

Verification of Chinese “Historical” Narratives on Ryukyu/Okinawa. Japanese Views on China’s Narratives

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Notwithstanding the results of the historic Sino-Japanese joint research that began in 2006, Japanese and Chinese interpretations of historical “facts” and reconstructions (manifestations) of those facts in the modern and contemporary periods differ greatly. As E. H. Carr points out, “[History] is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past”.² Differences between historians can be attributed to each historian’s values, the society in which he or she lives, and the values and norms of the era. However, a growing number of historical research papers and writings in the guise of empirical research are lending legitimacy to political objectives and messages given priority by the Chinese in “historical research” papers. This raises questions about the content of their historical narratives and doubts about Chinese researchers’ attitude to employing the historical positivism approach.

This paper takes as an example the history of Ryukyu/Okinawa, currently an area where geopolitical tensions are growing due to differences in historical perception between Japan and China. By contrasting and examining these differences, this paper focuses on Chinese academics’ tendency to construct selective historical narratives primarily along ideological lines. For this, it is necessary to apply critical source analysis of references cited in the narratives and bring facts that have been shielded or suppressed to light. To evaluate the influence of Chinese narratives in Okinawa and respect the self-determination principle of the residents, I also apply the outcomes of the public survey in Okinawa in a multi-disciplinary manner. The goal of this analysis is not to make a dualistic good/bad judgment or to pursue individual responsibility but to understand these differences in perception and the political intent behind them. At present, no country officially objects to Okinawa belonging to Japan.

[Critical Apparatus; Concealing Materials; Ryukyu Disposition; Tributary System; Three Warfares; Historical Nihilism]

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² E. H. CARR, *What Is History?*, London 1961, p. 30.

Introduction

In recent years, the debate over the sovereignty of Ryukyu has once again become a focus of attention in China. I write “again” because before World War II (WWII), the Chinese Kuomintang government, as part of its counterstrategy against Japan, promoted the idea that Ryukyu/Okinawa had been “plundered” by imperialist Japan based on the assertion that it had been a dependency of China due to its tributary relationship with the Chinese dynasty. However, after WWII, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping of the Chinese Communist Party supported returning Okinawa to Japan, criticizing the U.S. for suppressing native people’s rights by taking control of an island that belonged to Japan to use as a military base. In 1961, Mao Zedong clearly stated that “*Okinawa is Japanese territory*,”³ which has been the official view of the Chinese Communist Party ever since. Nevertheless, in 2005, when tensions between Japan and China were rising due to Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s (LDP) visits the Yasukuni Shrine and other events, Xu Yong (徐勇), a professor at Peking University who specializes in the history of Sino-Japanese relations, published the “*Ryukyu Riddle Proposal*” (琉球謎案),⁴ which pointed out the lack of legal basis for the disposition of Ryukyu. Since then, other articles and opportunities to express opinions that differ from the official view have increased. In December 2009, a symposium by Xu Yong and other Chinese historical researchers was held in Beijing, where it was argued that “*neither the disposition of Ryukyu by the Meiji government (1879) nor the return of Okinawa to Japan by the U.S. (1972) had any basis in international law*”.

Okinawa is now at the forefront of the U.S.-China geopolitical/geoeconomic confrontation that has shaken the post-WWII liberal international order. Hence, history is being used as a crucial device to support the ideological nature of Chinese narratives about the Ryukyu Islands. Hybrid warfare, especially in the cognitive domain, is aimed at influencing global perceptions and behaviour patterns by using disinformation to cast doubt on Japan’s sovereignty over Okinawa. Examining this trend and its roots is a critical function of historical research today. This has the added benefit of alerting global readers to the true intentions of Chinese storytellers.

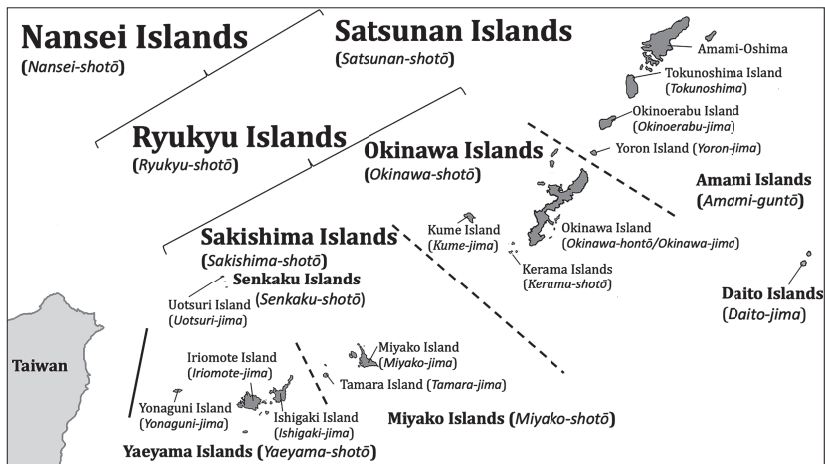
³ A. ISHII, 中国の琉球・沖縄政策 Chugoku no Ryukyu/Okinawa seisaku [China’s Ryukyu/Okinawa Policy], in: *Japan Border Review*, 1, 2010, p. 93.

⁴ Y. XU, 琉球謎案 Liu qiu mi an [Ryukyu Riddle Proposal], in: *World Affairs*, 15, 2005, pp. 62–63.

Geographic Scope of Okinawa/Ryukyu

The Ryukyu Kingdom was the first unified dynasty of Okinawa, founded in the early 15th century by Shō Hashi (尚巴志), who united the three kingdoms of Okinawa: Nanzan (南山) in the south, Chūzan (中山) in the central area, and Hokuzan (北山) in the north. The era of King Shō Shin (尚真), who reigned from 1477–1526 during the Second Shō dynasty, marked the largest expansion of the Ryukyu Kingdom, which was centred on present-day Okinawa Island and included the Amami Islands (now part of Kagoshima Prefecture) in the north and the Sakishima Islands (now Okinawa Prefecture), comprised of the Miyako Islands and Yaeyama Islands, in the south. The kingdom’s territory included the present-day Nansei Islands (see Map 1).

Map 1. Nansei Islands



(Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Japan).

In the Ryukyuan language, “Uchinaa” is what the people of Okinawa, who only generally shared the Japanese language and Kana (Japanese syllabaries) culture, called themselves in contrast to “Yamato” (大和) or “Hondo” (本土: mainland) or “Naichi” (内地: domestic land), all terms for mainland Japan. In the 14th century, “Ryukyu/Ryūkyū/Ruuchuu/Lew Chew” was the name given to the islands by the Ming dynasty in return for then-King Chūzan’s support of tribute paid to the Ming dynasty and

help countermeasures against Japanese pirates.⁵ In this paper, “Ryukyu/Ryukyuan” refers to the Kingdom of Ryukyu and related peoples, and “Okinawa/Okinawans” is basically used after Japan’s disposition of the Ryukyu Kingdom. It should be noted that other nomenclature exists.

Methodology of Verification through the Critical Apparatus of “Historical Narrative”

Hiroki Yamano proposes not a static understanding of “*history as narrative*” but a more dynamic meaning of “history” that allows for interpretation and analysis, that is, “*history as an apparatus*”.⁶ He points out the function of repressive and integrative history as an “*apparatus to image/creates national consciousness*,” which postmodern historians criticize. Along with this use of history as an ideological apparatus, he notes the active recording traces and research and inquiry aspects of history that Toru Kashima has also pointed out. Yamano argues that historical study should function as an “apparatus” to detect the ideology hidden in historical narratives and presented as objective “knowledge” or “truth” by the storyteller. In particular, he questions the meaning of history by pointing out, as Kashima does, that “*it has a double trend in the manifestation (the act of reconstructing historical narratives based on sources and information) and concealment (intentionally leaving out sources or information in the reconstruction of historical narratives) of facts*”.⁷

Using the history of Okinawa/Ryukyu as an example of the numerous disagreements between Japan and China, this paper examines the “history” created by the authoritarian regime to promote certain ideologies by contrasting the historical materials used by the storyteller with methods of empirical research with positivism. There are arguments against empirical historical research after the linguistic turn, but I do not go into those in depth here; this paper offers a critical examination of the historical sources. Specifically, by examining the references used by Chinese

5 S. HIRANO, 大清帝国と中華の混迷 *Daishinteikoku to chuka no konmei* [*The Great Qing Empire and Chinese Confusion*], Tokyo 2007, p. 287.

6 H. YAMANO, 分裂する「歴史」: 「歴史」の意味についての認識論的考察 *Bunretsu suru 'rekishi': 'rekishi' no imi ni tsuite no ninshikironteki kousatsu* [*Dividing 'History': an epistemological consideration of the meaning of 'history'*], in: *Kioi Ronso*, 5, 2017, p. 42.

7 T. KASHIMA, 可能性としての歴史 *Kanousei to shite no rekishi* [*History as Possibility*], Tokyo 2006, p. 43.

researchers, I determine whether there was anything intentionally left out of the historical narrative claimed as knowledge or “truth” in their papers (by concealing inconvenient information). Furthermore, to explore the tendencies of manifestation and concealment of historical perceptions and their inherent ideological nature, I evaluate them with Japanese researchers’ perceptions of these issues. This approach is suggested by Carr, who says, “*study the historian before you begin to study the facts*”. To understand the academic restrictions for Chinese researchers, I explore the background of their narratives by analysing the tendency of tightening control in line with the communist view of history and critical pressure with labelling “*historical nihilism*” by the CCP.

To quantitatively analyse the increase in the number of papers and articles by Chinese researchers, I examined the number of Ryukyu-related references on the website Aisixiang (愛思想) (www.aisixiang.com), which is an aggregator of scholarly writing on a range of topics from top Chinese experts.⁸ Of course, it is not possible to deny the possibility that there are many papers that are not listed on the website, but I use this site for quantitative analysis within a single platform. There are 89 articles related to Ryukyu/Okinawa on the website at the end of May 2023 (see Table 1). This showed that the number of such articles published on the website increased from one in 2009 to five in 2010, the year a Japanese Coast Guard patrol vessel under the administration of Naoto Kan (DPJ) cracked down on a Chinese fishing boat operating illegally in Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands (an instance of Japan exercising its jurisdictional rights in an area over which China also claims sovereignty). Then, in 2012, when the Yoshihiko Noda (DPJ) administration transferred ownership of the privately owned Senkaku Islands (Uotsurijima, Kubajima, Minami-Kojima, and Kita-Kojima) to the Japanese government, the number of articles increased to eight, and the following year to 10. The number of articles published in the journal remained a few per year until 2019 when the U.S. Trump administration increased the pressure on China to reach an economic deal and clearly stated its support for Taiwan. Then, the number of articles increased, reaching 14 in 2021, 24 in 2022, and 10 from January to May in 2023.

⁸ Interpret: China, Aisixiang, CSCI, https://interpret.csis.org/original_source/aisixiang/ (visited on October 14, 2023).

Table 1. Number of Articles on the “Aisixiang” Website and their Main Topic

Main category of an article	Historical/Legal status of Ryukyu/Okinawa		Doubts about Japanese sovereignty over Okinawa, and Ryukyu identity of Okinawans		Influence of Chinese culture in Ryukyu/Okinawa		Oppression of Okinawans by Japanese government and U.S. Forces		Total
	Ryukyu/Okinawa	Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu)	Doubts about Japan's sovereignty	Identity of Okinawans	Tribute system	others	Japanese government (including Japanese Army)	U.S. Forces (base issues)	
2009	1								1
2010		1	1	2			1		5
2011						1			1
2012	2		5			1			8
2013	1	3	1	3			1	1	10
2014									0
2015								1	1
2016		1	2		2				5
2017					1				1
2018									0
2019	2			1		1		1	5
2020			1		2			1	4
2021	3	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	14
2022	6	3	1	2	1	2	4	5	24
2023*			3	3	1	2		1	10
Total	15	9	15	13	11	8	7	11	89

* The number of articles in 2023 from January to May.

An examination of the contents of these 89 articles reveals that their main arguments can be summarized as follows (Note that many papers contain more than one topic and are counted by determining the topic they primarily claim to be about). (A) Doubts about Japan's sovereignty (15 articles): they suggest China rightfully has sovereignty over Ryukyu through historical “tribute relations” while Japan's sovereignty is doubtful. (B) Argument on the historical and legal status of Ryukyu/Okinawa (15 articles): Japan's “annexation” of Ryukyu was an illegal, imperialist act achieved by military force, and (C) Cultural influences from the Ming and Qing dynasties (total of 19 articles): the influence fostered an independence-oriented Ryukyuan identity (13 articles), which is seeking to improve relations with China. To verify the existence of a Ryukyuan identity reflecting Chinese cultural influences, as many Chinese articles point out, I apply the outcomes of a public opinion survey in Okinawa in a multi-disciplinary manner.

Outline of Ryukyu History up to the Disposition of Ryukyu

The Chūzan kingdom, which existed in central Ryukyu, began paying tribute to the Ming dynasty in 1372. In 1380, Hokusan and Nanzan were also incorporated into the tributary system, paying tribute to the Ming dynasty (there are documents showing tribute payments to Japan in the earlier period of Emperor Suiko, but they are not continuous⁹). After the annexation of Hokusan in 1416 and Nanzan in 1429 by King Shō Hashi, the Ryukyu Kingdom, the first unified dynasty in Okinawa, benefited enormously from trade, mainly from the Ming dynasty but also from other Southeast Asian countries. The rich state of the country was described as “Bankoku shinryō” (万国津梁), meaning a country that has prospered through trade, using ships as bridges to all nations. In 1458, Shō Taikyū (尚泰久), then king of the Ryukyu Kingdom, commissioned a Zen monk in Kyoto to make a bell, which is believed to have hung in front of the main hall of Shuri Castle, with “Bankoku Shinryō” inscribed on it.

In February 1609, Shimazu Iehisa (島津家久), lord of the Satsuma Domain, dispatched an army to Ryukyu. The purpose of the invasion by Shimazu was not to rule all of Ryukyu but to use it as an intermediary for trade between Ming China and Japan, which had been suspended since the mid-16th century, and to strengthen the Satsuma domain’s influence over Ryukyu.¹⁰ In response to this invasion, Ryukyu offered to pay tribute to Satsuma and did not request reinforcements from the Ming.¹¹ The Ryukyu Kingdom is often described as being “*merely a puppet kingdom of the Satsuma clan*” after the invasion, but there were dynamic and diverse rejections of Satsuma rule by King Shō Nei (尚寧), who refused to mediate the restoration of Ming-Japan trade and a subsequent compromise by King Shō Hō (尚豊) with the Satsuma establishing “*dual tributary relations with China and Japan*”.¹² As a result, while Ryukyu came under the control

⁹ A. OHATA, 沖縄の地位-その歴史的展望 2 Okinawa no chii-sono rekishiteki tenbou 2- [Legal and Political status of Okinawa 2], in: *The Waseda Law Review*, 50, 1 & 2, 1974, p. 54.

¹⁰ M. WATANABE, 琉球侵攻と日明関係 Ryukyu shinkou to nichimin kankei [Invasion of the Ryukyu Kingdom and Japanese and Ming Relations], in: *Oriental Research*, 68, 3, 2009, p. 95.

¹¹ S. ASATO – K. TAKARA – M. DANA et al., 沖縄県の歴史 *Okinawaken no rekishi* [History of Okinawa Prefecture], Tokyo 2010, pp. 130–133.

¹² K. TOMIYAMA, 近世初期における琉球王国の対薩摩外交: 尚寧・尚豊政権移行期をめぐって Kinsei shoki ni okeru Ryukyu oukoku no tai Satsuma gaikou [Diplomacy of the Kingdom of Ryukyu against Satsuma in the Early Modern Period: Concerning the Transitional Period of the Sho Nei and Sho Ho Regimes], in: *Bulletin of the Faculty of Education*, 54, 1999, pp. 53–66.

of the Satsuma clan, at the same time, it continued its “double tribute” relationship with Ming China.

In 1868, the Meiji government was established, replacing the Tokugawa shogunate system. In 1872, Kaoru Inoue, a vice minister of finance (Okura no Taifu, 大蔵大輔), submitted a proposal to the Cabinet for the disposition of the territory and people of the Ryukyu Kingdom to the Japanese government, which was approved. Inoue was the highest authority in the government, while the Iwakura Mission was traveling in the United States and Europe. As a result, Ryukyu King Shō Tai (尚泰) was appointed head of the Ryukyu Domain in 1872 by Emperor Meiji. This marked the first time a pseudo-monarchical relationship was established between the Japanese emperor and the king of Ryukyu.¹³ This event has also been described as “*the establishment of the Ryukyu domain*”. Because direct negotiations with foreign countries were prohibited and Shō Tai was treated the same as other feudal lords, he lost his position as monarch, and his family lineage was relegated to a Japanese noble family. However, this measure provoked opposition from the Ryukyuan clans. So, at the end of March 1879, the Meiji government dispatched more than 300 troops and 160 police officers to demand the surrender of Shuri Castle, a Ryukyuan royal palace. The Ryukyuan king was given a title and forced to reside in Tokyo, and the Ryukyu Domain was abolished replaced by the Okinawa Prefecture. In response to the disposition by the Meiji government, there was a debate in Qing China, led by Li Hongzhang (李鴻章), and the “*taking time to deal with the situation*” plan advocated by Li was adopted, but as a result, Qing dynasty was unable to take any effective steps.

In 1880, Nashiro Satonushioyakumoi Shunbō (名城里之子親雲上春傍, Chinese name: Rin Seikō 林世功), one of the teachers of Shō Ten (尚典), the last crown prince of the Ryukyu Kingdom, went to Fujian Province as a secret envoy. Feeling threatened by the Meiji government’s disposition of Ryukyu, he appealed to the Chinese about the plight of Ryukyu. However, when he learned about the Japanese government’s proposal to cede the Sakishima islands to the Qing government as a compromise, he committed suicide in China in protest. However, the Qing dynasty did not take any concrete action in response to his appeal. In Japan, the

¹³ T. NAMIHIRA, 『琉球処分』再考 -琉球藩王冊封と台湾出兵問題- ‘Ryukyu Shobun’ saikou -Ryuukyuhannou sakuhou to Taiwan shuppei mondai- [‘Ryukyu Disposal’ Reconsidered: The Ryukyu Domain King’s tributing and the Issue of Taiwan Expedition], in: *Policy Science and International Relations Review*, 11, 2009, p. 4.

disposition of Ryukyu in a narrow sense refers to the abolition of the Ryukyu Domain and the establishment of Okinawa Prefecture in 1879. But in a broader sense, the disposition of Ryukyu includes the entire series of events from the establishment of the Ryukyu Domain in 1872 to the rejection of the Meiji government’s proposal to cede the Sakishima islands to the Qing government in 1880.

Around 2004, the Japanese Diet began pointing out the harmful effects of excessive anti-Japanese patriotic education in Chinese history textbooks and the exhibits at the anti-Japanese war memorial museums in China. This prompted the Koizumi administration to propose a joint Japan-China history study group in April 2005, which the leaders of both countries agreed to launch during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to China in October 2006. Starting with the first plenary session on December 26–27, 2006, the study group held a joint meeting once a year, concluding with a fourth plenary session in December 2009. The joint study group’s report was initially released on January 31, 2010, with follow-up translations in both languages released in September 2010.

This is how Shinichi Kitaoka, who chaired the Japanese side of the meetings, recounted Okinawa’s history: Okinawa was originally a tributary to both the Japanese and Chinese dynasties, a position that could be called a “dual tributary.” Starting in 1609, it effectively fell under the rule of the Satsuma Domain but continued to pay tribute to the Ming and Qing because of its advantageous trade relations with the Chinese dynasty.¹⁴ However, there could be no vague dual affiliation in modern international relations, which emerged from the expansion of Western influence in Asia and Japan’s modernization through Westernization. So, Ryukyu was forced to choose one of three options: join Japan or China or become independent. Regarding independence, there were concerns about the possibility of being invaded and dominated by Western powers. Therefore, in October 1872, Ryukyu King Shō Tai was appointed head of the Ryukyu Domain and ranked as a member of the nobility to clarify that the Ryukyu Islands belonged to Japan. In the same month, diplomatic rights in Ryukyu were seized, and diplomatic affairs were transferred

¹⁴ 第一部 第一章 近代日中関係の発端 *Daichibu Daiichishou, Kindai nicchu kankei no hottan* [Part I, Chapter 1: The genesis of modern Sino-Japanese relations], Report of the Japan-China Joint History Research Committee (Japanese version), p. 14 (p. 193 of PDF), https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/pdfs/rekishu_kk_j-2.pdf (Visited on March 6, 2023).

to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁵ Subsequently, in March 1879, the Ryukyu Domain was abolished, and Okinawa Prefecture was established. Regarding the “Ryukyuan Disposition”, he also points out that *“there was no large-scale resistance involving the people or bloody repression”*¹⁶ and concludes that *“the Ryukyuan resisted, but it was mainly the ruling class, while for the people, the disposition of Ryukyu was clearly a change for the better after the pre-modern era of Satsuma rule”*.¹⁷

The following summarizes statements made by Xu Yong, the Chinese chairperson of the study group, and Mi Qing Yu of the Institute of Japanese Studies at Nankai University: Ryukyu was influenced by Chinese culture and had a strong relationship with successive Chinese dynasties, as evinced by the fact that Ryukyuan kings held tribute ceremonies and sent envoys 24 times during the Ming and Qing dynasties to prove their loyalty.¹⁸ The invasion by the Satsuma Domain made it a dual tributary state subservient to both China and Japan, but Ryukyu maintained its independent status vis-à-vis Japan until 1879 when it was annexed by Japan.¹⁹ And until the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, the Qing dynasty did not recognize the disposition of Ryukyu.²⁰ Noting the long and deep relationship between the Ryukyu Kingdom and Chinese dynasties, the Chinese insisted the annexation by Japan was illegal.

Reconstruction of Historical Narratives by Chinese Scholars and their Critical Examination

The recent doubts Chinese scholars have expressed about Japan’s sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands began when Xu Yong, in his article “琉球謎案” [“Ryukyu Riddle Proposal”] in the August 2005 issue of the journal “World Affairs,” asserted that the Ryukyu Kingdom became Japan’s Okinawa Prefecture as a result of Japanese militarist aggression and that neither the disposition of the Ryukyu Islands nor Japan’s postwar recovery of them from the United States had an international legal basis. This section will examine several articles by Chinese scholars on the “disposition of Ryukyu” and China’s sovereignty over Okinawa since

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15 (p. 194 of PDF).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17 (p. 195 of PDF), note 32.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 17 (p. 195 of PDF).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 17 (p. 239 of PDF).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Report of the Japan-China Joint History Research Committee* (Chinese version), p. 19 (p. 241 of PDF).

2005, focusing on their references, standards for value judgments, and relationship to previous studies to explore the trends of manifestation and concealment of historical facts and their inherent ideological nature. By comparing and verifying the content of articles by Japanese researchers focusing on similar themes, the manifestation and concealment of historical cognition will become clear, and the function of a “critical apparatus” of history will be verified.

A good place to critically examine these arguments is the article “*International Status of the Ryukyus as Seen in the Records of the Japanese Expedition: A Discussion of the Relationship between the Ryukyus, Japan and China (2014)*”²¹ written by Xin Bin and Liu Xiaohu. Their research included an evaluation of the Japanese translation of “*Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*”,²² a report on the visit to Japan and Ryukyu by the U.S. Navy fleet led by Commodore Perry, who visited Ryukyu and Japan in 1853 and 1854 and collected extensive information on the political, economic, and social conditions of that time. My use of this paper is not intended to be an individual criticism of Xin and Liu but rather to provide an objective historical account of the Perry fleet’s expedition to Japan. More researchers can verify historical materials written in English and can overcome the language barrier because Chinese scholars tend to use historical material written in Chinese, and Japanese tend to use the material in Japanese.

Critical Analysis of “International Status of the Ryukyus as Seen in the Records of the Japanese Expedition (2014)”

Xin and Liu have identified the diary of Matthew Calbraith Perry as a valuable historical document for the study of the Ryukyu Kingdom in the latter half of the 19th century. Perry led the U.S. fleet to Shanghai, Ryukyu, Edo, and other cities, tasked with negotiating and concluding the Convention of Kanagawa between Japan and the United States (signed on March 31, 1854), and the Convention between the Lew Chew

²¹ B. XIN – X. LIU, 《日本远征记》所见琉球的国际地位-兼论琉球与日本、中国之关系-‘Ribenyuanzhengji’ Suojian Liuqiu di guojidiwei -jian lun Linqiu yu Riben, Zhongguo zhi guanxi [International Status of the Ryukyus as Seen in the Records of the Japanese Expedition: A Discussion of the Relationship between the Ryukyus, Japan and China], in: Haidai Japan Studies, Ocean University of China Press, November 2014, <https://www.aisixiang.com/data/134525.html> (visited on December 12, 2022).

²² M. C. PERRY – F. L. HAWKS, *Narrative of the expedition of an American squadron to the China seas and Japan*, Washington 1856.

Islands and the United States (signed on July 11, 1854). They analyse the relationship between Qing China and Ryukyu and between Ryukyu and Japan by examining Perry and other foreigners' perception of Ryukyu's sovereignty in his expeditionary journal. For this purpose, they refer mainly to the “ペリー艦隊日本遠征記” [“Chronicle of the Perry Fleet's Expedition to Japan”], which was translated into Japanese by Office Miyazaki Inc. in 2009 and indicate the page numbers in the original document as well. A similar article appeared in the “Journal of East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies” (2015).²³

Although it was always debated whether the Ryukyu Islands belonged to the Satsuma Domain of Japan or the Qing dynasty of China, Xin, and Liu use observations and records from Perry's expedition to argue that the Ryukyu Islands were a “feudal domain country” (藩属国) in the tribute system of the Ming and Qing dynasties, and because they were dependent on maritime trade with China, China had “sovereignty” over the islands. Their version of history is that the Ryukyu Kingdom struggled to maintain close relations with China through tributary relationships and maintained its identity and values through the transmission and acceptance of Chinese culture, while the Japanese Satsuma Domain effectively controlled Ryukyu by exercising military power and influence over the governing structure. Thus, they conclude that the “Qing dynasty influence was a recognition of culture and values, while the rule by the Satsuma Domain was an invalid and false recognition by the outside world”. In their view, the language, customs, laws, dress, morals, ethics, and trade relations of the Ryukyu Kingdom attest to its deep relationship with China. In addition, they insist that even if the Ryukyu Islands were under the internal rule of the Satsuma Domain at the time, there was no relationship equivalent to a “double tribute relationship” in Western international relations, which would preclude Perry recognizing one. From these analyses, they conclude that Perry perceived Ryukyu's identity as essentially identical to China's, and “sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands belonged to China”.

They write: “There is no doubt that the Ryukyu Islands have always maintained a firm tribute to China. Furthermore, the language, customs, laws, dress, morals, ethics, and trade transactions of the Ryukyu Islands all speak of their relationship

²³ B. XIN – X. LIU, ペリー艦隊の対中・日・琉関係の認識 Peri kantai no tai Chu Nichi Ryu kankei no ninshiki [The understandings of Perry's squadron to China-Japan-Ryukyu relationships], in: *Journal of East Asian Cultural Interaction Studies*, 8, 2015, pp. 359–373.

with China,” citing page 175 of the “*Narrative of the Expedition*”, even though page 175 in the original document contains no such description. Instead, on page 151 of the original, there is a passage that corresponds to their description, which reads: “*It is a question yet discussed to what power Lew Chew belongs. By some, it is said to be a dependency of the Prince of Satzuma, of Japan; others suppose it to belong to China. The probabilities, however, are all on the side of the dependence, more or less absolute, of Lew Chew on Japan, and probably, also, of some qualified subordination to China, as they undoubt(-)edly send tribute to that country. Language, customs, laws, dress, virtues, vices, and com(-)mercial intercourse, all are corroborative of such an opinion. But of this more will be said hereafter.*”²⁴

Looking at this statement, it is hard to conclude that the language, customs, laws, dress, morals, ethics, and trade transactions of the Ryukyu Islands “*all speak of a relationship with China*”. Moreover, on page 222 of the original, Dr. Bettelheim, an English missionary who spent several years in the Ryukyu Islands, provides five reasons why it is reasonable to conclude that the Ryukyu Islands, which appear to be somewhat independent, is, in reality, an inseparable part of Japan, despite their paying tribute to China. His reasons: (1) There are Satsuma barracks in Naha (*Napha* in the original text); (2) Ryukyu’s trade is almost exclusively with Japan (30 to 40 junks in the 400 to 500 tonnage class come and go between the islands and Japan annually, while junk is sent to China only once a year); (3) Many Japanese reside in Naha, where there are many cases of intermarriage with Ryukyuans, but no Chinese to be found; (4) At least two Satsuma representatives were present whenever Dr. Bettelheim met with Ryukyuan officials. And the fifth point, verbatim: “*5. The language, dress, customs, virtues, and vices of Lew Chew correspond to those of Japan, thus establishing a prima facie relationship.*”²⁵

These reasons are not quoted in Xin and Liu’s paper. The original document also states, “*Lew Chew did not appear to be Chinese, and the common language of the country is not that of the celestial empire, though Chinese is understood and spoken by some of the Lew Chewans who are educated.*”²⁶ Chinese is said to be understood only by some of the ruling class. “*They are, however, very proud of it, and say it is a ‘language’ of their own; though as far as could be ascertained, the signs used do not at all express the sounds of the spoken Lew Chew*

²⁴ PERRY – HAWKS, p. 151.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222–223.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

language, which is, undoubtedly, a dialect of Japanese. Neither is this writing, as has been said, identical with the Japanese Katakana,²⁷ though the document notes that Japanese was spoken in Ryukyu and Katakana was used for its notation. This description is also not mentioned in Xin and Liu's paper, as it does not fit their description of Chinese influence on the Ryukyus having been concealed and "covered up (not spoken)." Of course, it is entirely possible that some of the descriptions in "Narrative of the Expedition" contain misunderstandings and incorrect information. But my purpose here is to detect information that is being concealed rather than to determine whether the original information was correct or incorrect.

Xin and Liu also find evidence for absolute Chinese control and limited Japanese control over the Ryukyus in a quote from the Shogunate official who negotiated with Perry, who asserted that "*Lew Chew was a distant dependency over which the crown [of Japan] had limited control*".²⁸

A critical point to understand here is that the Ryukyu Islands needed to be a separate entity to conclude a treaty of amity with Perry, who not only had an official order to establish supply bases for coal and water in Japan, Ogasawara, and Ryukyu for whaling ships, a major American industry at that time but also had a strategic imperative to see China as a new market. Furthermore, it is important to note that Perry and other U.S. military officers and bureaucrats of the time were aware of the rivalry between the United States, a latecomer to imperialism, and the United Kingdom, which was expanding its influence over the Qing dynasty.²⁹ In other words, Xin and Liu's paper cites only the parts of "Narrative of the Expedition" that contribute to their argument for China's sovereignty over the islands while not providing sufficient historical criticism of the account of Perry's expedition (by examining the authors' motivations and omissions) or analysing the background and strategic objectives of Perry's expedition.

More notably, in their Japanese paper "ペリー艦隊の対中・日・琉関係の認識" ["Perceptions of the Perry Fleet's Perceptions of Chinese, Japanese, and Ryukyu Relations"] (2015), they stated that the Ryukyus, while enduring cruel exploitation and domination by Satsuma, main-

²⁷ Ibid., p. 224.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 222.

²⁹ T. OMAGARI, 『明白な宿命』とペリー提督の恫喝外交 'Meihaku na shukumei' to Perry teitoku no doukatsu gaikou ['Obvious Fate' and Commodore Perry's intimidation diplomacy: The Ogasawara Islands and the opening of Japan], in: *International Human Studies*, 15, 2009, pp.14–16.

tained trade relations with China and gained a unique sense of belonging through the acceptance and inheritance of Chinese culture. According to Xin and Liu, to keep its sense of belonging and cultural identity, the Ryukyu Kingdom had to present the false appearance of being an “independent nation,”³⁰ quoted description of Perry fleet’s interpreter Williams, “I consider Lew Chew to be a dependency of Satsuma, which completely conquered the island in 1609. Satsuma monopolized Lew Chew’s trade and controlled its internal and foreign affairs. To maintain a profitable trade and to allow the islanders to maintain the appearance of an independent state in name only, they allow the dispatch of tribute ships to Fuhchau (Fuchou).” However, Williams’ original description of Perry’s Japanese expedition includes this: “I look upon Lew Chew as a dependency of Satsuma (rather than subject to Japan) by whose prince it was conquered entirely in the 17th century, 1609. That principality monopolizes the trade and manages the relations and policy of the island, allow(-)ing the voyage of homage to Fuhchau every year to keep up a profitable trade and a shadow of independence among the natives.”³¹

Throughout the original text, there is no description or analysis that clearly supports “cruel exploitation and domination by Satsuma.” The reality is that the Satsuma Domain established a control office (在番奉行, *Zaiban bugyō*, resident magistrate) in Ryukyu to interfere in Ryukyu’s domestic politics, which had no authority after 1624³² and also took away trade rights to control Ryukyu effectively. So, while Ryukyu maintained the posture of a nominally independent state, it was a puppet kingdom. Indeed, many Japanese researchers have pointed out that Ryukyu was a puppet kingdom, although it managed to maintain autonomy as a nominally independent country.

Verification of Chinese Researchers’ Claims of Sovereignty over Ryukyu

Here, I examine the claims of Chinese scholars regarding (A) perceptions of the “tributary system”, (B) perceptions of “imperialistic” Japanese annexation and oppression of the Ryukyu Islands by force, (C) Ryukyuan identity, as defined in Xin and Liu’s discussion, with comparative analysis of their relationship to previous research.

³⁰ XIN – LIU, *The understandings of Perry’s squadron*, p. 372.

³¹ A Journal of the Perry Expedition to Japan, p. 26.

³² X. WANG, 琉球: 战争记忆, 社会运动与历史解释, Liuqiu: zhanzheng jiyi, shehui yundong, yu lishijieshi, [Ryukyu: War Memory, Social Movements, and Historical Interpretation], in: *Kaifang Shidai*, 3, 2009, p. 23.

China's Assertion of Sovereignty over Ryukyu through the "Tributary System"

The first argument for China's sovereignty over Ryukyu/Okinawa is based on the ancient tributary system regarding the modern "suzerain/vassal state" relationship. This study of the suzerain/vassal state relationship between China and the Ryukyu Kingdom has been a central issue in the study of China-Ryukyu relations in China to date.³³

The Kingdom of Ryukyu, occupied by the Satsuma Domain in 1609, was in a "dual tribute" status, sending tribute to the Satsuma Domain while continuing tributary relations with China until its incorporation into Japan in 1879. However, recent Chinese researchers place the cultural and economic influence of the tributary system at the centre of their research on China-Ryukyu relations and use it to prove China's sovereignty over Ryukyu/Okinawa. For example, Li Jinming (李金明) points out that in the last 500 years of tributary relations with the Ming and Qing dynasties, Chinese rulers did not interfere in the internal affairs of Ryukyu or colonize Ryukyu but accelerated the civilization of the Ryukyuan by dispatching envoys and accepting Ryukyuan students. In terms of cultural heritage, he concludes that the Ryukyu belonged to the Confucian culture of China rather than Japan.³⁴ Furthermore, Rear Admiral Luo Yuan (羅援) of the World Military Studies Department of the Academy of Military Science, known for his hard-line stances,³⁵ asserts that "until the Japanese occupation in 1879, Ryukyu was a tributary state and under direct Chinese control".³⁶

Various previous studies of the tributary system have looked at aspects such as procedure and ceremony, gifts for the system, its impact on the country paying tribute, and meaning for Chinese dynasties. Generally, there is an acknowledgment that the system is a "kind of world order or

³³ See XIE, *Forty-Year Overview of the China-Ryukyu relations Research History*.

³⁴ J. LI, 明清时期中国文化在琉球的传播, *Ming Qing shiqi zhongguo wenhua zai Liuqiu di chuanbo*, [The Transmission of Chinese Culture in Ryukyu during the Ming and Qing Dynasties], Fujian Tribune-Humanities and Social Sciences Edition 2013, p. 91.

³⁵ *Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA's 'Hawkish Faction'*, Jamestown Foundation, July 25, 2013, and others point to Luo as a "propagandist." Although it is difficult to position this People's Liberation Army major general as a historical researcher, his opinions are widely quoted in the Chinese media and exercise a certain amount of influence, so the discourse he espouses is also cited here.

³⁶ Y. LUO, People's Daily Online, September 12, 2012, <http://news.cntv.cn/2012/09/12/ARTI1347461280322560.shtml> (visited on February 9, 2023).

international order in the pre-modern period formed mainly in China”.³⁷ One analysis explains that “originally it was a domestic order of the Chinese dynasties, with the tributary system formed between the Chinese dynasties and neighboring states appearing as an extension of this Chinese domestic order”,³⁸ while Sun Wei (孫薇) observes that “rather than appearing as an extension of the domestic order, it is itself an integral part of the Chinese order”.³⁹ Sun defines the arrangement as a “system of appointments to one’s own vassal depending on the Son of Heaven consciousness, a political and spiritual doctrine of the ruler as having a mandate from heaven to justify their rule in Confucian thought”.⁴⁰ The significance of the system was that the gift of a family name to the king of a peripheral or neighbouring country (such as Korea, Annam, or Ryukyu) made him a member of the family of the king of the Chinese dynasty, permitting and approving his right to rule his country.⁴¹ However, these previous studies did not examine whether the tributary system of the Ming and Qing dynasties provides a basis for Chinese sovereignty (in the modern sense) over the Ryukyu Islands.

The mainstream perception of a formal tributary relationship centred on trade and cultural exchanges was revised by Chinese bureaucrats influenced by the modern perception of international relations in the late Qing Dynasty when territorial encroachment by Western powers was progressing. For example, Mogi points out that since the 1880s, the Qing dynasty has strengthened its involvement in the tributary countries by establishing borders in the modern sense and substantial control. He notes the reorganization and restructuring of the tributary relationship in the modern era and returns to the original meaning of the system, concluding that “*the traditional order in East Asia is a ‘tradition’ redefined in modern times*”.⁴² This echoes the opinion of Kawashima, who

³⁷ See S. KINJO, 冊封体制と奄美, Sakuhou taisei to Amami, [Tributary system and Amami], in: *The Journal of the History of the University of the Ryukyus*, 2015, p. 12.

³⁸ S. NISHIJIMA, 中国古代国家と東アジア, *Chugoku kodai kokka to Higashi Ajia*, [Ancient Chinese States and East Asia], Tokyo 1983.

³⁹ W. SUN, 冊封・朝貢について: 中琉の冊封・朝貢関係を中心に, Sakuhou chokou ni tsuite: Chu Ryu no sakuhou chokou kankei wo chushin ni, [About tributary system: Focusing on China Ryukyu Tributary Relationships], in: *Okinawa Bunka Kenkyu*, 17, 1991, p. 5.

⁴⁰ SUN, *About tributary system*, p. 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴² T. MOGI, 伝統的秩序をどう踏まえるか: 東アジア新秩序の構想をめぐって, Dentou-tekki chitsujo wo dou fumaeru ka, [How to Follow the Traditional Order: On the Idea of a New East Asian Order], in: *International Affairs*, 623, July/August 2013, p. 48.

characterizes Chinese scholars' understanding of the system as "*the result of the adjustment of the tributary system at the end of the Qing Dynasty, articulated as an afterimage*".⁴³

In other words, recent Chinese scholars' understanding of the tributary relationship is based on modern international relations originating in the West, completely ignoring previous studies by Chinese scholars who pointed out the vague and limited nature of the original tributary relationship in terms of traditional trade and cultural relations. For example, Zhuang Guotu (庄国土) argues that the "China-centred system" of the Ming and Qing dynasties based on the tributary system was an expansion of a subjective view of China based on wishful thinking by the Chinese dynasties and in reality, not an objective entity recognized by other countries. It was not, in other words, a politically binding relationship (in the modern sense).⁴⁴ He points out that the tributary states continued the tribute arrangement for economic reasons without ever approving the master-vassal relationship that would make the Chinese dynasty a "superior state," explaining that this system was, in reality, "*a means to satisfy the pride of the Chinese rulers within Chinese domestic literature*".⁴⁵ He concludes that China could not have gained political influence over neighbouring countries because the foreign policy of the Ming and Qing dynasties was based on non-interference and non-involvement. Wang points out that China's political tradition holds a worldview that goes beyond the realm of "nation-state sovereignty" and does not equate sovereignty with traditional tribute relations. For example, he notes that unlike the Satsuma Domain, which established a "*Zaiban bugyō*" after the invasion of Ryukyu, the Chinese dynasties rarely intervened in Ryukyu's internal affairs despite a 500-year suzerainty relationship. And Chiang Kai-shek did not directly intervene in Ryukyuan affairs after WWII, which may also reflect a traditional worldview.⁴⁶

While pointing out the differences between traditional and modern values and emphasizing the existence of a traditional international relations system with China at its centre, it may be too convenient to

⁴³ M. KAWASHIMA – R. HATTORI (eds.), 東アジア国際関係史, *Higashi Ajia kokusaikankei shi*, [History of East Asian International Relations], Nagoya 2007, p. 24.

⁴⁴ G. ZHUANG, 略論朝貢制度的虛幻, Luelun chogong zhidudi xuhuan, [A Brief Discussion on the Illusion of the Dynasty Tribute System], in: *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 3, 2005, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ WANG, *Ryukyu: War Memory, Social Movements, and Historical Interpretation*, p. 21.

bring up the modern understanding of “state sovereignty” in interpreting the traditional pre-modern tributary system. However, it should be noted that previous studies by Japanese researchers, in line with their own political correctness, have ascribed an “anti-Japanese” motivation to Ryukyuan royalty who opposed the disposition of Ryukyu. They view the actions of Ryukyuan royalty who went to the Qing Dynasty to oppose the disposition of Ryukyu as “*protecting their own status and property*”⁴⁷ instead of their royalty.

Criticism of the “Annexation” of Ryukyu by Imperialist Japan and Denial of Japanese Sovereignty over Ryukyu/Okinawa

The second argument criticizes the “armed invasion” of Ryukyu by the Satsuma Domain, characterizes the period of Satsuma military rule as “oppression”, and casts doubt on the legality of the subsequent establishment of Japanese sovereignty over the Ryukyu by the Meiji government through “disposition”. For example, Zhang Haipeng (張海鵬) and Li Guoqiang (李國強) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences published a paper on May 7, 2013, pointing out that the Ryukyu Kingdom was an independent state attached to China as a tributary state during the Ming and Qing dynasties, whose sovereignty became a point of conflict between Japan and China after imperialist Japan “swallowed” it by force. They say that the defeated Qing government was not capable of raising the Ryukyu issue when signing the Treaty of Maguan (Japanese name: Treaty of Shimonoseki) after the Sino-Japanese War, and lost not only Ryukyu but Taiwan, Taiwan’s attached islands and the Penghu Islands. However, when Japan agreed to the Cairo Declaration, which set the terms for Japan’s surrender and the return of Manchuria, Taiwan, and the Penghu Islands to the Republic of China and established freedom and independence for Korea, and the subsequent Potsdam Declaration, which stipulated that Japanese sovereignty was limited to Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and various smaller islands designated by the Allied Forces, it gave up claims of sovereignty over Taiwan, Taiwan’s attached islands and the Penghu Islands, except for Ryukyu. That is why the authors

⁴⁷ C. LIM, 琉球復国運動の反日的性格-琉球復国誓願書を中心に, Ryukyu fukkou dou no hannichiteki seikaku, [The Anti-Japanese Character of the Ryukyu Restoration Movement: Focusing on the Ryukyu Restoration Pledge], in: *Bulletin of the Okinawa Association of Law and Politics*, 15, 2008, p. 31.

claim, “*it is time to reopen the historically unresolved question of sovereignty over the Ryukyu*”.⁴⁸

Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned this position on the following day. In response, Hua Chunying, then-deputy press secretary of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated at a regular press conference on August 9 that “*the article was written in the capacity of an individual researcher*” and there was “*no change in the Chinese government’s position*” regarding Japan’s sovereignty over Okinawa, implying that Chinese government had no intention of claiming undetermined ownership of Okinawa, as it had in the past. However, she added: “*The reason why the issue of the Ryukyu Islands, which has been a long-term concern of the academic community, has once again become prominent is that the Japanese side is constantly taking provocative actions on the Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands in Japanese) issue and violating the sovereignty of Chinese territory. The paper reflects the interest and research of the Chinese people and academia in the Diaoyu Islands and related historical issues.*”⁴⁹ This made it clear that the growing debate over ownership of the Ryukyu Islands is directly linked to China’s challenge to Japanese sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands. In addition, Major General Jin Yinan (金一南), a professor of the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the People’s Liberation Army National Defense University, argues that the Diaoyu Islands issue should be discussed in the larger context of the unsettled sovereignty of the Ryukyu Islands (and how Japan acquired them).⁵⁰

In this paper, I have no intention of affirming or praising the past actions of countries that invaded other countries in pursuit of imperialist expansionism and colonization. However, in reconstructing past historical events, using current values and analytical standards to understand and judge those events is not valid. For example, starting in 1687, the Great Qing Empire attacked the Dzungar Khanate (Kingdom), located around the present-day Junggar Basin, and annexed it in 1759.⁵¹ This is

⁴⁸ H. ZHANG – G. LI, “《马关条约》与钓鱼岛问题, *Maguan tiaoyue yu Diaoyudao wenti*, [*The Treaty of Shimonoseki and the Diaoyu Islands*], People’s Daily, May 8, 2013, <https://news.sina.cn/sa/2013-05-08/detail-ikmyaawa4896485.d.html> (visited on December 6, 2022).

⁴⁹ CRI Online, August 9, 2013, <https://japanese.cri.cn/881/2013/05/09/162s208256.htm> (Visited on March 17, 2023).

⁵⁰ Y. JIN, 琉球群岛为中国属地, *Liuqiu Gundao wei Zhongguo Shudi*, [*Ryukyu Islands as a Chinese possession*], China News Network, July 12, 2012, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/mil/2012/07-12/4029207.shtml> (visited on March 17, 2023).

⁵¹ R. KOBAYASHI, Tibet in the Era of the 1911 Revolution, in: *The Journal of Contemporary China Studies*, 3, 1, 2017, p. 94.

almost the same time the Satsuma Domain occupied the Ryukyu Kingdom after it invaded in 1609. Zhao Erfeng (趙爾豐), Viceroy of Sichuan, invaded Tibet in 1905 after the “Ryukyu Disposal” and entered Lhasa in 1910, defeating the lords of the eastern Kham region. However, he was killed by revolutionary forces upon his return to Chengdu following the Xinhai Revolution in 1911. In other words, the historical events of the past should be told with an awareness of the norms of the time, not as something to be judged, understood, and narrated using current-day values and standards.

Interestingly, before the publication of Zhang and Li’s paper, Wang had pointed out that “*in the nationalistic era (after the establishment of modern international law), a region was either part of another political entity or independent with sovereignty, since no pattern could exist that was neither*”, which he insists “*meant the collapse of the traditional pre-modern pattern of statehood*”. Wang also explains that the Japanese colonization of the Ryukyu and the first attack on Taiwan in 1874 heralded a major change in the rules of the previous regional order in Asia. According to him, the international law of early Europe was, in fact, the international law of imperialism, which Japan tried to apply to join the ranks of European imperialism, and “*in the new era, the rationale and justification for one polity to attack and occupy and another was based on entirely new rules, the old rules no longer applied*”.⁵²

In Japan, many researchers have evaluated the Ryukyu Kingdom’s disposition over the past century. The first view is that it was a process of national unification at the time of the formation of the modern state.⁵³ The second view is that it was part of national unification but that the authoritarian and nationalistic aspects which were part of the unification process should also be emphasized.⁵⁴ The third view is that it was an invasive annexation rather than a national unification.⁵⁵ There are further

⁵² X. WANG, 琉球と区域秩序の两次巨変, *Liuqiu yu quyuzhixu di liangci jubian*, [The Ryukyus and the two great changes in the regional order], Aisixiang, December 21, 2009, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/31234.html> (visited on March 10, 2023).

⁵³ Fuyu, Iha (伊波普猷) viewed the disposition of Ryukyu as liberation and pointed out that “the Ryukyu Kingdom was destroyed, but the Ryukyuan were restored by entering Japan” (M. GABE, 明治国家と沖縄, *Meiji kokka to Okinawa*, [Meiji State and Okinawa], Tokyo 1979).

⁵⁴ M. KINJO, 琉球処分論, *Ryukyu shobunron*, [Theory of Ryukyu Disposition], in: *Okinawa Times*, 1978, p. 32.

⁵⁵ K. INOUE, 琉球処分とその後, *Ryukyu shobun to sonogo*, [Ryukyu Disposition and Aftermath], in: K. NIISATO (ed.), *Okinawa Bunka Ronso 1 Rekishi Hen*, Heibonsha 1972, p. 430. In addition, various doubts have been raised about the basis for claiming

variations among these views, so different assessments of the “disposition of the Ryukyus” coexist in Japan. Another viewpoint that has been gaining support sees the disposition of Ryukyu not as a domestic issue or in terms of a bilateral relationship between Japan and the Qing dynasty but rather from the perspective of the collapse of the old kingdom system and the transition to modernity in Asia.⁵⁶ Other disputes that could be viewed from this perspective include the Meiji and Qing governments confronting each other over Korea and the Qing government and France arguing over Annam (present-day Vietnam), which were all part of the transition to modernity.

It should be noted further that in 1637, the Ryukyu Dynasty, which had been placed under the rule of the Satsuma Domain and heavily taxed by the Satsuma, imposed a heavy capitation tax on the inhabitants of Miyako Island and other islands. Before the 14th century, Miyako Island and the Yaeyama Islands formed an independent cultural sphere that was not subordinate to any dynasty. Then, in 1522, due to the misconduct of Nakaya Kanamori (仲屋金盛), the legitimate son of Nakasone Sorabi (仲宗根空広), who was the chief Tuimiya (豊見親) of Miyako, control of Miyako was transferred to the Kingdom of Ryukyu.⁵⁷ The people of Miyako suffered heavily under the so-called “triple tax” (from the Miyako, Ryukyu, and Satsuma authorities). At the same time, it is important to note that Nakasone Tuimiya of Miyako made great achievements in pacifying the rebellion of the Yaeyama chief Oyakeakahachi, which occurred on Ishigaki Island in 1500 and the rebellion of Untora (鬼虎) on Yonaguni Island (some say in 1522, though there is no basis for that date⁵⁸). These historical archival studies clearly show that the Ryukyu

that the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands) were Chinese territory from the Ming Dynasty in “Senkaku Islands: Historical Clarification of the Diaoyu Islands” by Kiyoshi Inoue, who received an honorary doctorate from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. M. SHIMOJO, *Refuting Kiyoshi Inoue’s ‘Senkaku Islands: Historical Clarification of the Diaoyu Islands’*, Column/Research Report, JIIA, 2021, <https://www.jiia.or.jp/JIC/20210827-shimojo-report/> (visited on May 5, 2023).

⁵⁶ K. KURAKICHI, *Issues in the Kingdom of Ryukyu*, Hirugisha 1989, pp. 388–390; M. TINELLO, The ‘Disposal of Ryukyu’ from an International Perspective, in: *Waseda RILAS Journal*, 9, 2021, pp. 291–293.

⁵⁷ S. NAKASONE, 薩摩侵攻400年先島から考える, *Satsuma shinko 400nen sakishima kara kangaeru*, [400 years after the Satsuma invasion: thinking it from Sakishima], in: *Bulletin of the Miyakojima City Museum*, 14, 2010, p. 19.

⁵⁸ K. SHIMOJI, Nakasone Tuimiya and Untora: On the chronology of the Yonaguni attack, in: *Bulletin of the Miyakojima City Museum*, 14, 2010, p. 1.

Kingdom itself was invasive and “*expanded its territory by military force*”. This may also be evidence that military force occupation of other people’s lands was a common method of solving problems and expanding power at the time. Furthermore, simply asserting that “*Ryukyu was oppressed by Japan*” is an oversimplification that does not take into consideration the diversity of Ryukyu.

Assertion of the Existence of a Ryukyuan Identity Reflecting Chinese Cultural Influences

The third argument points out the Chinese cultural influence in the Ryukyu Kingdom, which had a tributary and seigniorial relationship with China and viewed the “imperialization” by the Meiji government and control exerted by the Japanese government through education and culture as destroying opportunities for the revival and expression of native Ryukyuan identity, which in turn raises doubts about the return of Okinawa to Japan and Japan’s sovereignty over it. This argument also points to the “discrimination” and “oppression” of Okinawa residents by the Japanese military during WWII and by the U.S. military rule during its occupation after the war, as well as by the Japanese government since the return of Okinawa to Japan in 1972.

For example, in 2012, Jin noted that “*Ryukyu was both an independent country and a vassal state of the Chinese dynasty and had very close relations with China. Although Japan occupied it by force, Ryukyu’s sovereignty still rests with China*”.⁵⁹ Luo also argued that there was no legal basis for the decision made in 1972 by the United States, which directly governed Ryukyu after WWII, to return Ryukyu to Japan.⁶⁰ The most extreme claim would be that of Wu Zhe (吳啟訥).⁶¹ He sees the Ryukyu Islands as a victim of U.S. national strategy, asserting that the people of the Ryukyu Islands still harbor affection for China on a psychological and cultural level, but their affection has been deeply suppressed by the “democratic and liberal” discourse constructed by the United States and Japan. In other

⁵⁹ See Y. JIN, *Ryukyu Islands as a Chinese possession*.

⁶⁰ Y. LUO, *People’s Daily Online*, 2012.

⁶¹ Wu Zhe, Associate Research Fellow, Institute of Modern History, CUHK, Taiwan, and Adjunct Associate Professor of History, National Taiwan University, appeared on a Taiwanese TV program to explain the Uyghur issue on January 17, 2020, but was criticized for being too biased toward the official view of the Chinese Communist Party, and the TV station re-broadcast the program with significant modifications, <https://www.storm.mg/article/2234333> (visited on May 2, 2023).

words, since their colonization by Japan in 1879, the Ryukyuan have been deprived of their spiritual subjectivity. Wu explains that this spiritual colonization became deeply rooted in people's minds over generations, making it difficult to break through the influence of the Japanese educational system, ideology, and religion.

Wu believes that a “*strong external force*” is needed to break through the elements that impede the expression of Ryukyuan consciousness and argues that only if Chinese anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism succeed can the Ryukyu Islands achieve decolonization and regain the sovereignty of an independent nation.⁶² His theory is based on the logic that Japan has suppressed the spiritual subjectivity of the Okinawans and that intervention by an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial China (a strong external force) is necessary to break it. However, the theory, which assumes that Okinawan sentiment toward China is positive, is rejected by the following public opinion survey (see Table 2). The mean of Tanabe's seven-point scale of favorability toward the Liberal Democratic Party, Prime Minister Abe, Okinawa Governor Onaga (at the time of the survey), citizens' groups opposed to the U.S. military bases, Japan, the U.S., and China ranges from +3 for most favourable to -3 for least favourable. According to the average and standard deviation (i.e., the smaller the standard deviation, the smaller the difference in opinion), Okinawans' favourable perception of Japan is 2,361, which is lower than the overall Japanese average of 2,571, but both are close to +3. In Japan (0,985) and Okinawa (0,7363), favourability toward the U.S. is also not negative. On the other hand, favourability toward China is negative in Japan (-1,480) and Okinawa (-1,198).

Of course, it is undeniable that the Japanese government's treatment of the Okinawan people to date has not sufficiently considered their thoughts and wishes. However, to imagine that anti-U.S. or anti-Japanese government sentiment automatically means a pro-China sentiment or that relying on China will lead to a movement for independence is to overestimate the reality and power of the Chinese narrative and China's soft power, and to ignore the true feelings of the Okinawans.

⁶² Z. WU, 喚醒琉球主体意识 有待中国复兴, *Huanxing Liuqiu zhuti yishi you dai Zhongguo fuxing*, [The awakening of Ryukyuan actor's consciousness awaits China's revival], Yuanwang 遠望雜誌, April-June 2022. <https://www.aisixiang.com/data/139298.html> (visited on May 3, 2023).

Table 2. Favourability Ratings for Political Affairs and Other Countries

		Liberal Democratic Party	Shinzo ABE	Takeshi ONAGA, then Okinawa governor	anti-USFJ Base NGOs	Japan	USA	PRC
Okinawa	average value	-0.139	-0.666	0.710	0.348	2.361	0.763	-1.198
	standard deviation	1.891	1.907	2.025	1.961	1.013	1.355	1.561
Japan	average value	0.436	-0.088	-0.026	-0.199	2.571	0.985	-1.480
	standard deviation	1.726	1.867	1.451	1.364	0.733	1.172	1.496

(Prepared by the author from TANABE, 2017, Table 6, p. 132).

Tang Yong Liang divided the formation of Ryukyuan identity into three periods: the Meiji to early Showa period, when Ryukyuan national identity was high and Japanese national consciousness was low; the WWII period, when Japanese national consciousness was strengthened; and the postwar period, when Ryukyuan national consciousness and Japanese national consciousness, including the period of direct U.S. domination, increased simultaneously. He points out that, because of more than 100 years of Japanese oppression and assimilation policies, the “Ryukyu color” was eliminated, and the number of people who could speak Ryukyuan was reduced, narrowing the possibilities of a “Ryukyuan independence theory” based on the idea that Okinawans were originally Ryukyuan, not Japanese. He concludes that the current anti-U.S. military base movement is a mass movement (i.e., not linked to an independence movement) that defends the rights of Okinawans based on their Japanese national identity using the Japanese Constitution as a tool.⁶³

Lim, who conducted the first academic survey of Okinawan residents’ opinions about their identity, found that Okinawa has one of the most dynamic identity dynamics in Japan, especially given its different history and unique cultural forms and its bitter experiences in modern times, which include the “disposition of Ryukyu,” assimilation and imperialization movements, the Battle of Okinawa, U.S. military rule, reversion to Japan in 1972 and the continuing controversy over the U.S. military base. However, he points out that this experience has not only a “top-down” aspect but

⁶³ See Y. TANG, 近代以来冲绳人群体认同的历史变迁, *Jindai yilai chongshengren quntirentong de lishibianqian*, [The Historical Evolution of Okinawan Identity in the Modern Times], Riben Xuekan, 2015.

also a “bottom-up” aspect that Okinawan society tries to promote on its own, such as the assimilation movement to become Japanese, independence efforts such as the Yaeyama Jichikai/Republic (which existed for just eight days, December 15–23, 1945 on Ishigaki-Jima⁶⁴) in the early postwar period, and the movement to return to Japan. Based on Lim’s research, Tanabe also points out that Okinawa has undergone different historical experiences from mainland Japan, particularly the Ryukyu’s disposition and its “Japanization” and “imperialization.”

Furthermore, he quotes Sakashita’s explanation,⁶⁵ noting that the U.S. occupation authority recognized the “Ryukyuan/Okinawan” as an ethnic minority that merited autonomy and referred to the main island of Okinawa as “Ryukyu” instead of “Okinawa” as part of the American policy to separate Okinawa from Japan. Therefore, the people of Okinawa desired to be Japanese, and after the reversion in 1972, the “Ryukyuan/Okinawan” identity was formed with linkage to ideals of self-determination, such as autonomy and economic independence, while recognizing the sovereignty of Japan.

Analyses of previous studies by Ishikawa, Sakashita, and others, along with a close look at Okinawa’s history, reveal that the identity formation of Okinawa residents can be broadly divided into (i) the Ryukyu Kingdom period, which formally maintained a tributary relationship with the Ming Dynasty; (ii) substantial assimilation by the Satsuma Domain after its invasion of Ryukyu and subsequent “dual tributary” with the Satsuma and Qing dynasties; (iii) the period of the disposition of Ryukyu by the Meiji government and the voluntary Japanization by the Okinawa people after the Sino-Japanese War⁶⁶ and imperialization during the militarism

64 J. FURUKAWA, 研究ノート「八重山共和国」について、沖縄・八重山占領史研究の一こま, *Yaeyama Kyouwakoku ni tsuite*, [Research Note on “Yaeyama Republic”, A Part of the Research on the History of the Occupation of Okinawa and Yaeyama], in: *Senshu University Bulletin*, 34, 2009, p. 163.

65 M. SAKASHITA, 『「沖縄県民」の起源：戦後沖縄型ナショナル・アイデンティティの生成過程1945–1956』, *‘Okinawa Kenmin’ no kigen: Sengo Okinawagata national identity no seisei katei*, [The Origins of “Okinawans”: The Generation Process of Postwar Okinawan-style National Identity 1945–1956], Tokyo 2017.

66 T. HIYANE, 『近代沖縄の精神史』, *Kindai Okinawa no seishinshi*, [A Spiritual History of Modern Okinawa], Tokyo 1996, p. 133; S. TERUYA, 「沖縄教育における『文明化』と『大和化』：太田朝敷の『新沖縄』構想を手がかりとして」, *Okinawa kyouiku ni okeru bunmeika to yamatoka*, [‘Civilization’ and ‘Yamato-ka’ in Okinawan Education: A Clue from Ota Choufu’s ‘New Okinawa’ Concept], in: *Journal of Education*, 76, 1, 2009, p. 3.

period; (iv) the attempted de-Japanization under the 27-year-long U.S. military rule and opposition to it by residents expressing a desire to return to mainland Japan.⁶⁷ It can be said that the identity of Okinawans has continuously been reconstructed through the ongoing process of these events.

However, against the backdrop of the seemingly endless U.S. military base issue and the Japanese government’s failure to convey respect for Okinawans, on May 15, 2013, Professor Yasukatsu Matsushima (from Ishigaki-jima) of Ryukoku University co-founded the Association of Comprehensive Studies for Independence of the Lew Chewans (ACSILs) with the goal of achieving Okinawan independence. Matsushima sees Japan as an imperialist invader that took the Ryukyu and the Senkaku Islands and continues to rule them as a colony,⁶⁸ and argues for winning Ryukyu’s independence by “*taking Ryukyu back from Japan by putting pressure on the Japanese government with the help of Russia and China, which are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council*”.⁶⁹ After Ryukyu achieves independence, he demands the withdrawal of the Self-Defense Forces and U.S. forces stationed in Okinawa and calls for permanent neutrality through unarmed neutrality (of course, an independent Ryukyu with unarmed neutrality and no U.S. military facilities would be ideal for China). At present, however, there is not a high level of support among Okinawans for Okinawa’s independence.

The results of Lim’s survey on Okinawan independence⁷⁰ (see Table 3) show that when asked, “*if the Japanese government allows Okinawa residents to freely decide the future of Okinawa, should Okinawa become independent?*” only 20 percent of the respondents answered that it should, while 60 percent said that it should not. If the Japanese government does not allow the

⁶⁷ S. ISHIKAWA, 復帰運動における「沖縄的」アイデンティティと「日本的」アイデンティティの変容と相剋, *Fukkiundou ni okeru okinawateki identity to nihonteki identity no henyou to soukoku*, [*The Transformation and Conflict of ‘Okinawan’ and ‘Japanese’ Identities in the Reversion Movement*], pp. 179–200.

⁶⁸ Y. MATSUSHIMA, 帝国の島, *Teikoku no shima*, [*The Island of Empire*], Tokyo 2020, p. 338.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁷⁰ C. LIM, 沖縄住民のアイデンティティ調査 (2005年–2007年), *Okinawa juumin no identity chousa*, *Okinawa Resident Identity Survey (2005–2007)*, in: *Journal of Policy Science and International Relations*, 11, 2009, pp. 105–147. Lim’s survey was conducted in 2005, 2006, and 2007 by selecting about 10,000 telephone numbers in Okinawa Prefecture and calling them in a computerized random sequence. Valid samples were obtained in 2005 (1,029 numbers), 2006 (1,200 numbers), and 2007 (1,201 numbers).

residents of Okinawa to decide their future freely, the number of respondents who think Okinawa should be independent drops to 10–20 percent, while the number of those who think it should not become independent rises to 60–70 percent. This result is at odds with Luo’s information in his 2012 article, which stated, “In a March 2006 poll, 75 percent of respondents agreed with Ryukyu’s independence and were willing to improve relations with China”.⁷¹ Furthermore, Luo did not provide any basis or citation for his March 2006 poll, and I was unable to find an equivalent poll at that time.

As Hiyane points out, there is a long-standing tendency in Okinawa to seek autonomy and, more recently, “self-determination (economically and socially from mainland Japan)”, but the desire for a special identity does not necessarily lead to independence.⁷² When asked why they should not become independent, the percentage of respondents who answered “because Okinawans and Japanese are the same people” decreased from 25.1 percent (2005) to 19 percent (2007), while the percentage of those who answered “because Okinawans do not have the ability to become independent” increased from 27.8 percent (2005) to 43.4 percent (2007). In other words, the Japanese government should be aware that the number of Okinawans who desire independence may increase if more of them believe that they are economically and politically capable of becoming independent.

Table 3. Okinawa Residents’ Views on the Pros and Cons of Okinawan Independence

	A. If the Government of Japan approves,			B. If the Government of Japan does not approve,		
	Nov. 2005	Nov. 2006	Nov. 2007	Nov. 2005	Nov. 2006	Nov. 2007
Okinawa should be independent	24.9%	23.9%	20.6%	20.5%	16.3%	12.3%
Okinawa should not be independent	58.7%	65.4%	64.7%	57.4%	69.5%	69.6%
Okinawa residents should decide it	2.8%	1.7%	0.8%	4.9%	2.0%	1.0%
Other	2.5%	0.8%	1.3%	4.1%	1.4%	1.6%
Don't know/difficult to reply	11.1%	8.3%	12.7%	13.1%	10.7%	15.5%

(Prepared by the author from LIM, Table B3, p. 120).

⁷¹ LUO, *People’s Daily Online*, 2012.

⁷² R. HIYANE, 沖縄認同の形成—社会「内部」及「外部」因素的分析, Chongshen rentong de xingcheng shehui neibu ji waibu yinsu de fenxi, [Okinawa identical Formation - A Social “Internal” and “External” Factorial Analysis], in: *Prospect Foundation Quarterly*, 20, 4, 2019, p. 108.

It is evident in examining the formation of Ryukyuan and Okinawan identities that China had little involvement in the process, outside of the royal family and noble class of the Ryukyu Kingdom, due to very loose cultural and ceremonial relations. And because Li Hongzhang was passive and did not respond to the protection request from the ruling class of the Ryukyu Kingdom during the disposition of Ryukyu, he could not have significantly influenced the subsequent formation of Okinawan identity.⁷³ China also had little influence in the process of Japanese-Okinawan identity being reaffirmed as “Japanese” through direct U.S. rule after WWII and the reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1972.

Ideological and Political Conditions under Xi Administration Influencing Chinese Scholars

The Chinese Communist Party: CCP (officially the Communist Party of China) has made creating an environment favourable to the CCP a core part of its political struggle to defeat its opponents without fighting. To this end, in 2003, the CCP Central Committee and the Central Military Commission of the CCP adopted the “*Regulations for Political Work of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*” (PLA), which stipulates a fighting style based on the “three warfares” – public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and international legal warfare. Through these, the PLA engages in operations aimed at disintegrating enemy organizations, combating the psychological and propaganda efforts of opponents, and other activities.⁷⁴

On the other hand, during the Hu Jintao era (2002–2012), an objective and positivist approach seems to have been permitted. For example, Ishida, in conversation with a researcher at the Nanjing Massacre Research Center, described how Chinese researchers felt “*a kind of pride that objective and positivist research methods had begun to take root*”⁷⁵ around 2000. Before that, research methods adopted by historiographers in China since the Cultural Revolution were more political than scientific in nature.

⁷³ J. LI, 李鴻章与晚清对日外交, Li Hongzhang yu wanqing dui ri wajijiao, [Li Hongzhang and late Qing’s Diplomacy toward Japan], in: *Journal of the University of International Relations*, 3, 2007, pp. 26–30, <https://www.docin.com/p-1686809144.html> (visited on March 16, 2023).

⁷⁴ Strategic Research Group, 3. Definition of Three Warfares by China and Examples of the warfares related to Air Power, in: *Air Power Research*, 2, 2016, p. 114.

⁷⁵ T. ISHIDA, 感情・価値観としての歴史認識, *Kanjo kachikan to shite no rekishi ninshiki*, [Historical Perceptions as Emotions and Values], PRIME 2015, p. 84.

The establishment of an objective and positivist approach to historical research in China based on factual historical criticism can also be seen in the fact-based reevaluation of the Kuomintang forces in the anti-Japanese war that was done during the Hu Jintao administration (although it should be pointed out that preparations for Taiwan reunification were underway at this time).⁷⁶ However, in the era of Xi Jinping, who succeeded Hu Jintao as General Secretary of the CCP, political messages have increasingly taken precedence in research outcomes. Recognizing that CCP history became secondary to China's national history during the Hu Jintao era and intent on restoring the primacy of Communist Party history,⁷⁷ Xi Jinping has stressed the importance of history education at every opportunity, as he did at the CCP Central Party School on March 1, 2013.⁷⁸ As a result, educational institutions in China have begun teaching the so-called "four histories": party history of the CCP, new Chinese history (national history), history of reform and opening-up policies, and history of socialist development. With this approach, CCP leadership is trying to establish historical verification that only the CCP can govern China and that socialism is the appropriate governing philosophy.⁷⁹

Any expression of a view of history that deviates from the official "correct view" promoted by the CCP is criticized as "historical nihilism" in China. This term, which came into use around 1974, during the late Cultural Revolution period, has been widely used to criticize books such as "Mao: The Unknown Story" (2005), which exposed Mao Zedong's private life. In recent years, the term has spread beyond the field of history to literature, entertainment, and education.⁸⁰ According to a recent keyword search survey of "historical nihilism" by Izutani, the term began to

⁷⁶ N. KAWAMURA, 習近平政権における統治戦略としての『歴史』の位置付け, *Shu kinpei seiken ni okeru touchi senryaku to shite no rekishi no ichidzuke*, [The Positioning of 'Histor' as a Governing Strategy in the Xi Jinping Administration], in: *Journal of Contemporary China Studies*, 37, 2016, p. 5.

⁷⁷ M. KAWASHIMA, 習近平政権の歴史政策, *Shu kinpei seiken no sekishi seisaku*, [Xi Jinping's Administration's History Policy], in: *JIIA Historical System Review Conference Proceedings*, 2021, p. 1.

⁷⁸ http://www.qsttheory.cn/zhuanqu/2021-06/18/c_1127575916.htm (visited on February 9, 2023).

⁷⁹ M. KAWASHIMA, *Xi Jinping's Administration's History Policy*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Y. IZUTANI, 中国における『歴史虚無主義』批判-方方『軟埋』と『歴史決議』-, *Chugoku ni okeru rekushi kyomu shugi hihan*, [Campaign against "Historical Nihilism" in China: Fan Fang "Soft Burial" and "Historical Resolution"], in: *Bulletin of the Faculty of International Studies*, 24, 2002, p. 1.

appear in general use around 2004, with a sharp increase after 2013. This corresponds to the time Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the CCP.

The CCP’s official view of China’s modern history is “a century of humiliation”⁸¹ at the hands of Western powers and Japan and reinforces the legitimacy of the CCP by casting it in a leadership role fighting imperialism and fascism during that difficult period. Japan’s “imperialist rule” over the Ryukyu Kingdom and its “oppression” is a natural fit with this version of history. This narrative also justifies land acquisition efforts with a “*Map of National Humiliation (National Shame)*,”⁸² which portrays China as humiliatingly “plundered” by foreign nations. Based on a comprehensive map showing past Chinese dynasties, it is a major factor in fostering attitudes to change the status quo by erasing current borders with neighbouring countries. According to the “Chinese Influence Operation” report by IRSEM (France), China’s support for leftist activists and anti-base movements calling for the independence of Okinawa and New Caledonia is part of this effort. The report also points out that Chinese companies are attempting to expand their influence through increased investment in Okinawa, tourism, and sister city exchanges.⁸³

When political tensions in Japan-China relations were heightened by then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on August 13, 2001, political messages began to increase in the papers of Chinese scholars. Subsequently, Japan-China relations improved with the visit to China by then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in October 2006 and the visit to Japan by then-President Hu Jintao in May 2008. However, the defeat of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the 2009 election in Japan and the subsequent formation of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government brought turmoil in Japan-U.S. relations, and the ensuing confusion led to a rise in anti-Japanese government sentiment in Okinawan society. Doubts about Japan’s sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands also emerged in China. After a Chinese fishing boat was stopped by a Japan Coast Guard patrol vessel in Japanese territorial waters around

⁸¹ A. A. KAUFMAN, *The “Century of Humiliation” and China’s national narratives, Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on China’s Narratives Regarding National Security Policy*, 2011, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf> (visited on December 8, 2022).

⁸² W. A. CALLAHAN, The Cartography of National Humiliation and the Emergence of China’s Geobody, in: *Public Culture*, 21, 1, 2008, pp. 141–173.

⁸³ P. CHARON – J. B. J. VILMER, *Chinese Influence Operations: A Machiavellian Moment*, IRSEM 2021, p. 402, <https://www.irsem.fr/report.html> (visited on April 3, 2023).

the Senkaku Islands and the Chinese captain was taken into custody in September 2010, which helped mobilize anti-Japanese demonstrations in China, there was an increase in media propaganda regarding the territorial claim on the Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands). After the Noda administration (DPJ) transferred jurisdictional rights over some privately owned islands in the Senkaku Islands to the Japanese government in September 2012, the number of articles and papers by Chinese scholars clearly challenging Japan's effective control over the Senkaku Islands increased. In other words, since the late period of the Hu Jintao administration,⁸⁴ which tended to emphasize a conciliatory attitude toward Japan, political messages became prioritized in the articles and papers of Chinese scholars. In the Xi Jinping era, with the Chinese government promulgating its version of modern history and eliminating other views by establishing the Institute of History at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, historical research has returned to an era of political conclusions again taking precedence.

Although Chinese government officials insist that papers and statements by Chinese scholars on Ryukyu and Okinawa do not represent the views of the Chinese government (for example, Lt. Gen. Qi Jianguo in June 2013⁸⁵), a keyword search for "Ryukyu" using a Chinese domestic search engine such as www.baidu.com yields only information on the imperialist military occupation of the Satsuma Domain and Meiji Japan, the oppression of the Ryukyuan people and doubts about Japan's sovereignty over Okinawa. For the average Chinese reader, who likely has little access to information other than this official view, it would be natural to assume that Ryukyu is a "*land that was annexed by imperialist Japan by force, and whose ownership has not been finally determined*". Even Chinese high school history textbooks (note that these are not the new history textbooks introduced in 2022, which are said to reflect the revisionist history promoted by the Xi Jinping regime) describe Japan as "*long wanting to take over China's Taiwan and its vassal states of Korea and Ryukyu, and then to attack mainland China*".⁸⁶ This narrative is also directed to people in Africa, the Middle

⁸⁴ KAWAMURA, The Positioning of 'History' as a Governing Strategy, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Calls Grow in China to Press Claim for Okinawa, in: *The New York Times*, June 13, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/14/world/asia/sentiment-builds-in-china-to-press-claim-for-okinawa.html> (visited on April 10, 2023).

⁸⁶ 中外歷史綱要 第五單元 中國歷史教科書 *Zhongwai lishi gangyao Diwudanyuan Zhongguo lishi jiaokeshu*, [An Outline of Chinese and Foreign History Unit 5: Chinese History Textbooks], Beijing 2019, p. 98.

East, Southeast Asia, and other Eastern regions,⁸⁷ though not to industrialized Western nations that would be critical of this view.

However, the more the Chinese government inflames Chinese nationalism through “wolf warrior diplomacy,” the more China’s reputation with neighbouring countries shifts to a negative one. For example, due to China’s military spending and the perceived threats resulting from the growing activity of the PLA and China Coast Guard, attitudes about China among Okinawans have worsened. This can be seen in the results of a public opinion poll conducted by NHK on the 50th anniversary of the Reversion to Japan. (Table 4)⁸⁸ In response to questions asking how much of a threat they perceive their neighbours to be, a total of 86.7 percent of Okinawans said they are concerned about a threat from China. It is worth noting that Okinawans’ threat perception of China and South Korea is higher than their overall numbers for Japan and that proximity is a factor in Okinawans’ perceptions of threats posed by other countries.

Table 4. Perceived Threats from Neighbouring Countries

	Okinawa	All Japan		Okinawa	All Japan
China (PRC)			North Korea (DPRK)		
I feel threatened a lot	56.3%	49.7%	I feel threatened a lot	56.8%	62.8%
I feel threatened in some extent	30.4%	39.4%	I feel threatened in some extent	27.1%	26.5%
I don't feel threatened much	9.2%	9.0%	I don't feel threatened much	10.8%	7.8%
I don't feel threatened	1.0%	1.2%	I don't feel threatened	2.2%	2.2%
No reply	3.1%	0.8%	No reply	3.1%	0.7%
South Korea (ROK)			Russia		
I feel threatened a lot	11.7%	10.6%	I feel threatened a lot	29.7%	33.3%
I feel threatened in some extent	30.7%	43.7%	I feel threatened in some extent	38.9%	41.3%
I don't feel threatened much	46.6%	39.2%	I don't feel threatened much	24.5%	22.2%
I don't feel threatened	7.8%	5.6%	I don't feel threatened	3.3%	2.4%
No reply	3.3%	1.0%	No reply	3.6%	0.8%

Prepared by the author from “Survey on Attitudes toward Okinawa on the 50th Anniversary of the Reversion to Japan”, 2022, Question 27, p. 6.

⁸⁷ China launches propaganda for recognition of disputed maritime claims, in: VOA, July 27, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_china-launches-propaganda-recognition-disputed-maritime-claims/6193497.html (visited on December 5, 2022).

⁸⁸ Survey on Okinawa in the 50th anniversary of the reversion to Japan (Okinawa/Nationwide survey), NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, conducted by mail method from February 2 to March 25, 2022.

Conclusion

From the Chinese articles, papers, and descriptions concerning Ryukyu/Okinawa examined in this paper, historical materials or information that do not support the CCP's official historical narrative were concealed or ignored. It is also clear that the idea of sovereignty over a "vassal state" created by the tributary system that Chinese scholars have promoted in recent years is an assertion based on a modern perspective, reconstructed within China to reflect a contemporary Western understanding of international relations. Furthermore, the empirical historical research conducted through critical examination of historical sources, which had been gaining ground in China in the 2000s, reverted under the Xi Jinping regime to the previous politically prioritized approach that conveniently interpreted history under the guise of "historical research" to achieve ideological and political objectives. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the function of history as a critical apparatus to detect ideology and political agendas through finding concealed historical facts was fully recognized. And this reconstruction of historical narratives in which ideology and political agendas take precedence is likely to increase under the Xi regime, which aims to strengthen the leadership role of the CCP, with Xi Jinping as the guiding leader of the party. However, the increasing number of studies that prioritize ideological and political agendas will lead to the deterioration of China's soft power and the decline of its reputation, as it becomes obvious that Chinese scholars could not apply an empirical analysis approach.

The recent increase in articles and papers by Chinese scholars questioning the basis in international law for the disposition of the Ryukyu Kingdom and reversion of Okinawa to Japan, in some cases even asserting Chinese sovereignty over Ryukyu/Okinawa, has shifted from the original goal of subverting the basis for Japanese territorial sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands to building anti-U.S. and anti-war momentum within Okinawan society, where there is a high concentration of U.S. military and Self Defense Force facilities. In other words, while the Chinese government and academic circles are fully aware of the strategic significance and function of Okinawa, they also recognize political opportunities in the problems posed by the U.S. military base (crimes committed by U.S. soldiers, noise, and environmental destruction) and the conflict between Okinawans (*Uchinanchu*) and mainland Japanese (*Yamatonchu*) over the relocation of the base. This is closely related to the increasing geopolitical and strategic role that Okinawa plays in the growing tensions between the U.S. and China.