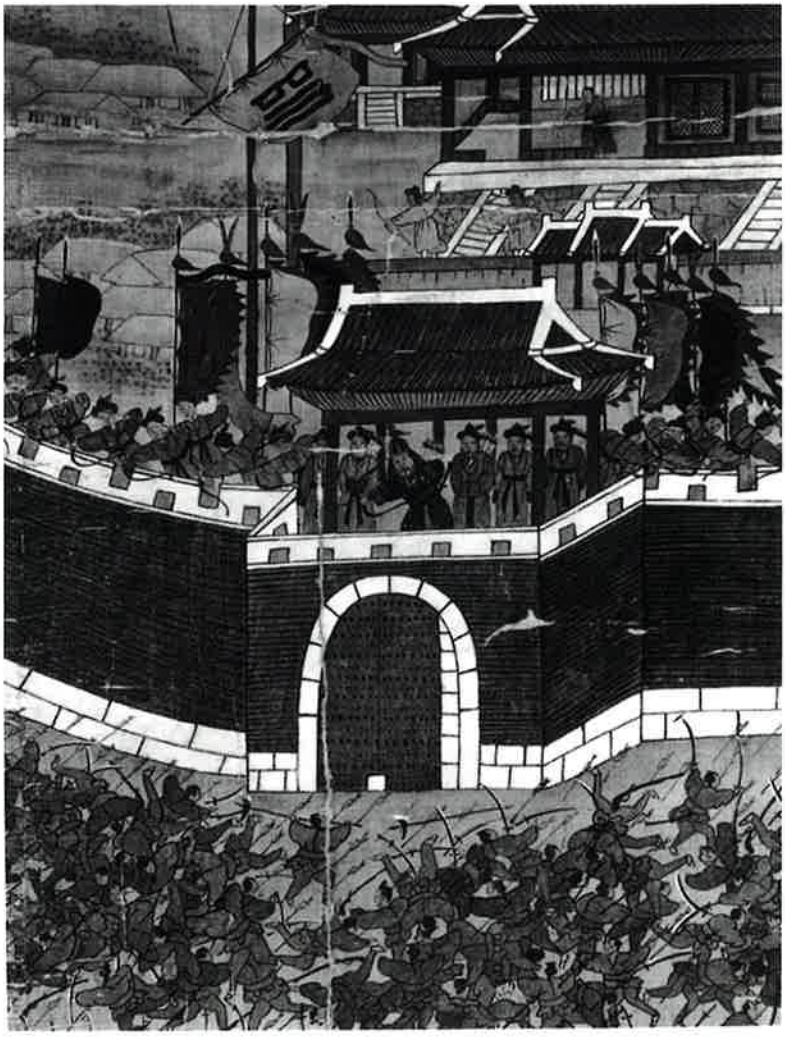
The Book of Corrections

Reflections on the National Crisis during the Japanese Invasion of Korea 1592-1598

懲毖錄

Yu Sŏngnyong



TRANSLATED BY

Choi Byonghyon

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Contents

Abbreviations Used in the Notes

CHJ	*The Cambridge History of Japan*
CJS	*Chungjong sillok*
CPC	*Chungbong chip*
CSKI	*Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions* (Palais)
HDMSN	*Haedong myŏngsinnok* (Kim Yuk)
HITS	*Han'guk inmul taesajŏn*
IJS	*Injo sillok*
JQZSTS	*Jianquiao Zhongguo Sui–Tang shi*
KHIG	*Kwanghaegun ilgi*
KJIG	*Kukjo inmulgo*
KJPM	*Kukjo pangmok*
LCPL	*Liangchao pingrang lu* (Zhuge Yuansheng)
MJS	*Myŏngjong sillok*
MUDSM	*Mang'udang sŏnsaeng munjip*
MSLZ	*Mingshi liezhuan* (Fu Weilin)
NHK	*A New History of Korea* (Lee Kibaik)
NJCN	*Nanjung chamnok* (Cho Kyŏngnam)
NJD	*Nihon jinmei daijiten*
SJS	*Sŏnjo sillok*
SJSS	*Sŏnjo sujŏng sillok*
TGCY	*T'onggamch'alyo* (Kang Chi)
TYSN	*Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*
YLSKS	*Yŏllyŏsil kisul* (Yi Kŭng'ik)
YNIG	*Yŏngnam inmulgo* (Ch'ae Hongwŏn)
YSGIG	*Yŏnsan'gun ilgi*
ZLRD	*Zhongguo lidai renming dacidian*

Translator's Preface

The text of *Chingbirok* (The book of corrections), originally written in Chinese, has been translated into Korean and Japanese quite a few times, but never into English until now. The English translation of this Korean classic, therefore, is long overdue, but since it is the first attempt of its kind, it should be considered a work in progress rather than a finished product.

There are two versions of *Chingbirok*. The first, called *Ch'obon Chingbirok,* consists of two books; the second, *Kanhaeng Chingbirok,* is an extended version, made up of sixteen books. When one refers to *Chingbirok,* one usually refers to the former. *Ch'obon Chingbirok* deals with all of the events during the Japanese invasion of Korea from beginning to end. The fourteen books added in the *Kanhaeng Chingbirok* consist of various historical records, including the author's memorials submitted to the king, official letters, and orders sent to the military commanders, most of which were written during the wartime crisis. The writings called *Nokhu chapki* (Miscellanea), basically a fragmented presentation of the author's personal observations and discussions of public policies, are not included in the longer version.

For this translation I used both the author's original text written in classical Chinese and Lee Chaeho's Korean translation and footnotes. Recently I learned that Mr. Lee was publishing a revised version of his translation, and I was fortunate to obtain his manuscript through my friend. His work helped me a great deal in clarifying some of the difficult problems in the original text, and I am grateful to Mr. Lee for lending me his manuscript.

I have transposed dates and other temporal references to Western conventions. The titles of the individual chapters in my translation are not found in the original text, but I chose to provide them in accordance with the general practice of Korean translations. The subtitle "Reflections on the National Crisis during the Japanese Invasion of Korea, 1592–1598" is also my own.

One of the major difficulties and frustrations in my undertaking was translating the numerous official titles of the historical characters that currently have no exact equivalents in English. The outstanding works of eminent scholars including Edward W. Wagner and James B. Palais were of great assistance in this regard. I am deeply indebted to the generous help of many people. At the initial stage of my work, I consulted my colleagues at Honam University. Professors Yu Myongwoo, Kim Kyongho, Kim Hongjung, Kim Myonghee, and Lee Songnam helped me with their expertise as well as their enthusiasm for my enterprise. My translation was proofread by a number of competent readers, especially Professors Joseph Wendling, Michel Englebert, and members of my family. However, my translation went through a number of revisions and reorganizations, and a revised version was read by Professor Emeritus Michael Timko of City University of New York, my former teacher and mentor. The final version of my translation was read and reviewed by Professor James B. Palais of Washington University, the author of the monumental *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions.*

With regard to the publication of this book, I owe my deepest gratitude to Professor Ryu [Yu] Myongwoo, my colleague at Honam University and presently president of the Korea Translation Foundation, for his great help. As a descendant of the author, Yu Sŏngnyong, Professor Ryu met with scholars and experts on my behalf to verify some of the details. I also wish to extend my appreciation to Dr. Lee Dai Soon, former president of Kyongwon University; Professor Emeritus Lewis Lancaster and Professor Hong Yung Lee, former chairs of the Center for Korean Studies, University of California, Berkeley; Jonathan Petty, program assistant at the center; and Joanne Sandstrom, managing editor at the Institute of East Asian Studies. I also would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Ryu [Yu] Youngha, the sixteenth descendant of Yu Sŏngnyong, the author of this book. As the head of the Yu clan, Mr. Ryu kindly invited me to his house in Hahoe village in Andong, Korea, and provided me with much valuable information and photographs. I am also indebted to the authorities of Chinju National Museum and Osaka Museum in Japan, who gave me permission to use some of the pictures in their possession. I am also very grateful to the Korea Translation Foundation and to Chairman Jin Roy Ryu of the Sŏae Memorial Research Foundation for their moral and financial support.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my wife Inyoung, my sister Byongnim, my daughter Yoon Sung, and my niece Nim, who supported my efforts through the entire process.

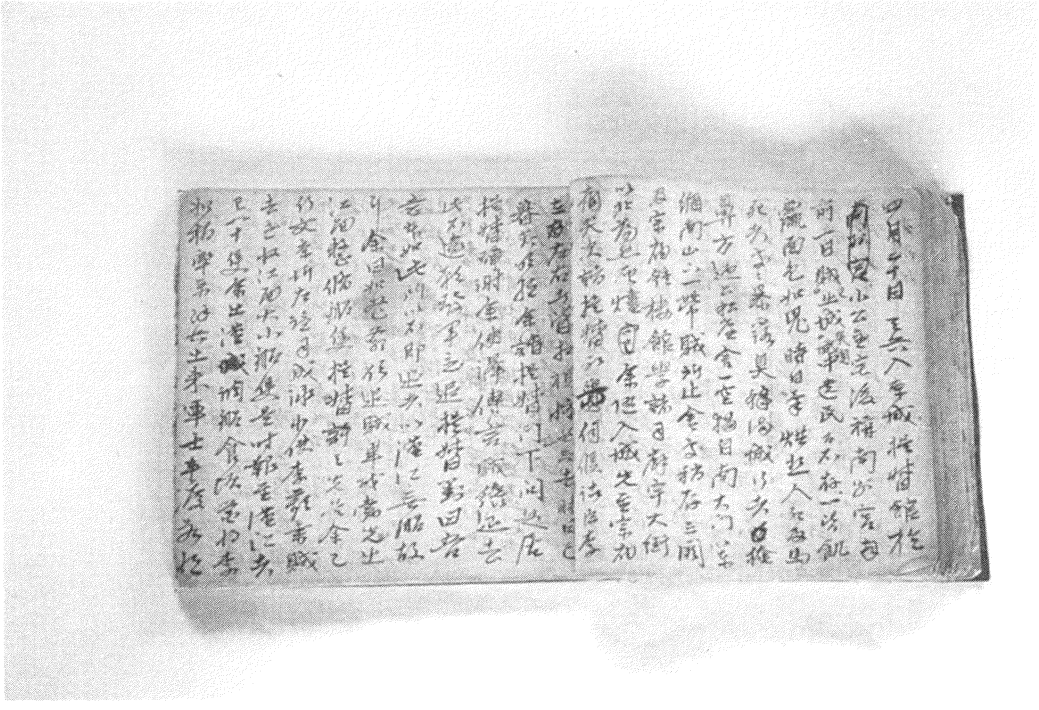

Figure 1. The original manuscript of *Chingbirok* (The book of corrections).

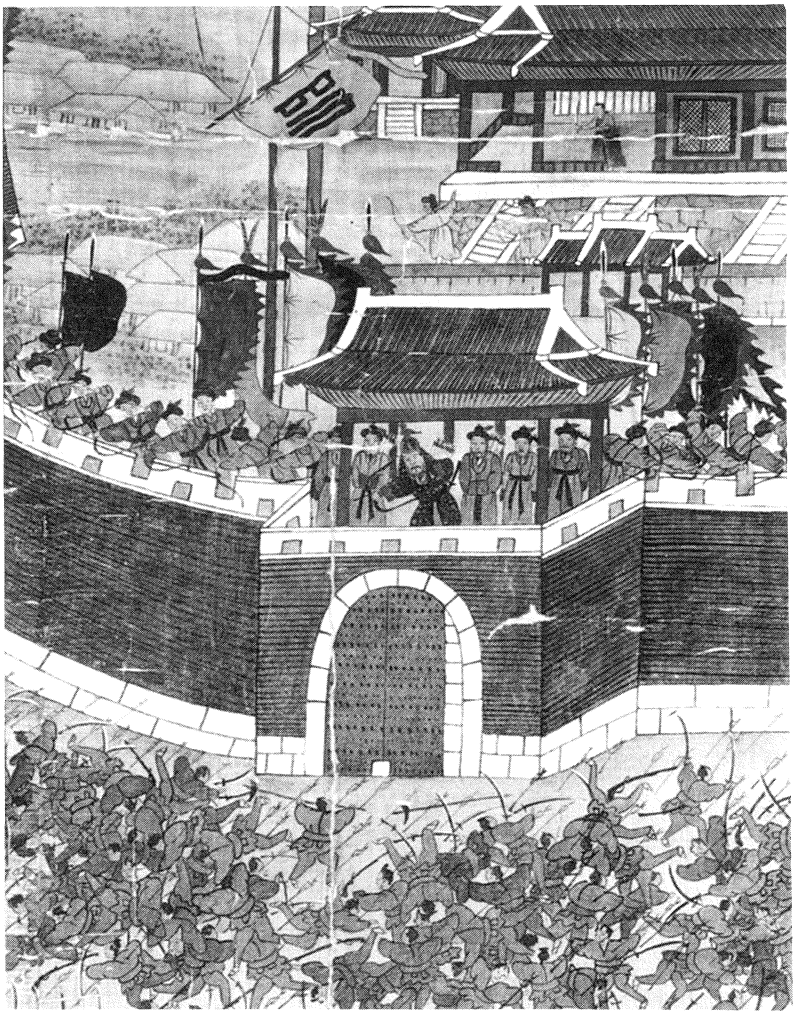

Figure 2. The Japanese army wielding long swords and guns is laying siege to a Korean fortress. Koreans on top of the wall are shooting arrows at the attacking Japanese soldiers.

Figure 3 (Ch'unghyodang House). Yu Sŏngnyong's house, called Ch'unghyodang (House of Loyalty and Filiality), in Hahoe Village, Andong, North Kyŏngsang province.

Introduction

The Japanese invasion of Korea (Chosŏn) in 1592 and the subsequent seven-year war was one of the most tragic and traumatic experiences in Korean history. The magnitude of this tragedy was unprecedented. Hundreds of thousands died and the country was devastated. It took many years for Korea to recover.

Looking back upon this tragedy from start to finish, Yu Sŏngnyong's memoir vividly portrays all the major developments of the crisis, as well as the men who were involved in it, and persuasively demonstrates what went wrong. The purpose of writing *Chingbirok* (The book of corrections), as the author professes in his preface, was to prevent the same mistakes from taking place in the future. What is the historical lesson to be learned from the Japanese invasion? The author offers his own answer to that question and at the same time challenges his readers to reach their own conclusions.

The Japanese invasion in 1592, known as the Imjin War, was a sobering experience for Korea, Japan, and China, for it led them to test their own strength and arrive at a new international order. Korea and China were roused from their complacency by the severity of the ordeal, and Japan emerged as a new, potential regional power, although the war ended inconclusively. In the short term, Korea and China were rudely awakened by the crisis; however, they soon fell asleep once again. From the long-term perspective, it is clear that these three countries failed to learn their lesson from history, because a similar crisis was to recur approximately three hundred years later. Playing the role of the aggressor once again, Japan provoked a war with China in 1884, and following its victory, took over Korea in 1910. Hideyoshi's old dream had finally become a reality after more than three centuries, although it too eventually ended in failure.

After the war with Japan at the end of the sixteenth century, Yu Sŏngnyong, who served as the chief state councilor during the

crisis, wrote *Chingbirok.* The title has often been translated as "War Memoirs," but this book is much more than that. The purpose of the work, as its author clearly states in his preface, is not merely to record the events during the crisis but to draw a moral lesson from them and prevent similar disasters from taking place in the future. This historiography, emphasized by the author himself, is in fact more central to his book than the war records themselves, and is the main reason I decided to translate the title as "The Book of Corrections."

The Western notion of history, as its root meaning indicates, is basically centered on "inquiry." History is a form of inquiry, or investigation, to produce a rational explanation for significant events in the past. In this sense, Yu Sŏngnyong's book, in its conception and approach, has much in common with the ethos of Western history. However, it also reveals a strong moral purpose, which is more manifest in the Oriental tradition. According to this view of history, historical facts are important not only for the investigation of things in the past, but also for the moral lesson they provide. History is a repository of morality and wisdom. For this reason, Yu Sŏngnyong's records hardly spare any details of the facts, no matter how embarrassing they may be. True, he was at times inadvertently involved in factional fights and not at all generous to his opponents in his historical accounts. Nevertheless, the overall account of the historical events he presented, even when evaluated from today's standards, appears to be admirably faithful to the facts as well as to the historical principles.

The Historical Background of the Text

The international relations between Korea and Japan can be traced at least as far back as the early Three Kingdoms period. According to *Memorabilia of Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk yusa*), Japan sent an envoy to pay homage to King Naemul of the Silla kingdom (391). However, Silla saw more pirates than envoys from Japan, who constantly invaded its seacoast. Thus, King Munmu (661–681), seeking divine aid to repulse the Japanese pirates, built a Buddhist temple and his own tomb under the sea. Becoming a sea dragon after his death, he wished to protect the country from the Japanese pirates. This story is only one of the numerous indicators of the troublesome relations between Korea and Japan. There were, of course, times of goodwill and warm friendship. Paekche, one of the three kingdoms, sent scholars and monks to

Book I

ONE

The Envoys from Japan

In the Pyŏngsul year of Wanli (1586), Tachibana Yasuhiro, a Japanese envoy, visited Korea with a letter from Taira no [Toyotomi] Hideyoshi, the ruler of Japan.[1] The formal relationship of the two countries can be traced two hundred years back to the early years of the Ming empire when Genji [Ashikaga Yoshimitsu], the king of Japan, established his kingdom.[2]

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[1] Wanli is the reign name of emperor Shenzong (1573–1620) of Ming China. Tachibana Yasuhiro was originally a subject of Sō Yoshihirō, the stepfather of Sō Yoshitoshi, who was made the governor of Tsushima by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (*NJD*). "Taira no" is the old adopted surname of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) before he was appointed *kanpaku* (imperial regent) and bestowed the name Toyotomi (Bountiful Minister) by the emperor in 1586. The Taira was one of the four prominent houses that dominated the Japanese political scenes during the Heian period (794–1185). Hideyoshi, born of an obscure family, probably adopted the well-respected name of the Taira house as his surname when he began to serve Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), a powerful warlord whom he later succeeded. According to the *Tenshō* records, Hideyoshi was awarded the *naidaijin* title in the third month of 1585, and the imperial proclamation addressed him as "Taira no Asan Hideyoshi." However, according to Mary Elizabeth Berry, the author of *Hideyoshi*, Hideyoshi used Kinoshita during his early career and again changed his name, to Hashiba, when he served Oda Nobunaga.

Oda Nobunaga, betrayed by his own man, was assassinated in 1582, and Hideyoshi quickly seized power after defeating Akechi Mitsuhide who had killed Nobunaga. By 1590 Hideyoshi became the undisputed master of Japan, and as he took complete control of the country, which was torn apart by power struggles among ambitious military overlords, he finally invaded Korea. His ultimate goal was to conquer China through Korea, but his armies were met with the unexpectedly strong challenges of the combined forces of Korean and Chinese armies, and he temporarily withdrew some of his forces after a series of negotiations with Ming China. Deeply frustrated, Hideyoshi made his second attempt to invade Korea in 1597, but he died suddenly in 1598, bringing the conflicts to an end (*NJD*).

[2] Genji here indicates Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), the third shogun of the Muromachi period. Born the grandson of Ashikaga Takauji, the founder of the Ashikaga shogunate, he unified two imperial families (Nancho and Hokucho), which divided the country from the time of his grandfather Takauji, and began the official trade with Ming China. In the early fifteenth century, Yoshimitsu was able

In the early part of their relationship, Korea sent diplomatic envoys to Japan for courtesy when there was a need to express congratulations or condolences. This can be evidenced by the fact that Sin Sukju visited Japan as secretary (*sŏjanggwan*) of our diplomatic mission with a letter from our king.[3] Later, King Sŏngjong visited Sin [Sukju] on his deathbed and asked him if he had anything to say for the last time.[4] Sin replied, "I hope Your Majesty will not lose peace with Japan."

Impressed by Sin's advice, King Sŏngjong sent his envoys, First Counselor (*pujehak*) Yi Hyŏngwŏn and Secretary Kim Hun and tried to establish better diplomatic relations with Japan.[5] However,

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to suppress the southwestern feudal lords whose pirate ships were marauding along the China coast, ending a six-hundred-year lapse in formal trade with China (*CHJ*).

The king of Japan is actually the shogun, a de facto ruler who ran the country. Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in his official document to Ming China signed as "the king of Japan," and the Chinese government in its reply to the letter of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu addressed him as "the king of Japan." Therefore, although Ashikaga Yoshimitsu was not the king of Japan, the author appears to have followed the common practice of calling the Japanese ruler the king of Japan.

[3] Sin Sukju (1417–1475) was a scholar-politician in the early period of the Chosŏn dynasty. He passed the state examination for civil service in 1439 and became junior sixth counselor (*pusuch'an*) of Chiphyŏnjŏn (Hall of Worthies) in 1441. The following year, he visited Japan as secretary of the Korean diplomatic mission and contributed to the invention of the Korean alphabet, *han'gŭl*. He made as many as thirteen trips to Ming China to seek the help of Hanlin academician Huang Zan, a renowned authority in phonetics, and Huang Zan was known to have been deeply impressed by Sin's power of understanding. Sin soon established himself as a distinguished scholar along with his colleague Sŏng Sammun and rose in rank. In 1452, he was secretary to Great Lord Suyang, who visited Ming China to thank the emperor. Because of this trip, he was able to form a special relationship with Great Lord Suyang, and later, played an important role in making him a king and became a Chŏngnan Merit Subject. During the reign of King Sejo and King Sŏngjong, he rose to chief state councilor after serving numerous high-ranking offices. In his final years, he joined the team of historians to publish the *Veritable Records* of King Sejo and King Yejong. He also wrote *Haedong chegukki*, a record of his travel to Japan as an envoy (*HITS*).

The secretary was a member of the diplomatic mission who was in charge of drafting official documents.

[4] King Sŏngjong (1457–1494) was the ninth king of the Chosŏn dynasty.

[5] Yi Hyŏngwŏn (?–1479) passed the state examination in 1451 and rose to first counselor in the Office of Special Counselors. As *pujehak*, his official status was senior third rank. In 1479, in the reign of King Sŏngjong, he traveled to Japan as an envoy but returned home without accomplishing his diplomatic mission. He was sick by the time he arrived in Tsushima and later died of sickness on Kŏje Island (*HITS; KJIG*).

Kim Hun (1448–?) passed the state examination in 1471, winning the highest honor, and served as librarian of the National Confucian Academy (senior sixth

Book II

FORTY-TWO

New Ming Relief Army Recaptures P'yŏngyang

In January 1593 [December 1592 lunar], the Ming court sent a massive relief army to Korea, appointing Song Yingchang, deputy vice minister of war, as military commissioner (*jinglue*);[1] Liu Huangshang, vice director of the Ministry of War (Bingbu yuanwailang), and Yuan Huang, secretary (*zhushi*), as military administrators, with an order that they station in Liaodong. It also appointed provincial military commander (*didu*) Li Rusong as the supreme commander of the relief army and sent him to Korea.[2] Commander Li, accompanied by the three generals Li Rubai, Zhang Shijue, and Yang Yuan, as well as the generals of the southern command Luo Shangzhi, Wu Weizhong, and Wang Bidi, crossed the [Yalu] river.[3] As a result, the total number of the Ming army amounted to more than forty thousand.

The Japanese army, in the meantime, did not make any move after Shen Weijing of Ming China left them and returned to his

[1] Song Yingchang (?) was deputy vice minister of war who had expertise on matters related to the Japanese. The Ming court sent him to Korea, and he recaptured P'yŏngyang and Kaesŏng with General Li Rusong. However, he had conflicts with Minister of War Shi Xing over Ming's war policy. While Shi Xing tried to push his peace talks with the Japanese through his agent Shen Weijing and withdraw Ming's troops from Korea, Song objected to Shi Xing's plan and insisted on continuing the fight against the Japanese. When his idea was not accepted by the court, Song resigned (*ZLRD*).

[2] Li Rusong, provincial military commander of Ming's relief forces, had successfully suppressed the rebellion in the western region of Ming China just before he came to Korea. His army crossed the Yalu River in December 1592 and attacked the Japanese forces in P'yŏngyang in the following month, on January 6, 1593 (*ZLRD*).

[3] Li Rubai (?) was the younger brother of General Li Rusong. Luo Shangzhi (?) was one of the Ming's commanders from the southern part of the country. He was known to be more enthusiastic than his colleagues in giving assistance to Korea.

country. They waited for Shen for fifty days, but he did not show up. Getting suspicious, the Japanese declared, "Our horses will drink the water of the Yalu River by next January." The men who escaped from the Japanese camps also reported that the Japanese were busy repairing the equipment they used for attacking the fortress walls, and the people became more afraid of the Japanese.

In early January 1593 [December 1592 lunar], Shen Weijing again visited P'yŏngyang and stayed in the enemy camp for a few days. He returned to China after having talks with the Japanese, but I did not hear anything about the details of their talks.

Around that time, the Ming army arrived in Anju and established its military camp in the south of the fortress. The way they set up their banners and weapons, which appeared so orderly and disciplined, gave an impression that there was something divine in their work.

I asked for an interview with Provincial Military Commander [Li Rusong] to discuss military matters. Being in his office, Commander Li allowed me to be led in. I saw him and found that he was a man of impressive stature. We sat on chairs, face to face, and I took a map of P'yŏngyang out of my sleeve. I showed him the topography and geographical features of the place, pointing out the best route for the attack on the enemy. The provincial military commander paid great attention to what I said and placed a red mark where I indicated. He also said, "The Japanese soldiers depend only on their muskets, but we have cannons whose range exceeds five or six *li* [a mile or so]. How can they stand up to us?"

After I took leave of him, he sent me a fan inscribed with a poem that he personally wrote. His poem read as follows:

> Upon hearing that our neighbor was in trouble
> I crossed the river, leading my army under starlight
> Our sage emperor is anxious for the news every day
> And his humble servant would not enjoy wine even at night
> The spring and the Great Bear make me lion-hearted
> The bones of the tricky Japanese will ache with fear
> Let me speak of nothing but victory even in jokes
> I am always on a horse even in my dreams.

At that time, the fortress of Anju was filled with Ming soldiers. One day, when I was in Paeksang-ru Pavilion,[4] one of the Ming

[4] On the bank of the Ch'ŏngch'ŏn River in Anju.

A Brief Chronological Life History of Sŏae Yu Sŏngnyong

1542 (King Chungjong 37). Oct. 1. Born at Sach'ŏn-ri, Ŭisŏng-hyŏn, Kyŏngsang province, the second son of Yu Chungnyŏng, governor of Hwanghae province.

1557 (King Myŏngjong 12). Passed the local state examination.

1558 (King Myŏngjong 13). Married the daughter of Lord Yi Kyŏng, a fifth-generation descendant of Prince Kwangp'yŏng.

1562 (King Myŏngjong 17). Became a student of Yi Hwang (T'oegye).

1564 (King Myŏngjong 19). Passed the Classics Licentiate Examination (*saengwŏnsi*).

1565 (King Myŏngjong 20). Entered Sŏngkyun'gwan National Confucian Academy.

1566 (King Myŏngjong 21). Passed the Erudite Examination (*munkwa*) and was appointed supernumerary third copyist (*kwŏnji pujŏngja*) of the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence (Sŭngmunwŏn).

1567 (King Myŏngjong 22). Promoted to second copyist (*chŏngja*), third diarist (*kŏmyŏl*), and copyist (*kisagwan*) of the Bureau of State Records (Ch'unch'ugwan).

1568 (King Sŏnjo 1). Appointed second diarist (*taegyo*) of the Office of Royal Decrees (Yemun'gwan).

1569 (King Sŏnjo 2). Appointed librarian (*chŏnjŏk*) of the National Confucian Academy, assistant section chief (*chwarang*) of the Board of Works, and bailiff (*kamch'al*) of the Office of Inspector-General; travelled to Ming China as secretary of Sŏngjŏlsa (Imperial Birthday Embassy); criticized university students in China for the trend of following Wang Yangming and Chen Baisha; asserted that Xue Wenqing was the right model of orthodox Confucianism, drawing attention as well as admiration from the Chinese court; also pointed out the

Glossary

anjipsa (pacification commissioner)

bingbu shilang (vice minister of war)
bingbu yuanwailang (vice director of the ministry of war)

canjiang (assistant regional commander)
ch'albang (chief of a post station)
ch'amp'an (second minister)
ch'amŭi (third minister)
changnyŏng (third inspector)
ch'ech'alsa (supreme commander)
chedokgwan (provincial educational commissioner)
chesŭng pangnyak (sure strategy for victory)
chin'gwan system (garrison-based command system)
chisa (third minister-without-portfolio)
chobangjang (auxiliary defense officer)
ch'ŏmji (fifth minister-without-portfolio)
ch'ŏmsa (garrison commander)
ch'ŏngbaengni (unblemished official)
ch'oyusa (recruiting officer)
ch'ungŭiwi (royal and righteous guard)
chŏnghŏn taebu (senior second rank)
chŏngja (second copyist)
chŏngnang (section chief)
chŏnjŏk (librarian)
chŏpbansa (entertainment official of Ming generals)
chwabang'ŏsa (defense commander of the left)
chwabyŏngsa (provincial army commander of the left)
chwarang (assistant section chief)
chwasu (head of the local gentry)
chwasusa (navy commander of the left)
chwaŭijŏng (second state councilor)
congbing (regional commander)

didu (provincial military commander)
dousi (regional commander)

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Index of Names, Places, and Terms

The Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592, known as the Imjin War, was one of the most tragic and traumatic experiences in Korean history. The magnitude of this tragedy was unprecedented. Hundreds of thousands died, and the country was devastated. It took many years for Korea to recover.

Looking back upon this tragedy from start to finish, Yu Sŏngnyong, who served as chief state councilor during most of the crisis, vividly portrays all the major developments of the crisis, as well as the men who were involved in it, persuasively demonstrating what went wrong.

The purpose of writing *Chingbirok* (The book of corrections), as the author professes in his preface, was to prevent similar disasters from taking place in the future. His book, however, is much more revealing; it provides a lively perspective of the relationship, which has been often marked by conflicts and wars, of the three neighboring countries involved in the war—Korea, Japan, and China.

Professor **Choi Byonghyon,** translator of this book, is a poet and an award-winning writer of Korean fiction. He received his M.A. in English literature from Columbia University and his Ph.D. in English literature from City University of New York, and he has taught both English and Korean literature at a number of colleges including Honam University, University of Maryland University College in Seoul, and University of California at Irvine as a Fulbright visiting scholar. He is currently working on the English translation of *Mongmin simso* (Admonitions on governing the people).

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