

A study on historical evidence and its implications of the “Free China Junk” crew landed Diaoyutai Island in 1955

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ABSTRACT

Diaoyutai Islands are a group of islands affiliated to Taiwan. There are many discourses on the sovereignty and legality of claim on the islands. This article firstly introduces the history of Taiwan's only ancient Chinese junk "Free China", describes its tortuous voyage and the process of salvaging it back to Taiwan, and highlights the importance of this cultural heritage. Following that, this research proves with historical evidence that the crew of the ship had visited the Diaoyutai Island in 1955 and to restore its image that it was an are of long held traditions for Taiwanese fishermen to to sail and fish. This article hopes that this historical study will provide alternative views and arguments for the discussion of Diaoyutai sovereignty and related issues from the perspective of cultural heritage preservation, traditional territory and sovereignty themes.

The article also discusses the relocation of Free China from the National Museum of Marine Science and Technology (NMMST) to the National Taiwan Ocean University (NTOU) in 2019. Finally, it proposes several suggestions for future study on historic evidences and ship preservation.

Keywords: Taiwan, The Free China Junk, Diaoyutai Island, sovereignty, cultural heritage preservation

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INTRODUCTION

The government of the Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan reiterates that from the perspectives of international law, history, geography, geology, and practical use, the Diaoyutai Islands, appertaining to Taiwan, are an inherent part of ROC territory. They fall under the administrative jurisdiction of Daxi Village, Toucheng Township, Yilan County. The Islands are located in the northeast of Taiwan and the southwest of Okinawa, only about 90 nm from the main island of Taiwan in the south, and 230 nm from Naha, the capital of Okinawa to the north. However, Taiwan, China, and Japan all claimed Diaoyutai as their territory, which caused a series of sovereignty disputes. After participating in the rescue of the "Free China" junk, the author accidentally discovered an unknown story between “Free China” and Diaoyutai. It is hoped that this exploration will provide another viewpoints on sovereignty and of Diaoyutai and the preservation of cultural assets.

SAVING THE “FREE CHINA” JUNK

In 1954, Paul Chow hoped to attend a yacht race from Rhode Island to Sweden, and enlisted Benny Chia-Cheng Hsu, Loo-Chi Hu, Marco Yu-Lin Chung, Reno Chia-Lin Chen, and then US Deputy Consular to Taiwan Calvin E. Mehlert to participate. They bought a traditional Chinese three-masted sailboat named "Shengshauli" from a Chinese fishermen. On March 8, 1955, this traditional Chinese sailing boat was launched in Keelung and renamed the "Keelung". At that time, the governor of the Taiwan Provincial Government, Yan Jiazheng, attached great importance to it and promised to subsidize the purchase of the ship and provided the necessary administrative support, but requested that the name be changed to "Free China".

On April 16, 1955, the "Free China" departed from the port of Keelung to San Francisco. This old Chinese junk had no radio navigation instruments and other equipment. There was only an old telegraph machine. The whole navigation relied on the compass, the sun, astronomy and the five digits. Those young men were inexperience in sailing the boat. After a 114-day difficult voyage, they finally arrived in San Francisco on August 8, 1955 (local date), completing the feat of crossing the Pacific Ocean (Figure 1). The "Free China" crossed the Pacific Ocean, inspiring Chinese people's high maritime consciousness. The people associated with the sea use the most important maritime dates in Chinese history - "Zheng He's Seven Voyages to the West" - to commend sailing

activities. Accordingly, the government set the date of Zheng He's voyage, July 11th, as the "Navigation Day" in Taiwan, highlighting a milestone of the Chinese people's march towards the ocean.

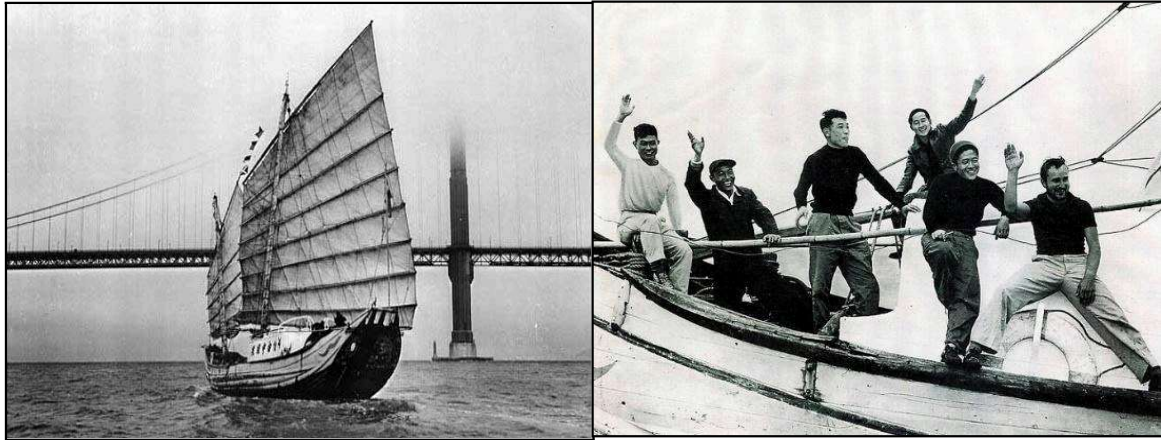


Figure 1: Free China sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco in 1955 (left) and its six crew members (right). (Dione Chen; Sail-World, "Mystery Chinese sailing junk is finally going home," 22 Apr. 2012, <https://www.sail-world.com/Australia/photo/174985> retrieved 2020/1/20)

The "Free China" was finally abandoned in an Alameda yard for decommissioned vessels in San Francisco, USA, then to be subject to dismantling or destruction. Family of the crewmen, led by Dione Chen, set up a website to rescue the "Free China". Paul Chow and US NOAA expert Hans Van Tilburg also called through the New York Times, hoping to rescue the ancient vessel. On the Taiwan side, people from the cultural assets preservation community, Shu-Ming Tseng and Jeng-Horng Chen echoed this support and wrote a letter to the media for saving the ship. In response, the Premier of the Executive Yuan (Cabinet), Liu Chao-shiuan, instructed his subordinate Council for Cultural Affairs to review and discuss the follow-up plan. Wang Show-lai, Director of the Preparatory Office for Cultural Heritage Preservation Research Center, invited a special investigation team led by Wen-Yan Chiau, the deputy minister of the Environmental Protection Agency of the Executive Yuan, who has marine professional and cultural expertise, to travel to San Francisco, USA from June 11 to June 18, 2009. The team went to Bethel Island in California to conduct the on-site investigation of the "Free China". The team met Paul Chow, Calvin E. Mehlert, Dione Chen, Mr. Spotts (owner of the boatyard), John C. Muir (Director of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park Management Office), Mr. Warmgoor (Nauticus Freight Company), and Byron Chung (son of crew member Chung Yu-Lin) to discuss their opinions. Although the vessel was partially damaged, the team concluded in its final report to the Taiwan government that the ship "Free China" be sent back to Taiwan for its value in cultural heritage and maritime education.

According to the above investigation report on the "Free China", the Taiwanese Headquarter of Cultural Heritage held a meeting on July 16, 2009, and decided that "Free China" should be shipped back to Taiwan in the manner of a "whole ship" for restoration, research, display, education, and tourism planning. A "consultant group" was also set up at this time. After twenty or thirty related meetings, a second survey was organized by Lwun-Syin Lwo, Dean of the National Taiwan Ocean

University, and a plan was made for the return of the “Free China”. Yet, in late June 2010, the rescue operation was still stuck. Calvin E. Mehlert wrote to the author, expressing his high concern and his expectation that the ship be returned to the Chinese land intact:

“ ... it would be a shame, of course, if a way could not be found to bring this last surviving example of an ancient Chinese craft home to Chinese soil in one piece. To hack it up, as if it were a piece of firewood, would be an insult to one of the greatest ship-design achievements of all time. To do so would be to turn one’s back on a sacred responsibility to the Chinese nation and to future generations. “

Due to insufficient funding for rescue operations, the author immediately asked the Secretary-General of the Presidential Office for help. With the approval of President Ma Ying-jeou, two major financial companies sponsored two million New Taiwan dollars each to solve the problem of insufficient funding. After three years of hard work, the “Free China” was finally transported by Yangming Shipping Lines from the United States to the port of Keelung on May 17, 2011, and then placed in an open space at the National Museum of Marine Science and Technology (NMMST) in Keelung. On July 11, 2011, a welcome ceremony was held at the museum (Figure 2). On the next day, the author arranged for the crew and their families to visit the Presidential Palace to meet President Ma Ying-jeou. (Following this visit, Loo-Chi Hu and Calvin Mehlert passed away successively.) After President Chiang Kai-shek had initially received the crew in the 1950s, this visit for the crew and their families brought perfect closure to the “Free China’s” Pacific voyage (Figure 3). After the establishment of the Ministry of Culture, the Bureau of Cultural Heritage (BOCH) attached great importance to the ship and commissioned a team organized by the National University of Marine Science and Technology in Kaohsiung to restore the “Free China”. In the future, if BOCH can continue to support the design of a better venue for the “Free China”, the significant ancient junk can be well protected and displayed for generations to come.



Figure 2. The welcome home ceremony for the “Free China”. (Epoch Times, Wen-Yan Chiau)



Figure 3: The former Presidents of ROC received the crew members. (Shi-Yeoung Tang, Central News Agency 2012 <http://taiwandiaoyutaislands.tw/ch/leader/587.aspx> retrieved 2019/3/4)

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF THE CREW LANDING ON DIAOYUTAI ISLAND

The record of the amazing journey of the “Free China” across the Pacific depends on the precious gift of Calvin E. Mehlert of his 16mm film images, which have become important empirical materials for follow-up research. New Zealand director Robin Greensburg used these images to produce two films which were entered in the International Film Festival and won awards for documentaries. In June 2012, the author watched her film “Free China” and found that the crew boarded a “No-Man Island” on April 17-23, 1955. In the film, the island has a prominent rock at the top of the island (Figure 4), and crew member Benny Hsu ascends the rock (Figure 5). Calvin Mehlert later also provided the author his diary on April 21 (Figure 6), depicting their adventure to summit. Because this strange rock does not resemble the northern three islands of Taiwan (Pengjia Islet or Agincourt Islet, Mianhua Islet or Crag Islet, Huaping Islet or Pinnacle Islet), it inspired the author’s curiosity to begin to verify its identity.

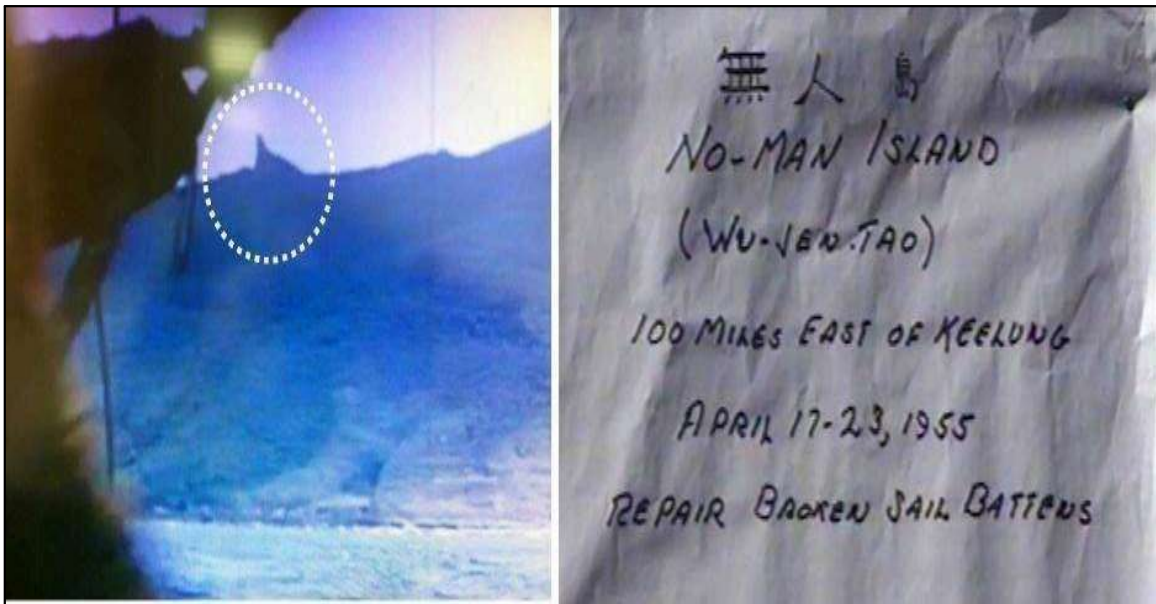


Figure 4: Film excerpt shows a special rock on the no-man island and crew record. (Calvin E. Mehler/Robin Greenburg)



Figure 5: Crew member Benny Hsu waving his hand on a big rock of the "no-man island". (Calvin Mehler)

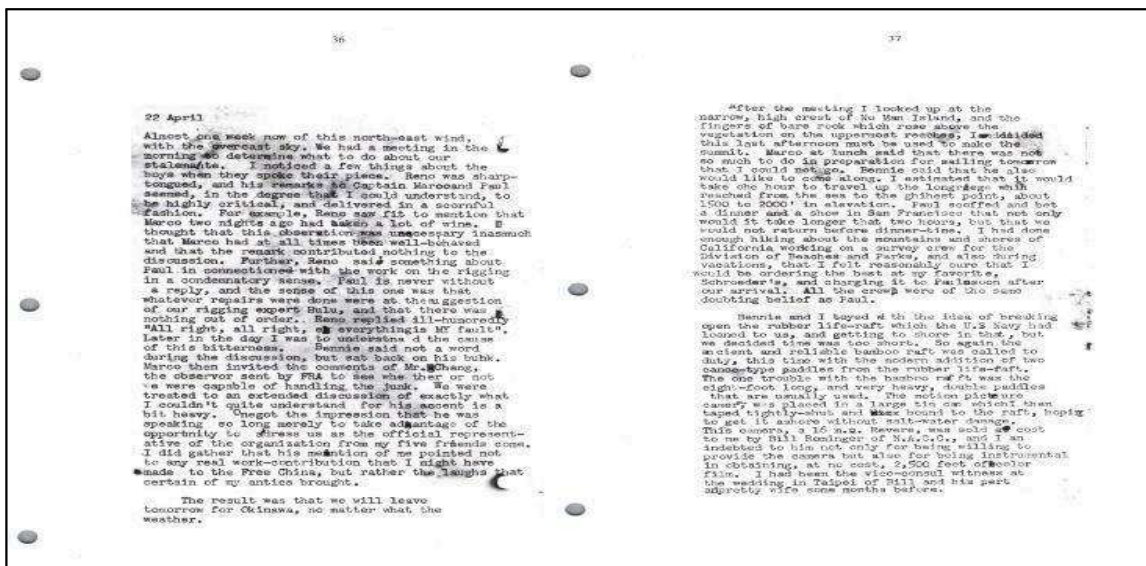


Figure 6: A diary of Calvin Mehlert on 21 April 1955 (partial). (Calvin Mehlert)

1. Photo comparison

After comparing the shape of the top rocks in the relevant pictures of the fishermen and Japan (Figure 7), the author preliminarily determined that this uninhabited island may be Diaoyutai Island. On June 19, 2012, the author asked Paul Chow by email: "Where is the unmanned island?" Paul responded to the question that night: "It is no-man island. The small boat fishermen in Keelung, particularly the harpooners, have been using it as a shelter for as long as we could remember back in our history. Calvin made several trips ashore when we were at anchor there and found wreckage and skeletons. I believe it is Diaoyutai". Paul was formerly the captain of the Fisheries Management Office. He fished in Shandong, Hainan, Shanghai and Taiwan, and has rich experience in boating. According to his memory, the uninhabited island sheltered Keelung fishermen, especially the dart (harpoon) fisherman. Another crew member, Calvin, cruised many times around the island and also found wrecked boats and bones. He also believed it was Diaoyutai. These remains are likely to be the unfortunate deaths of Taiwanese fishermen and fishing boats.

2. Literature review

In order to confirm this preliminary discovery, the author went to the National History Museum on Nanhai Road, Taipei City, and read in the storeroom the "Diary of the Free China" (wooden fishing boat) crossing the Pacific Ocean on July 14, 1957 (Figure 8). According to the records, the ship was anchored at 25 degrees 45 minutes north latitude and 122 degrees 45 minutes east longitude on April 17, 1955, apparently in the waters near Diaoyutai.



Figure 7: A protruding peak on the Diaoyutai Island. (<http://www.diaoyuislands.org/islands/22.jpg> top; <http://ww2.hdnux.com/photos/13/51/61/3054665/3/628x471.jpg> bottom, retrieved 2012/6/30)

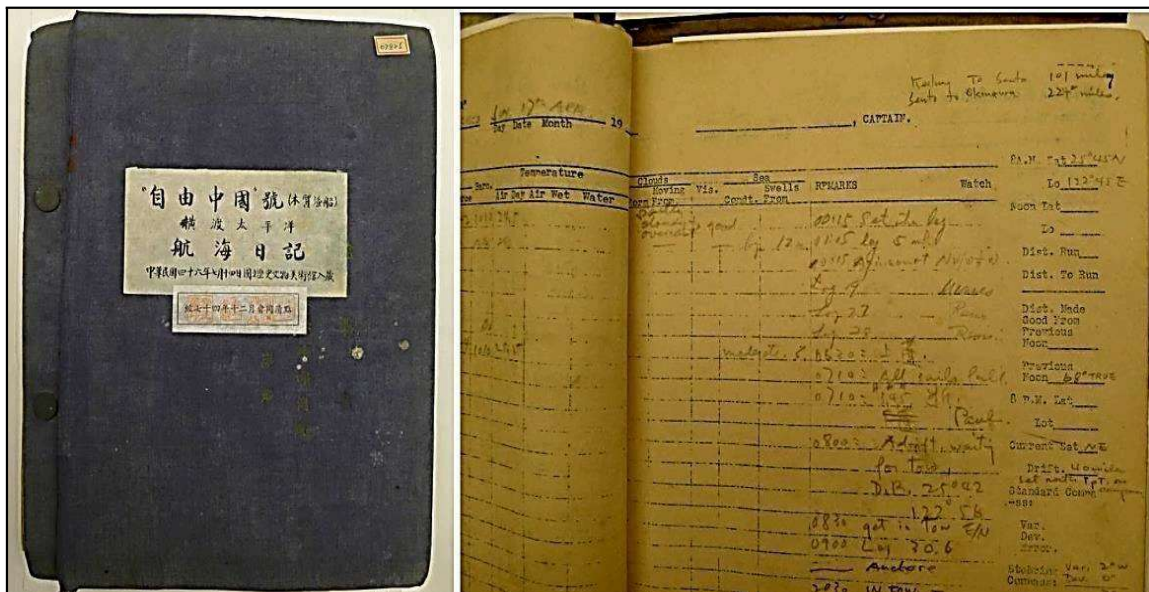


Figure 8: The logbook and a record of the Free China Junk. (National Museum of History; Wen-Yan Chiau)

3. Chart review

In addition to exploring the sailing diary, the author then contacted Paul Chow to obtain the original nautical chart (Figure 9). The map clearly marks the anchoring place of the "Free China" and also marks Taiwan's three northern islands, specifically illustrating that the uninhabited island in the film is indeed not one of the three islands mentioned above. Figure 10 further indicates the location of the unmanned island and the shape of the island on April 18-23.

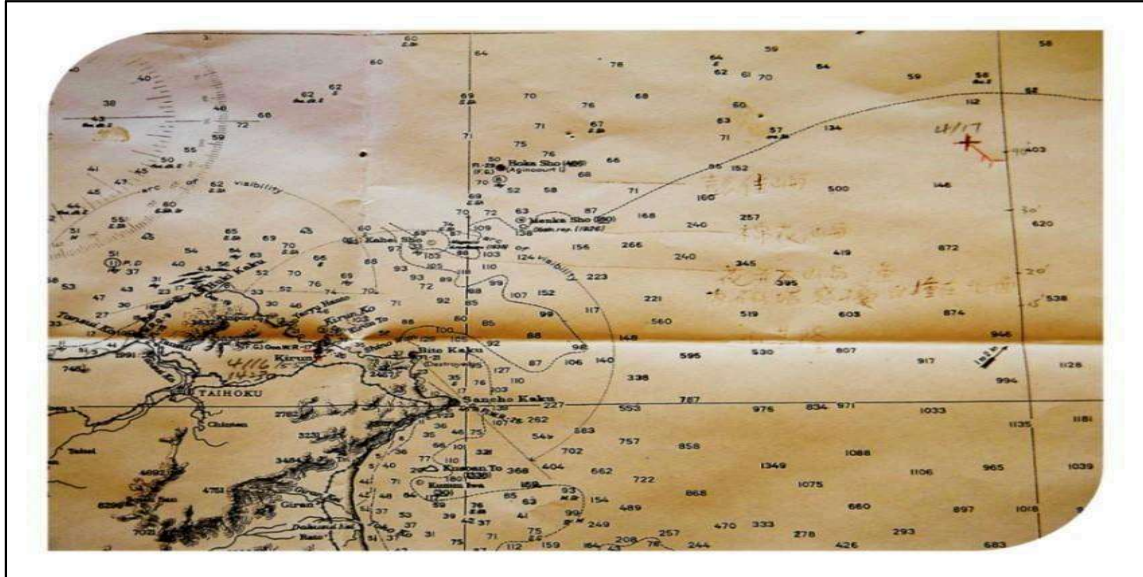


Figure 9: A portion of chart used by the “Free China Junk”. (Paul Chow)

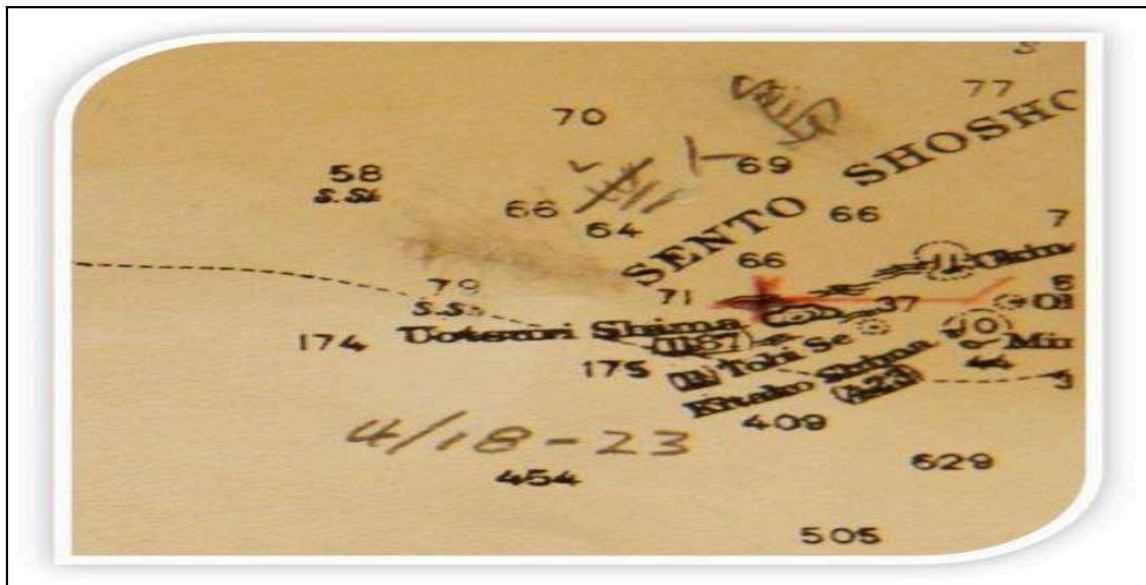


Figure 10: The anchoring position of the” Free China Junk” from 18-23 April 1955. (Paul Chow/Wen-Yan Chiau)

4. Satellite image overlay

Based on the above information, the author further overlaid the chart on the Google Earth satellite image. By moving away from the chart and calibrating the position, it can be determined that the "Free China" was indeed on April 18-23, 1955 anchored in the waters of Diaoyutai (Figure 11). The results of this comparison were immediately communicated to Paul Chow and Calvin Mehlert, and mutually confirmed. On June 22, 2012, Calvin Mehlert wrote an email to the author and stated: “Wikipedia - in its entry “Senkaku Islands” - gives the coordinates of “Diaoyu Dao” as 25 degrees

46°N and 123 degrees 31'E. This - according to my astrological observations while taken on watch the night of April 19, 1955 - is exactly where we anchored just before our move to more sheltered waters. Wikipedia gives the height at 383 meters which is within 10 meters of the height that I calculated."

On June 23, Paul Chow, who had participated in the protest movements of the 1960s, was very excited. The reply is as follows:

"I am so glad to hear that you have confirmed my belief that our Keelung and Suao fishermen's island 無人島 (no-man island) is indeed釣魚台 (Diaoyutai) , the piece of rock our whole family has fought to keep it Chinese in the 60's."

On the same day, Calvin Mehlert also wrote again, attaching four pages of the diary of April 22, and again confirmed the "unmanned island" is "Diaoyutai":

"Attached are four pages from my diary for April 22, the day that Benny Hsu and I climbed the peak. To my mind, your and our photos are conclusive evidence that our Wu-jen-dao is Diaoyu-tai. There just aren't any other small islands in that area. Calvin"

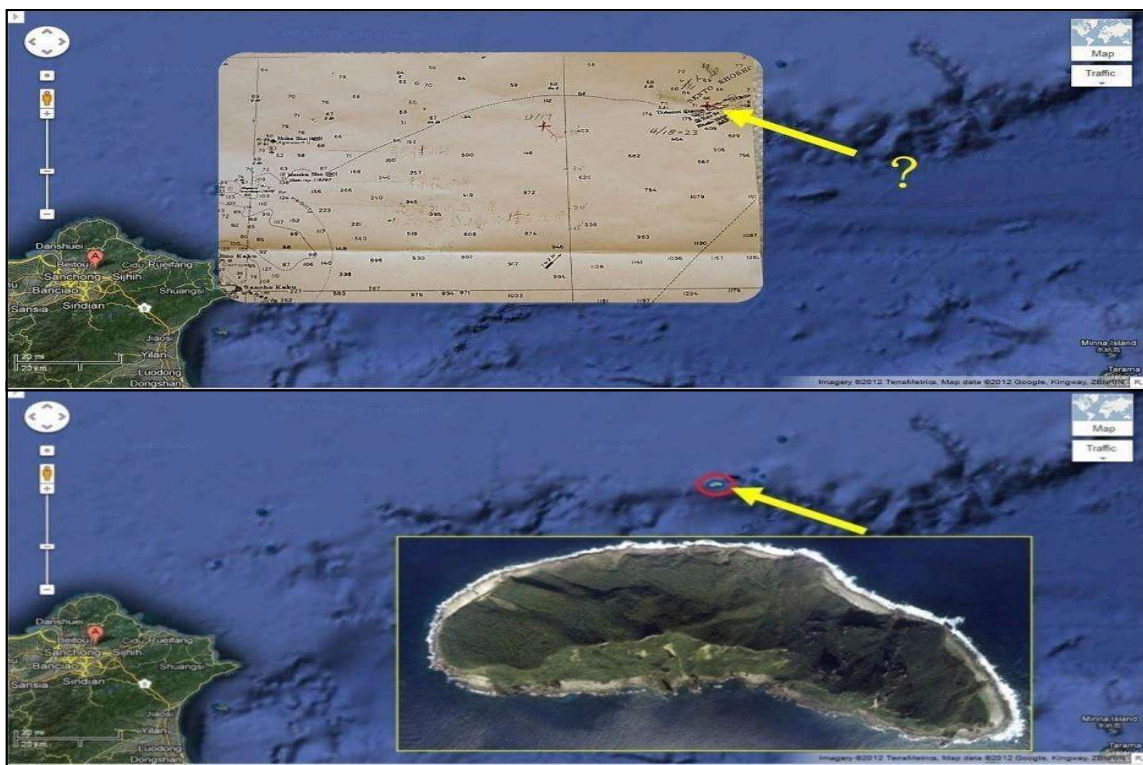


Figure 11: An overlay of chart and satellite image (top) and identified Diaoyutai Island (bottom). (Google Earth; Paul Chow)

5. Searching and verifying the landing site

The film shot by Calvin Mehlert not only saved the wonderful and rare record of the "Free China" voyage, but also provided an important basis for the crew to board the Diaoyutai. Although it was determined that the ship's crew had been anchored in each area of the Diaoyutai waters, the specific

anchoring and landing site was shown in Figure 12 of the Diaoyutai birds eye view pictures, which provided clues.

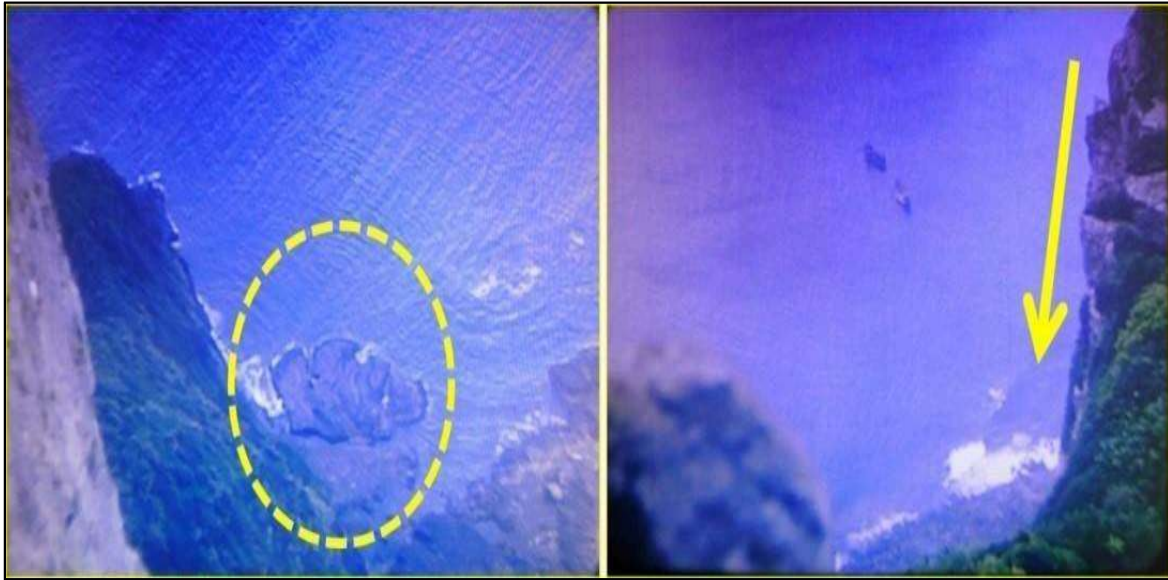


Figure 12: A birds eye view of a specific rock and anchoring of two vessels near shore at Diaoyutai Island. (Calvin Mehlert)

Due to the limited weathering of hard rocks or sea erosion, it can be used as a landmark for comparison. Additionally, there are not many similar cliffs in Diaoyutai. Therefore, the author used Google Earth to characterize the landform along the coast (Figure 13-14). After careful comparison, it was found that this particular rock was located under the cliff on the south bank of Diaoyutai. Although more than 60 years have passed, the shape of the stone has not changed much (Figure 15). Based on the above-mentioned evidence, through the film shot by Calvin Mehlert, the historical facts of the crew of the "Free China" landing on the island were confirmed. According to Calvin's diary, they landed on the island on April 22 and 26, 1955.



Figure 13: A study on the topography and land form of Diaoyutai Island. (Google Earth)

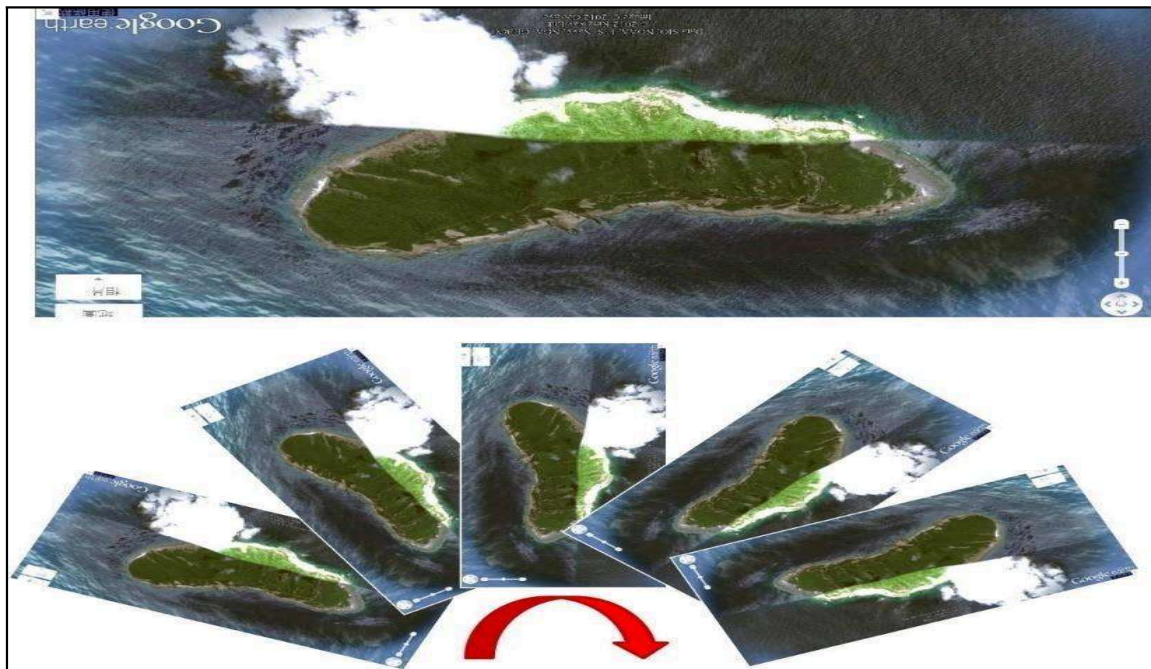


Figure 14: A cliff on south coast of Diaoyutai Island. (Google Earth)

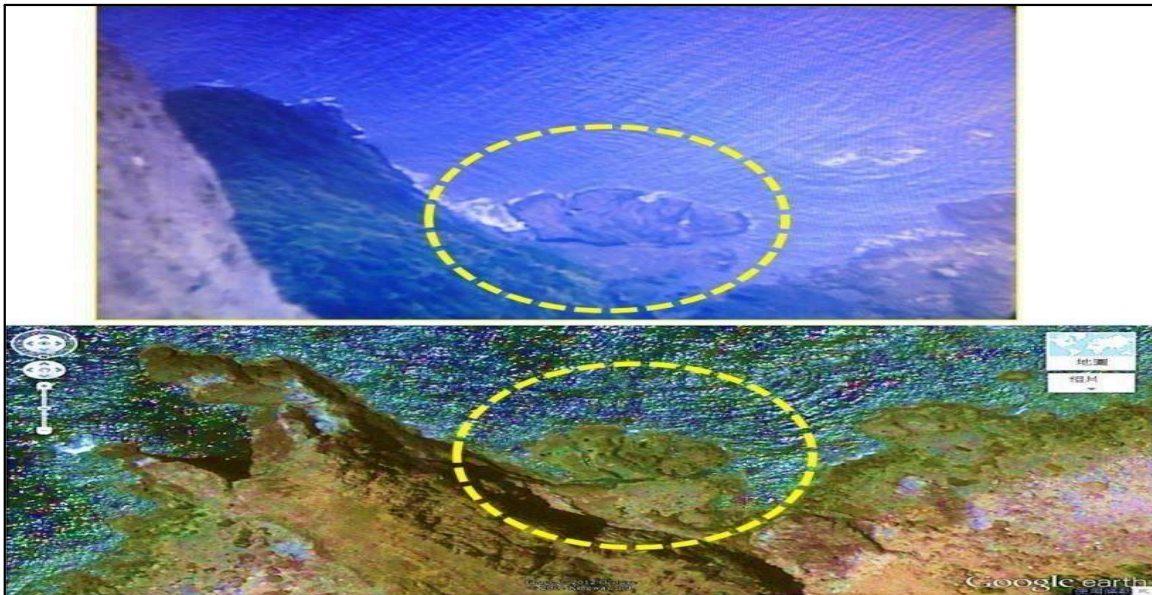


Figure 15: A comparative image of the specific rock on the south coast of Diaoyutai Island. (Calvin Mehlert top; Google Earth 2012 bottom)

THE EXPLORATION OF THE EXERCISE OF SOVEREIGNTY

The film shot by Calvin Mehlert not only left interesting records for the "Free China" crossing the Pacific Ocean, but also accidentally recorded the precious footage of the crew landing on Diaoyutai, providing an alternative to the legal and political discussion of the sovereignty dispute on the islands. Figure 16 shows four photos clipped from Calvin Mehlert's film. The picture on the upper left is the "Free China", being towed out of the port by a fishing boat. The picture on the upper right shows that the fishing boat accompanied or escorted the "Free China" to the Diaoyutai waters. The bottom left is Calvin's view from above, photographing the two boats moored in the waters of Diaoyutai. In the bottom right, crew member Benny Hsu with a bamboo raft after he landed on the Diaoyutai. Apparently, at this time, Calvin had gone ashore first and filmed from the shore. In this photo, you can clearly see that the "Free China" (right) and the fishing boat (left) are staggered off the Diaoyutai shoreline. Does the fact that they can come and go freely in the waters here without any interference explain the long-standing habits and freedom of Taiwanese fishermen to come here? Does it also indicate that this is our "traditional domain" or "home backyard"? Also, what is the nature of the fishing boat, and why it is worthwhile to identify it along the way to Diaoyutai? Figure 17 is also a photo extracted from the film of Calvin Mehlert. On the left, the fisherman's boat pulls the bamboo raft close to it with rope, including a tin tea or drinking water pot, and may other supplies as well. On the right, the white-hatted man directing the crew to sail, is apparently an experienced person. During this voyage, what role does that fishing boat play? Is it a "state vessel" dispatched by a governmental agency?



Figure 16. The fishing vessel accompanying the “Free China Junk” and anchoring side by side near shore at Diaoyutai Island. (Calvin Mehlert)



Figure 17. The fishing vessel provide drinking water and sailing assistance. (Calvin Mehlert)

In order to clarify these questions, the author sent an email to Paul Chow on October 5, 2018. At noon on the same day, Paul, who has a good memory, wrote back with a gray tone and stated:

"The first time I was frustrated, I returned to Keelung with my tail, and the departure permit was immediately revoked.

When we re-applied, the Port Authority convened a captain-general 葉世湘 (Ye Shixiang) (former captain of Zhongli vessel, a graduate of Wusong Fisheries College) who led a group of ten to check whether the ship and crew have the conditions to cross the Pacific Ocean. Each team member is an experienced deep sea captain. It is recommended to organize a navigation expert team to follow the review of the fishing boat to the unmanned island at the entrance of the country. If the vessel and crew have the conditions, they will approve the permit. Otherwise, the "Free China" with the audited fishing boat will sail back to Keelung. The audited fishing boat, "漁象輪(Yu-hsing)", was dispatched by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and a team of experts included 張雷豫 (Zhang Leiyu) (with white hat, a graduate of Wusong Fisheries College) and a former fisherman captain "Lao Tseng" who guiding the crew on sailing skills in the film."

Paul's reply inspired the author very much. For the trial of sovereignty disputes, there are many international cases. The International Court of Justice not only pays attention to the principle of "effective occupation", but also plays a crucial role in providing the integrity of documents and the exercise of continuous sovereignty. For the review of the "Free China" departure certificate, the "port authority" of the central authority convened experts, and the "Ministry of Economic Affairs" assigned "Yu-hsing" to play the role of an audit ship. In other words, the "Yu-hsing" vessel was indeed a government ship or "state vessel", and the verification of "Free China" whether it has the ability to cross the ocean should be an exercise of the above sovereignty. At that time, the Ministry of Economic Affairs of Taiwan sent the "Yu-hsing" to guide the launch of the "Free China" and escort it all the way to Diaoyutai waters, with both finally mooring in that area. Do these facts again show that the Diaoyutai is indeed a traditional fishing ground where Taiwanese fishermen come and go freely, and an inherent territory of Taiwan? This research and follow-up research may provide other perspectives on the legal and empirical discussion of Diaoyutai issues.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above research, on the one hand, confirms the fact that Taiwanese officials and fishermen in the Diaoyutai waters could come and go freely in 1955. However, if consideration is further extended to the issue of sovereignty, more detailed information and research are needed to support it. Therefore, it is recommended that follow-up research items include:

1. Collect and analyze relevant files in 1950s from the governmental agencies to confirm their sovereignty behavior as well as to examine whether the government "continuously" carried out similar sovereignty behaviors at the time to strengthen the basis for the claims of sovereignty in the disputed areas.
2. Continuously collect and study information on other ancient ships (including underwater cultural assets) and explored their significance in cultural assets, fishery history, immigration history, maritime history, and ship technology.

3. Consolidate and properly preserve the personal files, images and cultural relics left by the crew of the "Free China". If it is confirmed that those documents have preservation significance and value, they should be cataloged and stored in the national archives, museums or other suitable places for preservation and maintenance and appropriate use.
4. In-depth analysis and research on documents related to important cultural assets or national rights and/or interests should be encouraged.

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Biography



Dr. Wen-Yan Chiau, former director of the Institute of Marine Affairs and Resource Management and dean of the College of Ocean Law and Policy, is currently a chair professor of National Taiwan Ocean University (NTOU) and National Sun Yat-sen University of Taiwan. Dr. Chiau received his M.A. (1989) and Ph.D. (1991) from the University of Pennsylvania, U.S. after earning his B.S. (1976) and LL.M. (1980) degrees in Taiwan. Dr. Chiau’s specialties are environmental planning and management, especially with regard to the areas of city and regional planning, climate change, coastal zone management, wetland conservation, ecotourism, underwater heritage, ocean policies and environmental law. He also participated in rescuing the “Free China Junk”. Chiau was appointed as the Deputy Minister of the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA), Executive Yuan in August 2008. In 2011, he was nominated by the Kuomintang Party as the legislator-at-large.