A Study of Research Trends in Korea on the Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592 (Imjin War)

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Foreword

On July 28, 2013, the national football (soccer) teams of South Korea and Japan played a game in the East Asian Cup at Chamsil (Jamsil) Stadium, Seoul. A sense of tension prevailed throughout the match, in which Japan defeated South Korea, 2-1.

After the game, there was a lot of controversy over the materials brought to the stadium by the supporters. Just before commencement of the game, a group of Koreans displayed a banner that said, “No Future for People Who Forgot History.” Some people brought placards containing the portraits of Admiral Yi Sunsin and Korean independence activist, An Chunggŭn (Junggeun). A group of Japanese waved a flag of the Rising Sun, which is a symbol of Japan’s militarism.

The authorities seized all these placards. After the game, the Korean media suggested that sports nationalism should end. Some Korean netizens criticized the authorities’ seizure of the placards, calling it an act of toadyism toward Japan, while some Japanese netizens made fun of the Korean national team for its defeat, and called South Korea an inferior country.¹

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What caused the portraits of Admiral Yi Sunsin and An Chunggŭn and the Rising Sun flag to appear at a sports event? Yi Sunsin was a naval commander who won victories over the Japanese in sea battles during the Japanese invasion of Korea in the late sixteenth century. An Chunggŭn assassinated Itō Hirobumi, who was a central figure in Japan’s invasion of the Asian continent in the early twentieth Century. The Rising Sun flag is a symbol of Japan’s militarism. As it were, the Korean fans tried to display figures who fought against Japanese invaders, while their Japanese counterparts attempted to show a symbol of their country’s expansion and invasions.

As symbolized by these banners and placards, the current relationship between the countries remains very sour. The rightist regimes of the two countries are in a state of acute confrontation and conflict over many pending issues, including those of historical consciousness.

Issues related to the “Imjin Waeran,” or the Imjin War, initiated by the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592, that I intend to deal with in this article can be said to be the starting point of the hostilities that each country harbors toward the other. Prior to that late sixteenth century invasion and subsequent war (1592-1598), the peoples of the two countries were rarely in large-scale contact with each other, except for some contacts made in coastal areas called Samp’o (Sampo) in Kyŏngsang province (Gyeongsang). The Imjin War was the first event in which the two peoples encountered each other on the Korean peninsula on a large scale, and it came in a form that was distorted by Japan’s invasion. Even after the war, the impression and the memory that it has left in the two peoples came to be the basis of the way they have viewed each other.

How have Koreans viewed and studied the Imjin War and the Japanese who perpetrated it since the Chosŏn (Joseon) period? In this article, I will dare to attempt to present an overview of the question.
How Koreans Viewed the Japanese Invasion During the Chosŏn Period

Remorse, Animosity, and Hatred

During the Chosŏn Period, Koreans did not have a fixed view of Japan, as clearly indicated in the names used to refer to Japan and to its people: Japan, Wa, Wa people, Wa barbarians, Wa bandits, Island barbarians, Wa pirates, and Ugly Wa.\(^2\) Japan, Japanese, Wa, or Wa people are neutral and relatively friendly names, while Wa barbarians, Wa bandits, Island barbarians, Wa pirates, and Ugly Wa clearly connote negativity and hostility. Until the fifteenth century, the ways Koreans viewed Japan and its people were mixed. Due to the severe damage inflicted by Wako (Japanese pirates) since the mid-14th Century, Koreans started to have a negative view of Japan. On the other hand, some Koreans had a positive view of the Japanese as people whose customs were plain and modest and who attached a high value on righteousness.\(^3\)

The way Koreans viewed Japan had been worsening gradually in the sixteenth century, and the Imjin War cemented the view. Korean intellectuals referred to Japan as “an enemy with whom they could not never share the sky” following the enormous damage inflicted by the invasion. Above all, Koreans regarded the digging up of the Tombs of King Sŏngjong (Seongjong) and King Chungjong (Jungjong) by Japanese troops as the most insulting and disgraceful of acts. Animosity is likely to cause people to seek revenge. Toward the end of the Japanese invasion, some Koreans said that the country should attack the island of Tsushima, if not mainland Japan, in return for what Japanese had done. They stressed that they should endure ordeals such as sleeping with one’s head laid on a spear and chewing animals’ gall bladders, and take revenge on the enemy to repay forever the insult and disgrace inflicted on the king and the people.\(^4\)

However, it was not easy to exact revenge on Japan despite the simmering hatred and resentment. Korea did not have the capability or means,
and the Ming Chinese military, which came to the aid of Korea in the war and intervened deeply in the country’s internal affairs, advised against it. As it happened, Korea resumed diplomatic relationships with Japan instead of taking steps for revenge. Leaders in Tsushima desperately wanted to restore relationships including trade, and they used both stick and carrot tactics to persuade Korea.\(^5\)

There was another reason for Korea’s resumption of diplomatic relations with Japan. Nurhaci, who was expanding his power in Manchuria, was threatening both Ming China and Korea. Korea could not afford to confront enemies to both the south and the north, and so had no choice but to suppress its anger and animosity toward Japan. In 1607, Korea reestablished diplomatic relations with Japan and dispatched a royal envoy. To save face, Korea attached a name to the royal envoy, “Hoedap kyŏm (gyeom) swaehwansa,” meaning “an envoy replying to Japan’s request for restoration of diplomatic relationship and repatriating Korean POWS.”

During the Imjin War, Japanese troops killed and injured many Koreans and they also took many Koreans to Japan. They perpetrated the atrocity of cutting off people’s noses and ears. However, Koreans had to maintain its relationship with Japan as neighbors after the war. It was an inevitable choice for a country with limited capabilities that had to deal with a growing threat on the northern borders with Manchuria.\(^6\)

However, Koreans harbored resentment toward the reality of having to accept what they regarded “the enemy with whom they could never share the sky.” During the 18th century, a leading Korean intellectual, Yi Sŏngjo (Seongjo) (1663~1740), lamented over the reality of having to reconcile with the enemy due to the county’s powerlessness:

Unfortunately, the country is located close to Wa (Japan). In the year of Imjin (1592), Wa invaded the country on a large scale and threatened us to let them use the path for their conquest of Ming China. King Sŏnjo (Seonjo) took refuge in Ŭiju (Uiju), far away from Seoul, and asked Ming China to come to the country’s aid. The entire country fell into misery and Chongmyo (Jongmyo) Shrine fell into ruins. Japanese
troops even perpetrated an unforgivable act of digging up royal tombs of Sŏllŭng (Seolleung) and Chŏngnŭng (Jeongneung). They are ene-
mies that we can never share the sky with. As the country is powerless, 
we are unable to cross the sea and destroy them. We are accepting 
them as a neighbor, building Waegwan (a place for trade with Japa-
inese) in Tongnae (Dongnae), treating them with courtesy. What a 
shame!7

Koreans’ Animosity toward Qing China Overshadowing Animosity toward Japan

By the time of the outbreak of Imjin, Koreans’ cultural pride, particu-
larly their sense of cultural superiority over the Japanese, was soaring sky 
high. Such a sense was based on Korea’s closeness to Ming China. At that 
time, Korean intellectuals thought that Ming was a parent country and 
that they were part of the Ming family.8 They regarded Japan as a miser-
able nation that could not even achieve access to Chinese civilization 
without their help. As one taken to Japan as a POW during the war, 
Hwang Chŏnguk (Jeonguk) (1532~1607) called Japan a “miscellaneous” 
country.9

It was quite natural that Koreans did not ever consider Toyotomi 
Hideyoshi’s threatening offer that Korea should let Japanese troops use it 
as a path on their way to the subjugation of Ming. Following the end of 
the Imjin War, Koreans thought that they should repay what Ming had 
done during the national crisis caused by the invasion. Sin Hŭm (Heum) 
(1566~1628), for one, said, “Japanese are the enemy that we should not 
share heaven with,” and “we could overcome the trouble thanks to the 
assistance of Ming.”10 Some Koreans spoke of Ming’s coming to its aid 
during the war as a reason for indebtedness similar to reestablishment of 
the country, and even used the relevant term when referring to the Imjin 
War.11 Under these circumstances, Koreans came to accept more earnest-
ly the idea of a Ming-centered world.

As it happened, the influence of Nurhaci in Manchuria grew larger fol-
lowing the end of the war, threatening Ming as well as Korea. The way
Koreans viewed Japan became more complicated. The war showed that Japan had become a military power.\textsuperscript{12} To be able to check Nurhaci’s invasion, the country’s border with Japan needed to be stabilized. This presented a dilemma to Korea as a victim of Japanese aggression.

Koreans chose to resolve the dilemma by separating Toyotomi Hideyoshi from Tokugawa Ieyasu. According to this view, only Hideyoshi, and his lieutenants who had invaded Korea, were the enemy that they could not share the sky with. To them, Hideyoshi was an unforgivable criminal who had invaded Korea harboring the deluded ambition of conquering Ming, but Tokugawa Ieyasu was the person who got rid of Hideyoshi’s son and followers, and tried to restore friendly relationships with Korea.\textsuperscript{13} They said that they could trust Ieyasu’s sincerity, judging from the fact that he asked Korea to restore diplomatic relations and arrested those responsible for digging up the royal tombs. Koreans tried to save face, saying that it was not a kingly attitude to turn one’s back on inferiors forever.\textsuperscript{14}

In the early seventeenth century, Korea was attacked twice, in 1627 and 1636, by the Manchus (later Qing China). In January 1637, King Injo had to surrender and kneel down in front of the chieftain of the Manchus in Seoul. This brought a tremendous mental shock, along with a sense of humiliation, to Koreans. The country had to sever its ties with Ming China under the threat of Manchus, and in 1644, Ming itself surrendered to Qing.

Following a series of events, including the Manchu attacks on Korea and the Manchu conquest of China, the way Koreans regarded Japan changed. In particular, the bitter animosity toward Japanese caused by Imjin War became mitigated. Following the Manchurian attack in 1636, Korea displayed the intention to use Japan to check the Manchus. This gave Japan an opportunity to transform itself from an enemy that had inflicted enormous pain on Korea during the calamity to a neighbor to cooperate with. Following the attack in 1627, Japan’s presence loomed larger than before. Japan began striving to obtain economic gain in exchanges with Korea, taking advantage of Korea’s dilemma.\textsuperscript{15}
With the Manchu Invasion in 1636, the enemy to be avenged for Koreans changed from the Japanese to the Manchus. Koreans’ hatred and animosity toward Japan subsided below the surface due to the bitter feeling toward Qing China. Cho Kyŏng (Jo Gyeong) (1586-1669), for one, screamed, “A Manchurian, a barbarian, dares to call himself an emperor. Now, we Koreans cannot share the sky with the barbarians. We must do all we can to confront Qing.” He went so far as to insist that Korea should establish a friendly relationship with Japan and depend on its power to fight Qing. Such a view was shared by Yun Hyu (1617-1680) and Song Siyŏl (Siyeol) (1607-1689). These two thought that they could reconcile with the Japanese for the greater cause of fighting Qing.

The heightened animosity toward Qing was associated with an intense longing for Ming China, which had fallen. Koreans harbored bitter feelings against Qing, which had made the number one civilized country disappear and the king of the number two civilized country kneel down in front of its chieftain. By the reign of King Chŏngjo (r. 1776-1800), even Yi Sunsin, the hero of the Imjin War, was said to be “a retainer of the Ming emperor who lost his life in an effort to maintain the China-centered world order.”

Koreans’ animosity toward Japan, particularly the hatred caused by Imjin, re-surfaced in the nineteenth Century. The Manchu attack of 1636 was by now a remote past event. In the mid-eighteenth century, Korean Sirhak (Practical Learning) scholars insisted on Pukhangnon (Bukhangnon) (a view that Korea should accommodate Qing’s civilization and culture rather than stubbornly turning their back on it and calling the Qing barbarians). Koreans’ animosity toward Qing now subsided. Meanwhile, they still harbored fear of Japan. Following the opening of Korea’s ports to foreigners, long-forgotten ill-feeling associated with the Imjin invasion revived, and Koreans saw signs of Japan’s forthcoming invasion. Chŏng Chaep’il (Jeong Jaepil), for one, refreshed people’s memory of Imjin:

“Wa (Japan) is our enemy. During the invasion in the year of Imjin
(1592), they even perpetrated the atrocity of digging up our royal tombs. We, Korean subjects of the revered king, should never forget it. Personally, our family was one that suffered a crushing calamity during the war. Lord Ch’ŏmch’u (Cheomchu) lost his life. Thereon, his wife committed suicide. Lord Tosa (Dosa) also lost his life. Lord Chinsa (Jinsa) was forcefully taken to Japan and suffered insulting treatment there for three years. He finally returned home, but his mother, wife, sister, and elder brother’s wife all plunged into sea and killed themselves so as not to be humiliated by the invaders. As a descendant of theirs, how can I ever forget the hatred? I will never be able to revenge myself fully on the enemy whatever I do. I will never let anyone in my house use anything associated with the Japanese. If I ever make a big bow at the ancestors’ tombs in Japanese-made clothes, their spirits will jump out of the tombs in anger.”

Almost 300 years had passed since the end of the Imjin War, but Chŏng Chaep’il’s mind was still filled with anger and animosity toward the Japanese for the calamities that his ancestors suffered. During the war, Lord Ch’ŏmch’u, his wife, and Lord Tosa lost their lives. Four women in Lord Chinsa’s family killed themselves so as not to be humiliated by the invaders. However, many of Chŏng’s contemporaries liked using the Japanese-made goods that were introduced into the country following the opening of the country’s ports to foreigners. Chŏng Chaep’il was critical of such people.

**Research Trends on the Imjin War in the 20th Century**

**Japan’s Colonial Rule (1910-1945)**

The parties involved in the Imjin War, Korea, Japan, and Ming China, have defined and remembered the war generally from a self-oriented perspective. The “self-orientedness” is shown by the names each of the three
calls the war. Koreans, as we have seen, have called it “Imjin Waeran” (Japan-caused Calamity in the Year of Imjin) and “Chŏng’gyu Chaeran (Jeon’gyu Jaeran)” (Japan-caused Repeated Calamity in the Year of Chŏng’gyu). The expression “Calamity” indicates the extreme animosity and hatred harbored by Koreans toward the invasion. Japanese had called the war “Hotaiko no Seikan” (Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s Conquest of Korea) and the like. Following Japan’s forcible annexation of Korea in 1910, Japanese started calling it “Bunroku Keicho no Eki” (The Campaign in the Year of Bunroku and Keicho), which denotes an intention not to recognize that it was an invasion. The way Chinese name the war has also changed. Just after the event, they used terms like Wa (Japan)’s Invasion of Korea. By the early seventeenth century, the term “the campaign in which we came to the aid of Korea” appeared. Today, the term that Chinese officially use to call the war is “the campaign in which we resisted the Japanese and came to the aid of Koreans,” which noticeably emphasizes China’s view that it bestowed kindness on Korea.20

Korean intellectuals’ animosity toward Japan based on the Calamity of Imjin remained in place toward the end of the Chosŏn Period, as shown in the foregoing. Around the period close to the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese played up the Imjin War, adopting a practice of exalting the great feat of their ancestors’ expansion into foreign countries. Japanese also attempted to use it, along with Empress Consort Jingu’s conquest of Samhan, to justify their annexation of Korea, and their invasions of other countries in East Asia.21

By the time Japan’s forthcoming invasion loomed large toward the end of the Qing Dynasty, the Chinese gradually heightened their interest in the Imjin War. The following shows how Chinese intellectuals viewed the situation. In his work titled Dongwokao (東倭考), Jin Anqing said, “It is regrettable that Ming failed to control a simple group of Japanese barbarians properly during their invasion of Korea.” Deng Zhicheng lamented, “China managed to deal with Japan during the Imjin War, but could not do anything during the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and handed Korea over to Japan.” Wang Poleng, with the Imjin War in mind, referred to the
Sino-Japanese War as a “Japanese pirates’ attack of the 20th Century.” Huang Ning also called it a pirates’ attack, and using sharp-tongued language, accused Japan of starting “an evil war.” To summarize, between the end of the 19th Century and the mid-20th Century, the Chinese appeared to link Imjin with the Sino-Japanese War and even with the Korean War (“The War waged to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea”).

During Japan’s colonial rule of Korea, Korean scholars could scarcely carry out research on the country’s history. Research on Imjin did not go far either quantitatively or qualitatively. Only a few historians, including Sin Ch’aeho (Chaeho) and Ch’oe Namsŏn (Choe Namseon), fought defiantly against a multitude of Japanese researchers who regarded Imjin as a war won by Japan, attempting to stress Japan’s superiority over Korea and to justify its colonial rule. In 1908, right before Japan’s forcible annexation of Korea, Sin Ch’aeho wrote a book titled, Sugun Cheil wi’in Yi Sunsın jun (Biography of Yi Sunsin - The No.1 Naval Hero), out of an earnest wish for the recovery of the receding sovereignty of Korea with the reappearance of a national hero like Admiral Yi. In 1931, Ch’oe Namsŏn wrote a book titled, Imjillan (The Calamity of Imjin). He had an object-oriented mission, setting out to inspire national consciousness in the minds of Koreans by having them remember how their ancestors overcame national crises and how they could emerge from the humiliating burden of colonial rule.

Following the country’s liberation from colonial rule in 1945, Korea went through political upheaval amid ideological confrontations between the right and the left wings. Under these circumstances, research on national history, including on Imjin, could hardly be carried out properly, a situation that continued with the outbreak of the Korean War.

Even so, Koreans’ interest in Imjin and their animosity toward Japan based on the war never subsided. In May 1952, when the Korean War was still going on, a rally was held in Pusan (Busan) on the occasion of the 360th anniversary of the Imjin invasion, resolving to overcome the new national crisis. Participants held up slogans encouraging people to remember the Imjin War and renew their resolve for the destruction of
communists, and to uphold Admiral Yi’s spirit of self-sacrifice for the ultimate goal of unification of the country. Even at that time of national crisis, people saw a need to remember and to shed new light on the Imjin War.

It was in the 1960s that Korean historians started their research on Imjin in earnest, and from diverse perspectives. First of all, many works were produced with a focus on the activities carried out by militias and naval troops led by Admiral Yi, in other words from a perspective of resistance to the invasion. In depth studies were made on damage incurred by civilians, firearms used in the war by Korean troops, and the country’s diplomacy with Ming. Moreover, a vast general history of Imjin written by Yi Hyŏngsŏk (Hyeongseok) was published. It was the first work of its kind ever published in the country. All this showed that research on the war was starting in earnest.

One noteworthy feature of the trend of research work carried out in the 1970s was the adoption of a self-reliant view of the history of the Korean nation. Besides, under the encouragement of the military regime, the social atmosphere was for upholding past war heroes like Yi Sunsin. The number of biographies of Yi increased dramatically. Nanjung ilgi (War Diary) and Imjin changch’o (Jangcho) (Reports on the Status of War Preparations), written by Yi, were translated into modern Korean and published. Research on the militias who took part in the war also increased in number. The need for research on the militias was felt as early as 1945. When the country was going through a time of hardship due to Japan, stories of volunteer militias who fought Japanese invaders were good material for encouraging a sense of resistance and a resolve to overcome difficulties. The existence of militias was important material evidence to put an end to the claim that the Imjin War ended up in a one-sided victory for Japan. It was also necessary to encourage local inhabitants of the areas where militias were organized to take a sense of pride in their native regions. Such needs combined to entice researchers to enter vigorously into the study of militias.

In the 1980s, research on Imjin tended to recede from their past focus
on heroes and martyrs. It is noteworthy that there were enthusiastic
movements in support of shedding new light on Imjin as a war won by
Korea. Such an atmosphere became noticeably prevalent after historian
Hŏ Sŏndo (Heo Seondo) presented such a view.26 He also spotlighted the
activities carried out by government troops from a new perspective. In the
past, emphasis had been placed on the activities of militias. This emphasis
was based on a view that government troops failed in the initial stage of
the war to put up substantial resistance to the invaders, who were over-
whelmingly stronger, and that the militias fought more bravely than the
government troops. The view that militias continued to play a de facto
role of government troops throughout the seven-year war may be mislead-
ing.27 Amid efforts to shed new light on the nature of the war, many re-
searchers appeared who focused on specific and micro-prudent aspects of
local battles (e.g., the Battle of Chinjusŏng (Jinjuseong), the sea Battles of
Myŏngnyang (Myeongnyang) and Sach’ŏn (Sacheon)) rather than on the
overall progress of the war.28

The 1990s and Thereafter

In the 1990s and thereafter, the scale of research works on Imjin deep-
ened and widened. The number of works increased considerably amid
heightened interest in the history of foreign relations and diplomacy. The
year 1992 was the 400th anniversary of the invasion, and 2007 was the
400th anniversary of the demise of Yu Sŏngryong (Seongryong), who as
the Prime Minister who commanded the government troops during the
war. It appeared that those anniversaries also contributed to a heightened
interest in Imjin. In 1992, 2007, and 2012, a number of academic research
events, including international symposia, were held in Korea to shed new
light on the war. In 2005, the Center for Korean Studies of Sogang
(Sŏgang) University held an international symposium on the subject. Pa-
pers submitted to these events were published as collections of theses or
as books.29

Three points are noteworthy in the trend of research on the war carried
out in the 1990s and thereafter. First, the new prevailing view was that the event should be viewed from the perspective of an international war encompassing the whole of East Asia rather than from that of a single country. “The Japanese Disturbance of Imjin – a Tripartite War in East Asia,” which was published in 2007, drew attention by announcing, as its title indicates, that it was an international war. To readers, the book seemed like an appeal to approach the event from a comprehensive perspective of East Asia instead of at the level of the national history of a single country. Second, energetic studies were made on details of the event with a focus on facts that had remained unknown and on those that had remained unattended to despite important content. That is to say, research themes became very diverse. Third, active studies were made on diverse memories associated with Imjin and their survival down the years, and on the conflict over whose memory should be adopted as legitimate.

**Expansion of Views Encompassing Entire East Asia**

In the 1990s and thereafter, Korean researchers started approaching the event in earnest from a perspective of the histories of China and Japan. In this process, materials kept in those countries came to draw more attention from Korean researchers. The use of the following materials have gradually become common: Chinese government-compiled materials, such as *Ming shilu* (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty), *Jinglue fuguo yaobian* (Outlines of National Strategy and Recovering the State), private materials including collections of writings, records handed down in the families of military leaders who took part in the war, and Japanese military records such as *Qunshu leicong* (群書類從) (Book of Collected Variety).

The view that it was necessary to approach the event from a comprehensive perspective of East Asia, instead of from the level of national history, led to the insistence that a new name for the war that could be used commonly by the three countries should be established. It was not an easy thing to do. Writer Kim Sŏnghan (Seonghan) wrote a long historic
novel entitled the “The Japanese Imjin Invasion,” published over six years in *Tong Ilbo (Donga Ilbo)* (1984-1989). At the beginning, in January 1984, the novelist used the title “The 7-Year War.” It shows that he was attempting to approach the event from a perspective encompassing the views of the three countries as early as the early 1980s. However, readers protested against the use of such a title and the novelist was made to change it. The scar left in the minds of Koreans concerning the tremendous loss and damage caused by Japan’s atrocious invasion remained unhealed for hundreds of years.

It was Japanese researcher, Manji Kitajima, who played an important role in the dissemination of the idea that a new name that could encompass the perspectives of the three countries should be adopted. For his book published in 1994, he used the title, “Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s Invasion of Korea” instead of “Bunroku Kicho no Eki.” He made this courageous decision to use a new term that took into account the attributes of the event rather than continuing to use one that had been used by local academic circles.

Recently, a Korean researcher proposed an unusual idea concerning the name of the event. Historian Kim Kibong (Gibong) said, “In the study of history, the use of names needs serious discussion in consideration of their importance as an object that constitutes historic reality beyond the role of rendering the past event.” He added that the term the Calamity of Imjin was not a proper one, as it sought to hide the flow of social history within the country and ruled out historic relevance as an international war outside of the country. He proposed the use of terms such as the Imjin War, the 7-Year East Asia War, or the Tripartite War in East Asia, instead of the Calamity of Imjin.

This trend has spread to schools; for the subject of East Asian History newly adopted in high schools in 2011, the textbooks use the term the Imjin War.
Expansion and Segmentation of Research Themes

In the 1990s and thereafter, details of the event that had been unknown or undealt with came to be handled in earnest. Researchers also started to shed new light on the overall characteristics of the war.

There was a study made from a perspective of comparative history concerning naval boats used in the war by the three countries. This went a long way in helping interested people get a grasp of the war from a more objective and comprehensive perspective by studying the status of naval forces and boats of the participants the war.

It was a significant factor in maintaining interest in militia activities, exploring those activities of their leaders that had previously been unknown, and introducing them to academic circles.

It is also noteworthy to have a micro-prudential view of the activities of Japanese troops. It is a well-known fact that they built fortresses along the southern coast of the Korean peninsula in anticipation of a long-term stay. One researcher checked the facts concerning Japanese troops’ use of existing Korean-built fortresses. He also checked the facts concerning Hideyoshi’s instructions for the construction of fortresses here and there in Korea on his troops’ advance towards the border with Ming China, and Japanese troops’ selection of places close to towns and advantageous to their defense. The efforts he made to meticulously check the relevant sites should be praised. Another researcher investigated the hardships experienced by people in particular areas during the war from a perspective of local history and micro-history. He checked a diary of a local official who went through the war in Indong, Kyongsang province, drawing attention in his book to a part of the tragedy and to social scenes that had up to then been unknown.

There is one noteworthy research work concerning the need to divide up the Chosŏn Period, with the Imjin invasion serving as a dividing line. The researcher raised an objection to the previous view that it is a heteronomous act to set Imjin as a criterion for dividing the period. He stressed that there was no interruption in the rule by a group of people from noble
families, but on the other hand, following Imjin, there was a clear separation from the previous military system, along with many other changes.38

Yet another scholar attempted to shed new light on the role of government troops. This one said that Yu Sŏngryong’s self-reflective view, which appears in his Chingbirok (Jingbirok) (The Book of Correction), could be made ill use of by Japanese researchers during the colonial period. That is, Yu’s exaggerated remarks about the government troops’ weakness in the initial stage of the war and the activities of the militias, which filled the void, were used against the writer’s intention, as a basis for Japanese imperialists’ theory on Chosŏn as a doomed dynasty. To summarize, Japanese imperialists said that Chosŏn, which had to wage a war relying merely on the help of militias, was doomed to be a colony. The writer stresses that the government troops were far from being extremely weak, and they subsequently came to take over their proper role from the militias.39

Another important feature of works carried out in this period was an expansion of the scope of historical materials used to shed light on the status and memory concerning the war. Korean literary researchers who studied extant writings about the status of the war played an important role here. Kim T’aejun (Taejun), Sŏl Sŏnggyŏng (Seol Seonggyeong) and others contributed to the expansion of the horizons of the research based on stories and relevant records of Piroin (被擄人, Chosun civilian internees captured by Japanese army) about their experience in a foreign country.40 Ch’oe Kwan (Choe Gwan), for one, expanded the scope of literary works to be analyzed even to Japanese literature.41

*Heightened Interest in Conflicts over the Formation and Transmission of War Memories and Their Legitimacy*

Research works on the transmission of memories concerning Imjin were another trend of the recent period. A researcher used the term, “the struggle over memory,” concerning what the main energy was that helped Koreans get over their national crisis. He said that the experience that
King Sŏnjo had to go through emerged as an official memory, pushing aside the memories of his ministers, including Admiral Yi, on the occasion of selecting those deserving rewards immediately after the end of the war. King Sŏnjo, seeing the Japanese invaders’ rapid advance northward, took refuge in places close to Ming China. His authority as a leader collapsed. On the other hand, the popularity of Yi Sunsin and others soared following their devastating victories over the enemy. The King claimed that the Ming troops that came to the aid of Korea were the main energy that helped the country get through the war, and that the country’s military leaders just followed Ming troops, doing nothing themselves to speak of. Sŏnjo went so far as to praise himself as the leader who helped the country get through the war, claiming that the country was able to encourage Ming to send rescuing troops because he went as close to the border as Ŭiju. The same researcher said that King Sŏnjo created the concept of indebtedness to Ming, comparable to the reestablishment of the country, by insisting that his memory was legitimate and it exerted influence even on the country’s diplomatic stance during the transfer of power in China from Ming to Qing.  

Now, let us look at a researcher who looked into the experience of people at the grassroots during the war, based on Imjillok (Records of the Imjin Waeran). This researcher paid attention to the portrayal in Imjillok of the king, who was irresolute and foolish and did not listen to the warnings of his ministers. The researcher said that such a portrayal was an expression of the expectation that the king and his ministers should be responsible for defense, and that grassroots people ought to feel hatred when such an expectation was not met. He noted that the sites of incidents occurring in Imjillok are Tongnae (Dongnae), Ch’ungju (Chungju), Wŏnju (Wonju), P’yŏngyang (Pyongyang), Ŭiju, and others all across the country. He said that the memories of grassroots people created in the records contributed to formation of a consensus on a larger scale beyond the category of villages and provinces; further, the historical memories contained in Imjillok, which was published prior to the country’s door-opening, show that the local people were aware that they were part of a
social and political community distinct from those in foreign countries.\textsuperscript{43} There is an article about Kwak Chaeu (Gwak Jaeu), who served as a militia leader. It recounts how memories about the militia leader were made up, and how they were reproduced and handed down through generations. In July 1597, Kwak led refugees from Kyŏngsang province to Hwawangsan Fortress to protect them from Japanese troops, led by Kiyomasa Kato, who had reinvaded Korea. Kwak took advantage of the rugged terrestrial conditions of the fortress and succeeded in protecting the people without attacking the Japanese troops. The Japanese troops for their part did not take the trouble to attack the fortress, and instead advanced to other destinations. However, the researcher says that a book entitled *Hwawangsansŏng tonggorok* published in 1734 contained a made-up story about how “the people who gathered in the fortress fought desperately not to let the Japanese troops take the fortress.” The book listed the names of 699 people who gathered in the fortress. In fact, only 19 of them were among those actually associated with the fortress. The writer points out that around 1734 the Noron faction was gaining strength by upholding Cho Hŏn (Jo Heon) as their spiritual leader, and the Namin faction invented the memory of Hawangsang Fortress so as not to be undone by the opposing faction.\textsuperscript{44}

**Conclusion**

To Koreans, the “Calamity of Imjin” has great historical significance. The war played a decisive role in the way Koreans formed their views of the Japanese and the Chinese. The image of Japanese as invaders and that of Chinese as those who came to their aid are still kept in their mind.

Until the fifteenth century, the way Korean intellectuals saw the Japanese was mixed. On one hand, they had a negative view of them due to the damage inflicted by pirates. On the other, they felt that Japanese valued righteousness highly and that their customs were plain and modest. In the sixteenth century, Koreans felt that they were the number two civi-
lized people only after Ming China, and tended to disdain the Japanese. With the Imjin Invasion in 1592, Koreans came to harbor deep animosity and hatred towards the Japanese. They felt that they had been humiliated by barbarians, and regarded Japan as “an enemy with whom they could never share the sky.”

After the end of the 7-year war, Korea could not afford to avenge itself on Japan. The country had to recover from the damage left by the war, and moreover, the Manchus were threatening along the northern border. The situation forced Korea to mend fences with Japan. Following Manchu attacks in 1627 and 1636, Japan’s presence loomed larger than before. Korea had to take a more conciliatory stance toward Japan despite past grudges. Some people even insisted that the country should form a joint front with Japan against the Manchurian threat. By the nineteenth century, Koreans felt again threatened by Japan, and their hatred and animosity based on what they had gone through during the Imjin War were rekindled.

During the colonial period, Korean research on Imjin did not go far either quantitatively or qualitatively. Leading Korean intellectuals such as Sin Ch’aeho and Ch’oe Namsŏn engaged in research on the war in an effort to recover the country’s disappearing sovereignty and to enhance the sense of national pride. In this effort, they focused on Yi Sunsin, who won victories over the Japanese in many sea battles in the war. They earnestly hoped that there would be another hero like Yi who would save the country from the humiliating situation of colonial rule.

A crucial element in the research the “Calamity of Imjin” carried out by Korean scholars was a sense of pride. A manifestation of such a sense was the ceremony to commemorate the 360th anniversary of the Imjin invasion held in Pusan in 1952 amid the turmoil of the Korean War. In the research carried out in earnest in the 1960s, historians explored diverse subjects, including the activities of militias and Admiral Yi. They tried to find instances of steadfast resistance to Japanese invaders by Koreans, and tried to conclude that after all it was not a war in which Korea lost to Japan. These efforts were based on hatred and animosity toward Japan.
The devastating defeat in the initial stage of the war was a scar on Koreans’ sense of pride. The rulers were blamed for their lack of ability. Amid this atmosphere, Yi Sunsin and militias came in for praise. The praise of Yi deepened in step with the military regime’s efforts for enhancement of the national consciousness in the 1970s. The need for healing the hurt sense of pride in the relationship with Japan drove the research works on Imjin in the direction of focusing on a hero-centered perspective of history and the theme of overcoming national hardships. The research carried out in the 1980s saw an expansion of the scope of subjects and a broadening of the historical materials used. However, the overall trend in the 1980s was an extension of what had occurred in the 1970s.

In the 1990s and thereafter, research on Imjin showed improvement in both quantity and quality. In particular, the need to look at the war from a perspective of East Asian history, and for that matter, world history, rather than from one of a country’s national history, has been shared by more and more researchers. Diverse new relevant topics have emerged. They were ones that had remained hidden due to the emphasis on historic perspectives focusing on resistance, heroes, and victories. It was also a new research trend that as well as concrete aspects of the war, such as the causes, development, and result, there was a heightened interest in stories about people from diverse walks of life who experienced the war, and about their memories of it.

Notes:
1 Han’györe, July 29, 2013; Chungang Ilbo, July 30, 2013.
2 Scrutiny of the database of Chosön wangjo sillok (The Veritable Records of the Chosön Dynasty) shows an interesting result about the approximate frequency of the terms referring to Japan and its people: Japan (1,810 times); Wa people (1,373 times), Wa barbarians (350 times), Wa bandits (322 times), Wa pirates (303 times), Pirates of Wa (185 times), Island barbarians (99 times),
Japanese (7 times), Wa enemy (5 times), and Ugly Wa (once).


5 For Korea’s reestablishment of diplomatic relationship with Japan following the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin, refer to: Eiri Mitake, Kinsei Kannichi kankeishi kenkyu (A Study of Korea-Japan Relationship in Early Modern Period), trans. Son Sŭngch’ŏl (Seoul: Iron-kwa Shilch’ŏn, 1990); Min Tŏkki, Chŏn kûndae Tong Asia segye-ŭi Han Il kwan’gye (The Relationship between Korea and Japan in East Asia in the Early Modern Period) (Seoul: Kyŏngin Munhwasa), 2007.


8 Kim Sŏngil, “Ŭidap sŏnwisa p’yŏnghaengjang” (Reply to Konishi Yukinaga), in Hakpong sŏnsaeng chip (Collected Works of Kim Sŏngil) Vol. 5. “況皇明乃我朝父母之國也 我殿下畏天之敬 事大之誠 終始不貳 故北望神京天威咫尺 玉帛之使 冠蓋相望 此實天下之所共聞知也 貴國今雖絕和 數十年前曾有觀周之使 豈不知我邦一家於天朝乎”


11 Han Myunggi, Imjin Waeran kwa Han Chung kwan’gye (Imjin War and the Korea-China Relationship) (Seoul: Yŏksa Pip’yŏngsa, 1999).

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14 Sŏnjo shillok (The Veritable Records of King Sŏnjo), Vol. 203, 9th lunar month of 1606. “備邊司啓曰…… 但今既易世 家康主國 自以為盡反秀吉之所爲 乞款於我 以帝王待夷之道 終無可絶之辭 况渠若能先爲致書 縛送犯陵之賊 則 不可無相報之事”

15 Han Myunggi, Chŏngmyo pyŏngja horan kwa Tong Asia (Chinese Invasions in 1637 and 1644 and East Asia) (Seoul: P’urŭn Yŏksa, 2009), 37-84.


17 Han Myunggi, Chŏngmyo pyŏngja horan kwa Tong Asia, 356.

18 Hwang Kyŏngwŏn (1709–1787) was a leading figure with such a view. The conspicuous activities carried out by “devoted retainers” are portrayed well in Hwang Myŏng paesinjŏn (A Tale of Retainers Devoted to Ming China’s Emperor).

19 Chŏng Chaep’il, “Kyegain mulllyong waemul” (No Japanese-made articles are allowed in my house), in Mijae chip (Collected Works of Chŏng Chaep’il) Vol. 3.

20 Concerning changes in the way of calling the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin, refer to Manji Kitajima, Toyotomi seiken no takgakininsiki to Chŏsen sinryaku (豊臣政權の對外認識と朝鮮侵略) (The Toyotomi Regime’s View of Foreign Countries and Invasion of Korea) (Tokyo: Azekura Shobo, 1987); Han Myŏnggi. “Chaejo chieun kwa Chosŏn hugi chŏngch’isa” (Koreans’ Sense of Indebtedness to Ming Similar to Reestablishment of the Country and the Political History in the Late Chosŏn Period), Daedong Munhwaguk Yŏngu 59, 2007.

21 As regards the flow of research on the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin in Japan since the medieval times, refer to: Manji Kitazima, “Epilogue,” in Toyotomi Hideyoshi no Chŏsen sinryaku (豊臣秀吉の朝鮮侵略) (Hideyoshi’s Inva-

22 Such a view also appears in Chen Weifang, Chaoxian wenti yu jiawu zhanzheng (The Korean Issue and the First Sino-Japanese War) (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian). Concerning the way Chinese have studied and viewed the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin since the end of the Qing Dynasty, refer to: Michihiro Ishihara, “萬曆東征論,” Chôsen Gakubo (Chosôn Journal) Vol. 21~22, 1961.


24 Pak Chaegwang; Cho Wŏnnae, “Imjin waeran sa yôn’gu üi ch’ui wa kwaje” (The Trend of Studies on the History of the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin), in Chosôn hugi sa yôn’gu üi hyŏnhwang kwa kwaje (The Status of Studies on the History of the Late Chosôn Period) (Seoul: Ch’angbi Ch’ulp’ansa, 2000).

25 Cho Wŏnnrae.


27 Ibid.

28 Pak Chaegwang, Ibid, 2005

29 In 1992, the Chinju National Museum, which specializes in the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin, published Imjin waeran 400 chunyŏn kinyŏm kukche simp’ojiŭm nonmunjip (Collection of Theses Submitted to the International Symposium Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the Imjin War). Based on these theses presented and interviews with researchers, two books were published, Yu Sŏngryong üi haksul kwa kyŏngnyun (Academic Achievement of Yu Sŏngryong) (Seoul: T’aekhaksa, 2007) and Yu Sŏngryong kwa Imjin waeran (Yu Sŏngryong and the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin) (Seoul: T’aehaksa, 2008). A book, Imjin waeran-kwa Tongasia samguk chŏnjaeng
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(The Japanese Disturbance of Imjin – A Tripartite War in East Asia) (Seoul: Hyeonnisut’ū, 2007), was published based on the result of the symposium held at Sogang University. In 2012, Imjin Waeran Chǒngsin Munhwa Sŏnyanghoe held four international symposiums in Seoul, Kwangju, Pusan, and Taegu. Many theses were presented there. At present, preparations are under way to publish a book containing them.


31 Tonga Ilbo, December 30, 1983 and December 25, 1989. The novel Imjin waeran (The Japanese Imjin Invasion) was republished under the original title Ch’ilnyŏn chŏnjaeng (The 7 Year War) in 2012.


34 Kim Chaegŭn, “Imjin waeran Chung Han Il myŏng kunsŏn ŭi t’ŭksŏng” (Characteristics of Naval Boats of Korea, Japan, and Ming China Used during the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin), in Imnan sugun hwaltong yŏn’gu nonch’ong (A Collection of Research Works on Naval Forces Activities during the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin) (Jinhae: Naval Military Research Laboratory, 1993).


37 Yi Hunsang, “Ŏnŭ chibang isŏ ŭi Imjin waeran chŏngŏn kwa chŏnsŭng” (Testimonies Made by a Local Petty Official about the Japanese Disturbance of


The following articles are all found in *Imjin waeran kwa Han’guk munhak* (The Japanese Disturbance of Imjin and Korean Literature) (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1992). Hwang P’aegang, “Imjin waeran kwa silgi munhak” (The Japanese Disturbance of Imjin and True Record Literature); Kim T’aejun, “Imjin waeran kwa kugoe ch’ehŏm ŭi shlgi munhak” (The Japanese Disturbance of Imjin and True Record Literature based on Experience in Foreign Country); and Sŏl Sŏnggyŏng, “Imjin waeran ch’ehŏm ŭi sŏlhwahwa yangsang” (The Experience of the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin Turned into Stories).


44 Ha Yŏnghwi, “Hwawangsansŏng ŭi kiŏk” (Memories of Hawangsansŏng Fortress), in *Imjin waeran Tongasia samguk chŏnjaeng*.
Abstract

A Study of Research Trends in Korea on the Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592 (Imjin War)

Han Myung-Gi

Following the Imjin War, the way Koreans viewed the Japanese came to be fixed. Prior to the war, Koreans held a mixed view of Japan and its people. Some Koreans held a negative view of Japan due to the damages inflicted by Japanese pirates, while there were others who held a positive view of Japan. In the 16th century and thereafter, Koreans tended to look down on Japan as being a culturally inferior country in tandem with their respect for Ming China as being the No.1 civilized country. The war cemented their view and Korean intellectuals came to regard the Japanese as being an enemy that they could not share the sky with.

As it happened, the threat from the Manchurians made Korea mend fences with Japan. Following attacks by the Manchurians in 1627 and 1636, Japan’s presence loomed larger than before. Korea had to take a conciliatory attitude toward Japan. A leading scholar went so far as to insist that Korea should establish a friendly relationship with Japan and depend on its power to fight the Qing. By the 19th century, Koreans’ animosity towards Japan, particularly their hatred for them, which was caused by the Disturbance of Imjin, re-surfaced.

During the Japanese colonial rule of Korea, Korean historians studied the Imjin War out of the desire to recover the country’s sovereignty and sense of national pride. They wanted to inspire Koreans’ national consciousness by having them remember how their ancestors got over national crises and to get out of the humiliating situation of the colonial rule under the leadership of national heroes like, Admiral Yi Sunsin.

A sense of pride was the core factor in Korean researchers’ study of the Imjin
War following the liberation of Korea in 1945. In the 1960s, Korean researchers carried out their studies of the Imjin War in earnest. They explored diverse subjects, such as militias and Yi Sunsin. They focused on events that would point to Koreans’ diehard resistance during the war and on the Imjin War not becoming a lost war for Korea. In the 1970s, the social atmosphere was about upholding past war heroes like, Yi Sunsin, under the encouragement of the military regime. Studies on the Imjin War were moving in the direction of praising war heroes who got the country out of hardships. In the 1980s, the subjects that were dealt with became more diverse and researchers used more historical materials, but the overall trend of research was not much different from that of the 1970s.

In the 1990s and thereafter, studies on the Imjin War deepened and widened. The new prevailing view was that the Imjin War should be reviewed from a perspective of East Asian history and, for that matter, world history rather than that of a specific country. Active studies were made on details of the said event with a focus on facts that had remained unknown. There was also a new research trend where there was a heightened interest in the stories about those from diverse walks of life who experienced the war and their memories about the war as, well as a focus being placed on concrete aspects of the war, such as the cause, development, and result.

**Keywords:** The Imjin War (the Japanese Disturbance of Imjin), Yi Sunsin; militias, sense of pride, the way Koreans viewed Japan, Koreans’ respect for Ming China, East Asian perspective, war experience, memories of the war
한국의 ‘壬辰倭亂’ 연구 경향에 대한 一考

한명기 (명지대 사학과 교수)

임진왜란은 한국인들의 对日認識이 굳어지는 계기가 되었다. 15세기까지는 조선 지식인들의 일본 이미지는 양면적이었다. 한편으로는 倭寇의 피해 때문에 그들을 부정적으로 보면서도 다른 한편에서는 그들을 긍정적으로 보는 시각도 있었다. 16세기 이후 조선에서는 尊明意識가 높아가는 경향과 맞물려 일본을 문화적으로 下視하는 경향이 높아져 갔다. 그 같은 와중에 임진왜란을 겪게 되자 조선 지식인들은 일본을 ‘영원히 함께 할 수 없는 원수’로 여겼다.

하지만 임진왜란 이후 조선은 일본과 ‘내기지 않는’和解를 할 수밖에 없었 다. 滿洲의 위협이 높아졌기 때문이었다. 더욱이 1627년과 1636년 임진왜란 호란과 병자호란을 겪으면서 일본의 존재감은 더욱 컸다. 만주(-淸)의 압박에 시달리던 조선은 일본에 더 유화적인 자세를 취해야만 했다. 일본을 ‘友邦’으로 삼아 침략에 맞서야 한다는 주장이 제기되기도 했다. 이윽고 19세기에 이르러 일본의 위협이 다시 높아지면서 임진왜란의 원한과 적개심 또한 다시 부상하는 양상을 보인다.

식민지 시대 한국인 연구자들은 국권을 회복하고 민족적 자존심을 고양하기 위해 임진왜란 연구를 연구했다. 임진왜란 당시 일본군을 물리친 李舜臣을 ‘영웅’으로 부각시키며 민족적 자존심의 회복을 꾀하는 한편, 이순신 같은 영웅이 다시 나타나기를 열망했다.

되었다. 비록 다루는 주제가 다양해지고, 이용하는 사료가 확대되는 등의 발전이 있었지만 1980년대의 연구 경향도 70년대까지의 연구 경향과 유사한 측면이 많다.

1990년대 이후 임진왜란 연구는 양적으로 확대되고 질적으로 심화되었다. 특히 임진왜란을 "一國史의 시각이 아니라 동아시아, 나아가 세계사적 시각에서 보려는 경향이 확산되었다. 새롭고 다양한 주제들이 대거 발굴되었다. 전쟁의 원인, 전개, 결과 등 구체적인 측면 뿐 아니라 전쟁을 겪은 다양한 신분과 계층 사람들의 전쟁 체험과 기억에 대한 관심이 높아진 것 또한 새로운 연구 경향이라고 할 수 있다.

주제어: 임진왜란, 이순신, 의병, 자존심, 대일인식, 尊明意識, 동아시아적 시각, 전쟁 체험, 전쟁 기억