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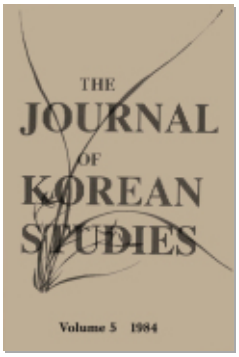

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Koryŏ Kwijok sahoe wa nobi (The Aristocratic Society of Koryŏ and Slavery). By Hong Sŭnggi. Seoul: Ilchogak, 1983.

Western scholars of Korean history are fortunate to have at their disposal a very fine dissertation on the subject of slavery in the Koryŏ period by Ellen Salem.[1] Ms. Salem concluded that by the mid-fourteenth century Korea had become a slave society, a point of view that has had important influence on more recent Western perceptions of Korean society. Orlando Peterson, in his survey of world slavery, was influenced by Salem's interpretation and listed Korea as the best, if not only, case of slave society in East Asia.[2]

Ellen Salem posed two criteria for judging whether a given society should be identified as a slave society or not: the proportion of slaves to the total population, and dependence on slave labor for basic production by the political and economic elite.[3] On the first point she was unable to provide specific statistics for the late Koryŏ period itself, but on the basis of the 80,000 monastic slaves converted to official slavery after the transition to the Chosŏn dynasty (in 1392), she estimated a total of two hundred thousand official and private slaves out of a possible total population of two million about the turn of the fourteenth century.[4] Unfortunately, Salem did not

1. "Slavery in Medieval Korea" (Columbia University, 1978), chap. 5 in particular.
2. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
3. Salem, "Slavery in Medieval Korea," p. 140.
4. Ibid., p. 154.

raise the question when 10 percent is a sufficient proportion to satisfy the first of her two criteria, and did not discuss specifically whether the labor force of the political and economic elite of late Koryŏ depended on slavery. The paucity of evidence from extant official documents such as the *Koryŏsa,* the main type of source that Salem used, explains the difficulty she had in satisfying her own criteria, but her general discussion of the qualitative evidence indicating an increase in slavery in the later Koryŏ period obviously indicates she believed that slaves had become the main source of labor for the political and economic elite.

The book under review here, that by Hong Sŭnggi, is a revised version of an earlier book of his on slavery in the Koryŏ period and represents the most ambitious work to date on slavery in Korea in the Koryŏ period.[5] Contrary to Salem, Hong does not argue that late Koryŏ society was a slave society; he confines his conclusions to statements about relative proportions, such as slave cultivators to nonslave cultivators, outside residents *(eogŏ nobi)* to domestic servants among private slaves, and cultivators to service workers at government offices among official slaves. Nonetheless, some of the conclusions drawn by Hong can be used to test the validity of Salem's conclusions about slave society.

Before attempting that, however, we must discuss the propriety of the two criteria adopted by Salem. As mentioned above, Salem noted that the proportion of slaves in a population is crucial but did not discuss whether 10 percent was above the acceptable minimum. This kind of problem has been raised by scholars of slavery in the West, who have noted that the ancient Greek city states, late Republican and imperial Rome, and the antebellum South of the United States were all slave societies, even though the proportion of slaves in their societies was only about 30 percent.[6] Does this mean that 30 percent should be taken as the dividing line between slave and nonslave societies? If so, then late Koryŏ society would not qualify according to Salem's criterion because only 10 percent of the popu-

5. The first book was entitled *Koryŏ sidae nobi yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Han'guk yŏn'guwŏn, 1981).

6. M. I. Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labour," in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity,* ed. Finley (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1960), pp. 53–72; idem, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973) pp. 71–79; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death,* pp. 354, 363. A single estimate of the percentage of slaves in the population can be misleading. Stampp shows a variation of from 10 to 55 percent slaves in the states of the southern United States. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pp. 29–33.

lation were slaves. Although some scholars of slavery might not endorse such a mechanical and rigid definition of slave society, nevertheless the 30 percent figure is not just an arbitrary designation of a single point along a continuum of societal possibilities, but rather a definition born of necessity. After all, if the Greek city states, Rome, and the antebellum South were suddenly declared to be nonslave societies because only 30 percent of the population was slave, how many societies would be left to discuss? Furthermore, it would leave a gaping hole in the Marxist scheme of historical progression and create a political uproar in the United States. Therefore, since those societies in Western history deemed to have been slave societies because of the importance of slave labor in the economy appear to have had no more than 30 percent of their population as slaves, 30 percent (give or take a few percent) has become by convention a lower limit for slave society. On the other hand, is there no lower limit below which a society would cease to be a slave society? Some scholars might be willing to allow the title for a society with only 25 percent slaves, but it is hard to imagine that many would be willing to concede, as Ellen Salem has done for late Koryŏ, that a society with only 10 percent slaves should be considered a slave society. Is there a point at which quantity turns into quality? Or should we rest content with ascertaining the percentage of slaves in any society without insisting on labels?

The question is not so easily resolved, however, if one is concerned not simply about labels and numbers but on laws of historical progression. For Marxists, the emergence of slave society in Korea in the fourteenth century poses a major anomaly, since slave society is supposed to precede "feudal" society, and most historians of Korea influenced to one degree or another by Marxism would categorize the period from the fourteenth to twentieth centuries as feudal. Even non-Marxist historians otherwise committed to the idea of historical progress should be nonplussed by the emergence of slave society (not, of course, slavery itself, which goes much further back in Korean history) in this period, for slave society could hardly signify "progress" compared to the early Koryŏ or Unified Silla periods. It is not surprising, therefore, that Korean historians of Korea have yet to identify the era from the mid-fourteenth century to 1800 as a slave society even though it is more than likely that the percentage of slaves in Korean society from about 1550 to 1800, if not 1300 or even 1200 to 1800, may have equaled the 30 percent figure. It would take a bold and courageous historian to make such an assertion, particularly in an era when so many are trying to escape the legacy of Japanese colonial scholarship that relegated

traditional Korea to the historical dustbin of a stagnant and unchanging society. Slave society from 1200, 1300, or 1550 to 1800, after all, would signify retrogression rather than merely stagnation. Nevertheless, the crux of the matter is to be found in the facts themselves and we will see what the book under review has to reveal on the subject.

What of Salem's second criterion, that the political and economic ruling elite had to be dependent on slave labor? Let us assume for the sake of argument that the political and economic elite of the period under discussion consisted of about 10 percent of the population (somewhat higher than the 6 percent given for the samurai class of the Tokugawa era in Japan). If it could be shown that all or most of the labor on their lands and estates were slaves, even though the rest of the land of the country was held either by smallholding peasant cultivators or by landlords using nonslave tenant labor, then some might be willing to concede that such a society was a slave society. This scheme seems to fit the antebellum South in the United States where plantation aristocrats using slave labor coexisted with free white smallholders and sharecroppers.

It is certainly easier to make the case for a slave society using the above definition than a more strictly Marxian one, that is where the majority of the productive labor force in a society would have to be slave. An agrarian society with 30 percent slaves would not be a slave society. Ultimately, one's criteria for categorization make all the difference in our perception of the facts.

In his chapter on the role of slaves in agriculture in the early Koryŏ period (early tenth to late twelfth centuries) Hong concludes that there were far fewer slaves than commoner (i.e., nonservile) tenants engaged in the cultivation of land held or owned by families (i.e., private owners), far fewer slaves than commoners and other types of cultivators on state land, and a much lower percentage of slaves than ordinary peasants in early Koryŏ society (chapter 4, especially the chart, p. 139). At first glance these opinions appear to coincide with Salem's view about early Koryŏ society, that as long as the *chŏnsikwa* system of land tenure was in effect (presumably to the end of the twelfth century) slaves could not have constituted the foundation of the economic system.[7] On the other hand, Hong only states that there were far fewer slave than commoner cultivators on both private and public land. Since a figure of 30 percent slaves would be quite compatible with his characterization of early Koryŏ society, there might be some basis for thinking of early as well as late

7. Salem, "Slavery in Medieval Korea," pp. 142–45.

Koryŏ as a slave society. If one takes into account Salem's probable assumption that the *chŏnsikwa* system represented something akin to state ownership and distribution of land, as opposed to the findings of more recent scholars that suggest the prevalence of private ownership, hereditary transmission, and the possibility of a variety of forms of labor, including slavery, on cultivated land in this period, a labor force with 30 percent slaves becomes possible if not probable. Since the *chŏnsikwa* system most likely was confined to prebendal grants (of tax allocations) to designated holders of rank and office and did not involve a major transformation of the preexisting systems of tenure and labor, it is still quite possible that slave labor played an important role in the economy of early Koryŏ. Even though no scholar has yet asserted that early Koryŏ was a slave society by any criteria, the interesting aspect of Hong's treatment is that his conclusions would not rule out the possibility. But, of course, Hong himself does not explicitly discuss the criteria for the existence of a slave society; he merely confined his remarks to a statement of proportions, and most unspecific proportions at that. Considering the importance put on these proportions in the literature on slavery for other countries, his statement about early Koryŏ appears to leave us no wiser than before.

Hong's study of late Koryŏ led him to conclude that there was a significant growth in the proportion of agricultural slaves to commoners on both private and public land, albeit with certain qualifications. On land owned by yangban he states that there were more slave than commoner cultivators, but on land owned by commoners or by the state, less slaves than commoners. For the country as a whole, there were still fewer slave than ordinary or commoner cultivators (p. 272).

Hong does not address the question whether late Koryŏ society was a slave society or not, but do his findings shed light on the question? Since 30 percent may be all that is needed to prove the existence of slave society, Hong's statement that commoner cultivators outnumbered slave cultivators would not rule out the possibility of a slave society. Since he explicitly states his belief that the majority of cultivators on land owned by the yangban elite were cultivated by slaves, the second of Salem's two criteria (that the political and economic elite be dependent on slave labor) might be met if a figure of "more than half" is sufficient to prove dependency. On the other hand, the vagueness of Hong's statements about proportions is likely to leave most readers uneasy and dissatisfied. The only unambiguous statement that can be made on the basis of Hong's conclusions is that the proportion of slave to commoner cultivators

increased from early to late Koryŏ, but the figures are sufficiently inexact that arguments could be made that slave societies existed in either or neither period.

What of the concrete evidence Hong used to justify even these vague and conservative conclusions? Hong has extended the base of primary source material on Koryŏ slavery beyond previous limits by investigating extant literary sources such as poems and private memoirs, but the evidence produced by this search is either qualitative or limited to fragmented quantitative statements. This new evidence reveals the importance of slaves to the daily life of the scholar-official yangban of the Koryŏ era, but it hardly justifies some of the conclusions Hong draws about major shifts in the types and proportions of slaves in late Koryŏ. To support his contention that there was a shift of private domestic slave servants to agriculture, Hong cites about a half-dozen cases of the most indefinite sort about mid- to late Koryŏ scholar-officials who either moved out of the capital with their slaves to country residences or visited friends and were waited upon by slaves, or visited their own properties in the countryside where they were attended by their slaves.

Typical of the evidence Hong uses is that of the famous fourteenth-century Confucian, Yi Saek. Yi mentioned in a tomb inscription he wrote for a deceased friend that he received permission from the king to return to his home village to live. On the way back home he observed one of his slaves selling an arrow to buy fodder for his horse. Distressed that a slave should be forced to incur such an expense, he compassionately compensated the fellow. This story is supposed to corroborate Hong's general observation about a shift of domestic servants to farming in the late Koryŏ, but cases like this are obviously too anecdotal and isolated to prove a general trend. Similar stories probably occurred at any period of Korean history, for capital officials were always retiring from their duties, sometimes back to their home villages in the provinces (p. 183 and pp. 182–88).

Hong is generally far too cavalier in his interpretation of evidence. In another instance he notes that Yi Saek mentioned to his friend, Kim Sejin, his plan to move to one of his land parcels in Yŏhŭng in Kyŏnggi province to undertake cultivation there, and he asked Kim to lend him an ox and some seed. Hong concludes that Yi *probably* (italics mine) expected his domestic slaves to do the labor (p. 187). But how do we know that he might not have rented out the land to commoner sharecroppers or hired laborers?

An even more egregious example of unwarranted conjecture is Hong's attempt to use the following story as evidence that even commoners were bringing more of their domestic slaves with them

to the countryside and shifting their main occupation to agriculture. One Kim Ch'ullyo was crossing a river with 300 men on the way to joining the front lines in the war against the Khitan. The boat capsized and the group was in danger of drowning but they were saved by three slaves who happened to be on the shore at the time. Hong deduces that the three slaves *probably* had a commoner master (a commoner because otherwise the title of their master would have been mentioned in the account), and that they must have been domestic slaves whose main occupation was agriculture (pp. 189–90). The first of these two deductions is feasible but not necessary; the second is pure conjecture.

Even when the evidence for commoner slaveowners moving back to the countryside with their slaves is good, the problem still remains of using isolated instances of no statistical significance to prove a general trend (p. 190). There is currently no dispute about the increase of private landed estates and slave cultivators in the period from the military coups d'état after 1170 to the end of the Koryŏ dynasty in 1392. Either commoner peasants were forced into slavery by powerful magnates or they commended themselves and their lands to them to gain their protection. Nonetheless, the quantification of this process is almost impossible. Hong's evidence on the increase of slavery in this period consists of about a dozen items culled from the biographies and annals of the *Koryŏsa* and the early Chosŏn *Sillok*. These items report cases of individual masters owning slaves by the tens and hundreds, and one statement of 1392 that the royal relatives and great families of the Koryŏ era owned over a thousand slaves per family. In some cases, powerful predators are reported forcing hundreds of commoners into slavery, in other cases they are seizing the slaves of others, and giving them as donations, gifts, and bribes by the dozen. Hong gathers this evidence under the heading, "the increase of outside resident slaves," which according to his definition were primarily agricultural workers rather than domestic servants (pp. 191–201). If, however, one assumes the most skeptical attitude possible about this evidence, the most that can be said is that the most powerful individuals in society at large, probably residing in the capital, owned lands or estates cultivated by hundreds of private slaves, and that the proportion of slaves in society was probably higher in late than early Koryŏ. Salem drew similar conclusions. She stated that "large agricultural estates, worked primarily by slaves, had sprung up throughout the country."[8] In addition to the kinds of evidence Hong cites, she also

8. Ibid., p. 145.

mentioned the increase of civil disputes over slave ownership and the establishment of special government agencies *(togam)* beginning in the late thirteenth century to adjudicate these cases.[9] While this evidence seems to substantiate the view of late Koryŏ as a slave society, it too must be viewed circumspectly. Sudō Yoshiyuki's four articles on late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn slavery (to about 1470) went into great detail on the adjudication of civil disputes over slave ownership. His work revealed that while much of the litigation involved the illicit forcing of commoners into slave status and their suit to regain proper status, other cases were disputes among slaveowners over proprietary rights. Furthermore, the great increase in the amount of litigation and volume of paperwork was caused by two factors extraneous to the problem of the increase of the slave population: the burning of the slave registers by the Red Turban invaders and the refusal of plaintiffs and defendants alike to accept decisions rendered by the authorities. The courts of the magistrates were clogged by appeals of decisions already rendered.[10] As for members of the elite owning slaves in the hundreds or even thousands, similar isolated statements can be found for the Silla period, but the evidence from the Shōsōin ninth century village documents indicates that there were no more, and usually less, than 10 percent slaves in any given village.[11] Most scholars do not think that Silla society was a slave society because they place more importance on isolated village evidence than the situation among the elite, and it is certainly possible that the late Koryŏ capital aristocracy may have depended heavily on slave labor while the rest of rural society was based on individual proprietorship, tenancy, and nonservile wage labor.

Hong compares the situation of two famous scholar-officials of mid- and late Koryŏ to help determine whether or not there was an increase in the number of slave cultivators or a shift in the use of slaves for domestic jobs to agriculture. These two famous slaveowners were Yi Kyubo (1168–1241) and the aforementioned Yi Saek (1328–96). Both had about the same number of elderly domestic servants, eight and ten respectively, but where Yi Kyubo only

9. Ibid., pp. 148–49.

10. Sudō Yoshiyuki, "Kōrai makki yori Chōsen shoki ni itaru nuhi no kenkyū (A Study of Slavery from the Late Koryŏ to the Early Chosŏn periods)," *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, parts 1 through 4 (1939).

11. Hatada Takashi,"Shiragi no sonraku: Shōsōin ni aru Shiragi sonraku bunsho no kenkyū (Villages of Silla: Silla Village Documents in the Imperial Storehouse), in *Chōsen chūsei shakaishi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku shuppankyoku, 1972), pp. 415–62.

used slaves at one of his two detached estates, Yi Saek appears to have used about ten slave cultivators on at least six of the ten parcels he owned at various places. Hong therefore concludes that there must have been a general trend to transfer domestic servants to estates and parcels of land to have them work as cultivators. Although Hong's conclusion is possible, the evidence of two isolated cases from two separate periods is hardly sufficient proof (pp. 202–13).

Hong is, of course, aware that even a trend would not prove whether the majority of cultivators in late Koryŏ was slave or commoner. On this point, he finds that previous scholars were evenly divided on the question.[12] In the context of this debate Hong discusses one important piece of evidence usually cited to show that slave cultivators were in the minority. This was the government's confiscation of the land and cultivators of the local Sasimgwan in 1319.[13] The Sasimgwan was a semifeudal vestige of late Silla and early Koryŏ, a post granting land, slaves, and certain supervisory rights over home districts to noblemen or aristocrats that the government sought to honor or placate. (Giving high officials control over their home districts was an obvious departure from the Chinese standard of avoidance.) The order of 1319 listed the amounts confiscated: 2,360 households of "people" *(min)*, 137 slaves, 19,798 *kyŏl* of land, 2,227 *kyŏl* of royal award land, and 317 *kyŏl* of support land *(wijŏn)* (land for the support of papermakers, inkmakers, waterdrawers, and knifemakers attached to the local yamen). Since "people" were commoners, it would appear that the Sasimgwan, at least, used far more commoner peasants than slaves on their lands.[14]

12. Hong listed the following scholars who supported the view that slaves were the dominant part of the agricultural labor force: Im Yŏngjŏng, Sudo Yoshiyuki, and Yi Sŏngmu. Those who think that commoner tenants were more numerous included Hatada Takashi and Kang Chinch'ŏl. See Hong, p. 213, nn. 31,32.

13. The institution of Sasimgwan was supposedly abolished in 1318, but as Hong and others have pointed out, the slave document from Hwaryŏngbu listing the slaves of Yi Sŏnggye in 1390 records Yi as a Sasimgwan. This document will be discussed here shortly.

14. Hong feels that no conclusion could be drawn about proportions of commoner and slave cultivators because it could not be determined whether the types of land listed were state land granted to the Sasimgwan (as prebends?) or privately owned land. If state land, then you could not draw any conclusions about the types of cultivators on privately owned land. Furthermore, the reason for the state's confiscation in the first place was because the Sasimgwan were illicitly "hiding" land and people, indicating that they had taken over both commoners and their land for themselves. Whether this meant that they had converted them to private slaves or simply collected rents could not be determined. See Hong, pp. 214–16. Nonetheless, no matter whether private or state land, the above figures do seem to indicate that

Hong also calculates on the basis of the above figure that each slave on royal award land cultivated 8.9 *kyŏl* on the average, and one household of common people cultivated 8.5 *kyŏl* of support land, or 8.4 *kyŏl* of ordinary land. If there were five people per household, then there were about five times as many commoners as slaves cultivating a piece of land; this would mean that a slave had to cultivate more land than a commoner. Since there were not as many slaves as commoners, Hong concludes that the proportion of official slaves involved in production on state-owned land was much lower than ordinary commoners. I wonder, however, whether this conclusion is warranted, since slave cultivators may also have had families (pp. 216–17).

Hong's overall conclusion is that while the main function of slaves in late Koryŏ shifted from domestic service to agriculture, the proportion occupied by the labor of slaves in agricultural production gradually increased, and slave labor took a greater proportion of labor on fields owned by aristocrats. Yet on all land, the proportion of slave to commoner cultivators was less (p. 218).

Nevertheless, one late Koryŏ document that he analyzes seems to contradict his conclusions. This is the 1391 Kaesŏngbu slave register, which lists twenty-six slaveowning households of "good" status, of which ten were yangban (since the household head had an official title). Four of the twenty-six households owned slaves; three were clearly yangban, and the fourth was possibly a yangban household. Obviously only a minority of all households and less than a majority of yangban households on the register (and by implication society at large) owned slaves. Furthermore the slaveowning yangban households only owned one to three slaves each, and Hong notes that the register must have recorded all the slaves they owned. The evidence in this document, therefore, would not support the view of late Koryŏ as a slave society even according to the two standards discussed above: 30 percent of the total population and the majority of the work force of the ruling class (pp. 219–26). If the Kaesŏngbu document were the sole evidence on the subject, Hong's conclusions that slaves constituted less than half the population but more than half the workers on aristocratic lands would be either wrong or exaggerated.

Hong notes that most scholars who have studied estates in late Koryŏ think that the powerful families, primarily the aristocratic

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commoner cultivators outnumbered slaves on lands previously held by the provincial Sasimgwan.

class, occupied most of the land in the country with their estates.[15] On the other hand, Hamanaka Noboru felt that it was not necessary to accept the statements of the *Koryŏsa* that all the commoners had ended up under the powerful families because even though the system of local control had its ups and downs, it was maintained to the end of the dynasty and the state was collecting taxes and labor service from the people of the prefectures and districts.[16] But is Hamanaka's statement much different from Hong's? Even to say that not all commoners ended up under powerful families would not rule out the possibility that 30 to 50 percent of them had become slaves, all that one needs to meet the Western standard.

In his usual cautious fashion, Hong is unwilling to endorse Hamanaka's view completely, even though it hardly differs from his own. Hong agrees there was a lot of state-owned land that was not absorbed into the estates or privately owned land of the aristocratic class, and that there was more privately owned land held by ordinary peasants than estate or private land of the aristocratic class. The aristocrats did not own the majority of the privately owned land, and the state was able to collect taxes to the end of the dynasty and maintain the state by it (pp. 217–18). But both Hong's and Hamanaka's statements are compatible with a 30 percent slave population.

This debate among Korean and Japanese scholars is over the question of which mode of labor constituted the majority, when most Western scholars seem to be willing to settle for 30 percent as a reasonable minimum for determining a slave society, providing that slaves are the dominant mode of labor for the ruling class. If these criteria are adopted, then Hong's *conclusions* at least seem to support the view that late Koryŏ was a slave society, for he believes that the yangban had more slave than commoner cultivators working their land, and the qualitative evidence about the number of slaves granted to individuals and given by them to others suggests that the proportion of slaves to the total population may well have been near thirty. The problem is, however, that not all the evidence supports

15. Hatada wrote that in late Koryŏ if most of the land was not estate land of Buddhist temples, then it was occupied by the aristocrats. Kang Chinch'ŏl also wrote recently that most of the land in the country was absorbed into the estates of the powerful. Hatada, "Shiragi no senraku," p. 586, Kang Chinch'ŏl, "Kōrai no nōsō ni tsuite no mondai ishiki" (Awareness of the Problem of Estates in Koryŏ), *Chōsen gakuhō* 74 (1975):141.

16. Hamanaka Noboru, "Kōrai makki no densei kaikaku ni tsuite," *Chōsenshi kenkyukai rombunshū* 13 (1976):51.

Hong's conclusions, in particular the information in the Kaesŏngbu register of 1391. In short, slavery was an important institution in late Koryŏ, and most scholars might be willing to agree that 30 percent of the population was slave and most of the cultivators employed by aristocrats were slaves, but neither contention can be proven exclusively. If you adopt Western criteria, it was possibly a slave society; if you prefer to emphasize the class nature of the majority of the work force, it probably was not a slave society.

Hong also makes a number of contributions to our understanding of various other aspects of Koryŏ slavery. He revises previous views about the role performed by slave retainers of the Ch'oe family by arguing that a number of slave soldiers were probably the core of the private military guards and the political power of the family, and that the Ch'oe regime was weakened and eventually destroyed because of personal animosities that arose among some influential slave confidantes. The coup d'état against Ch'oe Ŭi in 1258 that returned power formally to the king was, in fact, led by Kim Chun and a half-dozen slave retainers in league with certain officials.

Hong also reviews the literature of the slave revolts of the turn of the thirteenth century, during the period of disruption and military rule. He disputes the view that the slaves revolted because of economic hardship, and agrees with Pyŏn T'aesŏp that the slave revolts after the military takeover were more the result of economic improvement and raised consciousness than the reverse. But he disagrees with Pyŏn's view that the position of slaves had risen at the time. After a thorough study of eight slave revolts of the late twelfth to late thirteenth centuries, Hong notes that the types and causes varied widely, a conclusion that conforms to previous interpretations, including that of Ellen Salem.

Hong's most detailed analysis is reserved for the abortive Manjok rebellion of 1198, an incident that has drawn the attention of many scholars. Although the account of the rebellion in extant sources is brief, in this case the rebels (all six of the leaders were private slaves) phrased their grievances and goals in the terms of class war. Previous scholars like Pyŏn T'aesŏp pointed out that slaves had lost respect for authority because members of their own class were making it to the top of society through the ranks of the military and by participation in coups d'état. They also felt able to protest the beatings they had to endure as slaves and sought liberation from slavery altogether. Yi Kibaek had also focused on their desire to seize political power, as well. Hong feels that he has something new to add to these views by emphasizing the dual causation of the revolt: seizure of political power by the plot to kill Ch'oe Ch'unghŏn and

their masters, and liberation from the cruel treatment of slavery. It is hard to see, however, how this constitutes any new interpretation.

Hong attempts an overall explanation of why slave revolts were concentrated in the period of military rule from the late twelfth to the late thirteenth centuries. In general, he concludes that slaves were motivated to rebel because of an improving situation, awareness that some of their fellows had been able to rise in the world through military action and politics, and a resulting consciousness of economic exploitation and cruel treatment by masters and officials. On the other hand, official slaves participated in eight rebellions while private slaves took part in only four, a significant fact for Hong. He observes that eunuchs and official slaves fared rather well under the reign of Ŭijong in the late twelfth century, but suffered repression at the hands of Chŏng Chungbu and other military politicians after 1170. On the other hand, he found thirteen private slaves who fared rather well under the rule of the Ch'oe family after 1196 and became high military officers, officials, and trusted agents.

The English reader can get a more succinct but just as useful account of the rebellions from Salem, who presents most of the arguments made in Hong's book. She is somewhat more skeptical of the class motivations in the speech attributed to Manjok in the sources. Contrary to Hong, she is more innovative in utilizing some of the analytical categories developed by Eugene Genovese from his study of American slavery.[17] The most feasible aspects of the Genovese model are the increase in the number of slaves, divisions within the ruling class that slaves could exploit, and the acquisition of military experience by slaves in politics and in the war against the Mongols.

One of the most interesting sections of Hong's book is his account of the slaves and descendants of slaves who held high office during the period of Mongol domination (ca. 1270–1360). Hong culled the records of seventeen such individuals from the sources, a reflection of the fact that this was the period of the greatest opportunity and success for slaves in Korean history. The route to high office for most of them was through the military ranks, since they usually had no education, did not pass the civil service examinations, had no status, and could not benefit from the protection privilege for sons of high officials. These *naeryo* officials performed important

17. Salem, "Slavery in Medieval Korea," pp. 135ff. One of Genovese's arguments, that master-slave relations were becoming more businesslike and losing all aspects of personal bonding and loyalty appear too difficult to prove in the Koryŏ case.

functions as transmitters of government documents, which gave them access to kings and allowed them to earn royal favor. These positions belonged to the category of the "southern file" *(namban)*—as opposed to the regular civil (eastern) and military (western) files—and as such they were supposed to be limited to the seventh of the nine ranks in the government bureaucracy and prohibited from being appointed to civil or military posts. But these prohibitions began to be ignored from the late thirteenth century. Since the yangban aristocrats held these officials of base origin in contempt and objected to their appointments to high civil office, they had to move from *namban* posts to military positions, and then up the ladder.

Hong traces the stories of about a half-dozen men of slave or base origin who were extremely close confidantes of the three or four kings who were most subject to Yüan domination: Ch'ungnyŏl, Ch'ungsŏn, Ch'ungsuk, and Ch'unghye. Men like Pak Kyŏngnyang, Ch'oe Ando, and Kang Yu played important political roles in helping their kings to politic with Mongol emperors and officials in China to prevent being deposed or exiled. Ch'oe Ando, who worked for King Ch'ungsuk, performed a great service for his country as well as his king by helping to block a planned annexation of Korea to the Yüan empire in the 1320s. All of them earned rewards of land and slaves, power and influence in return for their services. Unfortunately in many instances, as in the reign of King Ch'unghye in the 1330s and 1340s, they exercised their influence for their own selfish interests. As Hong ably shows, it was because of the political vulnerability of Korean kings under Mongol rule that they found such men of low status useful and loyal servants. The period certainly stands in marked contrast, not only with the more Confucian and bureaucratic era of the Chosŏn period when the appointment of slaves to high office was almost unheard of, but also with the more aristocratic early Koryŏ and militaristic mid-Koryŏ periods as well. Hong points out that when King Ŭijong tried to appoint the eunuch and son of a slave, Chŏng Ham, to a high post in the twelfth century, the censors forced him to rescind his decision. By contrast, this only occurred three times in the period of Mongol domination. The aristocrats and officials disliked the appointment of men of base and slave status to office, but they could not overcome the authority of kings with Yüan support. In Hong's view, Mongol overlordship was double-edged, weakening the authority of kings and placing them in constant danger of removal, but on the other hand strengthening them at times vis-à-vis their own aristocrats.

What do Hong's findings about the role played by slaves and men of slave status and origin in the politics of the military and Mongol periods tell us about the nature of society from the twelfth to the late fourteenth centuries? Unfortunately, the prevalence of slaves in influential positions, their role as soldiers, politicians, eunuchs, civil officials, and confidantes of kings, has not been treated as a necessary manifestation of slave society by most scholars. Maybe it should be, for it is easier to appreciate the far greater visibility of slaves at the top of society than it is to gain a grasp on their proportions in the population or agricultural work force. Although the phenomenon of slaves serving in prominent positions was absent from the American antebellum South because of the severity of racial prejudice, it certainly occurred in imperial Rome.

And what of the slave revolts? Paradoxically, revolts could mean a weakening of a slave system since under a strong one you might not expect slaves to be able to revolt at all. Most of the revolts occurred in the century of military rule from 1182–1271 and they were certainly signs of slave discontent with their lot in life. They stopped occurring with much frequency after this time. Does this mean that slavery was waning? Hardly, since the circumstantial evidence about commendation, forced enslavement of people for debt, and the expansion of private estates together with the activities of some slaves as powerful royal advisers would indicate that slavery as a system was, if anything, becoming stronger. Certainly, the ubiquitousness of the slave, as cultivator, domestic servant, rebel, soldier, official, or private agent of kings, suggests that excessive concern with percentages of slaves in the population may be misplaced, that slave societies could be defined as ones where slaves play important and varied roles in helping to define and stamp the nature of their societies. If so, then the earliest date of slave society, or a society in which slavery was important, could be pushed back to the twelfth century.

Some scholars who have studied slavery in China have debated whether Chinese slaves were equivalent to the chattel slaves of the West, that is, treated as things or objects rather than as human beings. These scholars were not aware of more recent work in Western slavery that showed that despite the legal definition of slaves as chattel, they still had to be treated as humans in a number of ways. Hong did not specifically address himself to this question, but his research on the nature of slavery in Koryŏ times led him to conclude that the slave was almost totally subject to the master's will despite laws against arbitrary killing of slaves by masters. They could

be and were beaten by their masters without any protection from the state. Slaves were not permitted to commit any acts detrimental to the interests and dignity of their masters. Running away, suing for commoner status, despising, insulting, opposing, and conspiring against masters was regarded as contrary behavior. This was similar to Chinese practice.

Slaves were listed on their master's household register, although separate registers were kept for the outside resident slaves by the district magistrate of the place where the slave resided. Hong believes that this showed that the state regarded slaves as part of the "the people," that is, the subjects of the king, even though the state refrained from levying taxes and military service on slaves, at least until the latter part of the dynasty. In other words, while the registration system indicated that the government, at least, dealt with slaves as human beings of low status, ultimately the state made few inroads into the power of the aristocrats over their slaves.

Hong's views on two conventional opinions about distinctive features of Korean slavery demand our attention. Ellen Salem felt that the family life of slaves was honored by masters, but Hong deduces from the slave registers that masters showed no reluctance to break up slave families by selling, giving, donating, or bequeathing family members individually. Although he concedes that the outside resident slaves were more protected simply because of their physical distance from their masters and were thus able to maintain their families, they too could be broken up.

The second point is the conventional view that Korean slaves differed from Chinese and other types by their ability to own property, including other slaves. Hong confirms this in principle but concludes that the occurrence of property-owning slaves was extremely rare. He contradicts himself on this point because he admits that outside resident slaves were relatively unrestricted in property rights, and in his discussion of slaves who attained high office and became confidantes of kings during the period of military rule and Mongol domination, he mentions several instances of grants of land and slaves to these individuals.

Hong draws a number of important distinctions between official and private slaves. With respect to origins, he finds that the majority of official slaves were criminals and their relatives reduced to slavery as punishment; a minority came from prisoners of war. He attributes the source of most private slaves to poverty: that is, poor peasants who sold or commended themselves into slavery, or who were forced into it by creditors and powerful predatory types. Official slaves enjoyed certain advantages over private slaves. They

were able to maintain independent livelihoods because they were paid salaries by the state; they also found it easier to maintain families and private property. Some of them had surnames, probably because they or their ancestors had originally been high-status people reduced to slavery for the commission of political or other crimes. No prices were set for official slaves and they were not subject to purchase and sale. They were given by kings to private individuals as gifts, although it is possible that they may not always have been converted to private slaves by such deeds, especially if they were cultivators of state land and the land was granted as a prebend rather than an outright gift. Hong also thinks that most of the official slaves given as gifts were prisoners of war, indicating discriminatory treatment against slaves of foreign origin. The labor service of official slaves was also limited by law; it began about the age of twelve and ended at the age of fifty-nine. By contrast, there were no legal age limits on the use of private slave labor.

Hong also emphasizes the difference in economic income and independence between domestic servants and outside resident slaves. The former were under the constant supervision of the master and had the most arduous burdens and the least privileges. The outside resident slaves, by contrast, lived like nonservile sharecropping tenant farmers for the most part, paying rent *(cho)* to the master. There is no evidence on the rental rate for outside slaves, but Hong believes it had to be about the same as that for commoner tenants. Although not subject to state tax and labor service, their overall burdens must have been similar to commoners and they must have paid goods in kind to the master as well as grain rent. Supposedly they were able to keep what was left of the crop for themselves, which provided the economic basis for their private property. Hong concludes, as have most scholars who have studied the outside resident slaves, that their life style was hardly different from commoner tenants.

A certain proportion of official slaves also functioned as tenants on state land, paying a portion of the crop as *cho* (rent or tax) to the state and presumably keeping the rest for themselves. At this point Hong runs into a little difficulty because he presumes that the *cho* rate on state land cultivated by official slaves must have been 50 percent of the crop, the same as that for tenants on private land. Previous studies of the supposed differential *cho* rates have shown that the rate on public land *(kongjŏn)* was one-fourth the crop, only half the rate on so-called private land *(sajŏn)*. It is hard to imagine, however, how official slaves could have received such preferential

treatment in this kind of society. This is a problem, however, that cannot be easily resolved with the available evidence.

Hong also argues that the economic position of outside resident slaves was improving toward the end of the Koryŏ period, and since there was an increase in their numbers relative to domestic servants, slaves in general experienced a rise in the level of income and welfare. These conclusions, however, were based primarily on the comparison of the slaves of Yi Kyubo and Yi Saek in mid and late Koryŏ. Yi Saek, however, had only about ten domestic and ten outside resident slaves tending a half-dozen parcels; Yi Kyubo had about the same number of domestics but only two outside parcels with a couple of slave families. The evidence is hardly sufficient to warrant such a major conclusion about the overall economic position of slaves in late Koryŏ. Furthermore, Hong admits that many commoners had to commend themselves as slaves to powerful landlords because of financial difficulty, but he argues that the declining position of the commoners meant that the life conditions of commoners and outside resident slaves were becoming closer in nature. That may have been true, but an argument that commoners were declining to the level of slaves contradicts the thesis that slave income and livelihood was rising. Obviously the evidence on the rise or fall of slave income is not sufficient to prove either case.

In conclusion, Hong Sŭnggi has provided us with much interesting information but no startling new interpretations of slavery in the Koryŏ period. Despite his rather vague estimate that slaves constituted less than half the late Koryŏ population, suggesting that as many as 49 percent may have been slaves, the evidence he presents is contradictory. It is possible but not certain that there were as many as 30 percent, the conventional minimum for slave society in Western scholarship. Nonetheless, he has convinced me that slaves were ubiquitous if not numerous and that slavery was an important institution in Koryŏ times that helped to stamp the nature of Korean society at the time. Undoubtedly, the prevalence of outside resident cultivators who functioned like tenants may have done much to mitigate the harsher aspects of slavery. The tradition of scattered parcels rather than concentrated estates was probably responsible for this situation. On the other hand, the Korean tradition of emphasizing the inheritance of status probably contributed to a higher percentage of slaves in the population than in most Chinese dynasties.

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