

**Nanjung Ilgi:
War Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin
(Republic of Korea)**

2012-60

1. Summary

- *Nanjung Ilgi* (War Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin) is the journal of Yi Sun-sin (1545–1598), one of the most revered heroes of the Korean people, written during the Japanese invasions of 1592–1598. The diary consists of seven volumes of notes written almost daily from January 1592 through November 1598, until days before Yi was killed, on the cusp of a decisive victory, in the last sea battle of the war.
- The seven-year war, also known as the Hideyoshi invasions, was triggered by Japanese ambitions to challenge Ming Dynasty China, and advance into the Asian continent. Mass produced armaments were introduced by Japan and China and Korea built the world's first armor-plated warships. There is evidence that Southeast Asian and European mercenaries participated in the war.
- The war diary is without equal in world history as a commander's battlefield accounts. Written as a personal journal, it describes in detail the daily combat situations, the admiral's personal views and feelings, observations on the weather, topographical features of battlefields, and the lives of common people. The style is simple and elegant. The diary contains a number of poems, recited by Koreans to this day, heightening its literary value.

2. Nominator

2-1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Cultural Heritage Administration, Republic of Korea

2-2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

The government agency responsible for the management of cultural heritage in the Republic of Korea

2-3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Yi Kyung-hoon, director of the International Affairs Division,
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2-4 Contact details

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3. Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3-1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

- *Nanjung Ilgi* (War Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin), the handwritten journal of Admiral Yi Sun-sin, the Lord of Loyalty and Chivalry (*Chungmugong*), of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910); 1 item, 7 volumes; National Treasure No. 76
- Admiral Yi Sun-sin kept a daily journal over seven years from January 1, 1592 through November 17, 1598, recording his life in the military. The diary consists of seven books, each covering roughly a year, and titled after the zodiac name of the year based on the Heavenly Stems in the Chinese calendar.
- The volume titles are *Imjin Ilgi* (Diary of the *Imjin* Year) from 1592; *Gyesa Ilgi* (Diary of the *Gyesa* Year) from 1593; *Gabo Ilgi* (Diary of the *Gabo* Year) from 1594; *Eulmi Ilgi* (Diary of the *Eulmi* Year) from 1595; *Byeongsin Ilgi* (Diary of the *Byeongsin* Year) from 1596; *Jeongyu Ilgi* (Diary of the *Jeongyu* Year) and *Sok Jeongyu Ilgi* (Diary of the *Jeongyu* Year: Part II) from 1597; and *Musul Ilgi* (Diary of the *Musul* Year) from 1598. Of these eight volumes, seven remain today.

3-2 Catalogue or registration details

The contents of the diary are as described below:

Number	Names of volumes	Size (width x length, cm)	Number of pages	Period covered
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1	<i>Imjin Ilgi</i> (Diary of the <i>Imjin</i> Year)	25.7 x 34.5	27	<i>Imjin</i> year (1592): May 1–May 4 May 29–June 10 August 24–August 28 February 1–March 22 <i>Gyesa</i> year (1593): February 1–March 2
2	<i>Gyesa Ilgi</i> (Diary of the <i>Gyesa</i> Year)	24.7 x 27.5	30	<i>Gyesa</i> year (1593): May 1–September 15
3	<i>Gabo Ilgi</i> (Diary of the <i>Gabo</i> Year)	26.5 x 29.0	52	<i>Gabo</i> year (1594): January 1–November 28
4	<i>Byeongsin Ilgi</i> (Diary of the <i>Byeongsin</i> Year)	25.0 x 30.0	41	<i>Byeongsin</i> year (1596): January 1–October 11
5	<i>Jeongyu Ilgi</i> (Diary of the <i>Jeongyu</i> Year)	25.0 x 28.0	27	<i>Jeongyu</i> year (1597): April 1–October 8
6	<i>Sok Jeongyu Ilgi</i> (Diary of the <i>Jeongyu</i> Year: Part II)	23.5 x 24.2	20	<i>Jeongyu</i> year (1597): August 4, 1597–January 4, 1598
7	<i>Musul Ilgi</i> (Diary of the <i>Musul</i> Year)	23.0 x 27.0	8	<i>Musul</i> year (1598): September 15–October 7

The full original text of *Nanjung Ilgi* is compiled on the official database of state-designated important historical documents.

3-4 History/provenance

War Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin originally consisted of eight separate volumes, each titled by the author based on the zodiac name of the year covered, before the compilers of the *Complete Works of Yi, Lord of Loyalty and Chivalry (Yi Chungmugong Jeonseo)* gave the Korean title, *Nanjung Ilgi*, to the whole collection. This in turn was translated later into English as *War Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin*.

Yi wrote his journal in cursive Chinese script. The original calligraphy version was preserved by the admiral's descendants through generations of his direct lineage. In the late 18th century, King Jeongjo (1776-1800), concerned that this important historical source might be lost, ordered that it be published as part of the *Complete Works of Yi, Lord of Loyalty and Chivalry* in 1795. The entire text was printed in regular script at this time.

During the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), a number of historians affiliated with the Korean history compilation committee set up by the colonial government engaged in research of the diary and produced printed editions of excerpts. An annotated edition of excerpts was published in 1935, under the title *Nanjung Ilgi Cho* (Excerpts from the War Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin).

In the 1960s, based on this edition, the historian and poet Yi Eun-sang published the first modern Korean edition of *Nanjung Ilgi*, a result of cooperative endeavor with other scholars of classical Sino-Korean literature. In 1969, the government of the Republic of Korea verified that the handwritten calligraphy version was personally penned by Admiral Yi Sun-sin. Designated as a National Treasure, the original journals are currently under state care in the custody of the management office of Hyeonchungsa, the state-managed memorial shrine of Admiral Yi.

4. Legal Information

4-1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Choe Sun-seon

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4-2 Custodian of the documentary heritage

(name and contact details if different from the owner)

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4-3 Legal status

- Heritage under state management in accordance with the wishes of the owner.
- Responsible government agency: Hyeonchungsa Shrine Management Office, Cultural Heritage Administration.

4-4 Accessibility

The original edition of *Nanjung Ilgi* is on permanent display for public viewing at Hyeonchungsa, the memorial shrine of Admiral Yi Sun-sin, in Asan City, South Chungcheong Province. The photographic image of the entire journal and its modern Korean version can be accessed through the shrine's website for convenient browsing by researchers as well as ordinary visitors.

4-5 Copyright status

In the Republic of Korea, the duration of copyright protection for original writings is prescribed as 50 years after the author's death under Article 36 of the Copyright Act. Therefore, *Nanjung Ilgi* is not subject to copyright protection. However, derivative works, including translations, adaptations, rearrangements, variations and video productions based on original works, are considered creative works and copyrights of these works are protected under Articles 5 and 6 of the same statute.

5. Assessment against the selection criteria

5-1 Authenticity

Admiral Yi wrote his diary with brush and ink. The work handed down in his family is the single original handwritten collection of manuscripts bound in book form every year and carefully preserved by the author. The last volume, written in 1598, or the *musul* year, has entries up to November 17, two days before his death. After the admiral's death, his eldest son, Yi Hoe, and nephew, Yi Wan, took care of his diary so their family would preserve it through generations along with other personal belongings of the admiral.

Admiral Yi's descendants safely preserved his handwritten diary during the Japanese colonial period in the early 20th century even as the Japanese imperial family proposed to take possession of it, which the admiral's 13th-generation eldest grandson rejected. In 1962, the government of the Republic of Korea designated the handwritten original text as a National Treasure. With the consent of the Yi clan, the diary is currently entrusted in the custody of the management office of Hyeonchungsa, the memorial shrine for the admiral, under the umbrella of the Cultural Heritage Administration.

5-2 World significance

Nanjung Ilgi is a historical document about the Japanese invasions of Korea in 1592–1598. The war was in reality a tripartite conflict in which Korea fought in alliance with China to defend itself against Japan. But the Chinese troops dispatched by the Ming Dynasty included a considerable number of mercenary soldiers from Southeast Asia and Europe. The war also has significance in world history beyond Asia. It triggered an industrialized arms race with the development and introduction of armaments mass produced for both Japan and China: new firearms, such as the Japanese-made arquebus guns, and European cannons, called farangi (or *folangji* in Chinese and *bulanggi* in Korean), made in France and Portugal and used by the Chinese. Later, this 16th-century armed conflict was described as the “First Great East Asian War” by the American historian Kenneth M. Swope in a scholarly study in 2005, and also in a major book published in 2009.

Nanjung Ilgi is a major source on maritime battles which took place during the war, whereas there are relatively abundant records about land battles. In this regard, it is a globally important material for research in world history as well as in international relations and military conflicts in East Asia.

This war diary has been widely used in modern Western countries as well as in Korea to study the sea battles during the seven-year war. In particular, the records about “turtle ships” (Geobukseon), recognized as “the world’s first armor-plated warships,” and strategies using the ships have drawn keen interest among war historians. Japanese Admiral Togo Heihachiro (1848–1934) publicly remarked that he destroyed the Russian Baltic Fleet at the Battle of Tsushima in May 1905, during the Russo-Japanese War, by employing the strategies of Yi Sun-sin. Admiral Yi's war diary is an indispensable source for any historian studying the sea battles during the Japanese invasions of Korea. The results are shown in the bibliography above.

5.3 Comparative criteria

1. Time

The Japanese invasions of 1592–1598 resulted in the severest armed conflict in the pre-modern history of the Korean nation. The seven-year war also inflicted substantial damage on both Japan and China: Japan's Hideyoshi Shogunate, the mastermind of the invasions, gave way to the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603; and China's Ming Dynasty, which participated in the war to help Joseon Korea, rapidly declined and was eventually defeated by the Manchu who founded the Qing Dynasty in 1644.

Nanjung Ilgi is a valuable book providing a comprehensive understanding of the war. It has particularly immense value as a historical source offering diachronic insight into Korean naval activities throughout the war. In other words, the war can be chronologically observed in remarkable detail through this single source.

2. Place

The diary contains detailed descriptions of battle sites as well as places the admiral visited frequently. The admiral vividly describes the places where he served or visited for meetings on military matters, and the topographical features of battle sites and analyses of sea currents, noting precise geographic names and locations. According to his diary, the geographic scope of his activities was mostly centered on Korea's southern coastal region, from present-day South Jeolla to South Gyeongsang provinces, extending northward to the Chungcheong region and Seoul. The Korean southern coast, where Admiral Yi served as a naval commander, was a vital passageway in Japan's strategy to invade the Chinese mainland. Admiral Yi greatly contributed to thwarting Japan's aggressive ambitions by successfully blocking its forces' advance through this region. The places mentioned in his diary exist today, with important historical sites and monuments drawing interest and people from within and outside of Korea.

3. People

Admiral Yi Sun-sin was held in high regard by many prominent military leaders in Japan and China. In particular, Admiral Togo Heihachiro, modern Japan's greatest naval hero, was reported to have said, "Yi Sun-sin of Joseon is my teacher." His contemporaries, Chinese military leaders who participated in the war in Korea, such as Chen Lin and Xing Jie, also highly valued Admiral Yi's ability and loyalty. The British Admiral G.A. Ballard, who is well known in the Western world as a naval historian, commented in 1921 that Yi Sun-sin was entitled to be regarded as the equal of Horatio Nelson. More recently, the British military historian Stephen Turnbull wrote in his 2008

book that Admiral Yi Sun-sin's naval victories decisively contributed to Japan's defeat.

The diary also contains detailed accounts on activities of important figures at the time. Among them were Korean politicians including Chief State Councillor Yu Seong-ryong and Third State Councillor Jeong Tak; Chinese commanders Chen Lin, Liu Ting and Xing Jie, and Japanese commander Konishi Yukinaga.

4. Subject and theme

Nanjung Ilgi is a personal journal of Korea's top naval commander during the Joseon Dynasty, describing various events that occurred around the naval headquarters during wartime and their circumstances. It is also a major historical document. The diary faithfully delivers the writer's concrete experiences and facts in ways characteristic of documentary literature. Descriptions of historical events are blended with accounts of personal experience in this diary, as in many other personal journals.

The diary concerns a wide array of subjects, including the strict discipline of military life, the author's thoughts on political affairs, descriptions of individual combat as well as overall war situation, expressions of loyalty to the country, worries about the people, filial devotion, visits by important figures from Ming, views on Japanese soldiers who surrendered and their activities, and miscellaneous personal affairs.

5. Form and style

Admiral Yi Sun-sin wrote his diary in cursive Chinese script with brush and ink on traditional mulberry paper. His sentences are simple and elegant, which makes the diary a valuable literary work. Poems from his diary are included in other literary anthologies. The diary is also regarded as a work of art owing to the admiral's beautiful calligraphic style.

6. Social/spiritual/community significance:

Nanjung Ilgi is highly regarded as a classical epic that must be read by everyone in Korea today. It is widely used for public education with excerpts included in school textbooks and reading materials for students. As such, the diary is instantly identified with the admiral.

Nanjung Ilgi is highly regarded in social and political contexts as well in modern-day Korea, with the author revered as an iconic example of a clean-handed public official and a patriotic soldier dedicated to the nation's defense regardless of rank or worldly reputation. The admiral is widely revered as a role model of patriotism and national pride. His war diary is widely read not only in

Korea but in other countries as well, as it has been translated into many foreign languages.

6. Contextual information

6-1 Rarity

Nanjung Ilgi is an extremely rare example of a personal journal written by a top commander to record events in the military while leading forces in combat during wartime. It must have taken heroic and tremendously significant effort for an individual to keep a daily journal under such perilous circumstances. Further adding to the value of the diary is the fact that a private family has carefully preserved it through 14 generations over 415 years.

It is also worthy of note that the admiral's diary contains insider information on confidential matters in the military at the time, which is not found in other diaries written during the war that mostly recorded the wartime realities and people's lives. This is another factor that distinguishes the admiral's war diary from other personal journals.

6-2 Integrity

Nanjung Ilgi covers the entire period of the seven-year war. Each of the seven volumes is devoted to each year from 1592 to 1598, titled after the zodiac name of the year. One volume for the *eulmi* year, or 1595, is now missing from the original handwritten version. But the *Complete Works of Yi, Lord of Loyalty and Chivalry (Yi Chungmugong Jeonseo)*, a print edition published in 1795 during the reign of King Jeongjo of the Joseon Dynasty, contains this volume. Therefore, the entire diary has been handed down intact.

Admiral Yi wrote his diary every day throughout the war, except while he was in combat or in prison. Hence his diary may be regarded as a near-complete document of the war.