

The First Senkakus Clash: The 1955 *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Incident, American, Okinawan, and Republic of China Responses, and Japanese Diplomacy

Robert D. Eldridge*

Abstract

This article examines a relatively unknown incident that took place in March 1955 in the Senkaku Islands in which two junks, believed to have been operated by personnel from the Republic of China, attacked an Okinawan fishing vessel, the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*. In the attack, three fishermen died, their bodies never recovered. In addition to examining the incident and reporting afterwards, it looks at the efforts of U.S. officials responsible for the Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands and the U.S. State Department in handling the case vis-à-vis Okinawan and Japanese government officials and ROC authorities. The article uses a multi-archival approach with documents from the United States, Japan, Okinawa Prefecture, and the Republic of China. It also includes testimony and interviews, including those conducted by the author. The incident took place during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954-1955, leading some to speculate that the People's Republic of China may have been behind the attack, but there is no evidence to suggest this. Contemporary documents drafted by U.S., Japanese, and Okinawan officials and comments made by them both publicly and privately also point the finger at the Republic of China. The ROC's reclassification of once-publicly available Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents, making them inaccessible to researchers, suggests that perhaps indeed personnel from the ROC were at fault. As the United States was responsible for the overall administration of the islands, it took a pre-eminent lead in addressing the issue, but the author argues that the fact that Japan demonstrated interest in the case was also important because it showed Japan's contemporary concern about the fishermen from Okinawa, who were Japanese citizens, and that the incident took place near the Senkaku Islands, over which Japan had "residual sovereignty," as stated at the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty Conference.

Introduction

In early March 1955, three crewmembers of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, a 15-ton boat crewed by nine men from Okinawa, died after being attacked by two junks flying Republic of China flags in the waters off Uotsuri Island, the largest and most prominent of the islands making up the Senkaku Group (Senkaku Rettō). Two men, the captain and a sailor, were killed by gunfire, and another, the chief engineer, went missing, having likely drowned after jumping into the water. A search was conducted for the fishermen, but they were never found and presumed dead. Although vessels and their personnel from the Republic of China were suspected of the attack, subsequent attempts to identify the perpetrators of the attack were also unsuccessful and the incident remains unsolved and unresolved still today.

* Senior Fellow, Japan Institute of International Affairs.

Employing a multi-archival and multi-language approach, including primary documents and memoirs, as well as interviews, this study introduces in detail for the first time this little-known incident, which can be called the “first Senkakus clash.” It examines the investigation at the local level, using the testimonies of local fishermen and police reports, and looks at the political and diplomatic developments and responses surrounding the violent incident. It also discusses the regional context at the time of high tensions following South Korea’s actions around Takeshima between 1952 and 1954 and first Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954 to 1955 involving the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland.

In addition to clarifying the details of what happened in the incident and aftermath, this study is significant in that it argues the interest demonstrated by the Japanese government toward gathering the facts in the case and its quick resolution despite the United States being in charge of the administration of Okinawa at this time demonstrates that Japan viewed with seriousness its “residual sovereignty” over the Nansei Islands, including the Senkakus, as well as the fate of the people residing in them.

“Residual sovereignty” was a formula spelled out at the time of the September 1951 Allied Treaty of Peace with Japan. The United States, as per Article 3 of the treaty, was granted “all and any powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction” over the Nansei Islands. However, the architect of the peace treaty, John Foster Dulles, explained to the assembled delegates in San Francisco during his oral explanation of the treaty’s contents on September 5 that Article 3 also meant that Japan retained ultimate, “residual sovereignty.”¹

Because of this unusual arrangement, the United States would have the lead in responding to the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident that occurred a few years later, but because the lives and livelihoods of Okinawan residents, who were ultimately Japanese citizens, were at stake, the government of Japan would take an active interest in the incident’s resolution. To this writer, this fact—Japan’s interest—is one of the key, yet unexplored—aspects of this incident, which itself has not been studied in great detail before. Said another way, if Japan did not view the Senkakus and the remainder of the Nansei Islands as belonging to it, and thus the people as Japanese citizens, the Japanese government would not have taken as strong of an interest in the problem as it did.

Interesting, too, is the fact that throughout the interactions following the incident, the government of the Republic of China (i.e., the Nationalists) used the Japanese name for the Senkakus and never once insisted or even implied or insinuated that the islands belonged to the Republic of China, which it did fifteen years following the publication of United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East in the late 1960s suggesting there were massive reserves of natural resources in the area.²

These facts in the preceding paragraphs should further lay to rest claims by the Republic of China (and indirectly, the People’s Republic of China) that they have valid claims to the Senkakus.

This study is divided into seven parts, including this Introduction and the Conclusion, and several sub-parts. It expands on the section addressing the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident in my

¹ Article 3 of the Treaty of Peace with Japan reads: “Japan will concur in any proposal of the United States to the United Nations to place under its trusteeship system, with the United States as the sole administering authority, Nansei Shoto south of 29 degrees north latitude (including the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito Islands), Nanpo Shoto south of Sofu Gan (including the Bonin Islands, Rosario Island and the Volcano Islands) and Parece Vela and Marcus Island. Pending the making of such a proposal and affirmative action thereon, the United States will have the right to exercise all and any powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction over the territory and inhabitants of these islands, including their territorial waters.” For the making of Article 3 and its interpretation, see Robert D. Eldridge, *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem: Okinawa in Postwar U.S.- Japan Relations, 1945-1952* (New York: Routledge, 2001), particularly Chapter 7.

² For details, see Robert D. Eldridge, *The Origins of U.S. Policy in the East China Sea Islands Dispute: Okinawa’s Reversion and the Senkaku Islands* (New York: Routledge, 2014), particularly Chapter 3.

earlier book on the Senkakus by introducing official Japanese views, adding interviews with crew members, and looks at how the Republic of China handled inquiries as to the potential involvement of its personnel or citizens in the crimes.³ It draws on scholarship that has since emerged such as that by Jen Tien-hao, then an assistant Professor, Center for General Education, National Taichung University of Science and Technology, Saitō Michihiko, formerly a professor at Chuo University, and Kuniyoshi Makomo, a local researcher in Okinawa focusing on Senkaku matters, as well as in-person discussions with these scholars and researchers in Taipei, Tokyo, and Naha.

Cold War Tensions in the Area at the Time of the Incident and Tenuous Bilateral Relations

The Background

In early September 1954, following a heavy build-up of troops on Quemoy (across from Amoy or Xiamen) and Matsu (across from Fuzhou) by the Republic of China and other tensions, the People's Republic of China began shelling Quemoy. In November, the PRC dispatched warships, junks, and patrols to the Dachen (Tachen) Islands, across from Wenzhou and then to Wuqiu Isle between Quemoy and Matsu. People's Liberation Army planes also bombed the Dachen Islands and launched a larger attack in mid-January 1955 with some 10,000 troops in successful air, amphibious, and land operations, eventually forcing the islands to be evacuated of ROC, or Nationalist, troops.⁴

During this time, pressure grew in the United States to bomb the Communists on mainland China, and to possibly use nuclear weapons against it. Urged on by the pro-Taiwan Senator William F. Knowland, the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan on December 2, 1954. The treaty was ratified on February 9, 1955, and went into effect on March 3, when Secretary of State John Foster Dulles visited Taipei to exchange instruments of ratification.⁵

Although the treaty did not obligate the United States to defend the smaller islands held by Nationalist forces along the mainland, the Formosa Resolution, which was passed by both houses of Congress on January 29, 1955, authorized the president to employ American troops to defend Taiwan and the Pescadores against armed attack, including such other territories as appropriate to defend them. After threats of the use of nuclear weapons in March, the PRC proposed negotiations with the ROC, and the shelling of Quemoy and Matsu stopped on May 1. The first Taiwan Strait Crisis came to an end.

The evacuation of the islands in late February was likely triggered by the U.S. decision to not assist ROC forces in the defense of Nanchi, which was relayed to ROC officials on February 22.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63. To do this, the author has traveled to Taipei on numerous occasions to do research at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, where the archives of the Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs are held, and meet with scholars in Taiwan familiar with the issue. Unfortunately, the ROC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has resealed almost all the documents related to the Senkaku Islands and has denied access to researchers, a move criticized by scholars in Taiwan. The author, who already has copies of the formerly available documents used in this study, has written to senior government officials in Taiwan, including a former vice president and foreign minister, to ask them to push for reconsideration of the decision that is harmful to future researchers and that government's efforts at transparency. Hopefully, the publication of this study will further encourage the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs to move in this direction. (It goes without saying, but the author has no personal gain or stake in the outcome of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident.)

⁴ For details on the fighting at this time, see Hsiao-ting Lin, *Accidental State: Chiang Kai-shek, the United States, and the Making of Taiwan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 235-236.

⁵ This is one of five visits Dulles would make to Taipei as Secretary of State. Most of the visits occurred around the time of the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises (1954-1955, 1958).

According to the U.S. Ambassador at the time, the Republic of China determined that “holding the islands would place too great a strain on their own resources, and immediately began evacuation.”⁶ The ROC Navy proceeded to carry out the operation of evacuating 4,000 troops and 2,000 civilians from the islands over the course of three days. It can be assumed that all types of vessels were used at that time to conduct the rushed evacuation.

It was during this tense time that the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident occurred near Uotsuri Island, the largest of the five islands comprising the Senkaku Island group, or Senkaku Rettō. Because of the chaotic situation in the region, it has been unclear if the attack on the Okinawan fishing vessels (at least one other boat was also fired on, in addition to the shooting that took place on the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*) was done by desperate Nationalist troops or Communist forces disguised as ROC members. Subsequent investigations conducted by the ROC government were inconclusive, but a former Legislative Yuan member from Taipei stated later that ROC troops retreating from the Dachen amid the PLA attacks on them in February had reportedly garrisoned on the Senkakus and fired at approaching Japanese vessels.⁷ If true, what happened next would suggest that the initial reports of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident are likely accurate and possibly related. In other words, according to a Taiwanese official himself, it was in fact ROC personnel and vessels that were involved in the killings.

There were other events going on in the background that will be touched on later. These events were initially unrelated to incident, but would affect the handling of it, namely U.S.-ROC relations, political dynamics in Japan, personnel changes in the U.S. administration of Okinawa, and frictions within Okinawa, among other matters.

The Incident Itself

In the early afternoon on March 2, 1955, as mentioned at the outset of this paper, three members of the crew of an Okinawan boat, which practiced longline (*haenawa*) fishing for tuna near the Senkakus, went missing and apparently died (their bodies were never recovered nor their whereabouts known) after personnel in military fatigues from two junks flying Republic of China flags near the Senkaku Islands boarded the boat and shot the captain and a crew member. A third person, the chief engineer, dove into the water to avoid being shot. Other members of crew hid inside the boat with the fishing equipment and escaped being noticed, while three others jumped

⁶ Karl Lott Rankin, *China Assignment* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), p. 223.

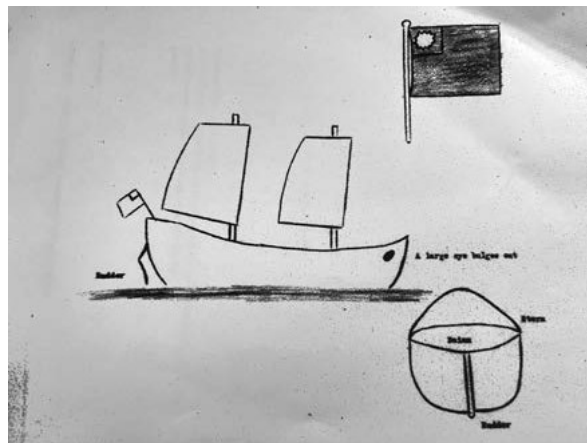
⁷ Fung Hu-hsiang, “Evidence beyond Dispute: Tiaoyutai (Diaoyutai) is Chinese Territory!” (www.skycitygallery.com/japan/evidence.html, accessed June 2024). The quote read as: “In 1955, Nationalist Troops while retreating from Tachen Island, were garrisoned on Tiaoyutai. Approaching Japanese ships would be fired upon to drive them away. This proves that even at that time the ROC (Taiwan) government possessed sovereignty over Tiaoyutai.” This statement is odd for two reasons. First, “Japanese ships” most likely did not go there at that time, particularly with the tensions related to the Taiwan Strait crisis. Okinawan fishing vessels would have, as that is one of their fishing areas. Second, were Okinawan (or mainland Japanese) vessels fired on, they would have certainly reported it to the proper authorities (i.e., the United States, which was administering the Senkakus). Fung, who was a controversial figure in academia and Taiwanese politics, died in 2021 from cancer. His reason for including this compromising information (about the garrisoning of ROC troops) therefore is unclear, but may have been to demonstrate that the Senkakus, or Tiaoyutai, was Taiwan/Chinese territory. (I asked the scholar, Dr. Hsiao-ting Lin, now affiliated with Stanford University, if he found any documents relating to the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident among the papers he used for his book *Accidental State*, but he said he did “not recall seeing or reading any documentation” about it. (Response, dated June 21, 2024, from Dr. Lin to author’s e-mail.) In the same paper Fung claims that “During the Cold War, when American forces were stationed on Taiwan, military maneuvers were periodically held which required the use of Tiaoyutai as an aerial bombing target. The American military applied each time to the ROC (Taiwan) government for authorization, confirming again that Tiaoyutai is ROC territory.” Dr. Fung provides no evidence for this statement, which is unlikely to be true, despite the paper’s title.

overboard.⁸

According to a detailed police report following interviews with the surviving crew members and personnel on board two other Okinawan boats in the area, the sister vessel, *Daiichi Seitoku Maru*, and *Taikyū Maru*, the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* was, while fishing, hailed by two junks (*Taian* and *Kinsuishin*) ranging in size from 25 to 40 tons and flying the flag of the Republic of China, with a request for assistance.



Photo of Daisan Seitoku Maru (from Robert D. Eldridge, *The Origins of U.S. Policy in the East China Sea Islands Dispute: Okinawa's Reversion and the Senkaku Islands*, Routledge, 2014, p. 62)



Drawing of Vessel that Allegedly Attacked Daisan Seitoku Maru and its Crew (from the aforementioned “Report of the Deputy Governor”)

The captain of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, Kinjō Jirō, was unable to converse with any of the approximately forty personnel, all wearing clothing resembling American-made HBT material used in military fatigues, i.e. olive drab, aboard the two junks, presumably due to language differences.⁹ He allowed one person to come aboard as a liaison. Kinjō learned from the

⁸ The nine members of the crew of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, their age, occupation, residence, and fate after the incident, were: Kinjō Jirō, 47, captain, from Naha (shot, fate unknown); Tōma Seitoku, 26, chief engineer, from Sashiki Village (jumped into water, fate unknown); Yonaha Kazuo, 32, fisherman from Sashiki Village (shot, fate unknown); Shinzato Kanshō, 32, fisherman from Sashiki Village (returned to Miyako); Shimoji Keizō, 24, fisherman from Mawashi City [now Naha] (returned to Miyako); Uchima Shinei, 23, fisherman from Kudaka Island, Chinen Village (returned to Miyako); Kanashiro [also reported as Kinjō, another possible reading of the name] Fusuke, 45, fisherman from Sashiki Village (returned to Yaeyama); Tamanaha Zenichi, 27, fisherman from Nishihara Village (returned to Yaeyama), and Asato Yoshio, 17, cook from Chinen Village (returned to Yaeyama). See “Memo to Chief of Police, Government of the Ryukyu Islands from Miyako District Station on Report of Incident Involving the Attack of the Daisan Seitoku Maru Near Senkaku Retto (Pennacle [*sic*] Island), March 8, 1955,” Folder 10 (Policy and Precedent Files: Daisan Seitoku Maru Case), Box 92 of HCRI-PS, Records of the Operation Division, Public Safety Department, USCAR, Record Group 260, U.S. National Archives, College Park, Maryland, United States (hereafter Daisan Seitoku Maru files). Copies of this folder are available in the National Diet Library in Tokyo, Japan, and the Okinawa Prefectural Archives in Haeburu-cho, Okinawa Prefecture.

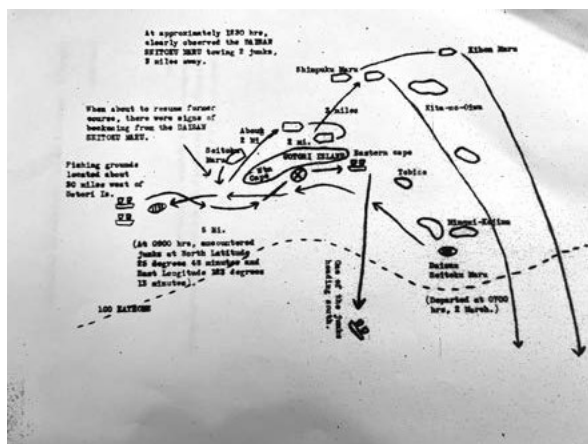
⁹ Because Kinjō was unable to communicate, it can be assumed that the crew of the junks were not native to Taiwan, which had been under Japanese control from 1895 to 1945 and whose education was conducted in Japanese. For this reason it is likely the junk’s crew were mainland Chinese, either Nationalist or Communist. See Watanabe Toshio (translated by Robert D. Eldridge), *The Meiji Japanese Who Made Modern Taiwan* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022).

interaction with the liaison through the use of gestures and writing *kanji*, or Chinese characters, that the junks desired a tow and some water.

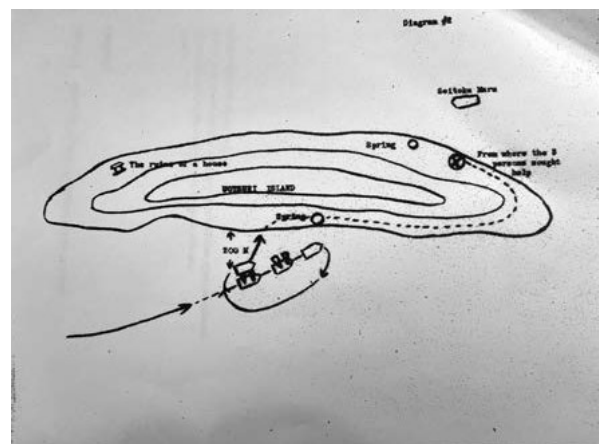
After giving them a tow to Uotsuri Island where there was a spring on the island in which they could get water, Kinjō requested them to drop anchor, but only one of the junks complied. According to the findings of the police report, as summarized by the Deputy Governor's Office of the U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (which was in charge of the administration of Okinawa by this point), "the other craft refused to do so and personnel aboard indicated they desired to be towed in the direction of Formosa [Taiwan]. Becoming suspicious of the actions of the personnel aboard the junk," Kinjō "withdrew his tow line and approached the anchored junk to permit the liaison man to return to his junk."¹⁰

However, the summary memorandum continues, “either two or three persons from the junk, armed with what appeared to be U.S. Cal. 45 pistols, boarded the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* and subsequently began firing at the crew, allegedly killing the Captain and one other and causing five men to jump overboard.”¹¹ (Unfortunately, the summary missed an important detail here that was included in the longer police report—an additional crew member, who had jumped overboard, went missing, presumably drowned.)

Three of the five that jumped overboard were picked up by the sister boat, *Daiichi Seitoku Maru*, which had been in the vicinity and heard cries for help. These men returned on that vessel to Ishigaki port on March 3 and reported the incident.



Drawing of Movement of Vessels at the Time of the Attack on the Daisan Seitoku Maru (from the aforementioned “Report of the Deputy Governor”)



**Drawing of the Location of the Attack on
the Daisan Seitoku Maru near Uotsuri
Island (from the aforementioned “Report
of the Deputy Governor”)**

One (Shinzato Kanshō) of the five returned to the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, having seen that the intruders had departed. Shinzato, who had joined the boat's crew the previous November, discovered two other crew members hidden in the hold of the ship. These three men subsequently went aboard the junk (*Kinsuishin*, with the numbers 17901 written on its stern) that had grounded and apparently been deserted by the original personnel.¹² As there was no one on

¹⁰ "Memo from Ralph R. Pate to Governor of the Ryukyu Islands on Senkaku Retto Incident, April 21, 1955," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

it, they returned to their boat after discovering some items that they brought back with them.¹³ They tried to start the motor but were unsuccessful and ended up spending the night aboard the boat. The next morning, March 3, they saw three fishing boats, probably from Itoman, about 500m away, but they were unable to attract their attention despite using cloth as flags. Anchored, they passed a second night on their boat. The next morning, the *Taikyū Maru* came into sight, and they were able to hail it. They received air to help them restart the engine.

With the boat's engine started, they decided to sail to the Miyako Islands, where Shinzato was originally from, but agreed to drift fish first since it was still early in the day. They left the area around 5 p.m. and planned to arrive at Hirara Port around 10 a.m. the next day (March 5), but being unfamiliar with using a compass, missed Miyako. Eventually, they arrived at 1 p.m. on the 6th, having engaged in more drift fishing after they got their bearings. This group also reported what they had witnessed to local police.

The Response to the Incident by U.S., Okinawan, and Japanese Authorities

U.S. Responses: USCAR and U.S. Embassy

It is unclear when U.S. authorities were first informed of the incident, but Major Russell A. Broner, who served as the Chief of the Yaeyama Civil Affairs Team, reported about the attack and return of three crewmen's arrival in Ishigaki at 10 a.m. on March 3 to the Deputy Governor of the Ryukyu Islands (a military officer) that same day.¹⁴ In addition to reporting the basic facts as known, Broner also noted that the junks had chased two Okinawan fishing boats operating in the area, *Kihon Maru* and *Shinpuku Maru*. These latter boats had raced back to Ishigaki to report the incident, arriving around 6 a.m. on March 3, according to a later report by Broner's staff.¹⁵

Broner, who had served along with two of his brothers in the famed Ghost Mountain Boys unit of the U.S. Army's 32nd "Red Arrow" Division in New Guinea during World War II, continued to report about the incident later that day having been told the maritime police interviewed the surviving crew members.¹⁶ Broner noted that the junks were flying the "Chinese Nationalist Flag."¹⁷ He added that the "exact identification of flag unknown yet; info[rmation] not considered

¹³ The personnel of the junk left, probably by mistake due the hurried nature of their departure, several items that were subsequently impounded as evidence. These items included: (1) a pair of light brown trousers, (2) a pair of green shorts, (3) a (signature) seal, (4) a raincoat, and (5) an undershirt. These items were turned over by the police to USCAR soon after the incident but had been "inadvertently misplaced." (See "Letter to James Pilcher, American Embassy, Taipei, Formosa, from Crescenzo Guida, Office of the High Commissioner, November 5, 1957," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.)

¹⁴ "Radio Message NR2 030150Z MAR 55 from YCAT to DG USCAR," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

¹⁵ "Memo by Ryoan Kinjo, Administrative Assistant, Yaeyama Civil Administration Team, to Chief, YCAT, on Senkaku Retto Incident Involving the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, March 8, 1955," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files. This report was forwarded to Paul H. Skuse, the Director of the Public Safety Department, USCAR, on March 10 with the note that "CIC [Counter-Intelligence Corps] have conducted a full investigation and requested all information thru their channels. They have read this report and concur in its accuracy as far as possible." According to the report by Kinjō, Yaeyama police were surprised at the information and initially "took a cautious attitude and waited for the Daiichi Seitoku Maru" to arrive. Members of the crews expressed later their frustration that the police did not move quickly to conduct a search for the junk and the missing crew members and instead focused their attention on the investigations.

¹⁶ For more on Broner's career, see Dave LeMieux, "Looking Back at the Broner Brothers' World War II Service, Plus Letter to Mom," *Muskegon Chronicle*, July 27, 2015 (https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2015/07/looking_back_at_the_broner_bro.html).

¹⁷ "Radio Message NR6 030715Z MAR 55 from YCAT to DG," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

reliable at present and [there] seems to be disagreement whether one or two junks [involved].”¹⁸

In a separate radio message at 10:30 in the morning on March 3, Broner requested that an immediate air search be conducted.¹⁹ It is unclear when the Office of the Deputy Governor of the Ryukyu Islands of the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands forwarded the request, but it appears that it was not until March 6 that the U.S. military’s Air Sea Rescue Unit responded by flying a mission that day over Uotsuri Island and the surrounding waters to locate and assist any persons in distress in the area, including the junk. However, according to the aforementioned summary, the search plane was unable to locate the junk or wreckage or any people in the water or on land.

In the meantime, early on March 4, the Deputy Governor’s Office requested a “complete and detailed report on events surrounding sinking or capture of Ryukyuan fishing boat [in] your area. Many conflicting rep[or]ts rec[eive]d here. F[orwar]d a[s] s[oon] a[s] p[ossible].”²⁰

Broner immediately responded agreeing to send a “detailed written report” as soon as possible and suggested that the intelligence unit of the Ryukyu Islands Command (G-2, RYCOM) be queried for more information. He explained that “this station is submitting data when available” and that “initial information obtained from natives involved was conflicting.”²¹

The Yaeyama Civil Affairs Team was able to give a more thorough, albeit provisional, report on March 8, but the confusion and lack of details at this early juncture was understandable in retrospect. In addition to the language and cultural barriers, as well as the likely agitated state of the witnesses, there was the fact that the whereabouts of several crew members, who could add extra context and information, and the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* itself were unknown in the first few days.

This would change on March 6, when the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* entered Hirara Port on Miyako Island with the remaining three crew members who gave additional statements on March 7, 8, and 9th. (Some gave additional testimony later in the month on March 25 in Yonabaru.)

It was Shinzato’s testimony that most clearly linked the personnel of the crew with the ROC. Other members had spoken about the “sun-in-the-blue-sky” flag, but Shinzato explained that Kinjō, the captain, had motioned for someone from the junks who could write to come aboard and had him write something on a piece of cardboard. “When I asked the captain what that man had written,” Shinzato stated later, “he replied that he wrote that they had fled from Kinmen (Quemoy) Island but that they do not know where Formosa is, and that they have not eaten for about six-seven days because they have no water.”²² In other words, according to Shinzato’s testimony, it was clear that the personnel of the junks were from the Nationalist forces, or at least claimed to be.

Another piece of possible evidence was subsequently found by the purser of a fishing boat, *Rinjū Maru*, whose port registry was Yaeyama. According to Ohama Kōki, the purser of the fishing boat who gave testimony at the Miyako District Station on March 22, one of the crew members found a suitcase under water near where the junk had been grounded when he was going ashore to Uotsuri Island to get water on March 19. Explaining to police officials later that “we

¹⁸ Ibid. That day, the *Stars and Stripes* reported that the assailants were suspected of being “Red Chinese,” i.e., those from the PRC. See “Memo by Sai Sho on Personal Opinion with Regard to the Case of the Attack of a Ryukyuan Fishing Boat by Chinese Junks, March 18, 1955,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* files.

¹⁹ “Radio Message NR1 P 040400Z MAR 55 from YCAT to DG,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

²⁰ “Radio Message CA 0531 040222Z MAR 55 from DG USCAR Okinawa to Chief, YCAT Civ Admin Team,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

²¹ “Radio Message NR1 P 040400Z MAR 55.”

²² “Statement by Shinzato Kansho, (M), age 32, a sailor and fisherman, March 7, 1955,” enclosure to “Memo from Ralph R. Pate to Governor of the Ryukyu Islands on Senkaku Retto Incident, April 21, 1955.”

were unable to see any sight of the grounded vessel, but we did see wreckage of the junk on the beach,” Ohama ordered the crew member, Nema Gentoku, to bring the suitcase to him and open it. Inside they found clothes, documents, and photographs.²³ “I thought these belonged to crew members of the junk that [is] alleged to have attacked the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* and therefore thinking that these [*sic*] property will be of some use if I keep them,” Ohama stated, and “brought back the documents and the pictures with me.”²⁴

In the meantime, by the 7th of March, the G2 was able to report to Lieutenant General James E. Moore, Commanding General of the Ryukyu Islands Command, that it learned from information obtained by one of the crew members that arrived on the 6th that the junks had Nationalist Chinese soldiers on board and was believed to have come from Kinmen or nearby islands.²⁵

It was increasingly clear by this point that the perpetrators likely included military personnel from the Republic of China. However, getting justice and proper compensation would become a major challenge for all the players, especially the victims and their families.

What made the situation more difficult and extremely frustrating for the Okinawan side was the fact that at this time that USCAR was in a state of major personnel flux that caused delays in handling the issue.

Before the personnel changes can be explained, it is necessary to first clarify the titles of those in senior positions of the administration and governing of Okinawa at this time. When one hears the title “Governor,” we might think of an elected leader from Okinawa. At the time, however, the leader from Okinawa was appointed by the United States government, and not elected. He was called the “Chief Executive.” At the time of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident, this person was Higa Shūhei, a former educator.

In the context of the declassified documents from USCAR, “Governor” refers to the military governor in charge of Okinawa, and “Deputy Governor” his deputy. The Governor was actually based in Tokyo, and had multiple hats, including Commander-in-Chief, Far East Command.²⁶ His deputy, i.e., the Deputy Governor, was physically located in Okinawa and handled the day-to-day matters for Okinawa as well as being in charge of the Ryukyu Islands Command.

At the time of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident on March 2, 1955, the “Governor” was U.S. Army General John E. Hull, but he turned over command to General Maxwell D. Taylor on April 1. Moreover, Taylor only served in that capacity for 65 days before being replaced by General Lyman L. Lemnitzer on June 5.²⁷ As such, not only did the incident in the Senkakus occur physically far away from the “Governor of the Ryukyu Islands” located in Tokyo, but it was also

²³ “Memo to Chief of Police from Miyagi Kenei, Superintendent, Miyako District Station, on Report of Discovery of Documents and Pictures from the Junk that Attacked the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* in Senkaku Retto, March 23, 1955,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Inexplicably, he threw the clothes and suitcase back into the ocean. The documents and their translations, as well as the photographs, can be found in the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* files.

²⁵ “Radio Message 070801 MAR 55 from G2 RYCOM to CG RYCOM Okinawa,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files. This was probably the aforementioned testimony of Shinzato.

²⁶ A biography about one of those commanding generals says he likened his job, which covered Korea, Japan, and the Ryukyu Islands, to a “three-ring circus.” See L. James Binder, *Lemnitzer: A Soldier for His Time* (Washington: Brassey’s, 1997), p. 208. He continued: “There are so many military and economic problems, both of which are in my area of responsibility, that it takes an unusual amount of time to keep things moving properly. Many other problems are backing up in Okinawa [the main island in the Ryukyus] and here in Japan...I spend a great deal of my time commuting between the three areas.” (*Ibid.*)

²⁷ According to U.S. Ambassador Karl L. Rankin in Taipei, Taylor stopped off in Taiwan for talks with President Chiang Kai-shek and other ROC officials on his way to the United States where he would assume the U.S. Army Chief of Staff position. See Rankin, *Assignment China*, p. 272. It is unclear if Taylor asked Chiang or the others to address the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident but it would have been a very good opportunity to have done so coming so quickly after it.

“professionally” far away in that it likely did not have the close attention of any of these individuals as they were either in the process of leaving their position or just arriving.²⁸

Sadly, a similar problem was happening for the Deputy Governor as well. On March 4, 1955, two days after the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident occurred, Lieutenant General David A.D. Ogden, who had been serving as Deputy Governor since early January 1953, left to be replaced the next day by Lieutenant General Moore. (Moore would later become the first High Commissioner when that position was established on July 4, 1957.)

Confusing things even more, these men were “dual-hatted,” meaning they had more than one job. In addition to serving as Deputy Governor, they were also, as alluded to earlier, the Commanding General, Ryukyu Islands Command, which mean they had dual responsibilities. Necessarily, some work took priority over other work. It is likely that handling the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident would receive increasingly less priority as time went on, even while the staffs of these offices continued to make inquiries.

On a related, and sadder note, Chief Executive Higa, who had been involved in responding to the issue from the beginning, died of a heart attack suddenly on October 25, 1956, and could not see the resolution of the issue to its conclusion.²⁹ The issue would involve the next three Chief Executives, and in fact, would never fully be resolved.

The lack of resolution, or even answers, early on became very frustrating for the families of the victims and others associated with the incident.

In the meantime, the final report of the incident—a 50-page document of summaries, drawings, and statements by the crew members as recorded by the police in Yaeyama, Miyako, and Yonabaru—was sent in early May to the Far East Command, which then forwarded it to U.S. Ambassador to Japan John M. Allison, who had been serving in Tokyo since 1953. Colonel C.W. Nelson, the Adjutant General, informed the ambassador of the contents of the report, which included a March 5 resolution by the Legislature of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands (GRI), and requested that

the proper officials of the Government of the Republic of China be notified of this unprovoked and illegal act allegedly committed by its nationals and vessels and that appropriate demands be made to secure an accounting for the three missing Ryukyuan seamen, adequate compensation for the damages caused to the crew members of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* and to the families of the missing seamen, and suitable punishment of the perpetrators of this act of piracy.³⁰

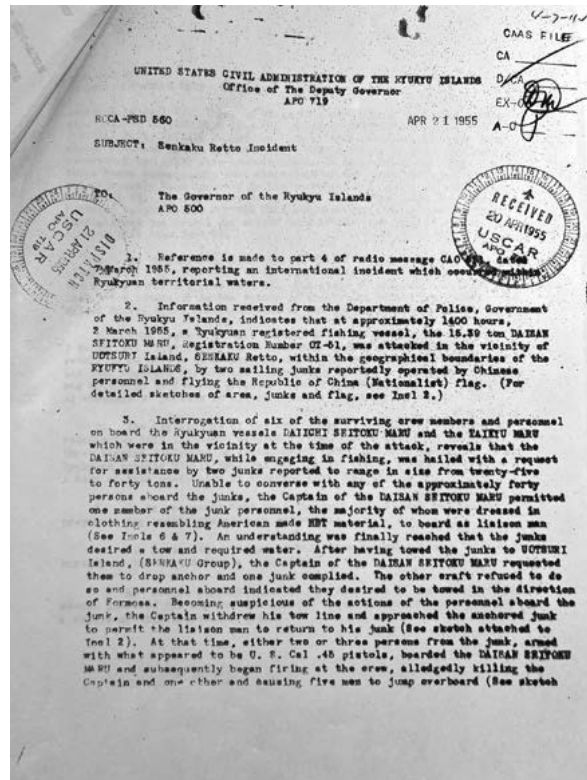
In early September, the U.S. Embassy’s George A. Morgan, who was serving as the Political Counselor, responded to the Far East Command, on behalf of Jeff Graham Parsons, who was serving as the Chargé d’Affaires ad interim, in place of Ambassador Allison who had returned to the United States to be there for Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru’s visit to Washington.³¹ It

²⁸ U.S. Ambassador to Japan John M. Allison noted the rapid change of commanders of the Far East Command in his memoirs, although he was able to develop a good relationship with most of them. See John M. Allison, *Ambassador from the Prairie or Allison Wonderland* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973), p. 228.

²⁹ For more on his work, see Robert D. Eldridge, “The Other Governor Who Passed Away in Office, Higa Shūhei (Part 1),” *This Week on Okinawa*, Vol. 64, No. 35 (September 2-8, 2018), pp. 10-11, and “The Other Governor Who Passed Away in Office, Higa Shūhei (Part 2),” *This Week on Okinawa*, Vol. 64, No. 37 (September 16-22, 2018), pp. 18-20.

³⁰ “Letter from C.W. Nelson, Far East Command, to Ambassador John M. Allison, May 4, 1955,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

³¹ See Allison, *Ambassador from the Prairie*, p. 276.



Report of the Deputy Governor of the Ryukyu Islands to the Governor of the Ryukyu Islands on the Senkaku Retto Incident (i.e., Daisan Seitoku Maru Incident), April 21, 1955 (Copy in Okinawa Prefectural Archives)

is unclear why it took Ambassador Allison's office this long to respond, as well as to send the note mentioned in the next paragraph.³²

The letter to the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Command (who was also dual-hatted as the Governor of the Ryukyu Islands), explained that the U.S. Embassy had contacted the Republic of China's Embassy in Tokyo and informed it about the incident and the evidence that the vessel and personnel were from the Republic of China. It requested information on what the ROC knew about the incident and whereabouts of the missing Okinawan seamen. Morgan suggested that upon receipt of such information, officers from the FEC headquarters and U.S. Embassy officials meet to "determine an appropriate course of action."³³ He also included a copy of the inquiry the Embassy handed to its ROC counterparts, dated August 5, 1955, and reproduced here.

The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Embassy of the Republic of China and has the honor to invite the latter's attention to the reported armed attack on the crew of the Ryukyuan fishing vessel Daisan Seitoku Maru, Registration No. OT-51, which occurred on March 2, 1955, in the vicinity of Uotsuri Island, Senkaku Retto, Ryukyu Island. Available details of the alleged attack on the Ryukyuan vessel and nationals are

³² One possible reason for the elapsed time is that Parsons, who had been serving as Deputy Chief of Mission since 1953 and was particularly focused on dealing with the "No. 5 Lucky Dragon Incident," went to the United States beginning in June for personal reasons. See Robert D. Eldridge, ed., *The Memoirs of Ambassador J. Graham Parsons: A Foreign Service Life* (London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), p. 159.

³³ "Letter from George A. Morgan to Commander-in-Chief, Far East, September 6, 1955," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

contained in the enclosure submitted for the convenience and reference of the Embassy. The Embassy may also be interested to know that on March 5, 1955, the Legislature of the Ryukyu Islands passed a resolution, a copy of which is also enclosed, requesting an investigation of the incident and the rescue of the missing crew members from the Daisan Seitoku Maru, and that a United States aircraft made an observation flight over Uotsuri Island on March 6, 1955, but was unable to locate the abandoned junk or its wreckage. Since there is evident indication that the attacking vessels flew the flag of the Republic of China, and that persons in the said vessels wore military uniforms of the Republic, the Embassy of the United States of America would appreciate receiving from the Embassy of the Republic of China any available information concerning the aforementioned incident and the whereabouts or disposition of the three missing crew members of the Daisan Seitoku Maru. In view of the seriousness of the alleged attack, which has been given the careful and protracted attention of American and Ryukyuan authorities, the Embassy of the United States of America would be pleased to receive from the Embassy of the Republic of China information concerning this matter at an early date.³⁴

It was Second Secretary William H. Bruns who delivered the *note verbale* to the ROC Embassy on August 8. In addition to providing a summary of its contents, Bruns asked ROC officials if the vessels were the same that Chinese naval authorities had previously requested (on February 23 that year) the U.S. Navy assist which were part of the Dachen Command and were on their way from Nanji Island to Keelung, in northern Taiwan.³⁵ ROC officials were unfamiliar with the request and had no answer. They immediately sent a telegraph about the conversation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Taipei the following day.³⁶ The response of the ROC's MOFA is discussed in a later section.

As Morgan's letter to the Far East Command was dated September 6, it means that he had not received a response from the ROC after one month. The reply from the Embassy of the Republic of China's eventually came on November 2 (and is introduced later). Unfortunately, it was not forthcoming and stated that ROC ships and personnel were not involved and suggested the attacks might have been from PRC vessels.

Morgan forwarded this response on November 16 to the Far East Command, for the attention of the J-5, which handles policy matters.³⁷ He did not include a suggestion about what to do next, perhaps leaving it up to the military leadership in charge of Okinawan matters to decide.

The Governor of the Ryukyu Islands (in other words, the Commander-in-Chief, Far East) in turn forwarded Morgan's letter and the ROC Embassy's note to the Deputy Governor's office in Okinawa. The letter, dated November 21, said that it was desirable to submit any additional evidence "so that further action may be taken through the American Embassy should the feasibility of that course be indicated."³⁸

As promised in a June 16, 1955 letter (introduced later) from the Deputy Governor's office to the Chief Executive, Major Harry Apple, on behalf of the deputy governor, shared the response

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Jen Tien-hao, "冷戰局勢裡的第三清德丸事件——東亞冷戰與琉球、釣魚臺問題 (The Daisan Seitoku Maru Incident in the Cold War Period: The Ryukyu and Diaoyutai Issues during the East Asian Cold War)," 海洋文化學刊 (Oceanic Culture Studies), No. 22 (June 2017), p. 79.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66 Fn 12.

³⁷ "Letter from George A. Morgan to Commander-in-Chief, Far East, November 16, 1955," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

³⁸ "Letter from Eugene L. Anderson, Far East Command, to Deputy Governor of the Ryukyu Islands, November 21, 1955," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

his office had received with Chief Executive Higa early the next year on January 4, 1956. In it, Apple highlighted the key paragraphs of the note from the ROC's Embassy in Tokyo in which the ROC denied responsibility and suggested it might have been the Communists who had attacked the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*. Apple also mentioned the governor's request for additional evidence and told Higa that the Deputy Governor's Office was planning to forward the physical evidence received from the police and include additional evidence the police might acquire in any future investigations upon receipt.³⁹

Okinawan Responses: Media, GRI, Victims, and the Fishing Industry

The Okinawan media was quick to gather information and report on the situation as well. Their first story appeared on March 3 in the *Okinawa Times* followed by reports on March 4 in the *Yaeyama Mainichi Shimbun*, *Ryukyu Shimpō*, and again in the *Okinawa Times*.⁴⁰ Eventually, some 32 stories appeared in the first two weeks.⁴¹

Perhaps as a result of the newspaper reporting, or their own internal investigations, the Yaeyama District Police Station received a radiogram from Chief Executive Higa immediately afterwards that ships "should be advised [not] to go to Senkaku Retto vicinity for the time being, for that area was regarded to be dangerous as indicated by the incident involving the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*."⁴² There are also indications that in fact the area had become increasingly dangerous in the days and weeks before.⁴³

On March 5, 1955, the Legislature of the Ryukyu Islands passed a "Resolution Requesting for Investigation of Shooting Incident on the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Crew" and submitted it to the United Nations, the International League for the Human Rights, the Government of Japan, Governor and Deputy Governor of the Ryukyu Islands, among others.

The 300-word resolution, which was signed by the Speaker of the Legislature of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands, Ohama Kunihiro, read:

In connection with an incident that about 2 p.m., March 2, in the vicinity of Uotsuri Island, the Ryukyus, in 123° 13' East Longitude, 25° 48' North Latitude, a 15-ton fishing craft, the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, owned by Mr. Seiyo Toma, 4-han, Baten-ku, Sashiki-son, Okinawa, was seized by two junks flying sun-in-the-blue flags (the national flag of the Government of the Republic of China); and two crewmen were shot up and four others missing, out of nine members of the crew; interviews with three crewmen (Fusuke Kinjo, Zenichi Tamanaha, and Yoshio Asato) who could complete to return escaping from danger, have been reported. Putting all their accounts together, however, one seems to be difficult to reveal the real facts of the incident whether this was of a mere piracy, a doing of Nationalist soldiers, or an action of Red China's soldiers. Although it is of course that the authorities of the U.S. Civil Administration and the Executive Branch will disclose the truth of the incident before long as they promptly begin

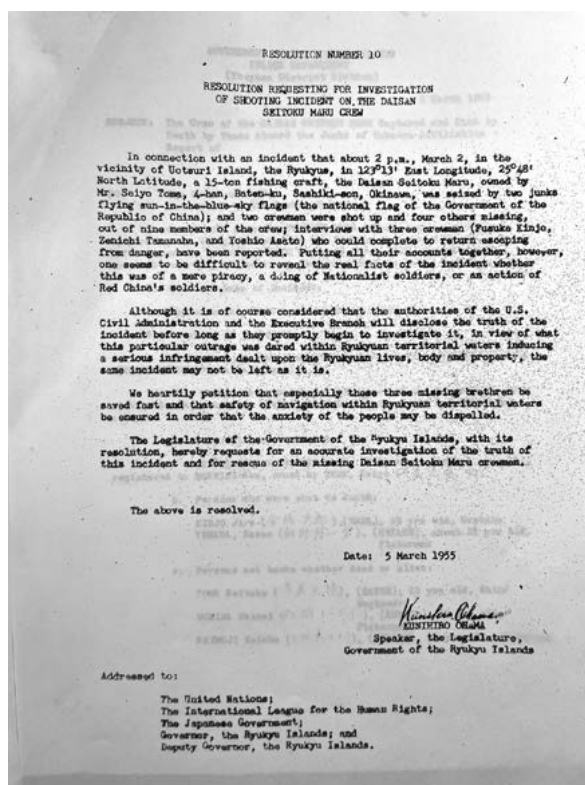
³⁹ "Letter from Major Harry Apple, Office of the Deputy Governor, to Chief Executive, GRI, January 4, 1956," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

⁴⁰ "Okinawajin Gyofu Shasatsu Saru (Okinawan Fishermen Shot)," *Okinawa Times*, March 3, 1955.

⁴¹ "Memo by Kuniyoshi Makomo on *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Shimbun Kiji (Newspaper Articles on *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, November 21, 2016," shared with the author. Incidentally, at the time, Higa was already under (unrelated) pressure from opposition parties in the Legislature, having faced an unsuccessful vote of non-confidence.

⁴² "Memo by Ryoan Kinjo."

⁴³ According to Kuniyoshi, fishermen from other area spoke later of the area having become increasingly dangerous in early 1955. The author wishes to thank Kuniyoshi for providing documentation to confirm this. See Tomishuku Mitsuyoshi, *Kushikino Gyogyōshi* (History of Fishing in Kushikino), (Kushikino, Kagoshima: Kushikino Gyogyō Kyōdō Kumiai, 1971), p. 423.



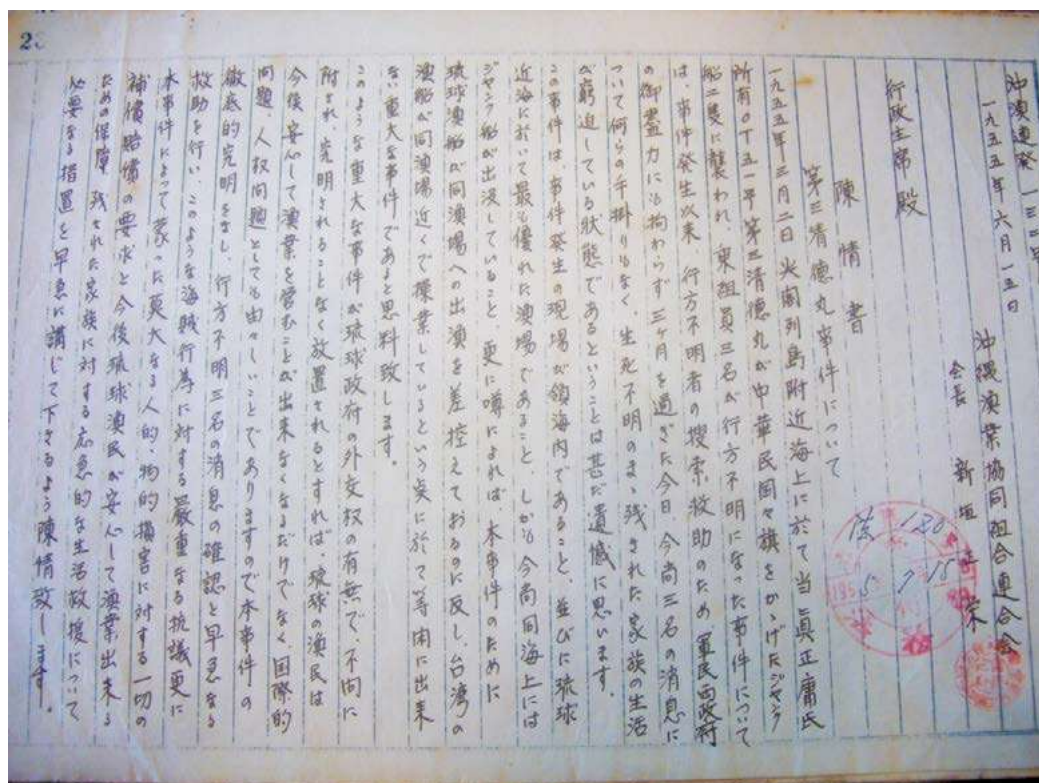
English Translation of Resolution by the Legislature of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands Requesting for Investigation of Shooting Incident on the Daisan Seitoku Maru Crew, March 5, 1955 (Copy in Okinawa Prefectural Archives)

to investigate it, in view of what this particular outrage was dared within Ryukyuan territorial waters inducing a serious infringement dealt upon the Ryukyuan lives, body and property, the same incident may not be left as it is. We heartily petition that especially these three missing brethren be saved fast and that safety of navigation within Ryukyuan territorial waters be ensured in that the anxiety of the people may be dispelled. The Legislature of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands, with its resolution, hereby requests for an accurate investigation of the truth of this incident and for rescue of the missing Daisan Seitoku Maru crewmen. The above is resolved. Date: 5 March 1955."

The resolution certainly had a special meaning for Ohama, as the former educator was from the village in Ishigaki—Tonoshiro—where the Senkaku Islands were registered. While it is uncertain if he knew the affected crew, he certainly knew the area in question and the impact it would have on the fishing industry.

The owner of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, Tōma Seiyō, the captain of the *Daiichi Seitoku Maru*, Tōma Seisei (also known as Masakiyo), and Tōma Shinsei, the president of the Yonabaru Fishing Cooperative jointly signed an appeal and sent it on May 15, 1955, to the Civil Administration, Government of the Ryukyu Islands, and Legislature for a search for the three missing, financial support for the families of the three victims, and compensation for the damage to the vessel. The petition contained a detailed list of the items requiring compensation, which amounted to 582,825 yen.⁴⁴ (A month later on June 15, the presidents of all the fishing cooperatives throughout Okinawa would make a similar request to the GRI.)

⁴⁴ "Petition to Chief Executive, GRI, May 1955," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.



Resolution from Okinawa Cooperative of Fisheries Association on Daisan Seitoku Maru Incident, June 15, 1955 (Original in Okinawa Prefectural Archives)

Chief Executive Higa forwarded this petition on June 8 to the Civil Administrator, requesting his “kind and appropriate consideration” in addressing the concerns of the petitioners, who had also sent a copy to USCAR directly.⁴⁵ On June 9, Yogi Tatsubin, a former educator from the Miyako Islands who was serving as the Deputy Chief Executive of the GRI, replied to the petitioners saying that the GRI had requested the Civil Administration to do its best to address their needs.⁴⁶

Also, in the meantime, Higa had requested a few days before that the Civil Administrator keep him informed about the status of the investigation. In his letter of June 6, Higa wrote,

Since this is a matter of the international problem [*sic*] this office wishes to settle the matter at the earliest date as possible upon submittal of any information to you each time we receive. Further, the ship owner and survivors have inquired with this office concerning development of the search of such case and also their representatives including President of the Yonabaru Fishery Association have petitioned to the Legislature of immediate solution of the same. Therefore, you are sincerely requested to furnish with this office informations of up-to-date search progress and future forecast for our information.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “Letter from Shuhei Higa, Chief Executive, Government of the Ryukyus, to Civil Administrator, USCAR, on Petition Concerning the Daisan Seitoku-Mar Case, June 8, 1955,” Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

⁴⁶ Saitō Michihiko, “Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken: Daisan Seitoku Maru Jiken ni Taisuru Chūka Minkoku no Taiō to Shinsō (An Occurrence of Attack against an Okinawa Fisherboat: Contention by the Republic of China about the Occurrence of Attack against Daisan Seitoku-maru, and Its Truth),” *Jinbunken Kiyō*, No. 81 (2015), p. 76.

⁴⁷ “Letter from Shuhei Higa, Chief Executive, GRI to Civil Administrator, USCAR, on Case of Daisan Seitoku Maru, June 16, 1955,” Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

The Office of the Deputy Governor responded to Higa's June 6 and June 8 letters on June 16. It explained that "all available information concerning this incident" had been forwarded to the Governor (in Tokyo, at the Far East Command) with the request that the matter be taken up "through appropriate diplomatic channels to fix responsibility; to secure an accounting for the missing Ryukyuan seamen; to demand adequate compensation for damages caused to the crew members of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* and to the families of the missing seamen; to ensure that the perpetrators be punished and to ensure that there will be no future occurrence of this nature."⁴⁸

The letter also promised to keep the Chief Executive's Office informed of further developments as soon as information was received. Regarding the issue of emergency financial assistance for the families of the missing fishermen, the letter explained that any such assistance would be the responsibility of the GRI should "welfare officials determine such measures are warranted and necessary."⁴⁹

In the meantime, on July 10, *Daisan Seitoku Maru* owner Tōma Seiyō and more than 30 others, including the heads of the fishing cooperatives, made an appeal to Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichirō, Foreign Minister Shigemitsu, the speakers of both houses, the heads of each political party, the Japan Civil Liberties Union, and the president of the Japan Prefecture Fisheries Association to resolve the issue quickly. The issue would come up in the parliament later that month, which is discussed in the next section on Japan's response.

Over the following months into 1956, it would primarily be the United States government, however, that took up the issue with Republic of China authorities. Unfortunately, as discussed earlier, the ROC denied any involvement by its personnel or vessels and there was no forward movement.

As such, on July 7, 1956, *Daisan Seitoku Maru* owner Tōma wrote directly to Republic of China Foreign Minister Kung-chao Yeh, a former university professor who had studied in the United States, asking him to resolve the issue quickly.⁵⁰ It is unclear if he received a response. If he did not, it was a missed opportunity for the ROC to explain its position directly to the victims, and this lack of response probably led to greater apprehension and mistrust.

Tōma followed this up a couple of weeks later on July 20 by asking the Chief Executive of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands Higa Shūhei about the status of the investigation.

Higa, who was preoccupied with the land crisis and would die a few months later from a heart attack, had Nishihira Sōsei, the Chief of Police, GRI, respond shortly after on July 27.⁵¹ Nishihira told Tōma that the GRI had not received any information from USCAR, and explained that they would not be able to share any information with Mr. Sai Sho, who headed the Ryukyuan People's Association of Formosa, as the latter did not have any diplomatic credentials or the authority to address the issue. It seems, from the context of that response, that Tōma believed Sai could act as

⁴⁸ "Letter from Earle F. Burns, Office of the Deputy Governor, to Chief Executive, GRI to Civil Administrator, USCAR, on Case of *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, June 6, 1955," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* The families were compensated in 1967 by the GRI, twelve years after the incident. As discussed more fully in the Conclusion, the author believes that if the ROC would not take responsibility, it should have been the United States government that paid compensation as the incident occurred "during its watch." An even better solution might have been for the Government of Japan to compensate the victims. This would have demonstrated further Japan's commitment to Okinawa and the victims, who were Japanese citizens.

⁵⁰ Saitō, "Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken," p. 77.

⁵¹ Nishihira would become Superintendent of the Police (Ryūkyū Keisatsu Kyokuchō) on July 30. He likely continued to follow the investigation in this more senior capacity, in which he served the next five years.

a go-between or liaison with the ROC on this issue.⁵²

The same day, Higa wrote to U.S. authorities to ask for an update, mentioning Tōma's petition and the families' "great anxiety" over the lack of clear answers.⁵³ Higa specifically asked that the following questions be addressed: "a. How and to whom did you contacted [*sic*] based upon the evidence presented to you by this office? And what is the result? b. After that how [do] matters stand in the question to settle and what do you foresee for its future?"⁵⁴

Upon receipt of the letter, the Deputy Governor's office immediately reached out to the Governor of the Ryukyu Islands in Tokyo for information on which to base a reply.⁵⁵ That answer was essentially a repeat of previous responses. Namely, it informed the Deputy Governor's Office that the "presently available evidence" was of an "inconclusive nature" and that while it did not have any additional information the office could inform the Chief Executive of "the attempts which have been and will be made to obtain additional information."⁵⁶

A curious thing happened after this response was received by USCAR officials, however. Paul H. Skuse, who was the Director of the Public Safety Department and oversaw the police, and Edward O. Freimuth, of the Liaison Office, decided not to share it with the Chief Executive. The reasons for this decision are unclear, but according to a handwritten memo, dated November 3, 1956, by Skuse, he consulted with Mr. John M. Steeves, the U.S. consul general in Okinawa and political advisor, who agreed that "we were right in not giving this answer to" Higa.⁵⁷ Sadly, as previously mentioned, Higa had died of a heart attack the week before. Skuse's handwritten note may have been a memo for the record about the status of their exchanges on this matter, or lack thereof.

Because the Chief Executive's Office had not received a reply, Higa's successor, Tōma Jūgō, a former judge and mayor of Naha City in the prewar who assumed office as Chief Executive on November 1, wrote to the Civil Administrator in late March 1957 asking for an update as the "families concerned are also longing therefor."⁵⁸ (Shortly before this on March 12—more than two years after the incident—the boat owner, Tōma, petitioned Yoshida Hōsei, a member of the Socialist Party, and other parliamentarians who were visiting Okinawa at the time when they met. As introduced later, Yoshida had raised the issue in the Japanese Diet in January, the year before,

⁵² Sai had penned a memo on the incident a couple weeks later. It is unclear to whom the memo was presented, but a typed English version can be found in the USCAR files on the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident. See Sai Sho, "Personal Opinion with regard to the Case of the Attack of a Ryukyuan Fishing Boat by Chinese Junks, March 18, 1955." Sai doubted ROC personnel did it and suggested it might have been the work of the Communists. At least one researcher believes Sai to have been an agent of the ROC. See Saitō, "Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken," p. 54.

⁵³ "Letter from Higa Shuhei to Civil Administrator on Case of the Daisan Seitoku Maru, July 27, 1956," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ "Letter from Major John L. Tanner, Deputy Governor's Office, to Governor of the Ryukyu Islands on Senkaku Retto Incident, August 3, 1956," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

⁵⁶ "Letter from Colonel Herbert L. Nelson, Headquarters, Far East Command, to Deputy Governor of the Ryukyu Islands on Senkaku Retto Incident, August 10, 1956," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

⁵⁷ "Handwritten note (untitled) by Paul H. Skuse, November 2, 1956," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files. For more on the position of consul general in Okinawa, see Robert D. Eldridge, "Report from Naha: The U.S. Consuls General and the 'Okinawa Problem' in the 1950s," *Kokusai Kōkyō Seisaku Kenkyū* (International Public Policy Studies), Vol. 7, No. 1 (October 2002), pp. 1-17.

⁵⁸ "Letter from Jugo Thoma, Chief Executive, Government of the Ryukyus, to the Civil Administrator on Case of the Dai San Seitoku Maru, March 28, 1957," Daisan Seitoku Maru Files. Tōma spelt his name "Thoma" but I will use the more common way here. It is unclear if he was directly related to the victim and his family. As he did not talk about the incident in his memoirs, or in any other known documents, it is unlikely that there was a connection.

and would do so a week later on March 19, 1957.)

The Deputy Governor's Office responded in early May that it did not have any "further information bearing on this case available" other than what was included in last letter on January 4, 1956.⁵⁹ This letter did, however, paraphrase the letter from the Governor it received in August 1956 (but which it inexplicably did not share at the time)—namely, that the "evidence previously submitted did not conclusively establish the identity of the assailants."⁶⁰ It also noted the Department of Police, GRI, had recently submitted additional evidence which might be "helpful in identifying one or more members of the attacking junks" and explained that the new evidence had been forwarded to "appropriate authorities with a request that further efforts be made to fix responsibility for this incident."⁶¹

It is unclear from this letter what the new evidence was, where and how it was received, to whom it was given, and when it was given. It is also unclear if it was given at all to anyone, at least at the time the letter was sent in May. The reason for this is that in the surviving records, there is no mention of such a transfer of property during 1956 or the first half of 1957.

However, in the summer of 1957, in response to a State Department Instruction Letter dated August 9, the Office of the High Commissioner, a position created in July, wrote to the new Consul General in Okinawa Olcott M. Deming to inform him that the office was "in possession of numerous items of personal property apparently belonging to the perpetrators of the alleged attack" on the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* and said that they believed "this evidence could be of great value to the investigating authorities in tracing the identity of the perpetrators."⁶²

The following month, on September 12, Skuse and Ronald W. Ota, supervising Criminal Investigator, from the Public Safety Department, USCAR, met with Peter A. Seip from the U.S. Consulate in Okinawa to discuss the contents of the evidence.⁶³ They decided that papers and other materials they had on hand should be forwarded to the U.S. Embassy in Taipei, which was done later that month. In the meantime, they sent copies of reports to the U.S. Consulate in Naha on September 20.⁶⁴

On September 28, the Office of the High Commissioner sent a large package containing the main evidence to James B. Pilcher, Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Taipei since July 1956 and later its Chargé d'affaires.

The spring and summer of 1957 had been a very difficult time for the U.S. Embassy in Taipei. Protests erupted over killing of a ROC army officer by an American soldier and his subsequent acquittal in a court martial hearing known as the May 24 Incident (also Reynolds Riot, after the

⁵⁹ "Letter from Chief Warrant Officer Jack C. Smith, Deputy Governor's Office, to Chief Executive, Government of the Ryukyu Islands, on the Case of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, May 9, 1957," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² "Letter from Colonel G.A. Walk, Office of the High Commissioner, to Consul General, August 30, 1957," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files. Deming became Consul General on June 30, 1957, replacing Steeves who had been serving in that capacity since December 1954, in yet another personnel change at an important juncture. For details on the timing of the appointments, see Eldridge, "Report from Naha."

⁶³ "Undated Memo for Record by Ronald M. Ota, added to Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Crescenzo Guida, Office of the High Commissioner, to Consul General, September 18, 1957," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

⁶⁴ "Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Crescenzo Guida, Office of the High Commissioner, to Consul General, September 20, 1957," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

name of the sergeant involved in the killing).⁶⁵ That kept Pilcher and his colleagues very busy as the Embassy and U.S. Information Service buildings were attacked and heavily damaged.

Later in the fall, after things had settled down somewhat, the Office of the High Commissioner sent a follow-up letter and package to Pilcher explaining that some evidence had been “inadvertently misplaced” and that “in our haste to mail the major portion of evidence which was mailed to you on the 28th of September the above [listed items] were omitted. It is hoped that these items will furnish additional leads.”⁶⁶

Coincidentally, the date this package went out was November 5, two years to the day that the ROC Embassy in Tokyo originally informed the U.S. Embassy there in 1955 that the ROC had nothing to do with the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident.⁶⁷

Charles J. Stanley, the Second Secretary at the U.S. Embassy in Taipei, immediately forwarded the list of new evidence upon receiving it.⁶⁸ It is unclear if he received a reply.

With no response had, Chief Executive Tōma was forced once again to write to the Civil Administrator and ask the status of the investigation. On May 8, 1958, one year after it had received a letter from USCAR in early May 1957 that the evidence provided by the GRI Police had been “forwarded to appropriate authorities” and that the Chief Executive’s Office “would be informed of any further developments concerning the case as soon as they became known,” he requested that “this office be notified of the results of the negotiations based upon the evidence furnished by GRI and of the future development of the case.”⁶⁹

Unfortunately, Tōma seems to have received no response to his letter, then or even before he finished his term as Chief Executive the following year in November 1959. However, this does not mean that the U.S. side was not working the issue. A week after Tōma’s letter, the Office of the High Commissioner wrote to Consul General Deming to request any information the State Department had that could be shared with the Chief Executive.⁷⁰

Moreover, after Pilcher received the first package of evidence at the U.S. Embassy in Taipei in late September 1957, the U.S. Embassy contacted the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs a week later on October 8 explaining that the U.S. side had received evidence suggesting “that unofficial personnel with loyalty to [the Republic of] China” were involved in the attack and was sharing it with the ministry.⁷¹

This note was eventually shared within the ROC government leading to several exchanges between MOFA, the Ministry of Defense, Navy Command, Chief of Staff, and others how to respond and other matters. According to a memo drafted by MOFA, it had informed the U.S. Embassy in Taipei on May 28, 1958, that ROC Navy did not have any vessels as described by the U.S. side but that it would continue to check with the other services, include the Security

⁶⁵ For details see Rankin, *China Assignment*, especially Chapter 10, and Stephen G. Craft, *American Justice in Taiwan: The 1957 Riots and Cold War Foreign Policy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2016).

⁶⁶ “Letter to James Pilcher, American Embassy, Taipei, Formosa, from Crescenzo Guida, Office of the High Commissioner, November 5, 1957.”

⁶⁷ Saitō, “Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken,” p. 50.

⁶⁸ Letter from Charles J. Stanley, Second Secretary of Embassy, to Dr. Hsu Shao-chang, Director, American Affairs Department, MOFA, November 13, 1957.” This document is labeled “11-EAP-01532” in the ROC’s MOFA files.

⁶⁹ “Letter from Chief Executive Jugo Thoma to Civil Administrator on Case of the Daisan Seitoku Maru, May 8, 1958,” Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

⁷⁰ “Letter from Theodore A. Christophil, Office of the High Commissioner, to Consul General, May 16, 1958,” Daisan Seitoku Maru Files.

⁷¹ Saitō, “Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken,” pp. 50-51.

Command.⁷² Throughout the remainder of the year, the ROC would continue to deny involvement (including in a December 20 note to the U.S. Embassy in Taipei) in the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident and insist that it was probably the work of PRC personnel.⁷³

No doubt frustrated with the failure to get helpful information or reach a solution, Yamashiro Zenkō, a recently elected member of the Legislature of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands, visited Taiwan in November 1958 and reportedly met with Chang Chun, Secretary General to the President of the Republic from 1954 to 1972, with whom he raised the issue.⁷⁴ Subsequently, in early 1959, he sent a follow-up inquiry to President Chiang Kai-shek's office.⁷⁵ Chang, whose name is also written as Zhang Qun, shared it with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and asked for clarification and details, and after receiving it, responded to Yamashiro, a former newspaper reporter and longtime activist, on March 7.

In its response, the President's Office explained that it had confirmed with MOFA the details of the incident, and shared with Yamashiro MOFA's reply:

It may be recalled that the case in question was submitted to this (the Chinese Foreign) Ministry for settlement by our (the Chinese) Embassy to Japan upon receipt of a note by the U.S. Embassy to Japan dated back August 5, 1955. This (the Chinese Foreign) Ministry then referred the case to the Ministry of National Defense (of China) for action and reply. Afterwards, a reply was received to the effect that our (Chinese) fleet or troops had never performed any activities whatsoever in the area where the accident of the Ryukyuan fishing boat occurred, or the attack on that boat; nor was there any such boat called "Chin-shui-chin" as stated in the original letter. This (the Chinese Foreign) Ministry immediately cabled our (the Chinese) Embassy in Japan, asking the latter to transmit the investigation results of the case to the U.S. Embassy in Japan. Later on, this (the Chinese Foreign) Ministry was in receipt of two letters dated respectively October 8th, 1957 and November 13th [*sic*], 1957, accompanied with pictures of newly discovered evidences regarding the case, requesting continuous investigation. Again, this (the Chinese Foreign) Ministry asked the Ministry of National Defense (of China) to conduct further investigation on the basis of the new clue furnished by the new evidence. The Ministry of National Defense (of China), however, replied that all the units concerned had been ordered to probe into the case with their utmost efforts, but according to their reports, no such personnel and ship as claimed could be found. This (the

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁴ "Chugoku Seifu ha Shiranu': Daisan Seitoku Maru Jiken ni Kaito (The Chinese Government Does Not Know: Answer to the Case of the Daisan Seitoku Maru)," *Ryūkyū Shimpō*, March 11, 1959. The author is grateful to Kuniyoshi Makomo for locating this article and other support he provided throughout the writing of this paper. Yamashiro may have been a part of a 196-member tourist group that traveled to Taiwan at that time. The group included those that had been born and raised in Taiwan during the Japanese administration of the island. (See "Taiwan he Hatsu no Kanko Dan [First Tourist Group to Visit Taiwan]," *Ryūkyū Shimpō*, November 5, 1958.)

⁷⁵ There is some confusion about when the letter was sent. A response from Chang Chun, of the Office of the President, Republic of China, references Yamashiro's letter as being sent on February 15. (See "Letter from Chang Chun to Mr. Yamashiro, March 7 [1959]," *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.) A newspaper story from that time, however, writes that the letter was sent on January 15. (See "Daisan Seitoku Maru Chōsa Mada Tsuzuku: Taiwan Kokumin Seifu Kara Shokan [Investigations to Continue on Daisan Seitoku Maru, Letter Received from Nationalist Government on Taiwan]," *Okinawa Times*, March 11, 1959.) In addition, scholar Saitō Michihiko, who examined the then-declassified documents in the files of the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, writes that the letter was dated January 14, and references two other exchanges which suggest, from the timing of the exchanges, that the letter was sent on January 15. (See Saitō, "Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken," pp. 72-73.)

Chinese Foreign) Ministry then sent a reply to the U.S. Embassy in China, by quoting in brief the letter of the Ministry of National Defense (of China), “on February 14 of this year.”⁷⁶

MOFA in turn informed the U.S. Embassy in Taipei about the exchange, explaining it had sent its response to Yamashiro. It also told U.S. officials that the Ministry of National Defense had not found any individuals or vessels identified in the evidence the U.S. side had presented.⁷⁷

Japanese government officials became aware of the exchanges, too, it seems, likely because of local reporting. On March 13, 1959, the Naha Office of the Nanpō Renraku Jimusho, an agency set up in 1952 at the suggestion of the U.S. side within the Prime Minister’s Office to monitor affairs in Okinawa as envisioned by former Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, sent a report to the Director of the Liaison Office of the Special Areas (*Sōrifu Tokubetsu Chiiki Renrakukyoku*), which included Okinawa, about the response Yamashiro received.⁷⁸ This office in turn forwarded it to Nakagawa Tōru, the counsellor of the Foreign Ministry and Director General of the Asian Affairs Bureau on March 23.⁷⁹

It is unclear if these events are related, but a colleague of Yamashiro, Asato Tsumichiyo, called on the High Commissioner, Lieutenant General Donald P. Booth, around this time about resolving the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* issue. Asato, who had been serving in the Legislature since its beginning in 1952 and was at this time its speaker, had been a lawyer in Tainan City during Japan’s administration of Taiwan. In 1935, he was elected to the Tainan City assembly.

He brought with him a petition to the Legislature, dated March 15, from Tōma and others connected to the fishing vessel but had not shared it with the Legislature yet as he “does not want to make a political issue of it” and “does not want it to get to the Communist Chinese for food to attack the [Nationalist Chinese].”⁸⁰ “However,” the undated memo of conversation prepared of the meeting said, “he has what he thinks is irrefutable evidence that the [Nationalist Chinese] did this. He thought by working through diplomatic channels we could get the [Nationalist Chinese] to pay solatium and compensation for the damage to the boat.”⁸¹

Asato, who would later become a member of the House of Representatives in the Japanese Diet in 1970, argued that “since the [United States] is the administrative authority here it is [the United States] responsibility to see that something is done about it. [The problem] is (5) years

⁷⁶ “Letter from Chang Chun.”

⁷⁷ The confusion in the dates is found here as well, because of the timing of the report from MOFA to the President’s Office, which is dated February 14, according to Saitō. Because of this confusion, I decided to leave the description in the text vague as to dates, but all of this transpired in the first few months of 1959.

⁷⁸ “Na Dai 383 Gō, Shōwa 34 Nen 3 Gatsu 13 Nichi, Naha Nihon Seifu Nanpō Renraku Jimushochō [to] Sōrifu Tokubetsu Chiiki Renraku Kyokuchō,” in *Beikoku Kanrika no Nansei Shotō Jōkyō Zakken Okinawa Kankei Daisan Seitokumaru Jiken* (米国管理下の南西諸島状況雑件 沖縄関係 第三清徳丸事件), Bunrui Bangō (分類番号) A'3.0.0.7-1 (68), Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo. For more on the establishment and operation of the office in Okinawa, see Robert D. Eldridge, “Early Liaisons,” *This Week on Okinawa*, Vol. 65, No. 32 (August 11-17, 2019), pp. 13-15.

⁷⁹ “Sōtokuren Dai 302 Gō, Shōwa 34 Nen 3 Gatsu 23 Nichi, Sōrifu Tokubetsu Chiiki Renraku Kyokuchō [to] Gaimushō Ajia Kyokuchō,” in *Beikoku Kanrika no Nansei Shotō Jōkyō Zakken Okinawa Kankei Daisan Seitokumaru Jiken*.

⁸⁰ “Undated Memorandum for Col Williams by Andy [last name unknown] on Mr. Asato’s Meeting with General Booth,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files. From the context, it appears to have taken place in March 1959.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

old now and nothing has been done about it.”⁸²

While it is likely that Booth, who had assumed his position as High Commissioner the previous May, did not commit to anything during his meeting with Asato, the memorandum of conversation stated afterwards that he directed his staff to “get the full facts of the case. Find out (1) what happened referenced publicity; (2) international difficulties; (3) what happened in the Japanese Diet; (4) [what happened in the] GRI Legislature; (5) what USCAR did, etc.”⁸³ Importantly, the memo also stated that the High Commissioner “wants to send a letter to [the Consul General] or, possibly, a message to [the Department of the Army], depending upon the facts. We should take position that the [United States] should make strong protest to Taiwan Government to get solatium for the bereaved people and payment for damage to the boat. If the [United States] does not want to take this matter up with the [Nationalist Chinese] then [the United States] should pay this...We cannot let this fester any longer.”⁸⁴

Unfortunately, it is unclear from the files what happened next on the U.S. side. It appears little progress was made, however, because in early August 1962, the new Chief Executive, Ota Seisaku, a judge and public prosecutor in the prewar, wrote to the High Commissioner, who was also new, Lieutenant General Paul W. Caraway, to inquire about the status. Ota had also previously served in Taiwan as the governor of Hōko Prefecture, otherwise known as the Pescadores (today, known as Penghu County), and had been the Deputy Chief Executive under Tōma.⁸⁵

Caraway’s office responded at the end of the month. Its letter, however, was unlike previous responses, seeming to suggest it was trying to end USCAR’s involvement. “Recognizing the importance of this case to the individuals concerned as well as to the Government of the Ryukyu Islands,” the response stated, “the High Commissioner wishes to express his regret in being unable to establish legal liability or responsibility for the incident based on the information and evidence available.”⁸⁶ Of note, this letter did not conclude with the phrase—“we will keep your office informed about any new developments,” which was always included in earlier letters. As such, it probably meant that USCAR had given up on pursuing the case on behalf of the GRI any longer.

GOJ Responses: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diet

It is important to look at how the Government of Japan responded following the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident as well. Despite not having administrative rights over the Nansei Islands at this time as a result of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the Government of Japan also became involved in the issue as previously mentioned. There were several, understandable reasons for this.

First, Japan was worried about the assault on the Okinawan fishermen, as it came so close after numerous incidents between Japanese fishermen and Korean authorities near Takeshima. As alluded to in the beginning of this article, tensions were high in the early to mid-1950s due to the unilateral establishment of the Syngman Rhee Line in January 1952 which placed Takeshima (which the Republic of Korea calls “Dokdo” but which the San Francisco Peace Treaty recognized as belonging to Japan) within the line that President Rhee established and committed to defend

⁸² *Ibid.* Here “(5)” is written, but it is because the discussants (or the recorder of the conversation) think the incident happened in 1954 rather than 1955.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ As Deputy Chief Executive, Ota had visited Taiwan in September 1958. It is unclear if he brought up the incident in his meetings with Vice President Chen Cheng and Secretary General Zhang Qun.

⁸⁶ “Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth S. Hitch, High Commissioner’s Office, to Chief Executive, Government of the Ryukyu Islands, on Expedious Solution of the Dai San Seitoku Maru Case, August 29, 1962,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

by force.

Within this unilaterally established zone, Japanese fishing boats were regularly fired on and seized, and in one incident on February 4, 1953, a chief fisherman was killed.⁸⁷ A Japanese Coast Guard patrol vessel was also fired on by the ROK Dokdo garrison on August 23, 1954. A year later in August, amid rising tensions, the ROK severed ties between it and Japan, forbidding trade and other exchanges. This escalation in tensions occurred as the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* saga was beginning. Japan had two major maritime incidents on its hands to deal with.

A second related reason Japan became involved is because Okinawan residents were Japanese nationals. Japan had “residual sovereignty” over the Nansei Islands, as stated by the U.S. special representative (John Foster Dulles) at the time of the San Francisco Peace Treaty conference.⁸⁸ In order to clarify this, Prime Minister Yoshida submitted a document entitled “‘Practicable Arrangement’ for the Southern Islands” in December 1951 when Dulles visited Japan which called for, among a half-dozen items, that “The U.S. confirms that the Southern Islands remain under Japanese sovereignty and thus the inhabitants remain Japanese nationals.”⁸⁹ As such, while the U.S. government administered Okinawa through the U.S. Army, the Japanese government maintained its strong interest in the fate of the residents. Therefore, it monitored the situation and as necessary appealed to U.S. authorities on behalf of the Okinawan residents.

It is unclear how and when the Japanese government first became aware of the incident. However, the local media began reporting it as early as March 3 (with the *Okinawa Times* doing so that day with other newspapers following the next day), so it was within approximately 24 to 48 hours of the incident that it became public knowledge.

Despite these reasons to be involved, because of the principle that the United States had primary responsibility to administer the islands, the Government of Japan felt its hands somewhat tied and could only appeal to the United States on behalf of the residents. (The author argues later that there were probably other things the GOJ could have done as well.)

With no immediate resolution in sight, the matter was taken up in the Parliament that summer. In the afternoon of July 26, during a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the 22nd Session of the Lower House, Hososako Kanemitsu, a Socialist Party member and lawyer, asked Nakagawa Tōru, a counsellor of the Foreign Ministry and Director General of the Asian Affairs Bureau, about the incident. Nakagawa, who would later serve as the Director General of the Treaties Bureau and Japan’s ambassador to the United Nations in the early 1970s, responded that the ministry had informed the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo of the incident and requested that the U.S. government do its best to investigate it. Nakagawa further explained that because the United States had administrative rights over the Ryukyu Islands, the U.S. government was primarily responsible for protecting the people of the islands, and thus the Japanese government had relayed to the U.S. side its desires and expressed its hope that the United States would do a thorough investigation. Unfortunately, he admitted, “the government has not received any reports yet [from the U.S. side].”⁹⁰

A couple of days later on July 28 (1955), Nakagawa wrote to George A. Morgan, who had

⁸⁷ This homicide was called the “Daihō Maru Incident.” See Daniel Roh, *Japan, Korea, and the Takeshima Secret Pact: Territorial Conflict and the Formation of the Postwar East Asian Order* (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2024), p. 34

⁸⁸ Eldridge, *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem*, p. 325.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 363-365.

⁹⁰ Saitō, “Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken,” p. 76.

joined the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo the year before as its Political Counselor.⁹¹ He referenced the incident and forwarded a summary of a petition from the families of the victims, owner of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, and others. In particular, Nakagawa expressed his hope that U.S. Embassy would “use its good offices so that the U.S. authorities would make every effort to investigate into the case, to rescue the three missing and to relieve the victims and take a proper step to ensure safe fishing operation of the Ryukyuan fishermen in the waters of the Ryukyu Islands.”⁹²

The five-page “Gist of Petition,” prepared by the Okinawan group and which appears to have been translated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was attached. Its contents are important, so the main text (minus the list of signatories) will be reproduced here.⁹³ The names of the three who are believed to have died in the attack were redacted by MOFA officials when they declassified the related file in 2021, but the names are already publicly known from newspaper articles at the time as well as U.S. diplomatic documents declassified decades ago, so they will be included here in parentheses (and can also be found in footnote 8).

Gist of Petition

About 2 p.m. on March 2, 1955 a shocking event occurred in the sea 123° 29' east longitude and 25° 45' north latitude, near Uotsuri Island of the Senkaku Islands, north-west of Ishigaki Island of the Yaeyama Islands, which lies within the territorial waters of the Ryukyus. The No. 3 *Seitokumaru*, OT No. 51 (15.39 tons) owned by Seiyo Toma was attacked by two junks (respectively named *Taian* and *Kinsuishin*) hoisting the national flag of the Republic of China (Sun in Blue Sky), and as a result of this outrage, [Kinjō Jirō], skipper of the No. 3 *Seitokumaru*, [Tōma Seitoku], Chief Engineer, and [Yonaha Kazuo], a crew member are missing.

Immediately after this event, Brigadier General [Walter M.] Johnson, Civil Administrator of the Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands, stated that “the U.S. naval and air forces were now employed to make investigations of the event and particulars would be communicated as soon as they are obtained” and he thought that “in the present stage it was not necessary

⁹¹ See “Interview with Ambassador George Allen Morgan, December 23, 1989,” The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project (<https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Morgan,%20George%20Allen.pdf>), p. 7. Also see “Interview with Margaret (Peggy) Morgan, September 2, 1986,” The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Program, Foreign Service Spouse Series (https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Morgan,%20Margaret%20Peggy_%201986%20-%20TOC.pdf), pp. 17, 22.

⁹² “Letter from Toru Nakagawa to George A. Morgan, July 28, 1955,” Kōjōsho (口上書, Verbal Note), Beikoku Kanrika no Nansei Shotō Jōkyō Zakken Okinawa Kankei Daisan Seitokumaru Jiken.

⁹³ The signatories and their occupations were: Tōma Seiyō, owner of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*; Tōma Seisei, owner and skipper of the *Daiichi Seitoku Maru*; Shinzato Kanshō, crew member of the *Daisan Seitoku Maru*; Kinjō Fusuke, same; Tamanaha Zenichi, same; Uchima Shinei, same; Tōma Seiko, same; Tsuha Gempachi, Mayor of Sashiki Village; Yamashiro Butoku, Speaker of Sashiki Village Assembly; Nakamura Seian, Chairman of Sashiki Fishing Cooperative Association; Miyagi Kigi, head of Baten Ward, Sashiki Village; Shiroma Bansei, Member of Sashiki Village Assembly; Sesoko Seishun, same; Kaneshima Shinsuke, Mayor of Yonabaru Town; Yamauchi Hisamitsu, Speaker of Yonabaru Town Assembly; Sesoku Yamato, Member of Yonabaru Town Assembly; Komaki Kiichi, same; Yamauchi Toshio, same; Tōma Seijin, Chairman of Yonabaru Fishing Cooperative Association; Sesoku Masao, Managing Director of Yonabaru Fishing Cooperative Association; Nakazato Zenshun, Head of Tosoe Ward, Yonabaru Town; Uehara Hideo, Chairman of Itoman Fishing Cooperative Association; Gima Shinki, Chairman of Naha District Fishing Cooperative Association; Taira Sentetsu, Chairman of Okinawa Federation of Fishing Cooperative Associations; Tamaki Jinei, Chairman of Yaeyama Federation of Fishing Cooperative Associations; Nagamine Kenshō, President of Ryukyu Marine Products Co., Ltd.; Uechi Seiko, Chairman of Ryukyu Fishing Vessel Insurance Association.

for the Ryukyu Government to take any steps in regard to the event.” (March 5th issue of the *Okinawa Times*) From the above statement it seems that the Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands conducted investigations of this accident. However, now after nearly four months since the event no information whatsoever has been given from the said authorities.

The Legislature of the Ryukyu Government adopted a resolution for submitting for submitting a petition to the United Nations, the International Civil Liberties Union, the Japanese Government, the Governor and Deputy Governor of the Ryukyu Islands, with regard to investigations and settlement of this case. No announcement, however, has been made as to what measures have been taken in regard to the petition.

Measures which we desire to be taken are as follows:

1. To search for [Kinjō Jirō, Tōma Seitoku, and Yonaha Kazuo], who have been missing and rescue them as quickly as possible.
2. Payment of indemnity by the country concerned for all the damage caused by unlawful acts of the junks.
3. In order to protect the life and safety of fishermen, to lodge a strong protest with the country concerned.
4. To extend an emergency livelihood assistance to the families of the missing.

This problem not only concerns us, but affects the life and livelihood of the whole fishery population of the Ryukyus.

The sea adjacent to the Senkaku Islands is the sole fishing ground for Okinawan fishermen, now that they have few fishing grounds because of their detachment from the main island of Japan. Though the sea just referred to lies within the territorial waters of the Ryukyu Islands, it is haunted by Formosan fishing boats freely and constantly. Besides, even after the event junks similar to those that caused the incident have been frequently sighted to the great horror of the Okinawan fishermen. When the fishing boats of Okinawans see such junks, they hastily run away, giving up their fishing operation.

Since the fishermen of the Ryukyus have almost no fishing ground in the seas near Okinawa owing to the bombing practice of the U.S. Air Force in that area, the above mentioned sea is the last fishing ground for them to sustain their livelihood; if this fishing ground is left to the plundering of pirates, those fishermen and their families will be driven to starvation.

In order to rescue the three missing men, to defend the natural right we have as human being, and further to protect the lives and livelihood of the Okinawa fishermen, we, in behalf of the whole fishermen of the Ryukyus, earnestly request the co-operation and assistance of the people of our father land.

July 1955.

As discussed in an earlier section, Morgan was at the time working on a *note verbale* to the Embassy of the Republic of China in Tokyo inquiring about the incident, which he sent on August 5. Unfortunately, the ROC's response was immediately not forthcoming. Morgan would later share this answer from the ROC when it came with the Japanese Foreign Ministry, as he did the Far East Command.

As we saw earlier, Nakagawa's request to Morgan came in part as a result of the petition, but also because of the questioning in the Diet he had undergone. This would not be the last time the issue would be raised in Japan's Parliament.

Later that year on December 8, *Daisan Seitoku Maru* owner Tōma asked five members of the Ryukyu Legislature, who were visiting mainland Japan, to take up the case of the *Daisan Seitoku*

Maru with the Japanese government and those from each of the political parties with whom they met.⁹⁴

They seem to have done so because on December 13, 1955, at the Upper House's Budget Committee, Yoshida Hōsei, a member of the Socialist Party, asked Justice Minister Makino Ryōzō and Foreign Minister Shigemitsu about the incident. Shigemitsu, who had visited the United States several months earlier, answered in the same vein as Director General Nakagawa in July: "Because the United States is in charge now of directly governing Okinawa, it is negotiating with the government of the Republic of China. However, Japan can not sit still and be quiet. The Japanese government has raised attention to this matter with both the United States and Republic of China and requested measures be taken to resolve the issue," and added, "It is regrettable that we have not received any report that the issue will be resolved along our desires."⁹⁵

The following year on March 19, after a similar request by Tōma earlier that month, Yoshida again brought it up Kishi Nobusuke who was serving concurrently as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, in questioning in the Diet. Although Yoshida referenced the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident in his question, Kishi responded in more general terms about the United States being in charge of the administration and that it was important for Japan to share the concerns of the residents with U.S. officials.⁹⁶

ROC Reactions: President's Office, MOFA, and the Military

It is unclear when officials in the Republic of China were alerted about the incident, but Japanese scholar, Saitō Michihiko, who worked with some of the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China in April 2014, wrote that he found a copy of the March 5 Resolution by the Legislature of the GRI in the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, which houses the archives.⁹⁷

A few days earlier on March 3, as previously mentioned, the *Okinawa Times* had published a story about the incident. Due to the presence of U.S. military officials in Taiwan, ROC officials certainly monitored the former newspaper, affiliated with but nominally independent of the U.S. military, and thus were aware of the story.

While the date is unknown, it appears that an official from the Taiwan Provincial Security Command was sent to meet with Sai Sho, the president of the Ryukyuan People's Association. Sai, as mentioned earlier had written up his thoughts on the incident supposedly in response to a comment by Funakoshi Shōyū, Director of the Economics Department, Government of the Ryukyu Islands in the Okinawan media. Among other arguments, Sai suggested that the items reportedly left by the perpetrators could have been staged by the Chinese communists: "a planned method of the communist junks for hiding the crime, and also this may be their

⁹⁴ Saitō, "Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken," p. 77. The five legislative members from Okinawa were: Taira Ryōshō, Aragaki Kanezō, Kaneshi Saichi, Nakazato Takeru, and Owan Kisaburō.

⁹⁵ "Dai 23 Kai Kokkai Sangiin Yosan Iinkai (23rd Session of the House of Councilors Budget Committee), No. 5, December 13, 1955.

⁹⁶ "Dai 26 Kai Kokkai Sangiin Yosan Iinkai (26th Session of the House of Councilors Budget Committee), No. 12, March 19, 1957.

⁹⁷ Saitō, "Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken," p. 44. Unfortunately, he noted, due to time constraints and the policies of the Institute, he was not able to see all the materials. Moreover, sometime after his visit, the Foreign Ministry reclassified almost all materials related to the Senkakus, making them inaccessible to researchers, a fact this author learned during visits to Academia Sinica in February and March 2024, and related discussions with Taiwanese scholar Tien-hao Jen (任天豪). The U.S. Embassy in Tokyo provided a copy of the resolution to the ROC's Embassy in early August, but the latter probably had its own copy earlier than that point.

conventional means.”⁹⁸ The meeting between Sai and Lee Mei-tetsu of the Security Command is referenced in a report dated May 12.

But there is at least one document that predates this one among the once-declassified ROC materials referencing the incident. It is dated May 10 and concerns an exchange by senior officials within the Taiwan Defense Headquarters.⁹⁹ This was followed by another exchange dated June 8.¹⁰⁰ There are two others from June, dated June 18, and the 25, concerning the incident, as well as two from July 18 and July 25.¹⁰¹ The latter sought to argue that the junks were the PRC’s.

It was in August, after the U.S. representative visited the ROC Embassy to inquire about the incident and ask for further information, when correspondence began to increase. An undated ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs memo discussed the meeting and issues raised and included the documents Second Secretary Bruns had submitted.¹⁰² In mid-September, the Chief of the General Staff contacted the Navy Headquarters to inquire about the comment Bruns made regarding the ROC request to the U.S. Navy in February 1955 to assist the junks.¹⁰³ On October 3, the ROC Navy responded that it would investigate and shortly thereafter, it responded that there was no truth in that statement.¹⁰⁴ The answer was forwarded by the Ministry of National Defense to the Foreign Ministry on October 14.¹⁰⁵

Early the following month, the ROC Embassy in Tokyo responded to the U.S. *note verbale* of August 5. Its response, dated November 2, stated,

The Embassy of the Republic of China presents its compliments to the Embassy of the United States of America and has the honour to reply to the latter’s note verbale of August 5, 1955, concerning the reported armed attack on the crew of the Ryukyuan fishing vessel *Daisan Seitoku Maru*, Registration No. OT-51, which took place on March 2, 1955, in the vicinity of Uotsuri Island, Senkaku Retto, Ryukyu Island. After a thorough investigation of the case based upon the information supplied by the American Embassy, the Government of the Republic of China wishes to state that the Chinese naval vessels and units had never operated in that part of the sea and therefore they could not have attacked the crew of the Ryukyuan fishing vessel *Daisan Seitoku Maru*. The result of the investigation further makes it clear that the Chinese Navy did not have ships as were described. However, in view of the fact that the Chinese Communist motorboats based on Fukien or Chekiang Province are capable of operating in the specified area, it was possible that the attack might have been made by the Communists for the purpose of disturbing the American-Ryukyuan friendly relations with the Republic of China.¹⁰⁶

The ROC Embassy in Tokyo informed its Foreign Ministry on November 5 that it had

⁹⁸ Sai Sho, “Personal Opinion with Regard to the Case of the Attack of a Ryukyuan Fishing Boat by Chinese Junks, March 18, 1955,” *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Files.

⁹⁹ Saitō, “Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken,” pp. 45-46.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50. While this may be true, under the panicked circumstances at the time discussed in the beginning of this paper, a request to the U.S. Navy for assistance would not have been unreasonable. Another possible explanation is that there may have been a miscommunication at the time between ROC and U.S. officials, with the latter interpreting a possible remark as a request for assistance.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ “Letter from George A. Morgan to Commander-in-Chief, Far East, November 16, 1955.”

forwarded the note to the U.S. Embassy.¹⁰⁷ This appears to be the last significant interaction on the ROC side for the remainder of the year.

It would not be until the fall of the following year before bilateral discussions would be had again.

Conclusion

This concluding section will cover three inter-related topics: responsibility for the incident, how the governments of the United States and Japan could have better handled the response, and the importance of transparency through the declassification of documents.

Following the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident, the Republic of China continued to deny its vessels and personnel were involved despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It unfortunately maintained that stance throughout the remainder of the 1950s, preventing a timely resolution. Lacking this admission, it was clear that the U.S. government was unable to produce any additional information to provide the Government of the Ryukyu Islands by the early 1960s.

It is unclear, however, if the U.S. government pressured the ROC to pay compensation to the Okinawan victims regardless of its willingness to admit involvement. (Potentially, groups or individuals within the United States who wished to support a fledgling government led by Chiang Kai-shek may have decided not to pressure the ROC to come clean on the matter.) It is also unclear if the U.S. government ever seriously considered the suggestion by High Commissioner Booth that it should pay the victims' families on behalf of the unknown perpetrators. (If it was not going to do the former—i.e., pressure the ROC government to come clean and pay compensation—it should have done the latter—pay compensation itself—since it was responsible for the Ryukyu Islands.)

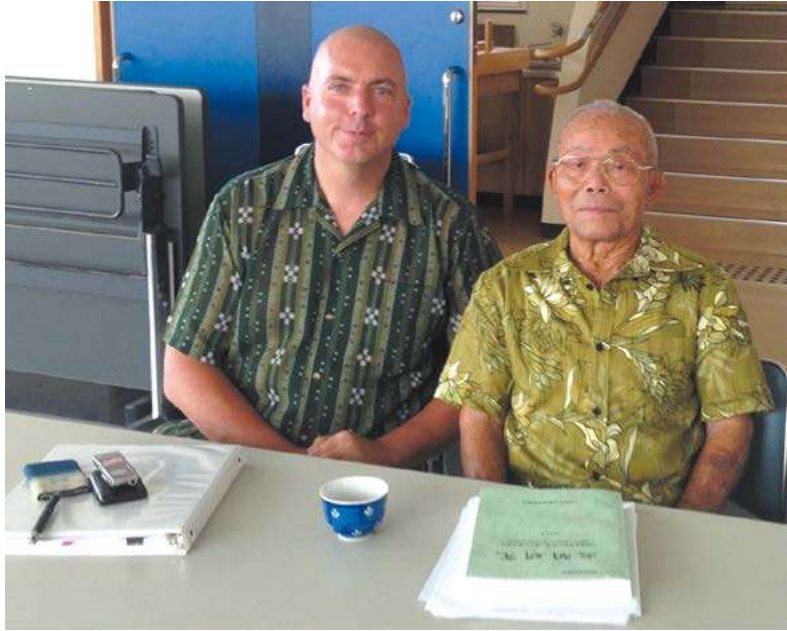
In any case, the Government of the Ryukyu Islands decided in 1967 to go ahead and pay compensation to the victims' families and others involved. This was a dozen years after the incident, obviously too long to have waited.¹⁰⁸

The failure of the United States to quickly and properly address the issue raised concerns among Okinawa residents and Japanese politicians and officials alike and was used to criticize the construct of the U.S. government having administrative rights over Okinawa.¹⁰⁹ In other words, what was the point of the United States being in charge of Okinawa when it was unable to protect the lives and property and rights of Okinawan residents, in this case, the fishermen? Fishermen would be increasingly unwilling to go too far from shore to fish if they did not have faith in the United States to be able to protect them. In fact, some fishermen stopped going to the Senkakus

¹⁰⁷ Saitō, "Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken," p. 50.

¹⁰⁸ Author's interviews with Tōma Seikyō and Kuniyoshi Makomo, July 11, 2014, Yonabaru, Okinawa Prefecture, and Kuniyoshi Makomo, July 24, 2024, Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture. The author would like to express his gratitude to Mr. Kuniyoshi for arranging the interview with Mr. Tōma, and for his contributions to gathering and analyzing documents and conducting interviews with those involved with the Senkaku Islands and the fishing industry in Okinawa. His work is of enormous help to other researchers and scholars. I would also like to express my appreciation to the editorial committee members of the volumes entitled *Senkaku Kenkyū*, which have been revised and updated over the years. In particular, I would like to draw attention to: Senkaku Shotō Bunken Shiryō Hensankai, ed., *Senkaku Kenkyū Senkaku Shotō Kaiiki no Gyogyō ni Kansuru Chōsa Hōkoku: Okinawaken no Gyogyō Kankei ni Taisuru Kikitori Chōsa*, 2014 (Naha: Senkaku Shotō Bunken Shiryō Hensankai, 2015) and Senkaku Shotō Bunken Shiryō Hensankai, ed., *Senkaku Kenkyū Senkaku Shotō Kaiiki no Gyogyō ni Kansuru Chōsa Hōkoku: Okinawaken ni Okeru Senzen kara Nihon Fukki (1972) no Ugoki*, 2009 (Naha: Senkaku Shotō Bunken Shiryō Hensankai, 2016).

¹⁰⁹ An example of this sentiment was found in a reporter's column in a local newspaper in "Kishaseki: Gaikōken Naki no Kanashisayo... (Reporter's Seat: Sadness of Not Having Diplomatic Rights...)," *Ryūkyū Shimpō*, March 11, 1959.



Author with Tōma Masakiyo, July 11, 2014, in Yonabaru, Okinawa Prefecture

area to fish after the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* Incident. Combined with the fact that the Kuba and Taishō Islands within the Senkaku Islands Group were used for U.S. military target practice, the concern about fishing too close to the Senkakus where pirates or armed personnel might harm them further reduced the fishing areas for them.

Regarding the U.S. handling of the incident, the Government of Japan should have asked—if it did not—to be allowed to dispatch an official and join the U.S. side investigating the incident. (No such record of a request was found in the various files examined so the author assumes the Japanese government did not ask.) Such a request would have further shown that Japan had a strong interest in the protection of Okinawan residents, who were Japanese nationals, as well as any incidents or incursions around the Senkaku Islands, which was Japanese territory. Although it does not seem to have done so at the time, this did not mean that the Government of Japan was not interested in the case, as this article has shown. However, the Japanese government lost an important chance to be more directly involved at this time in the early years of the post-treaty U.S. administration of the Ryukyu Islands with the safety and welfare of the people of Okinawa.

Similarly, the Japanese government should have also offered to pay the compensation if the perpetrators could not be identified. This, like the suggestion in the previous paragraph, would have established a precedent for Japan's closer involvement in Okinawan affairs. Whether the U.S. government at the time would have permitted it or not is uncertain, but at least Japan should have gone on the record to make the offer.

We may never know with 100% certainty who was responsible for the incident, but all evidence points to vessels and personnel from Nationalist China, i.e., the Republic of China. (It appears that an important piece of evidence—the vessel, *Kinsuishin*, No. 17901—was abandoned and later sunk. Where it sunk and whether it was done deliberately to hide some of the evidence, including perhaps the bodies of the victims, remain questions to be answered.¹¹⁰) This author highly encourages the ROC to be more forthcoming in its investigation, particularly as it happened during the government of the autocratic Chiang Kai-shek and whose record continues to be re-assessed within modern democratic Taiwan society.

¹¹⁰ Saitō, “Okinawa Gyosen Shūgeki Jiken,” p. 78.

Japanese scholar Saitō Michihiko, who worked with once declassified documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China, strongly believes, as does the author, that the junks involved in the attack belonged to the ROC, and thus the personnel were Nationalist Chinese. The same scholar dismisses the argument raised by Sai Shō at the time and the ROC Ministry of National Defense that it was probably a PRC vessel that was disguised as an ROC boat and that its personnel were also from the PRC, saying that there is no reason for the PRC to have done so and all of the witnesses insist that it was an ROC vessel.¹¹¹

In discussing the issue with Professor Saitō, we both agreed that the PRC probably did not have the ability to do such an operation near the Senkakus then.¹¹² Moreover, the author would like to add that had it been a “false flag” operation by the PRC to make the ROC look bad in Japanese eyes, the PRC does not appear to have done, at the time, any of the related propaganda afterwards to sustain the criticism of the ROC among the Okinawan or Japanese public. In other words, false flag operations are usually accompanied by a propaganda effort, but in this case there was none.

Some questions the author continues to have concerns intra-ROC government relations between the various ministries and players. For example, was the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which presumably wanted stable relations with the United States and Japan, potentially afraid of pursuing the truth behind the incident too far with the Ministry of National Defense? Or similarly, did the Ministry of National Defense look down on MOFA and choose not to share the truth? Or was there a problem within the Ministry of National Defense regarding the sharing of information internally? Did President Chiang Kai-shek or his close associates block disclosure of the information?

Despite the denials by the ROC, it is interesting to note that there were more than 60 pages of documents in seven folders related to the *Daisan Seitoku Maru* incident within its files held in the archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, as of 2015 before they were closed again to researchers. If the ROC had no involvement, it would theoretically have no need to keep the files or inquiries in the first place. Yet, it did. Furthermore, the fact that MOFA has since made the documents inaccessible to researchers can only mean it has something to hide.

In the interest of transparency, the Republic of China should make all documents available, and in the interest of accountability, if the Republic of China is able to verify that its vessels and personnel were indeed responsible for the incident, it should make amends somehow to the families of the victims and/or the fishing community in Okinawa. It would be a generous act and would contribute to even better Taiwan-Japan relations, which are admittedly already very positive. Although nearly 70 years has passed since the incident, there is no statute of limitations on goodwill and doing the right thing.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

¹¹² Interview with Saitō Michihiko, Hachioji City, July 26, 2024.