



## KOREA AS PART OF THE MONGOLIAN WORLD:PATTERNS AND DIFFERENCES<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The Mongolian world order was never a single unified, focused entity in large part because of a strong tradition persisting to the end of communality. As time went on this included Koryo Korea, a "son-in-law state" with strong marriage and other links to the center, in its case Mongol China, and one which used its special position to parley economic and political power within an expanded East Asian realm. Its relationship with Mongol China included many resident Koreans in Daidu and elsewhere and powerful consorts such as Empress Ki who dominated the last reign in Mongol China and whose son inherited. The present paper looks at this special relationship between Korea and the Mongol world and also at some of the cultural interaction involved, in this case cultural influences from the Mongol world as seen in the many changes in Korean foodways that took place during the time, including the coming of the national drink, distilled soju. It emerged based upon Mongol technological innovations and the known interest of the Mongol occupiers in distilled alcohol, based in milk for the conquerors but more typically in rice for the Korean conquered.

**Keywords:** Mongol, Korea, history, culture, drink

### MOĞOL DÜNYASININ BİR PARÇASI OLARAK KORE: ÖRNEKLER VE FARKLILIKLAR

#### ÖZ

Moğolistan'ın dünya düzeni, çoğunlukla toplumsallığın sonuna kadar devam eden güçlü gelenek nedeniyle, tek ve birleşik, odaklanmış bir varlık değildi. Zaman geçtikçe Koryo Kore, güçlü evlilik ve diğer merkezî bağlantıları olan bir "damat" devleti, (Mongol) Çin'in ekonomik ve siyasi iktidarın pareleleştirilmesi için özel konumunu kullanan genişletilmiş bir Doğu Asya ülkesi haline gelmişti. Moğol Çin, Daidu'da ve başka yerlerde yaşayan pek çok Koreliyi ve Moğol Çin'de son hükümdarlığa hakim olan Empress Ki gibi güçlü kişileri içeriyordu. Bu yazıda, Kore ile Moğol dünyası arasındaki bu özel ilişkiye ve ayrıca bu süreçte katılan kültürel etkileşimlerden bazılarına değinilmektedir. Zaman içinde gerçekleşen ve Kore'ye ait yiyeceklerde görülen Moğol dünyasının kültürel etkileri, ulusal içecek, damıtılmış *soju* ele alınacaktır. Bu içecek, Moğol teknolojik yeniliklerine dayanarak ortaya çıkmıştır ve Moğol işgalcilerinin saf alkol hakkındaki mevcut ilgisi fatihler için süte dayanmaktadır; fakat daha tipik olarak Koreliler için pirinçtir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Moğol, Kore, tarih, kültür, içecek

#### Ideological Background

The Mongolian world order was never a single unified, focused entity in large part because of a strong tradition persisting to the end of communality. Even though there was often a strong central army and authority, later, even as united rule broke down, the tradition that the totality of the Mongolian world was a single *ulus*, a single

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my colleague Park Hyunhee for her willingness to discuss the Mongol period in Korean history, the subject of her forthcoming book, with me but views presented here are strictly my own and reflect primarily my perspective as an historian of the Mongol world, Mongol China in particular. I am in no way an historian of Korea.

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“joint patrimony,” subject to joint control and enjoyment, persisted. This was even true when the unity of a supranational *ulus* tended to breakdown into competing *ulus*. This meant that the ruling class, no matter how powerful it was, was subject to restraint and had to consult with the masses, in the great *khuriltai*, “national assemblies,” that elected Möngke and Qubilai, and participating in all important decisions, for one example. This also meant that the Mongol Empire and its successor states had more than one way to expand. Direct conquest was obviously important, but so was intermarriage. In the *Secret History* (All citations of the *Secret History* are to Ligeti 1971) Cinggis-qan gives a retainer a wife and stresses that that act was a key part of the imperial governance system, the *yeke Tore*, the “great imperial system,” just as was conquest, taxation and booty generation:

Cinggis-qahan, when he granted Ibaqa-beki to Jürcedey, when he spoke to Ibaqa-beki he said: “You [have been conferred] not because you have no character or because you are poor in beauty, but [because] I indeed having entered the front and foot, and gone to place myself in the proper ordering, when I granted you to Jürchedey I was thinking of the great *töre*... (*Secret History*, 208).

In another place speaking to Jürchedey himself and then Ibaqa herself Cinggis again stresses *töre*:

Jürcedey has his virtues:

His virtue was being as a shield,

On the day of battle;

His virtue was that he was

My protection against the enemy people;

His virtue was that he unified

The scattered patrimony,

His virtue was that he made unharmed,

The dispersed patrimony

Thinking of *Töre* I conferred this on you. After this time our *uruq* [lineage] will be sitting on our throne. And they will be thinking of *Töre* that such a benefit has been conferred [by Jürchedey]. And if nothing is contrary to my words, from *uruq* to *uruq* Ibaqa’s throne must not be cut off (*Secret History* 208).

Ögödei (r, 1229-41) also makes the system clear by putting that same word *Töre* on an important coin (from his capital of Qaraqorum, the only one surviving of those issued), almost to the exclusion of other types of identification. *Töre* alone made clear what he wanted to express, namely that the coin in question represented the proper ordering and functioning of the Mongol universe, as granted by Heaven (Buell 2016: 43-64).

Thus *Töre* was not just social order in an abstract sense but involved the proper maintenance of a complex net of relationships. In this case, Jürcedey had served the *qan* well and deserved a reward. There was an obligation to reward him, and this

involved the granting of a high-status woman who through her alliance with Jürcedey was to cement a key alliance within the Mongolian empire. It was not just with an individual, Jürcedey, but with a large collection of subject people granted to Jürcedey, a sub-qanate that was still part of the whole.

This episode of course very much involved marriage politicking. On one level, the men of the ruling house could conquer and accumulate people for their own use, making the whole stronger; but the women were expected to hold it all together through marriage alliances, part of the *Töre* that Cinggis-qan mentions repeatedly.

And this *Töre* was in every way ordained cosmically as this concept of cosmic ordination is expressed in the Seal of Güyük-qan (r. 1246-48). It speaks of Tengri, "Heaven" as the governor and originator of it all:

*Möngke-Tengri-yin Küchün-tür Yeke Monggol Ulus-un Dalai-yin qan-u jarliy il bulqa irgen-tür kürbesü busiretügüi ayutuγai* "By the Power of Eternal Heaven, the *jarliy* [imperial order] of the Universal Qan of the Great Mongol Patrimony [*ulus*]. If this reaches a pacified or a rebellious people, it must respect [it] [and] it must fear" (Buell 2003: 293).

Acting contrary to *Töre* was thus acting contrary to the whole order of the universe. It was an inconceivable act.

#### **Korea and Elsewhere:**

As the Mongolian Empire expanded, and the space is too brief to trace the history of that expansion here, it took its system with it; very much so. The concepts of Eternal Heaven [Tengeri], an associated "power of the ancestors," also frequently mentioned, of the universality of the *ulus*, "patrimony," and of all the paraphernalia of imperial authority travelled along with the armies and migrating tribes. Korea, not the earliest Mongol conquest, its acquisition was in fact almost an accident (Henthorn 1963), soon became a vital one particularly at the end of Mongol rule in East Asia when Koryo Korea became Mongol China's most powerful surviving ally (Robinson 2009). And Korea was not just an important part of the Mongol world order politically but it too became a part of the *Töre*.

Korea was in fact a "son-in-law" state, where marital connections between the Mongol ruling house in China, the Yuan 元 Dynasty, and the Koryo ruling house, dominated and became the basis not only the ruling power of the Wang Clan of Koryo itself but of the position of the Mongols in Korea and over Korea. Since such relations were long-term, the two houses, that of Koryo and the Mongol Yuan became so inbred that one Korean King, Ch'ungson (1308-13), was a grandson of Qubilai-qan. While the last Mongol emperor of China, Ayurshiridara (r. 1371-78), was the son of Korean Empress Ki (died 1370?), to give just two examples.

The relationship was such that it has even found expression in Mongol oral history. As a young graduate student, for example, I heard the story of how Cinggis-qan went to Korea and was so enamored by the Koryo girls that he simply did not want to come back. The only way to get him to return home was to send an old horse-

headed-fiddle player to sing songs about Mongolia and make the great khan homesick. The story, which exists in many variants, in one, the Korean girl who tempted him was his real wife, Qulan, actually a Mongolian Merket with no Korean connections at all (See the discussion in Robinson 2009: 265), is false. Cinggis-qan never went to Korea, anywhere close in fact, but the Mongol who told me the story (a descendent of Temüge-otchigin, who had a special role in Korea as the Mongols first penetrated it),<sup>2</sup> (See the discussion of this man in passing in Henthorn 1963) while stressing this, also stressed that the story is indicative of the close relationships between Mongols and Koreans, of a sort that persists to the present day thanks to the close economic connections between South Korea and Mongolia.

And not just marriages were involved, but much more. There were major exchanges of elites, for example, and major exchanges of cultural and even technological goods, e.g., Mongol distillation technology used to make a new Korean beverage, *soju* (The topic will be the subject of a forthcoming paper by Park Hyunhee presented at the conference on Fermentation and Distillation in Salzburg Austria and to be published in 2017 in the online journal *Crossroads*. I also think Dr. Park for personally expanding upon information in her paper with me). International members of the Mongol and even world elite in China were present in Korea, including Uighurs (See Robinson 2009. For a family of Uighurs active in 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century Korea see also Michael C. Brose, "Uyghur Semuren in Koryŏ and Chosŏn Korean Society and Politics," in M. Rossabi, ed., *Eurasian Influences on Yuan China*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 178-199). Koreans were found in Daidu 大都 capital of Mongol China as a regular community (Robinson 2009), a large one and Koreas had colonized, with a great deal of help from the Mongols, the Liaoyang 遼陽 area (Robinson 2009). Koreans also actively participated in Yuan China's international trade (There is no full study of this important topic but of its connection with maps and map-making see the important study by Hyunhee 2012, See also Hyunhee 2013). Most important, Korean aristocrats even served in the Mongol royal bodyguard, a great honor.

The imperial bodyguard of Yuan China was a holdover in Mongol China from imperial times. Under Cinggis-qan at first it comprised a few hundred guards and special servants for the *qan's* inner *ordo* or palace tents. Later many more were added until the guard in various branches constituted a full *tumen*, a body of 10,000 warriors (For a full institutional history of the early Mongol Empire and Mongol East Asia see Buel 1977).

In addition to its military function, as a key part of the *ghol*, the imperial central pivot force when the army was mobilized, it acquired two other functions as well. The bodyguard or *kesig* became a center for government, in the words of the *Secret History*, it governed along with us (the *qan*) (See the discussion in Buell 1994). It also,

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<sup>2</sup> Henthorn among other things reproduces a tribute list from Temüge (page 202). It calls for 10,000 otter pelts, 3000 bolts of fine silk, 2000 bolts of fine ramie, 10,000 bushels of silk quilting, ink, writing brushes, and paper, textile dies, namely groomwell, safflower, indigo shoots, cinnabar red, and orpiment, also bright lacquer and tung oil.

and this was a most important role, became like George Washington's staff and what it did later for the young United States, a center for training and indoctrination.

One of the sub-categories of the *kesig* were the *turqaq*, literally, "hostages," and the *turqaq* were mostly young members of the Mongol elite, although they were certainly not just Mongolian, usually in any case from the very best families, sent to court to serve the *qan* and, at the same time, acquire a national perspective while being useful. In the *turqaq*, not only did the hostages, if they were not already so, become "Mongols," but learned not just Mongolian, the universal language, but the common parlance of court and empire and the ideological constructs associated with it.

Among those from outside serving as *turqaq* were young Koreans, Korean aristocrats but also princes including princes later ruling as monarchs (See Robinson, 78 and in particular 98ff). The importance of such service in terms of binding Mongol China and Mongol Korea cannot be underestimated. One result were Korean rulers in many respects more Mongolian than Korean although this does not mean that the Korean aristocracy as a whole was heavily Mongolized. The fact that the princes mostly had Mongol wives just added to their degree of assimilation. Mongol wives were still not universal even among the most powerful.

Also an important institution participated in jointly by both the Mongol side of the Yuan Empire and by the Koreans of Koryo were the "provinces," *sheng* 省 or *xingsheng* 行省 (Mongolian *il* although the Turkic form *el* was more common; both mean a pacified population), set up to administer the Liaoyang area on the one side, and much of Korea on the other in connection with the Mongol plan to conquer Japan. As I show elsewhere, these provinces, an innovation in East Asia for the Mongol period, were a key part of Mongol administration in terms of Mongol holdings as a part of the great communality, the *ulus*, including the functionings of the *jarquci*, an adjudicator for *ulus* authority, not exactly a "judge" as the term is often translated. Most were the most powerful officials in the entire Mongol system of governance; officials that could even overrule the ruler himself. Jarquci could even exist at a level completely above the imperial system of the *qan* (Buell 1977).

The most important feature of the "province" from the perspective of Koryo in particular was the fact that like the *ulus* themselves, the "provinces" were jointly ruled and administered. They were ruled by a collegium of officials, including imperial officers such as imperial *jarquci*, but also *jarquci* appointed by other centers of authority, such as imperial princes and princely domains. Essentially anyone with a strong interest, and not all were at the level of *jarquci*, had the right to participate in provincial government.

How the system worked in practice is most evident in a place such as the later *sheng* of what is now Yunnan 雲南 where documentation is particularly full (on how the province there came into being see Buell 1993: 466-479). Such a system existed in Korea as well as an early study by Karl-Heinz Reck has shown. Among the participants in the joint government of the *sheng* for Korea in fact was the Koryo king and his major

ministers. The *sheng* of Korea, for attacking Japan, was not just a Mongolian structure. Koreans owned it just like the Yuan elite (Karl-Heinz Reck 1968: 135-144).

Such common institutions, e.g., the bodyguard and the province system in this case, but also interactions between Koreans and others at Daidu, and within Korea itself, broad intermarriages, etc., helped promote the permeability of the two parts of the society affecting Korea in the Mongol era, namely that of Korea itself and the many societies of Mongol China. This tended to create a common elite that was often more loyal to the totality than to its components, one primary reason why Korea remained allied with the Mongols almost to the end, even when the Mongols as such had come to lack real power to intervene in Korea.

Common institutions and permeability also gave rise not only to solidarity but common experiences. Both Korea and North China, for example, experienced the massive Red Turban rebellions and invasions (Robinson 2009: 130), the later in fact greatly influencing the whole experience of late Koryo history. Also influencing the respectively Korea and the Yuan, and this is an entirely other issue, were parallel developments in the two societies. One, which must be addressed in detail in future research, was militarization although there has been no direct study of militarization in Mongol China and in Koryo Korea in comparative terms. Nonetheless, the process leading to the rise of Choson on the one side is very similar to the process leading to the fall of Yuan and the new Ming in China. Further research is certainly called for and would be fruitful (see John Duncan 2000 and John Duncan 1988-89: 9-79).

In conclusion, the joint experiences of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, Qanate China, and of Koryo Korea were not accidental and go beyond elite communalities. Not only were their experiences linked by a kinship network but by key institutions as well as was the case for other parts of the Mongolian world. That is to say, as I have strongly suggested above, Korea's experiences in late Koryo times with the Mongols were not haphazard or unique. In fact, Korea, as a "son-in-law" state shared experiences with many other parts of the Mongol world system, not just China, including the Seljuq kingdom, a vassal of the Ilqans of Iran, Lesser Armenia, also dominated by the Ilqans, and probably the Uighurs of Turkistan, which came under the East Asian Mongols. Tibet was similar too but different as well in its special religious connections with Mongol China. The list might be extended. In any case, the Mongol World Order was vast, Korea was simply one component of it. Where it was different, and that is another story completely, was in source material. Korea makes a particularly good case study as a consequence. This includes the well-documented Korean cultural history of the era, from *pulgoggi* to *soju* (see Appendix 1).

Nonetheless, in writing a history of Korea for the Mongol era it is important not to let our enthusiasm for the excellent source material and the interest of the subject itself run away with us. Just as in writing a history of Korea in the Mongol period it is important not to fail to see the Korean trees for a Mongolian forest, so it is likewise important to remember that the Koreans of the era have their own values and assumptions. For example, whatever the ideological justification, they often did not like it when the Mongols helped themselves to (largely elite) Koryo women (see Jahun Kim Haboush 2009: 42-49) even though from the Mongol perspective the marriages and the

rest were an honor and the Mongols, in their view, were simply helping themselves to booty which it was Korea's obligation to provide. And the booty involved in any case would not only be shared from the Mongolian side, perhaps indirectly in other forms, but could come back to the Koreans in abundance. This was the way the system worked or was supposed to work at least.

And while the Koreans participated in Mongolian political strictures, such as bodyguard membership and the province system, and the Korean elite did become part of a larger Yuan *ulus* elite, be it through active choice or passive acceptance, it would also be remembered that much of what went on in Koryo Korea was predicated on Korean interests, on Korean survival in particular, for example. The Koryo monarchy and its supporters were first and primarily devoted to the survival of Koryo itself often in the face of heavy-handed Mongolian action, something strongly resented, not just the tribute of beautiful women. Thus when we study the history of Mongol Korea it is, to be sure, to allow the Mongol and other elite of Qanate China to speak, but to allow a Korean elite to speak as well although often its actions speak far louder than words; what was done when the chips were down or no one was looking. So thus in studying late Koryo Korea and the Mongols we need balance our enthusiasm for an interesting case study with a realism for the Korea that actually existed. Such an approach is only too natural given the importance of the Mongol period not just in Koryo history, but in Korean history as a whole.

## **Appendix 1**

### **The Mongols and Korean Food**

Although seemingly isolated from the zone of the direct contact, namely the overland silk roads, another East Asian Society greatly influenced by foods and food influences coming from the west and the far west during the Mongol period was Korea. In large part, but not exclusively, the new foods and food influences reflected the assimilation of the Korean elite to Eurasian cultural standards, *i.e.*, those of the Mongol world order of which Koryo and even Choson Korea was very much a part. Nonetheless, Korean foodways still managed to be both Korean and foreign at the same time.

Korean food before the Mongols was more or less Korean in its own unique ways. Some western influences were already found since Korean merchants not only participated, distantly, in Silk Road commerce, but also actively maintained a maritime presence within the China Sea and on south. This including the presence of Western merchants in Korea and many Korean, for that matter, in China and elsewhere.

Being a country with an enormously long coastline Korea has relied and still relies on fish and seaweed. Well-watered, it also raises rice and other water-loving crops. Being fertile, and not extremely continental in climate, it can produce a great range of foods. Being throughout much of its history a country of extreme poverty (except recently in the south), it was long a land of grain and not rice, and of the most easily-grown vegetables. Meat was a luxury even for relatively rich families. This included for long the beef dishes so popular today which most likely were first popularized under the Mongols.

One of the characteristics linking Korea with interior Eurasia has been a reliance on small grains. Rice, a large grain, was long uncommon and grew only in the more fertile, level, southerly valleys. Wheat did not grow particularly well anywhere but, by way of compensation, there was widespread reliance on barley, buckwheat, sorghum, popularized in Mongol times, and millets. These last included not only broomcorn and foxtail, but also barnyard millet and other obscure East Asian plants. Most interesting and unique was the use of acorns to make flour and a pale jelly-like product similar to sticky rice cake. The acorns have to be processed intensively to remove the tannins and other bitter, unhealthful chemicals. Chestnuts and pine nuts are less common, but far from rare.

Grains are sometimes just boiled, like regular rice, but very often made into noodles, which are perhaps even more abundant in Korea than in other East Asian countries. Congee, *juk*, also abounds, and there is a whole tradition of *bonjuk*, healthful congees, made with medicinal herbs, fruits, black sesame seeds, and beans. The imperial court used abalone. These are recommended for countless illnesses, and indeed are usually quite nutritious and soothing.

The other distinctive feature about Korean cuisine is the enormous dependence on pickles. A Korean meal, in fact, is incomplete without a whole selection of pickles, usually in small side dishes arranged around the main course. This has several causes: long, cold winters when fresh foods were unavailable; an extremely rich flora with many options for pickling; a number of tough vegetables that are made easier to eat by the process; and a lack of any other way to preserve many vegetable foods. Even meat and fish find their way into the pickles.

The famous one, now known worldwide, is kimchi, a very salty mix usually based on Chinese cabbage and garlic. Various kinds of cabbage can be used. Chile peppers are now an inevitable, and major, part of the mix although a recent new world import. Radishes (including their leaves), bean sprouts, pine nuts, sesame seeds, cooked beans, various species of chives and onions, and other vegetables find their way in. The great vats of kimchi put down for the winter may include a whole chicken or a number of small (usually dried) fish. Related types of pickle are made of radishes, chives, and the like without the cabbage. A different pickling strategy, involving more oil and less salt and water, is used to make a wide variety of single-item pickles: rape-cabbage tops, *Platycodon* shoots, bean sprouts, seaweeds, and so on. There seems no limit to the uses of this process. Yet other processes were used to pickle, dry, ferment, and otherwise preserve the all-important and ever-present bean curd. Perilla leaves, which are so common in Korea that they count as a vegetable rather than just a flavoring herb, also find their way into pickles.

Meat was also enormously popular, but all too rare. The Koreans, like the Central Asians, were masters at stretching it by chopping it fine and using it in stuffing for dumplings. These generally resemble north Chinese forms and most appear to be imports. The familiar Turkic name *mandu* is used for one type showing certainly a Mongol-era derivation. Although only one type is actually called *mantu* Korean food is now characterized by a variety of similar dumplings. Also part of the introductions of the period were a variety of noodle dishes, in some cases noodles in adapted Korean dishes such as the stews and rich soups for which Korea is famed, and the practice of seasoning with pepper.



Also at least a conceptual import of the Mongol era was *bulkogi* and related foods. To make them meat is cut fine, marinated, and then cooked at the table over a brazier; a way of cooking now familiar in the western world via Korean *bulkogi* and other specialties abundantly found in restaurants. Although it would have been more logical for the Mongols to introduce mutton dishes to Korea in fact sheep are not common in Korea even today.

Another area in which the Mongols had an impact in Korea was in alcoholic beverages. The Mongols did not invent but seem to have taken to distillation and were instrumental in spreading convenient and easily portable distillation technology. This included to Korea where Mongol bases became centers for the production of what became the national distillate, now called *soju* and made primarily from rice. Interestingly this new drink was first called *arkhi* (Park Hyunhee, personal communication to P. Buell), the word almost universally applied to distilled liquors throughout much of Eurasia during the Mongol period.

Soju has been much developed since. Today can be made from anything starchy, including sweet potatoes (a major crop in the south since the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century). Soju can be, and often is, variously flavored with fruit, herbs, or savory tastes. It ranges from fairly strong (less often distilled) to *samsu* (Chinese *san shao*, “three times distilled”) and even more.

Thus Korea’s Links to Central Asia include the finely-cut meat cooked on a brazier or in a pan; the many types of stuffed dumplings; the many types of noodles and noodle soups; the widespread use of millets, buckwheat and barley; the importance and nature of distilling; and also, a subordinate issue, the widespread use of drying to preserve meat and other items. Very different by the contrast are the wide variety of plant foods and the incredible focus on pickles.

Thus it seems reasonable to see Korean food as a coordinate branch with Central Asia of the family tree of East Asian foodways. It developed from a similar background: hunting and gathering in a game-rich environment, then domestication of millet and rice, then the addition of the standard domestic animals and vegetables, then the development of noodles, pickles, and other technologies, and finally the elaboration of a whole complex of dumplings, noodle foods, finely-cut meat dishes, and so on. Where nomadic stockraisers elaborated dairy foods and easily-transported grain products, Koreans elaborated storage in less mobile ways. One cannot easily move 10-gallon pottery jars of kimchi.

Adapted from Paul D. Buell, Eugene N. Anderson and Montserrat de Pablo Moya, *Crossroads of Cuisine, The Eurasian Heartland, the Silk Roads and Food*, London: Reaktion Books, forthcoming

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