

A New Interpretation of the Bakufu's Refusal to Open the Ryukyus to Commodore Perry

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Abstract

In this article I seek to show that, while the *Ryukyu shobun* refers to the process by which the Meiji government annexed the Ryukyu Kingdom between 1872 and 1879, it can best be understood by investigating its antecedents in the Bakumatsu era and by viewing it in the wider context of East Asian and world history. I show that, following negotiations with Commodore Perry, the bakufu recognized the importance of claiming Japanese control over the Ryukyus. This study clarifies the changing nature of Japanese diplomacy regarding the Ryukyus from Bakumatsu in the late 1840s to early Meiji.

Keywords

Tokugawa bakufu, Bakumatsu, Ryukyu shobun, Commodore Perry, Japan

The Ryukyu Islands are a chain of Japanese islands that stretch southwest from Kyushu to Taiwan. The former Kingdom of Ryukyu was formally incorporated into the Japanese state as Okinawa Prefecture in 1879.



From the end of the fourteenth century until the mid-sixteenth century, the Ryukyu kingdom was a center of trade relations between Japan, China, Korea, and other East Asian partners.

According to his journal, when Commodore Matthew C. Perry demanded that the Ryukyu Islands be opened to his fleet in 1854, the Tokugawa shogunate replied that the Ryukyu Kingdom "is a very distant country, and the opening of its harbor cannot be discussed by us."² The few English-language studies³ of this encounter interpret this reply as evidence that



the bakufu was reluctant to become involved in discussions about the international status of the Ryukyus; no further work has been done to investigate the bakufu's foreign policy toward the Ryukyus between 1854 and the early Meiji period. In what follows, I compare American sources with Japanese documents to show that in 1854 the bakufu did not define the Ryukyus as a "country," that is, as a state completely independent from Japan. More importantly, I point out that during negotiations with Perry, the bakufu's understanding of the status of the Ryukyus was very similar to that of the Matsumae domain in Hokkaido, which the bakufu considered a territory under the authority of the Matsumae clan. In short, the bakufu never used the word "country" to describe either the Ryukyus or Matsumae and it deliberately defined its relations with these distant territories in ambiguous terms in order to deter interest by foreign powers.

According to earlier studies by Japanese scholars,⁴ sometime between Perry's first visit to Japan (1853/6/3 to 6/12⁵) and his second (1854/2), the head of the shogunate's senior councilors, Abe Masahiro, drafted guidelines outlining answers to possible questions about the Ryukyus' political status to be used in negotiations with Perry on his return to Japan. This manual, which unfortunately lacks a precise date, is an extremely important document which shows that Abe intended to claim that the Ryukyus were under the political authority of both China and Japan. It is clear that Abe recognized that the Ryukyuan issue would arise during negotiations with Perry and since bakufu officials had told Perry that the Ryukyus were "very distant," the shogunate apparently would not assert itself as a controlling power over Ryukyu. As a result, previous studies have characterized bakufu policy toward the Ryukyus in 1854 as a passive one that did not significantly influence subsequent events.

By comparing Abe's guidelines with Japanese

and American sources relating to the negotiations between Perry and the bakufu in 1854, I show that Abe did not draft his guide immediately before, but rather after negotiations were held at Uraga in 1854/2. Perry's request to give his fleet access to the Ryukyus alerted Abe to the importance of claiming Ryukyu's subordination to Japan during subsequent bakufu dealings with Western powers. While, at first glance, it seems of minor importance to clarify precisely when Abe drafted his guidelines, by demonstrating that he wrote them *after* the bakufu's negotiations with Perry, I am able to establish a new chronology that explains and clarifies the unfolding of events.

In addition, I argue that Abe's response to Perry's request marks a turning point in the bakufu's foreign policy stance on the Ryukyus and that the guidelines he produced profoundly influenced Japanese interpretations of Ryukyuan-Japanese-Chinese relations up until the early Meiji period. Appreciating the continuity in Japanese leaders' understanding of the status of the Ryukyus from the Bakumatsu forward is vital to understanding the Ryukyuan policy of the Meiji government after 1872.

Most scholars begin the process through which Japan annexed the Ryukyus, or the *Ryukyu shobun* (in Japanese, the "disposition" or "punishment" of Ryukyu), in 1872, too hastily discounting what happened before.⁶ It is important to understand this process within a broader context, particularly that in which Edo leaders, while interacting with the West, changed their designation of the Ryukyus from a country with which it maintained "diplomatic relations" (*tsūshin*) to a subordinate state. This study thus frames Japan's 1879 incorporation of the Ryukyus across a larger span of time than previous studies, beginning with events in the 1840s.⁷

Japanese-Ryukyuan relations up until the 1840s

For centuries, the small island kingdom of Ryukyu (present-day Okinawa Prefecture) played a leading role in East Asian diplomacy, particularly in relations between Ming/Qing China and Tokugawa Japan. In 1372, the Ryukyus established tributary relations with the Chinese and from the end of the fourteenth century until the mid-sixteenth century, the kingdom was a center of trade relations between Japan, China, Korea, and other East Asian partners.

Following its invasion by Satsuma in 1609, the Ryukyu Kingdom was placed under the indirect control of the Shimazu clan and, by extension, of the Tokugawa bakufu as well, while still maintaining its tributary ties with China. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, a structure of power among Shuri (the capital of the Ryukyu Kingdom), Kagoshima (the seat of the Shimazu castle), and Edo (the political center of the Tokugawa shogunate) emerged, in which Edo recognized the Ryukyus as a foreign kingdom subordinate to Satsuma, with Japanese-Ryukyuan relations left largely in Shimazu hands. Within this new framework, the Ryukyus paid an annual tribute to Satsuma, in this way playing a unique role in serving the interests of both China and Japan.

To sum up, the Ryukyus were certainly subordinate to Satsuma. However, since for Satsuma the islands were important precisely because of their close relations with China, there were also limits upon how it exercised control; therefore, during the early-modern period, the small kingdom was able to maintain a certain degree of autonomy.⁸

As for relations between the bakufu and the Ryukyus, the bakufu bolstered its own prestige through Ryukyu's subordination to Japan. As earlier scholarship has clarified, the first Tokugawa shoguns (Ieyasu and Hidetada) failed to meet the diplomatic requirements

demanded by traditional Chinese protocols and, in 1621, the bakufu reversed its intention to normalize relations with the Ming court in order to bolster its own efforts at legitimization.⁹ Thus Japan rejected Sino-centrism and began the process of re-assessing the hierarchical Confucian world on which it was based.



The Ryukyuan music parade or *rojigaku* consisted of fifteen or twenty musicians and was directed by a Japanese official called *gieisei*. In addition to performing when the mission reached or left an important destination, the musicians accompanied the parade of envoys along the streets of Edo, playing Chinese and Ryukyuan songs.

At this point, in an effort to create its own interstate order, the Tokugawa bakufu thought it prudent to receive diplomatic missions from the kingdoms on its periphery, just as China had been doing for centuries. The Ryukyuan embassies (known as *Edo dachi* or *Edo nobori*) played an important function in this regard. Embassies were regularly sent from the islands during most of the Edo period: congratulatory missions (*keigashi*) were dispatched whenever a new Tokugawa shogun was appointed, and missions of gratitude (*shaonshi*) were sent upon the enthronement of a new Ryukyuan king (eighteen such embassies were dispatched from Ryukyu to Edo between 1634 and 1850). In addition, embassies from Korea¹⁰ were also dispatched under the new interstate order centered on the *Nihon koku taikun* ("Great

Prince of Japan”), the title that the shogun assumed in the context of foreign relations from 1636.¹¹ The assumption of this new title marked an important transition in bakufu policy, whereby Japan sought a progressive separation from the Chinese tributary system (or world order) and the creation of a new regional order with Japan at its center.¹² The bakufu used these foreign missions to legitimate and increase the authority of the Tokugawa shoguns inside and outside Japan.

From the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Ryukyus maintained an ambiguous political status involving dual subordination to China and Japan. After the Qing replaced the Ming dynasty in Beijing in 1644, Ryukyu, in accord with Satsuma’s wishes, kept the true character of the Japanese-Ryukyuan relationship hidden from the Chinese. The Ryukyuan government feared that if the Qing knew about its subordination to Japan, it would end the Sino-Ryukyuan tributary relationship. For the Ryukyu Kingdom, maintaining tributary relations with the Qing was essential to preserving its limited political and geographical autonomy from both China and Japan.¹³ In its dealings with the Qing, the Ryukyu Kingdom concealed its subordination to Japan and took great pains to observe all the formalities regulating its tributary relationship, so as to avoid adverse repercussions.¹⁴

Satsuma covertly dominated the tributary trade between China and the Ryukyus for its own profit. Therefore, the Shimazu helped defray the costs of sending tributary missions to China and on many occasions, asked the bakufu to grant them loans for such costs until the 1850s.¹⁵

For its part, Chinese envoys to the Ryukyus had long known that the Ryukyu Kingdom was subordinate to Japan, but they chose to maintain the tributary relationship so as to protect Chinese and regional security, and to facilitate trade. In other words, the cautious

attitude of the missions helped prevent the Ryukyus’ subordination to Japan from becoming a major issue at the Chinese court in Beijing.¹⁶

After centuries under this arrangement, a new factor entered the equation: Western powers arrived in East Asia, including the Ryukyus and Japan, prompting the bakufu to define its relations with the Ryukyus to the newcomers. Prior to Perry’s arrival, Japan had made every effort to keep the country closed to Western contact. In 1793, the bakufu (led by the senior councilor Matsudaira Sadanobu) rejected a request by Adam Laxman, a Russian military officer who had recently arrived in Matsumae, to establish formal relations with Japan. The Bakufu stated that Japan only maintained external relations that were either diplomatic (in J. *tsūshin*) or commercial (*tsūshō*) in nature and it would not consider Russian demands unless they were presented to Japanese authorities at Nagasaki.¹⁷

Again, in 1805, the shogunate resisted pressure from the mission led by the Russian ambassador, Nikolay Petrovich Rezanov, who had recently arrived in Nagasaki, stating that while Japan maintained diplomatic and commercial relations with Korea, the Ryukyus, China, and the Netherlands, opening relations with any other state would be in violation of the laws issued by Japan’s ancestral founders.¹⁸ In this way, the shogunate sought to reject the establishment of new links with the Russians by codifying Japan’s traditional foreign relations in just two ways: diplomatic or commercial. However, in 1805, the bakufu did not specify which countries (among Korea, the Ryukyus, China, and the Netherlands) were to enjoy diplomatic, and which were to enjoy commercial, relations with Japan.

In 1844, the king of the Netherlands, William II, sent a letter to the Tokugawa shogun, Ieyoshi, asking that Japan open its ports to Western powers. In a reply sent to the Dutch

government in 1845, the bakufu followed the traditional diplomatic-commercial codification of Japan's foreign relations established during the tenure of Matsudaira Sadanobu, but clarified its position by pointing out that from ancient times, Japan had maintained diplomatic relations with Korea and the Ryukyus, and commercial relations with Chinese and Dutch merchants. While the bakufu would allow the Dutch to continue trade relations, establishing diplomatic relations with the Netherlands or any other state was impossible.¹⁹ In making this statement, the bakufu effectively declared to the Western world that the Ryukyus were a kingdom with which it maintained diplomatic relations – without mentioning, however, that this kingdom had also been under the subordination of Satsuma since 1609.

In conjunction with these events, following the Opium War (1844-1846) French and British vessels arrived in the Ryukyus and pressed the Ryukyuan government to establish diplomatic and trade relations (an event called *Gaikan torai jiken* by Japanese scholars). Flatly refusing this request, Ryukyuan officials began to hide their connections to Japan from Western visitors, fearing that the latter might reveal the Ryukyus' subordination to Japan to the Chinese. Since, at that time, the French and the British were preoccupied with other issues centered on China, they did not press the matter further. However, after leaving the kingdom, they left behind missionaries to spread Christianity and learn the local language. This situation troubled both the Satsuma and bakufu leaders, who feared that any international crisis involving the Ryukyus might undermine Japan's security.

In the middle of the above-mentioned 1844-46 Ryukyuan crisis (the *Gaikan torai jiken*), in 1846/i5,²⁰ the chief of the Satsuma retainers, Zusho Hirosato, initiated a series of meetings in Edo with senior councilor Abe Masahiro, with the meetings aimed at resolving the situation in the Ryukyus. Zusho put forward a

plan to allow trade between the French and the Ryukyuans, arguing that France would probably no longer accept a refusal from the Ryukyus and that among the demands made by the French, the trade option appeared to be the least harmful for Japan. In addition, Zusho argued that since the Ryukyus were considered a *gaihan* – a fief (*han*) outside the Japanese political system – authorizing trade with France that was limited to the Ryukyus would not violate Japan's historic foreign policy, which limited trade relations to Chinese and Dutch traders, exclusively in Nagasaki.²¹ As the bakufu was concerned that any conflict between the Ryukyus and France would adversely affect Japan's *kokutai* ("realm"), Abe tacitly consented to Zusho's request on 6/8.²²

In response to the 1844-46 Ryukyuan crisis, the bakufu followed protocol, and entrusted Satsuma to handle matters. More importantly, following Satsuma's suggestion, the bakufu also chose to distance the Ryukyus from Japan thereby preventing the opening of direct trade relations between France and Japan. In this way, the bakufu sought to use the Ryukyus as a "safety valve" to protect the Japanese realm.²³ As we will see, it was Perry's request to open a port in the Ryukyus that prompted the bakufu to change its foreign policy toward the territory.

The importance of reconsidering the date of Abe Masahiro's diplomatic guidelines



Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794-1858)



The Japan-US Treaty of Amity and Peace (or the Treaty of Kanagawa) signed on March 31, 1854 was Japan's first treaty with a Western state.

Earlier studies²⁴ have argued that Abe Masahiro drafted diplomatic guidelines for Japan-Ryukyu relations specifically for the negotiations between Perry and shogunate officials. Given that Abe's manual is included in

the Satsuma document *Ryūkyū gaikoku kankei monjo Ka'ei 6*²⁵ and that it lacks a precise date, it is likely that earlier scholars assumed that all records included in this volume corresponded to the Year "Ka'ei 6" (1853), as suggested by the title.

To understand when Abe wrote this manual – which is divided into 11 questions he thought the Americans might ask – it is important to note Abe's answer to the anticipated question whether the Ryukyus were subordinate to China or to Japan. In Abe's suggested response to this question, he stated that because "sakidatte" (recently, the other day) Perry had asked Japanese officials for permission to build coal depots in Matsumae, Uraga, and the Ryukyus, his request revealed that the Americans "were aware of the fact that the Ryukyus are subordinate to Japan." Therefore, Abe advised that Perry be asked: "Why do you *aratamete* (once again) ask questions related to this matter?"²⁶

This imagined exchange reveals two important facts that have not been properly assessed thus far. First, Abe did not draft his guidelines *before* the start of negotiations with Perry; rather, he wrote them either during or immediately after the first round of negotiations and, as he did so, he speculated that, during the next round of talks, the Americans might again raise questions about relations between the Ryukyus, Japan and China. In addition, because Abe refers to Perry's question about Matsumae, Uraga, and the Ryukyus, it is clear that this document was written *after* Perry had requested the opening of those three ports.

Let us now turn our attention to the first contact between Perry and bakufu officials. Perry arrived in Japan on 1853/6/3 and, of his relations with shogunate officials, he wrote in his journal: "The governor came on board in the afternoon ... He brought with him the original order the Emperor (the shogun)

addressed to the functionary who had to receive me ... He also said that the person appointed by the Emperor had no power to enter into discussion with me but was empowered merely to receive the papers and carry them to his sovereign.”²⁷

We can deduce from this entry that Perry understood that the bakufu had no intention of entering negotiations during this first contact with the Americans. In addition, with regard to the ceremony for delivering the American President’s official letter to the bakufu, Perry wrote that “[a]s it was understood that there was to be no discussion at this meeting, I remained but a short time, taking my departure and embarking with the same ceremony with which I had landed.”²⁸

During his first visit to Japan, Perry stayed only ten days and, as is evident from his accounts, the two parties did not enter into formal talks, not even about the coal depots that Abe refers to in his guidelines. The official letter from President Millard Fillmore to the Tokugawa shogun included the following request:

“Our steamships, in crossing the great ocean, burnt a great deal of coal, and it is not convenient to bring it all the way from America. We wish that our steamships and other vessels should be allowed to stop in Japan and supply themselves with coal, provisions, and water ... we request your imperial majesty to appoint a convenient port, in the southern part of the Empire, where our vessels may stop for this purpose. We are desirous of this.”²⁹

However, while the American President asked for the opening of a single port in the south of Japan, he did not specify any port city by name. So, when did Perry actually request the

opening of Matsumae, the Ryukyus, and Uraga, as specified in Abe’s guidelines? Let us turn to Perry’s second visit to Japan to clarify this point.

Perry returned to Japan on 1854/1, and negotiations with Hayashi daigaku-no-kami (the eminent bakufu official and Confucian scholar who was appointed to confer with the Americans) started on 2/10. During their first meeting, Hayashi informed Perry that although the bakufu had decided to accept the Americans’ request to provide assistance and supplies for their vessels, it strongly rejected the establishment of trade relations.

The same day, Perry handed Hayashi a draft treaty proposal, in which the Americans asked for numerous concessions such as a Most Favored Nation clause, consular jurisdiction, and a conventional tariff regime. However, they did not specify the name of any port city.³⁰ On 2/13, American officials delivered a letter from Perry to Hayashi. In this letter, Perry stressed the importance of Japan opening as many ports to American vessels as China already had – but again, he did not specify which ports he would prefer.³¹ Then, on 2/16, the Americans asked bakufu officials to meet them a few days hence in Yokohama (Uraga, Kanagawa), for the specific purpose of deciding which ports should be opened.³²

On 2/17, bakufu officials handed the Americans their own treaty proposal. In this document, the bakufu designated the city of Nagasaki as the sole treaty port and proposed that a second port be opened after five years. In addition, bakufu sources mentioned the Ryukyus and Matsumae only to discount them: “The Ryukyu islands are very distant and the opening of its ports cannot be discussed by us. Matsumae is also far away on the frontier, and it belongs to the Matsumae family.”³³ Perry’s version of this statement reads as follows: “Lew Chew is a very distant country, and the opening of its harbor cannot be discussed by us. Matsmai

[Matsumae] is also a very distant country, and belongs to its prince.”³⁴

Comparing the Japanese and American sources, it is clear that Perry and his translators turned the bakufu’s references to Matsumae and the Ryukyus into two “countries.” In addition, it is important to note that bakufu officials stated that the Ryukyus and Matsumae stood in similar positions in relation to Edo, while also specifying that Matsumae was a territory belonging to the Matsumae family. We can surmise that given bakufu reluctance to open both the Ryukyus and Matsumae to foreign vessels, it sought to define them as geographically distant territories.

Still, why did the bakufu mention the Ryukyus and Matsumae in its draft? In the last part of the sentence relating to Matsumae, the bakufu also stated that “*konotabi*” (on this occasion), it could not easily decide about the opening of Matsumae, and proposed that a definite answer would be given the following spring in Nagasaki, when an American vessel was scheduled to visit.³⁵

Thus, when the Americans asked for the opening of the Ryukyus and Matsumae, the bakufu declined to discuss the Ryukyus and, instead, proposed to give an answer on Matsumae the following year in Nagasaki. Given that no talks were held in 1853, we can assume that the Americans made a verbal request that the Ryukyus and Matsumae be designated as ports at some point during the first meeting of 1854, from 2/10 to 2/17. This corresponds to the date of the Japanese draft proposal.

Perry and Hayashi met again on 2/19. According to Japanese sources, during their second meeting, Perry asked Hayashi about the opening of “*kono-chi*” (this territory) – a reference to Uraga or Kanagawa (where the negotiations were held) – as well as five or six other ports.³⁶ It is important to point out that, based on the documents discussed thus far, this

is the first time that Perry had asked for the opening of Uraga. In response, Hayashi strongly rejected the opening of “*tōsho*” (this place, Uraga) but, at Perry’s insistence, consented to one port (in addition to Nagasaki) being made available in either northern or southern Japan. In response, Perry stated that a single port was inconvenient for the United States, and again pushed for the opening of three or four ports, including “Kanagawa” (Uraga). Hayashi replied that the opening of other ports apart from Nagasaki was a serious matter that must be carefully considered by the bakufu.

Although Perry continued to push for the nomination of ports during this second meeting, Hayashi pointed out that, since the letter from the American President (delivered to the shogunate in 1853) had requested the opening of a single port, and since no specific port was mentioned, the bakufu had chosen Nagasaki – fulfilling, in Japan’s view, the demand for the establishment of a treaty port. If Perry so strongly sought the nomination of another port, Hayashi countered, “Why are no ports specified in the letter from the American President?”³⁷

Perry eventually admitted that this was indeed the case, and agreed to wait two or three days for the bakufu to decide which ports would be opened at their next meeting.³⁸ Finally, on 2/26, Hayashi proposed Shimoda and Hakodate as treaty ports.

In his journal, Perry wrote of his second meeting with Hayashi (2/19) as follows:

“I told them that I should expect in the course of time, five ports to be opened to the American flag, but at present would be content with three, as follows: one on the island of Nippon, and suggested either Uraga or Kagoshima; another in Yeso (or Matsumae) [Hokkaido];

and a third in Lew Chew (Naha); and would defer all discussion with respect to the other two until some future time. To this, after many evasions, they answered that as I positively refused to accept Nagasaki, and having themselves objections to the selection of Uraga, they proposed the port of Shimoda, in the principality of Izu as one in every way suitable and convenient, remarking at the same time that Lew Chew was a distant dependency, over which the crown had limited control, and consequently they could not entertain the proposition. Matsumae also stood very much in the same relation to the imperial government.”³⁹

There are discrepancies between the bakufu’s and Perry’s accounts of this meeting – such as the number of ports that Perry asked to be opened to American shipping. Still, both sources agree that the first time Perry requested the opening of Uraga was on 2/19. Therefore, we can conclude that the Americans first asked for the opening of the Ryukyus and Matsumae between the first meeting on 2/10, and the Japanese treaty draft on 2/17. On 2/19, Perry again demanded the opening of Matsumae and the Ryukyus. In addition, he sought Uraga.

Therefore, we can conclude that the Americans first demanded the opening of the Ryukyus and Matsumae sometime between the first meeting on 2/10, and the Japanese treaty draft on 2/17. On 2/19, Perry repeated his demand. In addition, he also sought the opening of Uraga. Since Abe’s notes specifically refer to Perry’s request to open all three of these territories, he must have written them after 2/19. Thus, we need to explore a new chronology of events – one that differs from that outlined in existing

studies.

The Shogunate Debates the Ryukyu question

The Ryukyus’ shift from a diplomatic-type country to a “distant” territory

In a missive sent to the Dutch government in 1845, the bakufu had defined the Ryukyus as a diplomatic-type kingdom. However, it became apparent that the bakufu had shifted the definition of its relationship with the territory, specifically when Perry requested the opening of the Ryukyus. Although the bakufu balked at asserting official possession of the Ryukyus, it moved from defining the territory as a diplomatic-type kingdom (*“tsūshin no kuni”*), to declaring it in ambiguous terms as a “distant” territory, a designation which was very close to the position of Matsumae. We might argue that in 1854/2, the shogunate had already found it problematic to define the Ryukyus as a diplomatic-type country and therefore, during the negotiations with Perry, it generated a new, ad hoc designation. Seen in this light, the bakufu had no intention of characterizing the Ryukyus (and Matsumae) as countries or states that were completely independent from Japan.

Perry’s journal reveals that, during the negotiations, bakufu officials also stated that “Lew Chew was a distant dependency, over which the crown had limited control.”⁴⁰ Existing studies have read this statement as the bakufu’s refusal to acknowledge any authority over the Ryukyus.⁴¹ On the contrary, however, this is clearly the first time in the Bakumatsu period that the bakufu asserted some kind of authority (however limited) over the Ryukyus.

It is important to understand that Abe wrote his guidelines *after* the bakufu presented its treaty

draft, in which the Ryukyus were defined as a distant territory. We can infer that it was precisely this ad hoc, ambiguous definition that concerned Abe, since Perry, after reading the bakufu's draft, commented that there was "no good reason why the Americans should not communicate freely with Lew Chew, this point is insisted on."⁴² It is notable that on 3/3, Perry and Hayashi agreed to meet again fifty days later (1854/5) in Shimoda to discuss in detail all the problems that might arise between the US and Japan once Hakodate and Shimoda were opened to shipping. Thus, it is most likely that Abe wrote his guidelines knowing that Perry and Hayashi would be meeting soon afterwards, mindful of the fact that Perry was known to be persistent and would likely ask about the Ryukyus' opening again.

The bakufu officials' proposal for Japanese-Ryukyuan relations

In the new chronology that I am proposing, the U.S. request to open the Ryukyus had a significant impact on the shogunate's internal policy. Immediately after the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed in the spring of 1854, Abe drafted guidelines outlining appropriate answers to possible questions about the Ryukyus' political status, knowing that in fifty days, Perry was going to Shimoda for a second round of talks. Abe's guidelines were intended to demonstrate China and Japan's dual control over the Ryukyus.⁴³ From Abe's perspective, the American demands threatened Ryukyus' double subordination.⁴⁴ In fact, near the end of the guidelines, Abe observed that if Japan failed to claim possession of the kingdom, the Americans could take control of it. This is the reasoning behind Abe's suggestion that Japanese claims be asserted "*shika to*" (firmly).⁴⁵

Other passages in Abe's guidelines reflect the same stance. In the second clause, Abe suggested that if the Americans were to further press for details on the relations between Japan and the Ryukyus, bakufu officials should reply that the Ryukyus "are without any doubt subordinate to Japan and belong to the Satsuma lord."

Again, in the event that the Americans stated that they had heard that the Ryukyus were completely subordinate to the Qing, Abe's suggested response, in the tenth clause, was that Japanese control of the Ryukyus had begun "during the Keichō era (1596-1615), when the Shimazu punished the Ryukyus and subjugated it. Despite the fact that the Ryukyus had adopted the Chinese calendar and welcomed Chinese investiture missions, the bakufu did not make an issue of it and allowed Ryukyus' relationship with China to continue." However, Abe suggested noting that ever since Satsuma had "*mattaku*" (completely) subjugated the Ryukyus to Japan, Satsuma officials had resided on the islands as administrators and, whenever a new shogun was appointed, or a new Ryukyuan king was enthroned, the Ryukyus "asked [permission] to dispatch missions to Edo."⁴⁶

These statements from his guidelines show how Abe planned to assert Japanese control over the Ryukyus. In addition, in the event of extended questioning from Perry, Abe suggested that bakufu officials reveal not only that the Ryukyus were subordinate to both China and Japan, but also that Japanese control was more substantial.

In the last sentence of his guidelines, Abe stated that their contents expressed his personal view and asked a number of high-ranking bakufu officials to express their opinions on Ryukyuan-Japanese relations. Given that Hayashi Daigaku-no-kami and Tsutsui Hizen-no-kami submitted their detailed joint report on Ryukyus' relationship to Japan

in 1854/4, we can assume that Abe completed his guidelines before that date. Accordingly, Abe's manual was clearly written between 1854/2/19 and 1854/4.

In their report, Hayashi and Tsutsui cited the fact that the Ryukyus first submitted to the Shimazu in the Kakitsu era (1441-1444) as evidence of Ryukyus' subordination to Japan.⁴⁷ The report continued with an account of how the Ryukyus were a territory of the Shimazu clan and, accordingly, a number of Satsuma samurai served tours of duty in the Ryukyus. The report also cited the various Ryukyuan missions to Edo as proof of Ryukyus' subordinate status. According to the report, the Ryukyus were subservient to both countries – China was like the father of the kingdom, while Japan was considered its mother. In the event that Western nations pressed the issue, the report suggested simply responding that “the Ryukyus are subordinate to China.”⁴⁸

This last point proved controversial. Hayashi and Tsutsui's proposal was criticized by both the finance commissioners and the maritime defense officials, who asserted that Ryukyu was also subordinate to Satsuma.⁴⁹ The commissioners submitted their objections in an 1854/4 report, in which they argued that since Satsuma's cadastral register also included the revenues from the Ryukyu Kingdom, clearly this meant that, “the Ryukyus were subordinate to Satsuma.” The commissioners urged the shogunate to consult the lord of Satsuma before making any decisions about the foreign policy status of the Ryukyus.⁵⁰

The maritime defense officials also cited the cadastral register when they submitted their own criticisms of Hayashi and Tsutsui's proposal in 1854/5. They argued that it was important to consider that, by this point in the negotiations with the Western powers, the shogunate had already stated that Japan maintained exclusive “trade relations with China and the Netherlands, and diplomatic

relations with Korea and the Ryukyus.” Therefore, Japan could not logically claim possession of Ryukyu after claiming only diplomatic ties with the territory.

The maritime defense officials stated, however, that the Shimazu handled some of the islands' affairs, and that the Ryukyans followed orders from the Satsuma daimyo. These officials also cited various missions from the Ryukyus to Edo as proof of the kingdom's subordinate status and argued that that the Ryukyu Kingdom was “subordinate to both countries (China and Japan),” rather than to China alone.⁵¹

Clearly, Perry's request that the Ryukyus be opened to American vessels prompted the bakufu to begin serious discussions of the status of the Ryukyus in relation to both China and Japan. From these discussions, three main proposals emerged: Abe's suggestion that the Ryukyus be designated as under the dual subordination of China and Japan, while “firmly” asserting Japanese control; the Confucian scholars Hayashi and Tsutsui's proposal to claim that the Ryukyu Kingdom was subordinate to China; and the maritime defense officials' assertion that the Ryukyu Kingdom was subordinate to both China and Japan. While the stances of Abe and the maritime defense officials were close, the two Confucian scholars suggested a starkly different approach, one that would effectively cut the Ryukyus loose from Japan.

As we have seen, the bakufu's growing interest in clarifying its relationship with the Ryukyus arose from fears that the Americans might take control of the Ryukyu Kingdom. As they gathered information and opinions about Ryukyus' status, bakufu officials cited a variety of evidence – the invasion by Satsuma of 1609 (which initiated Ryukyus' subordinate status), the inclusion of the Ryukyus' revenue in Satsuma's cadastral register, and the presence of a number of Satsuma officials on the islands – as proof that the Ryukyu Kingdom was indeed

subordinate to Japan. In addition, many members of the bakufu saw the kingdom's tribute-bearing missions to Edo as solid evidence of Ryukyus' subordinate status.⁵²

The bakufu had previously defined the Ryukyus as a diplomatic-type country in a letter to the Dutch government in 1845, meaning that Japan could not claim territorial rights over the kingdom in the international arena. At the time this letter was sent, this designation was used as a major argument against opening formal relations with the West. However, as the maritime defense officials noted, this argument became problematic in the 1850s when the international situation dramatically changed. The shogunate could not maintain its earlier definition of Ryukyus and at the same time assert control over the territory. The bakufu's growing awareness of this contradiction explains why the shogunate thereafter no longer defined the Ryukyus as a diplomatic-type country in the context of foreign relations.

At this point, an important clarification should be made. Since existing scholarship has argued that Abe had drafted his guidelines before negotiations with Perry began (certainly before the bakufu submitted its draft proposal to the Americans on 1854/2/17), it took little account of Abe's new awareness of Ryukyus' strategic importance; for the same reason, it underestimated how Abe's guidelines and subsequent discussions of the Ryukyus within the shogunate influenced events. Let us now turn to the impact of the three positions on the Ryukyus' status on bakufu foreign policy.

On 1854/5/22, Abe asked the daimyo of Satsuma, Shimazu Nariakira, to meet him at his residence in Edo. Abe asked Nariakira if it would be wise to reveal to the Qing that the Ryukyu Kingdom was subordinate to Japan, since Japan could not permit a situation in which foreigners acted freely in the Ryukyus, as they had been doing until then.⁵³ Nariakira agreed.⁵⁴

This exchange shows that, in the spring of 1854, Abe was not only thinking of informing the Americans of the Ryukyus' subordination to Japan, he was also considering informing the Qing about the Ryukyus' subordinate relationship to Japan.

When Admiral Sir James Starling arrived in Nagasaki later that same year (1854/9) to sign a treaty between Great Britain and Japan, British officials asked about the extent of Japan's borders. In response, the Nagasaki magistrate explained that "the Ryukyus are a vassal state of Japan," and "Tsushima is part of Japan."⁵⁵ This reply suggests that, at least on the Ryukyus question, the shogunate embraced a foreign policy that was closer to the views of Abe and the maritime defense officials than to those of Hayashi and Tsutsui.

We now turn to the bakufu's response in 1856 and 1857 to the Ryukyus' signing of international treaties. After concluding the Treaty of Kanagawa with Japan on 1854/3/3, Perry traveled to the Ryukyus and signed an accord: the Ryukyu-American Treaty of Amity on 1854/6/17. As we have seen, even though Perry's journal contained passages in which the Ryukyu Kingdom was described as a "distant dependency" of Japan, Perry had also remarked, after reading the bakufu's treaty draft, that there was no reason why he could not "communicate freely" with the Ryukyus. Therefore, when Perry signed his accord with the Ryukyus, he recognized that the kingdom had a certain degree of independence in conducting its diplomatic affairs.⁵⁶ Subsequently, France and Holland concluded treaties of amity with Ryukyu in 1855 and 1859, respectively. In so doing, these Western nations recognized that the kingdom possessed at least some degree of diplomatic capacity.

But what were the bakufu's views on the international treaties concluded by the Ryukyus?

In 1856/1, Satsuma sent a series of directives to the Ryukyus in response to the treaty that the Ryukyu Kingdom had signed with the United States. According to these documents, when Satsuma informed the bakufu about the treaty, the shogunate's senior councilors (including Abe Masahiro) and the Nagasaki magistrate told Satsuma that, given that the bakufu had already signed a treaty with the United States, they did not consider the treaty concluded by the Ryukyus as "*futsugō*" (inconvenient) for Japan.⁵⁷ The shogunate did not consider the opening of the Ryukyus to be a critical issue for Edo because of the bakufu's own treaty with the Americans. In short, the new accord did not threaten Japan's control over the Ryukyus.

The reasoning behind this attitude is clarified in the bakufu's reply to a Dutch request to mediate a treaty between the Netherlands and the Ryukyus in 1857. The Dutch, who, for almost 200 years, had been the only Westerners to maintain contact with Japan, had informed the bakufu of their intention to conclude a treaty with the Ryukyus before approaching the kingdom itself.

After carefully discussing the Dutch request, the bakufu chose not to intervene in the negotiations between the Dutch and the Ryukyuans. The bakufu told the Dutch that even though the Ryukyu Kingdom "*shitagafu*" (obeys or submits) to Japan, "*moto yori gaikoku no koto nite*" (it had been a foreign kingdom from the beginning), it would be problematic for the bakufu to instruct the territory on the signing of a treaty.⁵⁸

As this exchange reveals, the bakufu responded cautiously to the Dutch. However, their response also revealed a major inconsistency. Whereas in the 1840s, the shogunate had told the Dutch that the Ryukyu Kingdom was a diplomatic-type country, on this occasion the bakufu affirmed the Ryukyus' submission to Japan. From the bakufu's perspective, while the

Ryukyu Kingdom was a kingdom subordinate to Japan, it was not actually part of Japan.

Internal bakufu discussions about the 1857 Dutch request reveal why bakufu officials were not particularly concerned about the possibility of the Ryukyus concluding a treaty with the Netherlands. By bakufu reasoning, even if the Ryukyus were to sign a treaty with the Netherlands, it would not mean that the Ryukyu Kingdom would lose ("*ushinau*") its dependence on Japan.⁵⁹ However, a fundamental misunderstanding is evident here. While the bakufu correctly understood international treaties in terms of the establishment of diplomatic relations, it failed to grasp that, according to international law, a treaty constituted a formal agreement between two sovereign states. Furthermore, since the bakufu had tacitly approved the Ryukyus' right to conclude treaties, it had implicitly acknowledged Ryukyus' diplomatic autonomy.

Four years later, in 1861/11, the bakufu instructed its officials to mark the Ryukyus, Ogasawara, the islands east of Etorofu (in the present-day Kuril group), and the land 50 degrees north of Karafuto (Sakhalin) as Japanese territories on maps of Japan. It is clear that the bakufu had begun to appreciate the importance of formally demarcating territories under Japanese control.⁶⁰ Whereas existing studies have interpreted this decision in light of the international situation in the 1860s and unrelated to earlier bakufu policies on the Ryukyus, I believe that the decision should be seen within a larger timeframe, one which takes into account that from the spring of 1854, the bakufu had already begun to define Ryukyu as a "*zokkoku*" (vassal state) in foreign relations.

In sum, after Perry had asked the shogunate to open a port in the Ryukyus, Abe Masahiro began to view the Ryukyus' status not only as a matter for Satsuma, but as an issue that involved the bakufu as well. After the

negotiations with Perry, Abe realized that the new international political landscape meant that Japan must change its foreign policy toward the Ryukyus and suggested that, should the Americans inquire about it, the bakufu should “firmly” assert the Ryukyus’ subordination to Japan so as to prevent Western encroachment on the islands. The bakufu’s change in approach was the result of probing by Western powers, as well as of its emerging awareness of the need to prevent foreigners from taking control of the Ryukyus. As a result, in subsequent negotiations with Western powers, the bakufu sought to define the Ryukyus as a subordinate or vassal state of Japan that was not, however, part of Japan proper.

The bakufu’s formal definition of the Ryukyus as subordinate to both China and Japan

In 1862/9, the bakufu sent an official reply to a British inquiry into the “contradictions” in the bakufu’s public statements on its relationship with the Ryukyus. The bakufu stated that the Ryukyus were subordinate to both China and Japan. According to this document, the Ryukyu Islands had belonged to Japan since ancient times; in 1609, the bakufu bestowed the Ryukyus to the Shimazu, and from that time, the Shimazu had directed the islands’ general affairs. However, the document also asserted that the Ryukyus had maintained diplomatic relations with China from time immemorial, a situation which the bakufu had allowed to continue.⁶¹

The document has elicited a range of interpretations from scholars. According to historian Iwasaki Naoko, this was the first time that the bakufu declared its control over the Ryukyus to a Western audience.⁶² Nishizato Kikō, by contrast, has emphasized that during this phase, the shogunate did not make a

definite statement about its suzerainty over the Ryukyus, and did no more than admit that the Ryukyu Kingdom was subordinate to both China and Japan.⁶³ Presenting another interpretation, Yokoyama Yoshinori has argued that by asserting that the Ryukyus belonged to Satsuma, the bakufu revealed that it did not exercise sovereignty over the islands.

Building on these earlier responses, I argue that it is necessary to reconsider the historical significance of the bakufu’s reply to Britain’s question in light of post-1854 bakufu foreign policy.

We can assume that the shogunate, from a defensive perspective, hoped to contain Western interest in the Ryukyus. The previous year, when Russia had attempted to seize Tsushima (the Possadonick Incident), the bakufu had saved the territory only through British intervention, an incident that suggested the shogunate’s helplessness against Western military power.⁶⁴

The British request for information on the Ryukyuan-Japanese relationship was linked to the Namamugi Incident, in which one of Shimazu Hisamitsu’s retainers killed a British merchant, Charles Lennox Richardson, near the village of Namamugi on 1862/8/21, an act which stirred British anger against Satsuma.⁶⁵ The bakufu’s official response to the British inquiry signaled another significant shift in the bakufu’s characterization of its relationship with the Ryukyus, a characterization designed to deflect the interest of foreign powers.

The shogunate’s reply not only clearly asserted for the first time that the Ryukyu Kingdom was subordinate to both China and Japan, but it also provided evidence to legitimate its claim to the islands. Also of great interest is the document attached to Japan’s formal reply to the British government, which has been largely neglected by existing scholarship. In it, the long-term

political relationship between the Ryukyus and Japan is explained in detail:

In the course of our Bunji era [1185-1190], the Ryukyu Islands began [to present] gifts [to Japan]. In the first year of the Kakitsu era [1441] ... It [began] to pay obeisance to the same family [Shimazu], and every year offered [them] tribute ... [in 1609] the daimyo of Satsuma, Matsudaira Iehisa, dispatched a military contingent to that island and ... made their lord surrender. From the time when the founder [of the Tokugawa shogunate], His Highness the *taikun* [Tokugawa Ieyasu] praised such merit by bestowing those same islands on Iehisa, the [Ryukyuan] envoys, as representatives of their lord, would visit Edo: [whenever] there is a new appointment of His Highness the *taikun* [the shogun] and a great ceremony is held by our government on the occasion of the renewed granting [of the Ryukyus] to the same [Shimazu] family [i.e., the reception of a congratulatory mission]. And also when a new successor is appointed from the house of the lord of those islands [i.e., missions of gratitude].”⁶⁶

The document goes on to say that whenever a new Ryukyuan lord is appointed, he receives instructions from the Satsuma daimyo, and that a number of Satsuma samurai reside permanently on the Ryukyus to manage the islands’ affairs. The document also states that from the beginning of the Ming period, Ryukyuan envoys had been dispatched to China, and that Edo had not prohibited the Ryukyuan lord from using the Chinese calendar and receiving his investiture missions from the

Chinese emperor.⁶⁷

This supplementary document provided evidence of Japan’s substantial control over the Ryukyus. The bakufu, following stories concocted by the Shimazu, stated that the Ryukyus had begun paying tribute to Satsuma in 1441, although Satsuma’s control of the Ryukyus actually began following the invasion of 1609. Even though the shogunate defined the Ryukyus in terms of dual subordination, Chinese-Ryukyuan relations were depicted in terms of Ryukyuan missions to China and Chinese investiture missions of successive Ryukyuan kings, which the shogunate had “allowed” to continue. By contrast, Satsuma’s control over the Ryukyus is described in detail as a more substantive involvement. In addition, the bakufu asserted that after Tokugawa Ieyasu had granted the Ryukyus to Satsuma, the kingdom came to be administered by the Shimazu clan, and at the same time, the bakufu also claimed that this relations needed to be reconfirmed by the shogunate each time a new shogun was appointed.

This is a previously overlooked – yet important – document. We can observe a close similarity between its contents and reports that a number of Edo officials submitted to the bakufu in 1854, following Perry’s second visit to Japan (especially the tenth clause of Abe Masahiro’s guidelines). Therefore, we can infer that the bakufu’s 1862 reply to the British was also based on the private reports presented to the shogunate after the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa. More importantly, when Westerners requested detailed information on Ryukyuan-Japanese relations, the bakufu followed Abe’s suggestion and “firmly” revealed the subordination of the Ryukyus to Japan. In other words, Abe’s 1854 diplomatic guidelines, together with the reports of the maritime defense officials and the Confucian scholars, continued to function as important reference points for the bakufu leaders’ understanding and explanation of relations

between the Ryukyus, Japan and China.

Thus, in 1862, the bakufu characterized the Ryukyus as subordinate to both China and Japan, while also strongly affirming Japanese control over the Ryukyus as a means of responding to the British and, by extension, to all Western powers. However, the bakufu never revealed to the Qing the true nature of its relationship with the Ryukyu Kingdom. Therefore, despite Edo's growing interests in Ryukyuan-Japanese relations, culminating in a significant formal and detailed declaration to the British, the disclosure of these relations to the Qing was still a complicated issue for Edo. It is important to emphasize that, at this point, the shogunate had no intention of incorporating the Ryukyus under its direct rule and, in its dealings with the Western powers, clearly stated that the Ryukyu Kingdom was not part of the Japanese realm.

Despite the lack of Japanese scholarship on the bakufu's foreign policy towards the Ryukyus after 1862, I would like to note some findings that have arisen from my research. It is no secret that during the 1867 Paris International Exposition, the Satsuma mission asserted that the Satsuma daimyo was the king of the Ryukyu Kingdom, and effectively declared to the Western world that their domain was independent of Edo. While existing scholarship agrees that Satsuma's policy in this area was of deep concern to the shogunate, no studies have clarified Edo's response.⁶⁸ However, according to British and Japanese diplomatic papers that I have recently studied, the bakufu responded by sending the magistrate for foreign affairs, Kurimoto Aki-no-kami, to Paris, armed with a collection of documents to be translated into English and French to be submitted to the relevant European governments.⁶⁹ In these documents, the bakufu pointed out that the shogun was the sole sovereign of Japan and that the lord of Satsuma was one of his retainers. In addition, the shogunate asserted that the Ryukyu Kingdom, while maintaining

tributary relations with China, was firmly subordinate to Japan (the bakufu) as a dominion of Satsuma. The bakufu, however, also stressed the fact that because the Ryukyus had its own king, the Satsuma daimyo could not claim to be the Ryukyuan king. In these documents, the Edo leaders repeatedly refer to the Ryukyuan missions to Edo to demonstrate the subordinate status of the Ryukyus to Japan, as well as the hierarchical relationship between the shogun and the Ryukyuan king. As I hope to demonstrate through further research, this episode marks the first occasion in which the shogunate submitted documents on Ryukyuan-Japanese-Chinese relations to the Western powers on its own initiative.

The early phase of the “*Ryukyu shobun*” in light of Bakumatsu-era policies

After the Restoration of imperial power, early Meiji policies toward the Ryukyus built on the changes that had occurred during the Bakumatsu period; this facet of the *Ryukyu shobun* merits further investigation. The Japanese authorities understood that within a context of strong Western nation-states and imperialist expansion, it was imperative for Japan to settle its sovereign boundaries. Consequently, resolving the status of the Ryukyus became an urgent matter.

In 1871, the Meiji government replaced the Edo-period network of feudal domains with a new system of prefectures (*ken*). The former daimyo were appointed governors of the new local administrations under the direct control of the central government. Although the Meiji government provisionally assigned control of the Ryukyus to the newly established Kagoshima prefecture, in the spring of 1872, Meiji leaders began to discuss the Ryukyus' political status in earnest. From their discussions, three possible courses of action emerged.

One solution was proposed by the Deputy Minister of Finance, Inoue Kaoru, and presented to the Central Board of the Council of State. Inoue argued that in the Keichō era (1596-1615), the Ryukyus had been subjugated by Satsuma, and from that point on, had been considered a *fuyō* (dependency, vassal state) of Satsuma, with the bakufu leaving general administration of the kingdom in the hands of the Shimazu. Pointing out that the Ryukyus had been using the Chinese calendar, and that its rulers had been receiving investiture from China, he advocated that Japan abolish the dual subordination system, and bring the Ryukyus into exclusive subordination to Japan to enhance the Empire's prestige.⁷⁰

A second proposal was advanced by Foreign Minister Soejima Taneomi, who also hoped to bring the Ryukyus into an exclusive relationship with Japan. However, he was convinced that it was necessary to realize this goal gradually. He proposed that, as a first step, Meiji leaders ensure that the Ryukyuan king, Shō Tai, be appointed as ruler of the Ryukyu "*han*" (domain). Soejima also suggested terminating all independent relations between the Ryukyus and foreign countries.⁷¹

The third suggestion came from members of the *sain*, or Ministry of the Left, who submitted a detailed, nine-point proposal urging that Japan maintain the status quo by declaring publicly that the Ryukyu Kingdom was subordinate to both China and Japan. In the first article, the authors stated that they had ascertained that the Ryukyus had long belonged to both China and Japan. However, in the second article they asserted that while the Ryukyus' subordination to China was merely nominal, the Ryukyus' submission to Japan was substantive and meaningful. Even though the Ryukyuan kings nominally received investiture missions from the Chinese emperor, and even though the Ryukyus followed the Chinese calendar, in reality, the Shimazu family had been governing the Ryukyus for generations.

Not only had they sent military missions to keep the peace and maintain order on the islands, but they had also accompanied the Ryukyuan ambassadors on visits to Japan.⁷²

As existing studies have highlighted, these three proposals demonstrate that from the Meiji leaders' perspectives, the Ryukyuan question was largely an issue between Japan and China.⁷³ However, these studies failed to emphasize the important connection between the Meiji leaders' understanding of tripartite relations, and the Tokugawa shogunate's view of these relationships. As we have seen, following Perry's request to open a port in the Ryukyus, the bakufu began to seriously debate Ryukyuan-Japanese-Chinese relations; shogunate officials (Abe Masahiro, maritime defense officials, and Confucian scholars Hayashi and Tsutsui) defined the Ryukyus as a kingdom that maintained tributary relations with China, but that had been subordinated to Japan as a dependency of Satsuma since the invasion and subsequent surrender in 1609. Later, the bakufu defined the Ryukyus in similar terms in a formal letter submitted to the British government in 1862.

It is interesting to note that both Inoue and the members of the *sain* defined the Ryukyus in terms of dual subordination, while specifying that the kingdom's subordination to Satsuma was the more substantial. As evidence of the Ryukyus' subordination to the Tokugawa bakufu, the *sain* cited the fact that the Shimazu had been governing the kingdom for generations, that they sent their officials to the islands to maintain order, and that they accompanied the Ryukyuan ambassadors to Japan – the same evidence presented in the above-mentioned bakufu officials' reports. Furthermore, Soejima proposed terminating the Ryukyus' foreign relations – revealing a rather optimistic view of Japan's ability to assume this task, despite Ryukyus' conclusion of international treaties in the 1850s. As we have seen, the bakufu did not consider these

issues as an obstacle to its control of the Ryukyus, and Soejima appears to have followed the same line of thinking.

In conclusion, while the *Ryukyu shobun* refers to the process through which the Meiji government annexed a foreign kingdom between 1872 and 1879, a complete understanding of this event demands recognition of its antecedents in the Bakumatsu era. While most scholars date Japan's annexation of Ryukyu from 1872 and view it as a process involving mainly Japan, the Ryukyus, and China, I argue that the *Ryukyu shobun* should be investigated within a larger timeframe and from a global perspective. Since the Western powers that concluded international treaties with the Ryukyus in the years 1854, 1855, and 1859 recognized that the kingdom possessed a certain degree of autonomy, it is important to clarify why those treaties did not prevent Japan from annexing a foreign kingdom.

As for the bakufu's foreign policy toward the Ryukyus, I have argued that Perry's request to open the Ryukyu Kingdom to American vessels was a major turning point. Abe's guidelines and the reports by high-ranking bakufu officials on the relations between the Ryukyus, Japan, and China – both of which were drafted shortly after the negotiations with Perry had begun – had a significant but hitherto overlooked effect on the foreign policy of subsequent Japanese leaders up until the early Meiji era.

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Notes

¹ This paper is an updated version of Marco Tinello, *Sekai-shi kara mita “Ryūkyū shobun”*, Yōju shorin, 2017 (Chapter 3).

² Matthew C. Perry, *The Japan Expedition 1852-1854: The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, Roger Pineau (ed.), Smithsonian Institution Press, City of Washington, 1968, 169.

³ George Kerr, *Okinawa, the History of an Island People*, Rutland Vt.: C. E. Tuttle Co, 1958, 330; Robert I. Hellyer, *Defining Engagement: Japan and Global Contexts, 160-1868*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2009, 163.

⁴ Nishizato Kikō, “Ryūkyū shobun-Karafuto-Chishima kōkan jōyaku,” *Ajia no naka no Nihon-shi IV: chiki to minzoku*, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1992, 170; Maehira Fusaaki, “Jūkyū seiki no Higashi Ajia kokusai kankei to Ryūkyū mondai,” *Higashi Ajia kara kangaeru 3: shūhen kara no rekishi*, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1994, 253; Yokoyama Yoshinori, “*Nihon no kaikoku to Ryūkyū*,” *Kokka to taigai kankei: atarashii kinsei-shi 2*, Shin Jinbutsu Ōraisha, 1996, 399.

⁵ Prior to 1873 Japan used a luni-solar calendar; for the Japanese dates in this paper, I have followed the historiographical conventions used to express dates in the year/month/day format.

⁶ Umeki Tetsuto, *Shin Ryūkyū koku no rekishi*, Hosei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 2013; Gregory

Smits, "The Ryūkyū Shobun in East Asian and World History," Josef Kreiner, ed., *Ryukyu in World History*, Bonn: Bier'sche Verlagsanstalt, 2001; Gabe Masao, *Meiji kokka to Okinawa*, San'ichi Shobō, 1979, among others.

⁷ In this respect, Nishizato considers the Opium War (1839-42) to be the beginning of Ryukyu's annexation to Japan, and its conclusion the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). Nishizato Kikō, *Shin-matsu Chū-Ryū-Nichi kankei-shi no kenkyū*, Kyoto Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005, 799.

⁸ To understand the early modern status of the Ryukyus vis-à-vis China and Japan, the following works are of paramount importance. Tomiyama Kazuyuki has shown that from 1609, even though there were limitations on Ryukyuan sovereignty due to its subordinate status to Satsuma, the Ryukyus continued to exist as a kingdom, and its kings continued to receive the investiture from the Chinese emperor in the same way as the Korean and Vietnamese kings. (Tomiyama Kazuyuki, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken*, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2004, 161). Kamiya Nobuyuki demonstrated that the Ryukyuan missions to Edo, which the Ryukyus were required to send throughout the Tokugawa period, were the result of a tripartite power relationship in which the bakufu, the Satsuma domain, and the Ryukyu Kingdom all tried to obtain an advantage (Kamiya Nobuyuki, *Bakuhansei kokka no Ryūkyū shihai*, Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1990). Watanabe Miki argues that the policy of concealing the true relationship between Japan and the Ryukyus from the Qing played a key function in safeguarding the autonomy of the Ryukyu Kingdom from the interference of both China and Satsuma. On the one hand, it helped the Ryukyus to maintain tributary relations with Beijing without exposing their true connections with Japan. On the other hand, it also served as a barrier that prevented Japan (especially Satsuma) from establishing direct control or influence over Qing-Ryukyuan relations (Watanabe Miki, *Kinsei Ryūkyū to Chū-Nichi kankei*, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2012, 245). In my manuscript, I mentioned that while in 1846 and 1847 Satsuma ordered the Ryukyu government to establish a trade relationship with the French, the Ryukyus strongly resisted these orders, and, eventually, Satsuma was unable to press the issue further (Marco Tinello, *Sekaishi kara mita "Ryukyu shobun,"* Yōjo shorin, 2017). As for the works of English scholars, in his *Visions of Ryukyu*, Gregory Smits pointed out that "Obviously early-modern Ryukyu was closely tied to both places [China and Japan], and these ties affected nearly every aspect of Ryukyuan life. It was precisely because of Ryukyu's complex ties with the Qing empire and elements of Japan's bakuhan state, I would argue, that the kingdom was able to maintain a substantial measure of autonomy within the broader historical conditions of the time." (Gregory Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, 156). In short, the Ryukyus were active players and able to maintain a certain degree of self-agency, as were Satsuma and Edo.

⁹ Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984, 64.

¹⁰ The dispatch of the Korean missions was a policy initiative of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who wished to restore official relations with the Korean court following Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea at the end of the sixteenth century. The first three embassies, dispatched in 1607, 1617, and 1624, were intended to secure the repatriation of Korean prisoners captured by Hideyoshi's forces and present the Korean monarch's reply to the state letters signed by the Tokugawa shogun. From 1636, these Korean embassies were known as *Chōsen tsūshinshi*

(communication envoys), and became diplomatic rituals of great symbolic value as well as a visible guarantee of peaceful relations between the bakufu and the Korean court. In total, Korea sent twelve embassies to Edo during the Tokugawa period.

¹¹ The title *taikun* used to designate the shogun was used in relations with Korea throughout the Edo period and with Ryukyu until 1714; in the Bakumatsu, this title was used to refer to the shogun in the treaties signed by the bakufu with the Western powers.

¹² On the creation of the title of *Nihon koku taikun* and on Tokugawa Japan's foreign policy see Toby, *State and Diplomacy*. On *taikun* diplomacy see Kamiya Nobuyuki, *Taikun gaikō to higashi Ajia*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1997.

¹³ According to Gregory Smits, after the early Ryukyu invasion by Satsuma, relations with China were a political necessity for the Ryukyu kingdom to survive on Japan's periphery as a quasi-independent country (*Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999, 33).

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of Ryukyu's policy of concealing its relations with Japan see Kamiya Nobuyuki, *Bakuhansei kokka no Ryūkyū shihai*, Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1990; and Watanabe Miki, *Kinsei Ryūkyū to Chū-Nichi kankei*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2012.

¹⁵ Kamiya Nobuyuki, *Bakuhansei kokka no Ryūkyū shihai*, Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1990, 252-254.

¹⁶ Fuma Susumu, *Shi Ryukyuroku kaidai oyobi kenkyū*, Yōju shorin, 1999, xi~x.

¹⁷ *TI*, vol. 7, 94.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁹ Fujita Satoru, *Kinsei kōki seijishi to taigai kankei*, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005, 23-24.

²⁰ *i* refers to an intercalary month, in this case intercalary 5 Month. In the Japanese luni-solar calendar, it was common to add an intercalary month after one of the 12 lunar months in order to keep the solar and lunar calendars in sequence.

²¹ 1846/i5/25. *DNIS*, vol. 1-1, 758-59.

²² *DNIS*, vol. 1-2, 38.

²³ Nishizato Kikō "Ahen sensōgo no gaiatsu to Ryūkyū mondai: Dōkō-Kanpō no Ryūkyū shozoku mondai wo chūshin ni," *Ryūkyū daigaku kyōiku gakubu kiyō*, vol. 57, 2000, 49.

²⁴ Nishizato 1992, Maehira 1994, Yokoyama 1996 (see footnote n. 4)

²⁵ Vol. 38, Historiographical Institute, Tokyo University.

²⁶ *RGKM ka'ei 6*, vol. 38, Tokyo daigaku shiryō hensanjo. See also Samuel Wells Williams, *Peri Nihon ensei zuikōki*, translated by Hora Tomio. Tokyo: Yūshōdō Shoten 1970, 448-449.

²⁷ Perry, *The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, 97.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁹ *BGKM* vol. 1, Tokyo Daigaku Shiryō Henshanjo (ed.), Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1910, 3-4.

³⁰ Akimoto Masutoshi, "Beikoku no tai-nichi seisaku to Nichi-Bei Washin jōyaku no teiketsu," *Kokusai seiji*, 14, 1960, 24.

³¹ *TIZ*, vol. 4, 608.

³² *Ibid.*, 619.

³³ *Ibid.*, 621-622.

³⁴ Perry, *The Personal Journal*, 169.

³⁵ *TIZ*, vol. 4, 622.

³⁶ *TIZ*, vol. 4, 624.

- ³⁷ Ibid., 624-626.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 626.
- ³⁹ Perry, *The Personal Journal*, 170.
- ⁴⁰ Perry, *The Personal Journal*, 170.
- ⁴¹ Kerr, *Okinawa*, 330.
- ⁴² Perry, *The Personal Journal*, 169.
- ⁴³ Williams, *Peri Nihon ensei zuikōki*, 447.
- ⁴⁴ Maehira, “Jūkyū seiki no Higashi Ajia kokusai kankei,” 255.
- ⁴⁵ Williams, *Peri Nihon ensei zuikōki*, 449.
- ⁴⁶ Williams, *Peri Nihon ensei zuikōki*, 448-449.
- ⁴⁷ On 1634/5/4, the Satsuma daimyo Shimazu Iehisa presented to the bakufu what has become known as the *Kakitsu fuyō* protocol. This holds that in 1441, the first year of the Kakitsu era, the daimyo of Satsuma, Shimazu Tadakuni, received an official document from the sixth Ashikaga shogun, Yoshinori, that bestowed the Ryukyu Islands on the Shimazu clan. However, other than Iehisa’s seventeenth-century letter, there is no documentation to support this notion (Kamiya Nobuyuki, *Rekishī no hazama*, Ginowan: Yōju Shorin, 2009, 5). We can thus deduce that Hayashi and Tsutsui followed the Shimazu’s fabricated account of the origins of Ryukyuan-Satsuma relations when they submitted their report to the shogunate in the spring of 1854.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 450.
- ⁴⁹ Williams, *Peri Nihon ensei zuikōki*, 450.
- ⁵⁰ Williams, *Peri Nihon ensei zuikōki*, 450.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 450-451.
- ⁵² With regard to the role of the Ryukyuan missions to Edo in the Bakumatsu period, I’ve argued that after the arrival of Western powers in Japan, the shogunate considered the Ryukyuan missions to Edo not only as a means of increasing the shogun’s prestige, but also as a practice through which it could demonstrate that Ryukyu was also subordinate to Japan. See, Marco Tinello “Ryūkyū shisetsu kara miru bakumakki Nihon gaikō no henka: kinsei kara kindai he,” *Okinawa bunka kenkyū*, n. 41, 2015.
- ⁵³ During the so-called *Gaikan torai jiken* episode mentioned above, French and British vessels arrived in the Ryukyus and requested the opening of the kingdom. On that occasion, the shogunate chose to treat the Ryukyus as a “safety valve,” and did not attempt to counter Western demands on the Ryukyus. In 1853-54, Perry also visited the Ryukyus and made new demands. Abe most likely reasoned that revealing the Ryukyu Kingdom’s subordination to Japan to the Qing would help impede Western encroachment.
- ⁵⁴ *Nariakirakō shiryō*, vol. 2, 462-3. Although in the spring of 1854 Nariakira agreed with Abe that, in the new international context, it would be wise to inform the Qing of the Ryukyu Kingdom’s subordination to Japan, it seems that this proposal came to nothing, since no documentary source testifies to further developments.
- ⁵⁵ *TIZ*, vol. 3, 99.
- ⁵⁶ In a recent monograph, *Sekai-shi kara mita ‘Ryukyu shobun’* (Ginowan: Yōju Shorin, 2017), I argued that – despite the view taken by earlier scholarship that the *Ryukyu shobun* was an event involving primarily Japan, the Ryukyus, and China – since the Ryukyus had concluded international treaties (with the US, France, and Holland in 1854, 1855, and 1859,

respectively), the annexation process also concerned the Western powers who were party to those agreements. In short, I argued that Japan's incorporation of the Ryukyus in the Meiji period was an integral part of both East Asian and world history.

⁵⁷ *ROHM*, vol. 14, 522.

⁵⁸ *BGKM*, vol. 15, Tokyo Daigaku Shiryō Henshanjo (ed.), Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1972, 599-600.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 599-600.

⁶⁰ Sugimoto Fumiko, "Chizu, ezu no shuppan to seiji bunka no henyō," Yokota Fuyuhiko ed., *Shuppan to ryūtsū*, Heibonsha, 2016, 231.

⁶¹ *Ihi nyūkōroku*, vol. 1, 32.

⁶² Iwasaki Naoko, "Ezochi/Ryukyu no 'Kindai'," *Kōza Nihon rekishi*, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005.

⁶³ Nishizato Kikō, "Kanpō-dōchiki (bakumatsu Ishinki) no Chū-Ryū-Nichi kankei kōsatsuō: ShōTai sakuhō mondai to sono shūhen," *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 64. Kyoto: Seikei Shoin, 2006, 50.

⁶⁴ Maehira, "Jūkyū seiki no Higashi Ajia kokusai kankei," 259.

⁶⁵ *Foreign Office*, 46, Japan Correspondence, vol. 24 (67), 232-234.

⁶⁶ *Ihi nyūkōroku daiichi*, 32-33.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 33. As we have seen, in 1854 Confucian scholars Hayashi and Tsutsui wrote in their report that the subordination of Ryukyu to Satsuma had occurred in 1441; we might therefore expect that, in 1862, the bakufu officials also referred to this report when they drafted their formal reply to the British government.

⁶⁸ Patrick Beillevaire, "Wavering Attention: French Governmental Policy Towards the Ryūkyū Kingdom," Josef Kreiner, ed., *Ryūkyū in World History*. Bonn: Bier'sche Verlagsanstalt, 2001; Hellyer, *Defining Engagement*, 2009.

⁶⁹ *Foreign Office* 46, Japan Correspondence; *Zoku tsūshin zenran*, 416, hen nen no bu, hi no tō Futsu koku ōfuku shokan jūsan.

⁷⁰ *Meiji bunka shiryō sōsho*, vol. 4, gaikō hen, Meiji Bunka Shiryō Sōsho Kankōkai, Kazama Shobō, 1962, 8.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷² *Ryūkyū shozoku mondai kankei shiryō*, Yokoyama Manabu seining henshū, Honkoku Shoseki, 1980, dai 2 shū, dai 6 kan, jōchū, 7~9.

⁷³ Nishizato Kikō, 2005. Namihira Tsuneo, *Kindai Higashi Ajia no naka no Ryūkyū heigō: Chūka sekai chitsujō kara shokuminchi Teikoku Nihon he*, Iwanami Shoten, 2014.