After the completion of his presidency in 1877, Ulysses S. Grant embarked on a world tour that lasted more than two years. The final leg of his journey took him to China and Japan, after which he returned to America in September of 1879.

While in China, government officials asked him to mediate their dispute with Japan over its abolition of Ryūkyū and creation of Okinawa Prefecture in March of 1879, to which Grant agreed. He later met with Meiji government officials in July of 1879 to discuss the matter. Within a few days, Grant sided completely with the Meiji government and utterly rejected the Qing government’s insistence that Ryūkyū’s autonomy be restored. Grant supported Japan because he interpreted the annexation of Ryūkyū (as Okinawa Prefecture) through the lens of irredentism, since Meiji officials justified it on the basis of deep commonalities between the Ryūkyūan and Japanese peoples.