

An Aspect of Modern Japan's Overseas Expansionism: The Taiwanese Aboriginal Territories in the Early Meiji Japanese Perspective

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Introduction

In April 1874, about seven years after overthrowing the Tokugawa *bakufu* (1603–1868), the Meiji government launched its first overseas military campaign against the Taiwanese aboriginal territories (*Taiwan banchi*). The Japanese official claim is that the purpose of the expedition was to chastise the Taiwanese aborigines, who had committed atrocities and maltreatment against “Japanese subjects,” and seek redress.¹ The first case which the Japanese cited as being one of the pretexts for the military operation had occurred in December 1871, when shipwrecked residents of the Ryukyu Islands had been massacred. The second case occurred in March 1873, when shipwrecked seamen of the Oda Prefecture (part of present-day Okayama Prefecture) were maltreated. The Japanese further justified their military action as being legitimate on the grounds that the aboriginal territories were outside the jurisdiction of Qing China.²

Although the Japanese provided these official justifications for their actions, scholars have presented a variety of arguments as to the true motive(s) for the overseas military action. Many studies have been undertaken on the Japanese expedition, and many have identified the cause of the expedition to be a domestic problem that annoyed the new imperial regime at that time. The popular interpretation argues that the government anticipated that the expedition would be an outlet for mounting anti-government sentiment among the ex-samurai.³ Toward the end of the Meiji era (1868–1912), the Black Dragon Society (*Kokuryukai*) stated that the government intended to use the overseas military campaign as a means of dealing with anti-government sentiment, which had been further aggravated after a political crisis. The crisis was fomented by a feud among prominent leaders over Saigo Takamori's “*sei-Kan ron*” in the fall of 1873.⁴ In one of the most recent studies, Ochiai Hiroki argues that the aim of the expedition was to keep the discontented ex-samurai in Kagoshima (Satsuma) and elsewhere during the threatening situation after the political crisis.⁵

The motives for the expedition are also examined from a variety of different angles. In addition to the domestic problem, the question of the Ryukyus' legal status is regarded as being another cause for the expedition. That is to say, the Meiji government intended to clarify Japanese sovereignty over the Ryukyus, which had been under

dual-subordination to both China and Japan since the early 17th century.⁶ Another objective of the military campaign was territorial ambition. Earlier studies regard the invasion of the aboriginal territories as an initial Japanese step in the process of encroaching on China.⁷ Disagreeing with the argument that the expedition's purpose was either to compete with Qing China or to challenge the Chinese world order, Mori Toshihiko also argues that the Japanese leaders were trying to obtain the aboriginal land in order to cope with the more critical domestic conditions that followed the political crisis of 1873.⁸ Robert Eskildsen also emphasizes the imperialist aspect of the expedition, which contained a plan to colonize the aboriginal territories. He interprets this as the mimesis of Western civilization for "contesting Japan's status in the Western-dominated international order."⁹

Do these interpretations conflict with each other? If so, is either of them valid or invalid? It is not necessarily true that a single study discusses merely a single motive for – or cause of – the expedition and denies others. Some studies refer to more than one motive.¹⁰ Some scholars, among whom I count myself, do not share the view that Meiji Japan designed and launched the military campaign as an initial step in encroaching upon China, no matter how it has been projected in Chinese eyes. This is something I demonstrated in my doctoral dissertation.¹¹ Meanwhile, as in some earlier studies, this article takes the position that the Japanese government and military leaders designed and carried out the expedition to the Taiwanese aboriginal territories on the basis of multiple motives. Through the process of punishing the aborigines who had committed atrocities against the "Japanese subjects," the Meiji government expected to tame the discontented ex-samurai, reinforce the claim of Japanese territorial sovereignty over the Ryukyus, and, simultaneously, bring the *terra nullius* under its own control.

However, previous studies have focused on each of the motives separately, without attempting to discuss them in the context of the larger framework. This article emphasizes that all of the motives can be understood through reference to the single context of Japan's concern over national security at that time. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the Western powers had a concrete plan to invade Japan. The Japanese fear of Western encroachment might have been an example of paranoia on the part of the Japanese, as Peter Duus has suggested.¹² In the international environment of that time, however, the Japanese felt that their country would follow the same fate as other non-Western countries if they should fail to take the necessary measures for national survival. It was, therefore, necessary to secure the Ryukyus by replacing the historical dual-subordination to China and Japan with sole territorial sovereignty on the part of Japan. The seizure of the aboriginal territories by mimicking the Western pretext of engaging in a "civilizing" operation was expected to address Japan's inferior international status and prevent the possible seizure by Western powers of nearby land, the ambiguous legal status of which the Japanese understood. The ex-samurai problem was not a mere domestic issue but a potential threat to the country's safety and future. Thus, for the Japanese in the very early Meiji period, the aboriginal territories became the

stage on which to ensure the country's survival in an international environment, one in which the Western imperialist powers enjoyed predominance.

Shipwreck Incidents of 1871 and 1873

It was the Ryukyu shipwreck incident that first drew the attention of the Meiji government to the aboriginal territories of Taiwan. According to the reports the government received, the incident occurred in December 1871. Four Ryukyu ships from the Miyako and Yaeyama islands suffered in a storm on the last day of November. On December 17, 66 crew members from one of the Miyako Island ships drifted ashore in the area of present-day Bayaowan, located in the south-eastern part of Taiwan. Unfortunately for the crew members, however, they landed in Mudan, on the south-eastern edge of present-day Pingtung County and the homeland of the Paiwan, one of the island's aboriginal tribes. Aboriginal tribes had repeatedly committed atrocities against foreign sailors, and the shipwrecked Ryukyuan were treated in a similar fashion.¹³ They were captured and confined by the tribesmen. Twelve escaped and were rescued by Chinese settlers. These survivors were handed over to Chinese officials in Fujian Province, to which Taiwan belonged administratively; in February 1872, they were returned to Ryukyu House, the branch office of the Kingdom of Ryukyu in Fuzhou. The rest of the 54 crew members failed to escape and were beheaded by the tribesmen.¹⁴

News of the incident reached the Meiji government in Tokyo on June 27, 1872, via a young diplomat, Yanagihara Sakimitsu. He was in Beijing to negotiate with the Qing government on the revision of the 1871 Sino-Japanese Treaty, whose content displeased the Japanese government. He discovered the news on May 11 in the Chinese newspaper *Jingbao* in Tianjin and dispatched a report to Tokyo eight days later.¹⁵ Another source of news was the Kagoshima Prefecture. The deputy prefectural governor (*daisanji*) Oyama Tsunayoshi received the news on July 17 from prefectural officials who had returned from the Ryukyus, and he reported to Tokyo on August 31.¹⁶

On March 8, 1873, another shipwreck occurred. In January 1873, a Japanese ship from the Bitchu Oda Prefecture – which became part of the city of Kurashiki, Okayama Prefecture, in 1875 – left its native port and encountered a storm while returning from Kishu (the present-day Wakayama prefecture). Four seamen, including Sato Rihachi, landed in the aboriginal area that is part of present-day Beinan in Taitung County. They were surrounded by hundreds of male and female aborigines, who stripped them of their clothes and plundered their belongings, including the ship. Fortunately, none were killed. Thereafter, they were protected by the tribal leader and passed on to the local Qing officials. According to the report to Tokyo from the Japanese delegation in Shanghai, the survivors were delivered from the Fujian Province to Japanese officials in Shanghai and returned to Kobe on July 20.¹⁷

Aboriginal Territories and the Ryukyu Question

It was from the Kagoshima Prefecture (*ken*) – the ex-Satsuma domain (*han*) – that the call for an expedition to the Taiwanese aboriginal territories first arose. Oyama, an ex-Satsuma clansman, proposed punitive military action against the aborigines who had committed atrocities on the Ryukyans, as this would enhance imperial prestige (*koi*).¹⁸ Several days before submitting the report to Tokyo, he informed his junior clansman, Kabayama Sukenori, about the Ryukyu shipwreck incident. Then, the army officer at the branch station of the Kumamoto garrison (*chindai*) went to Tokyo to persuade government leaders to launch an expedition.¹⁹ According to a couple of Japanese sources, as well as to prominent leaders – including Itagaki Taisuke of Tosa and Soejima Taneomi of Hizen (Saga) – Saigo Tsugumichi, another of Oyama's junior fellow clansman, supported the proposal. Tsugumichi's elder brother, Saigo Takamori, also seemed to approve of it, though conditionally.²⁰

The response of these ex-Satsuma clansmen to the incident is not surprising within the context of the historical and administrative ties between the domain, located in the southernmost tip of Kyushu, and the Kingdom of Ryukyu. The Ryukyus had paid tribute to Ming China (1368–1644) since the time before the unification by Sho Hashi in 1429. As a result of Satsuma's military conquest in 1609, the Ryukyus were put under the dual subordination to both China and Japan. The Tokugawa *bakufu* granted the southern archipelago kingdom as a fiefdom (*fuyo*) to Satsuma, which dispatched officials to supervise the islands.²¹ Since the mid-19th century, Satsuma had watched the increasing presence of Western powers in the nearby waters of Japan and the Ryukyus and felt that it would become difficult to maintain the dual subordination.²²

The new imperial regime, in which Satsuma clansmen, as well as Choshu clansmen, formed powerful cliques, had no intention of giving up its historical sway over the southern fiefdom. After a history of some 300 years, the *daimyo* domains were replaced by prefectures as the local administrative unit late in August 1871 and soon afterwards the government granted jurisdiction over the kingdom to the Kagoshima Prefecture.²³ In October 1872, a further step was taken when a Ryukyu congratulatory mission linked to the imperial restoration arrived in Tokyo in response to a summons from the new Japanese regime. The government renamed the Kingdom of Ryukyu (*Ryukyu okoku*) the "Ryukyu Domain (*Ryukyu han*)" and appointed King Sho Tai as the domain king (*han'ō*).²⁴ This marked the beginning of the so-called Ryukyu Disposition, a series of policies towards the Ryukyus that remained in force until the replacement of the domain with the Okinawa Prefecture (*Okinawa ken*) in March 1879. It is reasonable to assume that as a local administrator exercising jurisdiction over the Ryukyus, Oyama considered it necessary to deal with the shipwreck incident and, for the sake of imperial prestige, found the answer in chastising those who had committed atrocities against his people.²⁵

The Meiji government was evidently concerned about the possible effect of the Ryukyus' status on Japan's national prestige, as well as on national security. Inoue

Kaoru of Choshu pointed out the strategic importance of the Ryukyus, proposing the dissolution of the dual subordination, as well as opposing the imperial restoration.²⁶ Yamagata Aritomo, also of Choshu, more typically exemplified Japanese awareness of the possible link between the Ryukyu question and the country's security and survival. A leading political and military figure in the new imperial regime, he stated in September 1872, for example, that in the midst of the age of overseas expansionism, clarification of Japan's territorial sovereignty, according to international law, over the island in Japan's southern near waters would be necessary in order to provide effective border defense against possible foreign (Western) encroachment.²⁷

Regarding this concern within the national security context, the chastisement of Taiwanese aborigines who had committed atrocities against the Ryukyus was a demonstration of Japanese sovereignty over an archipelago that was adjacent to Japan proper. In fact, the guidelines for the expedition were approved by the government in February 1874, slightly more than two months before the overseas campaign was launched; the guidelines indicated that the military action against the aborigines was designed for this purpose, though it was not the only purpose.²⁸ At that time, the Japanese did not find this demonstration of national sovereignty to be in any way a strange concept. In fact, in July 1872, a month after his report on the shipwreck incident, Yanagihara Sakimitsu reported that Hettohorusuto (Walter Henry Medhurst?), the British consul in Tianjin at that time, had mentioned that if a Western power had encountered such an incident, it would have dispatched military vessels and attempted to obtain indemnities.²⁹ The Japanese would learn later of the 1867 American expedition to the aboriginal territories, which was an attempt to deal with a similar case, known as "the Rover incident."³⁰

Aboriginal Territories as a Possible Threat to Japan's Security

As witnessed in the views of its leaders regarding the Ryukyu issue, the Meiji government was uneasy about its country's survival as an independent state in the Western-dominated international environment. In a letter addressed to all his officialdom in April 1868, Emperor Meiji expressed a fear of suffering foreign (Western) encroachment and consequently losing his country's independence.³¹ The document, that took the form of an "imperial letter" (*shinkan*), should not, however, be regarded as an expression of the emperor's personal opinion. It was undoubtedly an expression of the shared anxiety within the government's leadership. For example, with extreme caution, and even enmity, Iwakura Tomomi, one of the most prominent figures in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji politics, was to warn: "Foreign powers have in-born villainous intentions. If we were awe-stricken by their tyranny, we would be destined to be their slaves."³²

After receiving the report on the shipwreck incident, some Japanese leaders began to worry that the aboriginal territories could become a threat – even a direct one – to their country's safety. In the late fall of 1872, they scaled up the expedition plan

from being merely a punitive military operation by developing an additional plan to conquer the aboriginal territories. On November 18, Inoue Kaoru wrote to Kido Takayoshi that some persons inside the government felt that seizure of the land was necessary to prevent the Western powers from merging the strategically important island into their sphere of influence.³³ Ohara Shigezane, an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, referred to Foreign Minister Soejima Taneomi, then head of the ministry, as being an active advocate of the conquest of not only the aboriginal territories but the entire island of Taiwan.³⁴ Soejima thought that Japan should seize the island before the Western powers took action. He seemed especially worried about the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's desire to obtain territory in the East and his specific interest in the island, a rumor which was well known within Japanese government circles at that time.³⁵ Inoue stated in his letter to Kido that Qing China claimed that half the island was under its jurisdiction but admitted that the other half, inhabited by aboriginal tribes, was outside it. Someone – unidentified in the letter – insisted that Japan should convince China to yield the entire island, which it could not afford to govern because of various problems, before a Western power encroached upon it.³⁶ That “someone” was probably Soejima, or at least a person who shared his ideas. In Soejima's written statement submitted to Emperor Meiji, probably before late December 1872, he upheld the seizure of the entirety of Taiwan as a means of forestalling the Western powers.³⁷

It should be noted here that Soejima's interest in Taiwan appears to have been further encouraged by two American diplomats. When the U.S. Minister to Japan, Charles E. DeLong, visited the Foreign Ministry on October 24, 1872, Soejima and the diplomat had their first conversation on the Taiwan issue. It was the beginning of Soejima's series of meetings with DeLong, which Charles William LeGendre was to join two days later.³⁸ LeGendre was the former U.S. Consul to Amoy, appointed in 1866, who had played a leading role in the 1867 U.S. expedition to the aboriginal territories. He had stopped in Japan on his way back to the United States.³⁹ The two American diplomats suggested that the aboriginal territories, over which Chinese jurisdiction was merely nominal, was nobody's land and that anyone could occupy it.⁴⁰ LeGendre was hired by the Japanese government in December 1872. In a series of memoranda drafted at Soejima's request, LeGendre preached about the legal status of the aboriginal territories and the strategic need for Japan to seize the island for national survival and future development in the midst of the rivalry between the major Western powers.⁴¹

In a conversation with the Qing officials, the Japanese referred to their anxiety about the possible negative impact of the status of the aboriginal territories on the national security of both countries. The zeal of Soejima and other political and military pro-expedition figures was not enough to win the support of other government leaders. They were not necessarily against military action itself but considered it premature in terms of the new regime's military stability and fiscal capabilities and the Chinese presence on the non-aboriginal side of the island of Taiwan.⁴² In December 1872, the government opted instead to dispatch a diplomatic envoy, led

by Soejima, to China to confirm its stance toward the aboriginal territories.⁴³ The Soejima mission left Tokyo on March 13, 1873 and arrived in China on April 1, carrying the “ostensible” objectives, so-designated by Premier Sanjo Sanetomi, to ratify the 1871 Sino-Taiwanese Treaty and negotiate with Beijing in the matter of audience with Emperor Tongzhi (r. 1861–75) which had been disputed between the Qing dynasty and foreign representatives at that time.⁴⁴ On June 21, Soejima dispatched Yanagihara Sakimitsu and Tei Einei to the Zongli Yamen to talk about the Taiwan issue. In the conversation with Yamen ministers, Yanagihara clarified the possible connection between the aboriginal territories and Japan’s national security. He stated:

“If a foreign power should occupy the aboriginal territories for the reason of the atrocities committed by the aborigines, and if these aboriginal territories should become some others like French Vietnam, Macao, and Hong Kong, Russia’s expanding territories from the Amur River to our northern frontier, we would be forced to face a menace on our southern shores.”⁴⁵

Aboriginal Territories and *Kaika*

Meiji Restoration, the popular English translation of *Meiji ishin*, is not sufficiently eloquent to express what the new imperial regime established after the demise of the Tokugawa regime. The restoration of the imperial regime (*osei fukko*) was certainly a crucial aspect of the historic Meiji Restoration. However, the popular term is not identical to the Japanese term *ishin*; it is a quotation from the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing*), one of the Five (Confucian) Classics (*Wujing*) and means *renewal* or *reformation*. *Ishin* had another aspect related to social, political, and cultural transformations, often referred to as *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment) or *kaika* (enlightenment and progress), which largely means the adoption and practise of Western civilisation.⁴⁶

The Meiji government was astute enough to be aware that *kaika* would have to be demonstrated both domestically and externally. It regarded the Taiwanese aboriginal territories as a stage for putting Western ways into practise. Medhurst told Yanagihara that a Western government would have opted for punitive military action against the Taiwanese aborigines when dealing with atrocity cases such as the Ryukyu shipwreck incident.⁴⁷ Soejima’s aforementioned statement to the emperor in December 1872 proves that he understood Japan’s acquisition of the aboriginal territories in terms of it being an action to “enlighten” (or civilize, as in *kaika*) them.⁴⁸ The imperial edict to Saigo Tsugumichi, who was appointed in April 1874 to the commander in chief of the expeditionary forces, also stated that the purpose of colonizing the aboriginal territories was to bring the inhabitants to a stage of being “civilized.”⁴⁹

As Robert Eskildsen argues: “the strategic appreciation of Western civilization offered a way of contesting Japan’s low status in a Western-dominated globe order of

nation.” The Japanese believed that *kaika* was necessary for imperial prestige (*koi*), which can be interpreted as synonymous with national prestige (*kokui*) for imperial Japan (*kokoku*).⁵⁰ The Japanese had not been treated as an equal by the Western powers since Mathew C. Perry’s opening up of the country in the mid-1850s, and they were obviously desperate to obtain higher international status and prestige and be recognized as “civilized” in the Western-dominated international community. The way to accomplish these objectives was to learn from Western models. Japanese leaders, for example, understood that the formation of a centralized government was an attempt to emulate Western powers; necessary step, if the country were to be considered equal to them, which would enhance imperial prestige.⁵¹

For the Japanese, however, the mimesis of Western ways was not aimed just at restoring and satisfying Japanese national pride. Through reference to the published commercial sources, such as newspapers and woodblock prints on the expedition, Eskildsen argues: “[They] evinced a sense of Japan’s vulnerability to Western imperialism and an awareness that Western civilization could be adapted to mitigate its vulnerability.”⁵² This perception of the expedition as joining both the emulation of Western civilization and national survival, which is projected on the commercial sources, reflected or coincided with the perception of elite contemporaries. Some of the political and intellectual elite of the Bakumatsu-Restoration period called this Westernisation effort *dai joi* (greater expulsion, particularly of barbarians), in contrast with *sho joi* (smaller expulsion), whose failure had been proven through minor clashes with the Western powers in the early 1860s. In other words, *kaika* was the greater expulsion for national survival in an international environment in which Iwakura Tomomi had warned that all countries were Japan’s enemies.⁵³ For example, the Japanese hoped that modernization by learning from the West would enable them to revise unequal treaties, thereby increasing the national wealth necessary to maintain independence.⁵⁴ As mentioned above, the dissolution of the dual subordination of the Kingdom of Ryukyu was a concrete application of the concept of territorial sovereignty introduced from the West, and the Meiji government considered this to be necessary for national security, as Yamagata and others had stated.⁵⁵ The attempt to establish diplomatic relations with Korea, by adopting Western-style diplomacy, was aimed at opening up the “Hermit Kingdom” to the outside world to prevent its anti-Western policy from going awry and causing the country to fall into Western hands.⁵⁶ The Japanese were afraid that the Korean peninsula could otherwise become a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the Japanese understood that, by adopting the Western practice of colonization, their own initiative in transforming the “masterless” land on which “savage” aborigines dwelled into the “civilized” world would be of great importance in relation to their country’s safety and future development in a perilous world.

Aboriginal Territories and the Ex-Samurai Problem

As previous studies have discussed, discontent among the ex-samurai against the Meiji government after the so-called political crisis of 1873 became the primary and direct cause of the expedition to the aboriginal territories.⁵⁸ In October 1873, government leaders such as Okubo Toshimichi and Iwakura Tomomi opposed and then killed off Saigo Takamori's proposal to dispatch himself as an envoy to Korea to cope with an impasse over the establishment of diplomatic relations. They were afraid that Saigo's mission would lead to a military conflict with the neighboring country, which would bring about further negative and even fatal consequences, such as Western intervention.⁵⁹ Saigo's true intent in his Korean policy proposal, called *seikanron*, is still the subject of debate among historians today; the documents of both his contemporaries and himself prove that he anticipated that his mission to Korea would possibly fail and would lead to an armed struggle, though he estimated that some years would still be necessary for war preparations.⁶⁰ He considered the likely overseas military campaign to be an outlet for the mounting frustration among the ex-samurai class.⁶¹ After the political crisis of 1873, Saigo and his supporters left the government, and anti-government sentiment worsened. Many ex-samurai Imperial Guard officers followed Saigo and left Tokyo. An assassination attempt was made against Iwakura in January 1874, and the Saga Rebellion in February of the same year – led by the ex-warrior group (*Seikanto* or *sha*) – supported firm action in the Korean issue. It was in this domestic atmosphere that the government decided to carry out the expedition to the Taiwanese aboriginal territories.

Government leaders had been aware of the mounting frustration and resentment among the ex-samurai class towards the new socio-political situation after the imperial restoration and even before the political crisis. For them, a more obvious and urgent issue was posed by ex-samurai officers in the military. The call for a punitive expedition to the aboriginal territories seemed to appeal to these officers as an opportunity to work off their frustrated energy. In a conversation with DeLong in October 1872, Soejima mentioned that the ex-samurai would be mobilized for an expedition to Taiwan.⁶² Tei Einei, the Foreign Ministry's Chinese interpreter, noted that Soejima had sensed that the military enthusiasm for the overseas military campaign had reached a critical point.⁶³

Saigo Takamori also regarded the expedition to the Taiwanese aboriginal territories as a possible outlet for ex-samurai discontentment. He viewed his own hometown of Kagoshima (in former Satsuma) as a major hotbed of anti-government sentiment and called it a "powder keg."⁶⁴ On July 21, 1873, he asked his younger brother, Major General Saigo Tsugumichi, and the Ministry of War's deputy minister to permit ex-samurai in Kagoshima to participate in the expedition.⁶⁵

Another matter that annoyed Saigo Takamori was in relation to the Imperial Guard (*Konoekyoku*). Many of them were his junior fellow clansmen and tended to behave as malcontents inside the new regime. He called them "Kagoshima's troublemakers (*Kagoshima no nanbutsu*)."⁶⁶ In August 1873, he confessed to the

Prime Minister (*dajo daijin*), Sanjo Sanetomi, that he was feeling pressure from the guard, calling for the immediate government approval of the expedition plan.⁶⁷ In fact, at his request, hundreds of ex-Satsuma clansmen, including ex-military and police officers who had followed Saigo and returned to Kagoshima, were allowed to cross the sea as members of the expeditionary forces.⁶⁸

However, previous studies have tended to view the ex-samurai discontentment from a narrower perspective. That is to say, they have failed to point out that for the Meiji government the discontent of the ex-samurai potentially had more than domestic implications. The leaders of the new imperial regime understood the necessity of domestic stability for national survival and development. For example, the imperial edict on the abolition of *daimyo* domains in August 1871 reveals that the government viewed domestic stability as the key to achieving a higher – and safer – position within the community of nations.⁶⁹

Saigo evidently shared this notion and believed that military action against Korea could help cope with the unrest among the ex-samurai, something that could lead to Japan's loss of independence.⁷⁰ His aforementioned request to his younger brother in July 1873 indicates that he regarded the expedition to Taiwan as a more feasible solution for the ex-samurai problem and that it might help to control the fate of the country more effectively than military action against Korea, an option which would still have needed years of preparation at that time. Okubo and other leaders who objected to Saigo's Korean policy indeed shared the same concern over national survival and prosperity but placed a premium on internal modernization rather than overseas military action in order to accomplish the national objectives.⁷¹ For those leaders who opposed Saigo, the irony was that to concentrate on the policy they believed indispensable to the country's future, they had to deal with the ex-samurai issue in the way that Saigo and his supporters had planned.

After approving the military expedition on February 6, 1874 and officially justifying this decision as a punitive measure against the Taiwanese aboriginal tribes who had massacred and maltreated the "Japanese subjects" in previous years, the Meiji government started to place more significance on the aboriginal territories as a means of dealing with the ex-samurai problem. As a matter of fact, not even a single sentence of the expedition guidelines referred to the colonization of the aboriginal territories.⁷² This was because Okubo Toshimichi and Okuma Shigenobu had eliminated references to colonisation from the original draft of the guidelines drafted by Yanagihara and Tei. This does not mean that the Japanese leaders completely abandoned their desire to seize these territories.⁷³ Those two leaders who finalized the guidelines appear to have held different views with regard to overseas territorial expansion. Okubo seemed to be less (or even the least) interested in colonizing the land among the government leadership, while Okuma does not appear to have been the most active but rather thought that colonization of the aboriginal territories would depend on the way in which the expedition developed.⁷⁴ During Okubo's absence in Tokyo, when he was required to deal with the discontented warrior uprising called the Saga Rebellion that had broken out

just days before the governmental approval of the expedition plan, calls for the revival of the colonization plan increased.⁷⁵ One of those most active in reviving the plan for colonization was obviously Saigo Tsugumichi. He considered that discontented ex-Satsuma clansmen should emigrate to the aboriginal territories.⁷⁶ The aforementioned imperial edict on April 4 reveals that his zeal had eventually succeeded in convincing the majority of the government leaders, and the annexation of the aboriginal territories had formally become part of the expedition plan.⁷⁷

Execution of the Expedition Plan and Its Consequence

The rationale for the Japanese expedition to the Taiwanese aboriginal territories, launched in late April 1874, was that the land was *terra nullius*. Hence, in the interests of protecting their own people, the Meiji government deemed it to be a righteous act of military chastisement against those who had committed the atrocities. It simultaneously believed that it had a right to occupy and colonize the aboriginal territories that belonged to nobody. The Japanese understood that the absence of Chinese territorial sovereignty over the aboriginal territories had been substantiated in the aforementioned conversation between the Zongli Yamen and Yanagihara Sakimitsu on June 21, 1873 and believed LeGendre.⁷⁸ The Yamen ministers stated that the aborigines guilty of atrocities were outside the influence of Chinese civilisation and also beyond Chinese jurisdiction.⁷⁹ The Japanese regarded these Chinese comments as providing a signal for the Japanese to go ahead and carry out an expedition.⁸⁰

However, by the time the advanced forces of the expeditionary forces, consisting of 3,658 soldiers, left the port of Nagasaki on April 27, 1874, the expedition plan had already been curtailed. In April 1874, shortly before the scheduled launch of the plan, Western ministers to Japan had begun to express objections and contend that the aboriginal territories belonged to China.⁸¹ The sudden Western response surprised the Japanese, as Okubo Toshimi confessed in a diary.⁸² With no way to resist the Western objection, all the Meiji government could do was suspend the expedition on April 24.⁸³ The plan's final execution was due to Saigo Tsugumichi's refusal to obey governmental decision and Tokyo's compromise with him.⁸⁴ However, the objective of the military action in the aboriginal territories was limited to the chastisement of the aborigines who had committed the atrocities, although Saigo did not personally give up on his ambition for colonization, and the Japanese troops brought along farm implements and seeds.⁸⁵

The Japanese invasion of the Taiwanese aboriginal territories brought about a diplomatic crisis with Qing China. While the Japanese legitimized the military action by falling back on the Chinese remarks of June 1873, as mentioned above, the Qing dynasty attacked the Japanese expedition to the aboriginal territories as an intrusion into Chinese territory.⁸⁶ This Chinese response might represent another miscalculation on the part of the Japanese. Not wishing to sour relations with Qing China, it cautiously restricted its military operations to the aboriginal territories

that were thought to be beyond Chinese territorial sovereignty since the June 21 conversation.⁸⁷ The Japanese were, however, rather nervous about the status of the Ryukyus, whose tributary relations with Qing China remained intact, even after the appointment of the king as domain king in October 1872. The government even instructed Yanagihara, appointed as first minister to Beijing, not to dispute the Ryukyu issue with the Chinese.⁸⁸ After the young Japanese minister's arrival in China in June 1874, both countries became caught up in arduous negotiations. Okubo Toshimichi arrived in Beijing to break the stalemate in August, but it was not until the end of October that negotiations were concluded.⁸⁹

On October 31, Okubo and the Zongli Yamen signed the Beijing Agreement with the mediation of the British Minister, Thomas F. Wade.⁹⁰ Confronted with China's conflicting views on the aboriginal territories and a request to withdraw from the land they claimed as their own, the Japanese no longer strove to obtain the aboriginal territories through negotiation. Instead, they sought an honourable withdrawal of the expeditionary forces in exchange for Chinese recognition of the expedition as a righteous action and an agreement on monetary compensation for the victims of the atrocities and the expedition's expenditures, although Okubo thought that the occupation of the aboriginal territories should be continued if diplomatic talks broke down.⁹¹ In the agreement, Qing China recognized the Japanese claim that the expedition had been a righteous action to protect its people, though somewhat euphemistically. It also agreed on a monetary settlement for some Japanese expenses and the "Japanese" atrocity victims, albeit that the use of the term "Japanese" failed to bring closure to the Ryukyu question since Sino-Japanese disputes over the southern archipelago continued and even intensified in subsequent years. In exchange, the Japanese expeditionary forces completely withdrew from the aboriginal territories by the end of 1874.

Conclusions

The voices within the Meiji government in favor of the expedition to the Taiwanese aboriginal territories in the early 1870s arose from the different concerns of the Japanese political and military elite. The initial cause of the Japanese attention to the Taiwanese aboriginal territories was the Ryukyu shipwreck incident of 1871. The land where the Ryukyuan castaways suffered the atrocities became a stage on which to demonstrate Japanese territorial sovereignty over the Ryukyus. The Japanese view on the status of the aboriginal territories in terms of international law alerted them to the risk of a possible Western encroachment on the land that was, apparently, unclaimed by anybody. In addition to a demonstration of territorial sovereignty over the Ryukyus through the military chastisement of those who had committed atrocities against their people, colonization of the aboriginal territories would also demonstrate that Japan was capable of engaging in the practices of Western civilization, something which the Japanese believed they must adopt regardless of their personal likes and dislikes. Furthermore, in order to safeguard

domestic stability, the aboriginal territories were to become a means of easing domestic unrest, which was mounting among the ex-samurai class. The expedition carried out in April 1874 and its consequences were markedly different from what the Japanese had originally designed and envisaged. As for the motives for the expedition, the issues that the new imperial regime wished to deal with through military action against the aboriginal land were all linked by a single thread: a concern as to Japan's safety and survival in a Western-dominated world, regardless of whether their fear of a possible Western degradation of Japan's independence might be seen as a sign of paranoia.

Notes

- ¹ *Dai Nihon gaiko bunsho* (hereafter referred as DNGB), 7: 1, 29-30.
- ² *Ibid.*, 1.
- ³ Matsunaga Masayoshi already pointed out this historiographical tendency in the late 1970s and this is still obvious in more recent works. See Matsunaga Masayoshi, "Taiwan ryoyuron no keifu: 1874 (Meiji shichi)-nen no Taiwan shuppei o chushin ni," 1; Kiyozawa Kiyoshi, *Gaiseika to shite no Okubo Toshimichi*, 88; Tokutomi Ichiro, *Taiwaneki shimatsu hen*, 52; Hanabusa Nagamichi, "1874-nen Taiwan bansha jiken," 51-79; Oka Yoshitake, *Kindai Nihon Seijishi*, 1: 174; Ko Sekai, "Taiwan iken (1871-1874)," 38-52; Nakajima Shozo, "Taiwan shuppei," 206-236; M. J. Mayo, "The Korean Crisis of 1873 and Early Meiji Foreign Policy," 793-819.
- ⁴ Kokuryukai ed., *Seinan kiden*, 1: 584.
- ⁵ Ochiai Hiroki, *Meiji kokka to shizoku*, 126.
- ⁶ Ueda Toshio, "Ryukyu no kizoku o meguru Nisshin kosho," 158; Ishii Takashi, *Meiji shoki no Nihon to Higashi Ajia*, 6; Matsunaga Masayoshi, "Taiwan ryoyuron no keifu: 1874 (Meiji shichi)-nen no Taiwan shuppei o chushin ni," 8; Ito Kiyoshi, *Taiwan: 400-nen no rekishi to tenbo*, 56.
- ⁷ For example, Leonard Gordon, "Japan's Abortive Colonial Venture in Taiwan, 1874," 171-185; Ishii, *Meiji shoki no Nihon to Higashi Ajia*, 2; Nakatsuka Akira, *Nisshin Senso no kenkyu*, 2-68; Yasuoka Akio, "Bakumatsu Meiji zenki no tai-Ajia kosho," 207-208.
- ⁸ Mori Toshihiko, *Taiwan shuppei: Dai Nihon Teikoku no kaimakugeki*, 142, 187.
- ⁹ Robert Eskildsen, "Meiji 7-nen Taiwan shuppei no shokuminchiteki sokumen," 61-95; "'Leading the Natives to Civilization': The Colonial Dimension of the Taiwan Expedition," 14-16; "Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan," 389-393.
- ¹⁰ For example, see Matsunaga, and Sato Saburo, "Meiji 7-nen Taiwan jiken Nisshin ryokoku kokan monjo," 63-69.
- ¹¹ Takahashi Hidenao, *Nisshin Senso e no michi*; Norihito Mizuno, "Japan and Its East Asian Neighbors: Japan's Perceptions of China and Korea and the Making of Foreign Policy from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century."
- ¹² Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*, 16.
- ¹³ Lin Chengrong, "The Mutan Village Incident: Its Significance for East Asian Geopolitics;" Lianes Punanang, "Sinvaudjan kara mita Botansha jiken jo (Cong Sinvaudjan kan Mudanshe shijian)," 41-63. Lin notes that both Mudan (Sinvaudjan) and Gaoshifo (Kuskus) tribesmen committed the atrocities; Lianes denies the implication of the Mudan tribesmen. The descendants of the aboriginal peoples claim today that the cause of the incident was miscommunication between their ancestors and the Ryukyuan.

- 14 DNGB 5: 258–260, 373–376; *Microfilm of the Japanese Naval Archives* (hereafter cited as JN-R), R34-F44843-44856; *Taiwan seito kankei ikken* 1. The descendants of the victims and assailants have recently made moves towards reconciliation. For example, in June 2005, 20 delegates from Mudan visited the tomb of the victims in Naha (Okinawa Main Island) and met the victims' descendants on Miyako Island. In December 2007, the delegates of Miyako Island visited the historical Shimen battlefield in Mudan to attend the unveiling ceremony of the Love and Peace (*ai yu heping*) memorial to commemorate the incident's 130th anniversary. See <http://idv.sinica.edu.tw/etwisdom/2009web/cholsp.html> (accessed on 8 Oct. 2009); "Botansha jiken kara 130-nen no toki koe koryu: Taiwan kankeisha ga Miiyako no shison homon" in *Ryukyu shimpō*, 18 June 2005, <http://ryukyushimpo.jp/news/storyid-3280-storytopic-1.html>; "Botansha jiken kinenhi no jomakushiki ni Ishimine Akira Miyakojima shicho ga shusseki" in <http://www.taiwanembassy.org/ct.asp?xItem=4> (accessed on 20 May 2009).
- 15 DNGB 5: 258–259.
- 16 JN-R 34-F44843-44848.
- 17 DNGB 7: 5; *Taiwan seito kankei ikken* 1.
- 18 JN-R 34-F44843.
- 19 Kabayama Aisuke, *Chichi Kabayama Sukenori*, 178–183.
- 20 Ibid., 181; *Segai Inoue-ko den* (hereafter referred as SID), 1: 475–476.
- 21 Regarding early modern Ryukyuan relations with China and Japan, see Robert K. Sakai, "The Ryukyu (Liu-Chiu) Islands as a Fief of Satsuma," 112–134; Chen Ta-tuan, "Investiture of Liu-Ch'iu Kings in the Ch'ing Period," 135–164; Araki Moriaki, "Ryukyu shobunron," 9: 44–81.
- 22 Ikuta Sumie, "Bakumatsu ni okeru Furansu kantai no Ryukyu raiko to Satsu-Ryu kankei," 79–87.
- 23 Endo Tatsu, Goto Takaomi, "Ryukyu shobun teiko," 121.
- 24 DNGB 5: 376–384; Namihira Tsuneo, "'Ryukyu shobun' saiko: Ryukyu hano sakuho to Taiwan shuppei mondai," 1–78. Namihira argues that the appointment of Sho Tai as *han'o* meant the formation of a lord-vassal relationship between Emperor Meiji and Sho Tai and that "*han*," in this particular case, should not be understood in the same meaning of a *daimyo* domain.
- 25 JN-R34-F44843.
- 26 SID 1: 475–476.
- 27 *Sanjo Sanetomi-ko nenpu*, 736–737.
- 28 *Okubo Toshimichi monjo*, 5: 344.
- 29 *Nihon gaiko bunsho Meiji nenkan tsuiho*, 1: 82.
- 30 Regarding the 1867 U.S. expedition to Taiwan, see Sandra Carol Tayler Caruthers, "Charles LeGendre, American Diplomacy and Expedition in Meiji Japan," 31–56; Huang Jiamo, *Meiguo yu Taiwan: Yiqibashinian zhi Yibajiuwunian*, 201–258.
- 31 *Meiji Tenno ki* (hereafter referred as MT), 1: 596.
- 32 Iwakura Tomomi, "Gaiko, kaikai, Ezochi kaitaku ikensho," 12: 8.
- 33 SID 1: 477.
- 34 *Iwakura Tomomi kankei monjo* (hereafter referred as ITKM), 5: 218.
- 35 *Nihon gaiko bunsho: Meiji nenkan tsuiho*, 1: 104.
- 36 SID 1: 477.
- 37 Tei Einei, "Soejima taishi teki-Shin gairyaku," 64–65.
- 38 DNGB 7: 5–8.
- 39 Regarding LeGendre's career, see Caruthers' Ph.D. dissertation mentioned in footnote 30.
- 40 DNGB 7: 5–15.
- 41 JN-R34-F44937-44960.
- 42 SID 1: 476–478; *Senan kiden*, 1: 549.

- ⁴³ Kabayama Aisuke, *Chichi Kabayama Sukenori*, 187–188.
- ⁴⁴ DNGB 5: 89; ITKM 5: 210; Tei Einei, “Soejima taishi teki-Shin gairyaku,” 75.
- ⁴⁵ DNGB 6: 178.
- ⁴⁶ *Iwakura-ko jikki*, 2: 927–929, 935.
- ⁴⁷ *Nihon gaiko bunsho Meiji nenkan tsuiho*, 1: 82.
- ⁴⁸ Tei Einei, “Soejima taishi teki-Shin gairyaku,” 65.
- ⁴⁹ MT 3: 233; DNGB 7: 20.
- ⁵⁰ Robert Eskildsen, “Of Civilization and Savages,” 392.
- ⁵¹ *Iwakura-ko jikki* 2: 830–831, 919.
- ⁵² Robert Eskildsen, “Of civilization and Savages,” 393.
- ⁵³ Iwakura Tomomi, “Gaiko, kaikei, Ezochi kaitaku ikensho,” 8.
- ⁵⁴ Irie Akira, *Nihon no gaiko: Meiji ishin kara gendai made*, 14–18.
- ⁵⁵ *Sanjo Sanetomi-ko nenpu*, 736–737.
- ⁵⁶ DNGB 2: 854–864.
- ⁵⁷ Ramon H. Myers, Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, 81.
- ⁵⁸ See footnote 2.
- ⁵⁹ *Okubo Toshimichi monjo*, 5: 53–64.
- ⁶⁰ *Okubo Toshimichi kankei monjo*, 1: 337.
- ⁶¹ *Dai Saigo zenshu* (hereafter referred as DSZ), 2: 660–664.
- ⁶² DNGB 7: 13–15.
- ⁶³ Tei Einei, “Soejima taishi teki-Shin gairyaku,” 65.
- ⁶⁴ DSZ 2: 634–635.
- ⁶⁵ Ochiai Hiroki, *Meiji kokka to shizoku*, 106.
- ⁶⁶ DSZ 2: 660–664.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 742–748.
- ⁶⁸ Yasuoka Akio, *Meiji zenki Nisshin koshoshi kennkyu*, 105–107.
- ⁶⁹ MT 3: 15.
- ⁷⁰ DSZ 2: 754–755.
- ⁷¹ *Okubo Toshimichi kankei monjo*, 5: 53–64; Nagai Hideo, *Meiji kokka keiseiki no gaisei to naisei*, 159.
- ⁷² *Okubo Toshimichi nikki*, 2: 227, 233–236.
- ⁷³ ITKM 5: 496–497; *Okuma Shigenobu kankei monjo* (hereafter referred as OSKM), 2: 283–284.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 207; OSKM 2: 283–284.
- ⁷⁵ ITKM 2: 510–514; OSKM 2: 262–263.
- ⁷⁶ OSKM 2: 275, 285–287.
- ⁷⁷ DNGB 7: 20.
- ⁷⁸ *Okuma Shigenobu sekijitsutan*, vol. 3 of *Okuma Shigenobu sosho*, 27; Kobayashi Takao, “Taiwan jiken to Ryukyu shobun: Rujandoru no yakuwari saiko 1,” 6.
- ⁷⁹ DNGB 6: 101.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 160–161.
- ⁸¹ For example, regarding British and U.S. attitudes towards the expedition plan in April 1974, see DNGB 7: 30–32, 40–43.
- ⁸² *Okubo Toshimichi nikki*, 2: 262.
- ⁸³ MT 3: 244.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 245–249.
- ⁸⁵ DNGB 7: 107–109; Matsunaga Masayoshi, “Taiwan ryoyuron no keifu: 1874 (Meiji shichi)-nen no Taiwan shuppei o chushin ni,” 9–10; *Qingji waijiao yinying handian siliao*, 18.
- ⁸⁶ DNGB 7: 74–75.

⁸⁷ *Okubo Toshimichi monjo*, 5: 344.

⁸⁸ DNGB 7: 22.

⁸⁹ For details of the negotiations, see DNGB, JN-R, and *Chouban Yiwu Shimo*.

⁹⁰ DNGB 7: 289–292.

⁹¹ Matsunaga Masayoshi, “Taiwan ryoyuron no keifu: 1874 (Meiji shichi)-nen no Taiwan shuppei o chushin ni,” 10.

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