

A Study on the Relationship Between “Costal Defense” and “Sea Ban” in Ming Dynasty

Minghao Chen^{1,*}

¹*History and Culture College of Lanzhou City University, Lanzhou, Gansu 730070, China*

**Corresponding Email: cmh_euclid@foxmail.com*

ABSTRACT

Due to the age of discovery, the awakening of commercial consciousness and the southward shift of commercial center, economy and culture of the southern coastal areas of Ming Dynasty developed rapidly. The Ming Dynasty devoted much energy and resources to this area. When exploring the potential, it was also very important to protect itself, therefore the two systems of “sea ban” and “costal defense” came into being. They are different from each other, but in some ways they make up for each other, their relationship changed along with the changing of Ming national power.

Keywords: *coastal defense, sea ban, frontier defense in Ming Dynasty*

1. INTRODUCTION

The sea is an important platform for national diplomacy. Since ancient China was an agricultural society, and most of the offshore areas were far from the capital city, the understanding and management of the sea has always been rather backward. With the rapid development of the absolute monarchy in the Ming Dynasty, the policy towards the sea has been changing. The weakness of the early Ming Dynasty, the demonstration and proclamation of national power of the middle time and the degradation due to in the late time all show that the relationship between coastal defense and sea ban have been changing. But in general, the sea initiative in the Ming Dynasty was still firmly controlled by the court.

In ancient China, especially during the Tang and Song dynasties, China always took the leading position in the offshore areas. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, due to the An-Shi Rebellion and the southward migration of the population caused by Jurchen people, a large number of artisans or merchants were forced to move to the south with their skills and capital which caused China's economic center move to the south, and set the fundamental for coastal areas and the subsequent prosperity of the sea.

In the Northern Song Dynasty, the southern economy had developed very rapidly. For example, in the History of Song there was a saying that “the revenue of the country mainly came from the south, especially the

southeast”. The southeast coastal area has become the commercial center of a country. “Their good were delicate and gorgeous, and they were good at doing business”, shows the high degree of commercialization and mature urban development.

Every coin has two sides, the southern towns enjoyed the demographic dividend, but have to bear the consequences of a large expansion of the population. After the founding of the Ming Dynasty, the southeast coastal areas were still in turbulence, some reactionary forces left behind by domestic peasant war began to stir up along the coast in collusion with foreign hostile forces. As recorded in the history books, “the struggle in groups in the late Yuan Dynasty and those who occupied the coastal counties including Zhang Shicheng, Fang Guozhen and Chen Youding. Zhang and Fang were selling salt and participated sea trade to support their business, and they killed the resentment of the family to uprising”^[1]. Mongolian in the north is still cast covetous eyes, the southern coast of the domestic and foreign reactionary forces caused by the sea pressure were headache for the Ming Dynasty, the court had no choice but to publish the sea ban and coastal defense policy in the south.

2. EVOLUTION OF COASTAL DEFENSE POLICY IN THE MING DYNASTY

China has large land area and long coastline “the coastal areas range from Lehui County to Annan boundary, 5000 miles to Fujian, 2000 miles to Zhejiang,

and 2000 miles to Jiangnan, 1800 miles to Shandong, 1800 miles over Baodi, Lulong to Liaodong, and over 1300 miles to Yalu River. Always invaded by island pirates and Japanese pirates, therefore the coastal defense is also heavy"^[2]. Therefore, the policy of sea ban has been an important part of ancient China border policy since ancient times. In the Ming Dynasty, China's 2000-year feudal absolute monarchy reached its peak, the policy of coastal defense and sea ban also in the unprecedented development, the awakening of domestic official and private marine and business consciousness, and the age of discovery overseas made great changes in various meanings of frontier and seas in the Ming Dynasty.

Coastal defense refers to a series of warning and defensive measures set up by the state in coastal and offshore areas, which belong to the military and used to defend the invasion of foreign troops and harassment of Japanese pirates, or to prevent the civil uprisings. In addition to the facilities and personnel, the development of a policy suitable for coastal areas is also an important part of the coastal defense system.

Before the Ming Dynasty, ancient China had not yet invented a systematic coastal defense system, but rather copied the measures of land border defense and the self-response of the imperial court in the border areas. However, due to the small number of enemy and light ships, advanced technology and high mobility, these have made the previous coastal defense extremely passive, most of the implementation of the defense policy mainly based on defense and counterattack, but this was not helpful, the lack of fluent information and the mismatch system made the foreign enemy a great threat to the people of the coastal areas.

As recorded in the history books: "In the April of 1369, the Japanese pirates appeared in islands, they invaded Suzhou and Chongming, killed residents, robbed property, coastal areas were deeply affected." After the founding of the Ming Dynasty, the situation at sea was still in turbulence. Domestic remnants of resistance and Japanese pirates constantly invaded the southeast coast, killing and robbing nothing they dared not do, which caused great trouble to the Ming Dynasty. The influence was widespread from Shandong to Guangdong.

In addition, there are such as "in this month, Gaozhou Prefecture encountered pirates rebellion, when the assistant prefectural magistrate Wang Mingshan died, the pirates He Junshan gathered hundreds of people which was a headache for the coastal areas; the official soldiers has arrested and killed the rest of the pirates party, Luo Ziren escaped and began robbery even robbed the official seal of the Prefecture; Luo forced Wang to surrender but failed and Wang was killed in Xiadong. Leizhou Commander dispatched military leader Huang Qing to arrest and kill Luo and his fellows"^[3]. "In this month, Haikou City of Gaozhou Prefecture encountered pirates rebellion, the assistant prefectural magistrate has been

killed; the official soldiers killed many pirates but some pirates escaped and began robbery even robbed the official seal of the Prefecture, and forced assistant prefectural magistrate to betray the court. The assistant prefectural magistrate refused and killed by the pirates, immediately". The case shows that in the early Ming Dynasty, the Gaozhou Prefecture already encountered pirates rebellion, "forced Wang Mingshan to surrender" means the pirates were so rampant that even threat local official to join them, when the official refused to do so, he was killed and finally the official soldiers killed all of the pirates. The small place of Gaozhou Prefecture even suffered a lot, and other place was not any better.

The hidden troubles in the coastal areas of the Ming Dynasty, the invasion of the foreign aggressors, the collusion between the foreign enemies and the internal remnants and the civil rebellion all caused great trouble to the coastal defense of the Ming Dynasty.

After experiencing these events, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang realized that he could no longer fully believe in system of the previous dynasties, the coastal defense ability and public security could not cope with the present severe situation. So the court set up a fixed patrol army on the sea, as recorded in the history books: "every spring, the ship managers began the patrol, the patrol divided into several routes to prevent Japanese pirates until Autumn." This kind of patrol was known as "ship managers patrol", which was a part of the coastal defense system established by the Ming court, at the same time assume the role of patrolling and warning, this was a very effective defense measures, until to 1403.

The "ship managers patrol" was a coastal defensive measure under the Ming government the coastline was too long and the islands were too numerous to take full care by the army, therefore, local also set similar patrol measures to assist the official forces to combat or patrol the sea. As recorded in the Chronicle of Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, "Zhejiang Commander: Hangzhou, Shaoxing and defensive departments of other places, every spring will start ship managers patrol to Jiaying, Ganpu, Songjiang, Jinshan to defend Japanese pirates, until autumn to shift", this greatly supported the court navy, also achieved greater results.

In addition to the ship managers patrol, which has stronger mobility in the sea, the Ming dynasty also set up sea fortress and guardhouse as the fixed defense measures, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang ordered "let Zhou Dexing, the Jiangxia Marquess to Fuzhou, Putian, Zhangzhou and Quanzhou to levy one navy soldier from every three household, for the coastal defense against Japanese pirates." In addition to collect soldiers in guardhouse, while hiding soldiers among the people, "besides guardhouse, every county has people army and every border has soldier" At the same time when setting up coastal defense, the cost couldn't be ignored, the Ming court should bear those costs, but the peasant uprising at

the late Yuan Dynasty just ended, the social economy was still in the recovery, the coastal economy couldn't be self-sufficient, the court did not have extra financial support to setting the coastal defense.

"Since Japanese pirates invasions in the era of Emperor Jiajing, each coastal major cities has set up governors, grand coordinators deputy military envoys and chief military officers, generals, guerrillas and other officers," Since Japanese pirates invasions in the era of Emperor Jiajing, the Ming court has vigorously developed coastal defense. However, the setting of "governor" and "grand coordinator" was still restricted by the inherent rules of officials, and the problem of the separation of civil and military has not been improved. The fragmentation of power was likely to unnecessary information interception or separation, which made the court's insufficient in controlling these areas, and negligence in the defense of one place may easily lead to major omissions.

In the mid-Ming Dynasty, the Japanese pirates invasion gradually subsided under the suppression of the Ming generals. At the same time, under the initiative of some officials, the Ming Dynasty had to relax the condition of sea ban, a wise measure that quickly stabilized the situation that had been difficult to suppress by military action for a long time, even surprised to some officials, and made them realize more clearly the truth that "when the market is open, the invaders are transformed into merchants." The strengthening of the coastal defense force and the relaxation of the sea ban were two necessary conditions for the fundamental solution of the problem of "Japanese pirates invasion", which should not be contradicted but complement each other.

By the late Ming Dynasty, the problem of "laziness" and "corruption" inevitably emerged, "in Zhejiang and Fujian, coastal defense have been degenerated gradually, only a few warships, sentry ships left, the previous navy soldiers in Zhangzhou and Quanzhou were more than 2500, now only 1000. Therefore the pirates began the repeated invasions to the coastal areas." In the late Ming Dynasty, the coastal defense has gradually weakened, left only a few warships, sentry ships, the main forces in the sea war, and the main troops in the coastal defense also neglected training, thus Japanese pirates began to recklessly up.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SEA BAN POLICY IN THE MING DYNASTY

Sea ban, also known as foreign ban, is a manifestation of the policy of isolation. As early as the Northern Song Dynasty, Emperor Taizong, published the sea ban policy, the Yuan Dynasty also implemented it in the early period. However, the sea ban in the Song and Yuan dynasties was a temporary measure and did not included in the country's

long-term strategy. But we can still regard the sea ban as a traditional, the routine of Central Plains dynasties. So in the early Ming Dynasty, the sea ban began to be implemented on a long-term and comprehensive basis, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang published the policy "at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty published a policy that none of boats is allowed to go the sea."

In the early Ming Dynasty, the central court focused on the northern areas, in order to prevent Mongolia, the court spent a lot of energy to set up defense, and neglected the control of the southeast coastal areas, so the early Ming Dynasty's attitude to overseas was mainly defense-oriented. "The previous coastal did have specialized administration, the leader was the same as the Governor of Funing State. In 1602, the Viceroy Zhu Yunchang and Governor Liu Yinglong submitted a memorial to the emperor to demand Controller-General of Fuzhou State moved to their state to administrate the coastal defense and set up the specialized department." [4]. "There were no special officials in the coastal areas before, later the Ming court let Controller-General of Fuzhou to administrate the coastal defense as well." We can learn from these records that in the early Ming Dynasty, most of the coastal defense officials were one with multiple positions, and the central government did not attach much importance to these areas.

The existence of tributary and the inherent image of "The Celestial Empire", made it impossible for the Ming Dynasty to carry out completed isolation policy, therefore, the embryonic form of the closed country - the sea ban - emerged.

In terms of the general social environment, there were Mongolian tribes in the north and Japanese pirates in the southeast. During the Ming Dynasty, Japanese pirates frequently invaded the southeast coastal areas. A large number of defeated vassals began to organize merchants and warriors to roam the sea, constantly invading China's coastal areas. Moreover, in the north, the Ming court should guard against the return of Yuan soldiers who fled the desert. Even after the collapse of the Northern Yuan Dynasty, the great threat of the Mongolian tribes still existed.

In case of without the Mongolian tribes, perhaps the Ming court would take the direct fight against the Japanese pirates, the Ming court put frontier defense focus on preventing the invasion of the Mongolian tribes, only took some self-defense measures to prevent the Japanese pirates. Under such social background, the establishment and implementation of the sea ban policy was urgent.

"The Emperor was tired of Japan's treachery", the sea ban appeared in the first year of the Ming Dynasty, e.g., in 1371, "prohibited the people of coastal areas from private sea activities", Ming court with silk, porcelain, grain in exchange for foreign spices, wood, etc., was an

unequal value exchange, so the political significance of the sea ban was more than its economic significance at this time, this initial sea ban was more like the Ming dynasty for foreign deterrence, with a certain warning, but we consider it a kind of compromise of early Ming Dynasty to foreign powers.

When Emperor Zhu Di came to throne, the Emperor seemed to be enthusiastic about the tribute trade as a form of foreign trade, Emperor Zhu Di was encouraged tribute during his reign. For example, the establishment of Municipal Administration Agency for Business Ships to facilitate trade between the two sides, the establishment of post stations to extend the trade cycle, as well as the dispatch of emissaries to make return visits. "The Ming Dynasty sent 62 missions to Southeast Asian countries and received 95 return missions; this does not include the missions sent to and from Annam, which were under Ming rule between 1406 and 1427, and these missions established ties with most of the important countries....."^[5] At the same time, during the era of Yongle, Zheng He, a famous navigator led seven voyages in the capacity of an ambassador, reaching as far as East Africa and Red Sea, which was unprecedented in terms of the size of the fleet and the times of the voyage. The aim of the voyages still to be discussed, but whether in order to find Emperor Zhu Yuwen, or in order to promote the strength of the Ming Dynasty, "Zheng He's Voyages" has attracted a large number of overseas countries to trade, providing strong and powerful support for the consolidation and development of the tribute system.

Under the sea ban policy, only the government can conduct large-scale trade with foreign traders, which seems to be a monopoly, but almost only the authorities have strong trade power, as well as the protection of the army, can have enough leverage at the negotiation to put pressure on foreign traders, which can also be regarded as a disguised protection. At the same time, due to the little population and declined economy at the early Ming Dynasty, the "sea ban" has also become the most effective measures to limit the outflow of population and capital.

The sea ban policy went through the Ming Dynasty. During the era of Emperor Zhengde, the northern war was in tense, the tribute trade began to decline, the court could not pay attention to south, and the sea ban policy began to slack, the private overseas trade began to rise; and by the era of Emperor Jiajing, the Japanese pirates invasions were rampant, and the coastal defense and sea ban policy was tightened once again. "Wang Yi, the Deputy Censor of the Minister of Punishment proposed that the Fujian coastal residents if guide the foreigners to pay tribute that cause troubles to the local, should be punished by the strict laws; if the officers who receipt the foreign tribute ships without report to the superior authorities, e.g. privately sell the logwood and pepper over 1000kg and communicate with foreign markets and cause troubles; people in Sichuan, Guangdong, Yunan and Guizhou if

privately purchase anything for foreigners; if soldiers and people of the Central Reception Department privately build ships and sell to foreigners; if smuggle weapons all must be punished according to the law, and migrate their families the previous laws has been sufficient, and punish the whole family was too cruel, but still widespread in Zhejiang and Guangdong." The court made multiple restrictions to trade personnel and trade goods, also issued a number of sea ban regulations to make up or reduce the loopholes, until the elimination of offshore Japan pirates invasions, and the public opinion to open the sea from has aroused.

The effect of the sea ban policy of the Ming Dynasty was linked to the prestige of the court, the stronger prestige of the court the more people would firmly believe that the court was without loophole in this invisible line of defense; on the contrary, the public had a grievance against the court, and this policy would force the people to collude with the foreigners and become a knife to themselves, for example, "to bring in long-time treacherous people, hook the Japanese pirates and the Farangi into the mutual market, the people take the initiative to attract foreigners this led to a sharp rise in risk coefficients in coastal areas. Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang cut off the tribute with Japan because he did not like Japan, it also demonstrate that the central government of the early Ming Dynasty towards conservative attitude to overseas, the Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang "strictly prohibited the communications with foreigners", blocking the normal way of livelihood for residents in coastal areas. For instance, "Tang He, the Duke of Xinguo inspected the coastal cities of Zhejiang and Fujian, and prohibited people into the sea fishing. "At that time people had no choice but to rise up and fight. As Gu Yanwu pointed out: "The people of coastal areas, without any chance to make a living, they suffered hungry, the poor people often joined the pirates but die in the tsunami. "Due to the strict sea ban policy, people had nothing to eat and then they had to rob in the coastal areas." In addition, residents of the coastal areas also took another means of struggle, fleeing and sneaking overseas. Therefore, the sea ban policy has not been effectively implemented, repeatedly issued to amend the ban on the sea, also illustrates this point. Some people even took part in private foreign trade activities. "People in the coastal areas often privately trade perfume, seducing foreigner to be robber." "The southeastern islands barbarians often assisted the pirate". The government's actions forced the people to smuggle and sneak, resulting negative influence in the society, which showed that the measures of the Ming court at that time were quite unreasonable.

Therefore, if we consider the sea ban independently, in addition to a certain degree of monopoly of its benefits is not much, but if we consider the sea ban policy as a complement to the policy of coastal defense, then there are both advantages and disadvantages.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Personally, I would like to divide the coastal defense policy in the Ming Dynasty into two parts, the first one is the sea and land defense, that is, mentioned previously “ship managers patrol” and “guardhouse” strategy, and the other is the soft defense “sea ban” for the areas and residents.

Coastal defense and sea ban were both established in the early Ming Dynasty and continued until the late Ming Dynasty. If the two were separated, the former towards to the military while the latter towards to the economy. Relying solely on the sea defense, could prevent the invasion of foreign troops and Japanese pirates, but could prevent the cultural invasions introduced by merchants and missionaries. In the 16th century, due to the age of discovery, the world’s circulation of goods and culture accelerated, and the Ming Dynasty was more or less involved in this situation. If the court let the free trade in the coastal areas at that time, it might cause a great loss of capital, and the situation would be worse along with the growing importance of the southern coastal urban agglomerations. It is not good news for the rule of an empire that the instability of the region will reach a very high level by relying solely on the latter's sea ban, the flight of the Japanese pirates, the remnants of the rebel forces, the loss of population or the blending situation.

Therefore, only by combining the two can bring into full play the greatest power of the system, resists the foreign enemies in the military aspect, and publicizes the national power to the foreign countries at the same time, while in the economic aspect, the court can control the economic lifelines of the region to the greatest extent through the economic control, the two-pronged approach of tribute trade and monopoly can realize the maximized management of the region.

As mentioned above, the combination of sea ban and coastal defense has both advantages and disadvantages, and the proportion of both advantages and disadvantages will change according to the rise or decline of the court's power and prestige in Ming Dynasty. But in general, this system was more beneficial than harmful throughout the Ming Dynasty, it protected the frontier and sea areas of the better, from the ruler set up the original intention, it did what it should do, but only to keep it. The country's strong coastal defense is the guarantee of its own security and the development of foreign trade, and the smooth foreign trade will become an important driving force for the country's economic development. It’s a pity that most of the rulers of the Ming Dynasty still stuck to their old ways of imperial power, did not aware of this, backward one step results backward further, private overseas trade has not been strongly supported by the government, but strictly constrained by the government. When the alienation between government and sea merchants Western colonists came to the East one after another, and

China lost the historic opportunity to dominate the trading network around the China Sea.

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