

RCYC LUMINARA · HONG KONG TO TOKYO

Sugar Power

When Samurai Came for the Sugar

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Amami kurozatō (Black Sugar)

RYŪKYŪ: THE DUAL SUBORDINATION & TRADE

circa 1700



THE INDIRECT TRADE ROUTE: CHINA TO JAPAN VIA RYŪKYŪ

NAGASAKI TRADE GOODS

Ainu trade
(separate system)

CHINA

- CHINA TRADE NETWORK
- JAPAN-RYŪKYŪ NETWORK
- TRANS-RYŪKYŪ TRADE ROUTE
- TRIBUTE / TAX FLOW

- Copper
- Marine Products (dried goods)
- Ginseng (Korea)
- Cotton Textiles



SATSUMA DOMAIN (Kagoshima Castle Town)

SATSUMA TAX GOODS

- Processed Ryūkyūan Indigo
- Sugar
- Deerskins

TAIWAN (Qing, under Fujian jurisdiction)

SILK

NAHA (Shuri Castle)

INDIRECT
exchange of Chinese Silk
to Satsuma via Ryūkyū

SATSUMA TAX COLLECTION (Processed Ryūkyūan Indigo, Indigo, Sugar, Deerskins)

SATSUMA OVERSIGHT

Tokunoshima Port Oshima



Satsuma Collection
Satsuma Redirection

NAGASAKI IMPORTS

KAGOSHIMA CASTLE TOWN

- Copper
- Marine Products (dried goods)
- Ginseng (Korea)
- Cotton Textiles



Sea of Japan

Beijing

NANJING

FUZHOU

FUJIAN

Xiamen

GUANGZHOU

Anhai
(Qing-era port
under Fujian
Jurisdiction)

Busan
Waegwan

NAGASAKI

Kyoto

Matsumae



A Maritime Bridge

The Ryukyu Kingdom and Its Two Masters



Seal from the [Qing Emperor](#) giving authority to the King of Ryukyu to rule. Written in [Chinese](#) and [Manchu](#).

SHURI

The Second Shō Dynasty governed from Shuri Castle in Naha — the harbour you left yesterday.

CHINA TRADE

A formal tributary relationship with Ming and Qing China granted access to silk, porcelain, and medicine.

JAPAN TRADE

Ryukyuan ships carried Chinese goods north to Satsuma, connecting two empires that refused to trade directly.



**The island you walked
this morning**

has a hidden history written in sugar.

**How did the remote
southern domain of Satsuma
become the most dangerous
power in Japan?**

And what paid for it?

1609

Three Thousand Samurai

The Satsuma Invasion of Ryukyu

THE INVASION

Shimazu Iehisa sent 3,000 battle-hardened samurai — veterans of Sekigahara — to annex the kingdom by force.

THE MASK

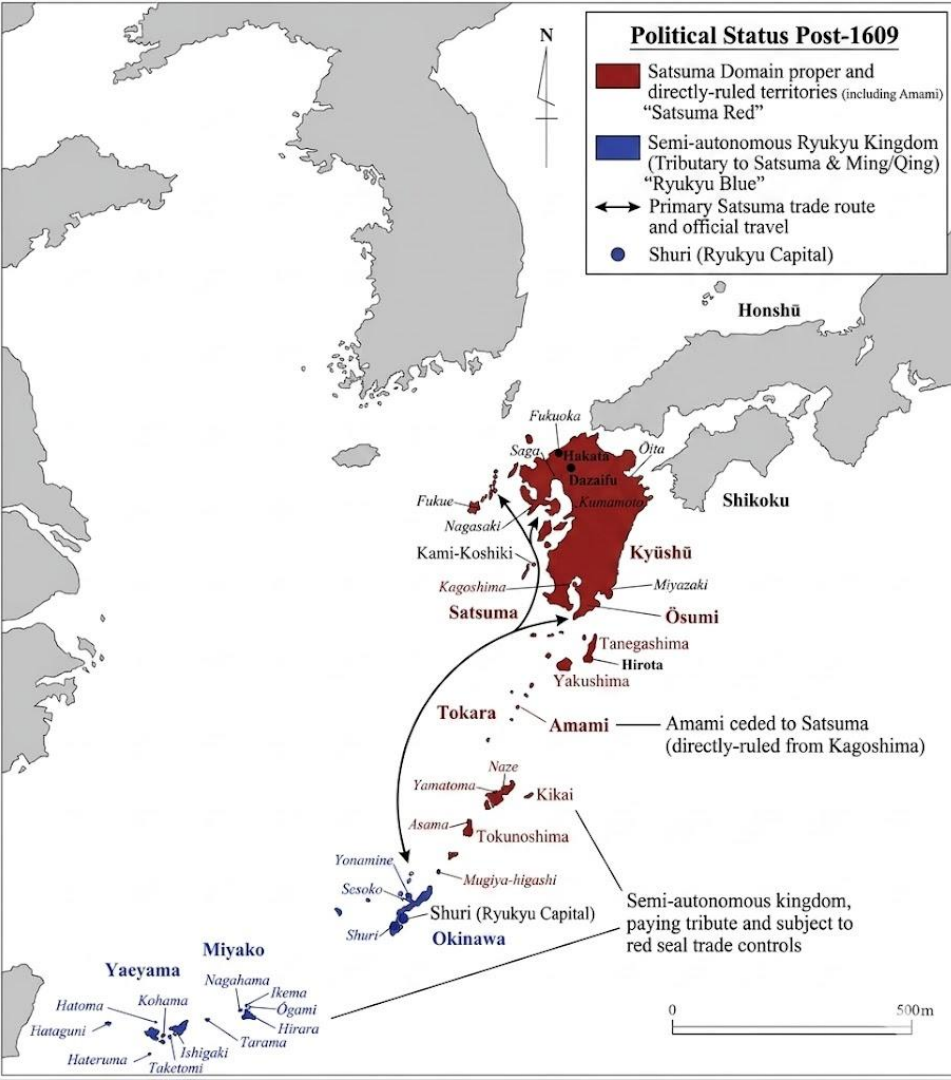
Satsuma hid its control from China, preserving Ryukyu's "independence" to keep the tribute trade channel open.

THE BACKDOOR

Prohibited Chinese silk, medicine, and books now entered Japan through the "Satsuma Gate," bypassing Tokugawa restrictions.

THE SPLIT

Southern islands retained nominal autonomy. Northern islands — including Amami — were seized for direct exploitation.



The Islands Divided

South: diplomacy. North: extraction.

SOUTHERN ISLANDS

Naha and Shuri retained their tributary relationship with China — the diplomatic mask that kept silk and porcelain flowing through Satsuma's backdoor.

NORTHERN ISLANDS

Amami Ōshima, Tokunoshima, and the surrounding islands were severed from the kingdom and annexed directly. Their purpose was not diplomacy. It was agriculture.

PART TWO

The Sugar Colony

Forced cultivation, monopoly,
and the money trail to Kagoshima



Spread of sugar cane cultivation in East Asia

Where the Money Went

Sugar Revenues to Kagoshima (ruled by the Shimazu Clan, Satsuma Domain), 17th–19th Centuries

¥500M

Shimazu Clan debt
to Osaka merchants
before sugar revenues – debt
service up to 100 percent pa

100%

of Amami sugar
controlled by
Satsuma monopoly

#2

wealthiest domain
in Japan by 1840s
(after Kaga)

Sugar revenues resolved the Shimazu clan's crushing debts and transformed Satsuma from a fiscally distressed periphery into one of the most cash-rich domains in Tokugawa Japan.

Produce Sugar or Starve

The Amami Extraction System

01

MONOCULTURE

Rice cultivation banned. Peasants forced into sugar cane production. Food imported from Satsuma at domain-set prices.

02

MONOPOLY

Sugar became state currency. Private sales punishable by death. Every gram shipped to Kagoshima under armed escort.

03

SURVEILLANCE

Sugar magistrates (satō bugyō) enforced quotas. Nearly one-third of the population were yanchu — bonded labourers.

04

THE LOCK

By controlling both food supply and market access, Satsuma created an inescapable system. Japan's first internal colony.

Sugar Money Became Cannon Iron

The Shūseikan: Japan's First Industrial Factory, Kagoshima

REVERBERATORY FURNACE

Western-style smelting technology for casting iron cannon — built from Dutch technical manuals translated into Japanese.

CANNON FOUNDRIES

Satsuma produced its own artillery, achieving regional military parity with European naval powers.

SPINNING MILLS

Cotton spinning machinery imported and replicated — the first mechanised textile production in Japan.

SATSUMA GLASS

Kiriko cut glass — developed as an experiment in Western industrial techniques. Tomorrow you can watch it being made.

January 1868

The Periphery Overthrows the Centre

At the Battle of Toba-Fushimi, Satsuma-led forces defeated the shogun's army outside Kyoto. The Tokugawa government — which had ruled Japan for 265 years — collapsed within weeks.

*The centre fell because
the periphery could afford to fight.*

*You came ashore on an island that once
paid for a revolution in sugar.*

*What you tasted today is
what Amami kept for itself.*

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