

## **The Paper Plot of 1304: Material Objects and the Constitution of Political Power in the Goryeo-Mongol Relationship**

### **1304 년의 지란(紙亂): 물품을 통해보는 고려-몽골의 정치적 관계**

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Paper was a regulated material object in Goryeo (918-1392) bearing tremendous power. It was made into books, used to create calligraphy, and served as a tribute gift. These forms of paper have drawn immense attention in the realm of cultural history. Yet, its most impactful usage was as the material substrate of bureaucratic governance and diplomatic intercourse. Paper's use therein was amplified after Goryeo entered a marriage alliance with the Mongols in 1274, increasing the cultural, economic, and political intercourse between the two. Consequently, the maintenance of the political relationship required a steady stream of not just people but paper in the form of edicts, memorials, congratulatory letters etc. However, in 1304 the reliability of that flow of paper was challenged by a plot using a forged memorial. That year twelve sheets of official paper bearing the royal imprimatur lay at the center of a conspiracy to keep the dethroned king, Chungseon in Dadu away from Goryeo and delegitimize him despite his father, King Chungnyeol's attempts to secure his return. The conspirators apparently deceived the king and sought to use a mission to the imperial court requesting permission for the king to attend court in order to submit a forged memorial defaming Chungseon and keeping him exiled in Dadu. However, the plot foundered on the emperor's denial of the attendance request. Possession of the documents then became incriminating and an attempt to smuggle the paper back into Goryeo was discovered. The abuse of the memorial was so serious a Mongol War Ministry official was sent to investigate and mete out justice. Ultimately, drafts surfaced implicating two officials who were arrested and sent to the imperial court. This study adopts a material cultural approach that emphasizes the power of moving material objects to generate political relationships to understand paper's importance in the 1304 plot. By crossing material cultural and textual analysis methodologies, it demonstrates that paper as a material object was constitutive of the political relationship between the Mongols and Goryeo, vital yet vulnerable to abuse. Accordingly, the study shows the production and control of official paper by the chancellery was critical to the effective functioning of the Mongol-Goryeo relationship in specific and the Mongol imperial system at large.

That generation and projection of political power through paper was a common feature of Mongol Eurasia and brings Goryeo into the global history of material objects in the practice of empire.