

## CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

### CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY: SINO-LIUQIU (Ryukyu) RELATIONS AND THE "WORLD ORDER" The Investitive and Tributary Relations of Liuqiu during the Ming Dynasty

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**ABSTRACT:** The Chinese have their own perspectives of "World Order." Although the Chinese Empire was strong and had one of the most formidable navies during the Ming Dynasty (i.e. seven expeditions of Admiral *Zheng He*),<sup>2</sup> it did not colonize the "small" and "weak" Liuqiu (Ryukyu or Okinawa) Islands. Why did the Chinese not colonize the people of Liuqiu? Do the Chinese have a different concept of "World Order" from Europeans? This paper will answer these kinds of questions and will focus on the how Chinese controlled Liuqiu as a tributary nation under the Chinese Empire. Also, from a cultural perspective, it will deeply search the uniqueness of Sino-Liuqiu relations during the Ming Dynasty.

### INTRODUCTION

China was itself viewed primarily as a cultural entity. The countries of East Asia -- Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and Liuqiu Kingdom -- have all originated in ancient China and developed within the Chinese cultural area. This region was most influenced by the civilization of China since ancient times. Geography has kept this region separate from West and South Asia and has made it the most distinctive of all the great culture areas.<sup>3</sup> In Western tongues, this region was the Far East; however, in Chinese terms, the Far Eastern region became Sinocentric. *Zhongguo*, the Middle Kingdom, China, implies an awareness of the country as both a political and geographical unit<sup>4</sup> of the Chinese Empire. *Tianxia*, all-under-Heaven, which was ruled over by *Tianzi*, the Son of Heaven -- the Emperor of China -- was used to embrace the whole world. China's relations with surrounding countries were colored by the concept of Sinocentrism and an assumption of Chinese superiority.<sup>5</sup> According to the fourteenth-century definition of China:

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<sup>2</sup>Marwyn S. Samuels, *Contest for the South China Sea*. (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1982), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>John King Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework," in John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup>Richard J. Smith, *China's Cultural Heritage: the Qing Dynasty, 1644-1912*, 2nd ed., (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, op.cit., pp. 1-2.

Central Cultural Florescence is another term for Central Kingdom. When a people subjects itself to the Kingly Teachings (Confucianism) and subordinates itself to the Central Kingdom; when in clothing it is dignified and decorous, and when its customs are marked by filial respect and brotherly submission; when conduct follows the accepted norms and the principle of righteousness, then one may call it a part of the Central Cultural Florescence.<sup>6</sup>

This alternative term of China, *Zhonghua*, Central Cultural Florescence, indicates a long-standing emphasis on the cultural basis of the Chinese Empire. Traditionally, over the centuries, the Chinese have promoted proper social relations and harmonious social frameworks to other societies by emphasizing Confucianism: filial piety, brotherly harmony, wifely submission, and the ritually correct marriage and funeral practices.<sup>7</sup> Actually, the Chinese tend to permeate and impose their own social philosophy on others like Liuqiu on the foreign policy front. Therefore, the idea of the Central Cultural Florescence will, at least the Chinese wish, convince and/or control not only the Asian region but also the world. Most officials firmly believed that the need to cultivate family virtues was universal,<sup>8</sup> which also would apply to other societies. As one Chinese investiture command stated, "in the social intercourse among gentlemen, we have to have *li* and *yi*. *Li* means dedication, and *yi* means principle. We all understand what we should do..."<sup>9</sup> There are *li* for the superior, *li* for the inferior, *li* for the elder, *li* for the younger.<sup>10</sup> On the functional organization for a good society, the master should be a master, the servant should be serve, a father should be a father, and a son should be a filial.<sup>11</sup> In other words, one should keep his role -- if you should pay tributary, you must do so. There is no question that China did play a "Big Master" role in the East Asian region during the Ming times.

This case study will illustrate the foreign policy of Sino-Liuqiu relations enabling us to **understand** the Chinese view of "World Order." Although some scholars including Jonathan D. Spence<sup>12</sup> suggest that the reason China did not occupy the Liuqiu Kingdom was because of the heavy burden for military expenditures. However, this can not be the *only* reason, and it *only* makes sense when a dynasty is weak. For instance, during the "golden era" of the Ming Dynasty, the Chinese spent a huge amount money for expeditions not only to countries in Asia but also to countries in

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<sup>6</sup>Smith, *China's Cultural Heritage; the Qing Dynasty, 1644-1912*, op.cit., p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Confucius, *The Analects*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 60-100.

<sup>8</sup>Patricia Ebrey, "The Chinese Family and the Spread of Confucian Values," in Gibert Rozman (ed). *The East Asian Region: Confucian heritage and its Modern Adaptation*, (Princeton: princeton University Press, 1991), p. 46.

<sup>9</sup>Xiao Chongye, *Shi Liuqiu Lu* [The Record on the Mission to the Ryukyu Islands], in *Shi Liuqiu Lu Sanzhong* [Three Types of Records on the Mission to the Ryukyu Islands] (The first print was in China in 1579, then reprinted in Taiwan: Government Press, 1970), p. 87.

<sup>10</sup>T'ung-Tsu Ch'u, *Law and Society in Traditional China*, (Taiwan: Rainbom-Bridge Book Inc., 1965), p. 234.

<sup>11</sup>Richard W. Wilson, Sidney L. Greenblatt, and Amy Auerbacher Wilson (eds.), *Moral Behavior in Chinese Society*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p. 41.

<sup>12</sup>Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search For Modern China*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp. 118-220.

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Africa. "China could have become the great colonial power, a hundred years before the great age of European exploration and expansion. But China did not."<sup>13</sup> Why? It does not make sense if the financial problem is the *only* reason for the Chinese not to occupy the Liuqiu Islands. Yet, from the cultural perspective, the Chinese, indeed, have a different concept of "occupation" and "World Order" from the Japanese and Europeans. Throughout this paper two events<sup>14</sup> will be examined: one is the investiture of Liuqiu Kings by Chinese missions, and another is the tributary paid to the imperial court of China by the Liuqiuan missions. By analyzing both events, in particular, we can be acquainted with the idea that the Chinese developed their own unique concept of "hegemony" under the Chinese "World Order."

### THE INVESTITIVE RELATION

The status of the Liuqiu Kingdom in early modern times was enigmatic not only to Western scholars but also to researchers from the East. Until the the *Wei* Dynasty (220 B.C. - 256 B.C.), there were not any records regarding the Liuqiu in the Chinese textbooks, and only after did the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, *Zhuo Yuanzhang* or Hongwu defeat the Mongol Empire in 1372, he brought the Liuqiu Kingdom into the Chinese tributary system.<sup>15</sup> In particular, until 1433, the Chinese Emperors had a strong interested in building a marine/naval expansion; they demonstrated their superior civilization as well as elaborated their own empire in terms of the Chinese notion. With the formidable navy, the Liuqiu Islands effortlessly became a member of the Chinese "Big Family System."

As a result, ships sent by the king of Liuqiu sailed to China every year. This annual contact between the Chinese and Liuqiu was political and cultural as well as commercial. Within the East Asian "World Order," missions from tributary countries frequently went to China, but the Chinese imperial court sent abroad only a small number of Chinese officials.<sup>16</sup> The prime occasion for dispatching missions out of China was the investiture of tributary kings. The official sent for this purpose was called *Tianshi*, celestial envoy, who was the representative of the Son of Heaven; the Chinese were in a superior position in a hierarchic "World Order." Each time, the Chinese mission brought a couple hundred military personnel under two commanders accompanied by two investiture vessels to Liuqiu Kingdom. Superficially, "their mission was routine, involving only a trip to the

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<sup>13</sup>Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405-1433*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 20.

<sup>14</sup>The author believes that Japan especially *Satsuma-han* had played an important role in Sino-Liuqiu relations during the Ming Dynasty. Because of limited space, this paper can not discuss the Japan factor in detail.

<sup>15</sup>Chen Kan, *Shi Liuqiu Lu* [The Record on the Mission to the Ryukyu Islands], in *Shi Liuqiu Lu Sanzhong* [Three Types of Records on the Mission to the Ryukyu Islands] (The first print was in China around the middle of 16th century, then reprinted in Taiwan: Government Press, 1970), p. 23.

<sup>16</sup>Ch'en, "Investiture of Liuch'iu Kings in the Ch'ing Period," in John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, op.cit., p. 135.

capital of a tributary country and officiating at the investiture ceremony."<sup>17</sup> The primary reason of an investiture of Liuqiu Kingdom is to expand the network of the Chinese Empire by using the Chinese "World Order" under the Chinese Emperor.<sup>18</sup>

During the nearly 300-years of the Ming Dynasty, only 17 investiture missions (Table 1-1)<sup>19</sup> were named to Liuqiu Kingdom from China and 16 missions were carried out. Before the emperor dispatched any mission to Liuqiu, there were four missions from the tributary country like Liuqiu in connection with an investiture between China and Liuqiu. First, when a king of Liuqiu passed away, the government sent an envoy to Chinese court to *baosang*, report the death.<sup>20</sup> A few years later, a second mission went to China to present the formal *qingfeng*, entreaty for investiture.<sup>21</sup> After the request granted by the Emperor, Liuqiu sent a third mission accompanied by some thirty people to Fuzhou,<sup>22</sup> where the Chinese mission will depart to Liuqiu, to *qiefeng*, meet the Chinese investiture envoys.<sup>23</sup> When the Chinese delegation completed their mission with some 40 tael gold<sup>24</sup> from new king of Liuqiu and returned to China, the king sent a fourth mission to the court to *xieen*, express appreciation for the emperor's gratefulness. Only the last mission went to Beijing to have an audience with the emperor, and the other missions stopped at Fuzhou,<sup>25</sup> where the Chinese could minimize a contact with the Liuqiuans because of the national isolation and the protectionism by the Chinese government.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Kurayoshi Takara, *Ryukyu Ogoku* [Liuqiu Kingdom]. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1993), p. 47.

<sup>19</sup>Xia Ziyang, *Shi Liuqiu Lu* [The Record on the Mission to the Ryukyu Islands](The first print around the early 17th century, then reprinted in Taiwan) in Qu Wanli (ed.), *Mingdai Shiji Chongkan* [The Series of the Ming Dynasty] Taiwan Student Bookstore, 1969), from introduction. Also, Ryuji Shimakura and Anko Majikina, *Okinawa Issennen Shi* [A Millenary Year History of Okinawa] (Tokyo: Japan University Press, 1924), pp.120-122.

<sup>20</sup>Chen, *Shi Liuqiu Lu*, op.cit., p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>22</sup>Since Fuzhou was the closest city (at that time) to the Liuqiu Kingdom, it became the major trade center in China. For centuries, many Chinese had had a long trade history with the Liuqiuans.

<sup>23</sup>Chen, *Shi Liuqiu Lu*, op.cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>24</sup>Every Chinese mission will receive this amount of gold to show gratefulness from the king. Xiao, *Shi Liuqiu Lu*, op.cit., p. 87.

<sup>25</sup>Ch'en, "Investiture of Liuch'iu Kings in the Ch'ing Period," in Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, op.cit., p. 137. Also see, Jun Kobata, *Chusei Nantdao Tsuko Boekishi no Kenkyu* [The Study of Southern Islands Trade in the Middle Ages], (Tokyo: Nihon Hyoronsha, 1940), pp. 326-333.

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TABLE 1-1 THE CHINESE INVESTITURE MISSIONS TO LIUQIU

	NAME	YEAR	YEAR GAP	KING OF LIUQIU
1	Yang Zai	1373	0	Chadu
2	Shi Zhong	1404	31	Wuning
3	Chen Xiufang	1415	11	Tarumei
4	Chai Shan	1427	12	Shangbazhi
5	Yu Bian & Liu Xun	1443	16	Shangzhong
6	Chen Chuan & Wan Xiang	1448	5	Shangsida
7	Qiao Yi & Tong Shouhong	1452	4	Shangjinfu
8	Yan Cheng & Liu Jian	1456	4	Shangtaijiu
9	Pan Yong & Cai Zhe	1464	8	Shangde
10	Guang Rong & Hang Wen	1472	8	Shangdan
11	Qin Hong & Zhang Xiang	1479	7	Shangzhen
12	Chen Kan & Gao Cheng	1534	55	Shangqing
13	Guo Rulin & Li Jichun	1561	27	Shangyuan
14	Xiao Chongye & Xie Jie	1579	18	Shangyong
15	Xia Ziyang & Wang Shizhen	1606	27	Shangning
16	Du Sance & Yang Lun	1633	27	Shangfeng
17	Chen Yanyi	(The task was never carried out because of the extinction of the Ming)		

Sources: By citing following sources, the author drew up this table. Xia Ziyang, *Shi Liuqiu Lu* [The Record on the Mission to the Ryukyu Islands] (The first print around the early 17th century, then reprinted in Taiwan) in Qu Wanli (ed.), *Mingdai Shiji Chongkan* [The Series of the Ming Dynasty] Taiwan Student Brookstore, 1969), from introduction. And Xiao Chongye, *Liuqiu Lu* [The Record on the Mission to the Ryukyu Islands], in *Shi Liuqiu Lu Sanzhong* [Three Types of Records on the Mission to the Ryukyu Islands] (The first print was in China in 1579, then reprinted in Taiwan: Government Press, 1970), p. 69. Also see, Ryuji Shimakura and Na'anryo Shinkyō, *Okinawa Issennen Shi* [A Millenary Year History of Okinawa] (Tokyo: Japan University Press, 1924), pp.120-122. And Tetsuro Noguchi, *Chugoku to Ryukyu* [China and Liuqiu] (Tokyo: Kaimei Shoden, 1978), pp. 186-206.

However, in the same period kings of Liuqiu had sent more than 384 missions<sup>26</sup> to China, and most missions were to pay tribute to the imperial court of China. Especially, during the *Yongli* reign (1402-1424), the heyday of Ming times, Liuqiu had good relations with China.<sup>27</sup> The king of Liuqiu usually received investiture two years after his succession.<sup>28</sup> In the 15th and early 16th centuries, Liuqiu was in a "golden age;" preparation for investiture was no problem.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, after the *Yongli* period, the imperial court frequently departed investiture missions to Liuqiu -- the "golden era" (1448-1479) of Sino-Liuqiu relation. During this 30-year era, the Chinese court dispatched six missions, about one mission every five years on average; consequently, both China and Liuqiu had enjoyed the frequent missions of exchange. In other words, both countries benefited not only politically but also economically.

On other hand, when time approached the end of the Dynasty, the dispatching of missions from China became difficult with decline of trade and economies of both countries. Liuqiuan had to wait more than two decades before the Chinese mission arrived at Naha. For example, King *Shangqing* waited more than a half century before the Chen Kan mission reached Liuqiu. In fact, the major reason for delaying missions was that the Chinese had to deal with many essential problems inside China. To the imperial court of China the important thing was that the ruler of Liuqiu accepted the Confucian world view.<sup>30</sup> That is, the Confucian School denied that uniformity and equality were inherent in any society. They emphasized that differences were in the very nature of things and that only through the harmonious operation of these differences could a fair social order be achieved.<sup>31</sup>

### THE TRIBUTARY RELATION

In the early years of the Ming Dynasty, the Chinese refused entry to foreign commercial ships because of attacks from Japanese pirates<sup>32</sup> around the coastal provinces and the difficulty in making

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<sup>26</sup>This number included missions for investiture, missions for tributary, and other business missions. Tetsuro Noguchi, *Chugoku to Ryukyu* [China and Liuqiu] (Tokyo: Kaimei Shoden, 1978), pp. 186-206.

<sup>27</sup>Zhang Xie, *Dongxi Yangkao* [A Study of the Trade Relation between East and West], (Beijing: 1617 reprinted at Zhonghai Shuju, 1918), pp. 32-33.

<sup>28</sup>Ch'en, "Investiture of Liuch'iu Kings in the Ch'ing Period," in Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, op.cit., p. 136.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ch'u, *Law and Society in Traditional China*, op.cit., p. 226.

<sup>32</sup>In fact, most pirates including the Japanese pirates were not genuine pirates. They were camouflaged merchants who pretended to be pirates because they did not want to pay the tribute to the imperial court. For the new Ming Dynasty, this could not be tolerated. Wang Jiwu, *Zhongguo Riben Jiaotong Shi* [The History of Sino-Japanese Commercial Trade] (Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1975), p. 150.

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distinctions between foreign camouflaged ships and commercial ships.<sup>33</sup> The only way for outsiders to access the Chinese market was to pay tribute to the imperial court. That is, trade with surrounding societies was always controlled by the Chinese imperial court. In the beginning of the Dynasty, the emperor took a passive attitude toward foreign policy. Emperor *Hongwu* did not favor the tributary system; he only asked tributary countries to pay tributary to the imperial court once every three years.<sup>34</sup> Yet, Emperor *Yongli* had an active role toward foreign policy: five expeditions against the Mongolians were conducted in person by him, seven expeditions to Southeast Asia and South Africa by Admiral *Zheng He*, and the conquest of Vietnam by *Zhang Fu*. He asked tributary countries to pay tributary to the court more frequently than ever; in his 24-year-reign, Liuqiu paid tributary to China at least 58 times.<sup>35</sup> Since the *Yongli* Era, at the pace of once every two years, the Liuqiu visited the Middle Kingdom.

For the Liuqiu, China was a huge empire, a major trade partner, a neighboring country, and a friendly nation.<sup>36</sup> The only way to survive politically and economically was to pay tribute to the imperial court of China. According to *Nishi Kosho Shi Kenkyu* [The Study of Sino-Japanese Connections] by Kenzo Akiyama the number of tributes to China during the Ming Dynasty were Liuqiu, 171 times; An'nan (Vietnam), 89 times; Siam (Thailand), 73 times; Korea, 30 times; Malacca, 23 times; and Japan, 19 times with rank order one, two, six, ten, twelve, and thirteen respectively. The fact that Liuqiu had the most frequent tributes to China than any other countries in the world indicates that Liuqiu had a geographical location more advantageous to other countries. In other words, the people of the isolated islands of Liuqiu highly demanded Chinese goods including silk and tea in the isolated islands. Also, it demonstrates Liuqiu had a special privilege to resell the superior Chinese goods overseas.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in Fuzhou, where Liuqiu missions reached in, many Chinese families had carried on trade with the Liuqiuns for centuries.<sup>38</sup> Unquestionably, Sino-Liuqiu relations were a good, friendly, and stable during this era.

On other hand, Liuqiu exactly followed the tributary schedule which the emperor of China set up. They always sent two to four ships with under a 150-people delegation<sup>39</sup> bringing ancient documents from the King of Liuqiu, dedicated to the Chinese emperor, empress, and Crown Prince. The major of tributary goods were souvenirs from Liuqiu: horses, crust, sulfur, stones for polishing

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<sup>33</sup>Zheng Liangsheng, *Mei-Nichi Kankeishi no Kenkyu* [The Study of Sino-Japanese Relations in the Ming Dynasty] (Tokyo: Oyamagaku Press, 1986), p. 17.

<sup>34</sup>Shigeo Sakuma, "Eirakutei no Taigai Seisaku to Nihon" [The foreign Policy of Yongli Emperor and Sino-Japanese Relations], *Hoppo Bunka Kenkyu* [The Study of the Northern Culture], no. 2, 1967, p. 111.

<sup>35</sup>Noguchi, *Chugoku to Ryukyu*, op.cit., pp. 188-192.

<sup>36</sup>Kurayoshi Takara, *Ryukyu no Jidai* [The Era of Liuqiu] (Okinawa, Japan: Hirugi Sha., 1989), pp. 93-94.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-97.

<sup>38</sup>Ch'en, "Investiture of Liuch'iu Kings in the Ch'ing Period," in Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, op.cit., p. 141.

<sup>39</sup>In order to prevent Japanese pirates attack, each ship had some soldiers., but the total number people in the delegation was decided by the Chinese side. Chen Kan, *Shi Liuqiu Lu*, op.cit., pp. 33.

knives, cattlehides, and grass clothes etc. Two kinds of products were sent to China: one kind like horses, was for the emperor, and another kind like sulfur, was for military use. Whereas the former is more like a luxury item, the latter is a practical goods.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the tributary products were only part of the goods in the tributary ships; most goods became merchandise for trade with the Chinese.

## CONCLUSION

The Chinese have long prided themselves on their culture, usually identifying themselves by common cultural characteristics rather than by geographic boundaries. Broadly speaking, the purpose of both the Confucian and the legal schools was the maintenance of the social order under the Chinese Empire. The Chinese believed that human beings were characterized by differences in intelligence and in virtues, and these differences set the stage for the division of labor. Under the Chinese "World Order," the concept of morality brings immediately to mind the tension-filled, dialectical relationship between a tributary nation and its master of the Empire.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the Europeans (and/or even the Japanese), the Chinese did not occupy or imperialize the "weak" and "vulnerable" nations like Liuqiu; however, they asked for shows of "respect" both to the Chinese court and their Confucian philosophy -- by paying tributary to the "Big Master." As long as the tributary countries are dedicated to the Middle Kingdom, the Chinese will not interfere in their affairs. For instance, the Emperor of China had never cared about who would be the next "legitimate" king in Liuqiu, but the Chinese cared about the "devotion" from the Liuqian in their "Big Family System." Could the Chinese imperialize the Liuqian like the Europeans did in Africa and the Japanese did in China, or did the Chinese have the power to occupy Liuqiu? The answer is "yes." Yet, the Chinese believed that they were the center of the universe and every nation would benefit from the Chinese civilization; it was not necessary for them to "imperialize" the Liuqian. By receiving tributary from Liuqiu and sending investiture missions to Liuqiu will psychologically and physically satisfy the Chinese demands -- **China is number one**. Therefore, the Chinese believed that this should be the concept of "hegemony."

Confucius once said, "To study without thinking is worthless, to think without study is dangerous." The purpose of this paper is neither to judge nor to honor, but to **understand** the Chinese mind. The concept of the Chinese "World Order" or the Chinese "Big Family System" in the Ming Dynasty is certainly more complex than most people thought, and it surely can not conclude in one sentence. Yet, from the cultural perspective, we, at least, can explain these previous questions. During Ming times, China always played the role of the "Big Master" in the Chinese "Big Family System" -- the Chinese "World Order." Through two types of events -- investiture and tributary missions between China and Liuqiu, we can understand that the Chinese have their own view of "World Order," and their own view of "hegemony." The Chinese view "hegemony" is clearly different from the Europeans. Indeed, the Chinese did not "imperialize" and "occupy" Liuqiu like the Europeans did China in the late 19th century. Instead the tributary nations had to express "**respect**" and "**dedication**" to the Chinese Empire and their Confucian philosophy.

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<sup>40</sup>Takara, *Ryukyu no Jidai*, op.cit., pp. 97-98.

<sup>41</sup>Wilson, Greenblatt, and Wilson (eds.), *Moral Behavior in Chinese Society*, op.cit., p. 38.

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