

An Introduction to The Rekidai Hōan

Documents of the Kingdom of Ryukyu

Revised Edition



Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education



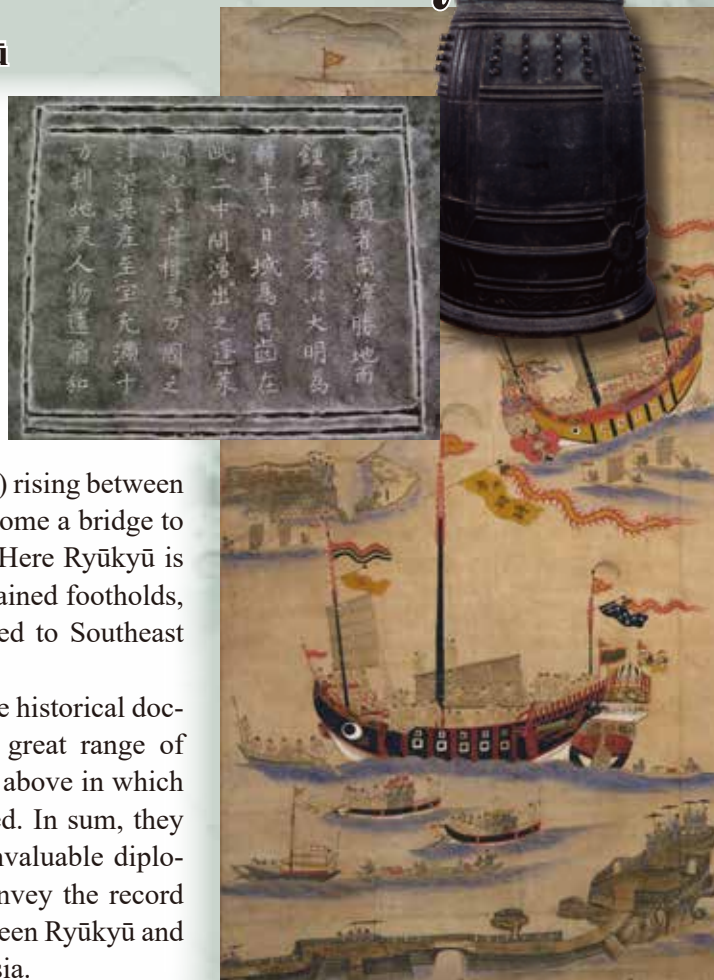
◆ The Rekidai Hōan: What are they?

○ The Prosperity of the Kingdom of Ryūkyū

The 1458 Bell Bridge to the Nations (*Bankoku shinryō no kane*), preserved at Shuri Castle, is famous as the symbol of the kingdom. Ryūkyū was rising as a trading state while the Ming Dynasty was establishing itself in China.

The inscription on the bell states, 'Ryūkyū lies in a favorable location within the southern seas. It receives quality goods from Korea, it is a direct associate of the Ming dynasty, and it is closely bound to Japan. Ryūkyū is *Penglai* (the legendary Chinese island of the immortals) rising between China and Japan. Due to its sea-going vessels, it has become a bridge to numerous lands and is replete with precious treasures.' Here Ryūkyū is praised for its adaptable marine infrastructure. Having gained footholds, due to relations with those states, Ryūkyūans also sailed to Southeast Asia and promoted their country through trade relations.

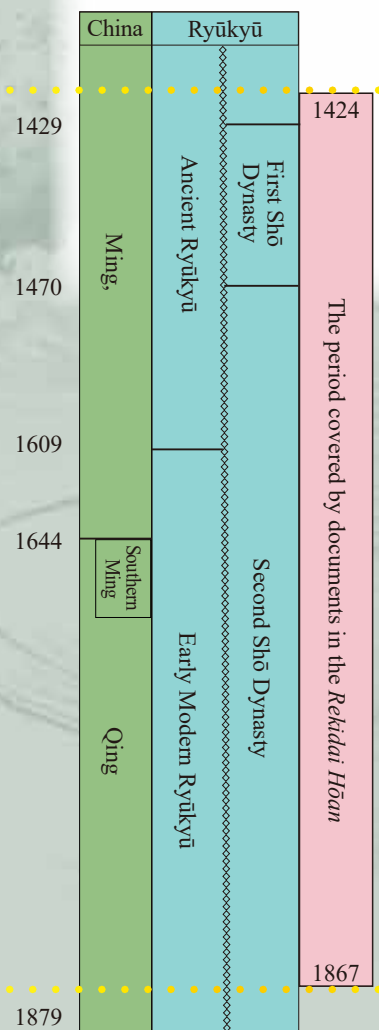
The *Rekidai Hōan* are historical documents that record the great range of the activities mentioned above in which Ryūkyū became involved. In sum, they consist of historically invaluable diplomatic sources which convey the record of communications between Ryūkyū and the eastern regions of Asia.



above: Bell in the Main Hall of Shuri Castle and a rubbing (or frottage) of the inscription
below: Painting of the Tribute Vessel (Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum)

○ The *Rekidai Hōan* Collection of Diplomatic Documents: a 444-year Record

The *Rekidai Hōan* are voluminous (4,320 extant items), and written in Chinese over the period 1424-1867, i.e. the kingdom era from the reign of King Shō Hashi to that of King Shō Tai. The collection comprises arranged and edited copies of letters from the Ryūkyūan government and documents sent from various foreign states, mainly China. (See also pp.5-6.) Not all the diplomatic correspondence between Ryūkyū and foreign lands has been preserved in this source. While that with China predominates, that with Japan is not included. However, that does not reduce the value because it is rare for any country to preserve so many diplomatic records spanning such long period.



○ Kume-mura (township), a Major Player in Ryūkyūan Foreign Relations

Ryūkyūan overseas trade was superintended by the elite of Kume-mura. Located in an area called Ukishima (floating island), it is now part of Naha.

Kume-mura, also known as Toei (the Chinese settlement 唐營、唐榮), took shape in the second half of the 14th century, and was established by groups of Chinese, later called the *binjin 36 sei* (36 families) from Fujian. They took a leading role in the development of Ryūkyūan foreign relations and trade, as well as being responsible both for interpretation in foreign trade dealings, and for navigation technology. They also drafted and interpreted Chinese-language diplomatic documents for contacts with China and other states. Copies compiled for future reference are the foundation of the *Rekidai Hōan*.



Naha and vicinity and Kume-mura in the 19th century

○ Compilation of the *Rekidai Hōan*: the First Commission, 1697

Rekidai Hōan compilation was conducted by the government at Shuri Castle. The purpose was not merely to conserve the voluminous diplomatic documents, but primarily to serve in the drafting of future diplomatic correspondence, and as a means of reference to past trends in foreign affairs. As indicated by their name, the *Rekidai Hōan* were venerated as official records left by successive generations. Moreover, the custom of tracing family genealogies, developed in the late 17th century, also influenced the compilation of the *Rekidai Hōan*.

The first compilation phase was conducted in 1697. According to the preface of the first collection, the government was concerned that documents long preserved in Kume-mura could easily be lost or dispersed. Thus, Sai Taku (蔡鐸), then the official head of that community, was commissioned to compile the documents. From c.1679, he assembled the documents for 1424 to 1697 into 49 volumes, and created two sets, one for Shuri Castle, the other for Kume-mura, i.e. the 1st collection. The compilation of the 2nd collection partly in 16 volumes, covering 1726 to 1729, was undertaken by Tei Junsoku (程順則). The process continued with documents running to 1858, in 200 volumes. That 3rd collection, extending to 1867, was assembled in 13 volumes. An additional collection was compiled containing records relating to contacts with Western countries.



The HIGASHIONNA Kanjun Cyanotype Copy, Okinawa Prefectural Library



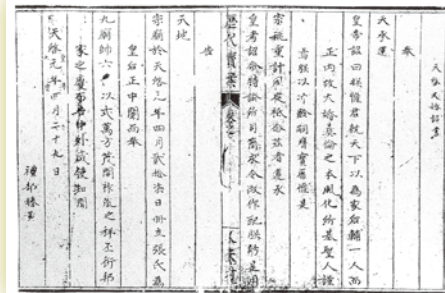
◆ The Compilation of the *Rekidai Hōan*: the Cyanotype and Manuscript (MS) Copies

● The Fate of the Various MS Copies

When the Prefecture was established in 1879, the Shuri Castle collection was transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs in Tokyo with other official papers. Regrettably, those papers were lost in the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake.

The Kume-mura copies, concealed for fear of confiscation by the Meiji government, were discovered in 1931 in the house of an ancient Kume-mura family. After those copies had been transferred to the former Okinawa Prefectural Library in 1933, researchers made more versions by the cyanotype process or manual transcription.

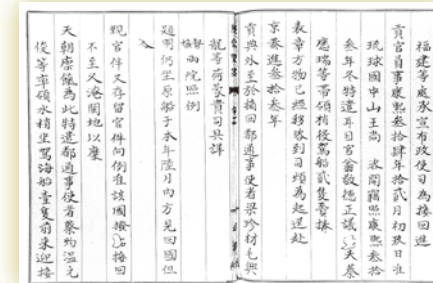
📷 The Kamakura Copy: Cyanotyping the Originals



Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts, Art Museum

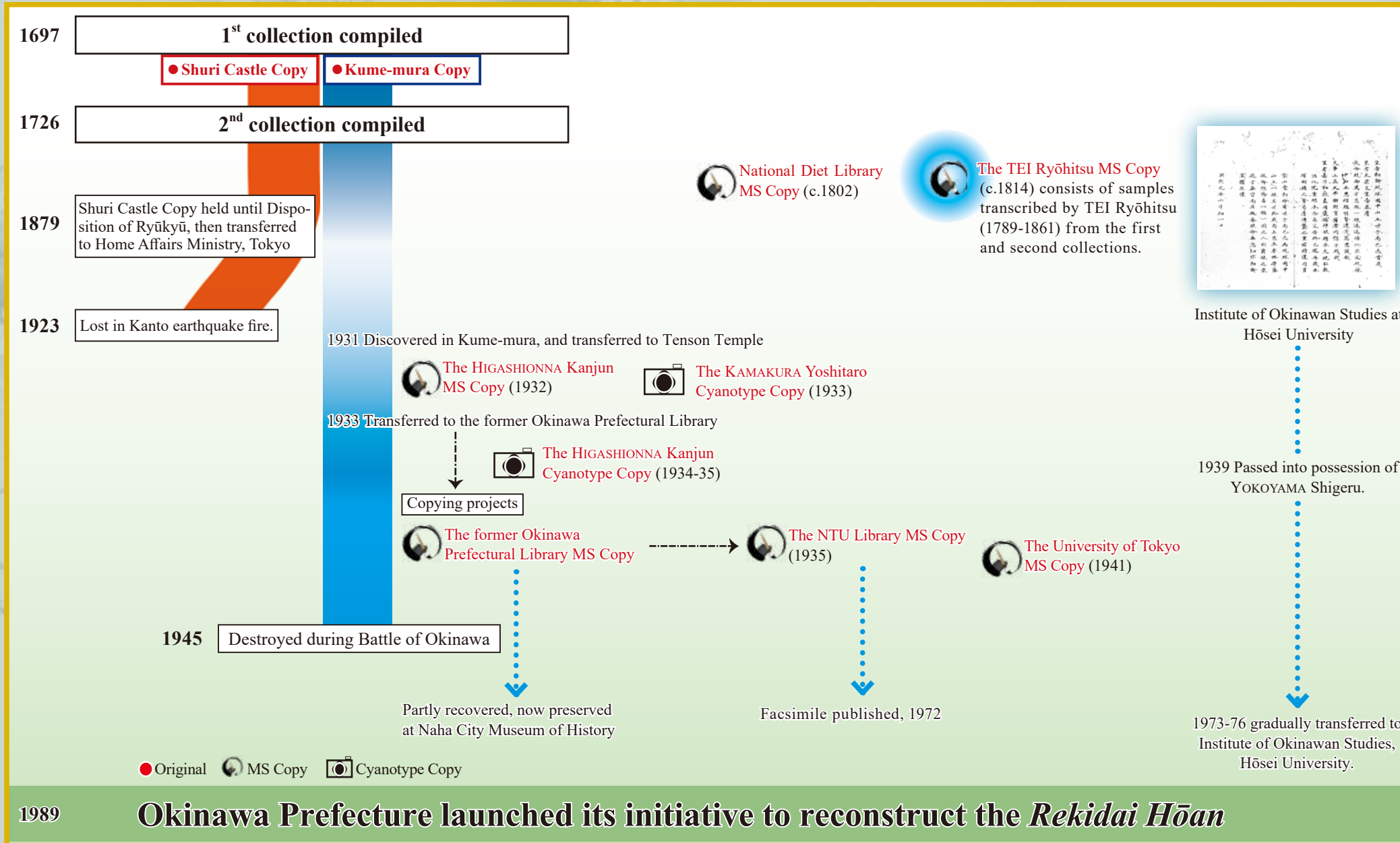
When the Kume-mura copy was discovered in 1931, KAMAKURA Yoshitaro, then researching Okinawan arts and crafts, cyanotyped the documents held in the Tenson temple in Kume-mura in 1933. Although incomplete and partly unclear, they still remain the most reliable version since they were reproduced from the originals. They contain copies of a total of 55 volumes: 35 from the 1st collection, 17 from the 2nd, two from the 3rd, and one from the additional series.

📖 The Former Prefectural Library Copy: the most accurate MS version

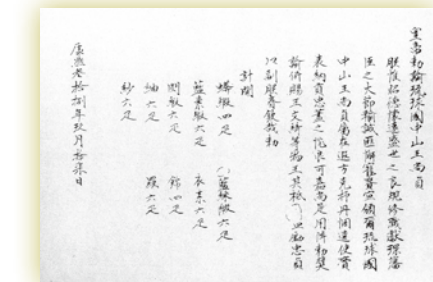


Naha City Museum of History

When the Kume-mura copy was moved to the former Prefectural Library, a MS version was produced under the supervision of the sinologist KUWAE Kokuei to preserve the originals as well as for research. It is the earliest MS version made in modern times. During the 1945 Battle of Okinawa, both the original Kume-mura version and that MS copy were misplaced in Genga, Haneji Village, the site to which they had been despatched. Fortunately, a portion of the MS copy, in all 99 volumes, including 31 from the 1st collection and 68 from the 2nd, were recovered. They are now at the Naha City Museum of History.



📖 The National Taiwan University Copy: the Most Extensive MS Version



National Taiwan University Library

In 1935, KOBATA Atsushi, a professor at Taihoku Imperial University, took an interest in the *Rekidai Hōan* and, at the request of KUBA Seisei, made a copy of the former Okinawa Prefectural Library version. That MS copy was accessioned into the collections of the National Taiwan University (NTU) after World War II. Its value, however, has been compromised both by speculative interpolations to supply omitted and effaced passages, and by transcription errors. However, this copy contains the most volumes, in total 249, including 42 from the 1st collection, 187 from the 2nd, 13 from the 3rd, and three from the additional series as well as four for the contents tables.



◆ Structure and Categorization of the Rekidai Hōan Documents

The Rekidai Hōan

1st Collection
Complete: 49 volumes
Extant: 42 volumes

1424-1697 organised chronologically as well as by document category

I	volumes 1-22	Yongle 22 nd - Kangxi 36 th (1424-1697)
II	volumes 23-43	Xuande 1 st - Kangxi 35 th (1426-1696)

2nd Collection
Complete in 200 volumes
Extant 187 volumes

1697-1858 Arranged chronologically (by Imperial era)

III	tables of contents (Parts I and II)	Kangxi 36 th - Xianfeng 8 th (1697-1858)
	volumes 1-14	Kangxi 36 th - Yongzheng 3 rd (1697-1725)
IV	volumes 15-30	Yongzheng 3 rd - Qianlong 14 th (1725-49)
V	volumes 31-49	Qianlong 15 th - Qianlong 30 th (1750-65)
VI	volumes 50-74	Qianlong 31 st - Qianlong 54 th (1766-89)
VII	volumes 75-89	Qianlong 53 rd - Jiaqing 4 th (1788-99)
VIII	volumes 90-104	Jiaqing 4 th - Jiaqing 13 th (1799-1808)
IX	volumes 105-122	Jiaqing 13 th - Jiaqing 22 nd (1808-17)
X	volumes 123-145	Jiaqing 21 st - Daoguang 7 th (1816-27)
XI	volumes 146-160	Daoguang 6 th - Daoguang 15 th (1826-35)
XII	volumes 161-173	Daoguang 15 th - Daoguang 21 st (1835-41)
XIII	volumes 174-189	Daoguang 21 st -Daoguang 30 th (1841-50)
XIV	volumes 190-200	Daoguang 30 th - Xianfeng 8 th (1850-58)

3rd Collection
Complete in 13 volumes
Extant, 13 volumes

1859-67 Arranged chronologically

XV	volumes 1-13	Xianfeng 9 th - Tongzhi 6 th (1859-67)
	Additional Collection	Kangxi 36 th - Xianfeng 5 th (1697-1855)

The Additional Collection
Complete in 4 volumes

N.B. Of the 266 volumes, 246 are extant, and 20 lost.

N.B. The organization of the 15 (I-XV) OPBE publications is based on the editorial structure adopted and published by the NTU.

Ryūkyūan documents relating to China (Ming, Qing), Korea and authorities in Southeast Asia
Zhao (詔) / *Chi* (勅) – imperial edicts from the emperors of China
Libu Zi (礼部咨) – communications from the Chinese Ministry of Rites
Fujian Buzhengshisi Zi (福建布政使司咨) – communications from the Government of Fujian Province
Biao/Zou (表/奏) – Ryūkyūan royal memorials sent to the emperors of China
Guowang Zi (国王咨) – communications from the Kings of Ryūkyū to the Chinese Ministry of Rites and the Government of Fujian Province
Fuwen (符文) – Ryūkyūan royal writs issued authorizing travel to China
Zhizhao (執照) – writs granting leave to board vessels bound for China
Hongguang Wengao (弘光文稿) – correspondence between the Ryūkyūan authorities and their Southern Ming counterparts
Longwu Wengao (隆武文稿) – as above
Yiyi Wengao (移彝文稿) – diplomatic communications from Korea and Southeast Asian states
Yiyi Zi (移彝咨) – communications from the Kings of Ryūkyū, destined for Korea and countries in Southeast Asia
Yiyi Zhizhao (移彝執照) – writs granting leave to board vessels bound for Korea and lands in Southeast Asia
Sannanwang Huaiji Wengao (山南王併懷機文稿) – records relating to diplomatic contacts between King Tarumi of San-nan (the southern principality of Ryūkyū) and Ming dynasty officials, and correspondence between Minister Kaiki and the port authorities in Palembang, Sumatra

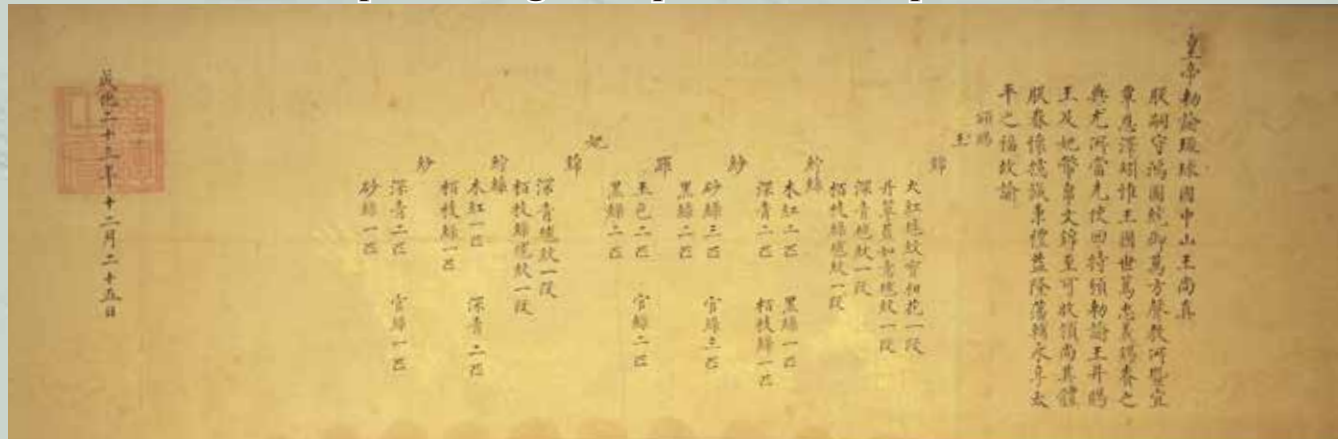
Correspondence between Ryūkyū and Qing China
(Zhao/Chi, Libu Zi, Fujian Buzhengshisi Zi, Biao/Zou, Guowang Zi, Fuwen, Zhizhao, etc.)

N.B. Document categories are as in the first collection

Documents relating to French and British contacts with Ryūkyū, 1844-47
 Documents relating to French, British and US contacts with Ryūkyū, 1846-55
Shishū Bunkumiho – extraneous diplomatic documents, 1773-84
 Inventories of goods imported on *kan-sen* (冠船) vessels carrying the Chinese investiture envoys from China, 1719
 Table of contents for the 2nd collection of the *Rekidai Hōan* (*Kenkon*, Parts I and II)

N.B. Tables of content are not included in the published NTU edition.

○ The Rekidai Hōan Copies of Original Diplomatic Correspondence



Declaration by Kōsū (Xiaozong) of the Ming Dynasty, despatched to King Shō Shin of Chūzan, the Kingdom of Ryūkyū, Chenghua 23rd year 12th month 25th day (8 January, 1488) (Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum)



First Collection, volume 1, No.24, KAMAKURA Yoshitaro Cyanotype Copy (Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts, Art Museum)

The *Rekidai Hōan* are copies of original diplomatic correspondence. When, for example, an imperial edict from China arrived, Kume-mura foreign relations officials made a copy. Meanwhile, the response to China was drafted, then sent to Shuri, and afterwards copied and filed for future reference.

However, even though the format and content, as well as the class of seal, are recorded, data on the medium on which the original document was written is lacking. From the decree title on the left, for example, information about the declaration from China can be inferred. Moreover, the paper would have been yellow with a clawed dragon and clouds painted in gold. Again, it would have been written in Chinese ink with a seal impressed above the imperial era datum.



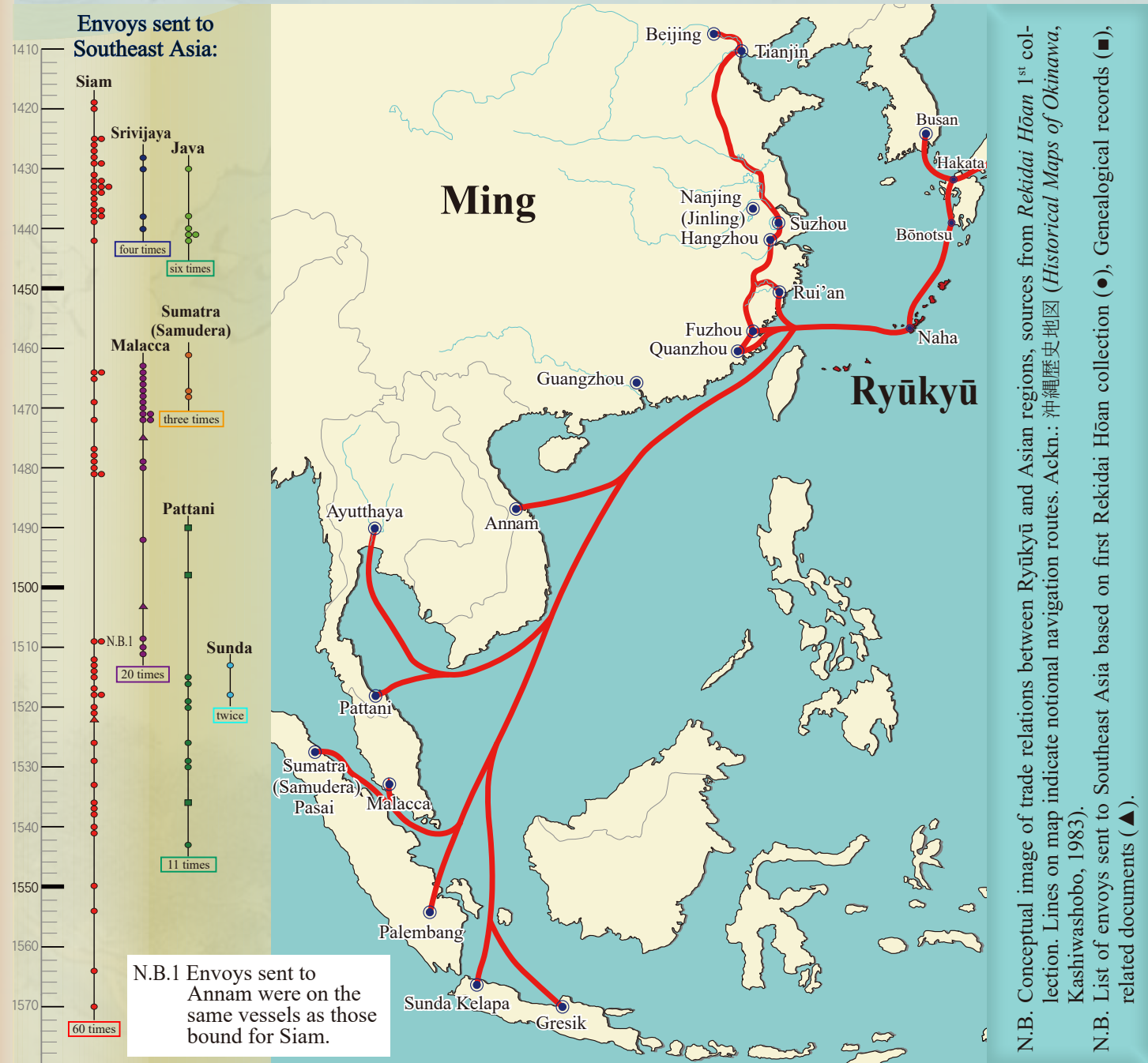
◆ First Collection of the Rekidai Hōan

(1424-1697)

○ The Entrepôt Trade

While imposing a ban on foreign trade undertaken by private commercial vessels, the Ming Dynasty (est.1368) allowed trade with its tributary states. Ryūkyū offered horses, sulphur and various goods as tribute to the Emperor and readily conducted trade with China. In the meantime, Ryūkyū also formed commercial relations with Japan and Southeast Asia, thus bridging China with Japan and SE Asia. At the time, vessels from those areas, gathered in Naha, which prospered as an entrepôt and hosted representatives of numerous nationalities.

Ryūkyū-SE Asian activities centred on Siam (Thailand). The loosening of the maritime ban in the later 16th century led to an increase in private regional exchange and a decline in Ryūkyūan trade. By 1570 Ryūkyū ceased to send envoys to the region.



A Sample Document Recording Trade with a Southeast Asian State (1-40-20)

To the King of Siam from King Shō Hashi of Chūzan, Kingdom of Ryūkyū
 In regard to the despatch of Yusami, and so forth.
 (9 November 1436)

The King of Chūzan of the Kingdom of Ryūkyū proffers this letter.

Although our country is situate distantly in the East Sea, we have enjoyed beneficial friendship with Siam for many years, and have enjoyed good relations with our neighbouring lands. In this instance, I am dispatching Yusami (or Isami 欲沙每) who as our chief envoy shall bear our offerings and thanks, which we trust that your Majesty shall be graciously pleased to accept. Whereupon, we beg that you shall kindly permit us to trade on equal terms in the porcelain, black pepper and sappanwood that we have obtained from Siam. Our purpose is to offer those goods to the Ming [China] on the return of our envoy. It is our hope that your Majesty shall be graciously pleased to lend your goodwill to the accomplishment of this our trading enterprise and thereby enable our mission to return with the favourable monsoon. Herewith, we authorize Yusami to bear our gifts and this letter.

List of gifts

Ornamental satin 5 <i>pi</i> [bolts]	White-blue satin 20 <i>pi</i> [bolts]
Swords 5	Variegated fans 30
Large blue vases 20	Small blue vases 400
Small blue bowls 2,000	Sulphur 2,500 <i>jin</i> [catties]

To Siam
 Zhengtong 1/10/1

One vessel, transporting Tei Chi (鄭智) and Ryō Tokuchū (梁徳仲) as interpreters.





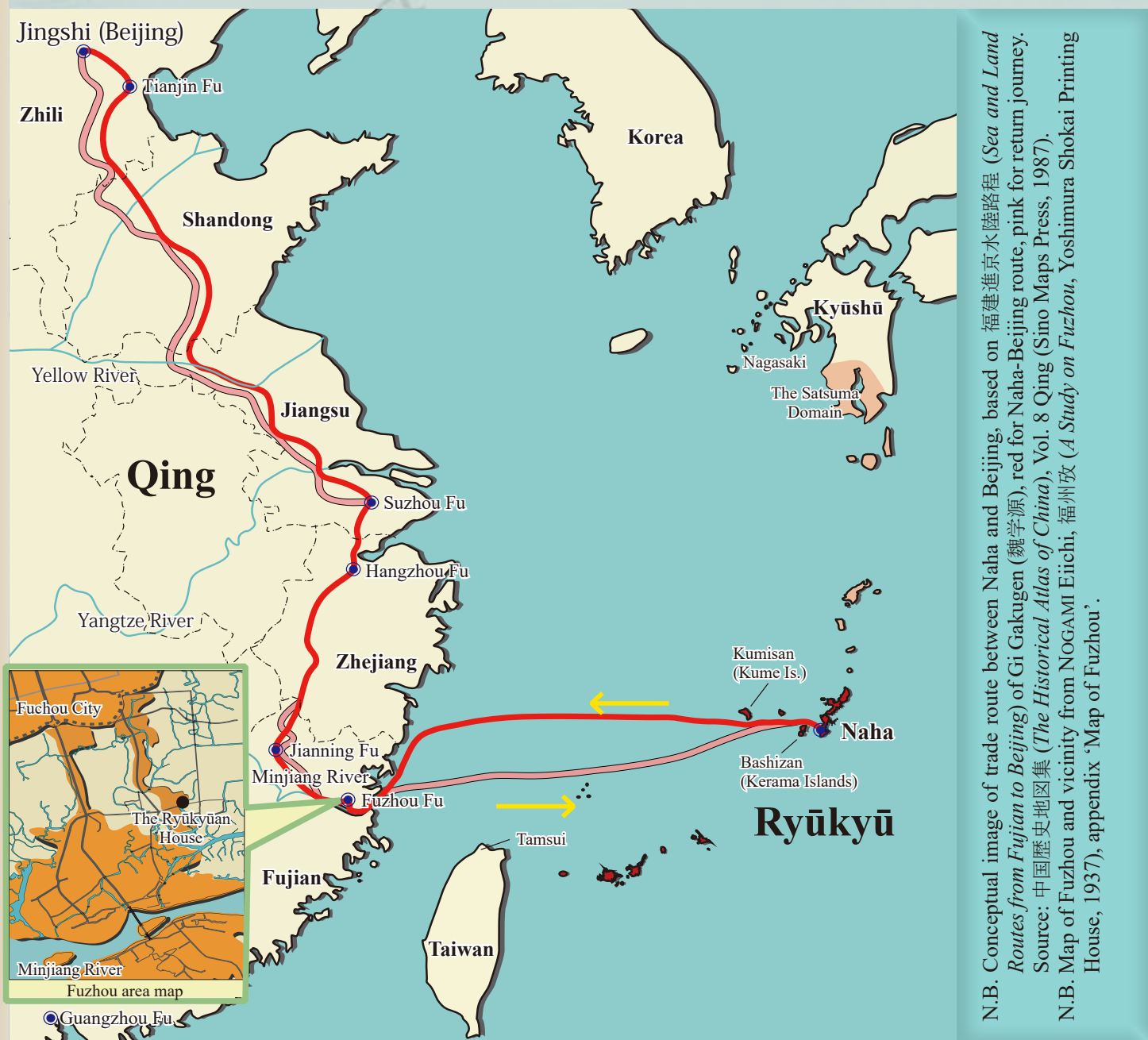
◆ The Second and Third Collection of the Rekidai Hōan

(1697-1858, 1859-1867)

○ China-Ryūkyū-Japan Trade

After the Shimazu Clan invaded in 1609, Ryūkyū came under the indirect control of Japan through the Satsuma domain. At the time, China was recovering from the turbulence of the mid-17th-century Ming-Qing dynastic transition. Thus, significantly for the political situation in East Asia, Ryūkyū sent envoys both to China and Japan, and thus conducted diplomatic relations and trade with both states.

As tribute to the Qing, Ryūkyū offered sulphur, copper and tin imported from the Satsuma Domain while at the same time taking Japanese silver, dried kelp and fishery products (*tawaramono*), i.e. sea cucumber, abalone and shark fin, dried and all in high demand. By return, Ryūkyū carried Chinese medicine, spices, silk fabrics etc. from China. Ryūkyū traded in those items and local Ryūkyūan goods, e.g. black sugar taken to Japan and fishery products to China for the markets of those two countries.



An Example of a Tribute Trade Document (2-162-15)

From the Board of Rites, responsible for foreign relations in Qing China, addressed to Shō Iku, Prince of Chūzan of the Kingdom of Ryūkyū, a declaration granting impost exemption on trade goods (25 February 1835).

The Board of Rites hereafter gives due notice to the Kingdom of Ryūkyū.

Our customs authorities in Fuzhou hereby report on and enquire as to the possibility of seeking permission for impost exemption on trading goods carried in two tributary vessels from Ryūkyū. On Daoguang 14/12/27 (25 January 1835), we rendered our report to the Emperor whereupon his majesty granted his permission. His Majesty has also certified the list of goods eligible for impost exemption. We hereby inform the Prince of the Kingdom of Ryūkyū of those proceedings.

Daoguang 15/1/28

(Appendix: Goods for Impost Exemption)

- gold folding screens, two sets (impost duty: 1 *liang*)
- white-paper folding fans, 1,000 (6 *qian*)
- kelp, 196,000 *jin* (156 *liang* and 8 *qian*)
- shark fins, 5,000 *jin* (22 *liang*, 7 *qian* and 5 *fen*)
- dried abalone, 18,140 *jin* (82 *liang*, 5 *qian*, 3 *fen* and 7 *li*)
- dried sea cucumber, 1,684 *jin* (1 *liang*, 6 *qian*, 8 *fen* and 4 *li*)
- awamori sake, 130 jars (1 *liang*, 1 *qian* and 7 *fen*)

Impost duty exemption in total is 322 *liang*, 6 *qian*, 1 *fen* and 8 *li*.

N.B. *liang*, *qian*, *fen* and *li* were monetary units in Qing China.

1 *liang* (*tael*=silver 37g) = 10 *qian* (mace) = 100 *fen* (cantareen) = 1,000 *li* (cash)

Products Circulating among Qing China, Ryūkyū and Japan



◆ The Rekidai Hōan Recompilation Initiative

○ Purpose of the Initiative

The *Rekidai Hōan* are documents of the utmost value in terms of understanding historical interactions among different countries and regions in eastern parts of Asia, as well as the foreign relations of the Kingdom of Ryūkyū. However, it is a matter of great regret that the original archives are lost due to confiscation by the Meiji government, the Great Kanto Earthquake fire and the Battle of Okinawa.

Okinawa Prefecture launched the recompilation initiative of the *Rekidai Hōan* in 1989. The purpose was a reconstruction of that source based on extant cyanotypes, handwritten copies, etc., and to make that record of the history and culture of Okinawa available to the people of the prefecture.

○ Collecting Related Historical Documents and Academic Exchange

In the process of recompilation, the collection of related documents, cross-checking and analysis are all necessary in order to supply missing sections which arose due to scribal errors, missing characters, and insect and other kinds of damage.

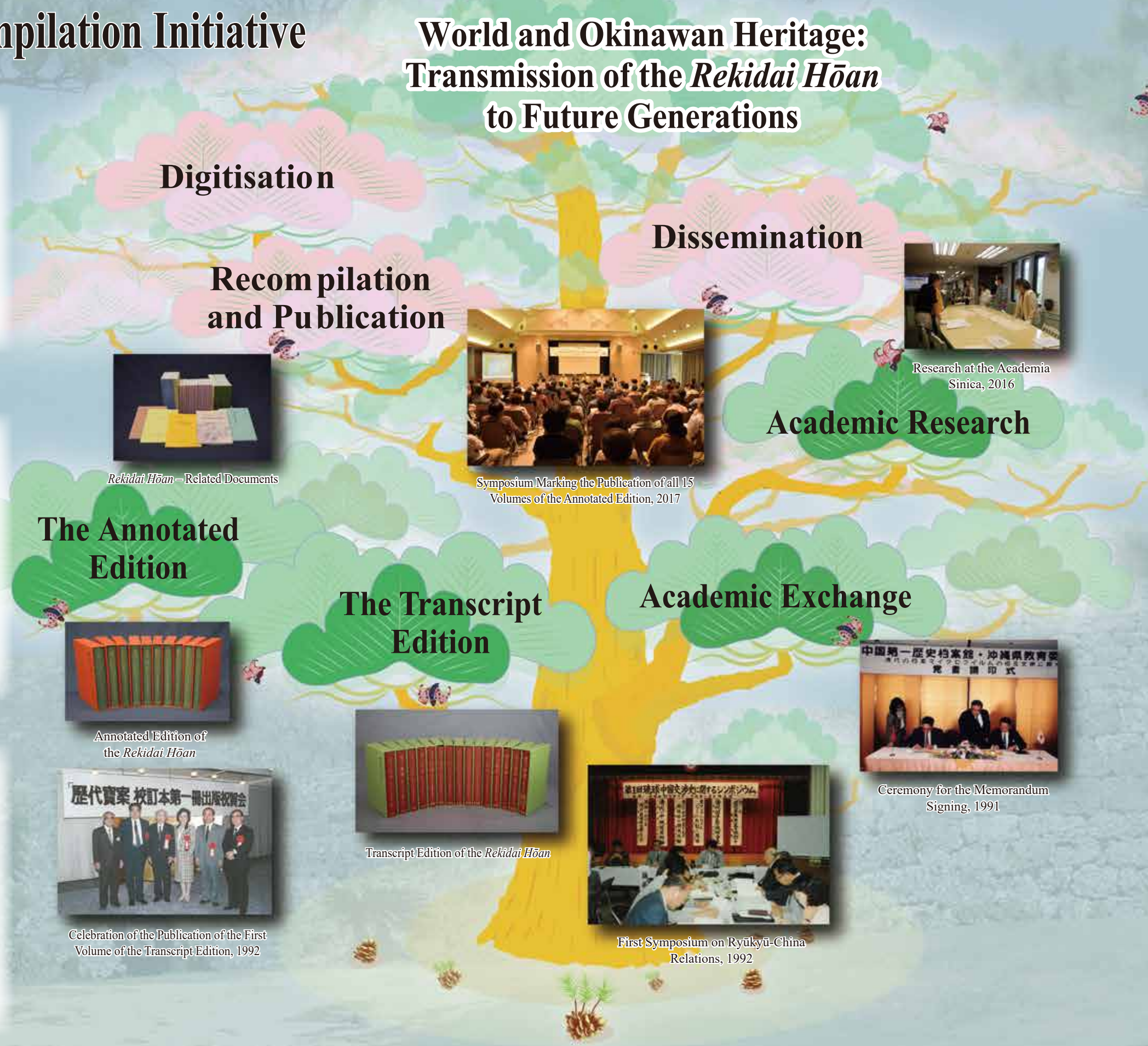
The Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education has been collecting historical documents relating to Ryūkyū, both at home and abroad, and making an outstanding contribution since the beginning of the initiative. It has arranged academic exchanges and historical documentary research with many scholastic institutions, in particular with the First Historical Archives of China, the National Palace Museum Library in Taiwan and the Academia Sinica, also in Taiwan, and thereby promoting the discovery of related materials and supporting the task of assembling further sources.

○ Future Plans

During the first phase of the plan, 1991-2007, and the second phase, 2008-2017, the initiative achieved publication of a complete transcript edition of 15 volumes, and an annotated edition of 11 volumes. During the third phase (2018-2027), the remainder of the annotations, glossaries (for the explanation of difficult words, passages and related items), a general table of contents, a general index and so forth are scheduled for publication.

Moreover, the initiative further plans to publish supplementary editions for the general public, one published in modern Japanese, and foreign-language editions, initially an English translation. Beyond that, a digitised version of the transcript and the annotated editions with searchable Internet texts will become readily accessible to the people of Okinawa and the entire world.

World and Okinawan Heritage: Transmission of the *Rekidai Hōan* to Future Generations



Rekidai Hōan-Related Documents



Symposium Marking the Publication of all 15 Volumes of the Annotated Edition, 2017



Research at the Academia Sinica, 2016



Annotated Edition of the Rekidai Hōan



Transcript Edition of the Rekidai Hōan



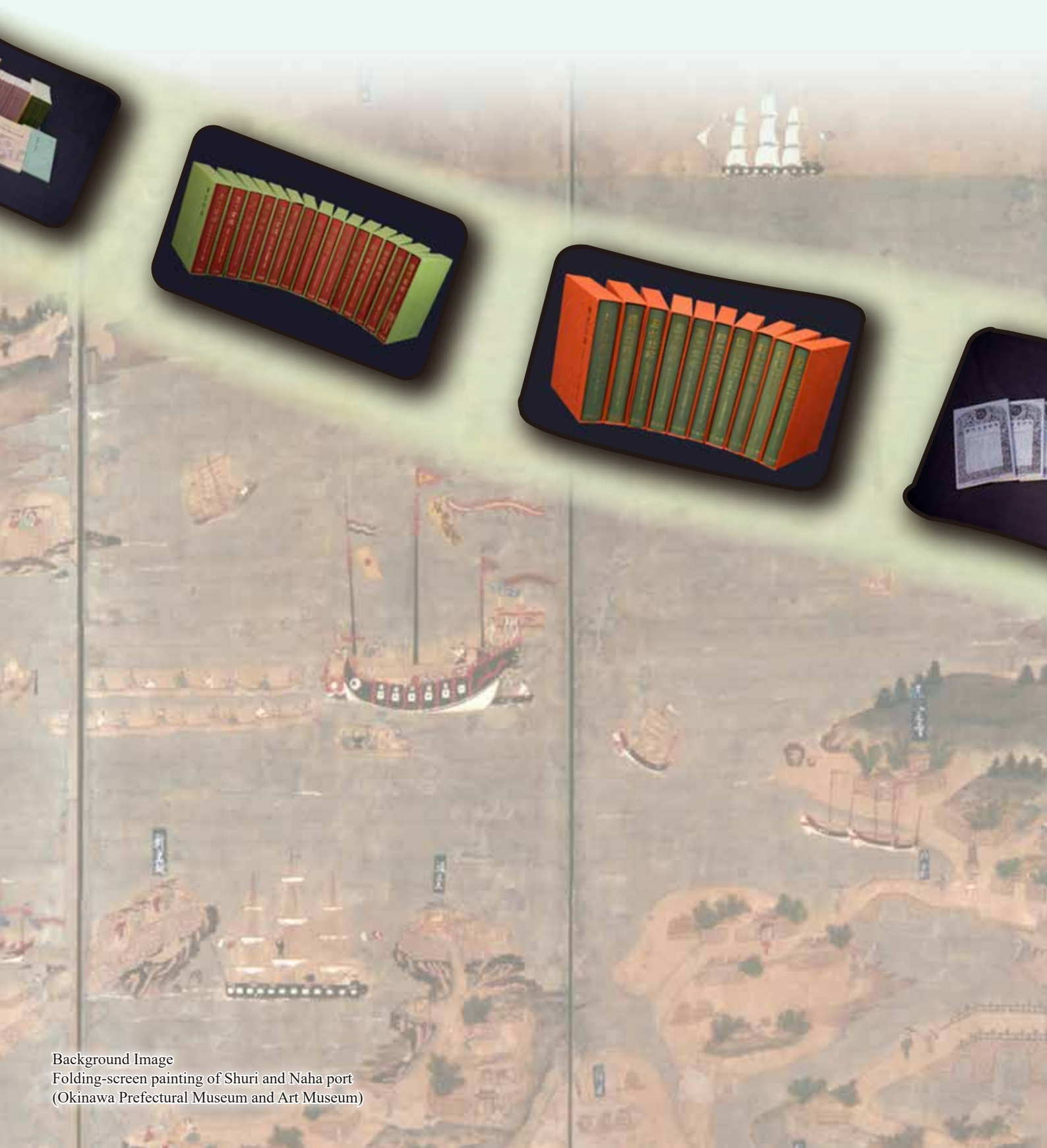
Celebration of the Publication of the First Volume of the Transcript Edition, 1992



First Symposium on Ryūkyū-China Relations, 1992



Ceremony for the Memorandum Signing, 1991



Background Image
Folding-screen painting of Shuri and Naha port
(Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum)