

King Chongjo: An Enlightened Despot in Early Modern Korea

King Chongjo (1752-1800) was the twenty-second ruler of the Joseon dynasty of Korea. He is widely regarded as one of the most enlightened and progressive rulers in Korean history. During his reign, he implemented a number of important reforms that helped to modernize and strengthen the country.

Early Life and Education

Chongjo was born in 1752 to King Yeongjo and his concubine, Lady Hong. He was a bright and inquisitive child, and he quickly mastered the Confucian classics. In 1762, at the age of ten, he was appointed Crown Prince.



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★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Chongjo's education was heavily influenced by the teachings of the Silhak school of thought. Silhak scholars advocated for the adoption of Western

science and technology to strengthen Korea. Chongjo was particularly interested in astronomy, mathematics, and military science.

Reign

Chongjo ascended to the throne in 1776, at the age of twenty-four. He quickly set about implementing a number of reforms to improve the lives of his people.

One of Chongjo's most important reforms was the establishment of the Kyujanggak, a royal library and research institute. The Kyujanggak was one of the largest and most comprehensive libraries in East Asia. It housed a vast collection of books on a wide range of subjects, including history, philosophy, literature, and science.

Chongjo also reformed the civil service examination system. Under the old system, only members of the yangban class were eligible to take the exams. Chongjo opened up the exams to all classes, regardless of their social status. This reform helped to create a more meritocratic society.

In addition to his reforms, Chongjo also patronized the arts and sciences. He supported the work of scholars, artists, and musicians. He also commissioned the construction of several important buildings, including the Gyeongbokgung Palace and the Changdeokgung Palace.

Legacy

King Chongjo is remembered as one of the most enlightened and progressive rulers in Korean history. His reforms helped to modernize and strengthen the country. He also patronized the arts and sciences, and he left a lasting legacy of cultural achievements.

Chongjo's reign is considered to be a golden age in Korean history. He was a wise and benevolent ruler who cared deeply for his people. He left a lasting legacy that continues to inspire Koreans today.

Further Reading

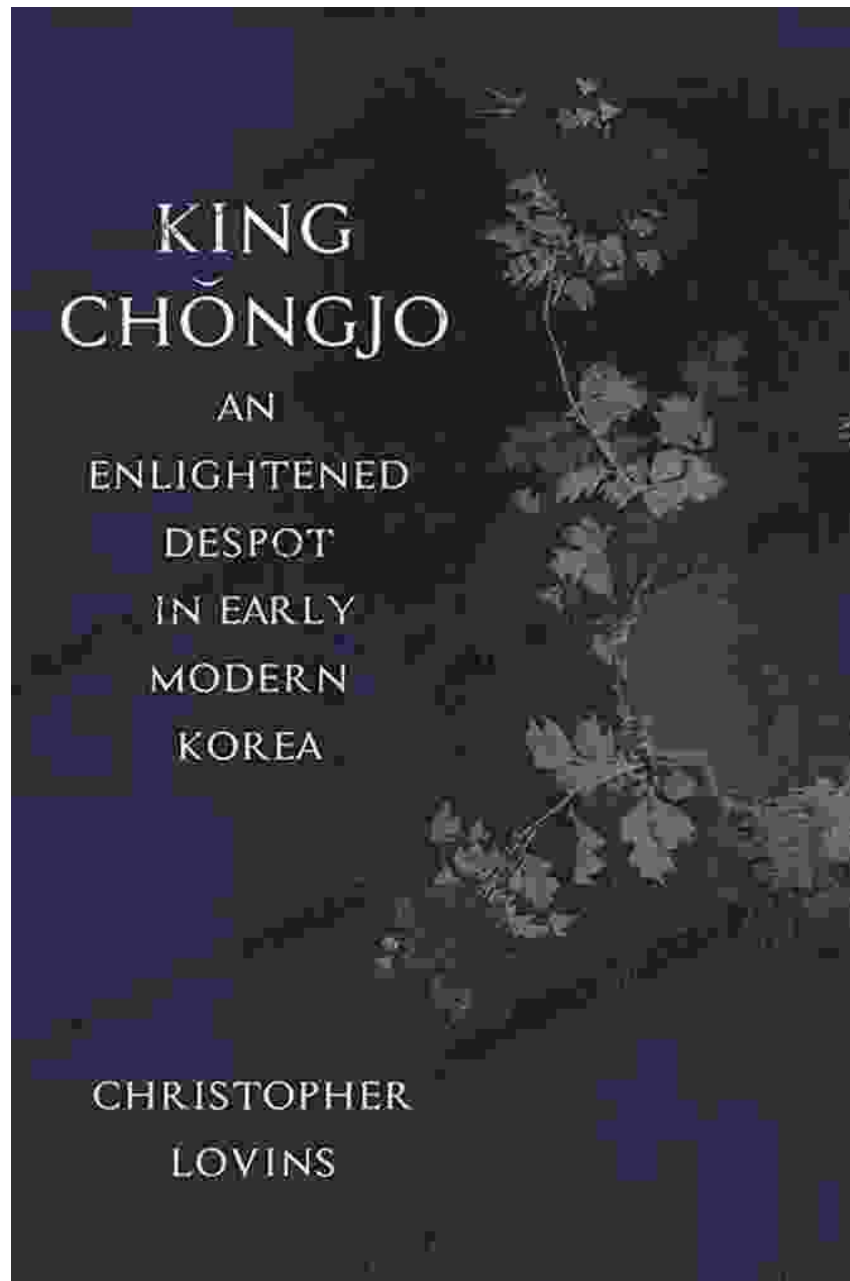
- [King Chongjo on Wikipedia](#)
- [King Chongjo on Encyclopedia Britannica](#)
- [King Chongjo: A Study of His Enlightenment Despotism by Park Yong-ho](#)

Images

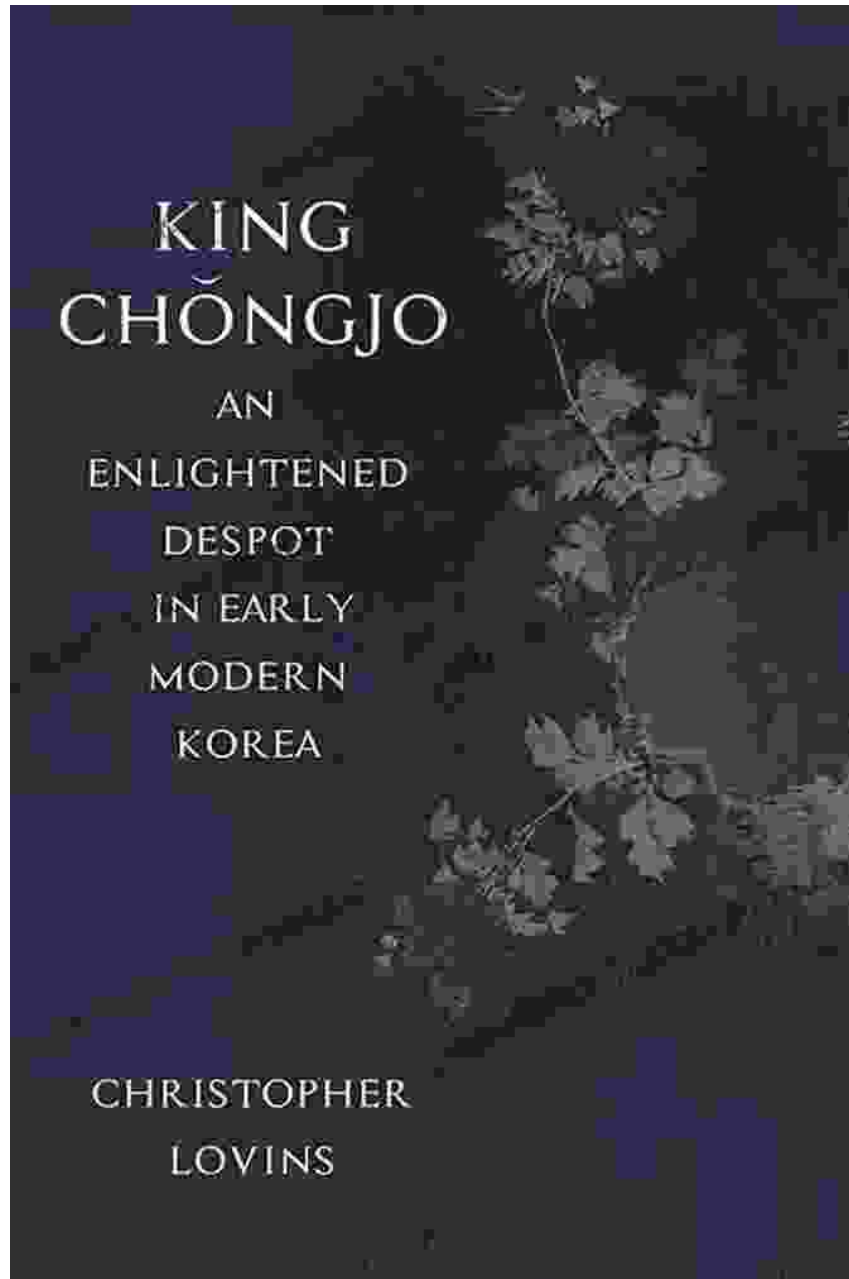
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The Kyujanggak Royal Library, founded by King Chongjo.



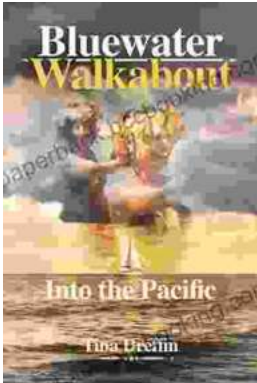
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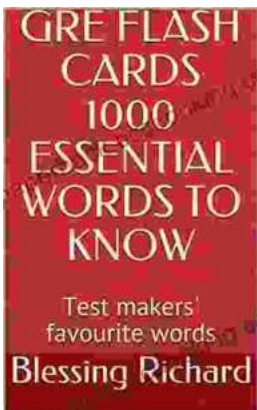
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