Turning toward Edification

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Civilizing Barbarians and Rebellious Allies

Japanese Defectors and Ming Deserters during the Imjin War

The institutions for managing foreign communities within or at the borders of Chosŏn were put to renewed strain when war broke out in 1592. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, prior to the onset of war, Chosŏn was faced with minor military threats only, the effects of which were limited to its outer borders. The largest military crises of the sixteenth century were of primarily local concern, including the revolt of Jurchen subjects under Nit’anggæ in 1583, a second Tumen River Jurchen revolt in 1587, the Three Ports uprising of Japanese merchants of 1510, and the Ulmyo Japanese pirate raid of 1555. The Chosŏn court responded to these crises with a number of reforms, including the development of a covered craft, the p'anoksŏn, as the primary naval vessel of the Chosŏn fleet, the establishment of a Border Defense Command (Pibyŏnsa), and the reorganization of the military into a local defense system (chesŭng pangnyak). However, these conflicts were not so large as to require a fundamental rethinking of its military and diplomatic institutions and protocols, and Chosŏn’s inefficient system for funding the military, which was imagined to be a self-supporting militia but in practice was financed through a corrupt and burdensome tax that “military support tax payers” did their best to avoid, limited the efficacy of any reforms.¹

Certainly, none of these disturbances prepared Chosŏn for the Imjin War of 1592–1598. In 1592, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (ca. 1536–1597), shortly after overcoming his last major rivals in Japan, directed the Japanese army to attack Chosŏn as a prelude to an invasion of the Ming empire. The Japanese army was perhaps the largest military force of any country in the world during the sixteenth century and was made up of soldiers hardened by the constant strife of Japan’s Warring States period.² A substantial number of the invading Japanese soldiers were armed with arquebuses, a weapon with which the Chosŏn military was unfamiliar. Within several months the Japanese army overwhelmed much of the peninsula, conquering first the southern county of Tongnae (present-day...
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Pusan), destroying much of the Chosŏn army at Ch'ungju, and then forcing the
Chosŏn monarch to flee the royal capital of Hansŏng, past the fortified city of
Pyŏngyang, and onto the very border of Chosŏn at Ŭiju on the Yalu (Amnok)
River. One branch of the Japanese army under Katō Kiyomasa even crossed the
Tumen River in Hamgyŏng Province and launched raids against the Jurchen on
the northern bank. Despite the superior Chosŏn navy and significant pockets of
resistance throughout the peninsula, only the arrival of Ming armies pushed the
Japanese back, with the Ming army under Li Rusong (1549–1598), a Liaodongese
general of Korean-Chinese origin, defeating the Japanese in the fourth battle of
Pyŏngyang in the first month of 1593. Even this battle was not decisive, and the
Ming reversal at the Battle of Pyŏkchegwan by the end of the month allowed the
Japanese to hold out at its fortifications on the southern coast for several years
of stalemate. This stalemate came to an end with the “Chŏngyu Offensive,” the
second Japanese offensive of 1597–1598, which was launched with the more lim-
ited goal of conquering Chosŏn territory and which devastated the southwestern
Chŏlla Province that had been largely untouched during the first invasion. This
offensive also ended in a resounding defeat for the Japanese at the hands of the
joint Chosŏn-Ming military.3

The Imjin War had substantial demographic implications for Chosŏn. While
the precise number of dead is unknowable, it is clear that the war resulted in
widespread civilian death from disease and starvation, in addition to those di-
rectly killed in the fighting.4 Many Koreans left the peninsula, either as captives
of the Japanese or willingly, following the Ming armies.5 The armies themselves
were enormous. Of great significance were the large numbers of foreign soldiers
who entered Chosŏn. In total, the estimated 150,000 Japanese soldiers who
served in the first campaign in Chosŏn launched in 1592, with another 140,000
serving in the second Chŏngyu Offensive launched in 1597, exceeded the popu-
lation of the Chosŏn capital of Hansŏng at its pre-nineteenth-century peak
of 200,000. The Ming military was significantly smaller, but still significant,
amounting to approximately 167,000 over the course of the war.6 Beyond that,
an uncertain number of traders and camp followers also took part, with trad-
ers especially traveling widely throughout the peninsula.7 Assuming a prewar
population of 9.8 million and postwar population of 7.8 million,8 the combined
Japanese military presence over the seven years of war came to between 3 and 4
percent of Chosŏn’s total population, while the Ming military, not considering
the traders who traveled with them, amounted to approximately 1 to 2 percent.

A substantial number of outsiders established themselves in Chosŏn during
the conflict. Of the many Japanese soldiers who took part in it, at least 10,000
remained behind in Chosŏn, frequently serving in the Chosŏn military, as also
did a significant number of the Ming soldiers brought to Chosŏn. Neither of
these two groups fit fully into Chosŏn’s established framework of bringing out-
siders for edification by a civilizing Chosŏn monarch, and both carried with
them a far greater political risk than the foreigners who had entered Chosŏn
before the war. At the same time, as with earlier submitting-foreigners, both
groups brought useful skills. In the crisis of war, the Chosŏn court could not
easily abandon these skills and so had to adapt its framework for administering
and integrating outsiders.

Japanese Defectors and the Chosŏn State

The Japanese armies that advanced on to Chosŏn in 1592 were vastly different
from the raiders that had launched attacks on Chosŏn during the fourteenth,
fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, just as the Japan of Hideyoshi was vastly dif-
ferent from the poorly centralized Muromachi Bakufu. Following the Ōnin War
(1467–1477) that devastated much of the Japanese capital of Kyōtō, Japan was
thrown into nearly a century of warfare known as the Warring States period.
Initially, this conflict destroyed the limited unity of the early Muromachi pe-
riod, as daimyō aristocrats, Buddhist monks, peasant groups and local strong-
men formed rival states that made only limited acknowledgment of the shogun.
However, the nearly constant warfare of the period inevitably resulted in the
consolidation of these petty states and improvements in military technology and
techniques. Large armies of peasant infantry equipped by the late sixteenth cen-
tury with European arquebuses partly replaced the cavalry and samurai of the
early Muromachi. As well, powerful strongmen—first Oda Nobunaga (1534–
1582) and then, after his assassination, Hideyoshi—brought unity and discipline
to the previously disunited and disorganized armies of Japan.9

Chosŏn’s established tools for relations with the Japanese were not suited
to the increasingly unified and militarized Japanese state under the control of
powerful warlords, and indeed the intermediate position of Tsushima, that had
been to Chosŏn’s advantage before the Imjin War, became a military tool for
the invading Japanese. Following the Ōnin War of the mid-fifteenth century,
Chosŏn had ceased sending envoys past Tsushima, which, depending as it did
on the profits of trade with Chosŏn, provided only information that was likely
to please the Chosŏn court. This, combined with the fact that many of the Jap-
anese envoys by the sixteenth century had imposter identities, left the Chosŏn
court with few sources of information on Japan. As a result, on the eve of the
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war, the Chosŏn court was deeply ignorant of the changing military and political situation in Japan under Hideyoshi.10 Worse, the Japanese traders who had previously passed to and from Chosŏn and the bicultural and bilingual islanders of Tsushima, who had originally been used by the Chosŏn state to pacify pirates and raiders, became the interpreters and guides for Hideyoshi’s conquest of Chosŏn.11 Writing shortly after the war, Yi Sugwang (1563–1629) expressed pain that the inhabitants of Tsushima, whose ancestors he imagined to be Korean migrants, should have aided “the plunder” of Korea, especially as the “Japanese of Tsushima know everything that is to be known about matters related to our country, and understand our country’s language, so they engage in all sorts of trickery and deception.”12

Such flexible loyalties could work to Chosŏn’s benefit as well, as significant numbers of Japanese soldiers switched sides to Chosŏn.13 Beginning in 1593, Japanese soldiers began submitting to Chosŏn, although generally in relatively small numbers, with the Ming under Li Rusong (who brought Japanese defectors with him to Liaodong) generally being more welcoming to defectors. By 1594, Chosŏn began to take a more active role, deliberately encouraging Japanese soldiers to switch sides.14 Defect they did—although precise numbers are not available. In 1595, Sin Ch’ungil (1554–1622), in discussion with an envoy of Nurhaci named Ma Sin, claimed that five to six thousand Japanese soldiers had deserted to Chosŏn.15 In 1597, officials discussing Japanese defectors serving with Kim Ŭngsŏ (1564–1624) estimated that a thousand Japanese defectors were serving under Kim Ŭngsŏ himself, and that, within Chosŏn as a whole, there were likely some ten thousand Japanese defectors.16 Considering that Japanese continued to desert after the end of the war in the early 1600s,17 the number quite likely grew.

What caused the defection of such a significant number of Japanese? In Han Munjong’s survey of the war, he points out the decline of morale within the invading Japanese army after the initial success in 1592, as the war became drawn out over seven years. Caught up in fortifications on the southern coast with insufficient food, and dealing with violent superior officers, many chose to improve their difficult circumstances by escaping to Chosŏn ranks. Thus, in 1597, several Japanese soldiers under the command of Katō Kiyomasa were lured by another Japanese defector agent, a man named Seiso. These defectors reported to Seiso that the labor duty imposed upon them had become excessively heavy, and their officers had become violent and abusive. No longer able to endure the hardship, they had fled the camp and defected to Chosŏn. This problem was more common in the ranks under Katō Kiyomasa, who had lost the support of his own troops, of whom “more than one hundred were deserting and escaping back to
Japan every day.”\textsuperscript{18} Contributing to defection, no doubt, was the fact that the united Japanese state was a very recent creation, still a work in progress under Hideyoshi. Thus, many low-ranked soldiers, especially, are likely to have had no strong loyalties to the central state, and thus no great interest in participating in the conflict.

Beginning in 1594 with the departure of much of the Ming army, the Chosŏn court became increasingly active in creating its own inducements to defect. Not surprisingly, there was some initial resistance within the Chosŏn court to accepting Japanese defectors, especially during 1593, when the Japanese soldiers were being brought back to Liaodong by Li Rusong. That year, Chief State Counselor Ch’oe Hŭngwŏn, for instance, complained that Japanese deserters left under Chosŏn supervision by Mǐng brigadier commander Shen Weijing could not with justice be executed but were not properly contained within the military camps, as by forming connections with Chinese (Tang) troops, they were able to travel about the villages freely, plundering the possessions of the common people. He described the Japanese established in Yongsan, to the immediate south of Nam-san and the Hansŏng city walls, “as like a tiger that has escaped its cage, or a scorpion in our sleeves.” Moreover, he worried that the number of Japanese brought up to Hansŏng by the Provincial military commander Li Rusong might possibly include those who had made false surrenders in order to spy out the strengths and weaknesses of Chosŏn’s defenses.\textsuperscript{19}

Despite the widespread suspicion and hatred of the Japanese, the Chosŏn court soon changed course and not only began to accept Japanese defectors but actually to take an active role in encouraging defections. Noting the growing exhaustion and declining morale within the Japanese ranks, it encouraged defection in exchange for privileges. This policy resulted in a significant number of Japanese submitting to Chosŏn, which offered such inducements as food and housing and military rank.\textsuperscript{20} King Sŏnjo in 1594 had already declared the need to avoid executing Japanese deserters, saying,

The killing of Japanese defectors is utterly without advantage. I have already expressed this view. Kim Ŭngsŏ, by not killing enemy soldiers, has already been able to gather eighty-nine deserters, while Kim Ch’ungmin has also brought six Japanese defectors. Those who leave their ranks and come to us must be given rations, so that they don’t starve. They should also be given titles to comfort them. In Japan, they kill others freely, and so even the people from that country are perturbed and frightened. There will certainly be many who hear of our customs and leave their camp for ours.
Rewards will also be considered for those who convince many Japanese to abandon their own side.21

Indeed, the Chosŏn court actively sent people to encourage Japanese to defect. Song Ch’angse, an agent sent in 1594 to sow dissension among the Japanese, claimed that “the lower ranks of the Japanese are mutinous, the officers are pained and resentful, and [the Japanese] are in the autumn of heavenly punishment. We truly have an opportunity to divide the army against itself at this moment, and we should not miss the chance by being too suspicious.”22

In addition to the motive of sowing dissension in the ranks of the Japanese army and weakening Japanese troop numbers, the fact was that many Japanese had key military and technical skills, notably the ability to employ arquebuses and Japanese swords. Reference to the employment of Japanese in a military capacity begin in 1594, early in the period of active inducement of Japanese to surrender. During that year, there are numerous references in the journal of Admiral Yi Sunsin, for instance, concerning the arrival of Japanese deserters, who were generally employed either in the unspecialized but vital position of oarsmen or in the more specialized role of cannoneer.23 Similarly, in 1594, the Border Defense Command reported on its trials of thirty-eight Japanese deserters in shooting and swordsmanship. Disappointingly, only two showed the ability to shoot, while the rest were found worse than Chosŏn marksmen and were ordered sent to Hamgyŏng Province, except for three who claimed an ability to make gunpowder, and four who asserted skill in swordsmanship.24 Such efforts continued to the end of the war, with particular inducements given to those Japanese who were able to teach superior swordsmanship, gunpowder production, and the use and manufacture of guns.25 According to a report by Kwŏn Yul, this caused considerable worry to the Japanese military, which was concerned not only by the number of Japanese defectors but also by their efficacy and success in communicating military techniques to Chosŏn, including improved means for building mountain fortresses. Kwŏn Yul’s report also indicated general knowledge among Japanese soldiers of the good treatment (including wives and official titles) that defectors received from Chosŏn; the main deterrent to defection was the risk of execution should their intention to desert become known to their superior officers.26

Japanese, in fact, as the report above suggests, were used in very active roles, such as fighting against Japanese. They were also used as spies and agents. Of course, it was standard practice for Chosŏn officials to interrogate Japanese defectors for information about the Japanese military in Chosŏn.27 But beyond
that, Japanese defectors were also dispatched to sow dissension among Japanese troops. As agents, they gathered information concerning the circumstances of the Japanese army and encouraged desertion, with some indeed being sent to Tsushima to gain intelligence concerning Japan’s domestic circumstances. A representative example of espionage is a case in 1597, when two Japanese defector agents plotted to enter the camp of Katō Kiyomasa to burn supplies and weapons and attract defectors as well as to see the state of Katō’s army.\textsuperscript{28} As for military activities, Japanese were used widely by the Chosŏn court in a number of battles during the second Japanese offensive of 1597, with many rewarded for their exemplary success, often through military titles and the granting of Chosŏn names.\textsuperscript{29} Even those Japanese whose skills were not so exemplary as to be kept in the southern provinces, and who were sent consequently to the northeastern border in Hamgyŏng Province, showed their metal, and indeed the Japanese arquebusiers were praised for their contribution to the Chosŏn pacification of Yŏksu, a fortified town controlled by rebellious Jurchen slightly to the north of the Tumen River.\textsuperscript{30} Japanese defectors, despite entering Chosŏn as enemies, had become vital elements in Chosŏn’s defense.

Ming Deserters

Posing as many problems as the Japanese deserters were the large numbers of Ming soldiers who entered Chosŏn during the war, many of whom, much like the Japanese defectors, stayed after the withdrawal of the Ming army in 1600. Chosŏn, of course, would almost certainly have fallen without Ming military support, although, since Hideyoshi’s stated objective for the war was to attack the Ming, the Ming military response was motivated in part by self-defense. As was suggested in one memorable court discussion, the goal of the Ming intervention was to keep the war out of Ming territory and “in the outer yards of China.”\textsuperscript{31} Yet the presence of a large force of soldiers and officers connected to Chosŏn’s Ming overlord, upon whom, in war time, Chosŏn depended absolutely, left an inevitable mark. Politically, Ming generals could and did make destructive demands on the Chosŏn court. As has been discussed by both Han Myŏnggi and Nam-lin Hur, the economic and ecological burden of maintaining a large Ming force on Chosŏn soil was indeed ruinous, requiring a Chosŏn court already strapped economically as a result of the destruction brought about by the war to redirect scarce supplies toward its Ming allies, further impoverishing its own population and considerably weakening its own military capabilities.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, one reason for the peace negotiations with Japan following 1593 was the
inability of the Chosŏn agricultural economy to support a substantial force of Ming soldiers. As Han Myŏnggi has discussed, the monarch Sŏnjo in general seemed to prefer emphasizing the military role of the Ming (whose aid, he, as monarch subordinate to the emperor, had the exclusive right to demand), rather than pass credit onto Chosŏn’s own righteous militias who had fought the Japanese in the south after his flight to Ŭiju and compared to whom the Chosŏn monarch could easily seem to have lost his legitimate right to rule. Nevertheless, politically, the presence of Ming generals and officials on Chosŏn soil could not but weaken the political position of the Chosŏn monarch, and the peace negotiations between the Ming and Japan between 1593 and 1596 were pursued with little regard to Chosŏn’s own interests.

In addition to such political and economic challenges, one must also consider the problem of the Ming soldiers themselves. In the official sources we are shown the actions of a state attempting to maintain its control over a refractory and often semicriminal group of soldiers and deserters at the same time as it sought to make use of those members of the Ming migrant community who had skills useful to the state; popular romances and hagiographic biographies contain a similar diversity of images, from descriptions of violent, destructive Li Rusong in The Record of the Imjin War (Imjin-rok), to Ming soldiers interacting on a friendly and informal level with local people, and even to deeply moral Ming loyalists. Ideologically, Ming military enthusiasm for such religious practices as the cult of Guan Yu placed them not so much as representatives of Chunghwa but as people involved in troublesome and heretical religious activities. Ultimately, rather than welcoming Ming migrants with open arms, the overburdened Chosŏn court attempted to restrict the activities of the communities of Ming deserters, preventing them from establishing themselves on Chosŏn soil.

Additionally, the Chosŏn state had to deal with numerous runaway soldiers. There is considerable reference in The Chosŏn Veritable Records to violence committed by Ming deserters, or todanghyŏng (literally, “runaway Tang troops”). In 1601, in the immediate post-Imjin period, Third Royal Secretary Yun Ansŏng emphasized the particular destruction caused by runaway Ming soldiers in the P'yŏngan and Hwanghae provinces, which he saw as having nipped in the bud the beginnings of the restoration of agriculture in these regions. Indeed, he claimed that the destruction caused in the region was ten times worse than when the Ming army was stationed there. While unrest, violence, and brigandage were hardly unknown among Korean soldiers during this period, Ming deserters were an additional, and significant, source of worry.
Although the policy of the Ming court itself was to force the return of Ming deserters, there seems to have been a general resistance to this from the soldiers themselves, many of whom, despite the destructiveness as discussed by Yun An-sŏng, had put down roots in Chosŏn. Yi Kŭngik described the Ming army as comprising “more than 221,500 soldiers . . . mobilized from Zhejiang, Shanxi, Hubei, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan and Burma.” This diverse list no doubt fails to cover the full diversity of the Ming army, which also included Mongols and Jurchens and many other groups, but it does remind us that, for the diversity of peoples from Yunnan or for Mongols from the border of Shanxi, or indeed for Chinese-speakers from Sichuan, Chosŏn may have been no more foreign than Shandong or Beijing; this, as well as conflicts with superiors, often encouraged Ming deserters to stay in Chosŏn rather than make the trip back to Ming. Thus, in 1601, court discussion described a group of runaway soldiers and Ming merchants living in Chosŏn. Their reasons for staying in Chosŏn are variously given as injury, the loss of their merchandise, or conflict with their commanding officer. After desertion, they established themselves either as farmers or as salt merchants. They were strongly opposed to repatriation, to the extent that some threatened to submit to the enemy (the Japanese) rather than return to China.

Nor was the Chosŏn court’s opposition to the continued presence of Ming migrants in any way absolute—in fact, it also made considerable use of Ming deserters. Medicine, geomancy, and other technical fields became established Chinese specialties. Of numerous examples discussed by Han Myŏnggi, the 1596 case of the two Yunnanese Li Yi (K. Yi ûl) and Hua Yingchun (K. HwaŬngch’un) stands out. The Chosŏn court chose to employ them for their ability to make gunpowder and poison powder. They were described as choosing to remain in Chosŏn because of illness—closer investigation suggested, however, that their real reasons were that, as Yunnanese, they did not want to make the return journey, and also because, as associates of an executed Ming officer, they were themselves at risk of arrest. Another figure also discussed by Han, Sun Long (K. Son Yong), who deserted from the Ming military on account of conflict with his superiors, was employed in Chŏlla as an instructor in the production of gunpowder, poison powder and landmines, activities which “the people of our country (Chosŏn) cannot do.” Even beyond their military abilities, the very presence of Ming deserters could have value as a deterrent—Chosŏn officials deliberately formed a military unit of Ming deserters specifically to be shown to the Japanese, because they imagined that the Japanese would be less likely to repeat an invasion if they imagined that Ming soldiers were still present. Another common area of specialty associated with Ming deserters was
geomancy. Geomancers such as Shi Wenyong were able to find employment in the Chosŏn court itself, while on a private level Du Shizhong, another deserter, seems to have gained a reputation as a geomancer among contemporary sajok aristocrats.

It is impossible to establish with any certainty the number of Ming deserters who remained in Chosŏn—with or without official connivance—after the formal withdrawal of troops. It can be assumed, however, that in the general disorder of the post-Imjin period, when death and flight among the commoner population rendered the state incapable of raising taxes on one-third of the land, and when the household registration system was largely ineffectual, far more Ming soldiers would have established themselves in Chosŏn than are recorded within court documents such as *The Chosŏn Veritable Records* or in later biographies. While some Ming deserters, as described above, declared the intention of leaving for Japan before they would return to Ming China, or participated in uprisings, many more would simply have kept out of the sight of the state in the first place. The Chosŏn state responded to them differently, according to its needs. Certain Ming deserters were seen as useful, and their presence in Chosŏn was actively supported by authorities, even as attempts were made to gain control over the large, sometimes criminalized bands of Ming deserters.

Integration into Chosŏn society did not necessarily make the Ming soldiers any more welcome, as their ignoring of obligations to the Ming emperor could be seen as contributing to a general failure to fulfill status obligations in Chosŏn as well. At the same time, the context of the Ming camp life, in which large numbers of Chosŏn subjects participated, weakened Chosŏn-Ming boundaries, and these weakened boundaries ultimately resulted in the departure of Chosŏn subjects with the Ming armies, further reducing Chosŏn’s already limited ability to demand tax and corvée obligations of its subjects. According to the Military Training Agency (*Hullyŏn togam*) in 1594, many Chosŏn subjects “starving and with no means of maintaining their livelihood . . . changed their clothes” as preparation for crossing the Yalu River into Ming territory. The office called for the employment of these internal refugees in special military roles to prevent their departure. In general, the loss of skilled labor, and especially of potential soldiers, was a matter of considerable concern to the Chosŏn court. It was fighting a losing battle, however, and a great many soldiers in the camp of the departing Ming officer Liu Ting were described as Korean-speakers from Kyŏngsang. Even as Ming soldiers left Chosŏn, Yun Ansŏng, discussing the problems caused by deserters in Hwanghae and P’yŏngan, conceded that “one cannot know the exact number of Ming deserters scattered about the region, or
who is or is not a runaway soldier,” so deeply had they integrated themselves into village life in Chosŏn.52

In fact, it was quite easy for Ming and Chosŏn subjects to cross over from one affiliation to another. Frequently, this was achieved through cross-cultural marriages. Just as with other sorts of uncontrolled fraternization, sexual and marital unions between Ming and Chosŏn subjects were a matter of considerable concern to the court. At the same time, it is clear that such unions were extremely common indeed. A variety of sources suggest that Ming soldiers during the Imjin War quite frequently gained Chosŏn lovers—for instance, Liu Ting in 1594 is said to have left particular orders to the Chosŏn court to protect his lover while he was in China—a request that, on account of his high status, was accepted only slightly grudgingly.53 Indeed, in the early seventeenth century, Yi Sugwang described a prophecy in which the Imjin War would end when “children know their mothers but do not know their own fathers.” This, he argued, was proven correct when, as a result of the war “sons grew old but did not know their father’s face, while women who were defiled by Ming soldiers would give birth to children and not know the father’s surname.”54

The above quotation reveals that the Ming soldier–Chosŏn woman union had become a widely recognized type by the time that Yi Sugwang was writing in the early seventeenth century, with adulterous Ming-Chosŏn unions becoming a stereotype. More stable marriages were also contracted between Ming Chinese and Chosŏn Koreans. According to Miscellaneous Records from a Time of War (Nanjung chamnok), an account written by Cho Kyŏngnam (1570–1641), who participated in the war as a member of a righteous militia, many of the Ming soldiers under the Liu Ting’s command in Namwŏn had married Chosŏn women from Chŏlla and Kyŏngsang provinces. One officer took a woman of private slave origin from Sŏnsan in Kyŏngsang Province as his concubine. Seemingly during the period of stalemate between 1593 and 1597 he successfully brazened his way past the border guards when he returned with her to Sichuan. There she gave birth to a son, and as he had no heir, he had their son raised by his wife. In 1598, when he returned for the final offensive against the Japanese, he brought her with him and purchased her from her original owner for several thousand taels of silver. However, such regular unions were not much more popular with the authorities than adulterous unions. Indeed, according to Cho Kyŏngnam, Chosŏn women departing with their Ming soldier husbands were all stopped by the Ming authorities at Shanhaiguan and thus forced to remain in the Liaodong and Liaoxi region. According to Cho, the total population of such women in Liaodong and Liaoxi reached several tens of thousands, although he also asserted
that they were all returned to Chosŏn in 1609. Indeed, although the Chosŏn court generally treated the departure of women as less serious than that of men, it was concerned by the large number of women leaving with Ming soldiers, and, in 1593, attempts were made to prevent Chosŏn women secretly leaving in the company of Ming soldiers. Of course, it is doubtful that either the Chosŏn or Ming states were able to effectively prevent the departure of many women, or to repatriate them all after they had departed to Liaodong.

Despite preventing the departure of such women, the court did not exert itself to treat well those who remained behind. Certainly, during the last years of Sŏnjo (r. 1567–1608) and the early years of Kwanhae-gun (r. 1608–1623), officials demanded action against women in Hansŏng who had been seduced by Chinese soldiers and who were suspected of continuing to engage in sexual relationships with the participants of various visiting Ming legations. In shocked tones they suggested that the soldiers had been so shameless as to seduce even women of good families; even after the departure of Ming soldiers, many such women became prostitutes for the Ming legations that visited the capital. Under both kings, such women were ordered to be sent into exile, either ten li outside of Hansŏng or even as far as Pusan. Exceptions were to be made for cases in which the women had not entered into the relationships of their own free will—although how such a determination would have been made is unclear.

There were, in fact, some cases of serious crimes committed by Ming deserters who formed ties with Chosŏn subjects. For instance, in 1599, one Chosŏn official, Hong Yŏsun, complained about Chosŏn village functionaries (hyangni) using Ming soldiers to attack more prominent officials. During the same year, a slave from Suwŏn named Maktong who lived in the Ming camp claimed to be Chinese in order to attack sajok families within the area, “terrifying sajok wives, plundering their possessions, and when he broke in at night, raping female slaves, and when someone did not follow his orders, leading Tartar troops and raising revolt.” He was able to claim Ming military support, not only because he was part of the Ming army but also because “in clothes and language he imitated the appearance of a Chinese person (Tangin).” By donning Ming uniforms and mastering Chinese, Chosŏn subjects could benefit from the status of a Ming subject to leave Chosŏn for Ming China or commit crimes against their superiors in Chosŏn.
Loyal Outsiders and Disloyal Allies

Why did the Chosŏn state worry about the Ming Chinese intermarrying with, or masquerading as, Chosŏn subjects? The Chosŏn state was not a modern nation-state, seeking to impose a universal culture on its subjects, but a court and elite that maintained authority through the scrupulous protection of status distinctions. Both Ming soldiers and Japanese soldiers were alike in providing useful military skills to the court, and all could potentially be the source of strife, but Japanese submission could be justified ideologically as serving the maintenance of the Chunghwa moral order in a way that Ming soldiers, whose transfer to Chosŏn involved an act of desertion from the Ming emperor, could not.

The Neo-Confucian philosopher Kang Hang, who is well known for the role he played as prisoner of war in introducing Yi Hwang’s (1501–1570) brand of Neo-Confucianism to Japan, is informative in this context. He argued against killing Japanese defectors, in part because it was a “violation against humanity to kill those who have already surrendered.” Moreover, as a Confucian thinker himself, he also argued that the attractions of Chosŏn’s benevolent civilization would be a powerful lure to ordinary Japanese who had been forced out of their families in early youth and afterward deprived of all rights to a family. This made them easy to detach from the Japanese state, as “they do not entertain a longing for their hometown, parents, wives or children.” Kang argued that Japanese soldiers with whom he conversed could see a contrast between the harsh routine of the Japanese army and the gentle life in the fertile land of Chosŏn. He represented his conversations with Japanese soldiers as follows:

When these soldiers gather, they often say to one another, “Chosŏn is utopia! Japan is a truly vile country.” One or another [of us] may reply with, “Our government treats Japanese who surrender with kindness and generosity. It provides them with food and clothing worthy of a general. I even heard of a high official posted to the third rank.” They could not help being amazed by the story and would sincerely wish to surrender.

To be sure, Kang Hang’s position cannot be extended to include Chosŏn society as a whole, as he was in any case a devoted Mencian, believing that human nature was naturally good and seeking solutions to the problems of the world by activating this nature. However, similar rhetoric of transformation does appear with great regularity in The Chosŏn Veritable Records. Notably, during the discussion between Sin Ch’ungil and Ma Sin of the Jianzhou Jurchen, Sin Ch’ungil specifically described the Japanese defectors in such a manner. As he said to Ma
Sin, when asked by Ma how many Japanese had submitted, he answered not only that Chosŏn had provided them with “clothing and headgear,” both established accouterments of Chungghwa civilization, but also that “to those Japanese defectors who long for morality and come to submit, our country offers them food and drink and places them at their ease. They are moved by our kindness and hold feelings of gratitude, and we settle them at our borders as a protection for the state.”

Sin Ch’ungil’s rhetoric was no doubt aimed at encouraging the Jianzhou Jurchens not only to show a healthy respect for the presence of Japanese defector gunmen at the northern border but also to emulate the Japanese in their proper appreciation for Chosŏn’s civilizing power. Yet, such language also appears in contexts where rhetorical threats are not required. In one especially notable example described by Kim Ŭngsŏ, a Japanese soldier named Sabaekku defected to Kim Ŭngsŏ, only to be sent on to serve under the military official Paek Sarim because Kim Ŭngsŏ lacked the necessary resources to support him. During the Japanese offensive of 1597, Paek Sarim was in charge of Hwangsŏk Mountain fortress, which fell to the Japanese after the soldiers from Kimhae fled the fortress, having conspired with the Japanese attackers. They left their leader Paek behind. As Paek had become excessively fat, he could not escape easily and was in great danger. Sabaekku, however, did not betray him and not only managed to shoot four Japanese attackers but even concealed Paek behind stones and vegetation, and by tricking the Japanese guard at the gate, was able to move Paek out of the fortress to safety. Sabaekku even managed to enter the fallen fortress again to obtain provisions by pretending to be a soldier from the Japanese army. As a reward, Sabaekku was given a Korean surname, with Kim Ŭngsŏ noting especially: “These days educated people of our country will not save the head of their household or their wives and children. Yet, in this case, [even] a barbarian reveals an honest mind, which should cause shame to others. Sabaekku should be succored with an especially substantial reward. Japanese defectors, already knowing the route of self-preservation, wish to form a far-sighted plan and adopt Chosŏn names. The court should settle the matter of granting surnames to Japanese defectors quickly.”

Sabaekku, as a Japanese defector, was assumed to be less capable of acting morally than an educated Chosŏn official. To the extent that he acted with much greater morality and bravery, he attracted the particular praise of the Chosŏn court, which, in response to Kim Ŭngsŏ’s request, offered him a Chosŏn name. Sabaekku’s reward for loyalty was to receive many of the usual benefits offered to submitting-foreigners.
In contrast to such cases one might note the controversy concerning the famous Ming migrant named Shi Wenyong, who was drawn into the factional politics of the period after the Imjin War. The son of another Ming officer, Shi was from Pujiang in Zhejiang, but for reasons that are now somewhat obscure, remained in Chosŏn after the general departure of Ming troops. Within Chosŏn he became associated with an influential and controversial volunteer militia leader of the Pugin faction named Chŏng Inhong (1535–1623), who became known for sheltering several Ming soldiers within his base area of Sŏngju. Because of his influence, and no doubt also because of the significant suspicion under which leaders of Imjin-era militias fell during the reign of Sŏnjo, his sheltering of Ming migrants became fuel for his political enemies. These criticisms were included in somewhat shortened form in *The Chosŏn Veritable Records* and in more complete detail by An Pangjun (1573~1654) in *The Collected Records of Lies and Truth* (*Honjŏng p’yŏllok*), an anthology of documents related to factional disputes between 1575–1650.

While the factual basis of the claims of the rival factions is now hard to evaluate, as each was clearly seeking to find pretexts to either discredit or defend Chŏng Inhong, the nature of the arguments used for understanding the role played by Ming deserters in Chosŏn are fascinating for what they reveal about attitudes toward Ming deserters. *The Revised Veritable Records of King Sŏnjo* (*Sŏnjo sujŏng sillok*), which was compiled during the reigns of Injo (r. 1623–1649) and Hyojong (r. 1649–1659) specifically to counter the bias in favor of the Pugin faction within the original *Veritable Records of Sŏnjo* (*Sŏnjo sillok*), which had been published during the reign of Kwanghae-gun (r. 1608–1623), includes an attack on Chŏng Inhong by Yi Kwi (1557–1633), a member of the Sŏin faction, based primarily on information obtained from his relative Yi Si’ik (1567–1642). Yi Kwi’s accusations against Chŏng were focused on Chŏng’s continued exploitation of the privileges he enjoyed as a leader of a righteous militia within the area of Sŏngju, despite royal commands to disperse and despite the fact that the Imjin War had been over for three years. As a part of a general charge that Chŏng had abused his power in the region of Sŏngju, Yi Si’ik accused him of compelling the daughter of a sajok man to marry a base person (slave) with a very close relationship to Chŏng’s family, and forcibly marrying a sajok woman (*punyŏ*), who had previously been taken captive by the Japanese, to a “runaway Chinese soldier who knew geomancy.”

This general accusation of lawlessness by Yi Si’ik could not go unanswered, and although *The Veritable Records of Sŏnjo* may have left out Yi Kwi’s original memorial, it did include O Yŏon’s memorial in response in defense of Chŏng
Inhong. Notably, O’s memorial provided considerable detail absent from Yi Kwi’s. O, for instance, developed a counterargument to Yi Kwi’s accusation that Chŏng Inhong had forced a sajok woman to marry a man whom Yi Kwi had called a “runaway Chinese soldier who knew geomancy.” O partly confirmed the story and indeed identified the soldier as Shi Wenyong, but insisted that Chŏng Inhong’s actions were entirely laudable. Chŏng’s ancestor was Zheng Chenbao, a man of Pujiang in Zhejiang who left for Koryŏ because he refused to serve the Yuan after the Yuan conquest and so his descendants had remained in Korea. This explained Chŏng Inhong’s exemplary treatment of Ming generals serving in Chosŏn, including Chen Gang and Mao Guoqi, whom he treated as elders from the same village (hyangjang). It also encompassed his good treatment of Shi Wenyong, an officer from Pujiang, who had “fallen behind and had been unable to return to the Ming. Shi would occasionally visit Chŏng Inhong, and Chŏng had been unable to drive him out simply because of the ancient duties of the shared hometown (hyangjong).” Similarly, there was nothing untoward in the marriage between Shi Wenyong and a local woman, as the mother of the girl was still alive, and the father’s kin were also alive. All suggestions of forced marriage were simply inventions of Yi Si’ik. In other words, according to O, Chŏng’s actions in all respects had been fully in line with Chosŏn’s alliance with the Ming, further strengthened by a familial connection to the fallen but much-admired Song dynasty. Chŏng conceded that Shi Wenyong had no terribly clear reason for remaining in Chosŏn (although in contrast to Yi Kwi, he does not specifically refer to him as a deserter or runaway), but ultimately described Chŏng Inhong’s actions as inspired by his desire to help a member of his own home community.

O Yŏon’s defense itself did not go unanswered and indeed resulted in a much more developed attack than that launched by Yi Kwi. Yang Hongju (1550–1610) claimed to have built on Yi Kwi’s and Yi Si’ik’s criticisms out of frustration that Yi Kwi’s memorial had been so fruitless. His countermemorial, which is found in simplified form in The Veritable Records of Sŏnjo, and in much more elaborate and detailed form in The Records of Lies and Truth, attacked Chŏng Inhong’s activities as specifically undermining the Chosŏn status system. He maintained that Chŏng Inhong’s home had become a lair for former righteous militia members and runaway slaves (both private and public). Yang also developed the accusation as related to Shi Wenyong, clarifying that it was not Shi Wenyong’s wife, but his mother-in-law—the wife of Chang Ham—who had been captured by the Japanese and (it is implied) raped. Shi Wenyong’s wife, by contrast, was still a young girl at the time of capture and so was able to escape rape. As Yang Hongju
argued, forcing Chang Ham’s wife to marry a Ming soldier would have been bad enough, even though she had been “dirtied” by the Japanese, but to force the innocent daughter into such a situation was simply unacceptable—a sign of complete contempt for the law of the land and for sajok status. As is recorded in the more extensive version found in *The Records of Lies and Truth*, this forcible marriage would have been unacceptable for a commoner, many of whom, during the chaos of the Imjin War, had experienced captivity, and even more so for the daughter of a sajok. “In the customs of our country to marry a person of an alien land, not to mention ladies of sajok background, is considered shameful even by male and female peddlers.”

Worse, in contrast to O Yŏon’s claim that Chŏng Inhong’s support for Ming soldiers was inspired entirely by a feeling of connection to people from Zhejiang, Yang Hongju argued that Chŏng Inhong’s actions amounted to disloyalty to the Ming court itself, for when the Ming sent an envoy to capture and return Ming soldiers hiding in Chosŏn, Chŏng Inhong ignored the order and concealed five Chinese deserters, including Shi Wenyong, Zhu Jiansong, and Guan Yinghua, at his home. His actions had wider implications as they encouraged hundreds of Ming deserters to conceal themselves throughout the two southern provinces of Kyŏngsang and Chŏlla. Yang Hongju asked how public order and social hierarchies could survive in Chosŏn, “with Chŏng Inhong acting as lord of runaways, including Chosŏn commoners of our country fleeing from corvée labor, public and private slaves rebelling against their masters, and Ming deserters ignoring imperial commands?”

Was the marriage between Shi Wenyong’s and Chang Ham’s daughter forced, as the Sŏin faction claimed, or was it with the full consent of her parents, as O Yŏon maintained? What was the nature of Chŏng Inhong’s relationship with Ming migrant groups—was he merely helping them as people from his ancestral hometown, or was there some broader plot on his part to accumulate a private army of runaways and deserters? Although it is perhaps impossible now to determine the truth of many of these accusations and counteraccusations, Yang’s attacks on Chŏng are meaningful for what they tell us about the continued ambivalence concerning the presence of Ming deserters in Chosŏn. The core of the Sŏin position, as asserted by Yang Hongju and to a lesser extent already by Yi Kwi, was that the presence of Ming deserters in Chosŏn under Chŏng Inhong’s leadership was corrosive to the entire social structure of society. Yang Hongju’s assertion that it was impossibly shameful for ordinary Koreans to marry foreigners can certainly be rejected. There is no shortage of examples of such intermarriage, these being in fact a key reward granted to submitting-foreigners of
Jurchen and Japanese origin, although as I discussed in chapter 1, these unions tended to be with women of low status. Thus, they might well have been shameful for sajok women by the late sixteenth century. In part, Yang Hongju was arguing (falsely) that marriage to a foreigner would always be considered shameful in order to establish, despite O Yŏon’s denials, that the marriage between Shi Wenyong’s and Chang Ham’s daughters must have been coerced. It is nevertheless meaningful that it was possible, even as a rhetorical flourish, to claim that Ming soldiers were people of an alien state with whom no union could be contemplated, much as marriages with Jurchens and Japanese could be considered out of bounds for members of official and royal families. Ultimately, the problem of intermarriage with Ming deserters for Yang Hongju was caught up with the general problem of disorder in post-Imjin Chosŏn, including concerns about the possible disloyalty of captured Chosŏn commoners.

Alternately, O Yŏon’s defense of Chŏng Inhong sought to emphasize that Chŏng’s connections with Ming deserters had thoroughly honorable origins—and indeed envisioned the connection between Chŏng Inhong and Ming deserters in a Zhejiang that crossed state boundaries. In fact, Chinese migrants in Chosŏn were administered according to the same submitting-foreigner category as Jurchens and Japanese, and in this sense all three could equally be called “people of alien lands,” but at the same time Chosŏn sajok possessed a cultural identification with Chunghwa, which was not restricted to, but also did not ignore, China as a political entity. Nobody envisioned a Chosŏn state existing outside of the Ming, but Chosŏn’s sajok aristocrats also considered themselves to set a standard of civilization in their own right. Moreover, Chosŏn had an ambivalent attitude to the many Ming soldiers in Chosŏn. On the one hand, the Ming intervention was vital to Chosŏn’s survival, and an exclusive emphasis on it served the interests of the Chosŏn monarchy (which avoided granting honors to Korean military leaders). On the other hand, the task of feeding and supporting the Ming army had been a logistic nightmare and a source of considerable conflict between Korean civilians and Ming military. O Yŏon’s emphasis on the Zhejiang connection reminded the Chosŏn court of the vital role of the Ming military, despite these stresses.

At least during the reign of Kwanghae-gun, O Yŏon’s argument must have been successful, as Shi Wenyong was employed in what later became one of the scandals of the Kwanghae-gun era—the expensive reconstruction of Kyŏngbok-kung, an important royal palace that had been destroyed during the Imjin War. Shi Wenyong, along with a Chosŏn monk named Sŏngji, was employed prominently in this project as a geomancer. The Journal of King
Kwanghae-gun (Kwanghae-gun ilgi) includes numerous references to him, but because the Journal was compiled under Injo, the editors added derogatory comments about Shi Wenyong in the form of either interpolations or editorial comments. The first reference to Shi Wenyong in the Journal is the statement by Sŏng Chinsŏn, the governor of Kyŏngsang Province, that “Shi Wenyong, a Chinese person, knows geomancy very well. He should be given a horse and sent up to the capital.” The editors of the intermediate draft (chunghŏbon) directed that “deserter” be added to “a Chinese” in the expression “Shi Wenyong, a Chinese person,” an addition that is present in the corrected draft (chŏngch’obon) completed under Hyojong. More often, the compilers simply added a note declaring Shi Wenyong to be a Ming deserter who was selected through the corrupt influence of Chŏng Inhong. Finally, the Journal notes that Shi’s labors came to an end in 1623, when, after the overthrow of Kwanghae-gun, he attempted to escape but was captured and executed.

Not only could deserting Ming soldiers, by violating their loyalties to the Ming emperor, imply the collapse of social order and even the revolt of slaves against their masters, but the relationships they formed with Chosŏn women threatened the clarity of the Chosŏn court’s own rule over its subjects. In his discussion of the Japanese trading colony in Pusan, James B. Lewis describes the tightening restrictions on sexual and marital relations between Japanese and Chosŏn subjects following the Three Ports uprising and the Imjin War—this he argues, was not inspired by Confucian disapproval of irregular unions, or by national hostility to foreigners establishing roots in Chosŏn, but by a fear, made especially strong following the Imjin War, that mixed subjects with multiple political affiliations could pose a military threat to the Chosŏn state. Similarly, although Ming soldiers were subjects of an empire that was seen by most Chosŏn officials as the font of civilization, Chosŏn officials also often considered intermarriage between Chosŏn subjects with Ming soldiers as a significant threat to the social order.

The Imjin War tore apart the elaborate relationships formed by the Chosŏn court with Japanese and Ryukyuans to its south and put considerable strain on its relationship with the Ming. Even before the invasion itself, first Oda Nobunaga and then Hideyoshi had eliminated the petty states with which Chosŏn had formed its relationships, although the Chosŏn court became aware of this only on the eve of war. The invasion itself brought widespread demographic displacement to Chosŏn, including not only departures of Chosŏn subjects—forced or willing—to other parts of the world but also the entrance of huge numbers of
Japanese and Ming soldiers onto Chosŏn soil. Many of these soldiers became migrants, as deserters from both Japanese and Ming armies abandoned their posts, formed ties with Chosŏn subjects, and elected to stay in Chosŏn.

For reasons related to both economic difficulties and distrust of the loyalties of those arriving, the Chosŏn state sought to police the floating population within its borders, making use of the tools for governing foreigners that it had developed in the previous two centuries. To a surprising degree, civilizational categories (barbarian/Confucian), or what might be termed "proto-national categories" (Chinese/Japanese/Korean) mattered less than the security of a migrant's affiliation. The Chosŏn court actively sought to attract both skilled Japanese and Ming deserters and encouraged, where possible, the settlement of both in Chosŏn territory as secure subjects of the Chosŏn monarchy, although Ming deserters, who had revolted against the Ming state to which the Chosŏn court also claimed to be loyal, posed ideological challenges that Japanese, who had been submitting to the Chosŏn monarchy since the beginning of the dynasty, did not.