

Consultative Politics and Royal Authority in the Goryeo Period

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Previous studies of the Goryeo political system argued that the ministers (high officials) dominated government affairs and were at the center of politics; it was also assumed that they represented the interests of noble houses. But such studies overlooked the role and power of the king. In this study, unlike previous ones, both the king and the subjects are examined with equal attention. As a result, it can be concluded that in Goryeo politics the king was at the center, and the running of state affairs was mostly based upon consultations between the king and the ministers or high officials. There were several systems that show these consultative processes. Before being issued, royal proclamations (*jeseo* 制書) underwent some deliberation at the Secretariat-Chancellery (Jungseo Munha-seong 中書門下省), and this process showed the consultations that went on between the king and the officials before the order was publicly issued. When a report was filed by an official, before making a decision and sending it to enforcement offices in order to implement the matter, the king requested implementation plans from the relevant offices. The fact that their opinion was usually reflected in the king's final decision supports the view that this is also a consultative mechanism. Councils were convened to provide counsel to the king, who, while assisted by officials, was in ultimate charge of such discussions. In case of wrongdoings, the king was criticized by the remonstrance officials (Dae-Gan 臺諫), who ensured the system continued to pursue consultation between the king and his officials. While Silla's consultation system only covered a handful of True Bone aristocrats, Goryeo's consultation system covered a much bigger group of subjects, which came to require a political system that would operate on the principle of consultation between the king and his officials. Eventually this type of politics based upon consultations became a specific characteristic of the Goryeo political system and its operations.

Keywords: Consultative politics, royal proclamations, memorials, state councils, remonstrance officials, Goryeo politics

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Introduction

Throughout the history of Korea, there have been various kinds of ruling classes, such as the True Bones (Jingol 眞骨) of Silla, the nobility of Goryeo, and the Yangban 兩班 of Joseon. Goryeo (918-1392) was a dynasty that was led by the nobility, and ministers (*jaesang* 宰相) who represented the nobility (*gwijok* 貴族) are generally believed to have controlled the government. Scholars also believe that the royal authority was relatively weak, compared to that of the ministers.¹ In fact, there have been many studies that strongly suggested that ministers were the central figures of Goryeo politics.

Goryeo introduced the Tang Chinese institutions, and established the Secretariat-Chancellery (Jungseo Munha-seong 中書門下省), which deliberated important matters of state,² as well as the Executive Department (Sangseo-seong 尙書省) and the Six Ministries (Yukbu 六部) as administrative bodies.³ Later Goryeo also accepted the Song Chinese institutions by building the Security Council (Jungchu-weon 中樞院) as a secretary office to the king.⁴

The senior officials of the Secretariat-Chancellery were known as *jaesin* 宰臣 while those of the Security Council were known as *chumil* 樞密; together they formed the primary governmental council known as Jae-Chu 宰樞, or Privy Council, in which they acted as a kind of ministers. Senior officials of the Secretariat-Chancellery concurrently held position of *pansa* 判事 at the Six Ministries, while the senior officials of the Security Council assumed positions as executives (*sangseo* 尙書) of those ministries, so they were able to control all aspects of the administration of the country. These ministers also formed the Supreme Council for Defense Matters (Dobyeongmasa 都兵馬使), which discussed issues of national defense, and the Directorate for General Affairs (Singmok-dogam 式目都監) which discussed issues of legislation.⁵ So they could

1. Byeon Taeseop, "Goryeo ui jeongchi cheje wa gweollyeok gujo" [The Goryeo dynasty's political system and its power structure], *Hanguk hakbo* 2, no. 3 (1976): 22-39; Pak Yongun, "Jungang jeongchi cheje ui gweollyeok gujo wa geu seonggyeok" [The power structure of the central political system and its nature], *Hanguksa* 13 (Gwacheon: Guksa pyeonchan wiweonhoe, 1993), 142-155.

2. Byeon Taeseop, "Goryeo ui jungseo munha-seong e daehayeo" [Study of Goryeo dynasty's Jungseo Munha-seong], *Yeoksa gyoyuk* 10 (1967): 355-377.

3. Byeon Taeseop, "Goryeo sidae jungang jeongchi gigu ui haengjeong chegye" [The administrative structure of the central political bodies of the Goryeo dynasty], *Yeoksa hakbo* 47 (1970): 1-42.

4. Byeon Taeseop, "Goryeo ui jungchu-weon" [The Jungchu-weon of the Goryeo dynasty], *Jindan hakbo* 41 (1976): 51-80; Pak Yongun, "Goryeo ui jungchu-weon yeongu" [Study of the Jungchu-weon of the Goryeo dynasty], *Hanguksa yeongu* 12 (1976): 91-141.

5. Byeon Taeseop, "Goryeo Dodang-go" [Study of the Dodang-go of Goryeo], *Yeoksa gyoyuk* 11,

be considered to have been the driving force of Goryeo politics.

Scholars who emphasize this aspect of Goryeo politics also argue that Goryeo was a society based upon the dominance of noble houses, because they consider the ministers to be the representatives of the noble houses and their interests. This argument has been accepted for a long time, but it contains some fundamental flaws and is not based on solid evidence. First, since the ministers occupied the highest offices in the bureaucracy, it was of course natural for them to take on an important role in government. But this fact in itself is not sufficient to declare them the central part of the governing system, because it fails to explain their position and role in an objective manner. Second, Goryeo politics was conducted by both the king and the ministers. However, previous studies have tended to ignore the king's role, simply assuming that the king's power was weaker than the ministers' power. Since this is just an assumption that is not backed up by facts, we cannot accept it at face value. In other words, the roles of the king and the ministers should be examined with equal amount of consideration. If we do so, we would be able to see that royal authority was not weak, and in fact the king was at the center of politics, and the politics of Goryeo was based on consultations between the king and the ministers.⁶ Although the nobility were the superior class of Goryeo society, Goryeo politics was not centered around the ministers but around the king.

Goryeo had a lot of institutional devices that were built on the premise of consultation between the king and his ministers. In this study, this aspect of Goryeo politics is primarily examined, in order to prove that Goryeo politics was led by the king on the basis of consultations with the ministers.

This study will examine two themes in particular. The first part will analyze the various forms of consultative politics: the issuing of a royal order and the king's approval of reports from his officials; deliberations at council meetings; and the checks-and-balances function of the remonstrance officials (Dae-Gan 臺諫). The second part is about the historical character of consultative politics on the Korean peninsula. The purpose of this part is to ascertain why such consultative mechanisms emerged as a vital factor in Goryeo politics, even if they had already surfaced during the Silla period.

12 (1969): 97-127; Byeon Taeseop, "Goryeo ui Shingmok-dogam" [The Shingmok-dogam of the Goryeo dynasty], *Yeoksa gyoyuk* 15 (1973): 45-70.

6. Pak Jaeu, *Goryeo gukjeong unyeong ui chegye wa wanggweon* [The governing system of Goryeo and the king's ruling authority] (Seoul: Shingu munhwasa, 2005).

Various Channels for Consultative Politics

1. Consultations Reflected in the Process of Issuing Royal Orders and Approving Reports

In Goryeo, consultations between the king and his officials were considered to be a vital factor in the governance of the country. The basic character of these consultations was that the king was at the center of politics, and the overall governance was led by both the king and officials. Various kinds of institutional devices were designed for this purpose.

First we need to consider the various types of royal orders, the foremost instrument of policy promulgation of the day. Before a royal order was issued, there was a consultation system between the king and his officials. Among the various types of royal communication, the decree (*joseo* 詔書), edict (*gyoseo* 敕書), and royal order (*seonji* 宣旨) were orders that were relayed to the relevant offices immediately. By contrast, proclamations (*jeseo* 制書) had to pass the deliberation of the Secretariat-Chancellery before they were relayed to the relevant offices.⁷ The Secretariat-Chancellery's authority to deliberate the contents of the royal proclamations was known as the "blocking and annulling" authority (*bongbakgweon* 封駁權). In Tang China, the Secretariat (Zhungshusheng) was in charge of drafting the royal orders, the Chancellery (Menxiasheng) was in charge of reviewing them, and the Executive Department (Shangshusheng) was in charge of implementing them. In Tang China, vetoing authority belonged to the Chancellery, which inspected the emperor's orders, but as Goryeo merged the Secretariat and the Chancellery and made it into a single office, the authority to block and seek to repeal royal orders rested with the Secretariat-Chancellery. We can see this fact from the following source:

The king issued the following proclamation (*je* 制), "... I wish my country to benefit from the power of Buddha, so find a place and build a monastery." The Chancellery replied by saying, "... Constructing a new temple would only anger ... the deities and the people, so it is not an option to pursue, even while trying to ensure peace." The king did not agree.⁸

This episode is from the tenth month of the ninth year of king Munjong's reign

7. Pak Jaegu, "Goryeo jeongi wangmyeong ui jongnyu wa banpo" [Types of royal orders and their issuing in the early Goryeo dynasty], *Jindan hakbo* 95 (2003): 29-54.

8. *Goryeosa* [History of the Goryeo Dynasty] 7 [1055/10/09, Munjong 9].

(1055). The king issued a proclamation to build a temple, but the Chancellery did not concur; in the end the king did not accept this advice. This shows us the fact that a proclamation had to be discussed between the king and the officials of the Chancellery⁹ before it was issued, and the king and the officials were generally encouraged to reach a consensus. Also, in this episode, the fact that the king ultimately vetoed the officials' objection shows us that the king was the one who had the final say in terms of his issuing of proclamations.¹⁰

Furthermore, the opposite communication channel, i.e. the the king's deliberation on what officials reported (*sangju* 上奏, memorials) to the throne, also reveals the Goryeo intent to manage governmental affairs through consultations. In many cases, the officials would report a matter, and the king would make a decision, and order the relevant officials to carry out the matter accordingly. What is important here is whether such reports directly reached the king or passed an inspection phase conducted by the ministers. If such reports first had to pass through the ministers, it would mean that they were in control of government affairs. If the king received them immediately, by contrast, it implies that he was in charge

In Goryeo, the officials' memorials were delivered to the king directly. Not only senior bodies such as the Secretariat-Chancellery, the Executive Department and the Six Ministries, but also other junior offices (*sagam seogok* 寺監署局) and temporary offices (*dogam* 都監), reported directly to the king without notifying the ministers first.¹¹ This means that the king had direct control over the officials' reports. Yet the king was never allowed to act arbitrarily. Although there were exceptions, the king generally decided within the realm of law and customs, otherwise he would have to face severe criticism from his own officials. So in the process of the king's decision-making, the officials had a system to voice their opinion before the king made the final decision. This was demonstrated by the

9. In this case, "Chancellery" should be read as an abbreviation for "Secretariat-Chancellery," since they functioned as a single organ in Goryeo.

10. There are not many remaining orders from the Goryeo period, making it impossible to explain exactly how the system operated concretely by surveying the period and frequency of the issuing of royal orders. Instead, we could explain its working through the kinds of royal order and the roles of the Secretariat-Chancellery and the Security Council. For example, for King Munjong's reign more records of proclamations remain than for other kings' reigns, but the other kings in the early Goryeo period also issued proclamations, while the Secretariat-Chancellery is known to have administered the proclamations. Thus it is possible to explain consultative politics between the king and the officials through the existence of proclamations.

11. Pak Jaeu, "Goryeo jeongi jeongchaek jean ui juche wa jean gwajeong" [Personnel in charge of proposing policies and the process of propositions in the early Goryeo dynasty], *Jindan hakbo* 88 (1999): 61-85; Yi Jeonghun, *Goryeo jeongi jeongchi jedo yeongu* [Study of the political institutions in the early Goryeo period] (Seoul: Hyeon, 2007).

steps the king took in processing the officials' reports.

There were two steps in the king's approval of the reports filed by officials. In the first step, the king ordered relevant offices to devise a way to deal with the matter to. In the second step, the king decided finally regarding the solution that the relevant offices suggested.¹² We can see this from the following events:

(1) The military commander of the northeast border (Dongbungmyeon byeongmasa 東北面兵馬使) reported: "A total of 1,238 households - Nine villages including Samsan 三山, Daeran 大蘭, and Jijeul 支櫛; barbarian chief (*beonjang* 蕃長) Yeomhan 鹽漢 of Soeulpo-chon 所乙浦村, barbarian chief Abani 阿反伊 of Sojijeuljeon-ri 小支櫛前里; barbarian chief Soeundu 所隱豆 of Daejijeol 大支櫛 and Ragina 羅其那, Oan 烏安, Muju 撫夷州, and Gorai 骨阿伊 - have come to us and requested to be attached to our registers (*bujeok* 附籍), ... please order the relevant offices to designate new village titles and bestow officials seals (*jugi* 朱記)." The king accepted.¹³

(2) The Hallim-weon 翰林院 reported, "Please assign the people of the eleven villages including the eastern Jurchen Daeran 大蘭 who newly surrendered to us, to a total of eleven prefectures (*ju* 州) designated as Bin 濱, I 利, Bok 福, Hang 恒, Seo 舒, Seup 濕, Min 閩, Dae 戴, Gyeong 敬, Bu 付, Wan 宛. Please bestow official seals and place them under the authority of Gwisun-ju 歸順州." The king accepted.¹⁴

In the first record, describing events which took place in the sixth month of the 27th year of king Munjong's reign (1072), we can see that the king ordered the relevant offices to make plans, in order to implement the original request. Then in the second record, we can see that the office that was assigned to carry out this task, the Hallim-weon, provided the king with a plan to incorporate all the households into Goryeo, in the tenth month of the same year, and received the king's final approval shortly after.

What should be noted is that although the king had the prerogative of making decisions on matters of state, for concrete policy proposals he respected the relevant office's opinion, and he made a final decision based upon it. Regardless of how the policy proposal was dealt with, consultation between king and officials was essential to it. Formally the consultation proceeded, from the officials' point of view, by presenting a policy proposal, and from the king's perspective, by ordering the drafting of a proposal, and deciding on it once the proposal was presented. Of course, as the king gave the orders to draft the proposal and made the final decision, he played a leading role in the consultative

12. Pak Jaegu, "Goryeo jeongi gukjeong ui gyeoljeong gwa sihaeng" [The decision-making process and its implementations in the early Goryeo dynasty], *Hanguksa yeongu* 121 (2003): 27-54.

13. *Goryeosa* 9 [1073/06/06, Munjong 27].

14. *Goryeosa* 9 [1073/09/04, Munjong 27].

process leading up to major policy decisions.

2. Consultations through Various Councils

The Goryeo king had the ultimate authority in governmental affairs, but that does not mean that he was allowed to use his power arbitrarily. When dealing with difficult issues where he found it difficult to reach a decision, he consulted his officials. The existence of various councils in which the king and his ministers or high officials could discuss issues together indicates that Goryeo really pursued consultation-based politics, and also allows us to ascertain the respective roles of the king and the officials in the process of reaching an agreement. There were many councils: the council of the high officials of the Secretariat-Chancellery (*jaesin*), the meetings of the privy council (Jae-Chu), and other councils in which various officials participated.¹⁵

The most important council was the meeting of the ministers (*jaesin*) of the Secretariat-Chancellery. The *jaesin* ministers were the highest ranking governmental officials who could discuss certain matters, even when the king did not seek for their counsel. They discussed at the Hall of Government Affairs (Jeongsa-dang 政事堂), and as they held positions in the Executive Department and Six Ministries, as well as the Censorate (Eosa-dae 御史臺) and the office for remonstrance (Gangwan 諫官), they were able to discuss a wide variety of important issues. Naturally they were the king's most valued counterparts. Here is a revealing episode from the eleventh month of the fourteenth year of king Myeongjong's reign (1184):

At first, the Board of Rites (Yegwan 禮官) reported, "The queen dowager passed away in the eleventh month (Jungdong 仲冬), so [in order not to conflict with the mourning for her] the Palgwan ritual 八關禮 should be observed in the tenth month (Maengdong 孟冬)." The king asked the opinion of the Sangbu 相府 (where the *jaesin* ministers worked), and State Councilor (Chamjijeongsa 參知政事) Mun Geukgyeom 文克謙 replied "... Observing the Palgwan ritual in the tenth month is not according to the founding king's intentions. Please, do not follow the suggestion of the Board of Rites." The king agreed.¹⁶

The Board of Rites was one of the Six Ministries. Reports of the Six Ministries were delivered directly to the king in Goryeo. Therefore, we can surmise that the report of the Board of Rites was also delivered directly to the king. Having

15. Pak Jaeu, "Goryeo jeongi gukjeong ui gyeoljeong gwa Hoeui" [The decision-making process and council sessions in the early Goryeo dynasty], *Hanguk munhwa* 30 (2002): 169-206.

16. *Goryeosa* 64, "Ye" (Rituals) 6, "Gukhyul" (State mourning) [1184/11/14, Myeongjong 14].

received the report, the king asked the *jaesin* ministers for advice, and only after they had stated their opinion did the king finally decide; in this case he accepted the minister's counsel.

What should be noted is that the Board of Rites' suggestion reached the king directly. In other words, the king sought for the *jaesin* minister's counsel only after he had received the original suggestion. So we can see that the king had direct control over governmental affairs, and the *jaesin* ministers only entered the decision-making process when the king asked them to. This means that the *jaesin* ministers were not really the central figures of the decision-making process (although they served as an important and integral part of it), as previous studies have tended to believe. The king was at the center of it and the ministers only served to assist him.

The next counterpart the king valued was the Privy Council, a group that contained more officials than the council of the Secretariat-Chancellery. Besides the *jaesin* ministers, this council also included the high officials of the Security Council (*chumil* ministers), who were not authorized to initiate a deliberation on their own, and were only allowed to discuss state matters with the *jaesin* ministers and only at the king's request. The following example is from the fifth month of the fourth year of king Yejong's reign (1109):

The king wished to issue a pardon, and summoned the Privy Council for deliberation. There Choe Hongsa 崔弘嗣 reported that a pardon would be inappropriate. The king said, "These days... we are faced with an emergency situation [because of border raids]; now I want to issue a pardon to ease the tension among the people. Why do you alone, sir, think we should not do so?" Embarrassed, all the participants retired, and the king issued a royal order, saying "... Every crime for which punishment was exile or less, and had been committed prior to this day, should be [pardoned] and [the prisoner] released."¹⁷

This record describes how King Yejong convened a meeting of the Privy Council and consulted them on how to stabilize the political situation during the Jurchen 女眞 conflict. In this council, most of the Privy Council ministers agreed with the king, but Choe Hongsa alone objected. So the king rebuked him and issued a royal order stipulating that minor criminals should be pardoned and released. Thus this council was convened by the king, and the Privy Council ministers freely stated their opinions, but the king made the final decision. Although the ministers could object to the king's opinion, the king himself made the final decision. Their opinions were only presented to aid the king in making a decision.

17. *Goryeosa* 13 [1114/05/09, Yejong 4].

It has been argued in previous studies that the Privy Council represented the noble houses, and acted as the leading force in governmental affairs. But as is clear from evidence of how the Privy Council operated, they were only advisors who assisted the king. Even if most of the participating ministers were from the noble houses,¹⁸ that does not imply that the ministers were in control of the government, as previously believed. The reason of this undue influence of the Privy Council in previous research is that they concentrated too much on examining the role of the Privy Council, overlooking the role of the king.

Besides these two minister-level councils, the king also took advice from the officialdom at large. When urgent matters arose, lower-ranking officials, who normally did not participate in important councils, were called upon to present their opinion to the Privy Council. The following example is from the eighth month of the eleventh year of king Yejong's reign (1116):

The Liao 遼 sent an emissary to Goryeo, requesting troops to attack the Jurchen. [On the *eulsa* 乙巳 day] the king summoned the Privy Council, close officials (*sisin* 侍臣), officials of the Supreme Council for Defense Matters (Dobyeongma-*pangwan* 都兵馬判官), and generals of various Guards (Jewi *daejanggun* 諸衛大將軍) to deliberate this; the assembled officials all approved of [the Liao request]. However, junior executive at the Office of Regalia (Wiwi-*sogyeong* 衛尉少卿, 4B) Cheok Jungyeong 拓俊京, office chief at the Board of Rites (Yebu-*nangjung* 禮部郎中, 5A) Kim Buil 金富弼, assistant office chief at the Board of Revenue (Hobu-*weonoerang* 戶部員外郎, 6A) Han Chung 韓沖, junior remonstrator (*usagan* 右司諫, 6A) Kim Busik 金富軾, junior exhorter [at the Censorate?] (*ujeongeon* 右正言, 6A) Min Su 閔修 disagreed, ... arguing that sending troops for another country could be the cause of trouble and would undoubtedly be dangerous for the future. The king asked for more counsel two or three times, but a consensus was never reached.¹⁹

In this record, King Yejong asked the advice of various officials including the Privy Council, and they discussed the matter. But the king did not make a decision. This council was joined not only by the Privy Council ministers but also by various other officials. Judging from their ranks and positions, they seem to have been mostly officials above the middle ranks (Chamsanggwang 參上官), who were also allowed to participate in the court audiences (*joboe* 朝會).

The officials who joined the council were able to voice their opinions freely,

18. Also, it should be noted that there were officials who were not descendants from noble houses yet still attained the post of minister. In fact, there were far more cases of people from families of low-ranking clerks or local influentials becoming ministers, than cases of people from noble houses becoming ministers.

19. *Goryeosa jeoryo* 8 [1115/08/, Yejong 10].

but they were unable to reach a consensus. Nevertheless, the result of the discussions was reported to the king, who also failed to reach a final decision. It is worth noting that the ministers, who argued in favor of contributing troops, did not blatantly overrule any ideas (including ideas that came from lower-ranking junior officials who were inferior to them) that were different from their own. If the ministers excluded arbitrarily any other voices different from theirs, the status of king would be lower, even if he decided finally to refer to the result of the council. Yet the ministers were not able to do so. Like this, the final decision of this council was entrusted to the king, and his officials including the ministers assisted him.

3. Consultations Reflected in the Checks-and-balances Function of the Remonstrance Officials

As seen, consultation between the king and his officials took place regarding the issuing of proclamations and the king's approval of official memorials. The king also consulted the various councils regarding important state matters. All of these consultative processes took place before a final decision was reached. But even after a decision was made, and an order was issued, corrective mechanisms were in place. The king's ordinary political attitudes were under constant monitoring from officialdom, which was designed to prevent him from abusing his power. The officials who were in charge of this monitoring process were the remonstrance officials (Dae-Gan 臺諫).

The remonstrance officials were composed of the censor (Daegwan 臺官) of the Censorate and the remonstrator (Gangwan 諫官) of the Secretariat-Chancellery. While the censor was in charge of presenting his evaluation of the government's policies, and also in charge of impeaching corrupt officials, the remonstrator was in charge of criticizing the wrongdoings of the king. In other words, one was in charge of checking the king, and the other was in charge of checking the officials. But their duties and jurisdiction often overlapped. Remonstrators sometimes impeached corrupted officials, while censors often criticized the king, and sometimes the censor and remonstrator formed a unified front (Dae-Gan ilche 臺諫一體) and criticized either the king or the subjects together.²⁰

In this section, the remonstrance officials' checking of the king and the king's political actions will be examined. Their activities reveal another aspect of the

20. Pak Yongun, *Goryeo sidae daegan jedo yeongu* [Study of the remonstrance institution of the Goryeo period] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1980).

consultation politics between the king and the subjects. The ruling class of Goryeo considered the king's acceptance of the criticism of remonstrance officials as the ideal behavior in politics and also as a barometer on whether or not the king was a sage-king.²¹ Therefore the king sometimes requested the criticism of the remonstrance officials. For example, even king Uijong (r. 1146-1170), who was famous for abhorring their activities, occasionally requested "loyal suggestions" (*chungeon* 忠言) from remonstrance officials.²²

In this sense, the remonstrance system functioned as a device that could force both the king and the officials to make compromises when politics were threatening to derail. In other words, remonstrance officials only criticized the king's actions or decisions when he broke the law or breached customs. Therefore the fact that the king accepted the remonstrance officials' criticism certainly does not imply that the king's authority was weak.

The verification procedure (Seogyong 署經) of the remonstrance officials shows us concretely how the system works. The verification procedure was intended to confirm whether or not the person who was about to be appointed to a public office was qualified to engage in public service and whether or not he had the right background. If a person's class-bound background turned out to exclude him from engaging in such service, then he would not be able to pass the verification process. This was to prevent the king from illegally appointing someone. We can examine this through the following example:

[During King Seonjong's reign] When (Jeong Mun 鄭文) transferred to the position of junior policy monitor (*useubyu* 右拾遺, rank 7B), the remonstrance officials criticized that "Jeong Mun's maternal ancestral line originated from the Cheoin Bugok (處仁 部曲), so it would be inappropriate to name him to the Office for Remonstrance." So he was reassigned to the post of reviewer at the Office of Royal Clan Affairs (Jeonjung *naegeubsa* 殿中內給事, 6B), drafter of royal edicts and proclamations (*jijego* 知制誥).²³

In this record, as Jeong Mun was appointed as junior policy monitor, the remonstrance officials intervened. The king accepted their rejection, and appointed him to another post. In Goryeo, people who descended from a Bugok locality were discriminated against, compared to people who originated from ordinary counties and districts. The remonstrance officials therefore objected

21. Park Jauu, "Goryeo jeongi gunsin ui wisang gwa yeokhal e daehan gwannyeon" [Reflections on the status and roles of the king and ministers in the early Goryeo dynasty], *Hanguksa Yeongu* 132 (2006): 1-31.

22. *Goryeosa jeoryo* 11 [1152/06/03, Uijong 6].

23. *Goryeosa* 95, "Yeoljeon" [Biographies] 8, Jeong Mun 鄭文.

because of his lowly origins, and most likely there were regulations that prevented such people from attaining certain posts. In cases like this, when remonstrance officials tried to invalidate an appointment, they tried to persuade the king by giving specific reasons. Because failing someone for the verification procedure amounted to overturning a royal order, it was necessary to adduce sufficient reasons. The king would then decide whether or not the grounds were sufficient to agree with the remonstrance officials' decision.²⁴

There were several options open to the king if confronted with a rejection by the remonstrance officials. First, he could concur with their position and not appoint the candidate in question. By deciding to drop an inappropriate appointment, the king and the officials would find themselves in agreement. Second, the king could refuse to accept their suggestion and go ahead with the appointment of the person he preferred. In this case, the king would have to justify such appointment with proper reasons. Then the remonstrance officials would relent and have the candidate pass the verification process. If the king failed to present a convincing case, then the king and remonstrance officials would be at odds. Third, the king could acknowledge that the remonstrance officials' concerns were justified, yet still choose to assign the candidate to a post different from the original post intended. The example of Jeong Mun quoted above was a case in which the king chose this third option, as a compromise.

The verification procedure by the remonstrance officials was a device that recognized the king's ultimate authority to assign a person to a governmental seat, while also making sure that such power would be wielded inside the parameters considered legal, and also that it would be acceptable to the entire ruling class. It was a device designed to reflect the king's own will as well as the subjects' overall opinion.

The Historical Meaning of "Consultative Politics"

The Goryeo dynasty developed various institutional devices designed to encourage consultation between the king and his officials, but with the king placed at the center of the system. The character of the Goryeo system can perhaps be better understood by comparing it with the consultation process within the Bone Rank system of the preceding Silla dynasty.

In Silla, the Bone Rank institution only applied to people living in the capital

24. Park Jaeu, "Goryeo sidae Seogyong ui haengjeong jeolcha wa seonggyeok" [The administrative procedure of the Western Capital and its nature], *Yeoksa munhwa yeongu* 36 (2010): 3-40.

Gyeongju; people living in local regions were not included in the system. The Bonk Rank institution comprised several status groups, including True Bone (*Jingol*), Headrank six (*Yukdupum*), Headrank five, Headrank four, etc. Only family members of kings and queens could be part of the True Bone group.

Silla's political system was based upon this Bone Rank institution, which continued to exist till the very end of the dynasty; Chinese institutions were adopted too, but they never displaced the native system, and therefore functioned in a modified or limited form. Goryeo, however, did not build its ruling structure on the Bone Rank institution, and in order to carry out Confucian philosophy, Goryeo embraced Chinese institutions completely, and eventually formed a political system that was completely different from that of Silla.

In the context of Silla's consultative politics, the way the senior offices were operated is noteworthy.²⁵ In Silla, people received official ranks (Gwandeung 官等) according to their status group, and were assigned to government positions according to their ranks. Specifically, the first five office ranks out of a total of seventeen were granted only to members of the True Bone group. Only people who occupied the first five office ranks were assigned positions as ministers of the senior offices, and they could also have joint appointments to several posts; some of them served as ministers of the other senior offices at the same time.

Therefore it is easy to see how the senior offices that mattered in governing Silla were monopolized by True Bone members, who basically discussed matters of state amongst themselves.²⁶ Because the reports to the throne by the senior offices represented the interests of the True Bone Class, the authority of the king was severely limited in the decision-making process.

The situation was similar in the council where the king and the ministers discussed state matters. Since the unification of the Three Kingdoms, participants to such councils were mostly ministers, who served as the top official of important institutions; these high offices were, for example the Head of the Council of Nobles (*sangdaedeung* 上大等), Chief of the Department of Military Affairs (Byeongbu-ryeong 兵部令), Chief Councilor (*sijung* 侍中), Chamberlain of the Palace Department (Naeseong *sasin* 內省私臣) etc.²⁷ In other words, only the

25. Among the most important Silla senior offices are the Jipsa-bu 執事部, Byeong-bu 兵部, Jo-bu 調府, Chang-bu 倉府, Ye-bu 禮部, Seung-bu 乘府, Sajeong-bu 司正府, Yeoljak-bu 例作府, Seon-bu 船府, Yeonggaek-bu 領客府, Wihwa-bu 位和府, Jwaribang-bu 左理方府, Wuribang-bu 右理方府, etc..

26. Yi Gidong, "Silla jungdae gwallyoje wa golpumje" [The government official system and the Bone Rank institution of the mid-Silla period], *Jindan hakbo* 50 (1980): 37-54.

27. Jeon Deokjae, "Silla Hwabaek hoeui ui seonggyeok gwa geu byeonhwa" [Nature of the Silla dynasty's Hwabaek council and changes it went through], *Yeoksa hakbo* 182 (2004): 1-31.

True Bones serving as ministers of senior offices were designated to provide the king with counsel, so the king's position in the council was far from influential. Thus, consultative politics in Silla only existed between the king and the True Bones, who protected their own vested interests, so the royal power was severely limited.

Compared to that, Goryeo's consultative politics included a much larger group of officials than Silla. This allowed both the king and the officials to have larger stakes. The government appointment system serves as a vivid example of this. Although the appointment of officials was a royal prerogative, in Silla, the king was not able to appoint someone whose background was lower than that of True Bone to the seat of a senior office minister. Yet in Goryeo, the king was able to select a candidate from a much large pool of people that embraced not only the personnel in the capital but also others living in local regions. This meant not only that the king's power to appoint would have been greater, but also that lower or provincial officials could attain the position of minister, thus giving them a larger stake.

However, as the size of the ruling class continued to grow, the possibilities for internal conflicts and divergences increased correspondingly. King Gwangjong (r. 949-975) abused his power, appointed personnel from lower ranks to superior positions, and caused political instability in the government by purging the elder commanders and meritorious subjects. His successor King Gyeongjong (r. 975-981) entrusted an influential official with his power, who then purged or killed all the officials who had gained power during Gwangjong's reign, and executed royal family members. As a result, the royal power was damaged. These events forced people to realize that both the king and the officials could abuse their authority.

So they came to realize that the illegal actions of the king and the officials should be checked, and that future politics should be based upon compromises and consultations. The political system that was established during king Seongjong's reign (981-997) integrated this principle into its very structure.²⁸ The Goryeo political system was designed with the king at the center, but allowed neither the king nor the officials to monopolize political power, and forced them to operate the government upon the spirit and principle of consultation.

28. Park Jau, "Goryeo chogi ui daegan jedo" [The remonstrance institution in the early Goryeo period], *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 68 (2008): 89-114.

Conclusion

Previous studies of the Goryeo political system assumed that it was dominated by noble houses: in this view, ministers merely represented the interests of those noble houses. However, these studies overlooked the role and authority of the king. In this analysis of the Goryeo political system, equal emphasis was laid on both the king and the officials, and conclusions are based on specific evidence. Through an analysis of sources that reveal the consultative aspects of the Goryeo political system, it can be confirmed that this was one of the defining features of Goryeo politics, and that the king was at the center, with political decisions made by the king following extensive consultations with officials.

Evidence of the application of these principles was found in the core elements of the system, namely the issuing of royal orders, the king's approval of reports from officials, the functioning of the chief councils, and the checks-and-balances functions of the remonstrance system.

The issuing of a royal order was an important political instrument for the king. Yet unlike royal communications such as decrees, edicts and royal orders, which were directly issued to the officials, proclamations underwent the deliberation of the Secretariat-Chancellery. This system ensured that there would be a consultative process involving the king and the officials regarding the proclamation's contents before it was issued. Also, for the approval of an official's memorial, the king had to go through two steps. First, the relevant offices were ordered to come up with policy recommendation to deal with the issue. Second, the king gave final approval to the offices' recommendation. Thus the system ensured that the officials' opinion was taken into account and reflected in the final policy decision.

For problems that the king could not resolve on his own, councils were convened to discuss political issues; this again shows us the tendency of Goryeo politics to encourage consultation between the king and his officials. The king was in charge of initiating the council, while the *jaesin* ministers, the Privy Council and others only served and assisted the king. And while the king's ultimate authority was duly acknowledged, there were also a number of remonstrance officials whose duty it was to prevent the king from making illegal decisions or taking illegal actions. Whenever a government appointment was deemed inappropriate, the remonstrance officials would block it by not allowing the candidate to pass the verification procedure, thus forcing the king and the officials to find a compromise solution. But such action was never intended to challenge the king's authority.

The consultative system of the Goryeo dynasty was fundamentally different from its Silla counterpart. The Silla consultation system only covered a handful of True Bones, who served as ministers of several senior offices and displayed a rather prominent voice in providing the king with their counsel. In such an environment, the king's authority was restricted. Yet coming into the Goryeo period, as the size of the ruling class expanded, it enabled both the king and the officials to have a more substantial say in matters, while also increasing the potential for conflict. Therefore they established a political system in which the king was at the center and instituted consultative procedures between the king and the officials. Therefore, the assumptions of previous studies, which are built on the premise that the political system was dominated by ministers serving the interests of the aristocratic families to which they belonged, should be modified and corrected.