

The Senkaku Islands in pre-modern period

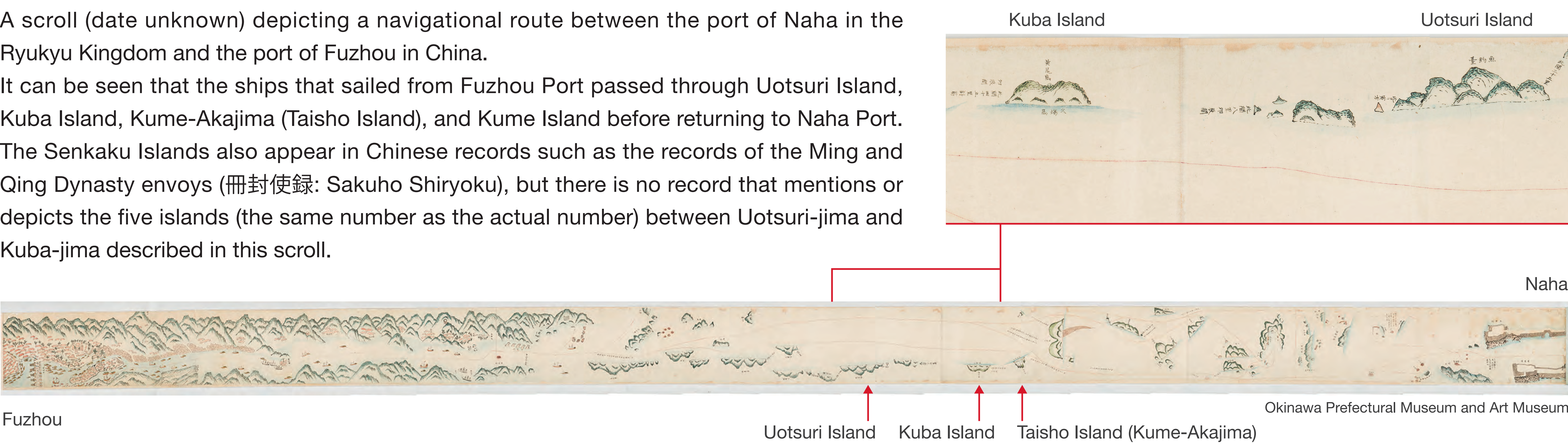
Senkaku Islands in pre-modern period – uninhabited islands ruled by no country –

Until they were incorporated into Okinawa Prefecture in 1895, the Senkaku Islands were uninhabited islands that belonged to no country. The Senkaku Islands were used as navigational markers for ships traveling in the East China Sea, and they were known from ancient times, appearing in documents and maps of the Ryukyu Kingdom (Figure 1). In addition, the Senkaku Islands are also depicted in the sailing route charts (generally referred to as “Asian sailing route charts”) of many of the 17th century Red Seal ships (Figure 2).

From the end of the 18th century, as Western ships began to explore and survey the waters around the Japanese archipelago, the Senkaku Islands were also sighted and surveyed by these ships (Figure 3). The Senkaku Islands are also mentioned in records of Chinese envoys to Ryukyu, and China has used this as a basis for its claim to sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, but this is not a valid argument.

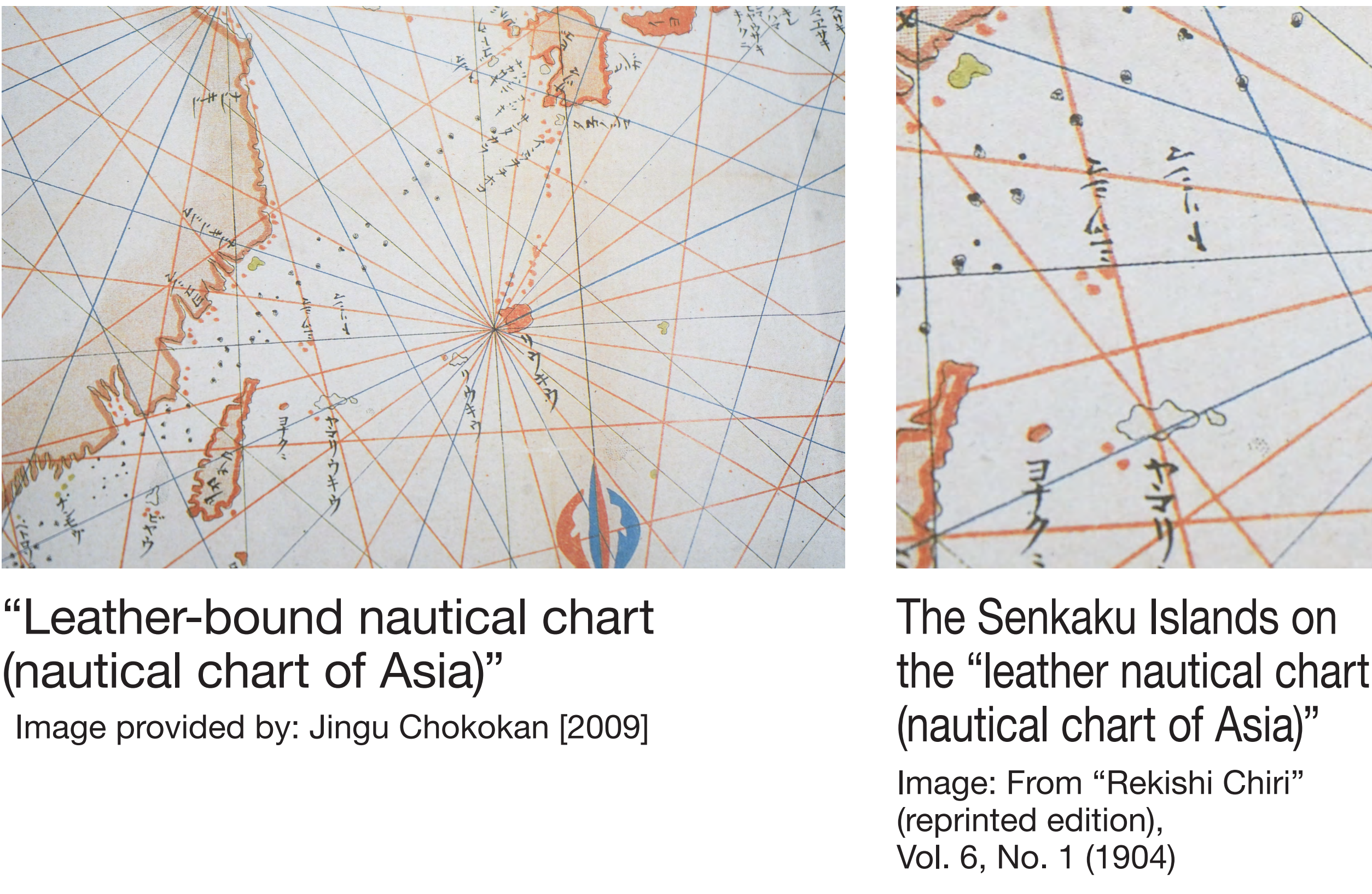
(Figure 1) Tobin Kokaizu [a scroll that depicts a navigation route between Naha Port in the Ryukyu Dynasty and Fuzhou Port in China] in the collection of Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum

A scroll (date unknown) depicting a navigational route between the port of Naha in the Ryukyu Kingdom and the port of Fuzhou in China. It can be seen that the ships that sailed from Fuzhou Port passed through Uotsuri Island, Kuba Island, Kume-Akajima (Taisho Island), and Kume Island before returning to Naha Port. The Senkaku Islands also appear in Chinese records such as the records of the Ming and Qing Dynasty envoys (冊封使録: Sakuho Shiryoku), but there is no record that mentions or depicts the five islands (the same number as the actual number) between Uotsuri-jima and Kuba-jima described in this scroll.



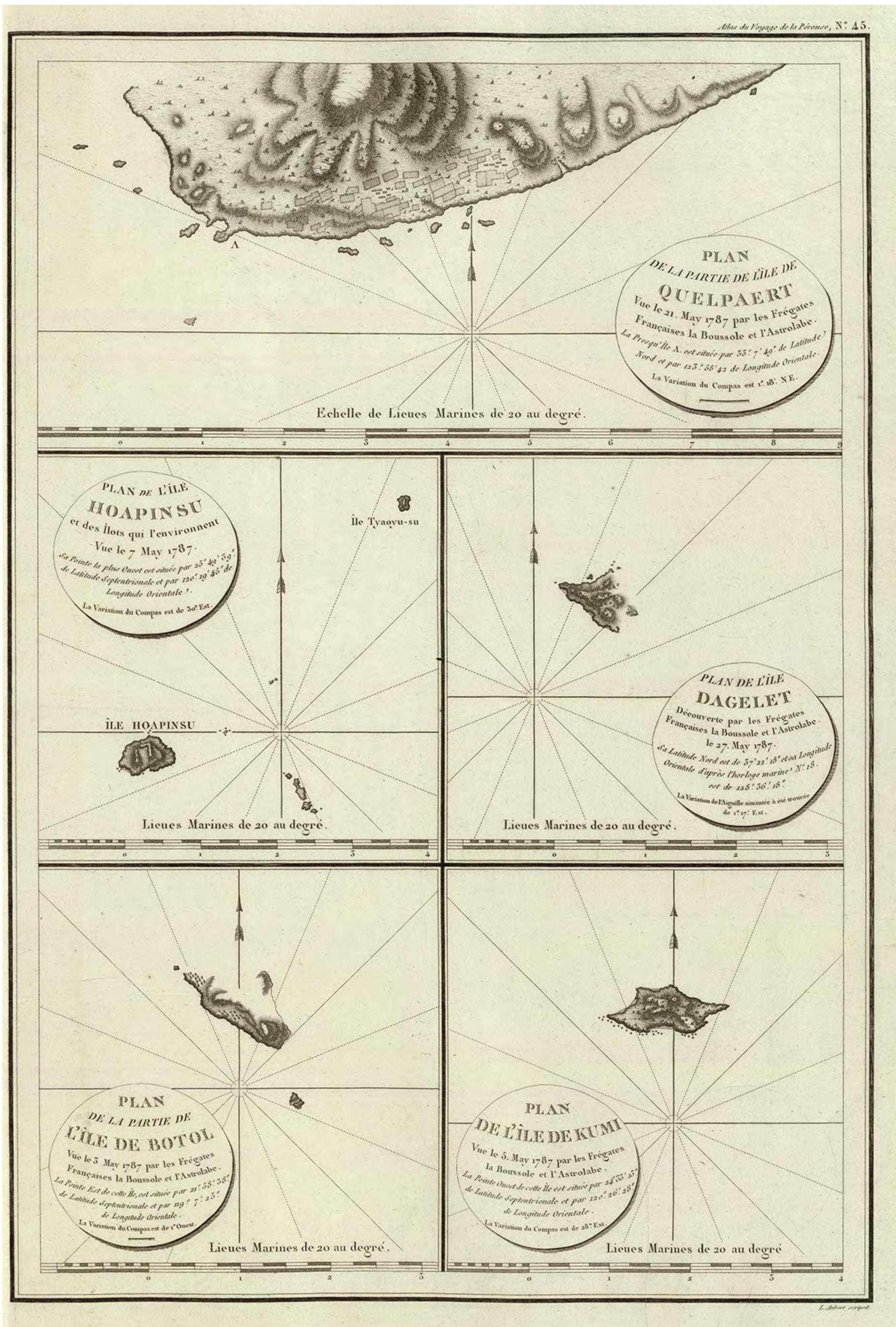
(Figure 2) “Leather-bound nautical chart (nautical chart of Asia)” in the collection of the Jingu Chokokan Museum

Shu-in-sen (Red Seal ships) were trading ships that were granted “shu-in-jo” (licenses bearing the Shogun's red seal) by the Edo Shogunate in the first half of the 17th century, and they made large profits from trading with various places in Southeast Asia. This map of voyages to Asia was owned by Kadoya Shichirobei, who was engaged in shu-in-sen trading, and after his death, it was sent back to Japan as one of his belongings. This is the only map of the shu-in-sen voyages with a clear history, and it has pinholes showing it was actually used. The Senkaku Islands are shown on this map as “Torishima” (islands of birds) and “Mitsushima” (three Islands), and it is thought that this is how the islands were called at the time. There are also many other maps of the shu-in-sen voyages from the same period that depict islands in the actual location of the Senkaku Islands.



(Figure 3) La Perouse: “Part of the Island of Quelpaert, Hoapinsu, Dagelet, Botol & Kumi.”

From the end of the 18th century, as Western ships began to explore and survey the waters around the Japanese archipelago, the Senkaku Islands were also sighted and surveyed by these ships. French explorer La Perouse observed the islands of the Senkaku Islands during his voyage in 1787, and recorded them on his nautical chart as Hoapinsu (Uotsuri Island) and Tyaoysu (Kuba Island), indicating their location by latitude and longitude. The names and locations he recorded were adopted by Western nautical charts and sailing directions, and in Japan, the Japanese translation of Hoapinsu, “Wahei-san” (和平山), became the alternative name for Uotsuri Island. In 1845, Captain Belcher of the British warship Samarang, which visited Ryukyu, saw Minamikojima and Kitakojima Islands and named them the Pinnacle Islands because of their pointed rocky peaks. This is the origin of the name Senkaku Islands.



La Perouse L ‘iles Quelpaert, Hoapinsu, Dagelet, Botol, Kumi.
Repository: David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries

The Senkaku Islands have been known to sailors from many countries for a long time. They were uninhabited islands that did not belong to any country. People only observed them during their voyage.

