

UCLA

Library Prize for Undergraduate Research

Title

A Clash of Perceptions: Deceit in the Ming-Japan Negotiation During the Imjin War

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2jt011ng>

Author

Ha, Yiming

Publication Date

2015-06-12

Undergraduate

Reflective Essay

I chose to write my thesis on the negotiations of Imjin War because it is not very well known in the West. Yet is an interesting historical episode, as the entire process was driven by lies and deception and lasted three years before it finally came to an end. In writing this thesis, I had to rely heavily on primary sources. The Imjin War was very well documented by the three sides who fought it – the Koreans, Japanese, and the Chinese – and a wealth of information still exists today. My faculty adviser Professor Hirano and the resource librarians at Young Research Library's East Asian Library guided me to a list of primary sources from all three countries and from there the project really took off. These primary sources were extremely detailed, containing information on every aspect of the war, and supplied me with most of what I needed to support my analysis. Two of the primary sources I used in my paper – the *Guo Que* and the *Nihon Gaishi* were obtained relatively late into the project after I realized the need to use them in supplementing portions of my narrative. I was led to both of them through a secondary source, in which they were quoted and referred to many times. My secondary sources mostly came the bibliographies of the two books I already owned on this topic. I noted down sources which I thought were useful and solicited my advisor's help in finding other sources to strengthen parts of my argument that was weak.

If finding the sources were easy, then selecting which ones to use proved to be more challenging, since there were just so many sources at my disposal. The core of my paper would rely on primary sources, and I had initially picked out five which I was sure I would use. Two more was added to the list later. These sources were chosen because they contained relevant information that could be used to shed light on the background of the war and strengthen my

analysis, and at the same time, their content was easy for me to access. The head of the East Asian Library Su Chen and the Chinese Studies librarian Hong Cheng were instrumental in helping me choose which sources I should use and which sources I should avoid. They advised me to use the sources that I already had instead of burdening myself with trying to find new primary sources. In particular, they argued against my using of the *Veritable Records of the Ming*, which in their opinion was simply too long and contained too much information.

The secondary sources took longer to sort out, as I had to not only read the paper but also focus on the author's analysis to see if it would in any way help me construct my own argument, which were obtained from studying the primary sources. Most of the first quarter was spent looking through these sources and selecting which ones I thought were useful. The initial secondary sources I selected were general accounts of the war in English and English translations of primary source documents (with the author's own interpretation and analysis). Research articles on the topic, texts on more specific aspects of the war, and foreign language source were found on an as needed basis once I had started to write. In particular, I had to focus on secondary sources that would give me a good account of the war from the Japanese perspective, since the Japanese primary sources covering the war are not as comprehensive as their Chinese and Korean counterparts. By the time I finished presenting my argument in the body section, there was no more need to find new sources. The sources I had compiled up to that point worked well, with the primary sources forming the backbone of my argument and secondary sources providing support, and were subsequently incorporated into my bibliography.

ABSTRACT

In 1593, the Chinese and Japanese armies fighting in Korea in the Imjin War (1592-1598) settled down and began negotiating for a peaceful solution to end the conflict. Yet the three year long negotiations came to be plagued by deception and misrepresentation made purposely by the negotiators to their respective sovereigns, culminating in the Chinese investiture of Toyotomi Hideyoshi as the vassal King of Japan in 1596, which to the Chinese was considered an honor but was an insult to Hideyoshi himself, who promptly sent his troops back to Korea to renew the invasion. This paper studies the problems faced by the lead negotiators which forced them to rely on deception, focusing on the issue of the Chinese perception of others as uncivilized, the political superstructure that was built around that perception, and how Hideyoshi attempted to challenge the Chinese world order in his approach to diplomacy.

Keywords: China, Japan, Korea, Negotiations, Imjin War

**A Clash of Perceptions:
Deceit in the Ming-Japan Negotiation
During the Imjin War**

Yiming Ha

History Departmental Honors Thesis
University of California, Los Angeles

March 17, 2015

Thesis Advisor:

Katsuya Hirano | History

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Sources	5
Background: The Imjin War	7
The Negotiations Begin	13
The Issue of Perception	28
Land of Dwarves: Ancient Views of Japan.....	30
A New World Order	37
Role of the Negotiators	40
The Aftermath	45
Conclusion	49
Bibliography	54

A Note on Romanization:

This paper uses the Pinyin Romanization system developed by Mainland China for all Chinese terms rather than the Wade-Giles system. For Korean terms, the Revised Romanization of Korean, the official Romanization system of South Korea launched in 2000, will be used instead of the older McCune-Reischauer system. Japanese terms will be Romanized using the Hepburn system, the most widely used method of transcription of Japanese today. The usage of these Romanization systems will apply to all terms including personal names and location names. However, when citing English translations of primary sources, I will keep the author's original Romanizations of Chinese, Korean, and/or Japanese terms. This paper will follow East Asian naming conventions, in which the family name (surname) comes first.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of my advisor, Professor Katsuya Hirano, whose suggestions and recommendations before and during the research process proved invaluable in helping me construct a better argument and in completing this paper. In addition, I would also like to thank the resource librarians of the East Asian Library, who guided me to most of the primary sources used in this paper and took the time out to help me translate passages from Classical Chinese to English.

*“I have sent fast ships in order to urge even Korea to pay homage to the Emperor of Japan, stating that, if it does not, I shall conquer it next year. I shall take even China in hand, and have control of it during my lifetime; since [China] has become disdainful [of Japan], the work will be more exhausting.”*¹

In a letter dated July 5, 1587 to his wife, the great unifier of Japan Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) outlined his ambitious dream of bringing Korea and China under his control. Less than five years later, his armies descended upon the Korean Peninsula in a brutal invasion that ravaged much of the country, sparking what one historian calls “the First Great East Asian War”². In Korea, the war is commonly referred to as the *Imjin Waeran* - literally the “Japanese Disturbance of Imjin” [the year of the start of the invasion corresponds with the *imjin* year on the Chinese sexagenary cycle]. The Chinese call it the “Joseon Disturbance” or “Wanli’s Campaign to Aid Joseon”, while to the Japanese, the war is known as the *Bunroku Keichō no Eki* – the “Invasions of Bunroku and Keichō [both were Japanese era names]. In English, it is simply referred to as the Imjin War. Altogether, the conflict lasted six years from 1592 until 1598, saw two separate invasions attempts, and involved the Japanese force under Hideyoshi fighting the combined armies of the Joseon Kingdom and Ming China, who intervened to save her loyal Korean tributary state from being overrun by the Japanese.

Yet half of those six years actually saw little to no fighting, and was instead dominated by a lengthy negotiation process between Japan and Ming China to end the conflict peacefully as the war settled into a protracted stalemate. Despite making rapid advances inland at the onset of the invasion, by the middle of 1593, the Japanese were pushed back south to the coast due to effective Korean naval and guerilla campaigns that targeted their overstretched supply lines, as

¹ Adriana Boscaro, *101 Letters of Hideyoshi: The Private Correspondence of Toyotomi Hideyoshi* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1975), 30

² Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 5

well as the arrival of large numbers of Chinese troops after the Ming intervention. At that point, it became clear to many of Hideyoshi's high-ranking generals that a diplomatic solution had to be found. Some on the Chinese side also supported ending the war through negotiations, even if they were mistrustful of Japanese intentions, for the state treasury buckled under the huge expenditures needed to maintain such a large expeditionary force in Korea for a prolonged period of time.³

And so the negotiations started, and what followed could be described as one of the greatest diplomatic farces in history. To get the negotiation on track, the two negotiators representing China and Japan purposely deceived their masters into believing they were in the superior position and carried on this deception for three long years. This culminated in the Ming investiture of Hideyoshi as the vassal "King of Japan", which to the Ming court was a great honor afforded to the barbarian Japanese but was an insult to Hideyoshi himself, who believed all along that the Ming was coming to him to apologize. Needless to say, the negotiation was a complete failure, and less than a year after it ended, the Japanese returned to Korea and fighting resumed.

The Imjin War is not familiar to many Westerners, as serious historical study of it only began in recent years. Full texts written in English dedicated specifically to this topic are few and most of the articles written for journals and book series tend to be summaries of the entire invasion or translation of primary source documents.⁴ Greater focus is given in these English

³ Samuel Hawley, *The Imjin War: Japan's Sixteenth Century Invasion of Korea and Attempt to Conquer China* (Seoul: The Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 2005), 566

⁴ The three main English texts about the war are Stephen Turnbull's *The Samurai Invasion of Korea, 1592-1598*, written mostly from the Japanese perspective; Samuel Hawley's *The Imjin War: Japan's Sixteenth Century Invasion of Korea and Attempt to Conquer China*, written mostly from the Korean perspective; and Kenneth M. Swope's *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*, written mostly from the Chinese perspective. A new English text by John Lewis titled *Asian States and Empires: East Asian War*,

sources as to why the invasion was launched, the process of the invasion, and the reason why it failed. The negotiation is mentioned usually in the context of the invasion process, often times with little analysis to go with it. Thus, it has been relegated to a more secondary role in the whole of the war.

This study focuses specifically on the negotiation that was conducted, and in doing so I hope to not only describe the process in detail but also offer a more in-depth analysis on why it was conducted, the way it was conducted, why it ultimately failed, and the consequences it had on the development of politics in East Asia as a whole. As this study will show, misunderstandings were abundant throughout the entire negotiation process, no doubt reinforced by false claims presented purposely on the part of the negotiators to their respective sovereigns, and this misunderstanding played a key part in the negotiation's failure. A question arises then – what does “deception” and the failure to achieve peace tell us about the world of East Asian politics – relations between states, the diplomatic process, and mutual perceptions – at the time?

In answering this important question, I make two arguments: the traditional Chinese world view of others as lesser beings, and Hideyoshi's challenge to the Chinese world order in not only the way he wanted to conduct the negotiation but also in his peace terms. First, I will argue that the notion of Japanese inferiority has long been rooted in the minds of the Chinese, which governed the way the Chinese saw and dealt with the Japanese state. Since pre-imperial times, the Chinese had maintained a distinction between Hua [Chinese] and Yi [barbarians]. Based on this distinction, the Chinese first viewed themselves as superior, surrounded by lowly barbarians. Secondly, the Chinese considered their barbarian neighbors to be insufficiently

1592-1598: International Relations, Violence and Memory was recently published, containing many translations of articles written by Japanese and Korean scholars.

human.⁵ The people who inhabited the Japanese archipelago came to be referred to by the Chinese as *wō* – which in Chinese means “dwarf”. Subsequent historical events caused the negative perception of the Japanese to grow, and by the time the invasion happened in the late Ming, Chinese officials and literati all saw the Japanese as untrustworthy and barbaric. This notion no doubt played a great role in the way the Chinese wanted to conduct the negotiations.

Second, I argue that Hideyoshi’s desire to negotiate with the Ming emperor as an equal rather than a subordinate was a challenge to the Chinese tributary system, and therefore the concept of Chinese superiority. China had always identified itself as the “Celestial Empire”, the “Center of the World”, to which all other states around it acknowledged its suzerainty, became its vassal, and engaged in tributary trade. This self-image was also widely accepted by China’s neighboring states for much of its history. Naturally, the Chinese expected Hideyoshi to negotiate as an inferior and to know his place before the Son of Heaven. Hideyoshi’s peace terms were considered a fundamental challenge to the notion of Chinese superiority. Since he had won the war, Hideyoshi naturally wanted the benefits befitting a victor, which included keeping the conquered territories in Korea. He assumed that the Ming was coming to him to apologize, and being the magnanimous person he was, he would forgive them. Hideyoshi thus placed himself on the same level as the Ming emperor, which to the Chinese was as ludicrous as it was insulting.

Given that the two sides had vastly different intentions and goals, it seemed amazing that the negotiations could even start, let alone be sustained for three years. The negotiators themselves were clearly aware that the price for peace in which both sides were willing to accept could never be agreed upon – the gulf between the Chinese and the Japanese, from their

⁵ Yuri Pines, "Beasts or Humans: Pre-Imperial Origins of Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy," in *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, by eds. Reuven Amitai et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 62

perceptions of each other to their demands for peace, was simply too vast. Nonetheless, the negotiators decided to carry on. But the very lies that drove the negotiations in the first place ultimately caused it to collapse, bringing three years of deception to an almost comical end.

Sources

Central to my study will be the primary sources in Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and some in English translation, supplemented by secondary sources published in English. Although the Koreans were mostly excluded from the negotiations, Korean sources will nonetheless play a key role in understanding both the invasion and the negotiation process. This is not surprising, given that the war was fought on Korean soil and every aspect of it was very well documented by the Koreans. The main Korean primary sources I will use are the *Seonjo Sillok* [the Veritable Record of King Seonjo] and the *Seonjo Sujong Sillok* [the Revised Veritable Record of King Seonjo]. Both are part of the *Joseon Sillok* [The Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty], which recorded the everyday actions of the kings and his conversations with his ministers.⁶ The entire negotiation process, as seen through the eyes of the Koreans, as well as the thoughts and opinions of King Seonjo and his ministers, are clearly documented in these annals. In addition, I will also use of the English translation of Yu Seongryong's *The Book of Corrections*, an account of the conflict based on the personal thoughts and experiences of Yu, who was in charge of military affairs during the war. The book begins six years before the Japanese invasion, when the first Japanese envoy from Hideyoshi arrived, and ends with the death of Admiral Yi Sun-sin.

⁶ King Seonjo (1552-1608) was the ruler of Korea at the time of the Japanese invasion. The revised annals contains entries on events that were not present in the original annals. These multi-volume annals were compiled after a king's death based on records made by official court historiographers who followed the king around and other court documents. Great importance was attached on making these annals objective and neutral - even the kings could not read them for fear that they would change the records and punish the historiographers. See Hawley, *Imjin War*, 295-296

The Chinese primary sources I use are the *Ming Shi*, Gu Yingtai's *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, and Tan Qian's *Guo Que*.⁷ These three texts documents the entire war from the Chinese perspective. The *Ming Shi*, as the official history of the entire Ming Dynasty, includes only the most important details of major events due to its massive size, and is laid out in a chronological format. Some more specific details can be found in the historical biographies of the generals who participated in the war and in the chapters on Korea and Japan, but the *Ming Shi* as a whole tends to be more generalized. For this reason, I also rely on the *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo* and *Guo Que*, both of which are private histories and thus not constrained by the need to include large amounts of information across a wide range of subjects. The *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo* is organized by topic, and has a chapter dedicated specifically to the Imjin War that details the entire sequence of events. Included in *Guo Que* are many recorded court debates and memorials to the emperor which captures the atmosphere within the Chinese capital regarding the war and the negotiation.

The negotiation is also documented by the Japanese in the *Taikōki*, a somewhat romanticized biography of Hideyoshi written by his personal physician a quarter century after his death, and in the *Nihon Gaishi*, written by Rai San'yō (1781-1832), which covers Japanese history from the Taira/Minamoto clans to the Tokugawa period. These two texts will be the principle Japanese primary sources I use. Though written mostly in *kanbun*, the chapters in the *Taikōki* regarding the negotiations were written in Classical Chinese instead and the *Nihon Gaishi* as a whole was written entirely in Classical Chinese. In addition, I will make use of English translations of documents and state papers from all three countries, which includes Hideyoshi's letters, both real and forged, to the Korean King and the Ming Emperor, the Ming

⁷ The *Ming Shi* is the official history of the Ming Dynasty, completed by official Zhang Tingyu in 1739 in the subsequent Qing Dynasty. It includes information on every aspect of the dynasty – events of each emperor's reigns, administrative divisions, funeral rites, biographies of major figures, etc.

Emperor's response to Hideyoshi, as well as Hideyoshi's letters to his wife.⁸ Finally, this study will also use English secondary sources such as Samuel Hawley's *The Imjin War*, Kenneth M. Swope's *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*, John Lewis's *East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence and Memory*, and Mary Elizabeth Berry's *Hideyoshi* as supplementary material. The first two texts are both comprehensive accounts of war, Lewis's text contains articles focusing on specific aspects of the war, while the last is the English biography of Hideyoshi, the man behind the invasion.

Background: The Imjin War

By 1590, Toyotomi Hideyoshi had subjugated the Hojo Clan in the Kanto region and achieved complete domination over Japan, bringing almost a hundred years of civil war to an end. Born into a peasant family in the small village of Nakamura, Hideyoshi had gained a reputation as a capable general under the service of Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), the first of the three conquerors of Japan. When Nobunaga died in 1582, Hideyoshi picked up the mantle of unification and within eight years brought the entire country to heel. Yet despite being the supreme ruler, Hideyoshi never attained the title of *shogun* – his low birth disqualified him from that position. Instead he arranged himself to be adopted into the noble Fujiwara house and in 1585 had the court appoint him *kampaku*, “imperial regent”. Six years later, he retired and became known as *taiko*, the “retired imperial regent”.⁹

With the situation in Japan mostly stabilized, the great unifier of Japan turned his attention outwards to the nations around him. As early as 1585, Hideyoshi had entertained the

⁸ Many English translations of Japanese and Chinese texts from that era are found in Yoshi S. Kuno's *Japanese Expansion on the Asiatic Continent*, Volume 1, while translations of Hideyoshi's letters are in *101 Letters of Hideyoshi: The Private Correspondence of Toyotomi Hideyoshi*, edited and translated by Adriana Boscaro.

⁹ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 20

idea of conquering Korea and Ming China, and now that Japan was unified, Hideyoshi sought to make that a reality. The real reason for Hideyoshi's invasion remains unclear to this day and has been the subject of many debates. Among the most prominent positions advanced by historians was that Hideyoshi wanted to supplant the Ming as the dominant hegemon in East Asia, for he was well aware of the prestige and the riches involved with the tributary trade; that Hideyoshi sought to keep his daimyo under control by removing the most dangerous ones and sending them to Korea where they would exhaust their fighting strength; and that Hideyoshi wanted to use the prestige and glory of this great conquest as a means of impressing his vassals and to assert his own authority. Others have argued that the invasion was motivated by Hideyoshi's desire to trade with China, that Hideyoshi needed land to reward his followers, that he craved foreign recognition, or that he was merely fulfilling Oda Nobunaga's ambition of unifying Japan, Korea, and China.¹⁰

Whatever the reason was, in 1586, Hideyoshi dispatched his first envoy to Korea in order to have them submit to his authority. Two more envoys were dispatched between 1586 and 1590, but the Koreans gave Hideyoshi no response. It wasn't until 1590 that the first Korean envoys were sent to Japan and a congratulatory letter was handed to Hideyoshi.¹¹ Unsatisfied with content of the letter and the gifts the Koreans sent, Hideyoshi had one of his vassals deliver a return letter to the Korean envoys, in which he boasted of his own greatness. He wrote that he was conceived immediately "after she [his mother] had dreamed that the Sun had entered into her bosom" and that a fortune teller said, "I was destined to extend my authority to all parts of the world wherever the sun shines. When I came to manhood, my benevolent rule would be

¹⁰ Swope, *Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*, 63-66

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53-55

admired by nations in every direction.” A great portion of this letter was dedicated to his achievements and his benevolence, and it ended with his declaration that he would conquer the Ming. The Koreans were “instructed” to join him and to pledge their service.¹²

It was not surprising that King Seonjo immediately rebuffed Hideyoshi’s demands. Since its founding, Joseon Korea was the Ming’s most loyal vassal and considered itself to be the most civilized state after China. The Koreans had a huge appetite for everything Chinese – they modelled their court and administration along Chinese lines, used the Chinese calendar and Chinese era names, clothed their officials in Chinese robes, read and studied Chinese history, admired Chinese sages, and created their laws based on the Ming legal code.¹³ The Celestial Kingdom of China was where the Korean kings gained their legitimacy – King Seonjo told one Ming official that, “The land of our small country was given to us by the Celestial Court since the time of my ancestors.” Thus, for Hideyoshi to ask the Koreans to turn against the Ming was akin to asking a son to turn on his own father.¹⁴ To the Koreans, this was absurd.

No doubt influenced by Chinese thought, the Koreans also saw the Japanese as barbarians. China was at the apex of the world, which was followed closely by Korea, so the Koreans thought lowly of others in the first place.¹⁵ The behavior of the Japanese and the various faux pas they committed during this initial round of diplomacy only strengthened the Korean

¹² Yoshi S. Kuno, *Japanese Expansion on the Asiatic Continent: A Study in the History of Japan with Special References to Her International Relations with China, Korea, and Russia*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937), 303

¹³ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 54-55

¹⁴ *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 2 (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoem, 1969), 3 (5/6/Seonjo 26, vol. 39)

¹⁵ The Koreans never diplomatically stated they were better than other Chinese tributaries, but privately they held themselves in high regard – second only to China because of their high attainment of Chinese learning. In the *Jungjong Sillok*, the following passage is recorded: “Our country is remote, in the eyes of China, we are no different from Annan and Jiaozhi [modern day Vietnam], but the Chinese does not look down on us as barbarians, and instead praise us as Little China.” Hawley, *Imjin War*, 55; *Jungjong Sillok*, vol. 1, (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonheom, 1969), 633 (26/12/Jungjong 7, vol. 17)

view that Japanese were rude and uncouth, having no knowledge of etiquette and manners. The Korean envoys were shocked and insulted at the poor way they were treated by the Japanese – they were housed in what they considered to be substandard lodgings, they had to endure a four month wait to see Hideyoshi, and there was no feast held in their honor. Yu Seongryong lambasted the Japanese, stating that, “These people, being extremely proud, behaved in the way they pleased; they act as if they had no one around them.” When they returned, the envoys described Hideyoshi as small and unattractive, and they were particularly appalled by his manners.¹⁶

The official reply of King Seonjo was simple – the Koreans would not desert the Ming and join Hideyoshi in his invasion. In his reply, the King wrote:

As for our kingdom, generation after generation, we have reverently adhere and attended to all duties and obligations due from a tributary state of Chung-Chao [China]. In fact, Chung-Chao has always regarded our kingdom as a part of its own nation. Our two nations have already kept each other informed of all national events and affairs. Each has given ready assistance when the other has suffered calamity or has been in trouble. Our two nations have acted as a single family, maintaining the relationship of father and son as well as that of ruler and subject... We shall certainly not desert ‘our lord and father nation’ [China] and join with a neighboring nation in her unjust and unwise military undertaking... We shall certainly not take up arms against the supreme nation.¹⁷

The King concluded the letter by chastising Hideyoshi, expressing shock and disbelief that the Japanese could even think of such an idea.

With his peaceful offer rejected, Hideyoshi began preparing for his invasion in the spring of 1592. If diplomacy failed to make the Koreans bow to him, he would have to make them submit using force. An invasion headquarters was established at Nagoya [present-day Karatsu on

¹⁶ Seongryong Yu, *The Book of Corrections: Reflections on the National Crisis during the Japanese Invasion of Korea, 1592-1598*, trans. Choi Byonghyon. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 29-30. It was customary for the Korean king to hold a lavish banquet to honor foreign envoys, so the Korean envoys expected the Japanese to do the same in return. When Hideyoshi met with the Korean envoys, he reportedly held his baby son in his arms and laughed when the child urinated on him.

¹⁷ Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, 304

Kyushu] and a massive army was drawn from the various daimyo that Hideyoshi now lorded over. A total of 158,800 men was assembled for the first invasion, divided into eight contingents. The first three contingents led by Konishi Yukinaga, Kato Kiyomasa, and Kuroda Nagamasa were tasked with capturing Seoul as fast as they could while the rest served as reinforcements.¹⁸ From Nagoya, the invasion force moved to the island of Tsushima, where they waited for ideal weather conditions before setting sail for Korea. On May 23, 1592 [1592.4.15 lunar], the Japanese departed Tsushima and the war began.

The Koreans were ill-prepared for the invasion. Since its founding in 1392, the Joseon had not engaged in any major military conflicts. Two centuries of peace had deteriorated the army, which suffered everything from poor discipline of the soldiers to rampant corruption among the generals. In his *Book of Corrections*, Yu Seongryong lamented the poor state of the military administration, stating that the government failed to properly train soldiers and employ capable commanders, thus losing the war.¹⁹ By contrast, the Japanese army was a formidable force, hardened by decades of civil war and led by fierce generals who had participated in Hideyoshi's campaigns to unify the country. The arquebus, which Hideyoshi and his predecessor Oda Nobunaga used extensively to great effect in Japan, decimated the poorly trained Korean army. Fortress after fortress fell to the Japanese, and those Korean commanders who did not flee perished with their troops in battle.

On the morning of June 9 [1592.4.30 lunar], amidst heavy rain and against the advice of most of his officials, the King Seonjo along with his family and the entire court quietly slipped out of the capital Seoul and made for the northern capital of Pyongyang.²⁰ Four days later, the

¹⁸ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 99

¹⁹ Yu, *Book of Corrections*, 36

²⁰ *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoem, 1969), 484 (30/4/Seonjo 25, vol. 26).

first Japanese army under Konishi Yukinaga triumphantly entered the city and was soon followed by other armies.²¹ The Japanese force continued northward, shattering the Korean defenses along the Imjin River (a river between Seoul and Pyeongyang). On July 19 [1592.6.11 lunar], King Seonjo fled Pyeongyang as the Japanese approached, making first for Yongbyeong then for Uiju along the Chinese border. Pyeongyang fell to Konishi shortly after. Meanwhile, in the northern Hamgyeong Province, the two royal princes Imhae and Sunhwa, who had been sent there to organize local resistance, were captured along with their entire entourages by Kato Kiyomasa.²²

King Seonjo repeatedly implored the Ming to send reinforcements, but the initial Ming response was muted. The Ming court was confused as to how Korea could be overrun within such a short period of time and there was some suspicion that the Koreans were working together with the Japanese.²³ More importantly, however, the Ming was dealing with a major rebellion in Ningxia which broke out just a month prior to the Japanese invasion, a rebellion that took almost six months to suppress.²⁴ Some time passed before the Ming realized the gravity of the situation in Korea, and a small relief force of three thousand men, composed mostly of cavalry, under Zu Chengxun was dispatched to Korea in August while a bigger expeditionary force was being mobilized. The overconfident Zu, however, rushed into Pyeongyang and his army was annihilated by the Japanese.²⁵

In October, Li Rusong, the general who successfully quelled the Ningxia revolt, was appointed supreme commander of the eastern expeditionary force with civilian official Song

²¹ Ibid., 486 (3/5/Seonjo 25, vol. 26); Hawley, *Imjin War*, 165-166

²² Ibid., 497 (11/6/Seonjo 25, vol. 27); Yu, *Book of Corrections*, 87

²³ Yu, *Book of Corrections*, 33

²⁴ *Ming Shi*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 275 (vol. 20, Shenzong 1)

²⁵ *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 247

Yingchang as military commissioner. The Ming army, numbering almost forty-thousand, arrived in Korea in January of 1593 [December 1592 lunar] to the warm welcome of King Seonjo.²⁶ Supreme Commander Li used a ruse to deceive Konishi into thinking the Ming was prepared to negotiate for peace, and the Japanese did not realize that the Ming army had arrived until it was upon them. On February 8, 1593 [1593.1.8 lunar], a combined Ming and Korean army began their assault on Pyeongyang, driving the Japanese into the inner citadel. Konishi and what remained of his dispirited army evacuated the city that night.²⁷ Finally, it seemed, the tides of war was beginning to change.

After retaking Pyeongyang and Kaeseong, however, Li grew overconfident and led his army against a superior Japanese force at Byeokjegwan, where he suffered heavy casualties and was defeated. Li grew more cautious afterwards, and he allowed the Japanese safe passage south to Busan if they gave up Seoul without a fight. The Japanese, with no supplies and low morale, agreed and on May 20th [1593.4.20], the Ming army entered Seoul.²⁸ Much to the dissatisfaction of the Koreans, Li Rusong refused to give chase to the retreating Japanese. King Seonjo would return to Seoul in November [October 1593 lunar], a full sixteen months after he abandoned the city.²⁹

The Negotiations Begin:

²⁶ Yu, *Book of Corrections*, 155. Prior to being appointed to civilian military commissioner, Song Yingchang served in the investigation bureau (*Dali si*), then as right deputy minister of works, and finally as right deputy minister of war. Song was known to be a hawkish official who advocated for military action instead of peace. He was ultimately forced to resign and dismissed from the government for his opposition to the negotiation. See *Guo Que*, vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 4676, 4682, and 4724

²⁷ Yu, *Book of Corrections*, 155

²⁸ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 340-341, 344

²⁹ Yu, *Book of Corrections*, 189

The Japanese retreat from Seoul ended the first invasion and signaled the start of the negotiation process. At that point, the Japanese invasion had already stalled. Even without the Ming exerting pressure, the rapid advance of the Japanese caused their supply lines to overstretch. Once the shock of the invasion wore off, the Korean army and volunteer militias were beginning to rally, launching guerrilla attacks that were denying the Japanese supplies and in the process recapturing some lost cities. More importantly, Admiral Yi Sun-sin and what remained of the Joseon navy went on the offensive, defeating the larger Japanese fleet in multiple engagements and thus cutting off the vital supply route from Japan.³⁰ Although the Japanese seemed invincible on land, the Korean navy with its better ships, including the famous turtle ships, and superior naval tactics denied the Japanese control of the seas.

For the Japanese commanders, the lack of supplies was problematic. The first to recognize this was Konishi Yukinaga. Not surprisingly, it was also he who first attempted negotiations with the Ming. Realizing that Hideyoshi's invasion would no longer succeed, Konishi was eager to sue for peace and in the process work out as many benefits as he could for Hideyoshi and himself. Here the interests of Konishi and the Chinese peace party converged, for they were never really interested in defeating the Japanese as they were trying to keep the Japanese away from China's borders. If that could be accomplished through negotiations, then why waste precious money on war? By 1592, the Ming was running on a budget deficit of nearly a million taels of silver – 4,512,000 taels in revenue versus 5,465,000 taels in expenditures, and

³⁰ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 240-241

continued war in Korea was only putting more strains on the treasury.³¹ Not surprisingly, the Wanli emperor was compelled to support the negotiation.

The peace party in Beijing was led by Shi Xing, who at the time served as the Minister of War, and he employed a man named Shen Weijing to handle the negotiations. Shen was not looked upon kindly by later scholars – in historiographies compiled in the subsequent Qing Dynasty, Shen Weijing was described as a “hoodlum” and a “rogue”.³² It was also clear that many Chinese did not trust him. Prior of the Battle of Pyeongyang, the Ming commander Li Rusong almost executed Shen Weijing and was only stopped from doing so by a subordinate, who argued that Shen might be useful in tricking the Japanese into negotiating so as to ambush them.³³ And if the Chinese did not trust Shen Weijing, then the Koreans trusted him even less. Throughout the negotiations, the Koreans saw Shen as a villain who was secretly collaborating with the Japanese invaders to undermine the interests of China and Korea. King Seonjo hated the man so much that he told his officials he woke up one night so angry that he wanted to kill Shen with his own hands.³⁴

For Hideyoshi, the negotiations revealed how out of touch he was with the reality of the war in Korea. Despite the fact that his army had been driven south and his navy repeatedly beaten, the invasion had not been a failure. On the contrary, it had been a success, for it cowed the Ming and the Koreans into submission, and now the Ming was sending its representatives to

³¹ Harry Miller, *State Versus Gentry in Late Ming China, 1572-1644* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 66. The figure comes from a study of Ming revenues and expenditures of the *taicang*, one of the four reserves mentioned in Ming records and probably the one accessed the most to pay out expenditures.

³² *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 247. Before serving as Minister of War, Shi Xing served as Minister of Revenue. As such, he was deeply aware of the Ming’s troubled financial situation. See *Guo Que*, vol. 5, 4655

³³ *Ming Shi*, vol. 20, 6193 (vol. 238, historical biography 126). According to the *Ming Shi*, Shen Weijing had just returned from a secret meeting with Konishi Yukinaga, who agreed to withdraw from Pyeongyang with the Taedong River as a boundary in return for Japanese access in the tributary trade system. When Li heard of this, he was livid and ordered Shen to be executed.

³⁴ *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 2, 28 (6/7/Seonjo 26, vol. 40)

apologize to him. This is evident in a letter he sent to his wife O-ne on June 21, 1593 [1593.5.22 lunar]:

The envoys of the throne have come here from the Great Ming Empire offering peace negotiations, and I have given them a note stipulating our conditions. If they agree to them all, I shall accept their apology, leave the Great Ming Empire and Korea to act just as such foreign countries please, and then make a triumphal return. However, I have given orders to my men to do some construction work and other things in Korea, and [I shall not see you for a while, but] I shall certainly see you around the 7th or the 8th month.³⁵

The note that Hideyoshi mentioned in the letter was a list of seven conditions that he laid out for ending the conflict peacefully. The seven conditions were:

1. The oath of peace shall be not be violated by either side [China and Japan], it shall remain in effect even if heaven and earth ends, with no violations or changes. That being the case, [Japan] will welcome a daughter of the Great Ming emperor to become the empress of the Japanese emperor.
2. In light of the discord between our two countries over the years, the Kangō plan [licensed trade between the Ming and Japan] has been severed in recent years. Henceforth, government and trade ships shall be able to travel freely between the two countries.
3. There shall be no intention to change the good will and friendship between the Great Ming and Japan. The ministers of authority of the two nations shall exchange sworn oaths and written statements [of this].
4. The first division of our troops were dispatched to conquer Korea. Presently, in order to control the country and pacify the people, we will send abled military leaders there. However, if all foregoing stipulations are accepted, then in spite of the fact that Korea has been rebellious against our country, we will return four of the eight provinces, including the national capital, back to the King of Korea as a sign of goodwill towards the Great Ming. Additional details will be given by our four representatives.
5. When the four provinces are returned, Korea shall send one royal prince and one or two state ministers across the ocean to us as hostages.
6. In the previous year [1592], we captured two Korean royal princes alive. Because of their high-birth, they do not fit in with the commoners. Our four representatives shall discuss with Shen Weijing about their return home.

³⁵ Boscaro, *101 Letters of Hideyoshi*, 56

7. The ministers of authority in Korea shall make sworn statements in written form that they will, generation after generation, never disobey or refuse [Japan]. Our four representatives will discuss the details with the envoys of the Great Ming.

28th day, 6th month, Bunroku 2 [1593], Hideyoshi (sealed in vermillion)³⁶

The above seven terms were not presented directly to the Ming envoys, but rather to Konishi Yukinaga, Otani Yoshitsugu, Mashita Nagamori, and Ishida Mitsunari, the four representatives mentioned above that Hideyoshi designated to handle the negotiations on his behalf.³⁷ In reality, it was Konishi who took the most active role in negotiating with the Ming and he knew that the demands Hideyoshi presented would never be accepted by the Chinese. He therefore needed to find a more pragmatic approach to solve this impasse and present the demands to the Ming envoys so the negotiation could continue.

The Ming envoys, as it turned out, were not really envoys at all. Civilian military commissioner Song Yingchang had two generals – Xie Yongzi and Xu Yiguan - disguise themselves as imperial envoys and sent them along with Shen Weijing to Japan to negotiate with Konishi.³⁸ Hideyoshi, believing that the envoys had come to apologize, received them personally in Nagoya with great fanfare and made every effort to entertain and impress them with his grandeur. All the high-ranking daimyo were ordered to attend banquets in the envoys' honor, gifts of every kind were lavished upon them, Hideyoshi personally treated them to a tea ceremony in his golden teahouse, and the entertainment also included a massive waterborne parade involving hundreds of opulent ships.³⁹ Through the reception of the envoys, Hideyoshi no

³⁶ *Taikōki* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), 447-448

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 439

³⁸ *Seonjo Sujong Sillok* (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoem, 1969), 638-639 (1/4/Seonjo 26, vol. 27)

³⁹ The ships were sculled by singing oarsmen and each ship bore a daimyo's crest and the imperial chrysanthemum seal. Its bows were decorated with a variety of spears and halberds, all inlaid with pearls and gold. *Taikōki* 432-436, 443-445; William Elliot Griffis, *Corea: The Hermit Nation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), 124

doubt wanted to show the Chinese how wealthy and powerful he was, and he wanted the Chinese to believe that Japan was indeed an equal of the Ming.

When it came to negotiations, however, Hideyoshi was nowhere to be seen. Instead, the two envoys met with Konishi and the monk Genso Keitetsu, who was an expert in written Chinese and thus served as the scribe for the Japanese. The meeting began amicably enough, with the two sides engaged in a discussion about Chinese paintings. But the topic soon shifted to the presence of Japanese troops in Korea, and Genso wrote that, “Korean troops in Jeolla and Gyeongsan Province obstructed the road and prevented our troops from withdrawing. It is the Koreans who are absurd. As a result of this, our troops could not withdraw.” The Japanese will withdraw, Genso continued, when the Ming agrees to the marriage of the Wanli emperor’s daughter to the Japanese emperor as a sign of sincerity. If the Ming agrees to this, then Japan would be willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of the Ming emperor. The Japanese would even send troops to help the Ming deal with the Jurchen problem.

The Chinese knew, of course, that this was not true. But whatever opinions the envoys had, they kept to themselves, for they were there to clear an impasse and so they went along with Genso and flattered the Japanese. Korea’s absurdity and their role in preventing the Japanese army from retreating would be reported to Beijing and investigated, they told Genso. Regarding Japan’s offer to help fight the Jurchens, the envoys graciously accepted should the need arise, though they were careful to point out that for the past ten years, the Jurchens had been at peace with the Ming.

Genso then shifted the blame of the war to the Koreans. Japan’s only desire had been to have good relations with the Ming, he wrote, and Korean king agreed through his envoys to Japan three years ago to mediate on Hideyoshi’s behalf. However, for three years the Koreans

did nothing, so Hideyoshi sent troops. Japan had no desire to attack the Ming, but only wanted to send a message to China directly, yet the Koreans and the Ming obstructed our passage. If the Ming continues to tolerate Korea's absurdity, then Hideyoshi would have no choice but to lead his troops to Liaodong to appeal to the Chinese emperor in person.

The Ming envoys also did not object to this version of events. China was well aware of the situation, they replied, and thus dispatched envoys to investigate. We now know the *taiko*'s sincerity in desiring only peace and good relations, and we will report this to the emperor. Throughout the conversation, Genso repeatedly advanced Hideyoshi's demand of a marriage between the Wanli emperor's daughter and the Japanese emperor as a sign of sincerity, though the envoys avoided discussing this issue at every turn.⁴⁰ If the envoys found Hideyoshi's remaining six demands to be absurd, then this demand would have been even more ludicrous.

However, since the list of demands were not presented directly to the envoys but rather to Hideyoshi's four designated representatives, Konishi told the envoys, perhaps not incorrectly, that conditions themselves served only as a starting point and could be negotiated upon.⁴¹ But since Hideyoshi never expressed just how much he was willing to compromise on, Konishi took the liberty of doing that himself. Accompanying the list of demands was a document Hideyoshi presented to his representatives. Much like the letter he sent to the Koreans before the invasion began, in this letter Hideyoshi once more boasted of his own greatness – how the Sun entered his mother's bosom in a dream when he was conceived, how a fortune teller said he would be destined to rule over the 'four seas'. Hideyoshi not only unified Japan, crushing all those who stood in his way, and made the country prosperous, but he also did the Chinese a great favor by

⁴⁰ *Taikōki*, 436-441

⁴¹ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 366

destroying the Japanese pirates who had long plagued the Chinese coast. Yet the Chinese, he wrote, “entirely ignored our great service and have expressed neither appreciation nor gratitude.” Therefore, he dispatched troops to punish the Chinese. The remainder of the letter detailed Korea’s treachery in promising to mediate between China and Japan but not doing so, and again when it promised safe passage to Japanese troops marching on China but obstructed the way when the Japanese landed. The war then, according to Hideyoshi, was not the fault of Japan. He only wanted the appreciation which was due to him from the Chinese and the Koreans prevented him from doing so. Therefore, it was the Koreans who sparked the war between China and Japan.⁴²

Hideyoshi no doubt wanted the document presented to the envoys, who would in turn present it to the Wanli emperor. But the document never reached Beijing. What reached there instead was a very different letter also in Hideyoshi’s name, forged jointly by Konishi Yukinaga and Shen Weijing. Rather than opine about his greatness, however, in this letter Hideyoshi instead expressed his submission to the Ming. The opening line read: “The former *kampaku* of Japan, [Your Majesty’s] subject Taira no Hideyoshi prostrates in reverence before Your Majesty and submits this document to express his gratitude.” In it, Hideyoshi stated that his only desire had been to become a child of the Ming emperor, and it was the Koreans who prevented him from doing so by not relaying his desires to the Chinese, and so forcing him to attack them. When peace was negotiated at Pyeongyang between Shen Weijing and Konishi Yukinaga, it was the Koreans whose deceit led to renewed conflict. Even so, the Japanese had shown their sincerity by retreating and giving back the Koreans their land. Now, the letter stated, “We have dispatched General Konishi Hida no Kami [Naito Tadatoshi] to request a dragon seal from the

⁴² *Taikōki*, 448-450. Translation found in Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, 329-332

Celestial Kingdom so as to safeguard the glory of Japan. I prostrate myself and I beg Your Majesty...to bestow on me the title of an imperially invested vassal king.”⁴³

Naito Tadatoshi, more commonly known by his Christian name Naito Joan, was a trusted servant of Konishi Yukinaga and accompanied Shen Weijing and the two Chinese envoys back to China.⁴⁴ Naito's journey to Beijing, as it turned out, would take almost a year. While the two envoys were meeting with Konishi in Japan, the Japanese forces still remaining in Korea launched an assault on the fortress city of Jinju, which they had failed to take in a previous attack. The Koreans resisted bravely for a week and when it finally fell on July 26 [1593.6.28 lunar], the Japanese soldiers massacred every living being within the city. The Koreans estimate that nearly sixty to seventy thousand people lost their lives, many of them committing suicide by drowning themselves in the Nam River as the Japanese breached the walls.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, the Chinese were livid that the Japanese would commit such an atrocity while peace negotiations were being conducted.

Song Yingchang sent an angry letter to Shen Weijing, accusing him of lying about the Japanese withdraw and secretly spying for the Japanese, and threatened to report him to the Ministry of War. Shen replied that the Japanese attacked Jinju because they were angry about their repeated loss at sea and at Korean guerillas targeting their troops. Now that Jinju had fallen, the Japanese's thirst for revenge was quenched. Shen was also summoned by Li Rusong, who

⁴³ The forged document can be found in the *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 2, 221 (11/2/Seonjo 27, vol. 48). Partial English translation is available in Jurgis Elisonas, "The Inseparable Trinity: Japan's Relationship with China and Korea," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, Volume 4: Early Modern Japan, eds. John Whitney Hall et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 283. In Chinese and Korean sources, Toyotomi Hideyoshi is often referred to as Ping Xiu Ji or Taira no Hideyoshi in Japanese (平秀吉).

⁴⁴ Chinese and Korean sources refer to him as Xiao Xi Fei (小西飛).

⁴⁵ *Seonjo Sujong Sillok*, 640-641 (1/6/Seonjo 26, vol. 27). The Second Battle of Jinju is considered to be the worst atrocity of the war. In his *Book of Corrections*, Yu Seongryong wrote that, "More people died in Chinju [Jinju] than in any other battle during the Japanese invasion." See Yu, *Book of Corrections*, 188.

demanded an explanation on why the Japanese were advancing into Jeolla Province. Shen said that that was not true, Japanese only attacked Jinju and they had no intention to attack Jeolla.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that the negotiations didn't immediately stop after the Jinju massacre. Surely, an atrocity on such a scale committed while peace negotiations were taking place should have had an immediate effect. Nonetheless, despite some initial anger, the Chinese decided to accept Shen Weijing's explanation and dropped the matter entirely.

Naito Joan, however, continued to be delayed in Korea and then in China for almost a year and a half. Lingering Chinese suspicions about Japanese intentions, particularly after the Jinju massacre, prevented him from moving forward. He traveled to Seoul, then Anju, and finally to Liaodong, where he was to hold until permission was given for him to enter Beijing.⁴⁷ While Naito waited, Kato Kiyomasa approached the Chinese and Koreans with Hideyoshi's original demands, apparently angered by the fact that Konishi was twisting them. Kato wrote to the Chinese that Konishi had lied – what he asked for was not Hideyoshi's demands. Hideyoshi had no intention of becoming a mere vassal of the Ming and Kato invited the Chinese to resend envoys to ask the *taiko* himself.⁴⁸ The Chinese did not believe him, suspecting that he was merely trying to sabotage the negotiations. The Koreans believed that Kato's actions was further proof of Japanese duplicity, but they had already been forced to support the negotiations under heavy Chinese pressure. Ultimately, Konishi had Hideyoshi recall Kato back to Japan for obstructing the negotiation.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 640 (1/6/Seonjo 26, vol. 27); *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 2, 43-44 (18/7/Seonjo 26, vol. 40). However, according to the *Nihon Gaishi*, when Shen Weijing asked Konishi to explain the attack on Jinju, Konishi angrily rebuked Shen Weijing by asking why large numbers of Ming troops still remained in Korea. See *Nihon Gaishi* (Osaka: T. Tanaka, 1900), 27 (vol. 16, Hideyoshi 2).

⁴⁷ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 371

⁴⁸ *Seonjo Sujong Sillok*, 654 (1/3/Seonjo 28, vol.29)

The issue of investiture and trade was hotly debated by the Chinese court in Beijing. Many were of the opinion that Hideyoshi should be granted neither rank nor trade, with only Shi Xing and a small minority of officials advocating investiture. Censor Yang Shaocheng submitted a lengthy memorial to the Wanli Emperor, decrying any plans for investiture:

During the reign of Emperor Taizu, we have repeatedly denied the Japanese [sending] tribute, which was a very farsighted decision. During the reign of Yongle, the Japanese would occasionally send one tribute, then afterwards they would gradually disregard the original rules. Since then, the Japanese have pried into our interior, frequently plundering and looting. By the end of the Jiajing reign, the entire eastern coast had suffered even more. Was the root of all this not caused by offering the Japanese investiture and tribute? Now the *kampaku* is insincerely deferring to us, and after sending us a memorial requesting investiture, how can we refuse? Our country's misfortune will surely start from this. Moreover, the *kampaku* murdered his master and usurped the country, and the Heavens will surely punish him. His people wishes to eat his meat and sleep on his skin, but did not do so out of fear. Our country uses righteousness to rule over the hundred barbarians, how can we allow a usurper to take advantage of our Celestial Empire's reputation? We must immediately cease any discussions on investiture, order Joseon to drill troops for defense, withdrawal our troops to the border and wait, and the *kampaku* will surely be defeated soon.⁴⁹

Among those who opposed investiture were many major officials, and the *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo* listed eight who submitted similar memorials arguing against investiture. The governor of the Liaoning area memorialized the throne stating that the situation with the Japanese had still not been decided, so there should be no talk of investiture. Seeing so many ministers oppose peace, Shi Xing redoubled his efforts at convincing the emperor, and Wanli eventually lashed out at his ministers for opposing peace.⁵⁰ After much debate, the court settled on a compromise by giving Hideyoshi a title, but refusing to allow him participation in tributary trade.

In January of 1595, Naito Joan was finally allowed to enter Beijing. By then, the Chinese had received both the forged letter of submission purportedly written by Hideyoshi and a letter from King Seonjo declaring his support for the negotiations.⁵¹ Naito was summoned to the

⁴⁹ *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 248

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Guo Que*, vol. 5, 4743. The actual date on which Naito Joan entered Beijing varies depending on the source. The *Ming Shilu*, the Veritable Records of the Ming, states he was called to Beijing on the lunar date 9/Wanli 21 [1593].

Forbidden City for an audience with the court and the Wanli emperor laid before him the Chinese conditions for peace. The Chinese terms were simple:

1. All Japanese [troops] must immediately return home.
2. Hideyoshi will be invested as vassal king, but will not be allowed to engage in tributary trade.
3. Japan must swear never to attack Korea again.⁵²

Naito Joan accepted the conditions immediately and made an oath that Japan would abide by them. Satisfied, the Ming court began preparing the investiture items – imperial documents conferring the title on Hideyoshi, crown and robes, and a golden seal. Li Zongcheng, the Marquis of Linhuai, was appointed the chief envoy, and Yang Fangheng, the capital military commissioner, would serve as his assistant. Shen Weijing was to travel with them to Japan as well.⁵³

Also in 1595, Konishi returned to Japan to give Hideyoshi a report on the progress of the negotiations.⁵⁴ There, Hideyoshi presented to Konishi a second set of peace terms:

1c.) I have received information that Shen Weijing appeared at Konishi Yukinaga's camp at Ungch'on in southern Choson and relayed the Great Ming terms for peace. I have decided to obey the Ming Emperor's orders and forgive Choson's treachery provided the following conditions are met: i) Choson must send one prince to Japan as my servant; ii) of the eight provinces of Choson, four will be annexed to Japan, as prescribed previously, iii) when the prince comes to Japan, two ministers will accompany him and attend on the prince in alternative shifts

2c) On the arrival of Shen Weijing and the Choson prince at the Ungch'on camp, ten of the fifteen fortresses built by the Japanese will be destroyed immediately.

Both the *Ming Shi* and the *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo* gives the lunar month 9/Wanli 22 [1594] without the day. *Guo Que* states that Naito Joan entered Beijing on the lunar date 18/12/Wanli 22 [January 27, 1595]. The *Nihon Gaishi* gives the lunar month 10 in 1594, although it gives no day.

⁵² *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 248

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 2, 496 (10/5/Seonjo 28, vol. 63) and vol. 2, 516 (22/6/Seonjo 28)

3c) We are prepared to forgive Choson its rebellion and make peace, because the Ming Emperor has so strongly urged us to do so. The [Ming] state letter will be delivered to Japan by Ming's Imperial Envoy. Henceforth, all diplomatic and trade ships between the two countries will be recognized by a tally stamped with a gold seal.

22nd day, 5th month Bunroku 4 [1595] Hideyoshi (sealed in vermilion)⁵⁵

The demand for a Ming princess was dropped in this second set of demands, and Hideyoshi replaced sworn oaths of peace with state papers. All the other demands, such as the southern four provinces of Korea and a Korean prince as hostage, remained the same. Konishi, however, did not relay this new peace proposal to the Chinese, and the Chinese took the demolition of Japanese fortresses as a sign of withdraw rather than the reduction of troops as Hideyoshi had intended it to be.⁵⁶ Once the Chinese court heard that the Japanese had demolished their fortresses, it allowed the envoys to proceed to Japan.

However, the investiture process began badly. The main envoy Li Zongcheng, apparently fearing for his life, abandoned the mission while they were in Busan. According to the *Seonjo Sujong Sillok*, an unnamed Japanese man secretly told Li that Hideyoshi had no real intention of accepting Ming investiture. He merely wanted the envoys to come so he could hold them hostage and demand ransom. Furthermore, the Japanese man said since Li would be unable to complete his task, he would no doubt be punished by the Ming emperor.⁵⁷ After hearing this, Li became terrified and fled in disguise in the middle of the night, leaving everything behind. It is also possible that Li feared punishment for failure, since he became aware that the Japanese never intended to fully withdraw.⁵⁸ Whatever the reason was, vice envoy Yang quickly rectified the

⁵⁵ Akiko Sajima, "Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations," in *Asian States and Empires: East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence and Memory*, by ed. John B. Lewis, trans. Sanae Nakajima et al. (Florence, Kent.: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 99. Originally found in *Nanzen kyūki*, last volume, 1-7. Numbering inserted by original author.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.100

⁵⁷ *Seonjo Sujong Sillok*, 657 (1/4/Seonjo 29, vol. 30)

⁵⁸ Sajima, "Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations", 101-102

situation by taking the chief envoy's seal for himself, and an order from Beijing was sent appointing Shen Weijing as the new vice envoy. This satisfied the Japanese, and the two envoys continued to Japan.⁵⁹

On October 22, 1596 [Bunroku 5.9.2], Hideyoshi received the Chinese envoys at Osaka Castle, where he was given his patents of investiture. The next day, Hideyoshi held a celebratory feast, wearing his new Chinese crown and robes. His daimyo retainers were similarly honored with Chinese court ranks and also wore Chinese robes, including Konishi Yukinaga, who was given the title *dudu qianshi*, a title belonging to one of the five military commissioners of the Ming.⁶⁰ After the banquet, Hideyoshi summoned the monk Saisho Shotai (1548-1608) to read the Ming investiture documents for him. Konishi, well aware of their content, privately urged Saisho not to read anything that might offend Hideyoshi. Saisho did not listen. The document read:

You, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, have risen in the island country and have learned how to revere Chung-Kuo [China]. You have sent an envoy to the West in order to express your admiration of us and your devotion to us. After having crossed the great northern barrier, a myriad miles in length, your envoy has reached our imperial capital and has presented your petition to have your country become our dependent state. Your reverence and obeisance have been sincerely expressed. Our blessing and protection should be extended to the country that has shown such devotion. With our special grace, we hereby invest you as 'King of Japan' ... You, Hideyoshi, are hereby instructed reverently to conform with the imperial desire and to maintain your everlasting existence by following the imperial guidance and by cheerfully obeying our imperial commands.⁶¹

The imperial edict that went along with the patent of investiture also gave Hideyoshi little reason to be happy. In it, the Ming emperor chastised him for invading Korea, a nation that had long been loyal and faithful to China. It went on saying that the Ming was aware that Hideyoshi

⁵⁹ *Seonjo Sujong Sillok*, 657 (1/4/Seonjo 29, vol. 30). Li Zongcheng eventually made it back to Beijing, where he was arrested by the Ming secret police. Because of his rank and the meritorious deeds of his ancestors, he was only demoted and fined.

⁶⁰ *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 248

⁶¹ Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, 336

only did so because he wanted to become a servant of China, and after reviewing Hideyoshi's acts of submission and sincerity, the Ming was appointing him a vassal king in a sign of trust. Also included were the three Chinese conditions for peace that Wanli had dictated to Naito Joan, who accepted on behalf of Hideyoshi. The edict ended with a command and a warning – “You shall not deviate from our instructions, but you shall reverently obey and adhere to our imperial command. Heaven looks down on the earth below and the will and laws of Heaven are strict and severe.”⁶²

According to the *Nihon Gaishi*, after hearing the content of the documents, Hideyoshi's face changed color, he immediately cast off his crown and robes, and tore up the documents. Fuming, he shouted, “I already have Japan in my grasp. If I wanted to be king then I would be king. What is this investing me like a bearded caitiff? Moreover, if I am king, then what does that make the Celestial Kingdom?”⁶³ Hideyoshi then directed his anger at Konishi, the main negotiator for the Japanese. Summoning the latter into his presence, Hideyoshi shouted, “You dare deceive me and now our country is humiliated. I will personally executed you and the Ming envoys.” After hearing this, Konishi shivered in fear.⁶⁴

It took urgings of his retainers to finally calm Hideyoshi down. He was reminded that it would not be appropriate to kill the envoys from the Celestial Kingdom, and Konishi was only spared because members of Hideyoshi's inner circle pointed out that Otani Yoshitsugu, Mashita Nagamori, and Ishida Mitsunari, the other three representatives, were just as responsible as Konishi for the result of the negotiations. If Konishi was to be punished, then the others would

⁶² Ibid., 336-339

⁶³ *Nihon Gaishi*, vol. 5, 37-38. English translation found in Swope, *Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*, 221

⁶⁴ Ibid., 38

also have to face punishment.⁶⁵ In the end, the Ming envoys were expelled from Japan and Konishi was sent back to Korea to lead the Japanese armies for Hideyoshi's renewed assault there.

The Issue of Perception:

Many reasons have been given on why the negotiations failed. Chinese chroniclers of that period generally believed that Hideyoshi became enraged that Korea did not send one of her royal princes as an envoy.⁶⁶ The Viceroy of Jiliao Sun Kuang memorialized the throne stating that Hideyoshi did not accept investiture because he was offended a prince from Korea did not attend.⁶⁷ From Hideyoshi's spontaneous outburst of rage that was recorded in Japanese sources, it is possible that Hideyoshi indeed believed the Ming had been humbled. To him, the investiture was a sign that the Chinese was offering him a position that was equal to the Ming emperor and thus recognizing him as a major player. In fact, the *Nihon Gaishi* even stated that Hideyoshi only accepted peace because Konishi told him the Chinese wanted to appoint him 'emperor'.⁶⁸ To be appointed a vassal greatly damaged his pride. The Koreans, meanwhile, were not surprised that the negotiations failed, for they never thought the Japanese were sincere about peace in the first place. The Koreans believed that the peace talks were only a ploy used by the Japanese to spy on Korea and rest their troops. Furthermore, the Koreans believed that Hideyoshi intentionally angered the Ming emperor as a part of a scheme to force the Chinese into launching a seaborne invasion of Japan that the Japanese could then ambush and destroy.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 419-420

⁶⁶ *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 249; *Ming Shi*, vol. 27, 8295 (vol. 320, Historical Biography 208)

⁶⁷ *Guo Que*, vol. 5, 4785

⁶⁸ *Nihon Gaishi*, vol. 5, 26

⁶⁹ *Seonjo Sujong Sillok*, 660 (1/12/Seonjo 29, vol. 30)

Some modern scholars, such as Li Guangtao, still hold the position that sending envoys of inferior rank to invest Hideyoshi was the primary reason for failure. Others, such as Zheng Liangsheng and Zhu Yafei, believe that Hideyoshi desired trade above all else.⁷⁰ Zhang Qingzhou argue that Hideyoshi broke off peace talks because he thought the Ming was appointing him 'King of the Ming' instead of 'King of Japan'. Becoming a mere vassal of the Ming was thus a great insult to his pride.⁷¹ Elizabeth Berry is also of this opinion, writing that Hideyoshi craved recognition and wanted his power to be recognized by the Ming emperor.⁷² Much blame have also been laid on representatives from both sides for the eventual breakdown of peace talks. Swope contends that the negotiations were doomed to fail from the beginning since the two sides were too far apart, and that actions by Konishi and Shen were ill-conceived and poorly executed.⁷³

It is convenient for scholars today, in hindsight, to assign blame on the negotiators. With access to documents and commentaries from all three countries, historians can easily speculate on why peace talks failed. The positions above offered by historians are not incorrect, and the negotiations failed probably because of a combination of those reasons. Yet at the heart of everything lies the issue of perception - that is to say, the negotiators realized that the greatest obstacle to peace was Chinese perception of the world, and they consciously worked to get around it. Contrary to argument made by Swope that poor judgment was exercised on the part of the negotiators, and their motivation and personal reasons for supporting the negotiation aside, I

⁷⁰ Swope, *Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*, 223

⁷¹ Qingzhou Zhang, "Kangwo yuanchao zhanzheng zhong de ming ri hetan neimu," *Liaoning Daxue Xue Bao* 95 (1989): 103-104

⁷² Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 232

⁷³ Kenneth M. Swope, "Deceit, Disguise, and Dependence: China, Japan, and the Future of the Tributary System," *The International History Review* 24, no. 4 (2002): 780. Kuno was also of this opinion, writing that Konishi and Shen were deceiving each other as well as their respective leaders. See Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, 167

believe that Konishi and Shen really did understand the situation and that they used whatever they thought was necessary to circumnavigate the wide divide between China and Japan. The fact that they put in so much detailed and concentrated effort into concealing the truth and bypassing obstacles, and the fact that the negotiation came so close to achieving its intended aim, clearly shows that Konishi and Shen were not just blindly throwing lies around.

Land of Dwarves – Ancient Views of Japan:

In examining the way the Chinese conducted the negotiations and why the negotiators felt the need to misrepresent the series of events, it is necessary to first delve into Chinese perceptions of Japan. As mentioned above, the Chinese had a very Sinocentric view of the world that dictated relations with neighboring countries. In the ancient text the *Rites of Zhou (Zhou Li)*, the Chinese assigned names to foreigners based on their geographic location – Yi (夷) in the east, Rong (戎) to the west, Man (蠻) to the south, and Di (狄) to the north. Collectively, they were known as the “four barbarians” (*siyi*).⁷⁴ Included in the eastern barbarians (*dongyi*) were the Japanese. Up until early modern times, the Chinese referred to the Japanese as *wo* (倭), which means “dwarf”. This term first appeared in the pre-imperial text *Shanhaijing*, but it was in the *Book of Han*, the official history of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE-24 CE), that it was used officially to describe the land of Japan. Relegated to one short passage towards the end of the “Treatise of Geography” section, the *Book of Han* states: “In the Lelang Sea are the people of Wo. They are divided into more than a hundred different nations and they present themselves [to

⁷⁴ Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 96

China] every season.”⁷⁵ From then on up until the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Japan would be recorded in Chinese historiographies under the “Eastern Barbarian” category.

While the Chinese certainly saw the inhabitants of the island of Japan as inferior to themselves, the early usage of *wo* does not appear to be derogatory. Indeed, the term was probably not meant to be a pejorative - *wo* was simply a name for a foreign land and a foreign people, and early Chinese historiographies recorded several tribes and kingdoms on the archipelago collectively as *wo*. These included a state belonging to Queen Himiko, the nation of *Nu* (Nakoku), the nation *Gounu* (Kumaso), a nation of dwarves where the people were only three to four feet in height, a land of naked men, and a land of black-teethed people.⁷⁶ Regarding customs, the *Book of Wei* wrote that the people of *wo* were fond of diving into the water to catch fish, that their diet consisted of raw vegetables in the summers and winters, that they ate out of a basket-like vessel with their hands, walked barefoot, and that they tattooed their entire bodies.⁷⁷

The name *Nihon* (日本) first became used during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), as the growing Yamato state did not like the meaning of the term *wo* that had been used to describe them, stating that the term was inelegant.⁷⁸ The lack of any unified socio-political structure on Japan was possibly one of the reasons why the Chinese considered its inhabitants to be uncivilized, and the Yamato state, which was beginning to become more aware of its standing in the East Asian order, responded by implementing reforms which copied the Chinese political and legal systems, beginning with changing its name. Subsequent Chinese historiographies began to

⁷⁵ *Han Shu*, vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 1658 (vol. 28 part 2, Geography 2)

⁷⁶ Lu Bi, *Sanguo Zhi Jijie*, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 701 (*Sanguo Zhi* vol. 30)

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 700

⁷⁸ *Jiu Tang Shu*, vol. 16, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 5340 (vol. 199 part 1, Eastern Barbarians). The *Old Book of Tang* gave three explanations on the change of names – Yamato scholars thought *wo* was vulgar, *Nihon* was another name for *wo*, and that *Nihon* was a small country that was absorbed by *wo*.

use *Nihon*, though they were careful to note that *wo* was the old name for the island nation and Chinese scholars continued to use *wo* to describe the people who inhabited it. By the Ming Dynasty, however, it becomes apparent that the term *wo* begins to take on a much more discriminatory meaning.

During the early Ming, Japanese pirates raided all along the Chinese coast, prompting great concern from the government. The Chinese called these pirates *wokou* (Japanese/dwarf pirates), *wo yi* (Japanese/dwarf barbarians), and *wo yi kou* (Japanese/dwarf barbarian pirates). The founder of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398), repeatedly sent letters to Japan instructing the Japanese ruler to control the pirates or face war, to which the Japanese either ignored or failed to comply.⁷⁹ In 1392, however, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408) ended the Northern and Southern Courts in Japan and in 1401 sought diplomatic relations with China. Subsequently he was invested as ‘King of Japan’ and Japan was integrated into the Chinese tributary system. Under Yoshimitsu, Japanese piracy declined and a major defeat dealt to them by the Chinese in 1419 effectively ended the first wave of piracy.⁸⁰ Yoshimitsu died in 1408 and his son broke off diplomatic relations, which were not restored until 1432 by Shogun Ashikaga Yoshinori (1394-1441). Kuno noted that the relations between Ming China and Japan in the 15th and 16th century fell into two periods – from 1401 to 1408, and again from 1432 until 1547.⁸¹ During these two periods, relations between the two countries were mostly peaceful and the Japanese were allowed to engage in licensed trade (*kanhe* in Chinese and *kangō* in Japanese), for long as Japan was within the Chinese world order, they were considered civilized.

⁷⁹ Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, 87-88.

⁸⁰ Elisonas, “The Inseparable Trinity,” 242

⁸¹ Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, 107

But whatever good impression the Japanese made on the Chinese during the tributary years was quickly overshadowed by a second wave of piracy which struck the Chinese coast during the 1550s and 1560s. Unlike the previous wave, however, the majority of pirates seemed to be Chinese. The *Ming Shi* stated that for the most part, only three in ten pirates were real Japanese, while seven in ten were those who subordinated themselves to the Japanese.⁸² Nonetheless, Chinese scholars and sources continue to use the common label of *wokou* to describe them, and it is possible that local officials labeled all the armed brigands as *wokou* in order to hide their own malfeasance and to redirect antagonism to the Japanese.⁸³ In addition, the Chinese also harbored suspicions about Japanese sincerity in joining the Chinese world order and acknowledging Chinese suzerainty. The continued pirates raids and the on and off nature of tributary relationship caused the Wanli Emperor to remark at one point during the negotiations that “the Japanese are deceitful by nature.”⁸⁴ Censor Yang Shaocheng, mentioned above, also seized on this point, arguing that the Japanese pirates have plundered the Chinese coast from the reign of the Hongwu Emperor all the way to the reign of the Jiajing Emperor, and that the chief reason was that they were allowed tributary trade.⁸⁵

Chinese sources covering the war in Korea referred to Japanese leaders as *qiu* -tribal chieftains, which symbolized the uncivilized nature of the Japanese. The Japanese as whole were referred to as *wo zei* (Japanese/dwarf bandits) or *wo nu* (Japanese/dwarf slaves). It is important to note that the usage of *nu* here is a clear departure from earlier usages – whereas the *Book of Wei* used it to describe the name of a nation, Chinese writers of the Ming-Qing period used it as a pejorative for the entire Japanese people. In these writings, Hideyoshi was portrayed as a slave

⁸² *Ming Shi*, vol. 27, 8352 (vol. 322, Historical Biography 210)

⁸³ Elisonas, “The Inseparable Trinity,” 253

⁸⁴ Swope, *Dragon’s Head and a Serpent’s Tail*, 198

⁸⁵ *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 248

from Satsuma who usurped the position of *kampaku* from Oda Nobunaga's son. The Chinese considered him to be little more than a barbarian who was eager to partake in the civilized culture of the Celestial Kingdom.⁸⁶

Having been influenced so much by China, the Koreans also saw the Japanese in a similar manner. In fact, the Koreans had a hierarchy where nations were ranked based on their attainment of Chinese culture. Naturally, Korea came second after China.⁸⁷ Korean texts of that era were written in Classical Chinese and thus used the same Chinese terminology (*wo zei, wo nu*) to describe the Japanese. And also like the Ming, the Joseon state was similarly plagued by Japanese pirates during the 14th and early 15th century, though the Koreans dealt with the pirates in a much different manner. Rather than limit commerce and mount defensive expeditions as was the Chinese case, the Koreans appeased those who could control the pirates. Official Korean titles were given to pirate chieftains who surrendered and trade licenses were granted to Japanese individuals. Most trade passed through the island of Tsushima, which was ruled by the Sō clan, who grew extremely wealthy by levying transit duties and charging fees for Korean trade licenses.⁸⁸

After the Ashikaga Shoguns were invested as vassal kings by the Ming, the Koreans and Japanese were theoretically on the same level within the Chinese world order. Nonetheless, the Koreans continued to look down on the Japanese and like China attempted to regulate commerce. Trade was restricted to only three ports and the Japanese could maintain no more than sixty residential households in these three port cities, but nearly two hundred Japanese ships continued to visit Korea every year. Elisonas notes that, "Overall, the Yi dynasty's policy toward

⁸⁶ *Ming Shi*, vol. 27, 8357 (vol. 322, Historical Biography 210); Swope, *Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*, 192

⁸⁷ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 55

⁸⁸ Elisonas, "The Inseparable Trinity," 244. Not surprising, the Sō clan strongly opposed the Korea campaign.

Japan in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was marked by efforts to limit the traffic from Japan in order to reduce the expense of diplomatic intercourse, diminish the drain of resources caused by the Japanese trade, and keep under control the sometimes-unruly Japanese community in Korea. For all that, the policy was not rigid but retained the capacity for compromise and the accommodation of Japanese interests.”⁸⁹

Hideyoshi’s invasion did not radically shift the Korean perspective of Japan. They continued to believe what they had always believed about Japan, but they became even more relentless in their portrayals of the Japanese as uneducated, dwarf barbarians. Even before the invasion began, as noted above, the Koreans expressed shock and disbelief at the Japan’s lack of regard for Chinese protocol and Hideyoshi’s poor behavior in front of their diplomats. In their writings, the Koreans mocked the Japanese for their lack of Chinese learning – when Kato Kiyomasa presented Hideyoshi’s original demands for peace, the Korean chroniclers were careful to note how poor his Chinese characters were.⁹⁰ The Koreans saw the negotiations as an attempt by the Japanese to deceive the Ming into buying time for reinforcements to arrive, and they regarded those who supported the negotiations as Japanese collaborators.

Interestingly, the war had an impact on the way the Koreans viewed Hideyoshi. Just as the war unfolded in 1592, the *Seonjo Sillok* made a short record about Hideyoshi – it stated that Hideyoshi had a low birth and sold straw to support himself, and that he crouched naked at the carriage of the former *kampaku* [Oda Nobunaga]. Nobunaga then assigned Hideyoshi to a filthy lavatory, and Hideyoshi pleased Nobunaga greatly by cleaning the lavatory with his own hands, leaving no stain or smell. Hideyoshi subsequently rose through the ranks and won a great

⁸⁹ Ibid., 245-246

⁹⁰ *Seonjo Sujong Sillok*, 654 (1/3/Seonjo 28, vol.29)

victory. Regarding Hideyoshi's rise to power, the *Seonjo Sillok* was more or less neutral by stating that Hideyoshi killed the man who murdered Nobunaga and established himself.⁹¹ By 1593, however, the Koreans began to believe that it was Hideyoshi who murdered his master Nobunaga. The *Seonjo Sillok* recorded a conversation between King Seonjo and an official named Yi Ho-min one year after the initial entry about Hideyoshi was written, where the king said, "Hideyoshi killed his master as if hunting for foxes and rabbits."⁹² The Koreans used the Chinese characters *zei qiu*, which translates to bandit chief, to describe Hideyoshi.

But Hideyoshi viewed himself in a vastly different manner. Already we can see in his correspondences to the Korean king and again to the Ming envoys that he elevated himself a semi-divine status with his solar conception and divine mandate. It is possible that he did so as another way of legitimization in the eyes of foreigners, for he was born a peasant and possessed no noble blood. Yet despite his lowly birth, Hideyoshi ultimately rose to become the most powerful man in Japan. Within the span of just eleven years, he had ended almost a century of civil war and held the country firmly in his grasp. But Hideyoshi did not stop at flattering himself. In his letter to the Ming, he would elevate Japan's status as well. To him, Japan was not a backwards nation populated by barbarians, it was a divine nation occupying the same position that had always belonged exclusively to China. Hideyoshi wrote that:

Japan is a divine nation. Our Divinity is the Heavenly Emperor, the Heavenly Emperor is our Divinity, there being absolutely no difference between them. Our nation having thus been created by the Divinity, our national customs were originally modeled after those of the Divine Age. The laws of our kings of yore were revered. The lives and doctrines of our ancestors were in accordance with the teachings and commands of Heaven, and were dependent upon the direction and order of the earth.⁹³

⁹¹ *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 1, 483 (13/4/Seonjo 25, vol. 26)

⁹² *Ibid.*, 680 (3/4/Seonjo 26, vol. 37)

⁹³ *Taikōki*, 448. Translation found in Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, 329

From this, we can see that the two sides held opposing views about each other, and this clash of perception between the Chinese and Hideyoshi would have a tremendous impact on the way the negotiation was conducted and its ultimate outcome.

A New World Order:

Having already elevated the status of himself and Japan, Hideyoshi next sought to displace China as the dominant hegemon of East Asia. Before the invasion, Hideyoshi sent letters to Korea, the Kingdom of Ryukyu, Formosa, the Philippines, and even India expressing his grand ambition to invade China and demanded their support.⁹⁴ Shortly after Seoul fell, Hideyoshi laid out his plan on the division of China in several articles that he sent to his nephew Hidetsugu. The Japanese emperor was to be installed in Beijing, his heir the Prince Hachijo would rule Japan, Hidetsugu would become the *kampaku* of China, and the rest of Korea and China would be divided amongst Hideyoshi's followers. As for Hideyoshi himself, the *taiko* chose the port city of Ningbo as his residence.⁹⁵ From these articles, it becomes apparent that Hideyoshi seriously considered conquering the Ming and was confident that his army could do so.

Yet when the war turned into a stalemate, Hideyoshi had to settle for something less – equality with China instead of dominance. Many historians have argued that Hideyoshi knew that his original objective of conquering China could never be accomplished. Why else, after so much rhetoric and planning about the conquest of China, did he suddenly decide to ‘forgive’ the Ming and settle for negotiations? Elizabeth Berry believes that Hideyoshi was well aware of his

⁹⁴ Translations of Hideyoshi's letters to these various heads of state can be found in the appendix of Kuno's *Japanese Expansion*, vol. 1, pages 300-314

⁹⁵ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 172-174

defeat, but he tried to mask it with flattering terms of peace.⁹⁶ Whatever the reason was, Hideyoshi seemed to believe that the war in Korea had showcased Japan's power. Even if his army was pushed to the south, they had devastated Korea and showed they were not a force to be trifled with. In his mind, that was probably enough to warrant peace with the Ming on equal terms, and he probably saw the Ming's willingness to negotiate as a sign of weakness. This was subsequently revealed in his seven demands for peace.

Particularly interesting are the first three articles – oaths of peace, a resumption of trade, and sworn statements of perpetual friendship. With regard to the second demand about trade, Hideyoshi declared that both trade and government vessels would travel freely between the two countries. In the Chinese world order, foreign diplomatic embassies were often attached to tribute missions and could only enter the Chinese border with proper documents or “tallies”, issued by the Chinese court. Statements of friendship took the form of submission to the Chinese emperor.⁹⁷ Tribute missions themselves were governed by strict regulations – the frequency of missions and the number of attendants were all dictated by the Chinese. Korea, being the closest to China and China's most loyal tributary, was allowed annual missions while Vietnam was allowed one every three years. Japan, on the other hand, had to make due with only one mission every ten years.⁹⁸ Hideyoshi's demands thus represented a radical departure from this traditional form of diplomacy. By allowing government vessels to travel freely, doing away with the strict Chinese protocol, and demanding that China abide by its oaths of peace and friendship, he was in

⁹⁶ Berry, *Hideyoshi*, 216

⁹⁷ David Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 56

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-59 The Koreans very able to send multiple tribute missions every year.

fact advocating for something closer to the diplomatic system of Western Europe with equality between states and regular exchanges of ambassadors.

Trade was also a major area where Hideyoshi tried to insert himself into. Many later historians have argued that trade was the reason why Hideyoshi launched his invasion of Korea. In his peace terms, Hideyoshi once again mentioned that trade should be resumed, though from the wording it seemed that he wanted to do away with licensed trade and instead promote much open commercial trade between China and Japan. This was also evident in the second set of terms he presented in 1595 to Konishi, in which he stated that diplomatic and trade ships from the two countries would be recognized by a tally stamped with a gold seal. This is possibly an attempt by Hideyoshi to control East Asian sea traffic by having each vessel carry a stamp from either China or Japan, thus breaking the Chinese monopoly on trade.⁹⁹ Hideyoshi was aware that China was at the center of a huge international trading network and that China had a tremendous impact on trade. David Kang notes that, “Both as a producer and consumer, the Chinese market was the most important factor in creating and sustaining trade. When Chinese power expanded, so did regional trade. When China was weak or focused on internal troubles, trade contracted.”¹⁰⁰ By positioning himself as an equal partner of the Chinese emperor, Hideyoshi likely wanted Japan to play the same role as China in facilitating international trade and thus reap the profits that came along with it.

Finally, Hideyoshi’s desire to carve out a place for Japan at the top of the Chinese world order was sealed with his demand that a Ming princess marry the Japanese emperor. This demand was also repeatedly brought up by Genso during the first round of negotiations

⁹⁹ Sajima, “Hideyoshi’s View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations,” 100

¹⁰⁰ Kang, *East Asia Before the West*, 110

conducted at Nagoya, who stated that the marriage was a sign of Chinese sincerity. While the Chinese had in the past conducted marriage alliances, known as *heqin*, and signed treaties of equality and even subservience with barbarian powers, it had always done so due to heavy military pressure and military defeats. During the early Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE), the Han government occasionally conducted *heqin* with the Xiongnu, a nomadic power occupying the Mongolian steppes. In return for peace, the Han would marry a princess to the Xiongnu leader and send annual gifts, in essence becoming a “brotherly state” that was equal in status with the Xiongnu.¹⁰¹ During the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the government once again had to pay indemnities to the barbarian dynasties in the north. The first emperor of the Southern Song (1127-1279) even styled himself as a “subject” of the Jin emperor in a peace treaty.¹⁰²

Yet the Chinese did not consider Korea to be a defeat. After the Ming army intervened, Pyongyang, Kaeseong, and Seoul had all been recovered and the Japanese army was forced to retreat south. Furthermore, China itself was under no direct military threat, and so there was simply no reason for the Chinese to consider *heqin*. Doing so would be beneath the dignity of the Celestial Empire, and the Chinese envoys refused to convey those demands back to Beijing. Interestingly, despite Konishi’s and Genso’s repeated emphasis on a marriage alliance during the early stages of the negotiation, the demand for a Ming princess was dropped from Hideyoshi’s second peace proposal in 1595 and never mentioned again.¹⁰³

Role of the Negotiators:

¹⁰¹ Ying-shih Yu, "Han Foreign Relations," in *Cambridge History of China, Volume 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 BC–AD 220*, eds. Denis Twitchett et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 386

¹⁰² Jing-shen Tao, "The Move to the South and the Reign of Kao-tsung (1127–1162)," in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 5: The Sung Dynasty and its Precursors, 907–1279*, Part 1, eds. Denis et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 682

¹⁰³ Sajima, "Hideyoshi’s View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations," 100

Konishi Yukinaga and his Chinese counterpart Shen Weijing thus faced the daunting task of overcoming this issue of perception in working towards a peaceful settlement. With neither side willing to back down, Konishi and Shen had to find a middle ground that could appeal to both the Ming and Hideyoshi. The fact that no middle ground existed or could be worked out did not concern Konishi or Shen, for the two of them simply conjured up their own middle ground and through lies and deceit presented it to their respective masters, who believed it to be the truth.

What, then, motivated Shen Weijing and Konishi Yukinaga to carry out such a convoluted scheme of deception in the first place? Surely they would have known that the price of failure might mean death, but they nonetheless decided to take the risk. For Shen, his motivation might have simply been money and fame. Much of what we know about him comes from historical works written during later periods by other individuals, and thus subjected to the author's biases. In Gu Yingtai's *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, Shen Weijing was described as a rogue merchant from the city of Jiaxing, a view that was echoed by the official history of the Ming - the *Ming Shi*.¹⁰⁴ Shen was also noted to be an eloquent speaker and even spoke some Japanese, which made him appealing to pro-peace officials in Beijing. He came to the capital responding to an edit issued by the Wanli emperor, which promised a handsome reward of ten thousand taels of silver and the rank of count to whoever could carry out the restoration of peace in Korea.¹⁰⁵ The emperor appointed him as the negotiator based on the advice of Shi Xing, the leading proponent of peace.

¹⁰⁴ *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 247; *Ming Shi*, vol. 27, 8292 (vol. 320, Historical Biography 208). The exact Chinese wording is 無賴 (*wulai*), which translates to “rouge”, “scoundrel”, or “hoodlum.”

¹⁰⁵ Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, 159

Unlike Shen, who was unknown in the government prior to his appearance, Konishi Yukinaga was a trusted lieutenant of Hideyoshi and was the daimyo of Higo Province in Kyushu. He was also a Christian, going by the European name Augustin.¹⁰⁶ Konishi's family were merchants from the city of Sakai (modern day Osaka) and they made a tremendous fortune from trade with Korea.¹⁰⁷ As such, Konishi's motives for peace were, like Shen Weijing, probably also personal – he wanted to restore commerce between Japan, China, and Korea and use his domain's strategic position on the southern island of Kyushu to profit from it. In addition, Konishi was a pacifist who believed that the power of commerce was greater than war, a perspective that was also shared by Ishida Mitsunari, another one of Hideyoshi's trusted advisors. Before the invasion was launched, both men endorsed a petition by the Sō clan of Tsushima arguing against the Korean campaign.¹⁰⁸ Through his family's business ventures with Korea and his own dealings with Tsushima (the main conduit of Japanese trade with Korea), Konishi had a deeper understanding of the dynamics of East Asian politics than Hideyoshi. He was aware of how the Koreans saw the Japanese and of how the Chinese saw the Japanese, and he knew that only by using deception could he accomplish what he had in mind.

For Konishi, Hideyoshi's approach to the negotiations was problematic – he was dealing with the Ming emperor in the same manner that he dealt with a rival daimyo. To quote Elizabeth Berry, “Hideyoshi acknowledges no difference between the sovereignty of states and the hegemony of a provincial daimyo; he approaches international diplomacy from the vantage of *senjoku* arbitration.”¹⁰⁹ Hideyoshi clearly believed himself to be victor, and that he was being

¹⁰⁶ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 127

¹⁰⁷ Tanezumi Harada, *Chōsen no eki monogatari* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1971), 27

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-26. Konishi was also the father-in-law of Sō Yoshitoshi, daimyo of Tsushima. See Sajima, “Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations,” 95

¹⁰⁹ Berry, *Hideyoshi*, 215

magnanimous by allowing the Ming to keep their hold over the northern four provinces of Korea. But Konishi understood the military and political situation much better than Hideyoshi did, and he was aware that the Chinese would never agree to Hideyoshi's original seven terms. Shen Weijing had already arbitrarily changed the first demand for a Ming princess, claiming that while the court had approved of it, the princess died en route to Japan and would be replaced with 300 horses, so Konishi focused primarily on the re-establishment of diplomatic relations and the restoration of trade, altering and dropping the other of Hideyoshi's demands one by one.¹¹⁰

Suspicious over Japanese intentions after the massacre at Jinju and the absence of any documents from Hideyoshi to the Chinese court prevented Konishi's envoy Naito Joan from entering China. The *Nihon Gaishi* recorded that Hideyoshi grew impatient at Naito's delay and, believing that Shen Weijing was deceiving him, began planning another expedition.¹¹¹ The Chinese were also demanding a document of submission to show that the Japanese were sincere about receiving investiture, and Konishi himself knew that investiture was the prerequisite for trade.¹¹² Together with Shen Weijing, Konishi forged a letter of submission from Hideyoshi, in which Hideyoshi claimed that he wanted to be a subject of the Ming emperor, and sent it to Beijing. Hideyoshi, of course, knew nothing of this. The aging *taiko* became obsessed with the upbringing of his second son, Hideyori. Shortly after his birth in late August of 1593, Hideyoshi departed from Nagoya, never to return. To him, the war in Korea became a secondary concern.¹¹³

Despite heavy opposition from his court and his own misgivings about peace, the Wanli emperor decided to invest Hideyoshi as a vassal king, but would not allow him to engage in

¹¹⁰ Sajima, "Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations," 97; *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 2, 679 (10/4/Seonjo 29, vol. 74)

¹¹¹ *Nihon Gaishi*, vol. 5, 27

¹¹² Sajima, "Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations," 98

¹¹³ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 352

trade. Konishi, not surprisingly, was unhappy with the Ming conditions for peace – he had achieved a restoration of diplomatic relations but failed to gain trading privileges. Nonetheless, he was forced to accept it, since it was Japan that wanted something from China, not the other way around. Sajima Akiko contends that Konishi accepted the Ming conditions because he thought the Ming would more or less honor Hideyoshi's demands – horses for a princess, a gold seal would represent a tally (for trade), and the investiture papers could be taken as an oath.¹¹⁴ However, Konishi did not take into account Hideyoshi's demand for the southern four provinces in Korea or the Ming demand that all Japanese troops must evacuate – in fact the investiture process carried on without this issue being settled by Konishi and Shen.

It might have also been possible, then, that Konishi was simply waiting for Hideyoshi to die. By 1597, the *taiko* was approaching sixty years of age, his health was rapidly faltering, and his primary concern was with his heir Hideyori. Konishi probably knew that Hideyoshi might not have long to live, and he decided to take a gamble to maintain his web of fictions long enough to see Hideyoshi's death and the Japanese withdrawal. This was evident in the fact that Konishi privately urged the monk Saisho to lie to Hideyoshi by not telling him the true contents of the Ming's investiture document and imperial edict. The issue of perception would be bypassed and both sides would be led to believe what they had always believed. Hideyoshi would continue to think that the Ming had indeed made him an equal, while the Ming would think that the barbarian Hideyoshi had accepted investiture and was bowing to the Chinese. Since Hideyoshi was the main aggressor in the conflict, his death would remove a major obstacle in future

¹¹⁴ Sajima, "Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations," 98

negotiations. Konishi could simply restart the diplomatic process, apologize for Hideyoshi's mistakes, and request permission to reengage in tributary trade.

It is not immediately clear what Konishi and Shen planned to do afterwards. The negotiation was carried thus far by misrepresentations and deception, but no actual problems had been solved. Hideyoshi, believing that the Ming had been humbled, would not doubt bring up the southern four Korean provinces that he thought had been promised to him, while the Ming would learn through the Koreans that the Japanese still remained on the peninsula. Lack of trade and hostages would also be areas of concern that would surface sooner or later. It might have been that Konishi and Shen simply wanted the investiture process carried out first and then solve the rest later, whether by waiting for Hideyoshi's death or through other methods. The lack of any documents from Konishi and Shen themselves, however, means that it would be impossible for us to know what their next course of action would be.

The Aftermath:

After the failure of the negotiations, Hideyoshi renewed the conflict in Korea in the summer of 1597. Most historians agree that objective of this second invasion was simply to hold onto the southern half Korea. Hawley, however, states that Hideyoshi's aim for the second invasion was different than that of his commanders. Most of his daimyo wanted to seize the southern provinces for Japan while Hideyoshi only wanted them to rampage throughout the land in order to save face after the humiliating result of the negotiation.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, fierce fighting resumed on the peninsula, with the Japanese successfully defending against overwhelming Chinese and Korean attacks on their string of fortresses. However, the second invasion also faced

¹¹⁵ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 441-442

the problem of logistics – with the exception of one naval victory at Chilcheollyang, the Japanese went on to lose all subsequent naval battles and thus saw their supply line from Japan once again under threat.¹¹⁶

Despite beating back every major Sino-Korean offensive, the Japanese commanders knew that they could not hold out for long. Once again, their failure to secure a supply line from the Japan and the devastation of southern Korea meant they could not supply their troops. Furthermore, they were aware that more Chinese troops were on their way to Korea.¹¹⁷ Hideyoshi himself seemed to realize this as well. As he lay dying in 1598, he gave instructions to his senior retainers to faithfully serve his young son Hideyori. Calling Asano Nagamasa and Ishida Mitsunari to his side, Hideyoshi dictated to them a command, “Go and withdraw my forces from Korea. If you are unable to do so, then dispatch [Tokugawa] Ieyasu. If Ieyasu cannot, then dispatch [Maeda] Toshiie. Send one of the two. Even though there are a million enemy troops, do not let them follow.”¹¹⁸ Toyotomi Hideyoshi died on September 18, 1597 [1597.8.18 lunar] at the age of sixty-three. According to the *Nihon Gaishi*, the final words he said were, “Do not let my hundred thousand soldiers become ghosts in a foreign land.”¹¹⁹

Hideyoshi’s death was initially concealed from the commanders and troops in Korea, but by November word began to reach them. The order was to withdraw from Korea as quickly as possible without losing dignity. Subsequently, the various daimyo there began contacting their Ming counterparts in order to arrange an armistice. Having tasted defeat at the hands of the

¹¹⁶ The Korean naval commander Yi Sun-sin was exiled during this period, a victim of political infighting and the Joseon fleet was led by his inept replacement Won Gyun. The engagement at Chilcheollyang destroyed large portions of the Korean fleet – only twelve ships survived the encounter. See Hawley, *Imjin War*, 458-462.

¹¹⁷ Swope, *Dragon’s Head and a Serpent’s Tail*, 254

¹¹⁸ *Nihon Gaishi*, vol. 5, 53

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Japanese, the Chinese commanders were, much to the chagrin of the Koreans, more than happy to let the Japanese retreat without fighting.¹²⁰ Admiral Yi Sun-sin and the Chinese navy under Chen Lin led one more attack on the retreating Japanese, which culminated in the Battle of Noryang. Yi Sun-sin perished during this battle, though the victory saw the destruction of some two hundred Japanese vessels.¹²¹ By the end of 1598, all Japanese troops had withdrawn, finally bringing the Imjin War to a close.

The war, surprisingly, did not have much impact on the overall diplomatic order of East Asia, for Korea and Japan quickly resumed diplomatic relations. This effort was spearheaded by none other than the Sō clan of Tsushima, who doctored a large number of documents to appease both sides.¹²² By 1601, Tokugawa Ieyasu had usurped power from the Toyotomi clan and in 1603 established the Tokugawa Shogunate. The newly established regime was thus looking for legitimization and trade, while Seoul was partly driven by the desire to prevent another invasion by establishing a “friendly” agreement with Japan.¹²³ A large number of Korean captives were repatriated from Japan, and Seoul agreed to dispatch an embassy to Japan in 1607, where they were received by the Shogun Hidetada and by retired Shogun Ieyasu. By 1609, a formal agreement had been concluded and bilateral relations had more or less been restored to the pre-war level, though the Koreans heavily regulated trade. Tsushima could send no more than twenty-ships annually and only Busan was open to them. Various other privileges that had been granted to

¹²⁰ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 548

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 552-555

¹²² Elisonas, “The Inseparable Trinity,” 295. The Sō forged a letter from Ieyasu to the Koreans in which Ieyasu used the title “King of Japan”. The Koreans were aware that this letter was a fake, but nonetheless decided to send a return embassy. The Sō subsequently created a counterfeit document that deleted portions which might offend the Tokugawa and replaced it with words of peace and friendship. They then replaced the document that the Koreans had with them with this counterfeit, which was then submitted by the Korean embassy to the Shogun. See also *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 5, 298 (24/12/Seonjo 39, vol. 206)

¹²³ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 574-575

them in past were likewise revoked or reduced. Nonetheless, a flourishing trade between Korea and Japan was maintained throughout much of the Edo period by way of Tsushima.¹²⁴

In China, the war seemed to be quickly forgotten as new problems came to plague the Ming. Though China did not suffer the same devastation that Korea did, the two expeditions drained the already depleted treasury. The continued budget issue, together with corruption and poor political leadership, left the Ming unable to deal with the growing Jurchen menace in the north and peasant rebellions within China. In 1619, the Ming army under Yang Hao (who had fought in Korea) suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Jurchen chieftain Nurhaci at Sarhu. A Ming army of 450,000 (contemporary estimates puts the number at around 90,000 to 100,000 men) was almost completely wiped out, with most of its commanders killed in combat.¹²⁵ In 1644, the peasant army under Li Zicheng entered Beijing and the last Ming emperor hung himself on a tree. Shortly afterwards, the Jurchens, who had now taken the name Manchus, entered China proper and took control of Beijing. Ironically, the remnants of the Ming dynasty in the south turned to Japan for help. An embassy was dispatched in 1649 to solicit Japanese troops in defending against the Manchus, but the Tokugawa regime saw the Ming as beyond saving and refused to help.¹²⁶

Of the three actors in the war, only Joseon Korea survived the turmoil that followed. After two invasions in 1627 and 1636 by the Manchus, the Joseon was forced to end their

¹²⁴ Elisonas, "The Inseparable Trinity," 295-296. The Sō clan also tried various methods to circumvent the strict Korean rules on trade.

¹²⁵ *Ming Shi*, vol. 2, 292 (vol. 21, Shenzong 2) and vol. 22, 6688 (vol. 259, Historical Biography 147). Also present in the battle was Li Rubo, brother of Li Rusong, and Liu Ting, both men veterans of the Korea campaign. Yang Hao languished in prison for nine years before being executed, Liu Ting was killed in action, while Li Rubo committed suicide after the defeat.

¹²⁶ Lynn A. Struve, trans. and ed. *Voices in the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers' Jaws* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 115

tributary relations with the Ming and submit the newly established Qing Dynasty instead.¹²⁷ Still, the Koreans never forgot what the Ming did to save their country, and shrines were erected all over the country to honor the Ming generals. When Prince Gwanghae attempted to break with the Ming to pursue a more balanced policy between the Ming and the Manchus, he was dethroned in a coup d'état by pro-Ming officials.¹²⁸ Even after the Joseon capitulation to the Qing, Joseon officials still wished for the Qing's destruction and the restoration of the Ming.¹²⁹ The Joseon Dynasty would survive until its annexation by Japan in 1910.

Conclusion:

Envoys Yang Fangheng and Shen Weijing attempted to depict their mission as a success upon their return. Envoy Yang sent a memorial stating that Hideyoshi had accepted investiture and Shi Xing told the emperor that Hideyoshi received the envoys with due courtesy and had submitted a memorial of gratitude.¹³⁰ Even as he reported to the emperor personally, Yang Fangheng continued to lie, stating that Hideyoshi not only accepted investiture but also cried out 'long live the emperor' (*wansui*). A ceremony of thanks, Yang said, was planned but had to be cancelled due to an earthquake.¹³¹ But the court was not fooled. The Japanese continued to remain in Busan and the memorial of gratitude from Hideyoshi was never received. Gifts, including gold, pearls, swan feathers, and even an orangutan, that were allegedly sent by Hideyoshi to the Wanli emperor as a token of thanks, were subsequently proven to have been purchased by the envoys themselves – the orangutan from Southeast Asia and the swan feathers

¹²⁷ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 568

¹²⁸ Myung-gi Han, "The Inestimable Benevolence of Saving a Country on the Brink of Ruin: Chosŏn–Ming and Chosŏn–Later Jin Relations in the Seventeenth Century," in *Asian States and Empires: East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence and Memory*, by ed. John B. Lewis, trans. Grace Koh et al. (Florence, Kent.: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 99-287

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 289

¹³⁰ *Guo Que*, vol. 5, 4786-4788

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 4793

from Guangdong province. Finally, a request from King Seonjo for military support against the second Japanese invasion completely discredited Yang and Shen.¹³²

Under heavy pressure, Yang divulged everything, shifting the blame to Shen Weijing and Shi Xing, and was dismissed from office. Upon hearing the truth, the Wanli emperor became greatly angered – the barbarian Hideyoshi had rejected what was considered to be a great honor and had disobeyed the all-powerful Son of Heaven. The failure of investiture thus became regarded to as a national disgrace and the only option left was to dispatch a punitive expedition to Korea.¹³³ Minister of War Shi Xing, who was the leading pro-peace official, was immediately arrested, and while the Ministry of Justice initially recommended condemnation and exile, the Wanli emperor believed Shi Xing's crime to be too great for such a light sentence and instead issued an edict calling for heavier punishment. Finally, the death sentence was announced, but Shi Xing died in prison before it could be carried out. His wife and children were exiled to a remote border region for perpetuity.¹³⁴

Shen Weijing was similarly arrested shortly after the second invasion began. He was tried for treason and sentenced to death. One theory stated that he allegedly went to Korea and tried to defect to the Japanese before he was apprehended and sent back to Beijing.¹³⁵ He languished in prison until the war was over, and in 1599 was beheaded in the marketplace along with Yang Yuan, a Ming general who led the failed defense of Namwon during the second invasion.¹³⁶

¹³² *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 249; *Guo Que*, vol. 5, 4793; Hawley, *Imjin War*, 422

¹³³ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 422

¹³⁴ *Guo Que*, vol. 5, 4802; *Seonjo Sillok*, vol. 3, 697 (21/10/Seonjo 32, vol. 118). The English translation of Wanli's edict to his ministers accusing Shi Xing deception and demanding heavier punishment can be found in Kuno, *Japanese Expansion*, vol. 1, 169-170. The Koreans were deeply satisfied with the fates of Shi Xing and Shen Weijing, praising discipline of the Ming as strict.

¹³⁵ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 422

¹³⁶ *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*, 250; Hawley, *Imjin War*, 476.

Shen Weijing maintained until the bitter end that the investiture was a success and that everything had been the result of a misunderstanding.

As for Konishi Yukinaga, he was quickly forgiven by Hideyoshi and sent back to Korea for the second invasion, however unwillingly. There, he performed with apparent distinction, capturing the city of Namwon from the Chinese general Yang Yuan and successfully defended against a Sino-Korean attack on the fortress of Suncheon.¹³⁷ After the war, he returned to Japan, where he was caught up in the chaotic aftermath of Hideyoshi's death. Konishi sided with Ishida Mitsunari against Tokugawa Ieyasu and fought on the losing side at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. He fled from the battlefield but was subsequently captured. A devout Catholic, Konishi refused to commit ritual suicide and was summarily beheaded by the victorious Tokugawa regime. His lands were confiscated and given to his rival Kato Kiyomasa.¹³⁸

The fate of the negotiators symbolizes the structural issue that had been embedded deep into East Asian politics, namely the issue of Chinese perception of the world, and the consequences should anyone attempt to challenge it. In attempting to find a peaceful settlement between China and Japan over Hideyoshi's Korean campaign, the two leading negotiators – Konishi Yukinaga for the Japanese and Shen Weijing for the Chinese – was forced to rely on deception and misrepresentation, realizing correctly that it would have been impossible to find a position that could satisfy both sides had they done otherwise. And with the exception of Konishi, both Shen Weijing and his superior Shi Xing paid for their efforts with their lives, carrying with them accusations of treason and disgracing the nation. The question of why they had to go to such lengths thus arises.

¹³⁷ Hawley, *Imjin War*, 473 and 544-546

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 570-571

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to move away from the view that the negotiators were themselves to blame and instead argue that the deeper reason why the negotiations failed was because of the Sinocentric world view and the political structure that was built around it. Konishi and Shen were not directly responsible for the negotiation's failure, they played only a small part in a much bigger problem. China was the Celestial Kingdom, and all other nations had to approach it with a degree of humility. China was the center of East Asian trade, but the only way to access it was to recognize the superiority of the Chinese emperor. This was the way the Chinese had conducted diplomacy for centuries, and this system was challenged by Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea. As I have shown, the Chinese had considered the people who inhabited the islands of Japan as uncivilized since ancient times, and this view became more and more prejudiced over time. Thus, the Chinese came to consider Hideyoshi and the rest of the Japanese people as nothing more than uncivilized barbarians who populated a land on the eastern fringes and occasionally ravaged the Chinese coast, while Hideyoshi saw himself as a great conqueror and unifier who had now even humbled the great Ming China.

By studying this Chinese world view and the political situation at the time rather than focusing on the actions of the negotiators, my thesis has argued that negotiators faced an issue of disjointed perceptions, and that they had little choice other than to use deception if they wanted to carry the negotiations forward. They realized that the Sinocentric diplomatic order within East Asia could not be overcome, but it was possible to bypass it instead by misleading their respective masters into thinking they were in the superior position. Contrary to the position made by some other historians, I have shown that the negotiators knew the problem and attempted to work around it, and when obstacles came up, they dealt with them in a swift and decisive manner. When the hawk Kato Kiyomasa tried to undo Konishi's efforts, for example, Konishi

immediately had him removed from the scene before he could do any more damage. Even if positions of the negotiators were based on nothing more than misrepresentation and empty promises of trade and submission, the negotiation came very close to success, though it was uncertain what would have transpired afterwards.

The complex nature of inter-state relations in East Asia and the Sinocentric tributary system differed vastly from diplomacy in Western Europe, and indeed, how we know of it today. Operating on a centuries old belief of their own superiority, the Chinese believed in submission more than they believed in compromise and this inflexibility of the Chinese political system was revealed during the negotiation process. Hideyoshi, meanwhile, had little knowledge of how the Chinese system worked and approached the negotiation as if the Ming emperor was another one of his domestic foes. It is hard to imagine how the two sides could even begin to negotiate when their perceptions and demands were so far apart, but Konishi and Shen managed to carry the negotiation forward for an astounding three years. In the end, despite their pragmatism and wit, they ultimately could not overcome the Sinocentric political structure of East Asia. Promises were easy to make, but without tackling the issue of disjointed perception and reforming Sinocentric diplomatic system, the promises could not be kept, and Konishi and Shen eventually fell victim to their own lies.

Bibliography

- Ban Gu. *Han Shu (Book of Han)*. 12 vols. 111. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962.
- Berry, Mary Elizabeth. *Hideyoshi*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Boscaro, Andriana. *101 Letters of Hideyoshi: The Private Correspondence of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (A Monumenta Nipponica Monograph, 54)*. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1975.
- Cosmo, Nicola Di. *Ancient China and Its Enemies: Rise of Nomadic Power East Asian History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Elisonas, Jurgis. "The Inseparable Trinity: Japan's Relationship with China and Korea." In *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 4: Early Modern Japan*, by eds. John Whitney Hall and James L. McClain, 235-300. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Griffis, William Elliot. *Corea: The Hermit Nation*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894.
- Gu Yingtai. *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*. 1658. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994.
- Han, Myung-gi. "The Inestimable Benevolence of Saving a Country on the Brink of Ruin": Chosŏn–Ming and Chosŏn–Later Jin Relations in the Seventeenth Century." In *Asian States and Empires: East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence and Memory*, by ed. John B. Lewis, translated by Grace Koh and Lewis B. John, 277-293. Florence, Kent.: Taylor and Francis, 2014.
- Harada, Tanezumi. *Chōsen no eki monogatari*. Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1971.
- Hawley, Samuel. *The Imjin War: Japan's Sixteenth Century Invasion of Korea and Attempt to Conquer China*. Seoul: The Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 2005.
- Jungjong Sillok (Veritable Records of King Jungjong)*. 6 vols. Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1969. (Originally compiled by Yi Gi and others, 1546 to 1550.)
- Kang, David. *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Kuno, Yoshi S. *Japanese Expansion on the Asiatic Continent: A Study in the History of Japan with Special References to Her International Relations with China, Korea, and Russia*. Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937.
- Liu Xu et al., comps. *Jiu Tang Shu (Old Book of Tang)*. 16 vols. 945. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.
- Lu Bi, comp. *Sanguo Zhi Jijie (Collected Commentaries on the Record of the Three Kingdoms)*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982. (Originally written by Chen Shou, 280).
- Miller, Harry. *State Versus Gentry in Late Ming China, 1572-1644*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

- Oze Hoan. *Taikōki*. 1626. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996.
- Pines, Yuri. "Beasts or Humans: Pre-Imperial Origins of Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy." In *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, by eds. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, 59-102. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Rai San'yo. *Nihon Gaishi*. 6 vols. 1827. Osaka: T. Tanaka, 1900.
- Sajima, Akiko. "Hideyoshi's View of Chosŏn Korea and Japan–Ming Negotiations." In *Asian States and Empires: East Asian War, 1592-1598: International Relations, Violence and Memory*, by ed. John B. Lewis, translated by Sanae Nakajima, Rachel Payne, & Lewis B. John, 93-107. Florence, Kent.: Taylor and Francis, 2014.
- Seonjo Sillok (Veritable Records of King Seonjo)*. 5 vols. Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1969. (Originally compiled by Gi Ja-heon and others, 1609-1616).
- Seonjo Sujong Sillok (Revised Veritable Records of King Seonjo)*. Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1969. (Originally compiled by Yi Sik and others, 1643-1657).
- Struve, Lynn A., trans. and ed. *Voices in the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers' Jaws*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Swope, Kenneth M. *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009.
- Swope, Kenneth M. "Deceit, Disguise, and Dependence: China, Japan, and the Future of the Tributary System." *The International History Review* 24, no. 4 (2002): 757-782.
- Tan Qian. *Guo Que*. 6 vols. 1653. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988.
- Tao, Jing-shen. "The Move to the South and the Reign of Kao-tsung (1127–1162)." In *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 5: The Sung Dynasty and its Precursors, 907–1279, Part 1*, by eds. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith, 644-709. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Yu Seongryong. *The Book of Corrections: Reflections on the National Crisis during the Japanese Invasion of Korea, 1592-1598*. 1600 (published 1695). Translated by Choi Byonghyon. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Yu, Ying-shih. "Han Foreign Relations." In *Cambridge History of China, Volume 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 BC–AD 220*, by eds. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, 377-462. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Zhang Tingyu et al., comps. *Ming Shi (History of the Ming)*. 28 vols. 1739. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.
- Zhang Qingzhou. "Kangwo yuanchao zhanzheng zhong de ming ri he tan neimu." *Liaoning Daxue Xue Bao* 95 (1989): 101-04.