Wang Ong\(^1\) (Sukchong), the fifteenth king of Koryó (r. 1095-1105) is known in Korean history as an enlightened ruler and a worthy son of the great Wang Hui (Munjong), whose long reign (1047-1083) is generally regarded as having ushered in the golden age of the dynasty\(^2\). Though Ong shared with Hui the distinction of being the third of a series of brothers who ascended the throne of Koryó\(^3\), there was one respect in which his accession was entirely without precedent: that is, his immediate predecessor was his nephew\(^4\). The family relationships involved may be represented as follows:

\(*) References to the Koryó-sa (KRS) are to the Kokusho Kankó-kai ed., Tokyo, 1909. References to the Chinese dynastic histories follow the Li'ai-ming cd. shih.

\(^1\) Ong’s original name was Hui; he changed it to Ong on April 18, 1101, in deference to a Liao taboo (KRS 11, 166b: third month, chi-mao day). Since he is referred to only as Ong in the Liaoshih I shall do likewise, to avoid confusion.

\(^2\) Koryó’s “golden age” is conventionally identified with the period from 1047 (beginning of Munjong’s reign) to 1122 (end of Yejong’s reign); see Yi Pyöng-do, Kuksa Taegwan (4th rev. ed., Seoul, 1956), p. 205. Sukchong’s annals in KRS are introduced by a eulogy of him (11, 156b), according to which Munjong once singled him out from among his (Munjong’s) numerous progeny as the one most likely to lead the royal house to new heights of glory. Professor Yi Pyöng-do, in his Koryó-sídat-ái Yônga (Seoul, 1954), p. 142, quotes this passage as one indication of Ong’s sterling character. A more realistic appraisal would, in my opinion, see in it an indication that Sukchong had special need for historiographical compensation.

\(^3\) Tókhong (Wang Hüm, 1016-1032-1034), Chôngjong (Wang Hyông, 1018-1035-1046) and Munjong (Wang Hui, 1019-1047-1083) were all sons of Hyónjong (Wang Sun, 992-1010-1031).

\(^4\) Older generation had followed younger to the throne only once in Koryó’s earlier history: Wang Song (Mokchong, 980-997-1009) was the first cousin once removed of his
Our only source for the circumstances of Ong’s accession is the dynastic history, Koryŏ-sa (KRS); its account is herewith summarized.

Wang Yun died on June 17, 1094\(^1\), and was succeeded by his eldest son Uk, who was then only ten years old. Some seven months later, envoys representing the Liaο emperor Tao-tsung (r. 1055-1101) invested Uk as “King of the State of Kao-li” (Kao-li kuo wang)\(^2\); this was the title traditionally conferred on Koryŏ monarchs by Chinese and Khitan (Liao) emperors alike\(^3\). Control of the government was assumed however by Uk’s mother, Queen Sasuk neé Yi\(^4\), since Uk was not only of tender years but was also afflicted with chronic illness. This regency was of short duration because of the machinations of Yi Chaui\(^5\), a powerful consort relative whose aim was to replace Uk with his own nephew, Wang successor Wang Sun. The two were of the same generation on the maternal side, however, since their mothers were sisters. The irregularities attending Sun’s accession provided the Liaο emperor Sheng-tsung (r. 983-1031) with a pretext for the first of a series of invasions which he launched against Koryŏ.

\(^1\) KRS 10, 153a (fifth month, jen-yin day).

\(^2\) KRS 10, 154 (twelfth month, ping-hsii day of lunar 1094, i.e., Jan. 22, 1095). This embassy performed an unusually wide range of functions: libations and condolences on account of Yun’s death, in addition to investiture of Uk. Though this last is not mentioned in the LS notices of Yun’s death (25, 576.3, 115, 584.2), there is no reason to question it.

\(^3\) For the first time by the Chinese in 932, under the Later T’ang (Wu-tai shih 74, 448.2) and by the Khitan in 996 (LS 13, 5750.1, KRS 3, 46b).

\(^4\) KRS 88, 8b, f.

\(^5\) Yi Chaui’s biography (KRS 127, 599b, f.) is an important source for the events we are now considering.