

The Importance of Underwater Archaeology in the Development of a Taiwanese Identity - A case study on the Green Island 1

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ABSTRACT

In 2014 the Green Island 1 became one of the first wrecks to be excavated by the Bureau of Cultural Heritage in Taiwan, two years after the establishment of the Underwater Heritage Department, and one year before the implementation of the Underwater Cultural Heritage Preservation Act. The wreck is likely a British brig from the second half of the 19th century (preliminary conclusion, may be subject to change), yet the research into this wreck should be viewed in relation to the development of both the field of underwater archaeology and the grander Taiwanese identity in general.

Taiwan did not truly form a unified state until after a 400 year long history of colonisation, and at the moment it still has a tense political position in relation to the People's Republic of China. The Taiwanese government is eager to use archaeological material to establish a substantial base to construct a Taiwanese history independent of that of mainland China, which can be seen in the attempts to expand the underwater heritage field. The various historical stages produce the image of Taiwanese people as a melting pot of different ethnicities, including the aboriginal people of Taiwan, the early settlers from the mainland, and different colonial powers who had taken possession of the island since the 17th century, as opposed to mainland China that had been under a much more isolated regime.

Maritime activity was an essential, and unavoidable, element in this international exchange, and historical documents show a high potential for archaeological sites throughout Taiwanese waters. The Green Island 1 is one of the example of such exchange, but as the field will continue to develop we are sure to form a picture of Taiwan as a unique meeting point of cultures in the Pacific.

Key words: Green Island wreck, Taiwanese history, colonial history

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Figure 1: Abstract Map of the Location of the 3 Hull Structures in Reference to Taiwan Main and Green Islands.
(Produced by the Bureau of Cultural Heritage, Archaeological Team)

INTRODUCTION

This article is a shortened version of my master's thesis in maritime archaeology 'The Importance of Underwater Archaeology in the Development of a Taiwanese Identity: A Case Study on the Green Island 1'. It was written under supervision of Thijs J. Maarleveld for the University of Southern Denmark, and with the support of the Bureau of Cultural Heritage in Taichung, Taiwan. The full data set of the Green Island 1 was obtained by a dive team under their management, including the site map added to this article. I am very grateful they gave me the opportunity to use their data and share a little insight into Taiwanese maritime archaeology.

The study of the Green Island 1 is used to create an understanding of the value of underwater archaeology in general. Therefore my main question in this research is: Why should we care about this wreck? The answer is perused through the historical development of the Taiwanese identity and its status in the country's current tense relationship with China. The role of archaeology in politics is discussed, which will give an understanding for the current development of the Taiwanese

Department of Underwater Heritage within the Bureau of Cultural Heritage. Then I will make an archaeological analysis of the 19th century European wreck that was discovered at Green Island, the Green Island 1, as it is one of the few wrecks found and excavated, from before the 20th century. Lastly, I will place this wreck in context of the construction of the Taiwanese identity, both in its original place in history as a link between Taiwan and the global maritime network, and as an object of interest for the current movements in recognising Taiwan's cultural heritage. The tense political climate adds an extra dimension to the position of the Green Island 1 wreck as a pioneering project in Taiwan's underwater cultural heritage protection.

TAIWAN'S MARITIME PRESENCE

Forgoing the extensive timeline presented in the full work, there are some patterns that can be highlighted to demonstrate Taiwan's history in terms of maritime activity. Firstly, Taiwan's geographical position and features made wreckings a common phenomenon. As maritime traffic and trade in and with East Asia increased, Taiwan, exactly on shipping routes between China, Japan, Southeast Asia, was encountered more often, and a trading post was established in the 17th century. The dangerous waters all around the island (due to sandbanks, reefs, and currents) in combination with unpredictable weather (including typhoons and monsoon rains) made sailing here very dangerous for the mercantile ships. American reporter Davidson mentions that he knows of at least 150 wrecked ships in a period of just 19 years (1850-1869), of which he names and expands on 33. He only refers to foreign (Western and Japanese) ships, and only those that were reported, so there should be many more throughout history. Therefore, shipwrecks from a variety of countries can be expected all around Taiwan.

In addition, ship wreckings impacted international politics in Taiwan. The island lacked a centralised government until the invasion of Japan at the end of the 19th century, and even then the indigenous peoples in eastern part were expressly left undisturbed. When ships would wreck at the coasts often everyone on board was killed, and the wreck was looted by pirates or indigenous tribes. Foreign governments responded with more violence, and tried to pressure the Qing government to take charge. The control from the Qing Empire was very limited though. Indigenous people in the mountains and the east, and many Hakka and pirate villages did not accept their authority. The government declared that the 'lands beyond the mountains do not belong to China'. This was an argument for Japan to invade the east with support from the United States and England (Davidson, 1903; Hopkins, 1885).

Also, culturally maritime activity brought many changes to Taiwan. One of Taiwan's most outstanding features is the mix of elements from many different cultures. For a period, it was a meeting point for indigenous tribes, Chinese labourers, Japanese samurai, European merchants and pirates. With every occupation the invaders brought new technologies, languages, foods, architecture, and even genes. All the different groups interacted with each other in their own way, with trade, conflict, intermarriage, etc. Of course, the terrible treatment and exploitation of locals should be acknowledged and appropriately dealt with, but in the end, it is what shaped every new generation and brought society to its current form.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A TAIWANESE IDENTITY

As noted, the Taiwanese identity consists of the interaction of many cultures, and in the last century this has become very important in the struggle for independence. Naturally, the definition of a group identity is problematic and subject to many perspectives. Liao Wenyi, head of the Taiwanese Independence movement made the following attempt in 1956:

The Taiwanese today are continuing the blood lines of Polynesians, Spaniards, Dutch, Fujianese, Cantonese, and Japanese. In other words: a conglomerate of the aboriginal people, the Han Chinese, the Japanese, the Iberians [Spaniards] and the Teutons [Dutch] (Fleischauer, 2007: 378).

The Taiwanese are all of these groups, but also none of them, as the unique combination cannot be found anywhere else, and has shaped the country. The independence movement ascribed an otherness to the Chinese founded on a palpable, distinct ethnicity. Its members were set apart through linguistic and cultural features. While the native Taiwanese were victimised in their resistance, the mainlanders were imagined as distinct antagonists in a brutal assault by a violent Chinese 'race'.

Often a group identity is defined by what it's not, instead of by what it is. In anthropological study of identity, a scholar looks for the 'We-group' and the 'Other-group'. Currently, this other group is formed by the mainland Chinese. In order to secure its independence, Taiwan has to prove how it is not a lost province of China like the Chinese government insists. This view would suggest that Taiwan becoming a part of China is natural, as a unification of people of the same history and culture. In opposition there is the notion that the time Taiwan spent under Qing rule was one of colonial and imperialist dynamics in line with the preceding and succeeding domination by the Dutch, Spanish, and Japanese. Very few people see themselves as just Chinese, instead as both Chinese and Taiwanese, and more and more people start to identify themselves as just Taiwanese (Teng, 2004).

ARCHAEOLOGY IN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND POLITICS

The anthropological layout of the establishment of the current cultural identity of the Taiwanese constructed above, albeit only as a brief, superficial take on a deeply complicated concept, is a basic necessity for the understanding of the impact of archaeological finds on this identity. In this context Taiwanese archaeological finds will encompass all finds on Taiwanese soil, including underwater, both from Taiwanese origin and foreign. As noted, the island has historically been engaged by a variety of peoples, who have become an integral part of the national identity. Therefore, any material marks that have been left behind, both foreign and local, should be considered within the context of the country's heritage. In its analysis of human culture and behaviour, archaeology shares close ties to anthropology. However, as the subjects that are studied have long since passed, the ethical ramifications of conclusions drawn with regards to people's identity were far less obvious, at least until a large part of the field transitioned into a post-modern paradigm, in which the research results became personal narratives that acknowledged the ties to modern communities (Trigger, 1989: 370-374). In combination with the current mindset that focuses on both our individual identification

and our place with a larger framework, archaeological research can easily be utilised to propagate whatever agenda the political or social elite find convenient.

On the more optimistic side of the same coin, it also makes for a socially relevant field that contributes to the return of heritage, history and agency to neglected groups and peoples. A shared consciousness can be at the base of an otherwise unrecognised cultural group. The collective memory of such a group is perceived as its history. While other disciplines that confront the perception of history rely on the various narratives, archaeology is set apart by its notion of materiality. Finds are connected to ever changing identities and their associated practices and constructs.

In addition, archaeological material can be used, or abused, to draw other conclusions on identity, especially in colonised regions, where there has been a conflict between ethnicities, and cultures. In regions where ownership is perceived in relation to the history of an ethnic group, archaeological studies that link a location to a specific culture may unwillingly be manipulated to make exploitative claims. While there are many examples from all over the world, often in relation to indigenous peoples, one maritime example is presented here.

The South Chinese Sea has been subject to tense political debates between the regional countries. Land reclamation forms a significant issue in these debates, particularly the Spratlys Islands. Until the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1994 there was little interest in the reef islands, as they have historically been known as ‘dangerous grounds’ without offering inhabitable ground, and therefore avoided. After UNCLOS even minor islands that are little more than rocks suddenly became an essential possession to all countries involved, as it allows them to expand their coastal base lines, and thus their Exclusive Economic Zone. Even Taiwan has claimed the right to one of the islands, Ibu Aba.

Archaeological material is now brought into the debate to support the claim of a continuous historical presence, and by extent the modern right to occupy the relevant territory. Liu Shuguang, head of the Chinese Centre of Underwater Cultural Heritage, ‘wants to find more evidence that can prove Chinese people went there and lived there, historical evidence that can help prove China is the sovereign owner of the South China Sea’. This is met with opposition from regional countries, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, which themselves have taken great liberty with the vague UNCLOS clauses. However, various ancient peoples, both regional and travellers, can be linked to the region, but none of their ancestors can claim their right of ownership simply because their successors had passed by, even if they could hypothetically prove their exclusive lineage (Flecker, 2015).

In a country like Taiwan, where identity is closely related to maritime activity, maritime archaeology can make a big difference. Taiwan has started documenting and preserving national heritage relatively late, as this was not recognised as a priority for much of its history for either the native inhabitants or foreign invaders. The Taiwanese government shows an eagerness to expand their underwater cultural heritage by generating an interest among the people. They attempt to create an awareness of the role the different peoples inhabiting the island have played. A foremost positive development is the open policy with regards to international collaboration and execution of excavations, especially since this attaches a global recognition of Taiwan as an independent state. Taiwan cannot be recognised as a fully independent country by the United Nations, and few

countries have done so. Therefore, to make a case against unification with China that gets international support, the Taiwanese government has to establish a vision of an independent Taiwan outside of the political perception. Underwater heritage seems to have been noted as a potential field to do so (Bureau of Cultural Heritage, 2018).

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE GREEN ISLAND 1

In 2013 a wreck was discovered at the coast of Green Island, an island 33 km to the east of Taiwan's main island, that was dubbed Green Island 1 or 綠島一號 (Fig. 1). In 2014 and 2015 it became one of the first extensively excavated underwater sites in Taiwan, carried out by a team from the Bureau of Cultural Heritage, thus becoming part of the movement to upgrade the scope of Taiwan's cultural heritage to include underwater heritage. In that context its value should be recognised.

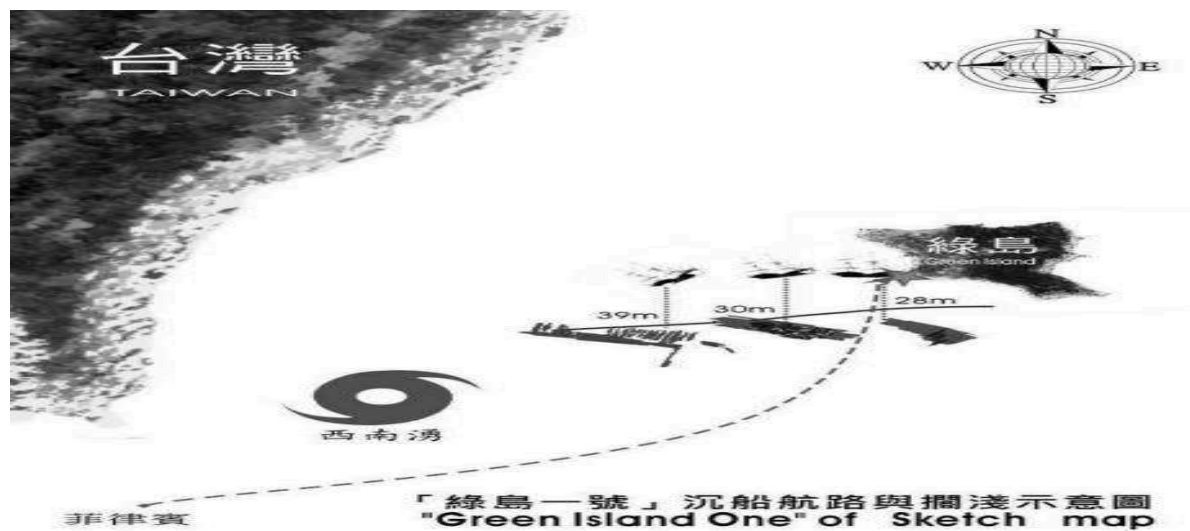


Figure 1: Abstract Map of the Location of the 3 Hull Structures in Reference to Taiwan Main and Green Islands.
(Produced by the Bureau of Cultural Heritage, Archaeological Team)

The wreck consists of three parts of wooden structures spread out at depths between 28m to 40m. Based on the preliminary observations of the material and ethnographic research it was speculated that this was a Dutch trading vessel sunk in 1880, which is known in local folklore for having provided the islanders with enough rice for several years. From its position and break lines it was concluded that the vessel wrecked at the shore and finally sank, after which the slope, currents and disintegration caused it to break apart, with some parts sliding down. Due to the difficult environment in this area, some of the ship's hull remained buried. In addition to the hull structures, several hundreds of artifacts were recovered, with 404 logged into a database, although many coins are grouped together, either out of convenience or because they have fused into stacks, so the true number is higher. The material consists of copper elements, including various types of nails and sheathing, Chinese cash coins, glasswork, shells, and earthenware. The assessment of the various elements in order to determine the origin and date is presented here in a concise manner.

STRUCTURE

Limited material and documentation make an exact determination impossible, but some structural features point towards a Western European design. This is evident from the relatively wide planks, which is uncommon in the American tradition. For example, the British clippers involved in the Chinese tea trade used planks up to 28 cm, while the American ones averaged at 18 cm. In addition, during the development of these clippers around the 1850's United States shipbuilders applied a new technique to strengthen the hull, as the new longer and slimmer hulls were in need of extra longitudinal strength. The technique consisted of bracing the outer surface of the wooden frames with diagonal iron straps. This system became common in sailing ships during the second half of the 19th century, and was part of the transition from wooden to iron hulls. By the start of the 20th century it seems to have become commonplace (Campbell, 1974: 65). On the Green Island 1's frames there are no markings related to such a structure.

However, it should be remembered that the estimated building period of 1850 to 1920 was characterised by intensive exchange of information and techniques. The British and United States' maritime activity dominated Western trading routes in Asia throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, but there was significant participation by other countries. In an attempt to catch up, many European countries adopted the new techniques and designs that had rapidly developed in Great Britain and the United States, which in turn had been built upon foreign designs (Oderwald, 1936: 71).

COPPER ELEMENTS

Most notable is the large number of Chinese cash coins from the Qianlong Period in the 18th century, all from Beijing. There are two examples from the Daoguang period (1820-1850), also from Beijing, which gives a clear earliest possible date. These coins were used for the whole Qing period though, until 1911, and even after (Cao, 2014).

Also some pieces of copper sheathing parts were recovered and more were recorded to be attached to the hull. Copper sheathing of the hull became a widespread practice after adoption by the British Navy in the second half of the 18th century. By the start of the 19th century the application expanded to mercantile fleets and across the Western world (Staniforth, 1985).

Lastly, several copper bolts help us estimate the size of the ship. In the 19th century the sizes were made standard by *Lloyd's Register of Shipping*, so when looking at the thickness of the planking in combination with that of the bolts this ship can be estimated at a tonnage of 600 ton. This gives it a length of about 50m (Desmond, 1919: 22; Davis, 1918: 59).

GLASS WORK

A significant portion of the finds consists of glasswork, primarily beverage bottle fragments, although there are some other shapes. There are many green shards stemming from bottoms and necks of bottles. All of these show they were made with a turn-mold production model, which was invented around 1880 and stopped being used around 1920 (Lindsey, 2010).

Some small bottles stand out. Their shapes can be found in bottle production catalogues from the 1910's, in which they are specified to be used for medicine and fine oil samples (Illinois Glass Co., 1906: 95 - 97). Some of the bottles even still contain a substance that appears to be many tiny red pills fused together.

These features are too limited to precisely pinpoint the exact background of the wreck, but are enough to establish a context. It was likely built after 1860, and sunk between 1890 and 1915. Two intact bottles form a problem, as they deviate from all other dating estimations. They are machine made, placing them after 1900. One of them has a 'Red Lion' beer label from Colombo, Sri Lanka and 'Pure Beverages Co. Ltd.'. circling the bottom. This company started as a branch from Coca Cola in Colombo in 1955. However, as all other material points to several decades earlier it can be suggested that these bottles were dropped at the same location afterwards, or belong to an older company with the same name.

There are no reports from foreign wreckings at Green Island during this period, but as the eastern part of Taiwan was still largely unexplored, it may be a ship that disappeared in an unknown location. The building tradition is western, probably English. However, many western countries exchanged techniques in the 19th and 20th centuries, and many countries traded in Eastern Asia around this time. As Green Island was not a regular harbour, it was probably traveling from southern China or Southeast Asia to Japan or Ningbo.

WHY THE GREEN ISLAND 1 HAS VALUE

In a country like Taiwan, where the identity is closely related to maritime activity, and where this identity is being threatened by political matters, maritime archaeology can make a significant difference. It is no wonder then that the government has taken initiative to establish an official branch for underwater heritage in their Bureau of Cultural Heritage, and is giving them the means to gather, preserve, and research any relevant materials. While the amount of material is still limited, there is a clear objective to generate an interest among the population and reach international acknowledgement and collaboration.

Now on to consider how the excavation of the Green Island 1 might contribute to this. As a western wreck from between 1875 and 1910, which was not reported, it becomes part of a story of one of the many foreign traders coming to or passing Taiwan and wrecking, thus very fitting to the national and local history. It being unreported during the end of the Qing dynasty, or Japanese period shows how much of Taiwan was still not explored and governed by the central authority. These results seem limited, and may not have made such a large impact on the Taiwanese history as enthusiastic new researchers had hoped, but it fits exactly with important aspects of Taiwan's maritime history that were laid out earlier.

Furthermore, the most important role of the Green Island 1 might not be its historical one, but rather its modern one. It is one of the first excavated wrecks, and has now become one of the first tangible pieces of an enormous puzzle that is Taiwan's unique mixed history and heritage, at least in terms of its maritime activity. In addition, it is one of the first to have been researched in an international collaboration, in this case between a Dutch student and the Taiwanese Bureau of Cultural heritage.

When this excavation and research is built upon with new wrecks and other underwater heritage, the puzzle will gradually become more complete to reveal a frame reference for the identity of the people of Taiwan, both for themselves and for the rest of the world.

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Biography



With this research I have finished my Master's Maritime Archaeology in Denmark, and am starting my professional career, focused on the development of cultural identity and heritage through underwater archaeology. My ambition is to create underwater museum projects to generate interest in underwater heritage, while protecting it. I did my first wreck dives in Asia, which inspired me to pursue this field. My fascination and love of Asian cultures and history directed me there for my research. My next goal is to obtain a PHD, through which I hope to contribute to progressing the field of maritime archaeology.