

## 02. Yorifune Shrine on Akuseki Island

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In this article, I consider Yorifune shrine (Yorifune Daimyōjin 寄船大明神) on Akuseki island (Akusekijima 悪石島, part of the Tokara Islands / Tokara rettō 吐噶喇列島) based on historical materials and the results of fieldwork I conducted in 2014. First, I consider the name of the shrine. *Yorifune* was a custom in medieval Japan that permitted the residents or lord of an area to claim cargo from ships that drifted to its seashore. In the medieval era, even if mariners of a drifted ship were alive, they were often deprived of the cargo in the name of *yorifune* and sometimes killed. According to a Korean document, this custom was also practiced in the Tokara Islands at the middle of 15th century. In light of these facts, it is possible that the name Yorifune shrine is related to this custom. In other words, the purpose of this shrine may have been to attract new ships so they could then become the possession of island residents. Since the custom of *yorifune* was prohibited in Edo era, the shrine's name probably dates back as far as the medieval era.

I then consider the Tokara Islands and Akuseki island. The Tokara Islands lay along the north-south shipping route between Satsuma province (present-day Kagoshima prefecture) and the Ryukyu Kingdom (present-day Okinawa prefecture). Navigating them is difficult, and they are hazardous for mariners, because the Kuroshio 黒潮 (a current) flows strongly from west to east through this area. In addition, most of the Tokara Islands' coasts consist of precipitous cliffs and are surrounded by coral reefs that keep ships away. The islands were not a resting spot but rather an obstacle for traffic between Satsuma and Ryukyu. On Akuseki island, there is only one port (named Yasura hama やすら浜), which the Yorifune shrine looks down upon. According to a topography from the Meiji era, the sea floor of this port had many sunken rocks. This meant that if ships wanted to anchor in strong winds, they would surely break apart. Even if winds were not strong, ships could only reach port at full tide. The deity enshrined at Yorifune shrine was probably worshipped as one that brings wealth from the sea. It is possible that Tamayose shrine (Tamayose Gongen 玉寄権現) on Takara island (Takarajima 宝島) and Yorimiya shrine (Yorimiya Gongen 寄宮権現) on Kuchinoshima 口之島 (one of the Tokara Islands) functioned similarly to Yorifune shrine. Residents of the Tokara Islands must have prayed to these shrines for ships to drift to them.

In closing, I turn to old foreign ceramics on the Tokara Islands. There remain many foreign ceramics, including very rare samples, on them. According to archaeological research, it appears they were brought not by usual trade, but mainly by unusual means such as *yorifune*. For reference, I looked at foreign relics found on the Koshikijima Islands (Koshikijima rettō 甑島列島). On their west side coasts there are precipitous cliffs, so it would have been dangerous for ships to anchor there. However, a mirror dating to Song dynasty China and foreign ceramics were donated to shrines in a sea village on their west coast. Considering that Chinese ships were deprived of their cargo in the Koshikijima Islands in the 16th century, these relics may have come to the village by *yorifune*, just like the ceramics on the Tokara Islands.