

## The Record of the Black Dragon Year

Peter H. Lee (editor)

translated from the Korean  
Institute of Korean Culture 2000

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The Japanese invasion of Korea from 1592 to 1598 inspired many popular tales, among the best known of which is the *Imjin nok* or *Record of the Black Dragon Year*, extant in some forty versions. This edition offers the original text and a translation of one version, along with a fifty page introduction.

The tale itself is a collection of largely fantastic episodes, often with only tenuous historical connections. The battles are reduced to fights between the heroes, who are always nine feet tall and weigh three thousand pounds, and politics takes an essentially moral form. Popular and scholarly elements are mixed: the agenda is often subversive, but still framed within the context of the Confucian system, complete with references to Chinese historical figures.

The result is a strange but still appealing read for a modern audience — and fortunately this volume provides enough background even for the complete novice to Korean culture. Lee's introduction begins with a social history of Korean vernacular fiction in the 17th and 18th centuries. This is followed by a survey of ten major plot motifs in the *Record of the Black Dragon Year*. And there's a look at some related literature, most notably the narratives of scholarly Korean prisoners taken to Japan. Other useful inclusions are a time-line, a glossary, and three pages with colour photographs of items from the period.

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