

Yang Haiying 杨海英, *Cong “Tang jiang shu tie” kan Ming-Qing shidai de nanbing beijiang* 从《唐将书帖》看明清时代的南兵北将 (Southern Soldiers and Northern Generals during the Transitional Period of Ming & Qing: From the Perspective of *Letters from Chinese Servicemen during Campaign in Korea*), Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中国社会科学出版社, 2022. ISBN 978-7-5203-8941-9, 512 pages, 189 RMB.

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In 1592 the Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), who had only recently politically unified a Japan ravaged by more than a century of civil war, decided to invade Korea, which at that time was ruled by the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897). The Koreans were not prepared to resist the Japanese onslaught, the largest amphibious landing in world history up to that point. Around 150,000 Japanese soldiers participated in the operation, with another 140,000 joining in a second landing in 1597.

The goal of the invasion, often posited by modern scholars, was not the conquest of Korea itself but ostensibly to overthrow the Ming empire and put the Emperor of Japan on the throne in Beijing. As the victorious Japanese drove back the hapless King of Chosŏn and his court to the border with China, the Ming court decided to respond to this challenge to their East Asian hegemony and come to the aid of their beleaguered tributary ally. The result was the largest multi-state war in the world at the time, with Ming China committing around 170,000 troops over the course of the conflict. The Koreans also mobilized many men and resources to resist the Japanese, notably in the form of an effective navy and several guerrilla armies.

Despite the war’s singular large scale, it has attracted only scant attention in Sinophone (and Western) academia, in contrast to Japanese and Korean scholarship. Part of the reason for this lies in the suppression by the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1912) of the commemoration of successful martial exploits by their Ming predecessors. The conflict also occurred during the reign of the highly controversial Wanli emperor (r. 1572–1620), who famously did not get along with his civilian bureaucracy and whom some later historians blame for the decline of the Ming empire. The war in Korea has often been framed as a key reason for this decline because it exhausted the empire’s treasury and thereby paved the way for the eventual Manchu conquest. This interpretation has recently evolved, and this book, written by Yang Haiying, a researcher from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, is an impressive fruit of this fortuitous development. Yang belongs to a burgeoning group of scholars uncovering the history of the Ming dynasty’s participation in the war, which also includes professor Chen Shangsheng 陈尚胜 and his dedicated research group at Shandong University, as well as professor Sun Weiguo 孙卫国 at Nankai University.

Professor Yang’s book grew out of two earlier research efforts, the first of which focused on the career of Hong Chengchou 洪承畴 (1593–1665), a Ming civil official overseeing military affairs during the tumultuous Ming-Qing transition. Hong later defected to the Manchu and served the Qing in a similar capacity. A book consolidating Professor Yang’s research on Hong appeared in 2006, and it set her on the path to researching the conflict in Korea known in Korea as the Imjin War and in China, Wanli’s Expedition in Aid of Chosŏn. This earlier book, *Hong Chengchou yu Ming-Qing yi dai yanjiu* 洪承畴与明清易代研究 (“Research on Hong Chengchou and the Ming-Qing transition”), narrated an event in which Korean harquebusiers, coerced by the Manchu to fight on the side of the Qing, inflicted heavy

casualties on the Ming army with their accurate fire during a battle in Liaodong. This led Yang to question how Korea could have obtained such skilled gunners (pp. 1–2), a question which was subsequently explored in a second monograph, titled *Yuwai Changcheng – Wanli yuan-Chao kang-Wo Yiwu bing kaoshi* 域外长城一万历援朝抗倭义乌兵考实 (“Foreign lands beyond the Great Wall – An investigation of the Yiwu soldiers of Wanli’s aid to Korea to resist Japan”), published in 2014. This work considered the role of Ming southern soldiers, originating from Yiwu County of the province of Zhejiang, in beating back the Japanese in Korea and bolstering the defences of Chosŏn by training new regular army units in their way of warfare. The southern soldiers were the heirs of the militia recruited by the famous anti-*Wokou* 倭寇 military commander Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528–1588), who devised new training methods and tactics to defeat the Sino-Japanese pirates or *Wokou* ravaging the south-eastern coastal areas of the Ming empire during the 1550s and 1560s. Their militia was characterized by strong discipline, small unit cohesion and tactics emphasising combined-arms operations with different contact weapons and shields. Another core skill of these southern soldiers was their proficiency with harquebuses and other gunpowder weaponry. Qi Jiguang trained his harquebusiers to high standards, and they were able to fire in coordinated volleys with accuracy.

These innovations were laid down in a comprehensive training and drilling manual, titled *Ji xiao xin shu* 紀效新書 (“New book of recorded efficacy”), which eventually found its way to Korea during the war and became a blueprint for Korean army reforms during and after the war. The Koreans recognised the southern soldiers as the most effective Chinese units to fight the Japanese, in contrast to the northern soldiers, who were more used to fighting against northern nomads and were less disciplined and less familiar with firearms. Indeed, it was the southern soldiers who successfully led the attack driving the Japanese out of P’yŏngyang in 1593. Southern officers also became trainers who helped reform parts of the Korean army along Qi Jiguang’s ideas. Yang’s 2014 monograph goes into these matters in much detail, in addition to other roles the southern soldiers played during the Imjin War.

The present monograph integrates the main insights from its predecessor without too much repetition and with new research materials and insights (pp. 3–4). The geographic scope of the subject is also enlarged: the southern Yiwu soldiers, although still playing a large role in the narrative, are no longer the sole topic of investigation. Northern generals and “western” troops from Sichuan, which included many south-western “martial” minorities in their ranks, are also accorded their due attention in the pages of this thick volume. At the centrepiece of this book stands a collection of letters Ming military officers sent to Chosŏn Chief State Councilor Yu Sŏngnyong 柳成龍 (1542–1607) during the war, titled *Tang jiang shu tie* 唐將書帖 (“Letters from Tang [Chinese] officers”, or “Letters from Chinese Servicemen during Campaign in Korea” as Yang herself translates the title). Yu Sŏngnyong, together with the Korean king Sŏnjo 宣祖 (r. 1567–1608), were the leading proponents of reforming the Korean regular army along Qi Jiguang’s ideas, especially after the excellent showing of the southern troops during the battle of P’yŏngyang. In addition to this collection, Yang did extensive genealogical research in Yiwu to find out more about the backgrounds of these military men.

These sources are supplemented by an impressive range of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean primary sources, including official and unofficial (dynastic) histories, literati *belles-lettres* collections (*wenji* 文集), memorials to rulers, and gazetteers. It is clear from the bibliography that Yang left no stone unturned in mapping the various roles Chinese military men played in

Korea during and after the Imjin War and their familial backgrounds and social relations. This is entirely in line with the book's main purpose: to present a “three-dimensional, dynamic, and multi-angled” history of the Ming Chinese military in Korea (p. 1). A second goal, reiterated a few times as a kind of manifesto, is to bring these men's heroic role to light after centuries of sometimes wilful neglect, often at the hands of Qing historiographers (p. 358). For military historians especially, this monograph is a true treat because it focuses on a social and professional group in Chinese history that has been neglected, partly because of the relative dearth of written sources they left behind.

The book itself is divided into three parts consisting of three chapters each. The first three chapters are organized according to the authorship of the letters received by Yu Sǒngnyong. Throughout, Yang has provided transcriptions of the letters with modern punctuation and images of the originals and attempted to ascertain the authors' identities whenever the letters did not provide this information. In doing so, she has rendered an invaluable service to her readership by making this collection available in a modern and accessible form. The content of the letters is then put in the context of the concrete historical events which provided the backdrop to their composition. The rich context supplied by Yang helps the reader make sense of the letters' content and also produces a helpful overview of the events of the war for the reader. In total, there are 44 letters collected and analyzed in the first three chapters.

The first chapter focuses on three southern military commanders hailing from Zhejiang: Wang Bidi 王必迪, Luo Shangzhi 駱尚志, and Wu Weizhong 吳惟忠 (dates unknown for all), the last of which had personally served under Qi Jiguang. These letters provide elaborate details about the conditions under which the southern troops initially entered Korea and their later service in the south of Korea in Kyǒngju. Many glimpses of the day-to-day conduct of the war are brought to life in these documents, including logistical problems, strategic deliberations about the conduct of the war, the gathering of military intelligence and cartographic knowledge, and the number of losses suffered in battles. Also of interest is the mention of the threat posed by marauding gangs of dispossessed Korean civilians who had turned to itinerant brigandage and attacked Ming soldiers as well. Luo Shangzhi comes forward in the narrative as the southern military officer who advocated teaching southern Chinese military methods to Yu Sǒngnyong, showcasing the active role of Ming military men in this military transfer process. Striking also are the cordial relations these military officers enjoyed with the Korean king, who, for example, presented gifts to Wu Weizhong.

The second chapter focuses on the letters by several officers who aided in training the Korean army during the long diplomatic intermission between the initial Japanese retreat to the south of Korea and the subsequent stalemate from late 1593 onwards and the second Japanese invasion and resumption of offensive operations in 1597. Again, it provides many details of this example of premodern Sino-Korean cooperation. The third chapter moves beyond strictly southern troops and collects the letters received from military personnel and occasionally civil officials burdened with military responsibilities from other parts of the Ming empire. Authors include Liu Ting 劉綎 (1558–1619), who commanded the abovementioned “western” troops hailing from Guizhou, Sichuan, and Yunnan; Chen Yin 陈璘 (1543–1607), a military commander and native of the Southern Metropolitan Province (Nan Zhili 南直隸, present-day Jiangsu and Anhui provinces); and civil official Li Hualong 李化龍 (1556–1612). All three would later play important roles in suppressing the Miao minority rebellion launched by Yang Yinglong 楊應龍 (1551–1600) in the southwest of the Ming empire right after the conclusion of the Imjin War.

The middle three chapters move beyond the letters to consider the implications of their contents for our understanding of different aspects of the war. The fourth chapter considers Ming strategy and sheds light on the debates surrounding issues like logistics, military training, diplomatic mediators, conducting peace negotiations with Japan in the absence of reliable knowledge of the country, and the difficulties of finding a diplomatic solution to a conflict without any of the sides losing their standing. The issue of military training is also revealed to have been put forward by some of the Ming officialdom as a conscious ploy to make Chosŏn self-reliant and thereby reduce the costs of the intervention for the Ming empire. This was easier said than done, however, as this entailed levying new taxes on a war-weary population of a war-ravaged country. The fifth chapter tackles this topic in detail and reveals the active role of southern Chinese officers and soldiers in guiding the creation of a new Korean army along the lines of Qi Jiguang's instructions as described in his *Ji xiao xin shu*. The letters add fresh insight into this transfer process not otherwise found in other Korean historical sources. Yang was able to identify more than 60 southern officers and soldiers who participated in this program, indicating their active involvement was much larger than previously assumed.

Military logistics, both in the West and East, have remained woefully understudied in the academy. Fortunately, the sixth chapter takes as its main subject exactly this question, mapping out the Ming army's logistics during the war. This network mainly operated on land and sea via Liaodong and Shandong provinces. The chapter provides illuminating details about the operation of this network, the goods (staple foods, weapons, silver, etc.) transported, and their costs. In addition, the reader is treated with a wealth of details on the middlemen in this network, who sometimes had a mixed Sino-Jurchen ethnic background and functioned as intelligence brokers as well. Beyond logistics, Yang also spends a few pages discussing the circulation of firearms knowledge and innovation among Ming officials during the war.

The last three chapters consider the history and service of different types of Chinese military troops in Korea, as well as the fates of some military men and their later commemoration in Korea after the Imjin War. Chapter Seven discusses the southern forces and their origins as Qi Jiguang's privately trained militia raised in Yiwu. Some of these would later go with Qi Jiguang to the northern frontier command post at Jizhen to help Qi instruct the northern soldiers in his new methods. The Ming would send southern troops from both Zhejiang and Jizhen to Korea, but Korean observers were keenly able to distinguish both from their northern military colleagues because of their distinctive clothing and dietary habits. The chapter concludes with a detailed investigation into the lives of the abovementioned Luo Shangzhi and Wu Weizhong juxtaposing Chinese and Korean sources, finally doing justice to two influential officers who had been ignored in official Qing-directed Ming historiography.

In the eighth chapter, the focus finally shifts to the "northern generals" alluded to in the monograph's title. As the Ming expeditionary army in the early phases of the war was predominantly made up of northerners, this chapter showcases some of the military families that emerged along the northern frontier that would supply officers to the army. Li Chengliang 李成梁 (1526–1618) and his sons, of mixed Sino-Korean pedigree, are famous examples of this phenomenon, but more examples are highlighted in the chapter. Many military families faced a dilemma during the Ming-Qing transition: stay loyal to the Ming dynasty and face extinction, or switch sides and preserve the family. Fleeing to Korea was a third option, as Chosŏn held the Ming in high regard in contrast to the "barbarian" Qing, and if you could prove or forge a family connection to a northern officer who participated in the Imjin War or otherwise performed meritorious and loyal service in the Ming military, you

could find a warm welcome there, as exemplified by the reception of Kang Shijue 康世爵 (1602-1685). This survivor of Ming battles against the Manchu fled to Korea in 1625, informed Korean officials of his ancestor's ostensible military exploits, and was eventually settled by the authorities in a region potentially disputed between Chosŏn and the Qing dynasty to serve in a military function. The last chapter zooms in on southern military officer Wu Zongdao 吳宗道 (dates unknown), who was promoted during the Imjin War and served as an important diplomatic mediator between the Korean court and the Ming. In addition, he possessed a geographically wide-ranging familial and social network engaged in trade activities and diplomacy between China and Korea. The family would also be caught up in the Ming-Qing transition, especially as it affected the family's activities in the northeastern province of Liaodong, and this chapter thus serves as another lens through which we can view this tumultuous period.

This monograph is a clear labour of love, expressed through the impressive erudite scholarship and the range of source materials in its composition. Yang Haiying has done a valuable service to the profession by making the *Tang jiang shu tie* accessible to a wider audience, and her connected analysis sheds new light on Sino-Korean relations during the Imjin War, the conduct of war and diplomacy in East Asia, technological and tactical innovations and their circulation, and the socio-familial histories of the often-neglected military personnel of the Ming dynasty. This monograph is perhaps not the best entry point to the Imjin War for the casual reader, but for the specialized scholar, it will bring many new details to the table, advancing our knowledge about the conflict and its aftermath considerably. The monograph successfully answers Yang's own question, originally posed in 2006, contemplating the origins of Korea's superior arquebusiers. In a twist of irony, then, the Ming military's own hard work reforming the Korean army would be used against them at the behest of the Manchu, a fact that must have created some mixed feelings among the Koreans who still felt indebted to the former for helping to defeat the Japanese.

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