

Ambiguous Boundaries: Redefining Royal Authority in the Kingdom of Ryukyu



Gregory Smits

Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 60, No. 1. (Jun., 2000), pp. 89-123.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0073-0548%28200006%2960%3A1%3C89%3AABRRAI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>

Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies is currently published by Harvard-Yenching Institute.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/hyi.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Ambiguous Boundaries: Redefining Royal Authority in the Kingdom of Ryukyu

GREGORY SMITS

Pennsylvania State University

THE women conducting the enthronement ceremony for King Shō Sen'i 尚宣威 in 1477 doomed his reign, at least according to the *Mirror of Chūzan* (*Chūzan seikan* 中山世鑑), an official history of Ryukyu completed in 1650:

In all previous cases, the high priestess and lesser priestesses left Uchihara and stood facing east in front of Kimihokori. This time, however, contrary to the norm, they stood facing west. Then, starting with the ruler above and spreading downward, all present wondered what was happening: spirits chilled, they clasped their hands, and their mouths turned dry. . . . Shō Sen'i . . . regarded himself as lacking in virtue. He said that having brought disrepute to the throne had brought down on him the wrath of heaven. After having reigned for six months, he abdicated.¹

Most historians of Ryukyu agree that Ogyaka, mother of Shō Sen'i's successor Shō Shin 尚真 (r. 1477–1526), orchestrated a movement within the court to oust Sen'i.² It is noteworthy that the conclusion of this succession struggle manifested itself in the actions of the

I would like to thank Robert Sandow and an anonymous HJAS reader for their helpful comments on a previous draft of this article. Takara Kurayoshi provided invaluable assistance in obtaining the *ogoe* photographs, and I am also grateful to Kamakura Hideo, Higa Akiko, and the staff of Toa Photonics for their assistance in this process.

¹ Iha Fuyū 伊波普猷, Higashionna Kanjun 東恩納寛惇, Yokoyama Shigeru 横山重, eds., *Ryūkyū shiryō sōsho* 琉球史料叢書, vol. 5 (Hōbunshokan, 1940, 1988), p. 56.

² See, for example, Takara Kurayoshi 高良倉吉, *Ryūkyū no jidai: ōinaru rekishizō o motomete* 琉球の時代：大いなる歴史像を求めて, revised edition (Naha: Hirugisha, 1989), p. 187.

court's female religious officials. This seventeenth-century account of events that occurred nearly two centuries earlier, however, should not necessarily be taken at face value. It reflects, among other things, Shō Shin's successful creation of the "tradition" of royal authority deriving from *tēda* (太陽 or 日), the sun-as-deity. In this ideological creation, official priestesses played a major role in court politics through their positions at the nexus of divine and secular power. During the seventeenth century, the Ryukyuan court began to rely on Chinese-derived models of kingship, which relegated female officials to increasingly marginal roles. Nevertheless, priestesses continued to occupy official positions within Ryukyu's government until the kingdom's end in 1879.

Historians and other scholars during this century have often tried to explain the precise nature of the relationship between the Ryukyuan king and the high priestess (*kikoe-ōgimi* 聞得大君), or, more generally, between male government officials and their female counterparts. In this essay, I examine both changes and continuities in the religious, ideological, and ceremonial basis of royal authority in Ryukyu. Always an eclectic mix of foreign and domestic elements, the ideological basis of the Ryukyuan monarchy changed as kings and their allies sought to re-define and clarify the royal institution in response to challenges posed by internal and external forces. With respect to official priestesses, for example, early in the sixteenth century they functioned as empowering agents, whose power was on a par with that of the king and his male officials. By the eighteenth century, however, the priestesses had become technical specialists, clearly subordinate to the king and his male officials.

Before proceeding with the analysis, I should briefly discuss the geopolitical status of Ryukyu. Shō Hashi 尚巴志 unified the island of Okinawa under his rule in the early fifteenth century. Prior to that time, political power in Okinawa and the other Ryukyu islands was in the hands of local warlords known as *aji* or *anji* 安司.³ Throughout the fifteenth century, a succession of Okinawan kings gradually con-

³ According to official histories compiled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Okinawa had been a united country since around 1187, but had been divided into principalities during the reign of the morally dissolute King Tamagusuku 玉城 (r. 1314–1337). In these narratives, therefore, Shō Hashi *re*-united Okinawa under one king. Modern historians of Ryukyu, however, commonly regard unification under Shō Hashi as the first such event.

quered the other Ryukyu islands, forging a kingdom that extended from the Amami-Ōshima islands in the north through the Miyako island group to the southwest of Okinawa. These kings also strengthened their power vis-à-vis the *aji*, creating a centralized bureaucracy in the process. The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was a time of material abundance for Ryukyu, whose court, officials, and leading merchants prospered as middlemen in an extensive trade network that stretched from India to Korea. China and Japan were particularly important for the small island kingdom, which regularly sent diplomatic envoys to both places, as well as to other countries. The logic of modern nationalism has asserted that if today's Ryukyans are Japanese, they must always have been so. Some modern Japanese historians have combined this axiom with the widely held notion of Japan as a "single ethnic group and homogeneous culture" (*tan'itsu minzoku, tan'itsu bunka* 単一民族単一文化) to claim that the ancient Ryukyu kingdom was part of Japan. Nakamatsu Yahiide, for example, has argued that the early inhabitants of Ryukyu were culturally related to the Japanese of the mainland. From this premise, he postulates an awareness of political subordination to Japan's court and bakufu on the part of early Okinawans.⁴ Although Ryukyu's status vis-à-vis Japan is debatable from 1609 to 1879, the kingdom prior to that time was an independent country by any definition.

In 1609, the domain of Satsuma invaded Ryukyu with the approval of the Tokugawa bakufu. Owing in large part to the rise of the Qing dynasty and the opportunities and dangers it presented to the various political entities of Japan, Ryukyu retained a substantial measure of autonomy from the mid-seventeenth century until the 1870s. Satsuma and the bakufu exerted political hegemony over the kingdom indirectly, working through Ryukyu's royal government. Ryukyu maintained formal relations with China from the fourteenth century onward, and Japanese domination had the effect of increasing the degree of Chinese cultural influence on Ryukyu.

⁴ Takara Kurayoshi summarizes the main arguments of those claiming pre-1609 Ryukyu as part of Japan and provides specific examples, including extensive reference to the arguments of Nakamatsu. He rightly criticizes this view as "ahistorical culturalism" (*hirekishiteki-na "bunka" ron* 非歴史的な「文化」論). See *Ryūkyū ōkoku no kōzō* 琉球王国の構造 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1987), pp. 236-50. For Nakamatsu's views, see especially pp. 245-46.

The reason, simply stated, was that neither Satsuma nor the bakufu valued Ryukyu for its own sake, but for its connections with China. The complex question of early modern Ryukyu's political and cultural status remains contested and controversial, and a detailed examination of this matter lies beyond the scope of the present study. The main point for our purposes is that the status of early modern Ryukyu was ambiguous not only for modern historians but also for Ryukyuan of the time.⁵ This ambiguity produced ideological struggles within the kingdom, some of which I examine here. Finally, with respect to terminology, I follow common practice in the Japanese-language literature, calling pre-1609 Ryukyu "Old-Ryukyu" (*Ko-Ryūkyū* 古琉球) and the post-1609 kingdom "early modern" (*kinsei* 近世) Ryukyu.

INTERPRETING THE *OMORO SŌSHI*

The most important source for reconstructing the relationship between religious thought and practice and political power in Old-Ryukyu is the *Omoro sōshi* おもろさうし, a collection of poem-songs sometimes likened to Japan's *Man'yōshū* 万葉集. The *Omoro sōshi* (hereafter shortened to *Omoro*) consists of 22 volumes, the first of which was compiled in 1531, the second in 1613, and most or all of the others in 1623 (the exact compilation date of four volumes is unclear). The first volume is of particular importance because it contains nearly all of the major terms, concepts, and themes of the text as a whole, with later volumes tending to reiterate the material found in the first. The *Omoro* we have today, however, is not the original sixteenth- and seventeenth-century text, but one reconstructed from fragments in the personal archives of various scholars in 1710 after a palace fire had destroyed all complete copies of the text the previous year.⁶

⁵ On the question of early modern Ryukyuan identity, see Gregory Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-modern Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

⁶ Sakima Toshikatsu 崎間敏勝, *Omoro no shisō* 「おもろ」の思想 (Yonabaru-chō: Ryūkyū bunka rekishi kenkyūjo, 1991), pp. 12–13; and Ikemiya Masaharu 池宮正治, "Ō to ōken no shūhen: *Omoro sōshi* ni miru" 王と王権の周辺—『おもろさうし』に見る, *Shin Ryūkyūshi, ko-Ryūkyū hen* 新琉球史, 古琉球編 (Naha: Ryūkyū shinpōsha, 1991), pp. 187, 191–92.

The temporal gap between the compilation of the extant text and the subject matter of most of the poem-songs, which ranges from the late thirteenth through the early sixteenth centuries, is one reason for the difficulty in using the *Omoro* as an historical source. Another is the often obscure language of the poem-songs. Sakima Toshikatsu points out that even at the time of the compilation of the first volume in the early sixteenth century, the poem-songs and their language were no longer a living tradition in Okinawa.⁷ The text contains a plethora of ancient terms that its compilers transcribed into Japanese spelling using mainly *kana* plus a small number of Chinese characters. These compilers, however, seem not to have known Japanese very well, and even the word *omoro* itself is the result of erroneous application of conversion rules to the Okinawan term *umui*.⁸ In addition to grappling with linguistic and orthographic obstacles, interpreting the *Omoro* requires a knowledge of the broader historical context at the times of its compilation. For example, Sakima points out that its first volume was compiled during a time of great anxiety about the danger from *wakō* 倭寇 pirate raids, which took place several times during the sixteenth century. Its frequently recurring themes of protection of the state and a longing for the better days of the past reflect a desire to escape from this danger.⁹

Like the *Man'yōshū* or the *Kojiki*, the *Omoro* contains material purporting to have originated centuries before the text was compiled. The political circumstances at the time of its compilation, however, did much to shape the final product. The topic of Buddhism is a good example. In discussing the limits of the *Omoro* as an historical source, Ikemiya points out that it contains no mention of Buddhism, which played a major role in the cultural and political life of the court in Old-Ryukyu.¹⁰ In making this point, Ikemiya follows common practice among scholars of Ryukyu to situate the *Omoro* outside the realm of Buddhism. Sakima has criticized this practice at length and makes a convincing case that Shingon Buddhism

⁷ Sakima, *Omoro no shisō*, p. 13.

⁸ Mitsugu Sakihara, *A Brief History of Early Okinawa Based on the Omoro* (Honpō shoseki, 1987), pp. 3–5.

⁹ Sakima, *Omoro no shisō*, pp. 13–14, 76. The *wakō* were also a menace to the coast of China at this time.

¹⁰ Ikemiya, “Ō to ōken,” p. 194.

informs much of the language and many of the ideas in the *Omoro*.

One example he discusses is the word *miya* みや, the term that occurs most frequently to indicate religious sites. Standard reference works on the *Omoro* define *miya* as a courtyard 庭 in which priestesses performed religious rites, a definition that dates back to the original notes to the *Omoro* and the first dictionary of Ryukyuan terms, the *Konkōkenshū* 混効験集 of 1711. If *miya* meant courtyard, however, why does the *Omoro* speak of *miya* as having been “constructed” (*kerahē* in the language of the *Omoro*, but written as 建ッ or 建立), a verb that would not have made sense with a courtyard as its object? An analysis of examples of *miya* in the *Ryūkyūkoku yuraiki* (Record of the origins of Ryukyu 琉球国由来記), completed in 1713, indicates *miya* meant a shrine for a Buddhist avatar (*gongensha* 権現社). Furthermore, that honorifics modify *miya* in the *Omoro* rules out its being a courtyard since such honorifics would not be appropriate for the ground the priestesses trample with their feet. Sakima then considers the question of why the eighteenth-century compilers (and re-compilers) of the *Omoro* and the *Konkōkenshū* regard *miya* as courtyards. He points out that a century had gone by since Satsuma’s invasion, and it had been more than two centuries since most of the *miya* mentioned in the *Omoro* had been built. All that remained by the eighteenth century was the word “*miya*” and the courtyards of structures that in most cases no longer existed.¹¹ In short, the *Omoro* often reflects the circumstances of Ryukyu in the eighteenth century despite the much older provenance of the poem-songs it contains.

Sakima’s broader argument is that Japanese Kumano *gongen* 熊野権現 worship became widespread by the time of Shō Shin. It regarded the Ryukyuan deities as Buddhist avatars and introduced Shingon rites into native religious practices. A good example is *amagoi* 雨乞い, rites in which the high priestess would pray for rain (the Ryukyu islands are subject to periodic droughts). Shingon Buddhism excelled at such rites, and their appearance in the *Omoro* is one of many examples of Shingon influence on native religious practices. For example:

In today’s shining sun
The high priestess

¹¹ Sakima, *Omoro no shisō*, pp. 94–101.

The fallen rain for which she prayed is merciful rain
 And likewise in the *miya* in the palace grounds
 It is as if gold has rained down on the earth (#19).¹²

Similarly, an analysis of the names of the ten sacred groves (*utaki* 御嶽) indicates that they functioned analogously to the protective shrines associated with esoteric Buddhism in both the Chinese and Japanese imperial courts. Indeed, the Ryukyuan court's uses of Shingon practices and terminology served symbolically to place its sovereign on a par with those of its larger neighbors. This lofty status is the main reason for the frequent uses of multiple honorific prefixes (as many as four) with words associated with the royal court. It also explains the use of the term *dairi* 内裏 in similar contexts, a term that in Japanese texts referred to the customary residence of an emperor.¹³

Clearly Shingon Buddhism was a major part of the ideological foundation of the early kingdom, and there is ample evidence that Kumano *gongen* worship came into the Ryukyu islands from Japan even before the establishment of a centralized kingdom.¹⁴ By the time of the *Omoro*'s reconstruction in the eighteenth century, however, and probably much earlier, specific Shingon-derived "native" Ryukyuan religious practices such as *amagoi* rites had come to be seen as so naturally and obviously Ryukyuan that their Buddhist origins had been forgotten.

SHŌ SHIN AND THE CREATION OF ROYAL IDEOLOGY¹⁵

The beneficiary of palace intrigues, Shō Shin spent most of his roughly half century reign carrying out institutional and ideological

¹² In citing quotations from the *Omoro sōshi*, the song number in parentheses is based on Hokama Shuzen 外間守善, *Omoro sōshi* おもろさうし (Kadokawa shoten, 1993), whose numbering corresponds with the standard version of the text. For this passage, see also Sakima, *Omoro no shisō*, p. 102.

¹³ Sakima, *Omoro no shisō*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of Kumano *gongen* worship in Ryukyu, see Sakima Toshikatsu, *Nirai-kanai no genzō* ニライ・カナイの原像 (Urasoe: Ryokurindō shuppan, 1989), pp. 219–302.

¹⁵ In this paper I use the term ideology in a broad sense of a more or less interconnected body of ideas, doctrine, myth, and symbol that functions to define a political or social group or institution and justifies its existence.

reforms designed to strengthen the power of the monarch. Many of his reforms resembled those of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the early Tokugawa shōguns a century later. Shō Shin established his capital at Shuri 首里 and placed all Okinawan weapons in royal arsenals. He required the *aji* to leave their ancestral lands and take up permanent residence in Shuri. To replace them, Shō Shin established a system of local officials appointed by and responsible to the central government. Most important for our purposes is that Shō Shin attempted to reorganize religious life to enhance royal power.¹⁶ In the process, he created new institutions and an ideology in which to ground them—creations that Ryukyans of later centuries and many modern historians came to regard as ancient tradition dating back to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries.

Although priestesses had participated in state ceremony prior to his reign, Shō Shin established a formal hierarchy of female religious officials that paralleled and supplemented the male hierarchy of central and local government officials. The top post was that of high priestess, to which Shō Shin appointed his sister. Her position and prestige was comparable to that of the king. Immediately under the high priestess was a group of officials with titles containing the suffix *-kimi* (e.g., Shuri-ōgimi 首里大君), collectively known as *kimigimi* 君君. This class of religious officials corresponded to the highest officers of state and were known in ordinary speech as the “thirty-three *kimi*” 三十三君, a name that resonates with the Buddhist Heaven of the Thirty-three Deities (J. *sanjūsan ten* 三十三天 or *tōriten* 仵利天). The next class of religious officials, titled *amu* 阿母 or *ōamu* 大阿母, oversaw religious activities in set geographic areas and corresponded to the *aji*. One *ōamu* typically oversaw the religious activities of islands other than Okinawa and corresponded to court-appointed governors. Shō Shin devoted considerable effort to consolidating Okinawan control of the other Ryukyu islands, and the appointment of *ōamu* to regulate religious rites was an integral part of the process. The most numerous officials were the *noro* (のろ, 祝女

¹⁶ For more details about Shō Shin’s reforms, see Takara, *Ryūkyū no jidai*, pp. 199–224; and George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1958), pp. 104–116. Although it is common to attribute the many institutional changes that took place during Shō Shin’s reign to the king himself (following official monuments and inscriptions, the main type of source for the period), the extent to which others around the king may have conceived of or carried out these changes is a topic in need of further research.

and other characters), pronounced *nuru* in Okinawan. They performed state-sanctioned rites within jurisdictions ranging in size from one to several villages. The *norō* brought the authority of the court to the level of individual villages and may even have assisted in the collection of taxes.¹⁷

While there is widespread agreement on the formal aspects of the hierarchy of religious officials that Shō Shin established, the question of its ideological basis has generated several overlapping yet different theories. The work of Nakamura Akira and Higa Minoru sets forth the major concepts and issues in the royal ideology of Old-Ryukyu. This work has been partially revised by China Teikan, Sakima Toshikatsu, and by Tonaki Akira's work on Old-Ryukyuan stone monuments. While all of these scholars have contributed significantly to our understanding of royal authority in the early Ryukyu kingdom, I agree with Sakima that the Shingon Buddhist contribution to royal ideology deserves greater emphasis.

Nakamura and Higa see Shō Shin's reign as a time of transition from one paradigm of solar worship to another. In this view, solar worship had long been a key element in Ryukyuan political ideology. The *aji*, for example, often adopted titles containing the word *tēda*, and the *Omoro* provides a wealth of evidence for early solar worship among the people of Okinawa. The object of this worship was not the sun in its totality, but the sun in the east as it rose to start the new day. The setting sun in the west was regarded as inauspicious, linked with old age, decline, and demise. In actual political practice, *aji* and later the early kings were regarded as possessing the power to influence the forces of nature for the benefit of their group. Furthermore, there is strong circumstantial evidence that local populations or rivals to power frequently overthrew ruling warlords whose physical and spiritual power seemed to be on the wane. The general term for this early form of solar worship is *wakateda shisō* 若太陽思想, "young sun ideology."

Shō Shin found *wakateda shisō* problematic as a basis for royal authority and promoted a different conception of the relationship between ruler and sun called *tedako shisō* 太陽子思想, "son of the sun ideology." Furthermore, the term *tedako* and its equivalents were used

¹⁷ Nakamura Akira, "Ryūkyū ōoku keisei no shisō: seiji shisōshi no ikku to shite" 琉球王国形成の思想—政治思想史の一齣として, *Okinawa bunka kenkyū* 沖縄文化研究, no. 1 (1974), p. 62.

only in reference to the king from Shō Shin's time onward. When work began on the *Omoro* in the 1530s, the compilers included poem-songs celebrating Eiso 英祖 (r. 1260–1299) as the first king of Okinawa and the first earthly descendant of the solar deity. Portions of the text explicitly link the present line of kings (the second Shō dynasty) to Eiso, and thus to the sun. *Tedako* ideology was inspired by the Chinese idea of heaven (*tian* 天) and Chinese-inspired conceptions of the ruler as son-of-heaven. As Higa points out, one could substitute the words *tēda* and heaven in the *Omoro* in most cases with no change in meaning.¹⁸ *Tedako* ideology, of course, would have also resonated with Japanese tales of imperial origins.

Because female spiritual power was deeply entrenched in Ryukyuan society at many levels, creating an ideology of rulership drawing on Okinawan traditions of solar worship required Shō Shin to establish his system of female religious officials. While he also utilized Buddhism and Chinese theories of rulership, these male-centered traditions did little to undermine the importance of the high priestess and her subordinates. In short, to portray themselves as solar descendants or representatives in a convincing manner, the kings of Old-Ryukyu formed symbiotic relationships with women who could serve as intermediaries between king and sun. A widespread form of folk religion throughout the Ryukyu islands was *onarigami* belief (おなり神信仰). An *onarigami* is a woman whose shamanic powers protect a male relative from earthly and supernatural malevolent forces. The typical situation would be a sister protecting a brother, though another female relative could serve as *onarigami* in the absence of a sister. Shō Shin's establishment of the system of female religious officials, with his sister as high priestess, can be regarded as institutionalizing *onarigami* belief for the benefit of the monarch and his government.

In a study of royal ideology and solar worship, China Teikan argued convincingly that *tedako* thought was an adaptation of *wakateda* thought rather than a sharp break with it. *Wakateda* thought was widespread throughout Okinawa as part of popular belief. Ordinary people deified the sun, and we find many poem-songs in the *Omoro*

¹⁸ Ibid., esp. pp. 69–73; and Higa Minoru 比嘉実, *Ko-Ryūkyū no shisō* 古琉球の思想, (Naha: Okinawa taimususha, 1991), a collection of previously published essays, esp. pp. 52–93 and, regarding Chinese-derived notions of heaven, pp. 97–110.

that liken *aji* to the sun. As part of his project to strengthen the monarchy, Shō Shin created *tedako* ideology, the idea of king as descendant of the sun. The two forms of solar religion were closely connected and elements of both continued to play major roles in royal ideology and the ceremonial embodiment of that ideology. While China agrees that Chinese conceptions of heaven were an important part of royal ideology and surely complemented its other components, he finds insufficient evidence that they helped create *tedako* ideology.¹⁹

China's line of argument can be significantly expanded in the light of Sakima's view that many of the key terms and concepts in the *Omoro* are of Japanese Shingon derivation. Sakima asserts (as have others) that the Okinawan term *teda* derives from the Sino-Japanese *tentō* (or *tendō* 天道), which had the two meanings of "ruler of heaven and earth" and "the sun," and which was also a name for the solar Buddha, Dainichi nyorai 大日如来 (Vairocana), the central deity of Shingon.²⁰ *Kikoe-ōgimi*, which became the title of the high priestess in Shō Shin's time, was originally another name for *teda* and therefore Dainichi nyorai. In its early Okinawan context it meant something like "the great deity [= solar deity] who, of its own accord, hears the supplications of the *noro*." Even after *kikoe-ōgimi* became the title of the high priestess, the term did not entirely lose its earlier meaning. The high priestess functioned in two different modes: as the guardian deity of Okinawan folk religion (*onarigami*) and as an avatar of the sun-as-deity (*tedashiro* 太陽代). It was Shingon Buddhism that made the second role possible.²¹ Throughout the history of the Ryukyu kingdom, Shingon and the Rinzaï school of Zen were the only forms of Buddhism to establish a formal presence. Both came to Ryukyu from Japan.

Let us summarize the major ideological and religious elements that contributed to royal authority during the time of Shō Shin. The *tedako* ideology portraying the king as a descendant of the sun drew upon two aspects of Okinawan religion: belief in the restorative,

¹⁹ China Teikan 知名定寛, "Okinawa no Taiyōshinkō to ōken: 'tedako' shisō no keisei katei ni tsuite" 沖縄の太陽信仰と王権—「てだこ」思想の形成過程について, Kubo Noritada sensei Okinawa chōsa nijūnen kinen ronbunshū kankō iinkai, ed., *Okinawa no shūkyō to minzoku* 沖縄の宗教と民族 (Daiichi shobō, 1988), pp. 101-122.

²⁰ Sakima, *Omoro no shisō*, pp. 65-67.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 20-24, 116-17.

life-giving power of the rising sun and belief in the power of women to protect male relatives. Chinese conceptions of the ruler as the son-of-heaven, mediating between cosmic forces and the world of humans, also contributed to *tedako* ideology. Japan was the source of the idea of the royal family as descendants of the sun-as-deity (*amaterasu* 天照) and of Shingon Buddhism, whose central deity, the solar Buddha, manifests itself in various forms according to the *honji-suijaku* 本地垂迹 doctrine. In the case of Ryukyu, however, it was not always clear whether the king or the high priestess (or both) was an avatar of the solar Buddha.

A study of stone monuments, the primary external manifestation of royal authority in Old-Ryukyu, sheds further light on its ideological and religious basis. The oldest extant monument was created in 1427. Between 1456 and 1459, the royal government erected thirty-three more monuments, of which eighteen are extant. Written in classical Chinese, the inscriptions on these monuments were carved by Buddhist monks and portrayed Ryukyu's kings as paragons of Buddhist virtue and as avatars. Later, during the reign of Shō Shin, Buddhist virtue remained a major theme in official monuments. The king, for example, was characterized as a believer in the Three Jewels and in the Buddhas. His accomplishments included the construction of a Buddhist sanctuary and numerous temples. But we also find the king portrayed as a sage in the manner of Chinese state Confucianism. *Qilin*, lions, tigers, dragons, and other creatures of symbolic importance in Chinese lore adorn the royal monuments from this time. China and its culture are portrayed not only as a model for rulership but also as exerting a beneficial effect on Ryukyuan cultural forms generally.²² In short, these monuments indicate that both Buddhism and a Chinese state Confucian model of rulership had become key elements in Ryukyuan royal ideology during the reign of Shō Shin.

Another result of Shō Shin's efforts to strengthen royal authority was his construction of Enkakuji 円覚寺. Completed in 1495, the Rinzaï Zen temple was built to enshrine Shō En 尚円 (r. 1470–1476), founder of the second Shō dynasty. The monuments mentioning or

²² Tonaki Akira 渡名喜明, "Ko-Ryūkyū ōken no messeiji: kinsekibun kara mita" 古琉球王権のメッセージ—金石文から見た, *Shin Okinawa bungaku* 新沖縄文学, no. 85 (Fall, 1990), pp. 54–57.

commemorating the construction of Enkakuji portray it as a tangible manifestation of Shō Shin's virtue. The *Omoro* also contains a verse celebrating the temple's construction:

That which Shō Shin planned
 The construction of Enkakuji
 As the prayers accumulate, *teda* is pleased
 That which the king planned
 The high priestess reveres
 The construction of shrines and temples (*miyadera* 宮寺)
 The royal priestesses (*kimigimi*) revere
 High and low are united
 Distant places are united
 The purifying water of shrines and temples
 Offer up to Shō Shin
 The coming of many generations and many years. (#283)

Tonaki Akira is struck by the difference between this *Omoro* passage and the text of monuments. Although both praise Shō Shin's construction of Enkakuji, the *Omoro* verse reflects no influence of Buddhism or Confucianism, he says, while the text of the monument makes no mention of female officials or native Okinawan religion.²³ Certainly the *Omoro* verse does not reflect Confucian influence, but the verse celebrates the creation of a major temple (the term *miyadera* clearly includes Buddhist temples), and the prayers offered therein please *teda*, the Ryukyuan solar deity and, following Sakima, a form of the solar Buddha. It therefore seems more appropriate to say that the *Omoro* passage reflects native Ryukyuan religion within the broader framework of Buddhism as appropriated by the royal court.

However, Tonaki's basic point of a disjunction between the classical Chinese of the monuments and those texts written in (Japanese-influenced) Okinawan is valid and important. This disjunction sharpened in the early sixteenth century when, during the reign of Shō Sei 尚清 (r. 1527–1555), it became standard practice to inscribe monuments in classical Chinese on one side and Okinawan on the other. There was also a brief period, around the first two decades of the sixteenth century, when monuments appeared written only in

²³ Ibid., pp. 57–58.

Okinawan. Here, too, Tonaki argues for a complete separation of the rhetoric of native religion and female officials, which comprises the Okinawan-language inscriptions, and the Buddhist-Confucian rhetoric of the Chinese texts.²⁴ It is true that the texts in classical Chinese make no mention of native Okinawan religious concepts or the activities of female officials. The Okinawan-language texts, however, do sometimes speak of Buddhism. For example, a sixteenth-century monument commemorating the completion of a road connecting Shuri and Shimajiri describes the celebratory activities of 300 Buddhist monks in addition to those of the priestesses. This counterexample notwithstanding, Tonaki is correct to conclude that Ryukyuan monuments reflect a general bifurcation between native and foreign underpinnings of royal ideology.²⁵

Another possible aspect of this bifurcation can be seen in the decorative carving adorning the top of official monuments and tablets. In addition to dragons, cranes, and other auspicious creatures from Chinese lore, starting with Shō Shin's reign we find a circular solar orb surrounded by clouds adorning the center of the decorative area of some monuments (see Figure 1). During Shō Sei's

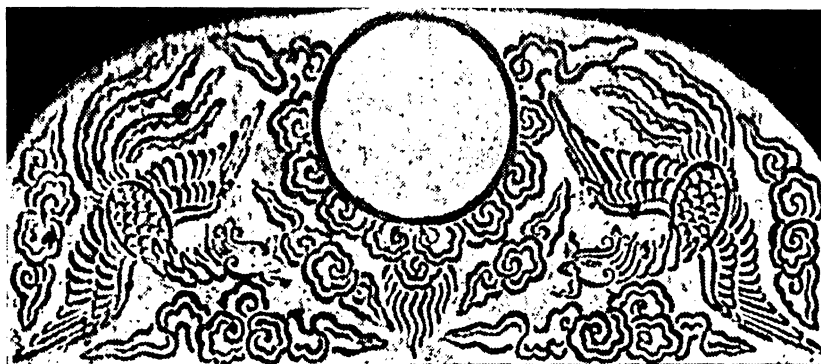


Figure 1: Decorative images from the top of a monument, 1527

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 58–60.

²⁵ Ibid. For the full text of this monument, see Okinawa kenritsu hakubutsukan 沖縄県立博物館, ed., *Kizamareta rekishi: Okinawa no sekihi to takuhon* 刻まれた歴史—沖縄の石碑と拓本 (Naha: Okinawa kenritsu hakubutsukan tomo no kai, 1993), p. 83. Regarding the Buddhist monks, see also Tomiyama Kazuyuki 豊見山和行, “Ryūkyū no ōkengirei: saiten girei to sūbyō saishi o chūshin ni” 琉球の王権儀礼—祭天儀礼と宗廟祭祀を中心に, Akasaka Norio 赤坂憲雄, ed., *Ōken no kisō e* 王権の基層へ (Shinyōsha, 1992), p. 192.

reign, and continuing through the life of the kingdom, this design motif appeared on nearly all monuments. There can be little doubt that *tedako* ideology was a discursive creation during the reign of Shō Shin and that it became firmly entrenched during Shō Sei's reign, when it was also given textual embodiment in the *Omoro*. Perhaps the most significant feature of the *tedako* ideological synthesis was that it obscured the boundaries between many of its major components or entities.

AMBIGUOUS BOUNDARIES: KING, PRIESTESS, SUN

Historians and other scholars of Old-Ryukyu often identify the high priestess or the system of female religious officials as the most distinctive institutional component of royal authority.²⁶ While women have played prominent roles in folk religions throughout East Asia, the case of Ryukyu is unique in that women occupied high office as part of the official structure of government.

By Shō Shin's time, the basic tenet of Japanese imperial ideology—emperor as living descendant of the solar deity Amaterasu—would have been widely known among Ryukyuan elites. A similar claim for the Ryukyuan monarch—king as living descendant of *teda*—might have been an ideal ideological move. Indeed, such a relationship is suggested in *tedako* ideology, but why complicate matters by having female intermediaries play a central role in the king-sun linkage? There were at least two likely reasons. One, mentioned above, was the strong belief in the spiritual superiority of women in Ryukyuan folk religion, the most important manifestation being women as *onarigami*. The second was the lack of any tradition of an anthropomorphic solar deity in Ryukyuan folk religion. The rising sun in the east, the source of life and vitality, was itself the object of veneration. Female intermediaries, therefore, were necessary to forge elements of Ryukyuan folk religion into a plausible royal ideology.

A common topic of inquiry among scholars of Old-Ryukyu is the precise nature of the relationship between sun, priestess, and king.

²⁶ See, for example, Tonaki Akira, Taba Yumio 田場由美雄, and Tomiyama Kazuyuki, "Ryūkyū ōken no tokushitsu o saguru" 琉球王権の特質を探る, *Shin Okinawa bungaku*, no. 85 (Fall, 1990), p. 43.

Closely connected with this topic is the question of power. Simply stated, who was stronger, the king or high priestess? Certainly the passage from the *Mirror of Chūzan* at the start of this essay suggests that priestesses may have possessed sufficient power to oust a king. Did institutionalizing the roles of these women during Shō Shin's reign increase their power vis-à-vis that of the king or place it under royal control? Examining the many references to king and priestess in the *Omoro* does not provide a clear answer.

In his thorough study of *Omoro* motifs, Tamaki Masami points out the many roles of priestesses that appear in the song-poems. Priestesses protect ships, sailors, the king, the country, lower-ranking priestesses, male government officials, sacred places, buildings, gates, rice, society in general, and more.²⁷ Although the details vary widely with circumstances, priestesses perform their protective roles by shamanic traveling, sometimes to obtain power and sometimes to go to where their help is needed. Focusing on the high priestess and king, Tamaki constructs a composite of this process by combining elements from different song-poems. First, the high priestess travels to and resides in the "other world" (*takai* 他界), the land of *obotsu-kagura* おぼつかぐら, the divine realm of the sun high in the sky, where she acquires spiritual power. The king invites her to return to a sacred site on earth, and he transmits this message via the hearth deity (J. *hi-no-kami* 火神, or *fi-nu-kang* in Okinawan). She then leaves *obotsu-kagura* and descends to a sacred site at which the king orders large fans waved and a drum beaten. After her arrival, she transfers the power obtained in *obotsu-kagura* (the most common term for which is *seji* せじ) to the king via a ritual process called *kami-asobi* 神遊び. The goal of this process is for the high priestess to protect the king by strengthening his power. The *Omoro* commonly uses the verb "to know" 知る, in the meaning of high priestess aiding the king. The idea here seems to be that the object of her conscious attention comes under her protection. By strengthening the king through the transfer of spiritual power, the high priestess ensures the smooth operation of society.²⁸ Insofar as royal authority is discur-

²⁷ Tamaki Masami 玉城政美, *Nantō kayō ron* 南島歌謡論 (Sunakoya shobō, 1991), pp. 193-94, 224-25, 238, 266-91.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 519-37.

sively produced, the high priestess played a major role in the process in Old-Ryukyu.

In numerous *Omoro* passages, the king prays to or otherwise honors the high priestess and, just as often, the high priestess prays to and exalts the king.²⁹ The relationship between king and high priestess was characterized by what Ikemiya calls a “dual nature.” On the one hand, in his capacity as king-as-solar descendant, he was the source of authority for Ryukyu’s female officials. But he was also dependent on the protection of the high priestess in her *onarigami*-like role. The king was both protector and protected, and the high priestess and other religious officials both offered prayers to deities and were the object of the prayers of others.³⁰ The boundaries between king and sun, king and high priestess, spiritual power and earthly authority, high priestess and deity, superior and subordinate, and, in some respects, male and female were often elided or blurred in the royal court of Old-Ryukyu. Ambiguous boundaries abounded.

All evidence suggests that these overlapping, ambiguous boundaries functioned to strengthen royal authority vis-à-vis the *aji* and possibly other claimants to the throne. The king and high priestess formed a symbiotic relationship from the time of Shō Shin, and there is no sign of any conflict between them. The major potential threats to royal power during the reigns of Shō Shin and Shō Sei were the *aji* and pirate attacks respectively. The high priestess and the system of female religious officials strengthened royal authority, and to compare the relative power of king versus high priestess is to ask the wrong question. Instead, within the broader context of possible challenges to the king’s power, we should focus on his relationship with sun-as-deity and how the high priestess facilitated it.³¹ Shō Shin’s adoption and uses of *tedako* ideology were part of a broader project of consolidating royal power and weakening that of the *aji*. He sought to clarify the boundaries between king and *aji*, but he had no such concern with respect to the boundaries between king,

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 256–376.

³⁰ Ikemiya, “Ō to Ōken,” p. 206.

³¹ Tonaki, Taba, and Tomiyama, “Ryūkyū no ōken,” p. 31; and Tamaki, *Kayō ron*, pp. 537–46.

priestess, and sun. Indeed, the blurring of these boundaries worked toward the king's benefit.

AMBIGUOUS BOUNDARIES: RYUKYU, JAPAN, CHINA

During the reigns of Shō Shin and Shō Sei, Ryukyu prospered owing to extensive foreign trade. By the end of the sixteenth century, this trade had dropped off sharply, Ryukyu's economy was depressed, and the threat of invasion from Japan loomed large.³² The turmoil of Japan's wars of reunification delayed that invasion until 1609. Ryukyu had not kept up with the latest developments in military technology, and its defenses, while adequate to ward off pirates attacking Naha from the sea, were no match for the mobile, battle-hardened soldiers of Satsuma and their firearms. Knowing its material strength was inadequate, the royal court hoped that the spiritual power of its priestesses and the deities with which they interacted would be sufficient to repulse the invaders. Ryukyu's rapid defeat strained, but did not destroy, the *tedako* ideology Shō Shin had created a century earlier.³³

Whether or to what extent Ryukyu became part of Japan from 1609 onward remains a contentious issue, particularly between com-

³² By the 1590s if not earlier, Ryukyuan elites were aware of the possibility of an invasion. A passage in the So lineage records (*So-uji kafu* 蘇氏家譜), for example, reads: "Sometimes we would hear of an impending attack from Satsuma. So on the twentieth day of the twelfth month, 1593, ships set out from Tomari to offer prayers from Okinawa to the five northern islands." Quoted in Itokazu Kaneharu 糸数兼治, "Sai On to Shushigaku: Kinsei Ryūkyū ni okeru sono shisōshijō no ichizuke" 蔡温と朱子学—近世琉球におけるその思想史上の位置づけ, Shimajiri Katsutarō, Kadena Shūtoku, Toguchi Masakiyo san sensei no koki kinen ronshū kankō iinkai 島尻勝太郎・嘉手納宗徳・渡口真清三先生の古稀記念論集刊行委員会, eds., *Kyūyō ronshō* 球陽論叢 (Naha: Hirugisha, 1986), p. 268.

³³ The records of Chinese investiture envoys to Ryukyu clearly indicate the royal court's reliance on protective deities to make up for the kingdom's lack of military power. The investiture envoy for Shō Tei 尚貞 (r. 1669–1709), Wang Ji 汪楫, for example, reports a conversation between then investiture envoy Xia Ziyang 夏子陽 and King Shō Nei 尚寧 (r. 1587–1620) in 1606 about defense preparations and the possibility of an invasion from Japan. The king acknowledged the possibility of an invasion and that Ryukyuan military strength was weak, but he assured Xia that the female deities who had protected Ryukyu in the past would do so again. Wang then points out that soon thereafter an invasion did take place and the king and leading minister became prisoners of Japan. When the king returned, he blamed one deity for the calamity and, although he continued to perform extensive religious rites, he never venerated that deity again. See Wang Ji 汪楫, *Sakuhō Ryūkyū-shi roku sanben* 冊封琉球使録三篇, Tahara Nobuo, trans. (Ginowan: Yōju shorin, 1997), p. 98.

peting Ryukyuan and Japanese nationalisms. A major difficulty is the tendency to apply modern conceptions of national sovereignty to Ryukyu and Japan of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. By modern reckoning, the evidence of Ryukyu's status is ambiguous: the kingdom was both a part of Japan and apart from Japan.

The question of Ryukyu's status is too complex to address here, but it will be sufficient to point out that the kingdom of Ryukyu continued to exist until 1879. It was under Japanese domination but, because of international developments within East Asia, especially the rise of the Qing dynasty, it retained a substantial degree of autonomy. Direct Japanese presence in Ryukyu was limited to one official from Satsuma and his small staff. On the other hand, Ryukyuan intellectuals and political leaders of the time were always aware of Satsuma's potential power. Furthermore, Ryukyuan elites themselves were often uncertain of the relationship between Ryukyu, different parts of Japan such as Satsuma and the bakufu, and the Qing empire. They responded to Japanese domination by constructing new visions of Ryukyu, although they based these visions on ideological foundations that differed significantly from those of modern nationalism. As a result of Ryukyu's ambiguous status after 1609, the issue of identity, broadly defined, became a major, ongoing concern among Ryukyu's elites. Intellectual and political debate and conflict in Ryukyu during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was largely the result of competing visions of what Ryukyu was or should be.³⁴ One result of this conflict was the marginalization of *tedako* ideology and the priestesses.

Itokazu Kaneharu argues that this marginalization took place quickly: "Belief in the deities vanished before the hard, cold fact of defeat in war." He characterizes the first half of the seventeenth century as a time when the old ideological pillars had been destroyed and, in a state of confusion, Ryukyuan searched for new values.³⁵ While Itokazu is correct to portray immediate post-invasion Ryukyu as a time of confusion, it is not clear that the war destroyed *tedako* ideology. Certainly it left unchanged the popular forms of

³⁴ For a complete analysis of this matter, see Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu*.

³⁵ Itokazu, "Sai On to Shushigaku," pp. 264-65.

folk religion from which parts of the ideology were derived. Indeed, the war had little or no direct impact on the lives of most ordinary Ryukyuans. Nor did the war make any immediate changes in Ryukyuan Buddhism or the general prestige of Chinese-derived models of rulership. Satsuma did issue general injunctions against constructing “excessive” numbers of shrines and temples. It also required the royal court to enforce a strict ban on Christianity and the *ikkō* 一向 sect of Pure Land Buddhism. Otherwise, however, Satsuma was little concerned with religious or intellectual activities within Ryukyu. All evidence indicates that the Ryukyuan royal court continued to follow the general theory and practice of the older *tedako* ideology throughout the seventeenth century.

There were changes, however, particularly during the tenure in office of Shō Shōken 向象賢 (1617–1675), a reform-minded official who was prime minister from 1666–1673.³⁶ Shō Shōken saw Ryukyu’s proper role as that of loyal vassal of Satsuma. One result of this vision was that he strove to reform government administration and popular customs so that Ryukyuans would appear culturally respectable to Satsuma’s critical eye. In *Haneji shioki* 羽地仕置, a collection of Shō Shōken’s directives and his reasons for them, he frequently described practices and customs of his day as “wasteful,” “benighted,” “stupid in the extreme,” or otherwise inappropriate. Sometimes he expressed embarrassment about the way Ryukyuan practices might appear to officials from Satsuma: for example, “As word of the lax attitudes of our officials toward public service has even reached Satsuma, it is an unavoidable shame for the whole country.”³⁷ Likewise, the high status of women in Ryukyu’s government and the occasional ritual subordination of the king to the high priestess disturbed Shō Shōken.

Although they had the enthusiastic backing of Satsuma’s officials,

³⁶ Shō Shōken’s name is also pronounced “Shō Jōken” and “Shō Zōken.” The character “Shō” (向) is that of the royal family, 尚, with two strokes removed for modesty. He is also known as Haneji Chōshū 羽地朝秀 or Haneji ōji 羽地王子 (Prince Haneji). The post of “prime minister” is *sessei* (*shisshū* in Okinawan) 摂政, the highest office other than that of the king and available only to royal relatives. It should not be confused with the post of *sesshō* in Japanese imperial politics.

³⁷ *Haneji shioki* in Okinawa-ken Okinawa shiryō henshūjo 沖縄県沖縄史料編集所, eds., *Okinawa-ken shiryō, zen kindai 1: Shuri ōfu shioki* 沖縄県史料, 前近代1—首里王府仕置 (Naha: Okinawa-ken kyōiku iinkai, 1981), p. 55.

many of Shō Shōken's reforms faced significant opposition from within Ryukyuan officialdom. As a result, his approach was not an attempt to abolish practices he disliked but to modify them. For example, when the king participated in religious rites with the high priestess, he often played a ritually subordinate role owing to the entrenched belief in female spiritual superiority. In such cases, Shō Shōken sought to end the king's direct participation in rites conducted by the high priestess. The following passage from the *Kyūyō* 球陽, an official history of Ryukyu, reflects this approach: "For the first time, changes were made such that the king's official visit to the palace of the high priestess was stopped. [In his place,] an envoy was dispatched to serve as a representative celebrant at the various sacred rites."³⁸ Not only did this move downgrade the importance of the rites, it significantly increased the distance between the activities of the king and those of the high priestess. Likewise, Shō Shōken ended the custom of royal participation in the most sacred of Ryukyu's native rites, the biannual worship at Kudakajima 久高島, a small island off the coast from Chinen 知念 in southern Okinawa. The rites celebrated the spontaneous generation of grain on the island, thought to have been a gift from the native deities. Shō Shōken argued that grain came to Ryukyu from Japan, not from the deities, and that royal participation was costly, dangerous, and undignified. In particular, he said that royal worship at Kudakajima was not based on any "wise or sagely teaching" and should people from "great countries" see the sovereign worshipping with priestesses, they would "laugh with derision."³⁹ Here, too, the rites themselves were not abolished. Instead, a royal representative took the king's place.

Another important move by Shō Shōken reduced the prestige of the *norō*, the most numerous rank of female officials. After 1667, *norō* no longer received *jireisho* 辞令書, official writs of appointment. This change took place within the context of governmental reorganization of official ceremony and reflected a lowering of the status of the *norō*.⁴⁰ Arguing that the practice was indecorous, Shō Shōken prohibited female officials from conveying official messages and formal

³⁸ Kyūyō kenkyūkai 球陽研究会, ed., *Kyūyō*, (Kadokawa shoten, 1974), #464.

³⁹ See *Haneji shioki*, pp. 43–45, for the text of the full argument.

⁴⁰ Takara Kurayoshi, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no kōzō*, pp. 50–56.

notices of appointment between the king and top male officials.⁴¹ Soon after Shō Shōken left office, the royal government instituted a policy whereby the queen, not the king's sister, served as high priestess.⁴² Not only was the queen's status clearly lower than that of the king, but the change also weakened the *onarigami* aspect of the king-high priestess relationship. Furthermore, the vagueness inherent in *tedako* ideology concerning the relationship between king, priestess, and sun became more problematic with the priestess no longer a close blood relative of the king.

Issues of ideology were not of primary importance for Shō Shōken. Seventeenth-century Ryukyu was beset by a host of pressing economic problems, and Shō Shōken sought to address them in a straightforward manner. He initiated policies to boost agricultural production such as tax incentives to bring new farmland into cultivation. Likewise, he reduced what he regarded as a waste of resources by simplifying both official government ceremony and private rites within elite families. As part of an effort to encourage Ryukyuan elites to embrace his vision of Ryukyu as Satsuma's vassal, Shō Shōken sought to reduce the cultural distance between Ryukyu and Satsuma. One aspect of this cultural realignment was lowering the formal status of female officials vis-à-vis their male counterparts and eliminating aspects of royal ceremony in which the king played a ritually equal or subordinate role to the high priestess. Shō Shōken's reforms significantly weakened *tedako* ideology, but they did not attempt to replace it with anything else.

It was at the end of the seventeenth century and throughout most of the eighteenth that a Chinese-derived state Confucian model of rulership steadily displaced *tedako* ideology. Starting at the end of the seventeenth century, the king began to perform Chinese-style rites venerating heaven as part of the annual cycle of court ceremony. Prior to this time, Shingon and Zen monks from Japan played a major role in Ryukyuan rites, and this legacy continued to be reflected in the earliest forms of the new royal ceremony. For ex-

⁴¹ *Haneji shioki*, pp. 4–6; Takara Kurayoshi, “Shō Shōken no ronri” 向象賢の論理, *Shin Ryūkyūshi, kinsei hen* 新琉球史, 近世編, vol. 1 (Naha: Ryūkyū shinpōsha, 1989), pp. 165–66; and Takara Kurayoshi, *Ryūkyū ōkokushi no kadai* 琉球王国史の課題 (Naha: Hirugisha, 1990), p. 219.

⁴² Takara, *Ryūkyū ōkokushi no kadai*, p. 219.

ample, the king performed rites on the day of the new year facing whichever direction court diviners deemed most propitious. The determination of an auspicious direction was not part of similar ceremony in China and was part of an older tradition of Japanese-derived yin-yang divination (*onmyōdō* 陰陽道) that Buddhist monks had performed. In the early eighteenth century, however, there was a conscious attempt on the part of Ryukyuan leaders to remove such Japanese influences from royal ceremony. In 1719, for example, the king always performed the *ne-no-hō* 子の方 new year's rites facing due north, in the direction of Beijing's Forbidden City for the explicit purpose of showing respect to the Chinese emperor.⁴³ Although there were some differences in the way the Ryukyuan king and the Chinese emperor venerated heaven, the Ryukyuan rites were clearly a modified copy of Chinese state ceremony. From time to time Ryukyuan Confucian scholars objected to the king's ritual veneration of heaven since doing so was properly the task only of the Chinese emperor. Tomiyama argues that the reason royal veneration of heaven continued in Ryukyu (unlike Yi-dynasty Korea) despite the objections of some Confucians was that the king had long performed similar rites under the older *tedako* ideology. In other words, royal veneration of heaven in the eighteenth century was a continuation of the long Ryukyuan tradition of royal solar worship, since heaven and *teda* had long been interchangeable. Thus, *tedako* ideology, although largely displaced, continued to exert a subtle influence on Ryukyu's new state ceremony. There was, however, a significant difference. The explicitly Chinese form now excluded women from playing a central role in the rites.⁴⁴

By examining the official posthumous portraits of the kings (*ogoe* 御後絵) we see quite vividly the change in royal image from *tedako* to a Chinese-style sage. Although these portraits were all destroyed during the Battle of Okinawa, ten have survived in the form of photographs. Those from the reign of Shō En 尚円 (r. 1470–1476) through the reign of Shō Hō 尚豊 (r. 1621–1640) are of similar design, with the king in Ming-style robes and crown. The royal figure is about four times larger than those of surrounding attendants and

⁴³ Tomiyama, *Ōkengirei*, pp. 195–99.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 199–202.

officials, and a standing screen featuring the orbs of the sun and moon is directly behind the king (see Figure 2). Photographs of the portraits of the two kings following Shō Hō are not available. Shō Tei's portrait, which would have been completed in the first decade of the eighteenth century, differs significantly from that of earlier kings (see Figure 3). The solar-lunar standing screen is gone, though its frame is still visible. The king is now nearly eight times larger than his attendants and ministers. His crown is the same as before, but his robes feature Qing-style decoration around the edges. On the floor in front of the king is a tripod vessel, a classical Chinese symbol of the authority of the ruler and a particularly important symbol in Qing imperial sacrifice.⁴⁵ The portraits of kings after Shō Tei contain these same features, but lack even the suggestion of the former solar-lunar standing screen (see Figure 4). The king's robes are fully Qing in style, featuring five-clawed decorative dragons, with four-clawed dragons adorning the fans held by the attendants. The five-clawed dragon was reserved for the robes of the emperor at the Chinese court, and its appearance on the robes of the later Ryukyuan kings was part of their official portrayal in the manner of Chinese sovereigns. Finally, the Ming-style crown contains additional jewels from Shō Boku's 尚穆 (r. 1752–1795) portrait onward (see Figure 5).⁴⁶

These portraits along with the changes in royal ceremony indicate a general trend to enhance the authoritative image of the king vis-à-vis other Ryukyuan elites. We see the king in the role of a Chinese-style sage, a small-scale emperor. By the eighteenth century, the king was no longer associated with the sun in official representations (with one exception to be discussed below) and rites. *Tedako* ideology, while lingering on in limited areas or as a vestige, had become displaced by Chinese-derived state Confucianism. Women were now absent from the center of state ceremony and ideology.

⁴⁵ Regarding vessels and Qing imperial symbolism, see Angela Zito, *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), esp. p. 46.

⁴⁶ For an analysis of the royal posthumous portraits, see Tomiyama Kazuyuki, "Ogoe kara mita Ryūkyū ōken" 御後絵からみた王権, Takara Kurayoshi, Tomiyama Kazuyuki, and Maehira Fusaaki 真栄平房昭, *Atarashii Ryūkyūshi zō: Araki Moriaki sensei tsuitō ronbunshū* 新しい琉球史像—安良城盛昭先生追悼論文集 (Naha: Yōjusha, 1996), pp. 61–74.

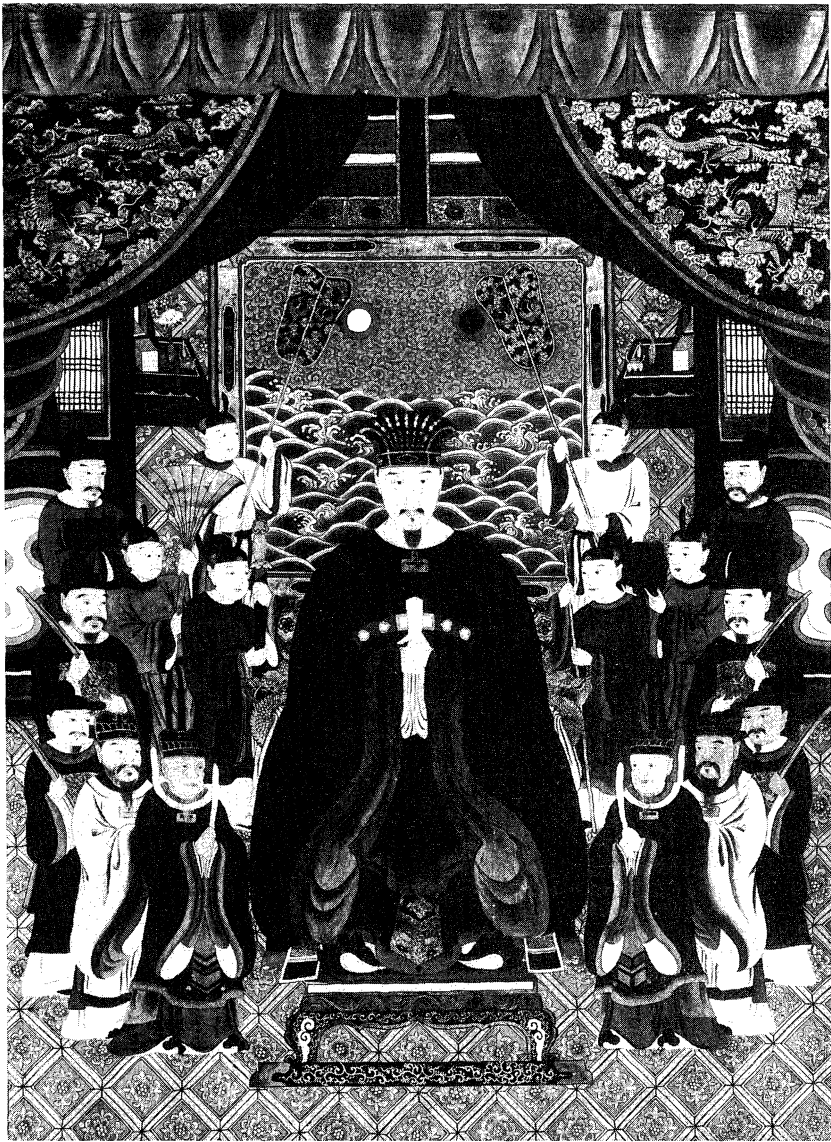


Figure 2: Posthumous portrait of Shō Hō. Property of Okinawa Kenritsu Geijutsu Daigaku. Used with permission.

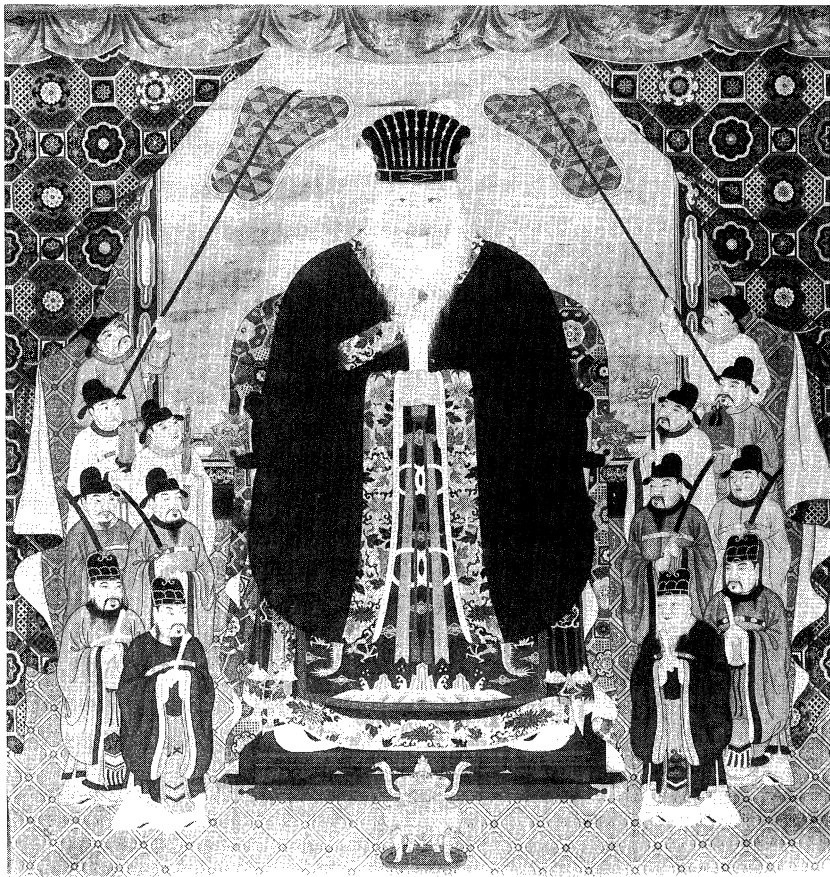


Figure 3: Posthumous portrait of Shō Tei. Property of Okinawa Kenritsu Geijutsu Daigaku. Used with permission.



Figure 4: Posthumous portrait of Shō Kei (r. 1713–1751). Property of Okinawa Kenritsu Geijutsu Daigaku. Used with permission.



Figure 5: Posthumous portrait of Shō Boku. Property of Okinawa Kenritsu Geijutsu Daigaku. Used with permission.

Eighteenth-century Chinese cultural influence on Ryukyuan life, in many forms, was greater than at any earlier time in the kingdom's history. Ryukyu's most intense period of sinicization took place when the kingdom was under Japanese political domination. However, Ryukyu's Japanese overlords were not concerned that the kingdom or its inhabitants adopt Japanese customs or culture. On the contrary, Ryukyu's primary value to Japan, both to the domain of Satsuma and to the bakufu, was as a conduit to China for goods and information.⁴⁷ It was to Japan's advantage for Ryukyu's elites to adopt Chinese cultural forms in the early modern period. From the standpoint of many Ryukyuan political leaders, the eighteenth-century enhancement of royal authority and transformation of the king's image into that of a Chinese-style sage were motivated by Ryukyu's ambiguous political status at the boundaries of the Chinese and Japanese political orders. The long history of the royal institution became a key tenet of early modern Ryukyuan identity.

FEMALE OFFICIALS AS TECHNICIANS

In 1784, word reached the king that a famine threatened Okinawa because of insect infestation of sweet potatoes. He asked the highest government body, the Council of Three (*Sanshikan* 三司官) about performing rites to ward off insects. After the council investigated local conditions, it reported back to the king that better weeding and fertilizing would be more effective in this case. The king agreed, but insect problems continued, encouraged by unfavorable weather conditions. So the king again suggested ritual action, and, this time, the council agreed. The king ordered the high priestess and the *norō* of each district to perform formal recitation of prayers (*otakabe* 御崇べ) and insect-repelling rites.⁴⁸ The high priestess and

⁴⁷ There is an extensive literature on Japan's foreign relations during the Tokugawa period in which Ryukyu figures prominently. An important seminal work in this sub-field is Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). Regarding the importance of Ryukyu as a conduit of information from China to Japan, see Machira Fusaaki, "Kinsei Ryūkyū ni okeru kaigai jōhō to Ryūkyū no ichi" 近世琉球における海外情報と琉球の位置, *Shisō* 思想, no. 796 (October, 1990): 67-89.

⁴⁸ Tonaki, Taba, and Tomiyama, "Ryūkyū ōken no tokushitsu o saguru," p. 28.

her subordinate officials remained active throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Vestiges of the older *tedako* ideology also remained. For example, nearly all official monuments retained the solar orb as the central decoration adorning the top portion (see Figure 6). What was the significance of these older symbols and institutions in the “Confucianized” Ryukyu of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

This question can be answered by examining the case of *amagoi* 雨乞い, official prayers and rites designed to cause rainfall. Okinawa receives most of its rain during the summer monsoon season. Occasionally, the monsoon rains fail to arrive at Okinawa or other Ryukyu islands, and the summer sun causes an evaporation rate of approximately 200 ml/month. The fields dry up, and Okinawa reverts to the same climate as the many other tropical desert areas around the world at about the same latitude.⁴⁹

The response of the royal government to such droughts was often *amagoi*. *Ryūkyūkoku yuraiki* 琉球国由来記, a record of Ryukyuan customs completed in 1713, provides a brief description of these rites in Shuri: “The rain sacrifice is conducted at this sacred site during times of extreme drought, and the sage above [the king] travels there. At that time, the celebrants are the *ōamu shirare* of the three districts of Shuri and the *Shuri niigan amu shirare*.”⁵⁰ The details of

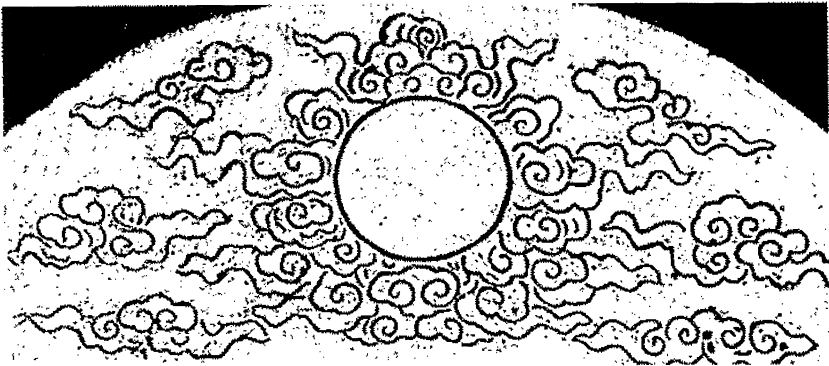


Figure 6: Decorative images from the top of a monument, 1798

⁴⁹ Higa, *Ko-Ryūkyū no shisō*, pp. 152–53.

⁵⁰ Iha, Higashionna, and Yokoyama, eds., *Ryūkyū shiryō sōsho*, vol. 1 (Hōbunshokan, 1940, 1988), p. 158.

amagoi varied from place to place, and there were at least five major varieties. The basic procedure in rural areas was first for the *noro* to pray at a local sacred grove. Next, the local inhabitants would dance in an elliptical pattern, while the *noro* ritually sprinkled water on the dancers. A *Kyūyō* account of an 1825 *amagoi* ordered by the central government reads:

From the twenty-fifth day of the eighth month to the twenty-seventh day, prayers were offered before the sacred flame in the royal palace and at each of the palace's sacred groves. Thirty-seven officials of various ranks from high to low were led in procession to pray together for rain in the palace courtyard. Also, the high priestess offered prayers before the sacred flame and led the thirty-seven officials in procession to offer prayers together at the shrines in each of Shuri's three districts. Zen monks prayed for rain at Enkakuji by chanting the *Dai-hannya kyō*; Shingon monks did so at Gōkokuji. Then, seventeen officials from Kumemura, led by the Taifu, stayed at the Tenpi temple complex for three days and prayed at the shrines of the Dragon King and Tenson. [listing of each official]. Also, on the first day of the prayers for rain, the officials of Naha and Kumemura and their staffs divided into two groups. A high-ranking official led one group to beseech the Dragon King, boarding a dragon boat from Kumemura, going to Tomigusuku, and praying for rain there. The other group, led by the Council of Three, prayed for rain before the Tenpi temple. Such prayers were also offered at Tomari and in each district for three days. During the *amagoi*, officials dressed one degree more humbly than usual, and the slaughter of animals was prohibited.⁵¹

At this level, high male and female officials, Buddhist monks, and the high officials (*taifu* 大夫) from Kumemura, Ryukyu's center for Chinese studies, participated in *amagoi*. The prayers to the Dragon King and other deities of southeast Chinese folk religion was a relatively late addition to the mix, dating to the reign of Shō Boku, who was much interested in Chinese popular Daoism.

Significantly, the king did not participate in *amagoi* at this time, although he did order the rites and sometimes presided over them. Prior to the eighteenth century, the king sometimes performed *amagoi* rites personally, reciting prayers, lifting up holy water, and performing the same rites as the priestesses. In the early eighteenth century, however, direct royal participation in *amagoi* stopped.⁵² By the time of the rites described in the *Kyūyō* passage above, a wide

⁵¹ *Kyūyō*, #1633. See also Higa, *Ko-Ryūkyū no shisō*, pp. 154–55.

⁵² Suetsugu Satoshi 末次智, “Nōkō girei to ō: Agariumaairi no shosō, amagoi to shoho girei” 農耕儀礼と王—東御廻りの諸相・雨乞と初穂儀礼, *Shin Okinawa bungaku*, no. 85 (Fall, 1990), pp. 80–82.

variety of government officials and technical specialists—priestesses, two kinds of Buddhist monks, China experts from Kumemura—served the king and the kingdom by contributing to the *amagoi*. The king now stood well above all other Ryukyuan. The high priestess, once nearly the king's equal in importance, had become a technical specialist in the service of the court.

It is also important to consider the ideological status of *amagoi* rites during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is hard to say whether most Ryukyuan elites had similar views of *amagoi*, but we can ascertain the view of early modern Ryukyu's most influential politician and Confucian ideologue, Sai On 蔡温 (1682–1761). In a passage in *Conversations with a Rustic Old Man* (C. *Suoweng pianyan*, J. *Saō hengen* 蓑翁片言), Sai On addressed this practice in a dialogue about ancient Chinese history between a fictitious “old man” and two aristocrats. One of the aristocrats asked why King Tang, founder of the Shang dynasty, prayed for rain:

Two members of the aristocracy came to visit the old man. One said, “There is a drought now. Don't we badly need to pray for rain?”

The old man said, “Is there a basis in the cosmic pattern (*li* 理) for such a rite?”

The aristocrat said, “Tang was a sage. He prayed for rain in a clearing within a mulberry forest.”

The old man said, “You know that King Tang prayed for rain, but you do not know his ideas about praying for rain.”

The aristocrat said, “I beg you to explain this matter.”

The old man said, “King Tang drove out Jie of the Xia and founded the Shang. The hearts of the people were joyous and they regarded it as a time when a violent ruler had been overthrown and replaced by an enlightened ruler. But unfortunately, after the good omen of Tang's ascendancy, there was a drought for several years. The people secretly harbored doubts and thought that *tian* (heaven, the cosmos) was going to replace Tang. At this time, if King Tang had been lacking in moral power (*de* 德力), *tian* would have brought about a change and the people would have been in misery. Therefore, he expeditiously established the practice of praying for rain and offered himself up as a sacrifice. The way he conducted himself brought him respect, and, from that time on, the whole realm believed in and obeyed him. He became a father and mother to the masses and set their minds at ease. This practice was something Tang devised to stabilize the people's minds and to preserve society. Is there, then, really a basis in the cosmic pattern for praying for rain? If there is, Tang should have prayed for rain when the drought started. Why did he wait until seven years had passed before he prayed for rain?”

[The other aristocrat then asks about an instance of the Duke of Zhou praying, and the old man makes the same point.]

The two aristocrats understood and said, ‘‘Hearing this now is like first awakening from a dream. But we ask, is it possible to do away with such false practices entirely?’’

The old man said, ‘‘Such popular customs are appropriate under certain circumstances.’’⁵³

For Sai On, the practice of official prayers for rain was an expedient technique intended to bolster the people’s confidence in the moral authority of the ruler. Such prayers have no efficacy in the sense of literally inducing rainfall.

This view of official prayer as an expedient device to bolster confidence in the state and its ruler was not limited to *amagoi* rites. For Sai On, all official religious rites were expedient devices, necessary as long as the common people continued to be ignorant of the true principles of the Confucian way. Sai On found this ignorance lamentable, saying that if prayer were indeed efficacious: ‘‘Why did Confucius not pray for the sake of Yen Yuan and Bo Wen? Examples such as this are clear and easy to discern. Why is it, then, that in later ages people confuse emptiness (*xu* 虚) and substance (*shi* 实), and those who always deal with substantive matters and clearly make this distinction are so very few? This is indeed lamentable.’’⁵⁴ Elsewhere in this passage, Sai On describes acts of prayer by high-profile figures as *quanfa* 權法, ‘‘expedient techniques.’’ He glosses *quanfa* with the Buddhist term *fangbian* 方便, ‘‘skillful means.’’⁵⁵ Noteworthy in this passage is the indication that while Sai On considered prayer to be an ‘‘empty’’ practice without metaphysical basis, many other Ryukyuan, elite members of society included, probably did not. Sai On not only regarded rites based mainly on native Ryukyuan religion as expedient devices, but he also relegated Buddhism to the status of *quanfa*.⁵⁶

After his death, Ryukyuan elites routinely studied Sai On’s writings as part of their education. By the end of the eighteenth century, Sai On’s Confucianism had become thoroughly institutionalized, in the curriculum of the state university, for example, in the form of an

⁵³ Sakihama Shūmei 崎濱秀明, *Sai On zenshū* 蔡溫全集 (Honpō shoseki, 1984), p. 185.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵⁵ The concept of *quan* 權 was central to Sai On’s Confucian thought and political practice. See Gregory Smits, ‘‘The Intersection of Politics and Thought in Ryukyuan Confucianism: Sai On’s Uses of Quan,’’ *HJAS*, 56.2 (December, 1996): 443–77.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 469–73.

examination system for certain government officials, and in new law codes. It is likely that by the early nineteenth century many Ryukyuan elites regarded *amagoi* and other official rites in which priestesses played a major role as expedient devices. The continued display of the solar orb on official monuments may also have served the purpose of conveying a sense of the power of the royal court to ordinary Ryukyuan, many of whom would have continued to practice solar worship as part of their religious activities.

CONCLUSION

The historical development of royal ideology in Ryukyu took place in three phases. The first begins with the reign of Shō Shin in the late fifteenth century and ends with Satsuma's invasion of 1609. Shō Shin and his successor Shō Sei established *tedako* ideology. Derived mainly from native Ryukyuan solar worship, *tedako* ideology was also shaped by Japanese Shingon Buddhism, including *honji-suijaku* notions of sovereign as avatar of the solar Buddha, as well as by Chinese examples of the ruler venerating and deriving power from *tian*, or "heaven," a term that in Ryukyu had close ties with *tēda*, the sun-as-deity. The second phase occurred in the seventeenth century, during which time the central role of priestesses as empowering agents came under attack. Shō Shōken's separation of the king from direct participation in many religious rites set the stage for the steady displacement of *tedako* ideology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the third phase. During the kingdom's final two centuries, Ryukyu's elites initiated large-scale institutional reforms designed to enhance royal authority and prestige and to portray the king as a Confucian sage, following Chinese models.

Some elements of *tedako* ideology, however, remained evident in royal rites and symbolism even during the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, Ryukyu's female religious officials, although by then clearly subordinate to the male sovereign, continued to serve the state as religious technicians. During times of emergency such as severe drought the role of the high priestess and her officials became especially prominent, as the state continued older traditions of performing official prayers. A distinctive feature of Ryukyuan history compared with its larger neighbors in East Asia is the high visibil-

ity, and, especially before the seventeenth century, the high degree of power of female officials. Although women played important political and social roles in ancient and prehistoric Japan, Korea, and possibly elsewhere in East Asia, in Ryukyu they did so in an official capacity through the nineteenth century. Still, even in Ryukyu, the status of female officials declined in early modern times, from empowering agent, on a par with the king to technical specialists in the king's service. In the eyes of Ryukyu's most influential ideologue, Sai On, the activities of the priestesses were merely expedient devices with no substantive grounding in the cosmic order.

The same eclectic mix of ideological elements—some native, some coming into the kingdom from China or Japan—remained present in Ryukyu during all three phases. Certain elements became more central and others more peripheral in response to new historical circumstances. Shō Shin attempted to distinguish the king from the *aji* by employing several interrelated strategies for associating the monarch, and the monarch only, with the power of the sun. Satsuma's invasion and subsequent domination of Ryukyu was the major impetus behind Shō Shōken's attempts to separate the king and priestess as well as the eighteenth-century sinification of royal rites, imagery, and symbolism. All elements, however, retained some degree of viability. In Shō Shin's time, for example, it would have been plausible for Ryukyuans to view the king as a Confucian sage in certain contexts. In the nineteenth century, the decorative carving on official monuments reminded them of the king's links with solar power. Royal authority in the kingdom of Ryukyu was created through an ongoing process of discursive construction.