



72. SINO- JAPANESE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS (1871)

© 2019 JETIR May 2019, Volume 6, Issue 5

www.jetir.org (ISSN-2349-5162)

Sino - Japanese Relations in early Meiji Era : Status of Ryukyu and Taiwan

Dr Surinder Kaur,
Asst.Professor(History),
GGSCW-26, Chandigarh

Both China and Japan had tributary relations with Ryukyu for several centuries prior to its annexation by Japan in 1879. Claimed simultaneously by two powerful neighbours, dual suzerainty over the Ryukyu archipelago, a chain of some 60 islands that lie between Taiwan and Japan, continued to remain shrouded in ambivalence, complexity, and peculiarities. Taking note of this wildered status of Ryukyu Islands, an eighteenth century Japanese scholar Hayashi Shihei (1738-1793) commented that the Ryukyu kingdom, being between two countries of China and Japan, "subjects herself to both countries and pays tribute to both. She uses the Japanese calendar when she deals with Japan and the Chinese calendar when she contacts China".¹

In an age when the international affairs of the countries of East Asia were governed according to the norms of the Chinese tributary system,² the kingdom of Ryukyu (Liu-ch'iu in Chinese) also maintained regular tributary relations with China. It was in 1372 that the Ryuku King Satto (1349-1395) sent the first mission from Okinawa to China, then under the rule of Emperor Hung-wu (1368-1403) of the Ming dynasty. The successive princes of Ryukyu continued this trend and every year ships sailed from Okinawa to Fukien. This annual contact with china, which was political and cultural as well as commercial, greatly enriched the 'Chuzan state', as the Ryukyu kingdom under Satto's rule came to be known. The kingdom gained further eminence during the reign of King Sho Hashi (b. 1372, r. 1406-1439) who brought various petty and loosely scattered principalities under his control and united them to the island of Okinawa, the seat of 'Chuzan state'. In order to derive benefits from the mainland trade and enhance his own position, Sho Hashi even entered into tributary relations with China during the reign of the Ming emperor, Yung-lo (r. 1403-1425). In course of time, the Ryukyu Islands became an important and thriving centre of East and Southeast Asian commerce.

¹ *Sangoku tsuran zusetzu (Illustrated account of three countries)* in Kikuchi Kenjiro, "Ryuku ga honpo oyobi Shina ni taiseshi kankei o ronzu" (Discussion of Ryuku relation with Japan and China), SZ, 7.10:860-861 (October 1896); quoted in Robert K. Sakai, "The Ryukyu (Liu-ch'iu) Islands as a Fief of Satsuma" in John K. Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.112.

² The tributary system was a distinct type of imperialism and diplomacy by which the power of the Chinese empire was extended far beyond its territorial limits. It was based on the belief that the Celestial (Chinese) Empire was the hub of the universe and that about this hub were grouped barbarian or uncivilized states. Under the tributary system, a tributary monarch was required to obtain investiture from the Emperor of China. In submitting to the overlordship of China, the acquiescing states were motivated by various considerations fear of the military might of the Chinese empire, need for security and military assistance against hostile neighbours and desire to partake of the benefits of a superior culture, and prospect of lucrative trade.