

The Aggressive National Defense Posture Taken during the Reign of King Sejong of the Joseon Dynasty

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This article will focus on the dispatch of expeditionary troops to defeat Japanese pirates whose headquarters were based on Daema Island (Tsushima Island in Jp.) and on military campaigns waged against the Jurchen tribes along the Pajeo River. It will examine King Sejong's political thought on conquest by focusing on the aggressive national defense security carried out against Daema Island and Pajeo River. King Sejong was Joseon dynasty's representative political leader and king of Confucian statecraft. This paper will also deal with the process of the Joseon dynasty's conquest of Daema Island from June 17, 1419 to July 6, 1419 and examine the following matters.

First, what were the causes, processes, and consequences of the conquests? Second, despite Joseon dynasty having conquered Daema Island, part of Japan's territory, why didn't local war break out between Korea and Japan? Third, why was Joseon not able to annex Daema Island despite having attacked Japan with 17,285 soldiers and 227 warships?

I will attempt to show how King Sejong's peculiar way of arriving at political judgment by engaging in constructive group discussions with the literati-bureaucrats, even those who opposed his ideas, contributed to the strengthening of the state during the formative years of the Joseon dynasty.

Keywords: Statecraft, dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island, military campaigns waged along the Pajeo River, aggressive national defense posture

Introduction

King Sejong has long been praised as one of the most cultured and shrewd kings in Korea's history (*Sejong sillok* [Veritable Records of King Sejong], May 5,

1426). There have been various research projects on King Sejong in terms of his philosophy, political thinking, historical views, and his commitment to the Korean alphabet (*Hangeul*) but insufficient research has been conducted regarding the nation's foreign relations and defense policy during his reign.¹ Leading examples of the aggressive defensive stance taken during the reign of King Sejong who adopted a form of Confucian statecraft² include the dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island (Tsushima Island in Jp.) and the launch of a military campaign to suppress the Jurchen tribes that were continually invading the regions along the Pajeo River. At that time, Joseon dynasty displayed a servile attitude toward the greater power of Ming China while adopting a stick-and-carrot attitude toward Japan and the Jurchen tribes. So, how was the decision to dispatch expeditionary troops to Daema Island to prevent invasions by Japanese pirates reached? The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the process related to the dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island and the launch of a military campaign to suppress the Jurchen invaders along the Pajeo River region as part of the aforesaid policy toward the more powerful and the easy-to-manage adversaries.

This paper focuses on determining King Sejong's foreign policy at that time, how the process was promoted, and what he did to overcome the difficult situation, as well as on the controversies and political conflicts occurring among Cabinet Ministers with regard to such policies.

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1. Most of the previous research on the nation's foreign relations and defense policies during the reign of King Sejong is centered on the historical relations between the nation and Japan, including that carried out by Shin Gi-seok (1957), Song Byeong-gi (1964), Lee Jae (1970), Son Hong-ryeol (1975 and 1978), Lee Sang-tae (1988), Jang Hak-geun (1983, 1987, and 2000), Kim Gu-jin (1983, 1988, 1995, and 2001), Kim Sun-ja (1999), Kim Ju-sik, et al. (1998, 2000-2003), Son Seung-cheol (1988 and 2004), Min Deok-gi (1989), Lee Byeong-seon (1990), Na Jong-u (1980 and 1992), Lee Hae-cheol (2001), Lee Hyeon-jong (1964b and 1993), Bae Yeong-bok (1994), Ha Woo-bong (1994, 1995, and 1996), Han Mun-jong (1992, 1997, 1995, and 2001), Han Myeong-gi (2001), Cha Mun-seop, et al. (2001), Chae Yeon-seok (2001), Oh Jong-rok (1992 and 2001), Shin Seok-ho (1959), Kim Gu-jin (1984), Lee In-yeong (1937), Lee Hyeon-hui (1964), Lee Eun-gyu (1974), Lee Hyeon-jong (1961), Kang Seong-mun (1989 and 2001), Yu Jae-gu (1985), Jeong Gu-bok (1998), Jo Nam-uk (1998 and 2005), Choi Seung-hui (1993). Research on King Sejong's political philosophy includes that carried out by Kim Un-tae (1982) and Kim Jae-yeong (1998). There are five papers on the nation's defense posture and its relations with Ming China and Japan during this period. It should be pointed out that insufficient research has been conducted on the king's political philosophy as a national leader based on Sejongillok (Veritable Records of King Sejong).
 2. For the concept regarding the governing of a nation, refer to Park Hyun-mo (2005: 25-30).

Governing of the Country during King Sejong's Reign: Dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island

1. National Security in Early Joseon Dynasty

In pre-modern times, China saw itself as the center of the world, regarding its emperor as the Son of Heaven and the leaders of smaller neighboring countries as something like feudal lords, thereby applying its Confucian concept of hierarchy to its relations with other countries. Under this concept, its smaller neighbors were supposed to regard China as the Elder Brother and require its support and protection, while maintaining friendly relations with each other under the protection of the Elder Brother. Smaller neighbors regularly paid tribute to Chinese emperors, who sent a messenger to them as a friendly gesture in return. On such occasions, a high-ranking official from the smaller country would lead a group of emissaries bearing tribute on a courtesy visit to the Chinese emperor, wishing him good health (Son Seung-cheol 2004: 76). This attitude on the part of China's smaller neighbors formed part of their practical strategy for survival.

In the Sino-centric international order that represented its sphere of influence in pre-modern times, the Joseon dynasty of Korea gained little economically from the practice of paying tribute to the Chinese emperors. Nevertheless, China was in the position of being able to exert substantial influence on the politics and defense of Korea. Thus, the kings of the early Joseon dynasty appear to have used the practice of paying tribute in an effort to have their regimes protected (Jeong Yong-hwa, *The Dong-A Ilbo*, November 8, 2004).

Tension continued to exist in the relations between Joseon Korea and Ming China, as the former looked for opportunities for material gain, including territorial expansion, while pursuing good-neighbor relations, serving the latter as the Elder Brother and promoting cultural exchanges with it. The defense policy

3. According to *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, Vol. 13, 15 and 17, the king adhered to a self-reliant defense policy. His measures for greater efficiency in national defense include: overhauling the nationwide military registers; reforming the military system; compiling *Paldo jiriji* (Geography of the Eight Provinces) (eight years spent); compiling a war history named *Dongguk byeonggam* (1450); obliging the sons of noble families to undergo military service in specially organized units named *Chunguida* and *Chungsundae*; obliging the sons of untouchables to serve in special military units; developing modern cannons, and overhauling the navy by developing improved warships (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, July 28, August 6, and August 11, 1419).

adopted by the early Joseon dynasty for the restoration of national territories should be understood on the basis of such a situation.³ Efforts to restore the nation's previous territories, including Manchuria and Liaodong, were continued from the end of the Goryeo dynasty to the early Joseon dynasty in view of their importance as strategic posts for the nation's further prosperity in East Asia. The *yeokseonghyeokmyeong* (replacement of a dynasty with a new dynasty) ideology, which formed the logical basis of the founding of the Joseon dynasty by Lee Seong-gye, its first king, could be justified by the international order in China's sphere of influence. Thus, maintaining stable relations with Ming China was of primary importance in the reign of King Sejong of Joseon dynasty as it was in the past during the reigns of Kings Taejo and Taejong to Sejong. This is why King Sejong accepted the status of a feudal lord of a smaller kingdom and "served the greater power of China."

Veritable Records of King Sejong, dated September 2, 1424 (sixth year of King Sejong's reign) clearly shows the king's belief that the nation should do its best to serve the Chinese emperor as a subject country. In September 1424, when Emperor Yongle of Ming China died, King Sejong remained in mourning dress for 27 days in a gesture of feudal submission to the Chinese emperor. At that time, Cabinet Ministers reminded him of the will of Emperor Hongwu of Ming that "all subjects should remain in mourning dress for no more than three days after my death," but the king did not listen to them.

A careful perusal of the theses written by Park Hyun-mo and Kim Hong-u on King Sejong's attitude toward China as the Big Brother shows that his thinking was based on a clear-cut understanding of the *Realpolitik* of that time. The Chinese emperor was deeply moved by his "consistent sincerity" as a subject in the form of tributes i.e., the dispatch of tens of thousands of cows and horses as demanded by Ming, a special local species of hawk named *haedongcheong*, and numerous maidens (Park Hyun-mo 2005: 11, 24). It appears that King Sejong showed a considerable level of understanding of power politics in the nation's relations with China, Daema Island, Japan and various tribes in Manchuria and other political powers, and that he was not an idealist like Woodrow Wilson (Kim Hong-u 2005: 13).

In the early 15th century, the political situation both in and out of the Joseon territory remained tumultuous. In China, the Mongol Yuan dynasty was on the decline, while the Ming dynasty established by the Han was focused on consolidating the power of the royal family; wild tribes frequently made incursions into the estuaries of the Duman River, which bordered the Joseon dynasty; and

Manchuria remained as an arena of struggle among the various Jurchen tribes. As for Japan, Gokomatsu came to rule the country in 1392, at a time when the Joseon dynasty was being founded on the Korean Peninsula, putting an end to the period of chaos caused by the struggle among warrior clans following the Kamakura Shogunate. However, his influence did not reach as far as Kyushu. Taking advantage of such a situation, Japanese pirates based on Daema Island—located between the Korean Peninsula and mainland Japan—conducted campaigns of plundering and pillaging (Min Du-gi 1980: 68-73). Daema Island, which served as a trading post between the two countries, was more or less devoid of arable land. According to *Taejong sillok* (Veritable Records of King Taejong), this was one of the reasons why they engaged in these predatory activities. (*Veritable Records of King Taejong*, April 8, 1410; *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, April 30, 1444).⁴

Japanese Pirates' Invasions of Korea and Dispatch of Expeditionary Troops to Daema Island during King Sejong's Reign

Japanese pirates based on Daema Island invaded Korea on more than 130 occasions between the reign of King Taejo (1392-98) and that of King Taejong (1400-18), and at least 50 times during the reign of King Sejong (1418-50). The following table shows statistics for the Japanese pirates' invasions of the Korean Peninsula based on *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty).

As shown in Table 1, Japanese pirates invaded the Korean Peninsula a total of 197 times (an average of 3.7 times per year) between 1392, the first year of King Taejo, and 1444, the 26th year of King Sejong. This figure can be broken down into a total of 58 invasions (an average of 8.3 invasions per year) during King Taejo's reign, 5 invasions (an average of 2.5 invasions per year) during King Jeongjong's reign, 78 invasions (an average of 4.3 invasions per year) dur-

4. Refer to Ha Woo-bong and Lee Hae-cheol on how the Joseon dynasty regarded its dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island for the destruction of Japanese pirates (Ha Woo-bong 1996: 142-4; Lee Hae-cheol 2001: 779) and Japanese academia's theory on the cause of invading Korea (I Yon 1999: 158-60). Japanese pirates' invasions of the Korean peninsula in the late 14th century were characterized by their large scale and the long duration of the pirates' presence on the peninsula (I Yon 1999: 160-72).

ing King Taejong's reign, and 56 invasions (an average of 1.8 invasions per year) during King Sejong's reign. The number of invasions undertaken by the Japanese pirates appears to have decreased as the years went by.

As for the number of battles fought against the Japanese pirates, the figure stood at a total of 25 battles (an average of 3.6 battles per year) during King Taejo's reign, 2 battles (an average of one per year) during King Jeongjong's reign, 27 battles (an average of 1.5 battles per year) during King Taejong's reign,

Table 1 Japanese Pirate Invasions and Trade Exchange in Early Joseon Dynasty

Year	Invasions	Trade Exchanges	Year	Invasions	Trade Exchanges	Year	Invasions	Trade Exchanges
1392	(1) 1	1	1412		23	1432		17
1393	(3)11	2	1413	(1)1	30	1433	(4)4	24
1394	(5)14	2	1414		28	1434	(1)2	38
1395	(4) 6	7	1415	(1)1	31	1435	(1)1	28
1396	(3)13	2	1416	(1)1	30	1436	(1)2	34
1397	(8)13	6	1417	(2)3	29	1437	(1)3	58
1398	(1) 1	7	1418	(1)1	37	1438	(1)1	61
1399	(1) 4	6	1419	(6)9	24	1439	(1)1	66
1400	(1) 1	8	1420	(1)2	29	1440	(1)1	16
1401	(1) 5	11	1421	(2)4	27	1441		18
1402	(3) 5	14	1422	(4)4	31	1442	(1)3	37
1403	(2) 8	11	1423	(2)2	65	1443	(1)2	39
1404	(1) 6	5	1424	(1)2	23	1444	(1)1	27
1405		9	1425	(3)3	26	1445		15
1406	(5) 5	16	1426	(4)5	24	1446		18
1407	(1)12	20	1427		24	1447		17
1408	(6) 7	16	1428	(1)1	49	1448		12
1409	(2)19	20	1429		23	1449		14
1410	4	23	1430	(1)2	35	1450		37
1411		14	1431	1	24	Total	(93)201	1,388

Source: Compiled according to the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*. Figures in parentheses under "Invasions" column refer to the number of battles carried out against Japanese pirates.

NOTE: 1392: 1st year of King Taejo's reign 1412: 12th year of King Taejong's reign
 1399: 1st year of King Jeongjong's reign 1419: 1st year of King Sejong's reign
 1401: 1st year of King Taejong's reign 1432: 14th year of King Sejong's reign

and 41 battles (an average of 1.28 battles per year) during King Sejong's reign. As such, it would appear that the Japanese pirates gradually became peaceful traders as a result of the Joseon government's effective suppression of their activities, among other efforts, and the stabilization of Japan's domestic situation. This is indicated by the fact that the number of exchanges with traders from various regions in Japan started to increase dramatically during King Taejong's reign: a total of 27 cases (an average of 3.9 cases per year) during King Taejo's reign, 14 cases (an average of 7 cases per year) during King Jeongjong's reign, 378 cases (an average of 20.4 cases per year) during King Taejong's reign, and 1,004 cases (an average of 31.3 cases per year) during King Sejong's reign. The impressive number of warships and crewmen of the Joseon Navy as indicated in the *Sejong sillok jiriji* (Veritable Records of King Sejong—Graphical Part), which is thought to be a reliable record, points to the status of the Japanese pirates' invasions (See Table 2).

Table 2 Number of Warships and Crew Deployed Nationwide during King Sejong's Reign

Province	Number of warships	Number of crew	Homeports (number of warships)
Gyeonggi	97	5,792	Namyang (34), Ansan, Incheon, Gyodong (26), Ganghwa (21)
Chungcheong	142	8,414	Boryeong (50), Taean, Nampo, Jangam, Seosan, Dangjin, Hongju
Gyeongsang	285	16,582	Dongrae (49), Ulsan (39), Yeonghae, Yeongdeok, Heunghae, Janggi, Gyeongju, Gijang (16), Geoje (28), Goseong (35), Jinju (37)
Jeolla	168	10,703	Muan (24), Boseong (18), Suncheon, Goheung, Jangheung, Gangjin, Yeongam, Haejin, Yeonggwang, Hampyeong, Muan, Buan, Okgu
Hwanghae	41	3,239	Ongjin (9), Haeju, Gangryeong, Pungcheon, Eunyul
Gangwon	17	1,103	Pyeonghae, Yangyang, Goseong, Budong, Uljin, Hyeondong
Pyeongang	41	3,480	Samhwa (11), Anju (15), Seoncheon (15)
Hamgil	41	10,069	Anbyeon, Yongjin, Yeongpyeong, Yewon (16), Bukcheong
Total	832	59,382	

Source: *Veritable Records of King Sejong—Geographical Section*.

Table 2 shows that the Joseon Navy under King Sejong had a total of 832 warships and 59,382 crew members. The majority of these were deployed in the three southern provinces, Gyeongsang, Jeolla and Chungcheong, where the Japanese incursions occurred with the highest frequency. The Joseon forces adopted a two-tier defense strategy, with the army repelling invading pirates that managed to pass through the naval defense line. This strategy was also employed in their dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island. Two hundred and eighty-five warships (34.5%) of the naval fleet were deployed in Gyeongsang, followed by 168 (20%) in Jeolla, and 142 (19.5%) in Chungcheong (*Veritable Records of King Sejong—Geographical Section*; Kim Jae-geun 1977: 25-30). The number of warships deployed from their home ports during King Sejong's reign shows the great extent to which the nation acknowledged the need to defend the areas most often targeted by the Japanese pirates. As such, Dongrae, Ulsan, Geoje and Goseong in Gyeongsang Province, Muan, Boseong in Jeolla Province, and Boryeong in Chungcheong Province saw the greatest deployment of warships.⁵ King Sejong also dispatched emissaries to the pirates and as a conciliatory measure bestowed farmland and houses on those who decided to quit piracy (July 18, 1419).

1. Decision-Making Process on Dispatching Expeditionary Troops to Daema Island

a. Discussion process about dispatching expeditionary troops to Daema Island

When King Sejong ascended to the throne in 1418, the former king Taejong, his father, retained command of the armed forces. In a discussion about the problems caused by the Japanese pirates, the former king declared, "The fact that I still hold command of the armed forces should not be misunderstood. It stems from my sincere wish to protect the king against any possible contingency.

⁵ According to *Veritable Records of King Sejong—Geographical Section*, the total number of crew aboard the warships reported by each province came to 49,317 at the end of Goryeo and in the early days of the Joseon dynasty; this compares with the figure of 50,169, the sum total for naval crew as reported by each warship at its home port. *Goryeosa* (History of Goryeo Dynasty) and *Byeongjiseongun* (Record of Warship Crew) show that there were different names for the naval forces, i.e., *seongun*, *giseongun* or *sugun*. Naval forces were deployed from ports near their homes.

Being young, he is not familiar with military affairs. I intend to turn over the control of the armed forces to the king when he reaches thirty, having accumulated experience in military affairs” (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, November 25, 1418). Thus, he wanted the new king, his son, to govern the nation with an untroubled mind, while he acted as a guardian of the throne, doing his best to subdue all possible causes of disturbance related to the throne, including the possible greed of relatives, such as the new king’s own brothers, an attitude apparently based on his own experiences when he acceded to the throne eighteen years before. Research on King Sejong conducted by The Academy of Korean Studies, including studies by Jeong Gu-bok (1982), Kim Un-tae (1982), Kim Jae-yeong (1998), Jo Nam-uk (1998), and Han Hyeong-jo (1998), is united in saying that the new king ruled the nation under his father’s protection and guidance where military affairs and other important state affairs were concerned until May 10 of the fourth year of his reign. In this respect, there may be some controversy as to whether the dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island in the first year of the new king’s reign was carried out under his own initiative or as part of the former king’s policy. It was indeed the former king who announced the dispatch of expeditionary troops to destroy the pirates on the island, appointed the commanders of the troops (May 14, 1418), and sent an imperial instruction to the troops already on the march, finding fault with their delay (June 20, 1418). The fact that the new king followed his father’s recommendations on important state affairs, including military affairs, in the first four years of his reign has important implications for the politics concerning the Japanese pirates. *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* shows that the number of sessions discussing the Japanese pirates came to 20 (an average of 2.9 per year) during King Taejo’s reign, 5 (an average of 2.5 per year) during King Jeongjong’s reign, 33 (an average of 1.8 per year) during King Taejong’s reign, and 96 (an average of 3.0 per year) during King Sejong’s reign. Discussion sessions about Japanese acts of piracy were held more frequently under King Sejong’s reign than during the three previous kings’ reigns, which indicates that it was one of the most important political concerns for King Sejong.

One day Taejong called the new king and several other important people together, including Chief State Councilor Yu Jeong-hyeon, Second State Councilor Park Eun and Third State Councilor Lee Won, Minister of Rites Heo Jo, Second Minister of Rites Lee Myeong-deok, and Minister of War Jo Mal-saeng, to discuss the dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island. He asked, “What are your opinions on the idea of attacking the Japanese pirates on

the island, as they currently appear to be maintaining a loose defense?" Park Eun, Lee Won, Jo Mal-saeng, and Lee Myeong-deok agreed, declaring that it would be a good idea to launch a surprise attack and then back off in preparation for their counterattack (May 13, 1418).

At another meeting called five days later, Yu Jeong-hyeon, Park Eun, Lee Won, and Heo Jo said, "It seems to be impossible to launch a surprise attack. It would be better to attack them when they return from Haeju," while Minister of War Jo Mal-saeng said, "It is right to make a surprise attack." The former king said, "I see that what you are saying today is different from what you said the other day. If we continue to take a passive attitude, and only think about how to defend ourselves, instead of driving them away, that will be as disgraceful as the Han dynasty being insulted by the Huns from the north. It is right to destroy them, taking advantage of their currently loose defensive position. We must send troops there, and capture their family members. Then, our troops should stay at Geoje Island and wait for their return from an expedition, attack them, set fire to their ships, arrest all men remaining on the ships, including traders, and kill all those who resist. In this way, we will be able to deter them from plundering and pillaging our people in the future. We should not appear weak before them and should do our best to prevent future disaster by taking a firm stance today." Then he gave an order for the troops, with Lee Jong-mu acting as their commander-in-chief, to be ready for the Japanese pirates returning from an expedition, and for the warships in each province to sail to Gyeonnaeryang by June 8 (May 14, 1418). King Sejong, along with the former king, personally saw the eight commanders of the departing troops. The middle and right wings of the troops departed first, with the left wing scheduled to depart the following day (May 18, 1433).

With Lee Jong-mu acting as the commander-in-chief and leading the middle wing, the expeditionary troops were also led by Woo Bak, Lee Suk-myo and Hwang Sang (for the middle wing),—and Lee Ji-sil, Lee Eul-hwa and Lee Sun-mong (for the right wing).⁶ The 17,285-strong force included nine commanding officers, 669 junior officers and those selected from the government troops,

6. The expeditionary troops led by Lee Jong-mu left Geoje Island and reached Aso Bay of Daema Island, wiping out the Japanese pirates of the island for a month. Besides Lee Jong-mu, the commanders included Woo Bak (in charge of carrying out orders for the middle wing), Lee Suk-myo (in charge of the supply of rations for the left wing), Hwang Sang (in charge of warships for the right wing), Yu Seup (in charge of coordinating commands for the left wing), Park

while the remaining 16,616 men consisted of armored soldiers, volunteers and others. The troops boarded warships sent from each province (10 from Gyeonggi, 32 from Chungcheong, 59 from Jeolla, and 126 from Gyeongsang), and departed for Daema Island with rations that would last them 65 days (June 17, 1418).

Upon reaching the island, Lee Jong-mu, commander-in-chief, asked the pirates' leader to surrender, to which there was no response. The troops launched their attack and eventually captured 129 pirate ships, set fire to a total of 1,939 houses, beheaded 114 pirates, caught 21 pirates as captives, and saved 131 Chinese held as prisoners of war. The left wing led by Park Sil, who was unfamiliar with the geography of the island, fell into an ambush and suffered serious loss, with 300-plus troops, including lower officers such as Park Mu-yang, Park Hong-sin, Kim Hye and Kim Hui, killed in action. The right wing led by Lee Sun-mong, Kim Hyo-seong, and Lee Ye killed hundreds of pirates, who had started to launch a counteroffensive in an attempt to capitalize on their successful ambush.⁷ Fearing that the expeditionary troops would remain on the island on a long-term basis, the pirates' leader politely asked for the withdrawal of the forces, stating that the island would be beset by rain storms in July. In response to this, Lee Jong-mu led the troops back to Geoje Island on July 3 (July 3, 1418).

Later, Cabinet Ministers discussed a plan for the dispatch of another team of expeditionary troops to Daema Island to quell the pirates' plundering and pillaging of the peninsula. Chief State Councilor Yu Jeong-hyeon presented a report to the king to the following effect:

1. The pirates based on Daema Island are cruel and horrible in nature, in addition to being likely to seek revenge when attacked. We must be well

Cho (in charge of the supply of rations for the left wing), Park Sil (in charge of warships for the right wing), Lee Ji-sil (in charge of coordinating commands for the right wing), Kim Eul-hwa (in charge of the supply of rations for the left wing), and Lee Sun-mong (in charge of warships for the right wing) (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, May 14, 1418). The Royal Court subsequently dispatched Chief State Councilor Yu Jeong-hyeon and Second Minister Choi Yundeok, along with other officers, such as Oh Seon-gyeong, Gun Ja-jeong, Gwak Jon-jung, and Kim Yun-su, to the departing troops to control and encourage them (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, May 20, 1418).

7. One hundred and forty-two people from the Liaodong region were captured by the expeditionary troops on Daema Island and sent back home to Liaodong on August 7 of the same year (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, June 20, 1418).

prepared against their attack, by deploying 20 warships at each strategically important harbor, keeping our warships in good order, deploying troops wherever warships cannot be deployed, refraining from making beacon fires, and maintaining a good defensive line.

2. We must overhaul our warships in January and February. It is necessary to send another team of expeditionary troops to Daema Island to destroy the pirates in March, when it will be too early for them to start committing acts of plunder and pillage, as the water is too cold and the wind is strong. In this way, we can reduce our losses and prevent the disturbances caused by their plundering during the farming season.
3. The warships kept in the three southern provinces, Gyeongsang, Jeolla and Chungcheong, must be repaired and overhauled during fall and winter. The timbers to be used for this purpose should be sent by the end of September from Samdeung, Yangdeok, Seongcheon in Pyeongan Province via the Daedong River or from Iseong and Ganggye via the Amnok (Yalu) River, as the southern provinces have insufficient timber resources. All repair and overhaul work must be finished by the end of January so that the warships will be ready for operations at their home ports in the three southern provinces.
4. Naval troops should be deployed near their homes.
5. All efforts should be made to plant as many pine trees as possible in consideration of their use for warships.
6. Castles should be built high to resist the Japanese pirate invasions.⁸

Yu Jeong-hyeon's report, which solicited the king's approval for the dispatch of another expeditionary force, led to a discussion among the Cabinet Ministers. On July 28, 1419, the first year of King Sejong's reign, the Ministry of War made a decision on the commencement of the repair of warships for the dispatch of troops to destroy the Japanese pirates based on Daema Island in September and October. Here, it should be pointed out that previous research on the Japanese pirate invasions appears to pay little attention to Yu Jeong-hyeon's role

8. King Sejong gave an instruction that the methods for taking care of pine trees and warships be reported to him (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, July 28, 1418; April 17, 1424). *Sasusaek*, a new institution in charge of building and repairing warships and cultivating pine trees, was established (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, December 20, 1432; April 28, 1424; September 23, 1434).

in assuring the nation's readiness to combat the Japanese pirates. The report he submitted to the king deserves credit in that it recognized the need for the suppression of the Japanese pirates, and covered the nation's natural environment and geographical conditions in relation to the invasions and the status of the pirates' movements in detail. If the nation had made Daema Island its territory after conquering it in compliance with Yu Jeong-hyeon's recommendation, the historical significance of the dispatch of troops to that island as part of King Sejong's aggressive national defense posture would have been quite different.

The expedition led by Lee Jong-mu exposed certain problems: Lack of sufficient training to accustom the troops to the sea currents near Daema Island and the geographical conditions of the island; the loose command system between the commander-in-chief and his lower officers;⁹ the partiality contained in the Ministry of War's report on those deserving the distinguished service award;¹⁰ cooperation among the rulers of Daema Island (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, October 17, 1418); and the commander-in-chief's decision to withdraw the troops from Daema Island, which was based solely on the advice of the pirates' leader regarding the forthcoming rain storms. Despite these problems, the expedition eventually led to the establishment of friendly relations between the Joseon dynasty and the inhabitants of Daema Island, transforming the latter into peaceful trading partners with the Korean people.

b. Criticism on the outcome of the dispatched troops to Daema Island

Following the campaign against the pirates based on Daema Island, the Joseon dynasty sent a strongly worded letter demanding surrender from the pirates' leader (named Dodo Ungwa). The letter contained the following salient points. First, Daema Island belongs to Gyeongsang Province of the Joseon dynasty. Second, Japanese pirates are on the island illegally and engaged in immoral acts. Those who choose to be naturalized as good citizens of the Joseon dynasty will be treated as such. Third, Joseon has every right to control Daema Island on its own terms, including the dispatch of expeditionary troops. Fourth, a position as a government official if the pirates' leader surrenders. Fifth, another team of

9. Refer to *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, August 16 and 18, 1418.

10. *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, September 24, 1418 shows that Lee Ji-sil's report on Lee Sun-mong's feat in search of the pirates on Daema Island from July 20 to 25 was missing in the report submitted to the Ministry of War, which appears to be a sign of partiality.

expeditionary troops will be dispatched if the pirates do not surrender (July 17, 1418). In response, Dodo Ungwa, the pirates' leader, provided an excuse in the form of expressing his wish to "protect Joseon from the outside," that the island should remain an autonomous territory of Japan, that he would like to maintain good relations with Joseon, and that he was in a difficult situation because his relatives were challenging him for leadership of the island. In short, he was saying that he would like to maintain his leadership over the island.

The Joseon government sent the following message to Dodo Ungwa: "Daema Island is part of Gyeongsang Province. Thus, if you have anything to report or inquire about, never fail to contact the Governor of Gyeongsang. Do not ever try to contact the central government directly" (January 23, 1418).

Following the demise of Taejong, who had taken a hard-line against Japan after the campaign against the pirates of Daema Island, King Sejong thought that such an attitude would only aggravate the situation and tried to settle the matter by officially designating the island as a territory of Joseon. He conferred the rank of a Joseon government official on the pirates' leader and tried to dispatch a provincial official to the island in an effort to rule over it on the king's terms. However, the provincial official could not be dispatched and the central government of Joseon could not exercise the right to appoint officials to important positions on the island. Thus, King Sejong failed to annex the island as a Joseon territory, following the campaign led by Lee Jong-mu against such a measure (Jang Hak-geun 1983: 31).

King Sejong's Management of the Nation—Suppression of Jurchen invasions of the areas along the Pajeo River

1. Strategies taken to suppress the invasion by the Jurchen tribes of the areas along the Pajeo River

King Sejong regarded Manchuria, lying to the north of the Amnok and Duman Rivers, as Joseon territory that would have to be reclaimed someday. In 1434, the 16th year of his reign, he also began promoting a policy of moving households in Gyeongsang Province to reclaimed territories in the northern areas. This policy's purpose would help secure the balanced development of national land through the cultivation of northern territories and find a way to effectively cope with frequent invasions by the Jurchen tribes by helping the region's agricultural

populace to secure a local defense system. The government also encouraged residents in the northern territories to form autonomous areas by appointing locals as their governing officials, while urging residents of the areas along the Pajeo River to form a self-defense system against the wild Jurchen tribes through the adoption of special strategies. The central government persuaded those from influential families in northern areas to assume positions as government officials in an attempt to establish more efficient control of far-away provinces and a strong defense system. In its early days, the Joseon dynasty made efforts to cultivate the northern territories in order to secure agricultural lands and tighten its national borders. The dynasty encountered many difficulties in this respect, as Ming China and the Jurchen tribes also had a vested interest in Manchuria and the areas along its borders.

As part of the king's commitment to the defense of the northern territories, particularly from invasions by the Jurchen tribes, General Choi Yun-deok established new settlements in four areas, Yeoyeon, Uye, Muchang and Jaseong, in the northwestern tip of the land, while General Kim Jong-seo built six fortresses, Gyeongwon, Buryeong, Onseong, Jongseong, Hoeryeong and Gyeongheung, in the northeastern tip of the land. The dynasty's basic policy toward the Jurchen tribes troubling its northeastern border was characterized by acts of conciliation, assimilation and suppression. The Jurchen tribes that most frequently invaded Joseon territories were the Moryeonwi, Odori, and Udikero factions. The Joseon government strived to win over the Golgan Udikero and Moryeonwi factions (*Taejo sillok* [Veritable Records of King Taejo], January 19, 1339).

So, how did King Sejong succeed in expanding and settling the territories in the northern tip of the Joseon territory in the face of aggression from hostile tribes? The following section shows how the Cabinet Ministers handled and discussed the matter, as recorded in *Veritable Records of King Sejong*.

a. A Discussion Session on Suppressing the Wild Tribes along the Pajeo River

On February 15, 1433, King Sejong presided over a discussion session among the Cabinet Ministers concerning a plan to suppress the invasions by the Jurchen tribes in areas along the Pajeo River, including how to carry out a successful campaign and punish them. The following session was recorded in *Veritable Records of King Sejong* (February 15, 1433):¹¹

- Chief State Councilor Hwang Hui: "Let us guard the borders tightly,

- smashing the invading enemies and holding false defectors in custody.”
- Second State Councilor Maeng Sa-seong: “The acts perpetrated by wild tribes in Yeoyeon have been reported to His Majesty. We must stand firm against these bandits, and expect them to behave. If they show no sign of improved behavior, let us start a campaign against them.”
 - Third State Councilor Gwon Jin: “People and livestock were all sent back because there was a guide in the twenty-some days of pillaging in Gyeongwon and Hoeryeong. Let’s make sure our troops and horses are well prepared to act against any invasion.”
 - Choi Yun-deok: “We must try to obtain as much information as possible about them from those who return from their lands, and establish a plan to punish them.”
 - Minister of Personnel Heo Jo: “These bandits’ acts cannot go unpunished. Let us make secret preparations and launch a surprise attack to punish them.”
 - Minister of Taxation An Sun: “Let’s attack their base, showing them how formidable we are. We must train our troops and build up our defensive position. If they run away, do not chase them. We should dispatch our expeditionary troops for a surprise attack, looking for a real opportunity.”
 - Minister of Punishment Jeong Heum-ji: “Let us make preparations, train our troops and select good officers, and wait until these bandits show us their weak points.”
 - Minister of Taxation Sim Do-won: “Let us discuss the reasons for sending an expedition or making peace and leave the tactics and details to relevant officers.”

11. Jurchen tribes invaded Joseon a total of 131 times between the early days of the dynasty and 1627. Joseon launched a total of 15 campaigns against them, including six carried out during the reign of King Sejong. The first campaigns were launched in 1433 and 1437 (*Veritable Records of King Sejong*, September 24 and October 2, 1422, September 25, 1424, April 10-19, 1433, September 7-16, 1437; Kang Seong-mun 1989:47, 71, and 2001: 102).

Campaigns launched against the Jurchen tribes during King Sejong’s reign

Tribal invasions	Campaigns	Year of campaign	Number of troops dispatched		Jurchen casualties	
19	2	1433	15,000		267 (killed)	27 (captured)
		1437	7,793	1 (killed in action)	46 (killed)	14 (captured)

- Second Minister of Punishment Heo Seong: “We should make peace with them with generosity and awe them with our dignity. It is also necessary to watch them carefully, carrying on as usual.”
- Minister of Rites Sin Sang: “Let us punish them. They have plundered our good people and killed our troops. Let us attack them, after monitoring their situation.”
- Second Minister Lee Maeng-gyun: “Let us punish these bandits.”
- Third Minister of War Hwangbo In: “Let us follow the strategy adopted by previous emperors, that of welcoming defectors, not chasing those who are running away, and defend ourselves against thievery.”
- Officer Lee Sun-mong, in charge of military morale: “Let us treat them politely as we have done, so that they may remain self-content, and then attack them. We must seek a real opportunity and wait until the Pajeo River is frozen over.”
- Minister of War Choi Si-gang: “Their leaders number only five or six. However, they lead many hundreds of people. In the long run, the best policy will be to defend our positions firmly, repairing and overhauling castles and stockades, sending a messenger to them as a gesture of good will, though it is below our dignity to do so.”
- Minister of Works Jo Gye-saeng, and four others: “The leader of the bandits is associated with the emperor of Ming China. We should be cautious.”
- Second Minister of War Jeong Yeon: “We should obtain Ming’s approval concerning our action against the bandits.”
- Second Minister of Personnel Kim Ik-jeong: “Let us prepare ourselves by training our troops and selecting good officers.”

This discussion session was presided over by the king himself, with the participation of 22 Cabinet Ministers. The opinions expressed by Maeng Sa-seong, Heo Jo, Choi Yun-deok and An Sun should be highly regarded, as they show that the ranking officials had a good understanding of the bandits. Such discussion sessions involving the king and his Cabinet Ministers appear to have contributed to the formation of proper methods of treating the Jurchen tribes, including the policy of suppressing their invasions in the areas along the Pajeo River.

b. Cause, Progress, and Outcome of the First Campaign against the Bandits in Areas along the Pajeo River during King Sejong's Reign (April 10-19, 1433)

The decision to launch the first campaign against bandits in the areas along the Pajeo River was made in the wake of an invasion of Yeoyeon, Pyeongan Province on November 29, 1432 by more than 400 mounted tribesmen. The invasion left 48 Joseon soldiers killed in action and 75 people taken as captives. *Ganggye* Deputy Commander Park Cho gave chase, and returned with 25 Joseon people, 30 horses and 50 cows. Upon receiving the report of invasion, the king discussed it with Hwang Hui, Maeng Sa-seong, Gwon Jin, Jo Mal-saeng, and Choi Si-gang (December 9, 1432).

On March 7, 1433, Deputy Commander Choi Yun-deok of Pyeongan Province sent a report to the king concerning a planned campaign against bandit activity along the Pajeo River. The report contained the following:

“Your Majesty ordered the mobilization of 3,000 troops to drive the bandits away from the Pajeo River region. I dare to say that that is too small a number of troops to fight them. It is necessary both to divide the attacking troops into several units, as the bandits are based in mountainous areas, and to leave behind a certain number of troops to protect our strategic positions. I would say that we need at least 10,000 troops. Please consider my opinion carefully so that we may pursue the campaign successfully with formidable strength.” After a discussion with his Cabinet Ministers, the king decided to follow Choi Yun-deok's recommendation regarding the dispatch of 10,000 troops (March 7, 1433). Subsequently, Choi Yun-deok reported to the king that the campaign would start on April 10 of that year. The king discussed it with Chief State Councilor Hwang Hui, Second State Councilor Maeng Sa-seong, Third State Councilor Gwon Jin, Minister of Personnel Heo Jo, Minister of Taxation An Sun, and Minister of Rites Sin Sang, and decided to give Choi Yun-deok the go-ahead. (March 24, 1433)

To rearrange the foregoing, the campaign went as described next. On March 17, 1433, Deputy Commander Choi Yun-deok of Pyeongan Province received a royal order to destroy the wild tribes frequenting the Pajeo River area. The mobilized campaign force consisted of 5,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry. The

original plan was changed to employ a large number of cavalymen for a surprise attack. On April 10, 1433, the troops led by Choi Yun-deok started marching, before dividing into seven units at a point near Ganggye. About 2,000 troops led by Lee Sun-mong, the commander of a middle wing troop of 2,515, marched on the fortress of the bandits' leader Lee Man-ju. Choi Hae-san, the commander for the left wing, composed of 2,070 troops, marched toward Chayeo. Lee Gak, the commander for the right wing, comprising 2,070 troops, marched toward Baekmancheon. Other commanders included Lee Jing-seok, who led 3,010 troops toward Ura, Kim Hyo-seong, leading 1,880 troops in the direction of the fortress of Im Hap-ral's parents, and Hong Sa-seok, leading 1,110 troops toward Pallisu. Choi Yun-deok led 2,599 troops toward the fortress of Im Hap-ral. On April 12, the troops launched surprise attacks against the bandits' bases before returning to Ganggye on April 19.

The campaign killed 267 bandits and took 238 prisoners, compared to just 4 killed in action and 25 injured on the Joseon side, a sweeping victory for King Sejong's aggressive national defense posture.

The following were a few factors that helped the expeditionary troops to carry out a successful campaign:

- 1) The enemy was completely surrounded by the Joseon attackers, led by cavalry units moving in seven directions.
- 2) The Joseon troops had sufficient information on the enemy situation.
- 3) The troops transformed heavy artillery pieces, which were originally intended for defense, into offensive ones, making them much lighter, and succeeded in carrying out fire attacks against enemy positions in dense forests. (Kang Seong-mun 1989: 50)

It was also significant that the troops carried out successful attacks against the most powerful factions of the Jurchen tribes. At that time, King Sejong switched from a passive defense that depended on acts of conciliation and assimilation used in the earlier period of the dynasty to an aggressive national defense policy against enemies invading the nation's northern territories. That lay in stark contrast with his attitude at the time of the dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island, in which the former king Taejong, his father, made all the necessary decisions. He showed his own unique upward leadership by arriving at a decision through open discussion with Cabinet Ministers based on the report submitted by the local military commander (Choi Yun-deok).

c. The Strategy, Art, Progress, and Outcome of the Second Campaign against Bandits in the Pajeo River Region during King Sejong's Reign (September 7-16, 1437)

The Jurchen tribes did not cease invading the areas along the Pajeo River after the first campaign by the Joseon troops. They invaded on five more occasions between the first campaign, which took place in 1432, and 1437. The king discussed the measures required to suppress the invasions with his Cabinet Ministers. He then had his Deputy Commander Kim Jong-seo of Hamgil Province devise a year-round defensive plan against the wild tribes that took into account the natural conditions around the Amnok and Duman Rivers.

The chart below shows that forty days in spring (April 10-May 20) and ninety days in fall (August 20-November 10) were the worst times of the year for military maneuvers. Conversely, they were the best times of the year for the plundering activities of the bandits. This means that the troops had to be most prepared for enemy attacks during these periods. During eighty days in winter (November 11-the end of January), the bandits could easily invade by crossing over the frozen rivers. However, the defending troops could also remain just as strong during that period, meaning that the defending troops were in neither a dangerous nor a safe position. The safest periods of the year against bandit invasions were during seventy days in spring (February 1-April 9) and ninety days in summer (May 21-August 19). In spring, the feeding conditions for horses were the worst and the bandits found it hard to travel long distances due to physiologi-

Time of year (by lunar calendar)	February 1 - April 9	April 10 - May 20	May 21 - August 19	August 20 - November 10	November 11 - January 30
Defensive condition	Stable	Dangerous	Safe	Dangerous	Neither dangerous nor safe
Defense posture	Hard to use cavalry	Maintaining a good defensive position with crack units	Inundation of rivers	Maintaining a good defense position with crack units	Taking all harvested crops inside castles and waiting until the enemy has nothing to eat

cal problems, creating a safe period for the defenders. In summer, the rivers and their tributaries were often inundated, which also meant a safe period for the defenders (Kang Seong-mun 1989: 50-2).

Most of the Jurchen invasions were perpetrated in summer (in order to take away farm hands) and in winter (to plunder harvested crops). The launch of the second campaign against the tribesmen was scheduled for September 7-16. It was thought to be a period for “maintaining a good defensive position with crack units” as well as a good period in which to mobilize a large number of troops.

Pyeongan Governor Lee Cheon made the following report about the second campaign.

“On September 7, 1437, we launched the campaign with 7,793 troops, dividing them into three units. Lee Hwa, the commander for the 1,818 men of the left wing, marched in the direction of Hongtari, to the south of Mt. Ola. Jeong Deok-seong, the commander of the right wing, led 1,203 troops toward Ahan, also to the south of Mt. Ola. Lee Cheon, the commander-in-chief, along with Hong Sa-seok and Lee Jin, led 4,772 troops across the river in the direction of Ongchon, Ojajeom and Omibu.” (September 14, 1437)

“In the offensive against the bandits, which continued for ten days from September 7th, twelve hidden caves were found and searched, 24 cabins storing beans and millet were set on fire, 45 bandits were killed, and fourteen others were captured. As for the expeditionary troops, they suffered only one casualty.” (September 22, 1437)

After the successful second campaign, King Sejong promoted Lee Cheon for his conspicuous part in the maneuvers (September 25, 1437). Thus, military commanders such as Choi Yun-deok and Lee Cheon were appointed to a position of importance in connection with the king’s commitment to the cultivation of the northern tip of territory along the Amnok and Duman Rivers. However, the expeditionary troops exposed their strategic and tactical weak points, including their lack of experience in cavalry engagements, the lack of sufficient information on the geography of the operation areas, and the lack of preparedness to wage a long-term battle.

Appraisal of Campaigns against Hostile Forces on Daema Island and the Regions along the Pajeo River during King Sejong's reign

King Sejong's dispatch of expeditionary troops to destroy Japanese pirates based on Daema Island went a long way in securing tighter defenses for the nation, as it effectively suppressed the plundering and pillaging perpetrated against the nation. As a result, the Joseon dynasty could thereafter concentrate on efforts to drive away the Jurchen tribes who frequently invaded the areas along the Pajeo River. The Amnok and Duman Rivers did not pose natural barriers to these invasions, as they (particularly the Duman) are shallow and freeze over in winter. Following the second campaign, four new settlements in the northwestern tip of the land and six fortresses built in the northeastern tip of the land formed strongholds in the nation's defense of those areas. As to the Jurchen tribes, which, on the basis of their high maneuverability, invaded Joseon 131 times between the early days of Joseon and 1627, the dynasty responded by building up its military strength, including the repair and overhaul of castles and the settling of people in the northern territories, while making efforts for peaceful coexistence with the bandits through conciliatory gestures and a policy of assimilation.¹²

During King Sejong's reign, the most annoying hostile forces were the Jurchen tribes in the northern territories and the Japanese pirates on Daema Island. The most conspicuous actions taken as part of the defensive posture during his reign were the dispatch of expeditionary troops to Daema Island to destroy the pirates and the launch of two campaigns against the wild tribes' bases outside the northern territories.¹³ The dynasty failed to make Daema Island

12. For example, Kurunturantimur (later adopted the Korean name Lee Ji-ran), a chief of a Jurchen tribe faction based in Gilju, along with more than one thousand households, surrendered and became good citizens of the Joseon dynasty. He was also appointed as a subject for his most distinguished contribution to the foundation of the dynasty—that of contributing troops to General Lee Seong-gye's (later became King Taejo) coup d'état toward the end of the Goryeo dynasty. The dynasty gave him a position as an official in an effort to conciliate his tribes. The dynasty encouraged the tribes to marry Koreans and allowed those who were naturalized as Koreans to pass through school education, undergo military service, and pay taxes (Kang Seong-mun 1989: 43-5).

13. Daema Island saw its most prosperous period during imperialist Japan's rule of Korea, when its resident population rose to 90,000, including 20,000 Koreans. In 2004, its population stood at a little more than 40,000, including 60 ethnic Koreans. Most of the maps made during the Joseon dynasty, including those made by Kim Jeong-ho, a well-known geographer and cartographer, show Daema Island as belonging to the dynasty.

its territory, as it failed to dispatch an official who could effectively rule the island, though it appeared to have succeeded in suppressing the pirates' marauding activities with the dispatch of troops intended to destroy them (June 17-July 6, 1419), while adopting a policy aimed at conciliation and the naturalization of the pirates. Following the attack by Joseon's expeditionary force, the pirates regularly presented tributes to the dynasty's kings and assumed a subordinate status, while Joseon provided them with support.

In conclusion, the military actions taken against the two major threats were examples of how King Sejong used political solutions to solve national security problems. In contrast to the former king Taejong's arbitrary decision to dispatch expeditionary troops to Daema Island, King Sejong showed a unique style of national leadership by holding a session for a straightforward discussion with Cabinet Ministers concerning the need to launch a campaign against Jurchen tribes on February 15, 1433. Such a style is also significant as an example of national leadership based on Confucian thinking. Thus, it appears that King Sejong showed exemplary upward leadership, a rare case in the nation's long history (Kim Hong-u 2005:17-9).

King Sejong's style of governing the country, as evinced in open discussion sessions, is the epitome of his statecraft (Kim Hong-u 2005:19-22). This unique style can also be found in the foreign policies pursued during his reign.

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