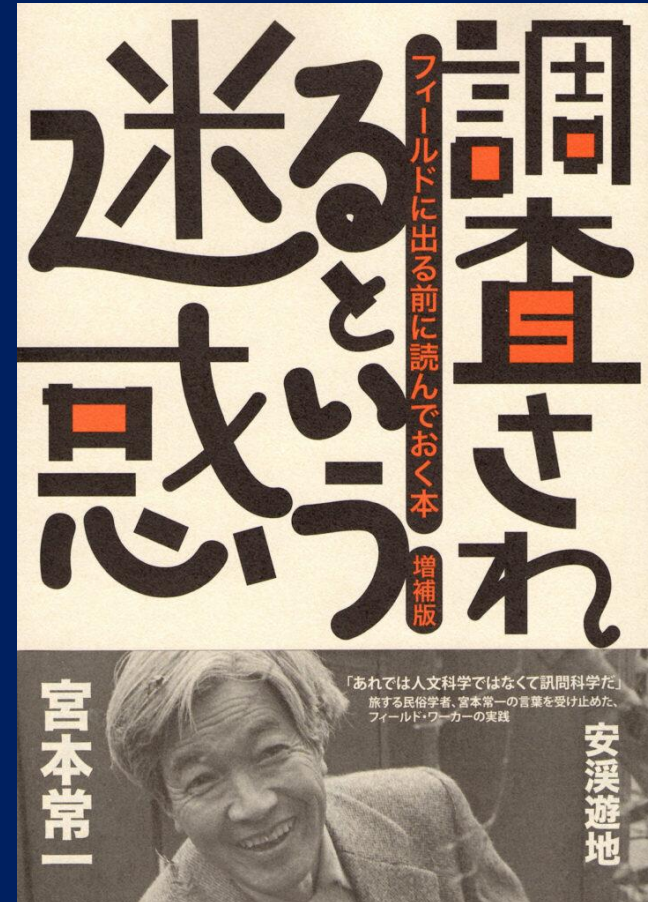


**Co-Creating Historical
Narratives on Yonaguni Island:
Silence, Ethics, and Art in the
Interchange
with Taiwan and Jeju peoples**

**Takako ANKEI, Yuji ANKEI
& Wakaranko as the co-creator**

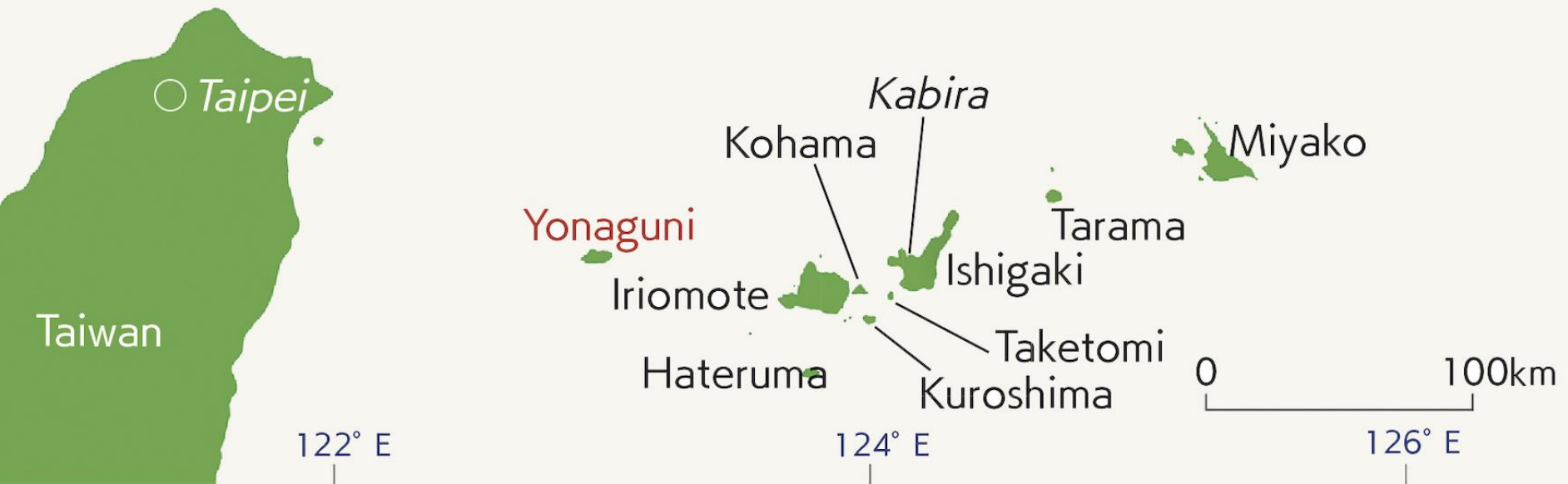
Our principle of island ethnography: **narrators as authors, researchers as editors, never extractors**



Ethnography on abandoned villages in
Iriomote Isl. (1984, 1986, 1990)

MIYAMOTO T. & ANKEI
Y. (2024) The bother of
being researched 2nd ed.
(Mizunowa Publ.)

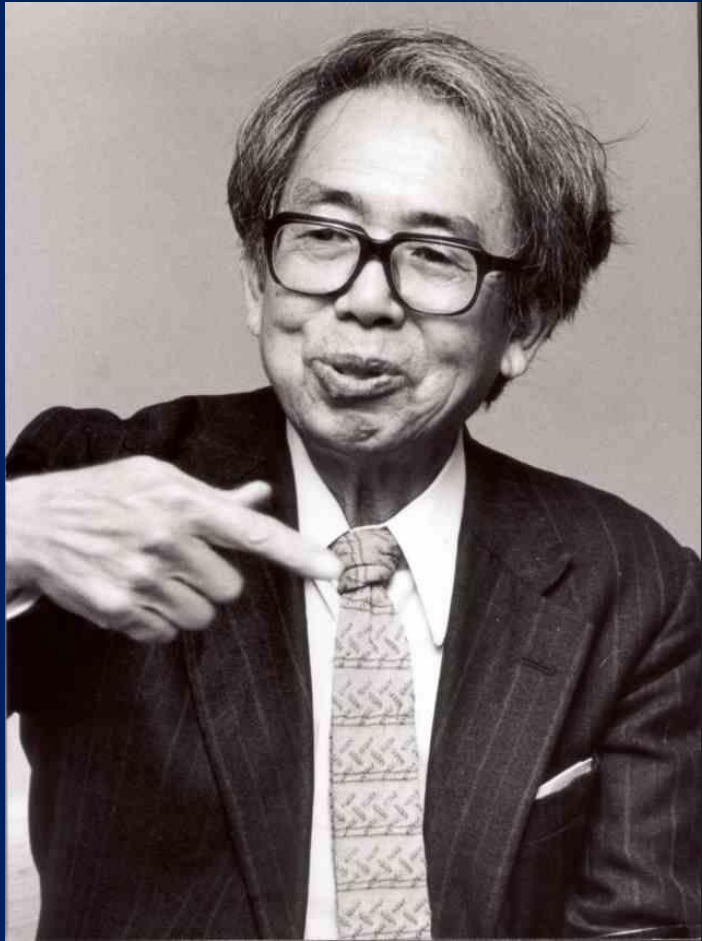
Taiwan (1895–1945, Japan's colony), Yaeyama & Miyako



Our studies: The most ancient rice varieties of Yaeyama were identical with those from Taiwan mountainous regions and southern islands (Ankei, Y. Ankei, T. et al. 2007*).

*安溪遊地・安溪貴子他著(2007)
『西表島の農耕文化』法政大学出版局

“One issue that preoccupies me day and night is the relationship between Taiwan and the Sakishima (Miyako & Yaeyama) Islands in the southern Ryukyu.” (KOKUBU Naoichi 1981: 63)



國分直一 (1908-2005)



Islandscapes of Yonaguni © T.Ankei 2025



Strange oral traditions so detached from reality.

MABUCHI Tōichi
(1974: 500–501)
stated: “It is
quite strange
that, on
Yonaguni...the
oral traditions
regarding with
Taiwan seem so
detached from
reality.” (『馬淵東
一著作集. 第1巻』社
会思想社、東京)



Mabuchi, 20 years old, with Yami children
in 1929. Wikipedia: National Taiwan
University Library

Taiwan seen from Yonaguni Island

(© Yonaguni Town Board of Education)

Visible only several times a year.



Yonaguni Island seen from Taiwan

Taipei Times 台北時報, Aug 15, 2022

Japan's Yonaguni Island is pictured in a photograph taken by a man surnamed Lee from the Wuyan Cape in Yilan County's Suao Township on Aug 6.

Photo courtesy of Lee

In the Yonaguni legend recorded by SASAMORI
Gisuke (1894)*, Taiwan had been **an island of
cannibals**, and **no drifting to Taiwan** took place
(Giants' sandal to frighten them reproduced in the airport)



*笹森儀助『南嶋探験』

© CHUN Kyung-soo, 2009

Method: Narrator-led remote co-creation of illustrated ethnography: A 36-year collaboration with Ms. Wakaranko (1954–2025)

A weaving-dyeing artist and self-taught folklorist born on Yonaguni

Since she was **two years old**, she had been made to memorize the oral history of the island.

She **memorized each version of narratives like a short movie**: she had a kind of Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory (HSAM, LePort et al. 2012).



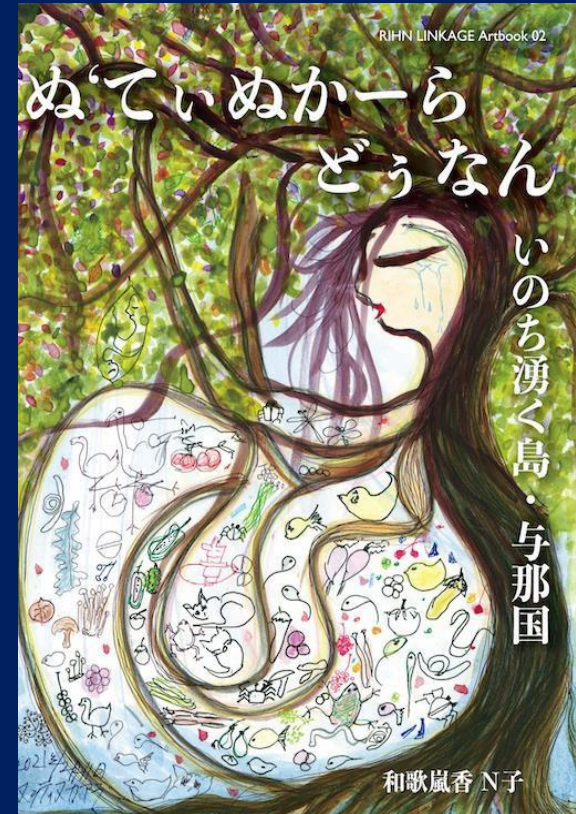
Wakaranko in her spring prayer
2021, © NAKASHIMA Hiromi

Doi: [10.1016/j.nlm.2012.05.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nlm.2012.05.002)

Forced silence and how she broke it with us, lifting burdens of having different memories from others

As a student, she was beaten and suffered broken bones for continuing to speak the Yonaguni language for defying the orders banning its use. In tears, her teacher urged her, “You will fulfill Chiri Yukie (知里幸恵)’s unaccomplished dream.” She died at the age of 19 while trying to record and preserve the literature of the Ainu.”

Local historians, ignorant of the oral history, accused her of fabricating the legends, which were not found in their books, and even burnt her notebooks.



Wakaranko's
illustrated
autobiography
(2023)

UNESCO-designated
Yonaguni language
with Japanese
translation.

Three men came
from a land
different from
Japan, China,
Europe, Taiwan or
Lan-yu (Botel
Tobago). Hence
they were named
Fuganutu, "men
from elsewhere"

フガヌト^フのほなし^ノ NO1 1回
シカチ^シ シカチ^シ シーランカチ^シ イヤヌ^イ マンブ^マシ^シア^ア
バガラヌ^バ シーランカチ^シ マ^マ
シヌ^シ チヌ^チ ト^トレ^レア^ア バガラヌ^バ ト^トウ^ウニ^ニア^アシ^シヌ^ヌト^トヌ^ヌ
ビシ^ビガ^ガシ^シ チ^チヌ^ヌ ス^スニ^ニア^ア シ^シヌ^ヌト^トヌ^ヌ
ダ^ダマ^マト^トヌ^ヌ ア^アラ^ラヌ^ヌ ト^トレ^レア^アヌ^ヌ ト^トラ^ラシ^シダ^ダア^アヌ^ヌ
タイ^{タイ}ワ^ワル^ル ア^アラ^ラヌ^ヌ コ^コト^トニ^ニア^アラ^ラヌ^ヌ
ウ^ウニ^ニビ^ビ マ^マ フ^フガ^ガヌ^ヌト^ト シ^シテ^テア^アヌ^ヌ
シ^シテ^テア^アヌ^ヌ ト^トラ^ラシ^シト^トヌ^ヌ フ^フガ^ガヌ^ヌト^ト シ^シテ^テア^アヌ^ヌ
フ^フガ^ガヌ^ヌト^ト シ^シテ^テア^アヌ^ヌ

Oral history of three (Jeju) drifters corresponding to the

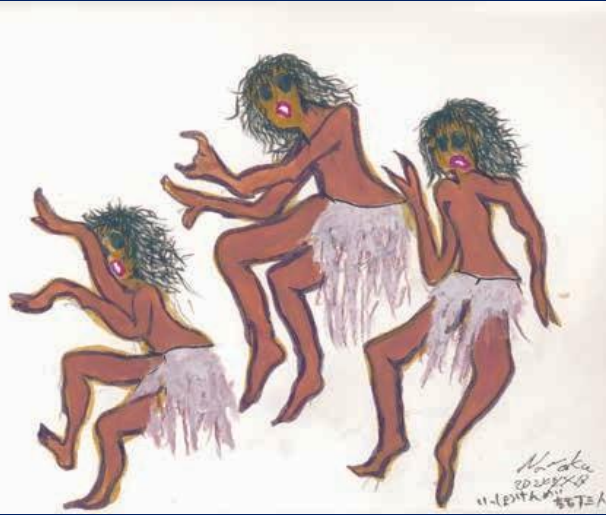
Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty (1479)

濟州人金非乙介姜茂李正

馬島留二朔今年四月初九日發船今五月初三日到鹽浦○
壬申 御經筵○日本國三河守源弘安遣 來獻土宜○下
書于濟州牧差官南季宜曰濟州人金非乙介姜茂李正玄世
守李青家金得山梁成石伊曹惟奉等去丁酉年二月賣捧
上柑子被船出來遭風漂流玄世守李青密金得山梁成石伊
曹怪奉等溺死金非乙介姜茂李正到琉球國隨本國使臣今
五月初三日到鹽浦其知會生還人本家物故玄世守李青密金
得山梁成石伊曹惟奉家各施恤典○癸酉 受常參視雪○
刑曹三覆啓典獄囚青坡驛于姜得敏毆殺仇叱同罪全羅道
旌義囚良人宋南毆殺良人高正罪南原因良人金水明毆殺
金水生罪並律該絞時絞城囚白丁朴夫奇黃莫同竊叱莊
劫寺僧強奪衣服罪律該斬不待時妻子係續錄永屬所在官
如婢並 從之○御經筵○傳旨戶曹曰古者邊卒且耕且戍
故地無遺利兵有餘食而邊禦自實見今大典載官屯田主鎮
二十結巨鎮十結諸鎮五結而各鎮屯田多不准或有全無者

非古也其令觀察使諸鎮角聲及聞慶空閑田地准數刷給
以充屯田且耕且戍以實邊禦○御夕講講論語至于曰論萬
是與君子者乎色莊者乎 上曰君子小人何以別乎侍讀官
李世建對曰莊與其行乎而觀之則可知矣檢討官曹偉啓曰
子曰視其所以視其所由察其所安人焉廋哉又一日始吾於人
人也聽其言而信其行今吾於人也聽其言而觀其行此言
足以別君子小人矣 上曰然○甲戌 賜丁酉以後文武科
重初試恩榮宴于議政府都承旨洪貴達左承旨金升卿貴宣
醢往焉○乙亥 御經筵○日本國一歧州上松浦 松
林院源實次把前州上松浦鴨打源水實泉等住持祐源位對
馬州太守宗貞國越中守宗盛弘橋氏立石右京亮西長護軍
井可文助藤原職家遣人來獻土宜○大王大妃傳于承政院
曰大殿寢殿卑濕汚壞人主一身所係至重子將移御壽康
宮請 大殿移御上殿其論此意于政丞等○傳曰 大王大
妃今欲移御壽康宮然壽康宮亦阨陋難居況 母后欲移御

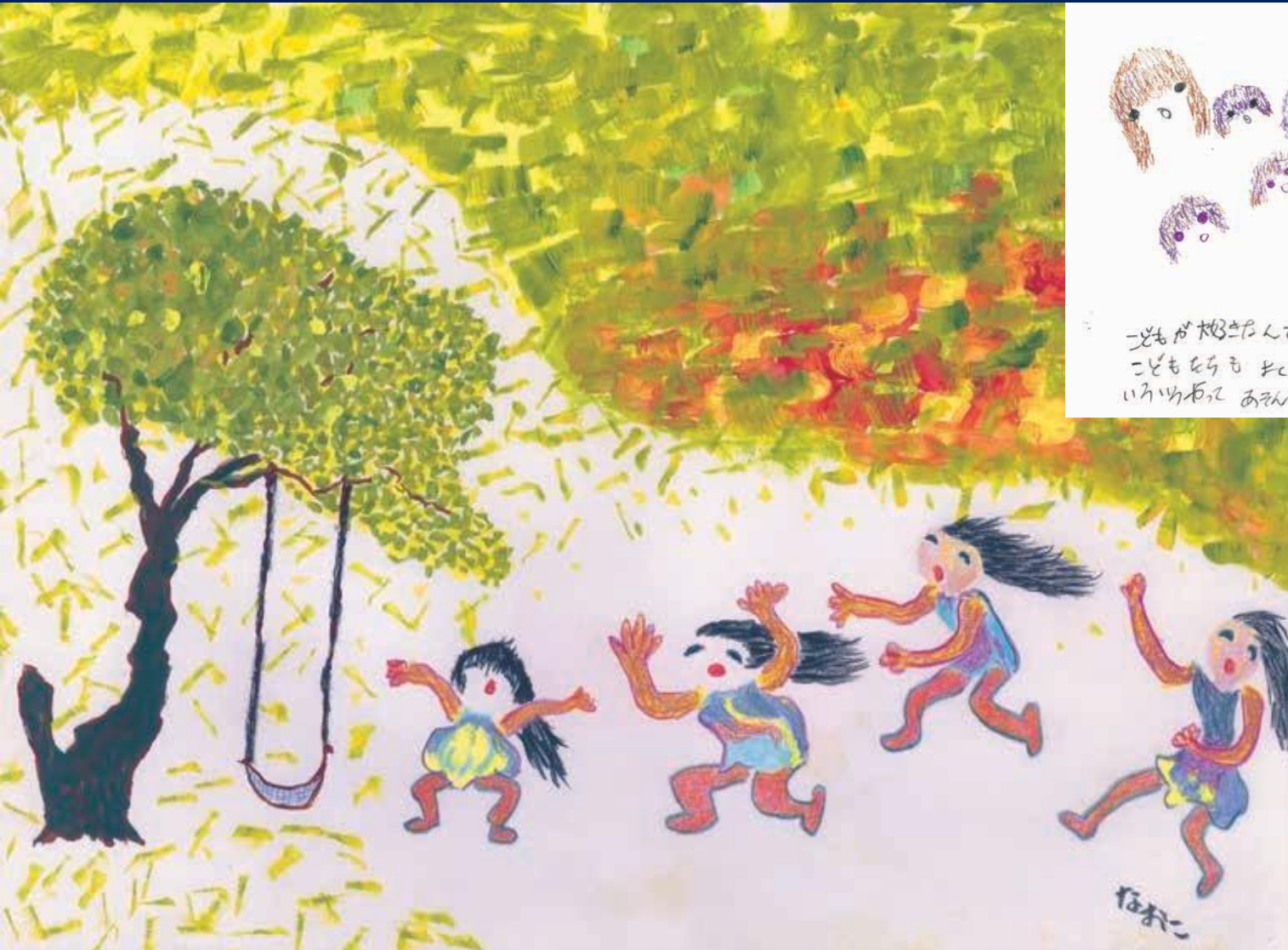
The antiquity and authenticity of Wakaranko's narratives



Her narratives of ancient drifters matched Veritable Records of Joseon Dynasty of the **Jeju drifters in 1477** down to the last detail.

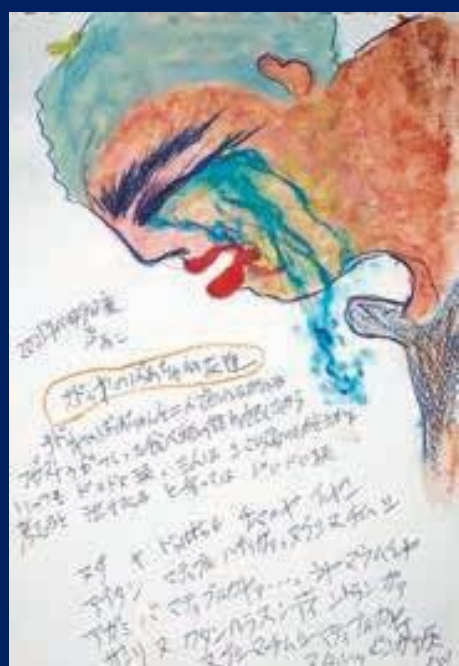


They were kind and wise, and **left behind countless innovations** that improved life on the island.



Their **sitting posture** was different from locals.

Elders of Yonaguni Island narrating in deep sympathy



At the age of two and a half, elders chose her as a future *Mutukkahamai*, a shaman in charge of weather and food.

Memorizing oral histories was a part of her on-the-job training to be a *Mutukkahamai*.

Wakaranko's oral history

1. The era of the
founders from Taiwan
(4,500 years ago?)

Wakaranko: The first settlers to the island were Taiwan indigenous peoples.

Long long ago, the indigenous peoples of Taiwan spotted an island in the eastern sea. Various ethnic groups joined to plan a migration to the island (Yonaguni). They failed many times, but finally succeeded. An elder even told the others that if they ran out of food along the way, they should consume his own flesh.

They first settlers lived in caves, such as *Bunada-abu*. The island had little vegetation. So, the people gradually brought various plants from their home.

This legend was regarded as “extremely inconvenient” just before Okinawa’s return from the US to Japan in 1972.

The earliest Tuguru-hama site (●104) is estimated to date back 4,500 years. The axes were made from stone sourced from Ishigaki and Iriomote Islands. All the other sites are later than 13th century.



Wakaranko: Rice seeds were first brought by *Unnaga-nu-duci*, the “friends at sea.”

Rice seeds came from southern islands.

After the harvest of rice we set small bundles adrift on the southern sea as a token of gratitude to the land where the rice originated.

We planted them in dry fields on the hills, and later in wet fields. In both places, we planted once and harvested twice.

Wakaranko's oral history

2. The Era of *Muranuuya*, an old woman who governed as a secular and religious leader of the island with her subordinate women.

(A *Muranuuya* welcomed the Jeju drifters in 1477).

The methods of barter trade with Taiwan

- Trade between Yonaguni Island and Taiwan took place **at sea**, without the ships ever landing.
- When multiple boats were out at sea, they **hoisted flags** to distinguish themselves from one another.
- It was easier to spot each other **at night** than during the day.

Barter items from Yonaguni to Taiwan

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1 Foxtail millet | 5 Banana fibre taught by <i>Fuganutu</i> |
| 2 Sun dried salt | (drifters from Jeju island) |
| 3 Salted fish | |
| 4 Fermented rice paste | |

From Taiwan, Wakaranko once saw and touched a silver ingot of the size of a new-born baby's head.



Barter with Southern Island(s)

- There was also trade with islands south of Taiwan (including today's Lanyu).
- While the products varied from island to island, dry sweet fruits (longan?) were brought from Lanyu.
- Wakaranko saw a necklace obtained through trade with the southern islands.



Aggressive Taiwanese in *Fuganutu* Legend

One night, the villagers captured some suspicious men in the dark, who turned out to be Taiwanese who had tried to kill the drifters and rob of their belongings. They were expelled from the island with the warning, “Don’ t ever come back.”

Muranuuya considered whether to send the drifters to Iriomote Island or Taiwan, and ultimately chose to avoid Taiwan—where food was plentiful but there was a risk of attack.

Wakaranko's oral history

3. The Era of Extractors:
the rule and poll (capitation)
tax of the Ryukyu Kingdom
(1637–1902).

“People in Ishigaki are suffering from forced labor from the King’s officials”: News of Yaeyama’s defeat in 1500 arrived at Yonaguni from *the 'friends on the sea.'*

Oyakeakahachi of Ohama, Ishigaki (～1500) King Shoshin 尚真王 (1465-1527)



絵 宮城厚

Pretend to be too sick and old to work: Peaceful disobedience by the woman leader, *Muranuuya*, to make people ready for the King's invasion and rule.



Corresponds to 1500-1522 period.

1. Divide each family to survive attacks.
2. Have each family's secret deposit.
3. The old should not work outdoors.
4. The old should stay in bed when officials come.
5. Go to bed even for slightest sickness.
6. Prepare bed-side drugs for the sick.
7. Every girl, pretend to have a fiancé.
8. Prevent children from overhearing adults' conversations.

Torture during the time of poll tax
in Taketomi Island
©CHUN Kyung-soo

Yonaguni was notorious for laziness and unpaid taxes, during the time of poll (capitation) tax system.

In response to Sasamori's inquiry, local officials explained that two years' worth of local taxes and savings had gone unpaid, due to poor harvests and the sinking of two ships loaded with rice.

Since long before the Meiji era, Yonaguni Island was notorious for its tax delinquency. The inspectors dispatched from the Ryukyu Kingdom to the Yaeyama Islands would always berate the officials on Ishigaki Island for failing to adequately supervise the residents of Yonaguni Island.

People claimed they had **no relationship with Taiwan**, an island of cannibals (Sasamori 1894)

During Sasamori Gisuke's expedition to the southern islands in 1893, he inquired about the local people's relationship with Taiwan. Although there had been instances of people drifting ashore on the Chinese mainland, none had ever washed up on Taiwan. Furthermore, since there was a legend that men and women who had washed ashore in Taiwan long ago had been captured and eaten, the locals replied that they made large straw sandals and set them adrift during festivals to make the island appear to be inhabited by giants, thereby deterring cannibals.

Yonaguni people escaped the exploitation from the Kings from 1500 until 1903, when the poll tax ended

Watch out ships from the East. Alert their arrivals on horseback.
Load hidden goods (crops and saké) onto the boats and set sail.
Head for the shared fishing waters between Yonaguni & Taiwan.
Hoist a white flag (for rescue) and a red flag (for emergency).

“Friends at sea” would come to our aid with food and fire.

Joining the boats together, and a banquet began on the sea.

This banquet ended when news of officials’ return arrived.
The island officials, having received bribes, closed their eyes.
(Wakaranko)

The size of a rice bundle was twice larger in Yonaguni to the
end of pretending to have only a half of the average yield of
Yaeyama (Ankei, Y. 2007).

Outesiders have long been fooled:

Four dimensions of Yonaguni island narratives

narratives	from inside	from outside
to inside	Taiwanese as the first settlers and enduring trade partners. (Wakaranko)	Work harder to pay due taxes. (Ryukyu King's officials, 18–19th century)
to outside	Unpaid taxes. "No relationship with Taiwanese cannibals." (Sasamori 1894)	Peaceful and caring people (Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty 1479)

The **resilience** and **fragility** of oral traditions: Reflections on the attitudes of researchers involved.

Wakaranko shared with us many oral traditions—including taboos such as “Don’t speak to travelers” and “You must **never speak of this until you die**”—placing her trust in us. These oral histories have been saved from the brink of being lost forever with her passing. We plan to return them to the local community, accompanied by numerous illustrations.

Returning the oral history with illustrations on the peaceful friendship to local communities

