

OKINAWAN HISTORY FROM LEW CHEW TO RYUKYU KINGDOM

🚩 Why the 1854 Perry–Ryukyu Treaty Was Written in Chinese

Short Answer: YES — but it's far more complicated than a simple vassal relationship

CN Relationship #1: China's Tributary State (Official & Public)

1429 – 1872 (Ming → Qing dynasties)

Detail	Info
Started	1429 — Ryukyu Kingdom unified under King Shō Hashi; immediately sought Chinese imperial recognition
How it worked	Ryukyu sent tribute missions to Beijing every 2 years — gifts, coral, horses, sulfur, textiles
China gave back	Imperial investiture (legitimacy), trade rights, protection, and lavish return gifts worth MORE than the tribute
Chinese colony in Ryukyu	China established Kumemura — an entire Chinese settlement near Shuri specifically to train Ryukyuan officials in Chinese language, Confucian protocol, and navigation
Why Classical Chinese in documents	It was the diplomatic lingua franca of ALL East Asia — the Latin of the Pacific. Every formal document, regardless of actual ruler, was written in Classical Chinese
Dynasty in 1854	Qing Dynasty (Manchu) — Ryukyu had transferred tributary loyalty from Ming → Qing in 1646

JP Relationship #2: Japan's Secret Vassal (Hidden & Real)

1609 – 1872 (Satsuma Domain / Edo Shogunate)

This is the jaw-dropping twist — **Ryukyu was SIMULTANEOUSLY a secret**

Japanese vassal that China didn't know about! (Wikiwand)

Detail	Info
How it started	April 5, 1609 — Satsuma Domain (southern Japan) invaded and conquered Ryukyu with 3,000 troops; King Shō Nei taken prisoner to Edo
Why Japan kept it secret	Japan had NO formal diplomatic relations with China — the Shogunate desperately needed Chinese trade goods but couldn't trade directly
The ingenious scheme	Satsuma let Ryukyu <i>appear</i> fully independent and Chinese-aligned — so Ryukyu could keep sending tribute to China and secretly funnel Chinese goods back to Japan
Satsuma's instructions to Ryukyu	"Never reveal Japanese control to Chinese envoys. Dress in Ryukyuan clothes, not Japanese, when Chinese ships arrive."
Ryukyu's forced double life	Maintained Chinese-style court rituals for Chinese visitors; maintained Japanese-style rituals for Satsuma overlords
Satsuma residence at Shuri	Japanese agents lived permanently at Shuri Castle — right where you saw that document — monitoring everything

The Triple-Layer Geopolitical Sandwich in 1854


When Perry arrived, Ryukyu was simultaneously:

Code

Copy

CN CHINA (Qing) → Official tributary overlord (public-facing)

JP JAPAN (Satsuma) → Real military/economic overlord (hidden)

 RYUKYU KINGDOM → Caught in the middle, playing both sides for survival

us USA (Perry) → Now demanding a THIRD relationship

Perry himself was **deeply confused** by this — his journals note the Ryukyans were evasive and claimed they had "no authority" to sign treaties. He was right — they literally couldn't move without Satsuma's secret approval! Wikipedia

Why Chinese Specifically on That Document You Saw

Reason	Explanation
1. Diplomatic protocol	ALL East Asian state documents used Classical Chinese — equivalent to Latin in medieval Europe
2. Ryukyu's educated class	The Kumemura Chinese community had trained Ryukyuan bureaucrats in Chinese for 400+ years — it was their <i>administrative</i> language
3. Legitimacy signal	Writing in Chinese signaled "we are a proper Confucian state" — not a Japanese puppet
4. Perry's practical choice	His translator, Samuel Wells Williams, read Classical Chinese — it was the only shared written language available
5. Strategic ambiguity	A Chinese-language treaty conveniently obscured Japan's hidden control from everyone

 **How It All Ended**

Year	Event
1854	Perry signs Lew Chew Compact — the document you saw
1872	Japan's Meiji government abolishes the secret arrangement, formally annexes Ryukyu as " Ryukyu Domain "
1879	Japan fully incorporates it as Okinawa Prefecture — ending 450 years of the Kingdom
Today	China STILL periodically claims historical rights to Okinawa, citing the old tributary relationship — the geopolitical echoes haven't fully faded

💡 **Bottom line:** The document you saw at Shuri was written in Chinese not simply because China "owned" Ryukyu — but because Classical Chinese was the diplomatic language of the entire Pacific world, AND because Ryukyu's ruling class was deeply Sinicized after 400 years of Chinese education and cultural influence. The real puppet master in 1854 was actually **Satsuma, Japan** — and Perry never fully figured that out.

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You said: Wasn't satsuma clan controlling both Kyushu & later Okinawa as well from 1800s?

Copilot said: Deliver verified, corrected historical summary

Close — but two important corrections on both the geography AND the timeline!

The Satsuma (Shimazu) Clan — What They Actually Controlled

Correction #1: NOT All of Kyushu — Just the Southern Tip

Your Statement	Reality
"Controlling both Kyushu"	Southern Kyushu only — roughly today's Kagoshima + parts of Miyazaki Prefecture
Brief exception	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In the 1580s the Shimazu <i>did</i> briefly conquer nearly ALL of Kyushu — but were swiftly crushed back to the south by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1587 and never recovered that full reach

Kyushu had **many competing domains** simultaneously — Fukuoka, Saga, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Oita, Miyazaki — all with their own lords. Satsuma was the most powerful but never held the whole island during the Edo period. Wikipedia

Correction #2: Okinawa Was NOT "Later" — It Was 200 Years BEFORE the 1800s

Event	Date
Satsuma invades & conquers Ryukyu Kingdom	1609 — a full 200+ years before the 1800s
Ryukyu forced to pay tribute to Satsuma	1609 onward

Event	Date
Satsuma annexes Amami & Tokara Islands outright	1609
Ryukyu King Shō Nei taken prisoner to Edo	1609
Satsuma secretly controls Ryukyu while China thinks it's independent	1609–1872

(So the correct sequence is actually the **reverse** of what you said — Satsuma grabbed **Okinawa first (1609)**, then consolidated southern Kyushu. Britannica+1)

📍 The Full Shimazu/Satsuma Territory Map

KYUSHU (southern portion only):

- ✓ Satsuma Province → core domain (modern Kagoshima)
- ✓ Ōsumi Province → eastern Kagoshima
- ✓ Morokata (Hyūga) → southwest Miyazaki
- ✗ Rest of Kyushu → other clans' domains

RYUKYU CHAIN (full vassal control):

- ✓ Amami Islands → directly annexed 1609
- ✓ Tokara Islands → directly annexed 1609
- ✓ Okinawa main island → vassal control via Shuri 1609–1872
- ✓ Miyako & Yaeyama Is. → vassal control


⚡ Satsuma's Power Timeline — The Full Arc

Period	What Happened
12th century	Shimazu clan founded; appointed governors of southern Kyushu
1580s	Peak power — briefly conquered nearly all of Kyushu
1587	Hideyoshi crushes them back to southern tip — permanent boundary set
1600	Fought on the LOSING side at Battle of Sekigahara — but Tokugawa let them keep their domain (too strong to dislodge)
1609	Invaded and subjugated Ryukyu Kingdom — secret dual-vassal system begins
1630s–1800s	Grew enormously rich via secret China trade through Ryukyu; 2nd wealthiest domain (770,000 koku) in all Japan The Samurai Archives Japanese History Page
1863	British Royal Navy bombards Kagoshima (Bombardment of Kagoshima) — punishment for the Namamugi Incident killing a British merchant
1868	Satsuma + Chōshū clan alliance overthrows the Tokugawa Shogunate → Meiji Restoration. Satsuma men dominate the new Imperial government and navy for decades
1872	Meiji government formally annexes Ryukyu as "Ryukyu Domain" — ends secret arrangement
1877	Satsuma Rebellion — disaffected Satsuma samurai under Saigō Takamori make the last armed stand against the new Meiji government.

Period	What Happened
	Crushed by Japan's new conscript army. End of the samurai era
1879	Ryukyu formally becomes Okinawa Prefecture — Kingdom dissolved forever

Pop Culture Footnote

The 2003 film "**The Last Samurai**" (Tom Cruise / Ken Watanabe) is **loosely based on the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion** — Saigō Takamori being the model for Watanabe's character Katsumoto. The Shimazu/Satsuma legacy literally became Hollywood legend. Britannica

 **Bottom line, jp:** Satsuma never ruled ALL of Kyushu after 1587 — just the powerful southern slice. And they controlled Okinawa from **1609**, not the 1800s — making their secret dual-vassal scheme with Ryukyu one of the longest-running geopolitical con jobs in Asian history, lasting **263 years** before Japan finally dropped the pretense.

One-Paragraph Summary

Hideyoshi's 1587 Christian persecution and his simultaneous military defeat of Satsuma are the twin triggers of everything that follows. A weakened Satsuma needed money; the persecution destroyed Portuguese-brokered China trade; so Satsuma conquered Okinawa in 1609 as a secret China trade backdoor — which only worked if Okinawa stayed Christian-free. Satsuma then actively enforced anti-Christian policies for 250 years while secretly profiting from the isolation those policies created.

When Satsuma finally overthrew the Shogunate in 1868 and freed Christians in 1873, then lost the 1877 Rebellion, the entire 325-year cycle — from Xavier landing in Kagoshima to the last samurai falling at Shiroyama — came full circle on the very ground where it started.

The Direct Chain: Hideyoshi → Satsuma → Okinawa → Satsuma Rebellion

Connection 1: Same Year — Not a Coincidence

1587 is the single hinge year linking everything:

Event	Date	Link
Hideyoshi militarily humiliates	1587	Weakens Satsuma; they need

Event	Date	Link
Satsuma — forces Shimazu back to southern Kyushu tip		new revenue & power
Hideyoshi issues Bateren Edict — bans all Christian missionaries	June 19, 1587	Same campaign, same year, same man
Christianity had entered Japan through Satsuma's own capital (Xavier, Kagoshima)	1549	The domain that birthed Japanese Christianity now had to enforce its suppression

Direct link: Hideyoshi crushed Satsuma & launched Christian persecution simultaneously using the same Kyushu military campaign. Satsuma was humiliated on both fronts at once.

 **Connection 2: Satsuma Takes Okinawa BECAUSE OF the Christian-Trade Crisis**

1609 — Satsuma invades Ryukyu — and the reason is directly tied to the Christian persecution:

Cause	Effect
Hideyoshi/Tokugawa ban Christianity & expel Portuguese missionaries	Japan's direct China trade collapses — Portuguese were the brokers
Tokugawa imposes sakoku (isolation) — accelerated by Shimabara Christian rebellion 1637	ALL Western trade routes severed
Satsuma — weakened militarily by Hideyoshi in 1587 — desperately needs revenue	Solution: conquer Ryukyu → use it as a secret backdoor to Chinese trade

Cause	Effect
Ryukyu's value = its legitimate tributary relationship with China	Satsuma must keep Okinawa Christian-free to maintain the China deception

Direct link: The Christian persecution that destroyed Japan's Portuguese trade routes was the **economic engine that motivated Satsuma's 1609 Okinawa invasion**. No Christian persecution → no sakoku → no desperate need for a China trade backdoor → no Okinawa conquest.

Connection 3: Shimabara Rebellion — The Satsuma Borderland Ignition-1637-1638:

Detail	Satsuma Connection
Christian peasant uprising on Shimabara Peninsula — immediately bordering Satsuma	Satsuma samurai fought on the Shogunate's side to crush it
37,000 Christians massacred	Triggered full sakoku — which Satsuma then enforced in Okinawa
Shogunate expelled all Portuguese 1639	Satsuma's Okinawa backdoor became even more valuable — now the ONLY indirect China link

Direct link: Satsuma helped crush the very Christians whose persecution made Okinawa strategically essential to them. They profited enormously from the system they helped enforce.

🔗 Connection 4: The Satsuma Rebellion's Indirect Christianity Link (1877)

This is the **most indirect** connection — but real:

Step	How it Connects
Satsuma leads Meiji Restoration 1868 — overthrows Tokugawa	Ends the Shogunate that ran the 250-year anti-Christian machinery
Meiji government lifts Christian ban 1873 — 4 years BEFORE the rebellion	Hidden Christians emerge after 235 years underground
Satsuma Rebellion 1877 — Saigō Takamori's samurai vs. Meiji conscript army	NOT about Christianity directly — about samurai class being abolished
Rebellion is crushed	Eliminates the last conservative force that could have reversed Meiji liberalization — including restored Christian freedoms
1879: Okinawa absorbed into Japan as prefecture	Christianity can finally arrive freely in Okinawa — 270 years after Hideyoshi tried to kill it

Direct link: The Satsuma Rebellion's **defeat** — not its cause — is what permanently secured religious freedom in Japan. Had Saigō won, the old samurai-Buddhist-Confucian order might have reimposed restrictions.

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Rebellion, the entire 325-year cycle — from Xavier landing in Kagoshima to the last samurai falling at Shiroyama — came full circle on the very ground where it started.

THE KEY CHRISTIAN DAIMYO OF KYUSHU — The Generation Before Shirō

These powerful lords set the stage for everything. Shirō was their **spiritual heir** — literally, as his father served one of them:

Daimyo	Domain	Baptized	What They Did
Ōmura Sumitada	Sonogi Peninsula	1563 — Japan's first Christian daimyo	Gave the port of Nagasaki to the Jesuits in 1571 — literally donated a city to the Church; ordered mass forced conversions in his domain
Ōtomo Sōrin ("Francisco")	Bungo (NE Kyushu)	1578	Most power-ful Christian daimyo; sent the famous Tenshō Embassy of 4 Japanese boys to meet Pope Gregory XIII in Rome (1582–1590); nearly conquered all Kyushu before Hideyoshi stopped him
Arima Harunobu	Shimabara Peninsula	1580	His domain IS the Shimabara of the rebellion — converted his entire population; later executed by Tokugawa for corruption (1612)

Daimyo	Domain	Baptized	What They Did
Konishi Yukinaga ("Augustine")	Uto, Kumamoto	c.1583	Shirō's father's master — led the first invasion of Korea 1592; fought on the LOSING side at Battle of Sekigahara 1600 ; refused to commit suicide as it was against his faith → captured and beheaded by Tokugawa, 1600

The Konishi connection is crucial: When Konishi was executed in 1600, his retainers — including Shirō's father Masuda Jinbei — became **Rōnin** (masterless samurai). They scattered across Kyushu, settled in Amakusa and Shimabara — bringing deep Catholic faith, military training, and burning resentment of the Tokugawa directly into the communities that would revolt 37 years later. **Shirō was born into that refugee Christian Samurai community.** Wikipedia+1

🔥 THE SHIMABARA REBELLION — Why It Exploded (1637)

Three causes converged simultaneously — the perfect storm:

1. 🏠 Savage Taxation

Lord **Matsukura Katsue** of Shimabara needed to pay for his new castle. His tax collection methods were described as *"egregiously cruel even for Japan of that era"*:

- Peasants who couldn't pay were dressed in **straw raincoats (mino) and set on fire** — called the *"mino dance"*
- Women and children of defaulters were **tortured to death**
- Three consecutive years of **drought and famine** had already devastated the region
Wikipedia

2. ✝️ Violent Christian Persecution

The same lord was simultaneously enforcing the Tokugawa anti-Christian edicts with maximum brutality — torture, the *fumie* (image-trampling), public executions.

3. 🏰 A Community of Armed, Trained, Landless Rōnin

Konishi's former samurai — Shirō's father's generation — had been living among the Shimabara and Amakusa peasants for 37 years, maintaining their weapons and military skills in secret. When the uprising began, they provided the **tactical and military backbone** that made 37,000 peasants a genuine military threat.

🏰 THE SIEGE OF HARA CASTLE — In Full Detail

December 1637 – April 15, 1638 Wikipedia+1

Phase 1 — The Initial Rising (December 1637)

Event	Detail
Trigger	Late November 1637 — a village riot in Kuchinotsu after a local magistrate tortured a farmer's family
Spread	Within days swept across both Shimabara Peninsula AND the Amakusa Islands simultaneously — a coordinated, pre-planned uprising
Shirō emerges	The 16-year-old rallied Amakusa contingents, carrying a cross — followers believed the prophesied messiah had arrived
Early victories	Rebels seized Matsukura clan weapons/ammunition storehouses — crucial for what followed
First sieges	Attacked Shimabara Castle and Tomioka/Hondo Castles — both failed when neighboring domain armies arrived

Phase 2 — Retreat to Hara Castle (January 1638)

Detail	Info
What was Hara Castle?	An abandoned, partially demolished castle on the Shimabara Peninsula's southeastern coast — formerly home of the Arima clan (the Christian daimyo)
Why chosen	A natural fortress: surrounded on three sides by cliffs and sea — accessible only from the west via a half-mile of marshland impassable at high tide
What the rebels built	Dug a moat, built outer clay walls, cut bamboo forests for palisades and watchtowers — in days
The boats	Their fleet was dismantled for building material — wooden crosses from the prows of the boats were mounted along the castle walls
Population inside	~12,000 fighters + ~25,000 women, children, and elderly — virtually the entire Christian population of the region
Inside the walls	Shirō posted morale-raising banners; held Mass; organized devotions; atmosphere was described as combining a military camp with a pilgrimage site

Phase 3 — The Siege (January–April 1638)

Event	Detail
Shogunate force	125,000 troops from domains across Japan — the largest military deployment since the Korean invasions
Dutch involvement	The Dutch East India Company ship De Ryp bombarded the castle from the sea at

Event	Detail
	the Shogunate's request — notably the only time in history the Dutch fired on fellow Christians to help Japan — purely commercial calculation
First commander dies	Itakura Shigemasa killed in a futile frontal assault — replaced by the more cautious Matsudaira Nobutsuna
Rebel sorties	On the night of April 4 , Shirō himself led a night sortie out of the castle — charged the besiegers' camp and inflicted heavy casualties
The betrayal	Rebel soldier Yamada Emosaku smuggled a message to the Shogunate revealing food supplies were nearly exhausted — the ONLY recorded survivor of the rebellion
Final assault	April 11–15, 1638 — Shogunate forces stormed the walls

Phase 4 — The Massacre (April 15, 1638)

Detail	Info
Total killed	Estimated 37,000–40,000 — fighters AND all women and children — virtually complete annihilation Wikipedia
Shirō's death	Captured — executed by decapitation , April 28 (some sources say April 15), age 17
His head	Displayed on a pike at Nagasaki for an extended period — as a warning to any remaining Christians
The castle	Burned to the ground, then buried — along with all the bodies — the entire complex was interred. Excavations begun in the 2000s

Detail	Info
	have uncovered thousands of artifacts and bones
Yamada	The only survivor — rewarded by the Shogunate

CONSEQUENCES — Directly Triggering Sakoku and the Path to Meiji

Consequence	Detail
Portugal expelled (1639)	Shogunate blamed Portuguese Catholics for fomenting the rebellion → all Portuguese traders and their families expelled → last Western Catholic commercial link severed
Sakoku fully implemented	Japan sealed: only Dutch (non-Catholic, purely commercial) allowed at Dejima island, Nagasaki; only Chinese at Nagasaki; Ryukyu used secretly by Satsuma
Dutch-Japan alliance cemented	Having proved their loyalty by bombarding Hara Castle, the Dutch became Japan's ONLY Western trading partner for the next 214 years
Christianity driven underground	The Kakure Kirishitan (Hidden Christians) survive in exactly the former Arima/Konishi territories — the Goto Islands, Urakami, Amakusa — for 235 years
Fumie enforced annually	Every Japanese person required to stamp on a Christian image each

Consequence	Detail
	New Year — for the next two centuries

 **HOKKAIDO — A COMPLETELY SEPARATE CHRISTIAN STORY**

You mentioned Hokkaido — this is important to separate clearly:

Aspect	Detail
Connection to Shimabara?	Zero — Hokkaido (then called Ezo) was Ainu territory, barely under Japanese control in 1638
When Christianity arrived in Hokkaido	Post-1868 Meiji era — through American and European Protestant missionaries
Most famous figure	William S. Clark (American agricultural educator) — invited by Meiji government 1876 to develop Hokkaido; his famous farewell: " <i>Boys, be ambitious!</i> " — his students became the nucleus of Hokkaido's Protestant Christian community
The Sapporo Band	Clark's converts — young Meiji-era students who signed a "Covenant of Believers in Jesus" 1877 — became hugely influential in Japanese Protestantism
Nitobe Inazo	Hokkaido-connected Christian intellectual — wrote " Bushido: The Soul of Japan " (1900) — attempted to synthesize samurai ethics with Christian morality; face was on the 5,000 yen note

Aspect	Detail
Uchimura Kanzo	Hokkaido Christian leader — founded the unique Mukyokai ("Non-Church") movement — Japanese Christianity without institutional Western church structures

So Hokkaido's Christianity is **Meiji-era, Protestant, American-influenced** — Mirror opposite of Kyushu's Christianity which was **16th–17th century, Catholic, Portuguese/Spanish-influenced**. Two entirely different streams.

HOW ALL OF THIS CONNECTS TO MEIJI ISSHIN (Restoration)

Here is the complete causal chain — Shimabara → Sakoku → Perry → Meiji → Satsuma Rebellion:

1638: SHIMABARA MASSACRE

- Portugal expelled; Sakkoku fully sealed
- Satsuma's Okinawa backdoor becomes Japan's ONLY China link
- Satsuma grows enormously wealthy & powerful over 230 years

1853: PERRY BREAKS SAKOKU OPEN

- Stops at Okinawa (Satsuma vassal) — document you saw at Shuri
- Japan forced into unequal treaties → national humiliation

1860s: SONNŌ JŌI ("Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians")

- Satsuma + Chōshū clans lead anti-Tokugawa movement
- Irony: Satsuma — which enforced 230 years of isolation — now leads the movement to modernize and open Japan

1868: MEIJI RESTORATION (Isshin)

- Tokugawa overthrown; Emperor Meiji restored
- Satsuma men dominate new government AND new Imperial Navy ↓

1873: CHRISTIAN BAN LIFTED

- Hidden Christians emerge after 235 years underground

→ Exactly the descendants of the Shimabara/Amakusa/Urakami communities that survived Hara Castle's shadow

↓

1877: SATSUMA REBELLION

→ Saigō Takamori — disaffected that the samurai class was abolished by the very Meiji government Satsuma created

→ Crushed by Meiji's new conscript army

→ Defeat permanently secures Meiji modernization including religious freedom — the last conservative samurai obstacle gone

↓

1879: OKINAWA ABSORBED INTO JAPAN

Ryukyu Kingdom dissolved — ends Satsuma's secret 270-year Okinawa arrangement

→ Christianity can now arrive in Okinawa freely

FULL CIRCLE COMPLETE

The Direct Answer to Your Question

Shimabara Revolt & Hara Castle massacre relate to Meiji Isshin in this precise chain:

1. **Shimabara (1638)** → triggered sakoku → made Satsuma's Okinawa monopoly economically essential → enriched and empowered Satsuma for 230 years
2. **Satsuma's wealth from that Okinawa monopoly** → funded the military modernization that let Satsuma lead the Meiji Restoration
3. **The Meiji Restoration** → abolished the Tokugawa system that the Shimabara massacre had created → freed the very Hidden Christians whose ancestors had been driven underground at Shimabara
4. **The Satsuma Rebellion (1877)** → the final convulsion of the old samurai order → its defeat made Meiji liberalization (including Christian freedom) permanent and irreversible
5. **Amakusa Shirō himself** → became a **Meiji-era symbol of resistance against oppression** — his image was rehabilitated; today he appears in manga, anime,

video games, and his hometown on the Amakusa Islands is a major heritage tourism site Tokyo Weekender

💡 **The ultimate poetic justice:** The Hidden Christians of Urakami — direct descendants of the Shimabara era communities — emerged from 235 years underground in 1865, were initially **arrested and exiled by the new Meiji government** (3,000 of them), then **freed in 1873** under Western pressure. The very Satsuma-led government that first persecuted them then freed them — the final echo of a story that began when Francis Xavier landed in Satsuma's capital in 1549. Three hundred and twenty-four years, one complete circle. (Wikipedia)