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ABOUT THE COVER

The bananas and seahorses that adorn the cover are two of the dozens of colorful illustrations in *Chūzan bussankō* 中山物産考 (ca. 1769), a description of the geography, flora, and fauna of the Ryukyu Kingdom (modern Okinawa) in the Harvard-Yenching Library's rare book collection. The author, Tamura Ransui 田村藍水 (1718–1776), was an Edo-born doctor and naturalist who rose to prominence as a key figure in the Tokugawa shogunate's successful effort to produce ginseng domestically from seeds smuggled from Korea. He wrote extensively on ginseng and other plants with economic value, such as sweet potatoes and cotton. Zhao Xuemin 趙學敏, the subject of He Bian's article in this issue, knew and wrote about many of the plants and animals featured in *Chūzan bussankō*. There is no reason to believe he was familiar with the work. Rather, both he and Ransui were participants in a lively transnational, even global, discourse on natural history that attracted scholars and policymakers interested in materia medica and other useful products.

In his account of Ryukyu, Ransui drew heavily on *Zhongshan chuanxin lu* 中山傳信錄 (1721), a survey of Ryukyuan geography and institutions by Xu Baoguang 徐葆光 (1671–1723), a Qing official who had traveled to Ryukyu in 1719. Xu's book was widely read as an authoritative source of information on Ryukyu. A *kanbun* 漢文 edition printed in Kyoto circulated among Japanese scholars, and a partial translation into French by the Jesuit Antoine Gaubil informed European readers about the kingdom.¹ Much of the text of *Chūzan bussankō*, including the descriptions of bananas and seahorses, is lifted straight from Xu Baoguang's work, but the illustrations are all Ransui's additions. In addition, he composed his own text to accompany

¹ Jo Hokō (Xu Baoguang), *Chūzan denshinroku* (*Zhongshan chuanxin lu*), punctuated by Hattori Somon 服部蘇門, 6 *kan* 卷 (Kyoto: Ran'en, n.d.); Antoine Gaubil, "Mémoire sur les isles que les Chinois appellent isles de Lieou-Kieou" (1758), in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères: Mémoires de la Chine, &c.*, vol. 23 (Paris: J. G. Merigot, 1781), pp. 182–245.

images of plants and animals that Xu had overlooked. *HJAS* thanks the Harvard-Yenching Library for its kind permission to reproduce the images.

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DETAILS: Tamura Ransui, *Chūzan bussankō*, 3 vols. (*kan*) [ca. 1769], vol. 2 (seq. 29, seq. 44); MS no. TJ 3468/6441, Rare Book Collection, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:32692219>. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.