



Ulleungdo and the Island Policy of the Joseon Period

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Abstract

In the Joseon period, the maritime ban policy gradually became a means of controlling the people when a reorganization of the military defense system and the preparation of countermeasures against the appearance of unidentified vessels were required. In the process, a maritime boundary consciousness was formed, and a defense system centered on the inner sea was established. As a result, islands located in the West and South Seas were transformed into garrison areas, receiving increased attention from the central government. By contrast, the change in the island policy toward Ulleungdo was relatively uncomplicated. In the early Joseon period, the governance of evacuating residents of Ulleungdo and the so-called island vacancy policy were carried out as a way of preventing damage from Japanese pirates. And the sutoje of Ulleungdo was formalized when the territorial dispute over Ulleungdo with Japan began in earnest at the end of the 17th century. The character of Ulleungdo was the same as that of the islands located on the West and South Seas in that it revealed the government's determination to properly control domestic territory. The development of the sutoje of Ulleungdo was also related to changes in maritime territorial consciousness and island policies.

Keywords: Ulleungdo, island policy, maritime ban policy, maritime territorial consciousness, *sutoje*

Introduction

People often think of *land* as the antonym to the word *sea*, but they do not readily associate *land* with *island*. The island is recognized as a unique space distinct from the mainland, even though the mainland too is connected to the sea. In this sense, the anthropological significance of the sea and its islands continues today.¹ In addition, in a situation wherein maritime territorial disputes are in full swing, maritime space and island areas are bound to be embroiled in territorial and sovereignty issues. Such maritime and island disputes constantly arise between China, Korea, and Japan. These include the Ieodo 離於島 (Suyan Reef 蘇岩礁 in Chinese) issue between China and Korea, the Diaoyu Islands 釣魚島 (Senkaku Islands 尖閣諸島 in Japanese) issue between China and Japan, and the Dokdo 獨島 (Takeshima 竹島 in Japanese) issue between Korea and Japan. Because of these disputes, research on the history of islands in each country is being conducted to as a way of providing historical evidence for their respective claims.

However, compared to today, when it is easy to claim actual control over islands due the development of navigation and marine patrol technology, there were more challenges to managing islands far from the mainland in the Joseon period. Therefore, arguing historical sovereignty based on modern territorial claims is problematic. The disputes over Ulleungdo 鬱陵島 and Dokdo are cases in point. In Japan, the Joseon government's evacuation of residents from Ulleungdo in 1413, known as the "island vacancy policy,"² is held as evidence that Joseon abandoned this territory. In order to counter this, Korea currently emphasizes Joseon's control over Ulleungdo based on the dispatch of *anmusa* 按撫使 (officials for comforting the people) and *gyeongchagwan* 敬差官 (officials dispatched to local areas for special duties) from the early Joseon period, and *sutosa* 搜討使 (officials for inspection and subjugation) starting from the late Joseon

1. See Dodds and Royle (2003, 487–488).

2. The first scholar to define the island policy of the Joseon period as the "island vacancy policy" was Sokichi Tsuda 津田左右吉, a representative colonial historian of the Japanese colonial period. Son Seung-cheol has criticized the validity of this term (Son 2010, 278–288).

period.³ However, since the purpose of dispatching *sutosa* was to bring the people who had illegally infiltrated Ulleungdo back to the mainland, and this was undertaken once every two to three years, the nature of the *sutosa* may be taken as equivalent to today's permanent maritime service and evidence of territorial sovereignty. However, the mission of the *sutosa* differed from that of a patrol. Therefore, in order to claim actual historical control over Ulleungdo based on the dispatch of *sutosa*, it is necessary to understand the Joseon government's view of the national territory that would motivate such dispatches. To this end, not only Ulleungdo but also the islands off Korea's western and southern coasts need also to be considered.

For the above awareness of the problem, this article will rethink the *sutoje* 搜討制 (inspection system) of Ulleungdo under the framework of the Joseon government's island policy and maritime territorial awareness. Since the study of *sutoje* began in earnest in 1998 with the work of Song Byeong-gi, considerable progress has been made through the efforts of many researchers.⁴ Based on previous studies, this article deals with how the Joseon government's maritime territorial consciousness changed and how its island policy adjusted accordingly. Based on this, this study reexamines the establishment and transition of the *sutoje* of Ulleungdo. Furthermore, this article aims to analyze changes in the perception of the island and the sea during Joseon period. It should be clarified in advance that the sovereignty issues surrounding Ulleungdo and Dokdo are excluded from this study.

The Maritime Ban Policy and the Formation of Maritime Territorial Consciousness

As mentioned above, islands form a unique space, separated from the

3. See Yeungnam University Dokdo Research Institute (2015, 40).

4. In particular, much research has been done by Kim Ho-dong, Shim Hyun-yong, Yu Mirim, Son Seung-cheol, Bae Jae-hong, Baek In-ki, and Kim Ki-hyeok. Due to space constraints, this study will not enumerate their specific research results.

mainland and located in the sea. Traditionally, everyone had to use a boat to travel to and from islands. In this sense, the perception of islands is relevant to the perception of the sea.

As is well known, maritime transportation developed on the Korean Peninsula from prehistoric times, and in ancient times travel to other lands along sea routes was not uncommon. However, from the end of the Goryeo period in the late 14th century, in order to prepare against possible incursions by Japanese pirates and due to the maritime ban policy of the Ming dynasty, a policy of strict control of the sea began.⁵ This control continued into the Joseon period. In principle, the maritime ban policy of the Goryeo dynasty mainly applied to the prohibition of private trade by sea merchants, although there is no record of the specific content of this ban left in Goryeo historical materials. In contrast, the Joseon government banned the launching of seagoing ships from the era of King Taejong (r. 1400–1418). King Taejong's 1413 order banning those who profited by forging *noin* 路弓 (permission to pass beyond the national barrier) as private trading enterprises was precisely that.⁶ Of course, it is worth noting that the target of the ban at the time was not the person who built or commissioned the ship but the person who took it to sea in the pursuit of private interests. It seems that these actions were intimately related to the contemporaneous Great Ming Code (Dai 2019, 369–370). In other words, it is no exaggeration to say that the maritime ban policy of the early Joseon period was implemented to protect the people from incursions by Japanese pirates and, at the same time to be conscious of Ming laws.

By the time of King Sejong (r. 1418–1450), there were signs the maritime ban policy was slackening. In western and southwestern coastal waters, private ships sometimes traveled alone and were plundered by Japanese pirates.⁷ There was also a regulation stipulating that if one obtained a pass and voyaged in a convoy with other ships, one could go out to sea even in a

5. On this, see Yi (2014).

6. *Taejong sillok*, gwon 26, 28th day of the 7th lunar month, 13th year of King Taejong's reign. Hereafter, citations from the *Sillok* and other such primary historical sources will be abbreviated as follows: *Taejong sillok*, 26:8b (Taejong 13/7/28).

7. *Sejong sillok*, 15:10a (Sejong 4/2/21).

private vessel.⁸ Namely, with permission from the local government office it was possible to sail within a specific geographic range if one did not trade in gold. Judging from this, if fishermen were allowed to venture out to sea, it was possible they could travel back and forth between the mainland and islands.

On the other hand, though implementing a maritime ban policy would have been somewhat effective in preparing against the plundering of Japanese pirates, it is also true that it caused a real livelihood problem. In the 16th century, the ban became a *legitimate* excuse for extorting the people on the part of *byeongsa* 兵使 (provincial military commanders) and *susa* 水使 (admirals), causing instability in local society. In order to resolve this problem, the Ministry of Taxation (Hojo 戶曹) attempted to eradicate this *legitimate* reason by requesting that coastal residents be allowed to fish in places like inlets where trade would certainly not be taking place.⁹ However, even without the exploitative measures of *byeongsa* and *susa*, the living conditions of coastal residents were very poor because of the ban itself. In particular, in the case of the coastal residents of the East Sea, because the land was arid and unsuitable for cultivation, they had no choice but to violate the ban to make a living by fishing.¹⁰

Entering the 18th century, the central government maintained its maritime ban policy despite the reduction of the Japanese piracy threat. This was to prevent intercourse between local residents and foreign vessels. Initially, government protection of and control over the people were two sides of the same coin. From this period on, the maritime ban policy was used as a means of controlling the people. The reason for this change is thought to be the mass appearance of *hwangdangseon* 荒唐船 (unidentified vessels) in the West Sea from the late 17th century. In 1684, Emperor Kangxi of the Qing lifted the ban on maritime trade.¹¹ As a result, *hwangdangseon* began to appear in large numbers on Korea's western coast.¹² Joseon sent an

8. *Sejong sillok*, 28:29a (Sejong 7/6/23).

9. *Myeongjong sillok*, 17:57a–57b (Myeongjong 9/11/1).

10. *Bibyeonsa deungnok*, 48:35a–35b (Sukjong 20/3/4).

11. *Qing Shengzu shilu*, 116:3b–4a (Kangxi 23/7/11).

12. For the factors behind the large-scale appearance of *hwangdangseon* in the West Sea by the

envoy to inform the Qing of its policy of a maritime ban, and in the meantime, responded to the rapid increase in *hwangdangseon* by strengthening the domestic coastal defense system. This meant the control of the coastal waters, which required the confirmation of the scope of the controlled area. Details of this are revealed in the following record:

There is no need to repeatedly inflict the evil of destroying agricultural work and causing hardship to the military forces by seizing every ship passing through the outer sea (*oeyang* 外洋) rather than solely those vessels approaching or anchoring at island fortresses or various islands. Therefore, in the future, even if some people are apprehended, they should be immediately chased away after taking only their official documents and be sent back to their boats so that we need not worry about them remaining in our territory.¹³

According to the above record, in the case of a *hwangdangseon* crossing into Joseon territory, only the official documents were taken and the vessel was then immediately chased away. As for the *hwangdangseon* that passed by the outer sea, these were difficult to intercept and even if captured how to handle them presented difficulties, and so it was decided to not attempt to capture them but to leave them unmolested. The above record also delineates the scope of the area under Joseon control, or the *boundary*, and that was the *outer sea*.

According to the *Sugyo jimnok* 受教輯錄, completed in 1698, since there was no penalty for dispatching a warship or other naval vessel to the outer sea at the time, the law of a hundred floggings and exile was applied to those who sent soldiers 100 *li* 里 out of the way to help them evade military service.¹⁴ During the reign of King Yeongjo (r. 1724–1776), fishing boats and merchant ships were prohibited from journeying to the outer sea.¹⁵ In this

early 18th century, see Seo (2015).

13. *Bibyeonsa deungnok*, 53:138b (Sukjong 29/6/29). 鎮堡諸島等處近陸止迫者外, 從外洋過去者, 則不必一一追捕, 重貽軍民廢農奔走之弊. 而此後則雖有所捉, 奪取票文之後, 即爲驅逐, 使之乘船還歸, 俾無留滯我境之患宜當.

14. *Sugyo jimnok, byeongseon*, 4:28a.

15. *Jeongaeksa ilgi*, 11:342 (Yeongjo 33/9/18).

way, Joseon regarded the outer sea as a space distinct from the safe inner sea and as such tried to exclude the outer sea from the scope of domestic maritime activities. In addition, in the case of the inner sea, which contrasted with the outer sea, this seemed to be recognized as a space completely within the precincts of Joseon. Therefore, the boundary mentioned above was regarded as the boundary between inner and outer seas.

However, this boundary between the inner and outer seas was not defined by law. Nonetheless, there was a customary standard for coastal residents engaged in maritime activities to distinguish the inner from the outer sea. According to Shin Myeong-ho's research, during the late Joseon period, the area within 5 *li* of the coast was termed *jeonyang* 前洋, while that area between about five *li* and ten *li* from the coast was referred to as *huyang* 後洋. Collectively, *jeonyang* and *huyang* were referred to as the inner sea. From ten *li* beyond the inner sea to the horizon was identified as the outer sea. The location of the horizon varied depending on the location of the observer because the higher one goes, the farther one can see. Therefore, members of the signal fire corps monitoring the sea could observe the horizon to a further distance than those standing on lower ground. Generally, the distance from a beacon tower with a height of around 200m to the distant horizon can be calculated as about a hundred *li* (Shin 2018, 70–82). On the other hand, it should be noted that the coastline in the late Joseon period referred not only to the shoreline of the mainland but also to the shoreline of islands. It was common for inner and outer seas to be recorded in the form of “name of place + inner (or outer) sea.”¹⁶ In this context, there could be cases where the ranges of inner and outer seas of different islands overlapped.¹⁷

Since the inner sea was treated as a part of Joseon, protecting the inner sea was equivalent to defending the territory. For example, in 1701, several fishing boats from Qing laid anchor in the *jeonyang* of Baengnyeong 白翎

16. In other words, the range of the inner and outer sea could vary depending on one's vantage point (Dai 2019, 373).

17. *Bibyeonsa deungnok*, 197:77a (Sunjo 6/8/2).

and Ungjin 甕津. In the document subsequently sent to the Qing, Joseon referred to these boats as “those that crossed the border illegally on pretense of fishing” (托以漁探, 越海犯境),¹⁸ clearly conveying to Qing that *jeonyang* belonged to Joseon territory. In the late Joseon period, the state’s maritime boundary expanded from *jeonyang* to the inner sea. The Joseon government guarded against foreign ships heading to the inner sea through signal fire monitors. This was because foreigners were forbidden to familiarize themselves with the inner sea of Joseon.¹⁹ This seems to have been related to a strengthening territorial consciousness at that time. During the reign of King Yeongjo, as tensions with the Qing eased, defensive concerns gradually turned into vigilance against illegal border crossings by Qing subjects. Under such circumstances, there was a need to strengthen territorial sovereignty in the border region. In particular, an attempt was made to thoroughly develop and occupy Korea’s northern region to prevent the possibility of any Qing invasion of Joseon territory.²⁰ Along with this, crackdowns on illegal border crossings by Qing subjects in this region were strengthened. In short, from the time of King Yeongjo, the need to secure territorial sovereignty emerged to defend against the possibility of a Qing invasion, and crackdowns on illegal border crossings were also applied as part of these efforts to increase territorial security. This territorial consciousness also influenced maritime awareness. In 1738, when six boats from Qing lay at anchor in the inner sea of Ocha 吾叉 in Hwanghae-do, Joseon immediately launched warships to drive them out.²¹ The division of the sea into inner and outer was, as it were, intended to prevent illegal border crossings or encroachment by foreigners, including those from the Qing, by securing a defensive system centered on the inner sea.

This concept of inner and outer seas would have applied not only to the West Sea but also to the East Sea. This is reflected in the fact that people began to judge whether Ulleungdo was domestic territory based on distance.

18. *Dongmun hwigo, wonpyeon, beomwol*, 60:9a.

19. *Bibyeonsa deungnok*, 185:122a (Jeongjo 21/yun6/10).

20. Joseon interest in the northern territories dated back to the 18th century (Cho 1974; Bae 1997; Kang 2005).

21. *Dongmun hwigo, wonpyeon, beomwol*, 62:23b–24a.

In 1694, the *seungji* 承旨 (royal secretary) Kim Guman 金龜萬 pointed out that the distance from the coast of Gangwon-do to Ulleungdo appeared less than that from Wolchul mountain in Jeolla-do to Jeju Island 濟州島, to mean that Ulleungdo was located within the maritime boundary of Joseon.²²

However, this did not mean that the outer sea was abandoned. The distinction between inner and outer seas was only to limit the scope of people's activities so that the defense system could operate effectively. As will be discussed later, during the Joseon period there were many cases of people entering island regions located in the outer sea. In order to evacuate residents from the islands, the government had to dispatch vessels to the outer sea. As such, it can be said that the formation of a consciousness of the inner and outer seas came about through the need to build a defense system centered on the inner sea, and its ultimate purpose was control over the populace.

In summary, conscious of the Ming ban coupled with realistic demands for preparations against Japanese pirates, Joseon continued to carry out its maritime ban policy. Over time, this ban gradually transformed into a means of controlling its population. Consequently, there was a need to reorganize the maritime defense system, leading to the development of a distinction between inner and outer seas. However, although the defense system concentrated on the inner sea, the surveillance of the outer sea remained, so it seems that contemporaries treated the inner and outer seas alike as Joseon territorial waters. In addition, with this change in maritime awareness, island awareness and policies began to take a new direction.

Changes in Joseon Island Policy toward the West and South Seas

Geographically, most island regions were far from the center so that they only played peripheral roles in state affairs. In many cases, the central government's measures for islands or island residents prioritized those islands that were recognized as having special significance, such as Jeju or

22. *Sukjong sillok*, 26:6b (Sukjong 20/2/23).

Ganghwa 江華島. The perception of islands in the early Joseon period was basically that of remote places beyond the influence of civilization. At that time, islands were often used as places of exile, with the character of *byeonji* 邊地 (border districts). However, it was necessary to determine the border as a premise before establishing a border district. The establishment of an administrative unit established it as definitive national territory (Bae 1998, 21). Looking at the usage of *byeonji* in the early Joseon period, it was widely used to refer to the northwest districts and the coastal regions of the West and South Seas. Among them, the latter case can be confirmed through a document sent to Tsushima Island 對馬島 from the Ministry of Rites (Yejo 禮曹) in 1438:

Tsushima Island, which is located in the south, has abandoned its virtue and caused trouble repeatedly, so the border patrol officer has already been sent to punish it and take its prisoners back.²³

The “border patrol officer” in the above text tells us that a garrison town was established in the border district. However, just as the term *byeonji* did not appear in the provisions of *Gyeonguk daejeon* 經國大典 (Grand Code for State Administration), the range of *byeonji* in the coastal areas in the early Joseon period was ambiguous. Thus, the nature of an offshore island region included in the coastal area, especially an island that did not have a military base, was unclear, to say nothing of an isolated island.

However, in the late Joseon period, the government’s interest in island regions increased for various reasons, including changes in maritime awareness, an influx of population into the islands, and the development of the maritime defense system. The above was revealed in detail mainly through debates on the establishment of garrison towns and counties and land reclamation.

23. *Sejong sillok*, 81:2b (Sejong 20/4/11). 對馬一島, 爲國南紀, 負德辜恩, 屢貽邊擾, 已令邊將往征其罪, 俘獲而還.

Garrison Establishment

The establishment of garrison towns was an essential part of the state's defensive preparations against foreign invasion. The guards installed in the island regions were mainly naval forces. Since the establishment of naval bases in the early Joseon period aimed to defend against Japanese pirates, the sites chosen were mostly concentrated on islands in the West and South Seas. As a result, military facilities originally located inland gradually moved to coastal or island regions (K. Kim 2004, 180).

The defensive system of the early Joseon period was organized such that mountain fortresses were placed inland, with the county guarding the periphery of the mountain fortress, and the garrison town guarding the periphery of the county (Cha 1980). However, the garrison town was usually established in a coastal region rather than on an island. But when the local defensive system was changed to the *jingwan* 鎮管 (Garrison Command) system during reign of King Sejo (r. 1455–1468), garrisons began to be established on coastal islands. This was then reorganized into local divisions when the *byeongsa* was dispatched in the early 16th century (K. Kim 2004, 182).

Such a local defensive system was advantageous for small-scale battles, but had many problems in the case of large-scale invasion. The frequent incursions by Japanese pirates following the reign of King Jungjong (r. 1506–1544), and the Imjin War of 1592, revealed these vulnerabilities. After the Imjin War, a reassessment was required not only of mountain fortresses and counties but also of the sea approaches of the West and South Seas. In this, the Joseon central government became conscious of the strategic role of islands in the defense of coastal waterways. This realization prompted attention be given to the installation of military bases on islands as part of the establishment of a defense system. While reorganizing the military defense system in the period of King Injo (r. 1544–1545), there was even a proposal to support Ganghwa Island by installing a fortress and building a warehouse on all of the west and south coastal islands from Hwanghae-do to Gyeongsang-do.²⁴ In this atmosphere, the debate on the establishment of

24. *Injo sillok*, 19:15b (Injo 6/8/23).

garrisons for improving the defense system was developed during the reign of King Sukjong (r. 1674–1720).

The process was such that one or two garrisons were established first to gauge their effect and the system was gradually expanded. In 1681, Min Yujung 閔維重 (1620–1687), then minister of war (*byeongjo panso* 兵曹判書), suggested rearranging the frontlines by hiding the fortress among the islands in the coastal sea and dispatching more *byeonjang* 邊將 (officials for border patrol) to them. He recommended Gogeu Island 古今島 and Cheongsan Island 靑山島 be first.²⁵ He also insisted on the establishment of a garrison on Wi Island 蝸島 and Ji Island 智島.²⁶ Overall, the importance of garrisoned islands in building a coastal defense system was recognized during the era of King Sukjong. Furthermore, other reasons for the debate on garrison establishment during Sukjong's reign include the widespread presence of *hwangdangseon* and the influx of people into the islands during that same period.

The additional garrisons also performed other functions besides that of military defense. Their functions were extended to include various activities for the people, such as civil administration, compulsory labor service, collection of export taxes, and so forth.

County Establishment

As the importance of islands grew, the government began to pay attention to issues such as household registration and property, and land management, and began to formulate relevant policies. For more effective control over islands, discussions emerged to integrate several islands into one independent unit, such as a county. Such was the case with the debate on county establishment in the Naju 羅州 archipelago in the late Joseon period.²⁷

25. *Sukjong sillok*, 11:1b–2a (Sukjong 7/1/3).

26. *Sukjong sillok*, 12:5a (Sukjong 7/7/26).

27. The term “Naju archipelago” refers to over 150 large and small islands currently located in the West Sea off Mokpo (Y. Song 2005, 379).

Before discussing this, it is first necessary to examine more closely the social characteristics of islands at that time. In fact, maritime territorial consciousness and the notion of inner and outer seas made the characteristics of islands more distinct as *byeonji*. Namely, the island area was viewed as an *uncivilized region* that was difficult for the king to edify and might easily become a den of criminals or the disaffected. In addition, since islands continued to be used as places of exile, the possibility that antipathy toward the dynastic system could spread from islands to other regions was sufficient to raise concerns and anxiety among the ruling class. Particularly during the Musin Rebellion in 1728, when anxiety over social stability was heightened, the central government urgently desired proper control over the country's islands.

In this atmosphere, in 1729, Yi Taejwa 李台佐 (1660–1739), then *uuijeong* 右議政 (vice prime minister), proposed the establishment of a county in the Naju archipelago. According to Yi, some islands located in the West and South Seas were outside the control of the central government despite their large areas and population, which had resulted in the island residents not being enlightened by royal authority and becoming unruly due to being subject to various taxation.²⁸ The term “various taxation” here refers to the arbitrary exploitation of the residents by both the royal family and government agencies, which prevented the arable land and fishing grounds of islands from paying taxes to the state. However, with the firm recognition of island regions as domestic territory, the penetration of state administrative power emerged as an urgent task facing the Joseon ruling class. In other words, the intent was to establish unified control over the entire country by incorporating the island regions, which were until then not effectively governed by public authorities, into the system of prefectures and counties (Y. Song 2005, 408). Therefore, after Yi Taejwa's proposal for county establishment, the related debate became white-hot.

Jo Munmyeong 趙文命 (1680–1732), *byeongjo panso* (minister of war), put forth Aphae Island 押海島 and Jangsan Island 長山島 as candidates for county establishment, hoping to neutralize those who had fled to these

28. *Bibyeonsa deungnok*, 85:38b (Yeongjo 5/2/22).

islands to evade state control.²⁹ Six months later, Jo and Yi Taejwa once again submitted a proposal for establishing counties on islands. King Yeongjo, however, held a negative attitude towards this, fearing that such county establishment would have various drawbacks in local administration. He believed that placing the islands under the jurisdiction of naval bases and conducting occasional inspections would be better than establishing counties.³⁰

However, the ministers made repeated appeals, emphasizing the purpose and convenience of county establishment. It can be said that half of those at the royal court supported the proposal. Nevertheless, the debate created parties for and against, with King Yeongjo actively siding with the opposition, leading to the failure to reach a consensus.³¹ Following this, related discussions were held multiple times, but it was difficult to implement these without resolving the conflict between necessity and limitations of county formation in the islands.

The reason discussion on county establishment failed at that time, as Song Yangseop has pointed out, was that the influence of each power class over specific island regions could not be easily overcome (Y. Song 2005, 410). On the other hand, we also cannot overlook the islanders' own opposition to the establishment of a county as this would have meant new tax impositions.

However, there were concerns among government officials that if counties were not established, the previous drawbacks would worsen. As one *amhaeng eosa* 暗行御史 (royal secret inspector) pointed out in 1783, large and small islands located in the West and South Seas were either pasturage or country estates, and there was no way for the islanders to appeal for assistance were an invasion to occur.³² In the end, not only bureaucrats but also local intellectuals sympathized with the idea of county establishment. But it was not until the end of 19th century that this idea was

29. *Yeongjo sillok*, 21:18b-19a (Yeongjo 5/2/25).

30. *Yeongjo sillok*, 23:31b-32a (Yeongjo 5/8/29).

31. *Bibyeonsa deungnok*, 86:106b-110a (Yeongjo 5/9/3).

32. *Jeongjo sillok*, 16:61b (Jeongjo 7/10/29).

realized with the formation of Jido-gun (Jido county).

Land Reclamation

In the late Joseon period, the central government also focused on land reclamation on islands. The purpose of reclaiming land on islands was to create an outlet for a growing population. During the reign of King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800) discussions over island land reclamation intensified.

Actually, until the era of King Sukjong, the people had been prohibited from migrating to islands.³³ Because the island regions were used as bases for timber cultivation at that time, illegal activities such as infiltrating the islands to fell trees were also prohibited. However, the situation began to change by the mid-18th century. Externally, with the stabilization of diplomatic relations, the sense of war crisis had receded. Internally, the growing disparities between urban and rural areas had given rise to many social problems, including in the coastal areas. Therefore, the central government began to emphasize a people-oriented awareness, to include agricultural issues.³⁴ Such was the case with the active preparation of management and development policies for islands during the reign of King Jeongjo.

In 1793, discussions were held on the development of Daecheong Island 大靑島 and Socheong Island 小靑島 in Hwanghae-do, which had seen the mass appearance of *hwangdangseon*. King Jeongjo ordered Kim Hyeok 金爀, then *cheomsa* 僉使 (garrison commander) in Baengnyeong 白翎, to undertake an exploration of those two islands. According to Kim's report, the area of reclaimable land amounted to one-third of the total area on Daecheong Island and two-thirds of the total area of Socheong. Based on this, the Border Defense Council (Bibyeonsa 備邊司) judged it reasonable to allow reclamation on those two islands. There were two reasons for this. First, due to the vast and fertile land of those two islands, allowing the

33. *Sukjong sillok*, 3:4b–5a (Sukjong 1/3/9).

34. Entering the 18th century, the king endeavored to assure his legitimacy through acts of cherishing the people (Y. Song 2015, 39–40).

increased population to migrate to the islands for reclamation was also a policy that aligned with the concept of *iyong husaeng* 利用厚生 (benefitting daily life). Second, the influx of population could also help strengthen the defensive system of the islands. King Jeongjo accepted this policy direction.³⁵

As seen above, the reason for such island reclamation debates was to maintain the livelihoods of a growing population. This logic was also applied to discussions on the reclamation of Wihwa Island 威化島 raised in 1798.³⁶

The population increase naturally led to a change in the government's perception of local residents. Changes in the composition of islanders in the 18th and 19th centuries made them a more deserving subject of attention and concern than mainland residents.³⁷ Namely, in the eyes of the government, the nature of islanders changed from being associated with exiles and fugitives to being the object of concern. This can be understood within the same context as the underlying concept of *iyong husaeng* in the discussion on island reclamation.

On the whole, the reorganization of the defense system was an urgent task in Joseon following the suffering and destruction of the Japanese and Manchu invasions in the 16th and 17th centuries. In addition, since the damage caused by *hwangdangseon*, which began appearing on a large scale from the late 17th century, could not be ignored, a maritime boundary consciousness was formed and the defensive system centered on the inner sea began to be established as well. At the same time, island regions, especially various islands in the West and South Seas, received more attention from the central government as their character changed from that of *byeonji* to border defense areas, leading to the establishment of garrisons and counties. In the middle of the 18th century, the population increase and the emergence of rural social problems led to the island reclamation discussion. With a larger population migrating to the islands, the composition of islanders became more diversified.

The changes in the status of island regions as described above should be

35. *Bibyeonsa deungnok*, 181:101a (Jeongjo 17/4/29).

36. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 1785:140b–141a (Jeongjo 22/1/15).

37. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 1644:66a (Jeongjo 12/7/13).

examined together with the change in the government's maritime territorial consciousness. The maritime boundary consciousness, with a focus on the inner sea, defined the land and border defense scope of Joseon in conjunction with the awareness of the northern territory. Thus, legitimate control over island regions was contingent upon the domination of domestic territory, because the population flowing into the islands mainly came from the mainland. It can be said that the control over island areas was an extension of rural social domination. Therefore, it should be seen as a result of the Joseon state seeking to control its own population, whether that meant allowing people to migrate to islands or evacuating them from them. This should also be understood in the context of the Joseon government seeking to strengthen its control over domestic territory while unifying its rule nationwide in the wake of the Japanese and Manchu invasions.

The Development of the *Sutoje* for Ulleungdo

Of course, in practical terms, it was challenging for the central government to establish a unified island policy due to the uneven geographical distribution and distance of the country's island regions. The islands mentioned above were primarily located in the West and South Seas. The formulation of the government's island policy and the establishment of its defense system also centered largely around those island regions. In contrast, the East Sea region did not receive much attention. This can also be discerned through the military bases established and warships deployed in these areas.

As can be seen in the table below, defensive fortifications during the late Joseon period were mainly focused in the West and South Seas. These areas contained various islands, and their sea routes were intricate and complex. By contrast, the East Sea region has a monotonous coastline and few islands due to its elevated coast. Furthermore, the West and South Seas suffered much damage from the appearance of *hwangdangseon* and frequent conflicts between foreign castaways and natives. Thus, fortifying the defense system was urgently needed in these areas. Eventually, the East Sea was excluded

Table 1. The Number of Military Bases Appearing in the Joseon Law Codes (18th Century)

Province	Gyeongguk daejeon 經國大典 (Grand Code for State Administration)	Seok daejeon 續大典 (Supplement to the Grand Code of Administration)
Pyeongang-do	3	5
Hwanghae-do	7	19
Gyeonggi	6	7
Chungcheong-do	6	19
Jeolla-do	19	40
Gyeongsang-do	23	52
Gangwon-do	5	-
Hamgyeong-do	7	-

Source: Adopted from Jae-gun Kim (1989, 254).

Note: Pyeongan-do, Hwanghae-do, Gyeonggi, Chungcheong-do, Jeolla-do and most of Gyeongsang-do belong to West and South Seas, while only Gangwon-do, Hamgyeong-do and a small part of Gyeongsang-do belong to the East Sea.

from defensive preparations in the late Joseon period.

However, when considering the island policy of Joseon, it must be noted that the East Sea bore some significance due to the presence there of Ulleungdo. Officials had already surveyed this island during the Goryeo dynasty, and it is speculated that mainland coastal residents began to settle on Ulleungdo towards the end of the Goryeo period (B. Song 2010, 23–25). Of course, after the founding of Joseon, migration to Ulleungdo from the mainland was prohibited. The Joseon government even took measures to evacuate the residents of Ulleungdo to the mainland as part of its preparations against incursions by Japanese pirates. As a result, Ulleungdo became known as a deserted island. Nevertheless, to prevent Ulleungdo from becoming a Japanese base, *sutoje* (inspections) were conducted during the reign of King Taejong (r. 1400–1418). Actually, this system of *sutoje* was established not only for Ulleungdo. In 1447, the inspection for Goch'ŏ Island 孤草島 was discussed.³⁸ *Sutoje* were also undertaken for islands in the South

38. *Sejong sillok*, 116:20a–20b (Sejong 29/5/26).

Sea during the reign of King Jungjong (r. 1506–1544). Therefore, the evacuation of islanders from Ulleungdo should be considered in the same context as the maritime ban policy. And it is necessary to examine the *sutoje* of Ulleungdo along with the island policies for the West and South Seas, identifying similarities and differences between them.

During the reign of King Taejong, raids by Japanese pirates were frequent. The government was concerned about Japanese hiding on various islands and occasionally raiding the mainland.³⁹ In fact, the proclamation of the ban on launching ships out to sea in 1413 mentioned previously was also because the Japanese had entered Heuksan Island 黑山島 to harvest seaweed. The government strictly controlled sailing activities, while trying to minimize the damage caused by the Japanese by evacuating islanders from the islands. In 1416, the first *sutoje* was carried out on Ulleungdo.

At that time, a person named Bang Jiyong 方之用 led a group of 15 people and settled on Ulleungdo, sometimes launching raids under guise of being Japanese. To investigate this, the central government summoned Kim Inu 金麟雨 and Yi Man 李萬 to inquire about the matter. Kim had formerly served as a *manho* 萬戶 (subarea commander), and Yi was knowledgeable of the geography of Ulleungdo. According to them, Ulleungdo had become a refuge for those fleeing military service because it was not a place people frequently traveled to. With concerns about the risk of the Japanese using Ulleungdo as a launching base for raids into Gangwon-do, the central government sent those two officials to Ulleungdo to evacuate the islanders.⁴⁰ They searched out and arrested three islanders and returned to the mainland in the second month of 1417.⁴¹

One of these three islanders, a man named Kim Eulji 金乙之, led a group of 28 men and women and fled back to Ulleungdo in 1423. Upon learning of this, the central government again dispatched Kim Inu to bring them back.⁴² This time, Kim searched out and brought back 20 men and

39. *Taejong sillok*, 5:27b (Taejong 3/6/11).

40. *Taejong sillok*, 32:15a–15b (Taejong 16/9/2).

41. *Taejong sillok*, 33:8b (Taejong 17/2/5).

42. *Sejong sillok*, 29:19a (Sejong 7/8/8).

women. Since King Sejong pointed out that the reason people fled to the island was to avoid forced labor, Kim Jaji 金自知 (1367–1435), then *yejo champan* 禮曹參判 (second minister of rites), requested that those people be punished. But King Sejong did not agree, emphasizing that their actions differed from the act of secretly entering another country.⁴³

From King Sejong's words, it can be inferred that although Ulleungdo had been transformed into a deserted island due to Joseon's island vacancy policy in the early 15th century, the Joseon government did not consider the island a foreign land but merely a refuge for fugitives fleeing forced labor, a remote and distant border region no different from the island regions located in the West and South Seas.

In 1438, the punishment for illegal immigrants to Ulleungdo changed from banishment to capital punishment. In that year, 66 men and women who had been hiding on Ulleungdo were captured,⁴⁴ and their ringleader, a man named Kim An 金安, was executed.⁴⁵ The following year, Kim Beom 金凡 and Gwi Saeng 貴生 were also executed for entering Ulleungdo.⁴⁶

The continuous occurrence of illegal immigrants aroused the central government's interest in the location and geography of Ulleungdo. In 1438, the governor of Gangwon-do was ordered to investigate the specific location of Ulleungdo.⁴⁷ Efforts to confirm the location of Ulleungdo by the central government continued until the reign of King Seongjong (r. 1469–1495).⁴⁸ As a result of the frequent occurrence of illegal migration to Ulleungdo and the dispatch of officials to retrieve them, it became clear that there were in fact two islands, Ulleungdo and Dokdo, as marginal areas just east of Uljin-hyeon.

Since the late 17th century, as a maritime boundary consciousness gradually formed, fishermen were prohibited from entering the outer sea.

43. *Sejong sillok*, 30:5b–6a (Sejong 7/10/20).

44. *Sejong sillok*, 82:7a–7b (Sejong 20/7/15).

45. *Sejong sillok*, 83:19b–20a (Sejong 20/11/25).

46. *Sejong sillok*, 84:16a (Sejong 21/2/7).

47. *Sejong sillok*, 82:12a–12b (Sejong 20/7/26).

48. During this period, the new name Sambongdo 三峯島 begins to appear in the records in place of Usando 于山島 and Mureungdo 茂陵島.

However, fishing activities in the inner sea were allowed to some extent. Unlike the western and southern coasts, where there are numerous offshore islands to serve as reference points for estimating distances, the eastern coast lacks offshore islands, making it challenging to distinguish between the inner and outer sea during navigation. At that time, it was thought that Seonginbong peak, located on Ulleungdo, was the visual reference for the fishermen of the eastern coast.⁴⁹ So although Ulleungdo was located beyond the outer sea relative to the mainland, it was not considered beyond the national boundary. For example, in a letter from the Joseon Ministry of Rites to the Japanese envoy in 1694, it was mentioned that “even though Ulleungdo is within our territory, we cannot approach it arbitrarily due to its great distance.”⁵⁰

In this context, An Yongbok 安龍福, a fisherman who had served in the navy, clashed with Japanese fishermen while fishing around Ulleungdo and was subsequently captured by the Japanese in 1693.⁵¹ With this incident as an opportunity, Joseon began earnest discussions on Ulleungdo. Interest in Ulleungdo grew even more after this territorial dispute over Ulleungdo broke out with Japan. In 1694, King Sukjong agreed to the suggestion of Nan Guman 南九萬 (1629–1711), *yeonguijeong* 領議政 (chief state councilor), to investigate the geographical situation of Ulleungdo and to either relocate its residents or establish a garrison there. Ultimately, Chang Hansang 張漢相, then *cheomsa* 僉使 (garrison commander) in Samcheok 三陟, was sent to inspect Ulleungdo.⁵² In addition, Seong Chohyeong 成楚珩, the former military commander, also insisted on establishing a garrison on Ulleungdo and expanding military camps in the eastern coastal region of Gangwon-do, believing that “Ulleungdo is indeed a strategic point for our country.”⁵³

49. Seonginbong peak is 984 meters high. Theoretically, as long as one entered the sea area centered around the mountain within a radius of 111 kilometers, the mountain could be seen with the naked eye.

50. 雖敵境之鬱陵島，亦以遼遠之故，切不許任意往來。 *Mangi yoram, gunjeongpyeon, haebang*, 10:61a.

51. For the progress of this incident, see B. Song (2010, 45–82).

52. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 360:14b–15a (Sukjong 20/7/4).

53. 鬱陵島，實爲我國之要地。 *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 360:79a–79b (Sukjong 20/7/16).

As such, An Yongbok's incident can be seen as the trigger for the territorial dispute over Ulleungdo. However, it can also be understood in the same context as the debate on garrison establishment on the West and South Sea islands to secure maritime boundaries and improve the country's defense system. Namely, underlying the interest in Ulleungdo was the demand for the maintenance of the defense system. When the Japanese government prohibited its natives from fishing on Ulleungdo, King Sukjong decided to inspect Ulleungdo once every three years, signifying the official regularization of the *sutoje*.

It can be seen that in the beginning the *sutoje* for Ulleungdo was aimed at preventing the landing of Japanese and any contact between Japanese and natives, that is, guarding domestic territory against foreign invasion. This was obviously consistent with the construction of the maritime defense system at that time. Since Ulleungdo had not been harassed too much by foreigners until the mid-18th century, the main function of *sutoje* became bringing illicit island-dwellers back to the mainland. However, compared with the more complex situation of the islands in the West Sea, Ulleungdo did not encounter serious problems, so the *sutoje* was able to be implemented normally.

With the accession of King Jeongjo, the *sutoje* for Ulleungdo came to be undertaken every two years. This was a result of the need to strengthen crackdowns with more and more people fleeing to Ulleungdo illegally. Let us examine the following record from 1795 by Yi Dongheon 李東憲, then *yeongjang* 營將 (chief commander) in Samcheok.

In recent years, coastal shipping merchants have regarded Ulleungdo as a treasure trove, so many have risked the ban on infiltrating the island and gone there. Moreover, according to the report of the *sutosa*, there were traces of fishing, harvesting seaweed and abalone, cutting bamboo, logging for shipbuilding, and collecting ginseng at that time, meaning that the degree of relaxation of border restrictions is heinous.⁵⁴

54. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 1750:34a (Jeongjo 19/8/21). 近來沿海船商輩, 視本島作為貨藪, 冒禁潛入之弊, 比比有之. 而以今番搜討行所報見之, 採取魚藪, 亂斫筍竹, 伐木造船, 偷採人蔘之跡, 若是狼藉, 邊禁之蕩然, 萬萬驚心.

Ulleungdo is an area rich in seafood and local products. In particular, abalone, among other seafood, was a must-have item for coastal residents to offer as royal tribute. The collection of abalone also became the responsibility of the naval forces, which led to a decrease in the amount of abalone collected by the general public. In addition, during the reign of King Jeongjo, heavy taxes, namely the ginseng tax, bridge tax, and detailed survey tax, were prevalent among the general public when tribute items were sent to the king from the eastern coastal region of Gangwon-do.⁵⁵ Because of this, fishermen had no choice but to venture to the outer sea since they could not secure their livelihoods in the inner sea. And the government had to try to strengthen control over the people by increasing the *sutoje* from every three years to every two years.

The *sutoje* of islands in the West Sea was also implemented during the reign of King Jeongjo. In 1786, considering the serious situation of illegal fishing by Qing subjects off Sin Island 薪島 in Pyeongan-do, King Jeongjo decided to restore the *sutoje* for that island. According to him, the *sutoje* of Sin Island had by convention been held three times a month.⁵⁶ It is not difficult to see that *sutoje* was an important tool in the government's control over island regions in the late Joseon period. However, the *sutoje* for islands in the West Sea was mainly undertaken to prevent illegal border crossings by Qing subjects, while the *sutoje* of Ulleungdo was mainly to bring illicit settlers back to the mainland. Moreover, due to the increasing number of illegal border crossings, the *sutoje* for islands in the West Sea also became implemented with great frequency. But the nature of the two *sutoje* was fundamentally the same; both were a tool of government control over the population.

Nevertheless, the maritime defense system began to be challenged with the appearance of Western vessels from the late 18th century. In addition to their appearance in the West Sea, these foreign ships also began to appear in the East Sea. Naturally, they could not miss Ulleungdo in this process. In 1787, a French exploring vessel came across Ulleungdo when traversing the

55. *Jeongjo sillok*, 16:67a (Jeongjo 7/10/29).

56. *Jeongjo sillok*, 21:22a–23b (Jeongjo 10/3/6).

East Sea, christening the island “Dagelet.” In 1849, another French ship found Dokdo and christened it “Liancourt” (Tabohashi 1931, 4–11). Meanwhile, Japanese incursions of Ulleungdo again became frequent. In order to cope with these external transgressions of its territory, the Joseon government decided to strengthen its seclusion. However, with the signing of the Ganghwa Treaty in 1876, Joseon was forced to open its ports, which meant the de facto end of its maritime ban policy.

Under these circumstance Japan obtained the right to survey the coast of Joseon and dispatched warships to explore the East Sea. At the same time, some Japanese were sneaking on to Ulleungdo for logging.⁵⁷ In response, the Joseon government pursued an active policy regarding Ulleungdo, protesting to Inoue Kaoru 井上馨 (1836–1915), the Japanese minister of foreign affairs, and demanding the Japanese government strictly enforce the ban. On the other hand, it was decided to dispatch Yi Gyuwon 李圭遠 as the *geomch'alsa* 檢察使 (investigator) to Ulleungdo to thoroughly inspect the island.⁵⁸ After his inspection, Yi reported the basic situation, such as the composition of islanders and its natural ecology, and insisted on reclaiming Ulleungdo and protesting against the Japanese government.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the Joseon government launched a pioneering effort and began to relocate people to the island. Finally, the *sutoje* ended with the establishment of a full-time island chief system on January 29, 1895.

If the *sutoje* signified the government's control over Ulleungdo, the dispatch of a *geomch'alsa* can be taken as a signal of the government's willingness to develop Ulleungdo. It can be said that with the lifting of the maritime ban policy and the gradual blurring of the maritime boundary, Joseon needed to declare its sovereignty over Ulleungdo in a more proactive manner.

57. *Tongmungwanji*, 11:102a–102b.

58. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 2887:82a (Gojong 18/5/22).

59. *Ulleungdo geomchal ilgi*.

Conclusion

In this article, the trend of Joseon's island policy and the development of the *sutoje* for Ulleungdo were examined. Conscious of the Ming's maritime ban and pressed by realistic demands to defend against Japanese piracy, Joseon continuously carried out a maritime ban policy from the late Goryeo period. This policy gradually transformed into a means of controlling the populace when there arose the need to reorganize the military defense system in the wake of the Imjin War and to prepare countermeasures against the appearance of *hwangdangseon*. In the process, a maritime boundary consciousness centered on the inner and outer seas was formed, and the defense system centered on the inner sea was established. As a result, the character of islands was changed from that of *byeonji* to garrison regions, receiving increased attention from the central government. The government endeavored to manage the islands as an extension of coastal rural community control by collecting information on their population and natural ecology. Debates on garrison establishment, county establishment, and land reclamation also arose amidst changes in the perception of the status of islands.

Of course, the above trend in Joseon's island policy seems to have concerned the West and South Sea island regions. By contrast, the East Sea region has few islands, with only Ulleungdo and Dokdo far away from the mainland, so the change in related policies was not complicated either. In the early Joseon period, the government policy of evacuating residents of Ulleungdo and the so-called island vacancy policy were carried out to prevent casualties and damage from Japanese piracy. However, following this, *sutosa* were dispatched to search for illegal Korean or Japanese infiltrators, gather geographic information, and obtain local products. At the end of the 17th century, when the territorial dispute over Ulleungdo with Japan began in earnest, Joseon formalized the *sutoje* for Ulleungdo, which was undertaken once every two to three years. It was not until 1895 that the *sutoje* was abolished.

The *sutoje* of Ulleungdo can also be understood in the same context as the policies of islands located in the West and South Seas. The territorial

dispute over Ulleungdo was not irrelevant to the formation of the consciousness of strengthening the national defense system during the reign of King Sukjong. Islands played an essential role as the first line of defense against invasion of the mainland from the sea. Therefore, as part of maintaining the defense system, the control of island regions had a military and practical significance. However, unlike the islands located in the West and South Seas, Ulleungdo was geographically far from the mainland, with many restrictions regarding the establishment of garrison or population migration. This was also the reason that efforts to establish a military base or to relocate people to Ulleungdo finally collapsed. However, the character of Ulleungdo was the same as that of the islands located in the West and South Seas in that it revealed the Joseon government's will to properly control the domestic territory. The development of the *sutoje* for Ulleungdo in the Joseon period was related to changes in maritime territorial consciousness and island policies. Its implementation resulted from a compromise between the government's will to establish a unified governing system and realistic limitations.

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