

## Qing legation members as private diplomatic actors : D. B. McCartee's role in the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Ryukyu Annexation

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While late Qing China's legations and consulates employed a significant number of foreigners as secretaries, counsellors, consuls, and legal advisors, past research has not adequately probed the reasons for their employment, nor the specifics of the functions they performed. This paper examines Divie B. McCartee, Secretary to the Qing Tokyo legation from 1877 to 1880, and considers the importance of private interventions he made into the diplomatic affairs of the legation and dynasty he served. Specifically, this paper demonstrates how McCartee's private actions sought to benefit the Qing position in the dispute on Japan's unilateral annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom and sought to help reinstate the erstwhile kingdom as a Qing tributary.

The paper divides McCartee's private actions into the three categories of (1) private research into the Ryukyu question, (2) informal interactions with ex-American President Ulysses S. Grant, and (3) media strategy, and reveals three key points of significance. First, that McCartee was intimately involved in devising two compromises that suggested a two-way and three-way split of Ryukyu. Second, that he communicated these solutions to Grant, who mediated the crisis on behalf of the Qing and Japan. Third, that a series of articles he published anonymously in the Japan Gazette newspaper succeeded in seriously undermining Japanese propaganda efforts surrounding its historical claim to Ryukyu.

These private interventions were, I argue, highly significant. Believing the idea of a two-way split to be an idea supported by Grant,

Japan came to propose the idea of compromising by such a means to the Qing in 1880. In addition, the articles McCartee published in the Japan Gazette, which undermined Japanese historical claims to the islands, may well have been a critical factor behind the Japanese decision to compromise in the first place.

Through the above analysis, this paper seeks both to provide a new perspective for considering the importance of private diplomatic initiatives pursued by subministerial or subambassadorial actors, and for considering how the efficacy of such interventions could be buttressed by these actors' skillsets, sociability, access to or membership of specific networks, and even social standing. In doing so, the paper seeks to make the case that actors who have previously appeared peripheral to diplomatic issues require revisiting as legitimate agents of potentially substantial change.