

Basic Studies on the Western Shipwrecks Discovered in the Ryukyu Archipelago and Their Influence on Modern Society

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Abstract

Extensive distributional survey of the underwater cultural heritage revealed the disposition of 230 underwater cultural heritage sites in the Ryukyu Archipelago, and 23 sites out of 230 are identified as the wreck sites. Dates of these wrecks vary from the 12th to 20th centuries; nevertheless, all the Western shipwrecks found at six sites are dated to within about 100 years between the latter half of the 18th century to the 19th century. This presentation is about the Western shipwrecks left in the sea area of the Ryukyu Kingdom. From the late 18th century, the ships from the Western powers started to appear frequently. Historical documents describes that those ships had not intended to come to the kingdom, but were wrecked due to maritime accidents. Such incidents brought opportunities for local population to come into contact with the Westerners though rescuing the wrecks and their crews. Historical documents and local lore, confirmed by the material evidence retrieved from the seabed, show that those contacts in some cases developed to the cultural interaction between local governments, or even nation-to-nation. Moreover, the stories of the accidents and rescue efforts by the local have long been handed down from generation to generation as moving tales. In fact, there are some cases that those tales were materialised, for instance in forms of a reconstructed Western ship

facilitated as play equipment in a local park near the wreck site, as well as an amusement park themed under the country of the wreck's nationality. This research aims to present how the archaeological evidence confirm historical records related to the Western shipwrecks though the result of investigation of underwater cultural heritage, as well as to analyse how those initial contacts with the Westerners though the wreck accidents developed into the cultural interaction which can be influential even now.

Key words: Ryukyu Archipelago, shipwrecks, survey

Introduction

The Ryukyu Archipelago consists of 199 islands, in a stunning vast sea area over 1200km between Kyushu Island, located at southern end of the Japanese Archipelago, and Taiwan. The largest island among the Ryukyu Archipelago is Okinawa Island, where the present prefectural government is seated. It is located almost at the centre of the archipelago (Fig. 1). Being different from the Japanese Archipelago, the islands of Ryukyu are under subtropical climate, warm throughout the year. Surrounded by the amazingly beautiful ocean and coral reefs, the area is also known for scuba diving and other marine sports.



Fig. 1: Ryukyu Archipelago.

Various kinds of underwater cultural heritage have been discovered so far and the authors have been continuously undertaking investigations and researches (Katagiri, et al., 2014a and Ono et al., 2016). Results of our distributional survey on underwater cultural heritage and its experimental presentation in the Ryukyu Archipelago were presented at APCONF, Hawaii in 2014 (Katagiri et al., 2014b). Researches on the wreck sites and sea routes of the ships in the Ryukyu Archipelago were presented at IKUWA, Australia in 2016 (Katagiri et al., 2016). This presentation focuses on the Western shipwreck sites among the shipwreck sites discovered in the Ryukyu Archipelago.

Historical Background

There once was an independent kingdom in the Ryukyu Archipelago, called the Ryukyu Kingdom from 1429AD to 1879AD. There was the capital palace, *Shurijo*, in Okinawa Island, the largest among the archipelago. The palace was the hub of the kingdom where the Ryukyu King who rules the islands lived. The Ryukyu Kingdom was a maritime state having thrived during the medieval, the 15th centuries, owing much to the special relationship with the Ming Dynasty China regarding the trades. It greatly flourished on transit trade connecting Japan, Korea, China and Southeast Asia. The international Naha Port was the centre of the international trades (Fig. 1). In the following early modern times from the 17th to 19th centuries, while subordinating to both Qing Dynasty China and Japan, the kingdom prospered many original aspects in their complex culture. On one hand, the kingdom had established domestic trade networks among the islands. On the other hand, the Tokugawa Shogunate prohibited international trades with other countries than China under the policy of national isolation (*'Sakoku'*) and the kingdom was becoming isolated from international community. Nevertheless, since the latter half of the 18th century, the ships of the Western great powers started to appear in the sea areas of the kingdom. People in the kingdom started to have contacts with Western ships and the Westerners through rescue of the Western ships stranded in the neighbouring sea areas. In a historical drawing on the folding screen, *'Suirinahakozubyobu'* (owned by Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum) painted in the 19th century, depicting the prosperity of Naha Port, Western ships are also depicted (Fig. 2). Contrary to the national isolation foreign policy, it is proven that the Western ships frequently appeared in the sea area of the Ryukyu Archipelago and was regularly in contact with the Ryukyu Kingdom.

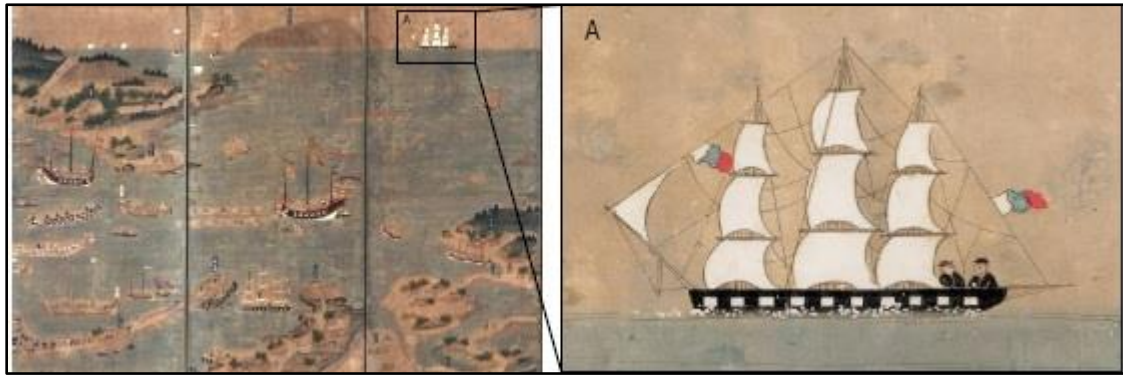


Fig. 2: Western Ships at Naha Port in the 19th Century

Nationalities and Proportions of the Western Ships Discovered in the Ryukyu Archipelago

Figure 3 shows the percentage of the shipwreck sites to the entire underwater cultural heritage discovered in the Ryukyu Archipelago, percentage of the Western shipwreck site to the entire shipwreck sites, and percentage of their nationalities. Underwater cultural heritage discovered in the Ryukyu Archipelago includes shipwreck sites, ports, production sites (like quarries, stone tidal weirs and salt pans) and submerged sites due to environmental change. The shipwreck sites total 23 sites, which accounts for ten percent of the whole.

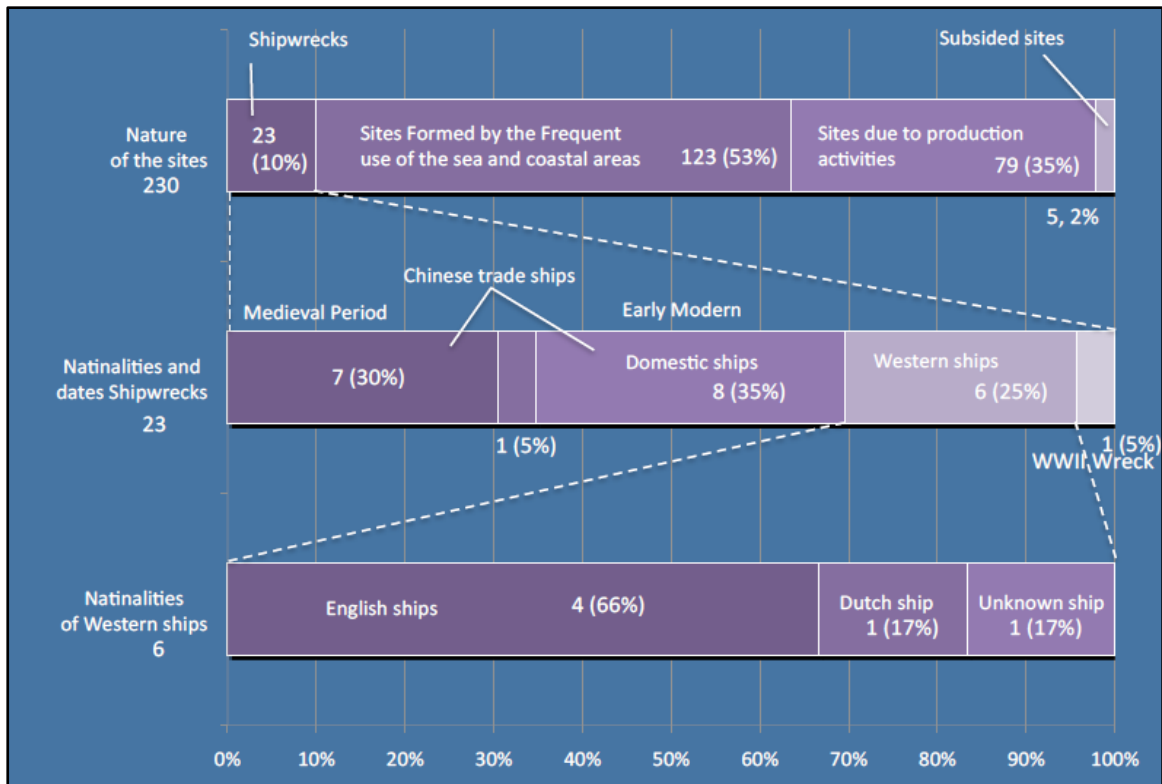


Fig. 3: Percentage of the Shipwreck Sites in the Ryukyu Archipelago.

The shipwreck sites according to its nature can be categorized into three groups; those related to the trading, those not related to the trade, and the World War II related sites. The first group of the shipwreck sites relate to trading; this includes those of Chinese trade ships and domestic trade ships. Among the sites of Chinese trade ships, seven sites are dated to the medieval and one to the early modern period, both in total account for 35 percent of the whole shipwreck sites. All eight domestic trade ships sites are dated to the early modern period, which accounts for 35 percent of the whole showing the same proportion as Chinese trade ships. Chinese and domestic trades ships together count 16 sites, which accounts for 70 percent of the entire shipwreck sites in the Ryukyu Archipelago.

In contrast, the Western ships appeared in the sea area of the Ryukyu

Kingdom not for trades, but for other purposes. According to the historical documents, they were destined to travel to different places, but were stranded and sunk in Ryukyu due to typhoons or the like. Six sites with Western shipwrecks were identified so far, which accounts for 26 percent. The date of all six sites are concentrated within c. 100 years between the latter half of the 18th century and the latter half of the 19th century, which does not conflict with the historical background of the kingdom. Nationalities of the most Western shipwrecks were identified through the historical records. Four sites out of six are British ships, one Dutch, and one unidentified. Even though the evidence is limited, the British overwhelm the others.

Location of the Western Shipwreck Sites

Figure 4 shows location of the Western shipwreck sites found in the Ryukyu Archipelago (No. 1 to 6), as well as the location of the iron stock anchors of the Western ships (A to C) discovered both underwater and on land. Figure 5 is the respective pictures.

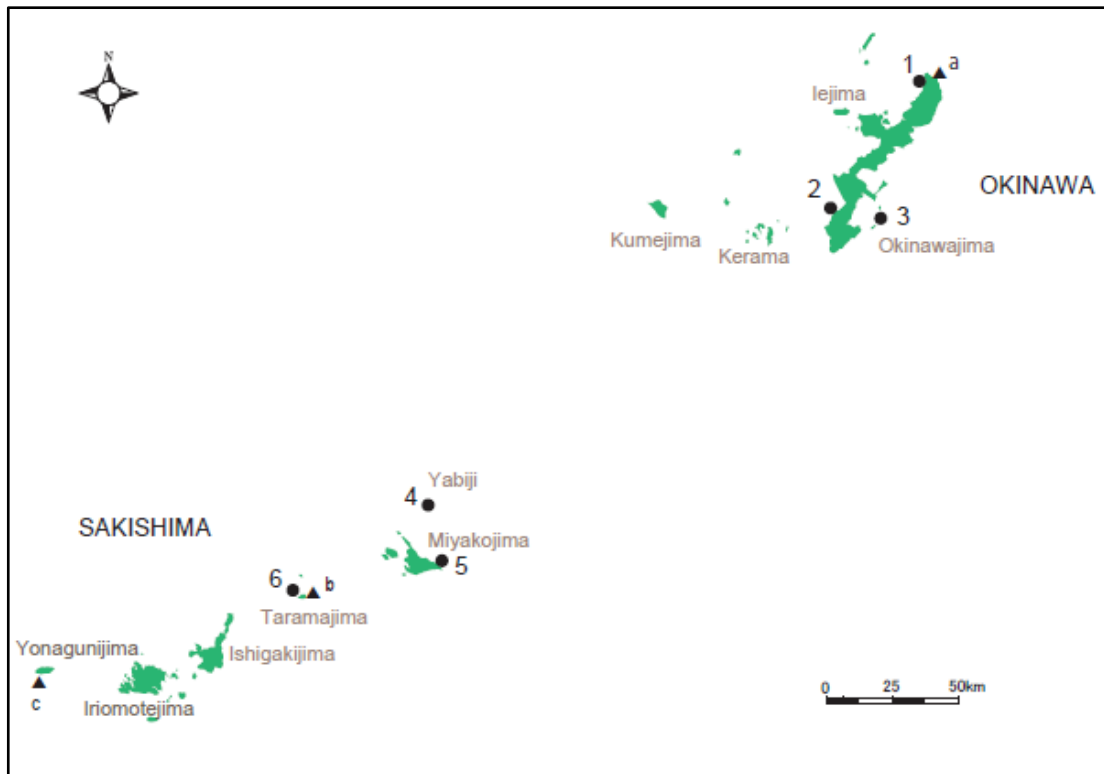


Fig. 4: Location of the Western Shipwreck Sites in the Ryukyu Archipelago.

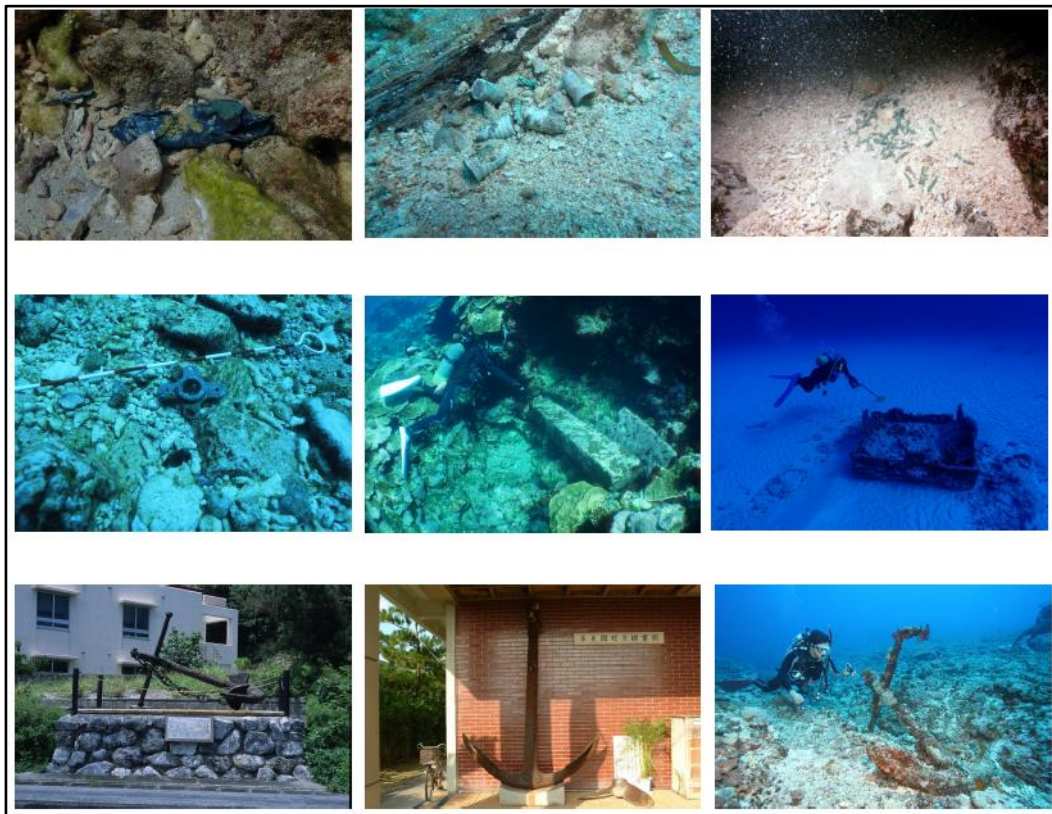


Fig. 5: Pictures of the Western Shipwreck Sites.

Three Western shipwreck sites are identified in Okinawa Island (No. 1 to 3) where the capital *Shurijo* used to be located, two in Miyako Island (No. 4 and 5) and one in Tarama Island (No. 6). In Yaeyama Islands located at the southern border of the Ryukyu Kingdom, no site with Western shipwreck has been discovered so far. Moreover, regarding the iron stock anchors of the Western ships, two are found on land, one in Okinawa Island (A) and one in Tarama Island (B), as well as one underwater in the sea area around Yonaguni Island (C).

The Outline of the Respective Western Shipwreck Sites.

Ginama Underwater Site (No. 1; A):

The site is located off the coast of *Kunigami* Village in Okinawa Island, on the seabed of about seven meter deep. Nansei Islands Underwater Cultural Heritage Research Group discovered the site in 2002 (Miyagi et al., 2004). Fragments of the hull, such as copper nails, European ceramics, wine bottles and Chinese pottery pieces were found on the seabed. Historical documents revealed that the ship is a British ship called the *Benares*, departed from Hong Kong destined to San Francisco (Watanabe and Nii, 2013). Building stones of granite and an iron stock anchor reportedly retrieved from the British ships were left in the neighboring areas on land.

Minamiukibaru Island Underwater Site (No. 2):

The site is located off the Coast of Minamiukibaru Island in Uruma City, Okinawa Island on the seabed of about 17 metre deep. It has been known for long by the local fishermen. Okinawa Prefectural Archaeological

Centre identified it as the Western shipwreck sites (Katagiri, 2009). Fragments of the hull, ballast, European ceramics, glass products, bullets and Chinese pottery pieces were found on the seabed. Historical documents describe that a Western ship was stranded and sunk in the sea off the island in 1876, but its nationality is unidentified (Heshikiya Azashi Henshu linkai, 2009).

Indian Oak Wreck Site (No. 3):

The site is located off the coast of Chatancho in Okinawa Island and found at a depth of about three metres. The Board of Education in Chatancho undertook the underwater investigation in 1984 and retrieved fragments of the hull like copper nails and pieces of copper sheathing, ballast stones, European ceramics, glass products, Chinese pottery pieces and the like were found. Historical documents revealed that the ship was the Indian Oak who had been fighting in the Opium War in 1840. The ship was drifted to the sea area while she had been transporting supplies (Nakamura, 1994).

Yabiji Underwater Site No.3 (No. 4):

The site is found at a depth of about 13 metres around the coral reef called Yabiji located in the sea area north of Miyako Island. The site was identified by the survey of Okinawa Prefectural Archaeological Center (Katagiri, 2009). Metal parts of the hull, European ceramics, glass products and iron ingot like products were discovered from the seabed. Historical documents indicate that the ship could be assumed as HMS Providence stranded in 1797 during her exploratory voyage in the North Pacific (Nagamine, 1997).

Yoshinokaiganoki Underwater Site (No. 5):

The site is located off Yoshino Coast of Miyako Island, found on the seabed at about five metres deep. The Okinawa Prefectural Archaeological Centre discovered the site in 2008 (Katagiri, 2009). Many pieces of granite stone blocks processed into cuboid shape are scattered on the seabed. Fragments of the hull, for instance copper sheathing, as well as Thai pottery pieces were also found (Arakaki, 2017). Historical documents indicate that the ship could have been a British ship stranded and sunk in 1853 on the way from Guangzhou in China to San Francisco. The document shows that only 6 crew out of 30 and 24 Coolies out of 243 survived, and thus 243 people died of this accident (Taira, 2001).

Takadakaigainoki Underwater Site (No. 6):

The site is located off Takada Coast of Tarama Island. Many pieces of pottery are scattered on the seabed at about 25 metre deep. The place was reportedly known among the islanders as the site where a Dutch ship had been stranded and sunk. The Okinawa Prefectural Archaeological Center undertook the first underwater survey in 2008 and identified that the site covers large area (Katagiri, 2010). Fragments of the hull, including copper nails, metal products, and Chinese ceramic pieces were found on the seabed (Arakaki, 2017). Historical documents reveal that the ship was a Dutch ship called Van Bosse, stranded and sunk in 1857 on the way from Shanghai to Singapore (Kaneda, 2001). There is an iron stock anchor reported to be retrieved from this ship (B) left on land, as well as a ceramic piece incised as 'AMSTERDAM' and Chinese pottery assumed to be the cargo (Miyagi et al., 2004). The Tarama Village Board of Education and Kyushu National Museum recently undertook comprehensive investigation and the use of metal detector revealed that the fragments of the hull were still buried in the sandy seabed (Sasaki, 2017).

Iron Stock Anchor off the Coast of Irizaki, Yonaguni Island (C):

It is not identified as a Western shipwreck site, but an iron stock anchor of Western design was discovered off the coast of Irizaki at Yonaguni Island, on the seabed about 26 metre deep (Katagiri and Yamamoto, 2014). Its nationality and other details are unknown.

Influence on the Contemporary Society

It is generally said that Captain Basil Hall was the first Westerner visited Ryukyu and introduced to Europe geography, customs, political and economic states and the like of Ryukyu based on his careful observation. On his way going back to Britain, he interviewed to Napoleon Buonaparte at St. Helena Island. It is a famous story that he told Buonaparte that people of Loo Choo (Ryukyu) had no arms, used no money and knew nothing of Europe and His Majesty Napoleon Buonaparte (Hall, 1851 and 1986). Interestingly, Hall was convinced that the people in Ryukyu did not use money as they did not receive payment of any kind from Hall's company for gratitude to all good things sent on board (Hall, 1851). This description coincides with descriptions often seen in the historic document of the western sides that shows surprise on Ryukyu people's hospitality with no expectation in return. Since then, Western ships coming to Ryukyu dramatically increased. The phenomenon was not only reported by oral histories and historical records, but also proved by the material evidence at many underwater wreck sites of the Western ships by their discoveries around the Ryukyu Archipelago.

The influence of those Western shipwrecks is seen even now. There is a park near the wreck site of Indian Oak (No.3), a British ship joined the

Opium War in 1840, and the play equipment set there in the design of the reconstructed Indian Oak (Fig. 6). Moreover, there is a theme park called 'German Village' in Miyako Island near the reportedly wreck site of a German ship, the R. J. Robertson (even though the site not mentioned above in this presentation as was not identified in the sea). The theme park is run by the municipality of Miyako City and people of the island are proud of the history of the rescue. Triggered by those rescue stories, the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and the German Prime Minister Gerhard Schröder visited Chatancho and Miyako City respectively to strengthen cultural exchanges when a summit conference had been held at Okinawa in 2000. In case of HMS Providence, although no park nor theme park, the local volunteers organised a group to commemorate HMS Providence (*HMS Providence wo Kataru Kai*). The group promotes cultural exchanges with England as the country of her origin and Hokkaido where she called at.



*Fig. 5 (left):
Picture of the
Western
Shipwreck
Sites.*

Curiously, it is often said in gossip that many beautiful women with fair skin were born in the villages near the sites where the Western ships had stranded and the Westerner crews were rescued. Those incidents prove that history of shipwrecks and their rescue stories dated back to more than a hundred years ago still has great influences on current society as bridging cultural exchanges between the Western world and Okinawa. Shipwreck sites in Okinawa are the valuable heritage as the material evidence of those incidents. In the future, further investigation and research on the Western shipwreck sites could promote cultural exchanges of the related countries and local places through exchanging and sharing information. The result of such activities could even be a trigger to develop large-scale international cultural interactions which could be a leading model-case project representing current globalised society.

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Biographies



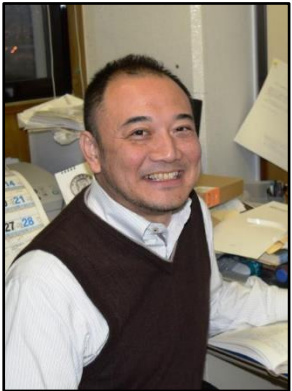
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