# 2 Maritime Practice and Virtual Geography

> By no means is it easy to sail from Japan to China, Korea, Ryūkyu, or Iki, Tsushima, Sado or Matsumae. The island of Hachijō, however, is the hardest to reach of all these places … The *Hayashio* is a current roughly twenty-one *chō* [2 km] wide that swirls like a waterfall. The floods come in two or three rows, hitting waves backward, making a noise like thunder that freezes people's hearts and drains away their souls. The torrents of the *Kuroshio*, again, are as black as spilled ink. Hundreds of whirls are floating, and no one can help feeling dizzy when looking at their dance … Whoever runs into this current will be driven off to America or so, and never come back.
>
> Furukawa Koshōken, *Hachijō hikki* (1797)

One stormy morning in the winter of 1753, a large Chinese junk, visibly battered, floated into view off Ōkagō village on the island of Hachijō (see Chapter 1, Figure 1.3). Having been surprised by a storm in the East China Sea, the junk had lost its mast and rudder, drifting helplessly in the current for twenty-two days until it reached this last Japanese outpost, some 200 kilometers south of Honshu's eastern bend. The islanders promptly lit a signal fire and dispatched a fleet of fishing boats to pull the junk to shore before the rapid flow of the Kuroshio would drive it out onto the open ocean. As the protocol demanded, the captain and two mates were taken ashore until the value of the freight had been ascertained.[1] Wada Fujiemon, a masterless samurai sentenced to exile on the island like many others, was called in to interpret by writing Chinese characters, demanding rescue fees from the castaways payable in saké, rice, and other consumables.[2] These demands were rescinded once captain Gao Shanhui, a tall man in noble robes, presented his authorization to trade in Japan. The massive vessel, counting a crew of seventy-one, had operated on a route between Southeast Asia and Zhapu near

[1] This was common practice in other regions of Tokugawa Japan as well. Matsuura, "Edo jidai kōki ni okeru Amakusa Sakitsu," 2011, 119.
[2] Ōba, *Hōreki sannen Hachijōjima hyōchaku nankinbune shiryō*, 1980, 455.



Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

Shanghai, from where it had headed to trade in Nagasaki. Though the sailors had thrown several hundred bales of merchandise overboard to save the vessel from the storm, the junk still carried hundreds of crates of porcelain, medicine, and foreign books destined for no lesser customer than the shogunal household in Edo – or so the captain claimed.[3] Since the island's only harbor was too narrow to shelter the gigantic freighter, crew and local magistrates rushed to carry the ship's valuable goods ashore before the next storm would tear the ropes into pieces.[4] Unlike domestic castaways, foreigners who landed in distress had to be repatriated by way of formal diplomatic channels. Particular caution was required if the cargo at stake belonged to a higher authority, making each transaction a delicate and potentially consequential matter. The magistrates knew that until the currents and winds would allow them to sail north to contact the shogunal representative in Shimoda, they would have to feed the stranded castaways for at least four more months.[5]

Though a foreign vessel of this size was rarely seen so far from the international entrepôts of western Japan, large vessels from distant countries had drifted to Hachijō many times in the past. The islanders acted swiftly and according to an exacting protocol that had been established over countless incidents of drifting and repatriation.[6] The high profile of the cargo's recipient and the foreign origin of the drifters demanded additional caution on the part of the island's magistrates. After all, they had been reprimanded for abusive cargo appropriation before. Huts were set up at Maesaki bay for the Chinese castaways, and captain Gao Shanhui, together with fourteen of his sailors, was put under the protection of Chōrakuji temple in Nakanogō village (Figure 2.1).[7] Once accommodated at Chōrakuji, the castaways were astonished to learn that the temple, which had sheltered many a Chinese castaway over the years, traced its heritage back to the monk Shūkan, who had himself come from China as a castaway in the late fourteenth century.[8] The spiritual

[3] Ibid., 455, 470.

[4] Given the high profile of the merchandise involved, the events around the drifting of captain Gao Shanhui's Chinese junk are exceptionally well documented. This account is based on the contemporary records published in Ōba, *Hōreki sannen Hachijōjima*, 1980, as well as renderings in the early modern island chronicle *Kaitō fudoki* and Furukawa Koshōken's report *Hachijō hikki. Kakitō fudoki*, in: WUL; *Hachijō hikki*, in: WUL.

[5] Ōba, *Hōreki sannen Hachijōjima*, 1980: 457.

[6] Under the law of the Tokugawa, international trade had been limited to a few official channels including a trading post in Korea, an entrepôt in the Ryukyus, and the shogunal harbor of Nagasaki. Despite lively smuggling activities, chiefly under the auspices of local rulers along Japan's Western coasts, foreign vessels were a rare sight in eastern Japan. Hellyer, "Intra-Asian Trade and the Bakumatsu Crisis," 2005.

[7] Ōba, *Hōreki sannen Hachijōjima*, 1980, 456.

[8] *Kaitō fudoki*, vol. 1, in: WUL, pp. 25–26.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004




Figure 2.1 Captain Gao Shanhui and the ship's boy in Hachijō, painted by the convict Kanō Harushio, 1753. *Hōreki do hyōhaku Nankin-jin no zō*, in: TMET, acc. no.: 656-08-01-05.

power derived from Shūkan's foreign heritage also descended on those carved figurines and other flotsam the islanders occasionally recovered from the ocean, for the current must have carried them all the way from *Tenjiku*, the homeland of Buddhism, whence the "river" Kuroshio was said to flow. At this outpost of Japanese civilization on the verge of the open Pacific, the steady influx of castaways and flotsam had given rise to an identity and an economy rooted in the transnational geography of the current's flow.

These encounters and the virtual geographies they inspired contrast starkly with the terracentric picture projected by the cadastral maps through which shogunal administrators beheld the realm. Commercially distributed and hence widely circulating commercial maps, as well, were commonly structured along roads and territorial borders. As a result, in Tokugawa period maps, Japan's islands typically appeared surrounded by an unstructured, light-blue margin representing a vaguely defined ocean. Experience-based knowledge of the ocean's texture hardly ever made it into the picture, and was in fact often a well-guarded secret among seafaring communities. Early modern Japan's

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

notorious "dead interest in the sea,"[9] to invoke Yasuo Endō's characterization, was really alive and well all along among those communities who traveled and worked the ocean, and knew its winds and currents connected each coast to a larger geographical context. Such vernacular geographies are only reflected in fragments in the written archive, since navigational knowledge was strategically valuable and to some degree esoteric. In Hachijō, most written evidence of this vernacular geography relates to the island's role as a penal colony: Over the period of Tokugawa rule, at least 1,887 criminals whose samurai status prohibited the death penalty were convicted to lifelong exile on the island.[10] These convicts served in the island's bureaucracy, as schoolmasters, or engaged in vocational writing. The sources at the heart of this chapter include administrative records, literary references, and ethnographic treatises by travelers and resident convicts. The glimpses they offer of these vernacular geographies suffice to reconstruct in broad strokes the oceanic counter-geographies unseen by administrative maps of the Tokugawa state.

How does attention to these divergent practices and geographies of the ocean affect the way historians ought to position early modern Japan within the churning Pacific world? Approaching the archipelago from the local perspective of Hachijō reveals the offshore environment as a place of informal diplomacy and a site of locally specific maritime knowledge production. A space of inconsistent state power, Hachijō was both remote and yet directly affected by urban expansion, commercialization, and the growth of inter-city cargo traffic along the Kuroshio. There was a palpable seasonality to the annual wave of castaway arrivals: Drifting with the northerly winter winds, castaways had to shelter for several months in Hachijō before they could be repatriated when the summer monsoon winds picked up. The scale of this exchange was considerable. In the peak year of 1850, over 300 sailors were rescued from twenty-seven vessels.[11] Where state power was not fully enforced, this situation brought about economic practices on the verge of abuse – at times negotiated and sanctioned by superior authorities – and folk beliefs embedded in a virtual geography structured by the Kuroshio's flow. By the turn of the nineteenth century, more frequent visits of foreign vessels put the islands on the frontline of geopolitical change, as multiple sightings and landings illustrate. We shall see in later chapters how in the Meiji period, Hachijō's location in the liminal space between Japan proper and

[9] Ibid., 29.
[10] Tokyo-to, ed. *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*, 1964, 38.
[11] Asanuma, "Chūsei," 1973, 207.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

its oceanic frontier would give rise to expansive networks of labor and expertise that connected the metropole with its new frontier islands.

## Virtual Geographies of Drift

The constant influx of castaways and flotsam connected the historical memory of Hachijō to a trans-oceanic geography of salvation and ancestral migration. The observation that practices are found throughout Japan which celebrate the seaborne advent of deities from a world beyond the horizon has intrigued anthropologists throughout the twentieth century. Most prominently, Yanagita Kunio, the grand doyen of Japanese ethnography, spent half a century studying cultural connections from the Kuroshio's upper reaches to the shores of eastern Honshu. In his grand theory *The Maritime Path* of 1952, Yanagita traced folktales and vernacular practices along the current, arguing that since prehistoric times, Japanese culture had been dispersed along the current's flow, just like the coconuts and tropical driftwood recovered from the shores of Honshu.[12] Having developed over the interwar years, Yanagita's theses may reflect imperial Japan's search for a greater Pacific identity. In the eyes of Hachijō islanders, however, the Kuroshio descended not from an unknown southern sea, but from the continental realm of *Tenjiku*, where the Buddhist teachings had originated, and China, whence the island's first settlers were believed to have set out. The islanders particularly cherished a heritage derived from Chinese castaways, with which they readily associated captain Gao's crew.

Shortly after their rescue, fifty-six men were set up at a shelter, while the captain with fourteen of his crew were accommodated at Chōrakuji temple. At the temple, they installed a figure of Mazu, the Hokkien protectress of all seafarers, which they had rescued from their ship.[13] Chōrakuji had a long history of Chinese heritage, a fact that is emphasized in the temple's founding tale. Originally established in the 1330s as Daizenji Temple, a branch of the Shingon sect, the temple was expanded under a Chinese priest named Shūkan who had reached the island as a castaway in 1393. Together with Shūkan, a crew of nearly four hundred had landed in distress, of whom seventy-seven perished shortly after their arrival, and the remainder lived for many years in Hachijō.[14] When Shūkan passed in 1428, having headed the temple for thirty-five years,

[12] Yanagita, "Kaijō no michi," 1989 [1952], 26–28. The first version of *The Maritime Path* was published in the journal *Kokoro* in 1952.
[13] Ōba, *Hōreki sannen Hachijōjima*, 1980, 457.
[14] Asanuma, "Chūsei," 1973, 130–32.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

he was followed by the priest Shūyū – also a "man of the Great Ming," as the temple's records stress – though it remains unclear whether he had reached the island together with Shūkan or arrived in a later incident. When, seven priests later, in 1547, a major party of Chinese castaways was rescued, magistrate Kikuchi Chū'emon seized the opportunity to change the temple's sectarian affiliation by naming one of the castaways as head priest – under the adopted name Shūkan, homophonous with his illustrious predecessor's though spelled differently – and reforming the temple as Chōrakuji of the Jōdo sect.[15]

At Chōrakuji, captain Gao was asked to comfort the souls of the hundreds of unfortunate Chinese castaways who had died on the island over the centuries. Long after the heyday of the Ming dynasty's large maritime expeditions, whose fleets are believed to have carried tens of thousands to Southeast Asia and even East Africa at the behest of the Chinese emperor, merchants bound for Nagasaki continued to reach Hachijō in distress. Unable to return, hundreds were buried in Hachijō over the years (see Table 2.1).[16] "Their graves are in all the villages," remembered one senior islander in an anthology he compiled in 1819, "and when people went to the mountains, they used to pay respects to them, since they were often troubled and haunted by their ghosts. When they told the Chinese castaway Gao Shanhui of Nanjing about this, he worshipped the ghosts and appeased them. Now, there is no more suffering."[17] Captain Gao's men also used debris from their vessel to build an ornate gate at Chōrakuji with an inscription that affirmed their cultural kinship with the islanders: "This place," the captain had his men carve into the pillars, "is no inferior to the [sacred district of] Putuo" – where the sailors had offered a sacrifice prior to their voyage – "the master of ceremony, an enlightened teacher, descends in the sixth generation from the previous dynasty of our country, the Great Ming … the intimate kindness of this countryman is true friendship among compatriots!"[18] The local heritage provided the grounds for a diplomacy that intertwined spirituality and ancestral bonds.

[15] *Chōrakuji engi*, manuscript founding tale of Chōrakuji temple, in: CTH. The priest who headed the temple after 1392 spelled his name *Shūkan* 宗閑, whereas the priest whose arrival in 1547 ushered in the sectarian change assumed the name *Shūkan* 宗感.

[16] *En'ō kōgo*, ed. in: Takahashi, "En'ō kōgo," 2012 [1819].

[17] Cit. in Asanuma, "Chūsei," 1973, 132.

[18] *Kaitō fudoki*, vol. 1, pp. 26–28, in: WUL, Acc. No.: ru-04 01249. This gate, as well as the Mazu statue rescued from the ship, was lost when the temple fell victim to bombings in 1945. All but two historical texts – the death registry and the temple's founding history cited here – sank with vessel *Tōkō -maru* and 149 civilians in the attempt to flee from the approaching war front in April 1945. Tokyo-to Hachijō-cho Kyōiku Iinkai ed., *Hachijō tōshi* 1973, 248.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

Table 2.1 *Major international drifting events in Hachijō*

| Year | Event / Sources |
|---|---|
| Third century BC (*mythological*) | Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang is said to have dispatched Xu Fu with 1,000 settlers who first populated Hachijō and Aogashima. |
| 1392 | Chinese, approx. 400 sailors landed, 308 survived the famine of the next year and remained in Hachijō. Among others monk Shūkan (宗閑), the later priest of Chōrakuji temple.[a] |
| 1492–1500 | Chinese, 200–300 people on board. *En'ō kōgo*, p. 88.[b] |
| 1547 | Chinese, unknown number of castaways, among which the later monk Shūkan (宗感) of Chōrakuji.[c] |
| 1644 | Chinese, three vessels at once, out of which one failed to land.[d] |
| 1753 | Chinese ("Nanjing"), 71 sailors under captain Gao Shanhui.[e] |
| 1765 | Chinese ("Yunnan"), Shipwrecked, no. of castaways unknown.[f] |
| Pre-1782 | Western. Reported about the Ogasawara islands.[g] |
| 1790 | "Chinese" (i.e. foreign), landed for water (and trade?), indicating the existence of an inhabited islands in the south.[h] |
| Pre-1797 | "From a Christian country." Brought three Kannon-like figurines, no further details known.[i] |
| 1863 | (Mikurajima) American, Coolie transporter *Viking*, en route Hong Kong–San Francisco with twenty-three crew members and over 400 Chinese coolies.[j] |
| 1867 | (Miyakejima) Russian, no. of crew unknown.[k] |

[a] *Chōrakuji engi*, 5–6; Asanuma, "Chūsei," 1973, 130–2.
[b] Takahashi, "En'ō kōgo" 2012 [1819], Takahashi 1802, *Mukashi no Itojimabanashi*, 132.
[c] Tokyo-to Hachijō-chō Kyōiku linkai ed. *Hachijō tōshi* 1973.
[d] Asanuma, "Chūsei," 1973, 207.
[e] Ōba, *Hōreki sannen Hachijōjima hyōchaku nankinbune shiryō*, 1980, *Hyōchakusen monogatari*, 2001.
[f] *Hachijō hikki*, p. 15, in: WUL.
[g] Ibid., 18, in: WUL.
[h] Ibid., 15, in: WUL.
[i] Asanuma, "Chūsei," 1973, 136; Igawa "Kinsei," 1973, 208.
[j] Hashiguchi 1991, 212.
[k] Ibid., 212.

The islanders traced these ancestral bonds further back than the written records of castaway landings. Yamaguchi Gorōsaemon, a samurai exiled to Hachijō in the early nineteenth century, wrote an introduction to local customs that was printed and sold in Edo in 1848 under the title *Sleepless in Hachijō*. Yamaguchi cited the islanders' belief that their island was first settled by the legendary explorer Xu Fu in the third century BC. Dispatched by the Emperor Qin Shi Huang of China, Xu Fu is said to have set out with 500 men and 500 women to find the elixir of immortality. On his eastbound voyage, the envoy discovered Japan, but his quest for immortality remained futile: "Having reached the bay of

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

Kumano in Japan without finding the elixir," Yamaguchi recounts, the envoy "feared about the consequences and dared not return to China, but remained in Kumano instead. He brought the women to what is now Hachijō, and dropped the men on an isle eighteen *ri* south from there, now known as Aogashima … Men and women lived separately on the two islands without ever forgetting their native land."[19] The story of Xu Fu first appears in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* from the first century BC, though without a specific reference to Japan or its outer islands.[20] By the early modern period, the story was merged in Japan with the widely circulating myth of an island of women, which, however, pointed to a more distant Pacific. The encyclopedia *Wakan sansai zue* of 1712 has it that beyond an isle of cannibals and an isle of immortals lay the land *Rasetsu* far in the south, where it is said that "there are women and if men go there, they never return."[21]

When the shogunal inspector Mikawaguchi Terumasa visited Hachijō in 1796, he returned with many observations about the island's customs and economy which he shared eagerly with the geographer Furukawa Koshōken, who summarized the main points in his manuscript *Brush Notes on Hachijō*.[22] Fascinated by Furukawa's description of the current and of life on this most secluded of all Japan's islands, the popular author Kyokutei "Takizawa" Bakin (1767–1848) hand-copied Furukawa's notes and began to prepare his epic novel *Wondrous Tales of the Crescent Moon* – one of the most iconic pieces of Edo period fiction, along with his iconic *Tale of the Eight Dog Warriors*, which the novelist started a decade later. Reminiscent of Chinese fiction of the era, Bakin blurred history, legend, and fantasy.[23] Published in twenty-nine volumes between 1807 and 1811, the illustrated novel sold in scores.

*Wondrous Tales of the Crescent Moon* told the story of the shining hero Minamoto no Tametomo who was banished to the island of Izu Ōshima in the late twelfth century. One day, the story goes, Tametomo observes birds flying from beyond the Kuroshio, which local fisherfolk do not dare to cross. They say that beyond the current, which "runs fast like a waterfall … lay the island of women and the island of devils, but since

[19] *Yatake no nezamegusa*, in: NDL, pp. 3–4.
[20] Chinese Text Project, *Shiji, Huainan Hengshan liezhuan*, 19.
[21] Tokyo National Museum *Edo kaibaku 400 nen kinen tokubetsu ten*, 2003, 83. *Wakan sansai zue*, vol. 14, pp. 29–31, in: NDL, Acc. No. 031.2-Te194w-s.
[22] *Hachijō hikki*, in: WUL.
[23] Miyata, "Kuroshio to minzoku shinkō," 1991b, 24–27. The *Wondrous Tales of the Crescent Moon* were published in 29 volumes between 1807 and 1811. Bakin's manuscript copy of Furukawa Koshōken's *Hachijō hikki* dated 1805 is held at Waseda University Library, Furukawa's original of 1797 at the NDL. *Hachijō hikki*, in: NDL; *Hachijō hikki*, in: WUL.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

nobody has ever been there, we do not know this for sure."[24] Tametomo promptly sets sail and within just one night, reaches the island of women. On the shore, Tametomo stumbles on a bunch of straw sandals which the women keep ready for their husbands' return from the island of men further south. In awe of the god of the sea, men and women meet only once a year, when the winds allow it for the men to sail north. Having lost the Chinese art of writing and enthralled by superstitions, the amazons are miraculously bestowed the ability to speak Japanese when the flamboyant hero arrives, since the goddess Amaterasu has decided that night that the island ought henceforth to be a part of Japan.[25] Bakin's literary construction located the islands in a liminal space that marked the frontier of Japan's cultural sphere.

Bakin's epic also referred to the dark history of disease and famine that had haunted Hachijō over the previous century. It is documented that at least four smallpox epidemics were triggered by the arrival of infected drifters.[26] Just when the Tametomo is about to leave Hachijō, a castaway is discovered drifting off the shore. But Tametomo cannot be fooled and recognizes the specter as the god of smallpox, a perfidious spirit who reveals itself time and again in the appearance of an old man:

> Floating on the wrappings of a rice bale and waving a red banner, [there was] an old man some one foot and a half tall and skinny like a withered branch, dancing up and down in the waves … the ghost had been driven out of Naniwa [Ōsaka] and was set adrift on the great ocean.[27]

In Bakin's version, Tametomo's power keeps this god of plague offshore for good, but the episode underlines that the "river" Kuroshio represented an entryway for both blessings and curses to coastal and island communities.

Edible cargo came as a special relief in times of famine, and the introduction of novel crops to the region is remembered in concrete episodes of maritime encounters. Given its isolation, Hachijō was particularly exposed to crises: Twenty-five famines are recorded in less than a century following 1690, the worst of which killed as many as one-fourth of the island's population in 1766–1768.[28] Just around that time, a certain Ōzawa Gon'emon of Omaezaki at the

[24] *Chinsetsu yumihari tsuki*, cit. in Miyata, "Kuroshio to minzoku shinkō" 1991b, 24–26.
[25] Takizawa, *Chinsetsu yumiharizuki*, 1986, vol. 2, 166–70. The historical Minamoto no Tametomo fought on the side of his clan in the conflict over imperial succession in the 1150s that preceded the Gempei war three decades later, after which the Minamoto established the Kamakura shogunate (1192–1333). *Kōdansha Encyclopedia of Japan*.
[26] Tsushima, "Hachijōjima nendaiki kara mita ekibyō, iryō no rekishi," 2013, 205.
[27] *Chinsetsu yumihari tsuki*, cited in Miyata, "Kuroshio to minzoku shinkō" 1991b, 24–26.
[28] Tokyo-to ed., *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*, 1964, 172–75; Igawa, "Kinsei," 1973, 173.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

entrance of Suruga Bay is credited with rescuing twenty-four castaways from Satsuma, whose boat carried a load of sweet potatoes. This tuber was formerly unknown in the region. As a memorial at the temple Kaifukudera – or "temple of marine blessing" – has it, Gon'emon's propagation of "Satsuma potatoes" helped famine relief and increased the agricultural output.[29] Likewise, an inscription at the Kikuchi family grave in Hachijō tells that the magistrate Kikuchi Hide'emon brought seedlings of red "Satsuma potatoes" from the island of Niijima in 1811, and eleven years later, his son Shōgenta introduced an improved "barbarian type" named *hansu* from the same island.[30] The Hachijō chronicler Kondō Tomizō (cf. Chapter 1) was eager to stress in his *True Records of Hachijō* that these tubers had been brought to Niijima by a Satsuma castaway named Uhei, whose boat was rescued just while the Hachijō magistrate Hide'emon was himself shipwrecked on that island en route to Honshu.[31] The experience of drift and shipwreck – or the prominent claim of it – seemed to offer the possibility of a divine intervention that underlined the consequential nature of these encounters.

Similarly, objects recovered from the floods derived their spiritual power from their drift and their presumed origin in *Tenjiku*, the Indian homeland of the Buddhist teachings, whence the islanders believed the current flowed "as one path of fresh water from the river Ryūsa in *Tenjiku*."[32] A wooden statue of the "barbarian *Rakan*," a Buddha figurine with a foreign-looking countenance, was recovered from the current in 1694 and was venerated as a Bodhidharma at the Hachijō temple Shakadō, as Tomizō writes (see Figure 2.2).[33] Drifting statues recovered from the current are venerated at temples and shrines in the other Izu islands, and even along the bays of Suruga and Sagami in Honshu. The Amidha Nyorai Buddha venerated at the Jōdo temple Kōryo-san Fusai'in on the island of Miyake, for example, is said to have drifted from *Kōryo* or "Korea," a cult that is documented as far back as the eleventh century.[34] The veneration of such drifting deities transcended the boundaries of Buddhism, animism, and institutionalized Shintoism. In particular, deities venerated at the major shrines of Western Japan, or the highly popular Seven Gods of Good Fortune, were believed to reach the

[29] Miyata, "Kuroshio to minzoku shinkō" 1991b, 20–21.
[30] Dangi, "Kinsei," 1991, 156. The name *hansu* is likely a local reading of the name *bansho* or "barbarian (foreign) potato."
[31] *Hachijō jikki kyokan*, vol. 25 "Miyage," p. 13, in: TMA, Nagatoro-ke monjo, no acc. no.
[32] *Hachijō jikki*, vol. 1, p. 30, in: Kondō, *Hachijō jikki*, 1964.
[33] Dangi, "Kinsei," 1991, 126; Hase, "Hachijō Rekishi Minzoku Shiryōkan," 2011, 2.
[34] Asano, "Miyakejima no gyogyō to shinkō," 1991, 542.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004



Figure 2.2 The "Barbarian *Rakan*" of Hachijō, a Buddhist figurine probably carved in southern China's Guangdong Province, recovered from the current at Hachijō around 1694. In: Dangi, "Kinsei," 1991, 126.

downstream islands adrift. The Mazu cult around the virgin protectress of seafarers, again, reached the region from the Fujian coast. At least two shrines in Tochigi have revered the goddess Mazu since her introduction by a Chinese monk in the year 1681 to protect the sailing routes around Honshu's eastern capes with shogunal approval. Originating in the late tenth century, the cult was practiced widely among seafaring communities of southern China and gradually spread along the routes of southern Chinese trade and migration to Taiwan and Southeast Asia. In Japan, sites of Mazu worship have been identified in Kyūshū, blended in with local Shintō practices.[35]

Yanagita Kunio subsumed these different practices around deities descended by sea as the "Boat of Miroku," referring to the future Buddha Miroku whose promised coming was expected on a ship from *Tenjiku*.[36]

[35] Miyata, *Kuroshio no michi*, 1991, 16; 22–23.

[36] Miyata, "Kuroshio to minzoku shinkō" 1991b, 10, 14. According to Yanagita Kunio, this cult is related to the deity *Nirō* of the Yaeyeama islands, today the westernmost extremity of Japan, a spirit that descends from the paradise "*Nirai-Kanai*" on a boat. Yanagita, "Kaijō no michi," 1989, 109–14.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

More recent studies have compared the veneration of drifting deities to the cargo cults of Melanesia, those practices of Indigenous communities oriented at summoning industrial flotsam, development assistance, or the power of foreign leaders – a concept that has later been criticized for reducing Indigenous cultures to a passive, lethargic stance.[37] The strategies of coping with drifters and cargo in Hachijō, anyway, were dynamic, pragmatic, and self-interested, as the following sections will show.

## Maritime Knowledge and Social Status

Sailing to Hachijō across the rapid Kuroshio current was extraordinarily demanding and at times dangerous even for experienced sailors. As it climbs over the Izu ridge, the Kuroshio accelerates up to 150 *cm* per second, creating a geography of dangerous whirls, "black rapids," and a stream "fast like a mountain creek."[38] Practical know-how of traveling in the current translated into relative political autonomy and was not readily shared with outsiders. "The islanders," wrote Kondō Tomizō around 1850, "treat information like the distance and direction of the maritime route to the shogunate with the deepest secrecy, and only say it is around 300 *ri* away."[39] Tomizō, a samurai convict from Edo, had been found guilty on seven charges of murder at age twenty-three and was banished to the island in 1827. Working like many educated prisoners as a scribe, Tomizō dedicated several decades of his life to the compilation of the monumental *True Records of Hachijō*, a comprehensive historia of the insular microcosmos.[40] Tomizō was the son of the explorer and ethnographer Kondō Shigezō, who had published about China and Vietnam before he was dispatched to Ezo (Hokkaido) and the Kuriles in 1801 on multiple missions to remove markers of Russian territorial claims.[41] Convicted to live and die in Hachijō, Tomizō instead set out to study the culture and environment of a place that, like the islands in the sea of Okhotsk his father had traveled, was "distant at sea several tens of miles from the Imperial lands, yet became subjected and civilized."[42] His lifelong search for fragmentary information from

[37] Miyata, *Kuroshio no michi*, 1991, 16–17; Lindstrom 1993, 20–29.
[38] Sarkisyan and Sündermann, *Modelling Ocean Climate Variability*, 2009, 195; *Hachijō hikki*, p. 5, 7.
[39] *Hachijō jikki*, vol. 1, p. 31, ed. in: Kondō, *Hachijō jikki*, 1964. 300 *ri* corresponds to 1,170 km. The gross overstatement of the actual distance – roughly 280 km – expresses the island's perceived remoteness from greater Japan.
[40] Kobayashi, "Foreword," 1964, 1.
[41] *Kokushi daijiten*, keyword "Kondō Shigezō."
[42] *Hachijō jikki*, vol. 1, p. 5, in: Kondō, *Hachijō jikki*, 1964.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

the secretive islanders provided the basis of an original version of oceanic history and geography.

Drawing on a surprising breadth of contemporary materials, Tomizō pointed out that while geographical maps represented coasts quite accurately, they fail to account for the importance of navigational instructions:

> I have earlier sought old records and accounts, removed the errors, and wrote the present text. However, while the shores and shipping routes of Musashi, Sagami, Izu, Suruga, Awa and Shimousa provinces are shown in detail [in the *Map of the Seven Islands of Izu*], regarding the maritime path from Ōshima to Mikura, I drew on the secret map of the Sasamoto family, the boatmasters of Hachijō. I tested it over many years, interrogating sailors from Niishima and Miyake, as well as skilled seafarers from various provinces. Based on the afterword of the *Nanpan Nikki*, I thus compiled a corrected map.[43]

Apparently, Tomizō gained access to a "secret map" to which he could compare the interviews he conducted with incoming sailors over the years. In general, the islanders treated any information related to the nature of their sea with secrecy, even vis-à-vis long-term residents like Tomizō. As he turned to the castaways arriving from western Japan, he learned more specific facts about the so-called "river Kurose." From Shikoku to the Kii peninsula and all the way to the Izu islands, the sailors said, they sailed into the current to accelerate their eastward journey.[44]

As an exiled samurai or *runin*, Tomizō filled a special position in the island's socio-political environment.[45] After the fall of the Hōjō clan at Odawara in 1590, the whole Izu archipelago had come under direct rule of the Tokugawa and thus became part of the shogunal lands of eastern Japan. The shogunate was originally represented on the island by a *daikan* intendant who supervised the village headmen, an office occupied since the seventeenth century by the Egawa family of Nirayama in the Izu Peninsula. Tokugawa loyalists from the very start, the Egawas expanded their power in the provinces of Izu and Musashi. As an effect, they entrusted their representation in the islands to subsidiary officials.[46] The extent of autonomy among the island's elite increased when the position of the shogunal envoy was abolished in 1726, and magistrates recruited from local families represented the authorities instead. This office rotated among the headmen of the five

[43] Ibid., p. 11.
[44] *Hachijō jikki*, vol 1, p. 30, ed. in: Kondō, *Hachijō jikki*, 1964.
[45] The term *runin* 流人 "exile" should not be confused with *rōnin* 浪人 "masterless samurai."
[46] Tōkyō-to Hachijō-chō kyōiku iinkai ed., *Hachijō tōshi*, 1973, 148; Nakada, *Izu to kuroshio no michi*, 2001, 81–83, 215. On the administrative positions, see: Igawa, "Kinsei," 1973, 139–50.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

villages of Hachijō.[47] Although island affairs were mostly negotiated at a local level, business with the outside world remained closely regulated. No trade could be made, no correspondence delivered, if not through the hands of the boatmasters or *o-fune azukari*.[48]

Given the high skills required to travel across the current and the legal restrictions on traffic around the penal colony, the offices of the two boatmasters became the most prestigious position among the magistrates of Hachijō.[49] The only authorized channel for trade with the outside world, the two vessels licensed by the shogunate represented the island's economic lifeline. All other boats were prohibited from sailing to and from Hachijō, in order to keep the penal colony hermetic.[50] On their annual turn – north in summer and south in fall – the boatmasters took orders from the islanders and delivered foodstuffs, medicines and books from Honshu. Just like the outsourced administration of the island, the official vessels were licensed, but not owned or operated by the shogunate. As the only shogunate-owned ferry, one or two prisoner transporters approached the shores of Hachijō each year, dropping off between five and nineteen convicts at a time and, very rarely, repatriating those who had been pardoned. As a result, the enforcement of shogunal regulations lay mostly in the hands of local representatives rather than dispatched magistrates.

Despite this administrative marginalization, Hachijō islanders had an intimate relationship with the ocean around them. Around 1850, Tomizō discovered an old, worm-eaten booklet apparently written by a fisherman in Suekichi village. The text makes use of a dialect jargon to describe the confluence and clash of currents and countercurrents, waves and whirls. Each current is described as either "climbing" or "falling," apparently relative to a geography reminiscent of the cosmology of drain described by the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi in the fourth century BC (see Figure 2.3). Zhuangzi explained the eternal equilibrium of the sea level despite precipitation through the concept of an enormous drain in the ocean: "Of all the waters under heaven there are none so great as the ocean. A myriad streams flow into it without ceasing. The cosmic drain

[47] Tōkyō-to Hachijō-chō kyōiku iinkai ed., *Hachijō tōshi*, 1973, 146–47; 157–60. Until the end of the Edo period, each *daikan* of Shimoda only paid the island one visit upon investiture in a generational event, ibid., 141.

[48] *Hachijō hikki*, in: WUL, p. 7.

[49] Tōkyō-to Hachijō-chō kyōiku iinkai ed., *Hachijō tōshi*, 1973, 149. These offices came with nominal samurai privileges and the threefold salary of a common soldier.

[50] Tokyo-to ed., *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*, 1964, 147; Igawa, "Kinsei," 1973, 143–44. The number of licensed vessels was increased to three in 1830, though without increasing the total volume of cargo capacity.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

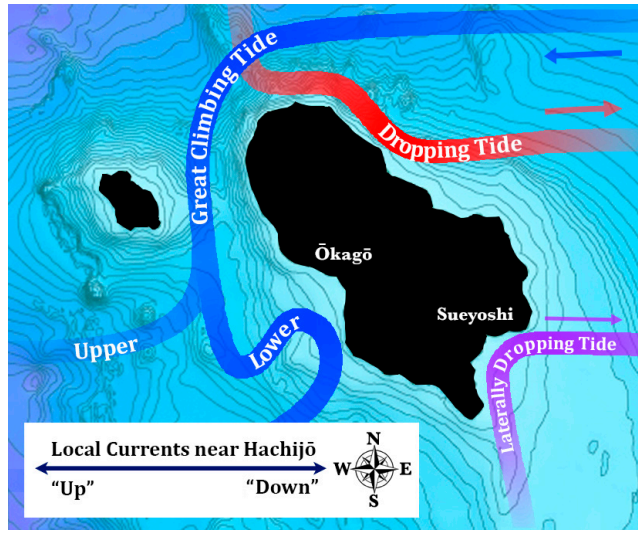



Figure 2.3 Map of Hachijō with select local currents. J.R. 2025.

*Wei Lü* drains them continuously, and yet [the ocean] is never emptied."[51] Joseph Needham translated the idea of *Wei Lü* as a "current," "the ultimate drain," or "cosmic cloaca" – an idea that, no matter how we translate it, illustrates the eerie feelings the eastward Kuroshio current must have elicited among coastal observers in Japan.[52]

According to physicist Kawai Hideo, who tracked down hundreds of historical observations of the Kuroshio, Arai Hakuseki's (1657–1725) description of a "falling tide" near the Ryukyus dating to 1720 is the earliest specific description of the Kuroshio in written text.[53] Near the Yaeyama islands, again, Satsuma traders marked their routes around a region of black whirls north of Miyako labeled *Yae dry rapids* because part of a reef surfaced amidst the current at times.[54] By 1750, a similar black bar, sometimes dashed and labeled "River Kurose," appeared on maps north of Hachijō, but it was not until the Meiji period that printed treatises connected these local phenomena into an interregional oceanic topography —the current that had long propelled those seafarers, whom Tomizō interviewed in Hachijō.

[51] "Autumn Waters," in: *Chinese Text Project*.
[52] Needham, *The Shorter Science and Civilisation in China*, 1978, vol. 3, 156–57. In modern Chinese, "*wei lü*" describes the last vertebra of the human spinal column.
[53] Kawai, "A Brief History of Recognition of the Kuroshio," 1998, 530–36.
[54] *Ritei zu*, route map of the Ryukyu Islands, dated 1776, in: ACLA, no acc. no.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

## Shipping Capitalism and Castaway Economy

Over the early modern period, domestic castaways reached Hachijō in such numbers that repatriation and the handling of their cargo became institutionalized. The rescue protocol varied based on the ownership of each drifting vessel and could be interpreted more or less liberally depending on the owner's political status. Administrative sources – and the gaps in the archive – suggest that the resulting "castaway economy" oscillated between humanitarian action and straight-out piracy, and was essentially shaped by the blurred nature of state power. Despite Hachijō's geographical remoteness from Japan's political centers, Hachijō was directly affected by the transfer of the archipelago's political and economic epicenter to Edo bay, and by the subsequent commercialization of Japan's inter-city cargo shipping business. Despite fragmentary records and most likely a significant number of unreported landings, 199 incidents are known between 1474 and 1865, with 300 sailors arriving on twenty-seven vessels in the peak year of 1850 alone. Most castaways reached Hachijō on voyages from Japan's western provinces, and some 70 percent of all reported incidents happened during the winter months when northwesterly winds prevailed (see Figure 2.4 and Table 2.2).[55]

As previously mentioned, some of the archipelago's most important shipping lanes led along or straight into the Kuroshio current. Inter-city vessels could reach a substantial size – a *sengokubune* carrying 1,000 *koku* corresponds roughly to a 150-ton cargo capacity – but only the largest vessels were fit for voyaging at high sea. As Jakobina Arch has argued, however, the famed legal restrictions on the construction of oceangoing vessels were not the main reason these vessels' seaworthiness was kept at

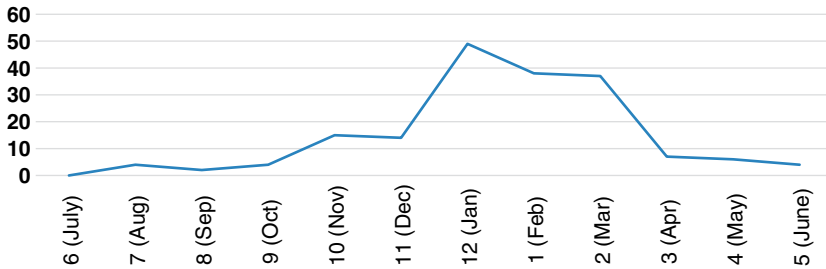



Figure 2.4 Seasonal structure of vessel rescues (fragmentary records). The numbers are cumulative by Japanese month.
Based on data in Igawa, "Kinsei," 1973, 205–07.

[55] Igawa, "Kinsei," 1973, 205–07.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

Table 2.2 *Origin of vessels rescued and peak years (fragmentary records)*

| Vessel origin | Vessels rescued |
|---|---|
| Hokuriku (Esp. Etchū, Echizen, Echigo, Kaga) | 4 |
| Chūgoku (Seto Inland Sea) | 13 |
| Kyūshū | 13 |
| Kantō (Esp. Edo) | 14 |
| Tōhoku and Ezo (Sendai to Matsumae) | 15 |
| Shikoku | 16 |
| Chūbu (Ise Bay to Izu province) | 30 |
| Kinki (Ōsaka, Awaji and Kii) | 74 |
| *Total* | *183* |

| Peak years | Vessels rescued | Sailors rescued |
|---|---|---|
| 1710 | 13 | *N.k.* |
| 1711 | 9 | *N.k.* |
| 1850 | 27 | "Over 300" |

*Note:* The seasonal and regional referencing of 199 recorded incidents of domestic vessel rescue (where possible) between 1474 and 1865 illustrates the significance of northerly winter winds and the use of the Kuroshio route for eastward voyages in the frequency of drifting events. By contrast, only twelve incidents have been related to summer typhoons. It is plausible that inter-annual peaks are related to Kuroshio "great meander" events. Large gaps in the record and the politically fraught nature of drifting incidents suggest a significant number of unreported cases.
Based on Tokyo-to ed. *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*. 1964, 206–14.

a minimum. Rather, cheap shipbuilding and minimal training of crews were the product of commercialization in the shipping business.[56] Wood scarcity inspired vessels constructed with smaller and flimsier parts, including assembled masts that were more prone to breaking in storms. The *bezaisen*, for example, the most common model of junks on Japan's inter-city routes, could be built without the massive trunks needed for keel, mast, and beams so crucial in Western-style vessels (see Figure 2.5). Not unlike the Chinese "sandboats," the *bezaisen* lay shallow in the water, an advantage for shipping in the silted bays of Honshu. They could be

[56] Arch, "Sailing within Sight of the Land," 2024, 105–10. A contemporary description of these Japanese vessels can be found in Engelbert Kaempfer's *History of Japan* published posthumously in 1727. Kaempfer, *Kaempfer's Japan*, 1999 [1727], 253–55. On the characteristics of early modern ship architecture, see Adachi, *I'yō no fune*, 1995.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

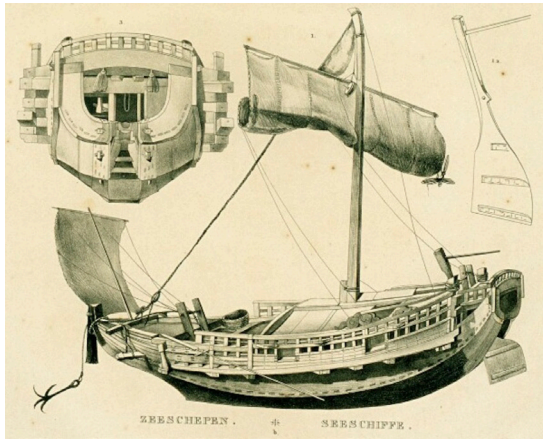



Figure 2.5 Representation of a Japanese cargo vessel of the type "bezaisen" in Philipp Franz von Siebold's *Nippon: Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan*, Leiden: Van der Hoek, 1832. Note the open stern and removable deck plates for swift loading, the square rigging, and the liftable rudder.

loaded quickly and handled by a crew with little technical training. At sea, on the other hand, the square-rigged vessels were unable to steer steeply into the wind, a grave disadvantage when caught in winds and currents pulling offshore.[57] Despite the elevated risk of ship loss, cuts on construction expenses prioritized cost-effectiveness over safety and minimized the financial loss in the case of accidents. The high frequency of accidents was therefore not the result of technological stagnation or rigorous regulation, but rather of the industry's capitalist rationality.

The rate of minor and major accidents was indeed considerable. Uemura Masahiro calculates that ships leaving the harbor of Uozaki near Ōsaka suffered an accident rate of 1–2 percent, whereas vessels exporting citrus fruits from Kii province along the Kuroshio met with accidents during up to 5 percent of all voyages, or as many as 7 percent of all sails out of Settsu province in the churning inland sea. Not every accident meant the complete loss of ship and crew, of course, but the risk of cargo damage was considerable. As Uemura further shows, constant expenses for ship repairs and indemnity for lost or damaged cargo weighed down the shipowners' budget sheets: Most vessels were amortized within five years, but some accidents caused liabilities that far outweighed the vessel's construction costs. To reduce the entrepreneurial risk, shipping enterprises were commonly run as joint ventures, or as a sort of shareholding company. Shareholders distributed the

[57] Adachi, "Daitokō," 2002, 64.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

entrepreneurial risk according to the shareholding ratio. Joint financial backing of businesses reduced the immediate lump risk for each partner as it also collectivized the liability for partial loss of each shareholder's cargo.[58] These quite sophisticated risk-hedging models were the closest correspondence to shipping insurance as it emerged in early modern Europe, as we will see again in Chapter 8.

In this sense, the emergence of Hachijō's castaway economy, and the regulatory interventions of the shogunate in response to it, were an effect of Japan's early modern commercialization. Hachijō officials regularly commandeered cargo in exchange for aid provided to surviving castaways. Once sailors were rescued ashore, they were compelled to trade their remaining merchandise in exchange for repatriation or ship repairs and tools lost along the way. Edible cargo often provided relief for the famine-stricken island's population. As little currency was in circulation in Hachijō, these purchases conventionally occurred as a symbolic barter against the locally-produced Hachijō yellow silk.[59] The routine of rescue, repair, and repatriation developed into a highly profitable business for the islanders and an elite of island magistrates and boatmasters who managed the proceedings to their own benefit.[60]

Since metal currencies were rarely used on the island until the late nineteenth century, the abusive character of this barter trade is hard to grasp at a glance, but comparison with Edo market prices gives a sense of the distortion. When a boat from Satsuma province loaded with tax rice landed in distress in 1675, the islanders compelled the crew to trade the cargo at 1 percent of usual market prices: If the silk needed for one kimono could buy one-fourth of a bale of rice in Edo, the islanders "bought" twenty-five bales from the drifters for the same silk.[61] Six months later, the islanders "bought" salt at thirty-five bales for one-tenth of a gold *ryō* from a vessel drifting from Ōsaka and in the next year, they "accepted" rice from a ship from Izumi province for one-fourth *ryō* per seven bales, as well as fifty barrels of saké for five *ryō*. When an Ise vessel with 1,030 bales of rice landed just a few weeks later, local authorities noticed that they were dealing with a shipment bound for the shogunal storehouses in Mino province. Given the high profile of the cargo's owner, the local magistrates sent a delegation to Honshu to authorize the trade in advance. As a result, the authorities in Ise approved a more modest, if

[58] Uemura, "Marine Transport Management in Early-Modern Japan," 1999, 123–35.
[59] Tokyo-to ed., *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*, 1964, 157, *Yatake no nezamekusa*, in: NDL, p. 12.
[60] Tōkyō-to Hachijō-chō kyōiku iinkai, *Hachijō tōshi*, 1973, 149–51.
[61] *Yatake no nezamekusa*, in: NDL, p. 12. Rice was traded in volume, not weight measures; the core unit of one *hyō* corresponds to approximately 72 liters.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

still exaggerated rate of one kimono's worth of silk per ten bales.[62] These episodes illustrate that trade with the castaways occurred under a certain degree of coercion, but by approving of these unfavorable terms, the outside authorities also paid for the islanders' rescuing services.

To suppress arbitrary appropriation of tax rice and other high-handed behavior on the part of Hachijō officials, customary rules became established regarding the handling of castaways. In 1774, a new regulation on the dealing with castaways made clear that:

> if a vessel with shogunal tax rice arrives, … the load shall be taken ashore and must be guarded day and night by workers and the shipwrecked captain and crew. They shall cautiously lock up the goods and the circumstances of the shipwreck shall be written down … Two crew members shall assist the local magistrate with recording the incident and reporting it to the incumbent *daikan* to ask for instructions.[63]

If a boat sank after the merchandise was brought ashore, one-tenth of its load migrated into the possession of the island's administration. If the ship could be saved, it was one-twelfth of the merchandise, and if a vessel sank in the harbor after the crew was rescued, what could be recovered belonged to the island. In the best case for the islanders, a boat would be stranded without a surviving crew, so that both boat and merchandise belonged to the island.[64] By stipulating explicit rules, the shogunate tied the local magistrates more closely to its trusted representative, the shogunal intendant of Shimoda on the Izu peninsula.

Similar rules also applied to locations north of the Kuroshio. On the western coast of the Izu peninsula, so much cargo drifted ashore that rules were promulgated stipulating that cargo discoveries had to be reported on public panels and had to remain displayed for six months before the goods were cleared. If the owner was found, the finder obtained one-twentieth of the cargo's value, or one-tenth if the cargo was recovered from below the surface. If no owner could be identified, the entire value of the cargo was granted to the finder. In secluded villages, this regulation was often disregarded by local magistrates, who shared an interest with the population in keeping matters local and discrete. There are records of several instances in which irregularities were discovered by higher authorities and led to disciplinary punishment of local officials.[65]

[62] The gold *ryō* was one of the basic currency units, weighing approximately 18 grams in gold. Kaempfer, *Kaempfer's Japan*, 1999 [1727], 445. The above prices are calculated based on Tokyo-to ed., *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*, 1964, 157–58.
[63] Cit. in: Tokyo-to ed., *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*, 1964, 160.
[64] Igawa, "Kinsei," 1973, 208–09. Tokyo-to ed., *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*, 1964, 157.
[65] Nakada, *Izu to kuroshio no michi*, 2001, 53–55.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

In Hachijō, as well, the appropriation of drifter's cargo remained a delicate affair. In 1804, the officials under local magistrate Kikuchi Sanai and his aide decided to confiscate the rice cargo of a stranded vessel owned by a daimyo of Dewa province, to distribute it among the population. Both magistrates were arrested and died under unknown circumstances. In accordance with their attributed status as magistrates, they were sentenced posthumously to exile on a distant island, and their families were expropriated. Other members of landowning families were also forced to pay a penalty.[66] This purge, directed collectively at the island's ruling elite, suggests that the local magistrates had misjudged the tolerance of the authorities, based perhaps on previous, inconsequential appropriations. The number of unreported incidents remains hard to determine. For example, most records are missing between the 1740s and the 1760s, the years when the worst famines in the island's history occurred – with the exception, of course, of the high-profile incident with captain Gao's junk.[67]

## The Surging Tide of Pacific Traffic

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Japanese and Chinese castaways were no longer the only foreigners coming ashore in Hachijō. On his trip to the island in 1796, the shogunal inspector Mikawaguchi Terumasa learned that in recent years, foreigners from Christian countries had steered to the islands to stock fresh water. As Furukawa Koshōken recounts of one incident:

> Necessarily every twenty to thirty years, a foreign ship drifts to the island, most often to refill fresh water. Even though they don't understand [the foreigners'] language, the islanders apprehend [their intent] and offer water. In return, [the foreigners] give them cotton cloth with patterns; then they wait for wind and sail back. There are three dolls they say they received one year from a barbarian vessel. Those [dolls] are very skillfully carved. One among the three is in the shape of a woman holding a child, looking like a newborn. It could be understood as a Kannon, about 7 *sun* [21 cm] in length. Since pagodite or peach stone is very precious if carved well, this must be a great treasure. One can imagine that its value in rice must be more than one *koku*. Someone well-versed examined it to gift it to the Lord of Mito, but they concluded that it must be the idol of the Jesus sect called "Deus." The one that brought this and left must have been a ship from a country of the Jesus sect. It happens often that one can see all of them hoisting their sails to the south of Hachijō.[68]

[66] Tokyo-to ed., *Edojidai no Hachijōjima*, 1964, 161–62.
[67] Ibid., 159.
[68] *Hachijō hikki*, in: WUL, p. 15.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

As the inhabitants of Hachijō had noticed, by the close of the eighteenth century, traffic in the Pacific was intensifying. Despite the shogunate's stubborn rejection of new relations with Western governments, some foreign vessels approached the island freely and without leaving traces in the official record.

If a ship was not stranded in the stricter sense, there were no castaways to repatriate and thus all involved parties avoided complications by refraining from contacting outside authorities. This nonchalance is also inherent in Mikawaguchi's remark that "a few years ago, when a barbarian vessel landed in distress to refill water, [the sailors] pointed south to the gesture of receiving water, therefore it is believed that there are inhabited islands out there."[69] Before the political and economic reforms of the Kansei era (1789–1801), that occurred in a climate of anxiety about the increasing presence of Russian vessels approaching by way of the Sea of Okhotsk, such irregularities could have been shrugged off as an open secret. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, however, Japan found itself amidst a shifting geopolitical situation. Scientific explorations began swarming around Japan in search of geographical intelligence.

While Jean-François de La Pérouse reached Sakhalin at the order of the French king Louis XVI, the Japanese explorer Mamiya Rinzō followed the Amur river into Siberia to return with the most detailed map that had been drawn of the region at that time. Several expeditions, including James King's (1779) and William Robert Broughton's (1796) explored Japan's maritime environs and were most likely discovered by its coast guards.[70] The Russian vessels that appeared first in the Sea of Okhotsk and later in the harbor of Nagasaki inspired Hayashi Shihei to call for a maritime defense that involved incorporating the archipelago's peripheries more systematically, while others, like the regent Matsudaira Sadanobu upheld frugal, Neo-Confucian ideas of austerity and reforms from within.[71] The Russian explorer Adam Johann von Krusenstern, again, sailed to the Izu islands in 1804 in search of the maritime currents he believed could accelerate travel from Japan's economic centers to Kamchatka and Russian North America.[72] Promptly in the following year, 1805, forty cannons and thirty-three halberds were sent to Hachijō to reinforce the maritime outpost, just months ahead of the first

[69] Ibid.
[70] Kawai, *Kuroshio sōgū to ninchi no rekishi*, 1997, 200–13.
[71] Hayashi Shihei's *Kaikoku heidan*, published in 1791, stands representative for emerging calls for stronger maritime defense along the Japanese coast in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. *Kaikoku heidan*, in: Lederer, "Preface," 2003.
[72] Kawai, "A Brief History of Recognition," 1998, 548–49; cit. on p. 552.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

1806 "Law on Water and Fuel Provisions" toward foreign vessels.[73] The rising tides of Pacific traffic had reached the archipelago's maritime periphery, and with it, spurred the shogunate's attempts to tighten its control over the outlying islands.

## Conclusion

But what happened to captain Gao and his crew who were stranded in Hachijō in 1753? The detailed paper trail the incident created illustrates how the incident set in motion a bureaucratic machinery that involved the highest level of government. Four months after captain Gao's crew had come ashore, the spring winds finally allowed the dispatch of an envoy to the Shimoda *daikan* on the Izu peninsula, who again forwarded the case to the Senior Council in Edo. It was claimed that hosting the castaways in Hachijō had cost the islanders no less than 83 bales of rice, and during the incident's first days, 450 men on 10 boats, as well as 65 oxen, were busy salvaging the battered vessel's cargo. Over the four months until the envoy's dispatch, 33 boats, 618 oxen, and 5,481 men were claimed to have worked for the wellbeing of the castaways – fantastic numbers considering that the previous year's census had given a population of only 4,683.[74] The shogun in person ruled that the castaways ought to be relocated to Shimoda for further investigations. Those instructions reached Hachijō in the fifth month, along with eleven vessels weighed down with shipments of rice, millet, soy sauce, and oil to compensate the islanders for their claimed expenses. After a stay of another month in the harbor of Shimoda, mostly aboard the ships, the castaways were sent to Nagasaki on the sea route, where they were allowed to sell their remaining cargo and return to China.[75] In absence of formal relations with the Qing empire, the shogunate relied on a standard procedure to repatriate Chinese castaways by way of Nagasaki, where the men were reunited with the Chinese trading community and repatriated on private vessels.

For the islanders of Hachijō, the incident certainly concluded with material and virtual gains. The long history of domestic and international encounters in the Kuroshio's tides illustrates how the remote island was embedded in a fluid geography that connected Hachijō's historical identity to distant shores. The high level of experience and place-specific

[73] Tōkyō-to Hachijō-cho ed., *Hachijō tōshi*, 1973, 211. *Kokushi daijiten*, keyword "Shinsui kyūyo rei." This law is not to be confused with the "Shinsui kyūyo rei" of 1842, which was issued in response to the first Opium War in China.
[74] Ōba, *Hyōchakusen monogatari*, 2001, 24–26; Igawa, "Kinsei," 1973, 173.
[75] Ōba, *Hōreki sannen Hachijōjima*, 1980, 455–57.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004

navigational know-how necessary to cross the current represented a strategic advantage for local authorities in negotiating the scope of their autonomy. In their maritime seclusion, reinforced legally due to their islands' function as a penal colony, Hachijō islanders affirmed their cultural and geographical identity through cultural kinship and informal diplomacy with drifters in the Kuroshio, and through the veneration of sacred objects recovered from the current. But Hachijō was also a bitterly poor island frequently afflicted by famines and epidemics. In this environment of blurred state control and environmental deprivation, local elites turned the virtually constant influx of castaways and cargo into an integral part of the island's economy.

As Chapter 3 will discuss in more detail, by the turn of the nineteenth century, geopolitical debates among urban intellectuals sparked a growing interest in Hachijō as a gateway to the rapidly transforming Pacific world. Starting in the 1860s, Hachijō provided the settlers for the shogunate's colonial venture to the Bonin Islands, and in the Meiji period, it became a central nod in the network of business, labor, and know-how that enmeshed island colonies beyond the Kuroshio. In other words, by the late nineteenth century, Hachijō had turned from an imagined gateway to the oceanic realm into a logistical transit node between the metropole and its pelagic empire.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:57:41, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009534611.004