

Part I: Historical Vignettes**Examining the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism****Gregory Smits****September 13, 2010**<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Gregory-Smits/3409>

History is, in many ways, a product of the present, meaning that contemporary myths and circumstances have a way of shaping how we understand the past. As Gregory Smits makes clear, this is no less true of contemporary Okinawa than it is elsewhere. Both at home and abroad, a widely held image of Okinawa presents it as possessing a timeless “peace culture” that contrasts with the warrior culture-infused history of mainland Japan. Smits demonstrates that this is a myth, and that the establishment of the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429-1879), which united what had previously been separate island kingdoms, involved military violence. He reviews the evolution of the military aspect of governance of the Ryukyu Kingdom period. From there, he discusses what he sees as the roots of the pacifism myth, which he claims began with nineteenth century accounts by Western visitors to Okinawa. Smits’ debunking of the peace culture myth, in turn, highlights the effects on Okinawan discourse of the more recent experiences of war and subordination that are discussed in subsequent articles in this collection.

Examining the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism

Gregory Smits

Introduction

This paper has four interrelated goals. First, I survey the contemporary myth of Okinawan pacifism. Second, I explain the structure, weapons, and select battles of the Ryukyu Kingdom's military forces, mainly to make it clear that the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism is indeed a myth. Next, I discuss the nineteenth and early twentieth-century development of this myth. Finally, I examine the recent and contemporary situation and 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 to project fantasies and desires.

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. For example, Gavan McCormack characterizes the 400-year period of 1609-2009, in terms of two sets of contradictions, one of which is "between Okinawan deep-seated peace orientation and the imposed priority to war and subjection by force." One way in which this alleged deep-seated orientation toward peace manifested itself was this:

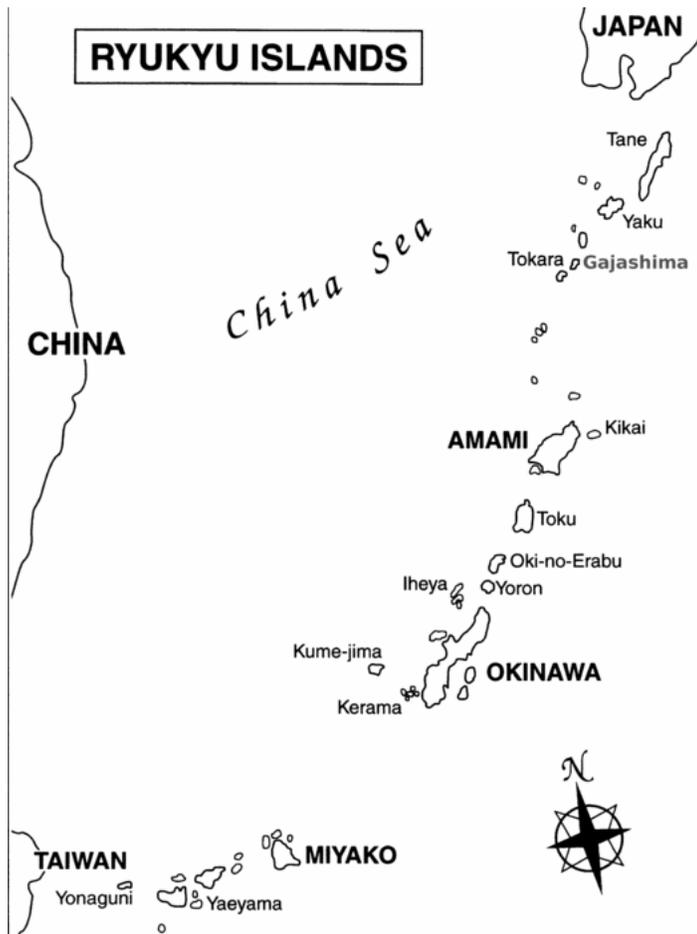
According to one story, probably apocryphal, as King Sho Nei in 1609 chose non-resistance to the superior force of Satsuma, he uttered the words *Nuchi du takara*. Whether or not he ever spoke them, these words have come to be understood as a statement of Okinawan value. Sho Nei's submission did not mean surrender. Facing physically superior opponents, submission was unavoidable, but conscience and value were not to be appropriated by force.¹

The ascription of this utterance, meaning "Life is a treasure," to Shō Nei (r. 1587-1620) is but one item in a rich apocryphal lore that has developed about certain events in Okinawan history. McCormack, like many other writers, suggests that peacefulness is an engrained characteristic of Okinawa, now or in centuries past. Let us consider, however, a very different account of Shō Nei's surrender to Satsuma.

In a recent book on the 1609 war between Satsuma and Ryukyu, Stephen Turnbull explains that the Satsuma invasion force of 3,000 soldiers (plus 5,000 sailors and laborers)

performed very well, but the fighting was not without problems for the invaders. One reason was that:

. . . only the island of Okinoerabujima surrendered meekly. Resistance on Amami-Oshima, Tokunoshima and Okinawa itself was fierce, but it was the Shimazu superiority in firearms, and their readiness to use both fire and sword in a ruthless manner against soldiers and non-combatants alike, that finally decided the matter.²



Map of the Ryukyu Islands and nearby areas.

As for the fall of Shuri castle, organized volleys of gunfire pinned down the Ryukyuan defenders long enough to permit the attackers to scale the walls of Shuri Castle using ladders. After capturing the ramparts and breaking down the castle gates:

In no time at all the vanguard of the Shimazu army was standing in the main courtyard outside the *seiden* [main palace]. It would appear that throughout the attack, King Shō Nei had courageously remained at his post but, seeing that the cause was hopeless, he surrendered to avoid further bloodshed. His three *sanshikan*

[members of the kingdom's highest governing body], Jana Teidō, Nago Ryōhō, and Urasoe Chōshi, all of whom had fought bravely at Naha and Shuri, went voluntarily as hostages³

When the Satsuma fleet tried to enter Naha Harbor, the Ryukyuan defenders repulsed it. Had the Ryukyuan military forces been able to perform a similar feat vis-à-vis the overland attack on Shuri Castle, the king might well have been able to negotiate an end to the war more favorable to Ryukyu. The key point here is that neither the king, nor his generals, nor his military forces “chose non-resistance.” They resisted vigorously until the invaders had fought their way to the king's front door. Only at that point did the treasure of life become apparent to the kingdom's top leadership.

As is well known, approximately one-fifth of the land of contemporary Okinawa consists of military bases, whose presence is a source of noise, other forms of environmental degradation, a variety of dangers including sexual assaults by military personnel, and other problems. When deployed skillfully, the juxtaposition of a peaceful Ryukyuan past versus a militarized Okinawan present suggests that, in addition to the obvious problems associated with the military bases, their presence violates the very spirit or soul of the peaceful Okinawan people. Among other functions, such a rhetorical strategy thereby enhances the poignancy of the image of Okinawans as victims. It is also appealing in a more general way to Okinawans and others who yearn for a more peaceful world and look to the past for some indication that a state based on peaceful foundations is possible. Indeed, as we will see, it was precisely such a yearning on the part of some Europeans in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars that created the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism.

Given Okinawa's recent past, it is understandable that many of the island's residents might find comfort in the image of their home as the center of a pacifistic kingdom. More substantially, the legacy of a peaceful Ryukyu Kingdom might contain lessons from which all of humanity might benefit. McCormack, for example, concludes his survey of Okinawa's past four centuries by stating that in “the early 21st century, humanity's best hope is for a recovery of Okinawa's *Nuchi du takara* values. Okinawa's anti-base and anti environmental destruction struggles are central to the global struggle for peace and sustainability.”⁴ There are problems, however, with this approach. First, it 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. Next, it is simply wrong. The Ryukyu Kingdom was a normal state in that it was based ultimately on coercive force—as we will see in some detail. Some might wonder whether, even if Ryukyu was not a pacifist state, what is the harm in presenting it as such? My simple answer is that if we are indeed to achieve a recovery of humanity along the lines McCormack suggests, then we need to be realistic about humanity's capacity for violence and the inherent roles that coercive power has historically played in human societies.

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 not only based on dubious assumptions about the normative force of history and the social and cultural coherency of “Okinawa” across time,

but it is simply incorrect. The Ryukyuan state, like all states, relied ultimately on coercive force—or the threat of it—to maintain order. This coercive force not only unified the island of Okinawa, but through the conquest of other islands, it created the Ryukyu Kingdom. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ryukyu functioned as a small-scale empire. 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, pirates often attacked Ryukyuan or Chinese ships engaged in trade or diplomacy, and pirates even attacked the port of Naha on occasion. In short, the Ryukyu kingdom did not lack police and military forces or occasions to use them.

Military Affairs in the Ryukyu Kingdom

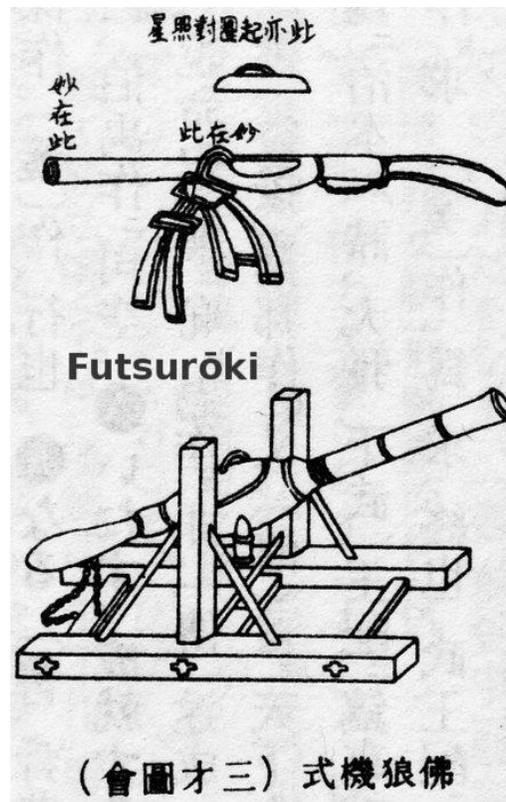
Soon after military force placed Okinawa under one ruler in 1429, the conquest of the other Ryukyu Islands began. Let us consider the example of Amami-Ōshima and nearby Kikaijima. In 1450 (1451 in some accounts), six shipwrecked Koreans drifted to Gajashima, a small island in the Satsunan chain. They 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 1466.⁵

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.⁶ 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.⁶ Invasions of Miyako, Yaeyama, and other islands also took place during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In short, the Ryukyu Kingdom became a small-scale empire, created, expanded, and sustained 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 Ryukyans in private trade deals. The inhabitants of coastal areas of Fujian often stockpiled these weapons to repel *wakō* pirate attacks.⁷

Other shipwrecked military affairs in and detail in a 1462 account. perimeter of the castle duty, with a member of appointed to train and conscripts. The basic unit man group, several of When the king ventured contingent of mounted him. Within the castle, in five-day rotations forces and made Outside of Shuri, a local stone fortress in each of Korean account did not these fortresses, but of them in addition to



A Ming-vintage Chinese artillery piece (bottom) called a *futsurōki* in Japanese. Ryukyu was an early adopter of such weapons during fifteenth century.

Koreans described around Shuri castle in The soldiers guarding the served yearly tours of the royal family oversee each year's new of the army was a 100-whom guarded the castle. out, a 300-man soldiers accompanied about 100 people serving administered the military logistical arrangements. warlord administered a the nearby districts. The specify the number of other sources list sixteen Shuri.⁸



Ruins of an Okinawan stone fortress (J.gusuku, O. gushiku).

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 strand of the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism: the story of *karate*.

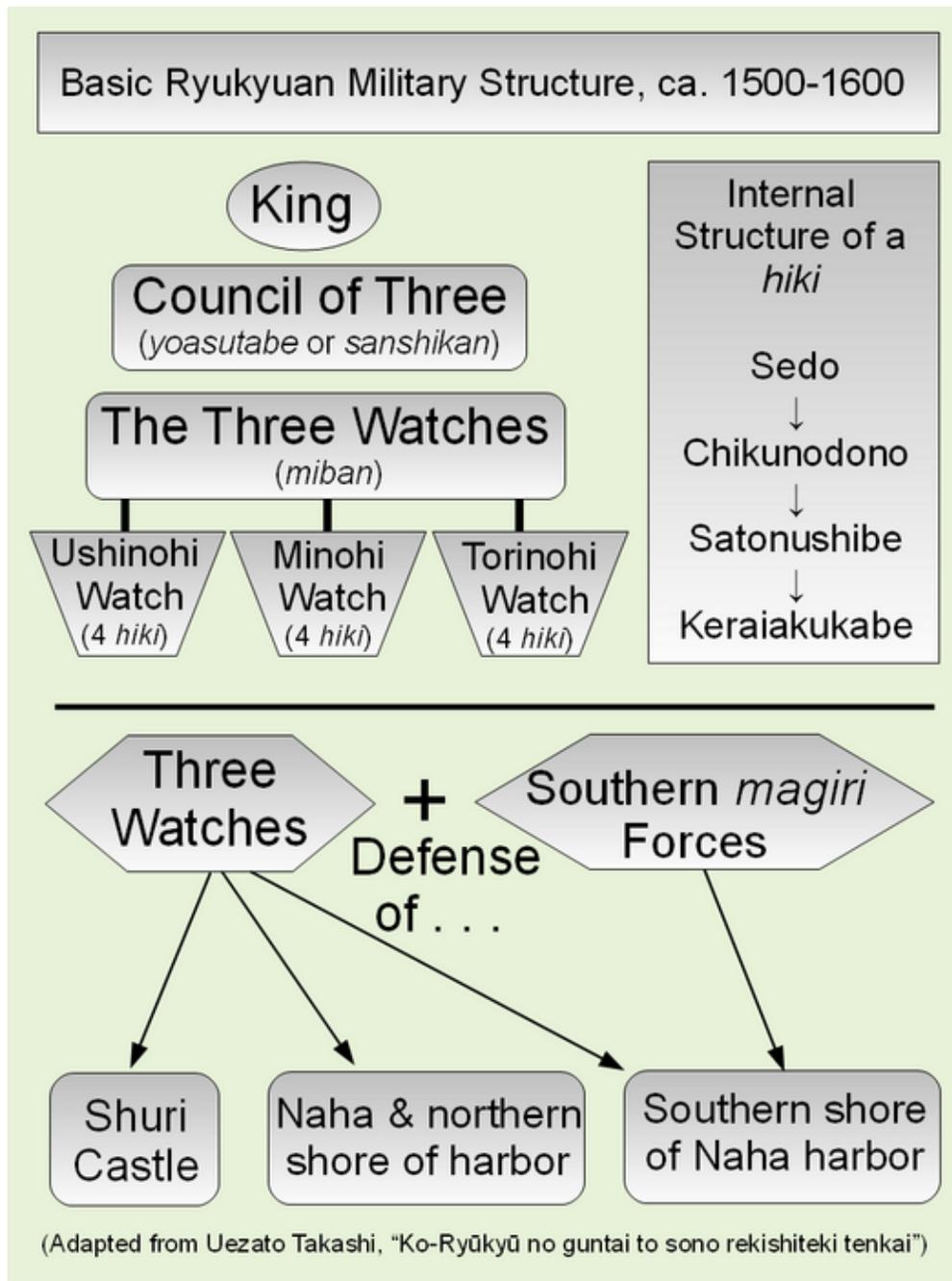
Because the king confiscated weapons and forbade their use, the basic story line goes, Okinawans became adept at fighting with their empty hands or using farm implements as weapons.⁹ Modern myth making notwithstanding, Shō Shin pursued two basic strategies with respect to military affairs. On the one 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.¹⁰

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 to 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.¹¹ 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 because 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 Fortress to defend the entrance into Naha Harbor. Shō Shin also established an official to oversee artillery deployment and technology.¹² As we will see, the combination of the Yarazamori Fortress 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.

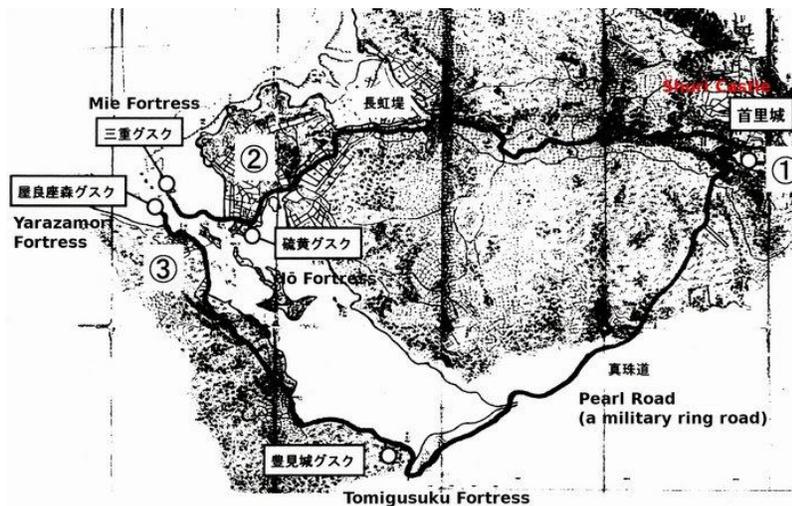


By the middle of the sixteenth century, Ryukyu’s military had reached its full development, and Figure 4 illustrates its basic organization. One general point reflected in this diagram is that Shō Shin designed his military reforms in part to focus the kingdom’s resources on guarding the central organs of state, namely the port of Naha and Shuri Castle. A network of fortresses and roads throughout the Shuri-Naha area supported this military organization. Yarazamori Fortress and Mie Fortress 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 Fortress, 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 Fortress, deep inside the harbor, was the command and control center. The Pearl Road, built explicitly for military purposes, connected these fortresses to each other and to Shuri Castle.¹³



A large-bore artillery piece called a *hiya*, which would have been deployed as part of the defense of Naha Harbor.



【図7】（沖縄県立博物館蔵「琉球那覇港及首里城間之図」に加筆）

The location of major defense centers and the Pearl Road connecting them. Shō Shin initiated this structure and later kings enhanced it.

demand.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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

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.¹⁴ 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

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.¹⁷

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 damage on the Satsuma forces and caused them to retreat. Although the Naha port defenses were effective, the overland approaches to Shuri Castle were not well defended. 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.¹⁸

After 1609, Ryukyu came under Satsuma's domination. The new political order undoubtedly resulted in changes to the kingdom's 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).¹⁹ 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.²⁰

After 1609, Ryukyu's tributary relations with China became crucially important for the kingdom's political autonomy. Ryukyu'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 appear 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.²¹ 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 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.²² 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.²³

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-à-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.²⁴ Other 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.

Origins and Development of the Myth of Ryukyuan Pacifism

One general point to bear in mind regarding the image of Ryukyu as a pacifist kingdom is that by the nineteenth century Ryukyuan officials had become extremely adept at manipulating the kingdom's image vis-à-vis outsiders. The most important group of outsiders was Chinese investiture envoys (*sakuhōshi*).²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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), features 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.²⁷ 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. Ryukyuan officials 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 and 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."²⁸ 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 reflect the state of Japanese or Ryukyuan 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 an

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 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 noted their 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 Loochoo; a tap with a fan, or an angry look, was the severest chastisement ever resorted to, as far as we could discover."²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹

One striking thing about this passage is the implication of superior moral virtue for those who hold to a belief in Ryukyuan pacifism, in contrast to a rogue Napoleon who scoffed at it. In any case, given the degree of ignorance of Ryukyu and other parts of East Asia that prevailed in 1816, it is conceivable that even thoughtful or worldly people might have

believed Hall's tale, though Napoleon did not. Certainly many of them would have wanted to believe in a country without weapons. Similarly, after experiencing the harrowing Battle of Okinawa in 1945 and decades of U.S. occupation thereafter, many contemporary Okinawans would surely find the idea appealing.

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 . . .³²

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.³³

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

The famous scholar of Ryukyu Iha Fuyū (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 *Omoro sōshi*, discussing weapons, defense works, the military character of the *hiki*, and related topics.³⁴ 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.³⁵

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 postwar 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 that 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.³⁶ 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. 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.

Why, then, does the myth of Ryukyuan pacifism find continue to find such fertile ground on which to thrive? There is no single or simple answer. Certain habits of thought that assume enduring qualities among groups of people over time facilitate uncritical extrapolating the prevailing anti-base, anti-military sentiment in Okinawa backward in time. The basic institutions, issues and events of Ryukyuan history prior to 1879 are not widely known among non-specialists. This situation means that relatively few people are able or willing to call the myth into question. More generally a lack of detailed knowledge of Ryukyuan history enables Ryukyu to function as a blank screen onto which contemporary people can project desires such as de-militarization. Perhaps the most important contributing factor is the trauma of Okinawa’s recent past. Although not necessarily accurate across large spans of time, McCormack’s characterization of Okinawa as a place that has suffered the imposition of war and violence upon it by outside forces is surely accurate from 1879 to the present. A large percentage of Okinawans yearn for a de-militarization of their island, and it is only natural to project this image onto past ages to provide inspiration and hope for the future.

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 and researchers. 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 agendas with relative ease. 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, one 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 and widespread desire among many of us 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 Okinawan suffering. 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, however, 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, then the relevant arguments for eliminating or correcting it should be made in the context of the present and recent past without recourse to an impossible version of history.

Gregory Smits is an Associate Professor of History at Pennsylvania State University. He is a social and cultural historian of Japan, whose interests range from the fifteenth through the early twentieth centuries. A specialist in the history of the Ryukyu Kingdom, he is the author of [Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics](#) and co-editor with Bettina Gramlich-Oka of [Economic Thought in Early-Modern Japan](#).

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Notes

¹ Gavan McCormack, "Okinawa's Turbulent 400 Years" *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 3-3-09, January 12, 2009.

² For a thorough account the Ryukyu-Satsuma war, see Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai Capture a King: Okinawa 1609* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2009). Despite being written for non-specialists, this book is based on a close reading of the relevant primary sources. The Ryukyuan military was an early adopter of firearms, possessing them prior to 1450. By 1609, however, Ryukyuan firearms, which were of Chinese design, were inferior to the European-style guns of the invaders.

³ Turnbull, *The Samurai Capture a King*, p. 45.

⁴ Ishigami Eiichi, "Ryūkyū no Amami shotō tōchi no ahodankai," *Rekishi 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.

⁵ Ishigami, "Amami," pp. 3-4, 9; and Uezato Takashi, "Ko-Ryūkyū no guntai to sono rekishiteki tenkai," *Ryūkyū Ajia shakai bunka kenkyūkai kiyō*, no. 5 (October, 2002), pp. 113-114.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 76-78.

⁸ Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 108-109.

⁹ Perhaps the most prominent example of this narrative is Nagamine Shoshin, "Okinawan Karate and World Peace," found at many web sites such as [this](#) (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" (found [here](#) as of 3-21-2006).

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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, 118-119.

¹² Uezato, "Guntai," p. 113; and Uezato "Ryūkyū no kaki," p. 78.

¹³ Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 117-119; and Uezato "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 82-87.

¹⁴ Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 120-121; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," p. 84.

¹⁵ Uezato, "Guntai," p. 124; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 82-83.

¹⁶ Uezato, "Guntai," p. 123.

¹⁷ Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 115-116, 121-124; Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 82-88; and Turnbull, *The Samurai Capture a King*.

¹⁸ Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 115-116; and Uezato, "Ryūkyū no kaki," pp. 82-88.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 116-117.

²¹ Entry #464. *Kyūyō kenkyūkai*, *Kyūyō*, p. 211.

²² Entry #1465. *Kyūyō kenkyūkai*, *Kyūyō*, pp. 439-440.

²³ Entry #1487. Kyūyō kenkyūkai, *Kyūyō*, pp. 445-447.

²⁴ Tomiyama, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken*, pp. 176-7.

²⁵ Satsuma maintained only a small direct presence in Ryukyu precisely because Ryukyu's relationship with China was crucial both for Satsuma and Ryukyu. With Satsuma support, Ryukyu devoted considerable resources to maintaining a good image vis-à-vis Chinese officials.

²⁶ Li Dingyuan, *Shi Ryūkyū ki*, Harada Nobuo, trans., ed. (Gensōsha, 1985), pp. 335-337.

²⁷ Li, *Shi Ryūkyū ki*, pp. 407-408. See also Kakazu Takeshi, "Rikuyu engi: Tei Junsoku ga fukkokushi fukyuu" *Ryūkyū shinpō*, 4-24-1993 (#17 in the series *Ryūkyū kanshi no tabi*).

²⁸ George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1958), pp. 250-251.

²⁹ Kerr, *Okinawa*, p. 255. For extensive excerpts from the crew members of these two ships, see pp. 249-260.

³⁰ 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, involves 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), pp. 85-94. See also "Satsuma-han shihaika no saibanken," Chapter 3 of Tomiyama, *Ryūkyū ōkoku no gaikō to ōken*, pp. 170-197.

³¹ Kerr, *Okinawa*, p. 259.

³² Basil Hall Chamberlain, "The Luchu Islands and Their Inhabitants: I. Introductory Remarks," *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 5, no. 4 (April, 1895), pp. 310-311.

³³ Chamberlain, "The Luchu Islands," pp. 318-319.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ Uezato, "Guntai," p. 105; and Iha Fuyū, "Ko-Ryūkyū no seiji," *Zenshū*, Vol. 1, pp. 419-495, esp. pp. 431-440.

³⁶ For a concise summary of these arguments and a listing of the key essays, see Uezato, "Guntai," pp. 105-106. In English the most comprehensive work is Turnbull, *The Samurai Capture a King*.