

# KANSAI GAIDAI UNIVERSITY

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メタデータ	言語: English 出版者: Kansai Gaidai University. Intercultural Research Institute 公開日: 2021-04-07 キーワード: Repatriation, Castaways, Tokugawa period, Closed-door policy, Domestic shipping 作成者: Nomura, Tooru メールアドレス: 所属: Kansai Gaidai University
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18956/00007986">https://doi.org/10.18956/00007986</a>

## THE REPATRIATION SYSTEM OF CASTAWAYS IN PRE-MODERN EAST ASIA

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Japan's Contacts with Korea trace back to prehistoric times. The sea-route across the Korean channel and along the west coast of Korean Peninsula was already well established by the seventh century. However, due to the lack of sufficient knowledge about oceanic meteorology, especially about raging typhoons, these missions often faced raging storms en route, which claimed many lives each time.

The difficulty of overseas travel established curiosity among Japanese about foreign civilization; they cherished various folktales in which a hero, traveling overseas, often by chance and after a breathtaking adventure, finally brought back many precious treasures, which, no doubt, implies the advanced knowledge abroad.

By the first half of the seventeenth century, the Tokugawa Bakufu (the Shogunate Government) gradually began to limit intercourse with foreign countries, a policy which came to be known as the *sakoku seisaku* or "Closed Door Policy". Stabilization of the domestic political situation by the middle of the seventeenth century sparked rapid development in domestic industry and commodity distribution based in the modern cities. The result was the expansion of marine transport, which made bulk movement possible.

However, the expansion of marine transport was followed by an increase in maritime accidents due to treacherous seas and the raging winds that surround Japan. Because of the strict closed-door policy, there were virtually no foreign ships in the waters off Japan, and except for Dutch ships or Chinese junks in the East China Sea, there was hardly any chance of being rescued by a foreign vessel. However, there were some lucky cases of being rescued in some ways and repatriated back to Japan.

The records of castaways such as Daikokuya Kodayu and Joseph Heco played an important role in increasing the awareness of Japanese intellectuals about the outside world and laid the foundation for the establishment, later in the nineteenth century, of an open-door policy. These castaways' records are worthy of further scrutiny from an entirely new point of view.

*Keywords:* Repatriation, Castaways, Tokugawa period, Closed-door policy, Domestic shipping

### Maritime Activities in Pre-Tokugawa Japan

Japan's Contacts with Korea trace back to prehistoric times. Some anthropologists argue that the Japanese race left her original habitat in the Mongolian steppe sometime in the first millennium B.C. and then began to migrate southward through Korea. According to this argument they finally settled down on the Japanese archipelago, driving its native inhabitants, including the Ainu people, northward. The late Professor Emeritus Egami Namio(江上波夫)<sup>1</sup> of Tokyo University maintained that nomadic elements could be seen among Koreo-Manchurian style harnesses excavated in various parts of Japan. Most scholars agree that there were frequent commercial contacts between the Korean Peninsula and the Kyushu region of Western Japan from the dawn of history. In fact, the similarities between the excavated megalithic monuments of South Korea and the northern part of Kyushu, especially Fukuoka Prefecture, strongly indicate that both regions might once have belonged to the same cultural, if not political, sphere.

When *Paekche*(百濟), a Japanese ally in Korea, was besieged by the *Tang-Silla* allied forces(唐・新羅連合軍) in 660, Empress Saimei(齊明天皇)(594?-661) herself led an army and set up base in Northern Kyushu. Two years later, Japan sent an expedition in an attempt to support *Paekche*; however, they met the overwhelming allied forces of *Tang-China* and *Silla* and were defeated miserably in the naval battle of *Paekchongang*(白村江) (which in Japanese documents is known as *Hakusukinoe*). Nevertheless, this overseas expedition proves that the sea-route across the Korean channel and along the west coast of Korea was already well established by the seventh century.

Japan's contacts with China, on the other hand, had been thwarted by the perilous East China Sea through the first five centuries of the Christian era; from then, navigators bound for China are believed to have sailed northward along the west coast of the Korean Peninsula until they reached the vicinity of Kwanghwa Island(江華島), and then sailed westward across the calm Yellow Sea until they reached the Shandong Peninsula(山東半島). However, with the emergence of the ancient kingdom of Yamato(大和政權) in what is presently known as the Nara region towards the end of the fourth century, Japanese interest in the advanced civilization of China grew steadily, spurring direct contacts with Chinese dynasties. This time, they looked for a new and shorter route to South China to avoid a long and tedious journey and the menace of pirates haunting the Korean coast.

The reunification of China by the *Sui*(隋) dynasty in 589 ended a three-century long period of North-South rivalry. The newly emerged Yamato regime, led by sagacious Prince Shotoku(聖德太子)(?-622), sent a series of missions to *Sui* China, known as "*Kenzuishi*" (遣隋使) among Japanese historians. However, due to the lack of sufficient knowledge about oceanic meteorology, especially about raging typhoons, these missions often faced raging storms *en route*,

<sup>1</sup> Egami Namio, *Kibaminzokukokka* (騎馬民族国家), Chukoshinsho, no. 147, 1967, pp. 162-8

which claimed many lives each time. Some of them, after desperate attempts to make the homeward journey, settled down permanently on Chinese soil. For instance, Abe-no-Nakamaro(阿倍仲麻呂、朝衡、晁衡)(698-770), a promising young Japanese student, went to Chang-an(長安)(modern Xi'an)(西安), the capital of *Tang* China, with the hope of bringing back the knowledge of China to Japan in order to spur the development of his motherland. However, he was blown as far south as Hainan Island by a treacherous storm. Finally, he gave up hope of repatriation and became a prominent mandarin in the *Tang* court.

There were, on the other hand, quite a few Chinese who overcame perilous seas to visit Japan and disseminate advanced knowledge among Japanese society. Among them, Reverend Yanzhen(鑑真和上)(known as *Ganjin Wajo* by Japanese) played an important role in upgrading the standard of Japanese Buddhism in the eighth century. In fact, he had been blown off course several times *en route*, during which time his eyes were badly damaged, eventually making him blind. His harsh experiences indicate the difficulty early travelers faced during their voyages.

The difficulty of overseas travel established curiosity among Japanese about foreign civilization; they cherished various folktales in which a hero, traveling overseas, often by chance and after a breathtaking adventure, finally brought back many precious treasures, which, no doubt, implies the advanced knowledge abroad.

Prior to the *Tokugawa* period(徳川時代)(1600-1868), Japanese trading boats used to sail as far as Bantam, Java and Melaka (Malacca). These trading boats are nowadays known as *shuinsen*(朱印船)(vermillion-seal boat), as they had the official permission from the Government. Their frequent visits to the various parts of Southeast Asia brought about the establishment of a *Nihon-machi*(日本町), or Japanese quarter, in major port-cities, among which San Miguel and Dilao, located on the outskirts of Manila, Ayutthaya in Thailand and Faifoo in Central Vietnam were the largest. Japanese sailors seem to have learned the technique of pelagic sailing either from Chinese or from Portuguese. *Genna Kokaizu*(元和航海図), a sailing chart of the *Genna* era (1615-23), testifies to the high standard of contemporary sailing techniques<sup>2</sup>.

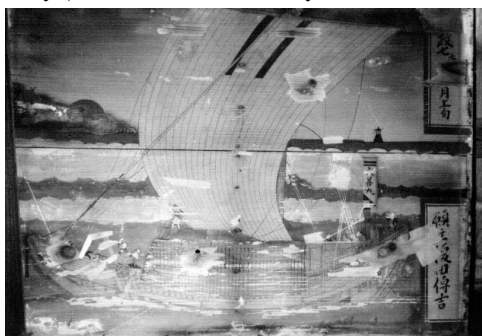
### The Tokugawa Bakufu's Closed-Door Policy

With the political reunification of Japan in 1600, the *Tokugawa Bakufu*(徳川幕府) (the *Shogunate Government*) gradually began to limit intercourse with foreign countries, a policy which came to be known as the *sakoku seisaku*(鎖国政策) or "Closed Door Policy". This culminated in the 1639 prohibition of all foreign contact except for trade conducted officially with the Netherlands and China. Dejima(出島), a tiny reclaimed island off the port of Nagasaki(長崎) was Japan's sole window to the

<sup>2</sup> cf. Iwao Seiichi, *Nanyoo Nihon-machi no Kenkyu (A Study of Japanese Quarters in Southeast Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)*, 1966, Tokyo; Furuta Ryoichi, *Kaiun no Rekishi (History of Shipping)*, Tokyo; Makino Nobutaka, *Kitamaebune (The Kitamae Shipping)*, Tokyo.

outside world. As a result, techniques of pelagic sailing acquired during the previous centuries were gradually forgotten.

On the other hand, stabilization of the domestic political situation by the middle of the seventeenth century sparked rapid development in domestic industry and commodity distribution based in the modern cities. This was especially so in the case of the *bakufu*'s capital city, Edo(江戸) (modern Tokyo), and the commercial city of Osaka. Exchange of commodities thrived between them and each



**Funaema (picture of a boat dedicated to the shrine for the peaceful navigation) at Taisaigu shrine, Karadomari. Date: 1824.  
Source: author's collection**

formed the center of a network of commercial linkages with other parts of the country. The result was the expansion of marine transport, which made bulk movement possible.

However, the expansion of marine transport was followed by an increase in maritime accidents due to treacherous seas and the raging winds that surround Japan. Between Edo and Osaka, for example, there were perilous areas such as the Sea of Kumano(熊野灘) (off Wakayama Prefecture) and Sea of Enshu(遠州灘) (off Shizuoka Prefecture). In addition, since celestial navigation using instruments such as the astrolabe, which had been introduced from Europe in the sixteenth century, were forgotten after the establishment of the *sakoku seisaku*, sailing was finally limited to coastal waters and used “land watching navigation” (*Yamami koho*)(山見航法) which depended entirely on sighting on-shore landmarks<sup>3</sup>. Thus, if a heavy storm struck and ships were blown far out to sea, there was no way to determine its location. Moreover, because of the strict closed-door policy, there were virtually no foreign ships in the waters off Japan, and except for Dutch ships or Chinese junks in the East China Sea, there was hardly any chance of being rescued by a foreign vessel. Consequently, we may assume that there were many tragic cases of boats drifting for several months until food and water ran out, and the crews died of starvation, or until they were cast ashore on deserted islands where they spent the rest of their lives without any means of returning home. In fact, from the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a marked increase in the incidents of Japanese crews being rescued by foreign vessels. Particularly when American whaling ships began extending their operations into the West Pacific Ocean, there were many cases of individuals who were repatriated to Japan after rescue by foreign ships, or after enduring hardships in the foreign countries where they had drifted ashore<sup>4</sup>. Generally speaking, the majority of these lucky people were those who had drifted southward

<sup>3</sup> Tanikawa Ken'ichi (ed.), “Hyoryu (Castaways)”, *Nihon Shomin Seikatsu Shiryo Shusei (Collections of Materials Concerning Common People's Life)* vol. 5, 1968, Tokyo. pp. 869-884; Arakawa Hidetoshi, *Ikoku Hyoryu Monogatari (Stories of Castaways Abroad)*, Tokyo, 1969.

<sup>4</sup> For example, both John Manjiro and Joseph Heco, two famous castaways of the late Edo period were rescued by American whaling boats based in Honolulu, Hawaii. cf. Kondo Haruyoshi, *Joseph Heco*, Tokyo, 1963; Nakagawa Tsutomu and Yamaguchi

and were sent back to Nagasaki aboard trading junks from China<sup>5</sup>.

Of those who drifted north, many were returned to Ezo(蝦夷) (present day Hokkaido) by the Russian authorities. For example, a sailor from Ise(伊勢) (Mie Prefecture) known by the name of Daikokuya Kodayu(大黒屋光太夫) was blown out to high sea in 1782 during a storm off Shizuoka and drifted ashore in the Aleutian Islands. He had an interview with the Russian Empress Ekatherina II(1762-96 in office) in St.Petersburg, and after ten years, returned to Nemuro(根室), Hokkaido with the Russian mission commanded by Adam Laxman.

### Castaways' Records as Historical Sources

Because Of the strict prohibition against Christianity, when castaways were returned to Japan, the Tokugawa Shogunate Government usually conducted a detailed investigation into the nature of their experiences abroad. In this respect, the foreign news brought into Japan by castaways during the closed-door period was a valuable source of information for reports prepared by prominent scholars at the Shogun's request. For example, on the basis of Daikokuya Kodayu's adventures, Katsuragawa Hoshu(桂川甫周)(1751-1809), who had achieved prominence for his knowledge of Western medicine and was on the Shogun's household staff, was able to compile *A Brief Report on the Northern District (Hokusa Bunryaku)*(北槎聞略)<sup>6</sup>. Throughout Tokugawa period, the major source of foreign news was the reports of the Dutch factory in Nagasaki, which were presented annually to the Shogunate in Edo. They are collectively known as "*Oranda Fusetsugaki*" (和蘭風説書). Every year the office of the Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie(Dutch East India Company) in Batavia(present day Jakarta) made a newsclip based upon the news from the Netherlands. Upon arrival at Nagasaki, the Dutch Captain was to submit the newsclip from Batavia to the Shogunate Government in Edo. Contrary to popular assumption, the Shogun and his close retainers were so well informed about world affairs that they even knew about the Napoleonic War in Europe only a few years later.

On the other hand, in order to maintain the closed-door policy, the Shogunate did not want the repatriated castaways to relate their experiences freely to ordinary citizens. Consequently, after castaways returned to Japan, the Nagasaki Magistrate's Office (*Nagasaki bugyosho*)(長崎奉行所) sometimes resettled them in the regions away from their native villages and prohibited them from speaking freely about their experiences abroad. For example, Daikokuya Kodayu was not permitted to return to his home in Ise but instead spent the rest of his life in Edo under house arrest in the "*Yakusoen*" (薬草園), the *Bakufu*'s walled-in medicinal herb garden.

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Osamu(tr.), *Amerika Hikozo Jiden*(*Autobiography of America Hikozo*),1964, Tokyo.

<sup>5</sup>Arano Yasunori, "Kinsei Nihon no Hyoryumin Soukan Taisei to Higashi Ajia (The System of Repatriation of Castaways in Early Modern Japan and East Asia)", *Rekishi hyoron*, no. 400; Katsuragawa Hoshu, *Hokusa Bunryaku*, 1943, Tokyo; Kamei Takataka, *Daikokuya Kodayu*, 1964, Tokyo; Murayama Shichiro and Kamei Takataka (ed.), *Roshia Mojishu* (Collection of Russian Language), 1967, Tokyo.

<sup>6</sup>Katsuragawa Hoshu, *Hokusa Bunryaku*, 1943, Tokyo.

However, the Tokugawa Shogunate's stringent implementation of the closed-door policy, far from suppressing, actually increased curiosity about foreign lands. Hence, the experiences of castaways often came to the attention of local progressive scholars and intellectuals who secretly circulated their accounts in the form of hand-copied manuscripts.

Such records of castaways played an important role in increasing the awareness of Japanese intellectuals about the outside world and laid the foundation for the establishment, later in the nineteenth century, of an open-door policy<sup>7</sup>. In this respect, the influence of these adventure stories on modern Japanese history was perhaps greater than has been previously acknowledged. Among the nineteenth century castaways, Joseph Heco, a fisherman (also known as America Hikozo)(アメリカ彦蔵), deserves our special attention. He was a native of Harima(播磨) (Hyogo Prefecture), who was rescued by an American whaling ship based in Honolulu, Hawaii. Under the auspices of several American philanthropists, he was educated in the United States and finally obtained U.S. citizenship. However, upon his repatriation to Japan in 1859, after a decade in the United States, he began to take an active part in the twilight of the Tokugawa Shogunate as a mediator in U.S.-Japan diplomatic relations. These international exchanges, paired with domestic feudal rivalries, culminated in the adoption of the open-door policy and Japan's modernization under the new Meiji regime.

Apart from their significance in spurring the modernization of Japan, the castaways' records often provide vivid descriptions of contemporary native societies and valuable historical, ethnographical and anthropological data. Yet traditionally the records of Japanese castaways have been labeled simply as "curious tales", and their value neglected. From this point of view, these castaways' records during Tokugawa period worthy of further scrutiny from an entirely new point of view.

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<sup>7</sup>Sugimoto Kaoru, *Chikuzen Rangaku Kotohajimeko (Study of the Origins of Western Medical Studies in Fukuoka)*, Fukuoka.

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