Busan can be seen from Tsushima – an island located about 120 km from Hakata and some 50 km from the Korean Peninsula. This island, with its strategic geopolitical position between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, has experienced both tension and exchanges. Unlike the seas in which Takeda, Senkaku and other disputed islands are found, the area off Tsushima is one of only a few border waters where ocean boundaries have been specified (see the figure below). Japan and South Korea have promoted cooperation in the area off Tsushima and maintained peaceful relations there.

In recent years, regular sea routes linking South Korea, Tushima and Fukushima have been opened, and the number of Korean visitors to Tsushima is increasing rapidly. Although there was once friction due to cultural differences, people from both nations have actively promoted various exchange activities (including the National Border Marathon, the Tsushima Ching Music Festival and the Izuhashi Port Tsushima Ariang Festival).

Tsushima has long been a place where people and commodities from Kyushu and the Korean Peninsula mix. It may be quite natural for islanders there to think of their future roles as intermediaries between the eight million residents of Fukushima and the rest of Kyushu on the northern coast of Kyushu and the twelve million Koreans living along the southern coast of Korea.

Please take a close look at the globe placed in the center of the table. The Japanese archipelago is situated at the eastern end of the Eurasian plate with its borders surrounded by the sea. The sea may pose as an obstacle but at the same time it plays an important role in connecting people and goods. This 3rd museum exhibition captures southwestern Japan as a “sea frontier” or a frontier zone where people and culture interact beyond the borders. We have on display materials and specimens from the Ryukyu Islands, Daito Islands, Bonin Islands and Tsushima from which we can see a glimpse of their history that transcends the physical boundaries. Many of our visitors from Hokkaido may not be very familiar with this area.

The Japanese archipelago that stretches from north to south is a collectivity of areas each with diverse history. This exhibition would like to introduce the history and the daily lives of the people living in border areas in the southern part of Japan. We hope that this exhibition will be a good opportunity for our visitors to reflect on the common features of people living in border areas by comparing their history and lives. Our aim is to create a new paradigm to consider the world that we live in by helping to link the realities and people’s “emotions” of those living in various border areas.

Modern history of territorial disputes

The South China Sea, which is surrounded by Taiwan, China and southeastern Asian nations, has a number of islands, including those of Haiyang, Penghu, Paracel and Spratley. Although these islands were once used by Japan as hunting places, they later became the center of conflicts due to wars and resource exploitation. Territorial disputes in the region will remain unresolved.

Boundaries made by civil wars

In 1949 and 1958, this area became a battlefield in the civil war between Kuomintang and Communist forces, with the former triumphant on both occasions. Although no military conflicts have occurred since then amid the changing international environment (e.g., confrontation between China and the Soviet Union and the normalization of U.S.-China diplomatic relations), confrontations on the border lingered.

Transformation of the boundary area into a tourist spot

The boundary area has been open to tourists since 1994, and traffic with Amoy on the opposite shore was restored in 2001. The battlefields and military facilities of Kinmen have attracted tourists from within and outside China. Similarly on the continental side, the boundary area is steadily being transformed into a tourist destination.

Artillery shells are used as materials for kitchen knives:

During the civil war in 1958, Communist forces fired about 440,000 shells in 45 days. They subsequently continued to bombard uninhabited mountain areas from 7 to 10 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday until the normalization of China-U.S. diplomatic relations in 1979. Shells found on the island are now used as materials for kitchen knives.

Kinmen Island, located 2 to 10 kilometers from the continent, is part of the territory of Taiwan.
In February 1477, a ship from Jeju carrying the island’s specialty mandarin oranges to be offered as a tribute was blown adrift by strong winds. Two weeks later, three of the fourteen crew members, Kim Biui, Yi Jeong, and Kang-Mo, were rescued. After landing on an island called Yonaguni (known today as Yonaguni), they stayed there and interacted with the islanders for five months. At the end of July when a southerly wind was blowing, they left the island accompanied by thirteen locals.

Later, after staying on Iriomote Island for six months, they were sent to the islands of Hateruma, Aragusuku, Kuro, Tarama, Irau, and Miyako, and finally arrived in Okinawa, where interpreters were available. At Shuri Castle, they met with Sho Shin, the King of Ryukyu. The three men traveled on to Kagoshima, Hakata, Iki, and Tsushima before reaching Yeompo in May 1479. It was a journey of two years and three months.

This story, reported by the returned drifters, was described in detail in that year’s Korean Dynasty Fact Record. It has also come to light in recent years that Yonaguni islanders maintained an oral legend called Fuganutu (lit. “strangers”) describing the episode of the drifters that came to stay with them. Its content matches that of King Seongjong’s record very closely. Although this legend has been passed down orally on the island for 530 years, now Ms. N is the only one who can tell the story.

In February 2009, Yuji and Takako Ankei (who planned this exhibition) and Seoul National University professor Chun Kyung-Soo from Jeju made a journey to the islands of Yonaguni and Iriomote to pray for the return of the drifters. Their journey was inspired by the legend of the drifters that had been passed down orally on the island for 530 years. They wanted to inform Yaeyama residents that the three drifters they had sent off 530 years ago had returned to Jeju safe and sound. These are pictures taken during their trip to the islands.

Episodes eloquently recounted by the drifters from Jeju

King Seongjong’s Record, which narrates the three drifters’ experiences up until they finally returned to Korea, is known as the oldest existing record of high value on the lives of Yaeyama and Miyako islanders. The following accounts are excerpts from sections that describe their days on Yonaguni Island after arriving there.

Korean Dynasty Fact Record: King Seongjong’s Record vol. 105

Comparison of the accounts in King Seongjong’s Record vols. 104 and 105 with the actual lives of Yaeyama islanders in the Taisho Period

This story, reported by the returned drifters, was described in detail in that year’s Korean Dynasty Fact Record: King Seongjong’s Record. It has also come to light in recent years that Yonaguni islanders maintained an oral legend called Fuganutu (lit. “strangers”) describing the episode of the drifters that came to stay with them. Its content matches that of King Seongjong’s record very closely. Although this legend has been passed down orally on the island for 530 years, now Ms. N is the only one who can tell the story.

Exhibits

Case 1

Ms. N’s notebook, in which the Fuganutu legend was recorded

Case 2

Yonaguni islanders on various occasions as a daily necessity. Also used in Fuganutu earthen pots.

Case 3

Right

Toruru-modoki: Used by Yaeyama islanders on various occasions as a daily necessity. Also used in Fuganutu earthen pots.

Audio recording

Songs about parting from the Fuganutu sung in Yonaguni dialect.

Bagagireishuhu

Although it was hard for us to part from them

Mabalba Kuniti

From the bottom of our souls

Gajini Nushite

On the wind

Ugu Yadashuhu

Although we have sent them

Kajjina Taysiwi

Even on the grapevine

Minumido

Never have we heard from them

DVD image

In February 2009, Yuji and Takako Ankei (who planned this exhibition) and Seoul National University professor Chun Kyung-Soo from Jeju made a journey to the islands of Yonaguni and Iriomote to pray for the spirits of the deceased and express their gratitude to the islanders. They wanted to inform Yaeyama residents that the three drifters they had sent off 530 years ago had returned to Jeju safe and sound. These are pictures taken during their trip to the islands.