

MEMORIES OF CAPTIVITY IN THE GREAT EAST ASIAN WAR (1592-1598)

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## Introduction

The Great East Asian War, or the *Imjin waeran*, as it is known in Korea, is one of the most well-known historical events in Korean history today. Raging from 1592 to 1598, the war began when Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded the Korean Peninsula with hopes of establishing a continental empire spanning East Asia. The war ultimately saw more than 500,000 troops from Japan, Korea, and China fighting in the Korean Peninsula in what became one of the largest conflicts in the region. The war was also unprecedented in the damage it wrought upon Korea. By 1598, Korea's arable land total fell to less than one-third of the antebellum period. A massive population shift also occurred with one-fifth of Korea's population, nearly two million people, dead or missing. Of those missing, more than 100,000 Koreans were abducted to Japan as war captives and slaves, or *piroin*, most of whom never returned.<sup>1</sup>

Meaning "people who have suffered capture and enslavement," many of the *piroin* were those who were captured and conscripted by the Japanese Expeditionary Force as laborers to assist with the transportation of supplies, construction of fortification along the coastline, as well as footmen to fight in the Japanese army. A large number of these people were also sold as outright chattel and exported to the Japanese Archipelago, where some were later resold to places such as Okinawa, Macau, the Philippines, Goa, and even Europe as part of a larger human

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<sup>1</sup> Jung Shin Kim, "The Memory of Joseon Captives during the Hideyoshi Invasions and the Legacy Thereof (1592~1598) -With a special focus on the exaltation and removal of honor" *Hanguk Sasangshak* [History of Korean Thought] 40 (2012): 105-142. Some Korean scholars have further suggested that as many as 400,000 Koreans may have been abducted during the entirety of the war. This means that when one considers the fact that the Korean population near the end of the 16th century was somewhere between 10 and 11 million people, as much as one to four percent of the Korean population may have been forcibly removed from their homes to be taken to Japan. See Kwon Tae-Hwan and Shin Yong-Ha, "On Population Estimates of the Yi Dynasty, 1392-1910", *Dong-Ah Moon-Wha* [Asian Culture] 14 (1977): 289-330, for more statistics on the Korean population in the Joseon Dynasty.

trafficking business facilitated by European merchants.<sup>2</sup> Of those taken to Japan, highly skilled workers such as potters, literati, physicians, Buddhist monks, and trained warriors were often allowed to live comfortable lives within their new local communities. More often than not, however, most people were enslaved as laborers and slaves within various Japanese households regardless of their class and status, with even some members of the elite *yangban* class being forced to forage for wood and kindling.<sup>3</sup>

With the conclusion of the war in 1598, some of the *piroin* began to return to Korea. The attempts of diplomatic normalization between the Joseon Dynasty and the newly established Tokugawa Shogunate in the early 1600s accelerated the gradual repatriation of these wartime captives. However, due to a lack of extensive support for such people, only some 7,000 (somewhere around seven percent of the entire *piroin* population) were actually able to return. The vast majority of Koreans either opted to stay in Japan or were unable to have their Japanese masters manumit them. For such reasons, the experiences of *piroin* were likely not extensively recorded or examined throughout the postbellum Joseon period, as the numbers of those who returned, though not small, were negligible in the face of the enormous numbers of casualties during the war. Furthermore, many of the elites as well as the Joseon court preferred to focus on the valiant military achievements, as well as stories of Neo-Confucian martyrs. As such, records regarding these people and their experiences have been scarce and limited at best.

It is thus unsurprising that research on the *piroin* has been limited when compared to the extant literature of the Great East Asian War and its impact on Korea as well as that of East Asia. This is likely because, keeping in line with the martial orientation of the Korean government,

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<sup>2</sup> See Lucio De Sousa's *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan*, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> See Kim, "The Memory of Joseon Captives during the Hideyoshi Invasions" *Hanguk Sasangshak* 40 (2012): 105-142.

Korean nationalists focused on pressing more militaristic depictions of the war in an effort to resist Japanese encroachments in the 1890s and 1900s.<sup>4</sup> For instance, following the nationalistic thinking of the West, Korean independence activist Shin Chaeho wrote a semi-fictional biography *Sugun Jaeil Wi'in Yi Sunshin-jun* [Biography of the Peerless Admiral, Yi Sunshin] in 1908, which related the life and military victories of Admiral Yi Sunshin, the greatest hero in the Great East Asian War. Harkening back to Admiral Yi, Shin wanted to emphasize the importance of the revitalization of Korea's military to defend itself against Japanese and Western aggressors, and had hoped that his work would inspire Koreans to rise up and mobilize to defend their nation's sovereignty in the face of inevitable Japanese colonization.<sup>5</sup> One consequence of this was that modern Korean studies on the *piroin* were not pursued in Korea until Korea's independence from Japan in the post-World War II era, with much of Korean scholarship on the war skewed heavily towards military narratives.

Interestingly, while Korea was focusing on consolidating a nationalist understanding of itself within East Asia, research on the *piroin* instead first began within Japan in the early 20th century. This may be less surprising if one considers the fact that after Japanese imperialism had begun to take off in the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, there was a markedly increased interest in previous antecedents to their imperial ambitions in East Asia, namely the Great East Asian War they referred to as *Kara iri*, or "entry into Tang" or "entry into China" during Edo times. This contributed to a rich development of historical study in Japan regarding

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<sup>4</sup> Han Myung-ki, "A Study of Research Trends in Korea on the Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592 (Imjin War)," *International Journal of Korean History* 18, no. 2 (2013): 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Shin published two more similar "histories" of great generals in Korean history, before Korea was ultimately annexed in 1910, at which point he exiled himself to Manchuria to protest Japanese Imperialism until his capture, incarceration, and death in Japanese occupied China in 1936.

the war in the years leading up to and beyond Japan's subsequent victories in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars in 1895 and 1905 and outright annexation of Korea in 1910.

Under the expanding historical study of the Great East Asian War, Japanese academic inroads on the *piroin* were first made under the scholarship of Masayuki Yamaguchi (山口正之; 1901 - 1964) in the 1930s, where he was able to utilize the plethora of Japanese records on Korean *piroin*, as well as that of the Jesuits in post-war Japan to piece together an understanding of Korean war captives in Japan. Masayuki focused extensively on the Christian Korean *piroin* by studying the records of Jesuits during and after the war. Masayuki's work did not delve into aspects of Korean resistance during the war, however, as the topic was considered politically incorrect in the face of extensive Japonization programs in the Korean Peninsula. In the post-World War II era, new efforts were undertaken by Japanese scholars such as Naito Shunsuke (内藤雋輔; 1896 - 1990) who took more liberties to explore these experiences of war by examining Korean resistance in the Great East Asian War and compiling a sizable corpus of sources on the subject.<sup>6</sup>

It was from this background that the first Korean attempt to study the phenomenon of the Korean war captives in the Great East Asian War emerged in 1963 under Choe Seomyeon, a notable Korean historian. During his stay in Japan as a political refugee, Choe was able to access the rich corpus of sources compiled by previous Japanese scholars such as that of Masayuki and Naito. Focusing on the institutionalized component of the extraction of human labor from Korea

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<sup>6</sup> Masayuki Yamaguchi 山口正之, <耶蘇會宣教師の入朝計劃> [Jesuit Missionary Plans of Entering Joseon], Manabu kusamura 青丘學叢 vol. 3, 1930; Naito Shunsuke 内藤雋輔, "Bunroku. Keichō-eki ni okeru hiryonin yibun" <文祿. 慶長役における 被虜人 遺聞> [Interesting Stories of Korean War Captives from the Bunroku-Keijo War], Chōsen Manabuhō 朝鮮學報 [Journal of Chōsen Studies] 49 1968, 10.



through means of capture and enslavement, Choe was the first Korean to assertively point out that the capture and exploitation of the *piroin* was a war crime.<sup>7</sup> Choe's work would be one of the first calling for Japanese recognition of its abuses during the war, which would form one of the undercurrents in its appeals against Japan's crimes against humanity during World War II. It is important to note as well, however, that Choe's studies were based exclusively on Japanese records and written in Japanese, which, despite Choe's criticism of Japan's wartime behavior, nevertheless did reflect Japanese biases regarding the war and institution of captivity, as well as the Korean academia's continued dependence upon Japanese scholars in the immediate post-colonial period.

Surprisingly, additional studies did not immediately emerge in Korea, with subsequent studies only beginning to emerge in the 1970s. This may be due to the politically turbulent conditions in the 1960s to the 1980s, during which the aforementioned Choe was also forced to seek asylum in Japan. In particular, starting in the 1960s and 1970s, a new campaign positioned President Park Chung-hee's military junta as a successor to Yi's legacy of able military leadership,<sup>8</sup> with President Park further spurring the development of a national history of Korea as part of the "reformation of consciousness." Lee Hyeongseok's, *Imjin jeonran-sa* [History of the Troubles of War of the Imjin Year] (1967),<sup>9</sup> was widely recognized as the first Korean history on the war, being published nearly twenty years after Korea's liberation from Japan and five years into Park Chung-hee's presidency. Written under the patronage of Park, the

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<sup>7</sup> Choi Seomyeon 崔書勉, *Jinshin· teiyū nananen seneki hi no hi toriko-tachi* "壬辰·丁酉七年戰役被の被虜たち" [Prisoners of the Jinshin-teiyu Seven Years' War] in *Kannichi bunkano nochisakae* 『韓日文化の後榮』 [Legacy of Korean-Japanese Culture], edited by Kangoku shiryō n kyuusho 韓國資料研究所 [Korea Materials Research Institute], 1963.

<sup>8</sup> Han, "A Study of Research Trends in Korea," 11.

<sup>9</sup> Kaeunghun Yoon, "The Change and Structure of Korean Education Policy in History," *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* 6.2 (2014): 182-184.

importance of the military narrative was emphasized throughout the entire book, with much attention paid to the Korean victories of Yi Sunshin and his peers. Later editions of the *Imjin jeonran-sa* contained Park's own calligraphy that read, "[t]hough all under heaven may be peaceful, forgetting war will certainly bring danger," once again placing the importance on military narratives and highlighting the indispensability of Park's martial role in steering Korea to success.<sup>10</sup>

In this backdrop, much of the academic research on the *piroin* was limited to factual research on Korean potters who were abducted to Japan and helped spur Japan's pottery industry, such as that of Shin Yincheol's "Imnan ttae japyeogan joseon dogongdeul" [Korean potters captured during the Imjin Disturbance] in 1976.<sup>11</sup> These articles typically emphasized how Korean potters who were forcibly resettled in Japan formed a booming industry throughout Kyushu and other parts of the Japanese Archipelago, giving rise to distinct Japanese styles such as Arita Ware and Satsuma Ware in the early 17th century. Part of this can be explained by the fact that the South Korean dictatorship was far more interested in emphasizing a particular narrative of Korean transfusion of technology to Japan, i.e., Korea's technological superiority over that of Japan during the war, rather than truly exploring the *piroin*'s experience.

Nevertheless, the landscape continued to change, as the assassination of President Park in 1979 and the gradual democratization of Korea in the 1980s saw the end of the monopoly of military narratives, allowing for the field to branch off in multiple directions. For instance, sizable developments in regional and global historical understanding of the war took place in the 1980s and 1990s, as the changing global order saw the opening of China in 1978 and the end of

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<sup>10</sup> “天下雖安，忘戰必危.” This can be found on the cover page of the 1974 edition.

<sup>11</sup> Shin Yincheol, “Imnan ttae japyeogan joseon dogongdeul” [Korean Potters who were abducted during the Imjin Disturbance] *Munhak Sasang* [Intellectual History of Literature] 10 (1976): np.

the Soviet Union in 1991. In particular, as Korea began to enter the larger East Asian and global markets, the increased need to understand Korea's identity *within* East Asia prompted the development of literature reinterpreting the so-called "Imjin Disturbance" as a regional, "Great East Asian War."

As part of this development, religious studies on Korean Catholics surprisingly broached the subject of the *piroin* in the 1980s through works such "Hangung cheonjugyo jeollaeui giwon" [The Origins of the Traditions of Korean Catholicism] in 1989, whereby scholars were able to trace how many of the first Korean Catholics were *piroin* who had converted to the Catholicism in Japan leading up to the persecutions of Christians in 1614.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Lee Wonsun first suggested in 1993 that the Great East Asian War was a major slaving expedition that contributed to the Asian arm of the global slave trade.<sup>13</sup> The more recent *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan Merchants, Jesuits and Japanese, Chinese, and Korean Slaves* by Lúcio De Sousa in 2018 similarly reflects the global dimension of the war and experiences of wartime captivity of Korean *piroin*. De Sousa in *The Portuguese Slave Trade*, however, is primarily interested in answering the question of how globalization and colonialism spearheaded by the Iberian nations of Spain and Portugal in the 16th and 17th centuries impacted the movement of people in Asia through the form of slavery. De Sousa's focus consequently relegates the problem of Korean war slaves in the Great East Asian War to a small chapter within a larger economic system. Furthermore, while De Sousa does successfully relate the experience of Korean war

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<sup>12</sup> *Hangung cheonjugyo jeollaeui giwon*, Seoul: Sogang University Press, 1989. See also the study of the Arita potter Lee ChamPyung (李參平) by No Sung-Hwan, "Ilbon nagasakihyeonui joseonin cheonjugyodoe gwanhan yeongu" [Study on Korean Catholics in Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan], *Ireo Ilmunhak* [Japanese and Japanese Literature] 49 (2011) 341-364).

<sup>13</sup> Lee Won-soon, *Joseonsidaesalonjib - an(hanguk)gwa bakk(segye)ui mannam-ui yeogsa* [History of Joseon Dynasty - The history of meeting between the inside (Korea) and the outside (the world)] (Seoul: Neutinamoo, 1993).

slaves in Japan and their adopting Japanese culture and oftentimes embedding into the Christian Japanese communities of various cities, he does not offer any conclusive discussions on the lived experiences of the *piroin* who returned to Korea as it is understandably unrelated to his research. Regardless, his analyses of Korean *piroin* who remained in Japan is useful in helping set the grounds for this research, as they complement perspectives of Korean war slaves from the Korean mainland itself.

Recent attempts to study the *piroin* in Korea have turned to more detailed and critical analyses of a handful of sources, with some scholars exploring non-traditional sources on captivity such as that of *King Seonjo's Korean Instructional Manuscript* to study particular rhetoric of the royal courts.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars have even turned to local family registers to study how the return of the Korean *piroin* was evidenced in the demographic records of select Korean towns and cities.<sup>15</sup> Utilizing digital humanities techniques and non-traditional interdisciplinary methods, this field is rapidly expanding as younger generations of Korean historians have attempted to respond to the deficiencies of available traditional sources on the *piroin*.

In this vein, other developments have emerged in the field of literature, as scholars began to make attempts to analyze the experiences of *piroin* themselves through analyses of “captivity literature” or records of mostly *yangban* elite *piroin*. So Jaeyoung’s *Imnan porodeurui haeoecheheom* [Overseas experience of Imjin Disturbance War Captives] in 1985 first proposed the autobiographical materials of *yangban* elites as potential sources that could capture the contemporary perspectives of captivity abroad with scholars having further attempted to utilize

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<sup>14</sup> “King Seonjo’s Korean instructional manuscript (1593) and his viewpoint of captive[s],” *Yinha University Korean Studies Research Institute* (54) (2019): 197-214.

<sup>15</sup> HAN, Sangwoo, “Imjin waeran p’iroin gwa tohwanindür üi hünjök ül ch’ajasö – 17segi ch’o hojök ürobot’ö” [Finding Imjin War Captives and Returnees in Household Registers of the Early Seventeenth Century] *Taedong munhwa yŏn’gu* [Taedong Cultural Research] 110 (06.2020): 173-200.

such texts to reconstruct contemporary Japan.<sup>16</sup> The first major English work dealing with the subject of the *piroin* also emerged from this field of study, with JaHyun Kim Haboush and Kenneth R. Robinson's *A Korean War Captive in Japan, 1597-1600: The Writings of Kang Hang* serving as a pioneer in introducing the experiences of *piroin* to Anglophone academia. Their translation of Gang Hang's *Ganyangrok* has since received much attention and praise for finally opening the gates to this topic, with leading scholars having commended Haboush and Robinson, stating that "the scholarly community owes these colleagues a sincere debt of gratitude for their work."<sup>17</sup>

Criticisms remain, however, that such studies naturally limited the scope of the study to the handful of literate Korean elites, whose depictions of their own experiences contained biases and that may not have been representative of other segments of Koreans. Furthermore, with regard to the case of Haboush and Robinson's translation, a broader historical analysis of the experiences of the *piroin* was not included, as it understandably lies outside of the immediate interest of translation work and making accessible the rich field for interested Koreanists. No major work in English has followed up on this initiative, however, which leaves much to be desired in the field as it is today. In response to these demands, since the early 1990s and 2000s some Korean scholars have turned to fiction as potential repositories for memories of captivity. In particular, starting with Jeong Myeonggi's analysis on the novel *Choe Cheok-jeon* in 1993,<sup>18</sup> various other sources of fiction such as Yoo Mongin's *Eou Yadam* from 17th century Korea have

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<sup>16</sup> So Jaeyoung and Kim Taejun, *Imnan porodeurui haeoecheheom* [Overseas experience of Imjin Disturbance War Captives], Council of Promoting Korean Culture, 1985.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis, James B. *Monumenta Nipponica* 70, no. 2 (2015): 297–300.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43864692>.

<sup>18</sup> Jeong Myeonggi, *Choe Cheok-jeon: Hanguk Gososeorl Geongu*, (Seoul: Iljisa, 1993).

emerged as sources that retain popular experiences of everyday life, as well as the broadening of horizons in East Asia at that time.

We can thus see that previous studies on the *piroin* and their experiences have usually been pursued along these three different tracks: 1) exploring the nature of the extraction of human labor through the capture and enslavement of *piroin*, 2) literary analysis of *yangban piroin*'s autobiographical texts, and 3) literary analysis of fictions in the genre of "captivity" and how they preserve traces of the broader segment of Korean *piroin*'s experiences of captivity. Though various components of research regarding the *piroin* already exist in these distinct areas, a more comprehensive understanding regarding the phenomenon and experience of war and wartime captivity has yet to be developed. In particular, a study placing the *piroin*'s experiences during and after the war within a broader social attempt to understand the experiences of war has not yet been attempted to this author's knowledge.

To address this, this thesis aims to explore holistically the different experiences of the Korean *piroin*, and how the various diverging stories bring to light a better understanding of Korean society during the late-16th and early-17th century. The first chapter, titled "Chapter 1: To Die than Live: Elite Preoccupations," lays out the context for the conventional narrative of the war during the late-16th and early-17th century Korean society by outlining the unique features of the Joseon court and elite class and the importance of Neo-Confucianism to their legitimacy. In particular, it focuses on how notions of honor and observance to the principles of the ideology were enmeshed to create a constricted understanding of Confucian decorum, and how this translated to the expectation of death before dishonor. It then explores how such notions were crystalized in their accounts of the war which were compiled and published in a post-war book known as the *Dongguk Shinsok Samgang Haengshildo*, or the *New Edition of Illustrations*

of *Deeds of the Three Fundamental Bonds in the Eastern Country*. By analyzing the specific episodes of people who died carrying out the deeds for each of the three fundamental bonds, this chapter will lay out the official point of view that was held by the king and his entourage of social elites during and after the Great East Asian War.

The second chapter, titled “Chapter 2: Forever a Criminal: *Yangban piroin* Appeals and Their Memory of Captivity” explores how the *yangban piroin* responded to these Neo-Confucian expectations through an analysis of autobiographical records of the *yangban piroin*. The chapter analyzes the records of Gang Hang’s *Ganyangrok* and Jeong Heedeuk’s *Wolbong Haesangrok*, and how each source utilized the same language of the Confucian state ideology, but arrived at a different conclusion from those who chose death in Chapter 1. In particular, the analysis explores how both of the *yangban piroin* stretched the constricted definitions of loyalty and filial piety to better suit their needs, namely survival. Through this, the author raises the question of whether a singular Neo-Confucian understanding may have existed within Korea at that time, and how this shaped the role of Confucianism in Korea. Even so, the author finds that both Gang and Jeong write in a manner deeply aware of the criticism they may receive from their peers and king, as well as the consequences of such a stigma upon themselves and their family. This ultimately shows the frigid climate within the political landscape of Korea and the immense pressure that the *yangban* elites faced to justify themselves in the postbellum period.

The last chapter, “Chapter 3: The Virtue of Survival: Popular Perspectives” explores the experiences of other *piroin* and their differences with the previous two chapters. The chapter closely reads the novel *Choe Cheok-jeon*, or the *Tale of Choe Cheok*, as well as several other works of fiction that capture the popular perspectives on their captivity and experience abroad. In this sense, the available texts serve as pinholes by which the author is able to make more general

conclusions of the broader segment of Koreans' response to the war and captivity. The chapter itself will delve into the themes of "virtue of survival," and story of women who survived, whereby the *piroin's* life, whether it be deliberate or not, often repudiated the constricted language of Neo-Confucianism. With an added component of Buddhist connections to the broader Korean people, this chapter also raises questions of the extent of the Confucianization of Korea by the Great East Asian War, as well as how the people may have realistically responded to the hardship of war and loss. This chapter thus adds a much needed layer of complexity to the dialogues present within Korea during a time of transition by introducing a popular narrative that was non-Neo-Confucian.

It is important to note that this research, however, is not without challenges or limitations. First of all, despite the aim in making holistic generalizations regarding late-16th and early-17th century Korean society, the limited number of sources that directly capture the *piroin's* experiences leads to a valid criticism on whether this thesis' findings are truly representative of the experiences of the *piroin*. Furthermore, there is another question of generalizability, when one considers the fact that a larger number of *piroin* never returned home from Japan. Though many were barred from being able to return, a sizable number, especially artisans, actively chose to remain in Japan rather than return to their homes. This consequently raises questions regarding how some Koreans experienced the war, and how they viewed their lives before the war. In this sense, it is debatable as to whether the analyses of the sources that the author provides can fully illuminate details regarding 16th and 17th century Korea. In any case, the experiences that are studied here are most likely only part of the whole picture of the Korean experiences of war and captivity.



Even so, this thesis makes a unique contribution to the extant literature by holistically analyzing how different *piroin* who returned from their captivity differently remembered their experiences and how these reflected the various experiences and social backgrounds of the Korean people. By bringing together the different silos of research and adding new analyses, the author attempts to highlight how the phenomenon of war and the consequent responses of Koreans can be seen through the stories and narratives of Korean *piroin*. Through this analysis, it is the intention of the author to underscore how segments of the late-16th and early-17th century Korean society aimed to make sense of the experiences of the Great East Asian War, and how these stories of captivity fit into the landscape of diverse opinions and perspectives within a dynamic postbellum Korea.

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#### Notes on Translation and Romanization

All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are the author's own. It has been the author's intention to translate the text as closely from the original as possible. When possible, he has added parentheses to help explain certain words and phrases, and square brackets to indicate words and phrases added to aid in the reading of the translation. As for the romanization of Korean words, the author uses the Revised Romanization of Korean for all terms, except for names of people who have used other romanization or spelling conventions.

## Chapter 1:

### To Die than Live: Elite Preoccupations

In 1593, after two years of intense fighting, a ceasefire of sorts was achieved when the Korean-Chinese counteroffensive fought the Japanese offensive to a standstill near the Korean capital of Seoul.<sup>19</sup> Within a few months, the Japanese forces retreated to the southern coast of Korea.<sup>20</sup> Little fighting occurred after this point, with both the Chinese and Japanese forces exhausted by the internecine struggle and frustrated by poor logistics. As the frontlines stabilized, both Chinese and Japanese forces attempted to sound out a peace deal, and in 1596, the Ming court decided to dispatch a joint Korean-Chinese delegation to Japan with the hopes of restoring the status quo.<sup>21</sup>

News of a renewed peace deal in 1596 was received with much chagrin in the Joseon court, as they had not been party to the decision between the Chinese and Japanese parties. Having rejected the initial offer to take part in the peace deals in 1593, the Joseon court had not been party to the negotiations since then. As such, in 1596, the Joseon court grudgingly called up the Korean scholar-official Hwang Shin to head the Korean delegation of the peace talks, as he had been personally demanded by the Ming diplomat Shen Weijing.<sup>22</sup> Demoted to a secondary role in diplomatic discussions between China and Japan, Hwang's mission was ultimately unsuccessful as the Chinese and Japanese failed to come to terms.<sup>23</sup> By 1597, the peace talks

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel Hawley, *The Imjin War: Japan's sixteenth-century invasion of Korea and attempt to conquer China*, (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch; Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2005): 324-327.

<sup>20</sup> Hawley, *The Imjin War*, 339; Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*, (Norman : University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 180.

<sup>21</sup> Hawley, 343.

<sup>22</sup> *The Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*, vol. 23, pg. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Hawley, 349-374; Swope, 187-226.

collapsed and the Korean Peninsula would once again be engulfed in warfare for another year before the Japanese withdrew from Korea altogether in 1598.

Though Hwang's mission did not succeed in achieving peace as hoped, Hwang nevertheless managed to compile and bring extensive information regarding Japan through his diary *Ilbon Wanghwan Ilgi (Daily Records of Travels in Japan)*.<sup>24</sup> Ranging from the diplomatic maneuverings in Japan to the various aspects of Japanese society and economy, Hwang paid much attention to the circumstances in Japan and their preparedness for further fighting in the peninsula.<sup>25</sup>

Hwang's writings are also notable, however, for his treatment of the large numbers of Korean *piroin* (i.e., people captured and taken to Japan) in the Archipelago. Following five years of warfare, a large number of Koreans had been captured and taken abroad to reside within various Japanese cities. Excerpted in the *Jaejo Beonbangji (Records of Nation that Helped Reconstruct Korea)*, one of the most interesting episodes regarding the *piroin* involves the letters Hwang received from the 17 Korean women living in the household of a Japanese daimyo (i.e., a Japanese great lord) at Osaka during his stay near there. Of the letters he received, Hwang pays particular attention to the letter written by an unnamed *yangban* woman beseeching the delegation to help free her and allow her to return home.

Ms. Such-and-such, Hwang writes, was part of the *yangban* class who had lived in Seoul before the war. Following the invasion of the Japanese forces in 1592, her family had been

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<sup>24</sup> Hwang is also recorded in the *Veritable Records* giving his own report of his experiences in Japan. See *Veritable Records*, vol. 23, pg. 134.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Hwang's actual writings have been considered lost. Though there are extant versions of the text, many scholars consider these to be incomplete and heavily edited. However, we can parse some of the missing pieces through the text *Jaejo Beonbangji (Or Records of the Nation that Helped Reconstruct Korea)* written by Shin Gyeong in the late-1600s. The episode that follows is not included in the extant version of Hwang's *Ilbon Wanghwan Ilgi*, but that of the *Jaejo Beonbangji*.

displaced and sought refuge in the mountains nearby. When the Japanese forces began to search the mountains and gorges for refugees, she was separated from her parents before she was captured by Japanese soldiers and later taken to Japan. Unaware of whether her parents were still alive since her capture, the woman writes:

O Heaven, o Heaven! What sin have I committed that you have had [through] me bring about this unspeakable grief and cruelty? If my parents have already passed away, then that is it; but if by chance my parents have survived to this time, then when [if ever] could their tender feelings and sad thoughts for me end? Between Heaven and Earth, could there be anything as painful and pitiful as this circumstance? The reason for my suffering in captivity in a foreign country for five years... is due to my sole desire of returning back to my old country alive and seeing my parents [once more]. This thought is my sole hope...<sup>26</sup>

Hwang notes how the entire Korean delegation was deeply moved by the letter, with some even shedding tears for this woman and her struggles. Though not explicit, the entire delegation was likely also impressed with the literary talent of this unnamed woman who could write so expressively and persuasively of her desire to return home and fulfill her filial duties to her parents.<sup>27</sup>

What is interesting, however, is that despite Hwang's sympathy and respect for the woman, it also seems likely that Hwang deemed the *yangban* women and other captives non-essential to the mission and chose not to rescue them. Hwang wrote, "her story was one of misery and many sighs, and her understanding of the world was deep; however, by not being able to kill herself at once, she has *disgraced* her body. *It is a shame.*"<sup>28</sup> By judging the captive woman as sullied, Hwang summarily dismisses the woman as one who had likely been "defiled"

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<sup>26</sup> “天乎天乎。妾有何罪。使妾若是之哀痛慘毒乎。父母既死則已矣。若或至今生存。則其戀慕哀思。何時可已。天地間豈有如此可痛可憐之事乎。拘在他國。今將五歲。。。只欲生還故國。見我父母。惟是之望而已。”

<sup>27</sup> *Jaejo Beonbangji*, vol 4.

<sup>28</sup> “言辭悽惋。通達事理。但不能一死。以辱其身。惜哉。” *Italics mine.*

by the enemy. Some may argue that by placing the onus of the defilement upon the woman herself and identifying her story as one of disgrace and shame, Hwang participates in the further dehumanization of the woman by denying her life and survival meaning. On the other hand, it also brings to light the helplessness of the *yangban* elites and the Joseon court themselves, as they were unable to respond and help those in need. Perhaps their belittling of the women's story was a defensive response to their own inability to change the status quo. After all, the fact that Hwang's diary entries simply skip on to mention an earthquake that happened the following day with no mention of the letters and the women who sent them is suggestive that they were unable to save these women from slavery.

At this point, one ought to ask a question regarding Hwang's appraisal of the woman's circumstances: Why did her surviving result in her body being "disgraced?" In other words, why did Hwang suggest that she should have killed herself rather than surviving? The answer to this question helps us not only understand how Korean society looked like during the Joseon period in the eyes of the *yangban* and elite class, but also how these subsequently shaped their expectations about "decorum" during and after the war. To best outline this, the chapter first explores the social and philosophical underpinnings of the *yangban* class by examining Joseon Korea's social divisions and the national ideology of Neo-Confucianism leading up to the war. The second part takes a closer look at the experiences of the so-called "laudable" Koreans in the *Dongguk Sinsok Samgang Haengsildo (DSSH)*, or the *New Edition of Illustrations of Deeds of the Three Fundamental Bonds in the Eastern Country*, and how the stories of the war dead make tangible the particular Neo-Confucian interests and expectations of the elite regarding death and survival in war.

### **The *Yangban* Class and their Understanding of Captivity**

To best answer the aforementioned questions, one must first ask the question of “What is the *yangban*?” Korean social historian Miyajima Hiroshi writes that the *yangban* has three well-known definitions in Korea: 1) the literary and martial officials of the Korean court (hence the name *yangban*, which means two orders or classes), 2) the social and political elite in the social hierarchy of Korea, and 3) a common expression for a woman to refer to her husband before other people after the late 19th century.<sup>29</sup> Each of these definitions show us that the concept of the *yangban* has evolved over time to reflect changes and new dimensions in Korean society, which adds to the elusive nature of the *yangban* class. It is important to note that unlike the Medieval samurai in Japan or nobles in Europe, the social status of the “*yangban*” was not legally defined within Korea. Rather, the status was a relative measure of their achievements as Neo-Confucian paragons in the communities they lived in. As such, many of the *yangban* felt a particular need to excel in the civil service exams, while also properly adhering to the Neo-Confucian virtues that they were supposed to study and defend.

John Duncan writes that the concept of a *yangban* class began to emerge in the late Goryeo Dynasty (circa 1270-1392),<sup>30</sup> during which Korea was still a largely feudal society with autonomous military aristocratic families dominating the political and social landscape.<sup>31</sup> In this loose feudal system, a group of aristocrats from these families had settled in the capital (to be henceforth referred to as “central aristocracy”) to form the backbone of the central government’s bureaucracy and aid the king in administering his kingdom.<sup>32</sup> Scions of prominent families of the

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<sup>29</sup> Miyajima Hiroshi, *Yangban*, 29. In regards to the last item, one can compare it to how the address “sir” was vulgarized in the modern Anglosphere.

<sup>30</sup> John Duncan, *The Origins of the Choson Dynasty*, (Seattle, Washington; London, England: University of Washington Press, 2000), 87-88.

<sup>31</sup> Yi, *New History of Korea*, 94-105.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-112.

central aristocracy tended to monopolize power within the government, as they often succeeded their fathers in high positions.<sup>33</sup> These families would come to form the core of the *yangban* class towards the end of the Goryeo Dynasty.

Though the central aristocracy in power did not significantly change, a distinct *yangban* class began to emerge in the late Goryeo Dynasty as the nation underwent significant change. In particular, the subjugation of Korea to the Mongol Yuan Dynasty played a large role in reshaping the central aristocracy's identity. Part of this began when the central bureaucracy finally managed to reclaim control over the government following a lengthy military regime. Prior to the Mongol invasions, Korea had been ruled by a series of military strongmen, who had ruled in the stead of the Goryeo king, much like the Japanese Shogun ruling with the authority of their Emperor. One consequence of this was the suppression of the central bureaucracy's power in favor of the military strongmen. The Yuan Dynasty's subjugation of Korea in 1270 finally ended the military dictatorship, catapulting the bureaucrats back to power.<sup>34</sup> Neo-Confucianism also played an important role, as it began to emerge as a prestige learning and political system during this time under Mongol sponsorship.<sup>35</sup> Promoting a rationalist ethical philosophy, Neo-Confucianism emerged as an alternative state ideology to what came to be seen as the meddling and decadent Buddhist religion.<sup>36</sup> Given that Confucian learning was already widely studied amongst the central aristocracy,<sup>37</sup> Neo-Confucianism came to be seen as a practical and uniting platform for socio-political reform in the Goryeo dynasty amongst the central aristocracy.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 118-119.

<sup>34</sup> For more information on the military regime, see Shultz's *Generals and Scholars*.

<sup>35</sup> Bary, *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, 2-4.

<sup>36</sup> Yi, 166.

<sup>37</sup> Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosun Dynasty*, 224, 237-238, 245-246; Yi, 130, 160.

In the backdrop of these developments, Yi Wusung points to the introduction of officials of lower and humbler origins in high positions of the government during the reign of King Chungyeol (r., 1274-1308) as a potential point whereby the central aristocracy began to develop an identity based on bureaucratic service.<sup>38</sup> In particular, Duncan claims that civil bureaucrats belonging to the central aristocracy aimed to differentiate themselves from these new political factions via drawing upon the legacy of the Song Dynasty's *shidafu*, or scholar-officials. In other words, the central aristocracy began to define its authority in terms of family histories of office holding within the central bureaucracy rather than their originally military roots.<sup>39</sup> Since the central bureaucracy was composed of the *mun* and *mu* (literary and military) orders, the central aristocrats of both orders began to refer to themselves collectively as the “*yangban*” or the “two orders of government.”

Following the end of the Goryeo Dynasty and the establishment of a new Joseon Dynasty in 1392, the *yangban* took it upon themselves to reform Korean society along Neo-Confucian lines. They supported General Yi Seonggye, the future founder of the Joseon Dynasty, and seized political initiative to enact a flurry of reforms following his ascension.<sup>40</sup> By criticizing the political meddling and abuses of Buddhist monks and temples, the *yangban* demoted the faith from its place as national religion and aimed to introduce a new national “religion” of Neo-Confucianism with aggressive policies to end the abuses of the Buddhist faith. To this end, they promulgated new laws banning the construction of Buddhist temples in the capital and cities,

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<sup>38</sup> In Duncan, 86. See more at “Yijo sadaebu ui kibon songgyok” [The basic nature of the Choson dynasty scholar-officials]. In Yi U-song, *Han'guk ui yoksa sang* [Korea's historical aspects] (Seoul: Ch'angjak Kwa Pip'yongsa, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> Duncan, 87.

<sup>40</sup> Yi, 162-165.



banishing them to the mountains and rural areas of Korea.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the official examinations for monks were discontinued for large periods of time, leading to the gradual depletion of talented monks in various temples. Such policies were continued throughout the five centuries of Joseon rule in Korea. This is not to say that Buddhism in Korea was completely wiped out from the Korean consciousness, however. Buddhism continued to offer religious comfort to the Korean masses, while members of the royal family continued to practice Buddhism in secret.

In the midst of these socio-political changes, it is important to note that the term *yangban* also began to expand outward to include non-capital residing, local gentry families in Korea at this time.<sup>42</sup> As a result, there came to be two types of *yangban*. The first were the original group of scholar-officials who drew their lineage from central aristocratic bureaucrats who served as officials during the Goryeo Dynasty. Given that these *yangban* lived clustered in the capital, they were referred to as the *jaebyeong yangban*, or capital-residing *yangban*. The second group were the *yangban* who lived outside the capital in their estates, and hence referred to as *jaeji yangban*, or landed *yangban*. Possessing large estates and abundant human labor in the form of slaves and sharecroppers, the *jaeji yangban* enjoyed enormous social privileges as a kind of gentry class in rural communities.

The main reason why the *jaeji yangban* were considered *yangban* despite not serving as a scholar-official was due to the fact any who could claim a clear lineage to a prominent official or influential scholar from the past could claim to be a *yangban*. This makes more sense when one considers the fact that many *jaebyeong yangban* were descended from the Goryeo central

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<sup>41</sup> Yi, 199; Duncan 224, 237-238, 245-246.

<sup>42</sup> Duncan, 88.

aristocrats, who themselves were descendants of families of landed local aristocrats. Through a complex system of pedigree tracing, many of the landed local aristocracy from Goryeo times could thus become a *yangban* during the early period of the Joseon Dynasty.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, given that the *jaeji yangban* often produced talented scions who passed their examinations to become scholar-officials, many members of the *jaeji yangban* saw themselves become members of the *jaebyeong yangban*. This kind of mobility was also reflected in the movement by the *jaebyeong yangban*, who after retiring from office, often went away from the capital to reside with their *jaeji yangban* relatives. The continued commingling and migration of people from the capital to the countryside played a large role in the diffusion of the *yangban* class across the entire Korean Peninsula.<sup>44</sup>

It is important to note that pedigree alone was not enough, however, for the title of the *yangban*. This was because the *jaeji yangban* were technically not bureaucrats and consequently could not technically claim to be *yangban*. This was particularly the case given that there were no clear laws that fully established the *yangban* class as a hereditary social class of elites unlike those in the Goryeo Dynasty, with the law only officially stipulating a free versus unfree status amongst its people. In fact, the concept of the scholar-official class that the *yangban* drew from China was not based on heredity but on meritocratic accomplishments, namely through succeeding in passing examinations to become an official (*daebu*) or by becoming an influential scholar (*sa*). Furthermore, in China, the title of a scholar-official could not be conferred upon successive generations based on pedigree.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Miyajima, 31-37.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

The *jaeji yangban* were keenly aware of the political ramifications for a full adaptation of the Chinese model of the *sadaebu* (c. *shidafu*), namely the likelihood of their demotion in Korean society. Thus, to best preserve their own interests, the *jaeji yangban* conditioned the inheritance of the *yangban* title upon the *yangban* family's observation of the rites associated with Confucianism and cultivating their knowledge of it. These entailed residing within a set town with other *jaeji yangban* of the same surname, performing the annual rites of ancestor worship, and serving the king via passing the examinations to become scholar-officials. For women, it was further expected that they show devotion to their husbands and preserve their sexual modesty.<sup>46</sup> In other words, actions mattered more than simple pedigree.

These expectations reflected the Neo-Confucian concept of the *samgang*, or the “three fundamental bonds” of loyalty, filial piety, and female obedience and chastity. The *samgang* was a philosophical term that emphasized the hierarchical loyalty between father and son, lord and servant, and husband and wife.<sup>47</sup> Though the original principle of the *samgang* emphasized the superior in each relationship, namely the lord, father, and husband, to lead and show their inferior counterpart the proper ways to observe the Confucian way, its meaning in Confucian circles both in China and Korea changed to mean a kind of complete devotion and loyalty of the inferior to his or her superior.

In the face of these obligations, the *samgang* became an ethical code for the *yangban* class. Since the inheritance of the *yangban* title depended heavily upon the observation of these ethical codes and other related rites, if a member of a *yangban* family conducted themselves in a

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> The 君爲臣綱 (k. gunwi shingang; ch. junwei chengang) or “the service of a retainer to his lord,” 父爲子綱 (k. buwi jagang; ch. fuwei zigang) or the “filial piety of a child to one’s parents,” and 夫爲婦綱 (k. buwi bugang; ch. fuwei fugang), “female obedience to her husband.”

manner that detracted from the *samgang*, it was seen as a threat to the entire extended family. Furthermore, since that the *yangban* class depended so heavily on their prestige and honor, any kind of detraction from the Confucian orthodoxy was seen as potentially destabilizing. Whether it be through an honor killing, forced suicide, or disinheriting of the said family member, a propitiatory action was often considered necessary to preserve the family honor and isolate the said detractor from the family.

What is interesting is that during the war, being captured and taken abroad as war slaves was considered a breach of the *samgang*. Beyond the obvious skepticism of survivors being potential double agents, many of the *yangban* class considered the *yangban piroin* as people who had dishonored themselves through not fulfilling the Confucian expectation of loyalty for *yangban* men. This was the case since leaving the state without the explicit approval of the king was seen as a treasonous act. As for *yangban* women, to be “following” or being captured by another man was seen as an act of infidelity to their husbands or otherwise male members of the family. It was for such reasons that many members of the *yangban* class chose to resist and die in the process rather than be remembered for their “failure” to protect their honor and kill themselves. These stringent codes and rhetoric of absolute loyalty and moral purity would come to define the *yangban* expectations of decorum during and after the war.

In the aftermath of war, records clearly suggest that these strict codes were applied to a large swath of *piroin*, many of whom were generally viewed with increased scrutiny by the state. For many of the *yangban piroin*, their loyalty was often questioned. One of the best known examples was Park Suyoung who had repatriated himself with Jeong Heedeuk in 1599. Park was a low-ranking official serving in Seoul, who had been captured during the war and taken to Tsushima as a *piroin*. Though Park enjoyed a comfortable life in Tsushima as a valued literati, he

nevertheless returned home with his family under the behest of the Korean mission to Japan. The Joseon court, sceptical of Park's allegiances, eventually framed him of espionage and treason, where after brutal torture and examination Park and his son were executed. Park's story was not unique as Gang Sajun who had been repatriated in 1601 was also similarly questioned, despite his service as a volunteer spy in Japan alongside fellow *piroin* Gang Hang. Though the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* do not mention Gang Sajun afterwards, one can assume the treatment he received was likely similar to that of Park.<sup>48</sup>

This Neo-Confucian standard of loyalty was also applied to broader segments of the Korean population during the war, as is evinced by the Joseon court's language regarding many of the *piroin*. For instance, the *Veritable Records* contain instances in which King Seonjo referred to his subjects under Japanese occupation as people who had surrendered and "entered the midst of [the Japanese.]"<sup>49</sup> Even when attempting to persuade these Koreans to leave the occupation zone and return to Korean soil, King Seonjo writes in Medieval Korean that he will not press charges against them for their implied betrayal of the state. By suggesting that they will be "swept away" and killed as part of the enemy when the time comes for the Korean and Chinese forces to liberate the conquered provinces, King Seonjo adds that this offer of amnesty will only be available for a limited period of time.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Park Suyoung's story can be found in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* under September 28th, 1605 (Year 38 of King Seonjo's reign), while Gang Sajun's story can be found under April 26th, 1601 (Year 32 of King Seonjo's reign).

<sup>49</sup> "...多數投入其中." See *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* under September 9th, 1593 (Year 26 of King Seonjo's reign)

<sup>50</sup> "이제란 너희 그런 의심을 먹디 말오 서르, 권흥, 여 다 나오면 너희를 각별이 죄 주디 아닐 새 ㅈㄴ니 아니라... 네 사던 ㄷㅇ 도라와 네대로 도로 살면 우연흥, 라 이제 곧 아니 나오면 예게도 주글 거시오 나라히 평당흥, ㄴ 휘면 너훤ㄷ, ㄹ 아니 뉘오츠, 라 흥, ㅍ, ㄹ며 당병이 황흥ㅇ도와 평안도애 ㄱ, ㄷ, ㄱ흥, 옛고 경샹 전라도애 ㄱ, ㄷ, ㄱㅇ 이셔 예 곧 과글리 제 새 ㅈ 흥ㅇ 곧 아니 건너가면 요스, 이 함병흥, 여 부산 동ㅇㅇㅇ 인ㅇ, ㄴ 예ㄷ, ㄹ홀 다 털

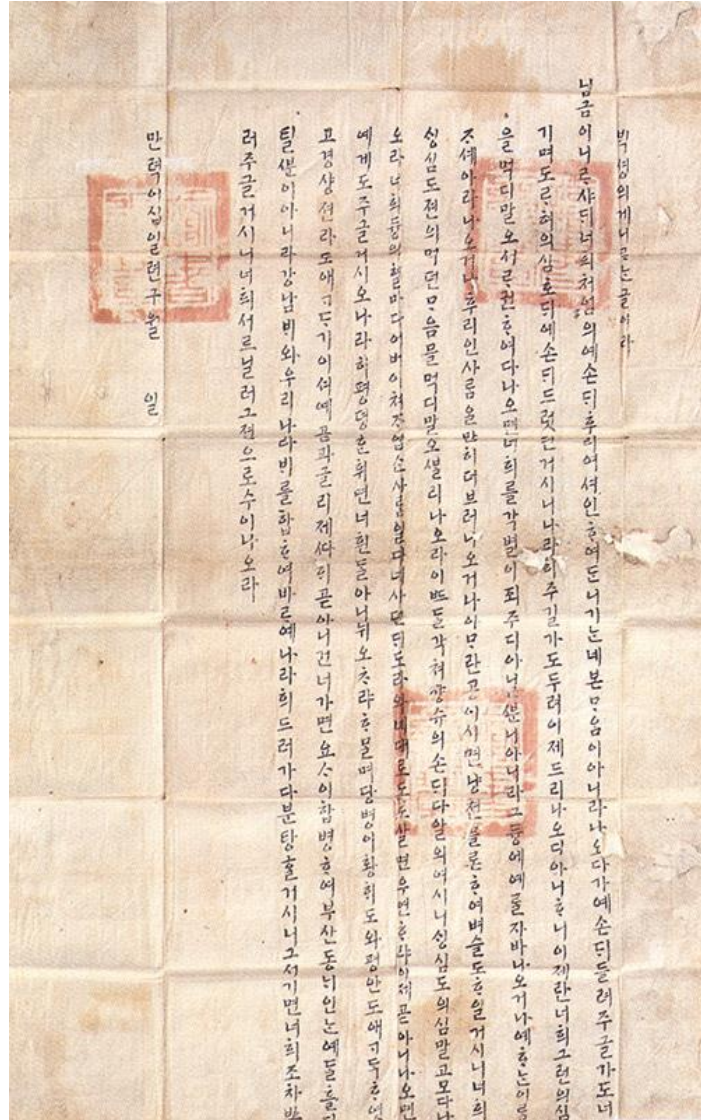


Image of “The Royal Edict of King Seonjo Written in Hangul”

All in all, we see that due to the unique circumstances behind the war as well as the particular orthodoxy proposed by the government, a particular language of criminality was expanded for all members of Korean society who failed to resist the Japanese and cooperated with them. Due to the nature of the *yangban* class, *yangban piroin* were under immense pressure to prove their loyalty to the state, namely through death, while those who *failed* to die often had

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새그이 아니라 강남 비와 우리나라 비를 합쳐 여바르 예나라희 드러가 다 분탕혀 르 거시니 그 저기면 너희조차 배러 주글 거시니 너희 서르 닐러 그 전으로 수이 나오라.”

to face the stigma of being a potential traitor, a dynamic that will be further explored in Chapter 2. As for the larger masses of Korean people, it is debatable as to whether such framing did have the intended impact of motivating them into patriotism. Their perspectives on the war and captivity will be further studied in Chapter 3. With these in mind, this chapter will continue to explore how these stringent Neo-Confucian expectations manifested itself in the various narratives produced in the aftermath of the Great East Asian War.

***Dongguk Shinsok Samgang Haengshildo: Crystalizing Elite Rhetoric***

In 1598, war in Korea finally came to an end. Though the Japanese had left the Korean Peninsula, the devastation wrought by seven years of internecine warfare was still there for all to see. Nearly two-thirds of Korea's arable land had been destroyed, and one-fifth of Korea's population, some two million people, were dead or missing. Of the two million, anywhere between 20,000 to 100,000 Koreans were abducted to Japan as war slaves, of whom only some 7,000 people managed to return home. These signs of devastation were altogether a stinging reminder for the Joseon court of its inadequacies that had led to its humiliation in the war. The depredation of war was not the only thing that the Joseon court was concerned about, however. The initial rage of the Korean populace following the King's retreat to the Chinese border that culminated in the burning of the royal palace was a clear sign of the commoners' frustration with the king and his government, while Lee Monghak's revolt in 1596 further underscored the fragility of the nation's unity. By the war's conclusion it thus became evident that the nation was in need of not only a physical reconstruction, but also a socio-political one as well.

For such reasons, when King Seonjo returned to the recaptured capital of Seoul in 1593, the Border Defense Council recommended that the King issue a decree of promulgating the official return of the Joseon court to the capital. What is interesting is the fact that the Council

claimed that the reason for doing so was because “the people in all four directions *will most definitely not know immediately of your return.*”<sup>51</sup> This underscores the fact that the court was acutely aware of its loss of monarchical legitimacy, whereby the common people were completely unaware and perhaps even apathetic as to whether their king had returned to the capital. In other words, the Council was keenly aware of the seeming lack of political centeredness and cohesion within society writ large. Thus, the Council explicitly emphasizes the need for the restoration of the status quo of the Joseon Dynasty through this promulgation, with the head of state reinstated in the political heart of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>52</sup>

The Council further added that the king ought to make known the stories of “*loyal servants, filial sons, and devoted women...* [so] that it may be widely told outside.”<sup>53</sup> Through making known these heroes and martyrs of Confucian virtues, the court was reestablishing the Neo-Confucian moral fabric of the state. By bringing forth a cluster of morally upright citizens, the royal court sought to recrystallize national unity through political notions of Neo-Confucian loyalty, filial piety, and female modesty in a shell-shocked society. Though it is debatable as to whether such programs of social reformation had any real significant results, it is undeniable that many appreciated the honor and prestige that such recognitions brought upon the family. This was because such systems were a persisting form of governmental welfare, by which instances of individual bravery were endorsed with royal approval and later awarded with gifts and privileges from the state. The Council and King thus actively sought to politically charge the people, as well as win the support of the family members of these Neo-Confucian martyrs and heroes who may have turned otherwise against the King.

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<sup>51</sup> “自上還于舊都之日，四方之人，必未及時知之。”

<sup>52</sup> “此舉係四方觀瞻，若爲教書，通諭四方，似爲便當。”

<sup>53</sup> “遭亂之後，忠臣、孝子、烈女褒錄事，並入於教書中，諷諭外方，亦似無妨。敢稟。” Italics Mine.



This project of establishing legitimacy was fully institutionalized in 1595, after the war had entered a lull in 1593 and he had returned to the capital. The Sino-Korean alliance had repulsed and fought the Japanese forces to a standstill in the southern provinces, and peace talks were being held between the Chinese and Japanese. During this time, the Joseon court had been demoted to a lower position in the negotiation process, lacking political weight to fully push its own agenda. Furthermore, criticisms persisted that King Seonjo had abandoned his people. In response to these deficiencies, King Seonjo ordered a large-scale national memorialization program of the martyrs of the war on July 12th, 1595, stating: “The business of rightly printing out and making known the stories of those who died doing their part will be assigned to the Border Defense Council.”<sup>54</sup> By repeating the same policy that he had pursued two years ago in 1593, King Seonjo was committing heavily to the rejuvenation of Korea’s national spirit through the language of Neo-Confucianism and the *samgang*. Furthermore, he was investing heavily into the establishment of a new alliance between himself and the families of the Neo-Confucian martyrs whose message the Joseon court had co-opted in its propagandistic mission. King Seonjo was interested in the reconstitution of the socio-political landscape in the aftermath of war, criticizing the decline and stagnation of the literary components of the government and emphasizing the necessity to renovate and replace academies of classical learning with a martial curriculum to train soldiers.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately, given that the king had demanded a strict system of verification of the stories of martyrs before their publication, the memorialization project quickly lost momentum and became bogged down under bureaucratic malaise. Furthermore, the resumption of hostilities

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<sup>54</sup> “...事變後, 死節旌表之人, 宜先印出, 頒諸中外事, 言于備邊司。”

<sup>55</sup> “我國文弊太勝, 如不關書院, 姑爲革罷。各道大都護, 宜立武學, 如訓練院, 使之養兵鍊業。”

in 1597 in the second phase of the war ultimately doomed the project, as scholar-officials working on the verification of materials were inundated with a massive body of new records of martyrs who died from the particularly brutal and violent Japanese offensive from 1597 to 1598. Moreover, though King Seonjo had initially emphasized the importance of the military and the militia, his decision to credit his closer scholar-officials and himself for their victory over Japan served to spark a political debate on how to best determine who had played the most important role in the war. Due to these factors, the project ultimately ground to a halt in the later years of King Seonjo's reign, as the king increasingly became ill and unable to rule. Nevertheless, though the records failed to be published under the king's reign, the preliminary research and institution for this project laid the grounds for the publication of what would come to be known as the *Dongguk Shinsok Samgang Haengshildo (DSSH)*,<sup>56</sup> during King Seonjo's successor Prince Gwanghae's rule.

Inheriting his father's commemorative project, Prince Gwanghae largely continued the collection and canonization practices of his King Seonjo. Prince Gwanghae pursued the project with great alacrity, which was instrumental in reviving the publication project that had been delayed for nearly two decades under his father's reign.<sup>57</sup> Not stopping at simply awarding the wartime heroes and martyrs, Prince Gwanghae aggressively pushed for the publication of a single bound volume of these stories on the basis of the three fundamental bonds of Neo-Confucianism, or *samgang*, of loyalty, filial piety, and female modesty in 1611. When the Ministry of Rites and the Office of Special Advisors delayed the project, citing their disagreement with Prince Gwanghae on only compiling records on those who had died during

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<sup>56</sup> To be referred to as *DSSH* from now on.

<sup>57</sup> 傳曰: "壬辰以後忠孝、義烈之行何限? 玉堂以事係重大, 遷延不勘, 已至二十年之久。歲月逾久, 事迹逾埋, 豈不可惜? 從速啓下刊頒, 以爲勸礪 (事, 言于弘文館。)"

and after the reign of King Seonjo, the project again ran aground in 1612. Through his persistent urging, and later frustrated rebukes,<sup>58</sup> the related departments were only able to compile and finalize a volume of the *DSSH* in 1617, more than 6 years after Prince Gwanghae had first begun the project.

It is important to note that Prince Gwanghae's enthusiasm for the project was very much related to his predecessor's preoccupations with legitimacy. When Prince Gwanghae ascended the throne as king in 1608, many saw his coronation with concern. This was because Prince Gwanghae was the second son of King Seonjo, born to a concubine, who had a much younger brother with a stronger claim to the throne. Due to his older age and successful tenure as prince regent from 1592 to 1608, however, Prince Gwanghae was able to garner enough support for his succession. Unfortunately, Prince Gwanghae's "lowly" birth prevented him from receiving the customary investiture, or imperial recognition, from the Ming Dynasty.<sup>59</sup> The Ming court particularly found fault with the fact that Prince Gwanghae had skipped the line of succession, as his younger brother had greater legitimacy as King Seonjo's successor. Partly in response to these threats to his throne, Prince Gwanghae was pressured to eliminate and kill his older and younger brothers, and later even demoted the official queen of his predecessor. This fundamentally tarnished his reputation as a tyrannical, fratricidal, and morally bankrupt king. Due to the loss of political capital, it is likely that Prince Gwanghae actively sought to increase

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<sup>58</sup> “壬子六月初一日 朔甲子傳于禮曹曰: “壬辰以後, 孝子、忠臣、烈女等實行, 速爲勘定頒布事, 曾已累教, 尙未舉行。當此人心質質、義理晦塞之日, 褒崇忠節, 激礪頹俗, 莫大急務也。該曹可急速議勘。”

<sup>59</sup> Han Myung-ki, *The Imjin War and Korea-China Relations* (Goyang: Yuksa Bipyongsa, 1999), 191; *Gwanghae-gun* [Prince Gwanghae] (Goyang: Yuksa Bibyongsa, 2020), 75-77.

his legitimacy in the early years of his reign through a massive number of recognition and awards of war heroes and the war dead as well as the publishing of the *DSSH*.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to note that the *DSSH* is unique from other *Samgang Haengshildos* in several ways. The first most important difference is that unlike previous pedagogical renditions of the *Samgang Haengshildo*, the *DSSH* has a stronger political agenda of affirming national unity while also showcasing the benevolence of the Joseon Dynasty. In particular, the *DSSH* was only composed of Korean heroes from the Three Kingdoms Period (56 BC - 668 AD) to the early 1600s, where among the stories of some 1507 Koreans who had died in the spirit of the *samgang*, 565 individuals, or nearly 40% of the total, were those killed during the Great East Asian War. Though many of the people were of the *yangban* class, many commoners and even *nobi*, or slaves were included in this list, which naturally broadened its appeal. Furthermore, many of these individuals also received Prince Gwanghae's royal patronage, which served to emphasize the fact that the Joseon court sought to actively identify heroes and martyrs of war and suitably grant them with rewards and prestiges, as a benevolent sage-monarch should according to Confucian principles.<sup>61</sup> Of the Korean martyrs who had received the patronage of the Joseon Dynasty, nearly 58% were awarded during the reign of Prince Gwanghae alone,<sup>62</sup> which showcases the degree and scope of his attempts to assuage the Korean population.

In terms of its structure, the *DSSH* was composed in a manner in which the experiences of the martyrs were typically addressed individually in a single folio (see image below). The

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<sup>60</sup> Lee Sangyu, et al, *Dongguk Shinsok Samgang Haengshildo*. [New Edition of Illustrations of Deeds of the Three Fundamental Bonds in the Eastern Country]. (Seoul: King Sejong the Great Memorial Association. 2015. [Original publication 1615.]), 30, 33. See also, *Prince Gwanghae's Daily Records*, Jungcho version, in *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*, December 12th, 1613 (Year 5 of Prince Gwanghae's reign).

<sup>61</sup> Lee Sangyu, et al, *Dongguk Shinsok Samgang Haengshildo*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> 765 out of 1,309.

verso (on the right in this case, as per Classical Asian writing convention) would usually contain an illustration of the deceased that would help explain the story and the particular deed that the canonized individual carried out before his or her death. Titles of the stories were always in four Classical Chinese characters, which gave the name of the individual and explained the particular deed of the dead. Employing some of the best illustrators of the time, the drawings of the subjects' death and expression of virtue were often vivid, dynamic, and more often than not extremely graphic, which was deliberately done to evoke a deep emotional response of awe, pity, and respect for the subject, as well as hatred and rage for the abuse of the Japanese. This was done to not only appeal to the readers' emotions, but also help the illiterate comprehend the story and virtues of these martyrs. This effort of broadening the accessibility of the text is also evident on the recto (the left), where one usually finds the written component of the subjects' life in both Korean and Classical Chinese. This continued the tradition of earlier versions that did include both languages for pedagogical purposes. The *DSSH* utilized the same format, but had a more explicit intention of politically assuaging his people, whereby it allowed for the text to be able to reach a much larger segment of the Korean population who could then read and appreciate the stories of brave heroes and individuals, regardless of the reader's education level and status.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Jeong Ho-hun, "Dongguk Sinsok Samkang Hangsildo (東國新續三綱行實圖) - Memory of War and Political Theory - " *Hanguk sasanghak [Study of Korean Thought]* 58 (2018), 110, 122.



Image of a folio from *DSSH*. This contains the episode of the warhero Admiral Yi Sunsin.

With regard to the content, the *DSSH* was composed of three books for each of the three fundamental bonds of filial piety, loyalty, and female modesty, with the “Illustrations of Filial Children” containing eight volumes, the “Illustrations of Loyal Servants” containing one volume, and the “Illustrations of Chaste Women” containing another eight volumes. What is important to note is the fact that through the deaths of these people, each and every one of these stories helped enforce a particular image and ideological message of Confucianism that the king and his advisors wanted to impress on the people. Stories of the war dead during the Great East Asian War served a particular purpose of emphasizing the unity of the nation and returning to and reestablishing social values that had been upended by the war, while also making evident the King’s concern for his people.

In this vein, the “Illustrations of Filial Children” contains 697 stories of filial sons and daughters, who exhibited varying forms of filial devotion to one’s parents. The most prevalent example of devotion during the Great East Asian War includes the act of self-sacrifice of an

adult child in an effort to save his or her parents. One such example is the episode “Pak In dongsa,” or “Pak In Dies with his father,” which reads:

Pak In (style name, Manho) was from Yeongdong Town and his father was Park Munsu. Pak served his father with sincerity and filial piety, and every morning and evening stayed with him, hunting and serving meat, to provide his father with sweet and delicious [foods]. Even when Pak had reached the age of sixty, he continued to do so with diligence. When the *Imjin waeran* broke out, Pak’s father became sick and was unable to escape far. Pak carried his father on his back and hid in the woods, when they unexpectedly ran into the enemy. Shielding his father with his body, Pak begged in tears, saying: “Kill me and do not kill my father.” The bandit was amazed and went away. The next morning, the enemy came once again, and Pak cried begging once more. However, the bandit did not listen and first cut down Pak before he killed Pak’s father. Both father and son died in each other's embrace. [Pak’s filial piety was recognized] under King Sogyeong (King Seonjo) who’s court granted him patronage.<sup>64</sup>

We can see that Pak’s devotion to his father is threefold, whereby he is shown to be a loving son by 1) abundantly providing for his father through food before the war, 2) carrying his ailing father on his back into the woods during the war, and 3) shielding his father with his body in his death. Each of these three aspects address the expectation of filial sons and daughters, with Pak’s filial devotion extending to even the pre-war period. Stories such as these also addressed the perceived inadequacies of the so-called unfilial sons and daughters, who during the war were either unable or unwilling to provide for and protect their parents. More often than not, families were separated during the war when the old and infirmed who were unable to keep up were often abandoned. Thus, in this episode, Pak’s story serves not only as a rebuke for such people, but also an ideal for the Korean populace, as they rebuild and mend their families in the postbellum era.

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<sup>64</sup> “朴忍同死 - 萬戶朴忍永同縣人僉知朴文秀之子也事父誠孝朝夕侍側常漁獵以供甘旨年至六十不怠壬辰倭亂文秀病不能遠避忍負入林藪賊猝至以身翼蔽其父泣請曰殺我無殺我父賊感歎而去翌朝賊又來泣乞如前賊不聽先害忍次及其父子同抱而死 昭敬大王朝旋門。”

The “Illustrations of Loyal Servants” similarly addresses Confucian values of loyalty and obedience. Containing 90 stories of loyalty, the book has various interesting tropes. The most obvious and numerous example is of the soldier that dies fighting the enemy, with 53 of the 90 being those who had been killed in battle during the Great East Asian War, such as that of Admiral Yi Sunsin, whose “wisdom and courage was greater than others.”<sup>65</sup> The inclusion of these stories are important in that they reverse King Seonjo’s hesitance to recognize the Korean military’s success, finally giving due credit to the soldiers who had died defending the nation. Furthermore, it underscores the fact that Korea had triumphed over its enemy through its own devices, rather than having to rely on Ming China’s intervention. This attitude is particularly important when one considers postbellum Joseon Dynasty’s concern over a renewed Japanese invasion, as well as the newly ascendant Manchu forces in Manchuria. Through recognizing the wartime contributions of these soldiers, Prince Gwanghae and his court likely sought to strengthen the allegiance of these martial families, while also preparing for potential conflict with both Ming China and the ascendant Manchu forces in Manchuria.<sup>66</sup>

The last book of “Illustrations of Chaste Women” contains the largest number of “martyrs” in the *DSSH* with 720 in total, which also contains the highest number of royally recognized individuals. This first underscores the realities of the Great East Asian War, whereby women were the greatest victim of war. Typically involving married women, the book focused heavily on the maintenance of sexual purity and loyalty of Korean women, who are often depicted as resisting attempts of rape and seduction by the Japanese soldiers and people of

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<sup>65</sup> “李舜臣 牙山縣人智勇過人.”

<sup>66</sup> Han Myung-Ki, *Gwanghae-gun* [Prince Gwanghae]. (Seoul, Korea: Yeoksa-Bipyungsa, 2020): 118.



power. More often than not, these struggles culminated in the gruesome death or suicide of the women, which was lauded by the government as an act of maintaining moral dignity.

For instance, in the episode of “Ms Pak jumps into a pond,” we read of how Ms. Pak, wife of Lee Daeseong, attempted to hide in a cave with her two children. When the enemy attempted to “capture and defile her,” she jumped into a pond with her two children and they drowned together.<sup>67</sup> In the episode of “Ms. Lee gets her face flayed,” we find that Ms. Lee, wife of Choi Gwangjin, was attacked by a Japanese soldier. The *DSSH* relates to us that when Ms. Lee “refused his attempts and rebuked the soldier, the Japanese stabbed her face with his spear and flayed her face. Still, she did not submit, and the soldier killed her.”<sup>68</sup> Through every episode, the audience is inundated with the common theme of butchery and gore that serves to demonize these Japanese “bandits” as rapists and murderers, while the women are extolled as martyrs of purity and dignity.

This book, perhaps more than any other in the entirety of the *DSSH*, thus signals the government’s attempts to make amends to its subjects by recognizing the great loss of life that had occurred. By memorializing these women and their deaths, the King and his ministers recognize the great injustice that had happened to their people. At the same time, however, these stories enforce a particular patriarchal understanding of gender at play. In particular, all episodes emphasize the fact that these women’s *bodies* were in danger of being defiled. Through the depictions of suicide, murder, and gruesome mutilation of the body, the authors of the *DSSH* show a clear preference for the physical annihilation and death of the women rather than surviving rape and dishonor. By emphasizing the aspect of resistance and attempt to preserve

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<sup>67</sup> Lee Sangyu, et al, *Dongguk Shinsok Samgang Haengshildo*, 5, 23.

<sup>68</sup> 李氏剝面- “李氏水原府人 幼學崔光軫妻也 遇倭賊賊欲污之 李氏力拒罵賊 賊以亂槍刺之剝其面皮 不屈而死 今上朝旌門”.

their purity at all costs, women are thus reduced to sexual objects whose moral obligations demand complete obedience and respect to their husbands with no alternative but death. In other words, by refusing them the agency to negotiate with their surroundings, the women are turned into passive, binary objects that are either pure or dirty.

### **Conclusion**

All in all, these illustrations serve as real-life examples of the general elite *yangban* expectation, which emphasized death at the cost of honor and moral dignity. It also lays the ground for a conservative Neo-Confucian interpretation of war and the appropriate behavior of its people. By preserving these real-life examples, the government sought to gain the political ammunition and capital to affect societal changes as they deemed fit. These episodes raise the question of whether these victims would have put their stories in such terms, however. After all, when one considers the fact that the authors of this text are all men who survived the war, it makes one wonder whether any of the victims mentioned in the previous books viewed their deaths in the same terms of virtuous martyrdom as the scholar-officials who compiled the *DSSH*. No one put this better than JaHyun Kim Haboush, when she aptly notes in *The Great East Asian War*, the victims' voices "[articulated] in [these] story [are] purely political, conceived of and expressed in male language: the male failure to protect the country."<sup>69</sup> In this sense, one thus cannot help but notice the bitter and artificial aftertaste the *DSSH* leaves for its readers, as it serves as a gruesome menagerie of taxidermical studies of filial piety, loyalty, and female chastity for building a more patriarchal and Confucian society.

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<sup>69</sup> JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Great East Asian War and the Birth of the Korean Nation*, (New York, NY : Columbia University Press, 2016), 146.

Furthermore, one must ask the question about the stories of those who survived the war and experiences of dehumanization. How did they view the war and experiences of depredation? How did they frame their own experiences? After all, the *DSSH* was one of many narratives that began to emerge during the postbellum period. The following chapters bring light to the stories and narratives neglected by the *DSSH*, and how they often did not agree with the constricted Neo-Confucian notions of the *yangban* elites as well as the Joseon court.

## Chapter 2:

### Forever a Criminal: Yangban *piroin* Appeals and Their Memory of Captivity

The previous chapter laid out the narrative of the war proposed by the *yangban* elites as well as that of the Joseon court. The question still remains, however, as to how the *piroin* themselves saw their experiences in light of these developments in Korea. In that vein it is particularly interesting as to how the *yangban piroin* saw their own experiences within light of their *yangban* heritage and Neo-Confucian expectations. For instance, how did they justify their survival when it was expected that the *yangban* class were to kill themselves? Or, in other words, how did they aim to convey their experiences of wartime captivity in a country where “people will not countenance [them]”, as Ms. Such-and-such points out in her letter?<sup>70</sup>

Fortunately, a select number of extant autobiographical materials detailing the *yangban piroin* experience exist for analysis. Many of these, however, are fragmentary or incomplete, such as Noh In’s *Geumgye ilgi*, which does not contain the first half of his experiences abroad. In this regard, Gang Hang’s *Ganyangrok* and Jeong Heedeuk’s *Wolbong Haesangrok* are of great utility, as they are both fully preserved and cover the entirety of their experiences abroad. For such reasons, a close reading of Gang and Jeong’s autobiographical material will be conducted for this chapter, which explores their understanding of their *yangban* heritage and Neo-Confucian expectations and their decisions to survive and return to Korea.

#### Gang Hang’s *Ganyangrok*: Conflicting Interpretations of Neo-Confucian Loyalty

Of the few autobiographical sources on *yangban* captivity, one of the most important sources is the *Ganyangrok* [Records of the Shepherd] by Gang Hang, written during and after his captivity in Japan from 1597 to 1600. It is important to note that Gang was a promising

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<sup>70</sup> *Jaejo Bunbangji*, vol 4. “妾則成一棄人。雖得還我國。固知必不容於人類。”

bureaucrat at the time of his capture, having passed the major civil examinations at a young age. He had descended from a line of successful *yangban* dating from the Goryeo Dynasty, and in many ways was expected to succeed his ancestors in achieving high office and maintaining his family name. Circumstances changed for Gang during the Jeongyu Reinvasion of Japan in 1597, when the Japanese Navy decimated the Korean fleet at the Battle of Chilcheollyang. Having been stationed further inland as a logistician, Gang rushed home to Yeonggwang just as the entire Jeolla Province was being brutally conquered by the Japanese Army. Gang was captured with his family by Japanese forces off the coast of his hometown at Yeonggwang in September 1597, before he could join the resistance forces and the remaining Korean naval fleet further up north.<sup>71</sup>

Gang writes that he and his family attempted to commit suicide by jumping overboard, but did not drown as the waters were too shallow.<sup>72</sup> The Japanese fished them out with hooks and had them tied on the deck to prevent a second attempt at suicide. After their first attempt at death, Gang notably did not attempt to die again while in captivity. Despite their resistance, they were unable to escape from the Japanese and were taken to Japan, where they made several further attempts to return to Korea before finally succeeding in 1600. While in Japan, Gang was held by the Daimyo Todo Takatora (1556–1630) in Ozu, Shikoku, before being moved to Osaka in 1598, and finally to Fushimi, from which they escaped to Joseon Korea.<sup>73</sup>

The *Ganyangrok* is a product of Gang's captivity in Japan, in which he includes his personal experiences of captivity as well as information regarding Japan's society, military, as

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<sup>71</sup> *Ganyangrok*, "Jeokjung bongseo," [A Memorial Sent from Captivity], "臣不得已。舟載父兄弟妻子。遵西海以謀西上。"

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, "臣自度不得脫。與家屬俱墜海水中。艤岸水淺。盡爲倭奴所執。"

<sup>73</sup> See JaHyun Kim Haboush's useful "Introduction" to her translation *A Korean War Captive in Japan, 1597–1600: The Writings of Kang Hang*, 2013.

well as geography. The text is written in five parts, namely “A Memorial Sent from Captivity,” “The Eight Circuits and Sixty-six Provinces of Japan,” “An Exhortation to Korean Captives Still in Japan,” “A Report to the Royal Secretariat on Japanese Social Practices,” and “Encounters with the Adversities of War.”<sup>74</sup> The first part summarizes his experience abroad, while reporting his findings in Japan, while the second part is thought to have contained a map and the names of important geographic locations. These were somehow smuggled into Korea, when Gang had sent two drafts, with one arriving at its destination in the Joseon court. Though doubts and suspicion swirled around the veracity of the report, the court came to recognize Gang’s work and treated him relatively favorably upon his escape from Japan in 1600. The remaining three parts were composed later when Gang was returning or had returned to Korea, whereby Gang writes more extensively on his experiences and observations while also drafting an “open letter” exhorting other *piroin* in Japan who had not yet repatriated themselves to Korea to return to Korea.

Gang had originally titled his manuscript as *Geongeorok*, or *Records of a Criminal*, prior to his death in 1618,<sup>75</sup> as he nuanced his survival as a shameful failure to fulfill his duties as a *yangban* bureaucrat. While it was customary for officials to abase themselves as “criminals” when addressing the king in East Asia, Gang likely had additional reasons to depict himself in this manner. This is likely due to the fact that Gang was aware of the Joseon court’s increased scrutiny against returning *yangban piroin*, as they were suspicious of the *piroin*’s potential role as double agents for the Japanese. In fact, contemporary to Gang’s return to Korea, there were two high profile cases in which Park Suyoung and Gang Sajun had both been censured and

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<sup>74</sup> “賊中封疏”, “倭國八道六十六州圖”, “告俘人檄”, “詣承政院啓辭”, “涉亂事迹”, respectively.

<sup>75</sup> *Geongeo* is a symbolism for a criminal. During the Joseon Dynasty, when transporting criminals, such people were often put in a caged cart with a rag or scarf tied to it.

interrogated upon their return, with Park and his son being executed as a spy and traitor.<sup>76</sup> In this backdrop, Gang Hang strove to keep a low profile, despite the Joseon court's favorable treatment of him. In fact, though Gang was nominated by King Seonjo to serve again as a local official in the Jeolla Province, he respectfully declined the post and retired to his home and focused on studying and teaching Neo-Confucianism. Gang likely laced his manuscript with the language of shame in an effort to temper his defense of his survival in order to avoid further scrutiny upon himself.

His disciples, however, retitled the text when it was published in 1656, writing that it was “impossible for [them] to refer to this book by that name [*Geongeorok*], thus debasing [Gang, their master, as a criminal.]”<sup>77</sup> Instead, they had the original title amended to *Ganyangrok* or *Records of the Shepherd* in homage to loyal shepherd Su Wu of the Han Dynasty. Su Wu occupies an important space within Confucian political philosophy as well as the *Ganyangrok* in that he is seen as a symbol of unwavering loyalty of a scholar-official to his king. In the *Hanshu* [History of the Former Han], it is recorded that Su was a Han diplomat who had been captured by the barbarian Xiongnu of the steppes after several members of his diplomatic mission attempted to assassinate the Xiongnu Chanyu.<sup>78</sup> In response, the Chanyu had arrested the entire entourage and demanded Su to surrender. Refusing to do so, Su was tortured, but ultimately did

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<sup>76</sup> Park Suyoung was not a yangban, but a minor official who had been taken to Tsushima. While he lived a comfortable life there, he returned with his family before being tried and executed as a spy and traitor in 1605. Gang Sajun was a yangban from Jinju, who had played an important role alongside Gang Hang in informing the Joseon court about Japan. While records do not suggest he was executed, it was likely he was forced into hiding. Park Suyoung's story can be found in the Veritable *Records of the Joseon Dynasty* under September 28th, 1605 (Year 38 of King Seonjo's reign), while Gang Sajun's story can be found under April 26th, 1601 (Year 32 of King Seonjo's reign).

<sup>77</sup> “況子弟門生可因是損貶之稱。而不思其變耶。”

<sup>78</sup> The *chanyu* is an equivalent to a “khan” or “khagan,” which is the title that nomadic people of the steppes used to denote a king.

not cave to the Xiongnu. He notably “failed” to kill himself, and was eventually exiled far into the steppes by Lake Baikal to tend sheep as a shepherd, where he remained in captivity for nineteen years until he was rescued and richly rewarded for his loyalty.<sup>79</sup>

Gang’s text interestingly walks a fine line between being a criminal while also being a loyal servant to the crown. In other words, Gang’s text reveals an uncomfortable tension between obligation and instinct, as well as the different interpretations of the Confucian value of loyalty. For instance, while Gang continues to address himself as a “criminal” deserving death for failing to observe the *samgang*, or the three fundamental bonds, Gang nevertheless continues to attempt to portray himself as a loyal Su Wu in the *Ganyangrok*. For instance, in 1598, while being moved from Ozu to Osaka on a ship, Gang wrote a poem:

My heart is heavy [with worry], a thousand thoughts swirl like a beehive. /  
Barely thirty, my hair has turned white beneath the ears. /  
How can I say that poor appetite is what has sapped my body and soul, /  
[When] the reason is because I cannot gaze upon my king’s face. /  
Everyday people read books to understand the gravity of names and righteousness; /  
When later generations study history, disputes [of right and wrong] will be long. /  
The captives’ life is no crane from Liaodong, /  
Awaiting death, I must look for *sheep* on the sea.<sup>80</sup>

Beyond the great grief and trepidation that is obvious within the poem, we can see that Gang is clearly thinking of Su Wu’s exile when he invokes the symbol of tending the sheep on the sea. By comparing his exile on the sea to that of Su’s exile in the steppes, Gang likens himself to Su Wu, as he dramatizes the seeming unbridgeable chasm between him and his king and the consequent pain he feels within himself. Rather than allow the desperation to precipitate him to suicide, however, he decides to “wait” for death to come to him. In other words, by claiming this

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<sup>79</sup> See *Hanshu*, Volume 54. Under “李廣蘇建傳,” [Tales Li, Guang, Su, and Jian.]

<sup>80</sup> “滿憶千愁若蜜房。 / 年纔三十鬢如霜。 / 豈緣鷄肋消魂骨。 / 端爲龍顏阻渺茫。 / 平日讀書名義重。 / 後來觀史是非長。 / 浮生不是遼東鶴。 / 等死須看海上羊。” Italics added for emphasis.



image of patient loyalty and fidelity to his sovereign, Gang counters the notion that he may have been morally deficient by not killing himself according to *yangban* standards. Interestingly, he further adds an atmosphere of ambivalence about the constricted Neo-Confucian understanding of the war, when he writes that “later generations” of Confucian scholars who study history will be unable to determine whether or not his deeds were right or wrong. In this sense, Gang hints that the seeming “orthodoxical” understanding of Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon court and elite circles may not be so impenetrable after all.

The *Ganyangrok* also displays Gang’s loyalty in a tangible manner. When one considers the chapters of the *Ganyangrok* alone, we can see that Gang managed to collect an enormous amount of resources regarding Japan’s military systems and capacities, as well as Japanese geography to the basic socio-political structures. The entirety of the volume, “The Eight Circuits and Sixty-six Provinces of Japan” relates Gang’s observations about Japan with detailed lists of places within it, as well as the name of major *samurai* and *daimyos*<sup>81</sup>. Gang writes that it was his unique status as a *piroin* that allowed him to evade suspicion and receive help from a Buddhist monk by the name Kojin (Hoin in Korean) who showed him a list of legal rulings.<sup>82</sup> From it, Gang found a detailed gazetteer and a table of the administrative offices of Japan that he copied down to send back to Korea.<sup>83</sup> Gang goes further and states that after hearing that Todo Takatora’s father had a detailed map, he had an interpreter translate the map for him to also copy into his notes.<sup>84</sup> Given that Korea was still at war with Japan during this time, any information

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<sup>81</sup> The names for warriors and feudal lords in Japan.

<sup>82</sup> Referred to as a *jaepan*, the legal rulings were a series of semi-civil law cases in Japan. It is unclear as to how this information would have been useful, but they likely brought clarity to the social conditions in Japan as well as other relevant concerns that the people had.

<sup>83</sup> “有金山出石寺僧好仁者。頗解文字。見臣哀之。禮貌有加。因示臣以其國題判。別方輿職官。該錄無餘。臣旋則謄寫。”

<sup>84</sup> “又聞佐渡之父白雲。有其國輿圖甚詳。備人舌人模出。”又聞佐渡之父白雲。有其國輿圖甚詳

regarding Japan's political structure and their geography was considered of paramount importance in the Korean court. By painstakingly compiling the wide range of sources regarding Japan and making it available to the Korean court, Gang was thus further presenting the case that his survival was justified through him serving the king faithfully, even without the royal sanction. This thus further raises the question of what loyalty really looks like, and whether the elite and government narrative of death is the only way to exhibit loyalty to one's sovereign.



Image of Gang Hang's *Ganyangrok*

。備人舌人模出。復以目擊之形勢。較我國防禦之長算。而間以愚者之千慮。竊議於其間。”

Lastly, but most importantly, Gang fulfills his duties to his king by offering up military advice on how Korea should prepare for future wars with Japan. Gang writes in “A Memorial Sent from Captivity” that though his words would never likely be fully considered as legitimate, and that he could be executed for suggesting that the old ways were wrong, Gang takes it upon himself to offer advice to his king as a loyal subject. Gang writes that since there were men in history who remonstrated with their dead bodies and some who did not hesitate to send his ideas on national policy even on his deathbed,<sup>85</sup> not responding to the crisis at hand in order to preserve his life itself would be an act of disloyalty.<sup>86</sup> As such, “A Memorial Sent from Captivity” delivers a sharp criticism of the Korean military system. Gang brings to attention the lack of systematic military training and recruitment of soldiers, as well as the indiscriminate and arbitrary assignments of military commanders in the Korean military. Gang similarly criticizes the irrational dismissals in the military that led to the ousting of Admiral Yi Sunshin and the consequent devastating naval defeat at the Battle of Chilcheollyang.<sup>87</sup> By raising these problems to the fore, Gang suggests that a fundamental systematic change regarding the Korean military is imperative for the kingdom’s survival in the future.

To best resolve these problems, Gang interestingly draws upon Japanese examples from his experience abroad. In particular, Gang argues for the construction of Japanese-style fortifications and the establishment of permanent armies and generals to guard them. By

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<sup>85</sup> This refers to an anecdote about a person who, on his deathbed, asked his son not to place his body in the main hall but in a side room, for his sin of not having been able to remonstrate with his king about a wrongful appointment. Upon hearing this, his lord apparently corrected the improper appointment and employed the right person. See Haboush's translation.

<sup>86</sup> “復以目擊之形勢。較我國防禦之長算。而間以愚者之千慮。竊議於其間。嗚呼敗軍之將。尚不可以語勇。況臣被擄偷生於賊窟中。輒敢饒筆論廟勝之得失。極知濫越。無所逃罪。然竊伏惟念昔人有以尸諫者。臨死而不忘獻策者。苟有利於國家涓分。則亦不可以罪人而遂己也。”

<sup>87</sup> “朝家之易一官差一使。似不大段。而下三道赤子之命。盡陷於凶鋒。則大段事也。”

guaranteeing lands and making associated posts heritable, Gang claims that the military service could become more appealing to the people and attract various talents within the nation. These draw heavily upon the Japanese examples of daimyos managing their feudal realms with the *samurai* class serving as examples of professionally trained warriors and strategists. Gang suggests that after replacing the existing rotating system of generals serving as temporary bureaucrats, Korea can better retain and develop its military capacity. To best realize these goals, Gang encourages the active usage of Japanese defectors to help build and develop a strong modern Korean army, rather than simply executing those who surrender.<sup>88</sup> These suggestions reveal a surprising degree of flexibility from Gang, as he is able to recognize the benefits of different, “barbaric” systems and is open to the idea of adopting strategies that work.

This raises the question of whether all *yangban* elites similarly subscribed to the seemingly narrow interpretation of the Neo-Confucian value of loyalty as blind obedience and death-embracing patriotism. If anything, Gang’s interactions with the Japanese suggest that despite his persisting biases towards the Japanese people, as evinced by his continued referring to the Japanese as bandits and dwarfs, Gang also saw his captors as subjects. For instance, Gang is known to have received help from the aforementioned monk by the name of Kojin, while other accounts show that various Japanese people were willing to help Gang and his family as they sought to escape Japan. Most notable is perhaps Gang’s interactions with Myōsuin Sōshun, or

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<sup>88</sup> “殺降倭。甚大失策。非但殺已降。道家之深忌。彼纔免襁褓。卽糊口於將官之家。平生不見父母兄弟。不入鄉黨隣里。從征四方。動淹旬月。雖有妻子。罕見其面。故惟將倭及農民有妻子。其餘則大半無妻子。無一分顧戀鄉土父母妻子之情。惟衣食是從。彼見我國之土地膏腴。衣食豐足。其國之法令刻急。戰爭相尋。常相謂曰。朝鮮誠樂國也。日本誠陋邦也。或人輒因其言開風曰。我國待降倭極其恩恤。飲食衣服。一與將官一樣。間有得三品重秩者云。。。交鋒之日。以其所長。攻其所長。以我所長。攻其所短。則保無不勝。以蠻夷攻蠻夷。中國之上策。”

Fujiwara Seika, whereby Fujiwara is described as being extremely intelligent and skilled in reading the “old script” or Classical Chinese characters.<sup>89</sup> It is suggested that the two were able to strike up a good relationship, as they wrote one another poems in Classical Chinese, while Fujiwara is also thought to have assisted Gang in escaping Japan.<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, it is believed that Gang helped spur the development of Neo-Confucian thinking in the Edo Period in Japan, as Fujiwara also learned from his interactions with Gang.<sup>91</sup> Thus, rather than viewing all Japanese as barbarians and his enemy as was expected of a *yangban*, Gang is shown to have been able to flexibly approach his circumstances, which translates into his recommendations to the king as well.

We can thus conclude that Gang Hang appealed most strongly to the *samgang* virtue of loyalty to justify his survival. However, Gang’s understanding of loyalty diverges from that of the official view endorsed by the Joseon court as well as many other *yangban* in Korea at that time. By claiming that his decision to not kill himself resulted in him being able to bring a great deal of information regarding Japan back to Korea, Gang presents the case that it may have actually been dishonorable for him to flee from the pain and struggle and to have committed suicide. Furthermore, Gang risks death by directly criticizing the king and his court on the problems of the military and suggesting solutions based on his observations from the “barbaric” Japanese. Through all of this, Gang consistently shows that not all *yangban* followed the standard understanding of Neo-Confucianism that was practiced in the court. Walking the fine

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<sup>89</sup> “又有妙壽院僧舜首座者。京極黃門定家之孫。而但馬守赤松左兵衛廣通之師也。頗聰明解古文。於書無不通。性又剛峭。於倭無所容。”

<sup>90</sup> “遂往見舜首座及廣通。願借力出疆。則廣通求寺澤志摩手書。以備關市之譏察。舜首座且許篙師一人。以教水路。至對馬乃許其還。”

<sup>91</sup> See Haboush’s “A Korean War Captive in Japan,” pg. xiii-xiv.

line between a criminal and a loyal official, Gang's story thus underscores how varying narratives existed within the elite circles of Korean society.

### **Jeong Heedeuk's Wolbong Haesangrok: Filial Piety**

Jeong Heedeuk's *Wolbong Haesangrok* [Wolbong's Records on the Sea] is another *yangban piroin* text which presents a different appeal to the *samgang* than Gang Hang's *Ganyangrok*.<sup>92</sup> Jeong Heedeuk's story is quite similar to Gang's in that Jeong was also captured with his family in Jeolla Province in 1597, before he was taken to Japan. Unlike Gang, however, Jeong did not jump off the ship in an effort to kill himself, as he was tied up on the deck of the ship. This was contrasted with the female members of his family, who all somehow succeeded in jumping overboard and drowning themselves in the sea. Their deaths came to be recognized by the Joseon court, when they included the stories of the women in the *DSSH* in 1617. As for Jeong, his inability to even try to kill himself results in him being unable to persuasively call upon the virtue of loyalty as did Gang Hang. As such, Jeong utilizes a different approach that of Gang, namely through emphasizing the Neo-Confucian virtue of filial piety as well as that of loyalty.

Captured by Hachisuka Iemasa, Jeong and a few male members of his family were taken to Tsushima before being deposited in Awa, Shikoku. Jeong writes that he had attempted to escape multiple times, but failed to do so. After the war's conclusion, several peace missions were sent from Korea at the behest of Japan, whereby the repatriation of *piroin* was used as a bargaining chip for the new Shogun as well as the other daimyo. Jeong was able to return to Korea through such diplomatic channels when he was able to persuade the daimyo to let him

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<sup>92</sup> This book was compiled in 1613 under the name *Mansarok*, or *Records of Great Adversity*. The title was amended in 1723 when his grandson had rebound the text with a new cover, who probably out of convenience simply titled it as *Records on the Sea*.

return to Korea.<sup>93</sup> Records suggest that not all *piroin* were able to do this, however, as certain daimyo had economic and political reasons to maintain a hold over their slaves. Jeong was lucky, however, as Jeong writes in the *Wolbong Haesangrok* that Hachisuka was largely sympathetic to Jeong and his family. As such, following the conclusion of the war, Hachisuka manumitted Jeong and his family members upon their request to be returned to Korea. After being released through diplomatic channels, Jeong embarked on his journey back to Korea. In a strange turn of events, Jeong was held over in Tsushima as the So family attempted to utilize the influx of returning *piroin* as bargaining chips for a normalization of relations with Korea. Finally, after six months, he was finally able to set foot on Korean soil in 1599, nearly two years after his capture.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bang, “Jeong Heedeuk’s Perception of Japan through the *Wolbong Haesangrok*,” 89.

<sup>94</sup> See *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*, July 14, 1599 (Year 32 of King Seonjo’s reign). It is important to note that the Joseon court viewed Jeong with increased scrutiny given his six month stay in Japan. Many officials were suspicious of whether Jeong had been turned into a double-agent and had been given directives to spy on Korea for Japan during that period.



Image of Jeong Heedeuk's *Wolbong Haesangrok*, Volume 2, which contains Jeong's poetry during his time in Japan.

A quick look at the structure of Jeong's text also shows us that it closely resembles that of Gang's. In Book One, for instance, we see that there are three chapters, "A Memorial to the King," "Records on Japan's Natural Conditions and Social Customs," and "Daily Records," which present a nearly identical, but more condensed version of Gang's chapter designations. In fact, the contents within them, such as Jeong's description of Japan's geography and social structures in the second chapter are largely the same as Gang's version, which suggest that there may have been some kind of dialogue among *yangban piroin* such as Gang Hang and Jeong Heedeuk, who had the means to share their perspectives and experiences during captivity. More likely is the possibility that given both the *Ganyangrok* and the *Wolbong Haesangrok* were



edited several times after their authors' death, the editors of both books had the means to reference one another during the publication process.<sup>95</sup>

A closer reading of the two texts, however, shows us that there are also notable differences between Jeong and Gang. The first is that unlike Gang, Jeong was not a bureaucrat of the central government at that time. Jeong thus had no tangible obligation to the government other than the nominal Neo-Confucian expectation to serve his liege accorded to him by his social status. For such reasons, the call to preserve his family and the family name as per filial piety may have been a larger, more pressing issue upon his mind. These differences in thought and philosophy are translated in Jeong's text where we see that when the second Japanese invasion began, he immediately sought to take his family and seek refuge further up north, whereas Gang initially attempted to raise a militia force to resist the Japanese forces.<sup>96</sup> Jeong also did not attempt to commit suicide unlike Gang and his family, perhaps as a result of this difference in priority.<sup>97</sup>

In many ways, this divergence also helps explain the different appeal of Jeong's text. Though Gang is shown to justify his survival in a language combining both Neo-Confucian shame and loyalty, Jeong is shown to be less driven by politics. In fact, compared to Gang's strident and confident tone, Jeong's writing sounds far more pensive and variable. Part of this can be attested by the difference in genre, in which Gang writes in an organized essay format, while Jeong is shown to be writing a diary. As such, Jeong's text naturally seems to meander and

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<sup>95</sup> *Haehaengchongjae*, 188-189.

<sup>96</sup> “聞參判北上。乃還至本郡。與前郡守巡察使從事官金尚窩。傳檄列邑。收召義兵。思漢之士至者數百人。”

<sup>97</sup> Though Jeong claims that he was unable to jump off the ship given that he was tied up, one may wonder the veracity of this statement given that all of the women in his family did end up jumping overboard in the name of female chastity and modesty.

lack the rhetorical drive that characterizes Gang's text. The other difference is that Jeong is shown to be passive, where unlike Gang who was able to jump off the ship, Jeong was unable to do so because he was bound on the deck. Furthermore, while Gang decided to survive on his own volition, the burden of survival is thrust upon Jeong by his father when Jeong's father says, "Take good care of yourself, and do not treat death lightly. Strive to return alive; my being able to see your face again will be your filial piety to me."<sup>98</sup> In other words, Jeong poses his narrative as one of grudging survival, in which he justifies his inability to kill himself as part of his observance to the Neo-Confucian virtue of filial piety before loyalty to the state and the king.

Jeong and Gang's differences in values are further brought to light in the differences between the following two poems respectively:

Old fathers and wise men are gathered by the stream,  
 The setting sun urges the stone pot to smoke faster.  
 The good times from last year, I clearly remember.  
 [Yet] alone, I collect wild herbs in a foreign land, tears streaming down.<sup>99</sup>  
 Last year, at this time, we sat at the table of our lord,  
 Offering a glass of wine wishing good fortune early in the morning.  
 This year, separated by war, I only have my sincerest heart for him.  
 Every day, my despair deepens.<sup>100</sup>

Jeong's poem brings to light his understanding of the "good times" whereby he was able to relax and enjoy the company of the various patriarchs in his family. In many ways, the leisurely and plentiful life at his home is contrasted with the lonely and harsh life he lives as he must work to make ends meet in a foreign land. These descriptions highlight Jeong's priorities, namely that of his family and the quiet life in rural Korea. Gang's poem also reflects upon the good times of

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<sup>98</sup> “汝慎勿輕死。以圖生還。使我再見汝面目則孝矣。”

<sup>99</sup> “父老群賢野水邊/ 夕陽催報石鑼煙/ 去年行樂分明記/ 獨采天涯涕淚漣。”

<sup>100</sup> “去歲茲辰捧御床/ 戴星先捧祝堯觴/ 今年流落丹心在/ 一日愁隨一線長。”

yesteryear, but Gang focuses instead on the aspect of honor and loyalty of being able to serve his king. It is through offering food and drinks to King Seonjo that Gang finds purpose in his life as the king's servant. Being separated from his liege, Gang expresses regret and sorrow for not being able to see and interact with his lord in person, as he is unable to answer to his calling as his lord's servant.

This is not to say that Jeong was blind to the political ramifications of his status as a *piroin* and a potential traitor. In fact, Jeong was likely quite aware of the flimsiness of the excuse that he was unable to kill himself because he was tied up, given that all of the women in his family did end up drowning to their death while he and his other male relatives were somehow unable to do so. Furthermore, Jeong would have been aware by the time of his arrival in Korea in 1599 that many members of the Joseon court viewed him and his fellow captives with increased suspicion, as they had been held over in Tsushima for half a year.<sup>101</sup> To this end, Jeong attempts to also effect a sense of loyalty to the king in his writing much like Gang. Jeong's opening line to the "Memorial to the King" reads, "Your servant, Jeong Heedeuk, a scholar without rank, bowing a hundred times facing west and wailing [in thanks for his majesty's graciousness,] cautiously offers up this memorial to your majesty."<sup>102</sup> Through this we see a clear form of literary prostration and a kind of ritualized subservience to the king that affirms a Jeong's nominal loyalty to his king.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Jeong includes extensive (albeit largely redundant)

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<sup>101</sup> See page XX and footnote XX for context.

<sup>102</sup> “幼學臣鄭希得百拜痛哭。謹上言于主上殿下。”

<sup>103</sup> This closely follows Gang's more florid opening of, "Your servant Gang Hang, former Assistant Section Chief in the Board of Punishments... After purifying himself and bowing one hundred times facing west and wailing, respectfully sends this memorial to Your Majesty, the Great King of Correct Principle, Established Perfection, Great Virtue, and Far-Reaching Brilliance."

information regarding the Japanese in his chapter “Records on Japan’s Natural Conditions and Social Customs” in a bid to establish himself as a valuable informant.

Jeong also invokes Su Wu’s image throughout his text. In Book 2 of the *Wolbong Haesangrok*, for instance, we find that several of his poems harken upon the symbol of Su Wu in a manner similar to that of Gang. For instance, one poem reads:

Last night the autumn winds rose;  
The traveler at the ends of the sky is filled with great regret and remorse.  
I wrote a letter and tied it onto the feet of a wild goose;  
May you fly to Sanglim.<sup>104</sup>

Emphasizing his restless state as a “traveler” or foreigner in a distant land far from Korea, Jeong brings up the image of Su Wu’s exile by Lake Baikal. Jeong dramatizes the deep regret and remorse he feels for “failing” by emphasizing the great distance between himself and his king in Korea. To this end, the wild goose represents Jeong’s hope of escape from Japan, just as Su Wu was able to find his freedom when he was able to send a letter to the Han court by attaching it to the leg of a wild goose. Jeong also more directly calls upon the image of Su Wu in Book 1, when he writes that he attempted to persuade the *piroin* who had been Japonized to return, saying, “How can one leave one’s mother and father’s country, and how can one follow in the deeds of Li Ling and Wei Ru?”<sup>105</sup> By mentioning the antithesis to Su in the figures Li Ling and Wei Ru, Jeong also tries to claim the image of Su for himself by suggesting that he is the figurative Su rebuking the traitorous Li’s and Wei’s in Japan.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> “昨夜秋風起/ 天涯客恨多/ 題詩繫雁足/ 須向上林過。”

<sup>105</sup> “父母之邦。其可去乎。李衛之事。其可踵乎。”

<sup>106</sup> Li Ling was a Han general who had defected to the Xiongnu after being defeated by them. He attempted to convince Su to surrender as well, but failed and was rebuked by Su. Wei Ru was another general who had defected to the Xiongnu.

Thus we find that it is between the two virtues of filial piety and loyalty that Jeong mainly trapezes through. Much like Gang who sought to tease out varying interpretations of loyalty to press his case of being a faithful and loyal servant to the king, Jeong also develops an interesting narrative of being both a filial son as well as a loyal servant to the crown. Unlike Gang, who was able to successfully develop a coherent defense of his character around loyalty, however, Jeong's attempts to press his case as a loyal servant rings somewhat hollow. Part of this stems from the fact that Jeong had never attempted to kill himself in a show of minimum loyalty, whereby his authority as a "loyal" servant was consequently limited to begin with. Furthermore, as we discussed earlier, Jeong was not an official at the time of his capture, but a young *jaeji yangban* who had not even taken the civil service exams.<sup>107</sup> For such reasons, Jeong's writing does not reflect a political crystallization that was evident throughout Gang's political philosophy in the *Ganyangrok*. Instead, Jeong's writing brings to light his personal grief and struggle of being separated from his family, which is supplemented by his virtues of loyalty to the state. In this sense, we find a more personal dimension to Jeong's struggles to survive in the face of pressures to commit suicide, compared to that of Gang.

### Conclusion

In sum, by comparing and contrasting these two sources, we can see that both of these *yangban piroin* utilized the language of Neo-Confucianism to arrive at a different justification for their survival. In the case of Gang Hang, the *Ganyangrok* was written in a manner that

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<sup>107</sup> *Jaeji yangban* were to some degree comparable to the rural gentry in Europe. Unlike their *jaebyeong*, or capital-residing *yangban* cousins, the *jaeji yangban* did not participate in the central government given their remoteness from the capital. The *jaeji yangban* were expected to nevertheless take examinations, participate in government, while also studying and carrying out Neo-Confucian values as paragons in their local communities. See the section "The Yangban Class and their Understanding of Captivity" in Chapter 1 for a quick review.

emphasizes the loyalty and devotion that Gang had for the king. Though he had failed to abide by the *yangban* expectation that he was to kill himself, Gang nevertheless succeeded in serving his king via bringing in vital information regarding Japan and a set of recommendations based on it. By doing so, Gang disassembles the charge of disloyalty to one of devout service to the king.

For Jeong Heedeuk, we see that he appeals to the virtue of filial piety. By emphasizing his father's command to remain alive, Jeong attempts to respond to the charges of cowardice, especially as the women in his family all managed to commit suicide. This, however, does not mean that Jeong was dilatory in his duties as a subject to his king. Jeong also invokes the image of a faithful servant to his lord via sending notes of information regarding Japan and its military capacity, while also appealing to the King through various symbols and languages of Neo-Confucianism. However, given that Jeong was not an official of the government and had never attempted to kill himself, Jeong does not attempt to fully absolve himself of his disloyalty. Instead, by laying bare his emotions and thoughts, Jeong attempts to elicit sympathy from his readers, and appeal to their humaneness. Furthermore, by successfully carrying out his father's commands Jeong establishes that he is at least partially morally blameless for his survival.

All in all, we are able to observe how the *yangban* class who survived their experience of captivity were often forced to justify their decisions. By utilizing the same language of Neo-Confucianism, both Gang and Jeong were able to defend their actions and justify their survival in light of their virtues. At the same time, we find that both authors realized that though they were returning to Korea, they were in many ways returning to a foreign land, where they would never be welcomed again. In sum, this language of in-betweenness and self-contradictions not only emphasizes the unique circumstances that Gang and Jeong finds themselves in, but also of the rhetoric of Neo-Confucianism itself, where we find that differing interpretations of Neo-

Confucianism and valuation of Neo-Confucian virtues may have coexisted in the immediate postwar period of Korea.

### Chapter 3:

#### The Virtue of Survival: Popular Perspectives

The previous chapter explored how the elite *yangban* segment of the *piroin* (war captives and slaves) remembered their experiences of slavery and how they responded to Neo-Confucian expectations of decorum placed upon their fellow peers and government. This chapter aims to widen the scope of such investigations by opening a discussion into popular perceptions of the Great East Asian War and experiences of captivity. This, however, is a very difficult task due to a great dearth of extant archival sources, as more than four centuries of time has done much to erode what few sources may have remained from this period. Furthermore, though new texts on captivity have continuously been discovered in recent years, most if not all of these have been compiled and written by the Korean elite *yangban* class for the ostensible purpose of defending their reputation as *yangban* rather than recording the experiences of the masses.

One solution to this problem may be found in the popular genres of fiction, namely Korean classical novels and the *yadam*,<sup>108</sup> which preserve traces of contemporary popular sentiments of the war and experiences of captivity. This is the case, as in the years during and immediately after the war a wide range of stories and fiction were circulated amongst the Korean people in both written and spoken form. Though many of these were about the victories of the Korean forces and the brutality of the Japanese (e.g., the *Imjin-rok*<sup>109</sup> or *Records from the Imjin Year*), a number of these stories also discussed the experiences of captivity felt by a broader

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<sup>108</sup> The *yadam* (野談) is a genre unique to Joseon Dynasty Korea that collects short stories and tales popular to common people. The genre was invented by Yoo Mongin in the early 17th century, which continued to exist into the late-Joseon Dynasty and Japanese Imperial rule.

<sup>109</sup> *Imjin-rok*, (壬辰錄) or the “Record of the Black Dragon Year” is one of most popular tales inspired by the Great East Asian War of 1592-1598 (or as the Imjin Disturbance or War as it is known in Korea). For further details, see Peter H. Lee’s “The Imjin rok, or the Record of the Black Dragon Year: An Introduction,” *Korean Studies* 14 (1990): 50-83.



segment of Koreans. Such stories vividly depict the lives and values of the Korean populace at the time, which reveal a different narrative that stands separately from the aforementioned viewpoints of the *yangban* elites. Within these popular narratives, one can see that most Koreans did not fully adhere to the *yangban* overtures of the Neo-Confucian *samgang* and instead followed a more humanistic view on life during and immediately after the Great East Asian War.

Jo Wihan's novel, the *Choe Cheok-jeon*, or the *Tale of Choe Cheok*, is a particularly good example of this.<sup>110</sup> Published in 1621, *The Tale of Choe Cheok* was a literary contemporary with the previously studied *Dongguk Shinsok Samgang Haengshildo* (DSSH; pb. 1617), but approached the experience of war and captivity in a markedly different manner. Bringing together a wide range of oral stories told in the period, Jo managed to present a work of historical fiction that reflected the contemporary social atmosphere as well as experiences. In particular, the novel is one of resilience and hope in an era of strife and conflict, manifested through the lives of the couple Choe Cheok and his wife Okyeong. The novel sketches out various aspects of Korean life during the war, such as Korean marriage practices in the late-16th century Korea through Choe and Okyeong's difficult courtship and their happy marriage, as well as the hardships experienced by the Korean people by following the sojourn of both Choe and Okyeong as they are separated by the Japanese Reinvasion of Korea in 1597. Through the survival and eventual return of the characters to Korea, the book underscores the hardy mindset of the people. Choe and Okyeong serve as synecdoches of the Korean populace finding ways to move past the loss and devastation of war. These aspects make Jo's novel an immensely useful historical text that allows us to look into Korean society and popular experiences in the immediate post-war period.

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<sup>110</sup> Min Yeongdae, *조위한의 삶과 문학* [Cho Wihan's Life and Literature], Kookhak, Goyang-si, 2000

Much of the extant reviews of this novel have been critical, however. Many have pointed out Jo's potential biases as a member of the *yangban* class, claiming that the *Choe Cheok-jeon* does little but cosmeticize the characters' suffering with appeals to Neo-Confucian values.<sup>111</sup> Such criticism is understandable when one considers the fact that Jo was born into a well-known prestigious *yangban* family in Seoul in 1567. From a young age, Jo enjoyed his academics and had a special aptitude for literature and comedy. During the war, he escaped from Seoul and sought refuge in Namwon where he briefly joined the "righteous army" or Korean militia, fighting for Korea. After the conclusion of the war, he passed the civil examinations in 1601 and 1609 and began his political career. Following the deposition of Prince Gwanghae in 1623, Jo served as an important official of the Joseon court, serving in a variety of positions past the age of 80 until his death in 1649.<sup>112</sup>

It is important to understand, however, that Jo was not some sycophantic sinecurist, but someone who had tangibly experienced the great suffering caused by the Great East Asian War. While fleeing from the war with his family in 1592, he lost his only daughter to starvation and the cold on the road to Namwon. Shortly thereafter, his mother also passed away. Just as the Japanese were beginning their reinvasion in 1597, he had lost his wife. Thus, when Jo returned to Seoul in 1598, one year after the war's conclusion, he returned to an empty house alone.<sup>113</sup> Devastated, Jo decided to leave Korea, planning to join a Ming Chinese soldier in the Ming withdrawal, whereafter he intended to go touring various Chinese historic sites. Only through his

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<sup>111</sup> Jung Shin Kim, "The Memory of Joseon Captives during the Hideyoshi Invasions and the Legacy Thereof (1592~1598) -With a special focus on the exaltation and removal of honor (節義, jeolwui)-", *Academy of Korean Ideology* 40 (2012): 105-142; Chung, "Imjin War and POW," *Journal of Korean Classics* 41 (2013): 5-40.

<sup>112</sup> Min Yeongdae. *Jowihan-ui salmgwa munhag* [Cho Wihan's Life and Literature]. Kookhak, Goyang-si, 2000.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

older brother's persistent urging to stay did Jo finally abandon such a plan.<sup>114</sup> In many ways, these devastating experiences of loss and death as well as his own dreams of travel throughout East Asia were not unique to Jo alone, and are fundamentally laced throughout his writings, as the *Tale of Choe Cheok* similarly focuses extensively on family, love, and loss, as well as travel throughout East Asia.

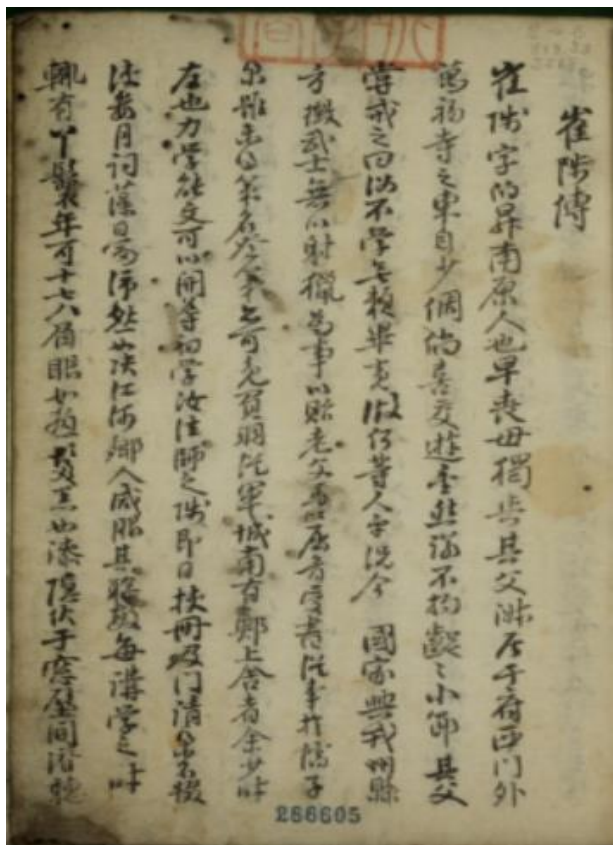


Image of the first page of the *Choe Cheok-jeon*

Other critics have further questioned the novel's lack of realism, as they have addressed how numerous hyperbolic elements and *dei ex machina* make the novel largely unbelievable.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Min Yeongdae, *조위한의 삶과 문학* [Cho Wihan's Life and Literature], Kookhak, Goyang-si, 2000; Chung Chul-heon, "Imjin War and POW, Altered Memories and Narrative Reconstitution," *Journal of Korean Classics* 41 (2013): 5-40; Lee Jongpil, *문학교육의 차원에서 바라본 고전소설의 '우연성과 비현실성'*: <최척전>의 교육 내용을 중심으로 [A Cultural Educational Perspective on the

Even so, the *Choe Cheok-jeon*'s utility as a historical source is evident in the high degree of historical accuracy in the text. Part of this no doubt stems from Jo's own experiences living in Namwon and having fought in the war as part of the Korean militia alongside Chinese forces. Details regarding the location and distances of various places within the city of Namwon, such as the Buddhist Manbok Temple in the outskirts of the city are largely accurate. It is also likely that Jo conducted extensive research on the historical events of the war himself, paying particular attention to the Siege of Namwon and its subsequent sacking in 1597. The defeat of the allied forces of Korea and China in the *Choe Cheok-jeon* closely mirrors historical records, as does Choe and his family's fleeing into the neighboring Jiri Mountains and the following pursuit and assault of the Japanese soldiers who captured large numbers of Korean war captives. The *Nanjung Jabrok* [Miscellaneous Records During the War], for instance, details the sacking of Namwon on August 16th to the 18th, writing:

The vicious bandits captured Namwon. This was the day when Kiyomasa Kato's army marched from Hamyang to Unbong. Huangshan was full of enemy soldiers, and when I went down to Gochon in the middle of the night, there were so many soldiers that it was difficult to cross the road; hence I came back... All the troops of Kato Kiyomasa and Konishi Yukinaga withdrew and returned to Unbong, where they stayed for a few days. Afterwards, the Japanese soldiers searched the Jiri Mountain, lodged in temples, or camped at the top of the mountain. Their atrocities of butchering and looting are beyond words.<sup>116</sup>

These records were corroborated by the Japanese, where a Buddhist monk Keinen similarly wrote in his journal that all residents of the city of Namwon were murdered regardless of gender

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“Coincidence and Unreal” : On the Educational Message of the Choe Cheok-jeon], Research Center of Korean Language and Literature Education at Korea University, 2017, 19-28.

<sup>116</sup> “凶賊陷南原 . 是日乃清正兵自咸陽踰入雲峯時也。荒山上下賊鋒彌漫。夜下高村。則賊兵充斥。勢難越逕。乃空還。兩路兵皆退。還雲峯留數日。亂入智異山搜探。或留宿寺刹。或聚宿山頭。殺掠之慘。不可勝言。” See Min Yeongdae, *조위한의 삶과 문학* [Cho Wihan's Life and Literature], Kookhak, Goyang-si, 2000.

and age, so much so that the “dead on the ground were like sand on a beach.” In other instances, he also wrote on the practice of capturing Korean children, writing that “[the Japanese soldiers] tied up the children and executed their parents. The sight of parents and their children wailing was like that of hell itself.”<sup>117</sup>

These historical accounts are similarly reflected in Jo’s account of the sacking of Namwon in the *Choe Cheok-jeon*, which brings to life the desperation and violence that took place at this time:

When the Japanese invaded Namwon in August of 1597 (the year of Jeongyu), all the people fled and hid. Choe Cheok’s family also fled to Yeongok Temple in the Jiri Mountains. After a few days, Choe’s family ran out of food and almost starved. Choe came down to look for food with three or four strong men... On that day, the Japanese stormed the temple and plundered it leaving nothing behind... After waiting for the enemies to retreat, Choe managed to enter Yeongoksa Temple and found corpses piled up in the temple with blood everywhere. At this time, a groan was heard softly in the forest. Choe ran [to the sound], and found several elderly people groaning with wounds all over their bodies. When the old men saw Choe, they wept and cried: “Enemy soldiers entered the mountain, looted our possessions and killed the people for three days. If you want to find your family, go to the waterfront and ask.” Choe cried out to the sky, wept, hit the ground, vomited blood, and immediately ran for the Seomjin River. Eventually, he regained his composure and went to the river, where he found dozens of wounded elderly people on the banks of the river who had gathered together and were weeping. Choe Cheok approached and asked [about his family], and the elders answered. “I hid in the mountains and was brought here by Japanese enemies. From here, the Japanese *dwarves* chose only the strong men and carried them on their ships, leaving the old and young who were [too sick to travel] stabbed [as you can see].” When Choe heard this story, he wept loudly.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See under August 16 to 18, 1597, as well as August 8th, 1597 in Keinen’s *Chosen Nichinichiki*.

<sup>118</sup> 至丁酉八月，賊陷南原，人皆逃竄。陟之一家，避于智異山燕谷。入山累日，糧盡將饑，陟與丁壯數三出山求食且覘賊勢。行到求禮，猝遇賊兵，潛身於巖藪而避之。是日，賊入燕谷，彌山遍谷搶掠無遺。而陟路梗不得進退。過三日。賊退後，還入燕谷，則但見積屍遍橫，流血成川。林叢間，隱隱有號咷之聲。陟就訪之，老弱數輩癢痠遍身。見陟而哭曰：“賊兵入山三日，奪掠財貨，芟刈人民，盡驅子女，昨已退屯蟾江。欲求一家，問諸水濱。”陟號天痛哭，攝地嘔血，即走蟾江。既已無可奈何，起向蟾江，則岸上

As one can see, there are components of the *Nanjung Jabrok* as well as that of the Japanese first-hand accounts of Keinen that are melded into Jo's version. For instance details regarding the escape of the Korean civilians as well as their eventual slaughter by Japanese forces are clearly echoed in the first half of the excerpt. Keinen's description of the captured Koreans and their systematic extraction from Korea is also drawn out in the latter half of the text above. All in all, this suggests that there clearly is utility for the *Choe Cheok-jeon* as a historical source.

Jo's frank and objective retelling of the popular experiences of the people is also evinced by his treatment of Buddhism throughout the novel. As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, Buddhism had lost its status as the national religion following the establishment of the Joseon Dynasty due to the perceptions that it had corrupted and misled the Goryeo Dynasty.<sup>119</sup> The *yangban* who took control of the new government focused extensively on reforming the nation along Neo-Confucian policies, with themselves as guardians and paragons of Confucianism. Despite its weakened status, Buddhism continued to attract adherents in Korea, however, and continued to provide religious comfort to a wide range of Koreans at all levels of society. Historical records suggest that some members of the royal family of the Joseon Dynasty, despite its outward Neo-Confucian veneer, continued to worship the Buddha, while the vast majority of the Korean commoners never stopped believing in the faith. For instance, the Gyeongbok Palace is said to have had an unofficial royal Buddhist temple compound constructed during the reign of King Sejong the Great,<sup>120</sup> while certain tombs of the Joseon royal tomb also had small Buddhist temples.

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有老弱，創殘數十，相聚而哭。往問之，則曰：“俺等隱於山中，爲賊所驅及賊船，抽丁壯同載，推下穽鋒，老羸者如此。陟大慟。

<sup>119</sup> See Chapter 1 for more detail regarding this subject.

<sup>120</sup> See item under August 11, 1726 (year 2 of King Yeongjo's reign) in *Journal of the Royal Secretariat*.

Jo, being a *yangban* himself, likely did not subscribe to Buddhism in an outward fashion. Even so, Jo's novel exhibits a great deal of awareness of the appeal it had for the Korean populace, as he positively depicts their faith as well as the deity of the Buddha himself. Jo's decision to anchor the entire story upon the Manbok Temple of Namwon in both the beginning and end of the novel suggests that he understood the centrality of the Buddhist faith to Korean society, where, as Ok-young said to Choe Cheok, "The reason all of us met again today is because the Buddha of the Manbok Temple has bestowed on us a subtle grace. How could we not repay that favor?"<sup>121</sup>

Most critically, the utility of the *Choe Cheok-jeon* as a historical source is best evidenced by the close similarity of the novel with other unrelated contemporary pieces of literature, namely in the *yadam* genre. The *yadam* is an important Korean literary genre that emerged in the postbellum period when the free-spirited *yangban* Yoo Mongin, compiled the *Eou Yadam*. Yoo's *Eou Yadam* serves as a documentary time capsule of popular stories and oral histories told by the people at that time, a style of writing which continued to exist well into the modern period. The *Eou Yadam* is also important to this thesis as it contains a near-identical story to that of the *Choe Cheok-jeon*, namely the "Tale of Hongdo's Family's Travels." The "Tale of Hongdo's Family's Travels" (or simply the "Tale of Hongdo") similarity to that of the *Choe Cheok-jeon* can be best identified in terms of plot.

The *Choe Cheok-jeon* can be read in three parts, with the first part focusing on Choe's early life in Namwon and his marriage to his wife Okyeong. The story begins with Choe going to the local licentiate's house in Namwon to study after being scolded by his father for being a loafer. There, Choe discovers a talent for Chinese characters as he grows in knowledge. It is at

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<sup>121</sup> 玉英爲陟曰：“吾等之得有今日，寔賴丈六佛之陰隲，吾等豈不知所以報乎？”

this time that Okyeong, a young woman living in the licentiate's house, initiates their relationship by throwing a love letter through the window. Choe also falls in love with her and begins courting her for marriage. Despite Okyeong's mother's disapproval of Choe, the couple manages to persuade her and are later married to each other. They live happily and have their first son, Mongseok, who is given to them in Okyeong's dream by the Buddha of the Manboksa Temple at Namwon.

The second part deals with Choe and his family's estrangement by the renewed Japanese offensive in 1597. When the Japanese forces enter and sack Namwon, Okyeong is captured by Japanese forces and sold as a war slave to a Japanese sailor. Choe, separated by his family during the chaos, mistakenly believes that his family has been massacred by the Japanese and leaves Korea, following a Ming general to China. After several years, much to the surprise of both Choe and Okyeong, they find each other in Annam (Vietnam) when Choe's trading ship crosses paths with Okyeong's. The two travel together to Zhejiang, China, where they have their second son, Mongseon. After Mongseon becomes of age, he marries a Chinese woman named Hongdo who was the daughter of a Ming soldier who fought in the Great East Asian War.

The last part details the beginning of the Ming-Qing transition in China and the return of Choe's family to Korea. Choe is once again conscripted, but this time to fight in the Ming army against the newly ascendant, to-be Manchu Qing forces. The Ming army is defeated at Sarhu and Choe is captured in the prisoner-of-war camp, where he finds his son Mongseok, who was also captured after he had been deployed to fight as part of the Joseon Expeditionary Forces. The two escape back into Korea where they meet Hongdo's father and return to Namwon altogether. A year later, Okyeong also departs from China with Mongseon and Hongdo on a ship before miraculously being reunited with Choe, Mongseok, and Hongdo's father in Namwon.



The “Tale of Hongdo” similarly can be read in three parts, with the first part focusing on how a certain Mr. Jeong sought to marry the local girl named Hongdo. However, due to his lack of academic qualifications, he was initially rebuffed by Hongdo’s father, until Hongdo persuaded her father to allow them to marry. The next year, they have their child named Mongseok. The second part details how the family is separated by the war. When Namwon was sacked, Jeong was able to escape, but Hongdo was captured and enslaved by Japanese forces. Jeong, mistakenly believing that his wife had joined the Chinese troops in their withdrawal to China, travels as far as Zhejiang, China in search of his wife. Fortunately, the two miraculously cross paths there on a trading ship and settle down to have their second child Mongjin. Mongjin comes of age and marries a Chinese woman in search of her father in Korea. The third part focuses on the family members’ return to Korea during the Ming-Qing transition. Jeong meets his son Mongseok in a prisoners-of-war camp after they are defeated by Qing forces in the Battle of Sarhu in 1619, while Hongdo, Mongjin and Mongjin’s wife travel to Korea by ship. In the story’s conclusion, we find that all of them arrive safely and find each other in the city of Namwon.

The nearly identical plot of the “Tale of Hongdo” and the *Choe Cheok-jeon* suggests that these two narratives likely are related to one another in some capacity. Since the “Tale of Hongdo” is much shorter than the *Tale of Choe Cheok*, some scholars have speculated that Jo’s version may be an embellished version of Yoo’s rendition of the story. However, research has shown that due to the large variations in the name of the characters, the two versions are unlikely to be directly related to one another. Furthermore, given that both renditions of the text were published in 1621, and that Jo and Yoo had no real connections, it seems unlikely that either one of them had the opportunity to realistically influence one another’s works. It seems far more

likely that given both Jo and Yoo were in Namwon during the 1610s, they were likely influenced by a popularly told story or a group of similar stories in Namwon that spoke of a group of *piroin* who had been estranged by the war and were miraculously reunited some decades after. This theory seems more realistic when one considers the fact that Yoo's rendition belongs within the *yadam* genre of fiction that collected oral histories told amongst the people in a documentary fashion. In that sense, it is likely that both authors drew from the same source of inspiration and wrote similarly inspired stories rather than influencing one another. This further suggests that the *Choe Cheok-jeon* and other contemporary literary works likely accurately capture the popular mood and sentiments regarding the war as well as the issue of captivity.

Though we can thus see that the *Tale of Choe Cheok* among other literary works may be suitable historical sources, a closer reading has not yet been employed to place *The Tale of Choe Cheok* within the discussion of Korea's unique social context as well as perspectives of the broader segment of the Korean population in late-16th and early-17th century Joseon. Only limited attention has been paid to Jo's unorthodox handling of gender dynamics between Okyeong and Choe Cheok, as well as the cosmopolitanism made evident by the frequent travels of the characters, their fluidity of identity, as well as Choe and Okyeong's son Mongseon's marriage to Hongdo.<sup>122</sup> A comprehensive attempt to situate this novel within the general social impacts of the war has yet to be conducted either.

As such, this chapter thus addresses these by identifying two important themes and components within the *Choe Cheok-jeon*, namely that of 1) the "virtue of survival" and how the

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<sup>122</sup> Kim Young-mi, "조선시대 전쟁소설에 나타난 여성에 대한 기억과 침묵" [The Memory and Silence of Women that Emerged in the War Novels of the Joseon Dynasty], *Humanities Research* 61 (2021): 7-41; Choi Ji-nyeo, "한문소설 <최척전(崔陟傳)>에 나타난 동아시아와 다문화" [East Asia and Multiculturalism in the Classical Novel Choe Cheok-jeon], *Education of Classical Studies Research* 55 (2020): 83-102.

Buddhist faith continued to comfort larger segments of the Korean population; and 2) how women who survived the experience of captivity were represented. Each of these components respectively add new dimensions to our understanding of postbellum Korean society and the Korean people's attempts to make sense of their circumstances. That is, by moving past the previously explored Neo-Confucian language that came to dominate the political landscape, we are able to more effectively see the larger circumstances of Korean society in the years immediately after the war. To best understand these differences, this chapter will finally conclude by drawing some comparisons with the previously explored *yangban* narratives and their adherence to the principles of the *samgang*, namely loyalty, filial piety, and female obedience and chastity.<sup>123</sup>

### Virtue of Survival

One of the defining aspects of the *Choe Cheok-jeon* is the great migration of Koreans during the confusion of war. As we explored earlier, during the Joseon Dynasty in Korea, crossing the border to enter a different state without the permission of the king was considered a serious crime. This was because such an act was considered one of treason and a threat to national security. Reasoning that those who leave the country may fraternize with the enemy beyond the border to conspire against the king and his government, the Joseon court sought to limit the moving of people across the borders as much as possible. Only during the annual official tribute missions to the Ming and later Qing Dynasties or specific diplomatic events were

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<sup>123</sup> The three relationships were referred to as 君爲臣綱 (k. *gunwi shingang*; ch. *junwei chengang*) or “the service of a retainer to his lord,” 父爲子綱 (k. *buwi jagang*; ch. *fuwei zigang*) or the “filial piety of a child to one's parents,” and 夫爲婦綱 (k. *buwi bugang*; ch. *fuwei fugang*), “female obedience to her husband.” Each three will most likely be expanded and explored in the first chapter with regard to the yangban elites, as well as the introduction where some explanation will have to be included about the concepts.

Koreans ever allowed to legally enter a different nation.<sup>124</sup> There was also a social component to the stigmatization of those who left the state, as it was considered a crime against one's ancestors to leave one's hometown and travel afar. Since all members of the family had the responsibility to tend to their ancestors' graves, it was consequently believed that if a person left the nation, he or she was not fulfilling his filial and familial duties.<sup>125</sup>

The previous two chapters have explored how the Joseon court as well as a large number of *yangban* elites considered there to be no exceptions to this rule, even for those who were captured and taken abroad as war slaves. As such, many of the captured *yangban* who committed or attempted to commit suicide to protect their honor and dignity were lauded by the Korean government in the postbellum period, while those who *could not die* were largely ostracized and seen as potential traitors. For such reasons, when we read the elite narratives of captivity in Chapter 2, such as those by Gang Hang and Jeong Heedeuk, we found efforts of self-censure and justification for survival dominate the writings at hand.

Unsurprisingly, not all Koreans subscribed to this constricted interpretation of Neo-Confucian “loyalty” and the emphasis on moral values over human life, however. Rather, we find that the *Choe Cheok-jeon* brings to light what this thesis terms as the “virtue of survival.” An important point that defines the *Choe Cheok-jeon* as well as the “Tale of Hongdo” is the fact that all of its main characters survive despite their struggles and temptation to commit suicide. By choosing to live, we find that they are able to surmount the various adversities and return to Korea to be reunited with their loved ones. The important aspect of this is that only through

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<sup>124</sup> Kishimoto Mi'ō and Miyajima Hiroshi, <현재를 보는 역사: 조선과 명, 청> [Present-looking History: Joseon Korea and the Ming and Qing Dynasties], Goyang-si: Neomeo Books, 2014, 187; In Beom Seo, “조선시대 승려들의 압록강 월경사건” [The Trespassing Incident at the Yalu River Border of Buddhist Monks in the Joseon Dynasty,] *Korean Ideology and Culture* 54 (2010): 227-258.

<sup>125</sup> Chung, “Imjin War and POW.”

survival is one able to move forward, whether it be through new opportunities that come their way or the specific new skills that they acquire that become necessary for their survival in the future. In this sense, it is through surviving that people are able to move past their traumatic experiences and find contentment and healing within and beyond their new circumstances.

Furthermore, throughout all of these conflicts, Jo emphasizes the importance of help that the individuals receive. Given the fact that this book's scope is transnational, we find that many of those who assist the characters are often of different nationalities. In this sense, the book takes apart the conventional Confucian approach of delineating a border and framing the "other" as mysterious or hostile. We instead see that the text establishes these foreign characters as human, compassionate, and supportive, and they in turn view the foreign sojourners in a similar light. The *Choe Cheok-jeon* thus further rejects the rigid Confucian notions of loyalty and devotion to the state, and instead emphasizes a more transnational understanding of the human condition of East Asians during the Great East Asian War.

These aspects are perhaps best seen with Okyeong's experiences, who arguably was the most traumatized through her abduction and enslavement in Japan as a *piroin*. In the text, after Okyeong was captured from the Jiri Mountains following the sacking of Namwon, we find that she was taken to the ports where she was sold to a Japanese sailor by the name Donwu. Aboard the ship, Okyeong attempted to commit suicide by trying to drown herself multiple times. Each time, Donwu, a faithful and compassionate Buddhist, prevented her from killing herself out of sympathy for her plight. Furthermore, Jo interestingly portrays Donwu in a positive light, who despite his participation in the war and the enslavement of Okyeong as an enemy of Korea, is said to have been uncomfortable with the war itself due to his faith. We see thus a complexity within the character of Donwu, who despite being an aggressor and the enemy, was an unwilling

participant of the violence, for he also was conscripted by the Japanese to ferry ships and people during the war. Moreover, we see a form of transnational compassion, in that Donwu dotes upon Okyeong, later adopting her as his brother and giving her a Japanese name, for he did not know that she was a woman due to her clothes. This in effect blurs the lines between nationalities, gender, etc., instead bringing to light the universalism of human suffering and compassion in all people.

Donwu's intervention and prevention of Okyeong's suicide attempts is further enforced by the Buddha of the Manboksa Temple himself. Interestingly, throughout the novel, the Buddha appears on several occasions of crises to provide guidance and support in Okyeong's dreams. Each time, the Buddha commands her, "Be wary and cautious [of your deeds]; do not kill yourself. Later you will surely have an occasion for celebration."<sup>126</sup> This phrase captures the popular sentiments that things will get better, and that the only thing that they can do is survive, wait, and hope for a better tomorrow. Buddha's intervention in Okyeong's life is significant, as it is more than a simple *deus ex machina* that brings about a happy ending for all of the characters. The Buddha serves as a symbol of life, in which it constantly appears to Okyeong in moments related to life and birth. For instance, the Buddha is first mentioned in the text when Okyeong and Choe Cheok visit the Manbok temple to pray for a son. The Buddha of the Manbok Temple grants their supplication, appearing to Okyeong's dream and telling her, "I am the Buddha of the Manbok Temple. Since your faith is deep, I shall give you a special son."<sup>127</sup> Similarly, when Okyeong is on the verge of suicide and death, the Buddha appears to gently guide her back to the

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<sup>126</sup> “慎無死，後必有喜，” *Choe Cheok-jeon*, 3, 6, etc. This is my own translation.

<sup>127</sup> 陟聚婦之後，所求如意，家業稍足，而常患繼嗣之尚遲。每以月朔，夫妻往禱於萬福寺。明年甲午元月，又往禱之，其夜，丈六金身，見於玉英之夢，曰“我萬福寺之佛也，我嘉爾誠，賜以奇男子，生必有異相。”及期，而果生男子，背有赤痣如小兒掌。遂名曰：‘夢釋’。

path of the living by emphasizing the fact that she does have the capacity to move past the crisis and survive.

With this, we see that Okyeong ultimately decides to preserve her life and manages to push forward in the circumstances she is placed in. Under Donwu, Okyeong learns the trade of navigating a ship as well as the Japanese language. These skills turn out to become indispensable when Okyeong sets sail herself on her final return back to Korea and utilizes them to receive help and survive on the sea. Moreover, we see that the Buddha's words turn out to be true, as her survival brings about great joy in her life later on. Due to her decision to survive and remain on the Japanese trading ship, she manages to come across Choe's ship in Annam where they are reunited after being estranged by the war for several years. Furthermore, Okyeong's decision to continue on and survive after accidentally grounding her ship on the island off of southern Korea also pays off, as she is able to take her family back to Namwon and meet all of her relatives in one place at the same time. As such, we find that the Buddha provided religious comfort for many Koreans in the late-16th and early-17th century, despite the continued suppression of Buddhism and promotion of Confucianism throughout the centuries earlier. Furthermore, we find that the Buddhist faith gave many Koreans the spirit and motivation to continue on during the war, allowing them to surmount numerous difficulties and challenges they faced along the way.

Choe Cheok also follows a similar character arch, whereby the devastation of war originally leads him to attempt to commit suicide. After hiding from the onslaught of Japanese troops, he discovers that his family had been captured during the ensuing battle. Choe attempts to find his family amidst the bodies of the dead, before suffering from a complete mental breakdown, "beating his chest and stamping his feet in sorrow before fainting and collapsing." Describing what seems to be a seizure, we can see that the experience was truly traumatic for

Choe, perhaps more so than Okyeong in that he likely felt the responsibility for being unable to protect his family. Only through the persuasion of others, does he not follow through with his urges to thus kill himself, and when he returns to his destroyed home, Choe requests one of the Chinese soldiers to allow him to join the train of soldiers withdrawing to China. The soldier Yu Youwen, taking pity on Choe, allows him to join him on their trip back to his home in Zhejiang, saying that the world is far too large for Choe to remain in one place anyways.<sup>128</sup>

In many ways, this decision and dialogue subverts the government and larger *yangban* expectations regarding patriotism and loyalty. Since it was illegal for Korean people to leave their nation, the idea that a man could simply cross the border as part of the Ming entourage underscores the idea that Neo-Confucian ideals of loyalty to the state were not as firm as the *yangban* made them out to be. Furthermore, rather than finding the bodies of his family and conducting the funeral rites for them, especially his parents, Choe decides to take off all together and reject his duties as a son, father, and husband. This creates a unique circumstance in the text whereby Jo tangentially recognizes escape from pain and suffering as a legitimate form of coping over that of ritualistic suicide. The uniqueness of the situation is further brought to the fore when we consider the fact that it is ultimately through the charity of his Chinese friends, Choe is able to leave Korea and travel the greater East Asian world. This story once again emphasizes how even in the experience of devastation, Choe was able to lean on the support of others to make the

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<sup>128</sup> This dialogue in many ways reflects the personal life of Jo himself, as he also, returning to his likely dilapidated home after the war on his own, had intended to leave Korea to join his Chinese friend on their trek back to China. Though Jo ultimately did not leave Korea, Choe's story in many ways was likely what Jo had wanted for himself as well.



right decisions to move past his traumas, where the decision to not kill himself ultimately allowed him to be reunited with his wife in Annam.<sup>129</sup>

Thus, we can see that Jo's *Choe Cheok-jeon* not only brings to light the common Korean people's appreciation for humaneness as well as the value of life, but also criticizes the cold and perfunctory Confucian philosophy that had come to grip Jo's fellow colleagues and those in the court of the king. Furthermore, the *Tale of Choe Cheok* serves to symbolically open up the boundaries of Korea, whereby individuals are allowed to travel freely and mix with people of different nationalities without fear of repercussions. In many ways, Jo also does away with the notion of the idea of the "other" and establishes that everyone was human--even the Japanese, and that everyone was a victim of the war in some capacity. This is perhaps best illuminated by the imagery of Buddhism and the virtue of survival juxtaposed with that of the *yangban*'s rigid interpretation of Confucian loyalty. All of the major characters through their survival are thus able to move past their harrowing experiences and traumas, eventually being made whole and renewed through the reunion of family and friends at the end of the novel.

### **Women Who Survived Captivity**

One aspect that was missing in our analyses of Chapters 1 and 2 was the role of women in the various narratives presented in postwar Korea. Though we find numerous mentions of women through the records of Hwang Shin, the *DSSH*, as well as that of Gang Hang and Jeong

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<sup>129</sup> It is useful to note that this aspect of help and support of people is not unique to the *Choe Cheok-jeon* alone. As we saw earlier in Chapter 2, Gang also received help from sympathetic Japanese people, who not only allowed him to escape but also allowed him to gain access to information for him to send to Korea. Thus, transnational relationships serve to highlight the seeming emptiness of the constricted Neo-Confucian rhetoric of nationality and loyalty, and instead brings to light a universal humanism in East Asia at this time.

Heedeuk's accounts most of the women are shown to be powerless and unable to escape their circumstances. More often than not, stories of their survival were either dismissed as aberrations, while accounts of female death were cosmeticized with Neo-Confucian martyrdom. It is important to note, however, that many Korean women who suffered through the war were not merely passive characters who meekly accepted their fate.

As such, the other important theme within the *Choe Cheok-jeon* is the important social dynamics in terms of gender and female agency in late-16th and early-17th century Joseon Korea. One persisting legacy of the Joseon Dynasty and its impact on Korean society is the repression of female agency. Part of this was carried out in the name of Neo-Confucianism, with the most important tenets within the Neo-Confucian *samgang* being female chastity and modesty. These were interpreted as female devotion to her husband, whereby it was expected that wives be observant and obedient to their husbands.<sup>130</sup> One consequence of this dynamic was the increasing expectation that women were to stay out of the sphere of work held by men, as women were increasingly marginalized.

What is interesting about the *Choe Cheok-jeon* is that the two female characters Okyeong and Hongdo are often depicted as matriarchs who do not fully subscribe to the patriarchal dynamic. Whether it be in their courtship or their role as matriarchs in the family, these women are shown to possess not only the power but also ability to make important and informed decisions. An important distinction to make here, however, is that neither the novel nor Korean society writ large necessarily adhered to a necessarily truly modern feministic understanding of

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<sup>130</sup> Lee Chang-gi, “다원 문화(多元文化) 교류시대(交流時代)의 문화전통(文化傳統); 해석(解釋)과 재구성(再構成): 성리학의 도입과 한국가족제도의 변화 -종법제도의 정착과 부계혈연집단의 조직화 과정-” [The Literary Traditions of a Multipolar Era of Exchange,] *Collection of Papers on National Culture* 46 (2010): 105-137; Eun A Kim, “Legal position of Women on the Early Joseon,” *Study of Korean Classical Women's Literature* 19 (2009): 5-33.

gender and female agency. If anything, the readings of the *Choe Cheok-jeon* and other related sources show that many of these women did not outright reject Neo-Confucianism, but rather opportunistically participated within a patriarchal order. During unexpected circumstances where no man was available to make the final decision, we often see women step up to fill the void and make important decisions for themselves or their family. The fact that these subversions or unexpected gender role reversals were immensely popular show that Korean society during the late-16th and early-17th century was still relatively flexible, and that despite the nearly two centuries of Confucianization of the Korean Peninsula, a large segment of the Korean population continued to respect women's role of being capable surrogates for the husbands and sons.<sup>131</sup>

For instance, towards the beginning of the *Choe Cheok-jeon*, we see that Okyeong directly approaches Choe for marriage. Choe in his youth had been a loafer, and when his father rebuked his son for being one, he had since been learning characters at Licentiate Jeong's house. At that time, Okyeong was living with Licentiate Jeong after her family had fled Seoul in the first phase of the war. There, she was able to watch and listen to Choe study, whereby she decided to make a move for marriage first. In the text, we see that Okyeong throws a slip of paper through the crack of the window with a rather licentious line from the "Pyoyumae" or "Plum Dropping from the Tree."<sup>132</sup> By doing so, Okyeong initiates the relationship by making herself "available" to his advances, just as the woman with the basketful of plums waiting for the gentlemen hoped he "only speak about it."

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<sup>131</sup> In fact, efforts to truly reshape Korean society would only realistically be achieved in the late-17th century after extensive social reordering in the Later Joseon period.

<sup>132</sup> From the *Choe Cheok-jeon*: “陟獨坐誦書，忽然窓隙中，投一小紙，取而視之，乃書標有梅末章。陟心魂飛越，不能定情” The ripe plum dropping is symbolic of a woman having reached sexual maturity. It is included in *The Book of Songs* [*Shijing*]. The last line, 標有梅，頃筐墜之。 / 求我庶士，迨其謂之， according to James Legge's translation reads as follows: “Dropt are the fruits from the plum-tree / In my shallow basket I have collected them. / Would the gentlemen who seek me / [Only] speak about it.”

There are several aspects that make this episode reflective of the relative flexibility within Joseon Korea in the late-16th and early-17th centuries. The first is the fact that Okyeong knew how to read and write in Chinese characters as well as the classical poem itself. Though it may be surprising that Okyeong was literate, we find that some privileged Korean women were given the opportunity to learn to read and write. For instance, in the aforementioned *Eou Yadam*, we find mention of women who were literate, while one of the most prolific poets during this time, Heo Nanseolheun was also a woman. Such aspects show us that some women were given the opportunity to learn and that such practices were not discouraged. Furthermore, the act of initiating the relationship itself is remarkable considering the fact that the Confucian expectations dictated that men and women remain separate before marriage. To prevent any unseemly behavior between men and women, it was expected that nuptial discussions could only be conducted through a matchmaker. Okyeong, however, given her own unique circumstances as a refugee without her father, takes the risk of potentially disgracing herself by committing the scandalous act of being her own matchmaker in order for her own individual fulfillment.<sup>133</sup>

Okyeong's seemingly rebellious streak does not end here, however. When her mother reneges on the agreement with the Choe family by attempting to have her marry to a scion of the richer Yang family, Okyeong refuses to abide by her mother's wishes. After Okyeong's mother shuts Okyeong down, Okyeong warns her mother that "even until death [she] will have no other mind [other than marrying Choe]." Later that night, when everyone falls asleep, Okyeong proves

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<sup>133</sup> From the Choe Cheok-jeon: "玉英赧然遲疑, 强而後, 言曰: "母親爲我擇婿, 必欲求富, 其情則憾矣。第惟家富, 而婿賢則何幸, 而如或家雖足食, 婿甚不賢, 則難保其家業。人之無食我以爲夫, 而雖有粟其得而食諸。竊矚崔生, 日日來學於阿叔, 忠厚誠信決非輕薄宕子, 得此爲配, 死無恨矣。況貧者, 士之常, 不義而富, 吾甚不願, 請決嫁之。此非處子所當自言之事, 而機關甚重, 豈嫌於處子羞澁之愁。潛默不言, 而竟致嫁得庸, 爲壞了一生, 則已破之甑, 難以再完。既染之絲, 不可復素, 啜泣何及, 噬臍莫追。況今兒身, 異於他人, 家無嚴父, 賊在隣境, 苟非忠信之人, 何以仗母子之身乎"

her point by attempting to take her life by strangling herself, causing an uproar in the entire family. Ultimately, Okyeong's persistence persuades her mother to accept Choe, and the two are married later that year.<sup>134</sup> These stories reveal that Korean society was still relatively tolerant of self-choice marriages despite its Neo-Confucian veneer. Ultimately, through this experience, Choe and Okyeong grow closer together and find fulfillment in their marriage. Furthermore, we see that through this sense of marriage that stability is established in the family. Given that Choe lived only with his father after his mother passed away at a young age, while Okyeong had lost her father and had run away from Seoul with only her mother, the union of the two households serves to make two incomplete families into a complete whole. This wholeness and completion is shown symbolically when Choe sees his family's wealth increase, leading to a life of comfort and affluence.

Choe and Okyeong's second son Mongseon's marriage to Hongdo also raises doubts about the artificial constructions of family and expectations of the Joseon elite. In this case, Hongdo, a Chinese woman, also initiates the marriage by opportunistically seeking the hand of Mongseon. However, unlike Okyeong who had hoped for individual fulfillment through marriage with someone she loved, Hongdo marries Mongseon with the hope that one day she will be able to go to Korea or the "Eastern Country" with her in-laws. This is because Hongdo wanted to see her father Chen Weijing who had gone to Joseon in her youth and had not since returned. Since she deeply regretted not being able to remember the face of her father, whom she believed had died in Korea, it was her hope that she could travel to Korea where she could

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<sup>134</sup> “玉英夜訪于母曰：“崔從義陣，行止係於主將，非故負約。不俟其言，而輕自破約，不義孰正？若奪兒志，死而靡他，母也天只，不謀人只。”母曰：“汝何執迷如此？當從家長之處分爾，兒女何知就歸乎？”夜深夢間，忽聞喘息汨汨之聲，覺而撫其女，不在焉。驚起索之，玉英於窓壁下，以手巾結項而伏。手足皆冷，喉嚨間汨汨之聲，漸微且絕。驚呼解結，蹴春生點火而來，抱持痛哭。以勺水入口，小頃而甦。主家亦驚動來救，自後絕不言梁家之事。”

perform the rites for her father's spirit. Though one may dismiss Hongdo's decision as another form of filial piety, it is important to note that she pursues this goal on her own with the hopes that she will be able to find fulfillment in seeing her father once again.

In other words, rather than being pressured into marriage and becoming immediately subordinate to one's husband, both Okyeong and Hongdo negotiate their terms and conditions in the relationship for their own interest. For Okyeong, it was individual fulfillment through what she thought of as an ideal partner, while for Hongdo it was her hopes of finding a way to Korea in order to find her father. This highlights a degree of female agency within the discussion of marriage that suggests that not everything was as the elites thought. Furthermore, in terms of the plot, it is through this marriage that Hongdo does ultimately successfully meet her father in Namwon where he had travelled with Choe and his son Mongseok. In a certain way, Jo recognizes that women fundamentally drive the plot of the story, when it becomes obvious that it is ultimately Hongdo's decision that finally brings the entire family together, whereby her individual decision helps bring together and strengthen the family.

The *Choe Cheok-jeon* also showcases interesting instances in which the women take on the "masculine" roles from the male characters. For instance, following the defeat of the Ming forces and the capture of Choe, Okyeong decides to take the whole family and embark upon a journey across the sea to return to Korea in order to be reunited with her husband. It is at this time that Mongseon attempts to stop her by saying that taking such a trip will be certain suicide. When Okyeong refuses to acquiesce, Mongseon breaks out in tears and implores her to reconsider, stating that "a small ship like this cannot make it to the land."<sup>135</sup> Hongdo, however, also sides with her mother-in-law by stating that the dangers of the sea are no different than those

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<sup>135</sup> 夢仙泣訴曰：“母親何爲出此言也？若能得達，豈非大善？而萬里滄波，非一葦可航之地”

on land.<sup>136</sup> When her son fails to see reason, Okyeong issue a ultimatum against her son, bluntly stating:

Though the seas are dangerous, I have already experienced them. Long ago, when I was in Japan, I made a ship my home and traded at *Minguang* (ports in Southern China) in the spring and sold goods at Ryukyu in the fall. I have a rich experience of crossing tall and fearsome waves by divining from the stars and currents. Dangerous waves and gales I will face, the wellbeing of the ship I will defend. Even if there were some unfortunate disaster, what way where will there be [anyways?]<sup>137</sup>

From this scene, we can see that Okyeong is firmly in control through her previous experiences, and volunteers to defend the ship and the wellbeing of the family. In other words, Okyeong emerges as the head of the family with the ability and duty to protect them in the absence of the father figure. Both Okyeong and Hongdo subvert the Neo-Confucian family hierarchy, whereby Mongseon falls below them in terms of decision making. Furthermore, in their ensuing sojourn Okyeong manages to utilize what she has learned during her captivity and slavery to survive the ordeal of travel. In this sense, one could also claim that Jo imbues Okyeong with matriarchal strength, whereby she is able to fully take control of her life's circumstances and move past her humiliation at the hands of men.

Such a glowing review of Okyeong's resourcefulness and determination allows us to surmise that there was a general popular appreciation for the resilience of women in Korean society at that time. This can be corroborated by similar examples found in the *Eou Yadam* in a variety of stories, with the "Tale of Gang Namdeuk's Mother" being a prime case. Set a generation before the Great East Asian War, the story details how Gang Namdeuk's mother

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<sup>136</sup> 紅桃在傍, 謂夢仙曰: "無阻. 親計自熱, . 雖在水火盜賊, 其可免乎?"

<sup>137</sup> "水路艱難我多備嘗 昔在日本, 以舟爲家, 春商閩廣, 秋販琉球 出沒於驚波駭浪之中, 占星候潮, 涉歷已慣. 風濤險易, 我自當之, 舟楫安危, 我自御之 脫有不幸之患, 豈無方便之道?"

traveled to southern China in search of her husband. Due to a storm, Gang's father had been shipwrecked in China, and had been unable to return home due to a lack of funds and directions. However, he was able to send a message into Korea to his wife to tell her that he was still alive and needed her help to return home. Despite her sons' attempts to stop her, Gang's mother is said to have crossed the Korean-Chinese border on her own and traveled on foot to southern China, whereby she was able to rescue her husband and travel back to Korea together.<sup>138</sup> One can thus surmise that such agency of women was not uncommon during the period leading up to and immediately after the war.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, compared to the number of people in the *Dongguk Shinsok Samgang Haengshildo (DSSH)* who died as filial sons or loyal servants, a far larger number of chaste women died. Part of this no doubt occurred because they were often left defenseless in the war and suffered the most harm. On the other hand, we have seen that the *DSSH* was also the product of the elite and the government's intentions to emphasize a patriarchal order of society that demanded the subordination of women in Korea. The value of "to follow only one is the way of the woman," or "to follow only one is the way of a wife," was the centerpiece to what the elites believed were women's duties, which were preserved in the gruesome deaths of wives dying to protect their husband or purity. As such, stories of women who returned despite having been captured by the Japanese served as a counter-example to this new patriarchal order that the elites were attempting to establish, adding complexity to the discussions of gender in the postwar period.

### Conclusion

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<sup>138</sup> Yoo Mongin. *Eou Yadam*. Translated by Sin, Ik-chol, et al. Paju-si: Tolbegae Press, 2006.



In sum, in the course of this chapter, we were able to explore popular experiences and sentiments of the larger segments of Koreans regarding the war and experiences of captivity, and how they fundamentally compared with that of the government and *yangban piroin* in Chapters 1 and 2. In particular, we find that as Korea sought to make sense of the Great East Asian War, there were a variety of different narratives presented by various groups within Korea. Through the *DSSH*, the Joseon court attempted to assuage the disgruntled population by awarding Neo-Confucian virtues while also reshaping the minds of the people through the propagation of the *samgang*, or the three fundamental bonds of loyalty, filial piety, and female modesty. In this attempt, records of those who survived the experience of captivity and returned to Korea were ultimately frowned upon by the government as they provided a counternarrative to their own interpretation of the war. Meanwhile, in Chapter 2, we saw that the *yangban piroin* justified their survival through the language of Neo-Confucianism. Affecting the virtues of loyalty and filial piety, they attempted to justify their shameful shortcomings of not being able to kill themselves.

Chapter 3 offers a fundamentally different reading regarding the experiences of war and captivity. Through the reading of Jo Wihan's *Choe Cheok-jeon* and other contemporary pieces of literature such as Yoo Mongin's *Eou Yadam*, we find that many Koreans did not fully subscribe to the Neo-Confucian expectations of the *samgang*. In fact, we find that much of the popular understanding of the war was heavily influenced by a humanistic reading of their lives rather than Neo-Confucianism, whereby the virtue of survival was emphasized extensively throughout the novel at hand. Rather than choosing to kill themselves, the characters survive and surmount the difficulties and challenges of life, whereby they are able to return back to their homes and be reunited with their loved ones. Furthermore, Jo's *Choe Cheok-jeon* and Yoo's *Eou Yadam* bring to light an interesting picture of female agency and gender dynamics in late-16th and early 17th

century Korea. By showing women capable of making informed decisions while also taking control of their families in special circumstances, we see that women were respected as decision-makers in the absence of their husbands. This adds a new dimension to our understanding of how Korean women responded to the unique challenges of the war and how they made the most of their circumstances through a variety of means.

In conclusion, we see that Jo Wihan's *Choe Cheok-jeon* appeals to the popular sentiments via subtly challenging the *yangban* expectations of the time. By doing this, Jo implicitly states that every individual has inherent worth and thus deserves the right to live and be happy. Rather than killing oneself due to the shame of being captured, Jo speaks through his characters that one can move past the trauma and recover by being able to utilize such experiences. In this sense, his novel commends the progressive and regenerative fortitude of the Korean common folk, which would buttress the Joseon Dynasty for almost three more centuries.

## Conclusion

When the Great East Asian War erupted in 1592, the world as many Koreans knew ended. The thousands of people killed during the battles, as well as the ensuing collateral damage devastated Korea. For the Joseon court that had failed to defend its people, the war came as a stinging reminder of their inadequacies and weakness. For most of the people, the war was a time of chaos, with every man and family for himself. As for the tens to hundreds of thousands of Koreans who were taken to Japan and abroad, it was a time of crisis, with people having to adapt to foreign lands and new cultures.

In this landscape of upheaval, when the war concluded in 1598, the nation entered a period of physical, but also socio-political reconstruction. For most people, they returned to their daily lives with their respective views of the terrible war fought for past seven years. As for the government and king, we have found that despite the initial crisis of authority and legitimacy they faced for their deficiencies in preventing the war and protecting their people, the war ultimately served an important purpose of enforcing its agenda of injecting Neo-Confucian values into society. This was because the conflict at hand ironically produced a great number of victims that allowed for King Seonjo as well as his successor Prince Gwanghae to win the support of their people. Through a rigorous but expansive bureaucratic process of canonizing these victims as “martyrs” of Neo-Confucianism, both regimes were able to present themselves benevolent monarchs not only recognizing the responsibilities of the war, but also awarding those who had conducted themselves virtuously. Furthermore, the Joseon court later published these stories during the reigns of King Seonjo and Prince Gwanghae. Exporting these rather gruesome deaths of filial sons (and daughters), loyal servants, and chaste women dying for Confucian principle through various edicts that culminated in the *Dongguk Shinsok Samgang*

*Haengshildo (DSSH)*, both kings and their courts intended to rebuild the nation in a Confucian manner.

The main crux of the thesis analyzes the responses of the *piroin* to the war and their experiences of captivity in the face of this crystallization of Neo-Confucian political rhetoric in Korea. We find that contemporary to the increasingly stringent national rhetoric, several thousand Korean *piroin* had begun to return to Korea, bringing their own experiences of captivity. It is important to note, however, that the train of people returning to Korea was not a single monolith of people with the same experiences. Given that Korean society itself was diverse, with people possessing their respective outlooks on life, these differences were translated in the way that the different *piroin* viewed their experiences and the manners in which they carried themselves after the war. In other words, though each *piroin* had a different understanding of their survival, these various stories of survival allow us to more comprehensively understand Korean society and the peoples' varied lives in the late-16th and early-17th century.

The second and third chapters of this thesis addressed this by exploring the experiences of captivity for the elite *yangban* and commoner classes respectively. In the second chapter, we identify an interesting dynamic in which the elite *yangban piroin*, though aware of the need to commit suicide in order to protect their honor, “fail” to do so for a greater purpose. Furthermore, both of our subjects Gang Hang and Jeong Heedeuk interestingly co-opt the stringent death-demanding language of the *yangban* to present a case for his survival.

In the case of Gang Hang we find that he preserves his life in order to serve his king better by relaying critical information regarding Japan's geography and wartime economy. In particular, he takes upon the symbol of the Confucian character of the shepherd Su Wu to

establish himself as a loyal servant. In other words, Gang utilizes the language of loyalty to his king to challenge the *yangban* expectation that he should have killed himself to show his loyalty. As for Jeong Heedeuk, Jeong appeals to the Neo-Confucian virtue of filial piety. Claiming that his father had commanded him to survive, Jeong claims that his survival makes him a filial son. By constantly returning to his father's commandment, as well as numerous mentions of his sorrows of being separated from his family, Jeong emphasizes how his death would in fact have been an act of Neo-Confucian impiety. Interestingly, we see that Jeong also appeals to the fact that he was loyal through invocation of the shepherd Su Wu, and through collecting information from Japan. In this sense Jeong draws the readers' attention to the Korean elites' self-contradictory understanding via showing that he exhibited both virtues of filial piety as well as loyalty in his survival. This language of in-betweenness and self-contradictions consequently not only emphasizes the flexibility that Gang and Jeong possessed, but also of the variable interpretation of Neo-Confucianism itself, as we find that there were differing rhetoric of virtues existing within Korea at that time.

The third chapter analyzes the stories of captivity of the common people through Jo Wihan's novel, the *Choe Cheok-jeon*, as it successfully encapsulates the story of non-*yangban* *piroin*. In our analysis, we find that unlike the Neo-Confucian virtues of filial piety, loyalty, and female chastity that we identified amongst the *yangban* and the Joseon court in Chapter 1, the broader Korean experience more closely followed the "virtue of survival," as we find that the main characters, despite the temptation to commit suicide, continue on with their lives. For instance, Okyeong, though captured and taken abroad as a slave, does not commit suicide as did other *yangban* women in Chapters 1 and 2, while Choe Cheok moved on from his traumatic experiences to travel to a different place. By utilizing the skills that they learn in the process,

such as languages and in Okyeong's case naval science, both Okyeong and Choe are able to meet far away from home. Thus, in many ways, all of these aspects criticize the Neo-Confucian rhetoric and emphasize the rejuvenation of the Korean nation through moving past the difficult circumstances at hand.

Chapter 3 also raises the question of how women perceived their experiences of captivity, and how Korean society likely viewed it. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, we found that in the *DSSH*, compared to the number of people who died as filial sons or loyal servants, a far larger number of "chaste women" died as a consequence of the war. The *DSSH* emphasized the devastating impact of war upon Korean women, and how many were left defenseless in the onslaught of Japanese soldiers. Jo Wihan's *Choe Cheok-jeon* introduces a different perspective on Korean women as Jo writes about women who survived the war. In particular, Okyeong's story seemingly challenges the elite's precept that "to follow one's husband is the way of the wife." By emerging as a decision-maker and flexible learner, Okyeong brings to light the dimension of resourcefulness and strength of Korean women. It is important to note, however, that neither the *Choe Cheok-jeon* nor Jo himself was necessarily making a modern feminist criticism of his times. Rather, Jo simply relates contemporary Korean women as resourceful participants in a largely patriarchal society, who were capable of stepping up to take on traditionally male roles when necessary. By not disparaging these women, Jo shows how Korean society at this time generally respected women and their decisions, especially during the difficult circumstances of war.

More broadly, analysis of the *Choe Cheok-jeon* raises interesting questions about the psyche of the common people of Korea, as well as potentially East Asia during this time. For instance, we see that throughout the novel, the symbol of the Buddha and Buddhism is constantly

invoked as a sign of life and birth, who guide the ensemble of characters onto a more fruitful path. It serves as a spiritual *lingua franca* and explains the respect of life that many East Asians have for one another that translates into actions of kindness and sympathy. It is interesting that this respect for life is contrasted with the Neo-Confucian principle of honor before death, as well as the strict “otherization” of non-practicers of the Confucian ideology. Jo shows a resistance to depicting non-Koreans as one-dimensional individuals, or simply as foreign and the “other,” but highlights the fact that they have human concerns and struggles as well. For instance, we find through the stories of Donwu and Hongdo’s father Chen Weijing that everyone has suffered from the war through the division and separation of families. What is important is that the people accept their circumstances and move past the trappings of Confucianism by correctly realizing that they are but words and ideologies. This reflects the general theme of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism present within the experiences of war and captivity in East Asia.

In sum, this research brings together previous threads of research on the *piroin* together to provide a more holistic understanding regarding the phenomenon and experience of war captivity. Furthermore, in the process, it reveals new and interesting dynamics within late-16th and early-17th century Korea. This research, however, is not without problems. First of all, due to the very specific analysis of a handful of sources, this research’s generalizability may be lower than expected. For instance, when we take a closer look at Chapter 2, it becomes obvious that the sources above reflect only male perspectives from within the *yangban* class. What is interesting is that almost all of the elite *yangban* sources compiled from this period are written by and for male elite *yangban*. Though we know that elite women were also part of the *piroin* population, we do not see their perspectives reflected in the histories conserved. Very passingly, do we see mention of them within the discussion of the *piroin*, as we do with Hwang Shin’s note on the

letter of a Korean woman asking for the Korean diplomatic mission's help in freeing her from Japan. Even then, we see a subtle dismissal of her story as being insignificant, for she is never mentioned again in the official records in any capacity. It is thus important to note that this thesis' analysis on the *yangban* elite's perspectives on their captivity are only part of the larger picture. Furthermore, when one considers the fact that most of *piroin* (more than 9 out of 10) were not returned to Joseon Korea, this may mean the results of this study does not capture other important aspects of experiential differences of Joseon *piroins* from the Imjin War.

As such, for future research, it is the hope of this author to be able to address these limitations of this thesis. The author hopes that he may be able to access Japanese sources on the *piroin* who settled down in Japan and compare them with those who returned to Korea after the war. Being able to compare their experiences will be able to provide a better understanding of how Koreans truly felt about the war and how their lives were during the late-16th and early-17th century.

Furthermore, it is the hope of the author to be able to also explore how these stories may have been forgotten and suppressed in the late Joseon period. Part of this interest stems from the question of why records of this time are so limited, as well as why research on the *piroin* only recently has been pursued in the past thirty to forty years. All in all, the author hopes that future research on these subjects will shed further light on the unanswered questions of this paper at hand and enrich the findings of this thesis.



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