

# War and the Death of a *Kisaeng*: The Construction of the Collective Memory of the “Righteous *Kisaeng Non’gae*” in Late Chosŏn

Jung Ji Young

Translated by Franklin Rausch and Kangri Park, UBC

This article investigates how memories about the death of the *kisaeng* Non’gae developed from right after the Imjin War until the point where she became the symbol of a woman who offered her body for the country. Non’gae is widely known in Korean society as the *kisaeng* who, after the fall of the city of Chinju during the Imjin War, killed herself by embracing an enemy general and throwing herself into the Nam River. However, her death was not recognized as a sacrifice for the country from the beginning. During the process of compiling the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil* to (New continued illustrated exemplars of the three bonds of Korea) in the early 17th century, some proposed to include her, but strong opposition from the majority prevented this. It was simply unthinkable to consider a low-born female entertainer as the embodiment of “chastity.” Later, the elites of Chinju started to commemorate Non’gae, and petitioned the court to recognize her as a “righteous *kisaeng*.” During the 18th century, she indeed became recognized as a righteous *kisaeng*, and her death was discussed in terms of “loyalty.” This shows how during the Chosŏn period notions about gender and women’s agency in terms of loyalty changed. The so-called Three Bonds of filial piety, chastity, and loyalty are the representative Confucian

---

\* A first draft of this paper, entitled “The Loyalty and Chastity of Female Entertainers in the Imjin War: Memories of Non’gae and Gyewolhyang,” was first presented at the March 2007 Association for Asian Studies Annual meeting in Boston as part of a panel on “Gender, Ideology, and Language of the Korean War of 1592-98: New Dimensions beyond Military History.” This work was partially supported by the Centre for Korean Research of the University of British Columbia and the Academy of Korean Studies of the Republic of Korea in the year 2009.

Jung Ji Young ([jyoung@ehwa.ac.kr](mailto:jyoung@ehwa.ac.kr)) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Women’s Studies, Ewha University

*Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 22, no. 2 (December 2009): 157-180.

© 2009 Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies

norms adopted in the Chosŏn period, and are organized on a gendered basis: chastity was reserved for women and loyalty for men. However, in the wake of the Imjin War and the Manchu invasions, during the process of reconstruction the value of loyalty was inscribed on women through the discourse of Non'gae. The fact that a woman could be recognized for her direct contribution to the state rather than through the agency of men signifies a broadening of the social imagination of women. This was achieved, however, through the official construction of memories regarding Non'gae; the process of including her as an agent of loyalty entailed the exclusion of elements that were deemed irreconcilable with the concept of loyalty. The birth of the "righteous *kisaeng* Non'gae" marks both the result of and the impetus for the state's changing perception of women and their relation to the state.

**Keywords:** Non'gae, *kisaeng*, late Chosŏn, chastity, gender

Non'gae 論介 is rooted in Koreans' collective memory as a *kisaeng* 妓生 (female entertainer) who, during Hideyoshi's sixteenth-century invasion of Korea, killed a Japanese general by embracing him and leaping into the Nam River in the city of Chinju.<sup>1</sup> This article will focus on the various ways in which memories of Non'gae were formed in late Chosŏn society, and how the construction of this collective memory of "the righteous *kisaeng* (*ũgi* 義妓) Non'gae" spread beyond the region of Chinju, eventually receiving state recognition. Rather than the actual deeds or death of Non'gae, the article will analyze the process by which the memory of Non'gae was constructed after the Imjin War of 1592-1598, so that it will be possible to see who constructed that memory and how that memory was used. The following questions in particular will be addressed: How did stories concerning the death of a *kisaeng* establish themselves in the public memory of society? How do those memories represent gender relations in society? In the process of constructing memory, what was remembered and what was forgotten?<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Maurice Halbwachs is a representative of the theory of "collective memory." According to him, "collective memory" provides the members of a collective a distinctive identity that will differentiate them from other collectives. Collective memory functions as a tradition, which standardizes all differences within a collective and conceals changes. Collective memory, by taking the role of tradition, unifies individual constituent memories into one. See Chŏn Chinsŏng, *Yŏksa ka kiŏk ūl malhada* (Seoul: Humanist, 2005), 48-49; Kim Yŏngbŏm, "Maurice Halbwachs ūi kiŏk sahoehak yŏn'gu," *Sahoe kwahak yŏn'gu*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1999), 557-594.

2. This author thinks that consciousness of "Non'gae" as a regular part of mass culture began in 1954 with the serialization of Pak Chonghwa's novel *Imjin waeran* in the *Chosun Ilbo*. In 1962, Pak published *Non'gae wa Kyewŏlhyang* (Seoul: Samjungdang) as an independent volume by selecting the passages on the two *kisaeng* from the serialized novel on the Imjin war. For more about this author and how Non'gae was remembered during the period of national reconstruction

Non'gae is not some entity that exists objectively and in fixed form in historical time, but is an object of memory, which has to be recalled and contested by each generation according to its contemporary gaze. By studying how the recollection of this memory changed from generation to generation, this study does not seek to address how each stage of the recollection process was more or less faithful to the "original Non'gae." Rather, it aims to show how the collective memory of Non'gae in a specific period of time can be viewed as an "event" that reveals the "historical situation" of that time. The significance of grappling with the issues surrounding Non'gae as a subject of memory lies not in analyzing the actual circumstances of her life and death, but the historical reality embedded in the ways in which these facts are remembered.

From this perspective, we will examine how the recognition of Non'gae's death as a righteous act reflects changes in post-invasion Chosŏn society in terms of the relationship between women and the state, and between the state and the people. So far, there have been no studies of Non'gae that analyze her legacy within this framework. However, there have been multi-faceted studies in a variety of fields. Of particular interest are the works of Kim Suöp<sup>3</sup> and Pak Kiyong,<sup>4</sup> which closely examine the historical development of the records regarding Non'gae and the transmission of her story.<sup>5</sup> Although such studies do not deal with the memory of "Non'gae" as such, they are significant because they show the historical process through which the tale of Non'gae was handed down.

On the other hand, there are studies that discuss the life and death of Non'gae as incontrovertible historical facts, and attempt to find evidence of her deeds in order to venerate her as a national hero. There are meticulous studies

---

as people sought to come to grips with the chaos caused by the Korean war in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Jung Ji Young [Chŏng Chiyŏng], "Imjin waeran' kwa 'kisaeng' ũi kiök: Han'guk chŏnjaeng ihu ũi 'Non'gae' e taehan sangsang kwa chŏnyu," in *Imjin waeran: Tongasia samguk chŏnjaeng*, edited by Chŏng Tuhŭ and Yi Kyöngsun (Seoul: Humanist, 2007), 42-83.

3. Kim Suöp, in his 2001 work *Non'gae* (Seoul: Chisik sanöpſa), carefully examines the historical records related to Non'gae and the debate over her. Thus, his work was of great help in writing this article. The historical documents on Non'gae have been organized and placed on the Non'gae Cyber museum of the city of Chinju (<http://www.jinjunongae.com/>). These documents formed the basis of Kim's study.

4. Pak Kiyong, "Non'gae sŏrhwä ũi sösa chŏn'gae yangsang kwa ũimi," *Urimalgŭl* 32 (2004): 169-214.

5. Ch'oe Kwan, in his *Ilbon kwa imjin waeran* (Seoul: Koryŏ taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2003) provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between Non'gae and the Japanese commander in a chapter on the "Korean *kisaeng* and the Japanese knight."

that seek to confirm the historical “truth” of various elements of Non’gae’s story, such as where she was born or whether she was the concubine of Ch’oe Kyŏnghoe.<sup>6</sup> There are also recent studies that show that the tales of Non’gae are somewhat exaggerated.<sup>7</sup> These studies clarify that the earliest record has Non’gae dying while resisting the sexual advances of a Japanese soldier. This story then became wrapped up with the discourse on the virtue of loyalty in late Chosŏn society. Such studies are works that focus on either proving what is fact and what is fiction with regard to Non’gae’s death or, conversely, on demonstrating how her death has been embellished and (re)constructed.

However, the memories that have been recalled from the past were constructed according to the needs of a society that chose what to remember and what not.<sup>8</sup> No matter how much people would like to prove the “truth” about Non’gae, it will never be possible to do so. Such efforts to find proof become, paradoxically, only evidence for the fact that nothing about her can be proven. The only fact known about Non’gae is that a “memory” of her has been transmitted through history. It is no exaggeration to say that in general, the studies of Non’gae into the twentieth century are “constructions of memory” that produce myths about her.

In this article, as I examine the process by which the memory of Non’gae was constructed, I will concentrate on the following questions: What is the

---

6. These include: Kyŏngsŏng taehakkyo hyangtomunhwa yŏn’guso, *Non’gae sajŏk yŏn’gu* (Pusan: Sinji sŏwŏn, 1996); O Pyŏngmu, et al., *Non’gae ū saengae wa ch’ungjŏl* (Chŏlla-pukto: Changsu munhwawŏn, 1997); Chŏng Tongju (1997), “Chinju sŏng chŏnt’u wa Non’gae,” *Nammyŏngbak yŏn’gu*, 7 (1997): 71-102; *The Doosan World Encyclopedia (Tusan segye taebaekkuwa sajŏn*, Seoul: Tusan tonga, 1996) describes Non’gae in this way: “She was from the Chu 朱 clan which had Xin’an 新安 (in China) as its ancestral seat. She was born in Changsu 長水, North Chŏlla province. It is said that originally she was the daughter of a *yangban* but her father died. Her family endured hardships and its property was squandered away so Non’gae became the concubine of Ch’oe Kyŏnghoe 崔慶會, right commander in chief of Kyŏngsang province. Other than that, it is impossible to know any details about her early life.”

7. Han Kyumu, “Chosŏn sidae yŏinsang e taehan ohae wa p’yŏngyŏn,” *Ingan yŏn’gu* 9 (2005): 51-74; Pak Noja, “Ŭgi Non’gae chŏnsŭng: chŏnjaeng, todŏk, yŏsŏng,” *Yŏlsang kojŏn yŏn’gu* 25 (2007): 229-254.

8. The work of Pierre Nora had an important influence in criticizing historical objectivism and in asserting memory as an important issue in the study of history. See Pierre Nora, “Kiŏk kwa yŏksa sai esŏ: kiŏk ū changsodŭl e kwanhan munje chegi,” trans. Kim Injung, *Sŏyangsaron*, 87 (1995): 385-318 (translation of “Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-25). His works from 1984 to 1992 have been collected and published in a three part, seven volume series entitled *Realms of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). In this work, the way that particular memories within a cultural community form the identity of that community is analyzed. For issues related to memory, reality, and the nature of the mundane, see Harry Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

process by which the memories of a *kisaeng* are arranged into a single memory which is then re-born as a “public memory”? When this neat and tidy public memory is born, then what are the messy fragments that are lost? What do those scraps of memory have to say? What remains a whole? What becomes fragmented? How has this public memory evolved? What are the politics of inclusion and exclusion in this process?

This article will closely examine the method by which the memory of Non'gae was constructed in the late Chosŏn dynasty after the Hideyoshi invasions in order to examine the relationship between the state and women in the Chosŏn dynasty and the important changes that arose in the particular features of the relationship between gender and loyalty (*ch'ung* 忠). Moreover, the “scattered memories” of Non'gae, whose story was repackaged to suit the dominant standards of the state, will be revealed. Through re-remembering the “memory” of this woman, what has been considered to be “factual” will be questioned, the fusion of *kisaeng* and “loyalty” will be deconstructed, and a new hypothesis in which Non'gae is not bound by a single perspective will be developed.

## Constructing the Memory of and Monument to Non'gae

### 1. Memories of Non'gae

The story of Non'gae and her death are absent from public government records such as the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (Annals of the Chosŏn dynasty). Her death was first recorded in *Ŏu yadam* 於于野談 (Ŏu's unofficial histories), a work compiled by Yu Mongin 柳夢寅 (1559-1623), and based on stories that circulated in Chinju and its environs. Therefore, it is possible that its contents were not later recreations and so reflect stories in circulation at a time close to the Imjin War. Even so, it can not necessarily be trusted as an accurate transmission of the actual incident just because it was the first record of Non'gae. By looking at the story of Non'gae as contained in the *Ŏu yadam*, we can see the various ways by which her story changed and what elements were added:

Non'gae was a *kisaeng* who was attached to the government office in Chinju. In the *kyesa* year of the Wanli period (1593), Kim Ch'ŏnil 金千鑑 (1537-1593) led his righteous army into Chinju fortress and defended it against the Japanese invaders. In the end the fortress was taken by the Japanese, his army was

defeated, and the people were slaughtered. Non'gae made up her face and dressed in a becoming manner. She stood beneath Ch'oksök pavilion on a large rock directly under which flowed a deep river. All the Japanese looked upon her and found her enchanting but none dared to come close. At last a commander came to her, all alone. Non'gae smiled and welcomed him, enticing him to come closer to her. Then [when he approached near enough] she embraced him and threw herself down into the river where she and the general died.<sup>9</sup>

It is believed that this story was circulated around Chinju and was written down in the seventeenth century. This story was adapted and reorganized into many different forms in late Chosön.<sup>10</sup> The records of Non'gae from the *Öu yadam* of 1621 onward are organized in the following table so that the development and varying presentations of Non'gae's story can be seen.

Table 1. Records of Non'gae (17th-19th century)<sup>11</sup>

Year Written	Content	Reference	Year of Publication
	First record of Non'gae's death	<i>Öu yadam</i> , by Yu Mongin	1621
1625	Chöng Taeryung has "Üiam" 義巖 (rock of righteousness) inscribed on the side of a rock.	Chinyang sokchi 晉陽續誌 k. 2	1932
1577-1607	The story of Kim Ch'önil and how a <i>kisaeng</i> spoke out about the problems in the command structure	<i>Chaejo pönbang chi</i> 再造藩邦志 (1649)	1693
before 1651	The people of Chinju offer sacrifices in front of the rock on which Non'gae offered her life for the country.	"Üiam ki" 義巖記 in <i>Yanggok chip</i> by O Tuin (1624-1689)	1651
1721	(1) Ch'oe Chinhan (1652-1740), right commander in chief of Kyöngsang province, submits a memorial to the Border Defense		

9. Yu Mongin, *Öu yadam* (1621).

10. Different descriptions of this incident have been passed down through the various versions of the *Imjinnok* 壬辰錄. See Im Ch'ölho, *Imjinnok yön'gu* (Seoul: Chöngümsa, 1985).

11. The contents of this table are based mainly on Chöng Tongju's "Chinju söng chönt'u wa Non'gae," Kim Suöp's *Non'gae*, and Pak Kiyong's "Non'gae sörhwa üi sösa chön'gae."

Table 1. (Continued)

Year Written	Content	Reference	Year of Publication
	Council requesting that Non'gae be rewarded (請贈職定位次設齋室啓) (2) The Border Defense Council responded that there was no evidence, and asked for materials to substantiate the request		
	Myöng'am Chöng Sik (1664-1719) writes down the legend of Non'gae and has an inscription ("Üiam pigi") carved on a stele below the rock from which she threw herself	"Üiam sajök pimyöng" 義巖事蹟碑銘 in <i>Myöngam chip</i>	1664-1719
1722	(1) A message sent by fifth secretary Pak Hūijin to the Border Defense Council: Recognize the virtue of the government <i>kisaeng</i> and order her descendents to be found and given exemption from corvée labor and granted special privileges. (2) A report sent to the court uses the expression "righteous <i>kisaeng</i> Non'gae." Despite the desire to grant them an exemption from corvée labor, no descendents of Non'gae could be found.	<i>Ch'ungnyöl sillok</i> , compiled in the 31st year of King Sunjo's reign (1831) by Chöng Söndök 鄭德善	1831
	"The walls have fallen .... Non'gae sighed and said, 'Our country has arrived at this sad state. Being alive is no better than being dead. Nothing good would come from me just killing myself ....'"	"Üigi chön" 義妓傳, in <i>Sögyejip</i> 西溪集 by Pak T'aemu (1677-1756)	1739
1740	In the <i>kyöngsin</i> year (1740) Nam Tökha, who served at the military headquarters, made a request to give 21 people official positions and also set up a shrine to the righteous <i>kisaeng</i> and made a request that it be recognized; finally the King allowed this to be done.	An Suk, "Ch'ungmin ch'angyöl yangsa chohyang chölmok" 忠 愍彰烈兩祠助享節目 in <i>Ch'ungyöl sillok</i> k. 2	1798

Table 1. (Continued)

Year Written	Content	Reference	Year of Publication
1713-1780	There is a record based on hearsay to the effect that spring and fall sacrifices are offered to Non'gae because of her integrity and that these were carried out by government <i>kisaeng</i> .	<i>P'ungam chiphwa</i> 楓巖輯話 by Yu Kwangik (1713-1780)	1713-1780
	Sixth State Councilor Kwŏn Chŏk (1675-1755) writes that Ch'oe Kyŏnghoe described Non'gae as his "concubine." He also argues that she should be recognized as having "chastity" ( <i>yŏl</i> 烈).	<i>Ch'angbaekhŏn chip</i> 蒼白軒集	1750
	Describes the death of Non'gae	<i>Ch'ŏnggu yadam</i> 青邱野談	1766
	Comparison of the "righteous lady" ( <i>ürang</i> 義娘) and the chaos surrounding the battle of Chinju	"Chinju Ŭigi-sa ki" 晉州義妓祠記, in <i>Yöyudang chönsŏ</i> , simunjip, k. 13, by Sŏ Yuyŏng	After 1780
	The " <i>kisaeng</i> Non'gae" is described as being from Changsu and as having followed Ch'oe Kyŏnghoe, who had loved and favored her, from there to Chinju, where she killed two Japanese soldiers.	<i>Honam chŏrürok</i> 湖南節義錄	1799
	Divides the "Non'gae section" into separate sections and narrates them. Non'gae is said to be a "government concubine from Changsu" loved by Ch'oe Kyŏnghoe.	<i>Honam samgangnok</i> 湖南三綱錄	1839
1868	The central government set up a shrine near Ŭiam and in the sixth month special sacrifices were made there.	<i>Kŭmgye p'ildam</i> 錦溪筆談, by Sŏ Yuyŏng	1868
1868	Repair of the shrine to the righteous <i>kisaeng</i> ( <i>ügisa</i> ); in the sixth month, <i>kisaeng</i> hold special sacrifice;	"Ŭiam pyölche kamu," in <i>Kyobang kayo</i> by Chŏng Hyŏnök (Chinju	1872

Table 1. (Continued)

Year Written	Content	Reference	Year of Publication
	Non'gae receives her own separate sacrifice.	magistrate)	
	Non'gae is said to have been born in P'ungch'ön, a district of Changsu and is referred to as a "righteous <i>kisaeng</i> ". It is recorded that Ch'oe Kyönghoe came to love her while he was a county magistrate in Changsu.	<i>Honam üpchi</i> 湖南邑誌	1872

In the late Chosön period, Non'gae became the object of official public government rituals (*chesa*). As we have already seen, she was reborn as a state-recognized "righteous *kisaeng*." However, that was not something that happened spontaneously. Non'gae's name did not appear in the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to* 東國新續三綱行實圖 (New continued illustrated exemplars of the three bonds of Korea), which was published after the Imjin War in the third month of 1617. Instead, her story first appeared in the *Öu yadam* (published in 1621) of Yu Mongin, who added the following comment:

During the Imjin War the number of government *kisaeng* who died because they refused to serve or be violated by the Japanese was countless. Non'gae was not the only one. Yet their names were almost all lost. Although it is thought to be inappropriate to refer to those government *kisaeng*, who were licentious prostitutes, as "chaste" (*chöngnyöl*), should they not be considered people who lived under the civilizing influence of our king and who thought of death as if it were like going home and so refused to allow their bodies to be defiled by the Japanese invaders? How can not turning one's back on the country while refusing to follow the Japanese invaders not be loyal? How sad it is [that they are not recognized]!<sup>12</sup>

Yu Mongin lamented the fact that Non'gae was not included in the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*<sup>13</sup> and asserted that because she was a "licentious"

12. Yu Mongin, *Öu yadam* (1621).

13. For a summary of the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*, see Pak Chu, "Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to yölyödo ü punsök," *Yösöng munje* 20 (1992): 83-104; and Kim Hyök, "Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to ü kusöng kwa p'yöngch'an kwajöng," *Kyegan söjihakpo*, 25 (2001): 103-124.

government *kisaeng*, she was not recognized as having being motivated by the virtue of fidelity. Later, Ch'oe Chinhan (1652-1740), the right commander in chief of Kyöngsang province, transmitted the story of Non'gae to the Border Defense Council (*Pibyönsa*), and asked that she receive official recognition from the state. However, the Border Defense Council replied in the following way:

It is proper in a case such as the one you have described for us, where a woman during a time of war gives up her life and dies together with a bandit [the Japanese general] that she be given official recognition as long as the story is true. However, because no documents have been brought to light to prove the veracity of this story it is difficult to lightly make a decision in bestowing this weighty honor upon her. If there are documents that can prove the truthfulness of this story then this matter will be discussed in the army command and then their opinions will be sent to the Border Defense Council and then the matter will be settled appropriately.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, this document called for “evidence” that Non'gae had died with the Japanese “bandit.” Myöng'am Chöng Sik had the story of Non'gae inscribed upon the rock under Ch'öksök pavilion. This was recorded in his collected works entitled *Myöng'am chip*.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as soon as the court determined that there was insufficient evidence for Non'gae to be honored, the *yangban* of Chinju carved the story of Non'gae on the rock where she was said to have died and so created “new evidence.” The state then sought out her descendents so as to grant them exemptions from corvée labor and special privileges. For the first time Non'gae was called a “righteous *kisaeng*.” Later, in 1740 the Right Commander in Chief of Kyöngsang province Nam Tökha again raised the issue of Non'gae to the court and at last permission was obtained from the king to establish a shrine to her as a “righteous *kisaeng*.”<sup>16</sup> This is the first instance of the state constructing a shrine and offering sacrifice to a *kisaeng*.

It was recorded that in the nineteenth century a shrine was set up for Non'gae and special sacrifices called *Üiam pyölche* were conducted in her name. It began to be said that Changsu was her birthplace and at the end of the nineteenth century the details of where she had lived were revealed. A debate even arose over whether she was perhaps not really a *kisaeng* but was in fact the concubine of Ch'oe Kyönghoe. In the eighteenth century, Non'gae received

14. *Pibyönsa tŭngnok* 備邊司謄錄, k. 7, Kyöngjong 2, fifth month.

15. Chöng Sik 鄭弼 (1664-1719), “purok – kajang,” *Myöng'amjip* 明庵集, k. 6.

16. An Suk, “Ch'ungmin ch'angyöl yangsa chohyang chölmok” 忠愍彰烈兩祠助享節目, cited from Kim Suöp, *Non'gae*, 70-71.

recognition by the state and became a “righteous *kisaeng*,” but in the process various disputes arose and elements of her story were rearranged. Thus, excluded memories may have been dispersed throughout the various spheres of Chosŏn society.

## 2. The People of Chinju and the Kisaeng

The memory of Non'gae continued throughout the latter Chosŏn dynasty and her recognition as a “righteous *kisaeng*” by the state was connected to the evolving political situation from the latter half of Sŏnjo's reign (1567-1608) through the reigns of Kwanghaegun (1608-1623), Injo (1623-1649), Sukchong (1674-1720), and Yŏngjo (1724-1776). Sŏnjo showed a tendency to publicly recognize those officers who were regular military officials while neglecting the significance of the righteous army activities. Conversely, during Kwanghaegun's reign, local volunteer armies received significant recognition. After King Injo forced Kwanghaegun from the throne in 1623, the righteous army activities of Westerners and Southerners were seen more positively. However, Westerners and Southerners, rather than relying on the merit their predecessors had earned on the battlefield, showed a tendency to emphasize integrity and loyalty.<sup>17</sup> That the scholars of Chinju had the characters *ūam* 義巖 (righteous rock) inscribed upon the rock on which Non'gae had martyred herself should be seen in the same context of prioritizing integrity and loyalty.

Thus it was people of Chinju who, according to the changing situation of the times, made Non'gae into a “righteous *kisaeng*.” But who were these people of Chinju? The *Myŏng'am chip* identifies them as the “scholars (*samin* 士民) of Chinju,”<sup>18</sup> in other words the *yangban*, the elite of Chinju. Then the question arises: why did they make this lowly *kisaeng* into a “righteous *kisaeng*” and seek official recognition from the state? We can find hints to the answer in the records of Chinju fortress. The fall of Chinju during the war is described in Pak T'aemu's 朴泰茂 (1677-1726) *Ūgi chŏn* as follows:

17. No Yŏnggu, while examining how the perception of the war transformed from the latter half of King Sŏnjo's reign through the reigns of Injo and Sukchong, discovered that the focus of government evaluation of the war moved from an emphasis on government troops and the Ming supporting armies onto regional volunteer armies, lower ranked soldiers, and the meritorious services of lowborn people and slaves. No Yŏnggu, “Kongsin sŏnjŏng kwa chŏnjaeng p'yŏngka rŭl t'onghan Imjin waeran kiŏk ū hyŏngsŏng,” *Yŏksa wa byŏnsil* 51 (2004): 11-35.

18. For the statement that the stele of Non'gae was carved in accordance to the desires of the 'scholars' see “Sinbo pibyŏ samun,” in *Ch'ungnyŏl sillok* k. 1

At the moment when the [Japanese] bandits pressed their advantage upon our [Korean] forces, the Japanese general was killed [by Non'gae] and so, our soldiers who were utterly demoralized, were inspired to fight on. By offering up her body, which was as thin and fragile as a single thread, Non'gae restored [the good name of] the south for hundreds of years to come. Is it possible to find anything like this in history?<sup>19</sup>

In brief, the deeds of Non'gae could be used by the people of Chinju to wipe away the shame of the defeat at the second battle of Chinju<sup>20</sup> and restore their good name. This restoration of reputation was all the more urgent because of the rumors of internal division within the fortress. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Chŏng Yagyong (1762-1836) wrote about the situation in the city in the *Chinju ūgi sagi* 晉州義妓祠記 section of his *Yöyudang chönsö*:

When the fortress was endangered no soldiers were released from the neighboring counties to help, and because the court was jealous of the meritorious deeds carried out in Chinju there was even rejoicing at its fall. The stout walls of the castle fell at the hands of the enemy. The anger and sorrow of those who love their country has never been as great as it was at this defeat. And so, when a woman of no importance killed an enemy general she repaid the country and so illuminated the moral principle [that governs the relationship] between king and subject to all between heaven and earth.<sup>21</sup>

According to this explanation, when Chinju fortress fell, the surrounding counties did not provide any assistance and the royal court was in fact jealous of Chinju and desired its defeat. In this situation, Non'gae, a woman of no importance, killed an enemy general and clearly showed the principle of the relationship between king and subject. The death of Non'gae also showed the divisions and the lack of principle among so-called "subjects" at the time of the fall of Chinju. This is where Non'gae arrives on the scene and makes up for the humiliation that arose from the chaos following the defeat, for which both the people of Chinju and the male generals involved in the fighting were responsible. Thus it was the male *yangban* who constructed the memory of the righteous *kisaeng* Non'gae in order to wipe away the humiliation of defeat. Moreover, the memory of Non'gae did not remain at the local level. There also

19. Pak T'aemu, "Ūgi chön," in *Sögyejip*.

20. During the initial stage of the invasion, in the winter of 1592, the Japanese had failed to take Chinju, suffering a heavy defeat. Towards the end of the first stage of the war, after they had left Seoul and retreated to the area around Pusan, they took revenge, taking the city in the summer of 1593 and slaughtering all its inhabitants; this is the second battle for Chinju.

21. Chŏng Yagyong, *Yöyudang chönsö* 與猶堂全書, k. 13.

appears to have been a battle over constructing her memory as “Non’gae, the righteous Chinju *kisaeng* of the state.”

It is possible to see within the efforts of the Chinju *yangban* to have Non’gae made into a “righteous *kisaeng*” an attempt to ameliorate the difficult political situation the Chinju region found itself in after King Injo’s restoration in 1623 and Yi Injwa’s rebellion of 1728. At the time of Injo’s restoration, the Chinju region was sullied by its status as the hometown of Nammyŏng Cho Sik (1501-1572), the spiritual father of the discredited “Great Northern” faction (Taebukp’a). After Yi Injwa’s rebellion, in an atmosphere which sought to find the ideological roots of the “plot” in Nammyŏng’s teachings, Chinju’s reputation suffered even more damage. According to Pak Noja, the gentry of the Chinju region, whose relationship with the government had been difficult after Injo’s restoration and Yi Injwa’s rebellion, constructed the legend of Non’gae in order to promote an image of Chinju as a loyal (*ch’unghyang* 忠鄉) rather than disloyal city (*yŏkhyang* 逆鄉).<sup>22</sup> For these reasons, the story of Non’gae, which supported Chinju’s reputation, was actively promoted by its scholars.

At the same time, the *kisaeng* of Chinju carried out activities commemorating Non’gae. In 1651, O Tuin 吳斗寅 (1624-1689), an official at the Office of the Inspector General, heard that people from Chinju were conducting sacrifices in front of the rock where Non’gae had leapt to her death.<sup>23</sup> Yu Kwanik (1713-1780) recorded that: “Spring and fall sacrifices are offered to Non’gae because of her integrity. I hear that it is the government *kisaeng* who handle this.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, the sacrifices were arranged and carried out by none other than the Chinju *kisaeng*. While of course it is possible that it was the *yangban*’s interest that encouraged the memorial activities of these *kisaeng*, on the other hand, it was also possible that it was the active memory of these *kisaeng* that prompted the *yangban* to pay attention to “Non’gae.” At any rate, the Chinju *kisaeng*’s remembrance and commemoration of Non’gae as a righteous *kisaeng* was a motivating factor in the process of the local scholars constructing the memory of Non’gae as a righteous *kisaeng*. The appeals to the state came from male *yangban* who sought to restore the good name of Chinju after its fall from grace but were made possible by the continued offering of sacrifice to Non’gae by the *kisaeng*. It is possible that the *kisaeng* of Chinju strategically appealed to newly appointed government officials to make Non’gae into a righteous

22. Pak Noja, “Ŭigi Non’gae chŏnsŭng,” 246-247.

23. O Tuin, “Ŭiam ki,” in *Yanggok chip*.

24. Yu Kwanik, *P’ungak chip*hwa.

*kisaeng*. Seen in this light, the effect of Non'gae becoming a righteous *kisaeng* was to raise the reputation of the *kisaeng* of Chinju. Thus, an important driving force in making Non'gae into a righteous *kisaeng* was that the Chinju *kisaeng* remembered her and offered sacrifices to her spirit.

## Non'gae's Emergence as a "Righteous *Kisaeng*" and the "Loyalty" of a *Kisaeng*

### 1. *The Appearance of a New Concept of "Loyalty"*

Against this backdrop, why did the royal court's evaluation of Non'gae change in the latter half of the eighteenth century? It is hard to imagine that it was the result of new evidence of Non'gae that came to light during this time. Rather, in so far that there was any "new evidence," it was constructed, and so cannot conclusively support the veracity of the story of Non'gae. If that is the case, is it possible that there is a connection between the changing understanding in Chosŏn society of "loyalty and chastity" during the process of rebuilding the state after Hideyoshi's invasion? Let us look again at Yu Mongin's observations in the *Ōu yadam* quoted above. Although *kisaeng* were regarded as "unchaste" by default, he makes a strong case for calling someone like Non'gae "loyal." From his plea we can see that the perception of the *kisaeng* Non'gae and the incidents related to her death represented a very recent change in the social circumstances of Korea that was occurring at the time this story was recorded in Yu Mongin's book in 1621.

That a "licentious prostitute" would prefer to die to avoid rape was unprecedented. Therefore, when the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to* was compiled under state guidance in 1617, Non'gae could not be placed under the heading of "chastity" or "loyalty."<sup>25</sup> That Non'gae's "chastity" was not recognized by the compilers of the "illustrated exemplars of the three bonds" was because the so-called "lewd and promiscuous" *kisaeng* were thought to be dangerous and untrustworthy. The *kisaeng* sang and danced for others and were able to share their love with more than one man: not only with Chosŏn men, but possibly also with the Japanese as well. Because of the nature of their

---

25. In the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to* the category of commoner (*yangin*) includes scholars, concubines, private and government slaves, and women of the lower orders. It is possible to say that Non'gae was excluded from this category not because she was from the lower orders but because she was a "*kisaeng*."

work, it was impossible for *kisaeng* to possess “chastity (yŏl 烈).” Therefore the *kisaeng* Non’gae was excluded from the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil* to compiled under state guidance.

But when Yu Mongin wrote the *Öu yadam* in 1621, he saw Non’gae’s deeds as proof of her “loyalty.” At that time, a woman dying rather than suffering defilement was generally tied to the category of “chastity.” Criticizing the idea that Non’gae could not be recognized as possessing “chastity” because she was a *kisaeng*, Yu Mongin explained that she had shown “loyalty,” a higher virtue normally associated with men, and not with women, even of the *yangban* class. Moreover, Yu stated that, “Following the Japanese is the same as throwing away the country.” To oppose the Japanese was to be loyal. This understanding was entirely new for the time.

If we look under the heading “chastity,” under which Non’gae could not be recorded, in the 1617 edition of the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*,<sup>26</sup> we see people listed in the following order: filial piety, loyalty, chastity.<sup>27</sup> The sections on “loyalty” and “chastity” in this work were divided by gender. “Loyalty” was for men and “chastity” was for women. Thus, for women in seventeenth century Chosŏn, the virtue of loyalty could only be expressed through “being chaste.” If we examine the examples recorded in the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to* we can see that “loyalty” meant not yielding to the enemy. For example, slaves who refused to betray their masters when they were threatened by the Japanese and resisted the enemy on their behalf were recognized as “loyal.” Moreover, most recorded examples of “loyalty” were men. Thus it was believed that men realized the virtue of loyalty either by refusing to yield to or by killing an enemy, and through continued loyalty to one’s master. It is an exceptional case when a woman appears as an example of “loyalty.”<sup>28</sup> However, these women were private slaves (*sabi* 私婢: base

26. The book was intended to edify the populace by presenting them with concrete cases of people who excelled in the three cardinal virtues of loyalty, filial piety and chastity, so that they could emulate these examples. It consists of three main parts, “filial sons” (*hyoja p’yŏn* 孝子篇), “loyal retainers” (*ch’ungsŏn p’yŏn* 忠臣篇), and “chaste women” (*yŏllyŏ* 烈女篇); for each “exemplary person” there is a one-page illustration and an explanation in Chinese characters and the vernacular script. The work was first compiled under the title *Sinsok samgang haengsil to* 新續三綱行實圖 and completed in the eleventh month of 1615 in 17 fascicles. Later, one more fascicle was added with persons from previous works on exemplary persons, and duly published on the 11th day of the third month of 1617 in 50 copies as *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*.

27. The women of “chastity” recorded in the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to* all either maintained faithfulness to their husbands and served their in-laws, died for their husbands, followed their husbands into death, died protecting their chastity, or killed themselves for the same purpose.

women). Their resistance to the end when their masters were threatened by the Japanese was the substance of their loyalty. Thus, the meaning of “loyalty” for commoners was loyalty to their country, and for slaves, loyalty to their masters.

For women, “chastity” entailed dying while resisting the enemy or committing suicide. It also meant remaining faithful to one’s deceased husband and observing three years of mourning.<sup>29</sup> Only by resisting in the face of danger and taking their own lives rather than survive the shame of rape could women realize the ideal of “chastity.” Women could only express their loyalty through devotion to their husbands, and so “chastity” was construed through their relationship to men. Women were unable to become active agents of “loyalty” and were only able to realize “chastity” by refusing to betray their husbands even if it meant their deaths.

However, the Imjin invasions led to clashes between the Japanese invaders and Korean women. In the records of the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*, the “Japanese invaders” were established as a threat to a wife’s “chastity,” and thus the wifely duty of “chastity” took on the meaning of “resistance to the Japanese invader.” The Japanese invasions thus made it possible for the concept of feminine “chastity” and masculine “loyalty” to become linked. However, the conflation of “chastity” and “loyalty” was not that simple. Women were not direct agents in the battle against the enemy. When married women practiced “chastity” they became “faithful wives” and thereby indirectly also showed “loyalty” to the country. However, “chastity” and “loyalty” did not have the same meaning; therefore, the problem of women directly engaging in acts of “loyalty” became a matter of intense debate.

Non’gae was not killed defending herself, nor did she die by suicide: she died with the Japanese general – in other words, Non’gae killed a Japanese invader. In the process of evaluating the death of Non’gae, a new issue arose. Was it possible for a woman to become an agent that could directly practice “loyalty” without doing so through the concept of “chastity”? Was it possible to be recognized for “loyalty” without “chastity?” Could a woman become an agent of “loyalty?” The expression “righteous *kisaeng*” has an important meaning in regards to this question. In Confucianism, women are not thought to possess “autonomous righteousness” (*chönje chi üi* 專制之義). This belief that

28. The female slaves Wönwöl 元月, Nanjong 難終, and Makkae 莫介 are all examples of women included in the “loyal retainers” section of *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*. All three sacrificed themselves when the enemy threatened their master’s mother or wife.

29. There are no cases of men appearing under the category of “chastity.”

women were incapable of being the agents of righteous acts can be seen in the *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 (Book of Rites by the Elder Dai):

A wife is to be subservient to her husband. Since she lacks “autonomous righteousness,” her way is that of the three obediences: before marrying she follows her father, after marrying she follows her husband and if her husband dies then she follows her son and does not dare to do things herself. Therefore, she does not teach or command anyone outside the home. Her work is limited to preparing food.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, this passage discusses how women are unable to judge things on their own and are without the “autonomy” that allows them to take action. Therefore they had to follow men, who, as males, possessed “autonomy.” Thus, as Non’gae became recognized as a “righteous *kisaeng*” in the course of the eighteenth century, this also meant recognizing that women could be “autonomous.” In the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*, compiled in the beginning of the seventeenth century, there were no recorded cases of a woman directly killing a Japanese invader. However, the government *kisaeng* Non’gae was widely believed to have killed a Japanese general herself. Through a long process of debate, Non’gae came to be recognized not as a woman who maintained chastity towards her husband, nor as a slave who was loyal to her master, but as a *kisaeng* who showed loyalty directly to the state.

In the process of Non’gae being made into a righteous *kisaeng* during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we can see the concept of “loyalty” taking on new meaning. In the seventeenth century, although Yu Mongin asserted that Non’gae’s deeds were “loyal” she was not recognized by the central government for having “chastity,” let alone for being loyal. But in the eighteenth century records of the debate over recognizing Non’gae, her status as a government *kisaeng* was not considered important. Instead, what was significant was whether she had actually died as her story described. The verification of her death became the issue. The significance of this is that even a *kisaeng* could be recognized as righteous and autonomous, based on the merits of her actions.

These changes were in accordance with the Chosŏn dynasty’s attempt to reconstruct society in accordance with the Neo-Confucian system which disappeared with the fall of the Ming in 1644 after the Manchu invasion. In order to maintain principles and moral duties, Chosŏn designated itself as a

30. “婦人伏于人也，是故無專制之義。有三從之道，在家從父，適人從夫，夫死從子。無所敢自遂也，故令不出閨門，事在饋食之間而已矣。” “Benming jie” 本命解, *Da Dai Liji*.

protector of the “Chinese System.”<sup>31</sup> It was impossible in the society of the late Chosŏn dynasty, which had suffered the ravages of several invasions, to reconstruct the Chosŏn state by only emphasizing the loyalty of elite *yangban* men. Through the work of honoring patriots and the faithfulness of those who died to preserve chastity, the state emphasized the “chastity” and “loyalty” of not only elite *yangban*, but of commoners and even of the lowborn as well.

## 2. Dying for the “Country”

While Non’gae was recognized as a “righteous *kisaeng*” in the late Chosŏn dynasty, the meaning of her death changed over time. Subtle differences in the reasons behind her death occurred between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1621, Yu Mongin explained that she died “to resist rape when she encountered a Japanese invader.”<sup>32</sup> In the records written by O Tuin in 1651 when he heard that Chinju people performed rituals at the rock where Non’gae died, he summed up the reason for her death: “By no means could she live with a Japanese invader.”<sup>33</sup>

But subsequently in the eighteenth century, people in Chinju and those who called Non’gae a “righteous *kisaeng*” started to use the word country (*kuk* 國) in connection to the reason for her death. Ch’oe Chinhan submitted his report to the Border Defense Council in 1721 and discussed Non’gae, describing how she “came up with a plan to kill a [Japanese] thief for her country. She wore beautiful clothes and sat alone on a large rock, and sang while playing a Korean lute (*kŏmun’go*).”

In the eighteenth century work by Pak T’aemu, the “Ŭigi chŏn,” Non’gae’s death is described in this way:

---

31. For an analysis of the changes brought about by the fall of the Ming and the rise of the Qing see Jahyun Kim Haboush, “Constructing the Center: The Ritual Controversy and the Search for a New Identity in Seventeenth-Century Korea,” in *Culture and the State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, eds. Jahyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 46-90. Following this dynastic change there was a powerful feeling in Chosŏn that it represented the last bastion of Confucian civilization and so must defend traditional Confucianism at all costs. At the time of King Injo the government was worried as to how Chosŏn could continue the Ming civilization. Whether or not this could be accomplished was directly connected to maintaining the vested interests of the ruling powers. If they abandoned the Ming, then the Qing would be recognized as ruling China and no longer as a barbarian tribe. That would mean the formation of a new order focused on the Qing and the downfall of the ruling powers in Korea centered on King Injo.

32. Yu Mongin, *Ŭu yadam*.

33. O Tuin, *Ŭiam ki*.

The walls have fallen and nothing could be done. Non'gae sighed and said, "Our country has arrived at this sad state. Being alive is no better than being dead. Nothing good would come from me just killing myself. How could I do such a foolish thing as just throwing myself into a hole and dying [when I could do something to help the country]."

Thus Pak T'aemu explained that she had died out of "concern over the fate of our country and in order to hold true to a person's moral duty." Moreover, Pak T'aemu pointed out that although scholars boasted that they were loyal subjects and patriots, they were not willing to sacrifice themselves when the times demanded it and so had become objects of ridicule. Thus, he put Non'gae above them.

This development was connected to how "national" borders and "national" relations with foreign countries were understood after Korea had suffered the Japanese and Manchu invasions. These invasions created clear borders for the Chosŏn state that had to be defended from the two barbarians: the Japanese and the Manchu. The new understanding of national boundaries was linked to the awakening of the need to treat people within Chosŏn in a different way. This began the nationalistic process of defining all people within Chosŏn as subjects who should be patriotic towards their country and even be willing to die for it. The recognition of Non'gae as a righteous *kisaeng* represented such changes.

Ironically, Non'gae, as a "government *kisaeng*," did not have a relationship with just one man and so, unlike other women, was not considered able to meet the standards of chastity. Only a woman who followed one man, her husband, could achieve "chastity." However, this made for the paradoxical opportunity for *kisaeng* to enter the man's domain of loyalty. In a system of binary opposites where *kisaeng* contrasted with wife, and male with female, and "loyalty" and "chastity" were apportioned to each side, Non'gae came to be the very first "righteous *kisaeng*" who directly practiced loyalty to her country.<sup>34</sup>

This change meant that the state sought to classify and mobilize the lowborn as subjects capable of "chastity" and "loyalty." However, this also meant that the state acknowledged the male values of "loyalty" and "autonomy" as something that could be realized by *kisaeng*, who were of low status. The making of Non'gae into a righteous *kisaeng* showed that the state began to

---

34. After the nineteenth century, when the memory of her death sometimes identified her not as a *kisaeng*, but as the concubine of Ch'oe Kyŏnghoe, her following him into death fulfilled the ideal pattern of the "faithful woman" See *Honam chŏryŭrok* 湖南節義錄.

view *kisaeng* in a way that was completely different from the past. The state did this in order to mobilize and use the “*kisaeng*.” But in making Non’gae a “righteous *kisaeng*” there arose the unexpected result of changes to the sphere and standards assigned to “women” in the Chosŏn dynasty. Moreover, this was possible because Non’gae was not a “wife” who was connected to a specific man but a *kisaeng*. Even though she could not be the subject of chastity because she was a lowborn *kisaeng*, she could be recognized as a subject of loyalty because she was a lowborn *kisaeng*. On the other hand, though recognizing *kisaeng* as a subject of loyalty meant acknowledging their existence, the cost of that recognition was clear: absolute loyalty to the country and death. Without death, loyalty was impossible.

### Ambiguous Memories: Non’gae and the “Old *Kisaeng*”

In the eighteenth century, Non’gae was reborn as a “righteous *kisaeng*.” However, it was difficult to evaluate her as such and maintain the usual neat categories of morality and social status that existed within the context of the Chosŏn dynasty. This was because of the persistence of an image of her that deviated from Confucian norms. Non’gae’s sacrifice was in a different category than those of the women listed under the heading of “chastity” in the *Tongguk sinsok samgang haengsil to*. This was because Non’gae had killed a man, even though he had been a Japanese general: an action which contained elements that were difficult to subsume within the “standard image of Chosŏn women.” More than anything else, it was the questions raised by the uncertainty of her direct fraternization with the “Japanese general” that made it difficult to portray her as a Confucian woman.

These ambiguous elements were sifted away so that Non’gae could receive state recognition. However, a different memory of Non’gae continued to exist in the stories that circulated among the people. Non’gae’s story seemed at first glance to be neat and tidy, but lying beneath it and on its periphery remained stubborn fragments of “trash” memories that were different from the tale of Non’gae.<sup>35</sup> These fragments could not be included in the official memory of

---

35. Aleida Assmann, while discussing “trash” as “negative storage,” refers to the close link between trash and inverted or subconscious memory. Referring to the work of the historian Krzysztof Pomian and his concept of the “semiophor” she explains that “trash is not necessarily the final stage of alienation in the process of material change, but can also manifest itself as a ‘state of latency’ after an object has been divested of its designation, waiting for a new re-signation. As a culturally unframed object outside the realm of functionality and semiotization it

Non'gae which was reconstructed in order to receive state recognition. They could not enter the story and so remained uneasily at its boundaries. These trace memories entered into the story of a “woman” who, in the second battle of Chinju, helped the Japanese defeat the Chosŏn army.

The story of a woman taking a decisive role in the fall of Chinju castle appears in Chang Kyeyŏl's *Imjinnok*:

When the Japanese general Sök Chongno attacked Chinju fortress the siege lasted for more than a month. Since it did not fall he had water released inside the walls.<sup>36</sup> Then he made scarecrows out of grass and placed them inside the fortress. Still, no one moved. One woman clapped her hands and with a great laugh said “Japanese soldiers have entered the castle!” The soldiers were shocked and jumped into the water below the walls.<sup>37</sup>

And so because of the words of one woman, the fortress fell.<sup>38</sup> The identity of the woman in this story is not clear nor is it possible to know if she had some special motive for shouting. She may have wanted to help the Japanese attack or was calling down a curse for the defeat of the Chosŏn army. This story is skillfully connected to the recorded facts in the *Chaejo pŏnbang chi*:

During the battle for Chinju, the bandits [the Japanese army] lobbed fire over the walls. The blaze reached up to heaven and the fighting spirit of those within the walls plummeted. At this time Sö Yewŏn, the magistrate of Chinju, was confused and afraid and was always changing his orders and so the chain of command became disrupted. Moreover, he and Kim Ch'ŏnil, the commander of the volunteer army, often disagreed and so their relationship was not good. However, an old *kisaeng* quietly approached a subordinate of the general and said “Previously when Kim Simin defended this castle the people both high and low united together and because of this they defended it to the end. If we look at our

---

may be picked up to become the carrier of another, often marginal or inverse message.” Aleida Assman, *Kiök üi konggan*, trans. Pyŏn Haksu, Paek Sölja, and Ch'ae Yönsuk (Taegu: Kyöngbuk taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1999), 27.

36. A record that describes a massive downpour causing the fall of Chinju, which bears an affinity with this story of the Japanese flooding the fortress, can be found in the third volume of Sin Kyöng's *Chaejo Pŏnbang chi* 再造藩邦志.

37. Im Ch'örho, *Imjinnok yŏn'gu*, 204. There is another similar story of “women” bringing about defeat during war. For instance, one oral tradition passed down has it that during Hideyoshi's invasion when a volunteer army was fighting a Japanese army in Tot'a mountain fortress the volunteer army made many fake soldiers (*übyöng* 擬兵) and set them up so they looked like a powerful army. The Japanese saw them and were too afraid to advance. Then, an old hag appeared and told the Japanese soldiers how to launch their attack and the volunteer army suffered a massive defeat. Im Ch'örho, *Imjinnok yŏn'gu*, 205.

38. Sin Kyöng, *Chaejo pŏnbang chi*.

present situation, we can see that things are completely different from what they were then and so we will not be able to save ourselves.” Kim Ch’õnil heard this and since it was capricious chatter that would confuse the minds of the people he cut off the *kisaeng*’s head.

In another work, the old *kisaeng* who appears in the story is Non’gae.<sup>39</sup> In *Taedong kimun* 大東奇聞<sup>40</sup> the *kisaeng* who was critical of the way Kim Ch’õnil defended the fortress was established to be Non’gae.<sup>41</sup> When Kim Ch’õnil intends to kill her “for such mutinous talk,” he was prevented from doing so by the surrounding people. After that, the walls of the fortress fell and as the soldiers and the people were about to be slaughtered, Non’gae embraced the enemy general and leapt into the river, killing them both. This story is an extract from *Ch’õnggu yadam*. This memory describes how the *kisaeng* Non’gae drew attention to the problems in how the army was commanded and prophesized the fall of Chinju and so angered the volunteer army general.

The “woman,” the “old *kisaeng*” and “Non’gae” all, through their “words” gave help to the enemy. Perhaps there are fragmented memories of a very different Non’gae that were not included within the story of the “righteous *kisaeng* Non’gae” constructed by the *yangban* and government officials. Is there some connection with the woman who helped the Japanese general and the *kisaeng* Non’gae? The memories of Non’gae are ambiguous. The Non’gae

---

39. When we examine those studies that analyze Non’gae’s birth and death through various records that date from the nineteenth century and after it becomes apparent that Non’gae’s “age” does not square with the years given for her birth, death, and relationship with Ch’oe Kyõnghoe. Chõng Tongju, inferring that 1593 was the year of her death, hypothesized that Non’gae was twenty years old at the time of her death because it was said that she died “in the flower of youth.” This would put her birth year as 1574. However, if this dating system were accepted, it would mean that Non’gae would have only been between three and five years old when Ch’oe Kyõnghoe became the country magistrate of Changsu. If Chõng Tongju intends to argue that Ch’oe Kyõnghoe and Non’gae are lovers then in 1579 Non’gae would need to be at least twenty years old and if that were the case, she would be about thirty-five when she died and so would have been middle aged. If that is right, than she could not be “a young woman in the flower of her youth” as she was said to be. Chõng Tongju, “Chinju sõng chõnt’u wa Non’gae,” 83-85. If we reverse this theory then it is more likely that at the time of Non’gae’s death she was “the old *Kisaeng*” as found in the other stories.

40. The *Taedong kimun* was compiled by Kang Hyosõk and was published in 1925 by the Hanyang sõwõn 漢陽書院 and was a collection of anecdotes about Chosõn people. The story of Non’gae appears in the 51st chapter of the second volume of that work.

41. The 1930s novel by Kim Tongin called *Non’gae ùi hwansaeng* (The reincarnation of Non’gae) is based on this. In this version, Kim Ch’õnil looks at Non’gae’s daring opposition with disgust and wants to cut off her head. However, since she is the lover of Sõ Yewõn he does not kill her but instead drives her outside the walls of Chinju. Kim Tongin, “Non’gae ùi hwansaeng,” *Tonggwang* 33 (May 1, 1932).

who after the fall of Chinju embraced a Japanese general and died with him was not the only Non'gae. There was also the Non'gae who caused trouble by pointing to the chaotic state of the army under the male general's command. From this, it was believed that such actions helped the Japanese enemy and so played a part in the fall of Chinju. *Kisaengs*, during times of war, always became the objects of suspicion, because of the possibility that they could fraternize with the Japanese enemy. They occupied an ambiguous position between "loyalty" and "disloyalty." Non'gae was unknowable and so was a source of fear.

## Conclusion

What was the process by which the official memory of a woman was constructed in a traditional society? For whose consumption was it created? With these questions in mind, this article reflected on the new phenomenon that occurred in late Chosŏn society after the Imjin invasions, in which the *kisaeng* Non'gae was made into a hero. The article examined the different ways in which she was remembered and analyzed the elements that produced that phenomenon.

The work of remembering and recording the death of "Non'gae" after the Japanese invasions was undertaken in order to make her into a "righteous *kisaeng*" and was guided by the male *yangban* of the Chinju region in Kyŏngsang province. However, the state recognition of Non'gae as a righteous *kisaeng* was made possible by the "actions" of the Chinju *kisaeng* who continued to commemorate her after Hideyoshi's invasions. In the process of reconstructing the state after the Imjin and Manchu invasions the new phenomenon of women being classified as "loyal" came into existence through Non'gae. In late Chosŏn society, sexual divisions and sexuality collided and conflicted with Confucian values such as "chastity" and "loyalty." And as the "righteous *kisaeng* Non'gae" was created, these other memories about her were "forgotten:" a story of an old *kisaeng* who sowed chaos within the fortress of Chinju and brought about its defeat was erased since it conflicted with the ideal image of the Confucian woman. Meanwhile, there was a tendency as time passed to view Non'gae as Ch'oe Kyŏnghoe's concubine, which reflected the male *yangban* perspective to subsume the "righteous *kisaeng*" Non'gae into the traditional "way of three obediences" (*samjong chi to* 三從之道). Both of these "forgotten" memories speak to such collisions and conflicts.

The recognition of women as being able to directly sacrifice themselves for the country without the mediation of men allowed for an expansion in the social imagining and understanding of women. But it was because of Non'gae's status as a *kisaeng* that this was possible. Since she had no husband, she became a subject of the state not through "chastity" as a married woman, but because of direct "loyalty." However, such recognition was limited only to *kisaeng* during the Chosŏn dynasty. Making Non'gae into a "righteous *kisaeng* and a subject of loyalty" was possible through the work of erasing those unsettling and treacherous elements that clung to her memories. Naming a *kisaeng* as an agent capable of "loyalty" meant that Non'gae's existence was officially recognized by the government. However, the price of that recognition was absolute loyalty to the state; and that could only be achieved through death. Even though after the eighteenth century, the faithfulness of even lower status women was emphasized, *kisaeng* were required to be "loyal" and not "faithful." This process was accomplished by the production of a public memory of the *kisaeng* Non'gae. The inclusion of a *kisaeng* as a subject of "loyalty" was accomplished through the removal of elements that ran counter to that virtue.

After the eighteenth century, Non'gae was reborn as a "righteous *kisaeng*." Through her actions, women, who previously had only been able to be subjects capable of "chastity" within the gender framework of Confucianism were able for the first time to be labeled as subjects of "loyalty." The debate over whether or not she could be recognized as having "chastity" evolved into an acknowledgement of her "loyalty." Non'gae was both the cause and the result of the transformation in the relationship between women and the state.