

Center for Japanese Studies Seminar Series

A King's Legitimacy and a Kingdom's Exceptionality: Ryūkyū's Bankoku Shinryō no Kane 万国津梁の鐘 of 1458



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In 1458, Ryūkyū's king, Shō Taikyū, ordered the casting of a bronze bell with the intention of displaying it in front of his palace at Shuri. He commissioned a Japanese Zen monk to inscribe the bell with words of praise for both him and for the kingdom of Ryūkyū. Although he ruled for only two more years following the completion of this bell, which is known as the *bankoku shinryō no kane* 万国津梁の鐘 (“the bell of the bridge to the world”) today, the bell remained on display, not because Shō Taikyū was revered as an especially wise or effective ruler, but because it seemed to capture the cultural self-confidence and pride of the Ryūkyūan people. The inscription portrayed their kingdom as a special and unique place, despite the fact that it was located in such close proximity to its larger and more powerful neighbors, China and Japan. I argue that the bell's inscription qualifies as a very early example of Ryūkyūan/Okinawan exceptionalism. Such exceptionalism is especially remarkable given the fact that such claims emerged within the context of the Chinese tributary system, a system in which the Japanese did not participate, but in which the Ryūkyūans did.



Tokioka Room (Moore Hall 319) Thursday, March 21 (3:00–4:30 pm)

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