

Shifting Political, Legal, and Institutional Borderlines between Koryŏ and the Mongol Yuan Empire

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The relationship between the Koryŏ Dynasty and the Mongol Yuan Empire was characterized by shifting, often interactive, dynamics in the realms of politics, law, and institutions. The peninsula was devastated by Mongol forces in the first half of the thirteenth century, and the Mongols soon thereafter established a dominant political presence in Koryŏ. But by the turn of the century the relationship between Koryŏ and Yuan had evolved, and while many things changed, Koryŏ customs and traditions were also well preserved. Examined in this article are the “conceptual borderlines” (political, legal, and institutional), that for centuries had distinguished the political, social, and cultural life of the Korean people from that of China, but came to fluctuate with the Mongol advent, and then were reinstated in a rather interesting fashion. At this time, politicians’ aspirations diverged and loyalties were split, while the political interests of Koryŏ and Yuan remained separated even during the reigns of the so-called “hybrid kings,” those Koryŏ monarchs of mixed Korean and Mongol ancestry. Barriers between legal authorities remained intact, while institutional mixing between Koryŏ and Yuan became a new trend in Koryŏ, which resulted in Korean conventions being infused with Mongol Yuan institutions and upgraded to resolve administrative problems of Koryŏ. Understanding the full extent of such a complicated relationship will prove vital in determining the nature of Koryŏ history in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in raising our understanding of the broader history of East Asia during this period.

Keywords: borderlines, Koryŏ, Yuan, political aspirations, governance, legal codes, coexistence, institutional mixing

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