

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Jun Kimura. *Archaeology of East Asian Shipbuilding.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016. 320 pp. \$79.95 (e-book), ISBN 978-0-8130-5576-3; \$79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-6118-4.

Reviewed by Eric A. Rodriguez (Independent Scholar)

Published on H-Japan (August, 2017)

Commissioned by Martha Chaiklin

Despite the prevalence of hull construction scholarship in maritime archaeology, the shipbuilding traditions of East Asia have not witnessed the same breadth of discussion stemming from European or American studies. This disparity can be attributed to the limited number of shipbuilding studies published in English, as well as the subdiscipline's nonrecognition status among most of the Asian archaeology community. In the face of these drawbacks, *Archaeology of Asian Shipbuilding*, by maritime archaeologist Jun Kimura, provides an extensive inventory of East Asian shipbuilding materials to the greater archaeological community, and demonstrates the research potential of a theoretical framework that has not been applied among East Asian scholars. Drawing from the archaeological record, iconography, and historical documents, Kimura examines the material culture through a regional context, free of the nation-centric approaches that currently permeate the standing literature of the region. Through his detailed analysis, Kimura achieves a comprehensive understanding of the region's shipbuilding traditions that captivates non-Asian audiences and encourages new thematic research methods in the Asian archaeological community.

Kimura opens with a thorough summary of the standing literature and the current affairs of East Asian maritime archaeology, aptly stating that "shipbuilding traditions have been reviewed ... not by maritime archaeologists, but by maritime historians" (p. 4). Though past research lacks a maritime framework, Kimura demonstrates its potential by tracing the dispersal of technological innovations through a regional and chronological lens, revealing the cultural diffusion patterns of these

ship constructions, an effort Kimura defines as hybridization. With his research framework in place, Kimura sets up his discussion by identifying three regions of interest: the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea.

In chapter 2, Kimura outlines the state of early shipbuilding traditions in the Yellow Sea by reviewing coastal traders from the Goryeo dynasty (AD 918-1392) and rudder components from Japan's post-medieval Edo period (1603-1868). While these materials are far from the early periods of East Asian seafaring, their long-continued use, Kimura argues, may be indicative of an enduring tradition. This chapter also draws from planked-up dugout sites, such as the Kyuhoji site and Akiko Deguchi's 1995 study on Japanese rafts. While Kimura does not claim to subscribe to a linear development of seafaring in East Asia, placing these materials in this discussion without further details may denote a bias toward these theories. Progressing forward, the remaining bulk of this chapter is dedicated to the Goryeo wrecks where the author's thorough descriptions of the remains provide a strong understanding of East China Sea flat-bottom ship tradition. Despite the chapter's broad title, "Shipbuilding in East Asia," Kimura leaves the discussion of East China Sea and South China Sea materials for later chapters.

Kimura carries the discussion from the straits of the Korean Peninsula to the greater East China Sea area in chapter 3. This chapter catalogues a number of ship materials beginning with the Sui dynasty (AD 618) through the Ming dynasty (AD 1368-1644). The discussion that follows is a well-documented history of seafaring ship technology for the region, addressing the early practices

in iron fastenings to its origins in riverine ships from the Tang dynasty (AD 618-907). Through the review of iconographic sources and shipwreck materials, Kimura presents the consistency and variability of the hull designs of the flat-bottomed hull tradition as it shifted toward a dual functionality in rivers and seas. His discussions pertaining to the Jiangzu traders as flat-bottomed sand ships and the potential hull designs of Ming admiral Zhang He's fleet reflect the enduring presence and evolution of flat-bottom construction in Chinese maritime history.

Kimura continues his thorough descriptions in chapters 4 and 5, in which he details the history and material from two well-documented East China Sea traders from the region: the Quanzhou ship and the Shinan ship. Unlike flat-bottomed vessels, these ships have a sharp or hollow deadrise (a V- or U-shaped hull) and serve as detailed examples of the strict seafaring functionality of these hull designs. These chapters provide a thorough discussion of each site's discovery, cargo, hull construction (covering fastenings, frames, bulkheads, and planking). Kimura's concise, yet detailed collection of these sites provides a deep breadth of subject knowledge to audiences unfamiliar with East Asian preservation, excavation, and ship construction. As these chapters easily stand alone from the rest of the book, it is likely that these chapters will find their way into graduate-level seminars soon.

Following the discussion of the traders, Kimura interludes with a discussion of shipbuilding materials in chapter 6, focusing on iron fastenings and an analysis of timber species. Utilizing the previously discussed Quanzhou, Shinan, and the Goryeo shipwrecks, Kimura simulates the greater shipbuilding landscapes of the Yellow Sea through relative density studies and timber analyses. He concludes that the origin of the timber influenced the building traditions of the regions.

The proceeding chapter returns to the chronological flow of the book, providing the socioeconomic and changing political landscapes of shipbuilding activities from the Song to the Ming dynasties. Kimura demonstrates the larger influences of the political and geograph-

ical climates on shipbuilding, highlighting the effect of a tattered tribunal system on maritime networks during the Yuan dynasty and the aggressive policies of the Hai Ban during the Ming dynasty. This chapter then shifts to the repercussions of these legislative measures on ship construction through a comparative hull construction study, reviewing the variety of designs that originated during these periods. Kimura closes this chapter by drawing attention to the shifting nature of maritime networks, with a focus on the Ryuku archipelago. Iconographic resources present an understanding of these political networks and the tribute ships operating between China and these islands; however, the scattered recovery of ship materials from these waters limits the archaeological dialogue that can be obtained from their mention.

Kimura's penultimate chapter addresses the final area of discussion, the South China Sea. Despite the region's complex maritime activities, the archaeological record is severely lacking and provides one final challenge to Kimura. In response, he utilizes historic travel records and discusses the traditional influences stemming from the East China Sea and Indian Ocean, while making a case for the regional hybridity using a limited number of archaeological materials dating from the fifteenth century. Through the acknowledgment of the poor archaeological record, Kimura manages to create a discourse for his framework in the South China Sea. He addresses these shortcomings and uses the opportunity to frame several research questions, calling for similar studies to be properly conducted in this region.

To conclude, Kimura's *Archaeology of East Asian Shipbuilding* is a welcomed addition to the literature of maritime archaeology and East Asian studies. Kimura has the greater audiences of both fields in mind, as he provides supporting material (maps, timelines, glossary, etc.) and draws from possibly the most comprehensive collection of East Asian shipwrecks in a single work. While the stresses of a limited archaeological record are evident at times, this investigation into the cultural hybridity in East Asian shipbuilding traditions serves as a precursory example for Asian archaeologists to embrace thematic maritime frameworks in their respective subject matters.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-japan>

Citation: Eric A. Rodriguez. Review of Kimura, Jun, *Archaeology of East Asian Shipbuilding*. H-Japan, H-Net Reviews.

August, 2017.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49467>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.