



EASC COLLOQUIUM SERIES, SP2023

MARITIME EAST ASIA

TROUBLED WATERS: SEA, LITTORAL SPACE, AND MOVEMENT IN EAST ASIA

Bridge to Many Countries: The Ryukyu Islands and Maritime Networks,

1050-1530

DR. GREGORY SMITS (Penn State U.)

02/10, Friday, 12 pm
GA1100

*Light refreshment will be served before the talk

Abstract: Stretching between Kyushu and Taiwan, the Ryukyu islands form a boundary between the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries, the islands functioned as a maritime frontier region, home to trading-and-raiding centers. These centers consisted of harbor-fortress pairs, many of which maintained connections with other harbors throughout maritime East Asia. During the sixteenth century, the Ryukyu islands became a centralized state and a maritime empire. This talk focusses on the pre-state era in the Ryukyu islands and presents a new model for understanding their function within the East China Sea region during that time. Home to *wakō* (non-state seafarers who often operated as pirates), the Ryukyu islands functioned both as a hazard to the region's agricultural societies and as conduit for people, technologies, and goods to flow between them.



Bio: Gregory Smits is Professor of History and Asian Studies at Penn State University. He is the author of *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics* (1999), *Seismic Japan: The Long History and Continuing Legacy of the Ansei Edo Earthquake* (2013), *When the Earth Roars: Lessons from the History of Earthquakes in Japan* (2014), *Maritime Ryukyu, 1050-1650* (2019), and a follow-up volume about the Ryukyu islands before 1530. His recent work is interdisciplinary, combining traditional history with archaeology, anthropology, and other fields.



HAMILTON LUGAR

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