

# BUNKA WENHUA

Tübinger Ostasiatische Forschungen  
Tuebingen East Asian Studies

herausgegeben von/edited by

Klaus Antoni, Viktoria Eschbach-Szabo,  
Robert Horres, Achim Mittag,  
Gunter Schubert, Hans Ulrich Vogel

Band/Volume 17

---

LIT

## Metals, Monies, and Markets in Early Modern Societies: East Asian and Global Perspectives

Monies, Markets, and Finance  
in China and East Asia

Volume 1

edited by

Thomas Hirzel and Nanny Kim

---

LIT

# Money in the Kingdom of Ryukyu

Gregory Smits

Until the seventeenth century, most of the coins circulating in the Kingdom of Ryukyu were of Chinese or Japanese origin. The knowledge and technology for minting coins appeared in the kingdom during the middle of the fifteenth century, and several Ryukyuan kings issued coins. The quantity of these coins was small, however, and it is likely that their main function was symbolic. In other words, their minting was part of a package of symbols to bolster royal authority. During the seventeenth century, the royal government established mints to create *hatomesen*, a standardized form of cheap copper cash. From 1713, the royal government adopted *hatomesen* as the official unit for government accounting and otherwise promoted the use of *hatomesen* for domestic transactions. Lacking significant deposits of metal, Ryukyu relied on the Japanese domain of Satsuma for copper and for specially minted silver coins for use in tribute trade with China.

## *Introduction*

At the height of its economic and military power in the early sixteenth century, the Kingdom of Ryukyu extended from the islands of the Amami-Ōshima group in the north, through the island of Yonaguni to the south and west. This kingdom was a small-scale empire. Starting in the early fifteenth century, the kings of Okinawa steadily expanded their control over other Ryukyu Islands through military conquest and periodic re-conquest. As the Ryukyu Empire expanded northward, it frequently clashed or competed with Japanese rulers based in the province of Satsuma, who sought to expand southward. In the opposite direction, the Ryukyu state developed strong ties of trade with Ming China and participated in formal tributary relations. The royal court at Shuri, on the island of Okinawa, prospered as Ryukyuan ships traded extensively throughout South, Southeast, and East Asia.

By the late sixteenth century, the kingdom's prosperity declined significantly owing to competition from Portuguese and Japanese traders. This decline set the stage for a disastrous military defeat in a war with the Japanese domain of Satsuma in 1609. Conquest by Satsuma meant that Ryukyu became a de facto part of Japan's *bakuh*an 幕藩 state, although the kingdom appeared to operate as an independent country. The rise of the Qing

dynasty and bakufu anxieties over Chinese military power enabled Ryukyu to regain a substantial degree of autonomy. Satsuma guided Ryukyu's foreign policy indirectly, and Ryukyu became an important conduit of goods and information between China and Japan.<sup>1</sup> Maintaining tributary ties with China, however, was very expensive, and Ryukyu would have been unable to do so without substantial material support from Satsuma. Ryukyu had no copper or silver mines, for example, and Satsuma provided Ryukyu with specially minted silver coins for use in official trade with China.

This paper surveys the major forms of money in the Ryukyu kingdom between the time it rose to power as a small-scale empire in the fifteenth century and its annexation by Japan in the 1870s. In addition to intrinsic interest, an examination of Ryukyuan currency also sheds light on Ryukyuan economic, political, and social issues and its relations with China and Japan. The emphasis in this paper will be on the development of Ryukyuan *hatomesen* 鳩目銭 (pigeon-eye cash) in the context of broader economic and political developments.

### Early Forms of Copper Cash

There is little direct documentation of Ryukyuan coins minted before the seventeenth century, and many of the details of their manufacture, use, and quantities remain uncertain. Particularly mysterious is the *chūzan tsūhō* 中山通寶 cash. Some sources have speculated that it is the oldest form of Ryukyuan money, but others say that these coins were manufactured during the reign of Shō Shin 尚真 (r. 1477–1526).<sup>2</sup> In any case, there is no extant evidence to date these coins, and there are very few surviving examples.

The three other varieties of early Ryukyuan copper cash can be dated with reasonable certainty based on indirect evidence. *Taisei tsūhō* 大世通寶 were minted during the reign of King Shō Taikyū 尚泰久 (r. 1454–1461), whose posthumous title was Ōyo no nushi 大世主. Likewise, *sedaka tsūhō* 世高通寶 coins were minted during the reign of Shō Toku 尚德 (r. 1461–

1 For a detailed discussion of the status of early-modern Ryukyu vis-à-vis Japan and China, see Smits 1999, 15–49.

2 Higashionna 1955–1956, 31 and Yamauchi 2004, 64.

1469) and reflect his posthumous title. It seems likely that Ryukyu's connection with China was the main impetus for the minting of these coins, al-

though the circumstances of their production are unclear.

One of the rulers of Okinawa established tributary relations with Ming China in 1372. It was not until the early fifteenth century, however, that Okinawan kings received a crown, robes, and the full array of accouterments of investiture from the Ming court.<sup>3</sup> After the kings of the first Shō dynasty consolidated their control over Okinawa during the first decades of the fifteenth century, trade with China began to contribute

prominently to the economic foundation of the kingdom. The

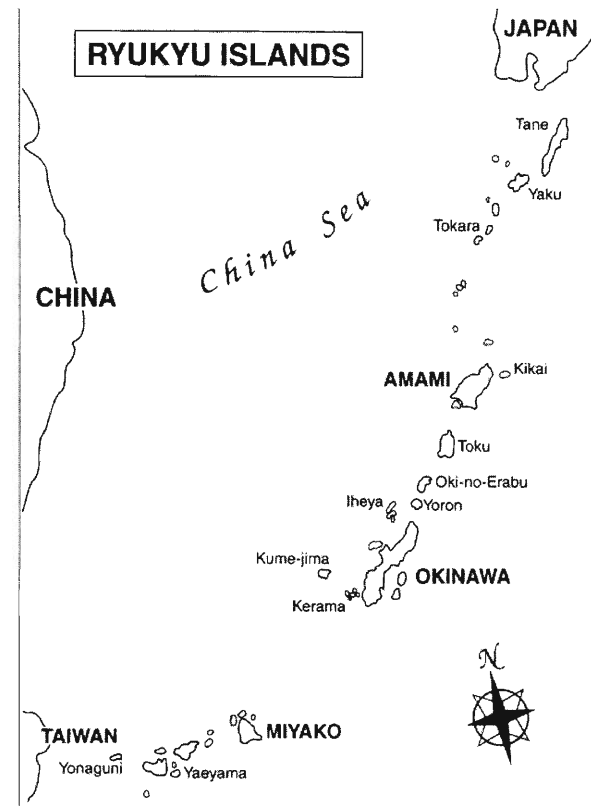


Figure 1. The Ryukyu Islands

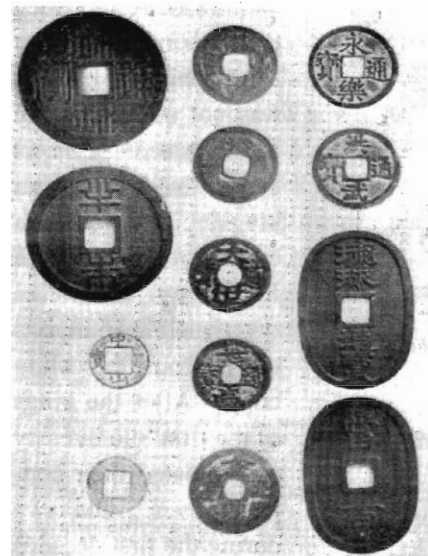
SOURCE: Gregory Smits 1999, 4.

increasing frequency of trade resulted in a shortage of cash. The Ryukyu court repeatedly asked Ming officials to supply it with Yongle coins 永樂錢 (copper cash first minted in 1408) and often had to resort to a type of money order called *chao* 鈔. Because Chinese merchants greatly preferred cash, *chao* traded at a substantial discount to their face value. This money shortage

3 There is an extensive literature on the early development of Ryukyu's relations with China. The best current summary can be found in Tomiyama 2004, 20–53.

was especially acute during the reigns of Shō Taikyū and Shō Toku and is the most likely proximate cause of Ryukyu's minting of coins at this time.<sup>4</sup>

We cannot be certain of the metalworking and minting technology that Ryukyu possessed during the reigns of Shō Taikyū and Shō Toku. Several sources speak vaguely of immigrant Chinese who brought minting techniques to Ryukyu. An analysis of monuments and other public inscriptions



**Figure 2. Ryukyuan coins**  
SOURCE: Higashionna Kanjun (1955-1956), front matter.

suggests that the reign of Shō Taikyū was a transitional period for metalwork. Prior to this reign, Japanese craftsmen inscribed monuments and performed other metalworking tasks, but after Shō Taikyū, Ryukyuans performed all metalwork. It is reasonable to assume that Ryukyuans came to possess the skills and tools needed for minting coins by the middle of the fifteenth century or shortly thereafter.<sup>5</sup> It appears that few if any of the *taisei* and *sedaka* coins were minted from scratch. Instead, they were Yongle coins (possibly damaged or worn) with two characters replaced. Whatever the exact circumstances of their minting may have been, the quality of these coins was poor and not on a par with those produced in China.<sup>6</sup>

The quantity of these early Ryukyuan coins was likely quite small for the simple reason that the kingdom lacked any known deposits of copper. Higashionna Kanjun has argued that the royal court produced its own coins to augment the cash shortage and thus facilitate trade with China.<sup>7</sup> Yamauchi Masanao, however, seems skeptical of this claim and suggests that these

4 Higashionna 1955–1956, 19–22.

5 Higashionna 1955–1956, 22–27.

6 Yamauchi Masanao 2004, 62, 64–65.

7 Higashionna 1955–1956, 19–22.

relatively inferior Ryukyuan coins may have been used for domestic purposes.<sup>8</sup> Another possibility is that the minting of these coins served no significant economic purpose. Doing so was an act of symbolic importance for enhancing the political legitimacy of the Ryukyuan kings. At this time, the kings were engaged in attempts to conquer the other Ryukyu Islands, but they also had to be wary of the power of local warlords in Okinawa. Ryukyuan kings sought to legitimize and enhance their power through a variety of symbolic moves, and it is likely that minting cash was part of this effort. It is probably significant that following Shō Shin's reign, when centralized royal authority had become nearly absolute, the minting of coins stopped for over a century. The fourth type of Ryukyuan coin is called *kanamaru sehō* or *kin'en sehō* 金圓世寶. All circumstantial evidence suggests these coins were minted during the reign of Shō En 尚圓 (r. 1470–1476), a former royal official who staged a coup against Shō Toku and founded the second Shō dynasty. The quality of existing coins is superior to that of *taisei* or *sedaka* cash, suggesting an improvement in Ryukyuan minting capabilities.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise, we know very little about these coins. It is likely that they, too, were produced as part of a package of symbolic actions that served to augment the king's authority. Prior to the seventeenth century, the vast majority of Ryukyu's coins came from China and Japan, not from the royal government mints.

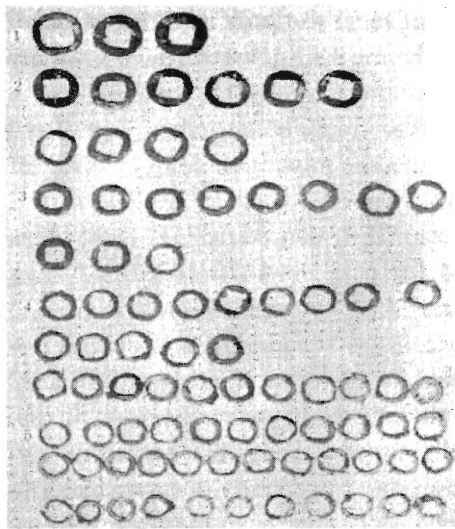
### *The Creation and Official Promotion of Hatomesen*

The coins of Japan's Ise Shrine (*gūsen* 宮錢) were called "*hatomesen*," "*hato no me*," or "*Ise no hatome*." Terms such as these also occur in other Japanese contexts in reference to coins of inferior quality. In this broad sense, the term "*hatomesen*" is the rough equivalent of *bitasen* 鏹錢, a general term for unofficial coins. Although the Ryukyuan term "*hatomesen*" undoubtedly derives from Japanese usage, Ryukyuan minting of *hatomesen* was an effort to standardize and improve the currency urban Okinawans used for their ordinary, domestic transactions. It is important to distinguish, there-

8 Yamauchi 2004, 64.

9 Yamauchi Masanao 2004, 65.

fore, between *bitasen*, a variety of coins of different sizes and origins, and *hatomesen*, a standardized form of inexpensive cash produced by government mints. In general, various forms of *bitasen* that had accumulated in Ryukyu were re-minted into *hatomesen* during the middle of the seventeenth century. Early in the eighteenth century, Ryukyu's government sought to



**Figure 3. Types of *hatomesen***

SOURCE: Higashionna Kanjun (1955-1956), front matter.

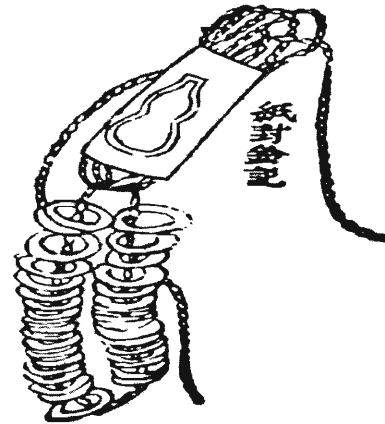
Ryukyu. During the second half of the seventeenth century, Ryukyuan officials re-cast these coins into *hatomesen*.

The most important source of raw material for *hatomesen* was the large quantities of *kajikisen* 加治木錢 locked away in storage in Satsuma. *Kajikisen* were privately produced coins for use in Satsuma's territories. Their face resembled Chinese Hongwu cash 洪武通寶, but on the back of each coin was the character *ka*, *ji*, or *ki*, hence the name *kajikisen*. In 1643, the bakufu strictly prohibited the use of these coins, and Satsuma took them out of circulation and put them into storage. Ijichi Tarōemon Jūchin, later known

to remove all other forms of copper cash from daily use, thereby requiring Ryukyuan to use only *hatomesen*. The *bitasen* that became the raw material for the *hatomesen* included several types of inferior cash that circulated in Japanese markets during the late Muromachi and very early Tokugawa periods. As higher quality coins drove inferior cash out of use in Japanese markets, merchants based in Hakata brought many of these undesirable coins to Ryukyu. Furthermore, large quantities of *kinsen* 京錢, mainly inferior coins produced by or for the Southern Ming court, circulated in

as Tōma Jūchin 當間重陳 (1591–1676), gave new life to these prohibited coins.<sup>10</sup>

Tōma came to Ryukyu from Satsuma at a young age as a minor official. In a very unusual move, he stayed in Ryukyu, changed his hairstyle and dress to the local manner, and otherwise "went native." With his knowledge of Satsuma, Tōma was an asset to the royal government, and he enjoyed a successful bureaucratic career. In 1656, he visited Satsuma for the first time in forty-five years. There, he obtained permission to return to Ryukyu with large quantities of *kajikisen*. Domain officials also gave him copper Buddhist temple objects confiscated from the outlawed Ikkō sect. With these raw materials in hand, Tōma established mints at Ōno-yama and Ikehara Village in the district of Goeku. The coins produced



**Figure 4. String of sealed *hatomesen* from the *Chūzan denshinroku***

SOURCE: Xu Baoguang 1982, 344.

from that project were called "*tōmasen*." The next large-scale minting of *hatomesen* took place in 1715, most likely in preparation for the investiture of King Shō Kei 尚敬 (r. 1713–1751), which took place in 1719. Prior to investiture, Ryukyuan mints produced approximately 110,000 *kan* (1 *kan* = 1000 coins) of *hatomesen*.<sup>11</sup> The various *bitasen* circulating in Ryukyu were gradually minted into *hatomesen* during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Based on small variations in diameter and weight, Ryukyuan mints eventually produced five different types of *hatomesen*.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to the arrival of the Chinese investiture envoys and their entourage of merchants in 1719, the royal government withdrew all Japanese coins

10 The creation of *hatomesen* is discussed to some extent in nearly every general history of Ryukyu. For the most detailed account, see Higashionna 1955–1956, 32–55.

11 Higashionna 1955–1956, 53–54.

12 See Higashionna 1955–1956, last page of the front matter, for a photograph of these five types.

from circulation in the capital region, replacing them with *hatomesen*. The two apparent reasons were to prevent the loss of high-quality coins that might have found their way into the hands of the Chinese merchants via private trade. The other reason for this move was that it was part of a broader effort to hide from Chinese eyes Ryukyu's extensive ties with Japan. If indeed this second reason was behind the withdrawal of Japanese coins, it did not succeed. Investiture envoy Xu Baoguang 徐葆光 wrote an extensive account of conditions in Ryukyu, as was customary. In his account, he explained that previous envoys had reported the extensive use of Japanese coins in the Ryukyuan market places. However, "these coins were temporarily withdrawn and replaced by *hatomesen*. After the envoys went back to China, things returned to their previous condition."<sup>13</sup> Xu was also aware of the origins of *hatomesen*:

In the marketplace, Ryukyuan conduct their business using cash. There are no silver coins. Among the copper cash are old coins or coins without a clearly-defined border. The square hole in the center is large, and the characters "Hongwu" appear on the face. Such coins have become fewer in number. The main coins in use now are thin iron discs, a string of which is hardly 9-12 centimeters in length, with a weight that amounts to less than a *tael*. The knot on a string of such cash is sealed, and if the seal is broken it cannot be used.<sup>14</sup>

The coins bearing the characters "Hongwu" would have been *kajikisen*. Xu was apparently relying in part on the writing of previous envoys, and his comment that few of these *kajikisen* were now in circulation fits the general trend of the Royal government re-minting all forms of inferior cash into *hatomesen*. The comment about *hatomesen* being "iron" refers to the fact that these coins, although theoretically copper, often contained noticeable admixtures of iron.

During the reign of Shō Kei, the royal government adopted *hatomesen* as the basis for official domestic business and government accounting. Therefore, all cash figures in "*mon*" 文 from 1713 and later refer to *hatomesen*. Prior to this time, "*mon*" might refer to its Japanese value or to *hatomesen* (in some contexts both figures were listed), which were valued at only 1/50<sup>th</sup>

13 Xu 1982, 345. See also Higashionna 1955–1956, 51–55.

14 Xu 1982, 345, sketch on p. 344. See Figure 4.

of a Japanese *mon*.<sup>15</sup> The government adoption of a *hatomesen*-based financial system was part of a broader effort to require Ryukyuan to use only *hatomesen*. All evidence indicates, however, that Ryukyuan preferred Japanese or Chinese cash whenever possible. By the end of the eighteenth century, Japanese cash began crowding out *hatomesen* in private transactions. *Hatomesen*, however, remained an important currency in Ryukyu until the end of the kingdom. During the eighteenth century, a total of approximately twenty-five varieties of Ryukyuan, Chinese, and Japanese cash circulated in Ryukyu.

### *Sai On's Theory of the Ryukyuan State*

Sai On 蔡温 (1682–1761) was Ryukyu's most prominent politician and scholar. Broadly speaking, he sought, with mixed success, to transform Ryukyu into a Confucian society. Unlike the stereotype of Confucian idealists, Sai On's policies were often rooted in pragmatic considerations. He was well aware that Ryukyu would never become the ideal Confucian society he envisioned without a solid basis of material prosperity. Therefore, the bulk of his administrative effort went toward measures to advance the kingdom's economic wellbeing.

Sai On also adumbrated a theory of the Ryukyuan state. This theory acknowledged the essential role of Satsuma while also minimizing that role and arguing that Ryukyuan themselves bore the main responsibility for the future of their society. This theory can be found in the essay *Hitori monogatari* 獨物語 (One man's views). Briefly, Sai On claimed that Ryukyu had survived as a distinct country for hundreds of years only because of fortuitous accidents of geography, being located under an especially potent array of stars and being shaped like a dragon. Nevertheless, he argued, if the kingdom were to survive and prosper into the future, it must advance the "Way of Government," one of several terms that served as shorthand for his vision of an ideal Confucian society. This Way of Government rested on a material basis, which is the relevant part of his theory for our purposes.

15 Higashionna 1955–1956, 12.

from circulation in the capital region, replacing them with *hatomesen*. The two apparent reasons were to prevent the loss of high-quality coins that might have found their way into the hands of the Chinese merchants via private trade. The other reason for this move was that it was part of a broader effort to hide from Chinese eyes Ryukyu's extensive ties with Japan. If indeed this second reason was behind the withdrawal of Japanese coins, it did not succeed. Investiture envoy Xu Baoguang 徐葆光 wrote an extensive account of conditions in Ryukyu, as was customary. In his account, he explained that previous envoys had reported the extensive use of Japanese coins in the Ryukyuan market places. However, "these coins were temporarily withdrawn and replaced by *hatomesen*. After the envoys went back to China, things returned to their previous condition."<sup>13</sup> Xu was also aware of the origins of *hatomesen*:

In the marketplace, Ryukyuan conduct their business using cash. There are no silver coins. Among the copper cash are old coins or coins without a clearly-defined border. The square hole in the center is large, and the characters "Hongwu" appear on the face. Such coins have become fewer in number. The main coins in use now are thin iron discs, a string of which is hardly 9-12 centimeters in length, with a weight that amounts to less than a *tael*. The knot on a string of such cash is sealed, and if the seal is broken it cannot be used.<sup>14</sup>

The coins bearing the characters "Hongwu" would have been *kajikisen*. Xu was apparently relying in part on the writing of previous envoys, and his comment that few of these *kajikisen* were now in circulation fits the general trend of the Royal government re-minting all forms of inferior cash into *hatomesen*. The comment about *hatomesen* being "iron" refers to the fact that these coins, although theoretically copper, often contained noticeable admixtures of iron.

During the reign of Shō Kei, the royal government adopted *hatomesen* as the basis for official domestic business and government accounting. Therefore, all cash figures in "*mon*" 文 from 1713 and later refer to *hatomesen*. Prior to this time, "*mon*" might refer to its Japanese value or to *hatomesen* (in some contexts both figures were listed), which were valued at only 1/50<sup>th</sup>

13 Xu 1982, 345. See also Higashionna 1955–1956, 51–55.

14 Xu 1982, 345, sketch on p. 344. See Figure 4.

of a Japanese *mon*.<sup>15</sup> The government adoption of a *hatomesen*-based financial system was part of a broader effort to require Ryukyuan to use only *hatomesen*. All evidence indicates, however, that Ryukyuan preferred Japanese or Chinese cash whenever possible. By the end of the eighteenth century, Japanese cash began crowding out *hatomesen* in private transactions. *Hatomesen*, however, remained an important currency in Ryukyu until the end of the kingdom. During the eighteenth century, a total of approximately twenty-five varieties of Ryukyuan, Chinese, and Japanese cash circulated in Ryukyu.

### *Sai On's Theory of the Ryukyuan State*

Sai On 蔡温 (1682–1761) was Ryukyu's most prominent politician and scholar. Broadly speaking, he sought, with mixed success, to transform Ryukyu into a Confucian society. Unlike the stereotype of Confucian idealists, Sai On's policies were often rooted in pragmatic considerations. He was well aware that Ryukyu would never become the ideal Confucian society he envisioned without a solid basis of material prosperity. Therefore, the bulk of his administrative effort went toward measures to advance the kingdom's economic wellbeing.

Sai On also adumbrated a theory of the Ryukyuan state. This theory acknowledged the essential role of Satsuma while also minimizing that role and arguing that Ryukyuan themselves bore the main responsibility for the future of their society. This theory can be found in the essay *Hitori monogatari* 獨物語 (One man's views). Briefly, Sai On claimed that Ryukyu had survived as a distinct country for hundreds of years only because of fortuitous accidents of geography, being located under an especially potent array of stars and being shaped like a dragon. Nevertheless, he argued, if the kingdom were to survive and prosper into the future, it must advance the "Way of Government," one of several terms that served as shorthand for his vision of an ideal Confucian society. This Way of Government rested on a material basis, which is the relevant part of his theory for our purposes.

15 Higashionna 1955–1956, 12.

from circulation in the capital region, replacing them with *hatomesen*. The two apparent reasons were to prevent the loss of high-quality coins that might have found their way into the hands of the Chinese merchants via private trade. The other reason for this move was that it was part of a broader effort to hide from Chinese eyes Ryukyu's extensive ties with Japan. If indeed this second reason was behind the withdrawal of Japanese coins, it did not succeed. Investiture envoy Xu Baoguang 徐葆光 wrote an extensive account of conditions in Ryukyu, as was customary. In his account, he explained that previous envoys had reported the extensive use of Japanese coins in the Ryukyuan market places. However, "these coins were temporarily withdrawn and replaced by *hatomesen*. After the envoys went back to China, things returned to their previous condition."<sup>13</sup> Xu was also aware of the origins of *hatomesen*:

In the marketplace, Ryukyuan conduct their business using cash. There are no silver coins. Among the copper cash are old coins or coins without a clearly-defined border. The square hole in the center is large, and the characters "Hongwu" appear on the face. Such coins have become fewer in number. The main coins in use now are thin iron discs, a string of which is hardly 9-12 centimeters in length, with a weight that amounts to less than a *tael*. The knot on a string of such cash is sealed, and if the seal is broken it cannot be used.<sup>14</sup>

The coins bearing the characters "Hongwu" would have been *kajikisen*. Xu was apparently relying in part on the writing of previous envoys, and his comment that few of these *kajikisen* were now in circulation fits the general trend of the Royal government re-minting all forms of inferior cash into *hatomesen*. The comment about *hatomesen* being "iron" refers to the fact that these coins, although theoretically copper, often contained noticeable admixtures of iron.

During the reign of Shō Kei, the royal government adopted *hatomesen* as the basis for official domestic business and government accounting. Therefore, all cash figures in "*mon*" 文 from 1713 and later refer to *hatomesen*. Prior to this time, "*mon*" might refer to its Japanese value or to *hatomesen* (in some contexts both figures were listed), which were valued at only 1/50<sup>th</sup>

13 Xu 1982, 345. See also Higashionna 1955–1956, 51–55.

14 Xu 1982, 345, sketch on p. 344. See Figure 4.

of a Japanese *mon*.<sup>15</sup> The government adoption of a *hatomesen*-based financial system was part of a broader effort to require Ryukyuan to use only *hatomesen*. All evidence indicates, however, that Ryukyuan preferred Japanese or Chinese cash whenever possible. By the end of the eighteenth century, Japanese cash began crowding out *hatomesen* in private transactions. *Hatomesen*, however, remained an important currency in Ryukyu until the end of the kingdom. During the eighteenth century, a total of approximately twenty-five varieties of Ryukyuan, Chinese, and Japanese cash circulated in Ryukyu.

### *Sai On's Theory of the Ryukyuan State*

Sai On 蔡温 (1682–1761) was Ryukyu's most prominent politician and scholar. Broadly speaking, he sought, with mixed success, to transform Ryukyu into a Confucian society. Unlike the stereotype of Confucian idealists, Sai On's policies were often rooted in pragmatic considerations. He was well aware that Ryukyu would never become the ideal Confucian society he envisioned without a solid basis of material prosperity. Therefore, the bulk of his administrative effort went toward measures to advance the kingdom's economic wellbeing.

Sai On also adumbrated a theory of the Ryukyuan state. This theory acknowledged the essential role of Satsuma while also minimizing that role and arguing that Ryukyuan themselves bore the main responsibility for the future of their society. This theory can be found in the essay *Hitori monogatari* 獨物語 (One man's views). Briefly, Sai On claimed that Ryukyu had survived as a distinct country for hundreds of years only because of fortuitous accidents of geography, being located under an especially potent array of stars and being shaped like a dragon. Nevertheless, he argued, if the kingdom were to survive and prosper into the future, it must advance the "Way of Government," one of several terms that served as shorthand for his vision of an ideal Confucian society. This Way of Government rested on a material basis, which is the relevant part of his theory for our purposes.

15 Higashionna 1955–1956, 12.



Sai On defined a "country" (*kokudo* 國土) as any place possessing a sufficient material foundation and whose society is guided by proper ethical norms. He defined the material foundation simply as the presence of all five of the agents of *yin* and *yang* (Ch. *wuxing*, Jp. *gogyō* 五行). In this context, the *gogyō* are best regarded as concrete elements, not abstract phases or agents. Furthermore, water, fire, and earth are ubiquitous, so the key variables are wood and metal. Ryukyu possessed forests suitable for timber production and harvesting. Indeed, Sai On's most successful project was an ambitious program of forest cultivation, preservation, and management, implemented throughout the kingdom. In *Hitori monogatari*, Sai On argued that although Ryukyu lacked metal deposits, it could exist as a proper country by using its surplus of wood to import metal from Satsuma.<sup>16</sup> In this way, Sai On acknowledged Satsuma's essential role in supporting Ryukyu but at the same time, he relegated Satsuma to the relatively mundane role of supplier of metal.

We have seen that one example of Satsuma's metal was the *kajikisen* and other copper items that became the raw material for the kingdom's first minting of *hatomesen*. As important as this copper was, Sai On may have been thinking more of silver when he wrote *Hitori monogatari*. The debasements of bakufu silver coins were a severe problem for Ryukyu in conducting its official trade with China. In 1697 the Ryukyuan court sent an envoy to Satsuma, who explained that the newly-minted Genroku coins were not suitable for trade. A decline in the quality of imported Chinese goods in subsequent years and a series of petitions by the royal government starting in 1702 finally convinced Satsuma to approach the bakufu about this matter. Satsuma had been reluctant to do so owing to a desire not to reveal too much about the domain's dealings with Ryukyu and China. Satsuma asked the bakufu for permission to mint coins of pre-1695 silver content. At first, the bakufu was uncooperative, but Satsuma finally attained permission by arguing that if Ryukyu could not fulfill its obligations vis-à-vis the Qing court, then international unrest might result. Ever nervous about Qing military capabilities, the bakufu agreed to the Satsuma petition.<sup>17</sup>

16 Sai On 1984, 88. See also Smits 1999, 84–85. For the details of Sai On's forest policy, see pp. 103–110.

17 For more details, see Smits 1999, 33–34.

Ryukyu's ties to China constituted its political lifeline. Without its access to Chinese goods and information in the context of the lack of official Japanese relations with the Qing court, Ryukyu's quasi-autonomous existence would have ended with Satsuma's 1609 invasion. It was most likely these basic facts, about which Sai On could not directly speak, that he was attempting to remind his readers of in *Hitori monogatari*. Ryukyu's existence as a quasi-independent kingdom indeed depended in part on Satsuma's metal in the form of silver coins and copper for Ryukyuan mints.

### References

- Higashionna Kanjun 東恩納寛惇 (1955–1956). "Nantō tsūkashi no kenkyū" 南島通貨志の研究 (Research in the History of the Currency of the Southern Islands). In Ryūkyū shinpōsha (comp.) (1979), *Higashionna Kanjun zenshū* 東恩納寛惇全集 (Collected Works of Higashionna Kanjun). Tokyo: Dai'ichi shobō, pp. 3–147.
- Sai On 蔡温 (1984). *Sai On zenshū* 蔡温全集. Edited by Sakihama Shūmei 崎濱秀明. Tokyo: Honpō shoseki.
- Smits, Gregory (1999). *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Tomiyama Kazuyuki (2004). *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken* 琉球王国の外交と王権 (Foreign Relations and Royal Authority in the Ryukyu Kingdom). Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan.
- Xu Baoguang 徐葆光 (1982). *Chūzan denshinroku* 中山伝信録. Translated and edited by Harada Nobuo 原田兔雄. Tokyo: Gensōsha. Chinese version originally published in 1721.
- Yamauchi Masanao 山内昌尚 (2004). *Sengo Okinawa tsūka hensenshi: beigun tōchi jidai o chūshin ni* 戦後沖縄通貨変遷史: 米軍統治時代を中心に (The History of Postwar Okinawa Currency Changes Focusing on the Period of Untied States Military Occupation). Naha, Japan: Ryūkyū shinpōsha.