

# 小笠原研究

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**A new era of island study – towards sustainable symbiosis of human and nature**

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OGASAWARA RESEARCH COMMITTEE OF  
TOKYO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

首都大学東京小笠原研究委員会

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首都大学東京小笠原研究委員会

OGASAWARA RESEARCH COMMITTEE OF  
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# **Ethno-cultural connections among the Islands around Yonaguni-jima: The network of the “East Taiwan Sea”**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the sea east of Taiwan lie the islands of Miyako and Yayeyama in the north, Taiwan, Green Island and Lanyu below them, and the Batanes Islands in the south. These three island groups, though situated around the same maritime region, belong to three different modern nations (Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines) with clear international borders. At present there is no specific name for this maritime region, only the vague appellation of “Pacific Ocean”. I start from the perspective of ethnology and, through a comparative historical and cultural examination of Yonaguni-jima and the islands surrounding it, discover that these islands developed similar cultural responses to the natural environment they share. Yonaguni, the westernmost point of Japanese territory, is not only geographically the link between the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan, but is also historically the last island to be conquered by the Ryukyu Kingdom. I have attempted to explore the history and culture of Yonaguni based on the following sources: (1) records of 15<sup>th</sup> century shipwrecked sailors, (2) ethnic origin myths, (3) extant secret ceremonies, (4) archaeological materials and oral traditions, and (5) navigational maps, charts, etc. from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on. The results reveal there was indeed a unique culture that grew up among the various ethnic groups of the maritime region described above, which ought to be given a name (I call it the “East Taiwan Sea” cultural circle) to establish a new “area” conception that will hopefully be the subject of many future dialogues within and among various disciplines in the humanities and natural sciences.

**Keywords:** East Taiwan Sea • Kuroshio current • Maritime region • Yonaguni island

## **INTRODUCTION — THE NAMELESS SEA TO THE EAST**

“Look eastward!”? If you stand on the island of Taiwan with your face toward the east, all you will see is a vast swath of sea, the “Pacific Ocean” displayed on maps. Compared to the maritime regions north, west and southwest of Taiwan—namely, the East China Sea, Taiwan Strait and Bashi Channel—with

which the academic community is fairly familiar, the stretch of an open ocean to the east seems to show few signs of cultural activities. Even if such signs existed, they would bear little relation to Taiwan, which is why there is no need to trouble to give this area a name to define its extent or examine the nature and significance of the activities of its peoples and species.

In this paper, I aim to cast doubt on the thesis outlined above and, drawing on my nearly two decades of research in the southwestern Ryukyu Islands, attempt to articulate a new perspective and vision for humanities and social science research on the maritime region east of Taiwan. This region does not yet have a formal name, although in a 1997 paper I used the phrase “East Taiwan Sea” for the first time and have subsequently employed the term “East Taiwan Sea” when describing the history of interactions among the various ethnic groups that inhabit the area around this maritime region (Huang, 1997; Huang, 2000) as well as the cultural affinity that links their myths, legends and rites.

The eastern sea I refer to is located roughly between 20 and 25 degrees north latitude and 120 and 126 degrees longitude; geographically, it includes three island groups: (1) the Sakishima Islands at the southwestern end of the Ryukyu Islands, (2) Taiwan and the islands of Lanyu and Green Island off its eastern seaboard, and (3) the Batanes Islands north of the Balintang Channel. The maritime region surrounding these three island groups is the “East Taiwan Sea” Region referred to in this paper (The population and area of these islands, see Table 1 attached)<sup>1</sup>.

I began my research with a simple doubt: Is the term “Pacific Ocean” an accurate description of the nature of interaction between communities and species in the sea east of Taiwan? If it can be shown that this sea has a unique character in terms of culture and natural science, then aside from its practical political and economic significance, the “East Taiwan Sea” is important academically as the region where the many distinctive characteristics of the islands of Northeast and Southeast Asia intersect; as such, it can serve to open up a new field of scholarly discourse.

## PREVIOUS STUDIES OF THE CULTURE OF “MARITIME REGIONS”

Historically, the idea of land power developed earlier than the idea of sea power. This is reflected in maps: land maps and terrestrial place names far outnumber their marine counterparts. For example, the map used by the Dutch for their Asian trade in the early 17th century<sup>2</sup> labels the entire sea outside the East Asian arc of islands without any name of the ocean or simply as *Oceanus Chinensis*. Clearly, European voyagers of the time knew only of the sea power of the Ming and Qing empires; they had not yet become fully aware of the names or

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to the Academia Sinica Computing Center for its assistance in making this map.

<sup>2</sup> See Willem Blaeu’s 1662 map of Asia “*Imperii Sinarvm*” in *Atlas Major*. My thanks to Kaim Ang for providing me with the 1991 edition from Rebo Productions, Holland.

concepts of the East China Sea, South China Sea and Sea of Japan. Not until the 18th and 19th centuries, the heyday of colonialism, when sea powers Britain, Japan and the United States rose to prominence in succession, did the names of Asian maritime regions become settled.

In recent years, Japanese scholars have given considerable emphasis to research on “maritime regions”, using the idea of “area networks” as a framework to study the historical roles played by Asia’s various seas. For instance, Takeshi Hamashita has suggested using the paradigm of maritime history to study the history of the Ryukyu Islands, the tribute system and the Chinese-versus-barbarian world view. The Asian maritime regions he refers to are bounded by the landmasses, peninsulas and islands of Asia, from the Sea of Okhotsk in Northeast Asia to the Sea of Japan, Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea, Java Sea and Banda Sea, continuing down to the Arafura and Coral Seas near Australia, all the way to the Tasman Sea in the south. Hamashita examines these interlinking seas and argues that since their scale and complexity is even greater than the Mediterranean Sea between Eurasia and Africa, one could say they are the most numerous and complex collection of maritime regions around any continent in the world (Hamashita, 1993; Hamashita, 1997; Hamashita, 1999; Omoto et al., 2001). These maritime regions took shape gradually over the course of history according to the principles of trade, politics, religion, economics (harbor construction), and so on.

To take another example, Yumio Sakurai has formulated the concept of “subseas” classified according to their political and economic functions, subdividing Southeast Asian maritime networks into the Bay of Bengal Sea, Bay of Thailand subsea, Strait of Malacca subsea, Java Sea subsea, South China Sea subsea, Sulu-Sulawesi-Makasar subsea and East Indonesia subsea (Sakurai, 1999). In addition, Heita Kawakatsu has used the idea of nautical history to reinterpret the historical development of Japanese civilization (Kawakatsu, 2001), and Hitoichi Yajima has studied Islamic civilization based on international commerce and cultural exchange in the Indian Ocean (Yajima, 1991). These are just a few examples of Japanese historians using the sea to create new insights.

Beginning in the 1980s, Taiwanese historians, many of them from Academia Sinica’s Institute of the Three Principles of the People,<sup>3</sup> have strongly advocated research on maritime history. Their research efforts, which have generally focused on maritime-related topics in Chinese dynastic history, have stimulated research in other historical areas, such as Chinese foreign relations, the Chinese diaspora and Chinese-Ryukyuan relations. Thus far, however, neither Japanese nor Taiwanese historians have given much attention to the

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<sup>3</sup> In 1983 the institute launched a research program in the history of Chinese maritime development. The institute’s name was changed in 1990 to the Sun Yat-sen Institute for Social Sciences and Philosophy, and again in 2004 to the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, under which a Center for Maritime History was established.

maritime region east of Taiwan. One possible explanation is that none of the people active in the region developed written languages of their own, which means they are seldom mentioned in historical documents.

Long before any of the above research took place, Chun-sheng Ling, the founder of the Institute of Ethnology at Academia Sinica, put forward the idea of an “Asian mediterranean sea” to explain the spread of ancient Chinese maritime culture to the Pacific Rim. The “mediterranean sea” he broadly referred to is encompassed by arc-shaped archipelagoes (from north to southwest, the Aleutian Islands, the Kuril Islands, Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, the Philippines, the Maluku Islands, the Malay Archipelago and the Andaman Islands); in other words, what we know today as the Sea of Okhotsk, Sea of Japan, East China Sea. The so called mediterranean sea, like its European counterpart, became the origin of two great human cultures (Asia and Europe), because its advantageous geographical environment was suitable for cultural development (Ling, 1954). Ling was especially interested in Taiwan’s location, pointing out that Asia’s mediterranean sea, oriented from north to south, was divided in two—the “northern sea” and “southern sea”—by Taiwan. Apart from this, Shun-sheng Ling’s focus was still on proving that ancient Chinese culture and civilization were shaped by a mixture of “eastern barbarian” culture (maritime culture) with “Chinese plain” culture (mainland culture).

Japanese ethnologist Naoichi Kokubu, a rough contemporary of Ling’s, used the notion of “sea roads” to interpret the relationship between the Japanese islands and mainland Asian culture as well as links with the Ryukyus, Taiwan and the Philippines. The “sea road” concept originated with another Japanese ethnologist, Kunio Yanagita, who used it to refer to the area through which the Kuroshio Current flowed, his intent being to trace the southern origins of Japanese culture. Kokubu, by contrast, used archeological evidence as a foundation and supplemented it by applying his knowledge of ethnology and folkloristics; by the 1970s he had become a leading expert in his field. The reason why Japanese archeologists and ethnologists became interested in research on the Kuroshio “sea road” in particular is actually quite closely connected with the early development of Taiwanese ethnology and archeology, as the next section will show.

## **TOPICS IN THE ETHNOLOGY, ARCHEOLOGY AND FOLKLORISTICS OF THE KUROSHIO CURRENT**

The foundation of Taiwanese ethnology/archeology/folkloristics was laid at the end of the 19th century by the exploratory investigations of Ryūzō Torii and Kanori Inō, who came to Taiwan from Japan. Since they were in a land that had never been studied, their methods laid a strong emphasis on fieldwork. In terms of research tendencies, Torii concentrated on establishing a linkage between Taiwanese aborigines and the Malayo-Polynesians to the south, while Inō

focused more on how continental culture to the west had influenced Taiwanese culture. Nevertheless, they both independently noted the possibility of research comparisons between Taiwan and the Ryukyus.

Ryūzō Torii in particular, upon finishing his investigations in Taiwan, made a point of traveling through the Yaeyama Islands on his way back to Japan; no one before him had ever undertaken an archeological excavation in or brought back ethnographic photographs from the Ryukyu Islands. Based on his findings, Torii suggested that the pre-historical cultures of Taiwan and the Ryukyus were related; it would not be an overstatement to say it was Taiwanese ethnology that inspired related academic research in the Ryukyus. In addition, Torii's account of his investigations in Lanyu—*Kōtōsho Dozoku Chōsa Hōkoku* (Report on Native Customs in Lanyu)—was not only the first ethnological record in Taiwan or Japan, but also laid crucial groundwork for subsequent research on the ethnology of the Kuroshio region.

The Kuroshio is an extension of the North Equatorial Current that flows east to west due to the influence of the earth's rotation and prevailing winds, then turns northward upon contact with Luzon. In other words, the greatest source of its momentum is the eastern shore of Luzon, which is also where the current's northern pull is the strongest. After passing by the east side of Taiwan, this warm equatorial current washes the western shores of Okinawa before continuing its northward flow to the Japanese islands, all the way up to Hokkaido. There, its countercurrent returns to the south, while the rest of the current collides with the Oyashio cold current from the north. This interplay between northern and southern currents, in combination with monsoon winds, essentially determined the conditions under which the peoples of the Sea of Japan, East China Sea and the maritime region east of Taiwan could make contact with one another.

Japanese scholars have been aware of the Kuroshio's power to move people and other species ever since the 1910s and 20s, when they acquired a fairly detailed understanding of the current by means such as casting bottles into the sea<sup>4</sup> or observing the drift of large amounts of pumice released by an undersea volcanic eruption below the Yaeyamas.<sup>5</sup> Ethnologists in Taiwan at the time must have been party to this knowledge. In 1928, when the Institute of Ethnography and Ethnology was established at Taihoku [Taipei] Imperial University, founding Professor Nenzō Utsurikawa cited myths and legends, linguistics and songs as evidence when discussing cultural ties between Taiwan and its neighboring islands in the Kuroshio region. This mindset was inherited by later scholars at the university, such as Takeo Kanaseki of the medical school,

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<sup>4</sup> The Japan Meteorological Agency did several experiments with sea bottles in 1918. For example, bottles released in the ocean between Keelung and Yonaguni were found 12 days later in central Okinawa, 66 days later in Shikoku, and 100 days later in Tokyo. See Ishimine 1990:14-16.

<sup>5</sup> The pumice released by the undersea eruption reached the Kii Peninsula after six months and the area around Hokkaido after a year. Ibid.



Naoichi Kokubu of the history department and Tōichi Mabuchi, a student of Utsurikawa's. In addition, Tadao Kano, who graduated from Taihoku High School and the Tokyo Imperial University geography department, used research on Lanyu as a starting point for his comparative research on the material culture and prehistory of Austronesian peoples both inside and outside Taiwan and Southeast Asian peoples, forging an excellent link between Taiwanese anthropology and Southeast Asian ethnology.

After the war, this field of inquiry was not totally suppressed. However, because the the Japanese anthropologists formerly living in Taiwan had all been repatriated and thus could not do research in Taiwan, they (Takeo Kanaseki, Naoichi Kokubu, Tōichi Mabuchi) each traveled independently to the Ryukyus in the 1950s and 60s to carry on their research, continuing to build on the foundation they had laid by their work in Taiwan (Huang, 2000). Also, a new group of ethnologists who arrived in Taiwan after the war continued to pursue the same theme in their first investigations at Academia Sinica's Institute of Ethnology. As discussed above, Shun-sheng Ling applied his pre-war research findings to his broader study of Pacific coastal cultures and frontier peoples in China. Likewise, Inez de Beauclair, Liu Pin-hsiung and Erika Kaneko all referenced comparative research on Southeast Asian peoples in their work on the culture, kinship relations and myths of Lanyu.

To summarize, at the same time Taiwanese anthropological research of the 1950s and 60s developed the theme of linkages with the Ryukyu Islands (especially the Sakishima Islands), it also continued to extend comparative research with the peoples of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. However, this broad field of inquiry was not pursued further by the Institute of Ethnology at Academia Sinica in the 70s and 80s; not until the 90s did a new wave of research appear there, as is discussed in the next section. In Japan, however, research on the cultures, societies and natural science of the Kuroshio exploded in the 1970s, mainly due to the work of the research team at *Kuroshio Bunka no Kai* (Kuroshio Cultural Workshop), established under the sponsorship of publishing company Kadokawa Shoten. In addition to the already-explored fields of archeology, ethnology and folkloristics, experts in subjects as diverse as linguistics, marine ecology, meteorology and botany conducted a multiplicity of studies (Kuroshio Bunka no Kai, 1979), achieving findings more detailed and persuasive than their predecessors'. After the 80s, young ethnologists involved in the workshop concentrated their attention on the various islands of the Kuroshio region. Shigeru Tsuchida and Moriguchi Tsunekazu, for example, carried out linguistic studies of the aborigines in Taiwan, Lanyu and the Batanes; Seiji Kasahara thoroughly investigated the natives of Miyako-jima, Kuroshima and Taiwan; and Katsuhiko Yamaji traveled to far-off New Guinea during the same years he was doing ethnological research in Taiwan. However, although scattered individual anthropologists produced impressive monographs, little



progress was made in developing the broad framework of Kuroshio regional culture.

## **YONAGUNI: THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY**

As alluded to above, in the 1990s Taiwanese ethnologists, led by the Institute of Ethnology at Academia Sinica, launched an interdisciplinary research project called “Cultural and Genetic Relationships between the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan and Southeast Asia”. Led by Yih-yuan Li and Mutsu Hsu, the four-year project aimed to combine the sociocultural analysis of anthropology with research on physical characteristics; to sort out the cultural and genetic relationships between the natives of Taiwan and Southeast Asia, it called for the participation of a large number of biological anthropologists to analyze blood. While it did not directly address the issue of a Kuroshio regional culture, it was my good fortune to be able to participate in the project by investigating the ethnological affinity between Taiwan and the Ryukyu Islands, which meant I had to absorb and digest the research on Kuroshio culture outlined above. Other ethnologists who participated in the project, such as Guang-hong Yu (responsible for the Philippines), Bien Chiang (responsible for the Borneo area) and even project leader Mutsu Hsu, endeavored to go beyond their individual areas of expertise and devote attention to broad comparative research on the Austronesian peoples as a whole.

Once the project was launched, I chose the Ryukyu Island closest to Taiwan—Yonaguni—as the location for my long-term field work, which began in 1992.<sup>6</sup> Prior to then, there was no academic research that set out to show a linkage between Yonaguni and the indigenous peoples of Taiwan; this made Yonaguni a more meaningful choice than the other islands. In fact, foreign researchers in the smaller islands of the Okinawan archipelago and the various regions of the main island usually operated under the principle of “one person, one island”—broad inter-regional or inter-island research was rare. On top of that, no researcher from Taiwan had yet studied Okinawan culture firsthand, so any island would have been a meaningful choice. You could say I followed my instinct, which told me simply that if I tried to skip over Yonaguni and research the other islands first, I would surely be left with a host of unanswered questions that would impede my work.

When I arrived in the westernmost territory of Japan, a small island merely 40 nautical miles away from Ilan in northeast Taiwan, what caught my attention first were the parallels between Taiwan’s and Yonaguni’s modern historical experience. Both affected by Japanese colonialism in the latter half of the 19th

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<sup>6</sup> Besides the themed research project described above, over the past decade that I has also received funding for her research in this area from the National Science Council, Academia Sinica’s Northeast Asia area research program, and the “Upland and Lowland Cultures and Societies of Monsoon Asia” theme project, for which she expresses her thanks here.

century, the two islands developed marginal economies subordinate to the national center. In fact, all the people in Yonaguni thought that the economic benefits they obtained from Taiwan were far greater than those they obtained from Japan and Ishigaki-jima, the center of the Yaeyama Islands, combined (Huang, 1995). I also had to deal with an issue raised earlier by other students of Kuroshio culture; namely, that of ethnological links between Okinawa and Taiwan. The question had still not been settled by decisive hard evidence, which is why Naoichi Kokubu began a 1981 paper with the heartfelt confession, "Whether asleep or awake, I cannot stop thinking about the matter of the link between Taiwan and the Sakishima Islands in the southern Ryukyus." Kokubu, then more than 70 years of age, was still obsessed with this unanswered question. My method of dealing with this question can be divided into the following approaches:

(A) Reinterpreting and cross-comparing historical sources (Huang, 1997)

None of the indigenes of Taiwan or the Sakishimas had a written language, so historical records of them did not exist until the arrival of foreign powers. The Sakishimas made their first appearance in recorded history around the late 15th century, but the peoples of eastern Taiwan, though occasionally mentioned in passing in 17th- to 19th-century documents, were only written about systematically near and after the end of the 19th century. Hence, anyone who tries to do a textual cross-comparison based on standard historiographical methods will encounter a host of difficulties. In light of this, I decided to take a 1477 account of the Yaeyama and Miyako Islands written by seafarers blown ashore there and compare it with an 1805 account of Taiwan's east coast, also written by a lost sailor; late 19th- and early 20th-century Japanese reports on the exploration of Lanyu and Lanyu customs served as a third basis of comparison. By this method I discovered that the people of these two areas (eastern Taiwan/Lanyu and the Sakishima Islands) were extremely similar in terms of their living techniques (food preparation, brewing of alcoholic drinks, domiciles, weaving), bodily decorations, agricultural calendar (rice varieties, millet production) and burial customs. Although the dates of the sources differed by three or four hundred years, when one considers that cultures change much more slowly in the absence of foreign intrusion, one can at least deduce that in the 15th century the two areas shared a similar natural environment and had developed a common cultural type.

Having made this point clear, the next question is: Did the two areas interact and, if so, what form did their interactions take? History attests that after having been ruled by the Ryukyu Kingdom in the 16th century and attacked from Kyushu by the Satsuma Domain after the 17th, the Yaeyama area became an important naval defense outpost under the *sakoku* (national isolation) system. Even if there were exchanges with Taiwan, they are not mentioned in any official history. That said, however, when I inspected *Yaeyama-jima Nenraiki*, a

17th-century administrative record of the Yaeyama Islands, I discovered that the *minami no shima* or “southern island” referred to in several entries (two for 1648, one for 1659) is in fact Taiwan. The records explain that some of the inhabitants of Yaeyama fled to *minami no shima* to escape high taxes, while others drifted there after being shipwrecked, where they were given aid and from whence they were transported back to Yaeyama by way of Yonaguni half a year later when the south winds began to blow in the spring. Comparing this with records of Western sailors being murdered *en masse* after drifting ashore on the east coast of Taiwan, we can surmise that Taiwan and Yaeyama had some level of mutual knowledge or friendship in the 17th century under which shipwrecked sailors were transported back home.

(B) The comparative study of human origin myths (Huang, 2000)

Tidan-du-guru, the most important Yonaguni legend about the origins of humanity, is extremely similar to a Kavalan legend that says humans originated from a land called Sunasai: both explain that humans came from a land of origin to the south, and both share several subtopics such as the idea that humans gradually migrated northward by sailing where the fish and shrimp were most numerous.

In fact, origin myths about a land of Sunasai are scattered among all the peoples of northern and eastern Taiwan. Since the early 20th century, several dozen such legends have been collected, and the Sunasai myth has received more attention than any other aboriginal legend. Academics have coined the term “Sunasai legend group” to refer to this collection, and past scholars like Nenozō Utsurikawa and Tōichi Mabuchi as well as modern scholars like Su-chuan Chan have speculated on past tribal migration routes based on the distribution of the myth. My research shows that based on its origin myth, Yonaguni can plausibly be viewed as part of the Sunasai legend group. This shows that the people of Yonaguni must have adopted the legend as a result of interaction with the peoples of the circle, or may even have come from the same land of origin. Yonaguni also has two flood myths, which describe the near-destruction of humanity and traces of sibling marriage, as well as a matriarchal society, all of which are traits shared by the peoples of eastern Taiwan.

(C) Using a combination of archeological artifacts and oral tradition to interpret historical events (Huang, 2000)

As the key link in the chain of islands from the Ryukyus to Taiwan, Yonaguni has a very special place among the Ryukyus. It is also interesting to note that in the formation process of the Ryukyu Kingdom, Yonaguni was the last island to be conquered (in 1510), some 120 years later than the other islands around Yaeyama. What factors made Yonaguni the last independent holdout against the southward expansion of the Ryukyu Kingdom? In the medieval history of the Sakishima Islands, three battles for control of Yonaguni occurred around the

15th century. First was an attempt by Sonai Dō of Iriomote-jima to conquer the island in 1450; next, after suppressing Akahachi's rebellion in Ishigaki, Miyako-jima attacked the island in 1500 but was repulsed; third was Miyako's successful campaign against Uni Tora in 1522. During that era, more battles were fought in Yonaguni than in any other island in the Sakishimas. The puzzling thing is that the reasons for these three battles are not clear in the historical records. Why was it Yonaguni that was coveted instead of another island? What was it about Yonaguni that made the "great powers" drool?

My research has led me to conjecture that Iriomote's and Miyako's invasions of Yonaguni may have had their origin in struggles for control over supplies of metal or natural resources. Likewise, Akahachi's rebellion should be seen as an attempt by Akahachi to break Miyako's control over iron resources by traveling to Satsuma—the metalworking center of Kyushu—to look for iron, thereby angering Miyako, which had monopolized the iron resources north of the Sakishimas. Since Yonaguni was then controlled by Iriomote Island, so became Miyako's target of war as well.

New light was shed on this issue in 1990, when smelting facilities were uncovered by archeologists in Iriomote. Local historians and I began to wonder whether controlling Yonaguni—with its location at the extreme western end of the Sakishima Islands—might have meant controlling the supply of resources from the west and south. For Miyako—a flat coral island without high mountains or trees and hence devoid of stone and wood resources—this would have held tremendous appeal. In fact, resource-poor Miyako's ability to emerge as the most powerful of the medieval Sakishima Islands derived from its location in the extreme north, where it could control the supply of resources from that direction. Eager to take possession of Yonaguni and control the supply of goods from the south and west, Miyako developed the ambition to take Yonaguni at all costs. In any event, as I reexamined the history of 15th-century "fortress society" through the lens of resource control, I began to strongly suspect that the natives of the southern Ryukyus and the iron-smelting Shihshanhang people of the north and east coast of Taiwan traded with one another, using Yonaguni as a relay point; this also fits with the above conclusion that Yonaguni can be seen as part of the Sunasai legend group.

The three lines of reasoning discussed above have convinced me that Yonaguni Island is the key to figuring out the cultural relationship between Taiwan and the southern Ryukyu Islands; its geographic location has had a pivotal effect on the maritime region east of Taiwan. I have also found that on the aforementioned 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch map *Indiae quae orientalis dicitur*,<sup>7</sup> Yonaguni is obviously not drawn to scale; its size is significantly exaggerated.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Willem Blaeu, 1642 *Indiae quae orientalis dicitur, et insulae adiacentes*.

I suspect that despite the paucity of textual evidence, European voyagers in the East Taiwan maritime region were abundantly aware of Yonaguni's existence.<sup>8</sup>

## CHARACTERISTICS OF AND FURTHER QUESTIONS REGARDING THE "EAST TAIWAN SEA"

In sharp contrast with land regions, so-called maritime regions are often places where many cultures intersect: not only do individual lives intertwine, but group cultures also compete and mix with one another. The "East Taiwan Sea" I outlined in the introduction shares these traits. The peoples of the area are quite diverse and include: (1) the Southern Ryukyuan peoples, among whom are the natives of the eight Miyako Islands (Miyako-jima, Irabu-jima, Ikema-jima, Shimoji-jima, Kurima-jima, Tarama-jima, Minna-jima and Ōgami-jima), the natives of the nine Yaeyama Islands (Iriomote-jima, Ishigaki-jima, Yonaguni-jima, Kohama-jima, Hateruma-jima, Kuroshima, Hatoma-jima, Taketomi-jima and the islets around them); (2) the peoples of northern and eastern Taiwan (Ketagalan, Kavalan, Ami, Tao); and (3) the peoples of the Batanes Islands (Itbayat, Batan, Sabtang, Mavudis, Y'ami, North, Dequey, Siayan). With the exception of the Ami, whose population exceeds 100,000, these peoples are generally few in number; some consist of merely a few dozen people.

These islands share the same ocean currents, climate and ecology. As for cultural characteristics, none of the peoples of the three island groups developed a written language, so their history is not easily reconstructed by means of written records. Nevertheless, through surviving texts (like storm-blown sailors' accounts and missionary records) supplemented by ethnological-archeological-folkloristic sources, we can still form a mental picture of what their lives were like a few centuries ago.

In terms of when they made their entrance into textual history, the three island groups are actually quite similar: (1) the historical record of the Miyako and Yaeyama Islands began with a 15th-century account penned by a group of Korean farmers who drifted ashore there, and the islands appeared in official Ryukyu Kingdom records beginning in the following century; (2) the natives of eastern Taiwan were first mentioned in 17th-century Dutch exploration records, as well as by Japanese fishermen who drifted there at the end of the 18th century; and (3) the textual record of the Batanes also began with 17th-century accounts by Japanese sailors blown ashore there and British freebooters who traded there, followed by the records of 18th-century British officers and Spanish Jesuits. What all these texts have in common is that they were all left to us by foreigners, which means the difficulties of reconstructing the island natives' history are quite similar to those encountered in reconstructing the

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<sup>8</sup> I have discussed the nautical chart in this area, see Huang 2010. In the course of my fieldwork in Yonaguni, I interviewed a nonagenarian born in 1910 who recalled that in his youth, all foreigners were called *Orandajin* (means the Dutch) regardless of their nationality.



histories of other non-literate peoples elsewhere in the world. Drawing on these limited sources, I have explained in the previous section my reasons for conjecturing that the peoples of the Miyakos, Yaeyamas and eastern Taiwan interacted and shared some level of cultural affinity. In 1906, Otto Scheerer established a relationship between Lanyu and the Batanes by systematically comparing records of Batan, the Babuyan Islands, Luzon and Lanyu. Likewise, Kōmei Sasaki (*Kuroshio bunka no kai*, 1977) used 17th- and 19th-century accounts by Japanese sailors washed ashore in Batan to point out the Kuroshio cultural characteristics of that island. Guang-hong Yu (2001) took the further step of comparing 17th-century sailors' accounts with his fieldwork findings in Lanyu. The upshot of all this is that the historical relationship between Lanyu and the Batanes has been proven virtually beyond doubt.

The remaining issue is how to prove the relationship between the Southern part of the Ryukyu Islands (Miyako and Yaeyama) and Lanyu and the Batanes Islands. If such a link could be established, then the "East Taiwan Sea cultural circle" could be shown to exhibit the network of interaction among set groups of people. But even though it may be difficult to find evidence of a direct historical relationship between these groups, their separate interactions with Taiwan are sufficient to prove they belong to a common cultural circle. And regarding Yonaguni's nearly-extinct annual ceremony in which some family members should return home to exhibit their household treasures only once a day in the year, an idea akin to a classic example of socioeconomic anthropology—the Kula ring trading network around the Trobriand Islands—is also worth to be considered. Other customs, such as taboos, domicile construction, bodily ornamentation and social organization, also demonstrate Yonaguni's relationship with the rest of the islands among the Kuroshio cultural network.

When researching the relationship among these three island groups, establishing a clear chronology is an important task. In addition to the above-mentioned texts and ethnological sources, which can only take us so far back in time, archeological findings in the area can provide a long-term perspective on the interactions among the island groups. Faced with a maritime area measuring 1200 kilometers from north to south, archeologists have divided prehistoric Ryukyuan culture into three areas: northern (Tanegashima and Yakushima), central (Amami Islands, Okinawa) and southern (Miyako Islands, Yaeyama Islands). Japanese cord-marked and Yayoi period artifacts—evidence of a close cultural connection with ancient Japan—have been found in the northern and central regions. No such artifacts have been found in the southern region, however: although some southern artifacts are up to four millennia old, none exhibit cord markings or signs of Yayoi manufacture. This suggests that the cultural origin or impetus for cultural exchange in the ancient Yaeyama and Miyako Islands was not Japan, but should be looked for elsewhere. Thus the

prehistoric cultures of nearby Taiwan and the Philippines, or perhaps southern China, are the key points of comparison.

Implements made from stone, clay, shells, bones, jade and metal (iron) have traditionally been viewed as ideal bases for cross-comparison of prehistoric cultures. The shell adzes discovered in Miyako and Ishigaki are strikingly similar to shell adzes excavated in Palawan in the Philippines, which has led to the conclusion that they came from the south (Asato, 1999). However, whether a similar culture existed along the southeast coast of Taiwan, also abundant in shellfish, is still unknown. Similarly, pottery and bone implements are suspected to have been brought from southern China by way of Taiwan, but existing excavations are insufficient for concrete comparison. Especially puzzling are the artifacts from excavations of southern Taiwan's Puyuma (or megalithic) culture carried out during recent decades. These evidence a high level of technical skill in the working of pottery, stone and jade that seems difficult to compare with the simplicity of the artifacts of the Sakishima peoples of that era—a bewildering prehistoric mystery (Ye, 2001). Other implements, however, such as chipped stone tools and the smelting sites that appeared in the Sakishimas after the 12th century, along with the Chinese porcelain found after the 13th century and even the features of villages from the 14th century on, are all comparable with excavations in northern and eastern Taiwan (Ōhama, 1999). Recent excavations by Taiwanese and Filipino archeologists in northern Luzon have also produced significant results (Tsang, 1998; Tsang, 2002). It is safe to say the academic community will soon be rewarded with profound and abundant insights resulting from further findings and dialogue in this field.

In addition, the “East Taiwan Sea” offers a wealth of contemporary social science research topics relevant to today. For one, all its peoples were colonized—multiple times, in fact—which makes them useful for comparative discussion of issues in colonialism. Also, the sea's three island groups are located at the margins (literally and figuratively) of their respective countries, and their shared political and economic experiences can be developed into comparative research on three different styles of society. In terms of national sovereignty, for the past 50 years, these islands' inhabitants have belonged to three different countries—Japan, the Republic of China and the Philippines—each of which has its own official written language; thus, any comparative research must face the challenge of bridging linguistic and national barriers. In other words, studying the humanities and social sciences of this area requires knowledge of many languages. Since few possess such knowledge, it is difficult for research to get off the ground. In this paper, the “East Taiwan Sea” I have tried to construct is simultaneously the northern extreme of the Austronesian cultural diaspora and the northern limit of European colonial expansion in Asia, as well as the intersection between the northeast Asian mainland's powerful pan-Chinese Confucian culture and the southern spread of Japanese civilization.



After millennia of interaction among multiple civilizations and cultures, we can anticipate watching an exciting new academic dialogue unfold.<sup>9</sup>

Table 1. Small Islands surrounding the “East Taiwan Sea”

(1) JAPAN:

the Sakishima Islands at the southwestern end of the Ryukyu Islands

Miyako Islands\*

Name of Island	Population	Area
Miyako	47,631	159.22km <sup>2</sup>
Irabu	6,003	29.08 km <sup>2</sup>
Tarama	1,335	19.75 km <sup>2</sup>
Ikema	731	2.83 km <sup>2</sup>
Kurima	179	2.84 km <sup>2</sup>
Ogami	36	0.24 km <sup>2</sup>
Shimoji	33	9.54 km <sup>2</sup>
Minna	4	2.15 km <sup>2</sup>

Yaeyama Islands\*\*

Name of Island	Population in 2008	Area
Ishigaki	47,690	229.00 km <sup>2</sup>
Iriomote	2,264	289.27 km <sup>2</sup>
Yonaguni	1,618	28.95 km <sup>2</sup>
Kohama	643	7.84 km <sup>2</sup>
Hateruma	562	12.77 km <sup>2</sup>
Taketomi	322	5.42 km <sup>2</sup>
Kuro	222	10.02 km <sup>2</sup>
Hatoma	60	0.96 km <sup>2</sup>
Aragusuku	10	3.34 km <sup>2</sup>
Total of Yaeyama Islands	Ishigaki City	45,183
	Taketomi Town	3,883
	Yonaguni Town	1,777

\* Okinawaken Somubu Miyakojimusho, 2010, *Miyako-gaiyo*.

\*\*Okinawaken Yaeyamashicho, 2009, *Yaeyama -gaiyo*.

<sup>9</sup> This paper was adapted from Huang, C. H. 2008, and modified after reporting at *The Interdisciplinary Workshop on Sustainable Symbiosis of Human and Nature From the View Point of "Island Study"* (Tokyo Metropolitan University, ISSIS, 2011.2.19). Thanks for all the participants.

## (2) TAIWAN:

Island of Taiwan and the islands of Lanyu and Green Island\*\*\*

Name of tribe	Population in 2009	Area
Kavalan	627	
Taroko	20,679	
Amis	88,933	
Sakizaya	377	
Bunun	15,697	
Puyuma	7,255	
Rukai	1,955	
Paiwan	16,331	
Yami	3,287	48.39 km <sup>2</sup>
Green Island	3,354	15.09 km <sup>2</sup>

\*\*\*Website of Council of Indigenous People, Executive Yuan ([http://www.apc.gov.tw/main/docDetail/detail\\_TCA.jsp?isSearch=&docid=PA000000004051&cateID=A000296&linkSelf=49&linkRoot=4&linkParent=4&url=](http://www.apc.gov.tw/main/docDetail/detail_TCA.jsp?isSearch=&docid=PA000000004051&cateID=A000296&linkSelf=49&linkRoot=4&linkParent=4&url=))

Website of Taitung Government (<http://www.taitung.gov.tw/statistics/>)

## (3) PHILIPPINE:

the Batanes Islands north of the Balintang Channel\*\*\*\*

Name of main Island	Population in 2007	Area
Amianan	Uninhabited	
Mavudis (Yami)	Uninhabited	
Misanga	Uninhabited	
Siayan	Uninhabited	
Dinem	Uninhabited	
Itbayat	3,069	
Batan	11,440	
Sabtang	1,465	
Diadekey	Uninhabited	
Ivuhos	Uninhabited	
Total of Batanes Province	15,974	219.01 km <sup>2</sup>

\*\*\*\*Website of National Statistics Office, Philippine.  
(<http://www.census.gov.ph/data/census2007/index.html>)

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## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS AT THE WORKSHOP

**Yumoto:** I suppose the language is a very good tracer of human immigration. How similar are the words in Yonaguni, are they close to the languages of Yami people or Batang people in Taiwan? How about the language of Yaeyama or Miyako.

**Huang:** There is a linguistic dialect. They distinguish the dialect of Miyako and Yaeyama. They are each a kind of dialect. But the Yonaguni is different from them, there is quite a difference. I have lots of friends who are in linguistic research. It's interesting that the Ryukyuan language scholars never study austronesian language and the austronesian scholars never study Ryukyuan. There is an academic boundary here. But if you don't speak two languages how

can you say they are different? Actually, there are lots of vocabularies remaining here, I found almost ten. It's about the same as east coast islands.

Also, from a historical point of view, language is very easily changed by political power. It can change in one generation thus it's not easy to trace the evidence of language here now. In Batang areas the Spanish had power in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and after that Tagalog, then for a short time United States occupied there.

I didn't talk much about the Oki islands and the Batang Island but they are very similar to each other. The legend of Oki islands says that they came from south. And the language here between Oki islands and Batang's is about 70% the same. Which language do you think is older? The language in Oki Island is much older than that of Batang Island. When the Batangnese people visit Taiwan and meet people from Oki Island and hear the language, they say it's like listening to a classic style of language. So, language is affected by political power. As you know, this area was under Japanese power after 1895. That's why in Taiwan area we can see lots of culture in ceremonies and ornaments and also language left in this area. My point is that the acting discipline also is divided by national border or languages. Traveling between Batang and Yonaguni or other islands is difficult because of the borders.

**Takakuwa:** How is the feeling of Yonaguni people? Before World War 2 the Yonaguni people had much more identity with the Taiwan people. Also, during the USA rule of Okinawa, still the Yonaguni people had lots of connections with Taiwan people. Some people are very proud of their experiences in Taiwan. Now, the Yonaguni is of course under the Japanese government. How are the feelings of the Yonaguni people? Are they attached to Taiwan or Japan?

**Huang:** They are very familiar to Taiwan but its Taiwan that was under Japanese colonial control. So these two areas share a period of historical time, the same time under Japanese control. That was only 50 years but of course after World War 2 they were close to each other because people who wanted to make a living or get higher education had to go to Taipei. But about ethnological regions with these Taiwan people, it needs some education. When they start to know that the culture is very close to Taiwan, of course they are very happy and feel confident. The people in Yonaguni are so happy to hear they have relatives in Taiwan. Because in the education of Japan, Yonaguni is always the most margin, the most not important one, the one the central Japanese can cut off. And from Taiwan, it is also the margin place of Taiwan's national education. Of course Batang is the margin place of Philippines, So three marginal places of education in each country. If we had this kind of scope to compare their characters, it would be very interesting.