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What was the extent of the territorial control of Ming Dynasty China? The historical background of Senkaku Islands in historical documents^{*}

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There were two events recently occurred in relation to the Senkaku Islands. One was the publication by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) of a 1969 map made up by China's State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping, in which the islands are referred to as the "Senkaku Islands" (the Japanese name for the islands). The map is included in materials assembled by MOFA of Japan dated March 2015 under the title "About the Senkaku Islands." *The material of English version is dated March 2013.

The second one was the misleading explanation by staff members at the Chinese Embassy in the United States spread to US researchers in relation to the agreement reached last year (2014) between Japanese and Chinese officials toward improving bilateral relationship prior to the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting in Beijing. According to those embassy officials, the Japanese side changed its traditional stance and acknowledged that the Senkaku Islands were a bilateral issue with China.

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Six key points



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The statement released by MOFA of Japan on November 7, 2014, noted only that “both sides recognized that they had different views as to the emergence of tense situations in recent years in the waters of the East China Sea, including those around the Senkaku Islands, and shared the view that, through dialogue and consultation, they would prevent the deterioration of the situation, establish a crisis management mechanism, and avert the rise of unforeseen circumstances.” No reference is made to the Islands as being a bilateral issue. The Japanese Government has made absolutely no change to its stance that there exists no issue of territorial sovereignty to be resolved concerning the Senkaku Islands. China is simply making a unilateral demand.

To take this opportunity to restate points of view on the Senkaku Islands, there are six key points.

- (1) How the Islands are referred to in historical documents
- (2) How the Japanese Government’s 1895 incorporation of the Senkaku Islands into Japanese territory is understood (There are some views of criticizing that action)

- (3) How the Senkaku Islands were handled in the postwar redefinition of Japanese territory—particularly in the San Francisco Peace Treaty. To put it simply, what were the legal status of the Senkaku Islands
- (4) How the Japanese and Chinese Governments have subsequently handled the Senkaku Islands, including whether or not there has been an agreement to “shelve” issues relating to the Senkaku Islands, the 1969 map of China’s State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping, and last year’s (2014) bilateral agreement
- (5) Relationship of the United Nations 1968 survey on oil reserves
- (6) Relationship with the implications of the reversion of Okinawa

Of these 6 points, the two most fundamentals are (1) how the islands are referred to in historical documents and (3) what the legal status of the Senkaku Islands under international law are. Here I will start by explaining references in historical documents.

Outside the scope of the Ming Dynasty’s maritime defense

China altered its traditional stance in 1971 to start claiming territorial sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands. Three documents have been quoted in support of that claim: *Chukai Zuhen* (*Chou hai tu bian*) [An Illustrated Compendium on Maritime Security], a treatise on Ming Dynasty’s maritime defense compiled by Hu Zongxian; *Shi Ryukyu zouroku* (*Shi liu qiu zalu*) [Miscellaneous Records of the Imperial Mission to Ryukyu] by Wang Ji, an imperial envoy of the Qing Dynasty; and the decree of Empress Dowager Cixi. The last of these was subsequently proved to be a fake and is no longer used. The Ryukyu paid tribute to both Japan and Qing Dynasty China, and the Qing court sent out an investiture envoy to the Ryukyu once in some years, and many of the envoys’ travel diaries remain.

Wang Ji’s *Shi Ryukyu zouroku* (*Shi liu qiu zalu*) records the envoy’s ship voyage eastward from Fujian, describing that when they passed the *kou* (*jiao*) (the outskirts) at “Sekisho (Chi Yu),” the easternmost tip of the Senkaku Islands, it was the “boundary between the inner and outer.” The Chinese Government argues that this was the boundary between China and other countries, but the comment of “boundary” was actually made by a crew member from the Ryukyu who was guiding the ship and meant “the boundary between inside and outside of Ryukyu.” In other words, all that

Wang Ji writes is that the Senkaku Islands lie outside the Ryukyu. Just because the islands are outside the Ryukyu does not make them a part of Ming Dynasty China, as I explain below.

The map in Xu Zongxian's *Chukai Zuhen* (*Chou hai tu bian*) certainly uses a Chinese name for (some of) the Senkaku Islands, but it also indicates how far the Qing military's garrisons and patrol area reached, and the Senkaku Islands are shown as lying outside both of these. In other words, Xu Zongxian records the Senkaku Islands as outside the scope of the Qing Dynasty's maritime defense.

On the other hand, there are numerous documents showing that the territory of the Qing and Ming Dynasties in principle extended only as far as the coast of the Chinese mainland as well as islands adjacent to its coast (according to *Senkaku hanbaku manyuaru hyakudai* [Senkaku Rebuttal Manual: 100 Topics], a recent publication of Associate Professor Nozomu Ishii of Nagasaki Junshin Catholic University).

Ming and Qing territory extended as far as its coast



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- Wang Ji's writing of *Kankai Shu* (*Guan hai ji*) also notes "Guo dongsha shan shi Min Shan jin chu." [once past Dongsha Shan, the territory of Min Shan comes to an end]. Min Shan refers to the territory of Fujian, so this expression indicates that once past Dongsha Shan, it becomes no longer in Fujian (or that Fujian territory ends). Dongsha Shan is a part of the Baso Retto (Mazu Liedao), and an island nestled close to the mainland of China.
- *Koumin Jitsuroku* (*Huangming shilu*) [Veritable Annals of the Ming Dynasty], a book about history of the Ming dynasty, places Taishan (Daisan), Shuangshan (Souzan), Dongyong (Touyu), Wuqiu (Ukyu), Penghu (Houko), and Pengshan (Houzan) (all of them are adjacent to the mainland of China) within the Ming Dynasty's back yard, and notes that "Ming and other countries co-existed the rest of the ocean." In other words, it says that the eastern area from these islands is the high seas.
- Drawn up under imperial orders, *Daimin Ittoshi* (*Da Ming yitong zhi*) [Gazetteer of the Unified Great Ming] similarly notes that Ming territory reaches as far as the coast—more specifically, "190 ri to the east coast." This is in the section explaining the territory of Fuzhou Prefecture (today's Fuzhou City), and means "to the coast 190 ri eastward from Fuzhou prefectural capital" 190 ri matches the linear distance from the capital to the coast, which is approximately 40km. Many other documents include similar description.

As described above, the historical Chinese documents clearly explain that Qing and Ming territory reached only to the coast. The maritime area between the Chinese mainland and Ryukyu was, as noted in the *Koumin Jitsuroku* (*Huangming shilu*), "shared with other countries," indicating that uninhabited islands in the maritime area in question, including the Senkaku Islands, were controlled by neither China nor Ryukyu. This is also consistent with common sense on history. Chinese historical documents recorded the actual situation quite naturally, free of political influence.

In 1895 by the way, the Japanese Government confirmed that the Senkaku Islands were uninhabited and incorporated them into Japan's territory. Since that time, they have remained as the territory of Japan.

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