琉球を再考する

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Rethinking Ryukyu

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In this essay, I attempt to re-conceptualize the broad contours of the history of the Ryukyu Kingdom. Simply stated, I seek to describe what Ryukyu was. I present Ryukyu as a small-scale empire, created and maintained by military force. Furthermore, it was a composite empire, consisting of smaller parts and sub-parts, whose existence was based mainly on a logic of resource extraction. Ryukyu, in turn was part of larger regional networks, with central nodes located at places like Fuzhou, Beijing, Kagoshima, and Edo. I acknowledge that such a portrayal of Ryukyu is likely to make some readers uncomfortable, owing to a tendency to romanticize Ryukyu's past. Nevertheless, to comprehend the legacy of the Ryukyu Kingdom within East Asian and Japanese history, I argue that it is beneficial to examine Ryukyu critically and to portray the kingdom in a way that best fits the known evidence. This essay is an initial attempt to do so.[1]

1. Different Ryukyuan Histories

I am well aware that creating an historical narrative reflects the time, place, and agenda of the author. Furthermore, the conceptualization, writing, and presentation of the history of Ryukyu itself has a long history. Shō Shōken's 1650 *Chūzan seikan* 中山世鑑 (Mirror of Chūzan) was Ryukyu's first official history. It emphasizes King Shunten's 舜天 descent from Emperor Seiwa (r. 858–876) via Minamoto Tametomo (1139–1170). This discussion occurs early in the work and at great length, thus functioning as the foundational narrative of Ryukyuan history.[2] Written mainly in Japanese, the *Seikan* linked the foundation of Ryukyu with the Japanese imperial line and with the Tokugawa shogunal line (who also claimed Seiwa Genji descent). That portrayal made ideological sense in 1650 as part of Ryukyu's adjustment to de facto Satsuma domination. This narrative also made ideological sense after the establishment of Okinawa Prefecture in 1879.

By contrast, Sai On's 蔡温 1725 *Chūzan seifu* 中山世譜 (Genealogy of Chūzan) was written in Chinese, mainly for the eyes of investiture envoys (*sakuhōshi, sappōshi* 冊封使) from China. Although similarly organized around the royal succession reigns, the

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Seifu begins with geography, specifying the name and location of each Ryukyu Island, including an outline map and the precise latitude and longitude coordinates for Fujian and Ryukyu.[3)] In the historical overview at the beginning and in the main narrative, Tenson arose like the mythical sage kings of pre-historic China, teaching the people how to cook, build suitable dwellings, cultivate crops, and otherwise reform their habits, culture, and customs, which constitutes the main discussion.[4)] The *Seifu* does mention that King Shunten's (r. 1187–1238) father was Minamoto Tametomo and that his mother was the daughter of a local lord, but it does not discuss the matter at length. Moreover, the immediately preceding discussion stresses that Ryukyu was a regional center of trade and that people from a variety of countries travelled there. In the *Seifu,* the significance of Ryukyu's kings was their transformative effect on culture, not putative early ties to the Japanese imperial family. This portrayal, of course, made sense given its overall goal of presenting Ryukyu's past to Chinese officials.

Moving much closer to the present, consider Iha Fuyū 伊波普猷 (1876–1947), often called the "father" of Ryukyuan or Okinawan studies. In Kyoto and Tokyo, where he received his higher education, Iha was exposed to theories of politics and human development based on prevailing notions of race and ethnicity. Iha's intellectual horizons were international in scope, yet he directed his ultimate concern to the island of Okinawa. He attempted what was probably the impossible feat of harmonizing Okinawans with each other, Okinawans with other Japanese, and Japan with the rest of the world. Okinawa's crushing economic depression of the 1920s, the so-called Sago Palm Hell (*sotetsu jigoku*), combined with upheavals in Iha's personal life, altered his academic views, strained his optimism, and sent him physically back to Tokyo, where he remained until the end of the Pacific War.

Trained as a linguist, Iha often wrote as an historian, albeit one who made extensive use of literary sources and language-related hypotheses. Although clearly dedicated to the welfare of Okinawa and its people, Iha was hardly a cheerleader by the contemporary standards of advocacy politics. In his short 1909 (revised 1942) essay "The Establishment of [Okinawa] Prefecture [*haihan-chiken*] Viewed from Evolutionary Theory," Iha begins with pigs, pointing out that Berkshire pigs are much larger than the swine in Okinawa. Both varieties, however, originated from the same stock in south China. Natural differences in the environment could create a new species within five or ten generations, but active human intervention can speed up the process dramatically. In the expansive confines of England, active breeding led to steady improvements in the pigs. In the narrow confines of Okinawa, however, the techniques of animal husbandry were not conducive to superior breeding. Having established that the surrounding environment can promote or limit development, Iha points out that Okinawans are of shorter average height compared with residents of other parts of Japan.[5)]

Because Okinawans lived on isolated islands in the sea, Iha argued, there was "not very much mixing of blood with outsiders" and a tendency to intermarry. A parenthetical addition in the revised essay points out that one can find many fine physical specimens in

Naha and other areas below Shuri Castle where historical admixture of different peoples (*ta jinshu*) was common. Here and elsewhere, Iha's ideas are similar to those of the majority of prewar Japanese intellectuals, who stressed the diverse, multi-lateral origins of Japan's people.[6] Moreover, given the mixing of populations so common in the modern era, Iha claims it is "natural" (*tōzen*) that in future generations more children with ideal physiques will be born in Okinawa.[7]

Iha makes a similar point from botany, explaining that crops flourish best when admixtures of outside cells contribute to their growth. After discussing this point at some length, Iha set the stage for his main argument that the creation of Okinawa Prefecture in 1879 marked the beginning of a period of beneficial improvement for the people of the former Ryukyu Kingdom. Intellectually poisoned for centuries by Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism (*Shushigaku* 朱子学), Okinawans suddenly became exposed to new systems of thought such as Wang Yangming Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, naturalism, and more. Thereby, the Ryukyuan people were "reborn," owing to the elimination of the "half dead" kingdom.[8] The matter, however, needed further explanation.

Once again, Iha turns to a biological metaphor, likening Okinawans of past centuries to barnacles—passive organisms with no legs or eyes that wait for the ocean tide to wash food into their mouths. Compared with active crustaceans, barnacles have atrophied. However, these barnacles are not inferior to crabs or other crustaceans because they are all products of their environment. The main culprit in Okinawa's process of atrophy was Satsuma, which invaded Okinawa in 1609 and allegedly imposed Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism on Ryukyu to the exclusion of other bodies of thought. How different, Iha speculates, might things have turned out had Okinawans replaced their folding fans with Japanese swords and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism with the thought of Wang Yangming? After ruminating on the reality of the world such that those of superior talents inevitably prevail over those of inferior abilities, Iha points out that after the creation of the prefecture, Okinawans were ill adapted to the new environment, like barnacles too high up on rocks for the tide to reach them. Over the past thirty years, Okinawans have begun to grow legs and open their eyes, but it is inevitable that they would still be at a disadvantage. Iha ends with an appeal for "willpower education" (*ishi kyōiku*) to overcome the 300-year burden of history that continues to hinder Okinawans socially.[9]

By contemporary standards, we might judge Iha's interpretation of Ryukyu's past as problematic. For one thing, he rarely distinguished between social elites and ordinary people or between people in different Ryukyu Islands. In this essay, "Okinawans" constituted a singular, poorly defined entity. The claim that Satsuma imposed Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism on Okinawa is difficult to sustain, as is the idea that this body of thought could possibly account for Okinawa's social conditions in the twentieth century. Throughout history, the vast majority of Ryukyuans were illiterate and lived lives unconnected with any of the intellectual traditions Iha mentions.

My point here is not to evaluate the accuracy of Iha's portrayal of Ryukyu's past but to underline that it was a product of Iha's social, economic, and ideological environment.

In a time and place that valued martial valor, for example, Iha lamented that Ryukyuans had placed excessive value on the civil arts, on "folding fans." It was also common throughout most of the twentieth century in many intellectual circles to regard Confucian thought as a vestige of the past to be abandoned or overcome in the interest of social progress. The application of concepts from the biological theory of natural selection to peoples or societies was also typical of the early twentieth century.

Iha's critical assessment of Okinawa and its people was often blunt and uncomfortable. His stress on willpower and motivation was typical of his time and place. The most common prevailing explanation for Okinawan poverty, both within Okinawa and in Japan at large, typically stressed attitude, willpower, and culture, not economics. Clearly, Iha did not subscribe to what we could call the germ theory of culture, that is, to the claims of scientific racism that culture derived from inherent biological traits. Here too, Iha was in the academic mainstream, at least within Japan and East Asia. This mainstream regarded putative ethnic or national characteristics as the product of environment and historical circumstances. Active intervention through education was capable of accelerating the process of altering these characteristics for the better. Indeed, for all his dislike of certain streams of Confucian thought, Iha professed great faith in what was essentially the classic Confucian notion of transformative person-building through learning.

Iha placed himself in a difficult middle ground. On the one hand, he sought to encourage fundamental changes within Okinawan society to align it better with explicit or implicit Japanese norms. On the other hand, he worked hard to provide an intellectual foundation for the full acceptance of Okinawans as Japanese by denizens of the mainland. The biological metaphors in Iha's essay were aimed at explaining real or perceived Okinawan particularities to broader Japanese audiences. Insofar as Okinawa might deviate from Japanese ideals, Iha's explanation was the influence of peculiar and unnatural historical circumstances, not inherent characteristics of Ryukyu's people. In a sense, Iha made Ryukyu's history bear such a heavy explanatory weight that it became seriously distorted under the load.

In the wake of the Pacific War, the former Okinawa Prefecture entered a state of political limbo under U. S. military control until 1972. Even after reversion to Japan, the U. S. military presence remained the greatest source of social problems and political contention within Okinawa. One result of this situation has been the intensification of the claim that Ryukyu was a pacifist kingdom—apparently the only one on earth.[10] According to this line, the Ryukyuan state possessed no military or police forces of any significance and governed in a consensual manner. Although the roots of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism precede 1945, its widespread adoption, even by scholars who should know better, was a direct result of the U. S. military presence. The claim of a pacifist Ryukyu Kingdom adds rhetorical poignancy to portraying the postwar militarization of the islands as a tragedy.

Although the details of this agenda differ from Iha's situation, the U. S. military presence has similarly resulted in a peculiar and arguably distorted portrayal of the Ryukyuan

past. There are, of course, many other sets of circumstances from which people might write about Ryukyu's past. I am sympathetic with those Okinawans who seek to reduce the militarization of the islands, but I do not agree that such ends justify the creation of a fantasy pacifist kingdom. Let us now consider the main question of this paper: What was Ryukyu?

2. Akahachi Rebels against Okinawa

The first entry appearing in the *Kyūyō* 球陽, under the twenty-fourth year of King Shō Shin's reign (1500), is concise: "Zenihara was appointed commanding general, and he destroyed Akahachi of Yaeyama." The *Kyūyō* was an official history first compiled in 1743, so the military action it describes was an event far back in time. The next three entries, also for 1500, chronicle major institutional changes in Yaeyama and Miyako. For example, the royal government established ōamu 大阿母, high-ranking female religious officials, in Yaeyama that year, and in Miyako three years later. Moreover, 1500 marks the establishment of royally appointed *kashira* (chieftains) in both Yaeyama and Miyako.[11] The terse *Kyūyō* entries refer to the military pacification of Yaeyama by the Shuri royal court in Okinawa and its immediate aftermath.

A dramatic statue in Ishigaki City depicts Oyake Akahachi 遠弥計赤蜂 heroically leading a rebellion against Okinawa and the 3,000 soldiers sent by its king. The matter was not as simple as a bi-polar military contest between Shuri/Okinawa on the one hand and Ishigaki/Yaeyama on the other. From the standpoint of Yaeyama, the years between about 1450 and 1500 constituted the Era of Rival Chiefs (*gun'yū sōran jidai* 群雄争乱時代). On the island of Ishigaki, for example, Naata Ufushu 長田大翁主 (1456–1517), Nakama Mitsukeima Eigyoku 仲間満慶山英極, and Taira Kubo 平久保 vied for power along with Akahachi, who eventually came to control the island. The defeat of Akahachi in 1500 did not put a complete end to military activities in and around the Miyako and Yaeyama island groups (with Yonaguni playing an especially active role). Indeed the wars of the Era of Rival Chiefs occasionally reverberated through the region until the end of the sixteenth century. In short, the geopolitical landscape of the Ryukyu Kingdom was complex and volatile at the regional and local levels.[12]

One *Kyūyō* entry for 1500 reads, "Shishika of Yaeyama died for loyalty, for which he has been honored with memorial rites." This vague passage refers to Miusuku Shishikadun 明宇底獅子嘉殿, a local strongman on the island of Hateruma. As the story goes, Shishikadun repeatedly refused the call to join Akahachi's rebellion, remaining loyal to Shuri. Agents of Akahachi took Shishikadun prisoner on board a boat, stabbed him to death at sea, and threw his body overboard. His remains were later found and returned to Hateruma for a formal funeral. The royal government bestowed honors on Shishikadun and appointed his six children as local officials on Hateruma.[13] Whether this traditional account is literally accurate is less important than the glimpse of geopolitics it affords in areas of Ryukyu far from the royal court. Local strongmen vied for power and influence,

and their relationship with Shuri—whether antagonistic, loyal, wavering, sincere, cynical, or whatever—was a key element in this process of struggle. This brief account of the tumultuous turn of the sixteenth century should be sufficient to suggest some of the difficulties in characterizing Ryukyu.

3.   Was Ryukyu an Empire?

What is an empire? Here, of course, we are concerned with the meaning of the word as a geopolitical entity and not in its various metaphoric uses. Turning to a typical dictionary definition, we find, "a major political unit having a territory of great extent or a number of territories or peoples under a single sovereign authority; *especially,* one having an emperor as chief of state."[14] This partially circular definition readily brings to mind great empires of antiquity such as Rome, Byzantium, Persia, China (Han, Tang, etc.), the "gunpowder empires" of the early modern era, and the British, Russian, and other empires of the modern era of imperialism. All of these empires, and many others, featured a political center from which the court of an emperor (or king, czar, etc.) controlled, with varying degrees of effectiveness, vast territories encompassing multiple ethnic groups.

Consider an arrangement in which a ruler with the title "king" exerted authority over a widely dispersed territory, acquired and maintained by military power. This territory included multiple, distinct ethno-linguistic communities. Each of these communities was largely self-contained in terms of culture, economic activities, and governance. Could such a kingdom reasonably be considered an empire? Looking at the dictionary definition, some questions come to mind such as scale. Exactly how great an extent of territory and how many different territories and peoples would constitute an empire? There is, of course, no precise answer, but such questions are worth considering if we are to understand the nature of Ryukyu as it developed and expanded during the fifteenth century, transformed significantly during the seventeenth century, and became part of Japan in the late nineteenth century.

Some additional, specialized definitions might help in forging an answer. In his classic work, *Empires,* Michael W. Doyle provides the following summary definition:

> Empire, then, is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire.[15]

Ryukyu would seem to fit this definition well. The royal court at Shuri forged and maintained formal and informal relationships with political communities in the Okinawan countryside, the *aji* 按司 domains and later districts (*magiri* 間切). It did the same vis-à-vis the other Ryukyu Islands. From approximately the middle of the fifteenth through the middle of the sixteenth centuries, Shuri increased its control over political communities in a vast arc extending from Amami-Ōshima to Yonaguni. This zone of control was con-

gruent with the royal court's military power, and the process of becoming a part of the Ryukyu Kingdom was either violent or accomplished with the threat of violence nearby.

Focusing on the issue of resistance, consider this point by Doyle:

> Imperial tyranny often results in widespread political resistance. In formal empires, resistance leads to police actions or the replacement of rebellious collaborators. In informal empires it leads to indirect constraints (threats of embargoes, blockades, etc.) or to military intervention. A successful response to peripheral resistance is a sign of effective imperialism, and effective empires control (constitute or can change) the political regime of the periphery.[16]

Oyake Akahachi's rebellion in Ishigaki exemplifies this power dynamic. Military forces from Okinawa directly suppressed and defeated the rebellion he led. To follow up and enhance its control, Shuri established formal institutions such as the *ōamu*, rewarded its local supporters, and installed friendly local rulers.

Indeed, altering the power balance and allocating resources to ensure essential cooperation of key allies is an integral process of empire creation and maintenance. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper explain the process as follows:

> The only way for a would-be king or tribal leader to become more powerful is to expand—taking animals, money, slaves, land, or other forms of wealth from outside his realm rather than from insiders whose support he needs. Once this externalization of sources of wealth begins, outsiders may see advantages in submitting to a powerful and effective conqueror. Emboldened kings or tribal leaders can then use their new subordinates to collect resources in a regular—not raiding—way and to facilitate the incorporation of new peoples, territories, and trade routes without imposing uniformity in culture or administration. Tribes and kingdoms provided materials and incentives for making empires.[17]

Oyake Akahachi sought power in a losing gambit to oppose Shuri. By contrast, Nakasone Tuyumiya enhanced his power by submitting to and cooperating with the royal court. For its part, Shuri sought to extract wealth from places like Miyako and Yaeyama while leaving many administrative details to the discretion of loyal local rulers. Furthermore, Shuri made no attempt to impose cultural uniformity on the other Ryukyu Islands, which would have made no sense vis-à-vis the goal of extracting resources.

It should be clear, even from what little we have seen so far of the Yaeyama region around 1500, that the power of the royal court at Shuri was a major element in local struggles. Such a situation is common in empires. Moreover, empires can be distinguished from other kinds of geopolitical collective organizations in part by the dominance of unequal political relations:

> . . . societies in an empire share the characteristic of a less-than-full integration of social interaction and cultural values—the imperial government is a sovereignty that lacks a community. Moreover, unlike both confederations and federations, the imperial state is not organized on the basis of political equality among societies or individuals. The domain of empire is a people subject to unequal rule. One nation's government determines who rules another society's political life.[18]

This point also applies well to Ryukyu. The kingdom was never an integrated cultural community, and with the exception of some social elites, denizens of the Ryukyu Islands did not regard themselves as "Ryukyuans." Indeed, only after Japan annexed the kingdom in 1879 did Ryukyuans come to know that they were Ryukyuans on a large scale.[19] Each island in the kingdom was a distinct cultural, linguistic, and political community, with all parts existing in separate and unequal relationships vis-à-vis Shuri and each other.

Is an imperial relationship the same as a hegemonic relationship? For example, would it be more accurate to say that Shuri exerted hegemony over the islands of Yaeyama? Hegemony and imperialism share obvious similarities, but Doyle's distinction between the two is useful in clarifying Ryukyu's status both within its boundaries and within a broader international context:

> A final useful distinction is between imperialism and hegemony. Reflecting important differences in world politics, the analytical separation of foreign policy from domestic policy helps define imperial outcomes. Control of both foreign and domestic policy characterizes empire; control of only foreign policy, hegemony. Thucydides first drew this distinction, noting Sparta's 'allies,' despite their subjection to Spartan hegemony during the Peloponnesian War, exercised a considerable degree of domestic autonomy—unlike the imperialized 'allies' subject to Athens.[20]

With this distinction in mind, we can at least partially address some thorny issues. For example, can a place be an empire if its ruler does not call himself an emperor and participates in one or more relationships with foreign countries in which that ruler clearly plays a subordinate role?

Consider the Ryukyu Kingdom in approximately 1700. Looking within its boundaries, the royal court at Shuri was the clear center and the pinnacle of political power and socio-cultural prestige. Shuri extracted taxes (tribute) from the islands in the Miyako and Yaeyama groups, typically dealing with, and supporting, locally powerful officials in regional centers like Ishigaki. These regional centers functioned much like miniature empires themselves, extracting wealth from districts or villages in their territories via the district and village-level officials. It was a nested hierarchical network with Shuri at the top and in ultimate control, but which maintained a significant degree of local cultural autonomy and governance. Of course, geography played a major role in maintaining this arrangement. Let us now change directions and extend this network outward from Ryukyu.

After 1609, the Chūzan King at Shuri ritually subordinated himself to both the Japanese shogun (via the lord of Satsuma) and the Chinese emperor. Shuri's relationship with Japan was mainly, but not exclusively, political, whereas its relationship with China was mainly, but not exclusively, cultural. Moreover, economic activities between China and Ryukyu and Japan and Ryukyu were significant, at least for the royal court and some Okinawan merchants. Ryukyu and its component parts became enmeshed in networks of trade, politics, and cultural relations that extended throughout much of the East Asian region and even beyond during approximately the reign of Shō Shin (1477–1526). With

these points in mind, I propose the following characterizations.

First, from the time in the fifteenth century that Okinawan military forces began their conquest of other Ryukyu Islands, the Ryukyu Kingdom is most accurately characterized as a small-scale empire. It continued as such until annexation by Japan in 1879, and possibly even longer depending on how one might interpret the so-called "preservations of old customs" (*kyūkan onzon* 旧慣温存) era, which lasted until about 1895 or 1900. Shuri's relationships with the other parts of its territory included both formal and informal aspects of imperialism. Contra the contemporary myth of Ryukyuan pacifism, it is important to stress the role of military force in this process of empire creation and maintenance.

Second, maritime empires often take on a political or cultural geography different from land empires. If the territory of all of the Ryukyu Islands were compressed into one contiguous piece of land and attached to some part of Japan, the whole thing would have amounted to a medium-sized domain (*han* 藩) and most likely would have possessed a high degree of cultural uniformity. That Ryukyu consisted of a widely dispersed arc of islands in advantageous locations for maritime commerce was the basis for its geopolitical and cultural characteristics.

Third, especially after Satsuma's invasion of 1609, Shuri's relationship with Japan was mainly hegemonic in nature. Satsuma and the *bakufu* largely—but not totally—controlled Ryukyu's foreign relations between 1609 and 1868. The early Meiji state increased this control. Satsuma did exert modest control over certain domestic matters such as the adjudication of high-profile criminal cases. However, for the most part, the royal court controlled Ryukyu's domestic affairs through its hierarchy of central government and local officials, bolstered if necessary by police and military power.

Finally, whether before or after 1609, Shuri's relationship with the Chinese imperial court included some elements of hegemony, but with important qualifications. The Chinese court dictated the terms whereby Ryukyu conducted formal diplomacy, formal trade, and informal trade with the Chinese court and with certain Chinese merchants. Moreover, Ryukyuan diplomats regularly recognized Chinese cultural superiority via the accepted ritualized and theatrical forms of diplomacy common in East Asia until the modern era.[21] When discussing China, such a diplomatic system and style is often called "the tribute system," although this term can be misleading. The Chinese court did not exert political control over Ryukyu's internal affairs, at least in the usual sense. It was crucial after 1609 that Ryukyu did not appear to Chinese envoys as being under overt Japanese control if the kingdom was to maintain its close ties with China. In a sense, this requirement functioned as a kind of limited hegemony. At the same time, however, it put limits on Japanese power over Ryukyu, thus creating a significant zone of autonomy for Shuri and its empire.

4. Was Ryukyu a Nation?

One difficulty in discussing Ryukyuan history today is the intrusion of modern concepts of national identity and state sovereignty. These concepts did not apply to pre-modern

East Asian societies in the same way that they came to do so during the modern era. This conceptual divide hinders accurate comprehension of the past and of the alternative possibilities for human social organization embedded in it. It also contains the potential to fuel territorial and other disputes in the present.

This section attempts to describe the pre-modern past of Ryukyu and the East Asian region according to its own logic, beginning with the key question of nationhood. Was the early modern Ryukyu Kingdom a nation in any meaningful sense of the term? To answer this question well, it is useful to ask the same question about early modern Japan and then compare Japan's situation to that which prevailed in Ryukyu. Drawing on this comparison, I point out several key differences between early modern societies in East Asia and modern nation-states. My argument is that the basis of both national identity and state sovereignty in early modern East Asia was significantly different from what emerged during the modern era.

Early-modern Japan was a patchwork of territories organized loosely around the political center of Edo and the religious-cultural center of Kyoto. The extent of early-modern Japan's physical territory was similar to that of today's Japan. Significantly, however, the boundaries of Japanese territory were fuzzy. In the north, "Japan" faded into *ezochi* 蝦夷地 (Ainu land) in Hokkaidō, which faded into the Russian frontier. In the south, Satsuma faded into Ryukyu, which faded into the Chinese frontier. After 1609, Shuri lost control of Amami-Ōshima and nearby northern Ryukyu islands, which became part of Satsuma's territory. The culture of this region remained largely unchanged despite the change of overlords, and informal ties with Shuri persisted. Cultural boundaries and those of political territories were rarely congruent. Popular conceptions of geography in eighteenth century Japan typically conceived of "a world made up of concentric circles of increasing strangeness, stretching almost infinitely outward from a familiar center."[22] In pre-modern East Asia, geographic centers such as Edo, Kyoto, Shuri, Fuzhou, and Beijing were clear, but borders and peripheral areas were not—precisely the opposite of the carefully calibrated boundaries of modern nation-states.

In the realm of culture, group identity was mainly a function of external appearances such as hairstyles, clothing, customary ceremonies, and social behavior, all of which could be learned by anyone willing to make the effort. Pre-modern national identity was not rooted in unchangeable qualities such as biological concepts of race. Noting that it is difficult to find anything resembling a coherent theory of race in early-modern Japan, Tessa Morris-Suzuki argues that it makes more sense to envisage an inherently unequal social order where everyone theoretically occupied a place in an intricate galaxy of statuses spiraling outward from a center represented by the imperial court and the Shogunal administration. Order, propriety, and virtue were generally assumed to be greatest at the center—in both social and geographical terms—and to diminish as one moved out toward the margins.[23]

Indeed, one might extend Morris-Suzuki's astronomical metaphor to regard each significant center in pre-modern East Asia as a star whose gravitational field ordered and

influenced satellite territories with diminishing force as a function of distance. Shuri, for example, was the main center for island groups such as Yaeyama, Miyako, and (before 1609) Amami-Ōshima. Zooming out, the entire Shuri-centered solar system of the Ryukyu Islands lay at the periphery of the larger and stronger gravitational fields of centers within China and Japan.

In a final iteration of this metaphor, we could say that the laws of the astrophysics of national identity changed abruptly during the modern era. Therefore, one urgent task for the Meiji state was to clarify Japan's northern and southern boundaries. In the south, a long process began in the early 1870s and concluded in 1895. It brought all of the Ryukyu Islands into Japan, thus making those who lived there Japanese citizens. The tumultuous cultural and economic impact of this change of sovereignty on the people of the former domains of Ryukyu's kings played out over an even longer time. Indeed, some would argue that the process of assimilation of Ryukyuans into Japan is still underway, although it is easy to overstate the case. Most contemporary residents of Okinawa Prefecture unproblematically regard themselves as Japanese and indeed are Japanese in any reasonable sense of the term.

Given the many differences between modern conceptions of nations and pre-modern conceptions of human communities, is it reasonable to regard early-modern Japan as having been a nation? Takashi Fujitani points out that during the Tokugawa period, "Japan was populated by a people separated from one another regionally, with strong local rather than regional ties."[24] Indeed, primary identities tended to be local during the early-modern era, and the term "*kuni*" (or "*-koku*"), more often than not, referred to a province or daimyo domain, not the whole of Japan. Today, by contrast, there is only one possible *kuni* (country) in Japan. That said, however, there is abundant evidence that early-modern Japanese, especially residents of urban areas, possessed a well-formed conception of "Nihon" (Japan). This Nihon did not compete with local identities, but helped tie them together.

The key enabler of the imagined community of "Nihon" in the early-modern era was popular print media, what Mary Elizabeth Berry has called the "information library." This diverse collection of printed material included compilations of military lineages, government officials, occupations, shrines and temples, popular festivals, educational guides concerning aspects of culture and the arts, travel guides, and much more. Berry characterizes the "Nihon" that developed from the information library as:

> a space of common access, where any pilgrim could follow a sacred route and any stranger mingle at a festival. Nihon emerged as a space of overlapping and intertwined geographies, where the circuits of religion and trade and artistic affiliation connected discrete places. Yet this Nihon subsumed without erasing the Avenue of Temples, the rice exchange of Kitahama, the burial ground of Mt. Kōya, the Bay of Bungo. Shaped in the vortex not of imperialism but of warlord alliance, the early-modern territory was a union of parts. Thus the information library constructed "our country" from the long, knowledge-heavy litanies of names and rituals and products that bound the whole together, not from any short, essentializing formula of

faith and race that set this country apart from others.[25)]

Early-modern Japanese nationhood consisted of "an integral conception of territory, an assumption of political union under a paramount state, and a prevailing agreement about the cultural knowledge and social intercourse that bound 'our people.'" The culture of this early-modern version of Nihon was "fashioned to negotiate difference rather than enforce sameness."[26)] "Nihon" was something that many early-modern Japanese recognized, even though not in the same manner or with the same degree of intensity as their modern counterparts.

Having briefly examined the status of early-modern Japan as a nation, what about Ryukyu? Did a widespread "Ryukyuan" identity exist among the denizens of the Ryukyu Islands during the centuries or decades prior to the kingdom's demise in 1879? The short answer is no. Certainly, there were varieties of Ryukyuan literary culture, but nothing comparable to Japan's public information library and Japan's relatively high level of literacy could be found in Ryukyu. It would have been difficult if not impossible for a peasant in Yonaguni, for example, to imagine herself as "Ryukyuan" in the sense of having a meaningful connection with other Ryukyuans in Miyako, Okinawa, or Amami-Ōshima. Although local officials swore oaths of loyalty to the king, many ordinary Ryukyuans would have had little or no conception of the royal court. Systems of taxation and governance differed significantly from one region to another. There was a paramount state for the purposes of resource extraction, but it was not a uniting force at the level of popular consciousness.

Let us consider Ryukyuan elites, defined rather broadly as those members of society who were literate and relatively wealthy or influential vis-à-vis the surrounding society. In this sense, the term "elite" would include most, but not all, of those with formal aristocratic (*yukkatchu* 良人) status and most commoners who worked as local government officials, whether in Okinawa or in other islands. Broadly defined, such elites constituted roughly 8–10% of the population.

To what extent did these elites regard themselves as "Ryukyuans" during the early-modern era? The upper echelons of the kingdom's elite undoubtedly regarded themselves as Ryukyuans, among other identities. Their social statuses and political offices linked them closely with the kingdom's center and with the centers in other countries. Indeed many Ryukyuan elites participated in a vigorous campaign to preserve the kingdom after it became clear that the Meiji state intended to abolish it in the 1870s. The rhetoric of this campaign defined Ryukyu not as a sovereign state in a modern sense but as a state constituted in terms of its relations with China and Japan. Specifically, China and Japan became Ryukyu's parents in the standard formulation. Ryukyu should continue to exist as a distinct kingdom so that it could carry out its filial obligations to each of its parents. Obviously, this elite conception of Ryukyu differed significantly from modern forms of popular nationalism, but we can say that the term "Ryukyuan" would have made sense to this small subset of the residents of the Ryukyu Islands prior to the 1870s.

The prevailing norms in early-modern Ryukyu's international environment helped constitute its elite society. For example, during the eighteenth century, a consensus about the nature of formal aristocratic status developed within government circles. The higher ranks of Ryukyuan elites bore the responsibility of fulfilling the kingdom's obligations to China and Japan. Those who excelled in this function were eligible for promotion and other formal rewards from the state. Similarly, these Ryukyuans shouldered the responsibility of maintaining and enhancing the kingdom's reputation (*o-gaibun* 御外聞) vis-à-vis its larger neighbors. They did so by carrying out trade and diplomacy in a ritualistically correct way and through their cultivation of the literary arts and other relevant knowledge. Moreover, the very existence of a formal class of aristocrats who theoretically functioned as cultivated exemplars of moral excellence served to enhance the small kingdom's respectability in the eyes of outsiders.[27]

Lower echelon elites such as local officials would have been well aware of their place in a hierarchy emanating from the royal court in Shuri. Their consciousness of Ryukyu within in a broader international milieu would have been less acute compared with leading central government officials. Although they may not have used the term "Ryukyuan," most local officials would have seen themselves as Ryukyuans to the extent of identifying with a polity centered at Shuri. They would have known their place in the empire.

The essential question for our purposes was which geo-political center or centers played a significant role in someone's identity. It is highly unlikely that a peasant eking out a living in a remote part of the island of Iriomote, for example, would have identified in any meaningful way with Shuri or the Ryukyuan state. That person's village would likely have served as the primary center of his identity. Secondary centers would likely have been the local government office on his island and possibly Ishigaki, the geo-political center of the Yaeyama Island group. A similar situation would have prevailed on other islands outside of Okinawa. Okinawans in rural areas would have been aware of the royal court not through symbols or literature, but indirectly, through the local officials empowered by it. The most influential community leaders were often not state officials, but the *niigan* 根神 literally "root deity" of each village. These women generally enjoyed higher levels of trust than did the state-sanctioned *noro* 祝女・巫女 (*nuru*) priestesses.

No common language bound Ryukyuans together, and other forms of culture varied significantly from one island to another. Symbols of royal authority were largely limited to the vicinity of the court itself or its obvious extensions such as ships. Throughout most of the Ryukyu Kingdom, the royal court was distant in every sense of the term. Rugged terrain and a lack of roads and transportation infrastructure served to isolate communities within the larger islands. Indeed, a common Okinawan word for districts or neighborhoods was *shima* シマ, also meaning island. In contrast with Japan, the custom of long-distance leisure travel did not develop in Okinawa or elsewhere in the kingdom. Few ordinary Ryukyuans would have had more than a vague knowledge of China and Japan or a sense of Ryukyu's place in the larger world of East Asia.

Let us take a broad definition of "nation" as an imagined community rooted in a

notion of shared, bounded territory, some common cultural norms, and of political authority emanating from a geo-political center. Looking at Japan in 1850, although not all Japanese consciously regarded themselves as "Japanese" a very large number did, even among the common people. Moreover, these self-conscious Japanese were at least roughly aware of the political and cultural boundaries of Nihon and of major events happening in far-away parts of the country. In this sense, it is reasonable to regard early-modern Japan as a nation, even while acknowledging vast differences from the modern form of the nation.

In early-modern Ryukyu, by contrast, the basic proportions were reversed. Although some Ryukyuans did regard themselves as "Ryukyuan," most residents of the Ryukyu Islands did not identify themselves with the territorial boundaries of the kingdom or the geo-political center of Shuri. In this sense, Ryukyu was not a nation. It is also important to emphasize that even for elites who did regard themselves as Ryukyuans, modern concepts of cultural essentialism or ethno-racial identity would have made no sense—as would also have been the case in Japan.

Indeed, this situation was precisely why the transition from the early-modern to the modern era was especially jarring for Ryukyuans and other newly-designated "*Nihonjin*" (Japanese). As Morris-Suzuki astutely points out:

> On the one hand, the Japanese state was defined as the bearer of progress in the archipelago's history; on the other, the name of the state itself was transformed into an ethnonym, so that "Japanese" (*Nihonjin*) was seen as a racial designation. This meant that Okinawans and Ainu were left in the curious position of being commonly defined as ethnically distinct from *Nihonjin* at the very moment as they were being claimed as Japanese citizens. This ambivalent relationship of the word *Nihonjin* to the various categories of political citizenship, race, and ethnicity was to haunt debates on national identity throughout the twentieth century.[28]

In the Ryukyu Islands, post-1879 Ryukyuan identity itself was both new and fraught with many of the contradictions and tensions that bedeviled the term *Nihonjin*.

In part because the nation-state has become so pervasive and normative in the contemporary world, it can be difficult to appreciate that until recently in human history most societies were something else. Moreover, older forms of imagined cultural communities rarely corresponded well with political boundaries. To say that early-modern Ryukyu was not a nation is not to suggest that the kingdom was fundamentally peculiar. On the contrary, polyglot, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic empires were common around the world. Ryukyu was one such place.

5.   The Nature of Foreign Relations

To understand Ryukyu in its own terms, we must also appreciate the logic of foreign relations that prevailed in pre-modern East Asia. Modern foreign relations typically take the form of contractual negotiations and agreements between theoretically sovereign states exercising independent agency. Of course, the de facto situation is often different,

but that need not concern us here. In pre-modern East Asia, by contrast, foreign relations was an extension of the Confucian concept of *li* 礼 (J. *rei*), which we might roughly translate as "ritualized conduct." Just as ritualized conduct constituted and re-affirmed the domestic social network, it functioned the same in relations between the various geopolitical centers throughout East Asia as described in the previous section. Foreign relations were a series of carefully choreographed performances among actors of *unequal* power and status. Therefore, it made perfect sense that the Board of Rites (*Libu* 礼部) was the division of government that oversaw foreign relations in China.

Briefly reviving the astronomical metaphor mentioned previously, the two centers with the strongest gravitational fields in early-modern East Asia were Beijing and Edo. The Qing imperial court interacted with a variety of states on China's periphery, most of whom sent periodic embassies to Beijing. While the classic tributary system model did not apply in all cases, it does fit the circumstances of Ryukyu and Korea well. These two kingdoms sent regular, tribute-bearing diplomatic embassies to Beijing, and their kings received ritual recognition (investiture) from Chinese emperors. Via the specialized envoys performing formal rites of diplomacy, Korea and Ryukyu regularly acknowledged and re-affirmed the cultural superiority of China. Part of this process included sending students to study in China, both formally and informally. It was as if the gravitational field centered at Beijing held Korea and Ryukyu in orbit around it.

In the cosmos, gravitational fields theoretically extend forever, and they overlap in complex ways. Similarly, the strongest centers in East Asia exerted a pull on lesser centers, and many of these lesser centers contained their own satellites. Formal performances of ritual served as an important medium for the expression of such influence. Beijing exerted a strong pull on Seoul, and Edo exerted a lesser but still significant pull on Seoul as well. The Korean king sent embassies to Japan, typically in connection with a change of shoguns. The pull of Edo on Ryukyu was even stronger by comparison.

Japan's Tokugawa *bakufu* did not maintain diplomatic relations with Qing China, even though it did engage in trade with Chinese merchants at the port of Nagasaki. Some degree of trade, of course, was simply an economic necessity. In the realm of diplomacy (vis-à-vis Korea, Ryukyu, and Holland), it is reasonable to view the Edo-centered network of foreign relations as a competing or alternative center to Beijing, albeit one of lesser gravity. The logic of the two centers was similar: affirmations of relative status and power differences via the public performance of rituals.[29]

Formal ritual displays linked Shuri with Beijing and Edo (via Kagoshima). A similar process linked Shuri with various geopolitical sub-centers within Ryukyu. Throughout the early modern period, it was customary for local officials in Ryukyu periodically to swear public oaths of loyalty to the king in ceremonies held at temples that usually involved sacred water. In 1632, for example, prominent royal official Tomigusuku Ueekata journeyed to Yaeyama as a "royal oath envoy," and in 1645, "sacred water envoys" travelled from Shuri to Yaeyama and Miyako. In 1669, sacred water envoys journeyed to remote parts of Okinawa in connection with the ascension of Shō Tei to the

throne. In 1713, three years after Shō Eki became king, loyalty oath ceremonies took place at Tōrinji in Yaeyama, and similar oath ceremonies took place in each district in Okinawa. Officials in Satsuma were aware of these rites and encouraged them. For example, in 1648 a directive from Satsuma authorizing Shō Shitsu to ascend the throne also specified that sacred water rites be conducted throughout Ryukyu as in the past. During the early modern era (and possibly earlier), local officials throughout Ryukyu periodically reaffirmed their loyalty the king. The king, in turn, ritually expressed loyalty to Satsuma, and Satsuma expressed ritual loyalty to the shogun. Similarly, a network of formal ritual linked the Ryukyuan king to the Qing emperor.[30]

In the realm of terminology, household registers (*kafu*) from Miyako and Yaeyama maintained by local elites sometimes referred to the presentation of "tribute" (*chōkō*) to the king in Shuri. Similarly, in these sources, Okinawa itself was often called *On-kunimoto* (venerable foundation of the country), which is precisely the same term that Shuri royal court documents used in reference to Satsuma.[31] In short, Ryukyu was enmeshed in a complex web of geopolitical gravitational forces, the exact nature of which depended heavily on social or geographical place and circumstances. A simpler but less accurate metaphor might be that of nested Russian dolls (*matryoshka* dolls). In any case, the main point is that the complex early-modern reality of political authority and foreign relations in East Asia cannot be translated or transposed accurately onto the modern logic of sovereign states, international law, and ethno-nationalism.

6. Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to re-conceptualize the broad outlines of Ryukyuan history, taking into consideration the geopolitical and cultural context of the kingdom and contrasting it with the very different context that came to prevail in the modern world. The kingdom was enmeshed in a large network of East Asian relations, and Ryukyu itself consisted of smaller networks, with Shuri as the ultimate locus of power. Relations of trade, culture, and politics linked Ryukyu and its subordinate networks to the larger entities of Japan (itself consisting of a vast network of geopolitical entities) and China. These relations were not equal. Ryukyu always played the subordinate role vis-à-vis China and Japan, and peripheral regions of Ryukyu were subordinate to Shuri. The subordination of Shuri vis-a-vis Satsuma, Edo, of Beijing does not negate the empire-like structure and function of the various parts and sub-parts of Ryukyu itself.

Ryukyu was not the realm of (mostly) sagacious rulers portrayed in the *Chūzan seikan* and *Chūzan seifu*. It was not a society atrophied by Satsuma's cruel imposition of Neo-Confucian thought. Nor was it a pacifist paradise innocently ignorant of political violence. For better or worse, Ryukyu was a normal state in the form of an island empire.

Notes

1) I am currently working on a book-length general history of Ryukyu that will expand on the points sketched here.

2) "Chūzan seikan," in Yokoyama Shigeru 横山重, (Ed.), *Ryūkyū shiryō sōsho* 琉球史料叢書, Vol. 5 (Hōbun shokan, 1940, 1988), 8–9, 15–24.

3) "Chūzan seifu," in Yokoyama Shigeru 横山重, (Ed.), *Ryūkyū shiryō sōsho* 琉球史料叢書, Vol. 4 (Hōbun shokan, 1940, 1988), 9–1, 20.

4) ibid., 20–24, 30.

5) Iha Fuyū 伊波普猷, *Ko-Ryūkyū* 古琉球 (Seijisha, 1943), 55.

6) The idea of the Japanese people as a closed, insular "single race and single ethnicity" was present in prewar Japan (corresponding to single origin hypotheses), but it did not gain prominence until after 1945, for reasons that Eiji Oguma has explored. See *A Genealogy of Japanese Self-Images* (Melbourne, Australia: Trans Pacific Press, 2002).

7) Iha, *Ko-Ryūkyū*, 55–56.

8) ibid., 57.

9) ibid., 57–59.

10) For a thorough analysis, see Gregory Smits, "Romanticizing the Ryukyuan Past: Origins of the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism," *IJOS: International Journal of Okinawan Studies* 国際沖縄研究, Premier Issue (March, 2010): 51–68. A revised version of this article appears as "Examining the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 8, Issue 37 (September 13, 2010). http://www.japanfocus.org/-Gregory-Smits/3409/article.html.

11) *Kyūyō kenkyūkai* 球陽研究会, (Eds.), *Kyūyō* 球陽, yomikudashi hen, Vol. 1 (Kadokawa shoten, 1974), 12–13. The precise identity of Zenihara is unclear, and Nakasone Tuyumiya (Toyomiya) Genga 中曽根豊見親玄雅, a local strongman, served as the de facto leader of the royal military forces after they arrived in the region.

12) *Kyūyō*, Vol. 1, pp. 12–13; Makino Kiyoshi 牧野清, *Shin Yaeyama rekishi* 新八重山歴史 (Kumamoto, Japan: Shirono insatsujo, 1972), 94–96. For the most thorough analysis of Akahachi's revolt and related matters, see Ōhama Eisen 大濱永亘, *Oyake Akahachi, Honkawara no ran to Sanyō-sei ichimon no hito-bito* オヤケアカハチ・ホンカワラノの乱と山陽姓一門の人々 (Ishigaki-shi: Sakishima bunka kenkyūjo, 2005), 44–219.

13) *Kyūyō*, Vol. 1, p. 12; Makino, *Shin Yaeyama rekishi*, 94–96.

14) Merriam-Webster Dictionary, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empire (accessed 2–17–2015)

15) Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornel University Press, 1986), 45.

16) ibid., 40.

17) Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 9–10.

18) Doyle, *Empires*, 36.

19) Gregory Smits, "New Cultures, New Identities: Becoming Okinawan and Japanese in 19th-Century Ryukyu," in Peter Nosco, James E. Ketelaar, and Yasunori Kojima, (Eds.), *Values, Identity, and Equality in 18th- and 19th-Century Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 159–178.

20) Doyle, *Empires*, 40.

21) For an analysis of the theatrical aspects of Ryukyuan diplomacy vis-à-vis China, see Gregory Smits, "Making a Good Impression: Cultural Drama in the Ryukyu-China Relationship," (part of Parades and Processions of Edo Japan, February 6–11, 2013, University of Hawai'i at Manoa) http://guides.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/edoparades/symposium_papers.

22) Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 15. This book informs many of the points in this section.

23) ibid., 83.

24)   T. Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 9.

25)   Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 228.

26)   ibid., 248.

27)   Watanabe Miki 渡辺美季, *Kinsei Ryūkyū to Chū-Nichi kankei* 近世琉球と中日関係 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2012), esp. 264.

28)   Morris-Suzuki, *Re-inventing Japan*, 32.

29)   For the classic analysis of this situation, see Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984, 1991).

30)   Tomiyama Kazuyuki 豊見山和行, *Ryūkyū Ōkoku no gaikō to ōken* 琉球王国の外交と王権 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2004), 287–88.

31)   ibid., 290.

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琉球を再考する

グレゴリー・スミッツ

　本稿の目的は、琉球王国の歴史の輪郭を再考することにある。つまり、琉球とは何かについて論述しようとする試みである。本稿では、琉球を軍事力によって形成され、保持された小規模帝国として提示する。加えて琉球は、資源搾取の論理を基礎として存在する小地域や下位地域から構成される、複合的な帝国であったとも言えるだろう。一方、琉球も、福州、北京、鹿児島、江戸などを拠点とする広範囲の地域的ネットワークに属していた。琉球をこのように理解することは、琉球の過去を理想化する傾向を持つ一部の読者に違和感を与えるであろうことは承知している。しかし、東アジアや日本の歴史における琉球王国の遺産を理解するには、琉球を批判的に検証し、根拠ある既知の事実に最も合致する王国の姿を描き出すことが有益であると筆者は考える。本稿は、そのような試みの最初の一歩である。