

## History of Korea Part 7

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Under the leadership of Taejo(temple name), Goryeo began with great potential. The peninsula was united from north to south and east to west. They were on the way to being one people. Goryeo proceeded to peacefully absorb the ruling class of the two other countries and incorporated them under its bureaucracy; conducting political marriages and distributing land and positions according to their previous status in their respective countries. In contrast to Silla's bone-rank, the elite upper class of the three kingdom countries were accepted and integrated equally into the Goryeo upper class.

The common people were all equal in their squalor.

No group of people in early Korea illustrates the caste system better than the 백정 Beak Jeong people.

The baekjeong (Korean: 백정) people were an untouchable caste in Korea, originating from some minority, nomadic groups of disputed ethnicity, probably Khitan people. In the early part of the Goryeo period (918 - 1392), these minorities were largely settled in fixed communities. They were severely restricted in what professions they could take up. They were basket weavers, itinerant entertainers, and butchers. A butcher who worked with bloody carcasses was the most unclean and undesirable person in a Buddhist society. They were also restricted as to what they could wear or where they could live. They could only marry into their own people. They lived under such heavy burdens throughout the Goryeo period and into the Joseon Dynasty. It was only when Christian missionaries from the west arrived with different ideas about the value of human life did movements arise seeking justice for all people. These movements leaned heavily to the left and were the breeding grounds for early Marxist revolutionaries.

Nobi was the Korean word which indicated a person that could be bought, sold and inherited. Slavery played a significant role in Goryeo. A significant portion of the population were slaves including prisoners of war, debtors, and criminals. Goryeo made slavery hereditary. If you were born to a mother and or father who were slaves, you were also classified a slave. They suffered a lot and there were several slave rebellions. One led by a slave in Kaesong named Manjeok. He spoke out about inequality and

injustice. The plot was betrayed and foiled. Manjeok and all involved were executed. Manjeok's rebellion was not the last and over time, as frustrations reached the boiling point, slaves rebelled and were crushed without mercy.

Overall, life in Goryeo for common people was shaped by a combination of factors, including the hierarchical social structure, the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism, the flourishing of art and culture, and the challenges posed by wars and invasions..

It was the golden age of Buddhism. Buddhism was the state religion of Goryeo. It was promoted by kings and had great influence on the royal court. There was significant patronage of art by royal and aristocrats. All levels of society were ardent believers. Princes often were sent to temples to be trained before they became kings. In turn monks often had great influence at court as advisors and diplomats. They produced the Tripitaka Koreana which was a vast collection of Buddhist scripture carved into wooden blocks, effectively the first offset printing.

Goryeo is known for the blue green pottery known as Caledon pottery.

Goryeo was also a maritime power trading with China and Japan. They put to sea in large vessels with lots of room for trade goods. These ships were also convenient to carry and land naval infantry. Large with open decks they were ideal for deploying the new technology called cannons. They achieved significant victories over the pirate mobs known as Waeko. The Waeko were based in Japan. The Goryeo Navy tactics were dependent on large sized battleships. Large battleships were very useful for shooting arrows, which was the Goryeo Army's traditional skill, and the use of cannons. On the other hand, Waeku preferred boarding tactics with small and fast ships. From 1350, the Waeku began to invade Goryeo on a large scale. The Goryeo Navy could not match them. In general we have the idea that Goryeo failed to repulse the invader because they fought on land, not sea. This is a misunderstanding. The Goryeo Government knew it had to meet the Waeku on the sea. But they could not do so because the Waeku overwhelmed the Goryeo's Navy in scale, although the Goryeo's tactics, depending on the bow and large size of the ship, required more soldiers and ships.

Finally, King Gongmin attempted to build even larger battleships. But traditional tactics required too many ships, beyond the nation's capacity. To solve this problem, it was required to devise new tactics that were able to increase the navy's power, especially in defeating the Waeku. Two plans were attempted. The first was employing marines from coastal provinces or islands. They were dispatched for training in fighting tactics and usage of new weapons. The second way, more important, was the use of firearms. The cannon was of some use. Its power was weak and it had a short range. More important weapons were the shipboard devices to repel boarders. These were basically the use of boiling liquids which had a good effect in driving off the pirates attempting to board. The revised tactics and weapons were able to make up for Goryeo's long time shortcomings in naval warfare. These changes were successful in confronting the Japanese Waeko pirates. These tactics and weapons were implemented by the Joseon Dynasty in defeating the Japanese pirates in the 16th century.

Today, The People's Republic of China plays a central role in the affairs of this world, including with the Han Chinese but also with many other ethnic groups that make up its citizens. In its long history, China has embraced and captured many ethnic populations, territories, and languages. The enduring philosophy of China is much reflected in the characters that are used to express its many languages. The character that represents China is an ideograph of a square with a vertical line down the center. This is to represent the idea that the country is the Middle Kingdom and the surrounding nations are the outliers owing loyalty and tribute to the center. Until today this is the operating worldview of China. Inner Mongolian, Tibet, Taiwan, and North Korea are currently drawn into this realm. From the early settlements on the Yellow river, the Han Chinese pushed east, south and northeast to the sea, south and north to the steppes. The recurring pattern was expansion and push back. In the far north, on the steppes of central Asia some of the most consequential push back came from the plateau known as Mongolia. Of course Genghis Khan was the famous, up from poverty, leader that put together the tribes and led them on a rampage that would

result in the changing of history, the building of the greatest empire the world had yet seen, and the realigning of the map of the world. The hordes, decimated, armies, nations and peoples. Along the way, they pushed other nations and people to new places on the map. They pushed into Europe, Russia, and the middle east. They pushed deep into China and usurped the dragon throne. They were less effective as administrators than conquerors. The Yuan's experiences in the Korean kingdom tends to illustrate this.

Korea had struggled with the various northern tribes, mainly the Khitan and Jurchen tribes, since the times of the first walled cities. Although related to those tribes, the push and shove continued until it temporarily abated when the Koreans built up their own kingdoms strong enough to repel the invaders. But the Mongols represented a more existentially difficult challenge. In 1231 CE, a Mongol force pursued a Khitan detachment into Goryeo territory. Goryeo at first tried to pacify the Mongols and began paying tribute. Unfortunately a Mongol official was killed in the conduct of business between the two sides and the Mongols sent an army seeking justice or revenge. This was the inauspicious beginning of the conflicts between the powerful Mongol hordes and Goryeo. The Mongols dominated in the initial phases, conquering territory and armies. Over the passage of time the resistance stiffened and the Mongols were unable to fully subjugate Goryeo. The Koreans fought hard and employed strategies like moving the capital with the royal family to the island of Gangwha off the coast of Incheon. They also used successful guerilla tactics and victories in siege warfare. After 30 years of continuous fighting, Goryeo was exhausted and sued for peace. As a result Goryeo submitted to, became a vassal of, and paid tribute to The Yuan Dynasty. This dynasty was a Mongol dynasty established by Kublai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan. The Yuan Dynasty conquered China in 1271. After a faction of Goryeo nobles rebelled due to their exhaustion and permission, they forced the royal family to submit to the Yuan dynasty. As a tributary state, Goryeo had a unique relationship with Yuan. They obeyed Yuan, recognized it as superior, and had overseers to ensure obedience. They also paid tribute in gold, silver, pottery, women, horses and Eunuchs. The royal family princesses that were sent to Mongolia were married to members of the Mongol royal family. At least one of the Goryeo princesses rose up to become empress of the Yuan, Empress Gi. Likewise princes were sent to Korea, married Korean women and became kings of Goryeo. The relationship between Goryeo and the Yuan was firmly entangled by the marriage relationships, both royal and common. As in the marriage relations, the political relations were hopelessly entangled. Customs, language, and culture flowed back and forth with Yuan always in the superior position and Goryeo in submission. Over time problems were encountered and were worked out. If Yuan had not crumbled of its own accord, they may have become one nation.

Eventually the Yuan's problems caught up with it. In essence, the Ming dynasty's overthrow of the Yuan was a culmination of internal Yuan weaknesses, the widespread Red Turban Rebellion, and the decisive military leadership of Zhu Yuanzhang. The Red Turban Rebellion was a peasant uprising that began in central China against the Yuan Dynasty that spilled over into Goryeo. The rebellion began in 1351 and was a major threat to the Mongol Yuan Dynasty leading to its overthrow and the rise of the Ming. The Goryeo Kingdom was considered a branch of the Yuan Dynasty and so was ripe for raids and pillaging. The Red Turban launched full scale invasions of Goryeo in 1359 and 1360. Both invasions were met by strong Goryeo resistance. The Red Turban was turned back, the Yuan was further weakened, and Goryeo took steps to throw off the yoke of its vassal status. By the mid-14th century, Goryeo King Gongmin took steps to reform the government, further weaken Yuan influence and regain lost territories in the north. The elite of Goryeo saw the writing on the wall and a split between the supporters of the Yuan and the up and coming Ming developed.

In 1368 when the Yuan collapsed and the new Ming Dynasty took the dragon throne, the Ming faction was in place to install a new independent regime in Kaesong. The rise of the Joseon Dynasty followed.