

琉球大学学術リポジトリ

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Romanticizing the Ryukyuan Past: Origins of the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism

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理想化された琉球の歴史：琉球における平和主義の起源

グレゴリー・スミッツ

昔から、琉球は人々の空想や願望を反映させる空白の画面として機能してきた。ここでこの現象の一側面、すなわち琉球は平和主義の王国であり、軍や警察力を持たなかったという考えについて述べる。このエッセイは4つの主要部分で構成される。最初は沖縄の平和主義という現代神話の考察である。次に、琉球の平和主義の神話は事実に基づく根拠がないということを明らかにするために、琉球軍の構造体や武器、戦闘などを見してみる。その後、「沖縄は平和主義の歴史がある」という神話の19世紀から、20世紀初期までの展開を論じる。最後に架空の構造としての沖縄・琉球について結論する。

Introduction

On August 28, 2009 the Okinawa Association of America marked its 100th anniversary by hosting the musical *King Sho Hashi — Dynamic Ryukyu* at the Redondo Beach Performing Arts Center in Los Angeles. The poster promoting the event characterizes it as “an ultra modern *kumiodori* musical in Japanese and English,” and the main visual image of the poster features a young man wielding a sword. The sword is not poised for violence. Instead it is held backwards, blade against the forearm, as a dance prop¹⁾ The following passage from an article describing the musical quotes from its producer: “Discussing his purpose in creating the work, producer and stage director Daichi Hirata said, ‘For Okinawans, King Sho Hashi was the first historical figure to have a truly positive impact on the country. I want to take that passionate Okinawan tradition and convey it to future generations using King Sho Hashi as the motif.’”²⁾ The promotional poster for the musical says of Shō Hashi that “His vision united a kingdom.”³⁾

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Perhaps the most obvious critical detail that comes to mind in examining the discourse surrounding *King Sho Hashi — Dynamic Ryukyu* is the peculiarly modern conception of Okinawa’s distant past that assumes some kind of meaningful “Okinawan” identity already existed when Shō Hashi began his conquests. Both Hirata and the promotional poster suggest that there already was a “country” or a “kingdom” of Okinawa, and that Shō Hashi (1372–1439; r. 1422–1439) performed a glorious service for the people living in this place by uniting them. In this view, Okinawa has become a timeless entity, a screen onto which contemporary people can project identities, values and aspirations. Significantly, the promotional literature connected with *King Sho Hashi — Dynamic Ryukyu* is silent about the potentially problematic issue of Okinawa’s relationship with Japan. Moreover, the celebratory nature of this musical drama and the literature surrounding it elides something that might seem essential to even the most basic telling of Shō Hashi’s story: military violence. Shō Hashi ruled Chūzan at a time when Okinawa was home to three small states. He waged bloody military campaigns in the north and south of Okinawa to conquer Hokuzan (also called Sanboku, destroyed in 1416) and Nanazan (also called Sannan, destroyed in 1429). Shō Hashi was surely ambitious, but if his main goal was anything other than personal gain, there is no good evidence of it. Prior to their violent unification, the three Okinawan states maintained tributary relations with the Ming Chinese court via the Ōsōfu, a quasi-independent office located in Chūzan and staffed by Chinese expatriates.⁴⁾

Let us consider a different celebratory version of Shō Hashi’s unification, that found in the *Chūzan seikan* (Mirror of Chūzan, hereafter “*Seikan*”) The *Seikan* was Ryukyu’s first official history, completed in 1650 by Shō Shōken (Haneji Chōshū). Interestingly, the *Seikan* account of Shō Hashi’s conquest is much longer than that of Satsuma’s conquest of Ryukyu in 1609. Roughly like *King Sho Hashi — Dynamic Ryukyu*, the 1650 account of Shō Hashi contained an agenda that spoke to its contemporary audience. In the classical Chinese manner of writing history, Shō Shōken described Shō Hashi as a virtuous man who brought order to a chaotic Okinawa. Indeed, Shō Hashi “went hungry himself when the people were starving and suffered cold himself when the people were cold.” One might wonder how severely the people of Okinawa suffered from the cold, but such language was boilerplate praise in the manner of classical Chinese literature. Furthermore, Shō Hashi was sagacious, his words and deeds were good, and he was free of desires — like King Wen, celebrated founder of the Zhou dynasty in China. By contrast, the king of Sannan frequently hosted “large, drunken pleasure banquets” and was without decorum or loyalty⁵⁾ Historical sensibility throughout East Asia in the seventeenth century required that the founder of a dynasty be virtuous and the last ruler of a state be depraved. Similarly, though for different ideological reasons, modern Okinawan nationalism tends to romanticize the Ryukyuan past.

The major difference between the seventeenth century account of Shō Hashi and the contemporary musical drama was the emphasis on military conquest. The bulk of the description of Shō Hashi in the *Seikan* details the battles and troop movements that

resulted in his ultimate victory. In response to an alleged plan to conquer Shuri by the king of Sanboku, Shō Hashi appointed the *aji* (local warlords) of Urasoe, Goeku, and Yomitan as generals, assembled an army, and set out from Shuri Castle, arriving in Nago several days later. At one point the Chūzan forces outmaneuvered the enemy and their arrows “fell upon them like rain.”⁶⁾ Another fight involving 200 defenders of a northern castle and 500 Chūzan attackers “stained the grass with blood, and corpses sprawled along the roadway.” In addition to swords and arrows, a small band of twenty attackers crept quietly into the castle and set fires.⁷⁾ Blood-stained grass and corpses lining the roadway were, of course, stock metaphors for describing warfare.

The main point here is that the *Seikan* account is generally accurate in pointing out that Shō Hashi’s accomplishment was the result of hard-fought battles in which many Okinawans perished. From the standpoint of 1650, there was no particular reason to cover up or minimize Shō Hashi’s warfare, unlike the case of Ryukyu’s disastrous war with Satsuma in 1609. Indeed, that war with Satsuma is described only in the histological overview that serves as the *Seikan*’s introduction, and only in brief sterile terms. We read that Shimazu Iehisa dispatched Yokoyama Kenzaemon as a general, who invaded Ryukyu and captured the king. There is no account of specific battles, Iehisa is described as “benevolent and decorous,” and a few lines later “wise ruler” Shō Hō reinstated Ryukyu’s “old ceremonial customs and music,” thus presumably restoring harmony to Ryukyu in classic Confucian style.⁸⁾

Particularity after 1609, Ryukyu’s elites had to tread very carefully to maintain some degree of political autonomy. Their general approach was to use connections with China, bakufu fears of military conflict with the Qing court, and features of the Tokugawa-era hierarchy as a counterbalance to Satsuma’s power.⁹⁾ As part of this process, Ryukyuan elites became increasingly skilled at managing the kingdom’s image. They sought to convey to outsiders the image of a small, peaceful kingdom, where Confucian-style virtue mitigated or even eliminated the need for coercive force to maintain domestic order or to defend against external threats such as pirates. Herein lies the basic origin of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism, which retains widespread currency today. This paper has four inter-related goals. First I survey the contemporary myth of Okinawan pacifism. Second, I survey the structure, weapons, and select battles of the Ryukyu Kingdom’s military forces, in part to make it clear that the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism is without a factual basis. Next I discuss the nineteenth and early twentieth-century development of this myth. Finally, I draw some brief conclusions about Okinawa or Ryukyu as an imaginary construct. My basic argument is that Ryukyu has long functioned as a blank screen upon which people have projected fantasies and desires.

1. The Contemporary Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism

Searching the Web using combinations of terms pairing “Okinawa,” or “Ryukyu” with words such as “peace,” “weapons,” and “rape” reveals a large number of sites,

whose topics include the problem of U.S. military bases, the infamous 1995 rape of a twelve-year-old girl, Okinawan martial arts, other Okinawan arts and crafts, and Okinawan history. The content of these sites ranges widely in quality, and some include essays by scholars or others claiming familiarity with some aspect of Okinawan history or culture. Despite diverse content, what many of these sites have in common is the perpetuation of a romantic myth of Okinawan or Ryukyuan pacifism, typically in the service of a contemporary political agenda.

Active or passive acceptance of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism is common even among historians and other scholars. The usual approach is to juxtapose an alleged pacifistic past with a militarized present. Consider, for example, Laura Hein discussing an article on Okinawan pop music:

James Roberson discusses Okinawan pop musicians who . . . envision Okinawa as “betwixt and between” powerful external forces but also as embodying social and moral virtues that set them apart from other Japanese and from Americans. Two themes stand out in particular. The first is peacefulness, or “gentle kindness,” as the Rinken Band phrases it. That band claims in its songs a long history of diplomacy beginning before Okinawa came under Japanese rule and evokes modern Japanese (and American) bellicosity and Okinawan peacefulness by including a projected photograph of the Okinawa Peace Memorial in its live performances.¹⁰⁾

When deployed skillfully, this juxtaposition of a peaceful past versus militarized present helps assert that, in addition to the obvious problems associated with the military bases, their presence also violates the very spirit or soul of the peaceful Okinawan people. Such a rhetorical strategy thereby enhances poignancy of the image of Okinawans as victims. This approach often relies on questionable assumptions that Okinawa’s people are and have been a singular entity in terms of culture and viewpoint and that conditions obtaining in the rather distant past (the Ryukyu Kingdom ended in 1879) necessarily apply — or presumably *should* apply — in the present.

Perhaps the most prominent figure who regularly alleges past pacifism in addressing the base problem is former governor and Ryukyu University professor Ōta Masahide. For example, in a speech delivered in 1997, while still governor, he asserted that:

The [Ryukyu] kingdom’s predominant features were devotion to peace and an absence of weapons. The people’s wide recognition as an unarmed land of courtesy was stressed by the late Professor William Lebra of the University of Hawaii, whose *Okinawan Religion: Belief, Ritual and Social Structure* (1966) argues that the cultures of Japan and Okinawa differ fundamentally. In contrast to Japan’s “warrior culture,” Okinawa’s is notable for an “absence of militarism.”¹¹⁾

This claim sets up a lengthy discussion of the militarization of Okinawa from 1945 to the present. Notice that Ōta cites the authority of anthropologist William Lebra, most likely in this case because his audience was a U.S. congressional study group.

Although Lebra did not take up the topic as an issue for serious investigation, he per-

petuated the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism in the context of presenting background information about Okinawa. Almost certainly the passage to which Ōta refers is one in which Lebra compares Okinawa with the mainland of Japan. While pointing out the relatively more prominent status of women in Okinawa society, he stated that one reason might be:

the absence of militarism during the past five hundred years . . . Nearly all Western visitors since the time of Captain Hall have commented on the mildness and lack of overt aggression in Okinawan behavior. The absence of any martial spirit save where infrequently inculcated by the Japanese was particularly apparent in the battle for Okinawa during World War II, when virtually every Japanese fought until killed or committed suicide while Okinawans were not averse to surrender when they could.¹²⁾

As we will see, Lebra was incorrect about the absence of militarism for 500 years and the lack of battle-related suicides among Okinawans. We will also see that “Captain Hall” and other British sailors who visited Naha in 1816 were indeed influential perpetrators of an idealized image of Ryukyu. We will return to Hall later, but here it is interesting to note that although Ōta appropriated Lebra’s authority in the passage above, it is highly unlikely that Ōta or others who seek to expose Okinawan suffering would actually quote from Lebra as I have here. The reason is that we now have strong evidence pointing to a scenario precisely the opposite of that described by Lebra. In other words, Japanese soldiers during the Battle of Okinawa often surrendered, whereas many Okinawan civilians killed themselves and their families, often in especially gruesome ways. Indeed, these group suicides have become a major grievance in the contemporary narrative of Okinawan victimization.¹³⁾

The juxtaposition of an allegedly idyllic land without weapons or violence and the militarized islands of today, leads almost inevitably to the metaphor of rape. In an essay entitled “The Rape of Okinawa,” George Feifer takes the usual rhetorical approach, setting the stage as follows:

Throughout the centuries when Japan was almost hermetically sealed against foreigners, Okinawans welcomed their ships with a graciousness that startled passengers and crews. Although fear may have prompted it, the callers did not think so. Another eighteenth-century [sic] Englishman spoke for almost all such travelers when he reported Okinawans’ most prominent characteristics as “their gentleness of spirit and manner, their yielding and disposition, their hospitality and kindness, their aversion to violence and crime.” “For gentle dignity of manners, superior advancement in the arts and general intelligence,” another sailor maintained, “the inhabitants . . . are by far the most interesting, enlightened nation in the Pacific Ocean.” The Russian writer Ivan Goncharov was skeptical of such praise when he arrived in 1853. But “What a place, what people!” he found. “All exuded such a feeling of peace, simplicity, honest labor and plenty that it seemed to me . . . a longed-for haven.”¹⁴⁾

The paragraphs that follow this passage describe the U.S. military bases and the suffering they inflict on Okinawa’s inhabitants. The title of Feifer’s essay was surely prompted by an actual incident, which he mentions in the preliminary paragraphs: the 1995 rape of twelve-year-old schoolgirl by three U.S. soldiers. Although sexual assault had long been

a scourge connected with the bases, this particular incident became a *cause célèbre* among women's advocacy groups and the anti-base movement. The victimization of this young, innocent girl quickly came to symbolize the larger-scale rape of the former "peaceful kingdom."¹⁵⁾

While there are many good arguments for eliminating or reducing the U.S. military presence on Okinawa, the rhetorical strategy of invoking contrast with an allegedly peaceful kingdom of centuries past is based on dubious assumptions about the normative force of history and the social and cultural coherency of "Okinawa" across time. More fundamentally, it is simply incorrect. The Ryukyuan state, like all states, relied ultimately on coercive force — or the threat of it — to maintain order. Military force created the Ryukyu Kingdom, first to unite Okinawa under Shō Hashi and then to subjugate the other Ryukyu Islands and bring them under Shuri's control. In consolidating its empire and maintaining it, the Okinawan polity in Shuri sometimes clashed militarily with southward-expanding polities based in the province of Satsuma. To the south, Shuri relied heavily on tribute trade with China, and pirates often attacked its ships and sometimes even the port of Naha. In short, the Ryukyu kingdom did not lack police and military forces or occasions to use them.

2. Military Affairs in the Ryukyu Kingdom

Soon after military force placed Okinawa under one ruler in 1429, the conquest of the other Ryukyu Islands began. Let us consider the example of Amami-Ōshima and nearby Kikaijima. In 1450 (1451 in some accounts), six shipwrecked Koreans drifted to Gajashima, a small island in the Satsunan chain. They reported that the island was half under the control of Satsuma and half under the control of Okinawa. Later, four of these Koreans were taken to Sasari at the northern end of Amami-Ōshima. The local Okinawan military commander there sent the Koreans on to Shuri, where they met with the king and other officials. From their account, we know that Amami-Ōshima was under Okinawan military control by that time but that the fight to control Kikaijima was still in progress. Several Korean accounts point to the 1440s as the time Okinawan forces conquered Amami-Ōshima. On nearby Kikaijima, residents resisted the Okinawan invaders vigorously, finally causing King Shō Toku personally to lead an invasion of the island in 1466.¹⁶⁾

The observations of the Koreans in 1450 are significant in several respects. Notice, for example, that at this time Okinawans controlled half of Gajashima, an island very close to Satsuma. The many islands between Satsuma and Okinawa served as potential objects of conflict between a northward-expanding Ryukyu Kingdom and the southward-expanding ambitions of some of the warlords who controlled Satsuma. Gajashima seems to have been the all-time northernmost limit of Shuri's military control. The Chikama family, retainers of the Hōjō, controlled Satsuma at the turn of the fourteenth century, and they forged a network of trade routes throughout the northern Ryukyu Islands. In 1493, a force

from Satsuma invaded Amami-Ōshima and clashed with an army under Shuri's command. In a bloody battle, the Ryukyuan drove off the Satsuma invaders.¹⁷⁾ In 1537, King Shō Shin (r. 1477–1527), often credited by modern myth-makers with creating the “peaceful kingdom” by confiscating and locking up all weapons, led an invasion force of Okinawan soldiers to quell a rebellious Amami-Ōshima. The *Kyūyō*, an official history, states that Shō Sei dispatched soldiers to Ōshima in 1538. Some accounts record King Shō Gen as leading an invasion of Amami-Ōshima in 1571, though there is some debate among historians regarding the veracity of the 1571 campaign.¹⁸⁾ Invasions of Miyako, Yaeyama, and other islands also took place during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In short, the Ryukyu Kingdom functioned as a small-scale empire, created, expanded, sustained, and defended by the use of military force.

From the Koreans who drifted to Gajashima in 1450 we know that Ryukyuan firearms (hand cannon) at this time were of advanced design, “similar to those of our own country.” The Koreans reported that they studied these weapons with the aid of a royal official charged with the oversight of firearms. Such firearms almost certainly came from China. Ming court records include a 1452 decree by the Board of Justice forbidding the practice by residents of the Fujian coast of conveying military hardware to Ryukyuan in private trade deals. The inhabitants of coastal areas of Fujian often stockpiled weapons to repel *wakō* pirate attacks.¹⁹⁾

Other shipwrecked Koreans described military affairs in and around Shuri castle in detail in a 1462 account. The soldiers guarding the perimeter of the castle served yearly tours of duty, with a member of the royal family appointed to train and oversee each year's new conscripts. The basic unit of the army was a 100-man group, several of which guarded the castle. When the king ventured out, a 300-man contingent of mounted soldiers accompanied him. Within the castle, about 100 people serving in five-day rotations administered the military forces and made logistical arrangements. Outside of Shuri, a local warlord administered a stone castle in each of the nearby districts. The Korean account did not specify the number of these castles, but other sources list sixteen of them in addition to Shuri.²⁰⁾

This early system of military organization was almost certainly the direct predecessor of the *hiki* system established by Shō Shin, a pivotal monarch in Ryukyuan history. Throughout his long reign, he strove, with considerable success, to strengthen the power of the king vis-à-vis the hereditary warlords (*aji*), to enhance the ideological and symbolic authority of the king, and to build a centralized, efficient military system. It is therefore ironic that Shō Shin figures prominently in one variant of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism: the story of karate. Because the king confiscated weapons and forbade their use, the basic story line goes, Okinawans became adept at fighting with their empty hands or using farm implements as weapons.²¹⁾ Modern myth-making notwithstanding, Shō Shin pursued two basic strategies with respect to military affairs. On the one hand, he sought to place all Ryukyuan military power under direct royal command. On the other, he sought to strengthen Ryukyu's military by implementing a more efficient organization and

improved infrastructure.

Shō Shin required all local warlords to reside in Shuri, bestowing great social prestige on them while eliminating their military power. To fill the local power gap thus created, the king implemented the so-called *magiri-shima* system. “*Magiri*” were local administrative districts, and the term “*shima*” refers to villages within the districts (probably relying on the metaphor of villages as “islands” within districts). Shō Shin and his successors appointed non-warlord officials to oversee the districts, and the former warlords involved themselves with the aristocratic society of the capital and central government politics. Significantly, references to local military forces in monuments erected between 1522 and 1554 used the term “*magiri gun*” (district forces) instead of *aji gun* (warlord forces). We do not know the details of the composition of these forces, but they were all under Shuri’s direct command by the end of Shō Shin’s reign.²²⁾

The *hiki* system was the core of Shō Shin’s new military organization. Perhaps the easiest way to grasp the logic of this arrangement is think of “*hiki*” rather literally as meaning “to pull together.” Each *hiki* pulled together various officials and military forces into networks capable of dealing with emergencies. The *hiki* combined in one organization both military and police functions, including guard duty, administration of government, and administration of trade. Ryukyuan ships were the governing metaphor of the *hiki*. The *hiki* were led by officials with the title *sedo* (O. *shiidu*), a variant of *sentō*, ship’s captain. The names of the *hiki* all ended with *-tomi*, which was also the suffix for the names of large ships (like *-maru* for Japanese vessels). This terminology is indicative of the central importance of oceanic trade, a royal monopoly, for Ryukyu’s prosperity. Takara Kurayoshi has characterized the *hiki* as “overland ships” (*chijō no kaisen*) and ocean-going vessels as “floating *hiki*” (*umi ni ukanda hiki*). Not surprisingly, the *hiki* also provided shipboard military forces for Ryukyuan trade vessels, all of which were armed from 1421 onward. The *hiki* were grouped into three watches (*ban*), each of which contained four *hiki*. It is likely that the heads of these three watches evolved into the Sanshikan (O. Yoasutabe), the highest organ of government in Ryukyu from the sixteenth century until the end of the kingdom.²³⁾ In modern military terminology, one might characterize the *hiki* as rapid deployment forces.

In conjunction with these networks of rapid deployment forces, Shō Shin sought to strengthen the underlying infrastructure of the military, a policy continued by his immediate successors. A famous 1509 monument inscription at Urasoe tells of the king’s storing weapons there to reduce the need to obtain them from outlying areas. It is this inscription that is typically cited in connection with claims that Ryukyu became a society without weapons as a result of Shō Shin’s policies. The king also walled in the northern face of Shuri castle and in 1522 built a road for military use between Shuri and Naha. In 1546, Shō Sei extended the network of defensive walls around Shuri Castle and constructed Yarazamori Castle to defend the entrance into Naha Harbor. Shō Shin also established an official to oversee artillery deployment and technology.²⁴⁾ As we will see, the combination of the Yarazamori Castle and effective cannon served the kingdom very well when an

invasion force from Satsuma attempted to enter Naha Harbor in 1609. It also helped repel major attacks by pirates in 1556 and 1606.

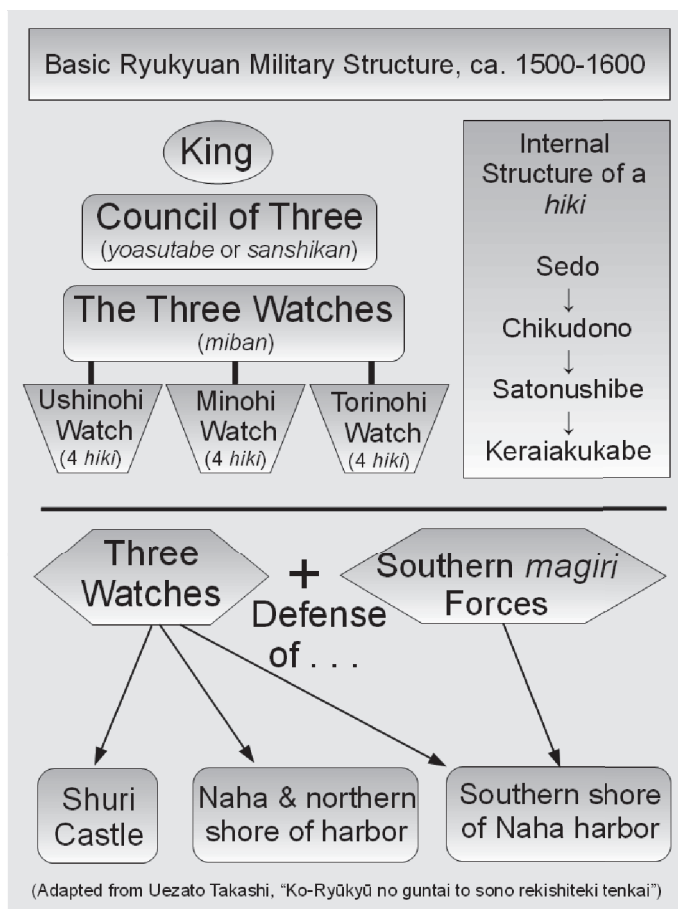


Fig. 1

By the middle of the sixteenth century, Ryukyu's military had reached its full development, and figure 1 illustrates its basic organization. One general point reflected in this diagram is that Shō Shin's military reforms were in part designed to focus the kingdom's resources on guarding the central organs of state, namely the port of Naha and Shuri Castle. This organizational structure was supported by a network of castles and roads throughout the Shuri-Naha area. Yarazamori Castle and Mie Castle were on opposite sides of the narrow entrance to Naha Harbor. An iron chain boom could be drawn between the two castles to close off the entrance to ships. Large-bore artillery pieces were concentrated in this area as well. Iō Castle, nearby but further into the harbor, functioned as the main arsenal, distributing weapons to the *hiki* soldiers as they assembled at their defensive positions. Tomi Castle, deep inside the harbor, was the command and control center.

The Pearl Road, built explicitly for military purposes, connected these castles to each other and to Shuri Castle.²⁵⁾

In terms of the size of Ryukyuan armies, documents connected with Okinawan invasions of other Ryukyu Islands, mobilizations to defend against pirates, and the mobilization to defend against the Satsuma invasion of 1609 indicate a range of between 1000 and 3000 soldiers, with naval flotillas ranging in size from 46 to 100 ships.²⁶⁾ Ryukyu manufactured some of its own weapons and acquired others from China and Japan. There is abundant evidence that Ryukyuans traded in weapons between these places, most commonly bringing Japanese swords to Ming China, where they were in great demand.²⁷⁾ Ryukyuans often made adaptations to foreign weapons. For example, many sword blades came from Japan, but the handles were of Ryukyuan design to facilitate wielding them with one hand.²⁸⁾ On the eve of the Satsuma invasion, the kingdom's major port was well fortified and defended with large-bore artillery pieces (shot with a diameter of 7–9 cm was most common). The *hiki* in Okinawa were able to muster an army of about 3,000 soldiers on relatively short notice. Ryukyuan swords and bows were of effective design. Small-bore personal firearms, however, while abundant, were not on a par with Satsuma's muskets. Superior muskets, and the concentration of Ryukyuan defense resources in the port of Naha contributed to the kingdom's eventual defeat, as did the battle-hardened quality of the Satsuma invaders.²⁹⁾

Although Ryukyu's defeat by Satsuma is well known, there are surprisingly few details on battle statistics. We do know, however, that Satsuma's attempt to enter Naha Harbor was a failure. The 3,000 defenders, the two castles, the boom across the harbor, and the Ryukyuan artillery inflicted heavy casualties on the invaders and caused them to retreat. The Naha port defenses were highly effective. Unfortunately for the defenders, the various overland approaches to Shuri castle were guarded much less effectively. After a Satsuma force broke through Ryukyuan defenses at Urasoe, it quickly surrounded Shuri Castle, cutting it off from the vast defense network that extended around Naha Harbor.³⁰⁾

After 1609, Ryukyu came under Satsuma's domination. The new political order undoubtedly resulted in changes to its military affairs, but many details of this period await further research. Overall, however, it is important to stress that post 1609 Ryukyu was not without armed military and police forces. Pirate attacks on Ryukyuan shipping remained a common problem, and Satsuma occasionally complained that Ryukyuan sailors did not defend their ships vigorously enough (Satsuma typically put up most of the capital for Ryukyu's tribute trade after 1609).³¹⁾ Ryukyuan ships sailing to China continued to be armed for their voyages and to need those arms. Seventeenth-century bureaucratic reforms reduced the status of the *hiki* but did not eliminate them. One document points out that in response to the appearance of a foreign ship at Yaeyama in 1640, "soldiers from Satsuma and several hundred Ryukyuan soldiers" were dispatched.³²⁾

After 1609, Ryukyu's tributary relations with China became crucially important for the kingdom's political autonomy. The kingdom's greatest military challenge, therefore was to ensure that tribute relations and trade took place without incident. Numerous

accounts of Ryukyuan tribute ships battling pirates are found in the *Kyūyō*, an official history. An entry for 1672 describes Ryukyuan tribute ships surrounded by pirates who attacked with flaming arrows. After a “bloody battle,” the Ryukyuan ships broke through the ring of pirate boats, at a cost of six sailors killed and twenty-four wounded.³³ In another incident during the reign of Shō On (r. 1795–1803), two Ryukyuan ships on their way to China fought a pitched overnight battle with three pirate ships. The Ryukyuan crew members brandished weapons (*heiki*) and used “a new type of cannon” (*ifū no teppō*) in their defense, which was ultimately successful—at least according to the official version of events.³⁴ Apparently these same ships were attacked again near Fujian, and the *Kyūyō* explains that the Ryukyuan crew manned their battle stations and defended themselves with cannon and pikes. The pirates sent out smaller boats that surrounded the tribute ships, and the battle took many twists and turns before the damaged Ryukyuan ships were able to enter Fujian.³⁵

The importance of trade and diplomacy for the kingdom’s prosperity both before and after 1609 required it to maintain naval forces capable of repelling the pirate attacks that were endemic in the South China seas. Moreover, the post-1609 Ryukyuan state sometimes wielded coercive force vis-a-vis internal dissenters. For example in 1632, King Shō Hō punished a number of allegedly derelict officials who oversaw the China trade by banishment to remote islands. One was even sentenced to death, but Satsuma intervened to reduce that sentence to banishment.³⁶ More well-known cases include the execution of Heshikiya Chōbin, Tomoyose Anjō, and fifteen of their supporters in 1734, following a failed bid to topple Sai On’s (1682–1761) administration, and the severe punishment of some prominent residents of Kumemura who protested the 1802 change in how Ryukyuan students sent to Beijing were selected (the *kanshō sōdō*). In short, even after 1609, Ryukyu was a normal country, and this normalcy included, for better or worse, state deployment of coercive force for political and economic ends.

3. Origins and Development of the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism

One general point to make regarding the image of Ryukyu a pacifist kingdom is that by the nineteenth century Ryukyuan officials had become extremely adept at manipulating the kingdom’s image vis-a-vis outsiders. The most important group of outsiders was Chinese investiture envoys (*sakuhōshi*). Let us consider the case of vice-envoy Li Dingyuan in 1800. In *Shi Ryūkyū ki*, Li’s detailed record of his stay in Ryukyu, he described with much enthusiasm the plot of the *kumiodori* play *Kōkō no maki* (Tale of filial piety) and concluded with an exclamation that heaven greatly rewards those who give their lives for filial piety.³⁷ During the eighteenth century, Ryukyuan officials began the practice of entertaining Chinese envoys with *kumiodori* designed to impress upon them the image of a refined and virtuous kingdom. *Kōkō no maki*, based on a legend from the time of King Gihon (r. 1249–1259), involves a daughter who offers her life for the good of society and her impoverished mother, only to be saved by miraculous cosmic intervention. She ends

up marrying the king's son. The play was first shown to Chinese envoys in 1756. In Li's case, just before his departure, royal envoys unexpectedly showed up with fans, incense, and other gifts. It was the birthday of his mother in China, but Li had not told anyone in Ryukyu about it. Ryukyuan officials had done their research well, and Li was most impressed by this display of filial consciousness on their part.³⁸ My point in mentioning Li's experience in Ryukyu is simply to emphasize the skill with which Ryukyuan officials worked to portray positive images to foreign visitors. In classic Confucian values, a state governed by virtue would have little or no need for coercive force. Ryukyuans presented this same general image to European visitors as well as Chinese.

Starting in the early nineteenth century, European ships made their way to Naha with increasing frequency. These visits produced a variety of reports about the inhabitants of Okinawa or other Ryukyu Islands, some of which were published and reached an audience of armchair travelers. The relative obscurity of Ryukyu added to its exotic appeal in such contexts. According to a summary of these accounts by George H. Kerr, "The visitor was invariably struck by the absence of arms or incidents of violence, by the unfailing courtesy and friendliness of all classes, by the intelligence of the gentry, and by the absence of thievery among the common people."³⁹ Kerr's general history of Ryukyu, the only such work available in English, quotes these European writings at great length, without any serious critique of their contents. Because he did not read Japanese, Kerr depended on assistants to translate or summarize Japanese materials into English. His book, though well-written and intelligent, did not even reflect the state of Japanese scholarship on Ryukyu circa the 1950s. The *hiki* system, for example, a foundational institution in premodern Ryukyu, receives no mention even though Iha Fuyū had already published a widely-known analysis on this topic some two decades earlier. In short, Kerr seems to have had no knowledge of Ryukyuan military affairs and took the nineteenth-century European reports of a pacifist society at face value. I make these points not to criticize Kerr, who did a superb job given his the limitations of his circumstances. His book, however, has been and continues to be, a prominent vehicle for perpetuating the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism.

A major development of myth of Ryukyuan pacifism came from the visit to Naha in 1816 of two British ships, the *Lyra* and *Alceste*. The ships were on a mission to survey parts of the Korean coast and the Ryukyu Islands, and they stayed at Naha from September 15 through October 27. Several members of the crew recorded observations of Okinawa, but Basil Hall, captain of the *Lyra*, and John M'Leod, physician on board the *Alceste* wrote lengthy accounts that were later published and widely read. These accounts gushed with praise over the kindness, gentleness, and intelligence of the Okinawans, whose behavior compared especially well with the alleged boorishness and arrogance of "the Chinese." According to Hall and M'Leod, Okinawa was a land of peace and serenity. Its residents bore no weapons and its people committed no crimes. According to Hall: "We never saw any punishment inflicted at Loo-choo; a tap with a fan, or an angry look, was the severest chastisement ever resorted to, as far as we could discover."⁴⁰ Hall's

account of social order enforced by fan taps was destined to be repeated many times and remains a potent image to this day.

It is perfectly likely that Hall's account is accurate as far as it goes. Why would Hall and the other crew members, whose movements were restricted to a small area, ever have had occasion to observe police and judicial activities during their short stay? Obviously Hall was unaware of the kingdom's law court, the *hirajo* or with the Ryukyu's two detailed law codes. Likewise, he was unaware of the offenders against these laws, who had been arrested, tortured, fined, exiled, had their property confiscated, or faced the death penalty.⁴¹⁾ It is hardly surprising that the accounts of Hall and M'Leod describing an idyllic Oriental land of peace and tranquility, free of the scourges of war, weapons and animosity, would have appealed to Europeans in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. Interestingly, Hall discussed Okinawa with Napoleon himself when the *Lyra* put in at St. Helena, and reported in his account that:

Several circumstances . . . respecting the Loo-Choo people surprised even him a good deal; and I had the satisfaction of seeing him more than once completely perplexed, and unable to account for the phenomena I related. Nothing struck him so much as their having no arms. "Point d'armes!" he exclaimed; . . . "Mais, sans armes, comment se bat-on?"

I could only reply, that as far as we had been able to discover, they had never had any war, but remained in a state of internal and external peace. "No wars!" cried he, with a scornful and incredulous expression, as if the existence of any people under the sun without wars was a monstrous anomaly.⁴²⁾

One striking thing about this passage is the implication superior moral virtue for those who hold to a belief in Ryukyuan pacifism, in contrast to a rogue Napoleon who scoffed at it. One suspects that scholars like Ōta, who surely know that the myth is unfounded, are of similar mind. In any case, given the degree of ignorance of Ryukyu and other parts of East Asia that prevailed in 1816, it is conceivable that thoughtful or worldly people might have believed Hall's tale, even if Napoleon did not. Certainly many of them would have wanted to believe in a country without weapons.

At the end of the nineteenth century Basil Hall Chamberlain, a relative of Captain Hall and noted authority on Japan, visited Okinawa Prefecture briefly and published a lengthy analysis in *The Geographic Journal*. His account vigorously endorsed the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism. Part of Chamberlain's account of Ryukyuan history reads:

In some important respects the country really deserved the title bestowed upon it by a Chinese emperor in 1579, and is still proudly inscribed on the gate of its capital city, the title of "The Land of Propriety." There were no lethal weapons in Luchu, no feudal factions, few if any crimes of violence. . . . Confucius' ideal was carried out — a government purely civil, at once absolute and patriarchal, resting not on any armed force, but on the theory that subjects owe unqualified obedience to their rulers . . .⁴³⁾

Here, of course, Chamberlain takes the descriptions of Hall and M'Leod and explains them in terms of classical Confucian values. In Chamberlain's version, Ryukyu was not only a rare or unique example of a society without war, weapons or aggression, but also a

rare or unique instance of a Confucian paradise.

Later in his account, Chamberlain restates the matter in terms of the prevailing tenets of racial science. After discussing the physical qualities of Ryukyuan in some detail and comparing them with the qualities of Japanese, Chamberlain states:

The most prominent race-characteristic of the Luchuans is not a physical, but a moral one. It is their gentleness of spirit, their yielding and submissive disposition, their hospitality and kindness, their aversion to violence and crime. Every visitor has come away with the same favourable impression — Captain Broughton, whom they treated so hospitably on the occasion of his shipwreck in 1797; Captain Basil Hall, Dr McLeod, Dr, Guillemard — even the missionaries, poor as was their success, and all the Japanese. For myself, I met with nothing but kindness from high and low alike.⁴⁴⁾

Today's advocates of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism similarly speak of "the" Okinawans as if they are and were a singular entity. Instead of relying on notions of racial characteristics, however, the preference is to rely on a romantic version of history.

The famous scholar of Ryukyu Iha Fuyu (1876–1947) is the final link between more recent conveyors of the pacifist myth like Kerr, Lebra, and Ōta and the original nineteenth century European myth-makers. Iha is a more ambivalent figure in this respect because some of his writing does acknowledge Ryukyu's military past. For example, in the 1930s he analyzed accounts of military affairs in the *Omorō sōshi*, discussing weapons, defense works, the military character of the *hiki*, and related topics.⁴⁵⁾ Elsewhere, however, Iha argued that Shō Shin enforced a policy of pacifism (*hisen shugi*) by confiscating weapons and prohibiting their use. He did acknowledge, though, that these moves were also aimed at suppressing internal rebellions and defending against pirates. As Uezato points out, in part owing to an imprecise conception of key concepts such as "defense" or "pacifism" Iha's exact stance is hard to discern.⁴⁶⁾

Conclusion

Among scholars of Ryukyuan history in the early twentieth century, there were explicit critics of the notion of a pacifist Ryukyu kingdom. Yokoyama Shigeru, for example, vigorously criticized Basil Hall's assertion of a land without weapons. Among post-war scholars, Nakahara Zenchū criticized Iha's portrayal of a pacifist Shō Shin, arguing that Shō Shin's policies were moves intended to strengthen the kingdom's military capabilities. Nakahara also argued that it was not the case the Shimazu confiscated the kingdom's weapons after 1609. In recent decades, scholars such as Takara Kurayoshi, Maehira Fusaaki, Teruya Masayoshi, Tomiyama Kazuyuki, and Uezato Takashi have confirmed and further developed the arguments of Yokoyama and Nakahara, shedding much light on the details of Ryukyuan military organization, equipment, and tactics.⁴⁷⁾ Abundant evidence of the Ryukyu Kingdom's military and police structures and capabilities is available for anyone who cares to take a close look the academic literature.

Simply a glance at the headlines of the entries in the *Kyūyō* should be sufficient to dispel the notion that Ryukyu was a land without weapons, crime or conflict.

If Orientalism is the process of Europeans projecting desires or fantasies onto distant “eastern” lands, then the nineteenth-century version of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism might accurately be regarded as a variety of Orientalism, albeit one abetted by Ryukyuan officials. Indeed, all parties were involved in conjuring up a Ryukyu that suited their purposes. The modern and contemporary manifestations of the myth now include a substantial number of residents of Okinawa among its proponents. The details of the Ryukyuan past are sufficiently remote that Ryukyu’s history can be molded to serve contemporary political agendas fairly easily. Obviously, interpreting the past is always a contentious issue, and many aspects of Okinawa and Ryukyuan history remain the subject of scholarly debate and disagreement. That said, however, the effacing of all forms of coercive activity on the part of Ryukyuan throughout history goes beyond the usual boundaries of academic debate. It is a remarkable propaganda accomplishment, first seriously attempted by eighteenth-century Ryukyuan officials.

It is understandable, of course, that thoughtful people would be distressed by the propensity of humans to behave badly. The myth of Ryukyuan pacifism undoubtedly resonates with a deep desire to believe that human nature is potentially good enough that societies free of coercive force are possible, while also adding poignancy to the narrative of modern Okinawa victimization. This psychological mix is powerful enough to anesthetize the critical thinking function that should be part of any scholarly or journalistic endeavor. I am not convinced that a fairy tale version of Ryukyuan history has much to offer by way of practical benefits. Insofar as the U.S. military presence has been a corrosive force in Okinawan society, relevant arguments against it should be made in the context of the present and recent past without recourse to an impossible version of history.

Notes

- 1) <http://okinawa-information.com/blog/king-sho-hash-dynamic-ryuku> (accessed 5 Nov. 2009).
- 2) Keiko Uchida, “How the Musical ‘King Sho Hashi’ United the Power of the Okinawan People,” Matthew Galgani, trans (14 Sep 2009) at: <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2009/9/14/king-sho-hash/> (accessed 5 Nov. 2009).
- 3) <http://okinawa-information.com/blog/king-sho-hash-dynamic-ryuku> (accessed 5 Nov. 2009).
- 4) Maeda Giken, *Okinawa, yogawari no shisō: hito to gakumon no keifu* (Naha, Japan: Dai’ichi kyōiku tosho, 1972), pp. 64–67.
- 5) Yokoyama Shigeru, Iha Fuku (Fuyū), and Higashionna Kanjun, eds., *Ryūkyū shiryō sōsho*, vol. 5 (Hōbun shokan, 1940, 1988), p. 37.
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- 8) *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 9) For more details, see Gregory Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), pp. 15–49.
- 10) Laura E Hein, “Introduction: The Territory of Identity and Remembrance in Okinawa,” *Critical Asian Studies*, 33:2 (2001), p. 209. Here I quote Hein, not Roberson, because Roberson does not actually go as

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far as Hein in juxtaposing the bellicose present with an allegedly peaceful past.

- 11) Ōta Masahide, "Okinawa Calls for a Just Peace: Speech to the U.S. Congressional Study Group on Japan," in <http://www.iwanami.co.jp/jpworld/text/okinawa01.html> (accessed 20 Mar. 2006).
- 12) William P. Lebra, *Okinawan Religion: Belief, Ritual, and Social Structure* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1966, 1985), p. 13. Lebra's Japanese translator, the late Mitsugu Sakihara, himself a Battle of Okinawa veteran, found this passage so contrary to everything he had observed, that he convinced Lebra to have it omitted in the Japanese version of the book (personal communication).
- 13) See, for example, the chapter "The War Comes Home to Okinawa" in Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York: The New Press, 1992), pp. 354–372. See also Ōta Masahide, "Re-Examining the History of the Battle of Okinawa," in Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Okinawa: Cold War Island* (Cardiff, CA: Japan Policy Research Institute, 1999), esp., p. 29.
- 14) George Feifer, "The Rape of Okinawa," *World Policy Journal*, 17:3 (Fall, 2000), pp. 35–36.
- 15) For a scholarly analysis of the significance of the 1995 rape, see Linda Isako Angst, "The Sacrifice of a Schoolgirl: The 1995 Rape Case, Discourses of Power, and Women's Lives in Okinawa," *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2001).
- 16) Ishigami Eiichi, "Ryūkyū no Amami shotō tōchi no shodankai," *Rekishū hyōron*, No. 603 (2000), pp. 5–9; and Uezato Takashi, "Ryūkyū no kaki ni tsuite," *Okinawa bunka*, vol. 36, no. 91 (2000), p. 76. The Korean source on which these authors rely is the *Joseon Wangjo Sillok*. See also Entry #115. Kyūyō kenkyūkai, eds., *Kyūyō* (Yomikudashi edition) (Kadokawa shoten, 1974), p. 11.
- 17) Ishigami, "Amami," pp. 3–4, 9; and Uezato Takashi, "Ko-Ryūkyū no guntai to sono rekishiteki tenkai," *Ryūkyū Aija shakai bunka kenkyūkai kiyō*, no. 5 (October, 2002), pp. 113–114.
- 18) Uezato, "Guntai," p. 114 and entry #202 and #227. Kyūyō kenkyūkai, *Kyūyō*, p. 14. Regardless of the details, it seems clear that Amami-Ōshima resented Shuri's control and often resisted with violence.
- 19) Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 76–78.
- 20) Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 108–109.
- 21) Perhaps the most prominent example of this narrative is Nagamine Shoshin, "Okinawan Karate and World Peace," found at many web sites such as <http://www.renseikan.com/WorldPeace.shtml> (as of 11–7–2009). Although rare, some martial arts writers acknowledge a more realistic interpretation of Shō Shin's actions. For example: "Although it is documented that King Shoshin ordered his provincial lords, or *aji*, to live near his castle in Shuri, many historians no longer believe that he totally disarmed his ruling class. Although a famous stone monument, the Momo Urasoe Ran Kan No Mei, which is inscribed with the highlights of King Shoshin's reign, tells of the King seizing the *aji*'s swords and how he amassed a supply of weapons in a warehouse near Shuri castle, some Okinawan historians believe that King Shoshin was actually building an armory to protect his ports and prepare for any potential invasion by *wako*, or pirates, not that he was stripping the Okinawan samurai or the general population of their weaponry" (accessed 21 Mar. 2006) at <http://tkdtutor.com/16Weapons/Offensive/Offensive.htm>.
- 22) These events are well documented in any general history of Okinawa. Uezato explains their significance in the context of military affairs with great clarity. See "Guntai," pp. 110–112.
- 23) For a detailed analysis of the *hiki*, see Takara Kurayoshi, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no kōzō* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1987), pp. 103–119. See also Uezato, "Guntai," p. 112, pp. 118–119.
- 24) Uezato, "Guntai," p. 113; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," p. 78.
- 25) Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 117–119; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 82–87.
- 26) Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 120–121; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," p. 84.
- 27) Uezato, "Guntai," p. 124; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 82–83.
- 28) Uezato, "Guntai," p. 123.
- 29) Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 115–116, pp. 121–124; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 82–88.
- 30) Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 115–116; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 82–88.
- 31) For example, in 1670 pirates connected with Ming loyalist forces captured a Ryukyuan ship, and Satsuma criticized the Ryukyuan as "cowards in the extreme." See, Tomiyama Kazuyuki, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2004), p. 80.
- 32) Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 116–117.

- 33) Entry #464. Kyūyō kenkyūkai, *Kyūyō*, p. 211.
- 34) Entry #1465. Kyūyō kenkyūkai, *Kyūyō*, pp. 439–440.
- 35) Entry #1487. Kyūyō kenkyūkai, *Kyūyō*, pp. 445–447.
- 36) Tomiyama, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken*, pp. 176–7.
- 37) Li Dingyuan, *Shi Ryūkyū ki*, Harada Nobuo, trans., ed. (Gensōsha, 1985), 335–337.
- 38) Li, *Shi Ryūkyū ki*, pp. 407–408. See also Kakazu Takeshi, “Rikuyu engi: Tei Junsoku ga fukkokushi fukyū” *Ryūkyū shinpō*, 4–24–1993 (#17 in the series *Ryūkyū kanshi no tabi*).
- 39) George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1958), pp. 250–251.
- 40) Kerr, *Okinawa*, p. 255. For extensive excerpts from the crew members of these two ships, see pp. 249–260.
- 41) There are many accounts of Ryukyuan judicial proceedings and law codes. One excellent source is *Okinawa no hankachō*, which details criminal cases before the Hirajo in the 1860s and 70s. One case, for example, involved the investigation into the actions of police officials who tortured a suspect excessively, thus causing his death. See Higa Shunchō and Sakihama Shūmei, eds., trans., *Okinawa no hankachō* (Tōyō bunko 41) (Heibonsha, 1965), 85–94. See also “Satsuma-han shihaika no saibanben,” Chapter 3 of Tomiyama, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken*, pp. 170–197.
- 42) Kerr, *Okinawa*, p. 259.
- 43) Basil Hall Chamberlain, “The Luchu Islands and Their Inhabitants: I. Introductory Remarks,” *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 5, no. 4 (April, 1895), pp. 310–311.
- 44) Chamberlain, “The Luchu Islands,” pp. 318–319.
- 45) Iha Fuyū, “Ko-Ryūkyū no bubu o kōsatsushite “karate” no hattatsu ni oyobu.” Hattori Shirō, Nakasone Masayoshi, Hokama Shuzen, eds., *Iha Fuyū zenshū*, vol 5 (Heibonsha, 1974), pp. 196–215 (originally published 1932); and “Ko-Ryūkyū no “hiki seido” ni tsuite—Ryūkyū bunka no ranjukuki ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu,” *Zenshū*, vol. 9, pp. 279–322 (originally published 1935). See also Uezato, “Guntai,” p. 105.
- 46) Uezato, “Guntai,” 105; and Iha Fuyū, “Ko-Ryūkyū no seiji,” *Zenshū*, Vol. 1., 419–495, esp., pp. 431–440.
- 47) For a concise summary of these arguments and a listing of the key essays, see Uezato, “Guntai,” pp. 105–106.

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