



Column: Kijimun's Monologue No.5

Bitan: the avatar of a housemaid of Tensonshi in Ryukyu

Keyword: *Ryukyu kitan*, *Yōkai*

Haisai! Kijimun yaibin! Mīdūsatashiga ganjū yati? (Hi, I'm Kijimun! Long time no see, how have you been?)

If you are suffering from headaches, you can find a good remedy in *Komonjo*!

In *Ryukyu kitan* which was written by Beizanshi (1832, Edo), There is a Ryukyuan *Yokai*, named "*Bitan*".

**Ryukyu kitan* is owned by University of Hawaii at Mānoa Library. Sakamaki/Hawley Collection.

"*Bitan*" lives in the sea of Taketomi Island. *Bitan* was a housemaid of Tensonshi who is the first dynasty of Ryukyu, and her name was Bintara. When she entered the sea, she transformed into this fish, "*Bitan*". "*Bitan*" has horns and a catfish whisker like a dragon, its tail is split into two and it has a lot of scales on its back.

This fish has a miraculous power. Hang its picture on a wall of your house, then your headache will be immediately gone! Even a simple housemaid had such a supernatural power, the holiness of Tensonshi was really unlimited!

To prove its miraculous power, people live in Taketomi Island rarely suffer from headaches.

In Ryukyu, there were many books which were very useful to cure a disease. For example, in *Honzō kōmoku* (1596) which is the best pharmaceutical literature of the study for esculent fauna and flora in Chinese history, there are detailed

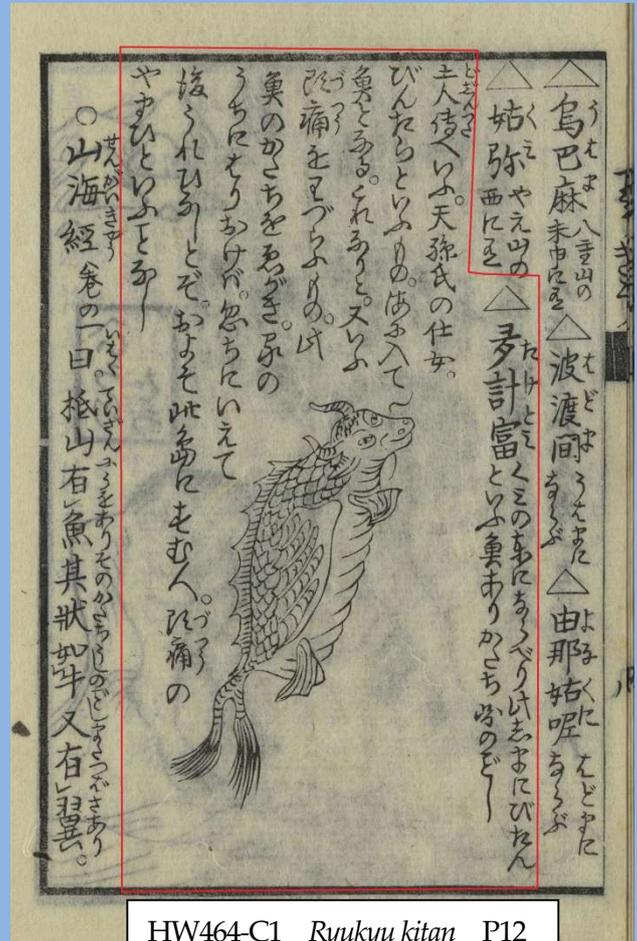
explanations about beneficial effects of plants. Also, *Gyozen honzō* (1832, Ryukyu) which was written about meals served to king of Ryukyu or about Chinese medicinal cooking by Tokashiki Tsūkan is my recommendation.

But, be careful, there are some disinformation too! Like, "Cut a piece of flesh of human thigh alive, decoct it and drink it. It cures even Hansen's disease! (At that time, it was regarded as a fatal disease.)", or "Crush bones of skull to powder, it cures any fatal diseases!" ...etc. There were some arrested in Edo who had carried these methods.

Let's try to cure your headache in decorating this picture on the wall. And let me know how an effect of the miraculous power of Ryukyu's charm was!

If you go fishing or make a dive in Taketomi Island, you may see this fish, *Bitan*!?

In this *Komonjo*, there are another pictures of Ryukyuan *Yokai* too. If you are interested in them, please check Digital Archive of Ryukyu/Okinawa Special Collection on the web site of University of the Ryukyus Library!
(Here! ⇒)



HW464-C1 *Ryukyu kitan* P12

