

Min Yŏnghwan

The Selected Writings of a
Late Chosŏn Diplomat

Michael Finch



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INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES
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Min Yŏnghwan

The Selected Writings of a Late Chosŏn Diplomat

TRANSLATED, ANNOTATED, AND WITH AN
INTRODUCTION BY

Michael Finch

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Translator's Preface

The translations of Min Yŏnghwan's writings in this collection were originally carried out as part of my research into Min Yŏnghwan's life for a doctoral thesis at the University of Oxford, which was undertaken with the generous financial support of the Korea Foundation from 1995 to 1997 and from the Daesan Foundation from 1997 to 1998. This thesis was subsequently published in revised form by the University of Hawai'i Press as *Min Yŏng-hwan: A Political Biography*. Although Min's works formed the most important primary source materials for that biographical study, I have long felt that his major policy essay, *Ch'ŏnilch'aek* (One policy out of a thousand); his travel diaries, *Haechŏnch'ubŏm* (Sea, sky, autumn voyage) and *Sagusokch'o* (Additional notes of an envoy to Europe); and the contemporary account of his death and funeral in 1905, *Min Ch'ungjŏnggong sillok* (A veritable record of Min Yŏnghwan) deserve to be read in full, so I am very grateful to the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of California at Berkeley for agreeing to publish these important works from the closing years of the Chosŏn dynasty in English translation. I would also like to express my gratitude to the University of Hawai'i Press for granting its permission for some material from my work *Min Yŏng-hwan: A Political Biography* (2002) to be included in the introduction of this work and to the Korea University Museum, Seoul, for its kind permission to reproduce the photograph of Min Yŏnghwan taken during his visit to Russia in 1896 for the cover of this book.

All the texts translated in this work have been taken from *Min Ch'ungjŏnggong yugo* (The posthumous works of Min Yŏnghwan) compiled and published by the National History Compilation Committee—now known as the National Institute of Korean History—(Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe) in 1971. Throughout this book I have used the McCune-Reischauer system for the romanization of Korean names and terms, Pinyin for Chinese, and the

Hepburn system for Japanese. I have also included an extensive glossary providing either Chinese characters or hangul for the many proper names and other terms that occur in the translations. As far as possible I have tried to identify the various places and people that Min encountered on his travels, whose names he recorded either in hangul or in Chinese characters. Where it has not been possible to make a positive identification, however, I have approximated the foreign name in the translated text on the basis of the original hangul version provided by Min, which can be found in the glossary.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my former supervisor at the University of Oxford, Dr. James B. Lewis, for encouraging me to take on the challenge of working with Min Yŏnghwan's works in classical Chinese for my doctoral thesis; my fellow graduate student at that time, Gwojeng Ju, for his generous and invaluable advice as I wrestled with translating Min's original texts; Joanne Sandstrom, the managing editor at the Institute of East Asian Studies for expertly guiding this project to fruition; her colleague at IEAS, Catherine Lenfestey, for preparing the files for the Library of Congress and the cover image for the printer; David Goodrich for his meticulous help with the glossary; all my colleagues and students at Keimyung University in Taegu, where I have been teaching for the last seven years; and my wife Kum Bin and our children Daniel, Sarah—who spent many hours helping me to prepare the index for this book—Edward, and Alastair for their patience and loving support throughout all my academic endeavors. Finally, I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to my father, who passed away in 2006, and to my mother, to both of whom this book is dedicated, for their deep love and support, which over the years has given me the strength and inspiration to persevere along the scholarly path.

ONE

Introduction

Min Yŏnghwan is well-known in Korea for his suicide in protest against the Japanese-Korean Treaty of Protection of 1905. The facts of his life, and in particular his contribution to Korea's early efforts to foster diplomatic relations with the West through his mission to Russia in 1896 and to the United Kingdom in 1897 and his subsequent support for the reform platform of the Independence Club, however, are relatively less well known. As 30 November 2005 was the hundredth anniversary of Min Yŏnghwan's death, it is hoped that this collection of translations of his major works—namely, his major policy essay of c. 1894, *Ch'ŏnilch'aek* (One policy out of a thousand), the diary of his mission to Russia in 1896, *Haech'ŏnch'ubŏm* (Sea, sky, autumn voyage), the diary of his mission to the United Kingdom in 1897, *Sagu-sokch'o* (Additional notes of an envoy to Europe), as well as a contemporary account of his protest against the 1905 Japan-Korea treaty of protection, *Min Ch'ungjŏnggong sillok* (Veritable account of Min Yŏnghwan)—will serve as a small commemoration of the efforts he made to ensure the continuing independence of Korea in the face of imperialist rivalry for control of the Korean Peninsula at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The following introduction provides a brief overview of his life and the historical background of the translated documents in this collection.

Min Yŏnghwan's Family Background

As a scion of the Yŏhŭng Min clan, Min Yŏnghwan's ancestry may be traced back to the late-Koryŏ official Min Ch'ingdo. The line of descent continues through the early Chosŏn officials Min Sim'ŏn and Min Kwanghun, the founder of the so-called three-branch line of the Yŏhŭng Min clan, a term that derives from the fact that Min Kwanghun had three sons: Min Sijung, Min Chŏngjung, and Min

Yujung. It was with the third son, Min Yujung (1630–1687), that the Yöhŭng Min clan came to the fore as one of Chosŏn's politically powerful family groups during a brief period in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

Min Yŏnghwan was descended from the youngest of Min Yujung's three sons, Chinyŏng, through the three generations of Yosŭ, Paeksul, and Tanhyŏn to Min's paternal grandfather, Min Ch'igu (1795–1874). Like Min Yujung before him, Min Ch'igu also had three sons and a daughter who married into the royal line. Although Min Ch'igu's daughter did not marry the king, she became the wife of Yi Haŭng, better known as the Taewŏn'gun, who became the regent on the accession to the throne of his son, King Kojong (r. 1863–1907).

Min Ch'igu's three sons were T'aeho, Sŭngho, and Kyŏmho. Min Yŏnghwan was the eldest son of Min Kyŏmho but was subsequently adopted into the line of his father's eldest brother, Min T'aeho, who had died childless in 1860. Min Ch'igu's second son, Min Sŭngho, became the adopted heir of Min Ch'irok, the father of Kojong's consort, Queen Min. Consequently, Min Yŏnghwan's relationship with the Chosŏn royal family was exceptionally close. He was not only the cousin of Kojong through his paternal aunt but was also a nephew of Queen Min by virtue of the fact that his paternal uncle, Min Sŭngho, was the queen's adopted elder brother.

Min Yŏnghwan's Early Life

Min Yŏnghwan was born in Chŏndong in Seoul on 17 August 1861 in the twelfth year of the reign of King Ch'ŏlchong. His courtesy title was Munyak (In accord with culture), his pen name, Kyejŏng (Cassia court), and his posthumous title, Ch'ungjŏng (Loyal and righteous). As has been mentioned above, he was the eldest son of Min Kyŏmho, one of the most influential and powerful members of the Yöhŭng Min clan, who held many important posts in the Chosŏn administration, including minister of war and director of the Office for the Management of State Affairs. He was also responsible for the creation of the Special Skills Force, a modern military unit under the command of the Japanese military instructor Horimoto Reizō. Min Yŏnghwan's father, therefore, was deeply involved in the self-strengthening program carried out by the Chosŏn court in the 1880s in response to the new challenges the country was facing from Japan and the West at that

CHAPTER TWO

One Policy out of a Thousand (Ch'ōnilch'aek)

Why is there no one either serving in the royal court or in the countryside who wishes to discuss the present urgent situation? In the first place, people do not speak up in order to guard against exceeding their official duty, and in the second place to avoid the jealousy of others. Some do not speak because they deem such discussion to be useless, and others think that it is already too late to say anything. These people are all weighing up what they might gain or lose by taking action in this world. Truly, there is a lack of loyal indignation in these anxious times.

I observe military disorder, base behavior, and a lack of knowledge and learning. In perilous times loyal indignation originally arises from those who uphold the law not those who abandon the land. So I dare not care about what other people care about, and I humbly say what they do not say. I will present one foolish policy document, which I wish to discuss with men of virtue. Alas! Perhaps this is like holding up a glowworm to add light to the brightness of the sun and the moon, or like pouring out a calabash of water to add to the water in the rivers and the seas.

Below I have carefully prepared four sections on the current state of affairs and ten sections on preparation and defense.

First Proposal on the Current State of Affairs

Russia's power is without equal throughout the whole world because it has over 300,000 leagues of territory, an army of more than 660,000 men, and 368 naval vessels. It has occupied

The title *Ch'ōnilch'aek* is taken from the Chinese proverb *yuzhe qianlu biyou yide*, which means, "Out of a thousand ideas of a fool there is bound to be one that is useful."

CHAPTER THREE

Sea, Sky, Autumn Voyage (Haech'ŏnch'ubŏm)

Royal Proclamation

As the time for the accession to the throne and coronation ceremony of the Russian Emperor is at hand, We command Min Yŏnghwan, Special Entry Officer 1A Rank in the Department of the Royal Household, to proceed to Russia as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to present gifts and to respectfully attend the ceremony.

10 March, first year of Kŏnyang (1896).

Royal Decree

Cabinet Prime Minister and Acting Minister of Home Affairs Pak Chŏngyang and Minister of Foreign Affairs Yi Wanyong appoint Min Yŏnghwan, Special Entry Officer in the Department of the Royal Household, to the post of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. The Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, Min Yŏnghwan, is installed by Royal order on 11 March as an official of the second rank to proceed to Russia.

Royal Appointment

Vice-Minister of Education Yun Ch'iho is commanded to proceed to Russia as the aide-de-camp of the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Russia.

Third grade Kim Tŭngnyŏn is officially appointed Second Rank Secretary to the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Russia; officially appointed to fourth rank.

Clerk in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kim Toil, is appointed Third Rank Secretary to the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Russia; officially appointed to fifth rank.

CHAPTER FOUR

Additional Notes of an Envoy to Europe (Sagusokch'o)

Author's Preface

For the last several years I have continuously traveled around many countries at the King's behest. This book is a record of those travels, albeit an ineloquent one. Alas! Since ancient times the duties of envoys have arisen from the difficulties of their nations. Among those envoys only Qiao of Zheng, Xi of Jin, and a few others were able to sustain their nations by their eloquence and stratagems. Moreover, the present world situation is more difficult than at the time of Zheng and Jin, and I am not the equal of Qiao or Xi.

My speeches and plans have been in the expectation of peace and in the hope that by carrying out my duties, I might benefit my country. It has not, however, been a simple matter to describe the mountains, rivers, and geographical features of foreign climes, nor the abundance of people, things, and places and to write it all down. Nevertheless, as those who come after me may wish to investigate what I attempted, I have made this record and kept it.

Royal Mandate

Royal Proclamation

State Council Ch'anjǒng, Minister of War, Min Yǒnghwan is appointed Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary.

On the 11th day of the 1st month of the 2nd year of Kǒnyang (1897), Deputy Minister of the State Council, State Council Ch'anjǒng, Yun Yongsǒn.

CHAPTER FIVE

Min Ch'ungjōnggong's Veritable Record: The Facts of November 1905

On the twenty-first day of the tenth month of this year (1905), the grave site of Min Yōnghwan's former wife, Lady Chōnggyōng, was relocated. On the previous day just before dawn, Min Yōnghwan followed the funeral procession down to Yongin, and after attending the burial ceremony, he returned home as it was getting dark on the twenty-second day of the tenth month. When he heard that on the evening of the twenty-first day of the tenth month the Korean-Japanese Treaty had been concluded and that Minister of Foreign Affairs Pak Chesun, Minister of Home Affairs Yi Chiyong, Minister of Military Affairs Yi Kūnt'aek, Minister of Education Yi Wanyong, Minister of Agriculture Kwōn Chunghyōn, and others had affixed a seal to the document without the permission of the emperor, he cried aloud shedding tears of blood, and after falling down in a faint several times, vomiting blood, he shut the door to his room and lay down.

On the thirtieth day of the same month at four o'clock in the afternoon, he held a discussion with Privy Councillor Cho Pyōngse on how to suppress the traitors and annul the treaty. At the head of a group of officials, they went into the palace and awaited orders from the emperor in the Department of the Imperial Household, and Privy Councillor Cho twice sent a memorial to the emperor. Finally, they received an order to disperse from outside the gate.

On the second day of the eleventh month Min Yōnghwan became the chief signatory of a letter of resignation, which was presented to the emperor. After receiving the emperor's reply, Min addressed a large gathering of people in a loud voice and with a serious countenance saying that they had to get the emperor's permission to avert the crisis and presented the memorial a second time. Finally, with those words he resigned.

Glossary

- 1A Rank (*chongilp'um*: 從一品)
2A Rank (*chongip'um*: 從二品)
A Strategy for Chosŏn (*Zhaoxian celüe*: 朝鮮策略)
accomplished scholar (*xiushi*: 秀士)
Achinsk (Ajinsük'ö: 아진스커)
acting minister of home affairs (*söri naebu taesin*: 署理內部大臣)
Additional Notes of an Envoy to Europe (*Sagu sokch'o*: 使歐續草)
Aden (Ajöng: 亞丁)
Aden Bay (Ajöng haegu: 亞丁海口)
adjutant (*suwön*: 隨員)
admiral (*haegun changgwan*: 海軍將官)
Adük River (阿得河)
Aejihollyun (애지홀룬)
Afghanistan (Abuhan: 阿富汗)
Africa (Abiriga: 亞非里駕) (*Abigaju*: 亞非加州)
Agency to Bestow Blessings (*Sönhych'öng*: 宣惠廳)
aide-de-camp (*suwön*: 隨員)
Ajimich'on [village] (아지미村)
Albert, Prince (Pagana: 博雅那)
Alexandria, Tsarina (Alleksandura: 알렉산드라)
Alexandrof (Erissandorop'u: 에리산도로프)
Alexandrovsky [artist] (Allyöksanduropsükki: 알력산두롭스끼)
Alexeev, E. I., admiral of the Russian Pacific Fleet (Aryöksyöphu: 아력섭후)
Alexei (Alyeshi: 알에시)
Alfred, Prince (Abiryöl: 亞腓烈)
Alkashyessukaya (Algasyessügasya: 알가세쓰갓야)
Alseniev (Alsyeinyep'u: 알세니예푸)
ambassador extraordinary (*t'üngmyöng taesa*: 特命大使)
America (Mirigyön: 美理堅)
Amur River (Heilong Jiang: 黑龍江)
An Sejöng (安世鼎)
Andong (安洞)
Andong Kim clan (Andong Kimssi: 安東金氏)
Androrygov (Andurorigop'u: 안두로리고푸)
Anhyön (鞞峴)
Annam (安南)
Announcement to Prince Kang (*Kanggao*: 康誥)
Anz and Co. (Ingssü: 잉쓰)
ao (Kr. o: 葵) dog
Arabia (Arappia: 阿拉比阿)
Arabs (Ajabaek: 阿剌伯)
Archibald (Asibol: 아시볼)

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