



John M'Leod
Voyage of His Majesty's ship Alceste,
along the coast of Corea, to the island of Lewchew;
with an account of her subsequent shipwreck
London, 1818

In 1816, the British government dispatched a mission to the court of China's Qing Dynasty to improve bilateral trade, sending Lord William Pitt Amherst (1773-1857) as ambassador extraordinary. Two warships, the Alceste and Lyra, escorted this mission. The author of this book, surgeon John M'Leod (1777?-1820), was aboard the Alceste.

Until the mission completed its negotiations with the Qing court and was ready to return to Britain, the Alceste and Lyra continued its voyage to explore Korea and the Ryukyu Islands. The ships made a port call in Ryukyu to conduct repairs and replenish their water and food supply. The delegation stayed there for over 40 days.

This book is a record of the one and a half year-voyage, from the departure through the return to Britain. The voyage was full of trials and tribulations, with the negotiations with the Qing court ending in failure and the Alceste running aground. In Ryukyu, however, the delegation had exchanges with the local people that transcended cultural and language boundaries. The book repeatedly describes the politeness of the people as well as their warm hospitality, with both surprise and praise.

Following the publication of its first edition in 1817, this book has been published in multiple editions and translated into Dutch and French, introducing Ryukyu—the friendly island country in the Orient—to many people in Western Europe. The end of the book includes a glossary of Ryukyu words compiled by a member of the crew Fisher as well as poems on the sorrows of leaving Ryukyu composed by another member of the crew Gillard. The book on display is the second edition published in London in 1818.