When I first saw *Sailing Ship Model* at the Peabody Museum, I was admittedly shocked. I had no idea where to begin or what questions to ask. Although I have a strong interest in Japan, my knowledge of Japan prior to the Meiji Era is very limited. Even more limited is my knowledge of ships (hence, the reason why I am taking this course).

From the style of the ship and its main construction material being of wood, I estimated that the ship was a model of a pre-Meiji Era ship, although I had no actual basis for this other than my best guess. In addition to the wooden construction, I noticed the sail was not made of a single piece of cloth but rather many strips of cloth tied together with rope. This made me wonder if this could actually be a seafaring ship as such gaps between strips of the sail’s cloth did not seem conducive to catching wind (which I assumed is more important on the open sea).
However, I found it interesting that there was a smaller sail from the back of the ship that may have given the ship more speed than the main sail could provide alone.

The hull of the ship is wide and shallow, which probably meant that it was not made to go very far into the ocean. The rudder was also small and simple, and looked easily breakable if it were caught in a large storm. Because of this, I figured the ship may have been a merchant ship that traveled no further than the routes along the coasts of Japan.

In addition, I noticed that the ship must have had a lot of cargo space given the relative size of the hull to the rest of the ship and the number of anchors (which was four). Upon closer inspection, I noticed that there was a small row boat which I guessed was probably used in the event that a port is not close by and sailors had to row to shore after anchoring the ship in deeper waters away from the coast. The row boat only had two oars (out of possibly four?) so I assumed that the ship was not manned by a large crew. This made sense as the ship did not seem to have much space for crew quarters.

One of the most interesting things I noticed however was the decor of the ship. The black tassels that dangled from the front of the ship did not seem to serve a purpose nor did the rope of beads that were strung from the top of the mast. The black paint on the bottom portion of the hull also struck me as interesting as it seemed to have been painted purposely in a manner that was either simply for aesthetic reasons or could have functioned to expand the overall lifespan of the ship (for example, if it was some form of protective coating or bonding such as tar). However, I am made to believe that it may have been the latter as the paint is very angular and does not align with how the ship may have sat in relation to water.

My speculations were made clearer when I spoke with Megumi, one of the members of my group. Since she is Japanese and could read Japanese, she gave me the name of a potential
ship – *bezaisen* – that had been used as a cargo ship during the Edo Period. When I looked it up, it looked to be almost an exact match! Fortunately, many of my initial observations were close – the *bezaisen* was indeed a merchant ship (although mainly used for cargo) and was used prior to the Meiji Period. Additionally, it was not used to travel outside of Japan, although some sources say that it may have but have linked it with Chinese junk ships. This is interesting as during our viewing of the ship model, one of the documents included of the ship called it ‘Chinese junk ship’. Although I was unable to check if this model was actually a Chinese junk ship or not, the research I was able to do on *bezaisen* convinced me enough that it could be a *bezaisen*. 