

**JaHyun Kim Haboush**  
***The Great Asian War***  
***and the Birth of the Korean Nation***

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This work is a very evident labour of love and of collaboration to prepare and publish JaHyun Kim Haboush's working drafts on a topic that preoccupied her for such a long time before her untimely death in 2011. For readers familiar with Kim Haboush's earlier article and chapter publications, this represents an important consolidation of her key arguments. However, there are also frustrations that newer ideas do not perhaps have the full development for which one might have wished, or equal analytical depth across all themes in the varied chapters; that is to say, much that reminds readers of Kim Haboush's innovative thinking that will be sorely missed in this scholarly community.

The over-arching thesis of Kim Haboush's work is that the Japanese invasions of Korea under Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉, known in Korea as *ImjinWaeran* 임진왜란 (1592-98), and the subsequent Manchu Qing attacks, *Pyŏngchaboran* 병자호란 (1627, 1636-7), left the Kingdom of Great Chosŏn 조선 with a far clearer sense of its identity as other than either Chinese or Japanese. This, she posits, was achieved in part through the rise in use of the vernacular Korean language and script (*han'gŭl* 한글) alongside the classical literary Chinese that had hitherto dominated intellectual culture and written forms of expression and communication. These were changes, she argues, in which many could participate, producing flourishing writing across genres by a broad range of individuals, all of whom were shaping what it meant to be Korean. These threats were of different orders, and so too were the resulting ideas that emerged from them: against the Japanese, Chosŏn distinctiveness was ethnic and historical, against the Manchu it was cultural, a matter of civilisation. The period's probing of the duties and responsibilities of the individual to the king and state, and the state to its subjects and community, are part of what Kim Haboush terms the emergence of a 'discourse of nation' at the end of the sixteenth century, one that was reshaped and intensified after the Manchu conquests that would mark in China the transition from the Ming 大明 dynasty to the Qing 大清 in 1644.

The hold of the Chosŏn dynasty on the throne of Korea pre-dated this period of national transition (established in 1392) and it would outlive it in a way neither the Chinese Ming or Japanese Toyotomi dynasties managed. Instead of destabilising its political structures, these new notions of nation and of identity would help to secure the Chosŏn on the throne until 1897. This was achieved, Kim Haboush suggests, in part through a mobilisation from, and of, the Korean civilian population hitherto unseen – an ‘activist loyalty’ (5) – and the adaptive forms in which the associated expanded ideas and participatory acts of nationhood were employed then and subsequently.

A strong thread through much of the work’s insights is this period’s significant affective dimensions. Kim Haboush does not employ the scholarship of the now burgeoning history of emotions (we must remember that all these works were drafted before 2011) but the importance of specific emotional expression and labour in these events and the arguments that she constructs about them is evident. Seen through this lens, Kim Haboush’s work highlights a significant avenue for further analysis on this topic using humanities emotions methodologies and frameworks, which will be of interest to both scholars of premodern Asia and of historical emotions. One wonders how this study might have been elaborated differently if conceptualised as an emotional community with its attendant performative affective behaviours.

Kim Haboush readily acknowledges the challenges of working within frameworks for concepts such as state and nation that have been principally developed for use in European and/or modern contexts (a challenge that remains the case the scholarship of the history of emotions likewise). However, she argues the need for pragmatic ‘mutual accommodation’ in the interests of drawing new examples, geographies and cultures into our discussions of what such ideas and practices mean and can mean in different times (10) and places. This work is framed very much as the start of a new conversation about how we study the Imjin Wars with alternative methodologies and questions to those, typically politico-military, that have dominated to date.

The first chapter examines exhortations to resist Japanese invaders as part of the movement that produced the well-known volunteer, ‘righteous army’ (*Ŭibyŏng* 의병), not as incidental or simply reflective of it, but as integral to the discourse of nation that then emerged. Awe and wonderment, she suggests, were key to the narrative about this unanticipated movement’s foundations. Kim Haboush terms these explicitly emotional literary works as operating in an unprecedented horizontal space of communication created by army leaders and supported by government officials but employed increasingly by elite men as private citizens. What quickly emerged in these textual forms was a series of tropes, evoking the terrible violence wrought upon the Korean people, culture and soil that articulated the destruction of Korea’s much-prized civilisation as a loss of humanity, and made all Korean people responsible for the land

that had nurtured them. This committed all inhabitants across class and region to restore Korea – actively and collaboratively. Tellingly, in the first year of conflict in 1592, verse was already circulating that «the people are the wall» (33). While the inclusiveness of class, literacy and regional differences are emphasised by Kim Haboush in these formulations, what is never elaborated is how women were envisaged, or could participate, in these concepts of ‘the people’ and the nation that they represented and stood to defend. Whether they were encouraged to fight actively, to resist, supply food or protect children, or were they simply embedded symbolically as pitiful rape and murder victims to inspire male acts of revenge, is unclear. Only three references across the book allude to women’s active engagement: the heroine Non’gae 논개 who sacrificed herself to kill a Japanese general rather than be violated (23, 62), the women who threw boiling water on attackers (62) and others who used their aprons to carry stones (90). Kim Haboush’s silence here may perhaps reflect the disinterest of the sources in carving a role for women as citizens of the nation, but it is nonetheless disappointing not to be addressed.

In the second chapter, Kim Haboush turns attention to how such exhortations were communicated. She analyses handcopying and woodblock printing, and distribution via previously government-employed postal routes, enabling copies to be read in local communities as collaborative, participatory acts that helped to develop a sense of community. So too were the practices of receiving and reading aloud the missives performative and community-building. These letters, however, were primarily composed in literary Chinese, not the language of most listeners, and thus had to be translated. Kim Haboush emphasises how contemporary sources stressed the significance of these letters in terms of how they moved people emotionally, rather than their content of common tropes, and highlights the social and emotional engagement that occurred through such group readings. However, it would be instructive to know more about how the emotional expression of literary Chinese translated into vernacular Korean and shaped the emotional expectations and realities of the non-Chinese literate majority. Kim Haboush’s main point here though is that the key contribution of these texts, and the righteous army broadly, was symbolic, shifting relations between the king and his people towards interdependency. These works no longer told people to wait for his protection but to make an active engagement with and for the nation, to pay back two hundred years of peace and prosperity that they had enjoyed under earlier Chosŏn monarchs. Constructed within a neo-Confucian framework, these letters created a horizontal discursive arena and participatory model in which all (men?) were vested with the power and capacity to become moral citizens of the new national space, through their contribution to its protection and future creation. Moreover, she argues that this was not only an idea advanced by Korea’s intellectual elite but one that they actually practised themselves in military engagements. These emerging genres and actions that commenced in 1592, Kim Haboush suggests, would remain to be reprised during the Manchu attacks and

even through to the 1905 Japanese colonisation of Korea (although this is unfortunately not elaborated in the current text or its notes).

We follow the unfolding Imjin conflict into Chapters Three and Four through the competing language choices of the three communicating groups – Japanese, Chinese and Korean – and the military engagements and political strategies in which they were located. Kim Haboush documents how King Sŏn-jo 선조 and his court begin to translate government edicts into *han'gŭl* and then employed *han'gŭl* directly for some. Since literary Chinese was accessible to both Ming and Japanese readerships and were used by both these forces to communication with Korean citizens, *han'gŭl* offered exclusivity for the king as part of a vertical communication to his subjects. Its appearance coincides with a key moment in international relations when Chinese and Japanese authorities began peace talks with each other about Korea's fate. Kim Haboush proposes that the king realised that Koreans needed to speak for, and to, themselves. This is a powerful argument, but the evidence cited suggests that these developments were largely haphazard. After all, the chapter concludes by noting that literary Chinese retained its communicative dominance in the inscriptional space through the subsequent Manchu crises, although she does not elaborate on how it operated there. Kim Haboush's principal claim here is that Korean had at least entered the inscriptional space where it could then interact with literary Chinese as another vehicle for conversations about Korean identity. Interesting but likewise not fully explored is the gender implications of her description of *han'gŭl* as a script that was perceived as secret, local and female in opposition to Chinese as transnational, public and male. How was *han'gŭl*, potentially problematic if it was understood as a language of women, and thus the subordinated or vulnerable, re-cast to be a viable medium of native expression – perhaps as familial and domestic? A potentially explosive discovery in the documents is Hideyoshi's reference to plans to supply local 'service women' for invading Japanese men in Korea. This represents a topic that warrants further investigation in the sources, but Kim Haboush simply observes that women who were raped were harshly treated by local communities, perhaps because their presence reminded men of their failure to protect them and the symbolic purity of the nation.

With Chapter Five, the focus shifts to commemorative sites, in particular, dream journeys, one literary genre that, Kim Haboush argues, gave space for articulation of grief and sorrow. While the genre pre-dated the Imjin conflict, she insists upon the special role that those produced after the war held in providing a site for continuing discussions about the role of the individual and the state. In these texts, dead bodies that speak to the living and which remain unburied preoccupied the male writers who created these texts for their male readers. Notable, however, is the role of women's voices and emotions in such texts, as the works question the established Confucian cultural and political order, the meaning of the sacrifices made by soldiers and their leaders, and asks whether the living were frankly good enough to bury the dead. Emotional expressions and practices are foregrounded within this literature, where

ghost soldiers can demand a narrator tell their story because of the power of his poetry to move them when they were alive, and where others, ordinary victims, lament their struggle to be recognised and buried as individuals and as members of families who will remember them. Two further works concern the period of the Manchu invasions, the only place in the work where these later events take centre stage. Kim Haboush argues that the psychological scar of the king's submission to these powerful 'barbarians' was perhaps greater, and more shameful, to Chosŏn's political and intellectual elite, than that left by the Imjin wars. The continuing dishonour of bearing tribute to these rulers sharpened, she argues, Korea's own sense of itself as the last bastion of Confucian culture, as the small brilliant centre (*sojungbwa* 소중화). The literature she explores here voices critiques made by a spectral female presence about the male political order as a 'bankruptcy of patriarchy' (144), one that compels some women to take on male virtues themselves. Fruitfully connecting these literary works to other ritual and material practices of memory, and to the production of commemorative monuments and acts established in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century, will have to await another scholar.

This is a very important and ambitious work, at times saddening that Kim Haboush was unable to map out fully all the many exciting ideas that it contains, and to provide coherence across the chapters' analyses. Scholars will nonetheless be very grateful for what we do have, and for the team effort of Kim Haboush's colleagues, friends and family who have made sure we can all benefit from her intellectual labours. Bringing insights from cultural, emotional and literary approaches, its best legacy should be to serve as powerful impetus to new directions, questions and methodologies in this field.