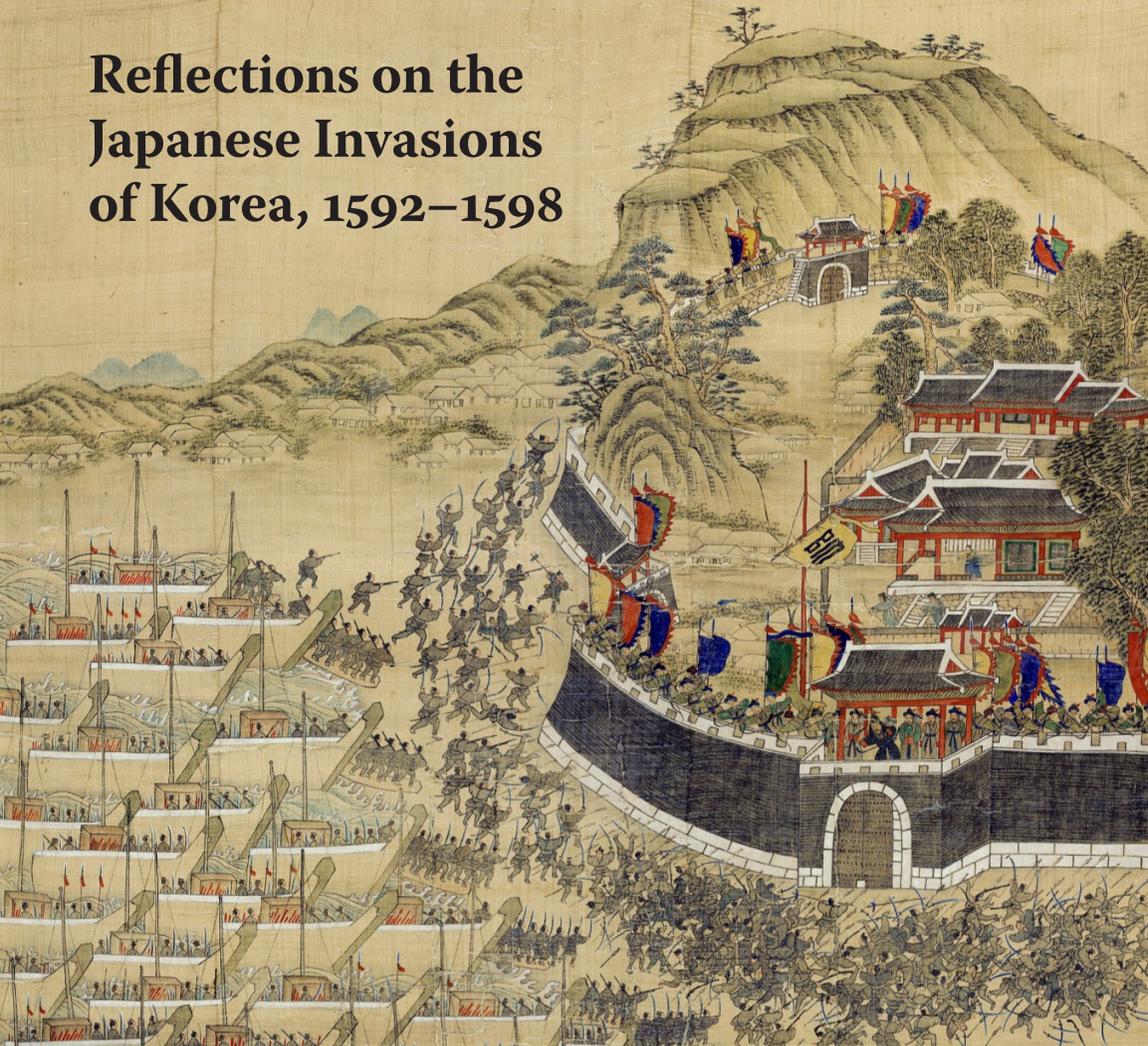


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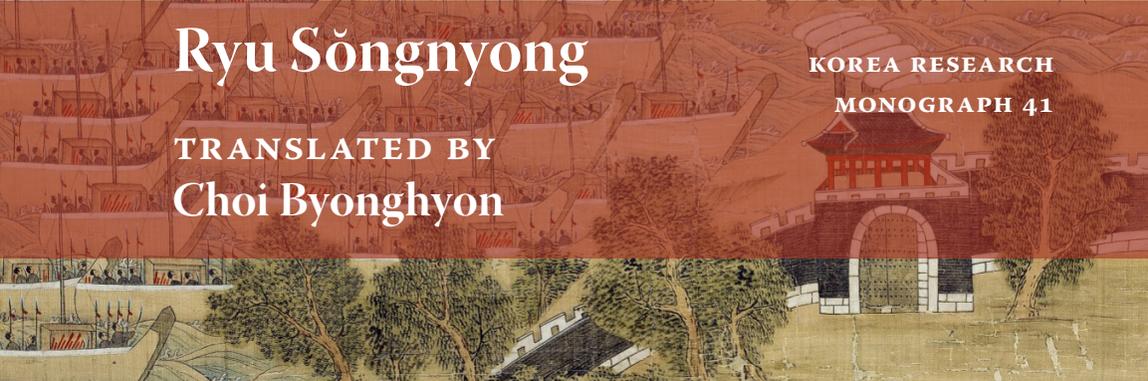
Reflections on the
Japanese Invasions
of Korea, 1592–1598



Ryu Sŏngnyong

TRANSLATED BY
Choi Byonghyon

KOREA RESEARCH
MONOGRAPH 41



Notes to this edition

This is an electronic edition of the printed book. Minor corrections may have been made within the text; new information and any errata appear on the current page only.

Korea Research Monograph 41

Reprimands and Admonitions:

Reflections on the Japanese Invasions of Korea, 1592–1598

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ISBN-13: 978-1-55729-329-9 (electronic)

ISBN-13: 978-1-55729-328-2 (print)

ISBN-10: 1-55729-328-7 (print)

Please visit the IEAS Publications website at
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**Institute of
East Asian Studies**
University of California, Berkeley

December 2025

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**Institute of
East Asian Studies**
University of California, Berkeley

A publication of the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Although the institute is responsible for the selection and acceptance of manuscripts in this series, responsibility for the opinions expressed and for the accuracy of statements rests with their authors.

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2026932358

ISBN-13: 978-1-55729-329-9 (electronic)

ISBN-13: 978-1-55729-328-2 (print)

ISBN-10: 1-55729-328-7 (print)

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Cover design: BookMatters

Cover image courtesy of the Korea Army Museum.

Composition: BookMatters

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Translator's Preface

The first English edition of *Chingbirok* was released in 2002, over two decades ago, under the title *The Book of Corrections: Reflections on the National Crisis during the Japanese Invasion of Korea, 1592–1598*. The translation process took place primarily in the late 1990s. Given that the text was relatively unknown to Western readers, and interest in Korean studies was not as vibrant as it is today, the prospect of publication in the United States at that time was highly uncertain. This is why I excluded the postscript, “Nokhu chapki,” from the initial edition.

The term postscript might be misleading, as this section consists chiefly of foundational materials and memoranda used in composing the main text of *Chingbirok*. Consequently, the postscript naturally repeats several sections but also includes elements that were excluded from the main text for various reasons.

These records encompass a wide range of topics, including ominous unnatural signs observed before the Japanese invasions; Ming envoy Si Xian's visit; the construction of a floating bridge over the Imjin River; Ming envoy Shen Weijing's demands to send communication envoys to Japan; the manufacturing of matchlock muskets during the war; the history of Korea's firearm production; and the construction of a shrine to Guan Yu—an ancient Chinese hero—in downtown Seoul. Additionally, the records describe the remarkable characteristics of Japanese warcraft. All of these details are absent from the main text of *Chingbirok*.

The postscript (“Nokhu chapki”) offers readers an intriguing, more intimate, and detailed glimpse into the wartime situation. As the title “*chapki*” (miscellaneous records) suggests, while the main text maintains an official tone, the postscript adopts a more unofficial and informal character. These records, with their personal insights and understated

Introduction

The Japanese invasion of Korea (Chosŏn) in 1592, which triggered a seven-year war, stands as one of the most tragic and traumatic chapters in Korean history. The scale of the calamity was unparalleled, with hundreds of thousands losing their lives and the nation left in utter devastation. The aftermath of the conflict cast a long shadow over Korea, requiring many years of painstaking recovery and reconstruction.

In reflecting on the tragic events from their inception to resolution, Ryu Sŏngnyong's memoir vividly captures the crucial developments of the crisis and the individuals entwined in its narrative. Through compelling prose, the author skillfully illustrates the intricacies of the events and incisively dissects the errors that unfolded. In the preface to *Chingbirok* (Records of reprimands and admonitions), he explicitly states his primary objective: to prevent the recurrence of similar mistakes in the future.

Contemplating the historical lessons derived from the Japanese invasion, Ryu Sŏngnyong not only offers his own insightful response but also challenges readers to develop their own interpretations. The author's narrative is a historical record as well as an invitation to introspection, encouraging a collective examination of the past to inform future actions. This approach underscores the importance of history as a tool for learning and prevention, making *Chingbirok* both a testament to past events and a guide for future generations.

The Japanese invasion of 1592, commonly referred to as the Imjin War, marked a pivotal moment for Korea, Japan, and China, prompting

ONE

The Envoys from Japan

In the *pyŏngsul* year [1586], during the reign of the Wanli emperor,¹ the Japanese envoy Tachibana Yasuhiro came to Korea,² bearing a letter from Taira Hideyoshi [better known as Toyotomi Hideyoshi], the ruler of Japan.³

Ever since the king of Japan, descended from the Minamoto clan,⁴ consolidated his rule and entered into friendly relations with our court during the early Hongwu reign,⁵ nearly two hundred years have now elapsed. In

¹ “Wanli” is the reign name of Emperor Shenzong (1573–1620) of Ming China.

² Tachibana Yasuhiro was a Kyushu warlord of the late Sengoku period who later became a retainer of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He had originally served under Sō Yoshihirō, the stepfather of Sō Yoshitoshi, who was appointed the governor of Tsushima by Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

³ Taira 平 was one of the four great aristocratic clans of classical Japan, alongside the Minamoto 源, Fujiwara 藤原, and Tachibana 橘. In 1586, when Hideyoshi was appointed *kanpaku* (imperial regent), the imperial court granted him the surname Taira, thereby conferring aristocratic legitimacy on his rule. Contemporary Korean and Chinese sources accordingly referred to him as “Taira Hideyoshi 平秀吉,” though in Japan he is more commonly known by the clan name he later adopted, Toyotomi 豊臣. Historical records from the Tenshō era show that Hideyoshi was granted the title *naidaijin* 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* (Harvard University Press, 1982), Hideyoshi used the name Kinoshita in his early career, later adopting Hashiba during his service under Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582).

⁴ “King of Japan” here refers to Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), the third shōgun of the Ashikaga shōgunate, who consolidated power in Japan and presided over a period of relative stability and cultural flourishing. In 1402 he sent a mission to the Ming court, and the following year the Ming emperor formally recognized him with the title “king of Japan,” identifying him as a descendant of the Minamoto (Genji) lineage. This recognition facilitated the establishment of tributary relations between Ming China, Japan, and—indirectly—Chosŏn Korea. (*NJD*)

⁵ Hongwu (1368–1398) was the reign title of Emperor Taizu, founder of the Ming

Japanese Envoy Sō Yoshitoshi

The Japanese envoy Taira no [Sō] Yoshitoshi arrived in our country.¹ Hideyoshi, having already executed Yasuhiro, dispatched Yoshitoshi to request that we send a communication envoy to Japan. Yoshitoshi, the son-in-law of General Konishi Yukinaga²—who held significant military authority in Japan—soon became one of Hideyoshi’s most trusted confidants.

Sō Morinaga, the long-standing governor of Tsushima, had ruled the island for generations while maintaining tributary relations with Korea. However, Hideyoshi expelled Morinaga and appointed Yoshitoshi to take

¹ Taira no Yoshitoshi (1568–1615), also known as Sō Yoshitoshi, was the daimyo of the Sō clan and the ruler of Tsushima Island. He became the son-in-law of Konishi Yukinaga, a prominent commander who led the Japanese invasion of Korea. Yoshitoshi entered Hideyoshi’s service in 1587 and was dispatched to Korea as Hideyoshi’s representative, tasked with urging the Korean court to send communication envoys to Japan and later negotiating a peaceful resolution to tensions between the two countries. When the Korean government rejected Japan’s demands, Yoshitoshi joined Konishi Yukinaga in the 1592 invasion of Korea. (*NJD*)

² Konishi Yukinaga (1555–1600), a Christian Japanese daimyo, spearheaded the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592 alongside Katō Kiyomasa. The son of a prosperous merchant from Sakai, he entered the service of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and quickly gained his trust through his intelligence and resourcefulness. Konishi commanded the vanguard of the Japanese armies during the initial landing at Busan in 1592, and, within a month, captured both Seoul and P’yōngyang. However, he soon lost P’yōngyang to the Ming relief forces led by Li Rusong and was forced to retreat, first to Seoul, then to Sunch’ōn in South Chōlla Province. After Hideyoshi’s sudden death in 1598, Konishi narrowly escaped to Japan by breaking through Yi Sunsin’s naval blockade. Throughout the war, he played a pivotal role in strategic planning and military operations, and was one of the few commanders who consistently advocated for a peaceful resolution, even persuading Hideyoshi to consider negotiations. Upon his return to Japan, he took part in the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. Captured in the aftermath, he was executed, refusing to take his own life in accordance with his Christian beliefs. (*NJD*)

Chronological Table Related to *Chingbirok*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Records</i>
1587; Sōnjo 20; 丁亥	[2]	• Japanese pirates infiltrate Nokto and Karip'o.
	[10]	• An envoy from Japan, Tachibana Yasuhiro, arrives.
1588; Sōnjo 21; 戊子	[2]	• Japanese envoys Sō Yoshitoshi and Genso arrive, pressing for the dispatch of communication envoys in return.
	[6]	• Sō Yoshitoshi and others return once again.
1589; Sōnjo 2; 己丑	[8]	• King Sōnjo grants an audience to Sō Yoshitoshi and others. (28)
	[9]	• The decision is made to dispatch communication envoys to Japan. (21)
	[3]	• The communication envoy mission, led by Chief Envoy Hwang Yun'gil and Vice Envoy Kim Sōngil, departs for Japan together with Sō Yoshitoshi and others. (6)
1590; Sōnjo 23; 庚寅	[11]	• The communication envoy Hwang Yun'gil and his party meet with Toyotomi Hideyoshi and receive a reply letter. (7)
	[1]	• The communication envoy Hwang Yun'gil and others, together with Japanese envoys including Sō Yoshitoshi, return to Pusanp'o. (28)
1591; Sōnjo 23; 辛卯	[2]	• Yi Sunsin is appointed naval commander of Left Chōlla Province. (13)
	[4]	• King Sōnjo receives Sō Yoshitoshi and others in audience. (29)
	[6]	• Sō Yoshitoshi returns to Japan and reports to Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

Brief Chronology of Ryu Sŏngnyong’s Life and Career

<i>Year</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Details</i>
1542; Chungjong 37; 壬寅		• On October 1, Ryu Sŏngnyong is born in Sach'on Village, Ŭisŏng County, Kyŏngsang Province, second son of Ryu Chungnyŏng, governor of Hwanghae Province.
1558; Myŏngjong 13; 戊午	[17]	• Marries a daughter of Yi Kyŏng, fifth-generation descendant of Grand Prince Kwangp'yŏng.
1562; Myŏngjong 17; 壬戌	[21]	• At Tosan in Andong, studies <i>Reflections on Things at Hand</i> under Master T'oegye Yi Hwang, who praises him, saying, “This man is born of Heaven (此人天所生也).”
1566; Myŏngjong 21; 丙寅	[25]	• Passes the civil service examination; is appointed acting assistant copyist (<i>kwŏnji puyŏngja</i>) in the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence.
1569; Sŏnjo 2; 己巳	[28]	• Is appointed bailiff in the Office of the Inspector General; travels to Yanjing (Beijing) as secretary of the imperial birthday embassy. Disputes with students promoting Wang Yangming and Chen Baisha, upholding Xue Wenqing as foremost authority of orthodox Confucianism, earning their admiration. Corrects palace protocol that ranks Confucian scholars below Daoist and Buddhist adherents, astonishing Ming officials.
1570; Sŏnjo 3; 庚午	[29]	• Receives the privilege of “leisurely reading” by royal favor.

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