

Some Observations on Cash Metals Shipped to China from the Ryūkyūs 1664–1874

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The monetary system in Qing period China was a bimetallic system in which silver bullion and copper cash constituted two parallel monetary standards.¹ As China was neither rich in silver nor in copper, the reality of that was that the raw material for cash minting depended on foreign sources. This fact has attracted considerable interest from various scholars. Richard von Glahn focused his research and analysis on the “age of silver” during the Ming and Qing dynasties up to the early eighteenth century, with a brief excursion into the late developments during the nineteenth century.² He proposed an alternative model for the understanding of international silver flows. Most importantly he placed the main emphasis on domestic demand rather than on foreign supply. Thus, he argued that China’s demand for silver was determined by long-term changes of bullion movement in China over the period from 1550 to 1700 and evaluated the hypothesis that China suffered a dramatic fall in silver imports beginning in the late 1630s, causing an economic crisis that may even have contributed to the fall of the Ming dynasty.³ Von Glahn’s analysis of Chinese silver imports has revealed that a full understanding of the formation of the global economy in the seventeenth century must take into account the changing structure of indigenous markets and demands in Asian economies. Von Glahn’s ground-breaking study on China’s monetary system and its interrelations with global trends in the manufacturing and uses of money, among other points underlined the necessity to expand research on silver, copper and the Qing economy in the light of the new emphasis on the demand for money metals in the international exchange. A recent in-

1 Chen Chau-nan (1975); Chen Chaunan, Chou Chienfu, and Tsaur Tien-wang (1979).

2 Von Glahn (1996a); von Glahn (1996b).

3 Regarding the argument that China became increasingly dependent on foreign silver, with the consequence that a sharp decline in silver imports even contributed to the fall of the Ming, see in particular articles by Flynn and Giráldez (1959); Atwell (1977); Atwell (1982); Atwell (1988); the idea that a lack of silver contributed in a decisive manner to the fall of the Ming has been criticized convincingly by Moloughney and Xia Weizhong (1989); see also Schottenhammer (2009).

ternational project sponsored by the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) entitled “Money, Markets and Finance in China and East Asia 1600–1900: Local, Regional, National and International Dimensions” concentrated on the mining, transport or import of money metals, which constituted one of the most important functions of the Qing government.⁴ If one undertakes any research on Chinese maritime trade history, copper imports from Japan to Qing period China are also an unavoidable topic. A number of scholars, both from China and the West, have contributed to it.⁵

As far as the Ryūkyūs are concerned, they had been subdued by Satsuma in 1609, which then considered the islands to be a vassal state that should send tribute to the Satsuma capital at Kagoshima and missions to the *shōgun* at Edo.⁶ Every trip made by Ryūkyūans to China was carefully supervised by Satsuma officials. When Ryūkyūan merchants went to Fuzhou in China, they were advised not to mention their Satsuma connection.⁷ Both the Satsuma clan government and the merchants from Kagoshima invested in the China trade, entrusting that trade to middlemen from Naha “in order to preserve the elaborate pretence required to satisfy Chinese sensibilities”.⁸

During the time period under consideration here (1664–1874), the Ryūkyū Islands continued to function as a kind of “mediator” in exchange relations between Satsuma, as well as Japan in general, and China. As far as China-Ryūkyūan tributary trade is concerned, it is interesting in this context to observe that during the Qing dynasty metals such as copper and tin, which were the constituents of metal cash, also entered China as tribute items transported from the Ryūkyūs – and this in spite of the fact that we know the island itself was scarce in copper.⁹ This phenomenon prompted me to give the topic some more consideration, specifically on the origin of these cash metals and their export quantities. On the basis of the historical archive materials found in recent years, a systematic and integrative analysis of the cash metal components from the Ryūkyūs during the Qing-period has now become possible. The main target of the present study is to highlight the Ryūkyūs’ role as a transit port during the Qing period.

4 “Monetary, Markets, and Finance in China and East Asia, 1600–1900” (MMF), supervised by Hans Ulrich Vogel of the Sinological Department, Tübingen University, Germany.

5 Cf. for example Hall (1949); Liu Xufeng (1993); Liu Xufeng (1999); Schottenhammer (2008a); Schottenhammer (2006).

6 Sakai (1968), 114.

7 Sakai (1964).

8 Kerr (1964), 182.

9 Smits (2008).

1 Cash Metals as Tributes from the Ryūkyūs

During the early Qing period, the mint metal procurement became an important issue for the Chinese government. The circumstance of China's scarcity in copper reserves made it dependent on importing copper from the neighbouring state of Japan. Especially during the interval between the Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1662–1722) and the early Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1735–1795) regimes, Qing China's mints subsisted solely on imported copper from Japan. John Hall contributed an important study on the early Qing's copper trade with Japan.¹⁰ In his view, during the seventeenth century, copper became one of the greatest export commodities. By the middle of the century, Japan was supplying almost the whole of the Far East with this metal.¹¹ It is interesting to observe in the tribute relations between the Ryūkyūs and China during Qing times that in the Ryūkyūan tribute lists the composition of tribute items to China was changed several times,¹² which was related to the background of increasing tensions between China and Japan. The trade between these two states also completely stopped then.¹³ During this period, China imposed some severe restrictions on maritime trade, while in the 1630s Japan officially closed its door to most foreign countries – only the Dutch, Chinese, and Korean could trade at Nagasaki under strict local government supervision – till 1853 when the gate was opened to the west.¹⁴ Despite the official Japanese policy of selective seclusion, however, this did not affect the Japanese demand for foreign goods. Until the Qing lifted the ban on maritime trade in 1684, the Chinese had been sending their trading vessels to Nagasaki – the single authorized Japanese port for foreign trade – mainly in order to purchase copper. According to Liu Xufeng's quantity statistics in his study on copper in the Qing period based on the data gleaned from both Chinese and Japanese archives, from 1663 to 1793 ca. 181,828 *tons* (363,655,076 *jin*) of Japanese copper was exported to the Qing territory.¹⁵ But this still does not completely account for the quantity of Japanese copper that was legally shipped to China. From the Kangxi period cash metals such as copper and tin were also regularly transported as tribute items from the

10 Hall (1949).

11 *Ibid.*, 445.

12 Wang Qing (2008), 219–233.

13 Hall (1949), 447.

14 This policy, clearly refuting the idea of a completely closed-up country, has been designated as “selected opening” (*sentakuteki kaikoku* 選択の開国) by Hamashita Takeshi. See Hamashita Takeshi (1990), 90.

15 Liu Xufeng (1999), 115, 138–141; Liu Xufeng (1993), 206, 219–221.

Ryūkyūs to the Qing court. And these metals might well have come from the territory of Satsuma.¹⁶

A thorough study on the Ryūkyūs' diplomatic documents and a Japanese local gazetteer provide us with an outline of the amount of cash metals, which were transported to China through the tributary channel.

Table 1. Quantities of copper and tin from Ryūkyūs 1664–1874¹⁷

Date	Copper	Tin	Date	Copper	Tin	Date	Copper	Tin
1666	600	0	1740	3,000	1,000	1810	3,000	1,000
1668	600	0	1742	3,000	1,000	1812	3,000	1,000
1672	1,000	0	1744-	—	—	1814	3,000	1,000
1678	1,000	0	1746	3,000	1,000	1816	3,000	1,000
1680	1,000	0	1748	3,000	1,000	1818	3,000	1,000
1684	3,000	0	1750	3,000	1,000	1820	3,000	1,000
1686	3,000	0	1752	3,000	1,000	1821*	500	500
1688	3,000	0	1754	3,000	1,000	1822	3,000	1,000
1690	3,000	0	1756	3,000	1,000	1824	3,000	1,000
1692	3,000	0	1758	3,000	1,000	1826	3,000	1,000
1694	3,000	1,000	1760-	—	—	1828	3,000	1,000
1696	3,000	1,000	1762	3,000	1,000	1830	3,000	1,000
1698	3,000	1,000	1764	3,000	1,000	1834	3,000	1,000
1700	3,000	1,000	1766	3,000	1,000	1836	3,000	1,000
1702	3,000	1,000	1768	3,000	1,000	1838	3,000	1,000
1704	3,000	1,000	1770	3,000	1,000	1840	3,000	1,000
1706	3,000	1,000	1772	3,000	1,000	1842	3,000	1,000
1708	3,000	1,000	1774	3,000	1,000	1844	3,000	1,000
1710	3,000	1,000	1776	3,000	1,000	1846	3,000	1,000
1712	3,000	1,000	1778	3,000	1,000	1848	3,000	1,000
1714	3,000	1,000	1780	3,000	1,000	1850	3,000	1,000
1716	3,000	1,000	1782	3,000	1,000	1852	3,000	1,000
1718	3,000	1,000	1784	3,000	1,000	1854	3,000	1,000
1720	3,000	1,000	1786	3,000	1,000	1856	3,000	1,000
1722	3,000	1,000	1789	3,000	1,000	1858	3,000	1,000
1723*	500	500	1790	3,000	1,000	1859+	25,000	0
1724	3,000	1,000	1792	3,000	1,000	1860	3,000	1,000
1726	3,000	1,000	1794	3,000	1,000	1862	3,000	1,000
1728	3,000	1,000	1796	3,000	1,000	1864	3,000	1,000
1730	3,000	1,000	1798	3,000	1,000	1866	3,000	1,000
1732	3,000	1,000	1800	3,000	1,000	1868	3,000	1,000
1734	3,000	1,000	1802	3,000	1,000	1870	3,000	1,000
1736	3,000	1,000	1804	3,000	1,000	1874	3,000	1,000
1737*	500	500	1806	3,000	1,000			
1738	3,000	1,000	1808-	—	—	Total	303,700	87,500

Notes: Measure unit for copper and tin: *jin*.

1723*, 1737* and 1821*: *Qinghe* 慶賀-ships were sent to Qing China for congratulations to the new throne.

1744-, 1760-, 1808-: Tribute trip had not taken place.

1859+: Instructed by the Fujian Government; to be paid with 3,500 *liang* of silver.

16 Cf. Wang Qing (2008), 225-227.

17 Sources: *Kagoshima-kenshi*, 2: 719-720; *Lidai bao'an*, part I-III.

In the Ryūkyūs' tributary history, cash metals like copper and tin were not part of their main tribute items at the beginning. They were only presented occasionally to China. During the Qing period, beginning from 1666, the Qing court received first 600 *jīn* and then 1,000 *jīn* of copper from the Ryūkyūs, but as extra tribute, not as the regular tribute item. Until 1684 copper was presented to the Qing court as the main tribute, every time amounting to 3,000 *jīn*. From 1694 tin was included in the main tribute list, once for 1,000 *jīn*. Based on my former study of changes in the composition of the Ryūkyūs' tribute to the Qing during the Kangxi period which had investigated the change in the Ryūkyūs' tribute items,¹⁸ a brief survey of the quantity of cash metals that went from the islands to China will be the focus of the present paper.

The information assembled from historical documents shows that during the Qing period, between 1664 and 1874, through the usual tribute channels there were totally ca. 15,185 tons (303,700 *jīn*) of copper and 4,375 tons (87,500 *jīn*) of tin transported from the Ryūkyūs to late imperial China. Observing the changes in the quantity of the tribute items from the Ryūkyūs we can see the trend of China's copper needs at that time.

From 1684 on, copper became one of main tribute items (see Table 1). Ryūkyū presented their tribute every two years with 3,000 *jīn* of copper. Moreover, when a new emperor ascended the Qing throne, an extra amount of 500 *jīn* of copper would be brought for expressing their congratulations to the Qing government. It is noteworthy that in the year 1857 (Xianfeng 7), Ryūkyū transported a one-off 25,000 *jīn* of copper to Fujian.¹⁹ What was the background to this unique amount?

In the *Lidai bao'an* the following matter is documented:²⁰ on the 18th day of June 1857 (Xianfeng 7), a certain Zheng Hongyou 鄭宏猷, the Ryūkyūan residence attaché (*cunliu tongshi* 存留通事, a kind of interpreter related to tributary affairs) in Fujian reported to his king an instruction from the Fujian Coastal Defence Circuit (*haifangting* 海防廳) that at that time copper cash had become scarce in Fujian and iron coins were not allowed to circulate in other provinces; thus, copper coins were to be produced in Fujian again.²¹ But the situation at that time did not permit it. On the one hand, Fujian had no copper reserves, and on the other the Taiping troops had blocked the transport road from the Yunnan copper mines to Fujian. For all these reasons the Fujian government asked Ryūkyū to arrange to send copper with the next

18 Cf. Wang Qing (2008), 213-228.

19 *Lidai bao'an*, II: 199.8317; III: 1.8442-8445.

20 *Lidai bao'an*, II: 199.8317-8318.

21 *Lidai bao'an*, II: 199.8317.

tribute ship or tributary receiving ship (*jiègòngchuan* 接貢船) to Fujian. The government would pay for these copper imports. Zheng Hongyou talked about this with the Ryūkyūan tribute envoys and other related personnel. After some discussion they found that due to the location of the Ryūkyūs, it was difficult to arrange much casting of copper for the Fujian government. Zheng explained that the Qing emperor's principle of “*rónyuán* 柔遠 (being gracious to foreigners)” did not only refer to tribute affairs but also extended to mutual help in difficult situations.²² It is recorded in this document that Ryūkyūan officials had thus to try their best to procure copper, a difficult task that was only accomplished when all the copper wares of the country had been collected and then been melted down to give a total weight of 25,000 *jin*. The copper was loaded onto a receiving ship accompanied by a resident interpreter named Sun Decai 孫得才 and dispatched to Fujian. The ship arrived there on the 29th day of April 1859 (Xianfeng 9).²³ The authorities ordered the governor-general and the provincial governor to admit them and the Ryūkyūans should be paid for the copper.²⁴ However, they did not want to accept the money and claimed that they had to return to the Ryūkyūs immediately while the winds were favourable in May. The Fujian government insisted that this copper was not regarded as tribute goods, so they must be paid for it before the ship set sail. As the copper was to be used for minting cash, the copper shipment was directly delivered to the *Baofuju* 寶福局 (Mint of the Province of Fujian). This 25,000 *jin* of copper from the Ryūkyūs comprised 5,267 *jin* of *hongtong* 紅銅 (red copper)²⁵ and 13,117.8 *jin* of *huangtong* 黃銅 (yellow copper)²⁶ as well as 6,584 *jin* of *huangtong* with 18% purity. The Fujian government paid 3,500 *liang* of silver to the Ryūkyūs for this copper.²⁷

2 Japanese Copper Transported by Chinese Merchants to Fujian via the Ryūkyūs

In the available historical documents both of China and Japan, two cases of Chinese copper merchants being shipwrecked on the Ryūkyūs were described in detail. It is clear that the copper was purchased in Japan, but transported to Fujian via the Ryūkyūs by Ryūkyūans themselves.

22 *Lidai bao'an*, II: 199.8317.

23 *Lidai bao'an*, III: 1.8442.

24 *Lidai bao'an*, II: 199.8317.

25 *Hongtong* 紅銅 refers to the copper of high quality. See Vogel (1983), 176.

26 *Huangtong* 黃銅 refers to brass, which is an alloy of copper and zinc. See Vogel (1983), 177; Burger (1976), 14.

27 *Lidai bao'an*, III: 1.8443.

Case 1 1742 (Qianlong 7)

According to a memorial of Nasutu 那蘇圖, the governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang, and the Fujian provincial governor named Liu Yuyi 劉於義 requiring permission to buy the merchants' copper for the local mint, we learn that in April of 1742 (Qianlong 7), a copper merchant named Xu Weihuai 徐惟懷 and others from Jiangnan 江南 twice met with strong winds.²⁸ In total fifty-five persons with a shipment of Japanese copper were blown onto the Ryūkyūs. The shipment and the personnel were sent on to Fujian escorted by Ryūkyūan officials. According to the governmental control information, the quantity of copper amounted to about 70,000 *jīn* (converted c. 35,000 *kg*). With Xu's co-operation, half of this copper was sold in Fujian. The government of Fujian Province paid 6,650 *liang* of silver for 38,000 *jīn* of copper for the province's mints.²⁹ The other half of copper was to be taken to Xu's native place. Due to the unpredictable situation that may be encountered on the journey from Fujian to Jiangsu and the huge costs involved, Xu also wanted to sell the rest of the copper, worth 32,420 *jīn*, to the Fujian government.³⁰ During the period of 1736 to 1745, the copper cash reached its highest value in Fujian. The local government tried to augment copper quantities in many ways. Besides purchasing copper in Yunnan, restrictions were imposed on underhand collecting and exporting of cash, in order to bring down the price. However, all these methods could not bring down the market price of cash.³¹ After constructively discussing the provincial cash minting situation and the difficulties the copper merchants were encountering, the government appointed Zhang Sichang 張嗣昌, the Provincial Administration's Commissioner (*buzhengsi* 布政司), to deliver the complete copper shipment to the Fujian Province Mint. When the copper price established by the Jiangsu and Zhejiang administrations was 17 *liang* and 5 *qian* per 100 *jīn*, the Fujian government took c. 5,674 *liang* of silver money from the land tax of 1742 for purchasing 32,420 *jīn* of copper.³² That is to say, in this year the Fujian government bought in total 70,420 *jīn* of Japanese copper for 12,324 silver *liang*.

28 Cf. also Schottenhammer (2010), 124.

29 "Gongzhong zhubi zouzhe caizhenglei huobi jinrongxiang Kangxi zhi Xuantong sannian" 宮中殊批奏摺財政金融項康熙至宣統三年. No. 1253. Nasutu and Liu Yuyi, "Mai shangtong yi zi guzhu" 買商銅以資鼓鑄, September 1742 (Qianlong 7).

30 *Ibid.*

31 Cf. Zhu Shuyuan (1999), 235.

32 *Op. cit.*, no. 1253, September 1742 (Qianlong 7).

In a Japanese source we find detailed information about the composition of Xu Weihuai's merchant group such as individual names, ages and origins as well as the contents of the shipment.³³

There were altogether fifty-three persons on this ship. The Japanese called the two main merchants of this group, whose names were Xu Weihuai and Luo Xihan 駱西翰, Nanjing 南京 merchants.

Table 2. Composition of the merchant ship of Xu Weihuai³⁴

a) people from Suzhou 蘇州 prefecture

Name	Age	Name	Age
Xu Weihuai 徐惟懷	45	Huang Erguan 黃二官	44
Luo Xihan 駱西翰	33	Gu Deshun 顧德順	27
Cheng Wanyuan 程萬元	25	Fan Sanguan 范三官	42
Shen Dishu 沈帝書	44	Rong Yuanfa 榮元發	25
Gu Zhenting 顧振廷	37	Lei Fangyuan 雷方原	25
Gu Jiansan 顧兼三	43	Wang Douyuan 王斗元	18
Xu Jianwang 許建王	24	Zhou Zhongzhao 朱仲昭	38
Ni Zitian 倪自天	45	Lu Xiankang 陸賢康	42
Hu Yaoming 胡耀明	36	Zhang Qilong 張啓龍	44
Shen Duansan 沈端三	28	Chen Shouguan 陳壽官	31
Liu Hanwen 劉漢文	31	Xu Zhuguan 徐助官	27
Zhang Shengjia 張聖嘉	53	Xu Junzhao 徐君兆	34
Yu Liuguan 郁六官	30	Yu Kaiguan 餘開官	27
Yu Kunguan 餘昆官	28		

b) people from Songjiang 松江 prefecture

Huang Siguan 黃四官	60	Zhou Shiguan 周十官	38
Zhang Sanguan 張三官	45	Tao Fuguan 陶福官	43
Lu Huaguan 陸華官	48	Gu Xiguan 顧喜官	30
Wang Fenguan 王分官	40	Xu Shengguan 徐聖官	26
Xu Siguan 徐四官	55	Jin Shouguan 金壽官	42
Chen Fuguan 陳福官	40	Yan Qiguan 嚴其官	32
Cai Wuguan 蔡五官	27	Cao Erguan 曹二官	25
Hu Sanguan 胡三官	39		

c) people from Fuzhou 福州 prefecture

Zhen Tanshan 鄭覃山	40	Wang Siyuan 王四元	40
Zheng Qizhen 鄭啓禎	45	Zhang Mingyuan 張明元	35
Cao Zhiyi 曹志義	30	Yan Botu 嚴伯圖	45
Zheng Yunli 鄭允理	30	Chen Qiyu 陳啓裕	24
Zheng Xiujin 鄭修進	35	Liu Liangxiang 劉良鄉	30
Lin Jiajin 林家金	33		

33 *Ryūkyū okoku hyōjōsho monjo*, 225-296.

34 Source: *Ryūkyū okoku hyōjōsho monjo*, 225-296.

From the above listed personal information, we know that twenty-seven people came from Suzhou prefecture, fifteen from Songjiang prefecture and eleven from Fuzhou prefecture. The age structure was between eighteen and sixty. One can observe an age heaping phenomenon at “0” and “5” when taking into account the persons from Fujian, which gives us to understand that obviously the education level and numerical ability at that time in the lower Yangzi was higher than that in a Southeast region like Fujian, where many people apparently were unable to specify their age more exactly. Furthermore, it is well known that Fujian’s geographical conditions allowed a number of Fujian inhabitants to earn their living as fisherman and also work as sailors, especially during the Ming and Qing period. We might infer that in the case of this shipwreck, the people from Fuzhou might have been employed as boatmen for the voyage to Japan. Generally speaking this occupational group might have a relatively lower literacy ability but high age heaping. Another phenomenon is that in Songjiang prefecture in the lower Yangzi region the male persons’ names were usually written with “*guan* 官 (official)”, which might a) symbolize the wish of the parents for their son becoming an official in the future or b) the educational standard of these seafaring individuals’ parents being relatively low, the character “*guan*” was the simplest name for a male child.

This shipwreck is also recorded in Chinese archives, from which we can get some additional information. The merchants’ ship was a large flat-bottomed junk (*shachuan* 沙船) with the registration “*shang zi san jia* no. 10 上字三甲十號”, whose owner was named Li Yongshun 李永順. There were nineteen helmsman and thirty-four merchants.³⁵ According to the Japanese document it came to light that the Chinese merchants’ ship had loaded voileor yarn, silk, satin, medicinal materials and sugar products for Nagasaki. In the cargo back to China, besides copper, there were also a lot of seafoods, such as seaslugs, abalone, shark’s fins and red vegetables, seaweed³⁶ and some other things like copper household utensils and laquerwork. All the dried seafoods together amounted to about

35 “Zhejiang Tidu Pei Shi zou Liuqiuguo husong nanshang zhi Min jingbo haiyang zhe” 浙江提督裴貳奏琉球國護送難商至閩經泊海洋摺 of 8th day of May, Qianlong 7, in *Qingdai Zhong-Liu guanxi dang’an xuanbian*, 7-8.

36 In a study of Chen Guodong, he argued that from near the beginning of the eighteenth century, Japan started to limit the volume of copper exports and put a specific action into practice. That meant the copper merchants had to purchase a quantity of pouched dried seafoods if they wanted to get the amount of copper they needed. Cf. Chen Guodong (2006), 14. About the exact quota of copper, see for example Liu Xufeng (1999).

103,400 to 105,430 *jin*. After windstorms there was c. 75,000 *jin* of copper and only 5,000 *jin* of seafoods left. Drawing an analogy between the quantities of copper (75,000 *jin*) documented in the Japanese source and that of 70,420 *jin* in the Chinese document, there is a deficit of 4,480 *jin*, which might have been lost in the second storm at sea.

Case 2 1743 (Qianlong 8)

Compared to the above case of 1742, we can find little information of the following case of 1743 – the eighth year of Qianlong. In the June of 1743, copper merchant You Zhongmou 游仲謀 from Wuxian 吳縣 left for Nagasaki to purchase copper. On the way back home in January of 1745, the ship came up against storm force winds and was blown onto the Ryūkyūs. Parts of the shipment such as copper and seafoods in bags were retrieved from the water. Fifty-one Ryūkyūans led by their main interpreter whose name was Cai Hongmo 蔡宏謨, conveyed eighty-two Chinese persons on board and the copper that remained to Fujian. The Ryūkyūans had brought their own native products, which should be taxed at 9 *liang* 3 *qian* 9 *fen* according to the taxation rate of the day, while the silver tax of the sea products like sealslugs, which for the Chinese merchants amounted to 3 *liang* 1 *qian* 7 *fen*. You reported there should be about 130,000 *jin* of copper left. As You Zhongmou sold this copper to the Fujian government for minting cash, the customs tax was exempted in order to encourage more copper merchants to make a more concerted effort to solve the problem of inland cash minting.³⁷ It is documented in a memorial that the copper was weighed by the officials, resulting in 148,000 *jin* of copper.³⁸

From the limited information on this shipwreck, one can at least find out that the length of stay of Chinese copper merchants in Japan at that time was about a year and a half. Besides copper they brought mainly seafoods back to China.³⁹

37 “Fuzhou Jiangjun Xin Zhu zou Liuqiuguo husongchuan dao Min zhaoli mianshui zhe” 福州將軍新柱奏琉球國護送船到閩照例免稅摺, in *Qingdai Zhong-Liu guanxi dang'an xuanbian*, 12-13. See also Schottenhammer (2010), 125.

38 “Min-Zhe Zongdu Martai deng zou zhuoqing qianhui Liuqiuguo husong renyuan zhe” 閩浙總督馬爾泰等奏酌情遣回琉球國護送人員摺, in *Qingdai Zhong-Liu guanxi dang'an xuanbian*, 13-14, here 14.

39 In the eighteenth century, due to the decreasing quantities of silver and copper permitted to be exported from Japan, Chinese merchants had to export increasing quantities of marine products, which were apparently wrapped in a kind of rice straw called *tanvara-mono* 俵物 in Japanese, in order to make their trade activities profitable. See Schottenhammer (2008), 365.

The Japanese copper which found its way via the Ryūkyūs to China in these two cases altogether amounted to about 218,420 *jin*. We know that during the Qianlong period there were four cash mints established in Fujian that needed annually 200,000 *jin* of Yunnan lower quality copper (*ditong* 低銅⁴⁰) from the Jinchai 金釵 mine for producing 43,200 strings of copper cash.⁴¹ The copper of Chinese merchants' ship that was transported to Fujian via the Ryūkyūs had no doubt played a significant role during that time of emergency demand for copper for provincial cash minting.

Conclusion

This article mainly investigated the quantities of the cash metals copper and tin from the Ryūkyūs to Qing China from 1664 (Kangxi 3), the year of normality of Ryūkyū's tributary relationship to the Qing court, until 1874 (Tongzhi 同治 13), the year of the last Ryūkyūan tributary ship sent to Qing China, as well as some observations concerned. This is clearly a field in which the China-Japan copper trade can provide important insights. The context mentioned in this contribution shows that the cash metals as tribute items from the Ryūkyūs to Qing China were not really Ryūkyūan native products. Both the tribute metals of copper and tin, shipped from the Ryūkyūs and via the Ryūkyūs to China, were all coming directly or indirectly from Japan. Although the quantity of "the metal from Ryūkyūs" was not really significant for Qing China, its subsidiary function should not be neglected. On the one hand, it had augmented the amount of copper ware required by the palace, and on the other hand it had relieved the shortages of copper in the provincial mints during the emergency. Hopefully this present paper could provide some contribution towards evaluating the China-Japan copper trade during the Qing period.

40 Vogel (1983), 249.

41 *Zhiqian tongkao*, 71.

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