only Korean involvement in the Ming-Qing transitional wars, with the exception of the Later Jin and Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1636 that Chosŏn had to fight

[268] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 63a (酉子 day, first article) [1618/intercalary 4/27].
[269] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 64b-66a (酉子 day, nineth article) [1618/intercalary 4/27].
[270] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 48a-49a (戊寅 day, seventh article) [1618/intercalary 4/20].
[271] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 31-40.

on home soil. The question of what swayed the king to abandon his preferred policy is key to an understanding of Chosŏn political institutions at the time.

Previous analyses have taken different stances towards the question of Kwanghae's neutrality. Han Myunggi, for example, argued that there was no substantial difference between the allegedly pro-Ming King Injo and the less pro-Ming King Kwanghae.[272] Kye Seung-Bom argued that Kwanghae was essentially attempting to play a waiting game to see who would come out on top in the Ming-Later Jin confrontation, while trying to keep Korea out of harm's way.[273] Both scholars share a consensus that there was a difference in perception between the vast majority of the court officials, who pushed for a more active role in the war, and Kwanghae, who hesitated to dispatch Chosŏn's troops. What can be added to their work is an analysis of how King Kwanghae's reluctance was slowly turned into acquiescence in the dispatch of troops for the 1619 Battle at Sarhu. The analysis provided below may also offer insights into the possible motives held by those who advocated alliance with the Ming and the significantly smaller number of those who supported the king's reluctance.

Stage I: News of the war in Manchuria (intercalary fourth month of 1618)

The debate as to whether Chosŏn should send troops to help the Ming war effort can be loosely grouped into four stages, during which we can observe the differences in reactions between King Kwanghae and his court officials towards the changing circumstances.

For the twelfth day of the intercalary fourth month in 1618, the *sillok* records news of Nurhaci planning 'rebellious (or disctructive) actions' (*chundong* 蠢動),[274] namely the attack

[272] Han Myŏnggi, *Imjin Waeran kwa Han-Chung kwan'gye* [The Imjin War and Sino-Korean relations], (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 1999), 253-406.
[273] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 270.
[274] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 25a-26a (庚午 day, third article) [1618/intercalary 4/12].

on the market town of Fushun. The reporting official, Yi Yubŏn, immediately called this plan an act of open treason, a great crime, and extremely wicked. The perpetrator, that is, Nurhaci, would have to be executed.[275] The following day the Border Defence Council demanded that the army would have to be trained in fire weapons and assembled in the Ŭiju area to be prepared in case Nurhaci engaged in more 'disctructive activities'. Additionally, the Border Defence Council raised concerns about the military commander of P'yŏngan not obeying commands. King Kwanghae agreed with the measures proposed and ordered that the commander be investigated.[276]

On the fifteenth day, King Kwanghae's answer to the Border Defence Council's suggestions for further preparations for the annihilation of Nurhaci seems more carefully phrased, as the King is recorded saying: 'The old chieftain is tameless, even with the military might of the Imperial Court; no one says that they will destroy him in a single strike. On this matter, I am afraid there cannot be an easy victorious campaign. Continue discussions.'[277]

The first of these four stages is marked by the reception of the news on the sixteenth day that Jurchen troops had marched into the Chinese market town of Fushun, pillaging, burning, and killing thousands. The news sparked outrage at the Korean court.[278] Nurhaci's cruelty was a clear violation of commonly accepted conduct and court officials condemned the Later Jin's actions.[279] There were also calls to bring Nurhaci to justice within the first few days of the attack, as courtiers called for the 'villain' to be 'annihilated'.[280] The king did

[275] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 25a-26a (庚午 day, third article) [1618/intercalary 4/12].
[276] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 26b-27a (辛未 day, seventh article) [1618/intercalary 4/13].
[277] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 30b-31a (癸酉 day, sixth article) [1618/intercalary 4/15].
[278] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 63a-63b (酉子 day, second article) [1618/intercalary 4/27].
[279] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 63a-63b (酉子 day, second article) [1618/intercalary 4/27].
[280] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 63a-63b (酉子 day, second article) [1618/intercalary 4/27].

nothing to end these memorials, nor did he endorse calls for during this first stage. Kwanghae's intentions, however, can be guessed at as he cautioned court officials that Chosŏn was not ready for war, and it would be unwise to weaken or test the defences.[281] This first stage is not yet characterised by a true dispute, but rather by a diverging reception of the news coming from Manchuria. Ming actors also do not feature heavily in the *sillok* entries of these first days of the conflict, except when they are quoted as sources for certain pieces of information regarding the Manchurian attacks or the counter-efforts from the Ming side.

Stage II: The generals' orders (intercalary fourth month of 1618)

The second stage saw Ming generals, such as Qiu Tan 丘坦, write to the King of Chosŏn on the twenty-first day of the fourth month, demanding troops and urging him to stand by the side of his suzerain.[282] Briefly, General Qiu reiterated Nurhaci's crimes of 'sneakily attacking Fushun, and escaping back to his nest, after taking money, kettles, horses, and grain, after burning the houses and destroying the city'. He then asked the Korean king to 'ready your country's men and horses without delay.' Kwanghae did not make preparations, but instead ordered for two measures to be taken: in a way of adding credibility to his point, he first redirected his attention to a famine caused by severe drought and ordered rituals for the mountains and rivers (*sanch'ŏnje* 山川祭) to be held according to precedent. Then the *sillok* records him lamenting the fact that the demands came from a place (China) that did not understand the specific difficulties Chosŏn was facing, saying the request had come at a time when,

[281] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 48a-49a (戊寅 day, seventh article) [1618/intercalary 4/20].
[282] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 49a-49b (己卯 day, third article) [1618/intercalary 4/21].

> we can barely defend our own borders. Raising our weak and untrained soldiers to aid the Ming, what good does it bring? If my lord thought deeply about the affairs of our small country, he would allow us to fortify our borders. By doing so we would not only strengthen our own defences, we could also get a better angle [on the enemy]. How would our small country dare argue, if the fatigued soldiers of our small country could be of the slightest use [to the Ming generals]. […] I order the Border Defence Council to debate this.

Instead of initiating talks with the Ming side, the Border Defence Council came back to the royal audience the next day with a reply that seemed to have completely ignored the king's directives. The council explained that their country had already been summoned and that provisions for the army were being gathered.[283]

'On the topic of the summoning of troops', the king replied on the following day, the twenty-third day of the fourth month,

> there has only been a request from the office of the imperial inspector. At this time there has not been a request from the commander-in-chief. Is this office of the imperial inspector aware of the non-existence of our country's troops? How can we raise a large army merely at the behest of the Mobile Corps Commander Qiu? We must await the military commissioner's request as well as an imperial decree, then this can be settled. […][284]

The counter-arguments presented by Second State Councillor Han Hyo-son, show just how difficult it had become to reconcile the antagonistic positions of the king and his court. Councillor Han reminded the king of the loyalty Chosŏn owed the Ming for saving their dynasty on the brink of ruin, repeating the common phrase that the Ming were to be

[283] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 51a (庚辰 day, second article) [1618/intercalary 4/22].
[284] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 55b (辛巳 day, fifth article) [1618/intercalary 4/23].

considered and treated as a father to the Korean kingdom. It is safe to assume that King Kwanghae had not forgotten about the framework of the Chosŏn-Ming relationship and its recent history, nor did the king explicitly question the framework. The question his Second State Councillor did not offer any answers to, however, is the question of the institutional link between the Emperor and the King. Kwanghae did not question the authority of the Emperor over his command, but he was unwilling to take the will of a Ming general as the will of the Emperor himself. Many of the courtiers were much more ready to accept the generals' letters as indication of the emperor's will and therefore took the general's word to be binding.

The letters also reminded the Korean king of the moral debt owed to the Ming, considering the lengths to which the Ming court had gone to defend the Korean kingdom from the Japanese invasions. As before, the majority of the court officials reacted differently to this new situation than the king did. Fearing the negative consequences that could result from angering the Ming and adhering to the ideal of loyalty, the officials urged a quick response to the requests from the Ming generals by setting up an expeditionary force.[285] Some court officials went so far as to argue that for Chosŏn, heeding the commands of the Ming military commissioner was 'our way'.[286] King Kwanghae, did not choose to opt for a path of simple obedience towards the Ming generals, nor did he expose himself to the point where he would have completely refused the Ming demands. Instead, the king chose to question the authority of the Ming generals and envoys that – perhaps rightly – pretended to speak on behalf of the Ming emperor. Basing himself on precedent, King Kwanghae argued that, for the Ming to demand Chosŏn troops, the king of Chosŏn would need to receive an imperial decree.[287] Only then would he dispatch troops. This line of argumentation was as much of a provocation to

[285] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 49a-49b (己卯 day, third article) [1618/intercalary 4/21].
[286] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 71a (辛巳 day, tenth article) [1618/6/24].
[287] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 52b (庚辰 day, tenth article) [1618/intercalary 4/22].

the Ming envoys as it was to the Chosŏn court officials. Both the Ming envoys and the Chosŏn court officials were anxious to supply the Ming emperor with the troops he needed to resist the Later Jin expansion in Manchuria. However, comparing the Korean king's argumentative strategy to the strategies he applied domestically, it is obvious that King Kwanghae applied the same kind of reasoning to the international sphere that he would have applied domestically. In the absence of clear written laws regulating the interactions between the Ming emperor and himself as the king of Chosŏn, he resorted to precedents to argue his case. Politically disagreeable as this might have been for court officials, it left them with little argumentative recourse.

Stage III: Under pressure (seventh month of 1618)

During the third stage of the dispute's development, the Ming generals lost patience with the reluctant Kwanghae and sabotaged his strategy. While Kwanghae had been able to block the dispatching of troops claiming that the only proper proceeding would be for him to receive a direct order in the form of an imperial decree, he still had to consent to a letter being sent to the emperor to explain the situation. The letter Kwanghae drew up, with the help of the few loyal subjects who stood by his side and apparently agreed with his political line, stressed Chosŏn's difficult material situation and argued that it would be difficult to fight abroad. During this stage of the conflict the Ming's Liaoning Commandery still controlled the northern shores of the Yalu River and the communication lines between king and emperor ran right through the territory of the men commanding the Ming army and attempting to bully the Korean king into sending military assistance. The Ming generals saw fit to make use of this position to intercept the Chosŏn envoys en route to Beijing, checking whether they were finally getting the answer they wanted. Upon discovering that the contrary was happening, they refused to let the envoys pass, telling them not to spread horrible lies and to convince

their king to set up an army. [288] These proceedings left the Chosŏn court in a state of even greater anxiety, as court officials feared that over two-hundred years of good relations with the Ming were coming to naught. Kwanghae himself can be expected to have been disappointed by this outcome as well. We can also assume that this behaviour displayed by the Ming generals might have brought back memories of past interactions during the East Asian War of 1592-98 or the Imjin War: the Ming military men were clearly disregarding Chosŏn protocol. Despite the added pressure, this stage did nothing to change the status of the debate at the Korean court. Although the Ming generals had made it clear that they felt entitled to issue orders to the Chosŏn army, King Kwanghae still stuck to his previous position of demanding an imperial order. Therefore, despite the increased tensions, Chosŏn did not send troops at this stage.

Stage IV: The imperial decree (late 1618 to early 1619)

The dynamics of the war debate at the Chosŏn court changed once again with Ming intervention. In the 10th month of 1618 the condition King Kwanghae had set out for his contribution to the Ming war effort was met: the Wanli Emperor formally requested Chosŏn troops.[289] While it took until the third month of 1619 for the letter to actually arrive at the Chosŏn court, details of its content had made their way to Hansŏng much more quickly. [290] The Emperor requested an army of no less than ten thousand soldiers along with seven hundred mounted horsemen. Already in the 12th month of 1618, before the official reception of the imperial decree, the 'supremely qualified' Commander Kang Hongnip was chosen to

[288] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 177; *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 137a-140b (己酉 day, second article) [1618/7/23].
[289] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 48(48): 15a (甲子 day, eighth article) [1618/ 10/9].
[290] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 178.

lead the Korean troops that were to be dispatched during the following months.[291] Kye argues that Kwanghae did not have any recourse left and had to grudgingly do as he promised.[292] That is one possible perspective. However, given that the king himself had previously worked towards getting a Ming imperial decree issued to settle a dispute in his favour, it is probable that Kwanghae knew from the beginning that the issue of the decree was likely to just be a matter of time; he was stalling. This interpretation seems likely, given that the Ming intervention indeed settled the dispute and the preparations at court such as the naming of Kang Hongnip as commander were made quite swiftly. Often such personnel decisions were decided after much debate. The fact that a decision was reached rather quickly seems to suggest that both the king and the court officials had been prepared for this outcome of their dispute. Kye argues that the king sought to buy time[293] to see whether the Ming or the Later Jin would gain advantage in the conflict. Strategically, this interpretation seems plausible, although of course, Kwanghae only managed to slow down the sending of troops by a few months – a lot by military standards perhaps, but on other occasions he had demonstrated that he could stay the course despite firm opposition at court for much longer periods of time. While it is true that the king slowed down the process of sending an army, there were no decisive moments in the conflict during the months he bought and there was no indication that the country's strategic situation had changed in a way that should have prompted a change in his stance. Accordingly, neither Kwanghae's decision to stall nor his decision to dispatch troops were likely motivated by a changing strategic situation. Given how stubbornly he had resisted pressure up until then, it does not seem likely that he had simply softened his objection to involvement, either. Both the king's reasons not to dispatch Chosŏn troops at the

[291] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 48(48): 123a-124a (丁丑 day, fourth article) [1618/12/22].
[292] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 178.
[293] The term Kye chooses is 'watch-and-wait'-policy, Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 171.

first request as well as his later decisions to get involved in the war are more likely to be found in his understanding of what it meant to be the king of Chosŏn, as will be explained in greater detail below.

The institutional approach

As argued in the introduction, the relationship between the Ming court and the Chosŏn kingdom were not regulated by any single document; there was nothing of the sort that could be called a treaty. Instead, the relations were founded on a much vaguer sort of agreement, of which only some main features were clearly defined. It remains undisputed that Chosŏn accepted the ritually superior position of the Ming emperor, recognising that the Son-of-Heaven had exclusive rights, such as the sacrifice at an altar to heaven.[294] Korean kings were banned from performing such sacrifices and with a few exceptions in early Chosŏn, this ban was generally accepted.[295] Chosŏn's acceptance of the Ming world order is also shown by the use of the Ming calendar that signified the acceptance of the Ming Son-of-Heavens' mediation between heaven and earth. Acceptance of the Ming calendar meant that the Korean kings were spiritually dependant on the Ming Emperors, which in Weberian terms lowered their degree of legitimacy vis-à-vis the Son-of-Heaven.

Given the nature of this relationship, it was unthinkable that the Korean kingdom should remain neutral in a conflict that threatened the Ming empire. Indeed, while Kwanghae was arguably politically opposed to the sending of troops, he did not directly challenge the hierarchy of this general order. While the hierarchical relationship between emperor and king was clear, however, there was still a significant degree of uncertainty concerning the many other institutions that would necessarily be included in an exchange between a Ming emperor

[294] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty*, (2000), 8-22.
[295] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty*, (2000), 8-22.

and a Chosŏn king. These institutions could include the Ming court's secretaries, official envoys, or importantly for the present case study, Ming military men. All these institutions were representatives of the Emperor and carried out the Ming court's policies, but of course the Korean king was also invested by the emperor. The question of whether a Korean king had to listen to the commands of a Ming general is at the core of the Korean war debate. Kwanghae was not just stalling for time, he was trying to clarify the exact contours of his kingdom's relationship to the Ming empire and specifically the extent of his sovereignty as a subordinate to the Ming emperor.

Based on both Kwanghae's words and actions, we can assume that the institution of the imperial decree was not questioned at this stage. At no point in the debate did Kwanghae advocate outright rebellion against the Ming order. Instead, he demanded an imperial decree to be issued. Within the Ming order, an imperial decree was the command of the highest importance and formality. At the same time, there were relatively few instances of imperial decrees being issued to Korea. Most often they were used in regard to state ritual, as in the case of investiture, or family politics, such as in the instance of the posthumous promotion of King Kwanghae's birth mother. In military matters, imperial decrees were also used. On several occasions, the Ming had previously asked for Korean troops and with an imperial decree, just the way Kwanghae was demanding on this occasion.[296] The consequences of disregarding such a direct order could have been very grave, as disobedience would have amounted to an outright rejection of the Ming imperial authority.

The imperial decree, this seemingly all-powerful tool, however, was limited by its format. A high degree of formality was necessary and the direct communication from the emperor to the king made it logistically impossible for the Ming court to dictate Chosŏn

[296] Seung B. Kye, 'P'abyŏng nonŭi rŭl t'onghae pon Chosŏn chŏn'gi Taemyŏnggwan ŭi pyŏnhwa" (A change in the Korean view of Ming China: Court debates on Ming requests for Korean troops in Early Chosŏn), *Taedong munhwa yŏn'gu*, v. 53, (2006), 309-346.

policy in detail, even if they had wanted to, considering how each correction of Korean policy would have required intelligence gathering in Korea, the crafting of a report back to the imperial court, and then waiting for a moment of the emperor's attention for him to create an appropriate reply to the situation in Korea. Accordingly, the imperial decree could only be used sparingly.

King Kwanghae justified his refusal to obey the demands and threats of the Ming generals in terms of precedent.[297] Ming generals had of course influenced Korean politics before, particularly in the context of the Imjin War and generally during the late Sŏnjo period. One example of policies induced by Ming military men can be found in the setting up of shrines for Ming generals, for the Wanli emperor, or for Guan Yu, a deified Han dynasty general who was revered by many Ming military men. Sŏnjo resisted the erection of some shrines for those he felt were less deserving of such honours, but there were equally instances of him being pressured into setting them up regardless.[298] Yang Gao, the Ming military commissioner, had also influenced Chosŏn policy indirectly when he was intercepting communications of Korean couriers meant for the Forbidden City as outlined above.[299] However, this type of influence was never viewed as a legitimate exercise of authority and could therefore not constitute a precedent that would justify the word of a mere Ming general to dictate policy against the will of a Chosŏn king. This is where the dispute begins. Both the Ming envoys and the Chosŏn court officials were ready to suppose that the will of the Ming generals was identical to that of the Ming emperor without confirmation from the Son-of-Heaven himself. This stance, however, would have implied that the Ming generals were in a position to give orders to the Korean king, and they would be on a higher hierarchical level

[297] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 78a-78b (甲申 day, third article) [1618/6/27].
[298] Kuwano Eiji, 'Chosŏn Korea and Ming China after the Imjin Waeran: state rituals in the Later Chosŏn period', in *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: international relations, violence and memory,* ed. James B. Lewis, Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2015), 308.
[299] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 177.

than the Korean monarch. Kwanghae had proven to be very well aware of status and power, as demonstrated by his prolonged efforts to raise the ritual rank of his deceased mother and the power struggle with the Queen Dowager. We can therefore conclude that on top of strategically disagreeing with the choice of dispatching troops to Manchuria, the king strongly disagreed with the way this choice was forced onto him.

At the same time, it would be wrong to suggest that the court officials would have been of the opinion that their king was ritually inferior to Ming envoys and generals. Instead the focus of the court lay with the concept of the heavenly intention or *tianyi* 天意 (K. *ch'ŏnŭi*). As with other policy questions the court had a tendency to give preference to policies that could be brought to congruence with ethical standards laid out in the Confucian canon. Aiding the Ming dynasty in this case of dire need was an obvious fulfilment of filial piety towards the hegemonic suzerain. The Ming envoys naturally invoked the concept of loyalty or *zhong* 忠 (K. *ch'ung*), the fulfilment of which implied a more active stance than the mere obedience to imperial decrees,[300] but on top of this theoretical position, many court officials were also impressed by the Ming generals' insistence and switched from backing Kwanghae's approach to accepting intervention under the Ming pressure.[301]

In conclusion, one could say that both the king and the court officials managed this debate in a fashion not dissimilar from other court debates: the king based his arguments on precedents and a formalistic approach of obedience to the Son-of-Heaven, all the while protecting the dignity of his office and his personal control over the Chosŏn state. The court officials based their arguments on imperatives deduced from other sources of authority: the will of the emperor as manifested in the commands of his direct inferiors, imperatives deduced from the canon, and finally a certain degree of inference of the Son-of-Heaven's

[300] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 50a-51a (丙子 day, eighth article) [1618/6/19].
[301] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 177.

wishes. Not dissimilar from the king himself, the court officials thus behaved in a way that would be the most likely to guarantee the continued dignity of their offices.

Conclusions

The case of the 1618-1619 war debate at the Chosŏn court shows how the Ming court was able to influence Korean politics. Some of this influence was seen as legitimate by all political actors at court, namely the rulings of the Ming emperor by means of imperial decrees. The fact that imperial decrees could produce shifts in Korean policy shows that the Ming court needs to be considered as an external, yet integral, part of the Chosŏn constitutional framework. During the rule of King Kwanghae, however, the consensus regarding the role of the Ming appears to have been limited to the direct commands issued by the Ming emperor, whereas Ming messages conveyed by Ming officials were subject to dispute as the Chosŏn monarch refused to accept them as binding. In this instance, as in other instances, the lack of clarity in the constitutional order was bridged to some extent by legal debates that involved the monarch himself as well as court officials and, in this case, Ming envoys.

The legal uncertainty that necessitated the war debate at the Chosŏn court brought about an opportunity for both the monarch and the court officials to position themselves according to the interests that came with the role they played at court: the court officials took a vague moral line, as they did in many other instances, given how easy it was for other members of the court to impeach bureaucrats who fell short of the high moral standards expected of the *yangban*.[302] King Kwanghae, on the other hand, followed a formalistic reasoning that protected the throne from a potentially ever-increasing Chinese influence that

[302] Chan Sik Song, 'The Power Structure of *Sarim* (士林) Politics in the Chosŏn Dynasty." In *The Institutional Basis of Civil Governance in the Chosŏn Dynasty*. Translated and compiled by John B. Duncan, Jung Chul Lee, Jeong-il Lee, Michael Ahn, and Jack A. Davey. (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies), 122.

could have appeared in case he granted a precedent and allowed Ming envoys and generals to dictate Korean policy and command the Korean army. In light of this perspective, it becomes clear that the question of Kwanghae's neutrality is inherently linked to his position and his understanding of kingship, and the question of Chosŏn's involvement in the Later Jin-Ming war is as much one of strategy as it is one of political institutions. Politically, the foreign policy dispute further alienated Kwanghae from his detractors at court and saw the number of his supporters dwindle further. Although the foreign policy itself may not have been the primary reason for the coup d'état that cost Kwanghae his crown in 1623, five years after the beginning of the war debate, the increased isolation of the king following the debate certainly contributed to making it possible.

Chosŏn's military intervention and the separate peace in Manchuria

As fiercely as the war debate was fought out at the Korean court, it nevertheless did not provide a definitive answer on where Chosŏn stood in the Later Jin-Ming conflict. The constitutional crisis remained fundamentally unresolved: on the one side were the policy preferences of the Ming emperor and the majority of the Chosŏn court and on the other side was the Chosŏn monarch. Though the decision to dispatch Korean troops, thus officially and practically entering the military conflict, could have brought about a conclusive political solution to the state crisis, the underlying issues resurfaced only half a year later. Following the crushing defeat the Ming-led forces suffered at the series of battles collectively known as the Battle of Sarhu in 1619, however, the Korean commander Kang Hongnip sued for a separate peace with the Later Jin chieftain Nurhaci, thus re-opening the question of Korea's participation in the war.

The nature of the Korean surrender has been subject to much historical research but also some speculation. Inaba Iwakichi was the first to explore the possibility that Kwanghae

may have given his general, Kang Hongnip, secret instructions and perhaps even ordered him seek a separate peace.[303] In his article on the Later Jin's Liaodong campaign of 1619, Ray Huang followed Inaba's reasoning arguing that 'evidences are overwhelming that the king, for good reason, did not put his heart into the campaign.'[304] Apart from a single entry in the *Kwanghaegun ilgi*[305] and accusations levied at Kwanghae during his dethronement, there is little hard evidence to back this theory and arguing against involvement in a military conflict and actively sabotaging said involvement are two entirely different sets of activities. What can be said with some certainty, however, is that Kang's surrender corresponded to Kwanghae's political will and —if the *sillok* is to be trusted— produced a favourable or at least understanding reaction from the monarch.[306] We might surmise that Commander Kang would have been unlikely to take such a grave decision without any backing at home whatsoever, and Kwanghae was virtually the sole person who would have offered support to the surrender. While the question whether Kwanghae did indeed order Kang to surrender might be interesting in terms of understanding Kwanghae's character, the fact remains that the king respected Kang's negotiation results and withdrew Chosŏn from the conflict between the Ming and the Later Jin, once again pursuing a separate foreign policy — much to the consternation of a growing anti-Kwanghae majority at court as well as Chinese envoys and generals.

Superficially, the separate peace might look like a major political success for the Chosŏn monarch, as the loathed intervention came to a halt and Chosŏn was able to withdraw from the conflict at a rather small cost: an invasion by Later Jin forces now seemed less likely, and even the toll of the battle had been somewhat reduced in that Korean prisoners of

[303] Inaba Iwakichi, *Kōkaikun jidai no mansen kankei*, (Seoul: Osakaya goshoten, 1933), 186-191.
[304] Ray Huang, 'The Liao-Tung Campaign of 1619,' *Oriens Extremus*, v. 28, no. 1, (1981), 51.
[305] This theory is based on the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* account, where Kwanghae describes how he gave directions to Kang Hongnip to surrender early. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 107a-109b (辛酉 day, first article) [1619/4/8].
[306] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 109a-110b (辛酉 day, second article) [1619/4/8].

war were to be repatriated to the peninsula according to the peace settlement.[307] Politically, however, the separate peace put Kwanghae in an impossible spot. In a way, the separate peace treaty can be adequately described as the starting point of a dilemma Kwanghae could never resolve: as the Later Jin-Ming conflict raged on, further Ming demands against Korea were extremely likely (and indeed materialised).[308] In order to heed these demands Kwanghae would have needed to do the politically impossible: recant the peace agreement, thereby loosing face domestically and risking a Manchurian retaliation that Chosŏn might not be able to withstand. The alternative course of action would have been to stand by the peace settlement. On the surface, this choice would allow Kwanghae to save face, however, it would be only a matter of time before the Ming would once again use the ultimate recourse: an imperial decree. If the king chose to stick by his separate peace and to ignore a renewed imperial decree asking for Chosŏn's armies to march north, he would need to place himself outside the norms and customs that governed both domestic and international politics, thereby seriously endangering his position and drawing his legitimacy into question. Kwanghae choose this second path of action and that may well be one of core reasons he did not rule until his death.

This part of the chapter will retrace the actions taken by Commander Kang that led to the establishment of the separate peace regime between Chosŏn and the Later Jin before exploring the political responses at court and discussing the political and legal implications in greater detail. A more detailed discussion of the role of imperial decrees in Chosŏn governance will follow in the next chapter.

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[307] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea: Bringing an unknown war hero back into history'. *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 2 (Winter, 2010): 568.
[308] One of these instances is recorded in *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 97a-98b (乙卯 day, fifth article) [1619/8/5].

The Korean intervention up to the Battle of Sarhu

The events surrounding the fourth day of the third lunar month of 1619, the day of the Battle at Sarhu, in many ways are crucial to the understanding of Korea's stance in the Later Jin-Ming conflict that started one year prior with the Later Jin attack on Fushun. Unfortunately, there is also a great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity concerning the Korean military intervention, drawing into question the resolve of the Korean monarch as well as the characters of Supreme Commander Kang Hongnip and his Assistant Commander Kim Kyŏngsŏ. Not even the exact nature of the peace negotiations has been determined with certainty thus far. The predominant problem is the scarcity of reliable written sources and the fact that the observers and participants of the Korean military intervention frequently contradict each other in their testimonies.[309] The likelihood of biased reportage stems from the understandable attempt of Chosŏn returnees to show themselves in a favourable light, so as to avoid being suspected of treason.

What can be said with certainty is that the intervention was not taken lightly. Despite Kwanghae often repeating the claim that Korea would have a hard time fielding any sort of army,[310] some 13,000 men were mustered and armed in preparation of the intervention. The Korean infantry was armed with muskets and provided with sufficient ammunition.[311] At the time the Chosŏn troops crossed the Yalu River into Manchuria, the Korean infantry was in the process of being modernised. In the last years of King Sŏnjo's reign a Directory of Firearms (*hwagi togam* 火器都監) had been set up and tasked with the modernisation of the Korean infantry. As one of Kwanghae's pet projects, the Directory of Firearms was later retired when King Injo took power in 1623.[312] According to Kang Hyeok Hweon, attempts to improve

[309] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea' (2010): 566-567.
[310] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 45(45): 51b (庚辰 day, tenth article) [1618/intercalary 4/22].
[311] Han Myunggi, 'Han'guk yŏktae haeoe P'abyŏng sarye yŏngu: 1619 nyŏn Simha Chŏnt'u ch'amjŏnŭl chungsimŭro' (A case study of Korea dispatching military abroad: Focus on the 1619 Battle at Sarhu), *Kunsasa yŏn'gu Ch'ongsŏ*, 1, (2001), 2.
[312] *Injo sillok* 1: 1a-4b [1623/3/13].

Chosŏn's infantry with Japanese technology and Chinese tactics were resumed nonetheless and reached their peak after the Later Jin and Manchurian invasions of 1627 and 1636 during the reign of King Hyojong (1619-1659, r. 1649-1659).[313] The advancing Korean troops in 1619, however, appear to have suffered from lacking logistical support. At least Yi Minhwan, a scholar-official who had passed the literary examinations and accompanied the troops into Manchuria, observed that the Korean morale slowly sank and blamed the Ming commanders hurrying the Korean troops along as they marched deeper into Manchuria slowly overextending their supply lines, leading the troops to suffer hunger and exhaustion before even the first encounters with Later Jin troops.[314]

Kang Hongnip, who was chosen to lead the Korean forces, acquired the reputation of a cowardly traitor soon after the battle and maintained this reputation for most of Chosŏn history.[315] At the time he was chosen, however, it is clear that he was a man with an excellent record. He had already served in the administration under King Sŏnjo and was promoted with a fair regularity.[316] 'Treason is the worst abomination in the world'[317] are the first recorded words of Kang Hongnip in the *Kwanghaegun ilgi.* These are Kang's first lines in the *sillok* overall. While Kang appeared as a successful official in the *Sŏnjo sillok*, none of his thoughts were recorded there. These first words, however, should have ensured that Kang was in the good graces of the new king, as they formed part of the series of accusations against the new king's elder brother Imhae. Kang's display of loyalty to Kwanghae did not go unnoticed and the records go on detailing a series of promotions and salary raises for Kang Hongnip, first of which was his promotion to the position of First Tutor (*podŏk* 輔德) only days after his

[313] Kang Hyeok Hweon, 'Big heads and Buddhist demons: the Korean musketry revolution and the Northern expedition,' *Journal of Chinese Military History*, Volume 2, Issue 2. (2014): 129.
[314] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea: Bringing an unknown war hero back into history,' *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 2 (Winter, 2010): 568.
[315] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea', (2010): 569.
[316] By the end King Sŏnjo's reign he had risen to the rank of *pugyori* 副校理 or Junior Fifth Advisor in the Office of Special Advisors. *Sŏnjo sillok* 203: 23b-37a [1606/9/24].
[317] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 2(2): 93a (壬子 day, third article) [1608/5/27].

accusations of treason against Imhae were publicized.[318] According to the *sillok,* Kang's loyalty, however, was not limited to the Korean monarch, but also extended to the Ming Emperor. Upon reception of the news that he was to be the supreme commander of the Korean troops sent to Manchuria, Kang lengthily elaborated on how crucial it was to heed the commands of the Ming.[319] Having served in the northern parts of the peninsula, Kang also spoke some degree of Manchu and therefore appears to have been a suitable candidate for this sensitive mission. Despite his earlier merits Kang fell from grace quickly and permanently at court after 1619. Just over a decade after he was calling for the king's brother to be treated 'according to the law', thus accelerating his own career, some of his fellow court officials were repeating that same phrase to ask for Kang's head and those of his associates and family.[320]

One of the reasons Kang appears as a traitor can be found in the testimony against him by Assistant Commander Kim Kyŏngsŏ. Kim, also a man with an illustrious personal career record but of more humble origins, seems to not have gotten along all too well with his supreme commander.[321] Assistant Commander Kim Kyŏngsŏ had been named second in command rather hastily before the departure of the troops, and his position in the hierarchy was often disregarded by the senior Kang, leaving Kim Kyŏngsŏ frustrated and somewhat resentful. Later Kim Kyŏngsŏ claimed that Kang betrayed the Korean troops by negotiating peace with the Later Jin before the battle and hindering him along with other brave officers and soldiers from playing a more active role on the battlefield by, among other things, taking away his stallion and replacing it with an old horse barely strong enough to carry Kim's

[318] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 2(2): 99a (丙辰 day, fifth article) [1608/6/1].
[319] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 23b-24b (己巳 day, sixth article) [1618/6/12].
[320] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 109a-110b (辛酉 day, second article) [1619/4/8].
[321] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea', (2010): 567.

weight.[322] Other accounts find no significant difference between Kang Hongnip and Kim Kyŏngsŏ, portraying both as traitors in equal measure.[323]

Most sources concur that Kang Hongnip sent translators as messengers or spies to the Later Jin camp after having arrived at the Shenhe (k. Simha) area where the Sarhu battles were to take place. These spies were often recruited from Jurchen people who lived on Korean territory or had other affiliations with Korea. The commanders on this expedition, however, brought their own translators. Kang's exact orders have not been documented, so this first indirect interaction between the Korean commander and the Jurchen camp quickly fuelled speculation among court officials that a settlement might have been reached even before the battle started.[324]

The plausibility of this narrative, however, is somewhat undermined by the fact that the Chosŏn troops eventually did end up facing their Later Jin enemies on the field. The entries in the *sillok* describe the encounter with the Manchurian cavalry as a complete catastrophe.[325] Though some of the Korean commanders, including Kim Kyŏngsŏ had fought against the Japanese in northern Korea[326] and cannot be said to have been inexperienced in the art of war, they nevertheless tragically misjudged their foe. Marching their infantry into the field in adverse weather conditions, the entire Korean vanguard was struck down before they had the chance to reload their muskets.[327] By the time Kang Hongnip entered into separate peace negotiations some nine thousand men of his command including many officers had lost their lives.[328] Some, such as Kim Ŭngha, would later be remembered as Korean heroes for having sacrificed themselves for the Ming cause. Even King Kwanghae readily

[322] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea,' (2010): 569.
[323] One example of this is the *Ch'ungyŏllok* 忠烈錄, that was commissioned by Chief State Councilor Pak Sŭngjong in 1621.
[324] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 111a-112a (壬戌 day, first article) [1619/4/9].
[325] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 64a-64b (乙酉 day, second article) [1619/3/2].
[326] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea', (2010): 563.
[327] Swope, *Military Collapse*, (2013), 23.
[328] This figure is based on *Chaam Chip* 5:10b-14a.

sponsored the deification of Kim Ŭngha who before long was remembered as a man who defied countless enemies even after his last arrows had been fired and who was ultimately struck down by an enemy spear. According to the later legend of Kim Ŭngha, even the Korean officer's dead body struck fear in the hearts of the Later Jin soldiery, so he was left sitting under the tree that had last provided him with some rear cover. His face was said not to have decomposed.[329] The *sillok*, less inclined to embellish this episode of history, describes the battle as a horrifyingly gruesome chaos in which some Korean soldiers fought valiantly to their end while others blew up their ammunition, thereby committing suicide before a ceasefire could be reached.[330] Considering these scenes, Kang Hongnip would have needed to be an extraordinarily cynical man to have negotiated this type of outcome before the battle. While the possibility cannot be fully excluded, a pre-arranged result for the Korean side also seems unlikely in that the losses suffered by the Korean troops do not appear to have differed too greatly from the losses suffered by the Ming army. The more plausible explanation for the defeat at Sarhu is the lack of military strategy on the Ming side that hampered their entire campaign against the Later Jin, followed up by a collective effort to shift the blame at the court in Hansŏng in order to mask the military humiliation.

The separate peace

In the *Art of War,* Sunzi stresses the importance of choosing generals with great care. Out in the field, the fate of the country, the well-being of the state, and its people, are beyond the grasp of the king and his advisors. Sunzi argues that the triumph or doom of the state will depend on only the soundness of the general's judgement.[331] While the first of these two observations certainly held true in the case of the Battle at Sarhu, Commander Kang may not

[329] A detail in the he *Ch'ungyŏllok* 忠烈錄.
[330] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 75a-77a (乙未 day, first article) [1619/3/12].
[331] Sunzi, *The Art of War, Chapter 3.*

be only key figure in determining the outcome of the peace negotiations following the battle itself.

While the records do not draw a great difference between the Supreme Commander Kang and his second in command, Kim Kyŏngsŏ, there is another person who seems to have been instrumental in withdrawing the Korean troops from the battle, or facilitating the Korean surrender after the dispatch force had already suffered considerable losses. This person is the official translator Ha Sŏguk. Ha, who had been travelling with the Korean army as a personal translator to the high command, had previously been sent to the enemy camp on a scouting mission where he possibly had the chance to become acquainted with some of the Later Jin commanders.[332] While this initial contact has fuelled speculation that the separate peace between the Korean and Later Jin forces was planned from even before the battle, there is no concrete evidence to back this version of events at which Kim Kyŏngsŏ hinted.[333] What can be said with some degree of certainty, however, is that the translator still became very influential in facilitating the withdrawal of the Korean troops from battle. According to the unedited version of the *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, the initiative for the surrender of the Korean troops came from the Later Jin side. While the fighting was still ongoing, the Later Jin summoned translator Ha to their camp and asked him to set up peace negotiations.[334]

Vice Commander Kim Kyŏngsŏ and later Supreme Commander Kang Hongnip followed this invitation.[335] While little of the actual content of the negotiations can be ascertained with certainty, it was this contact, established through the translator, that led to the Korean withdrawal. The Later Jin conditions were that Chosŏn troops should be withdrawn from the Ming forces and Chinese soldiers be removed from the Chosŏn ranks. These conditions were met and so one of the most crucial Chosŏn foreign policy decisions during

[332] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 75a-77a (乙未 day, first article) [1619/3/12].
[333] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea', (2010): 569.
[334] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 75a-77a (乙未 day, first article) [1619/3/12].
[335] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 75a-77a (乙未 day, first article) [1619/3/12].

Kwanghae's reign was taken by two generals facing military defeat assisted by a *chungin* translator.

Despite the uncertainties, the negotiations are nevertheless an interesting case of policy in practice. Vital questions of foreign policy were not decided after lengthy debates in the capital but were dealt with by the personnel available on the ground. The decision taken by the men in charge of the Korean army at Sarhu stood clearly opposed to the majority of the court in the capital, but the vertical linkage of power between different hierarchical levels of the state institutions was severed by the lack of direct and fast communication channels. The importance the Later Jin side attributed to the mere translator Ha Sŏguk is also apparent from the fact that his presence was requested for later diplomatic exchanges. Even the Ming appeared to have recognised Ha's value for Later Jin-Chosŏn relations. When the translator suddenly died on the return journey from a mission to the Later Jin in 1622, Ming partisan leader Mao Wenlong's men were accused of his murder.[336]

The aftermath of the intervention

The reactions at court to the devastating defeat suffered in the Battle at Sarhu, clearly show anxiety taking hold of the Chosŏn court. Almost as soon as the news was received the court officials started to question the actions of Commander Kang, often inferring quite directly that the military man had not fought honourably and had betrayed Chosŏn, and equally importantly: he had betrayed the Emperor.[337] Although the most prominent concern seems to have been to avoid giving the Ming camp the impression that the Chosŏn army did not stand firmly on the Ming side, this concern also had domestic consequences. Treason, as one of the ten abominations, may be committed by only one person, but the Ming Code, clearly details that several generations of the same family may be held accountable for such a

[336] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 62(62): 71a-71b (甲午 day, third article) [1622/9/1].
[337] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 102b (丙辰 day, fourth article) [1619/4/3].

crime.[338] Accordingly, the Chosŏn court started debating whether or not Commander Kang's wife and children were to be taken prisoner, and to ultimately be held responsible for his treason. The king, however, stayed his hand over Kang's family, thereby fuelling suspicions against the king.[339] Many times before, Kwanghae had used the negative projection of association with traitors against his domestic political adversaries, but this time, the suspicions were aimed at the king himself. The *sillok* even records Kwanghae saying that the Commander had acted according to a secret order from him,[340] but as there is only one mention of this agreement and no other sources have been found to corroborate this claim, historians are divided on the question of the credibility of this particular quote.[341] The question of Kang Hongnip's guilt remained unsettled, as the king did not allow legal action against his general. Kwanghae was, however, unable to stop the popular perception depicting Kang as a cowardly villain. This narrative was reinforced among other things by the 1630 publication of a biographical story under the title of the *Story of Caitiff Kang* (*Kang no chŏn* 姜虜傳).[342]

While the case of Commander Kang was vividly debated at court, the question of what was to be done about the new international situation was even more pressing and even more controversial. The separate peace had quite obviously broken the prohibition of direct dealings between Ming tributary states,[343] and left Chosŏn in a situation to decide how to continue the newly established relations with the Jurchen on the one hand, and how to honour the conflicting loyalties emerging from this new situation on the other.

Again, the majority of court officials supported a clear line: dealing with the Jurchen must be limited to lower levels of the administration, essentially rendering Jurchen relations

[338] Jiang Yonglin, *The Great Ming Code*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 59.
[339] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 52(52): 99a-100a (丙午 day, second article) [1620/3/28].
[340] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 107a-109b (辛酉 day, first article) [1619/4/8].
[341] Song, 'Intellectuals and the State', 103.
[342] Kim Sun Joo, 'Culture of Remembrance in Late Chosŏn Korea', (2010): 572.
[343] Wei Zhijiang, 'Lun Houjin Nuerhachi Zhengquan', (2008): 56.

as mere border contacts rather than real inter-state relations. At the same time, efforts should be made to ensure continued and renewed Ming trust in their Chosŏn ally. Clearly, the domestic discrediting of Kang Hongnip accorded with these policy goals.

Interestingly enough, many of King Kwanghae's statements in encounters with Ming envoys seem to go the very same way. The king quite clearly characterises the events surrounding the Battle of Sarhu as unfortunate,[344] only to then go on to complain about the weak and unreliable nature of the people he was charged with ruling over. His demonstration of humility and shame with regard to Commander Kang's actions serve as another example of a partially successful campaign in emotional diplomacy[345] aimed at gaining the sympathy of the Ming envoys. Naturally, the interests so clearly expressed by the court and apparently supported by the king aligned perfectly with the Ming desire to move past the incident at Sarhu and renew the strong alliance with Chosŏn. After all the Ming side was still hoping to regain Chosŏn military support in a war that was far from over.

In one regard, however, the king's line of policy did not fit in well with the policy design preferred by the court officials. Kwanghae decided not to lose the contacts established with the Later Jin and was in favour of keeping a regular correspondence with Nurhaci.[346] This stance is coherent with the stance Kwanghae took before the dispatching of troops into Manchuria. As before, he identified the threat posed by the Jurchen army as greater than the threat posed by losing Ming support. The question of whether the Jurchen contact could be upheld and under which format was one of the foreign policy questions occupying the court for months and indeed years to come.

Foreign relations with the Later Jin profited from the separate peace. Previously, Nurhaci had signalled that there was no grudge between the Later Jin and Chosŏn and that

[344] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 110b-111b (辛酉 day, eleventh article) [1619/4/8].
[345] As defined in: Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy*. (London: Cornell University Press, 2015), VII.
[346] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 183.

war was unnecessary.[347] The Later Jin even showed understanding for Chosŏn to side with an ally to whom they owed gratitude. But the Later Jin felt that since some of the *ŭn* 恩, the gratitude owed, had been repaid through the intervention, there was no further need for animosity between the two states. This initial, positive expectation the Later Jin harboured regarding future relations with Chosŏn cooled down rather quickly, as Chosŏn remained largely unresponsive towards Later Jin demands for more friendly relations.

The Ming side, initially eager to move past the events at Sarhu, also grew increasingly irritated with the policy of the Korean kingdom. On the other hand, Ming irritation was mainly due to the Korean King's hesitation to send further troops. As will be seen and discussed in the next chapter, this frustration led the Ming to seek a more active role in the governance in Chosŏn in a bid to reduce the influence of the stubborn king over the essential affairs of state, most prominently the control of the Korean military.

Overall, the Battle at Sarhu did little to alleviate the political tensions Chosŏn was facing both internationally and domestically. Instead, the stress on the question of international alignment loomed even larger, as the ability of the Chosŏn military to defend the kingdom by itself had been very seriously drawn into question by the show of superiority of the Later Jin cavalry. Pressures from the Ming and Later Jin for Chosŏn to behave according to their expectations did not lessen after the battle either. Interactions with the Ming remained largely unchanged; those with the Later Jin now had an added layer of practical politics as many Korean soldiers were still held as prisoners by the Later Jin side.[348] Many of them were released as a gesture of goodwill,[349] but the exchange forced upon the Korean court a conversation about which many officials felt uneasy.

[347] *Qing Taizu shi lu* 6:15b-17a.
[348] Their testimonies such as the Chaam Chip are valuable primary sources.
[349] *Qing Taizu shi lu* 6:15b-17a.

Conclusions

The only direct Chosŏn involvement in the Later Jin-Ming conflict during the reign of King Kwanghae was the Battle at Sarhu that resulted in a military failure. The failure was born out of a political compromise that placed little importance on the strategic value of the campaign. With the exception of the translators and the generals on the ground at the Battle of Sarhu, who, for a brief moment, were in charge of war and peace for the Korean Kingdom, the positions and objectives of each of the institutional actors is very clear. The majority of the Chosŏn court obviously backed the military campaign. While some strategic reasoning might have gone into this policy preference, the key argument was that aiding the Ming cause was the morally right course of action, in terms of repaying the Ming for going above and beyond their responsibility in saving the Chosŏn dynasty. After all, the Ming campaign in Korea had barely finished twenty years before the Jurchen raids in Manchuria grew into a war that seriously started to threaten Ming presence in southern Manchuria. On top of the argument of repaying that massive favour, the Chosŏn court also had a long-standing tradition of measuring their policies against the Heavenly Court's implicit wishes, which were assumed to be a guideline for ethical governance.[350] Despite this obeisance, when convenient, courtiers also pointed to the shortcomings of Ming policy and compared earlier Chinese dynasties favourably against the lesser moral standard of the Ming. To many court officials, assistance to the Ming was an obvious choice that did not require any direct instructions from the Ming side. Ming policy goals are equally clear: faced with the threat of invasion from the north, mobilizing the Chosŏn armies in order to increase troop strength and maintain a strategic advantage over the advancing Later Jin side was an obvious choice. As the urgency of the developments in Manchuria increased, so did the impatience of the Ming generals and envoys in their discussions with the Chosŏn high officials and monarch.

[350] Sohn Pokee, *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty*. (2000), 8.

In such a constellation the king and a small number of loyal supporters of his line of policy were the only factors that stood against the clear siding of Chosŏn with the Ming throughout the war. In an unambiguous hierarchical setting, one side in this debate would have been able to sway the other side, and Chosŏn would have been able to develop a coherent foreign policy of either clear alliances or clear neutrality. The fact that neither was achieved and Chosŏn half-heartedly dispatched an expedition force only to then withdraw from the conflict clearly shows that the hierarchy among the three principal institutional actors at hand: the Ming court, the Chosŏn court officials, and the Chosŏn monarch (leaving aside generals and translators in the field for now) was not clearly established.

In previous chapters we saw that the court officials were able to obstruct and delay the monarch's policy designs for long durations. In select cases they were also able to have the monarch withdraw decisions taken unilaterally, as was the case with the moving of Kwanghae's birth mother's spirit tablet to the royal shrine. However, marshalling and dispatching an army goes much further than political obstruction, delaying policies, and seeing to the fact that the king held to his word about upholding propriety at court: mobilization required a serious and concerted effort at policy making. The previous relations between Kwanghae and his court officials provide no evidence that the courtiers would have been able to force such an important policy on the king against his will. The Chosŏn participation at the Battle of Sarhu was indeed rooted in the active Ming intervention in Chosŏn politics rather than the officials' practice of using assumed Ming moral guidelines as political directives.

In part, the reason for this blurred hierarchical setting can be explained by the limitations of communication, as illustrated by the case of the military men and translators at the Battle of Sarhu. While Commander Kang was a high-ranking official, the *chungin*[351] Ha

[351] The *chungin* 中人 social class, the so-called 'middle people', ranked just below the *yangban*. *Chungin* staffed lower positions in the administration and took on assistant roles.

was inferior in rank to any member of the central bureaucracy in the capital. Nevertheless, these men were able to determine important aspects of Chosŏn's foreign policy simply because the officials and the monarch himself were far away and inaccessible in the moment when an agreement needed to be reached with the Later Jin side. The same distance dynamic holds true to a certain degree in the relations between the Ming emperor and his subject, the King of Chosŏn. There was no doubt about the theoretical supremacy of the Ming emperor, but the practical implications of this supremacy were somewhat unclear. As the Korean king refused to take orders from subjects of the Chinese Emperor claiming to be acting according to the emperor's wishes and directives, the hierarchically clear but practically quite limited tool of the imperial decree was used to sway the king.

As the pressure on the Ming court mounted with the defeats suffered at the hands of the Later Jin, the Chinese side became increasingly desperate. The imperial decree had been identified as the single clear and efficient way of exercising Ming authority in Chosŏn, and, as a result, Ming officials and generals increasingly sought to have imperial decrees issued in order to have Chosŏn contribute to the war effort in a meaningful way. The dilemma that resulted from this practice for Kwanghae has been mentioned briefly above and will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter examining the stages of decay of the monarch's authority in the time between the Battle of Sarhu and the Kwanghae's dethronement only four years later.

Chapter 5: Imperial and Royal Authority (1619-1623)

I. Emperor and King

   a. Nothing personal

   b. Delegation of the Ming emperor's authority

   c. Continuity and increasing pressure

   d. Significance of the Imperial decree

II. Ming generals and envoys

   a. A rock and a hard place

   b. A working relationship

III. Conclusions

The defeat at Sarhu brought about a tense situation for the Kingdom of Chosŏn during King Kwanghae's last four years on the throne. The rude awakening that was the superior showing of Later Jin forces on the Manchurian battlefields entailed the big strategic question of whether Chosŏn should attempt to withdraw from conflict or whether it should redouble its efforts of bringing back the status quo ante. The result of the battle aligned with the fears of possible defeat Kwanghae had voiced even before agreeing to send troops. The legacy of the battle, however, was interpreted in different ways at court. Reassured by the correctness of his judgement, King Kwanghae and his allies at court returned to a policy of limiting Korean involvement in the conflict. In avoiding a renewed dispatchment of Korean troops, Kwanghae was successful and in the roughly four years that lay between the battle of Sarhu and his dethronement no Korean troops were dispatched beyond their borders. Interestingly, and despite vocal support[352] of the Ming cause, King Injo did not send troops into Manchuria either, even though the four years between his assumption of power and the Later Jin invasion of Korea in 1627 should have provided sufficient opportunities. One opportunity that sprang from the disastrous campaign and the negotiations under Kang Hongnip's leadership was the establishment of diplomatic ties with the Later Jin. Kwanghae sought to exploit this new connection to secure a positive relation that should in turn ensure Korean troops would not have to face the Later Jin in the field again.[353] This initiative, however, met less success as a substantial number of bureaucrats involved with the process slowed it down, sabotaged it, or jeopardized the secret diplomacy by leaking information to the Ming side.

These continuous debates between the king and the bureaucrats make for an interesting study of how both king and bureaucracy were essential to governance and policy-making in the Korean kingdom. With the ever-decreasing cooperation at court, few steps could be agreed on and processes such as sending letters to the Ming emperor could drag on

[352] *Injo sillok* 10: 18b-19a [1625/10/15].
[353] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 183.

for weeks, as those in charge of writing the communications did not agree on the king's line and resorted once more to absenteeism and remonstration.[354] Domestically, Kwanghae was not in a good negotiation position when it came to relations with the Later Jin, as he required the assistance of court officials to establish and develop the relations. The court officials he relied on, however, viewed the attempt to establish such relations as unnecessary at best and as dangerous at worst. As a result of the fierce opposition from the bureaucracy, the letters actually sent to the Later Jin fell short of the degree of cordiality expected by the Later Jin and did not bring about a significant change in Chosŏn-Later Jin relations,[355] while at the same time relations with the Ming also suffered due to the king's refusal to re-send Korean troops to the Manchurian battlefields. How was it possible for Chosŏn to manoeuvre itself into this foreign policy dilemma? If the Wanli emperor had been able to sway the court debate in Hansŏng in favour of involvement in the war by a simple order before, then why was the same not attempted or carried out again? If the king was able to prevent a second dispatchment of troops, then why was he unable to push through his preferred type of diplomacy in regard to the Later Jin? This chapter will attempt to systematically answer these questions by examining the relationships between the institutional actors involved in the foreign policy disputes after the Battle of Sarhu. Particular attention will be paid to attempts by the Ming side to influence Chosŏn policy, as this chapter also serves as a test of the conclusions of the previous chapter, which found that the Ming court was involved in the domestic Chosŏn political scene.

As the war debate of 1618 had been tipped in favour of involvement by an imperial decree—an order in the name of the Ming emperor to rouse Chosŏn—this chapter provides an account of the imperial decrees sent by the Wanli emperor and the Taiqi emperor during the

[354] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 100b-102a (丙辰 day, fifth article) [1619/8/6]. The term to describe officials engaging in the practice of absenteeism is most often 怠慢, which is probably best translated as 'deliberately idle'.
[355] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 184.

four years between the battle at Sarhu and the dethronement of King Kwanghae. This approach highlights the Ming imperial secretariat's perception of its own authority vis-à-vis Chosŏn before discussing how these communications were received by the Korean monarch and bureaucracy. Additionally, the fact that decrees were sent in the name of two different emperors offers the opportunity to balance the importance of personal charisma of the Wanli emperor against the prestige and gravitas of the highest office in the All-under-heaven: did Wanli's decree carry more weight than Taiqi's decree?

Building on the observation of the previous chapter that a policy decision was reached based on the hierarchical relation of the two monarchs, this chapter will further analyse the reality of the relations between the Ming and Chosŏn courts during the last four years of King Kwanghae's reign: all relevant institutional actors were in agreement that the Ming Emperor had some degree of authority over the Chosŏn king and could –within the confines of precedent, established practice, and propriety– issue decrees that were considered binding at the Korean court. Due to the pressing nature of the Later Jin conflict, however, the Ming court sought to expand its influence at the Chosŏn court beyond the usual measure. As will be shown below, these attempts were largely rebuffed by King Kwanghae, although the Ming side could count on strong support from among the Chosŏn officialdom. King Kwanghae, however, remained suspicious of any attempts by the Ming court to undermine his sovereignty over the Korean military and defence.

The two sections of this chapter examine firstly the habitual centre-to-centre diplomacy between the imperial Ming court and the royal Chosŏn court. A particular focus here lies on the intent and the reception of Ming imperial decrees. As during these unusual times, the Ming military started to play an important role in the communications between the two countries –not least because the Ming court sought to delegate some of its authority over the Korean Kingdom to its military officials– the second part of this chapter will focus on the interactions between the Korean court and yet another institutional actor: the Ming military.

Emperor and King

> Accommodation of China was the norm in East Asia during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) eras. This did not, however, involve a significant loss of national independence, as nearby states were largely free to conduct their domestic and foreign policy independent of China.[356]

While the first part of this statement by David Kang is certainly corroborated by the present case studies and resonates with the Korean experience during the Kwanghae era in general, the second part has already been drawn into question in earlier chapters and, at the very least, needs further qualification. Kang's sweeping characterisation of Chinese-Korean relations during the larger part of the second millennium CE has already been partially refuted for the late Qing era by Kirk Larsen (2008) in his analysis of Qing imperial policies toward Korea in the nineteenth century.[357] Larsen points out that when Qing troops occupied Seoul in the 1880s and Qing diplomats were stationed in Korea, they defended Chinese concessions in the name of traditional suzerainty.[358] But, in reality, these measures served to uphold and further Qing interests in Korea. Of course, the situation of the Qing empire that was facing the pressures of Western and Japanese imperialism and the one of the Ming empire that was fending off the Later Jin and Manchurian invasions are by no means identical, but a number of similarities can be identified. In both cases a Chinese central empire revised its policy towards Korea in a way that it became difficult if not impossible for Chosŏn to freely conduct their domestic and foreign policy independent of China. In short, was the Ming pressure in the

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[356] David Kang, 'Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations'. *International Security* 28, no. 3 (Winter 2003/4): 175.
[357] Kirk W. Larsen*, Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910*, (Harvard East Asian Monographs 295, 2011), 15-16.
[358] Kirk W. Larsen*, Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910*, (Harvard East Asian Monographs 295, 2011), 16.

early seventeenth century different from the Qing pressure in the late nineteenth century? And, was the Ming pressure a legitimate exercise of authority, at least in the eyes of the Chosŏn kingdom?

In the case of late Qing imperialism in Korea, Larsen argues that the Chinese empire employed a hybrid of East Asian and Western mechanism and institutions, ritual-based relations in combination with a Western-style treaty system that had first been introduced to Korea by Meiji-period Japan.[359] Evidently, such a global approach, based on Confucian notions of time-honoured East Asian political institutions paired with a Western approach to treaty law and commercial ties of the informal imperial type,[360] was not available to the late Ming when they sought to expand their control over the Korean government and military. Instead, in the early seventeenth century, two primary channels of expanding influence were available: exploiting the high standing of the Ming emperor to exercise authority in Chosŏn or applying pressure by diplomatic or military means. While both these options are an application of power as per Robert A. Dahl's definition[361] of the term, only the first one can be said to have been an exercise of authority in a Weberian sense of legitimate authority.[362] Dahl explains power as follows: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do'. According to Weber the concept of authority describes a scenario in which the persons, over whom power is exercised, recognise the exercise of that power as legitimate. Authority then may be based on the view that power is wielded legitimately within a framework of sanctified traditions, within a legal framework, or based on the charisma of the person wielding power. We must keep in mind, though, that

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[359] Kirk W. Larsen*, Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910*, (Harvard East Asian Monographs 295, 2011), 16-17.
[360] The notion of the informal empire is based on Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Britain and China, 1842-1914.' *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth* Century, ed. Andrew Porter. (Oxford University Press, 1999), 148-149.
[361] Robert A. Dahl, 'The Concept of Power'. *Behavioral Science* 2.3, (1957): 202-203.
[362] Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait.* (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1960), 294.

differentiation between traditional and legal types of authority may be difficult, especially when considering a framework in which precedents are considered as a source of law. That leaves us with charisma and tradition or legality as the only avenues through which to exercise legitimate authority. The first part of this chapter will make the case that charismatic authority did not apply even in the case of the Wanli emperor, that there were limits to the Ming emperor's authority, and that attempts were made to expand the possibility of the exercise of Ming power beyond what was viewed as legitimate by Kwanghae and even what was viewed as legitimate by a portion of the Chosŏn bureaucrats.

Nothing personal

When Kwanghae was born as Yi Hon 李琿 in the summer of 1575, the Wanli Emperor's reign was already in its third year. While his governmental record within Ming is mixed and the Wanli Emperor, also known by his temple name Shenzong, withdrew from most governmental affairs for years despite still holding office and thus significantly weakening the Ming government, his reputation in Chosŏn was uniquely positive.[363] Examples of the Wanli emperor's negligence include cancelling morning audiences for twenty-five years and leaving important government posts unoccupied for long stretches of time.[364] Over the long decades of his reign, despite his mixed domestic record, the Wanli Emperor acquired a level of esteem in Korea that was rarely matched by other Ming emperors. Shenzong's reputation was largely due to the Ming efforts to halt the Japanese invasions of the 1590s that Kwanghae also fought in during his time as Crown Prince. After the war Kwanghae's role at the court became more and more precarious due to his father's hesitancy towards the Crown Prince and the resulting refusal of the emperor to grant

[363] Kuwano Eiji, 'Chosŏn Korea and Ming China after the Imjin Waeran', in James B. Lewis. *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: international relations, violence and memory.* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2015), 308.
[364] Kai Vogelsang, *Die Geschichte Chinas.* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Verlag, 2012), 402.

Kwanghae official investiture. The Wanli Emperor, on the other hand, was revered at state level in Korea in the aftermath of the war to the point that shrines were erected in his honour as well as in the honour of a number of select Ming commanders.[365] Some of these shrines that were set up during the Sŏnjo period saw some neglect during King Kwanghae's rule, but he was always ready to have them restored for the occasions that a Ming envoy might want to inspect them.[366] King Kwanghae may have performed well or even acted heroically during the Imjin War in his effort to save the ancestral tablets of his dynasty, but it was the Wanli Emperor who was credited with saving the country from the brink of ruin. On top of the clear ritual hierarchy between the institutions of a Ming emperor and a Chosŏn king, it should be clear that the charisma of a saviour gave the Wanli emperor a particularly high standing in Korea.

In 1620 the Wanli emperor passed away, not before thanking Chosŏn for the valiant effort at Sarhu and reminding them that the war was not over, and additional troops would be required. The old emperor's death left his country behind in a troubled state and in the unsteady hands of the Taichang emperor. The Wanli emperor's son, however, died after only some thirty days on the throne in somewhat dubious circumstances involving sexual overindulgence, red pills, and dysentery.[367] While this alone would have been enough to distract the Ming court from the essential border defence concerns of the time, the fifteen-year-old boy who took the throne after the Taichang emperor was one of the least competent individuals to occupy this pivotal position in Ming history. Ridiculed as the 'imperial carpenter' for his favourite pastime, the Tianqi emperor's peculiarities have fuelled the suspicion that he may have suffered from a learning disability, though the official version of

[365] Han Myung-gi, 'The inestimable benevolence', 280-1.
[366] Kuwano, 'Chosŏn Korea and Ming China after the Imjin Waeran', 298. quoting *Kwanghaegun ilgi*, T'aebaeksan archive manuscript, 54: 1a-15.
[367] Harry Miller, *State versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572-1644*, (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 119.

history at the time stated that he simply did not have the time to learn how to read and write.[368]

It is noteworthy that the death of the Wanli emperor, a man with a saviour's charisma, did not greatly impact relations between the Ming and Chosŏn. Neither did the imperial decrees receive less attention, nor did the word of Kwanghae gain additional weight, now that the Tianqi emperor was his interlocutor. Kwanghae also did not change his attitude towards the Ming imperial office, now that it was no longer occupied by the person who had so insulted him by repeatedly denying him investiture. While the tone of the Ming secretariat's communications became somewhat more demanding and imperial decrees somewhat less frequent, the former is attributable to the increased tension of the Manchurian situation and the latter can be considered a step towards normality, as the Wanli emperor had sent an unusual number of decrees in his last years. The peculiarities of the Tianqi emperor did not go unnoticed in Chosŏn and the envoys to the Ming imperial court were briefed that 'they should be aware themselves, that a man who spends day and night on woodwork, certainly does not have a lot of patience for official duties'.[369] The fact that such peculiarities were noticed, but not used in debate to discredit the position of the emperor, points to the fact that the person, or indeed the personal charisma, of the emperor was not relevant to Chosŏn policy makers. The authority of the emperor strictly resulted from the imperial office itself. In Weberian terms, the fact that little change occurred in the Ming-Chosŏn relation during the transition from the Wanli to the Tianqi emperor is a clear indication that Ming authority was not based on the Wanli emperor's charisma, but that Ming authority was viewed as legitimate on the basis of tradition or legality. Though not unexpected, this is an important qualification as both these types of authority are considerably more restrictive and require the party wielding power to remain within the boundaries of either tradition or legality.

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[368] Kai Vogelsang, *Die Geschichte Chinas* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Verlag, 2012), 402.
[369] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 59(59): 38a-40a (己亥 day, first article) [1622/1/3].

Delegation of the Ming emperor's authority

In the course of the war debate, Kwanghae repeatedly claimed he would respect the authority of the emperor, if an imperial decree was issued asking for troops, and he ultimately obeyed when the order was issued. On the one hand, Kwanghae taking the Wanli emperor's orders show the degree of legitimacy the Ming emperor enjoyed in directing Korean affairs, but on the other hand the imperial decree freed Kwanghae from an uncomfortable situation: having been pressured by Ming generals and bellicose court officials to finally dispatch troops, the Ming emperor's order provided an opportunity to give in to these forces without having to admit to backing down and accepting the demands of inferiors. The fact that Kwanghae complied with the request for Chosŏn troops could also lead one to believe that there were little or no tension between the institutions of the Ming emperor and the Chosŏn king. A careful reading of the imperial decree, however, suggests that dispatching Chosŏn troops might not have been enough to resolve the tensions. The imperial decree recorded in the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* for the thirteenth day of the second month of 1619, that is, the imperial decree the Chosŏn court received during the preparations for the battle of Sarhu reads as follows:

> The [Ming] Emperor issues a decree to the King of Chosŏn: I rule over a unified country, and, on all fronts, I have protected it against the Four Barbarians. At a time when we were gifting our treasures [to far-away countries] there came the alarming sound of bowstring and arrow.
> Long ago the remnants of Jianzhou [Jurchens] bowed their heads. [But] they were often insatiably greedy like dogs and sheep. And like wolves and pigs they unexpectedly plunged in, shaking our borders and inflicting great suffering on our people. [It was] Han negligence not to forestall [this]. I was greatly angered by this. Thereupon, the imperial campaign was set up in order defeat and capture Nurhaci. Solely, your majesty, the King of Chosŏn, has respectfully upheld the fief of Jizi 箕子 [kr. Kija], and reverently you have

> offered your tributary duty. [You too] have resented this gang of villains, this vanguard of traitors against us. You have respected the summons to war of [your] Great Master and gathered righteous council for [you] my subject ruler. You lent over ten thousand infantry men, given more than seven hundred cavalrymen, dispatched spies in order to investigate the enemy's situation, and purchased gunpowder in order to furbish fire weapons. Your fearless [logistical] acquisitions, serving your superior despite all worries; [all this] is deserving [of my] highest praise. Now, along with this specially prepared reply, I am sending monies for the dispatching of cavalrymen, for the gunpowder, and for the army's provisions and guerdon; in keeping with orthodoxy and precedent, by my authority, I bestow upon you this decree.
>
> You are instructed to command your army, strictly adhere to statutes and principles, listen to the [Ming] military commissioner, await the opportunity to dispatch [troops], advance at a given time, working towards the establishment of a scenario for us to [attack the enemy] on two fronts and hurry towards the achievement of pacification. I shall not be unappreciative in rewarding your meritorious deeds and your generals. You split your troops [and dispatch them] to the islands and prepare for the unexpected. Take appropriate emergency measures, so that there will be no unpleasant surprises. Alas! The smudge on the ancestral shrines has already been wiped clean, the virtue of generations is shining again. The guidance of the Heavenly Court is grand, the foundations of [your country] are re-established, [so let us] exercise [our] terrific power and use [our] sincerity and trust to set forth our reply. Respectfully, this concludes the decree.[370]

Some aspects of this decree fall within the range of expected rhetoric, such as the reference to the fief of Kija. The idea that Jizi or Kija departed from China when the Shang dynasty fell and founded a state in Korea that then became a tributary to the Chinese Zhou dynasty was a well-known theme both in Ming and Chosŏn and was routinely employed to

[370] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 49a-50a (丁卯 day, first article) [1619/2/13].

point to the long-standing tradition of positive tributary relations between Chinese and Korean states. However, in many ways this decree is still an extraordinary document. The Wanli emperor is quite generous not only in his praise for Kwanghae's loyalty, but also in his financial support for the Korean Kingdom that – as Kwanghae never grew tired to point out – had not yet recovered from the Japanese invasions.[371] One could even interpret the closing lines as an indication that the Korean involvement at the battle of Sarhu was going to be sufficient to repay the moral debt the Chosŏn dynasty owed the Ming for saving the country on the brink of ruin. The numbers of troop strength listed in this document appear to have been met by the Korean side as they correspond to the number the *sillok* records for the expedition force led by Kang Hongnip.[372] However, there are three characters within the otherwise expected instructions that are quite stark: *tīng jīnglüè* 聽經略 (kr. *ch'ŏng kyŏngnyak*) listen to the military commissioner. The rank of the military commissioner was one of the highest ranks within the Ming military at the time and granted particularly to commanders in charge of crises on the frontier.[373] At that time the military commissioner for the Later Jin was Yang Gao, a general who has already been mentioned in the previous chapter for interfering with the Chosŏn communication lines to the emperor. The character *tīng* 聽 (kr. *ch'ŏng*) in both Classical Chinese and Mandarin can plainly mean to listen, but as the most common secondary meaning is to obey, or to heed, it unmistakably carries a connotation of obedience. Hidden among the rather matter-of-fact military instructions, these three characters seriously draw into question the position of the Chosŏn king vis-à-vis not only the Ming emperor but other Ming officials as well.

[371] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 145a-146a (壬子 day, eighth article) [1618/7/26].
[372] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 54a-55a (乙卯 day, fourth article) [1619/2/21].
[373] Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford UP, 1985), 172.

Ming military commissioners and more generally high-ranking military men had been in a comparatively powerful position during the Imjin War and its immediate aftermath. Examples of this include instances of Ming military men forcing their will on King Sŏnjo when they had him perform rituals for Guan Yu, a deity largely foreign to Korea, in a ritual for which there was no precedent in Chosŏn.[374] Another example was the Ming general Liu Huangchang 劉黃裳 censoring the version of history King Sŏnjo was to present at court, following an argument about what had started the Imjin War. King Sŏnjo had noted that Hideyoshi's forces sought to attack China by way of Korea. Chosŏn had blocked the onslaught and was thus helping China. General Liu wanted it to be understood that China was helping Korea, not the other way around.[375] King Sŏnjo had also been cut out from essential policy decisions concerning the future of his country, when the Ming military commissioner sent their negotiator Shen Weijing 沈惟敬 to confer with the Japanese without including either Sŏnjo or a representative in the peace process.[376] Korean court officials deemed that 'all disadvantageous matters for our country have come from Shen Weijing'.[377] King Sŏnjo himself hated the Chinese negotiator with a passion and was convinced that his country was going to 'inevitably perish due to Shen Weijing'.[378] These cases, however, are not on the whole comparable to the situation in which Kwanghae found himself some three decades later. The Wanli emperor had not asked Sŏnjo explicitly to listen to his military commanders. All of the above situations arose because Sŏnjo was not in the position to assert his authority

[374] Song Sun Kwan, 'Intellectuals and the State: The Resilience and Decline of Neo-Confucianism as State Ideology in Joseon Korea'. (PhD diss., School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, 2013), 97.
[375] Song Sun Kwan, 'Intellectuals and the State: The Resilience and Decline of Neo-Confucianism as State Ideology in Joseon Korea'. (PhD diss., School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, 2013), 100. And *Sŏnjo Sillok* 1593: 26/1/3
[376] Samuel J. Hawley, *The Imjin War: Japan's Sixteenth-century Invasion of Korea and Attempt to Conquer China*. (Seoul: Berkeley: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch; Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2005), 370. And *Sŏnjo sillok* 36: 43a-44b [1593/3/24].
[377] *Sŏnjo sillok* 38: 27b-31a [1593/5/27].
[378] *Sŏnjo sillok* 40: 6a [1593/7/5].

against the men who were in the process of saving his country from Hideyoshi's invasion forces. This does not mean, however, that he had been placed in a systematically inferior position or officially placed under the jurisdiction of the Ming military commissioner. Cases in which Sŏnjo was cut out, censored, or ordered around arose *ad hoc* and would therefore not have been considered binding precedent for Kwanghae's stance towards military men.

The idea that a Ming emperor could order a Korean king not only to draft troops, but also to heed the commands of his military commissioner also raises the question of Chosŏn sovereignty. Discussions on sovereignty have played a role in many works on the tributary system. Generally, the consensus appears to be that when secondary states such as Korea, Vietnam, or the Ryūkyū Kingdom 'bowed before the Chinese emperor, they were in fact acknowledging the *cultural* superiority of the Chinese emperor, not his *political* authority over their states'.[379] However, neither aspect of this understanding of the tributary system can be said to faithfully depict the reality of Ming-Chosŏn relations at all times. On the one hand, Koreans did not refrain from celebrating their own cultural advances as vastly superior to those of the Chinese, when they felt they had outdone the Ming – as in the case of their printing techniques.[380] On the other hand, the outcome of the war debate clearly shows that the political authority of the Ming emperor carried weight in Korea. David Kang also discusses the concept of sovereignty in regard to the tributary system. He rightly points out that 'applying modern, Westphalian concepts of territorial sovereignty back into the past of the tribute system has little utility, because these concepts did not exist back then'.[381] Yet, in the same work, Kang expresses the view that 'as in the modern Westphalian system, mutual recognition of legitimacy and sovereignty was a key diplomatic aspect of the tribute

[379] Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han*. (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap of Harvard UP), 2007, 1.
[380] Kirk W. Larsen*, Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910*, (Harvard East Asian Monographs 295, 2011), 34
[381] David C. Kang. *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 155.

system'.[382] Sovereignty, according to the *Encyclopædia Britannica,* refers to the ultimate authority in the decision-making process of the state and in the maintenance of order. There is, however, no consensus among political theorists concerning the exact nature of sovereignty. Thomas Hobbes, for example, argued for an absolutist type of sovereignty.[383] For Hobbes the power of the sovereign should never be divided, because divided powers may destroy each other. Since Hobbes, however, European and American states have gained experience with powers that are divided horizontally among independent political institutions operating in a check-and-balance type of arrangement or divided vertically as in a federal system without necessarily destroying each other. Accordingly, Carmen Pavel argues that

> rather than being a binary concept, sovereignty can be understood more like a continuum, or a bundle of different kinds of functions and authority mandates, some of which can be transferred upward or downward. The fact that a state's sovereignty is limited by international institutions does not make that state completely devoid of sovereignty any more than the fact that an individual's autonomy is limited by the laws of a state makes that individual completely devoid of autonomy.[384]

In a similar way, we can conclude that the political authority of the Ming emperor was relevant in Chosŏn, a state in which sovereignty was otherwise unequally shared among the monarch, the head of the royal household, and a number of other relevant institutions.

Co-existing Korean sovereignty and Ming authority, however, did not necessarily operate in perfect harmony nor were the exact contours of this particular separation of powers clear. The case of the Wanli emperor ordering Kwanghae to listen to his military

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[382] David C. Kang. *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 56.
[383] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 115.
[384] Carmen E. Pavel, *Divided Sovereignty: International Institutions and the Limits of State Authority*. (New York: Oxford University Press), 2015, 20-21.

commissioner can be understood in two ways: either the emperor was delegating his own authority to his subordinate, or he was directly expanding the competences of his general at the expense of the Korean king. The result would have been the same: the Korean monarch would have been placed in a role subordinate to a Ming military man. In the context of constitutional law, the authority of a tribunal, agency, or institution to define its own responsibilities, competences, or jurisdiction is sometimes referred to as competence-competence.[385] Although there are instances of competence-competence to be found in international organisations such as the European Union or NATO, this phenomenon is most commonly understood to be one of the fundamental principles of a sovereign entity, e.g., national states.[386] If the competence-competence of the international framework of the tributary empire lay squarely with the Ming emperor, and he could freely reassign the positions, jurisdictions, and competences of actors such as the Korean monarch, Korean autonomy would have been entirely a question of the Ming emperor's political will.

At this point in history, however, the imperial decree cited above only reflected the position of the Wanli Emperor, since Kwanghae continued to refuse orders from anyone but the emperor even after the reception of this document. As a matter of fact, Kwanghae explicitly contradicted this point later the same year saying: 'Dispatching troops is an important matter. They can absolutely not be dispatched simply based on the words of an envoy'.[387] A few days later Kwanghae again specified that 'no matter can be more important than dispatching troops abroad. How can this be done based on the oral instructions of the military commissioner?'[388] As before, Kwanghae still claimed that he would dispatch troops, if he were formally requested to do so,[389] however, given the instructions of the Ming

[385] James Crawford, 'Continuity and Discontinuity in International Dispute Settlement. An inaugural lecture', *Journal of International Dispute Settlement* 1:1 (2010), 15.
[386] Daniel Loick. *A critique of sovereignty.* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), 11.
[387] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 98a (乙卯 day, eighth article) [1619/8/5].
[388] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 104a-104b (己未 day, second article) [1619/8/9].
[389] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 113a-114a (甲子 day, third article) [1619/8/14].

emperor, it appears that Kwanghae applied what might be described as a selective reading of the imperial decree or even partial non-compliance. In other words, King Kwanghae did not at this point question the Wanli emperor's authority outright, but he denied the emperor's attempt at delegating away his power. As a result of this denial, the Ming emperor cannot be said to have held the competence-competence within the tributary system, and Ming authority and Korean sovereignty continued to coexist. As to be expected, Kwanghae's reading of the imperial decree conflicted with at least some of his court officials who argued it would be convenient to just listen to the military commissioner. As a result of the ambiguities between authority and sovereignty, the argument about the exact extent of Ming authority continued domestically between the king and the bureaucracy.[390]

Continuity and increasing pressure

In the summer of 1619, following the defeat at Sarhu, the Chosŏn court once again received an imperial decree. The reception for a communication from the Ming emperor had been awaited with some degree of anxiety at the Korean court as the performance and loyalty of the Korean expedition force had been the subject of much debate among the court officials. Contrary to some expectations,[391] however, the message from the imperial court at Beijing was quite understanding and positive about the Korean efforts. As before, the Ming emperor even offered subsidies to lessen the toll of the fighting on the Korean state and population.

> Envoy Yuan Jianlong and others brought the imperial decree and monetary rewards to the capital. The king personally came out to the *Mohwagwan* [a hall with the specific purpose of greeting Chinese envoys].

[390] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 96b (庚寅 day, seventh article) [1618/7/4].
[391] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 198.

“The Emperor issues a decree to the King of Chosŏn whose name is regarded as taboo [as a matter of courtesy]: I am in possession of ten thousand nations, peaceful tributary states that rely on each other for their safety from danger, together in joy and sorrow. Recently, Chieftain Nu [Nurhaci] rebelled against heaven. Taking up arms, transgressing the way, he captured my forts and slayed my soldiery and commoners. As evil flourishes, the godly stand together in their indignation. My rage against him burns like fire. And only you, the King of Chosŏn, whose name is regarded as taboo, has denounced his crimes and sent a punitive expedition. With the intension to slice our common foe, planning to annihilate the traitor, you readied your army, equipped them for the long journey, and joined them [to Ming forces], united in strength and mind. You pledged to wipe away the object of our hatred. I could not be more pleased with the righteousness with which you served your lord. Since my great generals made insufficient plans, the royal army suffered a setback. This led to your army – although it was very successful – to unavoidably suffer losses. Your two generals have been captured and have not yet returned, many of the soldiers were gravely injured or perished. Whenever I heard such reports from my subjects, I could not help but feel sympathy. [Therefore] I have already ordered to identify and comfort the victims.

The special envoy is authorised to confer this imperial decree, and to offer you ten thousand ounces of silver as a reward for meritorious deeds. With this reward, hurriedly dispatched to your country, [I] offer [my condolences] to the dead and wounded, [and hope to] comfort those loyal and righteous souls, and to comfort the masses who are left in desolation. All of your lords and subjects, your officers and men, I am mindful of all of them. Now, the situation where we are riding a tiger has already arisen [meaning that there is no way back now], and the chase for the deer [meaning the fight for the imperial throne] must come to an end. Even more we have to pick out the vigorous and sharp, post them along the river, gather [our armies] along natural barriers, and take the opportunities to go into battle or to ward off [the enemy].

We have to unite so as to strengthen my momentum and prestige, so as to solidify your borders. This way, the cunning barbarians will not have the

> chance to make plans for a [renewed] aggression, and Liaodong will finally get the help it needs. Be mindful of the effects of what we do now, and do not discard the merit of what we have done so far. Wipe away the shame and dispel the inauspicious, work towards their extinction. I shall be generous in rewarding your meritorious deeds. Respectfully, this concludes the decree."[392]

Considering the events that transpired in the months between the two degrees, it is remarkable how closely the format of this decree follows the previous one. Kye Seung Bom takes this to be an indication that the Ming might have seriously considered the possibility that Chosŏn might defect and join hands with the Jurchen side.[393] This interpretation seems to be backed by the attitudes of some of the Ming envoys that found the Chosŏn court to be rather sluggish[394] and links up to an existing fear of Chosŏn courtiers. [395] During the frequent debates about the best strategy for Chosŏn in the Later Jin-Ming war, it was usually King Kwanghae who invoked the lessons to be learned from the Imjin War.[396] One aspect of the Japanese invasions, Korean court officials liked to invoke, however, was the threatening time when Ming court officials doubted Korean loyalty and seriously considered the option that Chosŏn might coalesce with the Japanese invaders. There was a genuine fear among Korean court officials that this experience might be repeated and preventing this from happening was a serious policy goal for many of those opposed to Kwanghae's foreign policy.[397] The imperial decree, however, does not objectively offer any reason to believe that the Ming were genuinely worried about the Korean stance and wanted to be on Chosŏn's good side at this

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[392] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 97a-98b (乙卯 day, fifth article) [1619/8/5].
[393] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 198.
[394] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 54b-56b (丁丑 day, sixth-eighth articles) [1618/6/20].
[395] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 97a-98b (乙卯 day, fifth article) [1619/8/5], *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 51(51): 7a-8a (甲申 day, fourth article) [1619/9/5].
[396] One instance of this is to be found in *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 145a-146a (壬子 day, eighth article) [1618/7/26], where Kwanghae makes the point that Chosŏn's strength has not fundamentally improved since the Imjin War.
[397] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 98a-99a (乙卯 day, eighth article) [1619/8/5].

time. The tone is indeed very positive, but this likely does not 'imply that after the defeat, the Ming court considered the possibility that Chosŏn might defect to the Manchus and made an effort to ensure that Chosŏn remained a Ming ally',[398] as Kye claims, because the tone is largely unchanged from before the Battle of Sarhu. Although the document does contain some words of encouragement and even the prospect of bountiful rewards for the King of Chosŏn, the Ming emperor clearly expected a continued cooperation with Chosŏn, as the letter not only asserts that Ming and Chosŏn share the same strategy goals, but also provides a brief description of how they should work together to achieve their goals.

At the same time this renewed imperial decree reveals the flaws of this particular form of inter-institutional communication. Though it must have been obvious to any reader that the Ming emperor was expecting additional Korean troops to join the Ming defensive effort, the decree does not ask for troops explicitly. While one can only speculate about the reasons for this omission, the results are clear: King Kwanghae once again had the opportunity to pretend to be in compliance with the imperial orders without offering anything substantial to the war effort. Moreover, the opportunity again arose of entering more positive relations with the Jurchen side. Had a more direct contact between the Ming emperor and the Chosŏn king been established, the king's posture of minimal compliance towards the emperor's orders would not have been enabled.

One can only speculate why the Wanli emperor did not make use of the tool of the imperial decree more directly. Several possible reasons come to mind: he might have relied on Chosŏn's policy having shifted permanently to a policy of hands-on support for the Ming cause after Kwanghae had entered the war once. He may have been unaware of the court debates in Chosŏn and the fact that King Kwanghae attached so much importance to the imperial decrees. He may even have remembered the leading role that Ming generals took on

[398] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 198.

during the Imjin War and was therefore confident that his generals and envoys would be able to work out the details. The fact remains this imperial decree would remain his last one, as the Wanli emperor passed away in 1620.

As the Ming-Later Jin conflict continued into 1620, the previously very positive tone in the messages from the Ming emperor turned to reflect the growing impatience or even suspicion that Chosŏn may want to back out of the conflict. The new Ming emperor responded to this situation with what can be understood as a carrot and stick type of diplomacy toward Chosŏn. On the one hand the Ming offered generous war subsidies that were handed over with each message, on the other hand, the messages themselves became increasingly demanding and accusatory. The record in the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* on the first imperial decree of 1620 shows this delicate diplomatic balance well.

> On the Muo Day, the thirteenth day, of the eighth month of the Kyŏngsin year [1620] the irregular envoy Yi Chŏnggwi [arrived] at the capital, in order to transcribe the obituary of the emperor and the imperial decree. This decree reads: "The Emperor issues a decree to the King of Chosŏn. Favour by the great [恩] does not give raise to ill will on the part of the small and trust exists outside of [physical] form. The wisest men are always ten thousand *li* [ahead], and gain knowledge before seeing or hearing. You of Chosŏn, that live so far in the east, have respected the fief of Kija for generations. Since that time, we have regarded you as our heart and stomach,[399] loyal and reliable for generations. You have resented Chieftain Nu for abandoning faith and bringing about calamity; in accordance with your duty, you have launched your full strength [against him]. Kindly you have held up father and elder brother, and vigorously you have protected head and eyes.[400] Even though the armies were temporarily weakened, our resolve is still undivided. [But now] you would rather admonish than take the appropriate action; [rather we should] rely on one another and only then bring out the anger against our common foe. Does

[399] A common metaphor for a loyal subordinate.
[400] A reference to Xunzi's discussions on the virtues of a soldier: protection of the superior as a duty of the inferior.

this mean you would rather watch the clam and the snipe?[401] Are you contemplating the benefits of baring both shoulders?[402] Because of this, I once again send seal and document [meaning an imperial decree], and once again bestow money [to you] to generously compensate and give preferential treatment and aid your defences. If I hear that the words of 'spies'[403] are transmitted along the roads, this will become a case of throwing the shuttle.[404] There are traces of the coming and going of barbarian envoys, and the bows are not released. And you, how can you allow this? And I, how can I bear this? Initially, there were not shadows [of secrets between us], [and now I have to] wait for the sunlight to dispel the shade? Still more, you offered your army to punish the treason, so why are you now not burning [Jurchen] messages and beheading messengers?

Do not differentiate in expelling foul rumours; there is no need to agonize. And yet, [even I] have not had a quiet day and have been hastily seeking to wipe away [the Jurchen], as I wish to soon destroy the barbarians. Not only the famous king's memorandum to the emperor, righteous and vigorous in its determination, it also has all the sincerity of a loyal subject. Emotional connectedness can be seen from [your] words.

Now I will pay increased attention to your sincerity, take better care of your resentments, be grand in my displays and auspicious in my declarations. This long-lasting alliance will renew its pledge [that gives us the] edge [over our

[401] This is a reference to a fable from the *Warring State Annals* (*Zhànguó Cè* 戰國策). In this story the snipe attempts to eat the clam, but the clam is able to hold onto the snipe's beak creating a stalemate that a third party, the fisherman, would be able to exploit.
[402] This is a reference to a text of unknown origin cited in the *Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era* (Tàipíng Yùlǎn 太平御覽), a Song dynasty text collection. The referenced passage describes a young woman sought-after by two parties. 'If you like the eastern family, bare your left shoulder, if you like the western family, bare your right shoulder', her family explained. The girl bared both shoulders and later explained that she wanted to 'eat with the eastern family, and live with the western family, because the eastern family was wealthy but ugly; the western family was poor but beautiful.' The implied meaning is not only one of indecision, but also of shamelessness and greed.
[403] Jurchen envoys.
[404] This is once again a reference to a story from the *Warring State Annals* (*Zhànguó Cè* 戰國策), in that two people tell Zengzi's mother her son is a murderer. Initially, she refuses to believe it. Though when the third person comes up with the same assertion she wavers and drops or throws the shuttle of the loom. This story is used as an allegory for the slow process of losing faith in a trusted or loved party.

> enemies]. My heaven will bring about pacification, and we will witness its grandeur. Their [the Jurchens'] string of coins is almost filled up and at the end there is their destruction. If we help each other and launch a joined campaign, we can purge all shame and expel all wickedness, and establish our names through the ages. Let this be your consolation. Respectfully. This concludes this decree."
>
> [Chosŏn court historians added the following commentary to the decree:] At that time, the two generals had already surrendered according to a secret order and the coming and going of envoys to the barbarians did not stop. The suspicions of the Heavenly Court deepened with every day. Among all the towns from Liaodong to Canton there was none that would not have been suspicious. Thereupon, the king had sent out an official with a memorandum and this imperial decree is the answer to it.[405]

Both the differences and the similarities to previous communications stand out in the message from the Ming emperor. As before, the emperor urged the King of Chosŏn to uphold the tributary relations and honour their alliance by sending troops. As before, the instructions on how Korean troops were meant to contribute to the war effort were sufficiently clear to understand that action was required, but not clear enough for the Korean king to be able to act on the instructions without adding his own interpretations. At the same time this message stands out in its relatively harsh criticism of Chosŏn's political response to the international crisis. Not only is the Chosŏn monarch likened to a girl who cannot make up her mind, the message shows quite clearly that the Ming side was aware of the communications with Nurhaci that the Chosŏn side tried to conceal[406] and that the Ming did not view this type of relation as legitimate. An independent Chosŏn foreign policy was clearly not desired in Beijing.

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[405] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 53(53): 126a-126b (戊午 day, first article) [1620/8/13].
[406] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 102b (丙辰 day, third article) [1619/4/3].

Regardless of whether the Ming side genuinely doubted the Korean stance in the conflict, this type of message was clearly designed to project doubt and it succeeded in generating a growing anxiety at the Korean court. The courtiers started urging Kwanghae with increased intensity to give up on his diplomatic efforts with the Later Jin and to finally do what the Ming emperor was asking for – to continue the war against Nurhaci. Instead of producing the desired result of having Korea become a more useful ally, the Ming emperor's communications led to an increased polarisation at the Korean court, as both sides refused to back down.

Interestingly, the high frequency of imperial decrees of 1619 and 1620 was not kept up and the following messages of the emperor were no longer concerned even with foreign policy but instead cover topics of state ritual that are not relevant to the present discussion. Of course, this does not mean that the Ming lost interest in either the war or Korean assistance. Instead, this may be attributable to a Ming effort to use alternative channels of communication or to rely increasingly on military men to handle relations with Chosŏn.

Significance of the Imperial Decree

In his discussion on communications with the Ming during the reign of King Kwanghae, Kye points to Kwanghae's refusal of an imperial decree in 1622 as a 'silent scream of independence'[407] and attributes increased tensions to his particular denial, claiming that it was on this occasion that King Kwanghae moved from a concealed to an open defiance of the Ming emperor's orders. By pointing out that these events took place only nine months before King Kwanghae's dethronement, Kye also makes a link between this last act of defiance and the Injo restoration. His argument is questionable on three grounds. Firstly, while the imperial decrees quoted above are somewhat vague in strategic terms, they are

[407] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 215.

sufficiently clear about sending troops that it must have been apparent to anybody at court that King Kwanghae had started being non-compliant at least by late 1620. Secondly, the imperial decree discussed by Kye is not actually directed at King Kwanghae, but instead it instructed Military Commissioner Liang to raise troops in Korea,[408] and so Kwanghae did not actually disobey any direct orders from the Ming emperor but simply continued on his trajectory of non-compliance. Naturally, this did not please Kwanghae's opponents at court, but it is still misleading to portray this event as the straw that broke the camel's back and led to the coup in 1623. Because – and this is the third point of criticism concerning Kye's coverage of the imperial decree carried by Liang – coups do not happen overnight, and the plot to overthrow King Kwanghae had already entered the planning stage as early as 1620.[409]

The imperial decrees and Kwanghae's increasingly obvious non-compliance with them did not sit well with many court officials who took Kwanghae's unfilial stance towards the Ming Emperor's expressed wishes very seriously and continued remonstrating fiercely against Chosŏn's ambiguous foreign policy until the very end of Kwanghae's time on the throne. It was clear to them that as a tributary king, Kwanghae was obliged to carry out the Ming emperor's wishes.[410] Inversely, acting against the emperor's wishes was viewed as an illegitimate use of royal power. There does not appear to be an instance when Kwanghae actively argued that this principle did not apply to him, so ultimately his stance towards the Ming emperor is better described as one of non-compliance than one of open defiance.

The Ming emperor commanded the highest level of authority in Chosŏn. There was a complete consensus at the Chosŏn court that the decrees constituted a legitimate use of authority in Chosŏn. In modern legal terms, one might say that the imperial decrees could be

[408] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 60(60): 57a-58a (癸未 day, second article) [1622/4/18].
[409] *Injo sillok* 1: 1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[410] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 61(61): 66a-67a (癸丑 day, third article) [1622/5/18].

considered to be a source of law[411] within the constitutional framework of Chosŏn. However, states are complex organisational units and so the relations between the two heads of states cannot be taken to be the equivalent of the entirety of relations between the Ming and the Chosŏn states at the time. The following discussion on the interactions of the Ming generals and envoys with the Korean monarchy should add some depth to our understanding of the hierarchical relations between the Ming and the Chosŏn monarchs.

Ming generals and envoys

Chosŏn-Ming relations had long become accustomed to a centre-to-centre approach. Both sides sought to handle most of their dealings in the course of official tributary missions.[412] These tributary missions, which also offered the opportunity for select groups of court officials to get to know the other country, occurred in the context of material and immaterial exchanges, however, they remained relatively exclusive. As the Ming shifted towards a policy of maritime exclusion –a policy that Chosŏn supported– and the land route ran through the inhospitable terrain of northern Korea and inner Manchuria, official contacts beyond the ties of the literary elites became comparably scarce. The Imjin War brought some change in this regard in the sense that Kwanghae's generation of Koreans had had a previously unthinkable level of contact with Ming military personnel. Despite these additional connections, there were few well-established procedures for how Ming military men were to interact with the Chosŏn monarchy, or the Korean bureaucracy and officialdom. As the Later Jin crisis necessitated such contacts, particularly in light of Ming hopes to mobilize the Korean army under Ming command, Ming generals and envoys poured into Hansŏng

[411] As described in Rudolf Geiger. *Grundgesetz und Völkerrecht*, 5. Aufl. (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2010), 73-142.
[412] Kirk W. Larsen*, Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910*, (Harvard East Asian Monographs 295, 2011), 33.

accompanied by a variety of conflicting expectations. The following discussion will explore these different expectations, as well as the question of how Ming military men fit into the constitutional framework of Chosŏn.

A rock and a hard place

'I have reviewed the *Chŏngt'orok* 征討錄 and whenever the Heavenly Court summoned troops, they have only been sent [to China] following an imperial decree', Kwanghae pointed out before the battle of Sarhu, and 'on this occasion they would be sent directly into Nurhaci's lair and would cross the Yalu River'. The source Kwanghae quoted here to make his case, the *Kukcho Chŏngt'orok* 國朝征討錄, or Records of Wars in the Early Chosŏn Period, is a compilation that details the military expeditions abroad during the periods from King Sejong (r. 1418-1450) to King Chungjong (r. 1506-1544).[413] Court official Yi Kyŏngjŏn answered: 'Waiting for an imperial decree to dispatch troops is still the regular way, but if the Military Commissioner bore the decree to draft troops, it would also be extremely simple'. The King did not agree and pointed out that 'as for the matters of state, there is not a single one that may be delegated'.[414]

Military men usually had no part in the communications between the Ming and Chosŏn monarchs, but already during the Sŏnjo period, Ming military men had played an important role for Chosŏn, not only defensive efforts against Hideyoshi's invasion forces, but also in the policy-making process of King Sŏnjo's court.[415] Though the strategic situation after the Battle of Sarhu is not comparable with that of the Imjin War, one parallel remains:

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[413] *Kukcho Chŏngt'orok*, Kukka Munhwa Yusan P'otŏl, accessed July 14, 2020, http://www.heritage.go.kr/heri/cul/culSelectDetail.do?s_kdcd=&s_ctcd=31&ccbaKdcd=12&ccbaAsno=15110000&ccbaCtcd=31&ccbaCpno=1123115110000&ccbaLcto=12&culPageNo=2&header=region&pageNo=1_1_2_0&returnUrl=%2Fheri%2Fcul%2FculSelectRegionList.do&assetnamel=

[414] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chŏngch'obon*) vol. 31(130): 8b-11a (庚寅 day, sixth article) [1618/7/4].

[415] Song Sun Kwan, "Intellectuals and the State: the Resilience and Decline of Neo-Confucianism as State Ideology in Joseon Korea." (PhD diss., School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, 2013), 100.

both periods saw a surge in the importance of Ming military men in the liaison between the Ming and Chosŏn states and in Chosŏn governance in general. As both the Sŏnjo and Kwanghae periods comprised times of extraordinary international tensions, the findings regarding the influence of Ming military men are not likely to correspond to their role during what has been described as the 'normal relations'[416] between Ming and Chosŏn. A comparison with the control the Qing dynasty sought to establish over Korean external politics during the international crises of the early twentieth century[417] might be possible but goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The relationship between Kwanghae and the Ming envoys during the years following the Battle of Sarhu is particularly interesting. During most times the situation of a Ming emperor delegating his authority over tributary kings did not arise. However, the imperial decree quoted above makes it clear that this is exactly what the Ming imperial secretariat had in mind. The practical gain from this manoeuvre for the Ming side would be undeniable. The imperial decrees, though historically respected by Korean kings, followed a rather limited format; their strategic gain was not at all comparable to having a Ming general directly draft and command Korean troops. However, since such a delegation of the imperial power was not usually necessary, a precedent that could have been followed was lacking, and neither the exact extent of authority of the Ming generals nor their relative power vis-à-vis the Korean monarch could be taken for granted.

The Korean court saw a number of different Ming visitors during the years under examination here. The most prominent and highest-ranking representative of the Emperor was the military commissioner (*jīnglüè* 經略, kr. *kyŏngnyak*). Although this post was not unique within the Ming dynasty, a single military commissioner was usually in charge of a single

[416] David Kang, 'Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations'. *International Security* 28, no. 3 (Winter 2003/4): 175.
[417] Kirk W. Larsen, *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 295, 2011, 16.

conflict. Accordingly, the role of the military commissioner was extremely elevated and the Chosŏn court paid close attention to who filled this role. The fact that the military commissioner had been the beneficiary of the Ming emperor's delegation of power, when the Wanli emperor had ordered Kwanghae to listen to his military commissioner, underlines the gravitas of this role. During the examined period, three men filled this post: Yang Gao occupied this post until the defeat at Sarhu, after which he was made responsible for the military catastrophe and imprisoned for years, before he was eventually executed in 1629.[418] Xiong Tingbi followed in his footsteps until he was accused of criminal activities and relieved from his command in 1622.[419] His command had not been any more successful than Yang's, which may have played a role in his dismissal. Xiong was then replaced by Yuan Jianlong. Yuan had previously gotten to know Korea as an envoy and court officials explained him to Kwanghae as a tired and feeble-looking man that could be easily read.[420]

Although military men and envoys of different ranks and denominations feature in the records, they will be treated here as a cohesive group based on their common purpose and because they all arrived in Chosŏn as official representatives of the Ming emperor. With this common purpose being the defence of the Ming realm, the drafting of Korean troops to aid in that effort was an important task to them. As the case of Military Commissioner Yang shows, good results were literally vital, which offers an explanation as to why Ming military men in Chosŏn were often considerably pushier and less comfortable than the messages from the far-away emperor himself. Though the emperor also had a strong interest in the conflict with the Later Jin, not getting Chosŏn support was a less immediate threat to his life. Despite being official representatives of the, at least officially, revered emperor, Ming envoys and generals at King Kwanghae's court were in a somewhat awkward situation. On the one hand the

[418] *Ming shi*, 259.
[419] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 60(60): 62b-65a (甲申 day, fifth article) [1622/4/19].
[420] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 125a-125b (癸酉 day, second article) [1619/8/23].

Korean king was keen to make them feel welcome and to have them have a good time,[421] on the other hand the monarch was not very forthcoming when it got to more substantial strategic questions. The derivative authority of the envoys, as shown by the interaction between Kwanghae and Yi Kyŏngjŏn above, was subject to controversy at court. Kwanghae, for one, was of the opinion that 'even if there were one hundred Military Commissioners' that would not mean that he would have to draft troops if they asked him to.[422] Any statement suggesting that the Korean king felt the idea that anybody other than the Ming emperor himself could tell him what to do was quite simply a case of *lèse-majesté*.

The *Kwanghaegun ilgi* records a number of instances of Ming generals rather directly asking for troops. Both before and after[423] the Battle of Sarhu, envoys and military men asked for Korean gunners (*p'osu* 砲手) or musketeers (*choch'angsu* 鳥鎗手). The Ming envoys appear to have been well versed in the diplomatic protocol of the two countries and Military Commissioner Yang Gao praised Korea for its exemplary filiality towards the Ming and claimed that helping the overlord was the highest virtue of the tributary state.[424] While the terminology employed by the military man resembles that of the imperial decrees, it is quite clear about expanding the hierarchical relationship of emperor and king to that of the two countries in general.

Kwanghae's answers range from clear dismissals of the envoys' authority and snide remarks about court officials who argued for Korea to dispatch its troops to dramatic descriptions of what was to come, if Chosŏn continued to fight in the Ming-Later Jin War. From 'Drafting troops is an important matter; of course, we cannot simply dispatch our army

[421] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 42b (癸酉 day, nineth article) [1618/6/17]. Kwanghae was interested in getting on the good side of the generals: 得其歡心.
[422] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 68a (庚辰 day, nineth article) [1618/6/23].
[423] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 104a (己未 day, first article) [1619/8/9].
[424] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 49(49): 13b-14a (丁酉 day, fifth article) [1619/1/13].

based on the words of an envoy',[425] and 'our country has something called precedents, and yet you are fearful of the military commissioner's words'[426] to 'the peril to the ancestral shrines, the slaughter of living souls will be more extreme than [the] Imjin [war]'.[427]

With the same consistency as Kwanghae's refusals to follow orders from envoys and military men, his court officials evaluated the situation differently. To the Border Defence Council it seemed obvious that the messages relayed by Ming military commissioners reflected the orders of the Ming Emperor.[428] This attitude was motived partially by the fear in Chosŏn that a new Ding Yingtai 丁應泰 would emerge in China.[429] Ding had been the author of the theory that Chosŏn had coalesced with Hideyoshi when the Ming first considered entering the conflict. The fact that with Xu Guangqi there appeared to be voices critical of Chosŏn at the Ming court, increased the anxiety about this possibility at the Korean court; especially, because of the hint that 'those at Chinese court who are suspicious of us, are not Guangqi alone.'[430] Nevertheless, it would be an incomplete picture to attribute the courtiers' hesitation to follow the king's approach to the question of Ming generals' authority. As previously discussed, the court officials had a long-standing tradition of interpreting the will of the emperor as the 'heavenly intent' (*tianyi* 天意, K. *ch'ŏnŭi*), from which imperatives could be derived. As described by Sohn Pokee, this practice essentially constituted a source of court officials' authority over even the king himself. [431] In the question of dispatching Korean troops to fight in the Later Jin-Ming conflict, the heavenly intent should have been clear. Faced with Kwanghae's non-compliance, however, court officials were forced into a meta-debate, having to argue that it was *the meaning of or the intent behind the imperial decrees*

[425] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 98a-99a (乙卯 day, eighth article) [1619/8/5].
[426] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 78a-78b (甲申 day, third article) [1618/6/27].
[427] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 61(61): 16a-19a (戊戌 day, first article) [1622/5/3].
[428] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 54b-55b (丁丑 day, sixth article) [1618/6/20].
[429] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 51(51): 45a-19a (壬子 day, thirteenth article) [1619/10/3].
[430] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 51(51): 45a-19a (壬子 day, thirteenth article) [1619/10/3].
[431] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty*, (2000), 8-20.

(*wangch'ik chi hŭi* 皇勅之意) that Chosŏn should send troops, as asked by the representatives of the imperial court. This stance makes it clear that court officials did not share Kwanghae's apprehension about the prospect that a Ming military commissioner would essentially be in charge of the Korean military in the stead of the Korean monarch himself. The expansion of Ming authority at the expense of the Chosŏn monarch was not a prospect that seemed to worry court officials. Equally, a discussion on the meaning of the words of the imperial decree suggests awareness of Kwanghae's selective reading and actual non-compliance.

Chosŏn court officials upheld their stance despite, or maybe even because of, the at times stark words the Ming representatives levelled at them. Already in 1618, at a time when the Ming emperor still sent messages that showed no trace of ill-will towards Chosŏn, Military Commissioner Yang 'sent a memorial, in which he harshly accuses our country, in which he cruelly insults our country',[432] as court officials reported to Kwanghae. Revealingly, Yang is quoted memorializing, 'Is there not something wrong in your country? Wicked rumours spread from Chin'gang [a Korean garrison in the vicinity of Ŭiju] to Beijing'.[433] But in his exchange with Chosŏn envoys, Military Commissioner Yang still went much further, not only was he 'already aware to the fullest extent, that the Koryŏ [sic] soldiery was useless'. He even cut off the Chosŏn envoy telling him: 'what do you know about the affairs of your country? The only thing your country can do is to follow my orders. […] Your country may have ten thousand skilled soldiers, but the intelligence, the garrisons, the command, all that is in my hands'.[434] The general attitude can be summed up by four characters in Yang's candid speech: 'I [or we] command your country' (*wŏ líng ĕr guó* 我令爾國).

[432] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 55b-56b (丁丑 day, seventh article) [1618/6/20].
[433] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 46a-50a (丙子 day, seventh article) [1618/6/19].
[434] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 46a-50a (丙子 day, seventh article) [1618/6/19].

These statements by Yang were not an isolated occurrence. He criticised the Chosŏn military and attitude towards the Ming on several other occasions in 1618 for being weak,[435] before he was exchanged for Xiong Tingbi in 1619. Ironically, court officials felt that Yang had been more suitable to the job, as he had already served in the Imjin War and was more familiar with Korea.[436]

During his time as military commissioner, Xiong Tingbi was less direct in his claims to authority than his predecessor, but instead chose a more indirect form of applying pressure to the Korean court, by criticizing the actions of the 'two generals', Kang Hongnip and Kim Kyŏngsŏ, thus forcing courtiers to distance themselves from the two both in terms of rhetoric and action.[437] As Kwanghae chose to ignore the Ming emperor's instruction to 'listen to the Military Commissioner', applying pressure to court officials was the method of choice for Ming military men to get Chosŏn to acquiesce and draft men for the joint defensive efforts again. On occasions this pressure went as far as threats of physical violence against court officials, when Ming men considered 'cutting them down according to martial law' if court officials would not be able to finally get the desired results by the noon of a day in the fifth month of 1622.[438] This dismissive attitude was not reserved for the court officials of Chosŏn but extended to the monarch as well. 'Countless times, we have asked them for troops and supplies, but the king is fearful in the face of the enemy and forgets his master. Stubbornly, he does not allow it and so he wrongs the All-under-heaven and the generations to come'.[439]

Overall, the attitudes and statements by the highest tiers of Ming representatives and envoys in Chosŏn during the late stages to King Kwanghae's rule were not hesitant in their dismissal of Chosŏn as a whole, of its military capacity, its bureaucracy, and its monarch.

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[435] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 46(46): 46a-50a (丙子 day, seventh article) [1618/6/19].
[436] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 116b-118a (丙寅 day, seventh article) [1619/8/16].
[437] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 75a (戊戌 day, second article) [1619/7/17].
[438] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 61(61): 74a (壬戌 day, second article) [1622/5/27].
[439] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 61(61): 74a (壬戌 day, second article) [1622/5/27].

Though some statements may be explained by the understandable frustration of losing ground in war and your needing to convince a reluctant ally to join your side, this dismissive attitude was also paired with a sense of entitlement to Chosŏn's military. This entitlement shows that, not only did the Ming emperor confer some of his authority onto the military commissioner, but the military men were also ready to exercise their authority in Chosŏn – only to be met by the Chosŏn monarch's non-compliance towards the emperor and dismissive attitude towards his appointees. The statements and attitudes by Ming representatives that in other circumstances could have been considered mere rantings, impolite requests, and slights on protocol constituted a serious threat to the authority of the Chosŏn monarchy.

A working relationship

Domestically, the lack of an institutionalised mitigation mechanism for institutional disputes in Chosŏn led to the situation that each dispute was settled in a different way. Sometimes philosophical, legal debate brought about solutions, and sometimes the dispute descended into false accusations, purges, and killings. Internationally, traces of comparable philosophical and legal debates can be found in the exchanges between the Ming empire and the Kingdom of Chosŏn. However, disputes could also bring about frustration, dismissal, and threats. The fact that Ming generals arrived in Chosŏn with a sense of entitlement, bearing pressure to succeed, and were received by a king who in turn dismissed their authority and was non-compliant about their demands for military assistance led to considerable mutual frustration. Yet, even under circumstances when the command structures and the hierarchy between Ming generals and representatives of Chosŏn were unclear, negotiations were possible and some were conducted successfully as late as the fifth lunar month of 1622, less than a year before Kwanghae was forcibly removed from the Korean throne.

One instance of such negotiations is related by Chief State Councillor Pak Sŭngjong. His memorial presented to Kwanghae details of the exchange between unidentified Chosŏn

court officials and a representative of the Ming military, Officer Ma. At the time of the exchange the Ming empire had already lost Liaodong, the land bridge to Korea, but not yet the hope of reclaiming this strategically valuable territory. Ma claimed that although Liaodong was just about as big as a bullet or a freckle, it worried him that it had fallen to the 'bandits', considering how that would cause Chosŏn to worry. The Korean interlocutors then reply that the loss of this freckle-sized territory caused the 'small country' the same pain Confucius experienced when losing his loving mother – enough to wail day and night. They also assured Ma that the 'small country's' lord and subjects all clenched their teeth looking west hoping for the chance to 'kill the bandits'. And that unfortunately, since the situation had changed, Chosŏn did not know just how to act in accordance with the imperial decree to dispatch more troops. Ma again reacted understandingly, showing awareness that Chosŏn had been hit hard by famine but pointed out all the same that since the south of the country needed no additional protection now, it should really be possible to send some troops to the northern border. The Chosŏn side agreed conceptually, while lamenting the fact that unfortunately the famine had hit the two southern provinces of Chŏlla and Ch'ungch'ŏng and these places were comparable to Suzhou's role in China. If Suzhou was in possession of plenty, the All-under-heaven would eat its fill. If Suzhou was lacking, the All-under-heaven would suffer hunger.[440]

Despite the underlying tension in a seemingly idle and polite conversational style, this instance of negotiation actually achieved some success. While the Korean representatives did not commit to sending troops, they relayed the messages contained in the exchange with Ma to their king who consented to the one request Ma brought up that aligned with the king's interests: Ma had asked whether Chosŏn could provide boats to transport the remaining Ming troops from the north Korean territories where they had taken refuge. King Kwanghae

[440] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 61(61): 8b-16a (丁酉 day, fourth article) [1622/5/2].

consented. It may, however, be worth pointing out that the king did not consent without ranting about the rest of the content of the negotiation relayed to him.

> This affair is linked to the question of life and death of this country and it should be fought out accordingly. Is this how we will pacify the All-under-heaven? You, [Pak Sŭngjong], look at how these days Ming generals of any rank have absolutely no restraint. It is all about lusting after great merits while doing as little as possible. […] Look at what this Officer Ma says! It is completely unreasonable! How am I going to fend off ten thousand barbarian troops with my untrained soldiers?[441]

Although Kwanghae was obviously on edge and did not quite appreciate the merits of this exchange, it actually tells us of a success story. Despite all the fundamental disagreements on the hierarchical relations between the institutions of both countries; despite rising levels of mutual frustration, the Ming and Chosŏn sides were still cooperating and finding solutions to problems that could be solved in the interest of both. Equally, this exchange shows that Kwanghae still had functional support at court. Even though his attempts at establishing positive relations with the Later Jin had failed largely due to tactical obstruction by court officials and *en force* remonstrations against the content of the official communications he proposed, in regard to his policy towards the Ming side, he could obviously rely on some support. The court officials negotiating with Officer Ma may have stressed Chosŏn's support for the Ming war effort as well as the theoretical validity of the imperial decree asking for troops, but they also pointed to the practical impossibility of sending troops. They stressed Chosŏn's impoverished conditions. Ultimately, the Chosŏn negotiators sounded a lot like Kwanghae himself in his communications with the Ming side when he was stalling before the battle of Sarhu years earlier. This strongly implies that Kwanghae could still count on some

[441] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 61(61): 8b-16a (丁酉 day, fourth article) [1622/5/2].

support for his reluctant policy towards the Ming, and his isolation at a polarised court was not complete even in 1622, when he had less than one year left on the throne.

Conclusions

King Kwanghae's foreign policy has often been discussed in the light of a pro-Ming-anti-Ming dichotomy.[442] While this approach does have some merit to it, it is important to include the fact that the Ming side attempted to drastically increase its influence in Korea during this time in a way that – had it been successful – would have seriously reduced the control of the Korean monarchy over vital state affairs such as the military and defence policies. These powers would have been passed on to Ming officials, at least partially. This assumption of power was based on the hierarchically superior position of the Ming emperor and would have been enabled had the Korean monarch not refused the delegation of power to Ming military men – also against domestic opposition.

Ultimately, the Korean involvement at the Battle or Sarhu would remain the only Korean involvement in the war under King Kwanghae. His reluctance to draft and dispatch troops meant that Kwanghae disregarded imperial orders and was subjected to the Ming imperial secretariat's criticism. While Kwanghae did not challenge the authority of the Ming emperor outright, he nevertheless chose a path of non-compliance that also attracted negative reactions among Korean court officials. Kwanghae made it clear that his path of action was in keeping with (at least his own reading of) precedent. Though it is clear that the Ming

[442] One example of that is Kang, Chae-ŏn, and Suzanne. Lee, *The Land of Scholars: Two Thousand Years of Korean Confucianism*. (Paramus, N.J.: Homa & Sekey, 2006), 322.
This dichotomy is also drawing criticism in more recent scholarship:
Han, Myung-gi (한명기), "'The inestimable benevolence of saving a country on the brink of ruin': Chosŏn-Ming and Chosŏn-Later Jin relations in the seventeenth century," *The East Asian War, 1592-1598: international relations, violence and memory*, ed. James B. Lewis (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge), 2015, 287.

emperor's authority was constrained by notions of tradition and legality, the exact contours of his authority and its limits were subject of debate.

In contrast to his ambiguous stance towards the Ming emperor, King Kwanghae did not shy away from dismissing the delegated imperial authority outright. He treated Ming envoys courteously on the surface but at the same time viewed their interference as unacceptable and the suggestion that he might have to take orders from them as a slight on his majesty. Even though court officials suggested it would be better if the Military Commissioners' authority were to be respected, Kwanghae effectively denied the notion of the Ming emperor having competence-competence in Korean affairs, that is, the authority to delegate power away from the Korean monarch. As the Ming effort to have their own military men govern at least some of Chosŏn's military affairs was denied, Ming generals played no active part in Chosŏn governance. Even though they were able to exercise some degree of influence, in the sense of 'power', as Dahl has defined it, they did not hold authority in Korea in the Weberian sense. Unlike the Ming emperor himself, who may be viewed as an external yet integral part of the Chosŏn constitutional framework, Ming envoys and military staff in Korea had no direct part in the decision-making process and are therefore to be seen as entirely external factors.

In domestic terms, Kwanghae was able to avoid being overruled by the majority of court officials opposing his policy towards the Ming and Later Jin, and this avoidance is a strong indicator of the authority of the throne vis-à-vis the court officials. Bureaucrats may have been able to obstruct Kwanghae's policy at many levels, but as this episode shows, they were not in the position to guide the country's policy over the head of the monarch. Cooperation between monarchy and bureaucracy was necessary to a successful formulation of policy.

Kwanghae's increasing isolation at court during his last years on the throne is easily attributable to his rather uncompromising approach to foreign policy. The motivations behind

his policy preference in terms of why he wanted to avoid war, what led him to distrust the Ming commanders, have already been explored by others.[443] His convictions may have been unconventional at the time, but – unlike his court officials – he also stood to personally lose a great deal of authority, had he allowed key functions of 'his' state to be handed over. Kye argues that Kwanghae cannot have been motivated by the *strengthening* of royal power as he picked fights with both the Ming and his own court officials, both essential pillars of his authority.[444] Logically, without the support from either the Ming empire or the Chosŏn court, Kwanghae's power could hardly have been strengthened. The findings of this chapter do not necessarily contradict this view, but they nevertheless provide strong evidence that Kwanghae was very much concerned with the *preservation* of royal authority in a situation where Ming representatives and court officials both sought to limit the monarch's say in his own country's affairs.

[443] Han Myŏnggi, *Imjin Waeran kwa Han-Chung kwan 'gye*, (1995), 250-55.
[444] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 227.

Chapter 6: Queen Dowager Inmok's Restoration

I. The precedent: King Yŏnsan's dethronement

   a. Prelude: by the power of Queen Dowager Sohye

   b. The case for Yŏnsan's dethronement

   c. Institutional actors behind the coup

   d. Conclusions

II. King Injo's path to kingship

   a. Introduction

   b. Queen Dowager Inmok's participation

   c. Conclusions

Few questions are as defining of a political order as the question of how the transfer of power from one monarch, president, or high priest to the next is organised. The case of King Kwanghae demonstrates quite clearly the merits and limitations of the loosely implemented system of primogeniture in Chosŏn Korea. Making use of his relatively free choice in the decision of naming his heir, King Sŏnjo successfully prevented the ascension of his eldest son, Prince Imhae. The *Veritable Records* describe the king's eldest son as a slow learner.[445] Korean envoys in Beijing maintained that Imhae was 'sick and could absolutely not be invested'. The Ming interlocutors, however, still wanted to explore the option of Imhae's investiture 'despite his mental illness' (*suī yǒu xīn bìng* 雖有心病).[446] The lack of clearly established rules of succession, that had first enabled the king to name Kwanghae crown prince, also invited speculations over the question of whether he should be replaced as crown prince by his half-brother Yŏngch'ang. Yŏngch'ang, by virtue of being born to the later Queen Dowager Inmok, a legitimate queen to King Sŏnjo, would usually have had a more legitimate claim to the throne than Kwanghae, the son of a concubine. Such instances of insecure succession polarised the court, which in turn could heavily influence the rule of the new king from the inception of his reign, as supporters of the crown prince could later count on the gratitude of a king, whereas court officials who supported rival claims, which would subsequently come to be viewed as illegitimate, would struggle not to be seen as enemies of the crown.

Kwanghae's succession illustrates just how influential court officials could be, just how relevant the *kongnon,*[447] the public opinion at court, could be. However, public opinion alone could only determine the outcome of a succession crisis indirectly. The authority to

[445] *Sŏnjo sillok* 17: 34b-36b [1583/8/5].
[446] *Sŏnjo sillok* 67: 35a-37a [1595/9/29].
[447] As discussed in Thomas Quartermain, 'Socio-Political Identity in Chosŏn Korea during the Japanese and Manchu Invasions 1567-1637: Barbarians at the Gates.' (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2016).

decide on the vital question of succession rested with those most immediately concerned about the dynasty – the royal family itself. The decision to name an heir lay with the head of the royal household, formalised by ritual conference of royal regalia and finally licensed by the imperial authority of the Ming after the fact. King Sŏnjo's support for Kwanghae, albeit wavering, was key to Kwanghae's acceptance first in the role of a crown prince and later to his ascension to the throne.[448]

King Kwanghae's road to kingship had been a difficult one. For his successor, King Injo, however, this path required far more complex manoeuvres. One obvious concern was that Injo's forced ascension to the throne relied on men to plot together in secrecy and – putting their lives at risk– devise and execute a plan that would result in their man being in the position to take the throne from Kwanghae. The debt of gratitude Injo would owe these men would naturally be far larger than the mere sense of allegiance that bound Kwanghae to the Great Northerner Faction. During the tumultuous earlier stages of the dynasty, so-called *kongsin*, or merit subjects, men who had a hand in facilitating successions for their candidate, came to constitute a social class of near-nobility.[449] In the case of King Injo, his allies, too, reminded him of the privileges they felt they earned for having placed their positions, wealth, lives, and families at risk gambling on his cause. Yi Kwal, one of the key conspirators behind the coup, went so far as to mount a rebellion that seriously threatened the dynasty in order to remind Injo and his fellow conspirators of the due he felt they owed him.[450] This dependence of King Injo on his own *kongsin* was perhaps the principal reason why, in Sohn Pokee's

[448] See chapter I for greater detail on the roles of King Sŏnjo and Queen Dowager Inmok in Kwanghae's ascension to the throne.
[449] This concept is explained in English by Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 13-16.
[450] Jahyun Kim Haboush, 'Dead Bodies in the Postwar Discourse of Identity in Seventeenth-Century Korea: Subversion and Literary Production in the Private Sector.' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 2 (2003): 417.

terms, Injo is usually considered a 'weak' monarch of Chosŏn, meaning a monarch who struggled to assert himself over his court officials.[451]

East Asian history has known many tyrants. Many ruled to their death. Yet, ever since the Zhou dynasty replaced the Shang in c. 1046 BCE, there has existed a powerful precedent of ousting corrupt rulers under the claim that they had violated ethical norms to the point of having forfeited their mandate to rule.[452] The Zhou actually coined a moral argument to justify their coup: loss of the Mandate of Heaven as evidenced by misrule that inflicts suffering on ordinary people. Bloody revolutions and rebellions have been fuelled and justified by this line of reasoning. For King Injo, however, such a line of reasoning alone would not have sufficed, and it risked expanding to indict the entire line of dynasts. After all, neither he nor his supporters were interested in arguing the dynasty had lost its legitimacy and that it was time for the type of renewal that Injo's forefather staged against King Kongyang of Koryŏ (1345-1394, r. 1389-1392). King Injo sought to establish himself as a legitimate king in the existing order. Accusations against Kwanghae alone would not have sufficed to make his case, but relying on precedent, there was one person who could: the queen dowager. Succession in the Kingdom of Chosŏn up to this point had been prompted by a number of causes: appointment upon the death of the previous king as in the case of King Kwanghae, abdication in favour of a chosen successor as in the case of King Taejong (1367-1422, r. 1400-1418) or King Sejong (1397-1450, r. 1418-1450). King Taejong murdered two half-brothers, who were contenders for the throne, and arguably intimidated his brother King Chŏngjong (1357-1419, r. 1399-1400) into surrendering the throne.[453] Such a scenario was not at all likely to succeed with the stubborn Kwanghae and neither was the precedent

[451] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty*, (2000), 19-24.
[452] Luke Glanville, 'Retaining the Mandate of Heaven: Sovereign Accountability in Ancient China.' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29 no. 2 (2010): 324.
[453] Donald Clark, 'Chosŏn's Founding Fathers: A Study of Merit Subjects in the Early Yi Dynasty.' *Korean Studies* 6, (1982): 30.

stemming from an early and unsettled time of the dynasty likely to convince many of the legitimacy of a potential coup against Kwanghae. One single precedent, however, seemed more promising: the case of King Yŏnsan,[454] who had been dethroned in 1506 following a coup staged by a number of key court officials. King Yŏnsan was replaced by his half-brother King Chungjong (1488-1544, r. 1506-1544). Crucially, the coup had been legitimised by Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn (1462-1530), third wife to King Sŏngjong (1457-1495, r. 1469-1494) and stepmother to King Yŏnsan. Formally, it had been Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn, the official head of the royal household by virtue of seniority, outranking even the king himself in her domain, who ordered the deposition of her stepson King Yŏnsan. She then offered the throne to King Chungjong, her own son.[455] King Injo was not related to Queen Dowager Inmok, the equivalent in his time to Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn. Yet, it must have been obvious to anybody remotely aware of the ongoings at court that Queen Dowager Inmok had every reason to hate King Kwanghae and would likely be inclined to exact any sort of revenge against her stepson.[456] King Injo could rely on her support.

Scholarship is divided on the question of what motivated the coup against King Kwanghae. Chosŏn records themselves stress the unfilial treatment of Queen Dowager Inmok as a primary motivation.[457] This version of events is also backed by studies into those court officials behind the coup: most of them had been purged or had vacated high positions over the question of the posthumous promotion of Kwanghae's birth mother and the treatment of

[454] King Yŏnsan is commonly known as Yŏnsan'gun or 'Prince Yŏnsan'. Like Prince Kwanghae, he was forced to abdicate and was never given a temple name (*myoho* 廟號) or posthumous name (*siho* 諡號). Further discussion is offered below.
[455] *Yŏnsan'gun ilgi* 63: 20a-24b [1506/9/2].
[456] There are many instances that provide evidence of Queen Dowager Inmok's personal hatred against Kwanghae. One such instance can be found here: *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13]: Upon being released from house arrest, Queen Dowager Inmok expressed the desire to personally claim Kwanghae's head.
[457] One instance of this can be found here: *Yŏngjo sillok* 9:11a-13b [1726/2/8]: This entry summarizes Kwanghae's crimes against Queen Dowager Inmok and goes on say that 'above King Injo freed the Queen Dowager and below he sorted out the ministers and subjects'.

Inmok.[458] More recently, some scholars have examined the argument that Kwanghae had been dethroned due to his lack of loyalty towards the Ming dynasty.[459] The question of motivation is an important one, given that the men who helped put Injo on the throne would –for the most part– maintain their privileged access to the new king and influence policy this way.

Previous scholarship, however, has tended to overlook the key player who formally ordered the deposition of King Kwanghae and the enthronement of King Injo: the head of the royal household, Queen Dowager Inmok. This chapter will examine the role of the queen dowager as head of the royal household in relation to the two extraordinary dethronements of Yŏnsan and Kwanghae before focussing on how the position of Queen Dowager Inmok came to aid Injo's coup against Kwanghae.

The men, aristocrats and bureaucrats, who enabled the Injo Restoration have been explored in a variety of studies. The role played by Queen Dowager Inmok, however, remains understudied both in regard to her personal role, meaning her own motivation and contribution to the coup, as well as her institutional role, meaning her authority to censor Kwanghae and legitimise the coup against him. Considering the lack of studies on the contours of the authority wielded by Chosŏn's eldest stateswomen, the following passages will include both a short discussion on the role of the Chosŏn dynasty's queen dowagers, and a discussion on the most relevant precedent of a queen dowager exercising her authority in the case of a dethronement: the case of King Yŏnsan's dethronement.

In his work *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* James Palais offers an influential description of the role of the eldest dowagers of the royal clan. Palais writes that 'the power of these women as queens was negligible, but their roles as mothers of future kings or eldest dowagers during brief interregna or regencies were crucial to the continued well-being of

[458] Yi Kisun, *Injo-Hyojong tae chŏngch'isa yŏn'gu* [A study on political history during the Injo-Hyojong period], (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1998), 12-54.
[459] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 271-272.

their male relatives'.[460] Palais also specifies that one of the most essential rights of these eldest dowagers was to designate the successor to a deceased king in consultation with leading officials 'when an heir was lacking'.[461] While it is true that Chosŏn queens did not have an active part in the formulation of policy at the Korean court, Palais' characterisation of the role of queen dowagers can nevertheless be drawn into question on two accounts. Firstly, it is true that family clans jockeyed for their girls to obtain the most prestigious positions attainable to women in the Korean kingdom, that of being named the official first queen of a new king. Proximity to the throne ensured that in-laws would receive preferential treatment, gaining access to opportunities to increment their wealth and political influence. It is, however, rather limiting to view queens and dowagers exclusively as assets to the male members of their clan. The fate of Queen Dowager Inmok's family also serves as a powerful reminder that proximity to the throne may have appeared desirable but could in no way be taken as a guarantee of the continued well-being of male family members.

Secondly, it is inaccurate to describe the power of the royal family's women as 'negligible', when they had the power to decide on questions of succession, which are, after all, among the most essential questions regarding the continued well-being of the entire country. Additionally, one may argue that following the depositions of Yŏnsan in 1506 and Kwanghae in 1623, both ordered by queen dowagers, the power of those women extended far beyond the extent of Palais' characterisation. In day-to-day politics, the dowagers' authority may not have been felt, but their authority rose to the level of dynastic continuity. One instance of this authority used at the time Yŏnsan may have been an exception, but the wielding of similar authority at the time of Kwanghae indicates institutional strength. The two-fold precedent of a deposition of kings by an eldest dowager, largely on the basis of their

[460] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 24.
[461] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 24.

violation of Confucian norms, most probably had a disciplining effect on the monarchs of the later Chosŏn dynasty comparable to the 'ideology check' brought to bear over monarchs by court officials. Accordingly, the power of the eldest queen dowagers would be better described as latent rather than negligible.

The precedent: King Yŏnsan's dethronement

The prelude: by the power of Queen Dowager Sohye

King Yŏnsan is one of the most notorious kings of Korean history. Both Korean and international scholarship also refers to him as Yŏnsan'gun, or Prince Yŏnsan, a reference to the fact that he was born to a former concubine, Lady Yun (1455-1482), and reference to the fact that he was denied a temple name upon his death – as the first Chosŏn king to be denied the honour of being enshrined in the Royal Shrine along with his forefathers.[462] Yŏnsan's tumultuous reign was heavily influenced by the politics of the internal palace, the royal harem, along with the family politics pursued by other members of the court.

His mother, Lady Yun, is said to have been chosen for her beauty, and being favoured by Yŏnsan's father King Sŏngjong, was promoted to the rank of legitimate wife upon the death of Sŏngjong's seventeen-year-old first wife Konghye.[463] While the *Ming Code* strictly prohibits muddling the hierarchy between wives and concubines,[464] promoting a concubine to the more favoured status upon the death of the wife was a legally acceptable proceeding. The

[462] Yŏnsan came to be known as Yŏnsan'gun after receiving the dubious honour of being named a 'prince' following his dethronement. *Chungjong sillok* 1: 5b [1506/9/3].
[463] *Sŏngjong sillok* 70: 5a-5b [1476/8/9].
[464] Art. 109 on the 'loss of hierarchy between wives and concubines' sets the punishment of demoting wives to concubines at one hundred strokes of beating with a heavy stick.
Jiang Yonglin, *The Great Ming Code*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 83-84.
Taemyŏngnyul chihae 大明律直解. Seoul: Pŏpchech'ŏ (서울: 法制處), 1964, 216.

promotion of Lady Yun, then pregnant with Yŏnsan, to Queen Chehŏn in 1476, meant that Yŏnsan was born as Yŏnsan-taegun, Grand Prince Yŏnsan, the legitimate heir to the throne.

Lady Yun's promotion, however, did not sit well with all at court. Particularly, Queen Dowager Sohye (1437-1504), King Sŏngjong's mother, viewed Lady Yun unfavourably.[465] The queen dowager was a highly educated woman and had herself excerpted passages from Chinese works on virtue and morality, offering *ŏnhae* or Korean translations written in *han'gŭl* and compiling them in an influential work called *Naehun* 內訓 or 'Instructions for Women' in order to combat what she perceived to be female ignorance, in part due to a lack of instructional materials.[466] Though not all of the contents of her work are original, it is nevertheless regarded as the first book authored by a Korean woman that is still in existence today.[467] While Queen Dowager Sohye's interpretation of women's role was not quite so subversive as to question the general Confucian hierarchy between men and women, she nevertheless argued that the fate of the country did not only depend on the virtue of its men but also on that of its women. Women should therefore learn to prefect their virtues also so that they could act as councillors to their husbands.[468]

Lady Yun, a former concubine, culturally less refined, jealous, and impulsive, obviously fell short of Queen Dowager Sohye's standards. Following an argument between Lady Yun and her husband King Sŏngjong, Queen Dowager Sohye moved to undo the

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[465] The Queen Dowager likened Lady Yun to Bao Si 褒姒. Bao Si, Queen to King You of Zhou and of mythical origins, was said to be one of China's great beauties. However, according to legend, King You emptied the coffers of the state only to make his melancholic wife smile, critically endangering the dynasty. Clearly, the Queen Dowager thought of her daughter-in-law as a dangerous villain. *Sŏngjong sillok* 70: 5a-5b [1476/8/9].

[466] Dorothy Ko, Jahyun Kim Haboush, and Joan Piggott, *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 147.

[467] John Duncan, 'The *Naehun* and the Politics of Gender in Fifteenth-Century Korea'. In Young-Key Kim-Renaud (ed.). *Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth Through the Twentieth Centuries*. (2015): 26-57.

[468] John Duncan, 'The *Naehun* and the Politics of Gender in Fifteenth-Century Korea'. In Young-Key Kim-Renaud (ed.). *Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth Through the Twentieth Centuries*. (2015): 40.

promotion of her daughter-in-law and reduce her back to the rank of concubine.[469] While the records are not quite clear about who first urged for the demotion of Lady Yun, the Queen Dowager was clearly identified as the responsible party by court officials who asked themselves whether the Queen Dowager would really want to demote the mother of two of the king's children, among them the heir to the throne.[470] They wondered why the entire court had legitimised Lady Yun as queen just a few years prior.[471] They also lobbied for Lady Yun to be installed in a separate palace.[472] This suggestion, however, met with King Sŏngjong's resistance. For him to demote his wife back to the role of a concubine would have been 'greatly impossible' (*tae pulga* 大不可). It would also have been a clear violation of the *Ming Code*.[473] The *Sŏngjong sillok* makes it clear that the Queen Dowager was a driving force behind the demotion of Lady Yun. The king, himself, remained ambiguous and is recorded asking his officials to 'please explain it to the Queen Dowager and, if nothing else, ask her to save Lady Yun',[474] specifying to the royal secretary that 'what I want to be transmitted to the Queen Dowager is that I want her to stop this'.[475]

Statements of kings in the *sillok* cannot always be taken at face value. It is possible, even plausible, that Sŏngjong secretly supported Lady Yun's deposition. If he did secretly support the move or at least acceded to his mother's argument, he not only allowed the Queen Dowager to look like the villain in this story, but he also appears to have bowed down to her decision and ultimately conceded that managing the royal family, even to the extent to removing an established queen of the kingdom, fell within her authority. Either way, the court officials' suggestion—to 'depose [Lady Yun], and have her dwell in private lodgings, so that

[469] *Sŏngjong sillok* 105: 5a-5b [1479/6/3].
[470] *Sŏngjong sillok* 105: 5a-3b [1479/6/3].
[471] *Sŏngjong sillok* 105: 5a-3b [1479/6/3].
[472] *Sŏngjong sillok* 105: 1a-3a [1479/6/2].
[473] *Taemyŏngnyul chihae* 大明律直解. Seoul: Pŏpchech'ŏ (서울: 法制處), 1964, 216.
[474] *Sŏngjong sillok* 105: 1a-3a [1479/6/2].
[475] *Sŏngjong sillok* 105: 1a-3a [1479/6/2].

mother and son may see each other, which is something joyful to see in human relations'[476]—bore no success. This allows for two interpretations: either King Sŏngjong did not have the authority to challenge the eldest queen dowager's decision in the domain of the royal household or he used her accusations to rid himself of his wife. As with Kwanghae's punishment of Prince Imhae,[477] it was not uncommon for Chosŏn monarchs to pretend adhering to a position on the moral high ground that they would only vacate later so as to respond to the demands of another party. If this were the case, the queen dowager would take the blame, but Sŏngjong would essentially be borrowing the queen dowager's legitimacy to order a deposition he could not order in his position as king. Both possible interpretations point to a position of significant authority of the queen dowager over affairs of the royal household, beyond the sole question of succession.

The case for Yŏnsan's dethronement

The consequences of Sŏngjong's failure to save his wife haunted the Korean kingdom for decades, as Lady Yun was sent into exile before being sentenced to death, dying from poison without returning from exile.[478] Her eldest son, Yŏnsan, bound to grow up among the family and court officials who actively worked towards his mother's death or idly stood by as her misfortune unfolded, grew up to be suspicious, if not paranoid,[479] and a man who perspicaciously set out to unveil the hypocrisies of the court. Yŏnsan's cynicism towards Confucian ethics and his cruelty towards court officials earned him a notoriety that makes it appear credible that he should be to blame for the death of his grandmother in 1504,[480] two

[476] *Sŏngjong sillok* 105: 1a-3a [1479/6/2].
[477] See Chapter III for greater detail.
[478] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 68. And *Sŏngjong sillok* 144: 22a-22b [1482/8/16].
[479] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 68.
[480] Queen Dowager Sohye died shortly after being confronted by Yŏnsan with the words: 'Why [*or* how] did you kill my mother?' *Yŏnsan'gun ilgi* 52: 20b-21a [1504/3/20].

years before he was ousted in a coup. At the time of the coup, a younger queen dowager decided to throw her support behind the coup to oust Yŏnsan, and that move set a precedent of further empowering the queen dowagers of Chosŏn.

Setting aside the extenuating circumstances resulting from Yŏnsan's uneasy childhood, not much can be said to challenge the picture of Yŏnsan as a tyrant and a moral reprobate. The cases of Yŏnsan and Kwanghae are comparable, although Yŏnsan's tyranny was arguably more extreme. Yŏnsan rejected Confucianism, but Kwanghae never challenged the established order outright. Yŏnsan purged court officials out of personal grudges and resentment against allegedly disloyal courtiers, but Kwanghae merely restructured the court to advance his political agenda. Yŏnsan was blamed for killing his father's concubines in a fit of anger, but Kwanghae murdered for political reasons: he had his brother and half-brother killed to eliminate them as potential rivals for the throne. Despite the differences in their character and their respective rulership styles, however, there are three key similarities that link both kings and that serve as an explanation as to why they ended up suffering a comparable fate: both committed serious violations of ethical norms; both incurred the wrath of a sizeable proportion of the officialdom; and both lost the support of the head of the royal household, the eldest queen dowager.

Officials, particularly, but not exclusively, young officials associated to the *Samsa* 三司, the three censoring organs,[481] frequently remonstrated against Yŏnsan's immoral leadership style.[482] Chiefly, Yŏnsan's detractors at court had two main concerns: his governance was seen as falling short of the Confucian standard of a sage king to the point of damaging the state, and his personal conduct fell short of a Confucian standard of propriety

[481] The three censoring organs were comprised of the *sahŏnbu* 司憲府, the Office of the Inspector-General, the *saganwŏn* 司諫院, the Office of the Censor-General, and the *hongmun'gwan* 弘文館, the Office of Special Counsellors.
[482] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 40.

and morality. The first accusation against Yŏnsan is well-illustrated by a memorial presented by the State High Councillors in 1502, which criticised

> (1) the king's persistent failure to attend the Royal Lectures; (2) the granting of firewood lands to princes and princesses; (3) the king's disporting in the palace park in the company of eunuchs, to the exclusion of contacts with the officialdom; (4) the great backlog of unattended official business; (5) the inability to reach the king in an emergency, due to his proceeding too deeply into the palace park; (6) the incessant construction activities in the palace park; (7) the demands for the procurement of fast horses for palace use; (8) the overlong detention on palace tasks of painters and artisans of all kinds; (9) the unrestrained level of expenditures; and (10) the exorbitant demand for tribute tax goods from Kyŏnggi Province.[483]

All of these accusations directly or indirectly make reference to ideals of good governance that had already been established since well before inception of the Chosŏn dynasty itself. Indeed, many of the points raised by the High State Councillors here appear to make clear reference to the virtues of good governance such as those extolled in Confucian treatises on statecraft, such as the *Zhengguan zhengyao* 貞觀政要, the eighth-century treatise on governance composed by Tang Taizong.

The *Zhengguan zhengyao* refers to the following virtues of good governance: attending the royal lectures served the purpose of the monarch's moral self-cultivation (*zìmù* 自牧). Handing out baseless favours according to one's personal inclination (*ēn suǒ jiā zé sī wú yīn xǐ* 恩所加則思無因喜) was to be avoided. The third point alludes to the king being shielded from the flow of accurate information (*yōngbì* 壅蔽). The *Zhengguan zhengyao* suggests the ruler-of-men to modestly listen to his inferiors (*xūxīn yǐ nà xià* 虛心以納下)

[483] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 56-57. *Yŏnsangun ilgi* 43: 15b-17a [1502/3/25].

instead. The fact that the officialdom was largely excluded would lead one to believe that the monarch was now receiving only biased information on the affairs of state. Confucian political writers often cautioned against this problem. The ruler should also be mindful to avoid laziness (*xièdài* 懈怠), begin things carefully, and respectfully bring them to a conclusion (*shèn shǐ ér jìng zhōng* 慎始而敬終). The fifth point may be understood as a reference to the king's excessive hunting activity. Practicing restraint in this hobby (*sān qū yǐ wéi dù* 三驅以為度) is listed as one of the nine virtues of a good ruler in the *Zhengguan zhengyao*.[484] Points six through ten essentially argue against excessive taxation and corvée labour (yáoyì bù xī 徭役不息) and lavish and irresponsible spending. This, the *Zhengguan zhengyao* warns, is often the beginning of a country's decline and corruption (guó zhī shuāibì 國之衰蔽).[485] Individually, most of the above accusations of the High State Councillors against Yŏnsan could have been treated as trivial problems. However, to an audience familiar with the Confucian tradition, it must have been clear that accusing Yŏnsan of all these infringements was the equivalent of calling him an incompetent king devoid of a ruler's virtues. Interestingly, however, at this point King Yŏnsan's moral depravity did not yet feature as part of the accusations, even though the king not only sought horses for 'palace use' across the country –he did the same for beautiful women.[486]

The censors reprimanded King Yŏnsan in the hope he might change and with the caution necessary not to give a powerful man a valid reason to have them prosecuted. Following his dethronement, court historians offered a considerably more damning account of

[484] *Gushiwen* 古詩文, *Zhen Guan Zheng Yao* 貞觀政要. Last accessed February 9, 2021. http://www.gushiwen.org/GuShiWen_083a5572d0.aspx.
[485] *Gushiwen* 古詩文, 'Zhen Guan Zheng Yao' 貞觀政要. Last accessed February 9, 2021. http://www.gushiwen.org/GuShiWen_083a5572d0.aspx.
[486] Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea: A history from ancient times to 1945*. (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 1976), 139.

Yŏnsan's character, as evidenced by the following passage from the *sillok*. The historiographer writes:

> Yŏnsan's character is strong, tyrannical [or perverse, depending on the reading]. […] He is harsh and cruel in his conduct of policy. He often indulges greatly in wine and women, casting aside sacrificial ritual and service. He posthumously honoured his mother, who had been expelled by his father. He killed many of his ministers. He hated listening to expostulations and remonstrations and had officials who spoke up killed and expelled. He clubbed his father's concubines to death. He expelled and killed many of his younger brothers. He spent his days with harlots and there were no bounds to the displays of lewdness. He muddled the hierarchy between wives and concubines. There was nothing he would shy away from. He altered the mourning rituals, turning a moon [or month] into a day. He used the three main-stays and five constant virtues to wipe the floor.[487] His crimes and evils are beyond description. Gods and men alike resent him. This is how it has been up until this day.

The historian went on to say:

> Sŏngjong's concubines, the Ladies Ŏn and Chŏng, often got favourable treatment from the royal father. On account of the deposition of Lady Yun, Yŏnsan beat them to death in the inner courtyard and distributed the sons they had given birth to, Prince Anyang and Prince Pongan, as well as their families, to isolated islands. He then had them found and killed. That is why it is being said that "Anyang's and Pongan's lines were already severed for good." He made their wives remarry others. Their children were allowed to sit the civil service examinations. Anyang's woman was given to Prince Kyŏnsŏng; Pongan's woman was given to Prince Yŏngsan and they were made to be their wives. These esteemed ladies were then beaten and expelled to far-away places. […] He [Yŏnsan] also said: "Harlots are a common good. You cannot

[487] This refers to the highest principles of Confucianism.

keep them to yourself. Every man [is to] have his maidservant. From now on all denominations of staff do not get to make concubines out of this lowly public [resource]. Anyone who violates this will be heavily indicted." With this regulation rape went unimpeded. Already, there was a secret order that, in case of pregnancies, the man should be beheaded and the child should be buried alive. […] When King Sŏngjong lay in his coffin, Yŏnsan personally shot the deer Sŏngjong had been raising. He grilled and ate them. When Queen Dowager Sohye passed away, he followed the moon-to-sun system.[488] When the ministers and people then all discarded their mourning attire, he once again had them excluded for twenty-seven days. He also discarded the state-wide mourning day and the fasting. On the state mourning day, he had music played and ate meat like on any other day. […]

Corvée labour was heavy and grain was scarce. There were endless lines of starving people. Outward from the Sungnye Gate and all the way to Noryang[489] corpses were piled up like mountains. Yŏnsan himself knew he was evil. He feared that someone might say it. Therefore, he abolished the royal lectures, reformed the censorate, the royal library, reducing them to two people.… From ancient times there have been many unreasonable and unnatural[490] lords, and yet none have been so extreme as Yŏnsan.[491]

Over the hundreds of years of record-keeping of the Chosŏn dynasty, this characterisation of Yŏnsan stands out as one of the most starkly vilifying entries. Of course, historiographers could have held a particular resentment against Yŏnsan, as the king had attempted to limit their privileges, ordering them to limit their records to routine

[488] Meaning that he announced a drastic shortening of the mourning period, which is meant to illustrate a serious lack of piety.
[489] The Sungnyemun or Sungnye Gate is the south gate of Seoul, otherwise known as Namdaemun or Namdae Gate. The Noryang Strait marks one of the furthest southern points of the Korean peninsula, where South Kyŏngsang Province faces the southern sea.
[490] The term *hwangnan* 荒亂 used to describe Yŏnsan's character can be translated in a variety of ways. *Hwang* 荒 suggests wildness and lack of cultivation, whereas the character *nan* 亂 often associated with chaos or rebellion, is best understood as a fundamental opposition to the 'natural' (i.e., Confucian) order of the world.
[491] *Chungjong sillok* 1: 2b-4b [1506/9/2]

administrative matters and imposing unwarranted personnel changes,[492] thus unduly interfering with their writing of the memoranda that would go into the *sillok*. The accusatory account of Yŏnsan's dealings is one of the first entries of the *Chungjong sillok,* which also explains some of the more hyperbolic claims. Nevertheless, this entry in itself presented a strong case that Yŏnsan was unfit to rule over a civilised Confucian nation. Yŏnsan had refused remonstration; he had not listed to the officialdom; he had evaded any possible 'ideological check'; and he had thus manoeuvred himself into a position where he was no longer tenable as King of Chosŏn.

Institutional actors behind the coup

Yŏnsan's erratic rule had alienated large portions of officialdom. Particularly, the emotional disputes over how to proceed in the question of his birth mother had seen many of the younger officials, particularly censors, taking an uncompromising position based on Confucian propriety, suggesting that Yŏnsan should refrain from his attempts at rehabilitating his disgraced mother. Both literati purges ordered by Yŏnsan, during which dozens of scholars were removed from their positions at court, often forced to flee or be killed, were related to this initial conflict and the subsequent conflicts over interpretations of doctrine and propriety.

Edward W. Wagner's 1976 work *The Literati Purges* offers a good description of both the causes of the purges as well as the events themselves. By the end of the two purges, Yŏnsan struggled to fill positions with personnel who could be trusted to carry out his policies according to his wishes.[493] Although the *yangban* constituted a sufficiently large pool of candidates, Yŏnsan's tyranny led many of them to prefer remaining in exile or dedicating

[492] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 67.
[493] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 68.

themselves to studies and teaching at Confucian academies far from the capital.[494] Interestingly, the efforts to remove Yŏnsan from his throne, however, were not headed by the masses of disgruntled *yangban* in the provinces, as one might suppose and as it happened just over a hundred years later during the deposition of King Kwanghae. Instead, the coup was launched by court officials who had remained in Yŏnsan's proximity.[495] Paradoxically, many of these men had been profiting handsomely from Yŏnsan's years of misrule, and they had climbed the ladder of officialdom at an accelerated pace. The purges had led to abnormally quick openings of prestigious positions in higher government. Clearly, some among the conspirators against Yŏnsan had an extraordinary feel for power and opportunity. Their positions close to the monarch enabled them to stage the largely bloodless coup against their king, all the while enabling a succession that ensured that they would win the favour of Yŏnsan's successor. Who would have stood up for a king who had lost all allies? Their rebellion was nearly risk-free and promised further rewards. With the last remaining officials rebelling against the throne, for a short time a moment of unity among the *yangban* was achieved. Unity among officials, one of the key factors in an effective 'ideology check' on a Chosŏn monarch, was perhaps the most important factor enabling the deposition of a king. Not long after King Chungjong's elevation to the throne had succeeded, a sense of injustice appeared among surviving purge victims, namely, that those who had profited the most from Yŏnsan's tyranny should profit the most from his dethronement burst the temporarily united officialdom.[496]

Upon ascending to the throne Chungjong issued a statement, which sheds additional light on the question of who was viewed as ultimately responsible for the substitution of kings.

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[494] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 70-71.
[495] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 70.
[496] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 70.

> In recent years, the lord [Yŏnsan] had lost his way; [under his rule] justice and administration were convoluted, severe, and exacting. The people's hearts were desperate. In this hour of need, fortunately, we could rely on noble martial and civic ministers and officials who –in their concern for the ancestral shrines, in their love for the people, and following the gracious orders of the Queen Dowager– have come together in my support and have persuaded me to assume the role [of king].[497]

If this account were to be trusted, Chungjong owed his throne to court officials, who acted by the order of the Queen Dowager. The *sillok* corroborates this version of the events in at least two instances.[498] Chungjong himself stressed that in taking the throne he was carrying out (*p'umsŭng* 稟承) the Queen Dowager's orders (*taebi chaji* 大妃慈旨).[499] Edward W. Wagner, too, mentions that officials were 'bearing the *consent decree* [emphasis added] of the queen mother', when 'the procession moved to the residence of Yŏnsan'gun's only legitimate half-brother and persuaded him to accept the throne'.[500] Beyond this single mention, however, the role of the queen dowager is not explored any further in Wagner's work. Additionally, Wagner's translation of *chaji* 慈旨 as 'consent decree' is rather unusual; it implies that the queen dowager consented to a proposition brought to her by officials and, to a certain degree, implies that the queen dowager had little agency in the affair. Much more commonly, the character *chi* 旨 is used to mean 'instruction' in the sense of command. *Chaji* 慈旨, literally 'benevolent instruction', is a phrase specifically employed for the instructions or commands of the queen mother. In regards to the queen dowager ordering the dethronement of Yŏnsan, the *sillok* employs the character *myŏng* 命,which is also best translated as 'command' or

[497] *Chungjong sillok* 1: 1a-2b [1506/9/2].
[498] *Yŏnsangun ilgi* 63: 20a-24b [1506/9/2], *Chungjong sillok* 1: 1a-2b [1506/9/2].
[499] *Chungjong sillok* 1: 1a-2b [1506/9/2].
[500] Edward Willett Wagner, *The Literati Purges.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 67. And *Chungjong sillok* 1: 1a-2b [1506/9/2].

'mandate' and unequivocally points to the command of a superior to an inferior.[501] What this means is that, although the officials may have been the engineers behind the coup, the institutional responsibility for it lay squarely with the queen dowager –a subtlety that is lost in Wagner's covering of the event.

Unlike explanations about the court officials, the historians of the *sillok* were not particularly forthcoming about what motivated Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn to throw her support behind the coup against Yŏnsan. Sŏngjong's third wife was Yŏnsan's senior by fourteen years and in her forties during the last years of Yŏnsan's reign. Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn had only ascended to the highest rung of the female hierarchy of the royal family following the death of Queen Dowager Sohye in 1504 –two years prior to the coup. Following the mourning period for Sohye, which the king had ridiculed and sabotaged, court officials suggested in 1505 bestowing honours on Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn in accordance with her new role as eldest queen dowager. Yŏnsan did not see any reason to object. On the contrary, he stated that the benevolence of the Queen Dowager toward him had been the equivalent of that of his birth mother.[502]

Although this statement by the king casts Yŏnsan's relation with his stepmother in a positive light, Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn still stood to profit from the coup. She might have been able to avoid Yŏnsan's wrath that befell Sŏngjong's concubines for their role in Lady Yun's deposition and death, but the king was inconstant and might have turned against her at any moment. Moreover, Chŏnghyŏn had arguably profited from Lady Yun's misfortune, and this would have made her vulnerable to Yŏnsan's wrath. More permanent safety was therefore something to be gained from a coup. However, more immediately, and in line with James Palais' characterisation of Chosŏn's queens,[503] a coup presented the opportunity to advance

[501] *Yŏnsangun ilgi* 63: 20a-24b [1506/9/2].
[502] *Yŏnsangun ilgi* 58: 9b-10a [1505/6/8].
[503] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 24-25.

Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn's male family members, namely her very own son to be made king, thereby advancing her own position, the standing of her family, and indeed her entire clan. The *sillok* may not have stated Chŏnghyŏn's motivation expressly, but her motives speak for themselves.

Conclusions on the Yŏnsan precedent

Revisiting Palais's characterisation of the role of the queens of the Chosŏn dynasty, the above cases offer little evidence to revise his assessment that their political power was negligible in terms of their contributions to the policy-formulation process. As spouses to kings, they were close to the top of the ritual hierarchy of the kingdom but remained strictly subordinate to their husbands as well as their husbands' mothers and paternal grandmothers. Palais concedes that the eldest dowagers could play key roles during the minority of an heir apparent or in questions of succession.[504] The case of Queen Dowager Sohye's interference with King Sŏngjong's marital life and harem, however, suggests that neither the interests nor the authority of the eldest queen dowager was limited to the essential questions of succession. It appears, instead, that any aspect of family politics was well within the scope of the eldest queen dowager's domain of authority as head of the royal household. Apart from that, Sohye also exercised considerable cultural influence as her writings came to be widely studied and set the standards and expectations for future female members of the royal clan.

Palais's description of female royalty as crucial to the continued well-being of male family members, is partially correct. Men certainly stood to profit from family ties to the throne, as it ensured titles of nobility, as well as sources of influence and wealth. Sending daughters into the royal harem and even better having the king formally marry a girl from one's family was one way of ensuring proximity to the throne. As the competition was stiff,

[504] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 24-25.

there was an understandably intensive process that naturally involved men jockeying for kings or princes to marry their daughters. Nevertheless, it seems excessive to describe this vying for proximity to the throne exclusively through the lens of female utility to male advancement. Instead, instances, such as the one of Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn installing her son on the throne, demonstrate that achieving a greater proximity to the throne could be mutually beneficial for the male and the female members of a family and result, at least partially, from female authorship. Although formally Chŏnghyŏn's position at court did not see any change brought by Chungjong's ascension as –even as a mere stepmother to the king– she had already formally headed the royal household from before the coup, it nevertheless gained her the prestige of being the mother of a king and it ensured her safety from the capricious moods and personal vendettas of King Yŏnsan.

The *Veritable Records* name the key officials who participated in the installation of King Chungjong and in the ousting of his tyrannical half-brother.[505] Repeatedly, however, the *Yŏnsan'gun ilgi* and the *Chungjong sillok* make it clear that these ministers formally acted under the orders of the Queen Dowager. The exact extent of Chŏnghyŏn's involvement in the planning and the execution of the coup can be debated, but the question of formal responsibility is clear: King Yŏnsan was dethroned at the behest of the Queen Dowager; his successor was named by her.

The prominent featuring of key officials also makes it clear that the Queen Dowager did not act by herself, nor was the Chungjong ascension an unmotivated exercise of power by the head of the royal household. The coup was preceded by years of official remonstration against what can best be described as Yŏnsan's abuse of power. The officialdom was almost entirely in favour of the coup both out of fear for their own lives and the lives of their families

[505] *Yŏnsangun ilgi* 63: 20a-24b [1506/9/2].

and out of righteous indignation regarding Yŏnsan's blatant disrespect for Confucian institutions.

In summary, three factors led to King Chungjong rising to the throne: (1) a broad coalition of officials willing to take the risk of carrying out the coup; (2) a broadly shared sense of moral and political indignation regarding the practices of the king; and finally (3) the eldest queen dowager's support for the restoration, that is, her issuance of the orders for deposition and crowning. All these factors would be present once again in the dethronement of Kwanghae. It is interesting to see that, with the exception of (3), these are the exact same factors that enabled what Sohn Powkee labelled the 'ideology check' on the Chosŏn kings. In this sense, dethronement may be viewed as a last-resort 'ideology check' enabled by the heads of the royal household –the most powerful women in the Kingdom of Chosŏn.

Injo's path to kingship

Introduction

The precedent set by King Yŏnsan's dethronement did not go unmentioned on the night of the coup against Kwanghae in 1623, when Prince Nŭngyang ascended the throne to become the sixteenth monarch of Chosŏn. He would later be remembered as King Injo. The court officials who helped organise the capture of the royal palace by a 'righteous army' showed their awareness of the Yŏnsan precedent when Kwanghae was captured. In an attempt to flee, the king had disguised himself, donning the mourning attire of his personal physician. The chase for the fleeing king was frantic and a number of buildings on the palace grounds caught fire as Injo's men searched dark corners with torches. With the successful capture, the question of how to deal with the royal prisoner needed to be settled. Queen Dowager Inmok is recorded suggesting that she should personally chop of the heads of Kwanghae and his son and present them as offerings to the spirits of the dead.[506] First Royal Secretary Yi Tŏk-hyŏng, however, reminded her of the preferential treatment dethroned monarchs had received in the course of Chinese and Korean histories, specifically invoking the case of Yŏnsan, as a case that 'can be taken as a model'.[507] Queen Dowager Inmok equally demonstrated her awareness of the case when she is recorded pressing Yi Tŏk-hyŏng:

> The minister's words are sincere. However, the monstrous killer of [his] father and brothers, who obscenely committed adultery with his father's concubines, slew [other] concubines of his father's, imprisoned his legitimate mother, committed all possible evils; how could he be compared to Yŏnsan?[508]

[506] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[507] Referring to the case of Yŏnsan, Yi Tŏk-hyŏng is recorded saying: '*ch'a ka pŏp ya* 此可法也'. While a variety of translations are plausible, the general suggestion to follow the precedent of the Yŏnsan case, however, is clear.
[508] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].

The coup against Kwanghae was meant to follow the playbook of the coup against Yŏnsan. However, the preconditions of the two coups were not the same –a fact that Injo and his supporters were careful to gloss over. Out of the three factors that had enabled Chungjong to succeed his half-brother Yŏnsan as king (a broad coalition of officials; a shared sense of political indignation; and the eldest queen dowager's support), only two were initially met in the dethronement of Kwanghae: over the years Kwanghae had made many enemies among the officials, and more broadly among the influential *yangban* class. His crimes against Queen Dowager Inmok's family among others, and his handling of foreign affairs were reproachable from a Confucian standpoint. Queen Dowager Inmok, however unlike Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn, had been factually demoted by Kwanghae's posthumous elevation of his birth mother's status and was not considered the head of the royal household during the last years of King Kwanghae's reign.

In the course of his conflicts with court officials, Kwanghae had made many enemies. The number of officials he could count on had gotten smaller and smaller to the point that Kwanghae had been struggling to fill posts with bureaucrats ready to do his bidding. His campaign against potentially threatening family members had killed prominent members of the court, princes, and their children, leaving a considerable stain on the king's reputation. His piety had been called into question both by his handling of international affairs as well as his imprisonment of his stepmother. Kwanghae, however, had been victorious in his arduous journey of promoting his birth mother to the rank of queen.[509] Not only had he been successful in silencing support for Queen Dowager Inmok domestically, he also had gained official Ming recognition for Lady Kim, his birth mother.[510] Lady Kim was Queen Dowager Inmok's senior and had been married to King Sŏnjo for a longer time. Accordingly, the

[509] As discussed in chapter III.
[510] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 116(116): 8a-8b (丁巳 day, third article) [1617/6/24].

assumption was that Sŏnjo had already had a first wife when he then also married Inmok. As such, marriage was a legal impossibility, and Inmok's status was questionable.[511] If she had not been a real queen, she could not be considered a real queen dowager and with no one more senior than him, Kwanghae himself was to be viewed as the head of the royal household. This achievement of Kwanghae's long-held family policy goal also meant that despite the growing dissatisfaction at court, a Yŏnsan scenario, meaning opposition to a sitting king from both the court and the head of the royal household, would have appeared impossible.

Addressing the problem in justifying the coup against Kwanghae that arose from the lack of a queen dowager supporting the dethronement, the very first sentences of the *Injo sillok* debark on a creative argumentative course, introducing the story of how Injo became king with the following sentences:

> On the thirteenth day, his majesty raised a righteous army and re-established the queen dowager to her position and titles. As per the queen dowager's orders, he ascended to the throne in the Kyŏngun Palace. He deposed Prince Kwanghae and sent him into exile on Kanghwa [Island].[512]

The Injo ascension relied on the court's acceptance of the above paradox. Injo restored the queen dowager's titles and Inmok, regaining her titles, was then allowed to order the transfer of power. The restoration of the queen dowager and the ascension of a new king, however, meant that Injo had to regard the grudging consent of the court as well as the Ming imperial decree promoting Kwanghae's birth mother as naught. What follows is that Injo's *ex tunc* annulment of a Ming imperial decree and the ceremonies at court legalising Lady Kim as

[511] The question of how to refer to Queen Dowager Inmok after her 'demotion' was settled in 1618. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 43(43): 99a (戊子 day, third article) [1618/1/28].
[512] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].

Queen of Chosŏn had to be considered a lesser crime than attempting a coup without the consent of the queen dowager.

Queen Dowager Inmok's participation in the coup

Although formally, Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn ordered the coup against King Yŏnsan, both the *Yŏnsan'gun ilgi* as well as the *Chungjong sillok* are fairly brief about her role in the coup. Upon ascending to the throne, Chungjong explains that loyal and righteous court officials, bearing an order (*myŏng* 命) from the Queen Dowager, persuaded him to take the throne.[513] Additionally, a short speech by Chŏnghyŏn is recorded in the *Yŏnsan'gun ilgi* briefly stating Yŏnsan's most egregious crimes as reasons for her to order him dethroned.[514] In the case of Queen Dowager Inmok, the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* and the *Injo sillok* paint a clearer picture of the active involvement of the queen dowager.

The very first entry into the *Injo sillok* for the thirteenth day of the third month of 1623 explains how the Queen Dowager first learned about the coup. Although the planning of the coup had been well underway for the past three years, Inmok was likely not aware of the conspiracy. According to the records, the soon-to-be King Injo sent two of his men to explain his intentions to Inmok upon entering the palace grounds. The queen dowager refused to leave the palace of her confinement, questioning the identity of the intruders who approached her in the middle of the night without an official stenographer, thereby violating propriety.[515] Injo then resorted to sending his Grand General Yi Kwi, one of the key conspirators, as well as First Royal Secretary Yi Tŏk-hyŏng to convince the Queen Dowager of his 'intentions'. Again, the Queen Dowager would not have any of it.[516] Even when Injo proceeded to ride up to her palace in an ornate carriage along with his imposing guard asking Inmok to join him,

[513] *Chungjong sillok* 1:1a-2b [1506/9/2].
[514] *Yŏnsangun ilgi* 63: 20a-24b [1506/9/2].
[515] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[516] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].

the Queen Dowager refused. Injo then rode off only to return making Kwanghae, who had been captured before, follow him. Injo proceeded to prostrate himself before the Queen Dowager, but presumably it was the certainty of seeing her gaoler as a prisoner that made Inmok change her mind about the situation. From this point on, the record depicts the Queen Dowager as an active party in the transfer of royal authority, urging Injo to stand up, telling him that 'for the grandson of a king, it is appropriate to take up the affairs of the state'.[517] Injo, however, remained prostrated crying and intermittently declaring that he was going to renounce his family and take responsibility for his crimes, that he had neither talent nor virtue, while the queen dowager went on to discuss with coup leaders whether the succession could be handled immediately without Ming consent. Having found proceeding with the coronation should be possible and that settling the question of succession was a matter of urgency, Inmok told Injo to stop crying, reassured him that his achievements bespoke his virtue and talent and encouraged him to claim the empty throne.[518]

The palpably agitated queen dowager did not shy away from showing her excitement about the developments of the night, to the point of making the entire coup about herself. Addressing Injo, who was lamenting the heavy burden of his guilt, she intervened:

> Do not speak. What are you guilty of? I, out of my unlucky fate, had to encounter the decay in normal [Confucian] human relations. The monstrous, abhorrent previous king treated me as his enemy; he slaughtered my father and mother, butchered my relatives; he flayed and murdered my children, and imprisoned me in a separate palace. Alone, I dwelled deeply inside the palace for a long time alone, without hearing even the slightest news from the outside world. [And then] unexpectedly, today, I get to see this affair!

Addressing the present ministers, she went on to say:

[517] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[518] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].

> The monstrous, abhorrent previous king truly was my hated enemy. In the royal court, treacherous ministers fell into divisions; I was vilely slandered and held prisoner for over ten years; […]. Thanks to [you] officials, normal human relations [will be] restored! Seeing [this] today, the achievement of [you] officials, it cannot be put in words![519]

This first entry of the *Injo sillok* is designed to cast a positive light on Injo's character. Any idea that the coup might have been carried out by a greedy, self-interested royal should be dispelled. Instead, the *sillok* casts the queen dowager in the role of the key legitimator of the coup. Paralleling the case against Yŏnsan, officials and princes of the royal family worked towards the coup together, and a queen dowager legitimised it. In the immediate aftermath, Queen Dowager Inmok had people check up on her ailing mother and her servants, both of whom had been displaced from the capital in the aftermath of the witchcraft accusations that led to Inmok's confinement.[520] Most importantly, however, on the fourteenth day of the third month, on the day that followed the night of the coup, she delivered a speech listing Kwanghae's crimes and formally ordering his dethronement. This speech is recorded both in the *Kwanghaegun ilgi* and the *Injo sillok*.[521]

Queen Dowager Inmok's dethronement speech offers a stellar example of political rhetoric of the Chosŏn dynasty and is in itself an act of statecraft that demonstrates the authority of her position at court.

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[519] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[520] From 1618 onward Kwanghae's court referred to Inmok as *sŏgong* 西宮(Western Palace), stripping her of the title of queen dowager without officially deposing her. This was a shaky compromise, recorded in: *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 43(43): 99a (戊子 day, third article) [1618/1/28].
[521] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 187(64): 64a (癸亥 day, first article) [1623/3/14]. And *Injo sillok* 1:5a-6a [1623/3/14].

The Queen Dowager ordered to depose the king. Prince Kwanghae and [Crown Prince] Chi are to be regarded as commoners. Following this order, today his majesty ascends to the throne. The statement of the Queen Dowager Inmok reads as follows: “Heaven gives rise to the people and establishes a ruler [for them]. It is Heaven’s will for him to teach propriety and human relations, establish order, uphold the ancestral shrines, and give stability to the common people.

The Great King Sŏnjo, who unfortunately lacked a legitimate heir, forwent the established hierarchy between senior and junior, due to the circumstances at that time, and named Kwanghae Crown Prince. Once he dwelled in the Residence of the Crown Prince, his lack of virtue became apparent. During Sŏnjo’s latter years, he harboured great resentment [against Kwanghae]. Upon reaching the position of crown prince, [Kwanghae] opposed the Way and rebelled against reason. His dishonesty was boundless.

Upon reaching adulthood, despite my own lack of virtue, I received the Son-of-Heaven’s decree to become the previous king’s spouse and a mother to the entire country. As the years passed, the man who was Sŏnjo’s son had to regard me as his mother. But Kwanghae listened to and placed trust in slander. Since his birth, he had been suspicious and inimical. [But then] he ordered the deaths of my parents. He butchered my clan. He harboured [animosity towards] the legitimate prince, [so he] snatched and killed him. [I] endured imprisonment, deposition, troubles, and insults. He did not restore human principles.

How to avenge the hatred of the previous king, and how about those who have not yet died? [He went] so far as to kill his brothers and massacre their wives. He beat his father’s concubines to death and filled up the prisons. He poisoned and killed the innocent. He displaced countless families; he [ordered the] building of two palaces. Over ten years, the [extensive corvée for construction] never stopped.
[…]

Our country has served the Imperial Court for over two hundred years. In righteousness we have been like lord and subject, but in benevolence (*ŭn* 恩) like father and son. The blessing of restoration after the Imjin War cannot be forgotten for ten thousand generations. In the forty years of his reign, the previous king has served the Great (*sadae* 事大) most honestly. His entire life he never sat down with his back facing west. Kwanghae forgot the gratitude [owed] and turned his back on virtue. He did not revere the heavenly commands, [instead,] secretly he harboured two hearts. He crossed over to the barbarians, already before the very first battle; he secretly instructed his servants in the army to look the other way and not to see the rebellion. In the end, [this] led to the entire army surrendering and being captured, a disgrace before [the entire world]. When imperial representatives came to our country, [many] were seized and tied up –just like the *pi* 貔.[522] Several imperial decrees were issued, but [Kwanghae] had no intention to reinforce the army, forcing our righteous and proper state of Samhan 三韓[523] to seek allegiance with barbarians and beasts. How can the heartaches and headaches [Kwanghae caused] be put into words? He destroyed the heavenly order of the universe; he ruined normal human relations; on the one hand, he offended the imperial court, and on the other hand, he incurred the hatred of the people. With his crimes and evil having gotten to this point, how should the country be ruled, how can the people be looked after? How can the venerable ancestors be left to dwell in their heavenly positions? How can the godly spirits at the shrines be rendered service? Most assuredly, by deposing him.

Prince Nŭngyang, a grandson of the Great King Sŏnjo, the firstborn of Prince Chŏngwŏn, is smart, bright, kind, and filial. He has an unusual appearance. Sŏnjo greatly loved him and raised him in the palace. [Sŏnjo personally] gave hints of his intentions on [his] naming. When [Nŭngyang] approached

[522] This refers to a mythical beast that was drawn on prison doors, presumably to prevent prisoners from escaping. Later this character in itself came to be used as a synonym for prison. Both usages are plausible here.

[523] The term 'Samhan', originally referring to the Mahan, Chinhan, and Pyŏnhan states of southern Korea, had become a common way of referring to Korea by Koryŏ times. For details see: Remco E. Breuker, *Establishing a Pluralist Society in Medieval Korea, 918-1170: History, Ideology, and Identity in the Koryŏ Dynasty.* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 19-36.

> [Sŏnjo's] desk, [Sŏnjo] would grasp his hand and sigh. His feeling of belonging [towards Nŭngyang] was very deep, unlike the rest of his grandsons.
>
> Today, [Nŭngyang] rose to greatly righteous action, dispelling darkness and rebellion against the natural order; he freed me from prison and insult, restoring my position and titles. The normal human relations were rectified; the ancestral shrines are at peace again. His achievement and virtue are majestic; gods and men [pledge their] allegiance [to him]. He may ascend to the Great Position. In order to continue the descendancy of Great King Sŏnjo, [I] invest his spouse, Lady Han, as queen. This concludes [my] instructions, let them be known.[524]

As in Wagner's covering of King Yŏnsan's dethronement, recent scholarship on King Kwanghae has also not recognised that the queen dowager was a crucial factor in this instance of transfer of royal power. Seung B. Kye goes so far as to deny Queen Dowager Inmok's authorship of the above speech asserting instead that Injo 'issued a message in the name of the queen dowager to justify his coup and promulgate his accession to the throne.'[525] He does not offer any evidence for this assertion, evidence much needed considering how extended passages of the speech clearly convey the personal standpoint of the queen dowager and even use remarkably similar wording to the Queen Dowager's more spontaneous utterings recorded for the day before the speech.[526] In a rather unusual line of reasoning Seung B. Kye then goes on to analyse the Queen Dowager's speech by length, concluding that the offences against the Ming must have been the key reason to dethrone Kwanghae, as they constitute the largest single grievance by proportion of the speech.[527]

Overall, Seung B. Kye's interpretation of the Queen Dowager's speech is not convincing. Firstly, Queen Dowager Inmok most likely gave the speech herself, as it offered

[524] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 187(64): 64a (癸亥 day, first article) [1623/3/14].
[525] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 271.
[526] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[527] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 271-272.

the explanation accompanying the act of state of deposing Kwanghae that she ordered herself, too. And secondly –if the Queen Dowager was in fact the author of the speech– it would be extremely unlikely that any of the more abstract political criticisms against Kwanghae could possibly outweigh the fact that Kwanghae was responsible for the deaths of Inmok's own father and son. Additionally, if the coup leaders were in fact motivated by the chance to bring about a change in foreign policy, it would still be impossible to deduce this motivation from the queen's speech, which –while fulfilling the purpose of justifying the coup– portrays the coup not as setting an agenda for foreign policy, but of fulfilling its purpose by rectifying human relations and giving peace to the ancestral shrines and the country.

Instead of treating the coup leaders and the queen dowager as the same, the motivation of the coup leaders to launch the coup must be treated as separate from the reasons that motivated the queen dowager to endorse the coup. Both the speech and the queen dowager's statements from when she first learned about the coup, leave little doubt about what led her to support the palace revolt: personal hatred towards Kwanghae, a strong desire for revenge, and gratification about being reinstituted as head of the royal household. The motivations of the coup leaders are more obscure and will be treated in chapter VII.

Conclusions

The royal family, with its rivalries and power struggles between fathers and sons, brothers and half-brothers, nephews and uncles, was both one of the main sources of continuity in the centuries-long history of Chosŏn as well as a frequent source of instability at court. Rivalries would often invite court officials to seek allegiance with male members of the family who might be considered candidates for the throne. In a particularity of the Chosŏn system, the core of the state and the almost absolute authority on all matters of policy-making, the monarch himself, was nevertheless not automatically the head of the royal family. The above case studies are just a small selection of the many instances –if perhaps some of the

most impressive– of Chosŏn's eldest queen dowagers making their authority as heads of the royal household felt at court.

James Palais has rightly pointed out that the queen dowagers were highly influential in cases where the succession was not settled.[528] The cases of Yŏnsan's and Kwanghae's depositions illustrate that Palais still understates the authority of Chosŏn's highest-ranking women to manage succession. In fact, the queen dowagers appear as the only institutional actor in the constitutional framework of Chosŏn to have ordered the deposition of monarchs and to have designated their successors. While this practice may have been experimental in its first instance, the deposition of Yŏnsan, it is clear that the dethronement of Kwanghae followed the precedent set out by the earlier case as closely as the different historical backgrounds allowed. In existing scholarship on Chosŏn, what appears to be a systematic underestimation of the queen dowagers' authority may well be due to the fact that existing scholarship has downplayed the significant roles of the queen dowagers in the cases explored above. Palais's statement regarding the limited power of queens in Chosŏn holds true, if one focusses exclusively on the realm of policy, where kings might have been influenced by officials' remonstrance and very occasionally challenged by imperial decrees, but otherwise held near-absolute authority. In personnel matters of the royal family, however, queen dowagers wielded both significant power and authority even over the kings themselves, making the dowager one of the most influential actors within the Chosŏn framework of state institutions.

The exercise of authority by monarchs in Chosŏn was expected to align to standards of Confucian ethics, law, and precedent. The same can be said about the authority exercised by the queen dowagers. In the case of King Yŏnsan's dethronement, court officials, along with

[528] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 24-25.

Queen Dowager Chŏnghyŏn, forged a precedent that was followed in the case of King Kwanghae's dethronement. Just over one hundred years after Yŏnsan had been sent into exile, Queen Dowager Inmok was viewed as having the authority to legitimately relieve King Kwanghae of his role at the heart of the Chosŏn state, but her authority to sentence him to death –or indeed to kill him with her own hands, as she threatened– was successfully challenged by court officials with reference to the Yŏnsan precedent.[529] Within the confines of their domain, queen dowagers pursued policy in coordination with court officials. But, as demonstrated by the above examples, they did so in a way of advancing their families' interests as well as their own personal interests and preferences. During the times when queen dowagers held positions as heads of the royal household, their authority can be said to have outweighed the authority of kings in matters immediately linked to the composition of the royal family's hierarchy and membership. Does that make them more powerful than the kings themselves? Yes and no. While they outranked kings by virtue of filial piety that respected seniority and they enjoyed the highest degree of authority in family policy matters, no other type of policy fell into their scope of responsibility. In other fields of policy their authority did not compete with that of kings.

Family politics were an essential feature of Chosŏn politics and therefore the authority of queen dowagers in this important domain did produce a number of consequences for other domains, too. The twofold precedent of a king being dethroned in situations that fulfilled the three conditions set out above of having lost the support of the court, having acted in severe violation of Confucian ethics, and having lost the support of the head of the royal household, gives additional weight to the 'ideology check'.

This observation should not lead us to believe that negative relations between the queen dowager, as head of the royal household, and the king were the norm in Chosŏn

[529] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].

history. Situations of the queen dowager not being the birth mother, or paternal grandmother, of the king were relatively rare, and situations of openly hostile relations, as in the case of Inmok and Kwanghae, were even rarer. Indeed, some monarchs of later Chosŏn even tried to make use of the elevated position of the queen dowager. King Yŏngjo (1694-1776, r. 1724-1776) may serve as an example of this practice, which was reminiscent of Kwanghae's borrowing of Ming authority in the settling of his domestic disputes. Having attracted criticism from court officials, Yŏngjo asked his stepmother, then head of the royal household as Queen Dowager Inwŏn, to allow him to step down as king.[530] Yŏngjo had counted on the queen dowager rejecting his demand, which would have improved Yŏngjo's standing at court. The king's plan, however, was scotched by the hearing difficulties of the elder stateswoman who told him to 'do as he pleased' –an announcement that plunged the court into chaos and fuelled the rivalry between King Yŏngjo and Crown Prince Sado. Although Yŏngjo's plan failed, his intentions reveal the potential positive effects of positive relations between king and queen dowager: ensuring that the queen dowager continued to support the king could weaken the court officials' criticism, thereby enhancing the king's standing at court. Naturally, this practice also emphasized the authority of the queen dowager as it was based on the plausibility of the scenario of the head of the royal household siding with the parties criticising the king and relieving him of his duties. In other words, in the same way that Chosŏn monarchs could use Confucian argumentation against non-compliant court officials or borrow legitimacy from Ming interventions, they could also potentially use the authority of the queen mothers to their advantage.

[530] Jahyun Kim Haboush, *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong: The Autobiographical Writings of a Crown Princess of Eighteenth-Century Korea*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 220. Referencing *Yŏngjo sillok* 78:10b-20a [1752/12/XX].

Chapter 7: Chosŏn under King Injo (1623-1649)

I. Domestic Turmoil and Kingly Dependence
   a. King Injo's righteous army
   b. Yi Kwal's rebellion

II. Allies in war: King Injo and the Ming imperial court
   a. Delayed investiture
      i. A question of precedent
      ii. Securing investiture: King Injo's foreign policy success
   b. A changed strategic outlook
      i. Rhetoric and action
      ii. Consensus on strategy

III. A new role for the Queen Dowager?
   a. Regained prestige
   b. Nobody above the law

The nature of the Kwanghae-Injo transition encompassed the potential for one of the most radical changes of policy in the history of the Chosŏn dynasty. Chosŏn courtiers harboured high expectations towards the virtue of their monarchs, as the kings' virtue and moral self-rectification were thought to produce a harmonious society and an orderly realm. Filial piety was among the core virtues expected of monarchs. A king's filial piety was to be directed toward the royal ancestors and particularly toward their predecessors as enshrined in the *Chongmyo* shrine, which preserved the spirit tablets of past kings and queens. At the time King Injo ascended to the throne, however, Kwanghae had neither died nor was he going to be enshrined among Injo's ancestors. As Kwanghae made his way into his exile first on Kanghwa, and later Cheju Island, King Injo was free to disregard any precedent Kwanghae may have set and was in fact actively expected to deviate from Kwanghae's choice of policy. This was particularly true regarding the treatment of the Queen Dowager and in terms of foreign policy as related to the ongoing conflict between the Later Jin and Ming dynasties.

The theoretical potential for change resulting from the coup against Kwanghae, however, had its limitations due to the institutional framework that remained intact despite the political upheaval. Beyond the institutional limitations to King Injo's authority, his sway over affairs at court was diminished due to obligations owed to the men who engineered and aided the coup. The political turmoil resulting from the dethronement additionally stifled the monarchy's potential towards effective governance. While King Kwanghae's heavy-handed policies had alienated a large part of the court, the unity between disgruntled courtiers, scholars, and officials in many cases did not extend beyond their shared opposition to Kwanghae. King Injo presided over a polarised court and had to reconcile officials who were hoping to see their support for the coup rewarded, while those who had stood by Kwanghae feared for their careers, if not their lives. Before long, King Injo, struggling to appease the quarrelling factions and unable to rely on his shaky legitimacy, faced a rebellion that seriously

threatened the throne. Its leader, Yi Kwal, an accomplished general who had actively supported King Injo's coup, turned to rebellion as a result of feeling marginalised and threatened by accusations of treason against his son. Though the Yi Kwal rebellion could be quelled, it would not remain the only attempt to forcibly remove King Injo from the 'great position' the Queen Dowager had asked him to occupy. Later rebels –they, too, were led by King Injo's merit subjects– were motivated by their opposition to his foreign policy that they perceived as meek.

Far beyond the tumultuous domestic situation and Injo's mixed record of asserting kingly authority, King Injo is remembered as the monarch who incurred two invasions from Manchuria by the Jurchen of the Later Jin in 1627 and by the Manchus of the Qing dynasty in 1636.[531] Following the defeat at Sarhu, King Kwanghae had attempted to establish diplomatic ties with Nurhaci to prevent further foreseeable hostilities. King Injo –distancing himself from his disgraced predecessor– employed a much clearer pro-Ming rhetoric at court, which has often been blamed for the first invasion. King Injo's obstinate insistence on maintaining tributary relations with the Ming and his refusal to recognise the Later Jin, and later the Qing dynasty, as an 'elder brother', then might be blamed for the second invasion.

While there is a wide consensus on the preventability of the second invasion, recent studies suggest that the strategic motivations for the first attack may have been outside Chosŏn control and the first four years of Injo's reign that lie between the coup that brought him to power in 1623 and the Later Jin invasion in 1627, did not greatly add to the already strained relations between the Korean Kingdom and the rising power in Manchuria. It is, however, not the purpose of this chapter to assess the soundness of King Injo's policy decisions. Instead, the focus of this chapter will be on the question of whether King Injo was

[531] The Later Jin took on the name of the Qing dynasty in 1636. From this point on the Jurchen were referred to as Manchurians.

in fact free to take policy decisions himself, despite his weaker position vis-à-vis other institutional actors at the Chosŏn court as compared to King Kwanghae.

King Injo's reign provides a great wealth of case studies into domestic factional politics and the behaviour of the collective of court officials under pressure. It also provides valuable case studies showing how strongly Chosŏn valued the concept of *ye* 禮 in foreign relations, and how this sense of propriety could be prioritised or even replace more pragmatic strategic considerations. Not least, King Injo's relation with his Crown Prince and his strict opposition to the Catholic ideas Crown Prince Sohyŏn brought back from Qing-controlled Shenyang, the tensions in the father-son relationship, which most likely ended in filicide, belong to the dramatic and in many ways tragic tale of King Injo's reign. While all these aspects characterise Chosŏn under Injo, most will only be touched upon superficially. Instead, I will focus on three aspects of King Injo's reign to examine the continuity of the constitutional limitations to royal authority and power under the changed political circumstances following Kwanghae's ousting from power. That is, this chapter will discuss the institutional relationship between (1) the throne and the officialdom, (2) the Chosŏn royal throne and the Ming imperial court, and ultimately (3) the throne and the re-established Queen Dowager.

Domestic Turmoil and Kingly Dependence

Despite Queen Dowager Inmok's speech and her support for the new regime, Chosŏn Korea entered a period of political unrest and instability in the months following the coup. The coalition of men who had engineered the palace coup, who had plotted and worked in secrecy together for at least three years,[532] fell apart almost as soon as their primary goal of

[532] According to the description of the coup offered in the *Injo sillok* the planning process started in the *kyŏngsin* year, i. e. in 1620. *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].

dethroning Kwanghae had been achieved. The rebellion had not been a risk-free endeavour as evidenced by the fact that some of the co-conspirators had been found out and underwent incarceration and torture.[533] Had the plot been unveiled prematurely, many of those involved would likely not have been able to save their lives nor those of their close relatives. Conspiracy against the throne was one of the ten abominations under the *Ming Code*[534] and King Kwanghae did not have a history of applying the law generously. As such, it is perhaps understandable that there would have been considerable expectations towards a substantial payoff associated with the high risk taken in a rebellion against Kwanghae. Under the pressure of these expectations, the coalition of men who enabled Injo's ascension burst asunder only months after the coup over the question of spoils.[535] Most notable among the discontents was General Yi Kwal. An experienced military man, Yi Kwal had already accumulated some dissatisfaction in the course of the coup itself, as he felt he was not given a role that befitted a man of his stature.[536] Almost immediately after the coup, his co-conspirators felt that Yi Kwal had done his part and were concerned about limiting his influence in the post-coup political framework. Renewed slights –Yi Kwal was even sent to a province to serve as a vice regional military commander[537] in an effort to quell his ambitions in the capital– angered the general to the point of taking up arms against his former co-conspirators. For a short time in 1624, Yi Kwal and his troops succeeded in taking the capital.[538] Injo fled alongside most of his courtiers. These events mark the first time that a Chosŏn monarch had to flee the court to escape the clutches of rebels. It would not be until

[533] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[534] The 'ten abominations' (十惡) are listed under art. 2 of the Ming Code.
[535] Guy Shimon Shababo, 'Life and death of a despoiler: the Confucian reformation of Yun Hyu' (PhD diss., The University of British Columbia, 2019), 25.
[536] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[537] *Injo sillok* 2:17b [1623/6/24].
[538] Guy Shimon Shababo, 'Life and death of a despoiler: the Confucian reformation of Yun Hyu' (PhD diss., The University of British Columbia, 2019), 38.

the reign of Kojong (1852-1919, r. 1864-1897, reigned until 1907 as Emperor of Korea), Chosŏn's very last king, that such a scenario arose again.

Most of the tumultuous developments following the dethronement of Kwanghae are not strictly speaking within the scope of this enquiry, insofar as they relate to factional strife within the bureaucracy, personal vendettas among people of rank and office, and outside the official function of institutions. Both the way that Injo's supporters justified their involvement in the coup, however, as well as the attempts undertaken by Yi Kwal to legitimise his rebellion will be explored below. If it were possible to answer the question of what exactly it was that motivated coup leaders, it would certainly add clarity to the contours of what was seen as acceptable kingly conduct. Yi Kwal's attempts at securing legitimacy for his rule did make use of the availability of members of the royal family and will be a concern for this study.

King Injo's righteous army

The men who helped the later King Injo ascend to the throne were officially labelled a 'righteous army' (*ŭibyŏng* 義兵) –a somewhat positively connotated way of refering to insurgents . In fact, Injo's righteous army was chiefly made up from two groups: retainers and family members of Injo himself, and officials who had either left the capital as a result of their moral indignation towards Kwanghae's character, his lack of filial piety, or his policies. Naturally, both groups also attracted a considerable number of opportunists. Although the proportions of each of these two categories cannot be determined with certainty, both were necessary for this enterprise to succeed.

Injo had grown up in the palace. His father, Prince Chŏngwŏn had been a half-brother of Kwanghae, and –like Kwanghae himself– was the issue of a concubine rather than one of Sŏnjo's queen consorts. Although, as Queen Dowager Inmok pointed out, the young Injo may

have enjoyed the special favour of King Sŏnjo,[539] his late birth meant that his proximity to the throne was bound to wane over the years. Particularly, following King Kwanghae's marriage to Queen Munsŏng who gave birth to a legitimate heir in 1598, Injo's chances of ever ascending to the throne would have been extraordinarily slim under normal circumstances. Accordingly, for those close to him, such as the 'warriors' Sin Kyŏngsin and Yi Sŏ, who were credited in the records with first devising a plan to dethrone Kwanghae and replace him by Injo, as well as for Injo himself, such a move presented the opportunity of a lifetime.[540] This inner circle of Injo's comprised a number of close retainers and notably several members of his mother's family. For example, Injo's maternal grandfather, Ku Samaeng, had been an influential minister during the later years of King Sŏnjo's reign. Among other posts, he had served as an extraordinary ambassador to the court in Beijing. Injo's kingship was going to ensure even greater prominence for the members of his extended family.

The records detail rather earnestly that after Injo's family members and retainers had come to an agreement, they sought to recruit 'those among the literati who were held to be prestigious' to join in on their plan.[541] One such man was Kim Ryu. Apparently, when approached about the possibility of joining the rebellion in 1620, the former royal lecturer and deputy director of the office of special advisors, Kim Ryu, agreed 'as soon as they spoke'.[542] Similarly, when former district magistrate Yi Kwi was approached by Sin Kyŏngsin, he was found to already 'have the will' to overthrow Kwanghae and was 'overjoyed' about being let in on the conspiracy. Both Kim Ryu and Yi Kwi had enjoyed illustrious bureaucratic careers.

[539] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[540] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[541] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[542] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].

Kim had been promoted regularly during the first years of King Kwanghae's reign.[543] Yet, two years after Kwanghae's final push towards the official posthumous legalisation of his birth mother as a queen of Chosŏn and one year after the defeat of the Korean forces at Sarhu, Kim was ready to turn on his monarch.

Scholarship is still divided over whether it was ultimately the queen dowager question or the indignation about Kwanghae's foreign policy that led men such as Kim and Yi to support the rebellion. In later periods of Chosŏn history, the coup is largely understood as a restoration of the position of the queen dowager.[544] Queen Dowager Inmok herself highlighted both, the unfair treatment she received as well as Kwanghae's 'treacherous' policy towards the Ming.[545] Perhaps as a result of the much greater concessions King Injo was forced to make regarding the Manchurian question following his two surrenders, Kwanghae's foreign policy was not stressed as much in the later Chosŏn records.[546]

What can be said with some certainty is that many literati who joined the rebellion had been driven out of office, or left office, long before the conflict with the Later Jin first erupted in 1618. Kim Ryu still held office in 1618, but his opposition to Kwanghae's family policies had become apparent by then.[547] That very same year, Kim Ryu was among a list of high-ranking officials who were attacked by censoring organs as follows: 'You would rather trespass against his holy Majesty than to go against the Western Palace [i.e., Queen Dowager Inmok]. How is that not despicable?' Rather insultingly, the censors also accused Kim Ryu of not only of propping up the queen dowager even after her father had been 'defeated', that is, labelled a traitor and killed, but also of 'salivating over the Western Palace'.[548] Kim Ryu and

[543] In the second year of Kwanghae's reign, Kim was named the head of the Office of Special Councillors. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 12(12): 85b-8b (癸未 day, sixth article) [1610/10/12].
[544] One instance of this can be found here: *Yŏngjo sillok* 9:11a-13b [1726/2/8].
[545] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 187(64): 64a (癸亥 day, first article) [1623/3/14].
[546] Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 261.
[547] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 44(44): 13a-14b (辛未day, second article) [1618/3/12].
[548] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 44(44): 13a-14b (辛未day, second article) [1618/3/12].

others who had recently excused themselves from court sessions were accused of 'forgetting their lord' and of 'having incurred the crime of treason, not below the ten abominations',[549] a clear demand that Kim Ryu and the others should be executed. The censors suggested purging even the old and sickly among those who had not showed up for court sessions, because 'even if they are old and sick, if they do not take part [in court sessions] for a long time, it is not as though it was not out of their fault'.[550] Kwanghae, however, was feeling sick himself, and did not wish to be bothered with the censors' report.[551] Kim Ryu would not remain the only one accused by the censors that day to join the rebellion.

Case studies such as Kim Ryu's illustrate well that some of the literati were ready to put their careers at stake to defend the queen dowager. It appears that they in fact preferred to go against the throne than against the queen dowager. Inmok's authority as queen dowager, and the indignation about Kwanghae's treatment of her family were certainly considerable drivers behind the rebellion. The heated nature of the debate and the very real threat to a considerable part of the higher officialdom of losing their positions at court, if not their lives, added greatly to the momentum of the rebels.

The question of whether Kwanghae's policy towards the Later Jin and the Ming contributed to fuelling the rebellion against him is less apparent from the records. Prominent literati who joined the rebellion had left the court before the defeat at Sarhu. Most left because of disputes over the queen dowager. Some left in the aftermath of the 1613 accusations of witchcraft and the execution of Inmok's father and son.[552] Some only left in 1618 when Kwanghae attempted to settle the queen dowager question for good. There is no clear indication of any of the coup leaders leaving in 1619 over foreign policy disputes. This does

[549] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 44(44): 13a-14b (辛未day, second article) [1618/3/12].
[550] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 44(44): 13a-14b (辛未 day, second article) [1618/3/12].
[551] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 44(44): 13a-14b (辛未 day, second article) [1618/3/12].
[552] Yi Kwi, one of the key conspirators, was among those sent off at this earlier stage. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 29(29): 104a (戊午 day, fifth article) [1614/6/9].

not mean, however, that between 1620 when the coup first entered the planning stage and 1623 when it was carried out, foreign policy could not have been an additional factor that might have motivated the conspirators further and that may have attracted some more less well-known literati to join their cause.

The coup leaders themselves did not publicly declare their goals. The queen dowager's speech understandably highlighted her own fate. In terms of Kwanghae's foreign policy, Inmok critiqued both Kwanghae's attempts at foreign policy with the Later Jin as well as the lack of military success at the Battle of Sarhu, accusing Kwanghae of sabotaging the campaign by ordering his commander to surrender. As discussed in chapter 4, Kwanghae's alleged secret order to surrender is likely to have been hearsay. For the coup leaders, however, the idea that Kwanghae was to blame for the military defeat would have been attractive. His lack of commitment to the cause was apparent from the fact that he had repeatedly argued against the campaign and delayed dispatching troops. Quite naturally, Kwanghae's detractors could present his –in fact quite reasonable– hesitancy regarding the campaign as a treasonous sabotage of the military. In this way, the military defeat gave rise to something of a stab-in-the-back myth that further undermined Kwanghae's position at court and further alienated the many literati who had left the court in the course of the decade-long disputes over the position of the queen dowager and the question of posthumous promotion of Lady Kim.

By 1623, the dissatisfaction against Kwanghae had such a large variety of sources that it is impossible to determine with certainty whether the policy towards Manchuria was the straw that broke the camel's back. One might reckon that Kwanghae could have held on to power had his expeditionary force in Manchuria not been defeated under such dubious circumstances or so resoundingly, but this, too, remains speculative. What can be said with certainty is that the nucleus of the rebellion was made up of close relatives and retainers of Injo's. This nucleus had a strong vested interest in advancing the position of Injo. Beyond this relatively small group, the 'righteous army' was able to capitalise on the frustration and

indignation against Kwanghae that by the early 1620s had become a prevalent stance among the literati.

This larger group of literati was less committed to Injo's personal claim to the throne than to the idea of punishing Kwanghae. Attracting prestigious literati to the cause of the rebellion greatly advanced its cause, but it also caused problems. Men of the likes of Kim Ryu did much to gather support for the rebellion among the literati. Operationally, however, they were not instrumental in carrying out the coup. The questions of what hierarchies should be established between men of action, such as Yi Kwal, and backstage supporters who held authority among the literati, such as Kim Ryu, quickly led to tensions. Even before the coup itself, this latent conflict became apparent, when Kim Ryu felt entitled to summon Yi Kwal when visiting a rebel military operation in Changdan.[553] Yi Kwal was fuming and was ready not to comply. A deeper crisis could only be averted through the mediation of Yi Kwi.[554] The fact that the troops at Changdan were commanded by literati without any military experience, rather than only the military officials in charge, would have been perceived as a slight by Yi Kwal. What can be understood as clashes of ego before the success of the coup gains an additional dimension when there were spoils to be distributed after Injo took power. After the dethronement of Yŏnsan, the coalition of literati had split over questions of justice and access to the throne, resulting in renewed violent purges of literati. In the case of Kwanghae's dethronement, the pre-existing conflicts among the rebels broke out in violence rapidly and fiercely, when Yi Kwal decided not only to substantiate his claim to titles but to attempt to undo Injo's ascension and to replace him with yet another son of Sŏnjo's, Prince Hŭngan.[555]

[553] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[554] *Injo sillok* 1:1a-4b [1623/3/13].
[555] Hŭngan did not share the same mother with either Kwanghae or Prince Chŏngwon, Kwanghae's half-brother and Injo's father. His mother was Lady Han. He was born in 1598.

Yi Kwal's rebellion

With the success of Injo's coup, the broad anti-Kwanghae coalition at court had fulfilled its unifying purpose and the logic of concurrence among individuals and groups at court returned. Even members of the great northerner faction who had stood by Kwanghae during the years when he was denied Ming investiture as a crown prince had turned on him during the last years of his reign. In the aftermath of the coup, however, it was the westerner faction that could capitalise most. Some great northerners were among those who were executed as Kwanghae's cronies. Others were able to switch camps. Yi Kwal had been a member of the lesser northerner faction,[556] which along with his difficult character and his previous clashes with authorities among the rebels, may have contributed to attempts to marginalise him after the coup. Rather than being offered a high rank and office in the capital, Yi Kwal was sent to P'yŏngan Province to ready Chosŏn's defences along the northern border. While this was certainly an important task, and an experienced commander of the likes of Yi would superficially appear as the right man for the task, it would have been clear to most that sending an ambitious commander, one of the first men to have reached the capital during the coup, off to the north could not be considered a suitable reward. The records suggest that it was King Injo himself who decided to send Yi to the north.[557] After all, Yi Kwal had served in P'yŏngan before and Injo reckoned that 'nobody else can take care of the north'.[558] Yi Kwi and Kim Ryu at least superficially intervened on behalf of Yi Kwal, reminding Injo that 'he is now a man of great merit' and that he should remain in the capital.[559] The king, however, was not swayed. Considering Injo's surprise when the rebellion broke loose –he is recorded saying: 'Yi Kwal is a loyal and righteous person, how can he

[556] Guy Shimon Shababo, 'Life and death of a despoiler: the Confucian reformation of Yun Hyu' (PhD diss., The University of British Columbia, 2019), 38.
[557] *Injo sillok* 1:9a-11a [1623/3/15].
[558] *Injo sillok* 1:9a-11a [1623/3/15].
[559] *Injo sillok* 1:9a-11a [1623/3/15].

harbour rebellious feelings?'[560]– it appears that King Injo did not fully appreciate the complexity of the situation. In retrospect, Injo's initial handling of Yi Kwal appears as a preventable error in judgement.

The slight of being sent off to P'yŏngan by itself, however, may not have been enough to push Yi Kwal to the extremes of turning his army on Hansŏng. In the course of the push against members of the northerner faction at court, Yi's own son became the target of suspicions and was eventually arrested.[561] This certainly fuelled Yi Kwal's irritation and frustration. Considering the Chosŏn context where guilt-by-association was wide-spread, in some cases even codified, the arrest of his son would have appeared as a direct threat to Yi Kwal himself as well. This reasoning is underlined by statements of Yi Kwi explaining to Injo in regard to the suspicions towards Yi Kwal's son: 'A son knows, but a father does not know? Could there really be such a reasoning?'[562] Accordingly, the Yi Kwal rebellion is best understood as resulting only partially from him having been slighted and not having received his due after the coup against Kwanghae. Political instability and the threat of purges against Kwanghae's former supporters implicated him, and the risk of losing everything most certainly contributed to Yi Kwal's determination to take up arms.

Militarily, Yi Kwal lived up to his reputation. The general managed to slip past his rivals and capture the capital. While there, he attempted to drum up support for his cause among the population. Interestingly, Yi did not seek any sort of arrangement with Injo, nor did he seek to reinstate Kwanghae, who would have needed to be retrieved from exile for such an undertaking to succeed and whose son and daughter-in-law had already succumbed to the deprivations of exile.[563] In an effort to lend legitimacy to his rebellion and to avoid the impression of usurping power for himself, he relied on the aid of yet another of the late King

[560] *Injo sillok* 4:7a-7b [1624/1/21].
[561] *Injo sillok* 4:7a-7b [1624/1/21].
[562] *Injo sillok* 4:7a-7b [1624/1/21].
[563] *Injo sillok* 2:18a-18b [1623/6/25].

Sŏnjo's children: Prince Hŭngan. Born in 1598 to Lady Han as a half-brother to both Kwanghae and Injo's father Chŏngwŏn. Hŭngan, just as Injo, would not have come anywhere close to the central royal authority under more usual circumstances. Growing up in the palace, he kept a low profile and did not feature to any significant extent in the annals. The considerations that led him to join Yi Kwal's rebellion are largely unclear today. For Yi, however, the prince offered an opportunity to claim legitimacy, and he chose to name Hŭngan King of Chosŏn. Since no legitimate agency of the state ever recognised Hŭngan, he is not listed as a past monarch of Chosŏn today. The case of his short kingship further illustrates the fact that princes of Chosŏn were viewed as potential kings and that there was a certain readiness among many of the princes to jump at, if not literally kill for, the opportunity of claiming the throne. This availability of candidates for the throne contributed both to the resilience of the dynasty and to instability at court. Interestingly, this pattern was not exclusive to Yi Kwal's rebellion. Indeed, the next major rebellion that followed just over one hundred years later followed a comparable pattern. In 1728, extreme members of the *soron* 少論 faction and their allies sought to oust King Yŏngjo from power. Motivated primarily by doubts regarding Yŏngjo's legitimacy and fuelled by allegations of his fraternal regicide committed against King Kyŏngjong (1688-1724, r. 1720-1724), who had favoured the *soron* faction, this rebellion of 1728, too, could count on the support of a risk-friendly royal – Prince Milp'ung.[564]

Prince Hŭngan could only call himself king for a few weeks before Yi Kwal's luck ran out. Yi had been unable to garner sufficient support to produce a general uprising. Most military men sided with Injo, whose claim to the throne had the greater backing within the royal family as well as among literati. With military defeat looming, Yi Kwal was captured

[564] In the case of Prince Milp'ung, too, the reasons why the rebels approached this particular royal are unknown. For details see: Andrew Jackson, *The 1728 Musin Rebellion: politics and plotting in eighteenth-century Korea*. (Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 54.

and killed by his own men who surrendered him in a bid to secure leniency for themselves. Prince Hŭngan was subsequently put to death by Sin Kyŏngjin and Sim Kiwŏn,[565] two close allies of Injo's. Sin had belonged to the very core of conspirators who first planned Injo's ascent to the throne. Nevertheless, the fact that the leaders of Yi Kwal's rebellion were executed without a trial, bespeaks the decay of royal authority and due process in the early stages of Injo's reign. Injo later reprimanded Sim and Sin. Particularly, the death of his half-uncle did not sit right with him. 'When it comes to killing a prince, there can be no exception for a high-ranking officer', he claimed.[566] The argument that Hŭngan, 'although he was a prince, had already betrayed his titles and can no longer be regarded as a prince'[567] appears to have swayed Injo, however. Serious punishments for Sin and Sim –who were long-standing and loyal subjects of Injo's and who had played their role in securing his kingship– were no longer considered.

Conclusions

The coalition that helped Injo claim the throne was brittle. This fragility may have partially resulted from the fact that although there were many reasons to oppose Kwanghae, and accordingly many joined the coup with the goal of dethroning Kwanghae, Injo himself enjoyed a limited base of supporters. Many, and that includes Injo's closest supporters in the coup, may have simply sought to succeed in the coup to advance personally or to better the positions of their families. The first contradictions and lines of conflict emerged even before Injo claimed the throne. In the aftermath, the question of who was going to be able to profit from the coup divided the coalition both because individual ambitions clashed as well as because of a revival of factional splits. The Yi Kwal rebellion illustrates both problems. The

[565] *Injo sillok* 4:27a-28a [1624/2/15].
[566] *Injo sillok* 4:34a-34b [1624/2/23].
[567] *Injo sillok* 4:34a-34b [1624/2/23].

emerging tensions would have made it difficult even for a more experienced ruler to assert his authority. King Injo's decisions regarding the first major crisis of his reign appeared hapless. Not only did he fail to handle Yi Kwal more delicately, allowing a preventable personal grievance to turn into a national crisis, Injo also allowed his supporters to encroach on the law and his own authority when he allowed them to carry out justice themselves and kill his half-uncle. Such failures to assert leadership set the tone for Injo's years on the throne.

Unchecked conflicts within the rebels, the literati, and Injo's various supporters led to a swift decay in central authority during the very first months of Injo's reign, despite the fact that the young king had received the mandate to govern from Queen Dowager Inmok and the coup had enjoyed widespread support among high-ranking bureaucrats. There are tendencies in scholarship to tie the Injo coup to specific policy goals, particularly in regards to the policy towards the Ming. Studies into the background of those most active in the coup, however, reveal that most of them opposed Kwanghae already on the queen dowager question, meaning that foreign policy may not have been a primary concern for them, although the possibility that Kwanghae's diplomatic efforts with the Later Jin, as well as the defeat of the Korean expeditionary forces at Sarhu in 1619, contributed to the resolve of the anti-Kwanghae coalition cannot be excluded. Regardless, foreign policy would naturally become a crucial aspect of Injo's kingship, as the conflict with the Later Jin was entering a critical period. Three years after the Yi Kwal rebellion had been quelled, Manchurian soldiers crossed the Yalu River into Korean territory. Domestically, King Injo's legitimacy and authority were shaky. The monarchy was in dire need of allies. Both the way King Injo conducted his foreign policy and the way he strengthened the position of the Queen Dowager can be partially explained this way, as will be discussed below.

Allies in War: Injo and the Ming imperial court

During the two and a half decades of his reign, King Injo had to witness truly epochal geopolitical changes. In the first months and years of his reign, his foreign policy was focussed on obtaining Ming investiture and the tokens of legitimacy associated with kingship, just as his predecessor had done during the posthumous promotion of Lady Kim. As King Injo lay on his deathbed in 1649, the world was a different one. The once seemingly all-powerful Ming dynasty was vanquished, their last emperor, Chongzhen, had hanged himself on the hill north of the Forbidden City's walls. The relationship between King Injo and the Ming can be loosely grouped into three stages. During the first stage up until 1625, when King Injo secured his official investiture,[568] the relations were characterised by a mutual dependence: The Korean king was struggling for legitimacy at home, and the formal Ming investiture would significantly enhance his prestige at court. The Ming side, on the other hand, was fighting a losing war and could not afford to lose an ally whose borders enlarged the Jurchen front for hundreds of kilometres.

Following the official investiture in 1625, the Korean king no longer depended on the Ming. Nevertheless, the Korean kingdom did not waiver in its support of the Ming side. By 1625 at least, honouring the alliance to the Ming had become much more of a choice. The invasion of 1627 showed that keeping up this support for a losing cause could be a costly path of action. Regardless, the Korean kingdom reverted to a defiant stance towards the Qing dynasty in the wake of the invasion. At no stage, it appears, did King Injo seriously consider abandoning the fight against the Qing even for a moment. In the face of the superior Manchurian military, King Injo's court was split between militant supporters of the Ming cause and those who advocated for a settlement with the Jurchen.[569] Both, however, were

[568] *Injo sillok* 9:22a-22b [1625/6/3].
[569] Thomas Quartermain, 'Besieged on a frozen mountain top: opposing records from the Qing invasion of Chosŏn, 1636-1637'. *Acta Koreana* Vol. 21, No. 1. (June 2018): 137. For a translation of Na Man'gap's diary recording the events of the time, see Na Man'gap, *The Diary of 1636: The Second*

motivated by the belief that their suggested policy was the safer way of ensuring the continued existence of the Chinese *ancien régime.*[570]

King Injo only gave in to the final defeat in 1636 when the Manchurian-led invaders had both captured the ancestral shrines that had been dispatched to Kanghwa Island and surrounded the King along with his family, including the Crown Prince, at the Namsan Mountain Fortress.[571] The royal family had taken up refuge in this large mountain fort to the south of the capital upon realising that their path to Kanghwa had already been blocked off. When King Injo surrendered, Qing forces had not yet been able to breach the fortress, but the Korean defenders were also unable to supply the troops of their besieged king.[572] With the Qing capture of both the living royal family and their enshrined ancestors, King Injo's kowtow to Hong Taiji (1592-1643) of the Qing in the snow upon his capture, the third stage of Ming-Chosŏn relations during the reign of King Injo commenced: the forced separation and the replacement of the Ming in their role as the central power by the Qing.

In the following, two aspects of the Ming-Chosŏn relation under King Injo will be examined in greater detail: the question of Injo's investiture and the question of Korean aid to the Ming cause. Ritual investiture for his deceased biological mother and the dispute over the dispatching of Korean troops in Manchuria had been the central and the most hotly disputed issues during King Kwanghae's reign. As shown below, King Injo's policy towards the Ming in part profited from the changed circumstances as the Ming continued to lose ground in what would later be called the Ming-Qing transition.

Manchu Invasion of Korea, translated and with an introduction by George Kallander, New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.

[570] Thomas Quartermain, 'Besieged on a frozen mountain top: opposing records from the Qing invasion of Chosŏn, 1636-1637'. *Acta Koreana* Vol. 21, No. 1. (June 2018): 164.

[571] Thomas Quartermain, 'Besieged on a frozen mountain top: opposing records from the Qing invasion of Chosŏn, 1636-1637'. *Acta Koreana* Vol. 21, No. 1. (June 2018): 145.

[572] Thomas Quartermain, 'Besieged on a frozen mountain top: opposing records from the Qing invasion of Chosŏn, 1636-1637'. *Acta Koreana* Vol. 21, No. 1. (June 2018): 145.

Delayed investiture

The Ming court did not respond enthusiastically to the supposedly pro-Ming coup d'état in the 'vassal state' (*wàifān* 外藩).[573] If anything, the immediate consequences of the coup gave reason for concern. Kwanghae may have been a difficult partner at times, but at least Ming generals had known him for many years. Ming officials initially saw the coup as a treasonous act but were eager to find out 'the details of the situation in the tributary state'.[574] If anything, the coup was disruptive and hindered a smooth cooperation between the two countries, on top of turning Koreans against each other instead of concentrating their efforts to the common defensive cause. Regardless, the extraordinary situation in Korea created an opportunity for the Ming imperial court to make their influence felt at the Chosŏn court once more by means of the central ritual that linked the two courts: the investiture of a Chosŏn monarch.

A question of precedent

Only fifteen years prior, the Ming court had demonstrated that they were not ready to grant investiture to any Korean royal, simply because the Chosŏn court asked them to. The case of Kwanghae's non-investiture as Crown Prince saw the Ming court persistently deny investiture based on the fact that the Korean court did not follow the common practice of primogeniture (*lì chángzǐ zhī chángjīng* 立長子之常經, kr. *rip changja chi sanggyŏng*).[575] Deposing monarchs could by no means be viewed as lawful by the Ming side, even if the official explanation the Ming court received made sure to stress the common Confucian elements, accusing Kwanghae of having 'lost the way of virtue since the time he ascended to

[573] It is notable that the Ming records also recognise the fact that Kwanghae had been deposed by the Queen Dowager for moral reasons. *Ming Xizong Shilu* 33 [1623/4/29].
[574] *Ming Xizong Shilu* 33 [1623/4/29].
[575] *Sŏnjo sillok* 181:24a-30b [1604/11/25].

the throne'.[576] There was no precedent of a similar proceeding in recent Chinese history, nor did the Chosŏn officials offer any older precedents as justification. Instead, they were forthcoming about the fact that the coup had been justified by the Queen Dowager[577] –a proceeding that would have been out of the question in Ming China.

At an early height of their power, the Ming dynasty had reacted forcefully, when the throne of one of their tributary nations was usurped, as was the case in the year 1400, when Hồ Quý Ly took the throne in Thanh Hóa from the reigning Trần dynasty of Đại Việt, in modern-day northern Vietnam. The result of the Ming attempt to re-establish the Trần was the twenty-year long Fourth Chinese domination of Vietnam.[578] Of course, such a precedent would have been entirely unsuitable to the situation in the early seventeenth century. Instead, another precedent from Ming-Chosŏn relations could be considered: Following the demise of King Yŏnsan in 1506, the Ming were asked to recognise King Chungjong. The Zhengde Emperor, recognising King Yŏnsan's clear lack of virtue decided to tolerate the coup. This toleration meant that the Ming court would not take any measures to re-instate the king they had invested, nor were they going to offer investiture to the new king –until the natural death of the deposed predecessor.[579] In the case of King Yŏnsan's dethronement, this condition did not pose a great problem to the Chosŏn court, as Yŏnsan died only a few weeks after being exiled to Kanghwa Island. Within months, King Chungjong was able to secure his investiture.[580] Kwanghae, however, was going to live another eighteen years after his dethronement, passing away only in 1641, five years before King Injo. Not a single Chosŏn monarch had ruled for eighteen years without investiture. For King Injo, the sixteenth man on the Chosŏn throne, forgoing this essential signifier of kingship was inconceivable.

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[576] *Ming Xizong Shilu* 33 [1623/4/29].
[577] *Ming Xizong Shilu* 33 [1623/4/29].
[578] Kathlene Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 58-63.
[579] *Chungjong sillok* 2: 34a-35b [1507/2/25].
[580] *Chungjong sillok* 5: 3a-4a [1508/1/5].

Securing investiture: King Injo's foreign policy success

Ritual and power have always been closely linked. In the case of the ritual of investiture, the Chosŏn monarch depended on the Imperial Court of the Ming dynasty. This obvious dependency opened the Korean monarchs up to Chinese pressure. Recent scholarship has examined the case of Injo's investiture as an example of Ming coercive diplomacy towards Chosŏn. Lee Ji-Young, for example, argues that the Ming court that had already denied Kwanghae's investiture as Crown Prince in order to extract resources from Chosŏn, also withheld Injo's investiture as King in order to ensure more military support from their Korean allies.[581] Ultimately Lee suggests that the Korean court was vulnerable to Ming pressure, because they were 'ideologically charged'.[582] Below, I will explain why this representation of King Injo's investiture is inaccurate and does neither the Ming nor the Chosŏn side justice.

Ming-Chosŏn relations were governed largely by precedent; the reliability created by observance of established norms was a major factor in the stability of the tributary system. With the coup against Kwanghae, Injo attained power in Chosŏn in a way that may have been legitimised domestically by Queen Dowager Inmok, but certainly not in a way that could be considered legitimate or acceptable at the Ming court. The only precedent of the Ming granting investiture to a Chosŏn monarch whose predecessor was still alive lay two hundred years in the past from when Injo came to the throne. Also, this precedent, set when King Sejo took over the throne from King Tanjong, was clearly not applicable. Tanjong had officially ceded the throne voluntarily and was in verifiably bad health, leading the Ming court at the

[581] Lee Ji-Young, 'Diplomatic Ritual as a Power Resource: The Politics of Asymmetry in Early Modern Chinese-Korean Relations.' *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13 (2013): 327.
[582] Lee Ji-Young, 'Diplomatic Ritual as a Power Resource: The Politics of Asymmetry in Early Modern Chinese-Korean Relations.' *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13 (2013): 328.

time to consent to Sejo's investiture.[583] This meant that in granting Injo investiture at all, the Ming side was clearly going out of their way and compromising their principles.

It is probably fair to characterise King Injo's court and indeed parts of the country at large as 'ideologically charged'[584] in the 1620s, even though the exact implications of this state may not be clear. The relevance of the court being 'ideologically charged' is also altogether questionable. Following the Injo coup, Chosŏn was highly politically volatile, as exemplified by the major uprising headed by Yi Kwal. These tensions cannot be said to have been ideologically motivated; instead, it was King Injo's lack of political legitimacy and the insecurity created by the coup itself that unleashed unrest and violence. Additionally, it would be a misunderstanding to characterise the importance accorded to the ritual of investiture as an implied turn towards orthodoxy at court. Investiture was a necessary element of kingship, the same way a US president only assumes office after swearing an oath or British prime ministers only take up their duties after being appointed by their queen or king. One might also quite simply reference the problems Kwanghae faced as Crown Prince for lack of investiture during a time when the Chosŏn court had not yet been electrified by the Aisin Gioro dynasty's war on the Ming. Kwanghae's case demonstrates clearly that investiture was taken very seriously, even when the court was not 'ideologically charged'.

In the third year of his reign, King Injo obtained Ming investiture. The Ming side made an exception to the established practice and expected King Injo to make contributions to the joint defensive effort. Keeping in mind Injo's dependency on the ritual and the clear Ming expectations, it is easy to suspect the Ming court of engaging in coercive diplomacy.[585] Yet, there was no coercive effect. King Injo was set on fighting for the Ming cause if called upon

[583] *Sejo sillok* 3:36a-38a [1456/4/20].
[584] Lee Sun-ah, 'Sim Kiwŏn's Revolt and the Return of Im Kyŏngŏp', *International Journal of Korean History* 2008.8, (2008): 1-24.
[585] Lee Ji-Young, 'Diplomatic Ritual as a Power Resource: The Politics of Asymmetry in Early Modern Chinese-Korean Relations.' *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13 (2013): 328-329.

before his investiture and he did not change his course of action after the ritual. In fact, he did not even abandon his support for the Ming side when this stance became quite obviously strategically reckless, and the Ming had lost all means of coercing Chosŏn.

Rather than looking at this episode of Ming-Chosŏn relations as an example of coercive diplomacy, then, one should look at it as one of Injo's major achievements in the domain of foreign policy. In the short period of three years, he achieved what Kwanghae as Crown Prince failed to achieve for a decade and a half –the Ming deviated from what they thought proper in terms of ritual. The Ming court was not above employing cunning tactics or giving in to bribes. Yet, the greatest policy concession of Injo's predecessor, Kwanghae's dispatching of Korean troops, was achieved not through a manipulative approach to ritual but by a straightforward imperial decree. Accordingly, it is considerably more plausible that the Ming court ultimately believed that establishing that same formal rapport between the emperor and the king by formally investing King Injo also served their interests best.

A changed strategic outlook

The questionable narrative of Korean neutrality under Kwanghae is partially based on the impression of a clear turn towards an obvious pro-Ming policy under King Injo. This perception is surprising, considering that Kwanghae did send an expedition force, which suffered defeat at the 1619 Battle at Sarhu. King Injo did not dispatch Korean soldiers outside Chosŏn territory. Although King Injo did not necessarily share his predecessor's unease about the continued presence of Ming forces under Mao Wenlong on Korean territory,[586] there is little in terms of policy to back up the idea of a pro-Ming swing under King Injo. What did change, however, was the rhetoric at court. King Injo was openly enthusiastic about the Ming cause and offered lavish praise to court officials who expressed pro-Ming sentiment in their

[586] *Injo sillok* 10:18b-19a [1625/10/15].

addresses to the throne.[587] Was King Injo's enthusiasm for the Ming side genuine? Did he merely view a pro-Ming stance as a convenient tool of distancing himself from Kwanghae and rallying the overwhelmingly anti-Manchurian court officials? It may not be possible to give a definitive answer to these questions. Instead, the discussion below will focus on the question of how King Injo was able to avoid the tensions between the Ming Imperial Court and himself that had plagued the latter years of his predecessor's reign.

Rhetoric and action

References to the fatherly position of the Ming emperors in their relation towards Chosŏn, allusions to Kija, the long tradition of Sino-Korean tributary relations, and direct references to the gratitude owed to the Imperial court for having saved the Chosŏn dynasty had already been common under King Kwanghae. Under King Injo –partially due to the much more enthusiastic response to such rhetoric by the new monarch– such discourse became the standard way of discussing international politics. Some scholars blame this discourse, and particularly the most recent addition to this discourse, the element of gratitude owed to the Ming for the aid in the war against the Japanese, for the seeming lack of strategic considerations in many of the discussions at court.[588] The concept of gratitude that the Chosŏn dynasty owed the Ming for their military assistance during the Imjin War has chiefly been summed up under the phrase of *chaejo chiŭn* 再造之恩. A possible translation offered by Han Myung-gi is 'saving the dynasty from the brink of ruin',[589] which aptly describes the precarity

[587] *Injo sillok* 10:18b-19a [1625/10/15].
[588] Thomas Quartermain argues that there was a 'true diversity of opinions within the government [that] was buried under a slab of rhetoric'. Thomas Quartermain, 'Besieged on a frozen mountain top: opposing records from the Qing invasion of Chosŏn, 1636-1637'. *Acta Koreana* Vol. 21, No. 1. (June 2018): 139.
[589] This concept is laid out in Han Myung-gi (한명기), *Imjin Waeran kwa Han-Chung kwan'gye* 인지왜란과 한중 관계 (The Imjin War and Sino-Korean relations). Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 1999 and presented in English in Han Myung-gi, 'The inestimable benevolence'.

of the dynasty's holding on to power during the Imjin War. A perhaps more literal translation could be the 'grace of restoration'. *Chaejo* could even be translated as re-establishment of the dynasty. The popular narrative then goes on to blame King Injo and his courtiers for seemingly abandoning strategic considerations and forcing Chosŏn into unwinnable and ultimately unreasonable wars. This narrative benefits unduly from hindsight and the knowledge that Qing suzerainty in East Asia did ultimately not differ all too vastly from the previous Ming-centred system and that Chosŏn was able to hold on to its own traditions and enjoy a similar extent of sovereignty. Not even the royal line was broken. The dynasty survived yet again. This outcome, however, was by no means foreseeable in the early 1620s. When the Mongols had conquered East Asia, they crushed the cosmopolitan Confucian society of the Song dynasty. The Mongols also burned and looted Korea, leaving little of the previous material culture intact, before subjugating the once-flourishing Koryŏ dynasty and relegating it to the status 'son-in-law'-country.[590] The Later Jin dynasty that rallied the united Jurchen tribes had been in existence for less than a decade, when King Injo had to make the judgement call as to whether to place his faith in their messages of good-will towards Chosŏn, which contrasted rather starkly with their record of burning and looting across Manchuria and the northern Chinese plains.

In hindsight, it is clear that the leaders of the Qing dynasty had no intention of annexing the Korean state. To King Injo and many of his officials, however, their world order and their own way of life seemed to be in great peril. Beating the formidable Manchurian armies themselves was out of the question. Their only hope was for the Ming armies to reclaim their former glory and strength and to throw back the Manchurian invasion –thereby saving Chosŏn once more. The officials' lofty speeches in Hansŏng may have made frequent reference to gratitude and tradition, but they also frequently invoked their *tonggu* 同仇, their

[590] James H. Grayson, 'Invading Mongols and the Preservation of Korean Traditions: The Monk Iryŏn and the Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms'. *Folklore* 128:1 (2017): 1-15.

common enemy. The last years of the Ming-Chosŏn relationship was defined by this common enemy as much as it was defined by ideological factors.

The tone at the Chosŏn court certainly changed when King Injo took the throne. The change in policy, however, remained moderate at best. A policy discussion recorded in late 1625 illustrates attitudes at court and the dilemma for Chosŏn foreign policy well.

> His Majesty spoke: "Yesterday, as we were sitting together, Military Judge Sŏ Sŏng opined: 'Our country and the Heavenly Court share the grace and righteousness between a lord and his subject and between a father and his son. Had it not been for the imperial grace, the recovery from the Imjin War would never have come. Now the barbarians [literally, the slaves and thieves] are invading the Xia [dynasty, meaning China]. If they were to approach the Imperial city, then by what means should [our] country retaliate?' Is it not fine this speech? He is so right! If the Heavenly Court will demand our troops to retaliate against the barbarians, we will follow as per the decree, and we will swipe away that stinking dirt! But what if there is no effort [by the Ming court] to draft [Korean] troops and the barbarians head straight for the imperial capital, how are we to react to that? Even if it were not for the Imjin case, as per the path of the subject (*insin ji to* 人臣之道), we cannot idly stand by. And yet, how could the grace of restoring Korea (*chaejo Tonghan* 再造東韓) be forgotten? Where there is great propriety there is no [distinction between] strong and weak. We should order the court to devise a policy to come to the aid [of the Ming] so as to repay the imperial grace."
>
> The Border Defence Council replied: "Your servants have respectfully read your wise instructions. Your sincerity reaches everywhere, it may well lift up the sun and stars and move heaven and earth! Who would not be invigorated by your foresight? If the barbarians were to breach the frontier [into China], and head straight for the Imperial capital, then General Mao [Wenlong] will certainly attack their rear so as to serve his emperor. Our country, righteously facing the common foe, may act in unison with him. This logic is necessary and [our] strength will be unstoppable. The troops that are guarding the border

> now may promptly join the relief army, [therefore] it would not be too late to act on this plan after the matter [of a breach of Chinese defences] has occurred. But if the lord, the subjects, the upper and lower [echelons of the country] hold on to their determination, we will annihilate this [enemy] as though they were our breakfast, and His Majesty will thereby repay the Imperial grace, and as for those below, we will be able to fortify [Korea], the tributary state. Such are the sincere intentions of your subjects, truly." [The King] replied: "Dishonestly spoken. This was not the intension behind my instructions."[591]

King Injo would have liked to take the initiative in the conflict. Gratitude featured strongly but was ultimately a secondary motivation. Primarily, Injo was concerned with acting as it seemed appropriate to him in his role as King of Chosŏn. Clearly, Injo understood the necessity of obeying imperial decrees and coming to the aid of the Ming as an element of his own role as a servant to the Son-of-Heaven. King Injo's insistence that he should show initiative and not idly stand by as the Ming Emperor faced troubles was ultimately his own personal interpretation of his role, as no precedent compelled him to go to such lengths. The King was ready to tread a new path in Ming-Chosŏn relations.

Interestingly, it was the Border Defence Council, which had often obstructed King Kwanghae's attempts to establish positive diplomatic relations with Nurhaci, that here – carefully hidden behind flattering rhetoric– they cautioned King Injo not to proceed rashly. King Kwanghae had already argued for Chosŏn defences to be strengthened. The presence of Korean armies along the Yalu River achieved just that. The idea that they could later be assembled to join with Mao Wenlong to attack the Manchurian rear may have been new, but it entailed no concrete action whatsoever. Despite the dissatisfaction King Injo voiced at the end of the above passage regarding this passivity, Chosŏn foreign and defensive policy stagnated, regardless of the passionate speeches by court officials and the king himself. All

[591] *Injo sillok* 10:18b-19a [1625/10/15].

this reflected the desperate situation in which the Ming and Chosŏn dynasties found themselves.

Consensus on strategy

Despite the lack of decisive steps towards a renewed active military involvement in the Manchurian conflict during the first years of King Injo's reign, the relations between the Imperial Court and the Korean court at Hansŏng improved. In part, this trend can be credited to King Injo's efforts to make his loyalty clear to Ming envoys. However, this positive trend also corelated with a negative trend: following their defeat at Sarhu in 1619, the Ming lost their control over Liaodong.[592] Later Jin military exploits and Ming defectors isolated Chosŏn from Ming territory leaving only the sea route open for direct communications and material tributary relations.[593] In this situation, with the coercive potential of the Ming forces diminished, the loyalty of the Korean court was even more remarkable. The Imperial court recognised this, as is evident from their messages and from imperial decrees during Injo's reign.[594]

With the exception of Mao Wenlong who continued to operate from Korean bases until the Later Jin invasion of 1626, the geographical separation limited the type of direct encounter between Chosŏn court officials and Ming military men that had previously strained relations during the Imjin War and more recently during the reign of King Injo's predecessor. The troublesome question of whether a Korean king had to follow directives of a Ming military commissioner, which had provoked considerable controversy and discontent during the reign of King Kwanghae, lost its relevance. This simplified matters for King Injo in his

[592] Kenneth M. Swope. *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-44*. (Routledge, 2013), 11-38.
[593] *Injo sillok* 19:54b-55a [1628/11/12].
[594] *Injo sillok* 19:54b-55a [1628/11/12].

dealings with the Ming and made it considerably easier for him to appear openly pro-Ming domestically. Being pro-Ming now no longer entailed the potential humiliation of having to take orders from the Son-of-Heaven's subordinates that had so infuriated King Kwanghae.

Despite some victories in battles against the Later Jin, the Ming armies were never in a position to reconquer significant stretches of land. Even after the 1626 victory at Ningyuan, during which the Manchurian leader Nurhaci was mortally wounded, the Ming side was ultimately unable to use their slight edge to drive the Later Jin back into Manchuria.[595] This meant that while the expeditionary forces of Mao Wenlong and the Chosŏn forces were conceptionally relevant to the war –since they could have attacked the Manchurian flank, if Manchurian forces were to march south– the Korean troops were stationed far from the main Chinese-Manchurian battlefields. The Ming court had already alluded to this situation as a strategic advantage in their communications with King Kwanghae after the Battle of Sarhu.[596] During the first years of King Injo this strategic situation remained unchanged. Since a Korean advance into Manchurian territory was bound to fail, the Son-of-Heaven ordered King Injo to fortify the Korean defences.[597] These instructions were far from controversial at the Korean court. They even coincided with what King Kwanghae had argued for. The Sino-Korean consensus on strategy between 1623 and 1627 made it considerably easier for King Injo to cast himself in a positive pro-Ming light. His rhetoric enhanced his standing both domestically and internationally and during these first years of his reign it came at a cheap cost. Of course, by the late 1620s and the 1630s, this situation would have changed drastically.

[595] Kenneth M. Swope. *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-44*. (Routledge, 2013), 37-68.
[596] *Kwanghaegun ilgi* (*Chungch'obon*) vol. 50(50): 97a-97b (己未 day, fifth article) [1619/8/5].
[597] *Injo sillok* 19:54b-55a [1628/11/12].

Conclusions on King Injo's policy towards the Ming

Relations between the Chosŏn and Ming courts developed more cordially under King Injo than under his predecessor. During the first years of his reign, Injo deployed an unambiguous pro-Ming rhetoric at court, which allowed him to cast himself in a loyal, humble, and thus positive light. This rhetoric was accompanied by a passive approach to foreign policy and defence matters. Chosŏn signalled readiness to act at the Ming emperor's behest but did not take the initiative.[598] Interestingly, King Kwanghae, too, had frequently signalled that he was willing to abide by imperial decrees, however, he did so by stalling and avoiding having to send troops at the orders of Ming military men. In practice, the policies of the two kings toward the Ming did not differ vastly, but King Injo was significantly more strategic about using the overwhelming pro-Ming sentiment at court to his advantage. The elimination of direct interference of Ming military men in the Korean policy formulation process allowed King Injo to employ a rather classic strategy of Chosŏn governance: he attempted to use his privileged relation to the Ming court to enhance his domestic legitimacy.

The Chosŏn court under King Injo has often been described as in a state of ideologic furore. Considering the credible threat the Manchurians posed to their lifestyle and indeed their identity, anything but a state of commotion would have had an unusual collective reaction. As it was impossible to foresee the consequences of defeat, a general pro-Ming stance was to be taken for granted. There was, however, a spectrum of opinion and even disputes within this general pro-Ming camp. Particularly, following the Later Jin invasion, the court split into 'moderates' who supported peace and 'radicals' who found any settlement with the Manchurians inacceptable.[599] Disputes of this nature were emotionally highly charged, and the positions were impossible to reconcile.

[598] *Injo sillok* 10:18b-19a [1625/10/15].
[599] Also referred to as 'peace faction' and 'anti-peace faction'. Thomas Quartermain, 'Besieged on a frozen mountain top: opposing records from the Qing invasion of Chosŏn, 1636-1637'. *Acta Koreana* Vol. 21, No. 1. (June 2018): 142. And Seung B. Kye, 'In the Shadow of the Father', (2006), 192.

When King Injo forcedly abandoned his pro-Ming stance, facing up to the reality that the Ming were losing the war, Chosŏn could not risk a third Manchurian invasion, and King Injo could not risk the life of his crown prince, he incurred considerable opposition at home from both elites in the capital as well as scholars and even the general population in the provinces. In 1644, when Qing forces took Beijing, disgruntled *yangban* organised themselves in an attempt to oust King Injo from power in order to return to an anti-Qing policy.[600] Sim Kiwŏn, a merit subject and facilitator of Injo's coup, a political ally of two decades, was identified as the leader of this rebellion.[601] King Injo was successful in his foreign policy in that he was able to secure investiture and he was able to use his relation to the Ming court to boost his domestic standing. His successes, however, could not outweigh the failure of the alliance to thwart the Manchurian onslaught, leading King Injo's hold on power to remain shaky throughout his reign. This crisis of the Ming dynasty translated directly into a crisis of the Chosŏn government.

[600] Lee Sun-ah, 'Sim Kiwŏn's Revolt and the Return of Im Kyŏngŏp', *International Journal of Korean History* 2008.8, (2008): 1-24.
[601] Lee Sun-ah, 'Sim Kiwŏn's Revolt and the Return of Im Kyŏngŏp', *International Journal of Korean History* 2008.8, (2008): 1-24.

A new role for the Queen Dowager?

King Injo's coup was followed by a different type of rhetoric towards the Ming at the Chosŏn court. The institutional relationship between the Ming emperor and the Korean king, however, remained virtually unchanged. One might argue that the personal aspect of who occupied the Korean throne was not a pressing concern to the Ming court –just as the Chosŏn king's loyalty and gratitude were directed at the institution of the Ming emperor rather than any single occupant of this position personally. Another institutional actor relevant to the constitutional framework of the Korean court, however, saw a considerable change in importance due to the coup: the Queen Dowager. Kwanghae had stripped Queen Dowager Inmok of her position and following accusations of witchcraft in 1613 arranged for her to be kept under house arrest. King Injo's coup not only produced the full rehabilitation of the Queen Dowager, but it also relied heavily on the nominal head of the royal household providing the necessary legitimacy for the coup to be accepted by those court officials who had not been directly involved in the coup and ultimately also by the Ming court.

In the case of the men who helped King Injo claim the throne, the status of merit subjects was an expected reward. With few exceptions, the risk these men took was rewarded with wealth and political influence for at least the duration of King Injo's reign. This beckons the question of whether Queen Dowager Inmok, too, was able to capitalise on her role in the coup and –if she could– how this regained new role appeared.

Regained prestige

Just as appearing loyal towards the Ming enhanced King Injo's prestige, appearing filial towards the Queen Dowager benefitted King Injo and provided opportunities to display his kingly virtues. Dethroning a king, at least in part, because he had lacked filiality towards his stepmother had been unprecedented and the case of Queen Dowager Inmok continued to capture the imagination of successive courts –as an example of the importance of filial piety

and a reminder of the importance of the female heads of the royal household.[602] As King Injo profited from this narrative, it does not come as a surprise that the Queen Dowager not only had her titles restored, but King Injo also made sure there was an audience when he ceremoniously moved her into Changdŏk Palace.[603]

The ritual of re-instatement of the Queen Dowager was lavishly performed and King Injo made sure to add honorifics to her name and title.[604] Such occasions served to elevate Inmok's status, who increasingly became an object of reverence. As Yi Kwal rose in rebellion, court records suggest that the rebellion was targeted at the Queen Dowager.[605] There is no indication that Yi Kwal had any qualms with Queen Dowager Inmok. However, the suggestion that he was plotting against her clearly appeared as the greater violation in comparison to a mere plot against the man who had so recently become king. This means that the pattern of mutual empowerment between King Injo and Queen Dowager Inmok that first emerged the very day of the coup was successfully replicated in the first years of King Injo's reign. The Queen Dowager did not remain passive in this early crisis of King Injo's reign. Although women were not usually seen in public functions at the Chosŏn court, Queen Dowager Inmok addressed both court and people publicly and condemned Yi Kwal's actions.[606]

Queen Dowager Inmok did not serve as a mere figurehead and legitimator of King Injo's policies. As a restored head of the royal family, Queen Dowager Inmok oversaw any matter that directly pertained to the affairs of the royal family. Following the dethronement of King Kwanghae, this meant that Inmok was immediately in charge of some of the most delicate questions of policy: how to proceed with Kwanghae himself; how to deal with his

[602] One such instance is recorded here: *Yŏngjo sillok* 89:19b-20a [1757/4/29].
[603] *Injo sillok* 1:22b [1623/3/21].
[604] One such instance is recorded here: *Injo sillok* 3:9b [1623/9/20].
[605] '*Yi Kwal ji ŏn pi ŭi chiŏ ŏn pŏm Chajŏn* 李貴之言非矣至於言犯慈殿' *Injo sillok* 2:27a [1623/7/20].
[606] *Injo sillok* 4:22b [1624/2/10].

crown prince?[607] Comparable to the way royal authority was exercised, this did not mean that the Queen Dowager had the sole authority to unilaterally decide what should happen to Kwanghae and those closest to him, but she led the process of determining the appropriate response. In this capacity, Inmok gave various speeches, and took the opinion of the higher rungs of the bureaucracy,[608] thus acting publicly and engaging with the bureaucracy in matters of family politics in a way that was rather comparable to how Chosŏn monarchs would conduct policy making in other fields of policy. King Injo, who was occasionally approached about the question of how Kwanghae should be dealt with, would instruct officials to direct such inquiries to the Queen Dowager.[609] The King did not encroach upon the authority of the Queen Dowager.

With Kwanghae and his son in exile, the political role of Queen Dowager Inmok diminished. As she settled into her new role, she used some of her power to enable 'private rituals' (*ch'inje* 親祭).[610] Occasionally, Inmok also got involved with other policy related matters. This, however, she did cautiously, demonstrating a clear awareness of where the boundaries of her authority lay. In 1627, to cite just one example, she let the ministers and the Royal Secretariat know her thoughts on the Manchurian question: 'The old woman has seen endless days, and again I have encountered these unfortunate events… The big affairs of the state are nothing women may interfere in, but it has come to my attention that barbarian armies are approaching with every day. I feel extremely anxious about this. This I had to tell you.' The present ministers assured her that they were moved by and grateful for her words. And that all of them were thinking hard to come up with a solution to the situation.[611] One year later in 1628, Queen Dowager Inmok reproached officials for bringing her opulent meals

[607] One of Queen Dowager Inmok's directives was to consult the Ming court on how to proceed with the dethroned Kwanghae. *Injo sillok* 1:15b [1623/3/17].
[608] *Injo sillok* 2:14b [1623/6/1].
[609] *Injo sillok* 2:14b [1623/6/1].
[610] *Injo sillok* 14:52b-53a [1626/12/26].
[611] *Injo sillok* 15:32a-32b [1627/2/9].

as per King Injo's orders. The Later Jin invasion had been devastatingly successful in its goal of extracting resources from the Korean peninsula and Koreans were going hungry. Queen Dowager Inmok, in the style of a Confucian noble, let the Royal Secretariat know that she had no intention of accepting abundant offerings.

> How would I alone have peace of mind? The people are the root of the state! Only once the people are at ease can the state be at ease! The hunger of the common people I cannot bear in my heart. The lord is extremely filial to the point of ignoring my orders.[612]

Towards the later years of her life, Queen Dowager Inmok settled well into her role as the 'mother of the nation' (*kungmo* 國母). Having honoured Inmok at every opportunity that presented itself during her lifetime, King Injo also sought to further promote her posthumously. Here, a royal lecturer by the name of Chang Yu sparked controversy when he suggested that Queen Dowager Inmok should be honoured for having bestowed the country on King Injo. The Board of Rites, however, disagreed with his proposed concept of the 'grace of receiving the country' (*suguk chi ŭn* 受國之恩). Chang Yu complained:

> What the Board of Rites says is that "there is no such thing as the grace of receiving the country and that we should [merely] perform a posthumous promotion." Such talk is mistaken! His majesty received his mandate from the Queen Dowager to follow in the steps of his forefathers as a grandson. How can they say there is no such thing as the grace of receiving the country? The Broad of Rites must not know the affairs of our country.[613]

[612] *Injo sillok* 19:19a [1628/9/7].
[613] *Injo sillok* 24:37b-38b [1631/5/20].

On this instance, King Injo followed the more moderate approach rather than adopting Chang Yu's compelling logic, thus deciding against the creation of this new concept.[614] No matter, King Injo had already done more than any Chosŏn monarch before him to elevate the status of a queen dowager. King Injo's reign, though unsuccessful in so many regards, set a shining example of filial piety, and Injo continued to receive positive attention for this fact at later courts. In general, though, Injo contributed to a generally more elevated position of queen dowagers in later Chosŏn.

Nobody above the law

Queen Dowager Inmok's life completely turned around the moment when King Injo paraded a captured King Kwanghae outside the palace where she had been confined. In the first few years following the coup, Inmok re-asserted her authority as the head of the royal household. In her later years, she occasionally weighed in when the was concerned about the state of the country. Under King Kwanghae, she had been the mother and daughter of traitors, and perhaps even a witch herself. Under King Injo she became the 'mother of the country'. At least officially, she was revered. This reverence, however, did not mean that in regard to the Queen Dowager court officials would renounce their most crucial right and duty: that of remonstrance. Where officials believed that the Queen Dowager overstepped her rights, they were sure to point it out. The *sillok* recorded at least one instance where Queen Dowager Inmok fell short of the expectations toward Chosŏn Confucian royalty. In this instance a mid-ranking official was stopped when he attempted to have seven blind people enter the inner palace. Apparently, he had orders from the Queen Dowager who wished to perform a ritual to pray for better fortune. A junior secretary of the Ministry of War stopped the odd group with the words: 'Lest it be for a command by His Majesty, I cannot allow miscellaneous people

[614] *Injo sillok* 24:37b-38b [1631/5/20].

(*chabin* 雜人) to pass through the forbidden gates.'[615] The mid-ranking official, the record goes on, was shaken and disturbed and the group was ultimately not admitted into the inner palace.

Of course, rituals such as the one Queen Dowager Inmok apparently had in mind were frowned upon at court to say the least. Although this particular ritual seems to have been for a benevolent cause, the accusations of witchcraft Queen Dowager Inmok incurred during King Kwanghae's reign reflect just how critically non-Confucian spiritual practices were received at the Chosŏn court during this time. Confronting the now-revered Queen Dowager with accusations again would have almost certainly backfired. However, by acting upon the common norm that only the king could admit people to the inner court, officials limited the Queen Dowager's occasional attempts to overstep the bounds of her role.

In cases where court officials found honours for the Queen Dowager, or even more rarely found her own conduct to be 'different from common practice',[616] they would use remonstrance to remind King Injo of what they viewed as proper. In this sense, court officials continued to act as guardians of due process. Just as courtiers had done when King Kwanghae had attempted to posthumously promote his mother, court officials would remind Queen Dowager Inmok that 'emotion does not triumph over propriety'.[617]

Conclusions

The way King Injo ascended to the throne provided both limitations and opportunities. Formally, the expectation to break away from the precedents set by a predecessor were almost never greater. At the same time, King Injo's ability to act on this mandate for change was severely and almost constantly questioned by opposition that did not shy away from open

[615] *Injo sillok* 8:13a [1625/1/19].
[616] *Injo sillok* 14:52b-53a [1626/12/26].
[617] '*chŏng pul sŭng ye* 情不勝禮'. *Injo sillok* 14:52b-53a [1626/12/26].

rebellion and constraint by merit subjects that expected reward for their role in the coup. As a grandson of King Sŏnjo, King Injo enjoyed a moderate degree of legitimacy. Nevertheless, to counter and forestall the recurring domestic challenges to his rulership, King Injo employed every available tactic in order to enhance his standing at court.

In relations with his court officials, King Injo encouraged pro-Ming rhetoric. A general pro-Ming stance was shared by virtually all relevant actors at court. Whether King Injo's enthusiastic embracing of the Ming cause was heartfelt we can only speculate. His rhetoric, however, resonated with his court and would lead most of the officialdom to rally behind their king. After the Later Jin invasion, King Injo reverted to this stance. In the course of the second invasion King Injo's court was divided into moderates who advocated settlement. Those opposed any settlement with the Qing later rebelled against King Injo's abandonment of the anti-Qing struggle. This case exemplifies the domestic pressures facing Injo. Ultimately, despite rebellions that seriously threatened his throne, King Injo was successful in passing down the throne to one of his sons. Staying in power throughout the momentous geopolitical upheavals of his time was not an easy feat and King Injo was in part able to achieve this by making sure not to repeat the mistakes of King Kwanghae –who had made the mistake of alienating large parts of the officialdom and the *yangban* population.

Up until 1625, King Injo's foreign policy was focused on securing investiture. In this, King Injo was successful. As the Ming came under pressure, King Injo stressed the idea of the Korean king as a servant of the Ming Son-of-Heaven –perhaps more consequently than any Chosŏn monarch before him. This loyalist stance let King Injo appear as virtuous; it placated courtiers, and it did not undermine the king's authority, because Ming military men no longer entered Hansŏng, nor did they embarrass King Injo in any way. Instead, King Injo profited from being associated closely to the revered Ming emperor.

In comparison to King Kwanghae, King Injo followed the 'public opinion' at court more closely and he stressed obedience toward the Ming emperor. These stances would

appear to weaken the position of the Chosŏn monarch. Relations between the monarch and his court, however, were developed in different ways by each Chosŏn monarch, and later on Chosŏn, too, knew its share of strong monarchs who were able to overpower the officialdom. The Ming court would disappear from the Chosŏn institutional framework with King Injo's surrender to the Qing invaders only to pass into Chosŏn political folklore. As the second Chosŏn monarch to have been instated by a Queen Dowager, however, King Injo did leave one important legacy: Queen Dowagers remained politically central actors in the Chosŏn institutional framework. King Injo's example of filiality was respected and often cited in later times throughout the dynasty. Later Queen Dowagers were highly regarded and treated with careful respect by later monarchs. Although no later Chosŏn monarch was dethroned by a Queen Dowager, the highest-ranking women in Korea continued to exert their influence throughout the frequent regencies of the later stages of the dynasty and in choosing successors to the throne when obvious heirs were lacking.

Chapter 8: Epilogue: Notes on Chosŏn's constitutional framework

There have been many works that have discussed Chosŏn's constitutional framework implicitly, often without discussing the regularities they observed in Chosŏn political practice specifically as elements of a constitutional framework. Some authors, on the other hand, have discussed Chosŏn's 'constitutional framework'[618] directly, yet without offering a definition for the phrase, or attempting an exhaustive explanation of its implications. Establishing a constitutional framework as a derivate of political practice is an undertaking that requires extensive documentation, and this thesis offers only an incomplete picture by examining the relations between the king, the bureaucracy, the Chinese emperor, and the queen dowager as key players within that framework during the Kwanghae-Injo period. Even though, of course, a study that is limited to a mere few decades, less than a tenth the duration of the dynasty, cannot possibly account for the entirety of Chosŏn's political practice, the approach opens up new perspectives both on Chosŏn's constitutional framework in general as well as the political realities of the examined period.

Any systematic examination of a constitutional order needs to establish relevant institutional actors that share in the state's sovereignty, the hierarchies between them, as well as the sources of law that govern their relations. Although, the case studies laid out in this thesis represent only a fraction of Chosŏn's political reality, some observations and conclusions regarding Chosŏn's political framework can be drawn.

The introduction of this thesis has discussed the merit of the emerging field of study on 'Confucian constitutionalism'. While this approach deserves credit for furthering a

[618] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 27.

functional debate on the nature of the Chosŏn state, the cases discussed in this thesis make it clear that Chosŏn's implicit constitution differed systematically from those in its neighbouring states. Although of course, there are 'Confucian' elements to the way Chosŏn was governed, and Confucian rhetoric often accompanied policy debates, the resulting order was nevertheless very Chosŏn-specific. In this sense, it might be more suitable to continue discussions on 'Chosŏn's constitutionalism' rather than a more general 'Confucian constitutionalism'.

Hierarchies and institutional actors

Previous studies, pioneered by Sohn Pokee[619] have found that the Chosŏn monarch's executive authority could be limited by court officials' appeals to Confucian 'ideology'. This view can only be partially confirmed by the observations of the case studies in this thesis. Instead, I would like to propose another view of the Chosŏn monarchy: one of monarchs constrained by expectations and compromise as well as the conflicting authority of other institutional actors, namely that of the queen dowager domestically, and that of the Ming court, particularly regarding international and defence matters.

The Queen Dowager

Previous studies have often understated the central importance of the queen dowagers in Chosŏn state affairs. In part, the lack of attention queen dowagers have received is attributable to the fact that they did not usually get involved with day-to-day politics and their authority did not usually enter into competition with that of the reigning monarchs. In managing the composition and hierarchy of the royal family, however, queen dowagers were

[619] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty: The Functional Aspects of Governmental Structure, 1392-1592.* (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications, 2000), 8.

in the position to take decisions with far-reaching consequences for the dynasty. Their management of the royal family, too, was often inconspicuous as many appointments followed clear-cut protocols and rituals. Where reality did not come into conflict with the pre-set protocols, the role of the queen dowagers remained largely ceremonial. The cases of King Yŏnsan's and King Kwanghae's dethronement, however, illustrate well the fact that the authority of queen dowagers could rise well beyond these otherwise merely ceremonial duties.

The rivalry between King Kwanghae and Queen Dowager Inmok that has featured in several of the case studies approached in this thesis, remains as a singularly conflictual relation between a reigning monarch and a queen dowager in the history of the Chosŏn dynasty. Ultimately, the Queen Dowager prevailed as the supporters of King Injo's coup called upon her to formally dethrone King Kwanghae. Recalling the Yŏnsan precedent, it seemed appropriate that a queen dowager be the ultimate judge of a king's merit and claim to the throne. What follows is that as heads of the royal household the queen dowagers' authority could outweigh even that of the reigning monarchs. Yet, the queen dowagers' authority remained constrained to the domain of family politics and politically relevant activities beyond this field were scarce occurrences.

The two cases of dethronement approached in this thesis mark the most extreme cases of queen dowagers making their authority felt at court. The dethronement of King Yŏnsan set the precedent that was followed during King Injo's coup. Due to the central importance of precedents as a source of law in Chosŏn Korea, such instances are likely to have contributed to a growing importance of Chosŏn's most powerful women in the course of the dynasty's history. While there are not many instances of queen dowagers appearing to be openly influencing Chosŏn governance during the early stages of the dynasty, their role appears as increasingly prominent in later stages of the dynasty. During the reign of King Yŏngjo, the question of a king's abdication was up for the queen dowager to determine, and the king

sought to expand his authority at court by borrowing from the queen dowager's authority and prestige at court. In the nineteenth century, the role of the queen dowagers became once again more prominent, as Chosŏn's matriarchs stepped out from the confines of the royal harem to preside over court sessions themselves during the regencies of Kings Sunjo (1790-1834, r. 1800-1834), Hŏnjong (1827-1849, r. 1834-1849), Ch'ŏljong (1831-1864, r. 1849-1864), and Kojong. For decades queen dowagers remained nominally in charge of Chosŏn affairs of state. As the direct male line of the royal family was severed, it was up to them to seek out relatives of former kings who would be eligible. As the precedent barring infants from ascending to the throne, which had stopped Queen Dowager Inmok from naming her son king, came to be disregarded, pliant young boys were often the dowagers' choice, which in turn further expanded the dowagers' authority over matters of state through regency periods. The reigns of King Hŏnjong and Ch'ŏljong stand out as particularly stark examples: King Hŏnjong died before he ever got to reign in his own name and King Ch'ŏljong, born to a remote and impoverished branch of the royal family was illiterate and quite unable to govern independently. Traditional scholarship has highlighted the control of the Andong Kim clan over the throne during this period of Chosŏn dynasty.[620] Nominally, however, queen dowagers remained in charge over the matters of state for long stretches of time. Further studies into the growing influence of Chosŏn's matriarchs and their increasingly prominent nominal role in governance could shed more light on this aspect of the dynasty's political reality.

The Ming court

Unlike Chosŏn's queen dowagers, the role of the Ming court in Chosŏn governance has received a lot of attention. Over a period of over two hundred years, Ming-Chosŏn

[620] James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 43-46.

relations saw it all: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The past of Sino-Korean relations is a charged field as East Asia has by large adopted the Westphalian concept of sovereignty that views national sovereignty as indivisible. Rather than applying such a rigid –and frankly ahistorical– concept to the past, it might be more conducive to our understanding of Ming-Chosŏn affairs to contemplate the possibility of shared sovereignty among various actors whose authority was limited by a variety of sources of law that will be discussed in greater detail below.

The extent of the Ming emperors' involvement in Korean affairs was contingent on circumstance. During peacetimes when there was little interest in Korean affairs, the relations between the two countries were limited to the tributary diplomatic and trade ties. Additionally, the Ming emperors fulfilled a domestic role within Korea that can be described as mostly but not exclusively ceremonial: the investiture of central members of the royal family. When the Ming court developed a stronger interest in being involved in Korean affairs, the Ming side could rely on acceptance of the emperor's divinity or semi-divinity at the Chosŏn court, and on acceptance that the emperor wielded legitimate authority beyond that of the Korean monarchs. Just as the queen dowagers' authority was limited by domain, however, the authority of the Ming emperor could not be used indiscriminately either: it remained limited by format. The case of King Kwanghae's acceptance of only the highly formalised imperial decree illustrates that the Ming court, too, was bound by precedent. The Ming court could issue decrees with which Chosŏn had to comply. These decrees, however, had to come directly from the emperor, which –considering the logistical constraints– made it difficult for the Ming court to exercise their authority beyond a certain point. Attempts at expanding their executive control over Korea were rebuffed by King Kwanghae, which in turn points to the high importance accorded to precedent and established practice in Ming-Chosŏn relations. Moreover, given the withdrawal of Ming troops after the East Asian War, it

is also clear that the Ming court had little interest in directly ruling Chosŏn and was willing to adhere to pre-war, established practice.

Kwanghae's experience as a crown prince also serves as a reminder of the close connection between ritual and power, as ceremonies that during other times could be considered as mere formalities were denied –with perilous domestic repercussions. Although the Ming court largely based its interactions with Chosŏn on precedent and established practice as well, there was also a level of flexibility. The Ming court was in some instances ready to recognise that Korean customs differed from their own. This is apparent from the fact that dethronements at the behest of a queen dowager were accepted even though they would have been clearly inadmissible in Ming China. It was, however, not always apparent or foreseeable for Chosŏn envoys what types of answers they could expect from the Ming court in such situations. The Ming court was sometimes accessible to pleas, to negotiation, or even to bribes, but sometimes the desired outcome could simply not be reached adding an element of uncertainty to Ming-Chosŏn relations.

Following the fall of the Ming dynasty, Chosŏn was forced to enter similar relations with the Qing dynasty. It appears that even when the Korean court did not accept the divinity of the Qing emperors, the system could be replicated based on precedents and established practice. Although a more general comparison of Ming-Chosŏn and Qing-Chosŏn relations is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, there are certain indications that the parallels between the two expand beyond the similarities in the rituals of investiture. As pressure on the Qing dynasty mounted in the nineteenth century, the Empire once again attempted to exert a stronger direct influence over the Kingdom of Chosŏn. In the nineteenth century, however, as described by Kirk Larsen, the Qing dynasty no longer relied solely on the traditional

instruments employed by the Ming dynasty.[621] Instead, it borrowed also from imperial practice as observed in the practice of Western powers of the nineteenth century.

The monarchy

Formally speaking, all executive power that did not come into conflict with either the authority of the queen dowager over with questions of the royal family or with the decrees issued by a Ming emperor fell exclusively to the monarchy.[622] In reality, of course, monarchs were never quite able to exercise this authority independently as they were constrained by what one could refer to as a vertical separation of powers. Bureaucrats informed their monarchs of current affairs and provided suggestions and council on how best to respond to upcoming challenges. Where they disagreed with the course of policy of their monarchs, they could admonish their kings during lecture sessions, remonstrate, slow down implementation, or ultimately retire from their offices in protest. The obstruction to policy implementation that resulted from coordinated protests paired with accusatory rhetoric were often enough to make a monarch reconsider. The question of how antagonistic or cooperative the relation between king and court developed strongly depended on the managerial style adopted by a reigning king.

In two cases the fundamental opposition of court officials to gross ethical violations of sitting kings led to their dethronement. While two cases in the hundreds of years of Chosŏn dynastic history might be insufficient for this to be systematically comparable to votes of no confidence, impeachments, or the like, they nevertheless illustrate that Chosŏn court officials (in the cases of dethronement acting in coordination with a queen dowager) were in the

[621] Kirk W. Larsen, *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910*, (Harvard East Asian Monographs 295, 2011), 15-16.
[622] As discussed in Chapter II, royal authority could also be divided and shared by two or more members of the royal family at a time.

position to place checks on reigning monarchs and often confidently defended what they identified as proper governance and due process.

What I have called a 'missing link' in the introduction, a lack of a systematic channelling of institutional disputes between kings and bureaucrats led to the situation that in instances of large parts of the officialdom disagreeing on a king's course of policy, individual, specific solutions needed to be created. In this context, Sohn Pokee's observation that there was a difference between 'strong' and 'weak' monarchs in the history of Chosŏn[623] can be understood: a monarch less inclined towards compromise, such as Kwanghae, could –at least for some time– force his course of action on the court officialdom and break down their resistance. Kwanghae did so through political accusations, dismissals, and even –as in the case of Queen Dowager Inmok's father Kim Chenam– by means of judicial murder. Less headstrong monarchs, such as King Injo, instead attempted to rule by consensus. While Sohn Pokee's classification has the benefit that it can be understood quite intuitively, there is nothing intrinsically 'weak' about attempting to rule by consensus. Instead, where it could be achieved, it arguably led to a greater acceptance of royal authority, achieved greater political stability, and meant the monarch could abstain from the brutality that often characterised the crack-down on opposition as practised by 'strong' monarchs. What is important to note, however, is that the constitutional framework of the Chosŏn kingdom essentially enabled both rulership styles and actual relations between the monarch and the bureaucracy were up to each individual monarch to establish, to negotiate, and to re-negotiate throughout their daily contact with their own government.

[623] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty: The Functional Aspects of Governmental Structure, 1392-1592.* (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications, 2000), 19-24.

The framework's fabric

Sources of law

Outside transitional periods when systematic organisational processes may be disrupted, it is the norm for any state to be constituted in a specific form. Such a 'normalisation' of state processes creates reliability. Even in the absence of reliable outcomes of policy decision processes, the processes themselves usually follow predictable patterns. These patterns or structures already constitute a basic constitutional framework.

Constitutions, whether they are written or unwritten, can be understood as a framework of norms. Even in the highly rationalised modern states that have summarised most relevant constitutional norms in one single document ceremoniously adopted as their constitution, their de facto constitution is often determined by various sources of law. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom today, this fact is rather obvious. Much of the British political reality is determined by largely unwritten rules. Additionally, norms of constitutional practice can be traced back to a variety of legal treaties from the Magna Carta, the 1689 Bill of Rights, the Acts of Union of the eighteenth century, as well as a variety of more recent sources. Even in mainland European countries that have single written constitutions and adhere to Roman law, state behaviour is constrained not by one single legal document, but by a variety of sources of law, including international treaties, as well as customary international law.

Chosŏn Korea was by no means a constitutional monarchy in the way of the United Kingdom. However, comparably, state behaviour in Chosŏn Korea was constrained by a variety of sources of law. Codified laws (*pŏp* 法, *yul* 律), text-based and abstract Confucian principles, expectations towards propriety (*ye* 禮), and 'precedent' (*ye* 例 or *kosa* 故事), co-

existed as important sources of law, or what could be colloquially referred to as the fabric of Chosŏn's constitutional framework.

Codified laws

The complex Chosŏn state –largely but not entirely following the examples of the Song and Ming dynasties– not only systematically recruited officials through a proto-meritocratic examination system, but it also recruited examination laureates for specific roles at court. In the way of what Alexander Woodside[624] would call a modern bureaucratic state, the Chosŏn bureaucracy was divided in terms of functional roles and structurally hierarchised within the individual agencies. To keep the complexity of the system manageable, competencies, duties, and remunerations that corresponded to each of the offices were documented and summarised and codified in documents such as the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* in the course of the fifteenth century.

While codified laws organised the structure of the bureaucracy, and sorted material aspects of remuneration and taxation, documents such as the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* do not offer a comprehensive overview of the way Chosŏn was governed. Notably, limits to the authority of monarchs are not listed and the authority of the Ming court or the Queen Dowager is not discussed. Efforts to examine *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* as a Chosŏn constitution, such as the approach undertaken by Hahm Chaihark, certainly have some validity in that the document can be considered a source of law with particular relevance to the bureaucracy.[625] At the same time, it should be clear that this single source of law is in itself insufficient to explain the rather more complex reality of Chosŏn governance and constitutional law.

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[624] Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea and the Hazards of World History*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1-17.

[625] Ham Chaehak (함재학, Hahm Chaihark), '*Kyŏngguktaejŏn*-i Chosŏn ŭi hŏnbŏb in'ga (경국대전이 조선의 헌법인가, Is the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* the Constitution of Chosŏn)', *Pŏpch'ŏrhag Yŏn'gu* (법철학연구) 7:2 (2004): 263-288.

Confucian principles

Ethical norms that can be loosely grouped as Confucian played an important role in evaluating policy proposals and kingly behaviour. Particularly, in terms of a king's habitus and in the evaluation of a king's virtuous conduct in the Confucian sense, these norms exerted a strong influence. Instances of a king falling short of ethical principles would almost always provoke criticism and opposition from among the court officialdom. As a king's virtue was seen as crucially important to the general well-being of the country, the officials' remonstrances can be described as loyal opposition in most cases.

'Confucian ideology' at the Chosŏn court has received considerable attention by scholars in the field and has been described as the basis for courtiers' ability to place checks on monarchs by Sohn Pokee.[626] This is understandable because royal failures to comply with ethical norms would attract opposition very reliably –although Confucian norms were not the only source of law that was used to restrict kingly authority. Precedents could fulfil the same function. Additionally, Confucian rhetoric could be used rather conveniently to add airs of legitimacy to any sort of criticism directed towards the throne or towards other courtiers.

As a source of law, Confucian ethics were fickle. The classics and the writings of the Cheng-Zhu School were held in particularly high regard at the Chosŏn court. However, even the very core of the textual body associated with Confucianism was already considerable. While doctrines offered abstract ideals to aspire to –which was certainly attempted by many kings and court officials alike in Chosŏn history– the Confucian texts did not offer a political manual that could serve as a political blueprint, let alone a constitution. Additionally, the classics, as is the case with most comparable sources of authority, required exegesis. And –

[626] Sohn Pokee. *Social History of the Early Chosŏn Dynasty: The Functional Aspects of Governmental Structure, 1392-1592.* (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publications, 2000), 8.

this is also the case with any comparable set of texts– the Confucian classics extoll a set of ideas that self-contradict in almost any situation to which one could possibly apply them. Should a king prosecuting his brother be dispassionate? Should he be humane or rigid? Brotherly or impartial? Should a king be filial towards his stepmother, or should she be loyal to her king? It would be possible to argue any side of these points with authoritative references to the classics. What this means is that, for the most part, applying Confucian ethics appropriately required interpretation and debate. The relevance of Confucian ethics for the political practice in Chosŏn, then, is perhaps best explained as something that added gravitas and legitimacy to the officials' opposition when criticising the monarchy or attacking rivals. Confucian ethics forced kings to strive for virtuous rule and enshrined the officials' right to remonstrance in addition to offering clear directives in regards to many of the spiritual questions linked to ritual kingship.

The above reasons contributed to Confucian rhetoric being pervasive at the Chosŏn court. Even when the classics did not offer clear directives on how to solve the political questions of the day, kings and courtiers were mostly mindful not to openly contradict widely held interpretations of the Confucian canon. Quite naturally, the precedents set during Confucian-influenced times did not usually contradict orthodoxy either, because orthodoxy could be construed in multiple ways. In that sense, the Chosŏn court operated in a strongly Confucian spirit. At the same time, as will be explained in more detail below, I would argue against viewing Confucian ethics as the primary pillar of the Chosŏn constitutional framework.

Precedents and customary law

Codified norms did not greatly restrict kingly behaviour. The Confucian ethics set an unattainable standard of virtue to strive towards. The classics offered clear directions on

spiritual and philosophical matters. Many of the practical aspects of kingship, however, were not regulated in this way. To illustrate this: according to the prevalent (Confucian) doctrines, the king was to serve the 'great' that is, China. The question of how exactly the 'great' was to be served, however, was regulated by precedents and customary law. Indeed, customary law and precedents came closest to offering comprehensive guidance on how politics were to be conducted in the Kingdom of Chosŏn. In day-to-day politics, kings were expected not to deviate from general practice lest it be for a good reason. When the court encountered an unusual situation, too, the most common reaction was to review the records for similar situations to see whether there were any precedents that could be followed (*chong* 從). When a suitable precedent was identified, the expectation was that it be followed. The authority of precedents set by previous reigning monarchs was reinforced by expectations towards the king's filial piety towards his ancestors.

Precedents and examples of general practice could be derived from several sources: laureates of the bureaucratic examinations were well versed in Chinese classics, so authoritative treatises from the classical period of Chinese history were a preferred source of precedents. Other dynastic Chinese histories would equally be reviewed. However, when precedents from those two sources were found to be in contradiction there was a tendency to favour precedents from the classical period, as more recent Chinese dynasties were suspected of falling short of the higher standards of the earlier periods. Chosŏn Korean history as recorded in the *sillok* was another major source of examples of established practice and precedents. In some cases, court officials would accord greater value to the Korean records and argue that in cases of conflict one should follow the Korean examples as practices differed from Chinese customs. In addition to these general records, Chosŏn monarchs would order the compilation of certain precedents. Such compendia could serve as blueprints on how to behave during certain situations. King Kwanghae's insistence on only needing to follow direct imperial decrees and on disallowing the dispatchment of Korean troops without

imperial decree, for example, was based on his reading of one such compendium, the *Kukcho Chŏngt'orok* 國朝征討錄.

Towards the later stages of the dynasty, the vast majority of situations kings expectably faced were comparable to situations past kings had already faced before them. Unlike the rather abstract Confucian ideals and codified laws that were largely irrelevant to the monarch's formulation and application of policy, common practice, precedents, and customary law could be used to regulate virtually any aspect of a king's life. Naturally, as in the case with Confucian ethics, precedents, too, often did not offer perfect solutions to current problems as newly emerging situations would often not be perfectly identical to past situations. Then, too, interpretation was needed, and debate arose.

In terms of the relations between the institutions with the highest degrees of authority at the Chosŏn court –the Korean monarch, the Ming emperor, and the Queen Dowager– precedents were a crucial and often the sole determinant of how exactly relations should be conducted. It might be futile to try and determine whether customary law or the more abstract Confucian ethics were more important to the Chosŏn constitutional order. One argument for the higher relevance of precedent, however, can be found in the relations the Chosŏn court entertained with the Ming and Qing emperors. Even when Chosŏn courtiers refused to recognise the divinity of the Qing emperors in the way they had done in the case of the Ming emperors, even when they actively considered the Qing to be contemptible barbarians, they were still able to entertain remarkably similar relations with the Qing, based on established practice and precedent.

Harmonisation processes

In popular imagination, law is a largely monolithic concept, and a common expectation towards its application is that it should be mostly automatic. In reality, however, laws are often in contradiction and require careful assessing, weighing, and balancing. This

holds true even in highly functional modern states with single constitutions. In countries that observe common law, or in the domain of public international law where several layers of law and several sources of law compete, a need for hierarchisation, or harmonisation, becomes rather more apparent. In the case of Chosŏn statehood, too, situations in which various sources of law were in open contradiction were common. As mentioned above, Confucian classics could be used to argue various sides on a single issue. Similarly, precedents could be in contradiction with other precedents or with Confucian ideas of propriety, as was the case with Kwanghae's posthumous promotion of Lady Kim. King Kwanghae believed that the precedents of posthumous promotions in other cases supported his case sufficiently, while many of his court officials did not accept that his precedents sufficed to offset the impropriety of the undertaking.

Court debates

Controversial issues such as King Kwanghae's posthumous promotion of Lady Kim would in most cases give rise to debate at court. Such debates were political in the sense that they were concerned with solving a political problem, but they were also legal debates in the sense that they would most often be argued on the basis of contradictory sources of law. To stay with the example: did the precedents fielded by Kwanghae to document the conformity of his project with 'permissible' (*ka* 可) state practice in Chosŏn suffice? Or did the action proposed by the king not actually mirror the precedents or did they even violate ethical norms such as were extolled in the classics? King Kwanghae's promotion of Lady Kim was clearly politically motivated. The opposition to it might have objected on grounds of propriety, but the objections were most likely also politically motivated, because how the matter was settled would lead to punishments or rewards for particular people. Nevertheless, the debate focussed

mostly on what was ‘permissible’ in the sense of the sources of law and precedent listed above, rather than what was politically desirable.

As evident from the cases examined in this thesis, disagreements between the king and his officialdom or between various parts of the officialdom could come to various types of solutions. Compromises were possible and could sometimes be achieved. If the king was able to convince a group of court officials to collaborate with his designs, that was often enough for the implementation to be secured. However, facing widespread opposition from among the officialdom could be dangerous for monarchs and many were careful to avoid excessive confrontations. If a monarch lost the officials’ readiness to comply with his commands, oppositional officials could ensure that the government ground to a halt. To ensure favourable developments in the ‘public opinion’ at court, monarchs therefore engaged in debate, too, and would often relent or compromise rather than go down the road of alienation.

The heavy-handed, and frankly manipulative, measures King Kwanghae took to ensure that debates did not take unfavourable turns, provide an example that illustrates both the importance of the debates, and also the fact that court debates in Chosŏn were not a purely intellectual contest. This means that the winner of the court debates was not always the party with the best arguments, or the party with the most convincing interpretations of the Confucian classics –although having convincing arguments certainly went a long way.

Relying on precedent as a vital source of law might have benefitted a conservative approach to policy, particularly towards the later stages of the dynasty and there was certainly a strong tendency to apply old solutions to old problems. This, however, did not generally bar Chosŏn monarchs and court officials from also treading new paths when they were confronted with new situations.

Engaging with the Ming court

In some cases, such as the naming of King Kwanghae as Crown Prince, or in regard to Lady Kim's posthumous promotion, achieving consensus between the reigning monarch and an otherwise sufficient number of officials to support a policy could prove insufficient for the ultimate implantation of the preferred course of action, and then was a moment when an action of the Ming court was required. The Ming court, too, operated in a way that was largely bound by precedent. The legitimacy of its authority over the Korean monarch was based on the emperors' divinity, but it was also based on the reliability of precedent and common practice-based relations. Therefore, the Ming side was generally hesitant to accept any type of request that appeared to be in violation of precedent or propriety. When King Kwanghae was dethroned, his forced re-instatement was briefly considered, before the Ming court took the decision of backing King Injo.

Considering the various outcomes of Chosŏn requests directed towards the Ming court during the reigns of King Sŏnjo through Injo, we can see that involving the Ming court in political decisions always wrought a considerable degree of political uncertainly. In the case of King Kwanghae's investiture as crown prince, the Ming court remained inaccessible to Korean pleas –perhaps because the pleas were not substantiated with sufficient diplomatic efforts by the part of King Sŏnjo. The Ming side set out criteria that needed to be fulfilled to name Kwanghae as crown prince, and the criteria needed to be in accordance with propriety. These criteria, however, remained vague and were subject to further negotiations. In the case of Lady Kim's posthumous promotion, the Ming court was accessible to Chosŏn requests. Probably not least because King Kwanghae made sure to emphasise how serious he was about the request by ensuring his envoys brought noticeable amounts of cash gifts. In the case of the investiture of King Injo, the Ming court appeared to be motivated at least partially by their own convenience.

In business-as-usual matters, relations with the Ming court were very orderly and conformed neatly to precedent and common practice. When Chosŏn requests were unusual, the Ming court, too, constituted a considerable source of uncertainty and replies were usually awaited with some anxiety at the court in Hansŏng. At the same time, as the cases examined here show, there was leeway in the Ming court's decision that opened up the possibility for Chosŏn representatives to reason or negotiate with Ming representatives, or in some cases smooth out differences with gifts.

Conclusions

The project of this thesis has been to capture the complexities of the Chosŏn Kingdom's constitutional framework during the Kwanghae-Injo period. The basic framework based on law, doctrine, and precedent was upheld for the whole duration of the dynasty. It survived famines, the Japanese invasions of the 1590s, and the demise of the Ming dynasty. Only in the face of the insurmountable pressures of nineteenth-century imperial aggression, this remarkably resilient framework faltered. Over the course of centuries, the sources of law colloquially labelled above as the 'fabric of the framework' remained the same. As precedents were added to the existing canon and general political practice underwent adaptation, the framework was able to change and the relations and hierarchies between relevant institutional actors were liable to change. In this sense, the present study into the reality of the constitutional framework during the Kwanghae-Injo period represents only a starting point – one frame in a slowly moving picture. Chosen in part for its temporal centrality, the Kwanghae-Injo period marks a necessary first step towards a more complete understanding of the constitutional development of the Chosŏn state.

Despite the necessarily incomplete nature of these conclusions on the nature of the Chosŏn constitution, the interpretation presented here of the constitutional realities at the time

of Kings Kwanghae and Injo in themselves open up new perspectives. The rivalry between King Kwanghae and Queen Dowager Inmok, as well as Kwanghae's stance of 'neutrality' in the Later Jin-Ming conflict, to reiterate just the two most obvious examples, can only really be understood in the light of the underlying constitutional framework and the positions relevant actors occupied therein.

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Ming Shilu	明實錄
Chaam chip	紫巖集
Taedong Yasŭng	大東野承
Kŏnju Kijŏng Togi	建州紀程圖記
Tangŭi t'ongnyak	黨議 通略
Taemyŏngnyul chihae	大明律直接
Kyŏngguk Taejŏn	經過大典
Qing Taizu shi lu	清太祖實錄

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