The Choson and Ming dynasty both faced devastating results from the constant presence of pirates from Japan, and in some cases China, on their coasts. Piracy was a brutal tactic that led to raids on villages, smuggling of goods, and vicious bloody attacks. The difficulty in combating piracy and dealing with the constant unrest caused by pirate threats was partially due to geographic location as well as policy toward other nation states. Geographically, Korea is a peninsula with open coastlines and with China, the entire east side of the country is coastline. With Japan being a mountainous group of islands, this factors into the reasoning for many individuals to pursue a life of piracy; to obtain goods and materials not readily available in the country. The Choson and Ming needed to develop effective policies to defend themselves from constant pirate attacks. Piracy greatly threatened their national security and both countries could not afford coastline attacks. These attacks decimated populations affected by economics. Also both countries where dealing with threats from northern enemies such as the Mongols and Jurchens.

The Choson were in a precarious situation. To the north and south, they were concerned with protecting their borders from Jurchens and Japanese pirates. At the same time, they also wanted to develop a working relationship with the Ming dynasty and establish legitimacy. Choson employed very similar tactics in dealing with Japanese pirates as they did with the Jurchens. Through foreign policy that included diplomacy, naturalization of peoples and trade policy, the Choson hoped to put down pirate activity. Decreasing the number of pirates working on the high seas was the main goal, keep the country safe against piracy attacks at all costs.
It was important for the “Korean diplomatic order,” leading to the establishment of the Choson court hierarchically ordering their external world. The first strategy utilized to decrease piracy threats was that of diplomacy. The court wanted to try and convert pirates to effective traders. To create traders, diplomatic ties needed to be created. The Choson court chose to communicate with Japanese leaders in hopes that they could help suppress pirate activity and encourage trade. By working with Japanese leaders, the Choson could exert dominance over the pirates, thus ending attacks on Korea. It was hoped that by establishing diplomatic ties, trade policies could be created between Korea and Japan in another attempt to suppress attacks. By trading, the pirates and Japan would receive their desired objects in a more honorable, less violent fashion. Trade would also help Korea protect itself. The court would know exactly what was going on for it would have control of trade and coastal activity, instead of being subject to surprise pirate attacks. Trade was very helpful in suppressing piracy for it promoted commercial activity as well as dictated which ports were open for trade. More importantly trade was beneficial for both the Choson court and Japan. Japanese leaders had reason to help suppress pirates because they were acquiring a wealth of goods and profit on the side.

The second tactic engaged by the court was that of naturalization. Naturalization was an economic relief program that would help the Japanese pirates in rehabilitating their pirate tendencies. Japanese were given land and positions within the government based on their various skills. The court offered the pirates land within in the southern provinces as well as Korean women to take as wives. All these benefits created the economic stability that the pirates lacked. Naturalization decreased the number of pirates
by means of friendly coercion. As pirates transitioned their lifestyle the court bestowed them with gifts and titles.

As piracy began to decrease in Korea the court began to focus more on trade regulations. The early regulations of trade were effective in decreasing piracy. To make trade even more effective with Japan, the Choson established passports that became a required part of trading. The passport was issued by the lord of the merchant, certifying permission to sail to Choson. Limitations were also set upon the number of routes Japanese traders could travel and restrictions on what materials they could carry. These were Choson security measures because of the violent nature of Japanese travelers.

Pirates were also a nuisance to the Ming dynasty as well. To battle against them, the Ming dynasty created a new position called Grand Coordinator of Coastal Defense. This position was created by the dynasty in hopes of building up military and political control within the domains of maritime trade and coastal defense. The Grand Coordinator of Coastal Defense would help solve the problem of constant bombardment of piracy on the coast of China. The person appointed to this new position was Zhu Wan. This position created many problems and Zhu Wan did not help solve the piracy problem.

Coastal defense was a major strategy the dynasty undertook to combat piracy. The basic structure consisted of patrols, guard points and signal towers along China’s coast. Coastal defense proved difficult as Ming rulers tried to create a line of walled cities, small forts, and stockades along the whole coast. Along with coastal patrol, overseas trade conducted on a private level was also outlawed. The Ming wished to rid China of foreign alliances not congruent with policies of the imperial court. Only tributary trade would be allowed. Despite strategies taken to prevent private trade, it
continued to thrive underground. Citizens began to take part in dealing with illegal imports. Private trade began to corrupt local gentry, who were positioned in their districts to maintain order and to uphold the empire’s laws, for they gained advantages for themselves and families.  

Even though Zhu Wan was appointed to put a stop to the illegal smuggling of goods and coastal disorder, he lacked support from the Emperor and imperial court in doing his job. As he investigated piracy threats, he found information that indicated local elite were active participants in piracy. Local prominent gentry families supported and participated directly in the smuggling trade, the “pirates in gowns and caps.” These particular pirates were gentry-officials or scholars, members of the elite class who supported illegal smuggling, on which piracy survived. The influence of elites on piracy and their close connections to the court made it difficult for the Grand Coordinator to exterminate piracy. Piracy was so closely interwoven in the threads of the dynasty that the policy of having one person responsible in destroying Chinese pirates was absurd.

The Ming did have coastal situations with Japanese pirates too, referred to as “dwarf pirates.” Similar to Korea, China not only had pirate threats, but also constant threat of Mongol invasions from the north. In fighting the Mongols, the Chinese used their moral influence to cause the border people to acknowledge Chinese sovereignty, but the Japanese alone resist for the more forces used against them, the more disobedient and rebellious they become. Another tactic utilized by the Ming to quell piracy was diplomatic communication with Japanese officials. Zhu Yuanzhang sent imperial letters to Japan asking for tribute and suppression of pirates. The Ming version of diplomatic contact was threatening. The communication was based on naval and weaponry force
that backed Ming demands. Ming policy really fluctuated between two types of policy, military force to break up pirate raids and through diplomatic initiatives to distract the piracy threat and ensure China’s security.\textsuperscript{17}

The policy of force to suppress Japanese pirates stems from the prejudice the Chinese had towards Japan. Japanese pirates were believed to be poor and evil, as well as blood thirsty, cruel and heartless. Japanese pirates were barbaric and naturally cunning. Their barbaric methods and craftiness made it hard for the Ming to decrease piracy and eradicate the pirate group. Hatred of the pirates led China to cut off all relations with Japan. Facing the difficulty of pirate raids, the Ming court issued a ban on coastal trade and blocked the regular trade routes, fueling the pirates to act even more violent and reckless.\textsuperscript{18}

The policies the Choson used for suppressing and dealing with piracy are based on the issues of economics and national security. By establishing a hierarchal order in the management of trade and rehabilitating pirates, the Choson court was successful in their ability to decrease pirate activity and establish themselves as legitimate diplomatic policy makers. Conversely the Ming had double the threat with attacks from Japanese pirates and Chinese pirates from within their own country. The Ming’s creation of a position to thwart piracy on the coast, as well as their tactic of force did not prove successful in warding off piracy threats. Piracy still ran ramped in China because of the corrupt gentry officials.

\begin{itemize}
\item[{\textsuperscript{1}}] Kenneth Robinson, “From Raiders to Traders,” \textit{Korean Studies} 16 (1992): 95.
\item[{\textsuperscript{2}}] Ibid., 104.
\item[{\textsuperscript{3}}] Ibid., 109.
\item[{\textsuperscript{4}}] Ibid., 95.
\item[{\textsuperscript{5}}] Ibid., 103.
\item[{\textsuperscript{6}}] Ibid., 104.
\item[{\textsuperscript{7}}] Ibid., 106.
\end{itemize}
12. Ibid., 31.
13. Ibid., 33.
16. Ibid., 21.

Bibliography


