On the Construction of Forts against Wo-k'ou (倭寇) in the Late Jia Jing Period: With Special Emphasis on the Zhejiang Coastal Area

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Past studies concerning the activities of Wo-k'ou in the late Jia Jing period had a tendency to discuss the matter in relation to Japanese invasions of China or the Japanese overseas expansion. In recent years, explanations from the perspective of internal turmoil in China, anti-establishment and anti-maritime prohibition (kaikin) movements have been mentioned. However if we consider the relation between the bandits and Japan, the composition of these bandits, the damage inflicted on the Chinese coastal areas, and the actions of pillage done by Wo-k'ou, the character was banditry carried out by both Japanese and Chinese groups regardless of nationality, and they were attracted to the material gains.

The Ming government instituted several measures against the violent acts of Wo-k'ou, and construction of forts was a major proposal. As a result of rebuilding the forts in every prefecture along the Zhejiang coast, we can assess at the culmination of the Wo-k'ou tide, all prefec-
tural forts were built anew or enlarged. Furthermore, many of the forts being constructed involved central and local officials; and the building of walls were not only to secure the forts themselves, but also to preserve the lives and property outside the forts. Just as Duyushi Zhang Huan advocated, the construction of these forts, to suppress the Wo-k'ou, political stability and financial security, the extensive building of the forts also were related to political and economic issues brought by the Wo-k'ou tide.

On the other hand, construction of the forts increased the burden on the common people. The city walls were generally four to five thousand meters long, and measured six meters in heights and width. In the case of a new fort, the costs were normally forty to fifty thousand silver taels. The court basically left the financial burden on the province, local government and the populace, which suffered the most. The financial burden of the populace is estimated to have been ten to twenty thousand silver taels. The burden which came with the Wo-k'ou, such as numer-
ous taxes, being impoverished and the damage done by the Wo-k'ou were added to the construction fees of the forts. Since this was too much to incur, protest movements against the construction of forts broke out. But even in such cases, the officials often quelled them with force and laid the burden for the construction on the common people.