

Special Feature

State Symbols, Group Identity,  
and Communal Memory  
in Jeong Gyeong-un's *Godae illok*,  
1592-1598\*

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## Introduction

The primary subject of this paper is the language used to describe the individual experience and the concept of group identification in the mid-Joseon dynasty during the Imjin War of 1592-1598 (Imjin waeran 壬辰倭亂) also commonly referred to as the (Great) East Asian War of 1592-1598 in English-language scholarship. The invasion occurred during the reign of King Seonjo 宣祖 (1552-1608) who ruled the kingdom of Joseon 朝鮮王國 from 1567 to 1608 and whose early rule oversaw the efflorescence of national politics, philosophies, and education with some of the most influential philosophers in Korean history active during his reign. In spite of the positive developments made in the king's early rule, Seonjo's time on the throne was defined by a foreign invasion that he and his court were mentally and materially unprepared to win without support by their regional ally, the Ming Empire 明帝國. Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537-1598), elevated to *taikō* 太閤 after ostensibly uniting the Japanese archipelago, dispatched the naval and land forces of a "united" Japan 日本國 to Joseon for the purported purpose of conquering the Ming ruled by the Wanli Emperor 萬曆帝 (1563-1620) who reigned from 1572 through 1620. Joseon was to be used as a road to conquer the Chinese and communications had been sent by Japan requesting Joseon's aid in "sending" their troops to China. Joseon, having no intention of letting the Japanese pass freely, became a battleground for over six years as hundreds of thousands of Joseon, Ming, and Japanese forces fought on land and at sea. The movement of troops, both as allies and enemies, also affected and displaced millions of people in Northeast Asia. The war was an unprecedented moment in Joseon's history in which everyone in the kingdom was directly involved.

Yet, the conflict remains Korea's pre-modern "Forgotten War" (Vermeersch 2007) and occurred during dynamic and dynastic global shifts in power—from the expansion of the European overseas empires to the subjugation of the Ming by the Manchu founded Qing dynasty 清國帝國 in 1644. There are also several limitations to the study of the Imjin War, chief among them the linguistic barriers that hinder the appreciation and transfer of knowledge

between contemporary international scholarly communities (Hur 2013). In addition, the majority of research has focused on the progression of battles, the development of weapons, and international relations before and during the Imjin War (see Robinson 2015; Kitajima 2015). It is only over the past few years that the number and diversity of studies has increased dramatically to include research on the post-Imjin War economic recovery (Kim 2015) and the effects that the memory of the Imjin War had on Joseon politics (Park 2015). However, studies that do address the concept and basis of individual expression in relation to common group identity have often been dominated by arguments over the presence or development of a national or proto-national consciousness in Joseon resulting from the creation of a nationwide national consciousness or ethnic identification formed by the adverse experience of the Imjin War or the Later Jin and Qing Invasions of Joseon in 1627 and 1637 respectively (Haboush 1999).

It is therefore of great interest to research the individual's conceptualization of group consciousness during the Imjin War due to current competing debates on the subject. In order to locate references to individual perspectives concerning group identity during the Imjin War, a personal journal from the invasion has been partially translated and analyzed to add some context to group identity during the Imjin War. This lesser-known but exceptionally important diary, *Godae illok* (*The Diary of Godae* 孤臺日錄) written by Jeong Gyeong-un 鄭慶雲 (1556-1610?), illustrates many of the qualities associated with a highly developed sense of group identity as he documented his own and others' social experiences in the midst of war and even the contents of public letters. Although limited by utilizing the *Godae illok* in classical Chinese, a modern Korean translation, and secondary sources on the diary in the Korean language, this study attempts to introduce the background and argue that the considered text is worthy of research to the academic community and to offer translations of sections of the diary. In spite of the fact that we are unable to analyze the full spectrum of Joseon experiences during the Imjin War, this *yangban*-written account does allow us to glimpse Joseon society and analyze different social concerns and issues during an era defining nation-wide crisis. The diary entries for the years, such as the *imjin* year, denoting the year of sexagenary year cycle, are written 1592, with lunar months and days following. The *imjin* year, 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month, 20<sup>th</sup> day in this paper is written as 1592.4.20.

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## The Imjin War and Historical Group Identity in Korea

Research on the Imjin War and its social impact by scholars working in Korea, Japan, and China (and in their respective languages) is far more numerous than those found outside of Asia. Although the numbers of works are greater and the variety of topics more variegated, research in Korea has been criticized for its Korean-centric viewpoint and lack of foreign source-materials before recently opening up to include more perspectives (Han 2013). Likewise, research in Japan and China was also claimed to have suffered from focusing too much on their own state's perspectives and communities' experiences and internal political dynamics while not including a greater variety of international primary source materials (Nakano 2013; Wang and Sun 2019). Studies on the Imjin War have also been slow to develop in academia outside of East Asia, but the war is gradually coming out of the darkness and into the penumbra of scholarly consideration.

Over the past decade there have been a number of monographs and edited volumes written on the conflict in English-language scholarship including *Samurai Invasion* (Turnbull 2002), *The Imjin War* (Hawley 2005), and *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail* (Swope 2009), all which overview the conflict predominantly from the Japanese, Korean, and Chinese viewpoints respectively. In addition, there is an edited volume consisting of seventeen articles with a diversity of viewpoints in *The East Asian War, 1592-1598* (Lewis 2015) and the posthumously published *The Great East Asian War and the Birth of the Korean Nation* (Haboush, W. Haboush, and Kim 2016), which surveys the creation of Korean national conscious using a variety of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese sources. However, there remain comparatively few studies in the English language concerning common and uniting group identity existing in Joseon during the invasion. Translations and textual analysis of passages and memoirs mentioning group consciousness and socialization are present in Yi Sun-sin's 李舜臣 (1545-1598) *Nanjung ilgi* 亂中日記 (1977), Yu Seongryeong's 柳成龍 (1542-1607) *Book of Corrections* (*Jingbirok* 懲毖錄) (2002), *A Korean War Captive in Japan, 1597-1600* (*Ganyangnok* 看羊錄) (Kang 2013), and *Epistolary Korea* (Haboush 2009). These books and primary source translations are joined by an increasing number of theses and journal articles on the war in English language and other non-East Asian languages, including research on one of the most famous civilian diaries kept during the war, *Sweimirok* by the *yangban* O

Huimun 吳希文 (1539-1613) (Finch 2009).

The authors of the most cited theories on the emergence of a broad state-wide group consciousness, commonly called nationalism, are Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Anthony Smith. Each of the authors claim that nationalism is a modern social construction with roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries citing commonalities in language, text production, and industrialization as some precursors. Excluding the work of *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 2006), most authors make explicit mention that some type of pre-modern, proto-national state existed before the fully formed nation state emerged either citing the "proto-nation" (Hobsbawm 1992, 60) and "ancient navels" of identity (Gellner 1997, 23) or the concept of "ethnies" (Smith 1996, 15). The reluctance of these theorists to properly deal with the issue of commonly binding social identity before their self-imposed time limits has led to them being used as convenient theoretical opponents for those scholars locating the "pre-modern" examples of group consciousness that, in turn, help some scholars push back the age of pre-modern group identity.

Regarding Korea in particular, Remco Breuker (2010) and John Gould (1999) have argued that it was in the Goryeo dynasty 高麗 (918-1392) that preceded the Joseon dynasty which first created a common identity with Breuker using theories of Smith's ethnies and the concept of charter polities (Lieberman 2003) to define state-wide group consciousness during this period. John Duncan (1998, 2007, 2010) has also written multiple times on the subject of proto-nation or proto-nationalism existing in Joseon due to the dynasty's sense of shared belonging and identity strengthened through Confucian moral values and historical figures from the Korean peninsula. When it comes to the Imjin War, English-language scholars have also repeatedly mentioned the Joseon people showed signs of patriotism either by the local Righteous Armies or monk soldiers who fought during the Imjin War (Hawley 2005, 270; Swope 2009, 108). However, many still observe a delineation between the modern and pre-modern eras with James Palais (1998, 5) writing that such an encompassing group identity akin to nationalism was weak or impossible for the peasant and lower classes to imagine a strong form of loyalty to the state. However, there is a trend to understanding Joseon group identity by surveying the variations in the components and origins that created group identity in its time. Joseon group identity was not made up of a single characteristic or did it originate from a single location. There were elements of the Samhan 三韓 identity as mentioned

by Breuker (2010) and Kim (2010) as well as elements recognized from Buddhism, and most importantly, the influence from China and Confucianism with its mixed group heritage. Rituals were also an important part of the process for the state and people to connect and share a common history and identity (Hur 2019).

Scholarly works in the Korean language often follow the same theoretical divisions as seen in English-language articles and books. For example, Heo Tae-yong (2008) argues that the idea of Goguryeo was used to promote unity even in the seventeenth century. However, there are also some significant differences in understanding the wider sense of community in Northeast Asia. One of the most important concepts to receive recent scholarly interest is the idea of Junghwa (Chinese civilization 中華)<sup>1</sup> and the effects on Joseon political thought in the seventeenth century. The evidence clearly shows that Joseon people could visualize themselves as being part of a larger imaginary group through the idea of Junghwa outside of the peninsula as well (Heo 2009, 2019; Bae 2014). In conclusion to this overview, there was not just one communal origin for state and common identity, but rather a host of origins and philosophies woven into the fabric of society that theorists often overlook. Strong state-centric identities, such as those held by Jeong Gyeong-un and other participants during the Imjin War, show a composition of multiple balanced yet competing elements of group identity. Peninsular histories and customs, the importance of Chinese civilization (Junghwa), and Confucian rites could all exist harmoniously at the same time with the immediate environment and concerns often determining the dominant expressed social identity.

### Analysis of and Selections from Jeong Gyeongun's *Godae illok*

Jeong Gyeong-un was born in 1556 during the reign of King Myoengjong 明宗 (1534–1567) to a *yangban* aristocratic family in Hamyang 咸陽 county. His father had died when Jeong was only two years old, and he went to live with his maternal grandparents. By the age of fifteen, Jeong had lost his mother and

grandparents to natural causes and relied upon older siblings (Jang 2015, 330). Jeong was married at the age of twenty-five, and at the age of twenty-six took the famous scholar and politician, Jeong Inhong 鄭仁弘 (1535-1623), as his teacher and political mentor. Jeong Inhong was later executed for his support of the support of King Gwanghae-gun 光海君 (1575-1641) after Injo's 仁祖 (1595-1649) "Restoration to the Throne" in 1623" (Injo banjeong 仁祖反正). Jeong Gyeong-un appeared to have great aspirations to join the government and win some form of recognition and place in society. At the age of thirty-six, and without government work, the Imjin War broke out and Jeong Gyeong-un may have seen this catastrophe as a blessing in disguise. He began to write *Godae illok* as soon as the war started, but he continued to write it beyond the end of the war until 1609. In this way, we cannot say that the diary is a mere wartime memoir, but also a document covering the re-development of Joseon following the Imjin War. The name Godae is Jeong Gyeong-un's pen name (*ho* 號) which refers to a two-storied tower at the former home of Yu Hoin's (1445-1494) in Wicheon 渭川 that he frequented and enjoyed (Jeong 2009b, 161). Jeong became active in the Righteous Army activity with Kim Seongil 金誠一 (1538-1593) and Righteous Army Commander Kim Myeon 金沔 (1541-1593), perhaps in the hope of gaining advancement or recognition that he seemed to desire. Following the war, Jeong returned to his hometown in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of 1599 and served in overseeing a number of Confucian *seowon* 書院 academies (in particular in his efforts to rebuild Namgye seowon 藍溪書院), but never passed the higher level civil service examination, *gwageo* 科擧, although his son was successful. The civil service examination was both a means to promote social status and become economically independent and the exam also necessitated knowledge of the Classics from China, including the Four Books and the Five Classics (*saseo ogyeong* 四書五經). Although not needing to keep a diary during and following the war, in many ways the act of keeping a diary was a way to maintain the skills of a government official and remain scholarly at least in his own mind. The diary is written with some skill by Jeong in the early years of the conflict, and the descriptions and entries are extremely vivid. It combines a variety of textual references to literary works, styles even though it is better remembered for its overview of the war, and collection of official documents. However, Jeong (ibid. 159) did not maintain his own standard and the quality of entries declined over time. Although Jeong Urak (ibid. 158) maintains that the intention of the diary was not to be a public document, I do not entirely

1. The concept of Junghwa encompasses the idea of civilization that was thought to be universal even though it originated and developed in Chinese states. Joseon also thought of itself as part of this civilizing force.

agree with this sentiment and see the diary of Joseon being both a document of both the private-public spheres.

Owing to the quality of entries and time span of the journal, there have been a number of studies on the diary ranging from analysis of his writing styles to involvement in the Righteous Army. The diary is seen as an important document as it presents information “looking up (from the base of society)” that shows the locations and travels of certain individuals, news, and events not recorded in the *sillok*, and detailed personal accounts of national tragedies (Min 2013). The effects of certain decisions by the allied Ming Chinese forces were also brought into discussion, as Jeong Gyeong-un often criticized the behavior of the Ming soldiers and commanders alike, especially after they allowed peace talks with the Japanese to continue. The result being a mixed image of the Ming (Han 2010). The *Godae illok* is also argued to be a way to see an undistorted view of the individual political consciousness and the general political consciousness of Joseon at the time (Pak 2010).

Interestingly, celebrations and events, no matter for whom, were maintained when possible during the war, and as well as Jeong never lost hope that one of his sons would eventually become a government scholar (1597.4.25) (Jeong 2009b, 172). The importance of Ancestral Rites (*jesa* 祭祀) for Jeong's immediate and extended family were also extremely important (ibid. 173), and Jeong Gyeong-un even had dreams of passing the *gapgwa* 甲科 examination and fighting alongside the king (1595.10.21 and 1596.3.16) (ibid. 174). In the studies, it is clear that Jeong wanted to promote his social standing with him constantly looked for the next examination hall even in the midst of war (1594.10.8). When not gathering supplies for the war, Jeong behaved and upheld his place as a dignified *yangban* searching for, and dreaming of, a place in government.

However, some of the most interesting analyses of the Jeong's diary involve studies on his writing styles that indicate the number of influences in his writing including Chinese Han Poems, references to the Chinese Three Kingdoms, and his meticulous note taking and documentation of events and letters (Jang 2015). The arguments made by a number of researchers point out that Jeong had multiple styles and influences, introduce new perspectives that he could maintain a critical view of Joseon society, and criticize the “aid” sent from the Ming, but still praise the king of Joseon and Ming emperor while writing and quoting literature from the universal Confucian customs.

The following translations focus on the outbreak of the war, meetings with friends, the advance of the Japanese, interactions with Ming soldiers, ceremonies, and the final entry of the war in order to offer an overview of group consciousness at the time. Jeong Gyeong-un's diary begins by briefly mentioning the Japanese force's landing and invasion.

[The Reign of the] Wanli Emperor, 1592.4.20:

The Japanese (*waejeok* 倭奴) have landed. Since all ten pages of this diary have dropped out, [I] can't look over the first part [of my diary].

He continues with his diary with lengthier passages which include more detailed accounts of the push made by the Japanese forces.

[1592] 4.23 (*imja*):

The enemy in Gimsan have crossed over Chupungryeong and are striking towards Hwanggan-hyeon. [—] The enemies divided and headed towards Sangju to enter and now remain in the castle there. The Mobile Border Commander Lee Il 李鎰 (1538-1601) met the enemy in battle at Sangju's Bukcheon but the troops were at a disadvantage. The enemy crossed through Joryeong on their way to Sangju, and after this each county they crossed became full of the enemy, [we] couldn't hear any news from Gangjwa for a long while. Communications with counties and prefectures of Yeonbyeon were severed, and everyone knew that they had become dens of the Japanese slaves (*waeno* 倭奴).

However, it was only Goje's County Magistrate, Kim Junmin 金俊民 (?-1593), who defended his power using a diversity of strategies. The enemy set out three times to the foot of the castle and all of them were repulsed. Not showing the fearful light in the slightest, this imposing figure repaired armor and weapons while planning defensive strategies was just like an unshakable pillar hit by the waves. Perhaps if the generals who led the army have had the hearts of Junmin, then how could this situation as if [the enemy] entered a border without anyone to defend it land have occurred? Junmin is a man of the capital. Admiral of the Right Fleet Commander Won Kyun 元均 (1540-1597), as the son of deceased Regional Commander [Won] Jun Ryang 元俊良(?-?), typically has courage and resourcefulness. If, from the first stage of the crisis he had boarded his warship and went to block the enemy, then the enemy would not have set foot on land even for a day. If he had combined his fighting power and promised to join with



Jeolla Commander of the Right Fleet Lee Sun-sin 李舜臣 [they] would have pursued and smashed the enemy. That the enemy could not take Jeolla province is the works of these two commanders.

[1592] 4.25 (*gapin*):

Supreme Commander Sin Rip 申唼 (1546-1592) met the enemy in Chungju's Dal River, did not take the appropriate responsive measures, lost on the battlefield, and drowned. Around 500 of the elite troops fell into the water and died. As soon as this news was known to the king, he sent the capital commander to Gwanmun to make a report and because of this there was an uproar.

[1592] 4.26 (*eulmyo*):

In succession, every town in Chungcheong and Gangwon provinces has fallen to the enemy and the roads are blocked. The people of Gyeongsang province escaped to the fields and forests, lie down, and hide. In this situation where they find themselves in caves on the bare ground. And they feel like they do not differ from being meat (fish and meat) and it's like they are not living.

[1592] 4.30 (*gimi*):

Between 1 and 3 in the morning (*sagyeong*), the king planned to leave the capital. Yu Hong 兪泓 (1524-1594) remonstrated stating that "The Altars of Soil and Grain (*Sajik*) [—] depend on the king here." The king did not heed this, and eventually discussed leaving the capital. Jeolla's special army envoy Lee Kwang 李洸 (1541-1607) under the pretext of fighting for the king (*geunwang* 勤王) joined troops to the capital army.

The world around Jeong was rapidly disintegrating, but it was during this time that the reader is able to observe what he considers of greatest value to Joseon society. Of primary concern were the safety of the king and the elements of the state that upheld aspects of his rule. These included the Altars of Soil and Grain (*sajik* 社稷) and the Royal Ancestral Shrine (*jongmyo* 宗廟). It appears that the people, particularly the *yangban*, were trying to recalibrate social structures and the focus of language for their advantage. There was no discussion of massive social changes in other sectors of society, even though they were occurring. Instead Jeong mentions both the support that should be shown to the monarch in order to build up the members of his own Righteous Army

and the support of local *yangban* for the king.

Jeong wrote that Kim Seongil and Righteous Army Commander Gwak Jaeu 郭再祐 (1552-1617) also arrived and repeated similar themes focusing on symbols of the present state. On the 1592.5.8, Kim Seongil is reported to have spoken about Civility (*yeui* 禮義) being the universe's immutable way and that the people should "wash away this national disgrace!" A letter was also sent from Kwak Jaeu stating that the Royal Ancestral Shrine and the Altars of Soil and Grain were in peril while speaking of filial duty. The vocabulary used to describe the fighters and their duty to their descendants stems from Confucian canon and should be of no surprise. But what is interesting is the emphasis placed on the state and the elements of the state related to ritual for the king (*jongmyo* and *sajik* shrines). As the locations of ritual were used as conceptual elements of the state, some modern authors have gone as far to affirm that the Royal Ancestral Shrines (*jongmyo*) and the Altars of Earth and Grain (*sajik*) represented the state itself. They are said to have been the "most important historical spaces in Joseon" (Kang and Yi 2011) and were also the locations where the Joseon state derived its basis and meaning (ibid. 13). The elements that were meant to bind the people had already been put in place over hundreds of years of development to create stability and a rallying cry around the king.

Later, calls for service to the king and locations associated with King Seonjo continued from 1592 to 1593 when troops were called up in loyal service to the king (*geunwang*) (1592.5.10 *gisa*) to fight for his majesty. However, finding troops proved a difficult task in 1592, and Jeong could only locate two volunteers before mentioning that their combined forces numbered around 400 men. There were reasons as to why it was difficult to gather these men, but one major reason was that there existed great distrust between the public and the *yangban*-led armies (Heo 2014). Distrust of the soldiers was also well founded as seen in this next passage.

[1592] 6.18 (*byeong-o*):

We marched and stayed the night at Hyanghyeon temple. The soldiers of the main army after lining up in formation stole horses and plundered valuables and these acts continued as they pleased. The people were barely coping with this suffering, but I could not control them. [...]

Yet considering the circumstances at this time in the war, the actions taken by his troops are hardly surprising, but they did nothing to inculcate a sense of unity with the people they were serving. However, the actions taken by the enemy served to lessen any animosity that Koreans held for their own troops. But the idea of communal suffering was helping generate the framework of mutual identification, but it was not the most important defining factor. In fact, the mutual suffering gave actual places and people, including the king, more importance and the concepts that underpinned the state came to the fore of discussion more often, and also to demonstrate that certain economically draining activities should be cancelled.

[1592] 8.7 (*gap-o*):

[...] The Special Army Envoy sent out a command to all towns ordering, “Since the king and court’s flight (*gukka pacheon* 國家 播遷), court officials cannot offer rites to the Royal Ancestral Shrine and Altars of Soil and Grains. Even though there are not towns trampled by the enemy, it is not peaceful enough to carry out rites in honor of Confucius (*seokchae* 釋菜). I wish to suspend the great religious ceremonies (*daeje* 大祭) for political expediency.

The immediate main problems facing Jeong in the first year of the war were the low numbers of men in his company (around four hundred) and the lack of provisions they needed to wage war. The Righteous Army began to tax the local people for weapons and food stuffs to support their forces.

[1592] 6.10 (*musul*):

The people of the precincts were all considered according to their circumstances and we decided upon war funds. Each gentlemen without position brought 5 pieces of iron for arrow tips (*jeokcheol* 炙鐵) and 15 feathers (for arrow fletches) to prepare long and short arrows. We trained the people how to use these bows and arrows for a long while. In all there were 249. We looked for and gathered war horses, called and gathered the soldiers, and every single day we filled the required number of war horses.

The reinforcement of mutual identity documented by Jeong in 1592 continues into the next year as they welcome the arrival of the Heavenly Ming Army and

the benevolence of the Ming Emperor which remained a powerful element of their mutual group consciousness.

[(*Gyesa* Year) 1593] 2.2 (*byeongsul*):

Truly speaking, if the benevolent emperor had not shown his affectionate grace, we could not have counted on a time for an opportunity to recover. That the emperor has bestowed his virtue of universal benevolence (on us). Ah! So wonderful!

However, this welcome of the Ming forces is short lived as the Ming begin to take what they need and begin to demand items such as food, horses, and other equipment, but Jeong was unable to comply. Jeong’s horse was stolen by a Ming soldier (1593.5.20 *gyeyu*), and both Koreans and Chinese ran amok through the towns and destroyed a great many villages (1593.5.4-20). Then the needs of the Ming army grew and Jeong could not help but show his anger at their increasing demands (1593.8.3 *gapsin*). Jeong’s own forces were also caught stealing the people’s possessions: “Without hesitation, they stole what they wanted”; “No law and order” (1593.7.4 *byeongjin*). Commenting on the Ming said, “The Ming army filled the camp and the people were completely gone, [their] unscrupulous damage was no different from the Japanese” (1593.7.14 *byeongin*). Even at the end of the war Jeong reported that, “A Tang soldier (Ming) stole my bowl and blanket. Contemptable. [...]” (1598.10.24 *byeongja*). Ming’s aid to protect the nation, which stood as a symbol for Joseon people in their imaginations, was no longer the reality they had hoped for. In fact, they were compared to the Japanese and caused other unforeseen disasters. At this time King Seonjo returned to the capital, Jeong mentions the symbols of the state and laments the situation.

1593.10.15 (*eulmi*)

The king returned to Hanseong (the capital) and the Crown Prince [later King Gwanghae-*gun*] remains in Haeju 海州. As his majesty crossed the waters and moves over the mountains and valleys it has now been one full year and he has finally returned. How must his Majesty feel, seeing the overgrown bushes in the old palaces? The two-hundred-year old Royal Shrine, Altars of Soil and Grain, and royal palaces as only ashes. When his Majesty arrived and saw this, oh, how will he grieve? How can he think of persevering?

This could have been for actual concern for the king and state, but more likely Jeong is thinking about the future and ideas of promotion even before the war has concluded. Most interestingly is the fact that Jeong also quotes the *Book of Odes* (*Sigyeong* 詩經) when referring to the state of the palace as continues to quote the same poem throughout his diary. Jeong also mentions the suffering of the common people, their motivations for fighting, the spirit of the common people, and the importance of the physical location of the king. Until the king returned to the capital, the author usually mentioned the king's location as if Seonjo himself were the centre of the country and state.

[(*Gap-o* Year) 1594] 11.19 (*gyesa*):

We entered into Hanseong (*doseong* 都城). The palace was in ruins, and the people's houses were burnt to ashes and not one house remained. The whole world has been crushed. Out of sadness, my heart helplessly shed tears. Alas, our country's two-hundred-year cultural achievements (*munmul* 文物) and institutions suddenly collapsed, broke, and left no traces. Even an ordinary man without position cannot stop lamenting the destruction of the country, so how then could gentlemen of the country who receive their stipends not feel any anger and passion? If the ruler and ministers become determined to recover the country through the co-operation of their hearts with an indestructible resolution, then there will be no difficulties in restoring heaven and reorganizing people's hearts to take revenge.

Perhaps the man with no position that he refers to is in fact himself, and he is criticizing those with government positions in order to elevate himself above them, at least mentally. At the end of the war in 1598, Jeong encounters an old friend, Pak Eonnam. He has aged, perhaps due to the war, and members of his family have been captured by the Japanese. Still, in their suffering there is hope shared between the two old friends.

[(*Musul* Year) 1598] 10.26 (*muin*):

I spoke together with Kang Chung. Again, I met and held hands with Pak Eonnam and we briefly exchanged words. Pak Eonnam has already been a friend for 10 years. All the hairs on his head and beard have turned white. As we faced one another and offered up the innermost thoughts that had accumulated over the time, it was hard to contain our sorrow. His older brother Cheongchi was taken as prisoner [by the Japanese], but [Eonnam]

had heard that he had not died and that his life had been spared. Where can we find these types of blessings? [...]

In one of the last entry's covering the war, Jeong writes one of his longer passages that reflects on a number of key issues that had built up over the past seven years: namely the sacrifices of the Joseon people and the missed opportunities by the Ming generals. The entry is as follows:

[(*Musul* Year) 1598] 11.19 (*gyeongja*):

The enemy commander Konisi Yukinaga 小西 行長 (1555-1600) has fled. The exalted official, supreme commander the Right Jeolla Fleet, Lee Sun-sin, is dead. At first Konisi Yukinaga twice called for peace talks with Commander Yu Jeong (1544-1610), Buddhist Army Commander, and said that they would dispersal military power and return [to Japan]. Yu Jeong feigned the allowing of peace talks and let the commander-in-chief [Lee Sun-sin] know this in private. The ships were readied and when half had crossed over, they were attacked. In the end, not all the Japanese (*waejeok*) were able to board their ships, the commander [Yu Jeong] fired canon shots. Lee Sun-sin responded to this call, went out, confronted, and destroyed hundreds of the Japanese (*wae*) ships. The Japanese (*wae*) knowing that they could not cross, again turned back to their camp. Konisi Yukinaga gave notice to Shimazu Tadatsune 島津 忠恒 (1576-1638) to come immediately to gather forces in order to fight a naval battle. Since Shimazu Tadatsune took a ship and led in front, the commander [Lee Sun-sin] attacked them from both sides and a great battle opened in the middle of the ocean. The commander [Lee Sun-sin] stood in front of the rank and file, and fought a bloody battle all day, but he was struck in the head with an iron ring [bullet] and died in battle. When the son saw the death of the father he hid his tears and sadness, and while not crying said, "As I will be certain to take revenge for my father, I swear that I will never live with [the presence of] the enemy." While saying this, they raised the flag and beat the drums, and did not end fighting until all of the enemy were dead. [...]

Ah! Our country has endured the fire of war for seven years until now, and thankfully the country of the Ming court that gave us the blessings of unbiased treatment, dispatching generals and increasing the soldiery without break for ten-thousand *li*. [...] [the Ming] soldiery magnificently spread out the dignity of the emperor, we believed that they would strike at and defeat the enemy on another day. In the [1598]10.9, the [Ming] Dongdu-*dok* [soldiery] lost an incalculable number of materials in Sacheon.



Monk commander Yu heard of this disadvantage and returned to camp [—] they had sworn to kill the enemy. Since the enemy leaders promised to one another and fled, how could the Ming country's soldiery not but reflect on this disaster and not cut off the head of Hideyoshi? Even though they did not achieve a great victory, they butchered many [of the enemy], and they did not allow even a single ship to return. In actuality, without the Ming looking like tigers and leopards in the mountains, it would have been truly difficult to bring about the current result. Even though the Ming's various generals did not exert themselves to the death on the battlefield, how lucky are they to still have the wealth of honor without any effort? [...]

## Conclusion

The brief passages from Jeong Gyeong-un's *Godae illok* illustrate the world that evolved around Jeong, but they also include a snapshot of the mental world that Jeong brought with him which developed prior to the Imjin War. In particular, the maintenance of symbols and places such as the Royal Ancestral Shrine and Altars of Soil and Grains which underpinned the central role of the monarchy in the state were frequently mentioned by Jeong. Certain individuals such as King Seonjo, the Ming emperor, and Lee Sun-sin were given also highest priority when it came to group consciousness, and their mentioning is similar to other studies made on the *yangban* identity at this time (Kye 2012, 2016). Perhaps the focus on these individuals was due to the fact that Jeong was himself a *yangban*: his training and that he had aspirations to become a government functionary.

The ideas of mutual group consciousness went through various stages with individuals being linked with mutual suffering and loss, but they were held together through the perceived resilience of the state's apparatus. Beyond the immediate concerns, the ideas of the world-order centered on Ming also came to aid those fighting in spite of the abuses by the Ming troops and qualms over the Ming army in actively confronting the Japanese. Jeong's expressed reliance on the universal philosophies and ideas that bound East Asia appears to have been unshaken and even strengthened, and he even praised the efforts by monk commanders against the Japanese.

The Joseon people had a number of social elements that could bind group identity and responded to the invasions in a multitude of ways. But they all used the cultural symbols laid down in the past for their own purposes of

identification. The political structure and histories were already established by the time of the Imjin War, but the invasion allowed for an efflorescence and new application of these words and meanings. The value of Jeong's diary is that we are able to see a number of different fluctuating values over time that remained relatively stable in the efforts to support the contemporary Joseon political system, perhaps, for Jeong's own want of a place in government. Although we have to consider his place in society as a *yangban*, Jeong Gyeong-un's record balances both the rhetoric and his observations of a society under siege, which provides us with a vivid picture of Joseon during the Imjin War.

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## Abstract

This paper explores aspects of state symbols, group identity, and communal memory that existed in Joseon Korea during the Imjin War (East Asian War) of 1592-1598. Although there have been many studies on the Imjin War by Korean and international scholars on the topics of diplomatic exchanges and military engagements during the conflict, they are comparatively few studies in English language scholarship concerning the war's impact on social integrity and group consciousness. The *Godae illok* written by a *yangban* Righteous Army member, Jeong Gyeong-un, documents his personal activities throughout the war, his interactions with members of the Ming Chinese forces, and views on a Joseon society besieged by the Japanese. Some scholars are quick to claim that this invasion became the new foundation of social and group consciousness in Joseon. However, a reading and analysis of passages in Jeong's diary would indicate that social consciousness based on the pre-Imjin War period was the foundation of group thought during the war, as many men went into battle with the aspiration of attaining lucrative positions in a government founded on ideals and philosophies predating the invasion.

**Keywords:** Imjin War, *Godae illok*, Jeong Gyeong-un, Joseon society, Joseon diaries