

BOOK REVIEW

Jieun Han and Franklin Rausch, trans. *An Chunggün: His Life and Thought in His Own Words*.

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Jieun Han and Franklin Rausch, the compilers and translators of *An Chunggün: His Life and Thought in His Own Words*, have done a great service to Anglophone historians of this period by casting much-needed light on Korea's arguably best-known convert to Roman Catholicism, who also assassinated Itō Hirobumi in 1909. It is this paradox of An Chunggün's conversion to Christianity and subsequent act of assassination that lies at the heart of historians' efforts to understand him in the context of his times. This collection of An's extant writings in English translation makes this fundamental paradox easier to understand. The translated material is well organized in a more or less chronological way and includes helpful introductions by Myung-lim Park of Yonsei University, the institution that provided funding for the publication, and by the translators, both of whom are well known for their previous scholarly works on An Chunggün.

These introductions are followed by An's autobiography, chapter 1, "The History of An Ŭngch'il," composed during his imprisonment and trial in Lüshun in 1910. This substantial autobiographical account traces An's life from his youth, about which he recounts his preference for hunting, singing, and dancing over his studies, through his marriage to Kim Aryō, his participation in the suppression of the Tonghak Uprising in Hwanghae Province, and his father's conversion to Roman Catholicism after seeking refuge from political enemies in a French Catholic church. Although An admits to his enjoyment of an active life "galloping around on fast horses" (42), he also converted to Catholicism at the behest of his father and was baptized by the French missionary Father Joseph Wilhelm (Hong Sökku). He subsequently engaged in various peaceful patriotic activities such as establishing two schools, participating in the National Debt Repayment Movement, and even attempting to start up a mining business.

Given his stated preference for an active life, however, it is not surprising that An subsequently became involved in the Righteous Army Movement in the wake of the Treaty of Protection of 1905. It was perhaps the bitter experience of suffering defeat at the hands of the Japanese military and all the hardships that ensued that pushed An toward his fateful decision to assassinate Itō Hirobumi when the opportunity presented itself at Harbin Station on October 26, 1909. After his arrest by the Russian police and subsequent transfer to Japanese custody, An lists his fifteen justifications for taking such an extreme action against Itō, who he perceived as being the chief architect of Japan's mistreatment of Korea and as betraying the Meiji emperor and the Japanese people by oppressing Korea and colluding with the Western powers against China rather than uniting with its two neighboring countries to counter Western imperialism.

This extensive autobiography is followed by a brief chapter of miscellaneous writings, comprising the newspaper article “On Uniting Human Hearts,” written by An and published in the *Haejo sinmun* in Vladivostok in 1908; a note entitled “The Thoughts of the Korean An Ŭngch’il,” his final farewell that was subsequently published in the *Taehan maeil sinbo* just before his execution on March 25, 1910; and a final statement made to his two brothers, Chonggŭn and Konggŭn, and Father Joseph Wilhelm shortly before his execution took place on March 26, 1910, that concludes, “When the sound of Korean independence rises up to heaven, I will dance and cheer manse!” (133).

Chapter 3 comprises excerpts from An’s trial records that reveal how An pleaded his innocence of murder and his insistence that he be treated as an enemy combatant engaged in a just war against an oppressive enemy embodied by Itō Hirobumi, the former resident general of Korea. What is most striking about this chapter is the willingness of the Japanese to restrain themselves from taking any hasty vengeful action against An for his killing of one of the most revered founders of modern Japan. There is clearly a public relations motive for this restraint, however, as the Japanese authorities at that time were keen to promote an image of Japan as an enlightened power on the world stage. On the other hand, An’s professions of respect for the Japanese emperor and friendship toward the Japanese people demonstrate that he was sincere in his belief that Itō was an enemy of the Japanese people as well as the people of Korea. Furthermore, the surprising and apparently genuinely friendly and respectful treatment that he received at the hands of his Japanese jailers and lawyers suggests that the latter also recognized the bravery and patriotism of An’s actions on behalf of his country. In this chapter, and elsewhere throughout the book, there are photographs and illustrations of An and other persons and places relating to his life and death.

Chapter 4 comprises notes on An’s posttrial hearing, and chapter 5 is a translation of the Interpreter for the Residency General of Korea Sonoki Tsueyoshi’s account of An’s interviews with Father Joseph Wilhelm prior to his execution. In this chapter the translators caution that An’s words, particularly those referring to the killing of Itō as an “evil act,” were most probably revised by Sonoki. Nevertheless, it appears that Father Joseph Wilhelm exhorted An to repent for the assassination of Itō and to recognize the error he had made in order to receive forgiveness and be able to enter heaven after his death. There is some ambivalence, however, as to whether An repudiated the assassination, but according to this account, Father Joseph Wilhelm accepted his repentance and heard his confession before administering communion to him while he was awaiting execution in Lüshun. An also had a final meeting with Chonggŭn and Konggŭn and his Japanese attorneys Mizuno Kichitarō and Kamada Shōji. In response to his brothers’ concerns over his impending execution, he responded: “Life is like a dream and death is no different from a long deep sleep. I consider it an easy thing to die so do not worry” (190).

As in chapter 1, “The History of An Ŭngch’il,” chapter 6, “On Peace in the East,” also contains the original Literary Sinitic text interspersed above the English translation. This chapter is the clearest explanation, albeit unfinished before his

death, of An's own worldview and begins with a condemnation of the Western imperial powers, especially the Russian Empire and its activities in the Far East. An argues that Japan's conflict with Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) was a just war but that its subsequent mistreatment of Korea and China was a betrayal of two nations whose people belonged to the same race as the people of Japan. For An, the primary enemy of Korea should never have been Japan but rather the Western imperial powers, and his vision for attaining peace in East Asia was for China, Korea, and Japan to demonstrate racial solidarity by standing up to the West and protecting one another's interests against the predations of the Western powers. According to An, in the Russo-Japanese War, Korea had sided with Japan against Russia when it could just have easily sided with Russia against Japan, but it had been repaid by being forced into becoming a Japanese protectorate against the will of its sovereign and people. He concludes his unfinished essay with the words, "In the end, Japan will alienate all those who would be its allies. It certainly cannot escape the fate of being isolated, bereft of friends" (213).

The penultimate chapter contains An's prison letters to his two brothers, Chonggün and Konggün; his mother, Cho Maria; his wife, Kim Aryö; Father Joseph Wilhelm, Bishop Gustave Mutel, and a paternal uncle. The final chapter is an illustrated collection of An's calligraphy produced while he was in prison around February and March 1910. Once again the Literary Sinitic is provided above the English translation, encouraging the reader to engage with the original text. Several of these calligraphic works have been designated Korean National Treasures. This chapter also includes an illustration of An's seal, which the translators interpret as "thomas, coréean" but which should be read as "an thomas corée," as the standard French translation for a male "Korean" would be "Coréen" not "Coréean," and the typography, spacing, and capitalization all clearly indicate three separate words (240). The book concludes with a brief afterword by the head of the National Institute of Korean History, Cho Kwang, who emphasizes the paramount importance of An's autobiography, the "Story of An Ŭngch'il," in understanding both the man and the times in which he lived (243).

Han and Rausch are to be congratulated on bringing together such a disparate collection of historical materials and presenting them in such a readable and well-organized form, providing us with the first substantial collection of An Ch'unggün's written works translated into English. The copious annotations demonstrate the translators' scholarship and attention to detail, while the elegance of the translation itself makes the book a pleasure to read. In addition, the inclusion of the original Literary Sinitic texts for An's autobiography, his essay "On Peace in the East," and his calligraphy is a welcome innovation and enhances the pedagogic value of a work that is likely to become the definitive collection of An's writings in English translation for many years to come.

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