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Archipelagic ambiguities: the demarcation of modern Japan, 1868-1879

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ABSTRACT: In the modern era, the demarcation of national boundaries has been a critical feature of the international system. Continent-based demarcations are often more complex than island-based demarcations due, in part, to the former's generally greater ethnic, religious and historical diversities. However, island-based demarcations, especially when involving archipelagos, can also be a challenging process. States with extensive archipelagos are often faced with geographical archipelagic ambiguities, whereby it is unclear to the archipelagic state and other states where the former's national boundaries begin and end. This paper explores the archipelagic ambiguities modern Japan was faced with and examines their origins and how they were resolved. By 1868, Japanese leaders realized that Japan's lingering territorial uncertainties could no longer be left unaddressed if their country was to become a contemporary state. The modern demarcation of Japan was a process lasting more than a decade, until the country resolved the geographical ambiguities along its northern and southern peripheries.

Keywords: archipelagos, borders, demarcation, islands, Japan, Kuril Islands, Meiji Japan, Okinawa, Ryūkyū Kingdom, Sakhalin

Introduction

It has been 24 years since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Throughout the latter struggle Japan was firmly integrated into the American-led capitalist bloc in opposition to the Soviet-led communist bloc. During the Cold War period Japan's independence and freedom of maneuver in the realm of international relations were constrained in large part due to the supreme and overarching nature of the bipolar conflict between the capitalist West and communist East. Japan, being totally defeated and exhausted following the Pacific War, allied itself with the United States and came to depend on the latter for political, economic and security guarantees, while internally focusing on the task of national economic recovery. This strategy, known as the Yoshida Doctrine, was named after its intellectual architect Yoshida Shigeru, who served twice as prime minister of Japan (from 1946-47 and 1948-1954 respectively) (Dobson, Gilson, Hughes & Hook, 2012, pp. 28-29). Relying upon American hegemonic power, especially in the areas of defence and foreign affairs, also meant that Japan's territorial disputes with other nations and/or territorial ambiguities were ultimately suppressed, shelved, or frozen due to the overarching geopolitical supremacy of the Cold War contest and Japan's junior partner status and in many ways subordination to the United States.

A generation after the termination of that all-encompassing conflict, Japan, like much of the rest of the world, has been freed from its restrictive framework. Nations are now more free to pursue their national interests, no longer forced to subordinate their interests to the interests of superpower hegemons, and in that regard Japan has been no exception. Nevertheless, Japan has found the transformation in structure of the international system from a bipolar order to a multipolar one difficult. A primary reason for this difficulty is because for almost 50 years Japan, safely embedded within the American global security system, effectively washed its hands power politics and functioned largely as a modern-day merchant trading state (Rosecrance, 1986; Pyle, 2007, pp. 259-261), mainly concerned with economic and developmental matters. To be sure, disputes and tensions with neighbors did arise but, again, they were largely suppressed, put off or the status quo allowed to prevail due to the dominant structural influence of the Cold War and the hegemonic power of Japan's American patron. Now in the early twenty-first century Japan is forced to once again act like a traditional nation-state and revert back to exercising agency in all aspects of its international relations, including in the domain of power politics. Its three historical bilateral territorial disputes in Northeast Asia have now become fully unfrozen and Japan and the other countries involved in them are now competing with and engaging each other in order to resolve these disputes according to their national interests.

Japan in 2015 is dealing with long-standing territorial disputes with China, South Korea and Russia over the Senkaku (Diaoyu in Chinese), Takeshima (Dok-do in Korean) and Chishima (Kuril in Russian) Islands respectively. While in the immediate historical sense, Japan's aforementioned disputes stem from the period of Japanese imperialism, conventionally spanning from 1894-1945 (Beasley, 1987), and the post-war settlement period shortly thereafter, in the longer historically view, the actual genesis of these conflicts begins with the Western intrusion into East Asia in the mid-nineteenth century, which caused the collapse of the East Asian international order that had traditionally existed there. For without this original shock from the West, it is likely that the ancient status quo East Asian international order would have continued (Kitaoka, 2011, p. 3). And the sweeping away of the said international order caused Japan to go down the path of becoming a modern state, according to Western norms and conventions, which included the demarcation of national boundaries and normalization of relations with neighboring states that brought it into conflict with China, Korea and Russia, where virtually no major disputes had existed in the previous 250 years. Hence, the roots of Japan's territorial disputes start during the early Meiji Restoration period of the 1870s when it sought to clearly delineate its national borders and normalize foreign relations.

Seven decades after the shattering of the Japanese Empire and a generation following the end of the Cold War, Japan is now on a determined quest to fully recover and reaffirm sovereignty over those territories that it believes where either wrongfully taken from it through military force in the twilight of World War II (e.g., Russia's seizure of the Southern Chishima Islands) or whose sovereignty has become ambiguous for some, with Japan's sole sovereign claim questioned, due to the American and Allied 'mishandling' (from the Japanese government's perspective) of specific Japanese territory during the post-war settlement via the American-led Allied Occupation of Japan (1946-1952) and/or through the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 (in force from April 1952) in conjunction with the post-war assertion of competing claims and propagation of nationalist narratives from foreign governments (e.g., the Takeshima and Senkaku Islands disputes). Through a determined and enduring effort, Japan

hopes to once and for all reunify the Japanese state, completely and unquestionably reabsorbing all its non-imperially acquired territory and correct the mistakes that were made vis-à-vis its inherent territory during the last days of World War II and the post-war settlement process.

Ironically, though Japan today seems to struggle to overcome its territorial disputes with its neighbors, in the 1870s it was able to resolve the territorial and diplomatic conflicts it had with China, Korea and Russia largely, but not completely, through peaceful means; full scale warfare was avoided, and that in itself is a major point of historical success that the Meiji leaders should be credited with. The Meiji oligarchy's successful track record of avoiding war during the aforementioned period serves as a positive reminder that Japan historically has had the capacity to resolve conflicts diplomatically. For at present, Japan's territorial struggles with the same countries it had disputes with during the 1870s will either be solved peacefully through tools of persuasion, such as dialogue, diplomatic negotiation, dealing-making and compromise or through tools of force and coercion, such as military brinksmanship, arms races, economic pressure or perhaps even outright war. With this in mind, the paper now turns to the main discussion of Japan's historical experience vis-à-vis international relations and its collision with and conformance to Western standards of international relations, with the primary focus being in regard to the national demarcation of its boundaries in the early Meiji period.

A clash of international orders: the Japanese experience and the challenge of national demarcation

All countries have physical limits that are generally demarcated and, in the best of cases, internationally recognized. Today this characteristic seems so obvious that we take it for granted. However, this notion of the demarcated, exclusive state is, in historical terms, a relatively new concept even for Western countries and especially for non-Western states. Clear demarcated boundaries, in which the sovereignty of nation-states over their territory is supreme, was an idea developed in the West mainly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through such major European events as the Protestant Reformation and the Thirty Years' War. The aforementioned events concluded with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and from these peace treaties emerged today's Western originated international system of states, with its rules and notions of state sovereignty, such as exclusive state control over territory and foreign affairs and the principle of legal equality between states (Anderson, 1996, p. 12).

This Western created international system, generally known as the Westphalian system or Westphalian sovereignty, was completely at odds with East Asian countries' understanding and practice of international relations prior to the establishment of the Western imperialist order there in the second half of the nineteenth century. "It must be remembered that until the 19th century [that is, before the arrival of Western powers] there existed in East Asia a unique international community with China at the centre" (Tashiro, 1982, p. 285). This international community, commonly referred to as the Sinocentric order or Chinese world order (Fairbank, 1968; Dobson, Gilson, Hughes & Hook, 2012, pp. 24-25), was an international relations framework that was diametrically different from the Westphalian system. The Sinocentric order's most important features were that it was non-egalitarian and hierarchical with China at its apex (Von Verschuer, 2006, p. 1). Unlike in the West, there never developed the notion of legal equality between states in this system (Kissinger, 2011, pp. 16-17). All states in this

system were vassals of and in theory subordinate to China and its emperor. This tributary system "did not give the [Chinese] emperor administrative control over non-Chinese territories, unless they were occupied by military forces. Rather, it was based on what we might call cultural imperialism" (Von Verschuer, 2006, p. 1). Japan, as we shall see, was nominally part of this system but also significantly influenced by it; so much so that it created its own non-egalitarian, hierarchical international relations framework with itself and with the Japanese emperor at its head (Tashiro, 1982, p. 289).

Along with the rules, laws and traditions associated with an international system, also influential in the demarcation of boundaries are the geographical features of a region, including whether or not a demarcation will be largely or entirely continent-based or island-based. History suggests that continent-based demarcations are often more prone to complexity and geopolitical contestation and conflict among states than island-based demarcations due, in part, to the former's generally greater ethnic, religious and historical diversities, with Europe being a prime example (Iriye, 1995, p. 286)[1]. In addition, island boundaries, more so than continental boundaries, are conducive to defining the nation as a distinct, compact and cohesive social entity (Baldacchino, 2014, p. 59). Islands thus provide natural grounds for the construction of independent states, as evidenced by the fact that only ten populated islands are today divided between more than one country (ibid; Royle, 2001, pp. 150-152; Baldacchino, 2013). For an island-based society such as Japan, then, a modern demarcation of its territory, which was mainly confined to four major islands, should have been relatively easy. However, Japan's modern demarcation was complicated by three main factors: (1) Its pre-modern Japan-centered international system had created archipelagic ambiguities along its northern and southern peripheries[2]; (2) Russia, a Western, industrialized nation contested Japan for sovereignty over islands north of Hokkaidō; and (3) China challenged Japan's claim to the Ryūkyū Kingdom (modern day Okinawa Prefecture) in the extreme south.

This paper explores the archipelagic ambiguities modern Japan faced in the late nineteenth century and examines their origins and how they were resolved. To begin, the paper will provide a brief survey of Japan's international relations history from the seventh century to the early seventeenth century to provide context and understanding. The survey will show that Japan's extensive archipelago had always posed challenges to the country's ruling class. Second, we will analyze how the Tokugawa Shōgunate (1603-1868), the feudal military government that immediately preceded modern Japan's first government, conducted and conceptualized international relations during its reign, and how its practices were directly responsible for the existence of territorial uncertainties along Japan's peripheries by 1868. And third, we will examine the modern demarcation of Japan and review how the country resolved the geographical ambiguities along its northern and southern peripheries.

Historical background

[1] Some historical examples of continent-based demarcations or continent-based territorial disputes that proved very difficult and/or costly to resolve include the following: (1) Alsace and Lorraine vis-a-vis France and Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; (2) Silesia vis-a-vis Prussia and Austria in the eighteenth century; and (3) the Balkan region in general during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[2] For the purposes of this paper, the term "pre-modern Japan" refers to Japan's historical experience prior to the West's forceful intrusion into Japanese affairs in 1853. The term "modern Japan" denotes Japan's historical experience after 1853.

An island society's geography includes elements that critically influence its political culture and conditions its historical experience (Warrington & Milne, 2007, pp. 383-384), thus, to understand how Japan developed such an aloof, insular culture and foreign relations posture, it is important to mention its island geography, namely, the size and configuration of its territory and distance from the Eurasian continent. It is located on an archipelago approximately three thousand kilometers from one end to the other. The archipelago consists of about seven thousand islands; however, there are four islands that are considered the "main" ones and they are also the largest in terms of physical size and population. They are from northeast to southwest, Hokkaidō, Honshū, Shikoku and Kyūshū (Batten, 2006, p. 6). Japan's island geography has allowed it to develop, unhindered, a homogeneous, self-reliant culture with a keen sense of uniqueness. Its geographical distance from the Eurasian mainland is also significant, as Kenneth Pyle explains, "Japan is separated from the Eurasian continent by more than 100 miles [160 km], five times the distance that separates England across the Straits of Dover from the Continent. This distance across the Korean Straits is surpassed by the 450 miles [724 km] of open seas that lie between Japan and China" (Pyle, 2007, p. 34). This combination of island geography and significant geographical distance from nearby countries provided Japan with natural isolation and free security from the outside world for most of its pre-modern history (Pyle, 2006, p. 397). For more than a millennium, Japan's insular position provided it wide latitude regarding whether to participate in international affairs at all (Kissinger, 2014, p. 182). This dynamic invested Japan with a detached and highly independent culture, one so independent that its historical foreign relations posture before the mid-nineteenth century is best described as solitary[3]. In fact, for most of its pre-modern history Japan did not directly participate in the Sinocentric order, choosing instead to remain aloof from it, operating its own Japan-centric order, which usually excluded China.

As early as the seventh century Japan exhibited its independent nature in its refusal to acknowledged China's superiority. In two letters to the Chinese court in 607 and 608, Empress Suiko (r. 592-628) expressed the idea that Japan was equal to China: "The Son of Heaven in the land of the rising sun sends this letter to the Son of Heaven in the land where the sun sets" and "the Emperor of the East greets the Emperor of the West" (*quoted in* Von Verschuer, 2006, p. 3). From the seventh century onwards, Japan's consistent resistance to formal inclusion in the Sinocentric order made it unique among East Asian countries (Pyle, 2007, p. 37). In only one instance during the pre-modern period did Japan recognize China's supremacy, and it was a fleeting and self-serving one[4].

Japan's detached approach to the Sinocentric order in conjunction with its island geography and distance from the Eurasian mainland also caused it to have a rather undeveloped (or non-existent) understanding of its own boundaries. The Japanese took their boundaries for granted because their territory was naturally marked by land and water, a critical feature of islands (Stratford, Baldacchino, McMahon, Farbotko & Harwood, 2011, p.

[3] Japan's historical solitariness has been compounded by the fact that culturally among the world's great civilizations it is alone, sharing no meaningful cultural connections or affinities with other states or civilizations (Pyle, 2007, p. 13). On this point, Samuel P. Huntington aptly observed that "Japan is a civilization that is a state" (*quoted in ibid*).

[4] In 1401 the third Ashikaga shōgun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408), restored official relations with China and acknowledged Japan's subordination to the Chinese emperor (Craig, 2011, p. 41; Von Verscheur, 2006, p. 106). Most historians agree he accepted vassalage in the Chinese tributary system for practical political and economic reasons at home (Pyle, 2007, p. 37-38; Toby, 1977, p. 331). Yoshimitsu would be criticized in history for compromising Japan's prestige and sovereignty (Toby, 1977, p. 332).

115) and historically the clearest form of demarcation, and, because, with but one exception in the thirteenth century, the country was never faced with an external power seeking to either conquer Japanese territory or Japan itself[5]. Professor Akizuki Toshiyuki argues that the Japanese did not really begin formulating a concept of national boundaries until the late eighteenth century, when the Russians started encroaching on the farthest northern reaches of Japan (*quoted in* Kimura, 2008, p. 3):

> Certainly, until the eighteenth century … the Japanese did not have any clear perception of their own territorial borders; and, more accurately speaking, it can be presumed they did not even possess the notion of national borders.

Lacking and taking for granted the notion of national boundaries, Japan from the seventh to the seventeenth century never moved to formerly demarcate its territory (in a Westphalian sense), including the many smaller islands surrounding its main islands. Nevertheless, such a lack of formal demarcation did not preclude Japan from developing maritime links with its periphery, because, like other archipelagoes (Stratford, 2013, p. 3), the Japanese archipelago was historically connected by nautical trade routes long before European intervention. Ultimately, however, Japan, not being part of any international system other than its own, had no need or no concept of territorial demarcation[6].

Even though Japan did not focus much attention on its national boundaries before the Tokugawa period, the Japanese archipelago, extensive as it is, did pose many diplomatic and security challenges to the country's pre-modern ruling elite, especially in regard to Japan's many peripheral smaller islands. These far-flung islands were always more difficult to protect and assert sovereignty over. Tsushima Island, which is situated in the middle of the Korea Strait and being some 53 kilometers from Korea and about 90 kilometers from Kyūshū (Lewis, 2003, p. 17), serves as an excellent example. Historically, it was a magnet for foreign attacks, sovereignty challenges and diplomatic dust-ups. It was attacked by a foreign power or powers in the seventh, thirteenth (twice), fourteenth, fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, Tsushima's proximity to Korea has also led to sovereignty challenges. For centuries, Choson Korea (1392-1897) claimed Tsushima Island was Korean territory since antiquity. This belief became orthodoxy for Korea and so enduring that as late as the twentieth century, Korean governments were still laying claim to Tsushima (Lewis, 2003, p. 44-45). Finally, Tsushima's island geography and distance from Kyōto, Japan's capital and center of political power during much of the pre-modern era, meant that the ruling class was not able to exercise absolute control over it, and this lack of central authority caused Tsushima to become a major base and staging ground for Japanese piracy, beginning in the thirteenth century and continuing for the next three hundred years (Hazard, 1967; Lewis, 2003, p. 45). Piracy raids

[5] In 1274 and 1281, Japan was invaded by the Mongols, whose leader, Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, sought to conquer Japan and make it a vassal of the Mongol Empire. Both attempts were repulsed; the latter with the help of some 'divine wind' (Turnbull, 2010).

[6] While pre-Tokugawa Japan did not have any experience with or concept of formal territorial demarcation as we understand it today, it did, however, have experience with determining and/or negotiating borders domestically with indigenous groups that inhabited the Japanese archipelago, most notably the Emishi in the ninth century and the Ainu in the sixteenth century (Murai, 2001, p. 82; Batten, 2003, pp. 33, 46). In the Tokugawa period the border between Japan and the Ainu became quite precisely defined through survey activities in the 1630s (Batten, 2003, p. 46; Siddle, 1996, p.32) and eventually relatively firmly drawn in the late seventeenth century (Howell, 1998, p. 120).

along the Chinese and Korean coastlines by Japanese pirates based in Tsushima (and Kyūshū) seriously frustrated and affected the political and economic stability of China and Korea in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (*ibid,* 1967, p. 277). Small island-based piracy, as found on Tsushima, would create diplomatic headaches for Japan's ruling elite for centuries until it was brought under tighter control in the Tokugawa period.

While Tsushima Island may serve as the quintessential example of a small, peripheral island creating security, diplomatic and other challenges for pre-modern Japan's ruling elite, other islands were not exempt from such problems. Parts of the Amami Islands, south of Kyūshū, were annexed by the Ryūkyū Kingdom in the fifteenth century (Turnbull, 2009, pp. 8-9) and another island to the south of Kyūshū, Tanegashima, is the site of first contact between Japanese and Westerners, when a Chinese junk carrying Portuguese sailors accidentally was blown off-course and ended up anchoring off Tanegashima in 1543 (Lindin, 2002).

The Tokugawa system

Following his pivotal military victory at Sekigahara in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shōgunate, moved quickly to consolidate political power and legitimacy for his samurai clan (Bryant, 1995, pp. 79-83). However, there were obstacles to these goals both at home and abroad. Domestically, Japan had just experienced more than a century of civil war, Ieyasu's great victory offered him the opportunity to become ruler of Japan, but the country was still very unstable and challenges to his nascent rule could not be disregarded. And, internationally, Japan was considered a rogue nation of Northeast Asia due to its recent military campaigns against China and Korea[7].

Even while facing such obstacles, Ieyasu and his immediate successors successfully consolidated political power and legitimacy. Internally, they did this through a mix of social, administrative and political policies[8]. Externally, they accomplished this through the establishment of a highly institutionalized Japan-centric international relations framework. And this framework, referred to here as the Tokugawa system, not only assisted in cementing Tokugawa hegemony, which was to last for more than two and a half centuries, but was also responsible for the existence of territorial uncertainties along Japan's northern and southern peripheries by the mid-nineteenth century.

The Tokugawa system, developed largely during the reigns of the first three Tokugawa shōguns, had many of the same features previous Japanese international relations systems had, such as being Japan-centric and excluding China; however, this new system was much more institutionalized and formally laid out than previous ones had been. How Tokugawa Japan conducted and conceptualized relations with other states (and indigenous people) illustrates this high degree of institutionalization and is important to our discussion.

[7] These military campaigns (1592-1593 & 1597-1598) were waged by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the political ruler of Japan immediately preceding Ieyasu.

[8] Policies included: (1) Maintaining a close relationship with and having the support of the imperial court, which was the supreme source of domestic legitimacy in Japan (Toby, 1977, p. 337); (2) weakening rivals and strengthening allies through the redistribution of land and wealth (Jansen, 2000, pp. 34, 54; Craig, 2011, p. 65) ; (3) the codification of rules and relations between the central government and sub-national governments, known as the Bakufu-Han system (Jansen, 2000, p. 56:); and (4) by articulating and applying a ruling ideology, known as Neo-Confucianism, to Japan (Totman, 1981, pp. 150-158). This latter ideology proved conducive to stabilizing Japanese society and solidifying Tokugawa rule due to its principles of hierarchy, filial piety and harmony.

With the exception of the decision to exclude China from this new Japan-centric world order[9], most of the defining and lasting features of the system were decided on and put in place in the 1630s during the rule of Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third Tokugawa shōgun. During this period Japan implemented the *sakoku* or 'closed country' edicts and policies, which restricted foreign relations, especially with the West, as Iemitsu viewed Western culture and religion as hostile to the Tokugawa political order (Ayusawa, 1964, p. 278). And, in terms of this discussion, the most important *sakoku*-related policy was Iemitsu's formal establishment of regularized special diplomatic and trading arrangements conferred to certain sub-national jurisdictions, known as hans or domains.

Having a national government empower sub-national jurisdictions (e.g., provinces, states, regions) to conduct diplomacy and/or trade on its behalf with foreign countries is a practice and concept that historically has been rather uncommon in the West, especially since the rise and establishment of the modern, centralized nation-state in the nineteenth century. But this is exactly how the Tokugawa system operated. And these arrangements had the adverse effect of creating and sustaining amorphous zones of ambiguous sovereignty in Japan's extreme north and south where boundaries would remain undefined and territories unincorporated until after the arrival of Western powers (Howell, 1998, pp. 111-112).

The Tokugawa system created two categories for the administration of international relations. One category concerned trading relations with countries that Japan did not have official relations with, namely China and Holland, the latter being the only Western country permitted to trade with Japan. These trading relations, which were conducted at Nagasaki, were controlled directly by the Shōgunate (Howell, 1994, pp. 73-74). The other category concerned diplomatic and trading relations with countries and/or peoples that Japan did have official relations and/or Shōgunate sanctioned relations with, specifically, the countries of Korea and the Ryūkyū Kingdom[10] along with the Ainu, an indigenous people in Hokkaidō, Sakhalin Island and the Kuril Island chain[11]. Tsushima Domain controlled foreign trade and relations with Korea; Satsuma Domain, in southwestern Kyūshū, was charged with these duties in regard the Ryūkyū Kingdom; and Matsumae Domain, located on the southern tip of Hokkaidō, was responsible for these duties in relation to the Ainu in Hokkaidō and further north. These domains, along with Nagasaki, provided Japan with "four windows" through which Shōgunate-authorized exchange was conducted with the outside world (Walker, 2001,

[9] Ieyasu struggled to decide whether he should open official relations with China or exclude it from a Japan-centric world order, because, for Japan to be incorporated into the Sinocentric system, it would have to recognize China's universal authority and thus compromise its own sovereignty and national honour. In the end, Ieyasu's son, Hidetada, the second shōgun, decided in 1621 against inclusion into the Sinocentric system, a main reason being his refusal to acknowledge China's superior position and relegate Japan to a subordinate status (Toby, 1977, pp. 332-336).

[10] The Ryūkyū Kingdom held a unique place within Tokugawa Japan's international relations framework. It was nominally a vassal of the Tokugawa Shōgunate and ultimately part of the Japanese realm but Satsuma Domain, having conquered it on behalf of the Shōgunate in 1609, was its immediate overlord, even collecting a tribute-tax from the Kingdom (Sakihara, 1972, pp. 329-335). Complicating the Ryūkyū Kingdom's status even further was the fact that it maintained a vassal relationship with China, sending tributary missions there throughout the Tokugawa period and long before then, too.

[11] Tokugawa Japan classified its diplomatic relations with these countries/peoples as follows: (1) Korea: equal country-to-country relations; (2) Ryūkyū Kingdom: unequal country-to-vassal relations (Tashiro, 1982, pp. 288-290; Toby, 1977, p. 353); and (3**)** Ainu: unequal country-to-barbarian society relations (Walker, 2001, pp. 136, 223-5).

pp. 39, 208). Furthermore, the broad parameters of these special rights of foreign exchange more or less remained in place for the duration of the Tokugawa period[12].

Because the Tokugawa system lasted as long as it did, these Shōgunate-domainal special arrangements became deeply entrenched in practice and in the minds of Japan's leaders. Hence, by the time Western nations, led by Russia in the last decade of the eighteenth century (Wilson, 2010, p. 13), began encroaching upon the undefined peripheries of the Japanese realm and demanding the Shōgunate open its ports to trade, the Tokugawa were poorly prepared (and ultimately unable) to manage such crises. Western countries, who came to Japan with a Westphalian concept of state sovereignty, found the Tokugawa system's special features conferred to particular domains to be both confusing[13] and an invitation to exploitation. Most critically, they viewed the Ryūkyū Kingdom, which Japan ultimately viewed as part of its realm via Satsuma (Smits, 1999, pp. 15-18), as a territory of ambiguous sovereignty and the islands of the extreme north beyond Hokkaidō as essentially *terra nullius*. As David Howell has commented, "Japan during the Tokugawa period was, by Western standards, a nation without fixed borders or clearly defined sovereignty" (Howell, 1998, p. 105). Thus, unable and unwilling to comprehend the Tokugawa system, Westerners ignored its rules and conventions, placing enormous pressure on the Shōgunate and, ultimately, facilitating its demise.

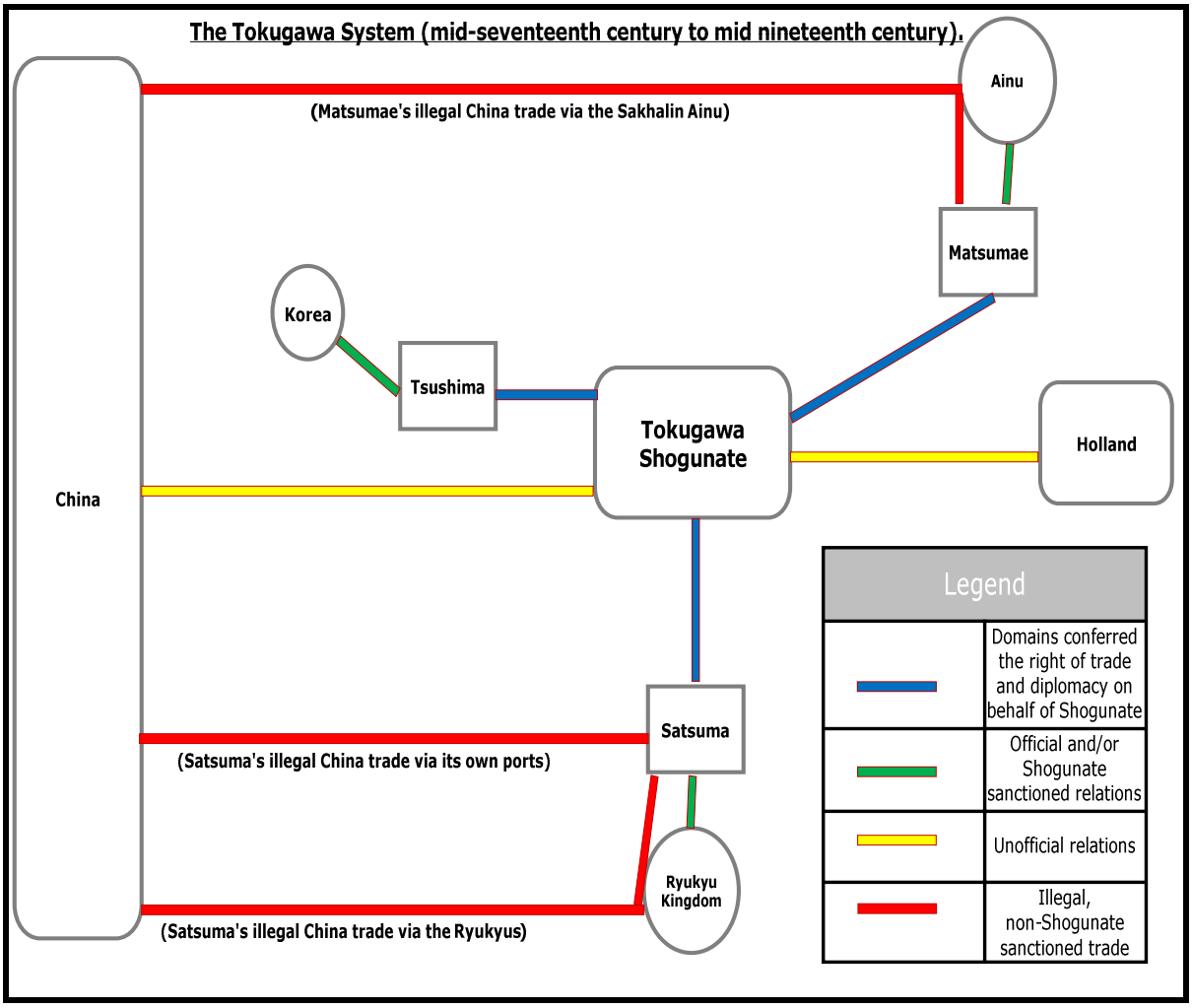
The Sinocentric-influenced Tokugawa system proved inadequate to deal with the many foreign threats Japan confronted in the mid-nineteenth century. Most importantly, by fostering zones of ambiguous sovereignty and failing before the arrival of Western powers to formally incorporate these zones into Japan proper, the Tokugawa (unknowingly) created an international relations system that was vulnerable to and ill-equipped for external aggression, a challenge Japan had hitherto not faced in centuries.

With the collapse of the Tokugawa system and Japan's forced entry into a Western-dominated international system by 1868, the task of addressing Japan's lingering archipelagic ambiguities, in an effort to modernize the country and preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity, was left to the new Japanese government that succeeded the Tokugawa.

[12] Nevertheless, some adjustments, reprimands and temporary cancellations of rights by the Shōgunate did occur and some domains did engage in illegal activity. Examples include: (1) Matsumae Domain temporarily losing its rights in the north twice (1799-1821 and 1854-1858) due to the Shōgunate's fears of Russian encroachment (Howell, 1994, p. 83); (2) Tsushima Domain being severely reprimanded in the mid-1630s over a diplomatic forgery scandal (known as the Yanagawa Affair) (Lewis, 2003, p. 22); and (3) Satsuma Domain's illegal trade with China and its extensive smuggling network (Hellyer, 2005, p. 11).

[13] Commodore Matthew Perry, who led an American expedition to Japan from 1853 to 1854 and is largely credited with opening Japan to Western powers, experienced first-hand how the Tokugawa system's special domainal features confused foreigners. When he asked Shōgunate officials to open the Ryūkyū Kingdom and Matsumae Domain to trade, they refused to discuss the subject stating they were "distant countries," adding "Matsumae belongs to its prince" (Hellyer, 2005, p. 10).

Figure 1: The Tokugawa System (mid-seventeenth century to mid-nineteenth century).



Modern Japan's archipelagic ambiguities

With the establishment of a new political order in 1868 following the fall of the Tokugawa Shōgunate, modern Japan's new leadership, commonly referred to as the Meiji oligarchy, realized that one of its first and most important tasks was to formally demarcate clear national boundaries. Meiji leaders agreed that if Japan was to be accepted by Western powers as a modern state, as well as preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity, the country would have to adopt Western international norms, including the Westphalian concept of definable, absolute national boundaries administered by a central government.

The impetus to move forward with this task was acute due to the threatening international environment Japan faced. Note that, at this time, the West was an expanding, aggressive, imperialistic force in the world (Craig, 2011, p. 97). And no country was more threatening from Japan's point of view than Russia because it had been intermittently contesting Japan's territorial claims in the north for decades, and had in the past resorted to

force against Japan over disputes[14], the most recent case occurring when Russia briefly seized Tsushima in 1861, shortly thereafter to be expelled by joint Anglo-Japanese pressure (Auslin, 2004, pp. 77-82). Feeling time was of the essence, Japan's new government moved resolutely to rectify the archipelagic ambiguities it had inherited from the Tokugawa Shōgunate.

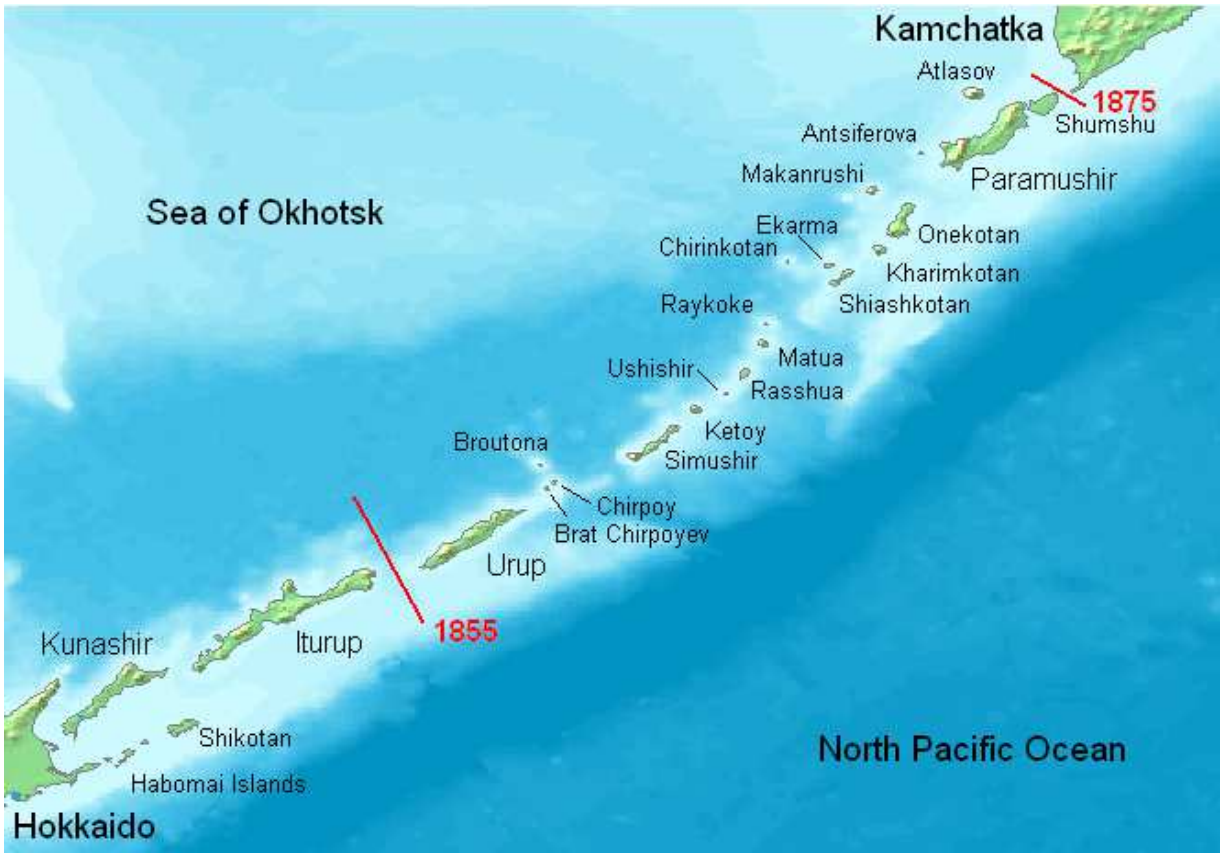
Achieving successful demarcation in Japan's extreme north beyond Hokkaidō meant coming to a final agreement with Russia over Sakhalin Island, with the Kuril island chain also likely to feature in the mix. Affecting such a final agreement would be the Treaty of Shimoda, signed between Russia and Japan in 1855. An outcome of that treaty was that it demarcated a Russo-Japanese border in the Kuril Islands, with the border being drawn between Etorofu (known as Iturup in Russian) and Uruppu or Urup (Nester, 1993, p. 721; Stephan, 1974, p. 2). All islands south of and including Etorofu were Japan's and all islands north of and including Uruppu were Russia's. However, in the treaty Sakhalin had been left intentionally ambiguous, having been declared a joint possession by Russia and Japan, with its final disposition left to future settlement (Stephan, 1974, pp. 88, 237). Thus, with a clear understanding of the dynamics at play in the north, the Meiji leadership pressed on in earnest to resolve the geographical uncertainties there.

Attaining successful demarcation in Japan's extreme south seemed more straightforward. However, this region was not without its complications. It was not immediately clear to Meiji leaders what approach to take in regard to the Ryūkyū Kingdom which, rather uniquely, had for centuries paid tribute to China and Japan, with Ryūkyū officials as late as the 1873 declaring that the Kingdom "regarded China as a father and Japan as a mother" (Sakai, 1968, p. 114). Having been subjected to dual subordination since the seventeenth century (Kerr, 2000, pp. 166-169; Pak-Wah Leung, 1983, pp. 259, 280), Japanese leaders had to determine whether they would be able to successfully incorporate the Kingdom into modern Japan's borders without drawing the ire of China. Of further concern was that the United States, under Commodore Perry, had unilaterally occupied and used the Kingdom as a naval depot before, serving to undermine Japan's sovereignty there. Meiji Japan's leaders, fearful of such a situation happening again, moved forward to address the geographical ambiguities in the south[15].

[14] The other much earlier acts of Russian aggression, which were not state sanctioned, occurred in 1806 and 1807, when two idealistic Russian lieutenants, acting on orders from their commander, frustrated with Japan's *sakoku* policy, carried out raids on Japanese settlements in Etorofu and Sakhalin (Stephan, 1971, pp. 37, 45-47).

[15] Another peripheral group of southern islands, the Bonin Islands (Ogasawara Islands in Japanese), were officially incorporated into Japan proper in 1876. However, the Bonin Islands are not included in this paper because of their extreme isolation and small size. Japan had claimed this island chain long before the forceful arrival of the West in East Asia in the mid-nineteenth century.

Figure 2: Kuril Islands by their Russian names, with 1855 and 1875 demarcation points.



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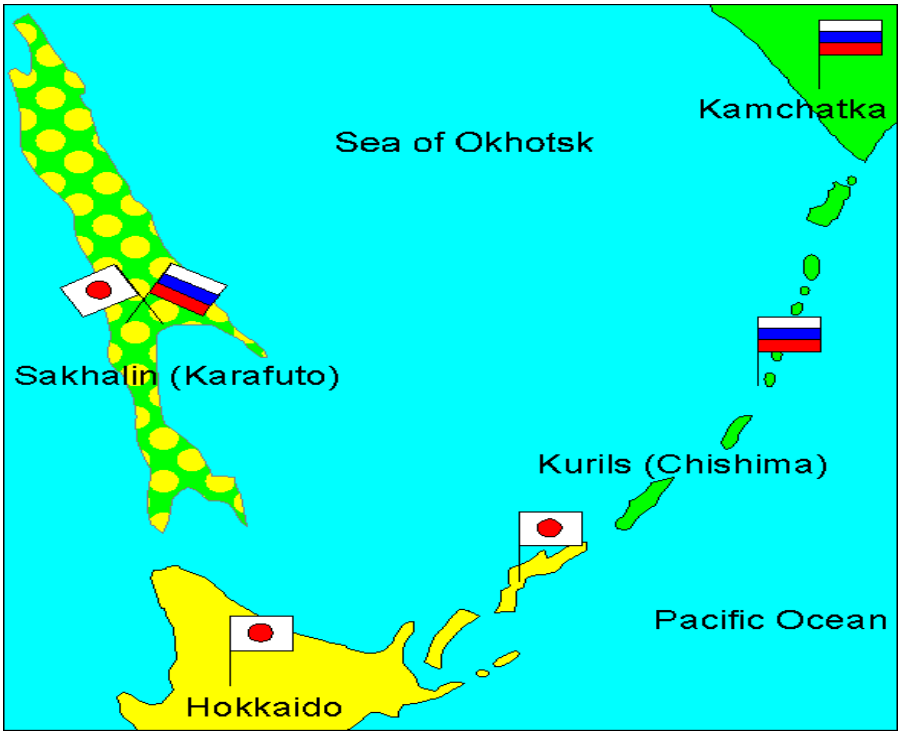
Resolution on Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands

The Meiji government was beset with internal and external problems in the early years of its administration. It was not until 1869 that the last remaining supporters of the Tokugawa Shōgunate were defeated. Hence, consolidating power and stabilizing the country following major political upheaval was its main focus. The demarcation of Japan's northern limits, via a final agreement with Russia over Sakhalin, besides being a key modernization and national development goal, was part of the government's stabilizing effort. For Japan's leaders saw the ambiguous status of Sakhalin as a nagging border problem with explosive potential. In the years following the Treaty of Shimoda, both Japanese and Russian nationals settled on the island, and this joint settlement caused friction and conflicts that often resulted in violence, as the two countries' peoples regularly came into contact with one another (Mayo, 1972, p. 800).

Figure 3: Russo-Japanese frontier after the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda.



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Japan's new leadership, mindful that the fallen Tokugawa Shōgunate's earlier diplomatic efforts to come to an agreement with Russia over Sakhalin had ended in failure, attempted multiple diplomatic initiatives to settle the boundary problem. First, it sought a third party to arbitrate the issue. In 1869-70, the United States was approached and agreed to arbitrate, however, Russia refused to enter into a third party arbitration framework. With arbitration off the table, Japan then in 1872 sought to purchase Sakhalin from Russia. However, Russia refused to sell its rights to the island and then countered with its own offer to buy out Japan's interests in Sakhalin, an offer which Japan declined. The failures of these two diplomatic initiatives forced the Japanese to consider a difficult choice: continue to try to attain Sakhalin or give up the claim to the Russians for concessions elsewhere (Stephan, 1971, p. 61).

By 1873 the importance of deciding what course of action was best to take regarding Sakhalin became critical because conflicts between Russian and Japanese nationals on the island were increasing, as was unrest and dissatisfaction among ex-samurai (see next sub-section) and, of crucial importance, by this time the Sakhalin issue became but one component of a broader set of very fluid and potentially combustible territorial and diplomatic issues facing the Meiji government. Besides Japan's territorial and diplomatic tensions with Russia, it also had such issues with Korea, as well as China via the Ryūkyū Kingdom and Taiwan (on the latter, see next sub-section), and these issues rose to prominence in early 1873 (Banno,

2014, p. 59). While each diplomatic issue in principal was a separate and individual one between the new Japanese government and another single national entity, in practice, among the senior decision makers within the Meiji oligarchy, the three cases interacted together and influenced each one's outcome, in the sense that the oligarchs weighed the benefits and costs to Japan's national interest of each case in relation to the others, debated the order of priority of them and in what sequence they should be managed. Hence, it can be said that as regards Sakhalin, Russo-Japanese relations alone did not determine the island's (and the Kuril islands') fate, but instead a combination of consideration for Russo-Japanese relations along with consideration for the other diplomatic issues that Japan was simultaneously dealing with is what determined Sakhalin's future.

Since the Meiji Restoration, most within the government believed that resolving the Sakhalin dispute with Russia was most important and urgent due to the fact the Russia was a Western great power and Japan was not strong enough yet to confront it militarily should war breakout between the two (Mizuno, 2004, p. 326, note 221). In 1873 this view remained the dominant one even though diplomatic issues with China and Korea had come to the fore, also. Nevertheless, the ongoing diplomatic dispute with Korea did have a major influence on the outcome of Japan's course of action vis-à-vis Sakhalin. Known as *Seikaron*, this diplomatic controversy concerned whether in 1873 Japan should launch a punitive expedition against Korea over the latter's past and continued refusals to open diplomatic relations with the former and recognize the legitimacy of the Japanese emperor as head of state of Japan (McWilliams, 1975, p. 240).

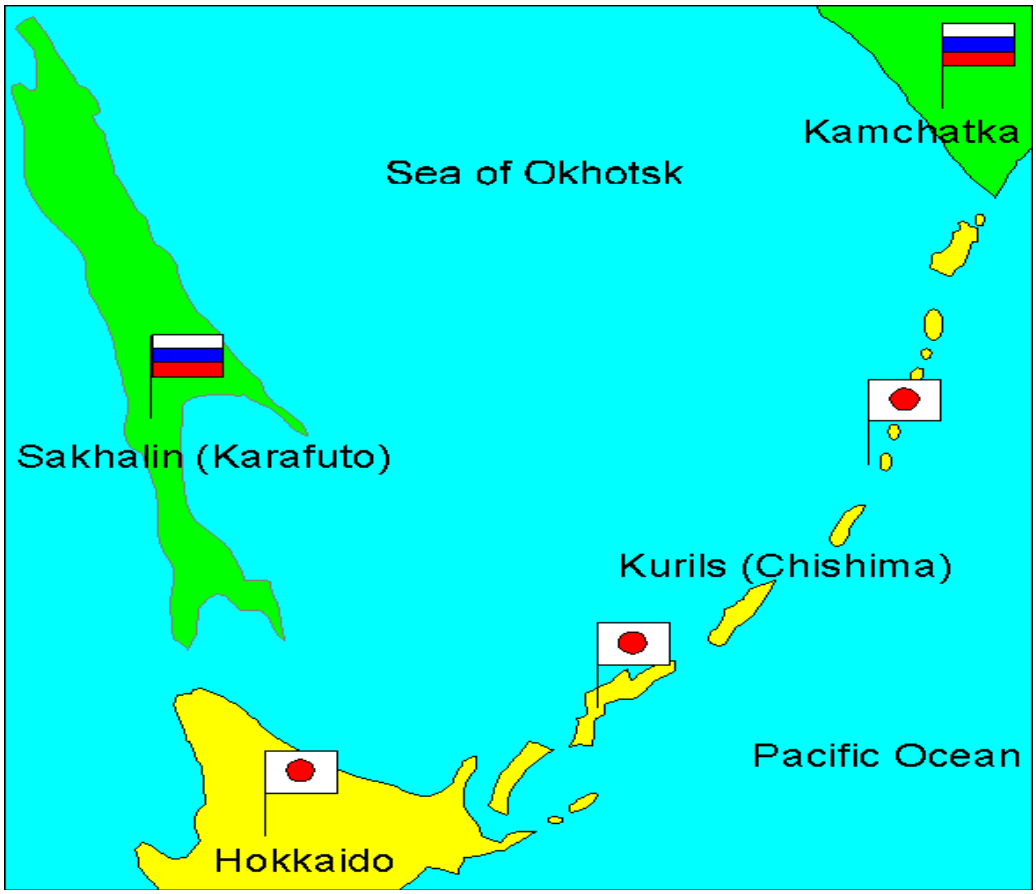
Understanding the main dynamics at play vis-à-vis coming to a decision on how to handle the Sakhalin dispute, from fear of Russian military power, to concerns about ex-samurai unrest, to how best to manage the Russia, China and Korea geopolitical constellation that bedeviled Japanese foreign policy, two factions emerged and formed opposing camps. One camp supported retention of the island even at the risk of war with Russia, while the other advocated abandoning it. The former faction's most forceful advocates were bureaucrats overseeing the colonization of southern Sakhalin, such as Okamoto Kansuke and Nabeshima Naomasa. And they had powerful supporters in the Meiji oligarchy such as Saigō Takimori and Etō Shimpei, men of the ex-samurai class with military backgrounds who had serious concerns about the security challenges posed by Russia on Japan's northern frontiers. Furthermore, Saigō and Etō, as military men, both saw the defence of Sakhalin as serving as an outlet for ex-samurai discontent as such an endeavor and challenge from an external threat would provide the fading martial class with new purpose (Stephen, 1971, p. 62). And Saigō, who was one of the most influential leaders of the early Meiji period, was known to have hawkish views towards Russia, viewing the latter as a menace and threat to Japan (Yates, 1995, pp. 139-140) and, according to at least one source, saw war between Russia and Japan as inevitable (Mizuno, 2004, p. 325).

The most persuasive and effective voice opposing this faction was Kuroda Kiyotaka, a deputy director of the Hokkaidō Colonization Office. During the first half of 1873 he argued that Sakhalin should be abandoned and for Japan to focus its colonization efforts on Hokkaidō. His main points were economic and geopolitical (Stephen, 1974, p. 93). On the economic front, Kuroda contended that Sakhalin was a huge economic burden, with the government from 1870 to 1873 having spent significant monies with no major economic returns. Moreover, few actual Japanese people lived there due in part to the harsh climate, which he felt would make the successful development of agriculture high unlikely (Stephen, 1971, p.

62), and he doubted whether income derived from the sale of the island's natural resources would ever sustain the population (Keene, 2002, p. 204), Regarding the geopolitical component of his argument, Kuroda asserted that the current joint occupation of Sakhalin was a geopolitical liability because it served as a possible source of war between Russia and Japan, a conflict which could be catastrophic for Japan, as the latter had only begun its modernization process and still faced much political turmoil domestically. Kuroda advised that out of consideration for Japan's relatively weak and developing state vis-à-vis Russia that conflict with the latter be avoided and claims to Sakhalin abandoned in favor of directing all colonization efforts on the development of Hokkaidō (Kimura, 2008, p. 31).

Kuroda's arguments gradually triumphed. Thus, in early 1874 a majority of the Meiji oligarchy decided that the best course of action was to exchange Sakhalin for concessions in the Kuril Islands. This initiative proved successful and on May 7, 1875 Japan and Russia signed the Treaty of St. Petersburg in the Russian capital. Through this treaty Japan relinquished its rights of sovereignty to Sakhalin in exchange for sovereignty over all the Kuril Islands (*ibid*., pp. 30-31). There were various key considerations as well as oligarchic internal political dynamics that caused Japanese leaders to decide to completely cede Sakhalin to Russia in exchange for all the Kuril Islands. To begin, by this time Russia, which had taken advantage of the domestic turmoil in Japan during the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods to develop its imperial footprint southward, had established preponderant influence on Sakhalin. Its presence on the island was much greater than Japan's in terms of population, economic development and military power. Japan's leaders saw Russian hegemony on the island as a fait accompli and believed they were helpless to challenge it. Secondly, Kuroda's detailed argument that Sakhalin was economically not viable proved convincing. Thirdly, as mentioned above, the Meiji leadership was dealing with the Russian challenge in the north while simultaneously managing ongoing diplomatic disputes with China and Korea. And throughout the debates that raged regarding these three separate disputes, it was the *Seikanron* issue that most affected the policy outcome for Sakhalin. At the height of that fierce debate in the latter half of 1873, Saigō and Etō, who had been strong advocates of both claiming Sakhalin as well as taking military measures against Korea, decided to sacrifice their advocacy of Sakhalin in hopes of winning greater support for an attack against Korea (Stephan, 1971, p. 63). And their sacrificing of Sakhalin was a boost to the anti-*Seikanron* faction, which was led by Ōkubo Toshimichi and Iwakura Tomomi, two senior Meiji leaders, because its members had argued that peacefully resolving the Sakhalin dispute with Russia was more urgent than the dispute with Korea as was internal development and maintaining internal and external stability, which a lingering border dispute with Russia threatened. Hence, with no major proponents inside the government for retaining the island, conceding it to Russia became a foregone conclusion; Sakhalin's fate was definitively sealed.

Figure 4: Russo-Japanese frontier after the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg.



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From the above review of the factors that influenced the final decision on Sakhalin, it is clear that, while the Japanese ideally had hoped to acquire the entire island, they did not view its acquisition as a core national interest. To the contrary, they viewed Sakhalin as a negotiable asset. Superseding the acquisition of Sakhalin was the core national interest of defining a clear northern boundary; one that was both defensible and reduced the likelihood of any geopolitical tensions with Russia for the foreseeable future.

The Meiji leadership, with its power base still not established and faced with other pressing issues, while also being fearful of Russia, ultimately sacrificed Sakhalin for the greater goals of national development, stability and demarcation. History would prove them to be prescient sages, as the Treaty of St. Petersburg earned Japan two decades of good relations with Russia, and these decades were crucial to Japan's national development as a modern, industrialized state (Stephan, 1971, p. 64; Craig, 2011, pp. 108-112; Jansen, 2000, pp. 371-411). Though at the time many Japanese were upset with the exchange of Sakhalin for the Kuril Island chain (Kimura, 2008, p. 31), the long-term benefits proved to outweigh the immediate, visceral criticisms, as the country's northern territorial ambiguities had been

eliminated and in their place a stable, formally defined national northern boundary was established.

Resolution on the Ryūkyū Kingdom

The demarcation of Japan's southern limits through the successful incorporation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom into Japan proper was viewed by the country's leaders as the critical southern component of the effort to demarcate national boundaries. Nevertheless, though the Meiji government was determined to demarcate a southern boundary, China stood in the way. China, like Japan, had long considered the Kingdom its vassal, having maintained tributary relations with it for centuries (Nelson, 2006, p. 368)[16]. And while the Meiji government was prepared to face down China over its claims to the Kingdom, two incidents occurred, with the first one being the most important vis-à-vis an expedition, that provided Japan with a chance to press its sovereignty claim while avoiding direct military confrontation with China.

The first incident took place in Taiwan in late 1871 when more than fifty Ryūkyūan sailors, who had been shipwrecked on the Taiwanese southeastern coast, were massacred by aborigines. This massacre enabled Japan to formally exercise its sovereignty claim (Gordon, 1965, p. 171), because, if the murdered Ryūkyūan sailors were to be considered Japanese nationals, then the Japanese government would have to seek compensation and punitive measures against the aborigines from the Chinese government, which nominally controlled Taiwan[17].

News of the Ryūkyūan massacre reached Tōkyō by the summer of 1872, a time when the Meiji government was already discussing and considering ways to incorporate the Ryūkyū Kingdom into Japan proper. Calls for a punitive expedition against the Taiwanese aborigines began to increase within the Meiji government and outside it, especially from influential men of the former Satsuma Domain[18], such as Ōyama Tsunayoshi, Saigō Takamori and Kuroda

[16] Though China's tributary relations with the Ryūkyū Kingdom were more consistent and formal in nature than Japan's, the Japan-Ryūkyūan relationship had always been considered a special one by the Ryūkyūans, even before the Kingdom became a formal vassal of Japan following military conquest by the latter in 1609. For example, during the Sinocentric system, while most Ryūkyūan official correspondence was conducted in Chinese, the Kingdom often corresponded with Japan in Japanese, which signified a special relationship between the two countries; essentially, long before 1609, the Japanese-Ryūkyūan relationship functioned outside the norms and rules of the Sinocentric system (Nelson, 2006, p. 370).

[17] The second incident occurred on March 8, 1873, shortly before Japan sent a government mission to China to, among other things, discuss and negotiate the Taiwan issue in light of the 1871 massacre. In this incident four shipwrecked Japanese sailors from Oda Prefecture (part of present day Okayama Prefecture) were abused and robbed by Taiwanese aborigines (Mizuno, 2004, pp. 313-314). Nevertheless, this second case did not have a major affect on the Meiji government's decision to send a mission to China, as that decision had already been made before the second incident occurred (the mission left Japan for China on March 13). It merely served to reinforce the view held by those who favored an expedition to Taiwan that an expedition should be sent and it was later cited as another pretext for the expedition.

[18] The modern chronology of Satsuma Domain's name changes is as follows: (1) it was known as the Satsuma Domain from pre-modern times until 1869; (2) in March 1869, when the domain lords restored their domains and people to the Emperor, as part of the Meiji government's modernization process, Satsuma Domain became Kagoshima Han or Domain; and (3) in August 1871, the Meiji government promulgated the abolition of domains and Kagoshima Domain was then renamed Kagoshima Prefecture.

Kiyotaka. These were men who came from a very strong martial culture[19] and felt obliged to act because the Ryūkyū Kingdom had been their domain's vassal for centuries. As well, advocacy for incorporating the Kingdom could be found generally among non-Satsuma Japanese officials who believed Japan must expand its territory for reasons of security and prestige along with the need to clarify Japan's southern periphery, with Soejima Taneomi and Yamagata Aritomo being prime examples.

After much discussion and consideration by the Meiji government and having received information and advice that supported an expedition from two Americans[20], it was decided that Japan would send a mission to China to, among other things, clarify the legal status of Taiwan and seek redress regarding the Ryūkyūan massacre issue. The mission was led by Foreign Minister Soejima Taneomi (same person as mentioned above) who was extremely hawkish on the issue of sending an expedition to Taiwan: he saw the Ryūkyū massacre as a pretext and means for justifying such an expedition and cementing Japan's formal claim to the Ryūkyū Kingdom and, if he had his way, acquiring much of, if not all of, Taiwan eventually (Mizuno, 2004, pp. 302, 310-311).

On June 21, 1873 members of the Soejima mission discussed the related issues of Taiwan's status and the Ryūkyūan massacre incident with Chinese officials. Upon being told by the Japanese that China had no effective jurisdiction over the aboriginal territories of Taiwan and thus Japan would send an expeditionary force to chastise the wild aborigines who had massacred Japanese subjects (Ryūkyūans), the Chinese officials countered that they had heard of a massacre of Ryūkyūans, who were Chinese vassals, but not of a massacre of Japanese. The officials went on to reject any type of redress and refused to discuss Taiwan's status within the Westphalian framework the Japanese were operating under. The Chinese government refused to take responsibility for the massacre, stating that the aborigines were beyond its jurisdiction, as they were barbarian or uncivilized people living in lands outside Chinese influence and administration (Pak-Wah Leung, 1983, pp. 268-270; Kitaoka, 2011, p. 22)[21]. This latter point proved to be a fatal mistake that Japan capitalized on. China, still operating under a Sinocentric understanding of international relations, failed to realize (or chose to ignore) that disclaiming all responsibility for law and order on the Taiwanese southeastern coast was tantamount to a formal renunciation of sovereignty there, at least according to the principles and conventions of modern, Westphalian sovereignty. Japanese leaders, adhering to the norms Westphalian sovereignty, and being mindful of the views of the said two Americans with considerable experience and knowledge in the issue of China's lack of sovereignty over certain Taiwanese aboriginals (Eskildsen, 2002, pp. 394-396;

[19] In fact, one element that undoubtedly produced such a strong martial culture in Satsuma was the uniquely large size of its samurai population: more than 26 percent of the entire local population was samurai compared to a national average of about six percent at the time of the Restoration (Mizuno, 2004, p. 322).

[20] The two Americans in question were Charles E. Delong, the U.S. Minister to Japan, and Charles LeGendre, former U.S. Consul to Amoy respectively. Through their experiences and knowledge of Taiwan and its dubious legal status, they advised and encouraged the Meiji government to carry out an expedition to Taiwan. The latter was even hired by the Meiji government as an advisor.

[21] Important to note is that the June 21 meeting remains a matter of controversy among Japanese and some Chinese scholars because the Chinese apparently failed to make a written record of the discussion (Pak-Wah Leung, 1983, pp. 269-270). Hence, the only official record of the meeting posterity has to refer to is the Japanese one. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that British official documents of conversations its foreign officials had with their Chinese counterparts in April 1874 record the latter making similar statements regarding China's lack of jurisdiction over Taiwan's aboriginal areas (Mizuno, 2009, p. 104).

McWilliams, 1975, pp. 240, 242), interpreted China's response as just that: a full renunciation of sovereignty, and began considering what their next move would be.

Diplomacy between China and Japan over the incident dragged on after the conclusion of the Soejima mission but left the matter unresolved. However, as with Sakhalin, the intertwined questions of the Ryūkyū Kingdom's legal status and whether or not Japan should send a punitive expedition to Taiwan became swept up in the greater *Seikron* debate of 1873 (Mayo, 1972, p. 798). And, as with Sakhalin, this latter political crisis helped determine Japan's course of action once more.

Following the decision to not militarily confront Korea in October 1873, the Meiji leadership felt something had to be done to mollify the intense anger of dissatisfied ex-samurai who had supported military action against Korea. The threat of instability and even uprisings were taken seriously by the Meiji government whose own power and legitimacy were still fragile and not deeply rooted. The political dynamics of the discontent certainly pointed in the direction of the possibility of major unrest. Significant and influential Meiji leaders such as Saigō Takamori, Soejima Tanenomi, Itagaki Taisuke and Etō Shimpei had all resigned their government positions following the decision not to take military action against Korea (Keene, 2002, p. 234). Furthermore, Saigō, being the most prominent military leader, having reached supreme commander of the military, and being the most powerful oligarch from Satsuma, which had strong representation in the new post-Restoration military, had a better understanding than most regarding just how angry ex-samurai were. He personally felt pressure from them, especially those in the military, in the form of discontent and the expectation to ensure overseas expeditions such as the Taiwan one were approved (Banno, 2014, p. 60). A key reason he was supportive of a punitive expedition to Taiwan was because he believed it could serve as an outlet for ex-samurai discontent, a view shared by many pro-expedition government leaders.

During the course of the first half-decade of Restoration rule, the ex-samurai had experienced and largely went along with major modernization reforms such as abolition of the feudal domain or han system, the reduction, reorganization or elimination of their traditional stipends, as well as national conscription, all of which ultimately removed their hereditary privileges and negatively affected their socio-economic status. And all these changes also instilled them was a deep sense of grievance because from their perspective they had received the least benefit from the new government although they had contributed the most to the achievement of the Restoration (Iwata, 1964, p. 197). Yet through all these upheavals and a sense of grievance notwithstanding, military service and hopes for martial glory had kept the ex-samurai focused and relatively satiated. However, following the end of the Boshin War in May 1869, there were simply no enemies to be fought or conquered (Banno, 2014, p. 60.). Recognizing this fact, many hoped overseas missions could provide the military with new purpose and afford it new glory and this viewpoint by 1873 became known as the 'strong military' position and Saigō became its de facto faction leader within the Meiji government until his resignation in October 1873. Thus the decision to take no action against Korea was seen by many ex-samurai, especially those in the military, as yet another example of the government's disregard for them and of denying them any hope of future purpose, prosperity or prestige.

Throughout the political tumult of the 1873-1874 period when the Meiji government simultaneously faced three major foreign policy crises, as mentioned in the previous sub-section, the aforementioned 'strong military' position was often opposed within the

government by what became known as the 'prosperous country' position. This position held that Japan was in the early stages of modernization and that foreign military engagements were not wise at a time when the country was still too weak compared to Western countries. Advocates of this position instead argued that the focus should be on building up Japan's national strength and prosperity through internal development, including economic and political development. The de facto leaders of this faction were Ōkubo Toshimichi (oddly enough, of Satsuma extraction) and Iwakura Tomomi. They had successfully opposed Saigō and the other members of the 'strong military' position over Korea in the fall of 1873, though at great cost to the political stability of the government and the country itself, which they recognized.

Political instability and discord festered through the winter of 1873-74. In an attempt to ease domestic unrest, Iwakura and Ōkubo and other members of their faction elected to pursue an expedition to Taiwan. In January 1874 a report was prepared under Ōkubo's guidance that argued for a Taiwan expedition and on February 6 the cabinet approved an expedition to Taiwan. The fundamental reason Ōkubo and other members of the 'prosperous country' faction agreed to the expedition was their real fear of uprisings in southwestern Japan, most especially in the former Satsuma Domain (Kitaoka, 2011, p. 22). In fact, less than a week before the fateful cabinet decision to approve the expedition, a rebellion in Saga, located in Kyūshū, broke out. It was led by former senior Meiji leader Etō Shinpei and would be unsuccessful.

Fears of rebellion, and with one actually going on, helped to persuade Ōkubo and other key members of his faction of the need to join forces with the 'strong military' faction in support of an expedition to Taiwan. Both factions believed achieving domestic stability by alleviating ex-samurai discontent was of the utmost importance, though for very different reasons, and saw the Taiwan expedition option as the best mechanism for attaining it. Furthermore, the opposing factions' interests converged regarding the goal of clearly demarcating the country's southern periphery by incorporating the Ryūkyū Kingdom into Japan as well as shared beliefs that such an expedition would bring much needed prestige and security to both Japan and the government. Hence, deemed a practicable solution to this domestic unrest and other concerns and interests shared by key members of both factions, a punitive expedition to Taiwan was chosen, with initial expeditionary forces launched in late April 1874 and the mission being successfully carried out in May and completed by early June (Iriye, 1995, pp. 289-290; Iwata, 1964, pp. 193-202; Mizuno, 2004, pp. 236, 340).

The Taiwan expedition was a very successful endeavor from Japan's point of view. It succeeded in strengthening Japan's claim to the Ryūkyū Kingdom, as the world now realized that Japan was prepared to protect the Ryūkyūan people, considering them Japanese subjects. And, most importantly, the mission was successful because the Chinese, desperate for the Japanese to evacuate from Taiwan, formally agreed in the fall of 1874 to recognize the 'righteous action' of Japan's expedition to 'protect its subjects [i.e, the Ryūkyūans],' among other things (Mizuno, 2009, p. 122)[22]. This recognition from China served to critically solidify Japan's claim to sovereignty over the Ryūkyū Kingdom (McWilliams, 1975, p. 275). In

[22] Other things of note included financial compensation, as China agreed in this formal agreement, known as the Beijing Agreement, to pay compensation to the families of the victims who had been killed, as well as compensate Japan for the facilities it built on Taiwan (Mizuno, 2009, p. 122). These payments further strengthened Japan's claim to the Ryūkyū Kingdom.

addition, the formal agreement's language vis-à-vis the Ryūkyūans also greatly helped support Japan's claim[23], as George Kerr (2000, p. 360) writes,

> In this agreement the Okinawans [Ryūkyūans] were referred to four times, but only as the 'subjects of Japan.' Tokyo had succeeded in winning China's formal recognition of paramount Japanese interest in the Ryūkyūs.

The ambiguous status of the Ryūkyū Kingdom persisted for a few more years, finally coming to an end in 1879. By this time more than a decade had passed since the Meiji oligarchy had come to power. All the major internal military threats to the Meiji government's rule had been put down (*ibid*, p. 378). Furthermore, Japan had been transformed at every imaginable level, including its administrative divisions[24], conceptualization and practice of state sovereignty and approach to national boundaries. And Japan had become a full member of the (Western-dominated) international community; having jettisoned its Sinocentric influenced international system and replaced it with Westphalian norms of state sovereignty. All that remained for the government to do to complete its goal of national demarcation was the formal integration of the Ryūkyū Kingdom. And while the Japanese could not be sure how China would react to this incorporation, the Meiji leadership decided the Kingdom's anomalous and anachronistic status as a semi-incorporated tributary state had to come to end. And so on March 27, 1879 the Ryūkyū Kingdom (by then officially known as Ryūkyū Han or Domain) was officially abolished and Okinawa Prefecture was created[25], much to China's frustration and prolonged protest, as it continued to halfheartedly contest Japan's claim to Okinawa into the 1890s. However, it proved to be a futile effort because Japan's decisive military victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 effectively ended Chinese attempts to contest Japanese sovereignty over Okinawa for the foreseeable future (*ibid*, pp. 388-392), as defeat in that conflict severely weakened China's power and prestige. Through this territorial incorporation Japan eliminated its southern territorial ambiguities and in their place a clear, formally defined national southern boundary was established. The demarcation of modern Japan was complete.

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[23] It should be noted that the term "Japanese subjects" in the Beijing Agreement became a point of contention between the two sides and remains a matter of academic debate among Japanese and some Chinese historians. China understood that the term only referred to the residents of Oda Prefecture that had been abused by Taiwan aborigines in the second incident of 1873 and not also to the Ryūkyūans from the 1871 first incident. Some Chinese historians have attempted to support this Chinese interpretation (Pak-Wah Leung, 1983, pp. 277-278). Conversely, the Japanese interpreted the term to include both the residents of Oda Prefecture and the Ryūkyūans and thus that China did ultimately, directly or indirectly, recognize Japan's claim to the Ryūkyūs. This latter interpretation has become the dominant one. Moreover, Mizuno has pointed out the serious flaws in some Chinese historians' interpretation of the primary source materials as well as their unacademic political adherence to the Qing Chinese interpretation. Furthermore, Mizuno opines that the British mediator of the agreement, Thomas Wade, also understood the term to include the Ryūkyūans from the first incident (Mizuno, 2004, pp. 344-345).

[24] Over 250 domains were abolished and reorganized into new sub-national jurisdictions known as prefectures.

[25] The modern chronology of Ryūkyū Kingdom name changes is as follows: (1) it was known as the Ryūkyū Kingdom from pre-modern times until 1872; (2) through an official proclamation, it became the Ryūkyū Han or Domain in November 1872, in a Japanese effort to further strengthen its claim to the Ryūkyūs; and (3) in 1879, Japan formally announced that the Ryūkyū Domain was abolished and Okinawa Prefecture was established in its place.

Conclusion

Territorial demarcation can be a challenging task, often rife with conflict between states. Continental demarcations are generally more complex than island-based demarcations because of the former's often greater ethnic, religious and historical diversities. Furthermore, island states, it is generally assumed, usually have their borders naturally drawn for them, as their territories are surrounded by water, which many consider the ultimate natural demarcation mark. Nevertheless, as the examined case of modern Japan demonstrates, island states with extensive archipelagos can face the challenge of ill-defined national boundaries.

Japan entered the modern world with acute archipelagic ambiguities. The causes of these territorial uncertainties were both geographical and cultural. The geographical causes were, firstly, extreme distances. The country is an extensive, seemingly unending archipelago stretching for thousands of kilometers from one end to the other. Such vast distances naturally posed a significant challenge to national demarcation. And, secondly, the country's island geography discouraged the Japanese from national demarcation because, though Japan is an island country, it historically was never a maritime nation with a strong seafaring tradition, as, for example, Britain was. Japan, being greatly influenced by China, always viewed itself from a continental perspective rather than an island one. A perspective emphasized by the fact that while the most complete mapping of Japan's administrative interior boundaries in the pre-modern period began in 1605, the coastline was not properly mapped until the 1830s (Yonemoto, 1999, p. 178). Thus, lacking the intellectual heritage of a maritime country and being fearful of oceans (*ibid*, p. 171), much of Japan's island geography, especially at the extremities, remained non-demarcated by the time Western powers arrived.

In addition to its geography, Japan's unique culture contributed to the nation's territorial ambiguities. Its solitary historical experience and foreign relations posture hitherto the mid-nineteenth century, along with its conceptualization and practice of state sovereignty, critically added to the challenge of demarcating its archipelagic territory in conformity with Western standards. Japan's pre-modern international relations framework was simply not compatible with the norms and conventions of Westphalian sovereignty. It is a remarkable achievement and testament to the Japanese's ability to adapt quickly when required that they were able to shift so precipitously from their pre-modern Japan-centric international system to a modern (and completely alien) Western international system. Much credit for this achievement must go to the Meiji leadership, as they were determined to demarcate the country's boundaries as part of a national modernization effort to conform to and be accepted as an equal by the West.

With the demarcation of the modern Japan complete by 1879, the country began to peer outward and, emulating the Western powers, set out on the path of imperialism. Ironically, modern Japan was demarcated peacefully through diplomacy and dialogue, while its later acquired overseas territories would be gained turbulently through warfare and conflict. The author sincerely hopes Japan's twenty-first century territorial disputes will be resolved in the former manner rather than the latter.

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