Population Movements during and after the Imjin War

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Books reviewed:

(1) Sousa, Lúcio de. *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan: Merchants, Jesuits and Japanese, Chinese, and Korean Slaves*. Studies in Global Slavery 7. Leiden; Boston: Brill. 2019.

(2) Bohnet, Adam. *Turning toward Edification: Foreigners in Chosŏn Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 2020.

The repercussions of the Imjin War of 1592-1598 echo through history, marking as it did an era of both forced and voluntary migrations that have long captured scholarly intrigue. Increasing efforts over the last decades have uncovered progressively more aspects of the war's wide-ranging impact, and particularly of the large population movements that formed part of the conflict. Certain facets of this great population upheaval have received more attention, such as the movements and legacies of Korean potters and pottery in Japan, while other aspects remain little understood. While lacunae in the historical source material must necessarily limit how much we can reconstruct – particularly of the stories of tens of thousands of voiceless people affected – there remains much constructive research which can and some which has already been done.

Three distinct avenues beckon scholars seeking to unearth fresh in-

sights: 'shifting' – redirecting academic focus towards overlooked domains; 'expanding' – fostering cross-border and interdisciplinary connections and exploiting multilingual historical sources, many of which have until very recently been gathering dust in disparate archives; and 'innovating' – finding creative ways to prize new insights from the limited material already available, sometimes with the aid of new digital methods. Lúcio de Sousa's *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan* and Adam Bohnet's *Turning toward Edification*, the two books reviewed in this article, exemplify each of these three approaches to varying extents.

Both monographs also respectively address the two directions of population movement when viewed from the Korean perspective: Sousa's book sheds light on those who left the peninsula (including those who later returned), and Bohnet's on those who came to settle in Joseon. Unquestionably, these two trajectories of migration were asymmetric in magnitude. Though precise figures may forever elude historians, the overwhelming exodus from the peninsula, whether coerced or voluntary, eclipses the inflow of those from foreign lands seeking settlement in Korea. Consequently, the corpus of scholarly work to date reflects this asymmetry, with a predominant focus on mass abductions of Koreans and the intricate web of associated inquiries.

Those wishing to study the abductions of people from the Korean peninsula in and around the Imjin War can and do approach the question from a multitude of vantage points. The first, and perhaps most pertinent, questions are some of the most basic: How many people were taken? Who and by whom? From where and whither to? The uneven historical record makes answering the question of total numbers frustratingly difficult, although we do have high-level – albeit incomplete – picture of the groups, routes and actors involved, which scholars continue to flesh out, often by looking at individual areas.

Rather than focusing on the broader vista, some studies eschew the macro for the micro, reconstructing the lived experiences of individuals. This is mostly readily achievable through the writings of literati captives who left first-hand accounts, such as Kang Hang and No In. More chal-

lenging is to give voice to the voiceless majority: the illiterate men, women, children captives, who appear to us only in others' descriptions. An increasing number of scholars are attempting to foreground these people's experience by piecing together the available evidence. Lúcio de Sousa, for example, has gone on to foreground the experiences of women.

A peculiar aspect of research into Imjin War abductees has been the extraordinarily prominent place historically given to potters and pottery. Due to the more tangible legacy represented by pottery traditions in Japan, for a long time studies focused on potter communities almost to the exclusion of others, who failed to leave such a visible trace of their arrival and survival in Japan. This trend has been corrected by recent studies looking at the diverse identities and journeys of the people involved, including Sousa's work considered here.

Creative, and digitally assisted, approaches are being applied to try and draw patterns from the sparse official record: for example, by analyzing extant household registers from before and after the Imjin War.

Another angle from which to approach the abductions is to consider the role of local authorities: state responses and attitudes in Korea, the role of central leadership (Toyotomi Hideyoshi) and the *daimyo* (lords) in Japan. The study of the state angle is frequently extended out to after the Imjin War, considering the post-war diplomatic exchanges in which Joseon sought to effect the return of its abducted subjects.

As well as 'upward' to those in power, the nature of the trade in humans that took place necessitates the scholars also to expand their gaze 'outward' to include the European actors and Southeast Asian context which played integral parts. This is precisely the dimension in which Sousa's monograph makes its chief contribution.

The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan, follows the author's earlier Spanish-language monograph, *Escravatura e Diáspora Japonesa nos séculos XVI e XVII* (Braga: Núcleo de Investigação em Ciência Políticas e Relações Internacionais, 2014). It is impressive in scope: spanning trafficking practices in East Asia, legislation in Spain and Portugal, and the experiences of trafficked persons worldwide. While

in terms of both time period and demographics it encompasses much more, this broader context is also valuable to understanding the mass abductions on the Korean peninsula during the Imjin War specifically.

The book navigates the complex entanglements between Portuguese traders, Jesuit missionaries, and the enslaved individuals of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean origin, commencing with a vivid portrayal of the Portuguese arrival in Japan. This sets the stage for the subsequent exploration of cultural exchange and economic interplay between the traders and the Japanese populace. It delves into the nuanced tapestry of encounters, shedding light on the evolving relationships and networks established during this period.

Sousa's narrative progresses into a comprehensive examination of the Portuguese merchants' involvement in the slave trade within Japan. Through extensive research and analysis, the book unpicks the web of factors that fueled the demand for slaves and the merchants' roles in facilitating this trade. This section also highlights the economic imperatives that underpinned the trade, elucidating its impact on the broader economic landscape. Sousa also explores the presence and influence of Jesuit missionaries in Japan and their entanglement with the Portuguese traders. The book dissects the moral and ethical quandaries faced by these missionaries amidst their involvement in a trade marked by human bondage, providing insights into the conflicting interests and ethical considerations at play.

A crucial aspect of Sousa's narrative is the examination of the slave trade's dynamics from diverse perspectives, including those of the enslaved individuals themselves. Through an exploration of the experiences of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean individuals subjected to slavery, the book provides a poignant depiction of the human toll and cultural ramifications of the trade. Moreover, Sousa draws our attention to the resistance movements and responses that emerged within the enslaved communities, shedding light on their struggles, resilience, and efforts toward emancipation. Additionally, the book examines the varied responses from local authorities and communities, unveiling the complexities of opposition to the slave trade within Japan.

Beyond the immediate implications, Sousa traces the long-term legacy and impact of the Portuguese slave trade on the socioeconomic and cultural fabric of Japan. The book navigates through the repercussions that reverberated through history, influencing subsequent developments within Japan and beyond its borders.

The contribution of the book is first and foremost to provide a perspective grounded in European history and sources, frequently unavailable to scholars of East Asian history. Moreover, Sousa succeeds in combining a deep understanding of Portuguese and Spanish texts with an ability to handle East Asian primary sources. The reach of the primary-source scholarship is impressive and therefore necessarily informative to any student of slave trades and related issues.

At the same time, the book's chief limitation is that it does not present this broad and deep scholarship in a more accessible way. For example, the author includes extensive quotes in the original Portuguese and Chinese without translation, effectively limiting the readers able to fully appreciate his book to a handful of scholars worldwide simultaneously adept in the contemporary versions of both languages.

Similarly, data is presented in a way that needlessly reduces its usefulness: in one instance, the sources for a table extending over 40 pages are given in an amalgamated list of a hundred publications. Such a presentation means that only a scholar engaged in a fully aligned research project and willing to spend the dozens of hours necessary could verify or meaningfully reuse the data, when individual attributed citations would have allowed a more casual reader to pursue an individual line of interest. Presentation of data as online resources would have been far more accessible, invited more productive collaboration, and thus made more worthwhile the undoubtedly huge scholarly effort underpinning the book.

Ideally, the author could also contextualize the book's findings with secondary scholarship on its broader themes, such as slavery or coercion, commerce, and empire. Yet, each study must have its emphasis, and this book's chief contribution is in its examination of primary sources.

A topic as expansive as intra- and trans-regional human trafficking

presents an enormous challenge in sheer scope, requiring as it does freedom to move between vastly different and highly arcane linguistic, legislative, and socio-historical contexts as well as to map and appreciate the interplay between them. More so than for narrowly concentrated subjects, therefore, collaboration and cross-pollination offer the greatest hope of advancing our common understanding. To foster such collaboration, studies in this area should be as accessible as possible, both linguistically and in terms of presenting their work. Provision of translations and explanations of quotations in secondary languages alone significantly extend a study's readership. By offering a route map through the primary and secondary sources used, scholars can also greatly ease the task of those who would follow in their footsteps, which will lead in turn to more pertinent and insightful contributions from their peers. In an age of increasingly diverse options for sharing data, large appendices of information which risk being largely redundant when presented in a book format can be rendered instantly accessible and manipulable by other scholars if offered as a digital resource alongside the traditional publication.

It is fair to say that *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan* represents important and hard-won scholarship that ties together sources and contexts unavailable to most scholars working on proximate subjects, but that its scholarship would have an even greater impact if it was communicated in a more accessible format.

While Sousa's gaze is outward across the seas, Adam Bohnet turns to look at the state of Joseon, and specifically, how it treated foreigners that arrived and settled on its territory. The temporal scope of Bohnet's study extends far beyond the Imjin War, and it is in observing evolution over time, rather than contemporaneous connections, that the author's interest lies in. Rather than those who left Korea, Bohnet's focus is on those who arrived and were to greater or lesser extents incorporated into Joseon society. Of the various lines of inquiry outlined above, *Turning to Edification* is a contribution to our understanding of state and societal attitudes and responses to population movements.

The book's introduction takes the narrower scope of empirical enquiry as a launching point for a review of the historiographical debate

around Korean collective political identity in the Joseon period, which succeeds in being both perspicacious and concise. This is a difficult territory for historians to tread, for on one side they must avoid accusations of being 'primordialist' nationalists, projecting back the 19-20th century nationhood onto the past, while on the other side also resist pressure to assert national identity to be a wholly novel invention of the nineteenth century, preceded by a vacuum. On such latter claims of pure modern invention, Bohnet is not sparing his opprobrium, calling them "indefensible" in light of any reading of Joseon dynasty texts (p. 9). Nor does the author shy away from identifying as anachronistic any concept of blood purity in the Joseon period – a focus of Korean nationalism in the twentieth century. Bohnet's conclusion on the nature of collective identity is balanced and nuanced, noting similarities and differences with Song China and other Asian examples, and prioritizing examination of the social structures that encouraged cohesion and the specifics of the imagined community as expressed in contemporary texts.

Faced with the amorphous question of identity, the author also seeks to elucidate what it was and was not by briefly setting it in the wider context of other societies around the world, citing some scholarship on European history. Yet, the heart of the book is an exploration of "why Jurchens, Japanese, and Chinese were categorized together as submitting-foreigners until the mid-eighteenth century, after which Chinese descendants were clearly distinguished from other people with foreign ancestors" (p. 4). As for why this is a subject worthy of our attention, the author juxtaposes examples of earlier discrimination and distrust of Chinese migrants against assumptions that Chinese immigrants would be looked on more favorably, in a political system and society dominated by a Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and which celebrated the Ming as its savior following the Imjin War. Intuitively, one would assume a more favorable regard for Chinese immigrants – at least at the higher levels of the bureaucracy – after the Imjin War, in which the Ming assistance rescued the Joseon state from destruction (the wider populace might have more ambivalent attitudes, having suffered at the hands of marauding Chinese troops). Yet, the author does not cite a great number of historians going

against this assumption and presents an anthropologist as the guilty exemplar.

The main body of the work moves between different communities in Joseon and through time. Chapter 1 sets the scene by reviewing what we know of how foreign communities were treated in the early Joseon period (defined as 1392-1592), while Chapter 5 eventually presents the later changes with which the book is most concerned. In the intervening pages we move between groups, with Chapter 2, for example, looking at how Japanese defectors and Ming deserters were treated following the Imjin War and Chapter 3 considering the fluidity of loyalty and subjecthood for people living at the furthest reaches of state power.

A central argument of the book is that it is not helpful to approach the Joseon state's treatment of foreigners through the lenses of Sinocentrism or the *hwa-yi* (civilized-barbarian) distinction. While he concedes that these were real and highly influential currents of thought, Bohnet argues that such an interpretation is likely to mislead us: as a *Chunghwa*-centered worldview was consistently dominant throughout the Joseon dynasty, we may be deceived into thinking that treatment of foreigners on that basis was also constant, whereas in reality it changed significantly over time. Bohnet points instead to the highly hierarchical and ritualized relations between groups of subjects and state authorities that characterized Joseon society as the most useful way of thinking about the state's treatment of foreigners: ultimately, the Joseon state sought to find the appropriate category, status, and privileges for each group. This call to focus on the ritual order is an important corrective, which may help re-center the student of this period on the sensibilities and priorities of the people they study. At the same time, the ritual relations and statuses which the Joseon state assigned, and different groups negotiated, inevitably represented an interplay between pragmatic considerations and evolving assumptions and world views. It would therefore be equally of interest to pursue in more depth the subtle shifts in Neo-Confucian thought over time – that is, to accompany the history of practice with a more ideational history, that looks beyond the specific treatment of naturalized subjects. Such an ideational exploration would equally serve to dispel the

impression of a constant attitude towards China as the civilized center.

Overall, *Turning toward Edification* is a thoughtful and coherent account of the Joseon state's differential treatment of foreigners that convincingly argues for important evolution in policy over time and the need to understand the ritual designation of Joseon society in its own terms. It presents enough thematic context and some initial directions for comparisons, as well as a careful consideration of the wider question of Joseon's self-identity.

In the wider field of studies on population movements in and out of Korea in the mid-Joseon period, important new works appear with increasing frequency. While critical aspects of the overall picture may ultimately remain frustratingly out-of-focus — not least the most basic question of numbers — recent work by scholars in both East Asia and Europe offers hope of significantly more light being shed on the networks, interactions, and individual experiences that made up these colossal population movements. Greater collation of information, facilitated on the one hand by increasing inter-institutional and multi-disciplinary cooperation, and by digitalization on the other hand, promises to reveal heretofore unrecognized patterns. Undoubtedly, the key to unlocking further insights will be truly transnational approaches, such as the one demonstrated by Sousa, and the ability to appreciate contemporary practices, events, and recorded experiences in their own context of meaning, as Bohnet behooves us to do.