Cultural Exchange between the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Korean Peninsula

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Up to now, when the culture of the Ryukyu Kingdom was the subject of comparative research about the history of cultural exchange with surrounding areas, the main focus has naturally been on cultural contact and exchange with neighboring peoples in mainland Japan as well as with regions in mainland China, while the cultures of the Korean Peninsula have been overlooked. Cultural exchange between the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Korean Peninsula began in 1389 when the King of Ryukyu sent back “Koreans Robbed by Japanese Pirates” who were captured by Japanese pirates called Wako, and offered sulfur and other products to promote a friendly relationship with the Koreans. Today it is clear that since then and throughout history, a variety of exchanges have taken place, including political refugees from the Ryukyu Kingdom who traveled to the Korean Peninsula, Korean ceramics artists who came to the Ryukyu Kingdom via Satsuma, and Korai Kawara (Koryo-style roof tiles), which have been excavated from the Urasoe Gusuku site. Nevertheless, from either side, there have not been adequate comparative studies done about the exchange of folk culture. In recent years, however, as there have been more and more exchanges with Korean scholars, and young students, such as graduate students and young researchers, have become more interested in Korean folk culture, some concrete results from comparative culture studies between the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Korean Peninsula have begun to appear. Therefore, based on my own research, this paper presents some new possibilities in the area of historical cultural exchange studies through a comparison of the household records of a Munchau in Okinawa and the family records of a Munjung on the Korean Peninsula. A Munchau means a group of people linked through paternal blood relationships. In the Ryukyu Kingdom, household records stating the lineage of each Munchau exist, and in the Korean Peninsula, similar family records also exist. As I compared them, I was able to identify a variety of similarities and differences. I believe that identifying whether the differences were generated by cultural exchange between the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Korean Peninsula, or whether they were generated individually as unique elements that reflect indigenous culture but which were at the same time influenced by Chinese culture, will provide an important starting point for future comparative culture studies between the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Korean Peninsula.