Comparative Studies in Society and History (2024), 66: 3, 584–611
doi:10.1017/S0010417524000057

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Inventing Ancestors and Limited Empiricism in Chosŏn Korea: A Case of the Kigye Yu Lineage

Sun Joo Kim

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA
Email: sjkim@fas.harvard.edu

Abstract

This paper investigates how the members of the Kigye Yu lineage imagined and invented their ancestral roots during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) and how such a pursuit of ancestral origins led to subsequent developments in genealogical records. As early as the fifteenth century, Chosŏn elites began to show interests in genealogy that included identifying remote ancestors from ancient times for various political, social, and cultural reasons. From the seventeenth century, the transformation of kinship organization in line with the Confucian ideal of patriliny and elites' competition for power and prestige intensified genealogical consciousness. Elites became heavily invested in searching for ancestral origins in the form of their lineages' founders and their tombs. While claiming to rely on documentary and physical evidence, elites often deviated from their professed empiricism and adopted evidence from dubious sources such as oral testimonies and geomancy to rationalize invented ancestral roots. Such pliable approaches, often observed in other early modern cultures such as late imperial China and Europe, opened a floodgate of lineages glorifying their ancestry by pushing their origins back even to mythical founders of ancient Korean and Chinese kingdoms, and adorning their lineages with invented heroes. At the same time, loopholes and blank spots in genealogies enabled quasi- and nonelites to become a member of prominent lineages by grafting their names onto their family trees.

Keywords: Kigye Yu; genealogy; invention; founding ancestor; *sijo*; empiricism; ancestry; lineage; ancestral tomb

Introduction

On 10 October 2017, the U.S. Public Broadcasting Service's series *Finding Your Roots* featured an episode concerning an American performer named Fred Armisen, who had until then believed that his grandfather Masami Kuni (1908–2007) was Japanese.[1] The episode revealed not only that Masami Kuni was in fact a Korean whose Korean name was Pak Yŏng-in, but also that the Pak family genealogy (*chokpo*

[1]The Romanization I use here follows the McCune-Reischauer system for Korean and the Hepburn system for Japanese. Korean and Japanese names appear surnames listed first without a comma, except in the case of

or *sebo*) accurately traces his ancestors as far back as Armisen's fifth great grandparents, who lived in the seventeenth century. More strikingly, host Henry Louis Gates, Jr. disclosed that the Miryang Pak family genealogy identifies as its progenitor Pak Hyŏkkŏse, a mythical figure said to have founded the Silla kingdom (57 BCE?–935 CE), making Armisen a royal descendant.[2] As Armisen put it, "How does that happen?" His shock might perhaps be attributed to his ignorance of Korean history, but compilers of Korean genealogies commonly claimed that their lineage's founding ancestors (*sijo*) were prominent personages such as dynastic founders, kings, princes, high-ranking officials, and generals, or Chinese rulers and migrants from far back in ancient times.[3] Many contemporary Koreans accept such genealogical claims as fact rather than myth, unaware that such questionable claims became popular only in the Chosŏn period (1392–1910).[4]

This paper examines how the members of the Yu family—whose ancestral seat (*pon'gwan*) is Kigye, an administrative unit in the southeastern Korean peninsula dating from the Silla kingdom—perceived their ancestry differently over time and documented it in various writings during the Chosŏn dynasty. It also explores how their desire to establish a deep and prominent ancestry led them to invent their founding ancestors.[5] As learned scholars and officials working to restore their ancestry, the members of the Kigye Yu utilized documentation and textual evidence, but their empiricism was malleable, susceptible to shaping by forces of hearsay and speculation. I argue that haphazard "genealogical research

authors with publications in English and figures well-known in the English-speaking world, such as Masami Kuni. Since many Korean names are identical, Korean names appear in full in all references.

[2]*Finding Your Roots*, Season 4, Episode 2 (premiered on 10 Oct. 2017). Korean families or descent groups identify themselves with a two-word combination of ancestral seat and surname. Therefore, Miryang in Miryang Pak refers to the ancestral seat of this descent group with Pak being the surname of the founding male ancestor. For a study of the Miryang Pak descent group, particularly the origins and development of a non-elite descent line within it, see Eugene Y. Park, *A Family of No Prominence: The Descendants of Pak Tŏkhwa and the Birth of Modern Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[3]For examples, see Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, *Chokpo wa Chosŏn sahoe: 15–17 segi kyebo ŭisik ŭi pyŏnhwa wa sahoe kwan'gyemang* [Genealogies and Chosŏn society: changes in genealogical consciousness and social networks between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries] (P'aju: T'aehaksa, 2011), 150–56, 566–76.

[4]Yi Su-gŏn, "Chokpo wa yangban ŭisik" [Genealogy and *yangban* consciousness], *Han'guksa simin kangjwa* 24 (1999): 20–49.

[5]It was originally called Mohye County, which was changed to Kigye and subordinated to Ŭich'ang County during the reign of King Kyŏngdŏk (r. 742–65). In 1018, it became a subordinate county of Kyŏngju and remained so until becoming a district of Kyŏngju sometime before the eighteenth century. See Kim Pu-sik, *et al.*, *Samguk sagi* [History of three kingdoms] (n.p., originally 1145), 34: 8b–9a. I used the online edition in Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, Han'guksa teit'ŏ peisŭ, http://db.history.go.kr/ (accessed 4 Jan. 2023); Chŏng In-ji, *et al.*, *Koryŏsa* [History of Koryŏ] (n.p., originally 1451), 57: 5b. I used the online edition in Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, Koryŏ sidae saryo Database, http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/ (accessed 9 Jan. 2023); *Sejong sillok, chiriji* [The veritable records of King Sejong, geographic survey] (n.p., originally 1454), 150: 3b–4a. I used the online edition in Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* [The veritable records of Chosŏn kings], http://sillok.history.go.kr/main/main.do (accessed 4 Jan. 2023); Yi Haeng, *et al.*, *Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam* [Augmented survey of the geography of Korea] (n.p., 1611, originally 1530), 21: 4a. I used the online edition in Han'guk kojŏn chonghap DB, https://db.itkc.or.kr/ (accessed 4 Jan. 2023); and Kyŏngju-bu, in *Kwangyŏdo* [Extensive map of Chosŏn Korea] (n.p., 1737). I used the online edition in Kyujanggak wŏnmun kŏmsaek sŏbisŭ, Kojido, http://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/main.do?mid=GZ (accessed 4 Jan. 2023).

techniques" enabled the invention of elite ancestries—a political, social, and cultural trend also prevalent in other parts of the world such as early modern China and Europe.[6]

This study differs from many existing studies that mention, mostly in passing, that the founding ancestors were imagined, presumed, or invented sometime in the Chosŏn dynasty, but provide no historical analysis of the invention.[7] Detailed studies to contextualize such inventions are rare due to a lack of sources, but also probably because they would attract hostile criticism from the members of the lineage being studied. An exception is Kim Mun-t'aek's study of the recovery of two ancestral tombs—the founding ancestor and the third-generation ancestor—of the Chinsŏng Yi descent group, which shows that the members of the Chinsŏng Yi, like the Kigye Yu, relied on lawsuits, hearsay, and geomantic evidence to verify their ancestral tombs in the seventeenth century.[8] Yet Kim does not make a point that the case of the Chinsŏng Yi is an invention of the early ancestors, and instead characterizes it as a "recovery" (*ch'usim*). There is a greater chance that the founding ancestor, a thirteenth-century person whose name appears in the 1600 edition of the *Chinsŏng Yi Genealogy*, and the third-generation ancestor, who was a great-great-grandfather of Yi Hwang (1501–1570), one of the most revered Neo-Confucian scholars of Chosŏn and a member of Chinsŏng Yi, are historical persons, since many elite families in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries kept their ancestral information reaching as far back as the twelfth or thirteenth centuries.[9]

Unlike the case of the Chinsŏng Yi, there is no doubt that the case of the Kigye Yu is one of invention, since it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that Kigye Yu members made any claim that their founding ancestor was either Yu Ŭi-sin, a loyal Silla subject at the time of the dynastic change from the Silla to the Koryŏ periods (918–1392), or Yu Sam-jae, a Silla noble. To trace when, how, and why the Kigye Yu invented its founding ancestors, this study will draw upon not only private writings such as biographies (*haengjang*), tombstone inscriptions (*myobimyŏng* or *myogalmyŏng*), mortuary plaque inscriptions (*myojimyŏng*), spirit path stele inscriptions (*sindobimyŏng*), genealogical records, and various types of essays preserved in literary collections (*munjip*), but also official records such as the histories of Koryŏ and Chosŏn, examination rosters (*pangmok*), and gazetteers (*chi*).

[6]I borrow the phrase "genealogical research techniques" from Markus Friedrich, "Genealogy and the History of Knowledge," in Jost Eickmeyer, Markus Friedrich, and Volker Bauer, eds., *Genealogical Knowledge in the Making: Tools, Practices, and Evidence in Early Modern Europe* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 1 n2.

[7]For examples of studies that mention the concocted nature of founding ancestors, see Song Chun-ho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu* [A social history of the Chosŏn dynasty] (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1987), 82–90; Yi Su-gŏn, "Chokpo wa yangban ŭisik," 37–38; Yi Su-gŏn, *Han'guk ŭi sŏngssi wa chokpo* [Family names and genealogies in Korea] (Seoul: Sŏul taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2003), 47–50, 104–6; Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, *Chokpo wa Chosŏn sahoe*, 150–56, 566–76; Park, *Family of No Prominence*, 12–15.

[8]Kim Mun-t'aek, "17C Andong Chinsŏng Yi ssi ka wŏnjo myoso ŭi ch'usim kwa munjung chojik ŭi kanghwa" [Recovering the remote ancestors' graves by Chinsŏng Yi descent group in Andong and strengthening its lineage organization], *Kyŏnggi sahak* 8 (2004): 333–69.

[9]See Song Chun-ho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu*, 30, 68–108.

The Rise of Genealogical Interests in Chosŏn Korea

The rise of and deepening interest in genealogical records expressed by the social, economic, and political elite called *yangban* or *sadaebu* or *sajok* in the first half of the Chosŏn dynasty provides the historical context within which the Kigye Yu began to invest heavily in comprehending their founding ancestors, starting in the seventeenth century.[10] Beginning in the Koryŏ period, many elite families kept various types of family records, including household registers, genealogical diagrams (*chokto*), and commemorative writings. They were often records of just three or four generations of selective paternal and maternal ancestors, although more extensive accounts are offered by a few extant genealogical diagrams, such as the "Haeju O Genealogical Diagram" (Haeju O ssi chokto) dated 1401, and the "Andong Kwŏn Genealogical Diagram" (Andong Kwŏn ssi chokto) dated between 1454 and 1456.[11]

As for genealogies compiled and published in book form, the *Andong Kwŏn Genealogy* (*Andong Kwŏn ssi chokpo*), published in 1476, is the oldest extant genealogy in Korea. It should be noted, though, that its compilers had already made various interventions to glorify their founding ancestor and to highlight a linear connection between the asserted founding ancestor and various lines of descent. First, it records as its founder Kwŏn Haeng, who allegedly assisted Wang Kŏn (877–943) in founding the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), but no historical evidence supports that claim. Second, the genealogy provides only one son's name in each of the first seven generations after Haeng, raising questions as to its veracity. Sŏ Kŏ-jŏng (1420–1488), though, in his preface to the 1476 edition, seems to rationalize the lack of a record by saying that the family declined for seven generations from Haeng's grandson Ch'aek, then regained its vitality from two tenth-generation descendants, Su-p'yŏng (?–1250) and Su-hong.[12] Third, in 1449, a few decades before the genealogy was published, Kwŏn Che (1387–1445), who earlier participated in revising the *History of Koryŏ* (*Koryŏsa*), was punished for his effort to fabricate his ancestor Su-p'yŏng as a direct descendant of Haeng: unfortunately for him, earlier records

[10]For a brief definition of *yangban*, *sadaebu*, or *sajok*, see Sun Joo Kim, *Marginality and Subversion in Korea: The Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion of 1812* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 8, and 194–95 nn9 and 10.

[11]"Haeju O ssi chokto" offers information on nine generations of ancestors and "Andong Kwŏn ssi chokto" thirteen. Chŏng Chae-hun, "Haeju O ssi chokto ko" [A study of the Haeju O genealogical diagram], *Tonga yŏn'gu* 17 (1989): 313–38; O Yŏng-sŏn, "Chosŏn ch'ogi kagye kirok e taehan il koch'al" [A study of family records], *Chŏnnong saron* 7 (2001): 305–30; Ch'oe Sun-gwŏn, "Chokpo ijŏn ŭi kagye kirok Andong Kwŏn ssi chokto" [Family records before genealogy and the Andong Kwŏn genealogical diagram], in National Folk Museum of Korea, ed., *Andong Kwŏn ssi chokto* [Andong Kwŏn genealogical diagram] (Seoul, 2012), 30–54; Kim Hyŏn-yŏng, "Chosŏn sigi sŏndae p'aak pangsik ŭi chokpo panyŏng yangsang—Haeju O ssi chokto rŭl chungsimŭro" [The ways in which ancestors are traced in genealogies during the Chosŏn period—the case of the Haeju O], *Han'guk kyebo yŏn'gu* 7 (2017): 7–38; Sun Joo Kim, "Diversity and Innovation in the Genealogical Records of Chosŏn Korea," *Historische Anthropologie* 31, 1 (2023): 37–40. Kim Nan-ok's study on Koryŏ epitaphs and other commemorative writings shows that Koryŏ and early Chosŏn elites held a wide range of knowledge about their ancestors, in a few cases exceeding ten generations back; "Yŏ-mal Sŏn-ch'o sŏnjo ŭisik kwa chokpo p'yŏnch'an ŭi sinbunjŏk paegyŏng" [The notion of ancestors and the compilation of genealogies during the late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn dynasties], *Han'guk chungsesa yŏn'gu* 25 (2008): 61–65.

[12]Sŏ Kŏ-jŏng, "Andong Kwŏn ssi kabo sŏ" [Preface to the Andong Kwŏn genealogy], in *idem*, *Saga munjip* [Collected works of Sŏ Kŏ-jŏng] (n.p., 1705), 5: 9b–11b. I used the online edition in Han'guk kojŏn chonghap DB, https://db.itkc.or.kr/ (accessed 4 Jan. 2023).

showed that Su-p'yŏng's ancestry was unknown.[13] Despite that incident, the three compilers of the genealogy—Sŏ Kŏ-jŏng, Pak Wŏn-ch'ang, and Ch'oe Ho-wŏn (1431–?), who were descendants of the Andong Kwŏn through the daughters' lines and succeeded Kwŏn Che as the genealogy's compilers—directly linked Haeng and Su-p'yŏng, already displaying their shared ethos that a deeper ancestry enhanced their social standing.[14]

Genealogy (*chokpo*) in a book form was conceptually different from other family records in that it placed the founding ancestor at the top and traced and recorded male and female descendants by generation—twenty-one generations in the case of the *Andong Kwŏn Genealogy* of 1476. Although Chinese genealogies, whose form Korea adapted, were compiled on the principle of patriliny, genealogies compiled before about 1600 traced the descent of both sons and daughters, because maternal lines were also important for determining social standing, and family properties were divided equally among sons and daughters.[15] That said, they did not record all the members across the twenty-one generations, reflecting the incompleteness of available source materials and a decision to exclude politically problematic lines of descent.[16] At the same time, having some blood relation to the founding ancestor was the key recording criterion, and it excluded children of a son-in-law who had married a woman who had no Andong Kwŏn blood.[17]

[13]*Sejong sillok* [The veritable records of King Sejong] (n.p., 1454), 1449/2/22 (lunar). I used the online edition in Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, http://sillok.history.go.kr/main/main.do (accessed 4 Jan. 2023).

[14]Song Chun-ho argues that the actual (not mythical or fabricated) founding ancestor might be from the generation when multiple descendants were recorded; *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu*, 82–90. In the case of Andong Kwŏn, therefore, Kwŏn Su-p'yŏng and Kwŏn Su-hong could be genuine founding ancestors of the two branches of Andong Kwŏn: the Ch'umil-gong and Pogya-gong branches, respectively. Miyajima Hiroshi, however, examined the genealogy more carefully and argued that in the case of the Ch'umil-gong branch, Kwŏn Su-p'yŏng's great-grandson Kwŏn Pu should be regarded as the true founding ancestor because records concerning the two generations between Su-p'yŏng and Pu are scarce. Miyajima Hiroshi, "*Andong Kwŏn ssi Sŏnghwabo* rŭl t'onghaesŏ pon Han'guk chokpo ŭi kujojŏk t'ŭksŏng" [Structural characteristics of Korean genealogies seen through the 1476 edition of the *Andong Kwŏn Genealogy*], *Taedong munhwa yŏn'gu* 62 (2008): 201–41, 203–11, 227–29, 237.

[15]Because both a son's and daughter's lines were continuously recorded, of around eight thousand names appearing in the *Andong Kwŏn Genealogy* of 1476 only about 380 are members of the Andong Kwŏn while the rest have different surnames. Song Chun-ho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu*, 33. On equal inheritance practices until the mid-seventeenth century, see Ch'oe Chae-sŏk, "Chosŏn sidae ŭi sangsokche e kwanhan yŏn'gu—punjaegi ŭi punsŏk e ŭihan chŏpkŭn" [The institution of inheritance during the Chosŏn dynasty—an analysis of inheritance records], *Yŏksa hakpo* 53/54 (1972): 99–150; Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), 203–30; Mark A. Peterson, *Korean Adoption and Inheritance: Case Studies in the Creation of a Classic Confucian Society* (Ithaca: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1996). For several different styles of genealogies developed from Northern Song China (960–1127), see Sheau-yueh J. Chao, "Researching Your Asian Roots for Chinese-Americans," *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 129 (2003): 27–30. The "Ouyang style," which organizes members of a descent group by generation in horizontally lined segments on each page, was most popular in Chosŏn.

[16]Miyajima, "Andong Kwŏn ssi Sŏnghwabo," 213–36.

[17]Yi Chŏng-ran, "Chokpo ŭi chanyŏ surok pangsik ŭl t'onghaesŏ pon Yŏ-mal Sŏn-ch'o chokpo ŭi p'yŏnch'an paegyŏng—*Andong Kwŏn ssi Sŏnghwabo Munhwa Yu ssi Kajŏngbo* rŭl chungsimŭro" [The compilation strategies during the late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn dynasties seen through the ways in which children were recorded—a study of the *Andong Kwŏn Genealogy* of 1476 and the *Munhwa Yu Genealogy* of 1565], *Han'guk chungsesa yŏn'gu* 25 (2008): 117–55.

Why did these fifteenth-century elites want to have a genealogy, whose form and scale differed so strikingly from the family records they traditionally kept? In early Chosŏn, as in Koryŏ, genealogical records were used and sometimes required for verifying ancestry when taking the civil service examinations or receiving official appointments, especially through *ŭm* protection privileges.[18] They also played a key role in clarifying inheritance of property rights, especially when ownership disputes developed into lawsuits. In addition, they informed the range of ritual obligations and marriageable partners.[19] That said, ancestral records of three or four generations would usually have been sufficient to meet these practical purposes. Song Chun-ho observes that from the Koryŏ through Chosŏn periods there was a progressive strengthening of an elite culture that honored prominent ancestry (*munbŏl ŭisik*), which prioritized a person's family background over their ability or talents as determinants of their success in government and society.[20] Kwŏn Ki-sŏk's study confirms that the early Chosŏn genealogical records were largely compiled by high-ranking central government officials and consequently embodied a sense that they shared prominent ancestry.[21] A statistical analysis of the *Andong Kwŏn Genealogy* of 1476 reveals that social status was the key criterion for inclusion, since those who held mid- to high-level government posts, and their descendants, had a better chance of being recorded.[22] In addition, Yi Su-gŏn notes that Chosŏn elites became more conscious of genealogy as they envisioned a society ordered by the Neo-Confucian principle of patriliny and patriarchy.[23] Because a Confucian

[18]For specific examples from Koryŏ, see Paek Sŭng-jong, "Koryŏ hugi ŭi 'palcho hogu'" ["Eight ancestral records for household registers" in late Koryŏ], *Han'guk hakpo* 10, 1 (1984): 208–13. The *ŭm* protection privileges provided sons, grandsons, or other close relatives of high-ranking officials with special access to bureaucratic positions. For specific regulations and practices during the Koryŏ period, see John B. Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 60–61.

[19]Paek Sŭng-jong, "Koryŏ hugi ŭi 'palcho hogu,'" 212; Yi Su-gŏn, "Chokpo wa yangban ŭisik," 31; Yi Su-gŏn, *Han'guk ŭi sŏngssi wa chokpo*, 38–40; Sim Sŭng-gu, "Chosŏn ch'ogi chokpo ŭi kanhaeng hyŏngt'ae e kwanhan yŏn'gu" [A study of genealogical publications in early Chosŏn], *Kuksagwan nonch'ong* 89 (2000): 1–34, 26; Yi Chŏng-ran, "Chokpo ŭi chanyŏ surok pangsik," 134–51; Kim Nan-ok, "Yŏ-mal Sŏn-ch'o sŏnjo ŭisik," 71–77. Robin Fox, in his study of kinship and marriage, notes that genealogical knowledge defined many of a person's "most significant rights, duties and sentiments"; *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 14. Early modern European noble families invested in genealogies for their political and social functions such as being proofs of nobility, succession of rulership, and noble titles, inheritances, and marriages. At the same time, they produced genealogies to boost their reputations and support their social aspirations. Like in Chosŏn, genealogy played an essential role in constructing early modern elite identities in Europe. See Markus Friedrich, "Genealogy as Archive-Driven Research Enterprise in Early Modern Europe," *Osiris* 32 (2017): 65–84; Friedrich, "Genealogy and the History of Knowledge."

[20]Song Chun-ho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu*, 36.

[21]Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, *Chokpo wa Chosŏn sahoe*, 110–28.

[22]Sangkuk Lee, "The Impacts of Birth Order and Social Status on the Genealogy Register in Thirteenth- to Fifteenth-Century Korea," *Journal of Family History* 35, 2 (2010): 115–27. Kim Nan-ok concurs that early Chosŏn genealogies were a product of a shared social consciousness of belonging to a privileged social group; "Yŏ-mal Sŏn-ch'o sŏnjo ŭisik," 78–83. Son Pyŏng-gyu also points out that elites in late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn compiled complex ancestral records, including genealogies, as a way to document their prominent ancestral roots and marriage relations; "13–16 segi hojŏk kwa chokpo ŭi kyebo hyŏngt'ae wa kŭ t'ŭksŏng" [The types and characteristics of household registers and genealogies in thirteenth- to sixteenth-century Korea], *Taedong munhwa yŏn'gu* 71 (2010): 7–41.

[23]Yi Su-gŏn, "Chokpo wa yangban ŭisik," 22–23.

transformation of Korean society and culture took a few centuries, however, the first genealogies reflected Korea's traditional values such as the importance of maternal lines.[24]

Other historical contexts that motivated early Chosŏn elites to pay attention to their ancestry might have included changes in the scope and nature of *yangban* elites. The previous Koryŏ dynasty was fundamentally an aristocratic society, in which only limited categories of people could assume government posts and enjoy elite status. From the very beginning of the dynasty, powerholders of the country were reorganized as territorially based aristocrats collectively called *hyangni*, who were identified with Chinese-style surnames and took their place of origin as an ancestral seat. Top-ranked *hyangni*, such as township headmen (*hojang*), had opportunities to participate in central bureaucracy either through the civil service examinations or other channels.[25] Over many centuries and in particular from around the fourteenth century, such territorially based aristocratic elites transformed into more bureaucratically oriented ones who put more emphasis on their identity as scholars and officials. In addition, major disruptions such as the thirteenth-century Mongol invasions, and in the fourteenth the Red Turban invasions and rampant pirate attacks, forced elites to leave their places of origin permanently. Uxorilocal marriage practices across county and provincial boundaries in the early Chosŏn also dispersed elites all over the country. These social and political changes may have created an environment in which elites sought ways to trace their ancestry and clarify their blood relations, leading them to compile genealogies.[26]

Another factor that might have encouraged early Chosŏn elites to study their ancestry was that previously unknown sources became available, as in the case of Kwŏn Che. Dozens of scholars and officials who participated in the compilation and multiple revisions of the *History of Koryŏ* in the early fifteenth century had access to historical records handed down from Koryŏ.[27] Also throughout that century, the new Chosŏn dynasty instructed each county and province to survey its own history, including by identifying indigenous surname groups (*t'osŏng*) and historically prominent persons, and to compile county-level gazetteers. Many local elites must have participated in this, as shown in the *Gazetteer of Kyŏngsang Province* (*Kyŏngsang-do chiriji*) compiled in 1425, the earliest surviving provincial gazetteer.[28] These efforts culminated in the compilations of dynasty-wide gazetteers

[24]Edward W. Wagner, "Two Genealogies and Women's Status in Early Yi Dynasty Korea," in Laurel Kendall and Mark Peterson, eds., *Korean Women: View from the Inner Room* (New Haven: East Rock Press, 1983), 23–32.

[25]Yi Su-gŏn, "Chokpo wa yangban ŭisik," 24–29; Duncan, *Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, 30–35.

[26]Yi Chong-sŏ argues that the loss of household registers preserved by the state and privately held family records during the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, and the rise of the new elite group with non-noble origins in the fourteenth, motivated the established nobles to seek out deeper ancestral records to differentiate themselves from the new elites. Yi Chong-sŏ, "Koryŏ p'alcho hogusik sŏngnip sigi wa sŏngnip wŏnin," [The question of when and why the household register format displaying all eight ancestral records formed], *Han'guk chungsesa yŏn'gu* 25 (2008): 5–29.

[27]For the process of compiling and revising the *Koryŏsa* and those who contributed to the works, see Graeme R. Reynolds, "The Histories of Koryŏ: Their Production, Circulation, and Reception from the Chosŏn Dynasty to the Present," PhD diss., Harvard University, 2021, ch. 3.

[28]Ha Yŏn, *Kyŏngsang-do chiriji* [Gazetteer of Kyŏngsang Province], in Han'gukhak munhŏn yŏn'guso, ed., *Han'guk chiriji ch'ongsŏ: chŏn'guk chiriji* 1 [Comprehensive collection of gazetteers: dynasty-wide gazetteers 1] (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1983).

in the form of the *Geographic Survey* (*Chiriji*) as an appendix to the *Veritable Records of King Sejong* (*Sejong sillok*) in 1451, and the *Survey of the Geography of Korea* (*Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*) in 1481. While the *Geographic Survey* was stored in royal repositories and was not viewable by the public, the *Survey of the Geography of Korea* and its 1530 revised version *Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea* (*Sinjŭng Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*) were available to consult. This unprecedented access to historical information was instrumental for Chosŏn elites to trace their ancestry.[29]

And yet, it seems that not all elites took part in this genealogical pursuit until the seventeenth century, when genealogical compilation and publication became fashionable. According to Kwŏn Ki-sŏk's study, just forty-four genealogical records were compiled between 1400 and 1600, while more than a hundred were composed in the seventeenth century alone.[30] Given the key role that elites played in rebuilding hierarchical society after the devastation and confusion caused by two major invasions —by the Japanese in 1592–1598 and then the Manchus in 1627 and 1636—they must have felt that their family histories should be restored to reinforce their elite status.[31] Elites also paid more acute attention to their social and cultural practices to meet the Neo-Confucian prescriptions of patriarchy and patrilineality, for which genealogy proved to be an essential tool.

A demographic/structural analysis is also helpful in understanding the elites' intensified genealogical pursuits to secure, maintain, and enhance their ascribed social status from the seventeenth century onward.[32] The general increase in the elite population throughout the Chosŏn, with no recruitment system to absorb the rising numbers of aspirants, led to more competition for positions and prestige. For example, the number of graduates from the higher civil service examination (*munkwa*), the main route into the bureaucracy, rose from about fifteen annually in the first half of the fifteenth century to twenty-nine in the seventeenth, and forty by the latter eighteenth. The number of lower civil service examination degrees (*saengwŏn* and *chinsa*), which did not guarantee access to bureaucratic employment but boosted one's elite status, increased from about fifty-two annually in the sixteenth century to

[29]For specific examples of using the *Koryŏsa* or *Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*, see Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, *Chokpo wa Chosŏn sahoe*, 69–70. Additional source materials for compiling genealogical records in early Chosŏn included household registers, commemorative writings such as mortuary plaque inscriptions, inheritance documents, oral traditions, and other family's records (ibid., 68–72).

[30]Ibid., 61, 344–65. Song Chun-ho counted only about thirty genealogical records that were compiled between the mid-fifteenth to early seventeenth centuries; *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu*, 32.

[31]For efforts of local elites to restore the local *yangban* association called *hyangan* after the wars, see Fujiya Kawashima, "The Local Gentry Association in Mid-Yi Dynasty Korea: A Preliminary Study of the Ch'angnyŏng Hyangan, 1600–1838," *Journal of Korean Studies* 2 (1980): 113–37; Fujiya Kawashima, "A Study of Hyangan: Kin Groups and Aristocratic Localism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Korean Countryside," *Journal of Korean Studies* 5 (1984): 3–38; Sun Joo Kim, "Chosŏn hugi P'yŏngan-do Chŏngju ŭi hyangan unyŏng kwa yangban munhwa" [The management of the local *yangban* roster and elite culture in Chŏngju, P'yŏngan Province, in the late Chosŏn period], *Yŏksa hakpo* 185 (2005): 65–105. For the Suan Yi descent group's effort to commemorate its ancestors by adopting several strategies such as documenting its ancestors' notable moral behavior, adorning their graves, and compiling and publishing its genealogy, see Sun Joo Kim, *Voice from the North: Resurrecting Regional Identity through the Life and Work of Yi Sihang (1672–1736)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 23–31.

[32]The demographic/structural model for explaining waves of state breakdown in early modern world history was developed by Jack A. Goldstone in his book *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

ninety-seven in the seventeenth.[33] And yet, throughout the Chosŏn period the number of civil bureaucratic positions did not increase. This structural condition led to heightened competition among aspiring elites and also motivated existing elites to seek strategies to consolidate their political power and social standing, whether through factional politics at the court, marginalization of and discrimination against certain members of the elite, or investment in ancestral distinction.

In reconstructing their ancestral records, Chosŏn elites sought out and relied on existing family archives. The woodblock editions of the *History of Koryŏ* and the *Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea*, published in 1613 and 1611, respectively, provided much needed historical detail and context.[34] While textual evidence was valuable for illuminating their ancestry, elites also worked to loosen the requirements of textual proof and even to forge evidence. The invention of glorifiable ancestors, once unleashed, took on a life of its own and ventured into uncharted territory.

Pre-Chosŏn Ancestors of the Kigye Yu Appearing in Verifiable Records

Despite the general increase in interest in genealogical compilations, the members of the Kigye Yu showed little concern with compiling their genealogy or identifying their founding ancestor until the mid-seventeenth century. And yet today, the Kigye Yu lineage association identifies as its founding ancestor (*sijo*) Yu Sam-jae from Kigye, a Silla official who held the sixth-rank position of Ach'an.[35] Wang Kŏn (877–943), the founder of the Koryŏ dynasty, designated one of Yu Sam-jae's descendants, Yu Ŭi-sin, as township headman (*hojang*) of Kigye County, although Ŭi-sin remained loyal to Silla and did not submit to the new Koryŏ dynasty. From then on, Ŭi-sin's descendants took as their ancestral seat Kigye, which had become a district (*myŏn*) of Kyŏngju County sometime during the Chosŏn period, and then became incorporated into P'ohang City.[36] When did this well-established ancestry of the Kigye Yu emerge?

Neither Yu Sam-jae nor Yu Ŭi-sin appear in pre-1600 sources, including the *History of Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk sagi*) compiled in 1145 and the *History of Koryŏ* compiled in 1451. Acknowledging this, members of the Kigye Yu in late Chosŏn suggested that the name "Sam-jae" could be either their founding ancestor's given name or a common noun referring to the three highest government posts. Yu Myŏng-hong (1655–1729), for example, opines that "Sam-jae," literally meaning "three top ministers," captures a

[33]Sun Joo Kim, *Marginality and Subversion in Korea*, 36–39. For a discussion of how this prolonged increase in the elite population shaped politics and society in late Chosŏn, see ibid., 8–9, 35–47.

[34]Graeme Reynolds argues that the *History of Koryŏ*, whose compilation was completed by 1451 after several revisions, was published in movable type at least twice by 1456 with limited circulation within officialdom. After its woodblock edition became available in 1613, the book became much more accessible. More than a hundred copies are preserved in archives and libraries in Korea, Japan, the United States, and other countries (ibid., ch. 3).

[35]A study of the surnames of officials who appear in the *Samguk sagi* finds only 377 with known surnames, which numbered less than twenty. No one with the surname Yu held any position. During the Silla period, it was quite rare for even elites to have a Chinese-style surname. Chŏn Tŏk-chae, "T'ongil Silla kwanin ŭi sŏnggyŏk kwa kwallyoje unyŏng" [A study on the characteristics of the government officials and the management of the appointment system in Unified Silla], *Yoksa munhwa yŏn'gu* 34 (2009): 112, 148–50.

[36]Kigye Yu ssi taejonghoe [Lineage association of the Kigye Yu], http://gigyeyussi.jangsoft.kr/sub_01/sub_05.html (accessed 9 Jan. 2023).

similarity of status between the three highest positions in Chosŏn and the Ach'an position, which was the highest that non-royal members could attain in Silla.[37] Likewise, the Kigye Yu also noted that the name "Ŭi-sin" might not be the person's given name but simply a reference to a "righteous subject" (*ŭisin*), in recognition of his unwavering loyalty to Silla and his unwillingness to submit to the new dynastic founder.[38] They repeatedly lamented their lack of family records (*poch'ŏp*), which they said had been mostly destroyed during the Japanese and Manchu invasions, and their consequent inability to specify people's years of birth and death or which government posts Sam-jae and Ŭi-sin held. Nobles in early modern Europe often made similar claims that they had lost family records due to war or some unfortunate accident.[39] Despite the scarcity and fragmentary nature of family records, the Kigye Yu nonetheless recorded the two as their known, prominent ancestors to be celebrated and commemorated, as the 1704 edition of the *Kigye Yu Genealogy* clearly illustrates (figure 1).[40]

The same 1704 work records about forty-five men from the founding ancestor to the eleventh-generation Yu Hyo-t'ong, and because Hyo-t'ong passed the higher civil service examination in 1408, it is reasonable to assume that most of them lived during the Koryŏ dynasty. The *History of Koryŏ* records at least twenty-five men with last name Yu (兪).[41] Of the forty-five men from the 1704 genealogy, only one, Yu Yŏ-hae, appears also in the *History of Koryŏ*. His record was duly noted by Yu Kye (1607–1664), a prominent Neo-Confucian scholar who compiled Kigye Yu's first genealogy in 1645.[42] The other twenty-four men might have had different ancestral seats, since there were at least seven Yu (兪) descent groups with different ancestral seats, including the Kigye Yu, according to the *Origins of Descent Groups* (*Ssijok wŏllyu*) compiled by Cho Chong-un (1607–1683) in the latter half of the seventeenth century.[43] In contrast, other Koryŏ era ancestors such as Yu Tŭk-sŏn, Yu Sŏn, and Yu Sŭng-gye, who reportedly held second- or third-rank positions in the 1704 edition of the *Kigye Yu Genealogy*, do not appear in the *History of Koryŏ*. From these details, one surmises that the compilers of the 1645 and 1704 genealogies, who must have had access to the *History of Koryŏ*, did not insert twenty-four Yus from the *History of Koryŏ* arbitrarily into the Kigye Yu genealogy. Rather, they seem to have followed whatever accumulated family records—including copies of household registers, which usually record four generations of ancestors for both husband and wife—or

[37]Yu Ch'i-ung, comp., and Sim Kyŏng-ho, trans., *Kugyŏk Kigye munhŏn* (hereafter *KM*) [Documents concerning the Kigye Yu lineage in Korean translation] (Seoul: Kigye Yu ssi taejonghoe, (chae) Puun changhakhoe, 2014), 1: 39 f. and 58 f.

[38]*KM*, 1: 75–78.

[39]Friedrich, "Genealogy as Archive-Driven Research," 70.

[40]*KM*, 1: 39 f., 58 f., and 75–78. Yu Myŏng-ham, compiler, *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo* [Genealogy of the Kigye Yu lineage] (Yŏnsan-hyŏn: s.n., 1704), 1: 1a–b. I used the online edition in Kyujanggak Han'gukhak yŏn'guwŏn, Kyujanggak wŏnmun kŏmsaek sŏbisŭ, https://kyu.snu.ac.kr/ (accessed 23 Jan. 2023).

[41]For a keyword search for the *Koryŏsa*, I used the Koryŏ sidae saryo Database, http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/ (accessed 23 Jan. 2023).

[42]Yu Kye, *Sinam sŏnsaeng munjip* [Collected works of Yu Kye] (n.p., 1690), 18: 3a–5a. I used the online edition in Han'guk kojŏn chonghap DB: https://db.itkc.or.kr/ (accessed 4 Jan. 2023). For Yu Yŏ-hae's entry in the 1704 genealogy, see Yu Myŏng-ham, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo*, 1: 1b. For the entry on Yu Yŏ-hae in the *Koryŏsa*, see Chŏng In-ji, *et al.*, *Koryŏsa*, 129: 50b–51a.

[43]Cho Chong-un, *Ssijok wŏlly* [Origins of descent groups] (Seoul: Pogyŏng munhwasa, 1991), 701–5.

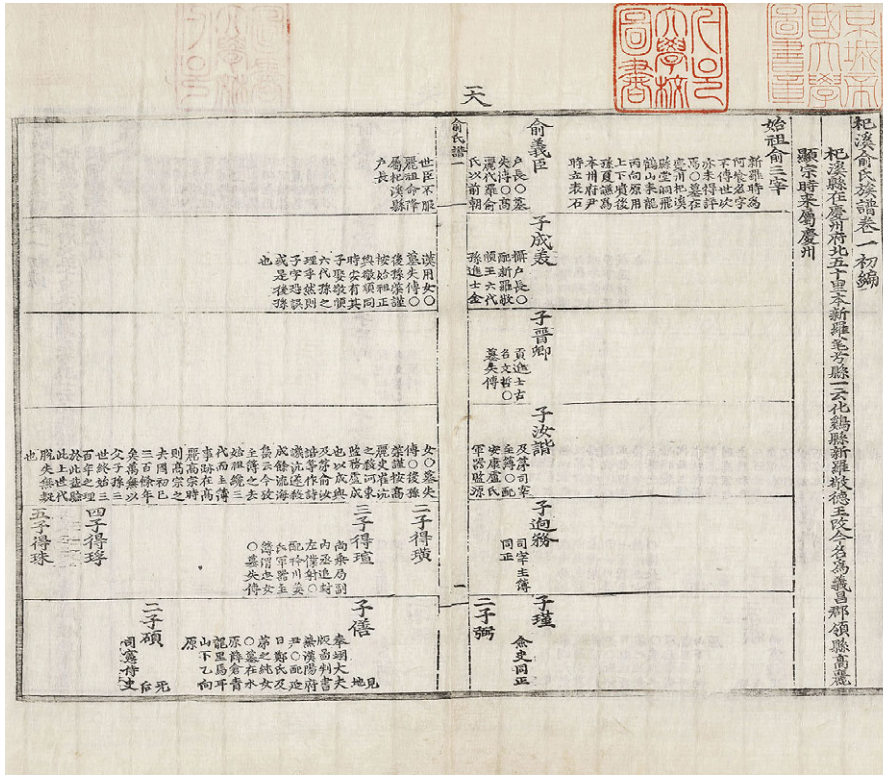

Figure 1. Founding and Early Ancestors of the Kigye Yu Descent Group. Yu Sam-jae's entry as founding ancestor is on the top right of the first row, and Yu Ŭi-sin's is on Sam-jae's left. Yu Sŏng-mi, recorded below Yu Ŭi-sin in the second row, is noted as Ŭi-sin's son; Yu Chin-gyŏng in the third row is Sŏng-mi's son, and so on. Source: Yu Myŏng-ham, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo* (1704), 1: 1a–b.Courtesy of Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University.

oral traditions they had at the time of compilation.[44] Even if the family kept multiple such records produced by their immediate ancestors such as grandparents, the earliest available records likely did not go back beyond a few hundred years. Viewed as a whole, moreover, such family records were probably fragmentary since each individual family kept its own.

Commemorative writings dedicated to prominent figures who lived before 1600, such as biographies, tombstone inscriptions, mortuary plaque inscriptions, or spirit path stele inscriptions also help us learn Kigye Yu's understanding of their ancestry.

[44]According to Yu Kye's preface to the 1645 genealogy, Kigye Yu's genealogical records for earlier ancestors were largely incomplete, missing entries because there were only "small-scale family records" (*sosŭng*) handed down from their ancestors. Yu Kye, *Sinam sŏnsaeng munjip*, 18: 3a–5a; and *KM*, 6: 18–20. According to Yu Myŏng-gŏn (1664–1724), there were two separate family records, each more than a hundred years old, when he was involved in compiling the 1704 edition. *KM*, 6: 22. Yu Kwang-gi (1674–1757) says that books and family records (*kajang*) were destroyed during the Manchu invasion of 1636. *KM*, 1: 346. Son Pyŏng-gyu shows how accumulated household registers could become sources for genealogical compilations. Son Pyŏng-gyu, "13–16 segi hojŏk kwa chokpo," 21–23.

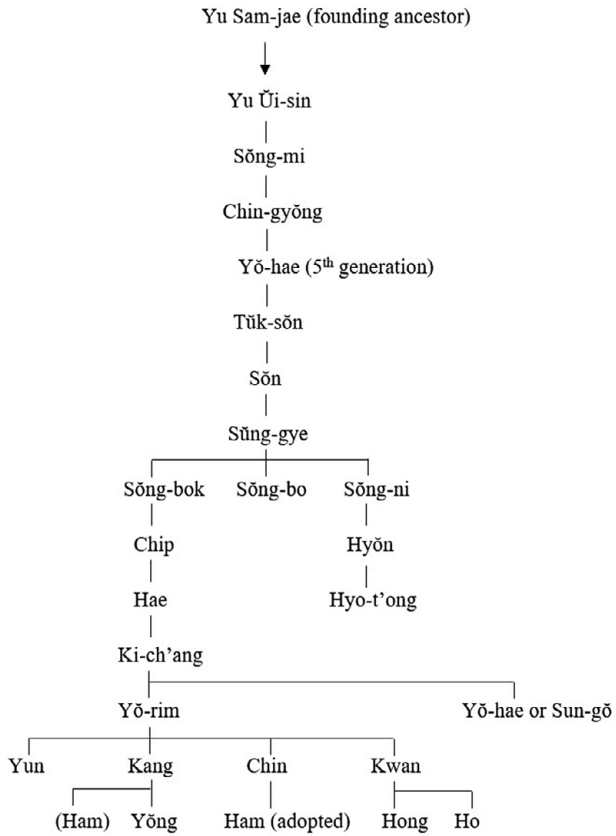

Figure 2. Koryŏ-Early Chosŏn Ancestors of the Kigye Yu Descent Group. Source: Yu Myŏng-ham, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo* (1704), 1: 1a–10a.

These essays were penned by either descendants of the person to be commemorated or eminent scholars and officials they asked to do so. In the latter case, the requestor often supplied existing family records to the author. Higher civil service examination rosters (*munkwa pangmok*) also usually provide the records of a successful candidate's four ancestors—in this case, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and maternal grandfather.

The earliest verifiable record concerning Kigye Yu's ancestry is the aforementioned Yu Hyo-t'ong's 1408 examination roster, which records three of his ancestors: his father Yu Hyŏn (1365–1428), grandfather Yu Sŏng-ni, and great-grandfather Yu Sŭng-gye—the ancestors included in the 1704 edition genealogy (figure 2).[45] The next earliest record comes from the 1504 examination roster of Yu Yŏ-rim (1478–1538), whose three recorded ancestors include his father Yu Ki-ch'ang (1437–1514), grandfather Yu Hae, and great-grandfather Yu Chip. However,

[45]All information concerning the higher civil service exam passers is from *Han'guk yŏktae inmul chonghap chŏngbo sisŭt'em*, http://people.aks.ac.kr/index.aks (accessed 9 Jan. 2023). Yu Hyŏn's birth and death years are in *KM*, 1: 114.

Yŏ-rim's spirit path stele inscription, written by Hong Ŏn-p'il (1476–1549) in 1540 on the request of Yŏ-rim's son Yu Chin, provides ancestral information as far back as Yu Sŏn, identified as Yŏ-rim's sixth-generation ancestor from the Koryŏ era (figure 2).[46] From then onward, Sŏn is mentioned consistently as a remote ancestor (*wŏnjo*) in other commemorative writings from the latter part of the sixteenth century (table 1).

In 1565, while serving as Kyŏnggi provincial governor, Yu Kang (1510–1570), another son of Yŏ-rim, reportedly erected a tombstone at the tombs of Yu Sŭng-gye, Yu Sŏng-bok, and Yu Chip—Sŏn's succeeding generations—all located in Ansŏng, Kyŏnggi Province.[47] In his biography of Yŏ-rim's grandson Yu Hong (1524–1594), composed between 1594–1598, Sŏng Hon (1535–1598) mentions Yu Yŏ-hae as an ancestor who appears in the *History of Koryŏ* but he does not clarify the relationship between Yŏ-hae and Sŭng-gye, who was recorded as the seventh-generation ancestor of Yu Hong (figure 2).[48]

Not until 1569 did a statement appear claiming that the Kigye Yu had origins in the Silla kingdom. The tombstone inscription dedicated to Yu Hae, composed by a magistrate of Hongju named Kim Ŏng-ryŏng (1529–?) at the request of his superior and Ch'ungch'ŏng Provincial Governor Yu Hong, makes such a claim before naming Hae's four ascending ancestors (Chip, Sŏng-bok, Sŭng-gye, and Sŏn).[49] Take note that this is the first time this unbroken ancestral link from Sŏn to Hae (and thus Hae's sixteenth-century descendants) was recorded in writing (figure 2). Kigye Yu's Silla origin is mentioned one more time in Yu Kang's mortuary plaque epitaph, written by his nephew Hong in 1570.[50] According to a later report made by Yu Myŏng-roe (1652–1712), a Kigye Yu man who served as the provincial governor of Kyŏngsang Province in the late sixteenth century attempted to pay homage to the tomb of the founding ancestor of Kigye Yu during his appointment.[51] This must have been either Yu Kang, who was appointed governor of Kyŏngsang in 1556, or Yu Hong, who was appointed to the same post in 1577.[52] It is quite plausible that either man had access to books such as the *Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea* (1530) and the *Gazetteer of Kyŏngsang Province* (*Kyŏngsang-do chiriji*, 1425), which contain information that the Kigye Yu originated from Kigye, and tried to learn more about his ancestry by visiting Kigye.[53]

[46]*KM*, 1: 201. The tombstone inscription for Yŏ-rim's brother Yŏ-hae or Sun-gŏ (? –1514) composed by Kim Chŏng (1486–1521) in 1517 only reports his father Ki-ch'ang. *KM*, 1: 193 f.

[47]*KM*, 1: 94 f., 105–8, 122–25. Kang descended from these three men, and Kang's descendants who later formed the Chasan-gong branch were the most successful among the Kigye Yu in producing civil service examination degree-holders and officials throughout Chosŏn. Sun Joo Kim, "Yu Taech'ing Family Documents and the Kigye Yu of Puyŏ," *Acta Koreana* 23, 1 (2020): 65–96, 72.

[48]*KM*, 1: 390.

[49]Ibid., 1: 132–34.

[50]Ibid., 1: 342.

[51]Ibid., 1: 45. This record was made by Yu Myŏng-roe (1652–1712).

[52]Ibid., 1: 343, 392.

[53]Ha Yŏn, *Kyŏngsang-do chiriji*, 130; Yi Haeng, *et al.*, *Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*, 21: 4a–5a. The surviving manuscript copy of the *Kyŏngsang-do chiriji* was kept in the provincial governor's office in Kyŏngju. Yu is listed as one of the four indigenous surname groups (*t'osŏng*), along with Yang, Ik, and Yun, that originated in Kigye. The *Sejong sillok, chiriji* (The veritable records of King Sejong, geographic survey), 150: 4b, dated the mid-fifteenth century, also lists the four indigenous surname groups from Kigye

Table 1. Commemorative Writings Dedicated to the Members of the Kigye Yu Written before 1600.

Commemorated Person	Records on Ancestors	Commemorated Year	Commemorative Activities	Source
Yu Sŭng-gye		1565	Yu Kang, as Kyŏnggi provincial governor, placed a tombstone.	*KM*, 1: 94
Yu Sŏng-bo		Late sixteenth century	Cho Hŏn (1544–1592) commemorated him as a loyal person to Koryŏ on the tombstone.	*KM*, 1: 104
Yu Sŏng-bok		1565	Yu Kang, as Kyŏnggi provincial governor, placed a tombstone.	*KM*, 1: 105
Yu Chip		1565	Yu Kang, as Kyŏnggi provincial governor, placed a tombstone.	*KM*, 1: 122–125
Yu Hae	Began to be prominent from Silla; remote ancestor Sŏn; immediate ancestors Sŭng-gye → Sŏng-bok → Chip → Hae	1569	Kim Ŏng-ryŏng (1529–?), magistrate of Hongju, wrote tombstone inscription on the request of his superior and Ch'ungch'ŏng Provincial Governor Yu Hong.	*KM*, 1: 132–134
Yu Ki-ch'ang (1437–1514)	Remote ancestor Sŏn; immediate ancestors Sŏng-bok → Chip → Hae → Ki-ch'ang	1557 (assumed)	Tombstone inscription by unknown person.	*KM*, 1: 160–162
Yu Yŏ-hae or Sun-gŏ (?–1514	Father Ki-ch'ang	1517	Kim Chŏng (1486–1521) wrote tombstone inscription.	*KM*, 1: 193 f.
Yu Yŏ-rim (1478–1538)	Sixth-generation ancestor Sŏn; immediate ancestors Chip → Hae → Ki-ch'ang → Yŏ-rim	1540, 1543, 1586	Tombstone inscription by unknown person in 1543; spirit path stele inscription written by Hong Ŏn-p'il (1476–1549) in 1540 at the request of Yŏ-rim's son Yu Chin; stele erected in 1586 by grandson Yu Hong.	*KM*, 1: 199–209
Yu Kwan (1499–1534)	Immediate ancestors Hae → Ki-ch'ang → Yŏ-rim → Kwan	1576	Tombstone inscription written by Song In (1517–1584).	*KM*, 1: 305 f.
Yu Kang (1510–1570)	Began to be prominent from Silla; remote ancestor Sŏn;	1570, 1572	Mortuary plaque inscription written by Yu Hong in 1570;	*KM*, 1: 322 and 342

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (*Continued*)

Commemorated Person	Records on Ancestors	Commemorated Year	Commemorative Activities	Source
	immediate ancestors Chip → Hae → Ki-ch'ang → Yŏ-rim → Kang		tombstone erected in 1572.	
Yu Yun (1516–1548)		1550	Tombstone inscription written by Chin Pok-ch'ang (?–1563) on the request of Yun's older brother Kang.	*KM*, 1: 383 f.
Yu Ho (1522–1579)	Koryŏ ancestor Sŏn; immediate ancestors Ki-ch'ang → Yŏ-rim → Kwan → Ho	between 1579–1593	Tombstone inscription written by Kim Kwi-yŏng (1520–1593).	*KM*, 1: 387
Yu Hong (1524–1594)	A prominent Koryŏ ancestor Yŏ-hae from *Koryŏsa*; seventh-generation ancestor Sŭng-gye; immediate ancestors Hae → Ki-ch'ang → Yŏ-rim → Kwan → Hong	between 1594–1598, 1597	Biography written by Sŏng Hon (1535–1598) between 1594 and 1598; tombstone inscription by his son Tae-jin (1554–1599).	*KM*, 1: 390 and 420

Before 1600, the Kigye Yu had only a vague idea that their founding ancestor might be from Silla—a speculation possibly deduced from the *Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea* and/or the *Gazetteer of Kyŏngsang Province*, which record that Kigye's history goes as far back as the eighth century and that Kigye Yu's founding ancestor hailed from there.[54] The information from the *History of Koryŏ* provided a reference to one Yu Yŏ-hae of the thirteenth century, but no further link was made at that time between him and any other Koryŏ ancestors such as Sŏn. Only later in the seventeenth century was Yŏ-hae recorded as Sŏn's grandfather. By the end of the sixteenth century, though, the Kigye Yu had established an unbroken ancestral line descending from Sŏn. Yu Tŭk-sŏn, later identified as Yŏ-hae's son and Sŏn's father, appears in Yu Kang's spirit path stele inscription, which Yi Chŏng-gwi (1564–1635) composed in 1634 on the basis of both Kang's biography and a mortuary plaque inscription composed earlier by Yu Hong. In this essay, interestingly, Yi mentions

and adds one (Kim) as a move-in surname (*naesŏng*). However, this *Geographic Survey*, as a part of the *Veritable Records of King Sejong* was not available for public viewing.

[54]Ha Yŏn, *Kyŏngsang-do chiriji*, 130; Yi Haeng, *et al.*, *Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*, 21: 4a–5a.

that Tŭk-sŏn, who held the senior second-rank position of Chwabogya, was the founding ancestor (*pijo*) of the Kigye Yu.[55]

Yu Kang and his nephew Yu Hong were most instrumental in historicizing and commemorating their ancestry in the late sixteenth century.[56] Kang passed the higher civil service examination in 1541 and served as minister of taxation (Hojo P'ansŏ, Sr. 2), while Hong earned the examination degree in 1553 and served as second state councilor (Chwaŭijŏng, Sr. 1). Hong's career highlight was when he brought back a copy of a volume from the *Collected Statutes of the Ming Dynasty* (*Tae Myŏng hoejŏn; Da Ming hui dian*), which had entries on Chosŏn, after he visited Ming China (1368–1644) as an envoy. This was a monumental event in Chosŏn because the copy resolved one of the most serious diplomatic issues between Ming and Chosŏn, dubbed the "dispute about the royal descent" (*chonggye pyŏnmu*)—Ming's erroneous understanding and recording of the Chosŏn founder Yi Sŏng-gye (1335–1408) as a son of the late Koryŏ power-monger Yi In-im (?–1388). For Yu Hong's achievement, King Sŏnjo (r. 1567–1608) enfeoffed him as the Lord of Kisŏng (Kisŏng referring to Kigye) and also appointed him a first-rank Kwangguk Merit Subject in 1590.[57] Both Kang and Hong took advantage of their exalted positions to either confirm the locations of their ancestors' tombs or influence illustrious scholar-officials to generate commemorative essays dedicated to their ancestors. Known for his voracious appetite for reading, Hong had a library of over ten thousand books. The knowledge he accumulated as well as his deep involvement in resolving the issue of the royal ancestry no doubt nurtured a keen interest and expertise in his own ancestry.[58]

Invention of Yu Ŭi-sin

By 1600, the Kigye Yu were able to trace their ancestry back to Yu Yŏ-hae of the thirteenth century, and also had an idea that their founding ancestor was from the Silla kingdom. Yet, they had no name. There was no mention of any Kigye Yu, to say nothing of an actual name, who was loyal to Silla and did not submit to Koryŏ. The earliest record of a righteous person refusing to submit to Koryŏ is in the preface to the first genealogy of the Kigye Yu, written by Yu Kye, who also served as its compiler. This 1645 edition does not seem to be extant, but Kye's preface is preserved in his collected literary work, *Sinam sŏnsaeng munjip*. In it Kye calls the righteous person the founding ancestor but does not name the person. In exalting this ancestor's quality, however, Kye states that he did not bend his loyalty despite being demoted to "a local clerk" (*pusŏ*), a position recorded as "a township headman" (*hojang*) in the genealogy's second edition, compiled in 1704. Kye adds that this ancestor's righteous spirit remained as a family legacy and influenced his descendants for generations.[59]

[55]*KM*, 1: 322–24. In his preface to the 1645 genealogy, Yu Kye comments that the prominence of the Kigye Yu originated from Yu Yŏ-hae's son Tŭk-sŏn. *KM*, 6: 18–20.

[56]Such commemorative activities were popular since the sixteenth century. Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, *Chokpo wa Chosŏn sahoe*, 147–50.

[57]Sun Joo Kim, "Yu Taech'ing Family Documents," 73 f.

[58]*KM*, 1: 400.

[59]Yu Kye, *Sinam sŏnsaeng munjip*, 18: 3a–5a; *KM*, 6: 18–20; and Yu Myŏng-ham, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo*, 1: 1a–b. Yu Myŏng-ham (1662–?) in his postscript to the 1704 genealogy mentions that there were

Kye's understanding that the founding ancestor of the Kigye Yu was a *hyangni* (or *pusŏ* or *hojang*) of early Koryŏ coincides with that of other descent groups whose early Chosŏn genealogical records also often identified their founding ancestor as a *hyangni*.[60] Kye's claim that this founding ancestor was demoted to a local clerk reflects his presentism, though, since the *hyangni* in Koryŏ were local powerholders, unlike the *hyangni* in Chosŏn, who were local administrative clerks.[61] During the dynastic transition from Silla to Koryŏ, the Koryŏ founder designated local strongmen as county headmen of several different ranks, collectively called *hyangni*, as a way to reorganize the countryside and also to make sure that the local powerholders stayed loyal to the new dynasty and kept the local society in order. Along with this reorganization of local areas, the Koryŏ bestowed Chinese-style surnames and had *hyangni* keep their place of origin as the ancestral seat.[62] Therefore, *hyangni* (with *hojang* being the highest rank among them) of the Koryŏ period were de facto local powerholders, and some became central aristocrats through the civil service examination system or other privileges available to them. The self-differentiation of *hyangni* between centralized aristocratic descent lines and those who remained in their ancestral seat and provided administrative expertise continued throughout Koryŏ. The dividing line and resultant contrasting identities between the prestigious scholar-official group, called *yangban* or *sajok*, and local clerks, called *hyangni* or *ijok*, became clear as the status of the *hyangni* was drastically denigrated by a series of reform measures in the early Chosŏn. These stripped them of privileges such as access to civil service examinations and placed them under the tight control of county magistrates and local *yangban*. Although some of these *hyangni* (or *pusŏ* in Yu Kye's word) shared their ancestral roots with the *yangban*, they eventually formed one of the middle-status groups called *chungin*, below the *yangban* in Chosŏn.[63]

Although there is no way to confirm whether Ŭi-sin's name is encoded in the 1645 genealogy, it is safe to assume it is because a few commemorative writings Kye composed before he died in 1664 clearly mention Ŭi-sin as the founding ancestor of the Kigye Yu (table 2). In the tombstone inscription dedicated to Yu Tae-jin (1554–1599) and written between 1659–1664, for example, Kye specifically states that the family's genealogy shows that the Kigye Yu originated from Ŭi-sin.[64] Once that information was invented, scholars and officials who were not members of the Kigye Yu repeated it in their commemorative essays, thereby solidifying the link (table 2). In the latter half of the seventeenth century, then, the members of the Kigye Yu as well as

many errors in the earlier 1645 edition. *KM*, 1: 20–22. Updated editions of the genealogy were compiled in 1704, 1738, 1786, ca. 1864 or 1867, 1912, 1964, and 1991.

[60]Yi Su-gŏn, *Han'guk ŭi sŏngssi wa chokpo*, 26–46.

[61]Yi Su-gŏn (ibid., 61) points out that many *yangban* families used the same story: that their ancestors of *hyangni* status in the Koryŏ did not submit to the new dynasty to anachronistically rationalize their *hyangni* origin.

[62]Song Chun-ho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu*, 68–108; Yi Su-gŏn, *Han'guk ŭi sŏngssi wa chokpo*, 107–23; Duncan, *Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, 30–35.

[63]Duncan, *Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, 52–153, 213–22; Kyung Moon Hwang, *Beyond Birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 161–81; Sun Joo Kim, "Fragmented: The T'ongch'ŏng Movements by Marginalized Status Groups in Late Chosŏn Korea," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 68, 1: 135–68, 138–43.

[64]*KM*, 1: 567, and 6: 18–20.

Table 2. Yu Ŭi-sin in the Seventeenth-Century Sources.

Year	Author	Type of Source	Source
1645	Yu Kye (1607–1664)	*Kigye Yu Genealogy* (not named but referenced to)	Yu Kye, *Sinam sŏnsaeng munjip*, 18: 3a–5a
1650	Cho Ik (1579–1655)	Spirit path stele inscription dedicated to Yu Paek-chŭng (1587–1646)	*KM*, 1: 799 and Cho Ik, *P'ojŏjip*, 31: 23a*
1649–1664	Yu Kye	Tombstone inscription dedicated to Yu Sŏng-jŭng (1576–1649)	*KM*, 1: 707 and Yu Kye, *Sinam sŏnsaeng munjip*, 23: 19a
1658–1661	Hŏ Hu (1588–1661)	Tombstone inscription dedicated to Yu Sŏn-jŭng (1583–1658)	*KM*, 1: 747
1659–1664	Yu Kye	Tombstone inscription dedicated to Yu Tae-jin (1554–1599)	*KM*, 1: 567 and Yu Kye, *Sinam sŏnsaeng munjip*, 23: 3b
Before 1664	Yu Kye	Biography of Yu Tae-gyŏng (1551–1605)	*KM*, 1: 512 and Yu Kye, *Sinam sŏnsaeng munjip*, 24: 1a.
Before 1664	Song Si-yŏl (1607–1689)	Petition to award a posthumous epithet to Yu Kang	*KM*, 1: 336 and 350
Later seventeenth century	Cho Chong-un (1607–1683)	*Origins of Descent Groups* (*Ssijok wŏllyu*)	*Origins of Descent Groups* (*Ssijok wŏllyu*), 701

*Cho Ik, *P'ojŏjip* [Collected works of Cho Ik] (n.p., 1688). I used the online edition in Han'guk kojŏn chonghap DB: https://db.itkc.or.kr/ (accessed 9 Jan. 2023).

other prominent Chosŏn elites shared the firm belief that Yu Ŭi-sin, a loyal subject of Silla who did not submit to Koryŏ, was the Kigye Yu's founding ancestor.

As briefly noted earlier, some members of the Kigye Yu believed that "Ŭi-sin," meaning a righteous subject, was not the name of the person who resisted submission to the new dynastic founder but rather a reference to the person to honor his righteous deed.[65] That is, while this person's given name had not been transmitted, the referenced appellation became his personal name. Why did the Kigye Yu, or more specifically Yu Kye, want to make a person of righteousness its founding ancestor in the mid-seventeenth century? Loyalty and righteousness were key Confucian values that any Chosŏn scholars and officials would desire to internalize and practice.[66] Chŏng Mong-ju (1337–1392), who was assassinated because of his objection to the dynastic change from Koryŏ to Chosŏn led by Yi Sŏng-gye and his followers, had been regarded as the emblem of these values and enshrined in the Confucian Shrine (Munmyo) in 1517, the highest honor that a Confucian scholar could attain. He was the first person to earn that honor during the Chosŏn period. More importantly, the

[65]Ibid., 1: 75–78.

[66]Other key Confucian values include filial piety and chastity. For example, Yi Si-hang (1672–1736) from Unsan, P'yŏngan Province, tried to portray his ancestors as champions of filial piety. Sun Joo Kim, *Voice from the North*, 23–31. On promoting the value of chastity, see Jungwon Kim, "Yŏl (烈): Chaste Martyrdom and Literati Writing in Late Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910)," in Charles R. Kim, et al., eds., *Beyond Death: The Politics of Suicide and Martyrdom in Korean History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019): 24–44.

second Manchu invasion of 1636 resulted in the Chosŏn's humiliating submission to the Qing (1636–1911). This traumatic event, in turn, created a political and social atmosphere in which those who advocated an anti-Qing and thus pro-war stance were celebrated. Moreover, those who died resisting the invading army, took their own life in anticipation of shameful surrender, or were taken as hostages to Qing were elevated as heroes of loyalty and righteousness. Many of these people as well as their descendants and followers, including Yu Kye, belonged to a political group called Westerners (Sŏin), which regarded an anti-Qing stance as the ultimate expression of righteousness and politicized that value. These socio-political environments might have provided a historical context for Yu Kye's desire to portray Kigye Yu's founding ancestor as having been the most righteous person possible by resisting a dynastic change, as Chŏng Mong-ju did.

Invention of Yu Sam-jae and Discovery of His Tomb

The first mention of Lord "Sam-jae" (Samjae-gong) as the Kigye Yu's founding ancestor appears in a record reportedly left by Yu Ok-kyŏng (1561–?) in 1625, although this was an indirect quote made by Yu Ha-gyŏm (1632–?) in his 1689 circular letter (*t'ongmun*) addressed to members of the Kigye Yu. According to the quote, Lord Sam-jae—not Ŭi-sin—was the righteous person during the reign of Silla's last king, Kyŏngsun (r. 927–935), who did not submit to Koryŏ and thus became a township headman of Kigye.[67] In the mid-seventeenth century, the Kigye Yu had invented Ŭi-sin as the founding ancestor and identified him as the righteous person. By 1689, not only had they invented a new founding Silla ancestor, Sam-jae, but they had also discovered the exact location of Sam-jae's tomb in Kigye district. It is the 1704 edition genealogy that clearly places Yu Sam-jae, a Silla official who held the position of Ach'an, as the founding ancestor and Ŭi-sin as a descendant of Sam-jae (rather than a son), although it adds a note to the entry of Yu Sam-jae that the person's given name had not been transmitted, signaling the compiler's understanding that "Sam-jae" was indeed a common noun referring to "the highest posts" (figure 1).[68]

The earliest record of the possible location of the founding ancestor's tomb comes from Yu Ok-kyŏng, just mentioned, who lived in Yŏngch'ŏn County adjacent to Kigye. He identified three tombs in Aedang-dong, Kigye. One reportedly belonged to a literary licentiate degree-holder from Paech'ŏn with an unknown given name (and thus it was simply called Yu Pae-ch'ŏn). The middle one, surrounded with stone walls, was believed to be the tomb of Lord Sam-jae. As early as 1614, Ok-kyŏng, a military degree-holder, reported this finding to Sim Yŏl (1569–1646), Yu Ham's (1526–1581) son-in-law, when he was appointed Kyŏngsang's provincial governor (figure 2).[69]

Regarding the discovery and securing of Yu Sam-jae's tomb, 1689 was a landmark moment for members of the Kigye Yu. In that year, while Yu Ha-gyŏm served as magistrate of Kyŏngju, a lawsuit revealed that Yu Sam-jae's tomb was located in Tang-dong (or Aedang-dong) about 4 kilometers (10 *li*) north of Kigye's old county

[67] *KM*, 1: 50, 53 f. Yu Myŏng-gŏn criticized this statement by Yu Ok-kyŏng as inaccurate. Ibid., 1: 54.
[68] Yu Myŏng-ham, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo*, 1: 1a.
[69] *KM*, 1: 53 f. Sim Yŏl's fifth-generation descendant became Queen Tanŭi (1686–1718), King Kyŏngjong's (r. 1720–1724) wife. Sun Joo Kim, "Yu Taech'ing Family Documents," 82.

seat. Before then, based on allegedly deceitful misdirection by residents, Kigye Yu members believed that the tomb they sought was another one, located in Ori-dong about 2 kilometers south and belonging to Yu Pae-ch'ŏn.[70] According to the lawsuit-related documents preserved by the Kigye Yu, the misidentification began sometime in the sixteenth century when Sŏ Hu-jun's (1610–1669) grandfather illegally placed his ancestor Sŏ Hon and his wife's tomb inside the boundary of the Tang-dong tomb.[71] When a Kigye Yu (either Yu Kang in 1556 or Yu Hong in 1577 as mentioned earlier), who was appointed Kyŏngsang provincial governor came to pay a visit to the founding ancestor's tomb, the Sŏ family, being afraid their illegal burial would be discovered, led the governor to believe the Ori-dong tomb belonged to Kigye Yu's unnamed founding ancestor.[72]

The Sŏ family's deceit was exposed when Sŏ Hu-jun sued Chŏng Se-ch'u, who buried his father's corpse right below the Tang-dong tomb in 1661 (or 1675), arguing that the Chŏng had infringed upon the legal boundary of the Sŏ family's ancestral tomb. The lawsuit produced a key witness, an elder named Yi Sin who had lived in Aedang-dong for generations, and whose father was a respected geomancer. According to the father, the Tang-dong tomb belonged to the Kigye Yu's founding ancestor, and the prosperity of the Yu descent group derived from the highly auspicious site chosen for the tomb. Yi's father also explained the Sŏ family's bad fortune in having no son to succeed them: their ancestor not only violated Yu's founding ancestor's tomb but also removed its tombstone and destroyed protective walls around the tomb. The Chŏng family won the lawsuit and subsequently placed more burials on the site. Several members of the Yu family living near the area heard of the lawsuit at the time but failed to follow up and confirm that the Tang-dong tomb did indeed belong to their founding ancestor.[73]

Consequently, when Min Chu-myŏn (1629–1670), a great grandson of Yu Ham, paid a visit to the founding ancestor's tomb to offer a ritual and also repair the mound as magistrate of Kyŏngju, he paid these respects at the Ori-dong tomb.[74] It was only when Yu Ha-gyŏm arrived in the area as magistrate of Kyŏngju that he summoned the members of the Sŏ family—Sŏ Hyŏn and Sŏ Ch'ŏl—and Chŏng Se-jae representing the Chŏng family, to straighten the matter out. In addition to Yi Sin's testimony, Ha-gyŏm was able to collect further evidence from elderly people in the area who all confirmed that the founding ancestor's tomb was the one at Tang-dong. Until that time, residents there had disguised the Ori-dong tomb as the Kigye Yu founder's in order to avoid the inconvenience of accommodating Yu officials who wanted to pay respects to their founding ancestor: the Tang-dong tomb was located in

[70]The information about the lawsuit is collected in *KM*, 1: 39–60. Yu Ha-gyŏm is the great-great-grandson of Yu Ho (figure 2).

[71]The boundary of a tomb was 100 paces surrounding it. Ch'oe Hang, *et al.*, *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* [Great code of administration] (n.p., 1661[1485]), 3: 36b. I used the online edition in Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, Chosŏn sidae pŏmnyŏng charyo, http://db.history.go.kr/law/ (accessed 9 Jan. 2023). The tomb's owner (or tomb occupant's family) reserved the right to occupy the land surrounding the tomb. For lawsuits concerning the violation of graves and illegal burials, see Kim Kyŏng-suk, *Chosŏn ŭi myoji sosong* [Gravesite litigations during the Chosŏn dynasty] (P'aju: Munhak Tongne, 2012); Sun Joo Kim and Jungwon Kim, *Wrongful Deaths: Selected Inquest Records from Nineteenth-Century Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 47–54, 129–203.

[72]*KM*, 1: 45–53.

[73]Ibid., 1: 45 f.

[74]Ibid., 1: 46.

Figure 3. Topographical features as seen from Yu Sam-jae's tomb facing south. Author's photo, 14 June 2023.

rugged mountains much farther from the residential areas (figure 3).[75] Another bit of circumstantial support for the Tang-dong site was its unrivalled geomantic merit, which surely suited the purpose of recognizing a founding ancestor.[76] Thanks to Ha-gyŏm's efforts, the Kigye Yu linked the Tang-dong tomb to their founding ancestor and immediately erected a stone marker there. The Chŏng family had to relocate its ancestral burials, although the Sŏ Hon couple's tomb was left intact.[77] This is shown on the "Illustrated Map of Yu Sam-jae's Tomb" (Sijo Yu Sam-jae punsan chi to) inserted in the 1704 genealogy (figure 4).[78]

After Yu Kang and/or Yu Hong as provincial governor of Kyŏngsang visited the presumed tomb of the founding ancestor of Kigye Yu in the late sixteenth century, and the idea that the Kigye Yu originated far back from Silla began to germinate, it took more than a hundred years and the involvement of multiple actors to invent the names of the earliest ancestors and to identify his tomb by mobilizing questionable

[75]Ibid., 1: 50–52. I took a field trip to the tomb of Yu Sam-jae on 14 June 2023. The site is still remote, deep in the mountains, and requires more than an hour of climbing steep hills from the Puun-jae, a graveside facility located in a valley about 100 meters below the tomb. The Kigye Yu lineage recently built a paved, one-lane road with extremely sharp curves that connects the public road to the tomb. I would like to thank the Kigye Yu lineage for providing access to the private road and other accommodations for visiting the tomb and the Puun-jae.

[76]Ibid., 1: 45–47, 50–52. For a similar case in which hearsay and geomantic merit were used as evidence in a lawsuit to verify one's ancestral tombs in the seventeenth century, see Kim Mun-t'aek, "17C Andong Chinsŏng Yi ssi ka"; Martina Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors' Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 200–4.

[77]*KM*, 1: 53. Although Yu Myŏng-gŏn simply states that the Sŏ Hon couple's grave was not removed because it was an old grave, the Yu lineage might have allowed it to remain to reward the Sŏ family for siding with them in the lawsuit against the Chŏng family. During my field trip to Yu Sam-jae's tomb, I learned that the descendants of the Sŏ family had finally removed the couple's grave a few years before.

[78]Yu Myŏng-ham, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo*, 8: 2a.

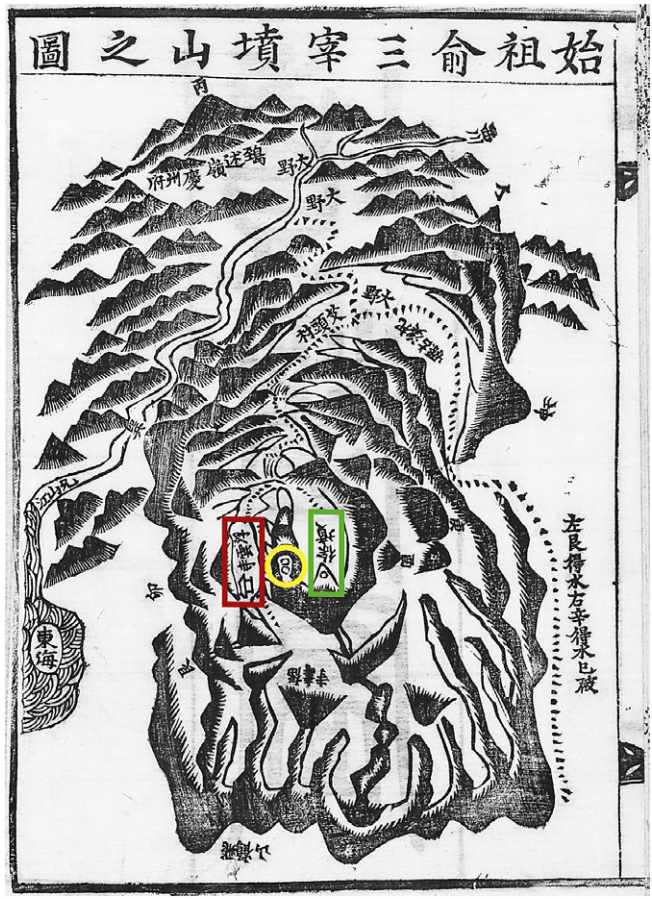

Figure 4. Illustrated Map of Yu Sam-jae's Tomb. Top: south; left: East Sea; yellow circle: Yu Sam-jae's tomb; green rectangle: Sŏ Hon couple's tomb; red rectangle: Puun-sa Buddhist temple. Source: Yu Myŏng-ham, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo* (1704), 8: 2a. Courtesy of Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University.

evidence. This long process was captured by a late seventeenth-century source, the *Origins of Descent Groups*, dated before 1689. Although the exact date of its compilation is unknown, it was certainly before the death of its author Cho Chong-un, in 1683. I think that it was completed later in Cho's life, since it is extensive and contains information on more than 540 descent groups, and so must have taken a great deal of time and experience to compile. Like the 1704 edition of the *Kigye Yu Genealogy*, the *Origins of Descent Groups* names Yu Sam-jae as the founding ancestor of Kigye Yu, Yu Ŭi-sin as a descendant of Yu Sam-jae, and Yu Sŏng-mi as a descendant of Yu Ŭi-sin.[79] One conspicuous difference is that the genealogy records Yu Sŏng-mi as the "son" of Ŭi-sin (figure 1), although its compiler agreed with and recorded Yu Kye's criticism that Sŏng-mi, who married a women who was a seventh-

[79]Cho Chong-un, *Ssijok wŏllyu*, 701.

generation descendant of Silla's last king Kyŏngsun, could not be a son of Ŭi-sin, King Kyŏngsun's contemporary. In contrast, Cho Chong-un omits the letter "son," making Sŏng-mi a descendant of Ŭi-sin. An intriguing note inserted into the entry for "Yu Sam-jae" in the *Origins of Descent Groups* reads that there is a tomb in Kigye that is said to be that of Sam-jae, indicating Cho's awareness of the intermittent visits and inquiries made by certain members of the Kigye Yu in Kigye as well as the lawsuits over gravesites there alleged to be the tomb of the Kigye Yu's founding ancestor.

In the following decades, the Kigye Yu took several tangible actions to protect this newly found tomb. In 1710, when Yu Myŏng-hong was Kyŏngsang provincial governor, he built a graveside hermitage (*punam*) called Puun-am, 16-*k'an* in size, using resources collected from his relatives.[80] Although Myŏng-hong was credited for founding the hermitage, the "Illustrated Map of Yu Sam-jae's Tomb" inserted in the 1704 genealogy (figure 4) clearly shows that a Buddhist temple named Puun-sa had existed right next to Sam-jae's tomb. Myŏng-hong must have designated this temple as a memorial hermitage by providing resources to either repair or expand the existing edifice. He had resident monks guard the tomb by prohibiting logging and grazing in the area. He also collected donations from relatives and added his salary to purchase some lands as ritual land (*chejŏn*), which were put under the care of either resident monks or nearby farmers. Caretakers used income from that land to prepare for regular rituals conducted at the tomb.[81]

In 1727, Yu Ch'ok-ki (1691–1767), who was also Kyŏngsang provincial governor, facilitated erection of a tombstone (*myobi*) on the left side of the tomb.[82] This work involved identifying a proper stone, shaping and engraving it, and moving it to the tomb site via land and sea. In 1732, Kyŏngju magistrate Kim Si-hyŏng (1681–1750), a descendant through a daughter's line, financed the addition of a capstone for the stele.[83] Five years later, Yu Ch'ŏk-ki, who had become provincial governor again, arranged for Kyŏngju magistrate Cho Myŏng-jŏng (1709–1779), a relative by marriage, to provide labor and resources to relocate the tombstone and adorn the tomb mound.[84] In 1748, Yu Chik-ki (1694–?) financed firing a porcelain epitaph to be buried near the tomb.[85] By 1786, Yu Han-jun (1732–1811) learned the folktale of Yu Sam-jae's birth, that a child wrapped in a red cloth came down from heaven, and recorded it in the "Family History" (*kajŏn*).[86] This motif of auspicious birth—descending from heaven—is common for the founder of a descent group or

[80]A *k'an* (or *kan*) is a unit for measuring the size of a house; 1 *k'an* refers to the width between two bearing poles, or approximately 2.4 meters. Yi Chŏng, *Changin kwa tak namu ka hamkke mandŭn yŏksa, Chosŏn ŭi kwahak kisulsa* [Technoscience of *tak* and artisans: resourceful evolution of Chosŏn papermaking] (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2023), 283. The facility is now called Puun-jae.

[81]*KM*, 1: 62 f.

[82]Ibid., 1: 39 f. Yu Ch'ŏk-ki is a fifth-generation descendant of Yu Yŏng (figure 2).

[83]Ibid., 1: 56 f.

[84]Ibid., 1: 57 f.

[85]Ibid., 1: 58–60.

[86]The story adds that a person picked up the child and raised him, and the place where the child descended became his home. The child's post reached Ach'an, but there is no way to verify his name and descendants because there is no historical record. In recording the earliest ancestors of the Kigye Yu, Yu Han-jun notes that some ancestral records before Yu Yŏ-hae have been lost. In addition, he states that he cannot write an individual biography for his direct ancestors before Yu Hae because there are no existing texts to rely on. Yu Han-jun, *Chajŏ* [My own literary works] (n.p., ca. 1783–1810), 14: 1a–2b. I used the online edition in Han'guk kojŏn chonghap DB: https://db.itkc.or.kr/ (accessed 20 July 2023). Yu was a prolific writer who developed an

Figure 5. Puun-jae near Yu Sam-jae's Tomb. Author's photo 14 June 2023.

kingdom.[87] In 1795, Yu Han-mo (1734–1816), during his appointment as magistrate of Kyŏngju, recovered the lost residence of the Yu family of Silla and a well.[88] For the rest of the Chosŏn dynasty, the members of the Kigye Yu provided resources to repair and expand the Puun-am, which remained the lineage's guardian hermitage and purification hall (*chaesil*) (figure 5).[89] Multiple generations of Kigye Yu members made various contributions to securing and protecting their founding ancestor's identity, and they often fully capitalized on their positions as county or provincial officials. Members both local and from the capital closely collaborated to achieve their goals.[90]

Conclusion

Elite competition for power and prestige in the face of an ever-growing pool of aspirants for elite positions unleashed genealogical pursuit in Chosŏn Korea. Martina Deuchler contends that the most compelling strategy of distinction for *yangban* elites was lineage-building through corporate activities such as compiling and publishing genealogies.[91] Song Chun-ho highlights a social trend toward valuing deep and prominent ancestry, which intensified in late Chosŏn.[92] Yi Su-gŏn shows that in the seventeenth century there were decisive changes in how Chosŏn elites thought of

unorthodox literary approach, pursuing an individual style of writing rather than following precedent, which was valued among Neo-Confucian writers. See Pak Kyŏng-nam, *Chŏ mada ŭi kil: Yu Han-jun p'yŏngjŏn* [My own way: a biography of Yu Han-jun] (P'aju: Kŭl hangari, 2021).

[87]Yi Su-gŏn, *Han'guk ŭi sŏngssi wa chokpo*, 104–6.

[88]*KM*, 1: 60–61.

[89]Ibid., 1: 62–67.

[90]Collaboration among kin members, including matriline descendants living in the capital and in the countryside, and reliance on bureaucratic power to facilitate various projects honoring founding and remote ancestors were common. See Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, *Chokpo wa Chosŏn sahoe*, 248–54.

[91]Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors' Eyes*, 2.

[92]Song Chun-ho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu*, 36.

their descent group identity and history. Adoption of the Neo-Confucian family system, which was primarily organized by the principles of patriliny and patriarchy, promoted the study and compilation of genealogies as a way to unite the members of descent groups and clarify hierarchical order within them. In this process, elites put more value on ancient and prominent ancestry.[93] Kim Mun-t'aek similarly argues that seventeenth-century elites came to develop interests in their remote ancestors, including founding ancestors, as they began to form lineage associations in tune with patrilineal ideology. In the process of forming patrilineal lineage organizations, the tomb of the founding ancestor provided a focal point through which dispersed members of the lineage could cooperate and be united.[94] In the case of the Kigye Yu, many members, including in-laws and descendants from daughter's lines, collaborated to gather information, sue adversaries, and finance all the related mnemonic activities. Such processes and commitments, shared among members, nurtured further interests in their ancestors and lineage and helped consolidate membership.

Availability of information enabled these pursuits of ancient and prominent ancestry. Family-kept information and commemorative writings were primary sources for compiling genealogies, but their scope, largely confined to several generations of ancestors, limited their efficacy in establishing longer timelines and broader connections. Information from state-led compilations and publications of historical and geographical books filled some gaps and also motivated *yangban* literati to investigate their ancestry. They did not usually attempt to change or remove readily available sources to glorify their ancestry.[95] When sources were not available, however, they relied on testimonials derived from vague and subjective memories. Moreover, they considered it acceptable to add their own views based on circumstantial knowledge and evidence.[96] Literati emphasized empiricism, but that principle easily capitulated to their social and cultural need for ancient and eminent ancestors. Such outright fabrication, which was rationalized on the basis of fragile evidence gathered by exercising power and authority over the witnesses, incurred no suspicion among their own members or their fellow literati, who engaged in similar practices.[97]

[93]Yi Su-gŏn, "Chokpo wa yangban ŭisik," 20–23, 32 f.

[94]Kim Mun-t'aek, "17C Andong Chinsŏng Yi ssi ka," 335.

[95]For examples of rejecting ancient ancestry based on empirical reasoning, see Kwŏn Ki-sŏk, *Chokpo wa Chosŏn sahoe*, 154–55.

[96]One example comes from Yu Sŏng-ju, who wrote an essay concerning Yu Ŭi-sin in 1795. After lamenting the lack of family sources that might elaborate Ŭi-sin's life, Sŏng-ju states his intention to supplement the existing record. He added broad historical context relating to Ŭi-sin's life during the dynastic transition from Silla and Koryŏ, but also a story that glorified Ŭi-sin and emphasized his righteousness and loyalty toward the fallen kingdom. *KM*, 1: 75–77.

[97]Yi Su-gŏn, "Chokpo wa yangban ŭisik," 43 f. Not all court cases were influenced by dubious evidence such as hearsay and geomantic speculation. Recent studies show that the final decisions of the local court in various civil litigations were based on verifiable written evidence rather than testimony. Kim Kyŏng-suk, "Kyŏlsong iban kwa sosong hyŏnjang, kŭriko nobi ŭi sam" [The court and nobi's life as seen through the court's decision], *Han'guk munhwa* 83 (2018): 309–34; *idem*, "Chejumin ŭi chaesan sangsok sosong kwa sŏjŭng—1663 nyŏn Cheju-mok kyŏlsong iban ŭl chungsimŭro" [Documentary evidence of the Cheju people's inheritance dispute—focusing on the Cheju County decision of 1663], *Komunsŏ yŏn'gu* 54 (2019): 39–71.

Attempts to establish and define lineage spaces in society by mobilizing credible as well as remotely related evidence were not unique to late Chosŏn elites. In the Pearl River delta in South China, major lineages in late imperial China, in order to consolidate positions in local politics and protect economic interests, claimed that their ancestors had originated from prominent families in the central plains, the cultural and political centers of the Tang (618–907) and Song. Helen F. Siu reported, "It is a common practice of the compilers of lineage genealogies to search backward in time to locate relationships with prominent 'ancestors,' however tenuously linked, in order to boost lineage status," and she added that "claims before the Song dynasty are not reliable."[98] David Faure, too, found that written genealogies compiled during the late imperial period often relied on myths and legends dating to early Chinese history to document their pre-Ming origins from northern China. It was also common for lineages to claim that their founding ancestors had been senior officials or members of the Song or Tang imperial families. The compilation of genealogies with such elaborate founding stories was closely related to securing settlement rights and the tax registration required in early Ming.[99]

We encounter a comparable case of genealogical construction and invention in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence. Giovanni Ciappelli offers a functional explanation for the popularization of family records there in the form of texts called *ricordanze* (family record books). Florentines began to produce these to document "evidence of [a family's] social promotion for future generations" or to convey and instill a family's self-identity by asserting deep and prestigious roots to its descendants or to the outside world. Acknowledging the production of family books, called *libri di famiglia*, in various places throughout Italy from the late medieval period, Ciappelli observes that they evolved into a proof for official recognition of noble status and the production of genealogies, including "false genealogies, created to increase the antiquity of a family's origins." In addition, he sees that such a "quest for a family's mythical origins, markedly present in the genealogies of some noble families since the beginning of the Early Modern period," was "rooted in a complex and long-standing cultural attitude."[100]

Likewise, other European families, from royal to noble and bourgeois, faced increasing competition for power and prestige in the early modern period and became preoccupied with genealogical knowledge for various reasons, such as to prove their nobility and enhance their political and social reputations and aspirations. The result was the production of increasing amounts of genealogical data and information in a variety of forms.[101] While genealogists and nobles sought out trustworthy data excavated from libraries and archives, they also accepted mythical stories as proofs and often relied on arbitrary readings of documents,

[98]Helen F. Siu, "Recycling Tradition: Culture, History, and Political Economy in the Chrysanthemum Festivals of South China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, 4 (1990): 765–94, 779 n34, 788.

[99]David Faure, "The Lineage as a Cultural Invention: The Case of the Pearl River Delta," *Modern China* 1, 1 (1989): 4–36.

[100]Giovanni Ciappelli, "Family Memory: Functions, Evolution, Recurrences," in Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, eds., *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29–30.

[101]For how general population growth had a much greater impact on early modern European elites by creating intense competition for limited resources and prestige, see Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World.*

which opened a door for outright forgery. The unknowability of the deep past, combined with dubious genealogical research methods, allowed for the relaxation of judicial evidentiary standards, especially regarding records from before 1400. For non-judicial reconstructions of family pasts, other forms of evidence such as coins, stone inscriptions, coats of arms, and even oral testimony were considered acceptable.[102] Markus Friedrich declares that "compromises of all kinds" were common in genealogical research.[103]

Elites' reliance on pliable empiricism in Chosŏn Korea left many gaps and loopholes in their genealogies, opening up possibilities for marginal elites or even non-elites to claim their place in elite genealogies. One loophole was uncertain ancient ancestry. As the Kigye Yu compilers in 1704 noted, it was problematic that they only had five generations of people to represent three hundred years between Ŭi-sin, allegedly of the tenth century, and Yŏ-hae, a historical person who lived in the thirteenth. They could have filled in missing names to clarify lost generations, they said, but decided not to do so because they did not know which or how many generations were missing.[104] Up to the 1867 edition, compilers did not arbitrarily fill in the missing generations between Sam-jae and Yŏ-hae and kept the original integrity quite well.[105] But then in the modern 1965 edition three new generations are inserted between Sam-jae and Ŭi-sin and the four original generations including Ŭi-sin and Yŏ-hae expand to ten.[106] Arbitrary insertions subsequently enabled the creation of new branches descended from those newly added ancestors. The number of branches of the Kigye Yu thereby expanded from six in the 1867 edition to fifteen in the 1965 one.[107]

Another loophole that enabled fabrication and expansion of genealogical records was missing information regarding many listed members. Where pertinent, compilers would add the notation "no son" (*muja*) or "no heir" (*muhu*) to an entry, which effectively blocked arbitrary addition of records, but many other entries listed the name only with no information whatsoever about descendants. These notational blanks allowed opportunists to enter their names as descendants and thereby claim lineage membership.[108]

Finding roots in Chosŏn Korea was quintessentially and exclusively an elite activity, one that began for practical purposes like clarifying immediate elite

[102]Friedrich, "Genealogy as Archive-Driven Research," 69–74.

[103]Friedrich, "Genealogy and the History of Knowledge," 4.

[104]Yu Myŏng-ham, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo*, pŏmnye, 1: 1a.

[105]Yu Ch'i-sŏn, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo* [Genealogy of the Kigye Yu lineage] (n.p., 1867), 1: 1a–b. I used the online edition in Kyujanggak Han'gukhak yŏn'guwŏn, Kyujanggak wŏnmun kŏmsaek sŏbisŭ, https://kyu.snu.ac.kr/ (accessed 4 Jan. 2023).

[106]Yu Ch'i-ung comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo* [Genealogy of the Kigye Yu lineage] (Seoul: Kigye Yu ssi kyŏngjongjung, 1965), 1: 61.

[107]Yu Ch'i-sŏn, comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo*, 1: 1a–b; Yu Ch'i-ung comp., *Kigye Yu ssi chokpo*, 1: 24.

[108]Scholars find that the phenomenon was widespread in late Chosŏn. Miyajima, "Andong Kwŏn ssi Sŏnghwabo," 237; Paek Sŭng-jong, "Wijo chokpo ŭi yuhaeng" [Popularization of fabricated genealogies], *Han'guksa simin kangjwa* 24 (1999): 67–85. In contrast, Song Chun-ho argues that the fabrication of genealogy did not and could not take place widely because each descent group was keen to preserve its integrity, and outright forgery would be discovered in the tightly-knit *yangban* society. Song Chun-ho, *Chosŏn sahoesa yŏn'gu*, 41–45. Despite evidence of fabrication, I regard genealogies as usable primary source, especially when complemented by other sources. As for the open-ended nature of genealogical knowledge and production in early modern Europe, see Friedrich, "Genealogy and the History of Knowledge," 5.

ancestry for official appointments and family inheritance, and for enhancing social standing. The genealogical endeavor soon became not only fashionable but essential as elite competition for power and prestige intensified in late Chosŏn. But the fragile empiricism guiding this pursuit of exclusivity and prominence cleared the way for others to join the privileged clubs that lineages embodied. This elasticity ultimately diluted the value of the genealogy in modern times.

Acknowledgments. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference "Momentum of Its Own: Inherent Dynamism in Pre-Modern Societies," convened by the Center for Interdisciplinary Research at the Bielefeld University, Germany in January 2021. I would like to thank Franz Arlinghaus, Andreas Rüther, and Jörg Quenzer for inviting me to the conference, and the conference participants, especially Simon Teuscher and Marion Eggert, for their comments. I also like to thank Dr. Hyun Jae Yoo for helping me to visit the tomb of Kigye Yu's supposed founding ancestor in the summer of 2023.

Cite this article: Kim, Sun Joo. 2024. "Inventing Ancestors and Limited Empiricism in Chosŏn Korea: A Case of the Kigye Yu Lineage." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 66: 584–611, doi:10.1017/S0010417524000057