

Kaibara Ekiken's preface to Chingbirok

A JAPANESE EDITION OF THE BOOK OF CORRECTIONS

As a rule, the Japanese of the Edo Period tended to regard the exploits of Japan's armies in Korea as glorious history. The blurb that the bookshop Izumoji Shōhakudō 出雲寺松柏堂 composed for its four-volume Japanese edition of *Chingbirok* 懲忿錄 (1695) is telling evidence. "The retired *kanpaku* Toyo[tomi Hideyoshi 關白豊臣秀吉]," it says,

"was an great man and an unparalleled hero. He thought big, and his deeds were grandiose and as resplendent as sun and moon. In this book it is described how he sent the skilled generals under his banner to Korea, how he subjected the numerous commanders of that country, and how it submitted to our court. It gives a true account of these events in Chinese, and is an extraordinary book, famed throughout the world."

The phrase, here de-italicized, that is used to describe Hideyoshi's matchless character is a literal quote from *History of the Jin Dynasty* (*Jin Shu* 晉書), where it describes the founder of the Later Zhao Dynasty 後趙, Shi Le 石勒 (reigned 319-333). Strictly speaking, this negates the point the writer of the blurb was trying to make, but on the whole, Hideyoshi and his commanders enjoyed an excellent repute during the Edo Period (1600-1868). Some people even used his name to voice their opposition to the Tokugawa *bakufu*, and the *bakufu* regularly prohibited the publication of prints of Hideyoshi and his commanders, and of books that were too lavish in their praise of them.

Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒, the scholar who was asked

to write the preface of the Japanese edition of *Chingbirok*, was an exception. He was not swayed by easy chauvinist sentiments, nor was he tempted by the possibility to make covert criticism of the *bakufu*. He could have been tempted, for one of the former *daimyō* of the fief he served (the Kuroda 黒田 fief of Fukuoka) had been an important commander at the time of the first invasion, and Ekiken had written extensively about his exploits in *History of the House Kuroda* (*Kuroda kafu* 黒田家譜) that he had composed. In this preface, however, there is no trace of any lingering sympathy with Japan's invasion of the continent. He condemns it in no uncertain terms.

"The Commentary states that there are five kinds of war. It distinguishes Righteous War, Reactive War, Covetous War, Arrogant War, and Rancorous War. Of these five, Righteous and Reactive Wars are the kinds of war in which a gentleman will engage himself."

This is how the Preface begins. The "Commentary" Ekiken quotes is something of a riddle. The text comes closest to the minor Taoist classic *Wenzi* 文子,¹ but is not quite identical. The sense, however, is simple: the only kinds of war with which a gentleman would want to associate himself are wars he has to fight because he is duty-bound to fight them, and wars to defend himself against aggression. Wars fought for such disreputable motives as gain, lust for power, or grudges are out of bounds for decent people.

Ekiken continues:

1 *Wenzi*, Chapter *Jiu shou*, *Daode* 10.

“The Commentary also states that countries that love war are sure to perish, even though they are large, and that countries that forget about war are sure to be in danger, even though the empire is at peace. How could one fail to be cautioned by the words ‘love’ and ‘forget!’”

This time, Ekiken quotes the “Commentary” correctly, but his source is a less than obvious military classic, entitled *Sima’s Method* (*Sima fa* 司馬法).² The sense of the second part is the same as of the Roman adage “If you want peace, prepare for war.”

The authoritative texts have been quoted; now follows the application:

“When formerly the Toyotomi campaigned against Korea, they indulged in a war of greed, of arrogance, and of rancour. It cannot possibly be regarded as a righteous war. Neither was it a war that was forced on them. It was a case of loving war. The Way of Heaven hated what they did, and it was only logical that they perished in the end.”

It is always good to know that the villain got his just desert. The Toyotomi perished in 1615, when Hideyoshi’s son Hideyori 秀頼 was attacked by the Tokugawa 德川 and died in the flames of his castle in Osaka. The Way of Heaven sometimes punished, not the culprit himself, but his descendants, and Ekiken was not the only one to lay a link between the invasion of Korea and the ignominious fall of the House Toyotomi. The Koreans themselves were also to blame, however:

“The Koreans were fragile and weak; their defeat was quick, like the breaking of tiles or a mountain slide. It had to do with a lack of basic education, and erroneous views on protection and defence. Therefore they could not deploy their soldiers in reaction to the Japanese attack. In the words of the foregoing quotation, theirs was a case of having forgotten about war.”

It is not quite clear to me what Ekiken is thinking of when he says that the Koreans “lacked basic education.” Does he mean training in the military arts? That would hardly fall within the scope of *kyōyō* 教養. More probably he

means something like knowledge of the world, or the failure to heed the lesson of *Sima’s Method*. On the other hand, “erroneous views on defence” is clear. When the invasions began, the Korean army was spread out evenly over the whole country, and there existed no central, national command. In times of peace, this is the way to keep the military small and compliant to civil rule, but it is not the way to stop an invasion.

“Alas! This was the cause that the Korean state was in grave danger of losing its vigour and nearly perished.”

It is strange that Ekiken uses the word “the vigour of the state,” where one would expect a word like “fate” or “future.” The character 勢 is always a problem. Does he here use it to denote the basic drive and energy that make Korea viable as a nation? Or does he mean 國勢 in the modern sense of “the strength of the country, i.e., its people, crafts, industry?”

“It is only right,” Ekiken continues, that

“Minister Yu 柳成龍 composed Chingbirok. The sense of the title is that later carts are warned by earlier carts that have overturned.”

The title is an erudite reference to a poem in the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經): “I have been chastised, and will guard against future calamities.” The italicized words correspond to the two first characters of the title.³ The poet has been stung by a wasp through his own fault, and is determined not to let it happen again, but he also envies the birds that can fly away, while he is earth-bound, and unable to cope with the problems of his house. In more sense than one, the poem is applicable to the situation of someone like Yu, who was one of the major dignitaries at the Korean court during the wars, and not only held some measure of responsibility for what had happened, but was also faced with the formidable task of rebuilding Korea after the Japanese withdrawal.

Ekiken does not dwell on this point, however, but proceeds to praise the book itself:

“The book is an excellent summary of the main facts, and its choice of words is simple and direct. It cannot

² *Sima fa*, Renben 2.

³ It is ode 289; translation according to B. Karlgren, *Book of Odes*, pp. 249-250.

⁴ 翻靡：谓以词藻华丽竞胜。唐韩愈《送陈秀才彤序》：“读书以为学，纘言以为文，非以夸多而翻靡也。”

be compared to usual writings on the subject, which contain many boasts and empty rhetoric.⁴ Those who discuss the war (senbatsu 戦伐) in Korea should take this book as their reliable base (tekkyo = tashika na yoridokoro). Other books, such as Chōsen seibatsu ki 朝鮮征伐記, even though they are written in Japanese script, still may supply some corroborative evidence. These two books can truly be called veritable records."

wood, and when it was finished, they asked me to supply a preface. I heartily approved of this book being circulated through the world. Therefore, I took my cue from the intention with which the author had composed these fascicles and discussed it, with this result. My only fear is that I shall be ridiculed by most scholars."

The book is well written and its author has made an intelligent selection of the main facts. It should become the norm for all future writers on the wars. "Norm," if we go by the characters, means both the target to strive for, and a base to start from. Ekiken allows for only one other book that can compare with *Chingbirok*, and that is *A Record of the Korean Campaigns* (*Chōsen seibatsu ki*).

It is interesting to see how Ekiken introduces this text: "It is written in Japanese, but still reliable." This value judgment echoes the one in the blurb, where it is emphasized that *Chingbirok* was written in Chinese. For the Japanese of the Edo Period, Truth came in Chinese characters. It had to be stressed, therefore, that *A Record of the Korean Campaigns* did supply additional facts, and that it could lay claim to the designation "veritable record." Of course, neither of the two books was a "veritable record" in the strict sense, for in the strict sense the words refer to a record of the *faits et gestes* of an emperor, compiled by officials after his death or abdication. Ekiken's rather loose use of the term is an example of the inveterate East-Asian tendency to look at the individual characters of a binome and deduct from these the meaning of the combination. He emphasizes this by inserting the character *dan*, "sincerely, truly": "Not what conventionally is called Veritable Record, but something that really gives a true account of the facts."

It is surprising that Ekiken had such a high opinion of *A Record of the Korean Campaigns*. Having been printed in 1659, it was one of the few accounts of the invasions that was available in print at the time. Its author, Hori Kyōan 堀杏菴, did his best to verify some of his facts, and he relied, I assume, heavily on the information he received orally when he served the Asano 淺野 in Wakayama 和歌山, but "reliable" is not a word that leaps to mind when one reads the text.

"Recently I happened to live in the capital as a guest. People of the bookshop had this book cut in catalpa

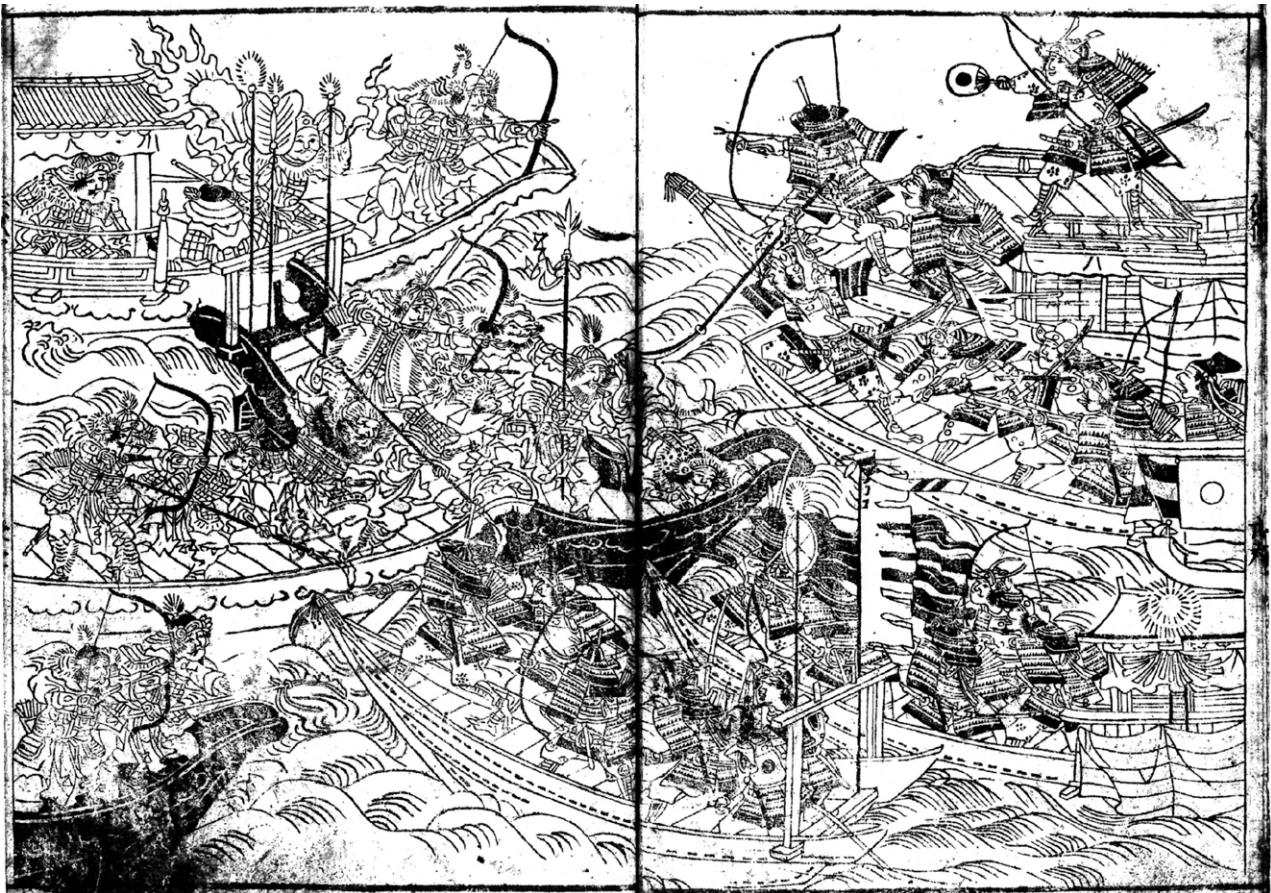
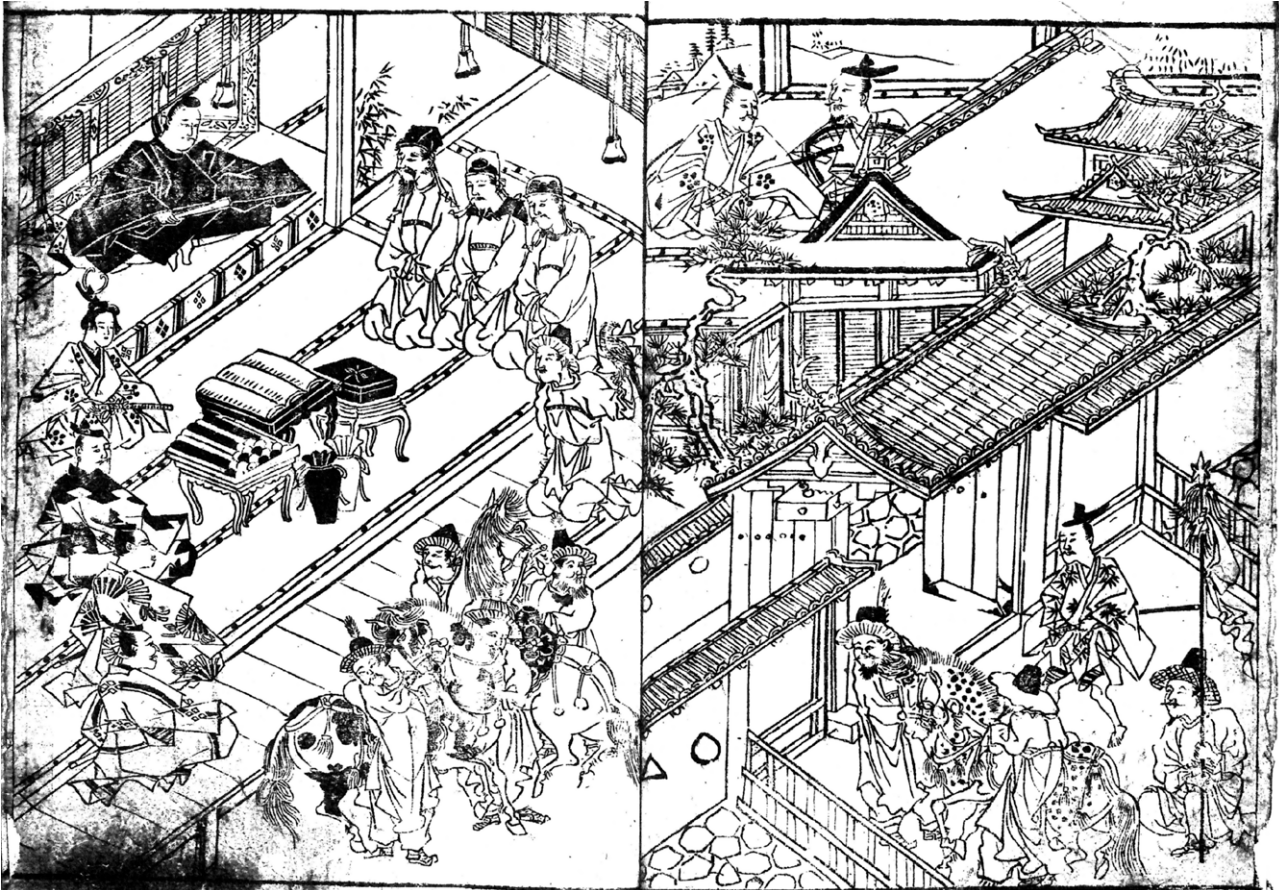


Illustration from the 1659 edition from the Chosen seibatsu ki

THE LEIDEN COPY OF CHINGBIROK: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

The printer's colophon is dated Genroku 8, which corresponds to 1695, but it is unlikely that a book printed in 1695 had been lying around at least 130 years until it was finally bought. The printer is given as Yamatoya Ihei 大和屋伊兵衛, with the additional remark "copied from a printed book" (?) 写板. The advertisements, however, that are pasted on the inside of the back cover of all four volumes, exclusively carry titles of Izumoji Shōhakudō 出雲寺松柏堂. When one tries to date these titles on the basis of *Kokusho sōmoku roku* and similar bibliographical aids, it can be established that a number of them were first printed in the An'ei, Tenmei, and Kansei periods (1772-1803), while the most recent one is from Ansei 5 (1858), though that may be a special case.

Izumoji was an ancient printing and publishing shop, originally set up in Kyoto. It branched out to Edo in the 1650s, and had become one of the three official purveyors of books to the *bakufu* (*goshomotsushi* 御書物師) by the early eighteenth century.¹ The advertisements in *Chingbirok* all prefix the name with "(Kokugaku) Goshomotsudokoro" (国学) 御書物所, and give an address in Kyoto (Sakai-chō, Sanjō-dōri). Yamatoya Ibei, on the other hand, is mentioned in Kerlen's catalogue of the Leiden collections only once, as the printer of this title, with the annotation "active in the Bunka Era (1804-1817)."²

The most likely hypothesis seems, therefore, that Izumoji sponsored a reprint of *Chingbirok* sometime early in the nineteenth century, the actual reprint being made by Yamatoya Ihei.

A handwritten note by Prof. Dr. J.J. Hofmann, (1805-1878) that is placed inside the book and is dated 1866, proves that by that date our copy was part of the Leiden collections, but the same note makes clear that Hoffmann had not used the text when he wrote his contribution to *Nippon* about Japan's relations with the continent, which he finished in 1839. The text does bear no other seals than those of the Leiden University Library, and has no *ex libris*. The book was not part, therefore, of the collections put together by Cock Blomhoff, Von Siebold, and Van Overmeer Fisscher in the 1820s. Neither is the book mentioned in the catalogue Hoffmann prepared of the

books that were bought by Donker Curtius "for the state" on his visit to Edo in 1858.³ The provenance of the book is thus unclear, but the most likely hypothesis seems to be that the book was acquired by Hoffmann himself, possibly through the Japanese who visited the Netherlands or studied in Leiden between 1862 and 1867, and that it was bought by the University Library with the rest of Hoffmann's personal library after his death in 1878. In that case, however, it is strange that the book does not have an acquisition number inscribed, which one would expect the library to do when it acquired the book.

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For the 1695 Japanese edition of the Chingbirok please follow the following links:

Chingbirok 1

www.koreanhistories.org/files/digital_sources/Chingbirok1.pdf

Chingbirok 2

www.koreanhistories.org/files/digital_sources/Chingbirok2.pdf

Chingbirok 3

www.koreanhistories.org/files/digital_sources/Chingbirok3.pdf

Chingbirok 4

www.koreanhistories.org/files/digital_sources/Chingbirok4.pdf

Chingbirok 5

www.koreanhistories.org/files/digital_sources/Hoffman_Chingbirok.pdf

¹ Peter Kornicki, *The Book in Japan. A Cultural History from the Beginning to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 200, 381.

² Henri Kerlen, *Catalogue of Pre-Meiji Japanese Books and Maps in Public Collections in the Netherlands* (Japonica Neerlandica Vol. 6, Amsterdam: Gieben, 1996), no. 139.

³ See Lindor Serrurier, (ed.), *Verzameling van Japansche boekwerken, door J.H. Donker Curtius op zijne reis naar Yedo in 1858 voor het rijk ingekocht; beschreven door wijlen J.J. Hoffmann en uitgegeven door -- --*, 's Gravenhage, 1882).