

Globalization of Sea Area of Northeastern Asia in 14-16th Centuries: Focusing on the Japanese Pirates

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1. Introduction

Historically, sea areas in Northeastern Asia were the channel that connected the cultures and commodities in Ming (明)-Joseon (朝鮮)-Japan (日本) where clashes and conflicts existed as well. In the 14-16th centuries, the three states were under a tributary system based on a tribute-return exchange established since the Ming dynasty. However, there was a huge difference in the centralization of the state power between Joseon and Japan, which loosened the tributary system. In this era, Japanese pirates were very active under different forms.¹

Previously, the studies on Japanese pirates mostly focused on the national history. The main subjects of those studies could be used to categorize by periods the piracy itself, the main agents of the pirates and the recognition of Japanese pirates from sea areas.² The main problem of those studies is that they reflect the current views on the nation-state-territory, namely the approach of one nation's history or the national history. The study of Japanese pirates should allow to make approaches on the piracy within the historical context of the 14-16th centuries-the expansion of trades, the distribution of silver, the failure of the Japanese's closed-sea policy and the expansion of sea areas-in order to comprehend the historical meanings of Japanese pirates.³

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¹ Japanese pirates, namely Chinese Wōkōu, Japanese Wakō, Korean Waegu.

² Han Munjong, 2002, “朝鮮의回顧와展望 (Retrospect and Prospect of Joseon),” 『韓日關係史研究의回顧와展望 (Retrospect and Prospect of the Study of Korea-Japan Relationship)』, Kookhak; Minoru, Nakada 2005, “日本에서의倭寇研究의學說史的檢討 (Theoretical Review on the Studies of Japanese Pirates in Japan),” 『第二期韓日歷史共同研究報告書 (The Second Korea-Japan Joint-History Research Report)』 Vol.3.

³ Siro Momoki, 2012, 『海域아시아사 研究入門 (Introduction to Maritime History of Asia)』, Minsokwon.

2. Increased Marginal Groups

In the 14-16th centuries, as the Japanese piracy became more active, new groups which were favorable to the pirates appeared and joined them in Ming and Joseon. These groups included people who were hostile toward the authorities within the countries. In this sense, we need to imagine the pirates as a connection with the classes structuring the medieval societies rather than as a national issue.

1) Joseon

The marginal groups connected with the Japanese pirates which arose in Joseon could be classified in different categories. Firstly, Jeju (濟州) islanders that conducted piracy on the southern coast of Gyeongsang Province (慶尙道) according to pirate custom and using Japanese language since 1470. Many Jeju islanders migrated to the mainland, but they were not registered in their residential village. It is recognized that some groups of those Jeju islanders learnt Japanese language and visited nearby islands to conduct piracy.⁴ It was difficult for Joseon's authorities to distinguish whether the pirates were from Japan or Joseon in Jeolla Province (全羅道). Many of these pirates were Joseon inhabitants who wanted to avoid taxation.⁵ There are also some examples of registered residents of Jeolla Province who joined the pirates. For instance, in 1472, 30 villagers from Nakan (樂安), Suncheon (順天), and Oksan (玉山) pretended to be Japanese or Jeju islanders and conducted piracy with four vessels.⁶

There were groups of Jeju islanders calling themselves Dudokjaji (豆秃也只) who lived around the coast of Sacheon (泗川), Goseong (固城), and Jinju (晉州) in Gyeongsang Province. Their customs were similar to Japanese traditions,

⁴ 世宗實錄 (Seongjong Silok, Record of King Seongjong) the 12th day of the 8th month, 13th Year. National Institute of Korean History a published book; <http://sillok.history.go.kr/main/main.do> (same as above).

⁵ Shosuke Murai, 1993, 『中世倭人の世界 (The World of Medieval Japanese)』, chapter 1, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo.

⁶ 成宗實錄 Seongjong Silok (Record of King Seongjong) the 27th day of the 2nd month, 3rd Year.

⁷ Shosuke Murai, 1993, chapter 1.

⁸ Seongjong Silok (Record of King Seongjong) the 5th day of the 8th month, 8th Year.

using a language that belonged to either Japanese or Chinese in 1477.⁷ They were unregistered and had marginalized life by fishing and collecting seaweeds with the vessels.⁸ There also is a record showing that Jeju islanders in the mainland were unorganized plunderers.⁹ All the marine commodities contributed by Jeju islanders were collected by ear shell divers (鮑作人) that collected marine products. It is known that some ear shell divers conducted piracy pretending to be Japanese pirates.¹⁰

There was also a group of Japanese and Chinese that boarded on foreign vessels (荒唐船) whose origin could not be distinguished. A record from 1544 shows that a group composed of Ming and Japanese people damaged Ming. One vessel belonged to a group of Japanese people, including a person called Shijirō (絲二老) and one to Chinese people including a person called Chae Sa Kwan (蔡四官) along with people from Hakata (博多), Hirado (平戸), and Doukyo (銅興). They were on their way back from Ming after a trade failed. 20 people from Doukyo and Jisero (時世老) in Hakata were on a Sampan ship (三板船) when they arrived on the coast.¹¹ The Japanese people on the foreign vessels were composed of various ethnic groups. In 1555, the Dallyang incident (達梁倭變), a piracy incident caused by a fleet of 70 pirate vessel, occurred nearby Dallyang in Jeolla Province. They are known as the pirates from Kyushu (九州), Japan, for being active around the coast of China and the southern coast of Joseon. The fleet was led by Chinese people with Japanese followers from Hirado and Godo (五島).

Lastly, there were movements of Joseon people joining the Japanese pirates. In 1556, there was a record from a Joseon's child who returned along with someone from Tsushima, who could only speak Japanese. Among the ear shell divers, there were people who went to Japan to avoid their duties assigned by Joseon authorities. The child raised in this environment was only able to speak Japanese and not considered as foreigner.¹² As the record indicates, there was a group of Joseon people who joined the Japanese pirates on their own.

⁹ Lee Young Kwon, 2013, 『朝鮮時代 海洋流民의 社會史 (Social Life of Maritime Migrants in Joseon Era)』, Hanwool Academy, pp.189~190.

¹⁰ Seongjong Silok (Record of King Seongjong) the 12th day of the 4th month, 16th Year.

¹¹ 明宗實錄 (Myeongjong Silok, Record of King Myeongjong) the 8th day of the 6th month, 9th Year.

¹² Myeongjong Silok (Record of King Myeongjong) the 14th day of the 5th month, 11th Year.

In 1587, Kim Kae Dong (金介同), the officer of the navy stationed in Jeolla Province, has been captured during the battle of Sonjuk island (損竹島) and sold to a southern country (南藩國). He escaped and went to Ming, then to Beijing and came back to Joseon along with a person called Yoo Jeon (柳堧). Kim Kae-Dong has been captured in the Dado Sea (多島海, archipelago) nearby Jeolla Province and then taken to Godo, sold out to Luzon in the Philippines and finally smuggled into Ming. Sa Hwa Dong(沙火同) from Jin island (珍島) in Joseon has been captured and then defected to Japanese pirates. He stated what one of the pirates said as follows, “The place has good environment for people to live, so you should not fear. The government of Joseon puts heavy duty and taxation on its subjects. You should stay. Last year, we anchored off Sonjuk island due to bad weather on our way to Garipo(加里浦) in Ma island (馬島). It was my initiation.”He continues, “the pirates lived on an island with a huge population called Godo. There were many people captured from Joseon, and there were about 500 vessels. They seized all the battle ships from Jeolla Province navy and took all the bows, arrows, and rifles. However, they didn’t know how to use them, so let their children play with them.”¹³ As he stated, multi-ethnic groups were formed within the pirates and these groups arranged the marginalized world that stood on the sea areas to resist the state authority.

2) Ming

There were records of increases of marginal groups in Ming. While Ming started to grow, although the state enhanced forces of the navy, rebels like Zhang Shi Cheng (張士誠) colluded with Japanese pirates. As a correspond, the state placed the limited prohibition on foreign maritime activities in Zhejiang (浙江) and Fujian (福建) province. Although Japanese people conducted most of the piracy activity in the early Ming era, there also were groups of Chinese people involved with them. The groups were mostly traders who attracted Japanese merchants and pirates for trade. Many people fled from the state control due to the social absurdities during the mid-Ming era.¹⁴ In 1443, Zhou Lai-Bao (周來保) from Huang Yan Xian (黃巖縣) Zhejiang and Zhong Pu fu

¹³ 宣祖實錄 Seonjo Silok (Record of King Seonjo) the 17th day of the 11th month, 21th Year.

¹⁴ Yoon SungIk, 2007, 『明代 倭寇の 研究 (A Study on the Japanese Pirates in Ming Era)』, Gyeongin Munhwasa, pp.170~172.

(鐘普福) from Longxi Xian (龍溪縣) Fujian, led 1,000 pirates to plunder Lejin Xian, where people fled from Hongxi's (洪熙) heavy duties. Due to the trade monopoly by the merchants and state officials, the Japanese pirates stayed around the islands nearby the coast of Ming to conduct piracy while recruiting Chinese ethnics who were in troubles.

Afterwards, the primary purpose of Japanese pirates in the 16th century was illicit commerce. They moved out of Ming to Southeastern Asia. Throughout the process, the ethnic composition of pirates included Japanese, Chinese and Portuguese people. There were many pirates from Ming who pretended to be Japanese pirates. During the Ming era, the ethnic composition of Japanese pirates was divided between 30% of real Japanese and 70% of pirates pretending to be Japanese.¹⁵

There was a small number of real Japanese pirates, and most of them were mostly from Fujian or Zhejiang and were associated with other ethnics.¹⁶ The pirates used to shave their hair with a 'Sakayaki style' and to wear Japanese customs. The pirates leaders such as Xudong (許棟), Wang Zhi (王直) or Xu hai (徐海) were Chinese. The hideouts of the pirates were located in Godo and Hirado in Japan where the Toujinmachi (唐人町) were established with the Mazushang (媽祖象). The religious vestige from China, as the number of Chinese pirates increased. For example, Wang Zhi, known as the king of pirates wearing silk clothing, was leading a group of 2,000 pirates with a massive fleet.¹⁷

In addition, the sudden rise of Japanese pirates and Chinese pirates in the age of Jiaping (嘉靖) was deeply related with the distribution of silver. As soon as silver from the new continent arrived in China, illicit commerce through black markets became popular. Merchants who focused on the marine trades turned into the pirates while continuing their marine trades because they experienced huge losses from the conflicts between the central and provincial government on the closed-sea policy.¹⁸ As Ryukyu (琉球) began to contribute to Ming through Quanzhou (泉州), people of Quanzhou joined the illicit commerce.¹⁹ The people

¹⁵ 明史 (Ming Shi) Vol. 322, Waiguo 3, Ribenchuan Jiaping 33rd Year, Zhonghua Book Company.

¹⁶ 籌海圖編 (Chou Haitu Bian) Vol. 3.

¹⁷ Myeongjong Silok (Record of King Myeongjong) the 1st day of the 4th month, 11th Year.

¹⁸ Yoon SungIk, 2001, "明代海寇論에 對한 再考察 (A Study of Hai Kai Lun of Ming Era)," 『明清史研究 (Journal of Ming-Qing Historical Studies)』 14, pp.23~31.

¹⁹ Kurayoshi Takara, 2008, 『琉球 王國 (Ryukyu Kingdom)』, trans. by Won Jeong Sik, Sohwa, pp.109~111.

of Quanzhou were both merchants and pirates who gradually turned into pirates.²⁰

Lastly, Chinese-oriented pirates (水賊) associated with Japanese pirates appeared in Joseon under the reign of King Myeongjong (明宗). It is significant that Chinese people in Joseon became pirates. People from Fujian used to conspire with Japanese pirates to provide weapons and teach them how to use cannons.²¹ Among Japanese pirates of the 16th century, there were groups composed of Jeju migrants and Chinese-oriented pirates. The pirates of Hailang island (海浪島) conducted piracy on cargo vessels around Hwanghae Province (黃海道) and Pyeongan Province (平安道).²² A record from 1528 indicates that there were thousands of Chinese people residing with 400-500 Koreans.²³

Furthermore, at the end of 15th century, a Portuguese called the king of the sea and the king of property owners went from Southeastern Asia to the Northeastern Sea. A record in Joseon also says that someone came back from Beijing in 1520 after bringing the information about a Portuguese conqueror in the kingdom of Malacca, but failed to negotiate with Ming.²⁴ The Portuguese designated by Ming climbed on the marine trade networks to come to Japan. For example, the person who carried Francisco de Xavier from Malacca to Kagoshima (鹿児島) was a pirate called Awan. It is recognized that Portuguese people appeared in East Asia as part of Japanese pirates, as the record of 1540's indicates that the people who introduced rifles and Christianity in Japan were Portuguese pirates.²⁵

3. Expansion of Sea Areas

The sea areas in Northeastern Asia in the 16th century expanded through

²⁰Choi NackMin, 2011, “明의 解禁政策과 泉州人の 海上活動 (Ban on maritime trade and Quanzhou people's maritime activities in Ming dynasty)”『歴史와 境界 (History & the Boundaries)』78, pp.116~117.

²¹Myeongjong Silok (Record of King Myeongjong) the 19th day of the 4th month, 2nd Year.

²²Seo Inbum, 2011, “朝鮮時代 西海 北端 海域의 境界와 島嶼問題 (The Northern boundary of West Sea and Islands Problems in Joseon),”『明清史研究 (Journal of Ming-Qing Historical Studies)』36, pp.363~367.

²³中宗實錄 (Jungjong Silok, Record of King Jungjong) the 6th day of the 8th month, 23th Year.

²⁴Jungjong Silok (Record of King Jungjong) the 15th day of the 12th month, 15th Year.

²⁵Shosuke Murai, 1997, 『海から見た戦国日本 (Sengoku Japan from the Sea)』, chapter 4, Chikuma Shinsho.

the distribution of silver and illicit commercial activities. The distribution of silver extended itself quickly as silver refinery occurred on the sea areas in Northeastern Asia. Japanese pirates of this period were actively participating at the illicit trades to occupy the sea area, which resulted in the expansion of sea area toward East Asian Sea.

1) Distribution of Silver

Between 1504 and 1528, silver refinery called Huichuifa (灰吹法, cupellation) has been introduced by Ming into Japan. But it was inefficient compared with Dancheon silver refinery developed by Kim Gam Bul (金甘佛) and Kim Gum Dong (金儉同). Kim Gam Bul, a commoner, and Kim Gum Dong, a slave of slave management office (掌隸院), stated as they wrought silver with lead as follow, "0.6kg of lead can make 1.2kg of silver. Joseon has plenty of lead, so we could be enriched with silver. The technique to work silver is to place ashes on an iron brazier, fill in with lead pieces, close it with pottery, and then melt with charcoals".²⁶ As the silver refinery techniques were introduced in Japan, trades ended with Ming and the lack of silver supply followed in Ming. In 1540 in Joseon, a huge change occurred in private trades. The primary importation changed from copper to silver. It came from the development of silver mines in Japan since 1526, like Kamiya Jutei (神谷寿禎), the merchant of Hakata, who found Iwami (石見) mine.²⁷ In 1533, he brought with the Joseon engineers in Hakata.

From 1523, Japan broken the tributary trading (勘合貿易) with Ming and seek to trade silver with Joseon, which caused the inflow of huge amount of silver. The cotton trading merchants found the situation favorable because the increase of silver supply led to a price reduction of silver. Before the introduction of silver in Japan, the silver outflow in Ming through private trading led to a lack of silver. The piracy period began when the commercial vessels from Ming traded with Japan for raw silk trading in exchange for Japanese silver. In Joseon, as the commercial distribution developed itself, large-scale merchants conducted illicit commercial activities regardless of the

²⁶ 燕山君日記 (Yeonsangun Ilgi, Record of Yeonsangun) the 18th day of the 5th month, 9th Year.

²⁷ Atsushi Kobata, 1968, 『日本鉱山史研究 (Nihon Kouzanshi kenkyu) English translation』, Iwanami Shoten, pp.108~111.

restrictions from the state.

During the 16th century, the state of Joseon placed strict regulations on silver production and closed silver mines. The Silver Prohibition Act (禁銀令) prohibited mining or trading of silver. As a consequence, a silver inflow from Japan supposed to be delivered to Ming arose. When we look at the situation, a record states, “As Japanese silver is distributed, the market (市廛) is filled with silver. The merchants going to Beijing openly bring silver, and each takes more than 3,000nyang (兩).²⁸ The envoys from Ming ask us where is the silver from whereas Joseon does not produce any.”²⁹

Next, the increased of the silver production in Japan during the 1530s created a new trading route connecting Japan and Jiangnan (江南) in China. Unlike the situation in Joseon, the technical techniques introduced in the area led to a surprising increase in production of silver. The primary reasons of the production's increased include no suppression from Ming that could have caused hindrance and state-driven promotion of silver production by unified power under Senkoku Daimyo (戦國大名). As a result, at the beginning of the 17th century, one-third of the silver production around the world was made in Japan.³⁰

In Joseon, the state was aware of the foreign vessels, consequently the large-scale invasion of Japanese pirates at Dallyang in Jeolla Province in 1555 occurred. The closed-sea policy from Ming resulted in a spread of Japanese pirates. In 1567, the state of Ming loosened the closed-sea policy and allowed the opening of a trading route between Southeastern Asia in Yuegang (月港) and Zhangzhou (漳州) in Fujian. The opening began with the Macao-Nagasaki trading by Portuguese merchants, during the age of trading between East Asia and Southeast Asia. Therefore, Portuguese merchants brought silver to Ming since 1570. In 1571, a large supply of silver inflow occurred while Manila belonged to Spain, which allowed a large-scale sailboat trading. China became the last destination of the new continent.

²⁸Nyang (兩) is a unit of old Korean coinage.

²⁹Jungjong Silok(Record of King Jungjong) the 25th day of the 6th month, 33rd Year.

³⁰Shosuke Murai, 1996, “中世倭人と日本人 (Medieval Japan and Japanese),” 日本史を海からより (*Japanese History from the Sea*, Nampungsa. If you use Korean translation version, show translated titles and show page number.

2) Illicit Commercial Activities

Since the end of the 14th century, Japanese pirates changed their primary activity from piracy to illicit commerce. They turned into trading agents. At first, in Joseon, the official trading decreased while illicit trading increased after the Sampo Incident (三浦倭變) from 1510. It was due to the loosening of state-control as the commercial activities increased. In 1542, 90 residents of Woongcheon (熊川), nearby Jepo (薺浦), were investigated for their involvement in illicit trading with Japanese merchants.³¹

In 1587, Kim Kae Dong, the officer of the navy stationed in Jeolla, has been captured during the battle of Sonjuk island and sold to a Southern country. He escaped to Ming, went to Beijing and then came back to Joseon along with an envoy called Yoo Jeon (柳典). Kim Kae Dong has been captured in Dado Sea nearby Jeolla, taken to Godo, sold to Luzon in the Philippines and then smuggled into Ming. The sea areas expanded as the pirates went to Haerangdo and Zhoushan (舟山) islands. The report from the prosecution office states (義禁府), “there are many people from Pyeongan Province and Jeju that fled to Haerangdo. The deployment of the constabulary forces to capture them is required.”³² Also, some people part of the group lost in the Ranciushan(蘭秀山)’s rebellion around Zhoushan islands fled to Jeju island while the others became active around Gobu (古阜) in Jeolla. As stated above, the maritime forces of Jeju island were deeply related to the maritime forces of Southern China.³³

In 1548, in Shuangyu (雙嶼) in Zhejiang which was the biggest illicit commercial region in Ming, has been suppressed by the state. However, it caused the expansion and the radicalization of illicit trading, which resulted in extreme piracy around the Southern coast of China that also impacted piracy around the southwestern part of Joseon and the Kingdom of Ryukyu, called Jiajing Japanese piracy. Japan was a safe hideout for the pirates. Many pirates including Wang zhi were based on the west part of Japan. The closed-sea policy increased piracy and the Portuguese merchants were involved in the illicit trades around the coast of Guangdong (廣東) and in Fujian during the 16th

³¹Jungjong Silok (Record of King Jungjong) the 19th day of the 11th month, 37th Year.

³²Seongjong Silok (Record of King Seongjong) the 19th day of the 8th month, 23rd Year.

³³Gimiaki Dagahashi, 1989, “中世 동아시아 海域에서의 海民과 交流 (People and Exchange in the Medieval East Asian Sea),” 『耽羅文化 (Tamra Culture)』 8, pp.123~130.

century. In Shuangyu, near Ningbo (寧波), a base of illicit trading done by Portuguese, Chinese, and Japanese was established.

After the Jiajiang, the Japanese pirates continued to expand their forces around Ming. Although the frequency decreased, the scale of damage and the size of pirate groups were large. While being based in Guangdong, the pirates expanded their areas of activity from the coast of Ming to the sea areas of Southeastern Asia. During this time, Huiyiben (曾一本) and Linfeng (林鳳) were famous for taking the pirate's heritage of Guangdong. Huiyiben was a subordinate of Wuping (吳平), who led a large pirate force.

In Guangdong, at the end of Jiajiang's era, Wuping created a force composed of 10,000 men. But he lost against Qi Li Guang (戚繼光) and consequently fled to Vietnam. Huiyiben drew the rest of the Wuping's force and began conducting piracy from 1568 around Fuda (福達) and Guangdong.

Linfeng is a pirate from Raoping (饒平) who led 4,000 men to fight and take Guangdong's pirates heritage. He was active even in the Philippines. He arrived in Manila in 1574, set fire in the city and killed thousand of citizens in Manila. His army was composed of 4,000 men, 62 vessels and 1,500 women. Sioco, one of his Japanese officers retreated when Manila's citizens counterattacked, landed again to attack, but lost against the Spanish navy. Linfeng retreated to Pangasinan, located at the north of Manila, and established a base to conduct piracy back at Guangdong and Fuda. In 1544, the pirates who caused the Eulmyo Incident (乙卯倭變) were from Japan. The sea route was in Joseon's sea area. During the 16th century, many foreign vessels were located around Joseon's coast. The increase of the production of Japanese silver in the early beginning of the 1530s resulted in the establishment of a huge trading route. They were called foreign vessels in Joseon. In 1544, an unidentified vessel appeared on the coast of Yompo (藍浦), Chungcheong Province (忠清道). They were Chinese merchants from Fujian that encountered storm.³⁴ The forces responsible of Eulmyo Incident were pirates from Kyushu. The reason for Wang Zhi's invasion was the lack of food supply on their way to reach the Kingdom of Ryukyu.

Lastly, when the people of Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong got involved

³⁴Jungjong Silok (Record of King Jungjong) the 24-25th day of the 6th month, 39th Year; Ming Silok Shizong Jiajing Yiyou December, 23rd Year.

in the illicit trading, the scale of trading became even larger. The illicit trading was led by Xiangshen (鄉紳), the Chinese merchant who went to Japan during the Jiaping era. The pirates such as Wang Zhi conducted commercial activities with Shuangweichuan (雙桅船), the vessel with two identical masts that were prohibited by the state of Ming.³⁵ After Eulmyo Incident, Wang Zhi developed the pirate vessels. Previously, the vessels they used were weak, but the vessels of Wang Zhi were very solid, which could not be destroyed by cannons. One report states, “the cannons of Japanese pirates are refined, so it is much difficult to defeat them now.”³⁶

4. Conclusion

Through the movement of people, goods and information, Japanese pirates of the 14-16th centuries were globalized. In this sense, it is inappropriate to call them Japanese pirates (倭寇), but the sea robber (海賊). Further studies should focus on the social changes by the association of low-class people, traders and the expansion of sea areas caused by pirate's activities. Furthermore, we need to approach the problem with a multi-national point of view, rather than one national one, to understand it as a development of the contacts and exchanges among different regions rather than under a centralized control. Through the widening of our perspectives, we comprehend now the process of globalization of Japanese pirates and their impact on Northeastern Asia in the 14-16th centuries.

³⁵ 『廣東通志 (Guangdongtongzhi)』 Vol. 66, Whi Zhi 3, Haikou.

³⁶ Myeongjong Silok(Record of King Myeongjong) the 16th day of the 5th month, 10th Year.

