Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Invasion of Joseon [Toyotomi Hideyoshi no Chōsen shinryaku]

By Manji KITAJIMA
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Kitajima Manji (北島万次: 1934-2018) dedicated his entire career to studying the Imjin War (1592-1598). As a Japanese historian, he gained a reputation for his broad use of Korean historical sources. The inspiration to delve into Korean sources came from Nakamura Hidetaka (中村榮孝: 1902-1984). While serving for a long time on the Korean History Compilation Committee established by the Japanese Government-General of Korea, Nakamura conducted multiple studies on Korean history and Korea-Japan relations. Once the two scholars met, Kitajima became academically influenced by Nakamura and particularly took to heart Nakamura's advice on the need to directly analyze Korean historical sources. This is perhaps why Kitajima participated for so long as a key member of the Japanese reading group on the Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty. As a result, more than half of Kitajima's studies on the Imjin War have been based on Korean historical sources. Even today, there appears to be no Japanese scholar who uses sources from the Joseon period more actively than Kitajima to study the Imjin War. Considering that Kitajima's research interests originate from the history of Korea-Japan relations, his approach toward foreign historical sources gives cause to reflect on what skills scholars in different countries need to be equipped with in order to engage in transborder communication to research the Imjin War.

Among Kitajima's various publications, this review will focus on *Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Invasion of Joseon* [Toyotomi Hideyoshi no Chosen shinryaku] (1994). The book, based on the author's lecture notes, features the Imjin War from beginning to end in an arrangement accessible even to general readers unfamiliar with the topic. For those in pursuit of further academic expertise on the topic, another work by Kitajima titled *Chōsen nichinichiki Kōrai nikki: Hideyoshi no Chōsen shinryaku to somo rekishiteki kokuhatsu* [The Chosen nichinichiki and Korai nikki Diaries: Hideyoshi's Invasion of Korea and its Historical Denunciation] (Soshiete, 1982) may prove to be helpful. It is available to Korean readers through its Korean translation by Kim Yoo-jung and Lee Min-woong (Kyungin Pubishing, 2008).

"Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion of Joseon" may sound unfamiliar to many in Korea. This is because the event is commonly known as *Imjin waeran* among Koreans. In Japan, it is referred to as *Bunroku-Keichō no eki*, meaning the "Battles of Bunroku and Keichō." The reason Kitajima chose to use a name unfamiliar to both Koreans and the Japanese is because he wishes to overcome the imperialist or colonial views of history that tend to regard Joseon as an object of conquest. Between a prologue and epilogue that conveys Kitajima's view of the Imjin War and the critical awareness he wishes to promote in relation to the historical event, this book consists of the following six chapters: Chapter 1 "The Inception of the Japanese Invasions," Chapter 2 "The First Invasion of Joseon to Conquer Ming China," Chapter 3 "The Counterattack from Joseon," Chapter 4 "The Ming-Japan Peace Negotiations Collapse," Chapter 5 "The Second Invasion of Joseon to Seize its Territory," and Chapter 6 "Wounds from the Japanese Invasions."

The prologue begins a story about a Japanese general named Sayaka who surrendered to Joseon and later took the name Kim Chung-seon. The activities of Kim Chung-seon and the existence of other Japanese surrenderers, referred to as *Hangwae,* were revealed through modern historical research methods by none other than Nakamura Hidetaka. When modern Japan started to take an interest in the history of Joseon-Japan relations, Kim Chung-seon was an eyesore. Japanese scholars identified the Japanese

general who surrendered to Joseon as a traitor or fictional character, which was something Nakamura sought to challenge. What Kitajima sought by introducing an episode related to Kim Chung-seon was to highlight the fact that the Imjin War has been an event that continuously affects the relations between Korea and Japan. He also sheds light on a figure who made his own decisions upon being called to serve in an unjustifiable war. This approach shines critical awareness Kitajima tries to maintain throughout the book and perhaps reveals the reason why he brings up Kim Chung-seon at the very beginning of the book.

Through Chapter 1, Kitajima unveils Toyotomi Hideyoshi's intent for invading Joseon. The letter the Joseon king handed a Tongsinsa mission in 1590 to deliver to the Japanese leader is reviewed to illuminate the logic behind Hideyoshi's purpose for going to war. To justify invading Joseon, Hideyoshi had to rely on a myth of divine descent, most likely created by a monk named Saisho Jotai who served as a diplomatic advisor. Hideyoshi's reply to the king of Joseon is mentioned only in the historical records of Joseon. Hence, without directly analyzing primary sources from the Joseon period, it would be impossible to pave the way for more fully grounded understandings of why Hideyoshi decided to invade Joseon.

Hideyoshi's intent to conquer East Asia began to manifest prior to his decision to invade Joseon. This is why he initially demanded that Joseon submit itself to Japan. The task of notifying Joseon of Hideyoshi's demand fell on the So clan of Tsushima. Hence, in Chapter 1, Tsushima's distress from having to pass on the delusion Hideyoshi was under and his unreasonable demands toward Joseon are juxtaposed with Joseon's understanding of the situation in Japan. Kitajima subtly compares Korean and Japanese historical sources describing developments that occurred in different places over the same issue around the same time. Such a comparison was possible because Kitajima chronologically collected and analyzed sources from each country, which eventually became published as a collection in 2017 that is proving to be a tremendous help to scholars.

Instead of faithfully conveying Hideyoshi's order to submit, Tsushima presented the order as a request to send a mission to congratulate the new Japanese king's enthronement. After carefully considering the request,

Joseon decided to dispatch a mission. During its visit to Japan, the mission witnessed the preparations being made to invade China, but envoys who took part in the mission gave contradictory accounts about the situation upon returning to Joseon. An explanation for this is offered in a subsection titled "Factional Conflict Among Joseon Bureaucrats: The Purge of Scholars and Party Strife." Kitajima explains that such differing accounts were caused by factional conflict in Joseon, and that state decisions, even those upon which the fate of Joseon depended upon, were dictated by party strife. This leaves a slight margin for regret because emphasizing the negative aspect of Joseon politics was equally employed by the colonialist descriptions Kitajima has been critical of. Of course, it does not indicate that Kitajima agrees with colonialist historical views. Yet, despite being well versed in historical sources from the Joseon period and familiar with research findings on the political history of Joseon, he only seems to search for domestic reasons to explain the Joseon envoys' conflicting accounts. To be certain, such accounts had little impact upon the way the invasions unfolded. Magnifying internal conflicts of Joseon should be treated with more caution because it can be used to mitigate the fact that the war was caused by Hideyoshi's aggression.

Chapter 2 opens with the preparations Japan went through to initiate aggression. The chapter clearly points out that Hideyoshi carefully planned and prepared for a war of aggression. In May 1592, the Japanese forces disembarked on the shore of Busan and began to attack the next day. It is unusual for a Japanese author to primarily mention dates according to the calendar used in Joseon and Ming China, which was slightly different from that used in Japan at the time, but each difference is kindly annotated in the book to prevent confusion.

The first battles occurred at the fortresses Jinseong and Dongnaeseong in Busan. The description of battle scenes has been entirely based on historical records from the Joseon period. The route the Japanese forces proceeded through thereafter is described by relying on sources and studies still widely utilized today including *Seojeong illok* (西征日錄), a war diary authored by a Joseon government official, as well as research findings on the Imjin War by Ikeuchi Hiroshi (池内宏).

On April 30, the Joseon court abandoned the capital Hanseong in search of refuge. The fire, set immediately afterward on Jangyewon where slave-related records and documents were kept, is mentioned as an episode that contains a contradictory aspect of a society in which slaves existed. Alongside the dispute sparked by the Joseon envoys' differing accounts of their trip to Japan, Kitajima seems to introduce such episodes to remind Japanese readers of how different the social and political circumstances were between Joseon and Japan.

The figures who stood at the very forefront of the Japanese forces were Konishi Yukinaga and Katō Kiyomasa. While Konishi Yukinaga, involved in both combat and negotiations, stopped at Pyeongyang Fortress, Katō Kiyomasa chose to proceed further north in the direction of Hamgyeong Province. The book refers to documents left by Katō Kiyomasa to introduce his attempt to advance to and gain control over Hamgyeong Province. Although the aforementioned Ikeuchi Hiroshi previously performed a study on the activities of Katō Kiyomasa, Kitajima can be credited for further developing the study by exploring Korean historical sources produced around the time when Katō Kiyomasa was active in Joseon. The people in Hamgyeong Province had been resentful of the discrimination they received from the central government to the extent that some even cooperated with the Japanese forces. Kiyomasa's attempt to rule nevertheless failed because people in Joseon generally had a stronger sense of resistance toward Japan.

Chapter 3 primarily covers volunteer Joseon soldiers called *uibyeong,* Admiral Yi Sun-sin, and the counterattack by the Ming forces. The historical source central to this part is the Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty. In addition, a broad range of other sources were consulted from *Nanjung jamnok*, *Jingbirok*, and *Munso mallok*, authored by Joseon elites who participated in the war, to Japanese records by Kuroda Nagamasa, Nabeshima Naoshima, and Katō Kiyomasa. Quotes from the Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty also sporadically appear in the chapter.

Voluntary Joseon soldiers are portrayed in comparison to the regular Joseon army that helplessly lost to the Japanese army. Although Koreans may be familiar with similar comparisons that appear in nationalist narra-

tives seeking to emphasize the activities of the voluntary soldiers, Korean academia has lately been attempting to critically revalue that approach toward voluntary soldiers during the Imjin War. It is Kitajima's balanced use of historical materials as above that helps bring textual analysis closer to the reality of the war in which the voluntary soldiers were engaged. This meticulous method also applies to the evaluation of main achievements of the Joseon Admiral Yi Sun-sin. Along this line, Kitajima provides an outline of the admiral's career, his victory in the Battle of Hansando, and how the damage the admiral caused Japan led Toyotomi Hideyoshi to forbid the Japanese naval forces from engaging in naval battles with Joseon.

At the same time, the chapter does not forget to touch upon the reinforcement sent by the Ming dynasty. Kitajima explains that Ming China's hierarchical relationship with Joseon dictated its decision to send reinforcement. From the Ming dynasty's point of view, Joseon served as a fence, which means that the ultimate purpose of sending reinforcement was to defend its suzerainty. The Ming forces, led by General Li Rusong, attacked and reclaimed Pyeongyang Fortress where Konishi Yukinaga had been stationed. The Japanese forces abandoned Hwanghae Province as well as Gaesong and retreated to Hanseong where they slaughtered the locals, presuming they would secretly communicate with the Ming forces advancing south. Such brutalities committed by the Japanese forces are constantly pointed out in the chapter with each development of the war.

However, when Li Rusong headed to Hanseong with a small number of troops in search of routes to advance south, he suffered an attack from some Japanese troops at Byeokjegwan and, after the battle, refused to advance any further into Joseon. This fight is what Kitajima regards as the decisive reason Li Rusong became dispirited about fighting in the Imjin War. Immediately after Li Rusong's defeat comes a description about the Battle of Haengju that resulted in Joseon's victory under the leadership of General Gwon Yul. The counterattack by Joseon and Ming China drove the Japanese forces onto the defensive. Hideyoshi, however, ordered the Japanese army to maintain its front. This, in turn, caused conflicts within the Japanese forces to surface. Kitajima's method of simultaneously using historical sources from three different countries to switch the subject of de-

scription while explaining developments in the war makes it easier to understand the reactions that each subject displayed in the face of rapid situational changes.

Chapter 4 provides an account of the peace negotiations. The chapter begins with the confrontation between Ming China and Joseon over entering into peace negotiations with Japan. Having lost their will to fight since losing the Battle of Byeokjegwan, the Ming forces were inclined toward negotiating for peace. Joseon, on the other hand, was against settling for peace because the Japanese forces robbed the tombs of former Joseon kings and abducted two of royal princes. Joseon actually named a few other reasons for refusing to engage in peace negotiations, which changed over time. Kitajima highlights the aforementioned two reasons in order to accentuate the ideological basis of Joseon that was rooted in Confucianism.

The Ming army disparaged the military capability of Joseon and criticized its argument against peace negotiations. However, Kitajima suggests a different opinion regarding Joseon's military capability. The Joseon forces had been capable enough to win the Battle of Haengju, another reason why Joseon refused to negotiate for peace. Still, the Ming ultimately ignored the opposition from Joseon and proceeded to engage in peace negotiations with Japan. To the delegate the Ming army sent, Toyotomi Hideyoshi suggested seven conditions for peace. Out of those seven conditions, Kitajima considered the most crucial to be the first requiring Ming China to form a marriage alliance with Japan, the second requiring Joseon to resume trade with Japan, and the fourth requiring four provinces out of the eight Joseon provinces to be ceded to Japan while the other four provinces and the capital Hanseong was to remain under the Joseon king's rule. The second battle at Jinju Fortress, which occurred around the time the peace negotiations began, is understood by Kitajima as a move Japan made to turn its fourth condition into a *fait accompli*.

After lengthy discussions, a Ming envoy visited Toyotomi Hideyoshi to perform a ceremony of investiture. Hideyoshi, however, was enraged. According to Kitajima, this was because Hideyoshi was being bestowed merely with the title "King of Japan" while the rest of his conditions were ignored, thereby prompting Hideyoshi to break off the negotiations. Kitaji-

ma therefore infers that Hideyoshi's demands had remained consistent from the moment he suggested the seven conditions for peace. Many studies have lately explored the significance of Hideyoshi's conditions, the developments during the peace negotiations, and the cause of the negotiations' rupture. Some of them have presented different views about the condition on territorial cession to Japan that Kitajima highlighted in the book. Readers, interested particularly in further details about the peace negotiations, will find it helpful to consult a variety of other studies that complement what is covered through this book.

Chapter 5, the longest chapter in the book, features *Jeongyu jaeran*, or the second invasion of Hideyoshi in 1597. The chapter begins with the attack order Hideyoshi issued to the Japanese generals right after the peace negotiations broke down. The order stated that a second invasion was inevitable due to Joseon's failure to fulfill the fifth out of Hideyoshi's seven conditions, which demanded that the Joseon king send one of his princes to Japan as a hostage in exchange for retaining four of its original eight provinces.[1] The fifth condition also stipulated that one or two government officials accompany the Joseon prince to attend on him as additional hostages. Why did Hideyoshi cite the fifth condition to justify the second invasion instead of the first, second, or fourth condition that Kitajima regarded as more crucial? According to the conditions Toyotomi Hideyoshi again suggested on June 22, 1595, a Joseon prince should be sent as hostage upon which that prince would be bestowed with the four Joseon provinces ceded to Japan. That revised set of conditions, however, is not mentioned in the book. The revised conditions have led some recent studies to conclude that by June 22, 1595, Hideyoshi had grown less demanding in that he requested to take a prince as hostage instead of territorial cession. Such a conclusion makes it understandable as to why Hideyoshi cited the unfulfilled fifth condition as he ordered the Japanese generals to launch a second invasion upon Joseon. In other words, it may be necessary to consider the possibili-

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[1] The original copy of the order given by Hideyoshi does not literally mention the words "fifth condition" but describes what the condition entailed.

ty that by the time Hideyoshi ordered the second invasion, he was no longer interested in territorial cession.

During their second invasion, the Japanese forces behaved more brutally than before. Evidence of this would be records about their practice of "nose slicing." The Japanese forces sliced off the noses of Joseon people to take them as war trophies. The number of sliced noses on record is alarming and multiple Japanese receipts issued for submitting sliced noses still exist to this day. Japanese historical sources also explicitly describe the practice of slicing noses, demonstrating that as the aggressor, the Japanese were well aware of its brutality. Such an atrocious order to cut off noses must have come from Hideyoshi since he collected the noses and ears from Joseon and erected a monument for their burial in Japan. Kitajima explains that the monument was a false gesture of offering repose that was in fact meant to demonstrate Hideyoshi's mercy. This clearly determines who should be held responsible for the Japanese forces' atrocious acts during their invasion of Joseon and how that person's legacy should be historically regarded.

Another indicator of the reality the Japanese forces faced was *Hangwae*, or the Japanese soldiers who surrendered to Joseon. There were surrenderers prior to Japan's second invasion in 1597, but the number of *Hangwae* increased during the second invasion. Skepticism about being mobilized for another war without just cause is likely to have prompted Japanese soldiers to escape. Kitajima in fact devotes quite a few pages to discuss *Hangwae*. In this chapter, he returns to further examine Kim Chung-seon who was introduced at the beginning of the book. The author particularly looks into records about *Hangwae* who advised Katō Kiyomasa to surrender during the Battle of Ulsan Fortress. Mentions of Kim Chung-seon can be found in historical sources from both Joseon and Japan. Based on a series of analysis, Kitajima concludes that Kim Chung-seon was someone who belonged to the forces that rebelled in opposition to the Toyotomi regime right before the eruption of the Imjin War. According to Kitajima, it is highly likely that the same person, forced to serve under Katō Kiyomasa, surrendered upon arriving in Joseon and became the man known as Kim Chung-seon. This deduction appears to be sufficiently convincing and

demonstrates that tracing the choices and activities of the Japanese, who disagreed with launching an aggressive war, is a task necessary to better understand the developments of the Imjin War.

The second invasion ended with the death of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The Japanese forces attempted to totally withdraw from Joseon, which triggered the Battle of Noryang, the final major battle of the Imjin War. Kitajima offers a detailed description about the siege at the fortress the Japanese built in Suncheon and the famous Battle of Noryang that ensued at sea. The author's tremendous interest in Admiral Yi Sun-sin seems obvious not just through the book, but from the fact that he translated *Nanjung ilgi*, the war diary of the admiral, and also published a separate monograph about the admiral.

Chapter 6 is thus left to deal with the aftermath of the Imjin War. This chapter titled "Wounds from the Japanese Invasions" primarily discusses Joseon abductees and the artistry of ceramics introduced to Japan by potters abducted from Joseon. Although the abducted Joseon potters were forced to settle down and adjust to life in Japan, they managed to preserve their artistry through the Edo period and into the modern times. Through their history, Kitajima attempts to relay the pain the Imjin War inflicted and give a strong warning against the approach that reads the acquisition of pottery techniques as a positive case of "cultural dissemination" that resulted from the Imjin War. Kitajima stresses that the case "should be considered as a depredation instead of a normal instance of dissemination." As an expert on the Imjin War, he probably regards the aforementioned approach as an attempt to mask the atrocities of aggression and instead accentuate its softer aspects.

The epilogue turns to modern Japanese research on the Imjin War. The *Bukgwan daecheopbi* incident is mentioned as an attempt identical to the one government-friendly Japanese scholars who carried out to obliterate Kim Chung-seon (Sayaka). The *Bukgwan daecheopbi* is a monument Joseon erected to commemorate the victory the voluntary soldiers led by Jeong Mun-bu against the Japanese troops under Katō Kiyomasa. In 1905, the monument was brought to Japan where the content of its inscription

was identified as false.[2] However, this identification was later disproved by the Japanese historian Ikeuchi Hiroshi. Kitajima takes the incident as another opportunity to stress the importance of meticulously examining historical sources from all the countries that took part in a war in order to paint an accurate overall picture of that war. He then criticizes those in Japan who attempted to "distort history by mobilizing immature research methods, irrelevant to the study of history, and to obliterate and conceal historical facts inconvenient for Japan."

The Imjin War carried out the idea of "conquering Joseon," which later contributed to the colonization of Joseon. The idea was therefore not something that suddenly materialized but was formed during the Edo period and developed into the *Seikanron* argument at a time when Japan was under pressure from the Western powers. The "legacy" Hideyoshi left not only served as an ideological backbone for Japan's colonization of Korea, but as the foundation for invading other countries as well. Through this book, Kitajima Manji offers a vivid illustration demonstrating how a historical event like the Imjin War eventually led to another series of invasions by a modern nation. This could serve as a reminder that the war should not be defined only within the context of the Toyotomi regime and contemporary Japan. Otherwise, scholars in Japan, as well as Korea and China, may one day all turn a blind eye toward historical truths from not only the time the Imjin War occurred but from the modern times as well.

Kitajima Manji maintains a balance among Korea, Japan, and China in terms of the historical sources cited throughout the book. Regarding Korean sources, the Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty were mainly used in addition to other works published around the time of the Imjin War. As for Japanese sources, the Red Seal permits (*shuinjō*) issued by Toyotomi Hideyoshi as well as letters written by Japanese generals were consulted. The Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty and *Sadae mungwe*—a collection of diplomatic documents Joseon exchanged with Ming China—

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[2] The *Bukgwan daecheopbi* was left in the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo until 2005 when it was sent to South Korea after persistent requests for its return by the South Korean government. The monument was thereafter sent back to its original site in North Korea in 2006.

were examined to describe the Ming dynasty's involvement in the war. Although quotes from sources are not individually annotated for general readers, the sources themselves are meticulously cited to support descriptions in the main text. From the beginning to the end, Kitajima does not look away from the brutalities of aggression but draws a clear distinction between aggressor and victim. He does not overlook the lives of various figures who became embroiled in the war. He issues a stern warning toward modern Japan's distortion of the Imjin War under the pretext of "historical research." That warning came from the unique research methods Kitajima developed as he critically examined previous research outcomes by those who were critical of such historical distortions as they studied the history of Joseon and its relations with Japan. Hence, this book will suit readers looking for a publication that covers the entire Imjin War and simultaneously traces the movements of all three countries that took part in the war.

All in all, the research methods Kitajima Manji developed, the findings his research produced, and the collections of historical sources he compiled have influenced many scholars studying the Imjin War, including the author of this review. That is why his sudden death in 2018 was all the more unfortunate because he left without being able to leave a summary of his own career as a scholar. Hopefully, this review may help remember and acknowledge the value of his work and serve as a reminder of academic integrity he sought to give to those interested in developing an understanding of the Imjin War.