

Recent Trends in Scholarship on the History of Ryukyu's Relations with China and Japan

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The concrete details of Ryukyu's foreign relations—its interactions with Ming and Qing China on the one hand and Satsuma and the bakufu on the other—are the key to understanding royal authority between 1609 and 1879. The changing nature of royal authority is also the key to comprehending the logic behind the major changes that took place in Ryukyuan society and domestic politics during this time. Ryukyu's foreign relations serve as a lens through which we can view the limits of Satsuma's power and the extent of Ryukyuan autonomy. Zooming out and looking at the broader context of East Asia, the lens of Ryukyuan foreign relations can provide insights into the nature of the kingdom's larger neighbors. Tomiyama Kazuyuki, for example, concludes *Ryūkyū ōkoku no kaikō to ōken* in part by characterizing Japan's *bakuhan* state as a “small empire,” one that included foreign countries and peoples from Hokkaidō through the Ryukyu Islands.¹ Tomiyama's main task, however, is not to use Ryukyu to shed light on Japan or China, but to examine Ryukyuan autonomy and royal authority through the details of foreign relations, broadly defined. Early-modern (*kinsei*) Ryukyu existed as a quasi-autonomous country because of its active engagement with a far-flung network of foreign relations. The major trend in recent studies of Ryukyuan history has been to re-evaluate the nature of the Ryukyuan state through its interactions with China, Satsuma, and the bakufu. With an emphasis on Tomiyama's recent masterful synthesis of research in this area, this paper discusses some of the recent trends in scholarship on

¹ Tomiyama Kazuyuki, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2004), pp. 302-3.

Ryukyuan history. I begin first by briefly placing these trends in their own historical context, starting with the period of postwar United States occupation of Okinawa.²

Historical Scholarship in the Service of Reversion

Between the end of the Pacific War and Okinawa's reversion to Japan in 1972, a foreign army occupied and controlled Okinawa. Particularly in light of mainland Japanese economic prosperity, Okinawans pressed with increasing vigor for a political reunification with Japan. Historical scholarship of this period often reflected the realities and pressing issues of the day. In the broadest sense, historians tended more often to examine Okinawa's post 1879 history than to deal with the Ryukyu Kingdom, whose very existence suggested at least some degree of separation from Japan. Historical writing about the early-modern kingdom tended to minimize the cultural, diplomatic, and political significance of Ryukyu's relations with China, often echoing Higashionna Kanjun's tendency to dismiss the Chinese investiture of Ryukyuan kings as mere *pro forma* ritual in the service of trade.³ Similarly, there was a strong tendency to regard the early-modern Ryukyuan state as a puppet of Satsuma.⁴

In the realm of culture, the emphasis was on Japanese influences on Ryukyu.

The earlier views of Higashionna, and to some extent Iha Fuyū, regarding the

² My summary of the history of historical writing about the Ryukyu Kingdom in the following sections loosely follows a similar analysis presented by Tomiyama (*Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 2-13), but with some modification and additions.

³ See, for example, Chapter 9 ("Chōkō kankei") of Higashionna Kanjun's 1957 work *Ryūkyū no rekishi*, in Ryūkyū shinpōsha, comp., *Higashionna Kanjun zenshū*, vol. 1 (Dai'ichi shobō, 1978), p. 33; or section 4 ("Sakuhō shinkō wa keizaijō no giman kōdō nari") in his 1951 *Okinawa shōgai shi*, in *Higashionna Kanjun zenshū*, vol. 1, pp. 205-7. See also Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 7-8.

⁴ A good example of this approach is Higuchi Masakiyo, *Kinsei no Ryūkyū* (Hōsei daigaku shuppankyoku, 1975). Although published in 1975, much of the research for the volume predated reversion. See also Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, p. 2.

development of Ryukyuan culture continued to influence interpretations during the immediate postwar decades. Higashionna explained the cultural differences between Okinawa and the Japanese mainland as unnatural artifacts from Satsuma's selfish policy of using Ryukyu in the manner of a cormorant to extract wealth from China. Iha, relying on notions of "racial" similitude, also regarded Ryukyuan culture as having a natural affinity with that of the Japanese mainland.⁵ The basic message of the pre-reversion period was similar: Okinawans should properly be part of Japan. Historical scholarship tended to emphasize this point.

A good example of this point is the treatment of Ryukyu's eighteenth century. This century was a time of strong Chinese and Confucian influence on a wide range of material and non-material culture, including royal symbolism and ritual, the ideological basis of royal authority, the writing of official histories, tombs, the introduction of *fungshui* (Jp. *fūsui*), and even the design of ships (the Ryukyuan *maaran-sen* of the late 18th century). Consider the description of this era in a well-known general history published in 1972. Shinzato Keiji, Taminato Tomoasa, and Kinjō Seitaku devote an entire chapter to "the flourishing of culture" ("Bun'un no ryūsei"), mainly during the eighteenth century, in *Okinawa-ken no rekishi*. The discussion begins with:

Following Shimazu's invasion, Okinawa took in Japanese mainland (*Nihon hondo*) culture anew, digested it, and gave birth to its own distinctive culture. While there were aspects of Ryukyuan subjectivity (*shutaisei*) that withered away before the

⁵ See, for example, Gregory Smits, *Visions of Ryūkyū: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp. 151-2; and Higashionna Kanjun "Satsuma no Ryūkyū ni taisuru ni seisaku," *Higashionna Kanjun zenshū*, vol. 4, pp. 224-235.

wall of Shimazu's vast power, owing to regular contact with Shimazu, mainland culture came into Ryukyu, which stimulated a cultural revival.⁶

What about China? It seems almost conspicuous by its absence in this passage.

Although there were some Japanese elements in Ryukyu's cultural revival, the main influence was overwhelmingly Chinese. The chapter in *Okinawa-ken no rekishi* ends with a discussion of the *kanshō* system of sending Ryukyuan students to China, but otherwise it minimizes any mention of Chinese influences. Notice also the awkwardness of the quoted passage in dealing with Ryukyuan subjectivity and in the repeated use of the word "mainland" (*hondo*), implying, of course, that *kinsei* Ryukyu was Japan.

Although this usage (and, in other works from this period, terms like *waga hondo* "our mainland" or *sokoku* "the motherland") was common in the 1960s and early 1970s, it is rare in works from the 1980s and later. Finally, notice that it was "Shimazu" that invaded Ryukyu and caused its subjectivity to wither, not "Satsuma," a term that might suggest a foreign geographical entity.

By contrast, recent histories of Ryukyu typically devote extensive coverage to the influx of Chinese culture during the eighteenth century. Akamine Mamoru is typical in this regard. *Ryūkyū ōkoku: Higashi Ajia no kōnaasutōn* (2004) includes a chapter called "The Sinification of Ryukyu" ("Chūgokuka' shite yuku Ryūkyū"). It begins with the complex dynamics of Ryukyu diplomacy vis-à-vis Japan and China and then discusses such topics as the introduction of Chinese ritual forms, *fungshui*, the diffusion of Confucian morality, Chinese-style official histories, the spread of popular Daoism, and

⁶ Shinzato Keiji, Taminato Tomoasa, and Kinjō Seitoku, *Okinawa-ken no rekishi* (Yamakawa shuppansha, 1972), p. 119.

Chinese maritime culture, including *maaran* ships.⁷ Later chapters discuss Ryukyu's tribute trade with China in detail. Viewed from the vantage point of 2004, *kinsei* Ryukyu looked much more Chinese than it did in 1972. A major reason for this difference was changes in political concerns following reversion. By 1980, a new generation of historians was beginning to make its presence known.

Paradigm Shift: 1980 through the early 1990s

In 1976, Taminato Tomoaki adumbrated a vision of early-modern Ryukyu as a foreign country within the territory of Satsuma. In 1980, Araki Moriaki refined Taminato's basic idea, and, later in the decade, Takara Kurayoshi proposed the influential formula of Ryukyu as a foreign country within the *bakuhan* system (*bakuhan taisei no naka no ikoku*). Not only with respect to this point, but in many other ways, the work of Araki and Takara during the 1980s was so influential that Tomiyama speaks of an Araki-Takara schema causing a paradigm shift in the study of Okinawan history. Among other contributions, Takara's close study of the documents used to appoint royal officials (*jiresihso*) led to a more nuanced understanding of the similarities and differences between "Old-Ryukyu" (*ko-Ryūkyū*, i.e., Ryukyu prior to 1609) and early-modern Ryukyu. Takara stressed the historical significance of Old-Ryukyu in shaping the nature of early-modern Ryukyu.⁸ During the 1980s, Dana Masayuki investigated *kafu* of

⁷ Akamine Mamoru, *Ryūkyū ōkoku: Higashi Ajia no kōnaasutōn* (Kōdansha, 2004), pp. 114-131

⁸ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 2-3, 10; Araki Moriaki, *Shin Okinawa shi ron* (Naha: Okinawa taimusu sha, 1980). Among Takara Kurayoshi's many books, a good example of his use of *jiresisho* and his argument that pre-1609 Ryukyu contributed much to the nature of *kinsei* Ryukyu is *Ryūkyū ōkoku no kōzō* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1987). For an explanation of his characterization of early-modern Ryukyu as a foreign country within the *bakuhan* system see Takara, *Ryūkyū ōkokushi no kadai* (Naha: Hirugisha, 1989), p. 392.

Ryukyu's aristocratic households, a type of source largely overlooked by other historians. His major work, *Okinawa kinseishi no shosō* was published in 1992. It went a long way toward clarifying the nature of Ryukyuan status distinctions (*mibunsei*), the working of local government, and offered a sophisticated analysis of Ryukyu's official histories.⁹

In contrast with previous decades, during the 1980s there was increased interest in Ryukyu's connections with China. Miyata Toshihiko, for example, examined trade between Ryukyu and Qing China through the *Rekidai hōan* and published his results in 1984.¹⁰ Because Miyata did not consider Satsuma or any other aspect of the broader context of Ryukyu's trade relations, his study is of limited value. More important is Uehara Kenzen's *Sakoku to han bōeki: Satsuma-han no Ryūkyū mitsubōeki*.¹¹ Although Uehara focuses mainly on interactions between Ryukyu and Satsuma, his study also had much to say about Ryukyu's interactions with China. Perhaps the most sophisticated work on Ryukyu-China interactions during the 1980s was Itokazu Kaneharu's research on the spread and influence Neo-Confucian in Ryukyu. Itokazu performed a philosophical analysis on the major writings of Sai On, analyzing them in terms of the thought of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. Furthermore, he contextualized Sai On's Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian thought in the local circumstances of Ryukyuan history.¹²

⁹ Dana Masayuki, *Okinawa kinseishi no shosō* (Naha: Hirugisha, 1992). See also Tomiyama *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰ Miyata Toshihiko, *Ryūkyū, Shinkoku no kōekishi: nishū Rekidai hōan no kenkyū* (Dai'ichi shobō, 1984).

¹¹ Uehara Kenzen, *Sakoku to han bōeki: Satsuma-han no Ryūkyū mitsubōeki* (Yaetake shobō, 1981).

¹² Representative examples of Itokazu's essays are "Sai On to shushigaku: kinsei Ryūkyū ni okeru sono shisōshijō no ichizuke," in Shimajiri Katsutarō, ed., *Kyūyō ronsō* (Naha: Hirugisha, 1986), pp. 263-292; and "Sai On no shisō to sono jidai," in *Shin Ryūkyūshi, kinsei hen*, vol. 2 (Naha: Ryūkyū shinpōsha), pp. 183-208.

Other important research during the 1980s on aspects of Ryukyu's interactions with China was conducted by Shimajiri Katsutarō, Kubo Noritada, Harada Nobuo, Tsuzuki Akiko, Xu Gongsheng, Maehira Fusaaki, and others.

The 1980s was also a time of advances in our understanding of the intricacies Ryukyu's connections with Satsuma and the bakufu. In addition to the work of Uehara mentioned above, Kamiya Nobuyuki's 1990 monograph *Bakuhansei kokka no Ryūkyū shihai* was a major contribution, which took into account the broader East Asian context. He examined the nature of Ryukyu-Satsuma relations in the context of the Ming-Qing transition as well as bakufu objectives.¹³ Kamiya's research was instrumental in laying the foundation for the view of early-modern Ryukyu as existing within a geo-political "space" created in part by the lack of formal diplomatic relations between the Chinese court and the bakufu.¹⁴ Other important research in Ryukyu-Satsuma/bakufu relations during the 1980s was conducted by Miyagi Eishō, Kishaba Kazutaka, Umeki Tetsuto, Nakachi Tetsuo, Maehira Fusaaki, and others.

Broadening Trends

One of the characteristics of the boom in scholarship on Ryukyu during the 1980s and beyond was the exploitation of new sources and the re-interpretation of old ones. Another contributing factor to the sophistication of this work was greater appreciation for and knowledge of the complexities of the *bakuhan* state and its foreign

¹³ Kamiya Nobuyuki, *Bakuhansei kokka no Ryūkyū shihai* (Azekura shobō, 1990); and Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ This view can be found in Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu*, and in Tomiyama, *Gaiko to ōken*.

relations, as well as similar depth with respect to China. In 1980, for example, it was still common to employ the term “*sakoku*” as an important characteristic of the Tokugawa state. A decade later, however, the notion that foreign relations were an insignificant component of the *bakuhan* state was no longer tenable. Today, the sub-field of Tokugawa-period foreign relations is a vigorous area of academic inquiry that has produced a large literature. Not only is it now common to regard Ryukyu as fully part of a network that extended throughout East Asia, but it is also common practice to view Japan’s *bakuhan* state in the same manner.¹⁵ Ryukyu, of course, figures prominently in this literature on Tokugawa foreign relations.

Itokazu’s research in intellectual history mentioned above is another example of scholars of Ryukyu broadening their range of expertise beyond local matters. In this case, Itokazu familiarized himself with the major scholarly works in Chinese Neo-Confucianism, which made possible his sophisticated analysis of Sai On’s essays. Prior to Itokazu’s research, scholars of Ryukyu often noted the influence of Confucianism on figures like Tei Junsoku or Sai On, but only Maeda Giken made any serious attempt to analyze Ryukyuan Confucianism. Maeda’s lack of depth in Neo-Confucianism and Chinese intellectual history, however, tended to limit his analysis to formal aspects of academic life such as lineages of scholars.

¹⁵ The first monograph to challenge conventional understandings of *sakoku* was Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). A Japanese translation appeared in 1990 as *Kinsei Nihon no kokka keisei to gaikō*. Nishijima Sadao’s important *Nihon rekishi no kokusai kankyō* (Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1985) covers the Tokugawa period as well as earlier eras. The work of Nagazumi Yōko has been especially important in establishing the sub-field of Tokugawa-period foreign relations. See, for example, *Kinsei shoki no gaikō* (Sōbunsha, 1990). Another important early study was Yamamoto Hirofumi, *Kanei jidai* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1989). Among scholars specializing in Ryukyuan history, Maehira Fusaaki has been especially active in contributing to the literature on Tokugawa-period foreign relations. See, for example, “Ryūkyū no kaigai jōhō to Higashi Ajia: jūkyū seiki no Chūgoku jōsei o megutte,” in Iwashita Tetsunori and Maehira Fusaaki, eds., *Kinsei Nihon no kaigai jōhō* (Iwata Shoin, 1997), pp. 95-109.

Benefiting greatly from the 1980s boom in historical scholarship, I began researching early-modern Ryukyuan history, first from the perspective of intellectual history and Confucianism and later with respect to questions of Ryukyuan identity and royal authority.¹⁶ Among other things, I argue that Sai On's Confucianism and his political agenda was based on the concept of *quan* (Jp. *ken*, "situational weighing"). Furthermore, despite his stance as a vigorous opponent of Buddhism, Sai On admired Shakyamuni (or his peculiar image of Shakyamuni), and, indeed, seemed to have regarded himself as Ryukyu's Shakyamuni. With respect to royal authority, I argue for a strong influence of Shingon Buddhism in Old-Ryukyu conceptions of solar power and its relations to royal authority (i.e. *tedako shisō*). During the early-modern period, I stressed the Sinification and Confucianization of Ryukyuan elite society as Sai On's vision of Ryukyu became dominant. Furthermore, looking at the larger picture, I argue for "a substantial degree of Ryukyuan autonomy and agency within a political and diplomatic matrix commonly described as 'dual attachment to Japan and China' (*Nitchū ryōzoku*)."¹⁷

It is precisely this point—that *Nitchū ryōzoku* and similar slogans are insufficient because they overlook the key element of Ryukyuan autonomy—which Tomiyama emphasizes in *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken*. His notes, however, list only Japanese-language sources. Tomiyama's earlier work was a major contribution to my conclusions

¹⁶ An example in the realm of intellectual history is "The Intersection of Politics and Thought in Ryukyuan Confucianism: Sai On's Uses of *Quan*." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 56.2 (December, 1996), pp. 443-477. For a study of royal authority that includes both Old-Ryukyu and early-modern Ryukyu, see "Ambiguous Boundaries: Royal Authority in the Kingdom of Ryukyu." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 60.1 (June, 2000): 89-123. *Visions of Ryukyu* combines both of these topics to examine competing conceptions of Ryukyu as a state and a society, mainly during the eighteenth century.

¹⁷ Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu*, p, 155.

in *Visions of Ryukyu*, and clearly the similitude of the two books is a case of researchers of similar orientations coming to the same conclusions. Tomiyama is typical in his reliance only on Japanese-language sources. There is some truth to the claim that Ryukyu/Okinawan studies has become “international.” After all, there is a small but growing body of scholarship in Chinese, English, Italian, and other languages.¹⁸ While all of this scholarship naturally draws heavily on Japanese sources, the various languages of the final products present genuine barriers to a full exchange of ideas. Translation is probably the only practical solution to overcoming these barriers.

Ryūkyū ōkoku gaikō to ōken

For the remainder of the paper I will examine select aspects of Tomiyama’s *Ryūkyū ōkoku gaikō to ōken*, a book that constitutes a major advance in the conceptualization of Ryukyuan history. The overall goal of the book is to move beyond the view of Ryukyu as a country with dual attachment or subordination to Japan and China (*Nitchū-ryōzoku*) or as a foreign country within the *bakuhān* state by assessing royal authority and the extent of Ryukyuan autonomy in a variety of areas. One key methodological point is that such an assessment requires a close look at concrete details to see the precise boundaries of the king’s authority. Although occasionally Tomiyama engages in entirely new research, in many instances he draws on the work of other scholars for the needed details. In this way, *Ryūkyū ōkoku gaikō to ōken* serves as a synthesis of major research to date. It is much more than a compilation or summary of past research, however, because at all times Tomiyama brings the

¹⁸ Rosa Caroli, for example, has written a comprehensive history of Okinawa in Italian. See *Il mito dell’omogeneità Giapponese: storia di Okinawa* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1999).

research of other scholars to bear on the problem of royal authority and Ryukyuan autonomy. Additionally, Tomiyama frequently points out areas in need of further research.

The general organization of *Ryūkyū ōkoku gaikō to ōken* is to examine Ryukyu's relations with a focus on China and then to do the same with a focus in Satsuma and the bakufu. A final section combines both approaches to create a Shuri-centered composite image of royal authority and its limits. The result is that instead of seeing Ryukyu as a puppet or subordinate state to either China or Japan, it emerges as a vigorous actor in its own right, using its role as a link between China and Japan to maximum advantage. Within this general organizational scheme, Tomiyama discusses a remarkable array of specific topics, including royal clothing and accouterments, the influence of the Ming court on the government structure of Old-Ryukyu, judicial affairs, maritime disputes, repatriation of shipwrecked sailors, diplomatic crises, post 1609 Ryukyuan resistance to and cooperation with Satsuma, taxation, finances, changes in the form of royal rites, ceremonies, and official oaths, expansion of royal authority within Ryukyu, and much more.

Owing to limited space, I will discuss only three of the many topics in *Ryūkyū ōkoku gaikō to ōken*, each of which serves as a good example of Tomiyama's approach and contributions. The topics are: 1) Shō Nei's resistance to Satsuma *after* his return to Okinawa in 1611; 2) Shō Hō's understanding of the new East Asian order in which Ryukyu found itself and his attempt to create a "space" for Ryukyu between China and Japan; and 3) networks of authority as revealed by oath swearing.

On the twenty-eighth day of the 10th month, 1611, less than ten days after he had returned to Shuri from Kagoshima, a letter from the Shimazu *daimyō* arrived for King Shō Nei. After making reference to Satsuma's recent invasion of Ryukyu and explaining its cause as improper conduct on Ryukyu's part, the letter went on to say that Ryukyu should devote itself wholeheartedly to establishing trade between the Ming China and Japan out of gratitude for Shimazu having allowed Shō Nei to return to his throne. It explained that during the time Shō Nei was in Japan, Tokugawa Ieyasu was thinking about dispatching soldiers from Kyūshū to China. Thanks, however, to my (Shimazu's) intervention, telling Ieyasu about Ryukyu's potential for restoring trade with China, he suspended these plans. The letter went on to lay out three possible courses of action for this restoration of trade, which Ryukyu was supposed to discuss with Chinese officials. The letter ended on an ominous note, saying that failure of diplomacy would mean war and bloodshed, and that Ming must choose between commerce or invasion. Two years later, Satsuma's advisor on foreign affairs, Nanpo Bunshi, composed another letter to Shō Nei. Commonly known as the "Gunmonsho," it was nearly identical in content to the previous one from Shimazu. The Gunmonsho, too, stated that a failure in diplomacy would result in the shōgun assembling a large force in Kyushu and invading China.¹⁹

Did Shō Nei's government bow to this pressure and cooperate in the manner specified by Satsuma? Different historians have offered different answers, but Tomiyama argues that Shō Nei did not convey the Gunmonsho to the Ming court. Instead, his officials worked vigorously to restore Ryukyu's tribute trade, then following a once in ten year schedule, to its normal schedule of once in two years. Moreover, a

¹⁹ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 147-149.

1614 letter from Shō Nei to the Board of Rites stated that Ryukyu had severed all ties with Japan. No Chinese or Japanese documents indicate that Ryukyu pursued the approach specified in the “Gunmonsho” and one clearly states that Ryukyu rejected it. By 1615, Satsuma seems to have resigned itself to failure in restoring direct Ming-Japanese trade, and settled for a restoration of the normal tribute trade as the next best option. Not only did Shō Nei refuse to facilitate Ming-Japanese trade, he actively worked against it. Indeed, Shō Nei discovered a plan by Nagasaki *daikan* Murayama Tōan to invade Taiwan and use it as a base for trading with Ming China, and the Ryukyuan king sent a letter or warning to Ming officials. Murayama’s attack proved ineffective (only one of his 13 ships reached Taiwan owing to unfavorable winds, and local resistance drove it away), but Ming officials praised Ryukyu’s loyalty, likening it to an earlier warning about Hideyoshi’s invasion. In short, even while ostensibly under Shimazu control, Shō Nei continued to pursue the same policy as he did before 1609, providing intelligence about Japanese actions to Ming China.²⁰

Here we see a remarkable degree of defiance of Satsuma, but there was little direct action Satsuma could take in this situation without jeopardizing Ryukyu’s link with China altogether. Shimazu hoped for a more compliant king to succeed Shō Nei and worked behind the scenes to expand the role of Prince Zashiki, the likely crown prince, in the royal government. Prince Zashiki eventually took the throne as Shō Hō (r. 1621-1640) and proved much more willing to work with Satsuma. It is important to note, however, that the royal family and top Ryukyuan officials had de facto veto power over any attempts by Satsuma to impose its choice of king. The reason was that the king

²⁰ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 147-157.

would not be able to receive investiture from China unless the royal family and leading officials endorsed his taking the throne via a document called a *ketsujō*. Satsuma could and did try to influence the process of royal succession and the appointment of leading officials but the final decision was mainly a function of internal Ryukyuan politics. Indeed, it proved difficult to convince the Ming court to invest Shō Hō owing to suspicions of Japanese interference. Ultimately Ming authorities required the submission of three separate *ketsujō* before they became sufficiently convinced of Shō Hō's legitimacy to order his investiture.²¹

Shō Hō's reign took place at approximately the same time that bakufu-imposed restrictions on trade in Japan made Ryukyu's link to China all the more valuable. It was also at this time that Satsuma sought to alleviate its growing financial crisis, in part by expanding trade with China. Shō Hō seems to have been the first prominent Ryukyuan who fully understood the kingdom's new international circumstances. Specifically, he realized that Ryukyu's continued existence as a quasi-autonomous entity—something other than just a territory in Satsuma's domains—was a function of investiture of Ryukyuan kings by the Chinese emperor and service to Satsuma. Service to Satsuma mainly meant serving as a conduit for trade. Although obvious in hindsight, the link between investiture and Satsuma's control was not obvious to many Ryukyuan officials in the 1620s and 30s.

Recognizing the importance of Ryukyu's economic service to Satsuma was one thing, but putting it into practice proved much more difficult. One problem was that many of the kingdom's officials, especially those who handled the China trade, consistently

²¹ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 67-69, 159-162.

sought to undermine Shimazu's interests by focusing on their own personal trade while in China and buying inferior goods for Satsuma. Indeed, as a result of these actions, Satsuma's initial attempts to profit from the China trade were unsuccessful. Shimazu laid the blame for this situation on Ryukyu.²²

Shō Hō attempted to repair this rift with Satsuma in various ways. In the eleventh month of 1632, the king announced in a series of memos that, as a group, the Ryukyuan officials in charge of the China trade are hostile to Satsuma and that henceforth any dereliction of duty would be punished. A series of specific punishments—often confiscation of property or banishment but sometimes the death penalty—for a variety of officials followed almost immediately.²³ Shō Hō took these measures in anticipation of arrival of investiture envoys in 1633. This crackdown on anti-Satsuma trade officials was part of a larger plan orchestrated by the king, his top officials, and Satsuma for taking maximum advantage of investiture to engage in trade. The bakufu itself endorsed such efforts, having told Shimazu that trade with China via Ryukyu could be an effective way to alleviate the shortage of certain Chinese goods in Japanese markets.²⁴

Shō Hō's move against obstructionist trade officials was only one aspect of the preparations for arrival of the investiture envoys. At the end of the eighth month, 1662, a directive from Satsuma arrived in Shuri. Addressed to the Sessei and Sanshikan, it specified in great detail a wide range of financial and shipping logistics in the context of

²² Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 68-69.

²³ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 176-7.

²⁴ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 70-1.

aggressive strategies for maximizing the tribute trade with China. In one example, Ryukyu was to propose that it send a congratulatory envoy to China at the start of each year and on the emperor's birthday. Tomiyama points out that historians have often cited this directive as evidence that Ryukyu was a puppet of Satsuma. Such a reading, however, is at odds with the language of the document, which clearly makes reference to past discussions between Ryukyuan and Satsuma officials and acknowledges Ryukyuan input. The document summarized what was in effect a joint economic venture, with Satsuma providing most of the capital and Ryukyu providing expertise and the ability to execute the plan. Incidentally, Ryukyu was able, for the most part, to follow the plan laid out in the document, and it managed to send four ships to China in the space of one and a half years between 1633 and 1635. Ultimately, however, the Ryukyu-Satsuma plan aggressively to pursue trade in China caused a backlash of restrictions by Chinese authorities. For example, when Ming officials discovered that Ryukyuan had exceeded the limit on raw silk purchases by 600%, they confiscated the silk. The matter then led to a ban on Ryukyuan purchases of raw silk that was not lifted until 1645—just in time for trade to stop owing to the fall of the Ming dynasty.²⁵ Satsuma struggled throughout much of the seventeenth century to realize a profit from the Ryukyu-China trade.

Shō Hō understood that Satsuma's capital was essential for funding Ryukyu's tribute trade and that investiture and the tribute trade were essential for the continued viability of Ryukyu as a distinct country. Although the plans that he and his officials made with Satsuma failed to produce the intended results in the short term, they helped

²⁵ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 274-280.

forge the basic logic of the early-modern kingdom. In a letter to a Ryukyuan envoy on his way to China in 1640 to petition for an end to the ban on the purchase of raw silk, Shō Hō explained that he had personally visited a variety of religious sites and prayed for the success of the petition. He next explained the shortage of Chinese goods in Japan in the wake of the bakufu's 1639 prohibition of Portuguese vessels has created a potentially profitable opportunity for Ryukyu. Realizing that profit, however, depended on cooperation with Shimazu.²⁶ Shō Nei demonstrated one variety of Ryukyuan autonomy via his refusal to cooperate with Satsuma. Whatever his personal feelings for Shimazu may have been, Shō Hō knew that Ryukyu's future as a kingdom depended on acting judiciously to create and occupy the geo-political space between the *bakuhan* state and the Chinese empire.

Tomiyama examines the contours of Ryukyuan royal authority from a variety of angles. One of them is oaths (*seiyaku*). The custom of swearing oaths of fealty almost certainly predates the Satsuma invasion of 1609, but the details are unclear. According to the *Ryūkyū-oku yuraiki*, we can conclude that early Ryukyuan oath swearing, like similar practices in medieval Japan, often consisted of drinking "sacred water" (*jinzui*) into which the ashes of the burnt text of the oath had been placed. The range of officials swearing oaths circa the turn of the seventeenth century was limited to the royal government in Shuri and did not extend beyond the capital. During the early-modern period, the practice of swearing oaths of fealty to the king expanded to the whole of Ryukyu, and often took on coercive overtones when officials dispatched from the capital required local leaders to swear loyalty to the king.

²⁶ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 70-1.

Oath-administering officials (*jinzui kensha*) were apparently dispatched to each magiri and to the major islands. For example, we know that in 1632 (11 years after Shō Hō ascended the throne), Tomigusuku Uekata of the Sanshikan was dispatched to Yaeyama as a “royal oath envoy.” Then, in 1645 (Shō Shitsu took the throne in 1641), “sacred water” envoys were dispatched to Yaeyama and Miyako. When Shō Tei took the throne in 1669, “sacred water” envoys were dispatched to Kunigami, Iejima, and Iheya Island, and they also inspected those regions to report on the extent to which their conditions had deteriorated. Shō Eki took the throne in 1710, and three years later loyalty oath ceremonies were enacted at Yaeyama at Tōrinji. Similar oaths would have been carried out in Naha and in each magiri soon after a new king ascended the throne.

Significantly, Satsuma promoted these loyalty oaths. For example, in conjunction with formal approval for Shō Shitsu to become king in 1648, it decreed that “sacred water” rites be performed throughout Ryukyu following past examples. We see here an interesting link to the practice of the Ryukyuan king submitting a document to Satsuma swearing loyalty to Shimazu. In other words, officials from throughout Ryukyu would swear loyalty to the king, who would in turn swear loyalty to the rulers of Satsuma, who, of course, swore loyalty to the bakufu. Loyalty oaths within Ryukyu reflect the expanding power of the Ryukyuan king within his domains. This expansion of power, however, was in large part the result of Ryukyu’s ties to Satsuma. We see a similar pattern in many other realms such as Satsuma’s financial support for Ryukyu’s tribute trade.²⁷

Ryukyu’s relationship with China and Japan’s *bakuhan* state was complex, evolving and multifaceted. It is difficult to describe accurately in sweeping

²⁷ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 286-8.

generalizations. In *Ryūkyū ōkoku no kaikō to ōken* Tomiyama advances our knowledge of early modern Ryukyu by painstakingly mapping out the contours and boundaries of royal authority in many different realms, relying on the wealth of empirical research that historians have produced in recent decades. In the process he gives full weight to the reality of Ryukyuan autonomy without denying or marginalizing Satsuma's power and interests or those of any other entity in the web of diplomatic and economic relations that extended from Beijing through Fujian, across to Ryukyu, and up to Satsuma and then to Edo.

In addition to rejecting simple formulae such as “*Nitchū-ryōzoku*,” Tomiyama's mapping process identifies numerous areas where more research is needed. Indeed he ends his book with a call for more research on trans-oceanic relations between China, Ryukyu, and Japan below the level of official trade. One topic he mentions is drifters and shipwrecked sailors.²⁸ The recent work of Watanabe Miki on this topic is a good example of research that will expand, and possibly modify, the contours Tomiyama has laid out. For example, Watanabe's investigation of Ryukyuan repatriation of shipwrecked Chinese and Koreans led her to conclude that Ryukyu used the necessity of concealing its connection with Satsuma from foreign eyes in part to shield itself from interference by Satsuma, thus creating a zone for autonomous action.²⁹ With respect to Ryukyu's 1694 decision to change the way it repatriated Chinese and Korean castaways (implemented from 1697 onward), sending them directly to China instead of through Nagasaki, Watanabe and Tomiyama come to somewhat different conclusions.

²⁸ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, p. 303.

²⁹ Watanabe Miki, “Shin ni taisuru Ryū-Nichi kankei no inpei to hyōchaku mondai,” in *Shigaku zasshi*, vol. 114, no. 11 (Nov. 2005), pp. 1-35. See esp. pp. 28-9.

Tomiyama stresses Ryukyu's making the decision on its own, without consulting Satsuma (much to Satsuma's irritation), and reads it as an example of Ryukyuan autonomy.³⁰ Watanabe interprets the change in terms of a clash of two different international orders, Japanese (*Nihon-gata ka-i kannen*) and Chinese (*Chūgoku-gata sekai chitsujo*). Given the circumstances, there really was no choice but to change to direct repatriation. Therefore, the matter was not really a case of Ryukyu exercising its autonomy.³¹

Obviously debate over difficult and contentious issues such as early modern royal authority and the extent of Ryukyuan autonomy will continue. It is likely that, at least in the near future, Tomiyama's *Ryūkyū ōkoku no kaikō to ōken* will play a major role in framing the terms of this debate.

³⁰ Tomiyama, *Gaikō to ōken*, pp. 81-4.

³¹ Watanabe Miki, "Nitchū no shihai ronri to kinsei Ryūkyū," in *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, no. 810 (January, 2006), pp. 12-28. See esp. pp. 24-25.