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The aims of this paper are threefold: (1) to consider what Western historians mean when they speak of Early Modern Japan, (2) to propose that we reconceive this period from the perspective of world networks history, and (3) to lay out some of the advantages I believe this offers for thinking about Sengoku and Tokugawa society.

The idea that Japan had an early modern period is gradually becoming common in every sector of our field, from institutional to intellectual history. Yet what that means has rarely been discussed until now, even in the minimal sense of determining its temporal boundaries. I want to thank David Howell and James Ketelaar for raising the issue in this forum, prompting what I hope will become an ongoing conversation about our periodization practices.

To my knowledge, the sole attempt in English to trace the intellectual genealogy of this concept is John Hall’s introduction to the fourth volume of the Cambridge History of Japan—a volume that he chose to title Early Modern Japan. Hall dates this expression to the 1960s, when “the main concern of Western scholars of the Edo period was directed toward explaining Japan’s rapid modernization.” Its ascendance was heralded by the 1968 publication of Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan, which Hall co-edited with Marius Jansen. “By declaring that the Tokugawa period should be called Japan’s ‘early modern’ age,” he reflects, “this volume challenged the common practice of assuming that Japan during the Edo period was still fundamentally feudal.” Although Hall sees the modernization paradigm as having been superseded in later decades, he nonetheless reads the continuing popularity of the early modern designation as a sign that most Western historians today see the Edo era as “more modern than feudal.” This notion is reiterated in even more pointed terms by Wakita Osamu in the same volume. “One particularly prominent and powerful idea” among Western historians of Japan, Wakita writes, “has been to use the term ‘early modern’ to refer to the kinsei period, thus avoiding the Marxist categories of analysis favored by many Japanese and, at the same time, drawing attention away from the period’s feudal aspects and toward those long-term trends related to the emergence of the modern Japanese state and economy after 1868.”

1. Many thanks to the colleagues, students, and friends who have shared their thoughts on the subject of early modernity, especially Philip Brown, Andrew Gordon, William Hauser, David Howell, Martin Lewis, Henry Smith, Andre Wink, the Early Modern Japan Network, the Early Modern History Workshop at Madison, and the Geographical Perspectives in Asian History seminar. Thanks also to Kris Troost for sharing her internet expertise and for help in tracking down sources.

2. This stands in stark contrast to the situation in Meiji studies, where the problem of what modernity means in the Japanese context, and when it began, have been central concerns at least since mid-century. While the Meiji debate has important implications for understanding what we are here calling early modernity, an analysis of those connections lies outside the scope of the present essay.


A glance through recent bibliographies in the field confirms that the Edo period as a whole is seldom referred to anymore as Feudal Japan (even if the political order of the time is still “habitually and haphazardly” characterized that way). It is also interesting that, in the early 1970s, a few Tokugawa scholars who identified their subject as “pre-modern” began to do so in quotation marks. But is the growing preference for “early modern” best understood in Hall’s and Wakita’s terms? The evidence is ambiguous at best.

Consider the half-dozen books on Japan published in the last twenty years that feature the words Early Modern in their titles. Together they span a wide range of topics, from early Tokugawa diplomacy to late Tokugawa ideology, and from travel to disease, and from a broad but environmentally anchored survey to an anthology on Edo and Paris. The last volume fits Hall’s paradigm nicely (the editors explicitly identifying both cities as “capitals of absolutism”), but the other five formulate their problems in terms that seem to eschew the feudal/modern dichotomy altogether. And the range of casual usage is wider still. When people like Harry Harootunian and David Howell call the Tokugawa period “early modern,” can this choice of words meaningfully be read as an attempt to avoid Marxian categories of analysis?

This is not to suggest that the echoes of 1960s scholarship that Hall hears in the words Early Modern Japan have faded away entirely. On the contrary, it is precisely for its perceived associations with a Weberian model of modernization that the expression attracts one group of scholars while provoking resistance from another. I was unaware of this resistance until I raised the issue on the Early Modern Japan Network this spring. To my surprise, some colleagues responded that they find the whole notion distastefully teleological, hearing in it a sounding of the past for the outlines of a proto-present. Others objected that it has inescapably Eurocentric overtones, calling to mind such Western developments as the rise of the absolutist state, the spread of secular thought, the

8. To my knowledge, the only book to date other than those discussed here that employs this designation in its title (aside from those mentioned above [Hall and Jansen 1968 and Hall 1991]) is George Elison’s earlier Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan [1973]. If readers are aware of others I have overlooked, I would be grateful for the correction.
9. Ronald Toby’s State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu [1984].
11. Constantine Vaporis’s Travel and the State in Early Modern Japan [1994].
15. McClain, Merriman, and Ugawa 1994:11. The temporal framework of the volume is specified in terms of political developments as “the period from the 1590s, when the Bourbons and Tokugawa rose to power, until the 1780s and 1790s, when the monarchy fell and the collapse of the Kansei reforms marked the beginning of several difficult decades that culminated in the Meiji Restoration” (xvii).
16. Although I have not done a comprehensive search, the only discussion of feudalism that I have discovered in these books is a footnote in Conrad Totman’s textbook, noting that he and others have long preferred to characterize the polity as neither feudal nor absolutist but ‘federal.’ Totman 1993:49, n. 12. Totman refers to the periodization issue only in passing, noting that the years between 1568 and 1868 are “commonly called Japan’s early modern period” (1993:xxv).
19. To be sure, research in the roots-of-modernization mode is still well represented in the field, as suggested by the title of Akira Havami’s recent book, Pre-conditions to Industrialization in Japan (1986).
growth of cities, the expansion of mercantile capitalism, and the like. The search for such random parallels, some argue, ignores the distinctiveness of the Japanese cultural milieu.

Judging from a preliminary survey of current writing in the field, however (as well as from some other suggestive comments on the internet), I am persuaded that most of us who use the location Early Modern Japan have something rather different in mind. While this expression might once have suggested a particular historiographical take on Japanese institutions, it no longer necessarily functions as a code-word in this way—primarily because the debate to which Hall refers is no longer compelling across the broad field of Japanese historical studies. In most cases, the viable choice for designating our temporal locus of interest is not “the feudal period,” but the Sengoku, Tokugawa, or Edo period. Given this set of alternatives, the salient feature of early modern is its cosmopolitanism. By locating our work in a chronology that has relevance outside Japan, it seems, what we are really doing is staking our intellectual claims on a wider terrain than that of Japanese studies. To the extent that this expression remains a code word in our field in the 1990s, what it signals to me is a desire to transcend parochial boundaries and to engage with other histories (and other historians).

Traditionally, the major way to do that has been through reference to European analogies or universal models (the latter usually generalized from European experience). Comparative work in this vein is often provocative and widely read—despite wary reactions from “suspicious people” (as Ashin Das Gupta calls his camp). The other way to engage with historians outside one’s own field, of course, is by exploring cross-cultural linkages. But linkage-history has traditionally been the province of those who study diplomacy, trade, migration, missions, and the like—subjects with an obvious international dimension. It is less often considered relevant for those who work at the national and local levels.

The conversations that have been formative for my own thinking about early modernity, however, effectively fuse these two approaches, situating comparisons within a highly-developed map of cross-cultural linkages. This method has yielded a relatively new sub-discipline that might be called “world networks history”: “world” to suggest a trans-oceanic reach, “networks” to highlight an

20. It would appear that the more energetic debate over early modernity in Chinese studies has been largely influenced by this kind of an agenda. According to Antonia Finnane’s recent assessment, “the chronology of nationalism and modernity in China remains a more or less disputed point. Evidence of commerce, the so-called ‘roots of capitalism,’ urbanization, increasing literacy, voluntary associations, and so on—in brief, the trappings of a civil society—can all be drawn upon to support the notion of an ‘early modern China’ emerging around the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries (Rawski 1991; Feuerwerker 1992). Parallel arguments can be mounted in the sphere of arts and letters, with Elman positing the emergence of evidential philosophy as the decisive conjuncture in late imperial history, and Vinograd’s research on the rise in portrait painting suggesting the discovery of the autonomous self (Elman 1990; Vinograd 1992). Related observations on the integration of the Chinese economy and culture can be used to suggest the existence of a nation in China pre-dating the age of nationalism (cf. Duara 1993:2-9).” Finnane 1994: 1161.

21. John Hall himself has repeatedly voiced strong objections to the application of European-derived models to Japanese history, but he clearly does not find such models to be implicit in the early modern concept. For instance, the introduction to Japan Before Tokugawa: Political Consolidation and Economic Growth, 1500 to 1650 (edited by Hall, Nagahara Keiji, and Kozo Yamamura) asserts flatly that “most of the institutional end products of the sixteenth-century revolution ... were idiosyncratic to the point that the use of the European analogy or any general model based on European data for analytical purposes is more apt to distort than to assist the historian in his effort to understand their meaning” (Hall, Nagahara, and Yamamura 1981: 15-16). The same essay glosses the Japanese term kinsei as “early modern” (p. 11).

22. “Preindustrial” is also sometimes used in socio-economic contexts; e.g., Hanley and Yamamura 1977.

23. In practice, the “other histories” where an early modern period is invoked are limited to western Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Japan, and increasingly China (although “late imperial” is more commonly used to identify these centuries in the Chinese past). Historians of Africa and the Americas rarely identify an early modern period in those continents’ histories, favoring instead the terms precolonial (or pre-Columbian) and colonial.

emphasis on patterned interactions, and "history" to underline a concern with the formation and transformation of these socio-spatial interactions over time. Early modernity in this literature is characterized, not in terms of a European paradigm or universal model of development, but as a particular configuration of global relationships: one brought about by new modes of navigation, finance, and weaponry in the fifteenth century, and brought to an end by the appearance of still more potent technologies of power at the beginning of the last century. At the risk of oversimplification, the early modern configuration could be said to have been created by the gunpowder revolution circa 1450 and superseded by the spread of industrial capitalism and European imperialism after 1800. But this set of markers is more suggestive than definitive. In practice, the temporal boundaries identified as bracketing the early modern period vary by as much as a century either way, depending on the domain in question.

The global perspective on early modernity has been most fully articulated in the burgeoning field of Indian Ocean studies. Nor is this surprising, since the Indian Ocean—as "the hub of world trade in early modern times"—was radically altered by, and contributed in singular ways to, the formation of the new world networks. But crucial contributions have been made by historians of other places and topics as well. Among the most important are studies of the gunpowder revolution, the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and English commercial empires, the much-disputed "seventeenth-century crisis," the intercontinental exchange of food crops and diseases, the nomadic empires of Central Asia, the Chinese and other trading diaspora, and the circulation of precious metals and other monetary media. As this (admittedly idiosyncratic) list suggests, world networks historians to date have been largely preoccupied with technology and political economy, most especially with military and monetary history. Guns and silver were, after all, the leading edge that sliced through long-standing regional boundaries. Yet cultural and intellectual developments are being fruitfully reexamined from a world networks perspective as well.

25. I prefer this formulation both to the world systems vocabulary of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), which is rooted in a mechanistic paradigm, and to Philip Curtin's "comparative world history" (Curtin 1984), which does not convey the centrality of cross-cultural linkages. Michael Mann's (1986) insistence that socio-spatial networks of power constitute the essential units of analysis for comparative historical sociology has been formative for my conceptual vocabulary.

26. The sources I have found most stimulating are Chaudhuri 1985; Perlin 1983; Reid 1988, 1993a, 1993b; Subrahmanyam 1990; and Lieberman 1993—a very modest sampling of a vast literature.

27. Wink 1993:106.


35. In a longer historical view, the "leading edge" may have been spices. Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes that "in their cultural significance spices were wholly medieval ... [yet] they existed like foreign bodies in the medieval world, forerunners of the loosened boundaries of modern times. The medieval spice trade had already done away with narrow local borders." He goes on to speculate that it would be rewarding "to study how long the process of 'reorientation,' so to speak, lasted, whereby [the Spaniards'] lust for pepper was transformed into one for precious metals." Schivelbusch 1993:12.

36. The subject of the cross-cultural exchange of ideas is only now being brought into an explicit world-networks framework. For a survey of the spread of world religions to 1500 that adopts this perspective, see Bentley 1993; for a bold thesis linking national
Taken together, this corpus of work proposes a way to conceive of early modernity as a global phenomenon, acknowledging Europeans' role without exaggerating it or making it somehow paradigmatic. Research on Indian Ocean and China Seas trade, for instance, has made it clear that Europeans neither created nor quickly dominated exchange networks in that part of the world. Throughout the eastern four-fifths of Eurasia, the newcomers remained dependent for many decades on local traders' capital and commercial expertise, and were obliged to accommodate themselves to long-established conventions of exchange. Accordingly, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in southern and eastern Asia have been pointedly characterized as "the age of commerce" or "the age of partnership" rather than "the age of conquest."

At the same time, work on earlier periods has shown that the modern world was not created de novo by the new technologies of the fifteenth century. It is now widely accepted that both maritime and overland trade links were well established in earlier eras, bridging the whole of what Marshall Hodgson called "the Afro-Eurasian ecumene." The conventional chronology suggests that early modern integration was in part a revival of contacts that had lapsed in the wake of the Black Death, and that it represented not the first but at least the fourth major surge of pan-Eurasian interaction in historical times. Likewise, the agricultural, demographic, and commercial intensification that marked this era is also understood to have been under way for some time before 1450.

In short, world networks historians do not envision the fifteenth century as the sole or even necessarily the greatest watershed in human history. One gets a sense less of a single "Great Transformation" than of a long, cumulative, and accelerating series of pulses of intensification in cross-cultural exchange. Each reconstitution of the network has had its own distinctive contours, yet in general each peak of interaction has been higher than the last, and over time the relationships have become both more extensive and more complex.

cultural standardization throughout Eurasia to the diffusion of firearms and the creation of centralized polities, see Lieberman 1993a.
39. In Southeast Asia, the tide had turned by the mid seventeenth century, and in South Asia by the late eighteenth, but in East Asia the balance of power favored indigenous regimes until the mid nineteenth century. As Peter Klein puts it, "With the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut on 27 May 1498 ... the European economie-monde had somehow or other succeeded in breaking through the spatial limits of its regional confinement. ... But did they really succeed as far as the maritime space of the China seas is concerned? It is my contention that they did not. At least not until after the middle of the nineteenth century when conditions had become quite different." Klein 1989: 64. For related views see Boxer 1969, Murphey 1977.
40. The previous three high-points of inter-Eurasian trade coincided with the establishment of stable, large-scale polities across the continent during the era of the Han and Roman empires (2nd c BC - 2nd c AD), the early Medieval age (6th - 11th c), and the brief period of Mongol unification (ca. 1250-1350 AD). See, e.g., Abu-Lughod 1989, Curtin 1988, Bentley 1993 (Frank and Gills [1993] argue that similar pulses of intercontinental exchange can be traced back to the Bronze age). Whether the Indian Ocean circuits shared in the otherwise widespread decline of the fourteenth century in unclear; see Wink 1993.
41. This is suggested, for instance, by the "medieval agricultural revolution" in various parts of the world, and by evidence that a growing demand for monetary media preceded the great flows of Japanese and Peruvian silver into India and China (on the latter, see Perlin 1986). I am indebted to Andre Wink for suggesting that such developments represent a general secular rise in the density of social and economic life across Eurasia, the product of patient spadework that began well before 1450.
42. cf. Hayami 1986.
43. A cognate vision of Chinese history is propounded by G. William Skinner (1985), whose synthetic vision I admire but whose conceptual vocabulary I find uncongenial. For a more extended discussion of Skinner's work on regional systems, see Wigen 1992:15-16.
If one is justified nonetheless in singling out the fifteenth century as the beginning of the modern world, it is because of two roughly synchronous and immensely important discontinuities. One was the wholly unprecedented scope of long-distance contact. Not only did Western Europeans begin to turn up in Gujarat and Malacca, bypassing numerous links in the established chains of exchange; at roughly the same time, they also stumbled onto the Americas. Only with the “discovery of the sea” in the late fifteenth century did the history of these two old worlds become entangled; only then did the global network begin to assume its modern dimensions. The other momentous change of this era was the appearance of reliable and powerful firearms. In Victor Lieberman’s words, the fifteenth-century military revolution “rapidly transformed the political equation throughout Eurasia.” The new killing tools everywhere “accelerated centralization by conferring an enormous cumulative advantage on the wealthiest, most innovative powers in each region—and, conversely, by raising the cost of warfare beyond the means of more local units.” These two developments, then—a radical increase in the spatial scope of long-distance interaction, and a comparable leap in the spatial organization of social power—marked the onset of modernity, setting the stage for both the loosening of boundaries and the “time-space compression” that are the keynotes of modern life.

This may be old news for historians of East Asia. Anyone who has been following the Asian studies journals over the past two decades has been party to much of this conversation, and some of our colleagues have made important contributions to the literature. Nonetheless, Japanese specialists are not yet very well represented in this discussion; it is mostly other Asianists who are doing the creative work of fitting Japan into the emerging picture of global early modernity. Moreover, while our awareness of this work may have changed the way we talk about Hideyoshi’s world in our survey courses, there is less evidence that we consider global integration a relevant backdrop for, say, literature, or gender relations, or even urbanization. For the bulk of the Tokugawa era, international issues (diplomacy, the silver trade) tend to be separated from intra-national developments (everything else) as if there were an impermeable wall between them. How often is the gradual diffusion of the sweet potato mentioned in the context of Tokugawa population trends? or the 1685 restrictions on silk imports considered in discussions of protoindustrialization? As

44. Discovery of the Sea is the title of J.H. Parry’s celebrated study of navigation, mapping, and ship design in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Parry 1981 [1974]).
46. The notion of time-space compression is elaborated in Harvey 1989, Part III. In Harvey’s view, the dazzling, dismaying developments of finance capital in the 1980s (compounded in the present decade by capital’s forays into cyberspace) are but the latest round in this continuing process, and might better be termed hyper-modern than post-modern.
47. Notably Innes (1980), Toby (1984), Tashiro (1976, 1989), and Yamamura and Kamiki (1983). Not surprisingly, all of these contributions discuss Japan’s international trade, and several focus on the export of silver and copper—undoubtedly the most important link between Japan and the wider world in this era. Japanese silver is now estimated to have constituted over 30% of all new silver put into circulation between the 1570s and the end of the seventeenth century; speaking primarily of the copper that succeeded it, Anthony Reid writes that “the privileged access of the VOC to Japanese minerals after 1639 through its factory at Deshima was critical to the success of the Dutch world-economy in Asia.” Reid 1993a: 288.
49. The Edo and Paris volume, for instance, while discovering a remarkable range of parallels in the two cities, essentially treats them as disjunct analytical subjects (Henry Smith’s discussion of print technology representing an important exception). The editors’ introduction does not discuss the international context in which Edo and Paris operated, and events that radically altered that context (such as the Tokugawa exclusion decrees) are not noted in the prefatory timeline (xix-xxv).
50. The outstanding exception in recent years is China in the Tokugawa World (Jansen 1992). A related study, analyzing the continuing engagement of Tokugawa thinkers with both Chinese and Western science, is Sugimoto and Swain 1989.
51. Susan Hanley’s essay on material culture, in volume 4 of the Cambridge History of Japan, notes that “sweet potatoes may
valiantly as Ronald Innes, Ron Toby, and others have tried to keep the door ajar, not much light seems to come through from the other side before the 1540s or after the 1630s.

Taking the cosmopolitan periodization scheme of world networks history seriously might open up new questions for research. What might it mean to see the exclusion policies of the 1630s as less a unique Japanese phenomenon than part of a pan-Eurasian swing away from the trade peak of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries? How might the rise of Neo-Confucianism and nativist thought be recast in light of evidence that international linkages in this period everywhere tended to nurture nationalistic reactions, promoting "exclusive and isolating" cultural orthodoxies? Or, to hit closer to home, how might local histories be enriched if regional development were viewed as inextricably related to the world across Japan's borders? Presumably, it should be possible to perceive echoes of global integration in the most disparate of social phenomena, at the most local of levels, long after the downscaling of international trade. My own research in southern Shinano suggests that this is the case. The packhorse trains and protoindustries that reshaped central Honshu's landscapes in the eighteenth century cannot be fully accounted for without reference to the long-term rhythms of world networks history.

Similar issues might be posed in the Sengoku period. To suggest that Japan's involvement in the early modern world begins not in 1568 or even 1543 but a full century earlier ought to raise new questions about everything from politics to culture in the "late medieval" period. For a hundred years before the Portuguese landed in Tanegashima, Japanese traders and pirates participated in the "Age of Commerce" heralded by Zheng He's expeditions of the early 1400s. To some extent, we know that their exposure to "the mobile, commercial, competitive order of the early modern period" worked to "loosen the controls" of an earlier age, contributing to the "entrepreneurial, fragmented, and competitive society" of Sengoku Japan. But how might such linkages with the wider world (however tenuous and fragmented) have impinged on, say, the spread of a cross-class "national culture" (which Barbara Ruch traces to this period), or the "culture of lawlessness" in Kyoto (vividly evoked by Beth Berry)? How does it change our perception of these and other Sengoku developments to think of the Onin War as an early act in the modern transformation of Japan?

These questions are simply meant to suggest that a linkage perspective could shed light on specific topics in Sengoku and Tokugawa history. But engaging seriously with world networks history could be of much broader significance for the field as well. What such an engagement offers above all is a bracing corrective to the problem of de-contextualized comparative research. As Geoffrey Parker, Victor Lieberman, and others have persuasively shown, trans-national relationships explain many of the cross-cultural isomorphisms at the national level that have long struck historians of these centuries. The diffusion of firearms and the appearance of well have been an important factor in maintaining a dense population in Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (1991:682), but this is not followed up elsewhere; there is no sustained analysis of population trends in the volume. Totman devotes half a page to the sweet potato when discussing the Kyoho Reform (1993:313), but does not mention it in his treatment of agricultural intensification, demography, or famines.

52. Jansen (1992:39), following Innes, deems this "the greatest import-substitution program of them all."
53. Reid 1993a, ch. 5; but see also Lieberman 1993b, Pombejra 1993.
54. Lieberman 1993a:531.
56. Quotations are from a description of early modern South China in Ownby and Heidhues 1993:5, 21.
58. For suggestive analyses of how quickly the Europeans' impact could reverberate beyond the limited zone of direct contact in the Americas and Africa, see Wolf 1982, Meinig 1989.
new forms of mobile wealth created similar problems and potentials for states from one end of Eurasia to the other. It is not coincidental that Japanese responses to those challenges bore structural resemblances to responses elsewhere in the Eurasian rim—territorial integration, fiscal reform, an elaboration of commercial reticula, and the spread of centrally-defined cultural norms being notable among them.60

At the same time, a networks perspective also helps to illuminate what is peculiarly Japanese about Early Modern Japan. Some local differences, of course, were simply the product of distinctive cultural legacies. To quote Victor Lieberman, “we are dealing with societies whose convergences affected what were arguably superficial features (in somewhat the same way perhaps as fish and dolphins responded to the same hydrodynamic imperatives with similar body shapes while remaining phylogenetically distinct).61 Yet the societies that Lieberman compares to fish and dolphins did not swim freely about. Rather, they were tied to specific places—and the environment that shaped them was not everywhere uniform. Each early modern society experienced the challenges of the age in a different way, depending not only on its distinctive cultural legacy but also on such relational considerations as who its neighbors were, whether it harbored resources that foreign merchants desired, its accessibility and defensibility given the technological conditions of the time, and the like.62 A different set of relational issues differentiated the experience of early modernity from one place to another at the sub-national level as well.

In short, military technology and mercantile capital may have created similar imperatives over a broad terrain, but their operation was still constrained by the friction of distance and by the contours of physical and social space. A keen sense of Japan’s position in the global trading world (and not just “Japan’s,” but Satsuma’s, Edo’s, Matsumae’s, and so on) is thus indispensable if we would apprehend what was unique about Japanese early modernity without falling into purely culturalist explanations. As Tosaka Jun has written, “Japaneseness” itself “should be examined as a concrete link in the chain of the international context.63

In this way, linkage-history serves not to displace comparative history but to discipline it, by subjecting comparisons to thorough contextualization. To my mind, this is the single greatest advantage it offers to the field. Easy analogies may misleading, but to eschew comparison altogether would be to adopt a policy of de facto scholarly protection-ism, leaving us with no one to talk to but ourselves.64 Only in dialogue with historians of other places can we fully appreciate what was unusual about Japan’s experience—and grasp the magnitude of Japan’s own contribution to the early modern world.

60. For a richly suggestive essay on the comparability of these processes in Western Europe, Russia, mainland Southeast Asia, and Japan, see Lieberman 1993a, especially pp 521-540. Numerous analysts of early modern Japanese state formation have been struck by the parallels with European absolutism; see for instance Grossberg 1981, Armason 1988, White 1988.
62. For instance, historians of insular Southeast Asia are quick to point out that not all Asian regimes had the option the Tokugawa exercised of minimizing and controlling European trade. Some were simply too exposed geographically and too dependent on the income from exchange, lacking the sort of intensive agriculture and well-developed internal market that would have been required to survive after rebuffing the military-backed European traders (Reid 1993a, ch. 5). Likewise, historians of the Spanish empire can help us appreciate how singular—and significant—it was that the Japanese had copper to fall back on when their silver reserves ran low (Flynn 1991).
64. It would also, I believe, represent a betrayal of John Hall’s true legacy. While his methodological essays repeatedly caution against the dangers of superficial analogies, those warnings grow out of a long-term engagement with European concepts of feudalism. Likewise, while Hall insists on the uniqueness of Japanese institutions, he manages to describe them in a vocabulary that is readily accessible to non-specialists, as attested by the regularity with which his work is cited in the world networks literature.
Many people in this room may find a world networks agenda less compelling than I do. Sengoku and Tokugawa historians are a diverse lot, and our field is not likely to arrive at a consensus any time soon about what early modernity means. But consensus is not necessary; it may not even be desirable. In the long run, we would probably be better served by a protracted and passionate dispute over our periodization practices—just as European historians have benefitted from the long-running dispute over the seventeenth-century crisis. Although that debate was never resolved, it served a useful function: in the words of Niels Steensgaard, it “demonstrated the interrelations of European history and broke the isolation of national studies. Every Europeanist working on seventeenth-century national history now is aware that his subject is a variation upon a general European theme and reflects and interrelates with developments in the rest of the continent.”65 If we are lucky, perhaps the present forum will initiate a similar movement in Japanese studies.

In the meantime, I hope this paper has at least established that the debate over periodization is as much about the spatial dimensions of our work as about its temporal boundaries. What Steensgaard has said of the seventeenth-century crisis could equally be said for early modernity: both concepts pose “as much a problem of the space of history as of the time of history.”66 The challenge I perceive in world networks literature is that of bringing the world back in—and thereby of putting Japanese history firmly on the map of the early modern world. Whether or not my colleagues agree with this particular agenda, I hope they will at least concede with Das Gupta that “it is useful for suspicious people to have some general notions to sharpen their suspicions on, and in the process a measure of understanding is not unlikely.”67

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66. ibid.; emphasis added.


Conceptual categories are so naturalized into our mental and cultural constructs that they often seem non-constructed and universal, but on further consideration they always reveal themselves to be the products of forces at work within specific cultural and historical moments. Conceptual categories thus have a history. This paper looks at the emergence of a category for “women’s writing” in early modern Japan, a category first made explicit in a vernacular prose text (kana-zōshi) by Kitamura Kigin (1624-1705) entitled *Ominaeshi monogatari* 1661; Tales of the Maidenflower).

The belief that there is a discrete category of “women’s writing” underlies much of American feminist literary criticism, which in the 1960s and 70s first turned to the problem of defining what made women’s discursive practice different than men’s. With the advent of postmodern criticism in the 1980s, many critics began to challenge the idea of women’s writing for being “essential” and overly “universal.” It was argued that critics who used the category failed to distinguish among the diverse positions within the category of “woman” and thus perpetuated an inaccurate description of women’s discursive practice. In response to the attack on the category of “women’s writing,” there was a resurgence of interest in the impact of gender on discursive practice in the late-1980s, fueled by a group of feminist critics who argued the value of maintaining such a category. These critics articulated, in various ways, a new position (via postmodernism) that attempted to restore theoretical interest to discussions of gender-based discursive difference within feminist literary criticism by proposing a new set of questions. Some placed emphasis on women’s lived experience, in specific locales and at specific historical moments, as influencing discursive practice. According to this line of inquiry, women’s writing differs from men’s to the extent that women’s and men’s lives differ. Others emphasized women’s relationship to language: to what extent do women feel they “own” the language in which they write, and to what extent is it perceived as belonging to men? Finally, still others emphasized the effect of female biology on discursive practice, questioning what impact the body, both as a physical and as a culturally constructed entity, has on writing. Taken as a whole, the new set of questions raised by these critics has succeeded in creating a critical space for inquiry about gender-based differences in men’s and women’s discursive practice, within and beyond the postmodern critique of the category of “women’s writing.”

It is in this critical context that I would like to explore the origins of the category of “women’s writing” in early modern Japan. My thesis is that in the 17th century a conceptual shift occurred in the way poetry by women was organized and consumed as text. I believe that the shift is correctly associated with a general reorganization of men’s and women’s roles in Tokugawa society at large. The shift, though modest, allowed the Anglo-European categorization of women’s writing to be naturalized quickly in Japan in

1. *Ominaeshi monogatari* might best be described, à la Luce Irigaray, as “this text which is not one:” Two distinct versions of the text exist, an undated manuscript and the woodblock print edition of 1661, and both are included as examples of the work in Asakura Haruhiko, ed. *Kana-zōshi shūsei* (Tokyo: Tokyōdō, 1987), vol. 8, and in Satō Ritsu, ed. *Ominaeshi monogatari* (Tokyo: Koten Bunko, 1970) vols. 278 and 282.

2. The group includes Nancy K. Miller, Naomi Schor, Linda Alcoff, Diana Fuss, Nancy Hartsock, and Tania Modleski; and, to a certain extent, Teresa de Lauretis and Gayatri C. Spivak, among others.

the modern era, as evident in the late 19th and early 20th-century terms for “woman writer,” keishū sakka and joryū sakka, and the more recent josei sakka, all of which hinge on having a concept of women’s discursive practice that is distinct in some essential way from men’s. To put it another way, my thesis is that, while a poem—or even a prose work—by a Heian woman may have revealed insights and perspectives attributable to the fact that its author was a woman whose life and linguistic experience was different than a man’s, and she thus presumably had something different to say in it, that fact alone did not link the work conceptually to every other work by a woman, nor was the work received as the repository of exclusively feminine experience. In a sense, female authorship was erased by this mode of reception.

Female authorship did, of course, attract critical attention in Japan prior to the 17th century. In an article on the Kokinshū prefaces comparing Chinese literary treatises to the mana preface in Chinese by Ki no Yoshimochi and the kana preface in Japanese by Ki no Tsurayuki, John Wixted has noted the following:

Women writers fare poorly in these critical treatises. Speaking of Li Ling and Lady Pan, Chung Hung states that “together they spanned roughly a century; but discounting the [one as a] woman, there was only one poet for the period.” When Yoshimochi describes the decline of earlier Japanese poetry, he states pejoratively, “it became half the handmaid of women, and was embarrassing to present before gentlemen.” And Tsurayuki says of Ono no Komachi, “Her poetry is like a noble lady who is suffering from a sickness, but the weakness is natural to a woman’s poetry.”

The statements in the Kokinshū prefaces are typical expressions of the formulaic misogyny of Chinese literary discourse, but I would like to distinguish their abstract negative assessment from the actual placement of women’s poems in the Kokinshū sequences, where they stand on an equal footing with those by men. While the formulaic expression of contempt for women’s poetry in the prefaces seems to distinguish women’s writing from men’s based on gender, the structure of the Kokinshū reveals no such distinction. And in the centuries afterwards, poetry by women continued to be integrated into the imperial anthologies (chokusen shū) and gathered into private collections of poems (shika shū) in a way identical to poetry by men. Until the early modern period, gender was missing from among the conceptual categories—season, theme, rhetorical mode, occasion—whereby poetry was constructed as text.

At what point, then, did the identical treatment change? When did the shift occur that put poetry by women into a separate category simply on the basis of the shared gender of the poets? I have chosen here to identify the shift with Tales of the Maidenflower, a 17th-century collection of anecdotes about women poets, with examples of their poems, that has been associated with Kitamura Kigin as either author or editor. Because The Maidenflower is, to my knowledge, the first collection of women’s poetry in Japan, and perhaps in the world, it is of critical interest for our locating the emergence of a Japanese theory of “women’s writing.”


5. Clearly, the conceptual shift was occurring simultaneously in multiple arenas and its traces can be explored in other textual and non-textual sites.

6. Kitamura Kigin’s exact relationship to Ominaeshi monogatari has received considerable attention from Japanese scholars, but I have chosen in this essay to focus on other issues surrounding the work. See Nakamura Yukihiko chojutsu shū, vol. 5; Watanabe, “Ominaeshi monogatari kō” in Kana-zōshi no kitei; Moriyama Shigeru, “Ominaeshi monogatari no shomondai,” Kokubungaku (November, 1961) and “Ominaeshi monogatari no shoñon ni tsuite,” Kokubungaku (November, 1967); Aoyama Tadaukazu, Kana-zōshi jokun bungei no kenkyū (Tokyo: Òfüsha, 1982).
Kitamura Kigin was a pioneer in making Japan’s court literature accessible to people of the emerging Tokugawa urban culture in 17th-century Kyoto, and to a lesser extent in Osaka and Edo. He had several vehicles for the task: he practiced and taught haikai poetry composition in the style of Matsunaga Teitoku (1571-1653), and through it introduced the elite traditions of waka and renga to a wider audience. He also produced meticulous commentaries of the court classics, the most famous of which is probably the 60-volume commentary on Genji monogatari, the Kogetsusho (1673; Commentary of the Lake and the Moon). In addition, Kigin wrote at least three kana-zōshi, books in vernacular Japanese, including The Maidenflower. These books served primarily to interpret, in a practical way, some aspect of court literature for the urban readership. Though, later in life, he became tutor to the Tokugawa shogunate in poetry composition and the vernacular classics, Kigin seems always to have had his hand to the pulse of popular culture. It is therefore not surprising that a work like The Maidenflower is associated with his name, whether or not he actually authored the work.

Modern literary historians place The Maidenflower into a subcategory within kana-zōshi of vernacular prose works known as instructional books (kyōkun sho), and specifically into a specialized subset of such books designed for the instruction of women (jokun sho). Instructional books are generally described as giving the general reader practical knowledge on behavior and manners, and supporting the development of the sort of sound relations among members of society that were considered, in Confucian ideology, essential to maintaining social order. Instructional books thus satisfied the desire of urban men and women to acquire the moral and cultural attainments that would help them better their lives. The Maidenflower served to instruct women in building good character through the guided reading of examples of women’s poetry from Japan and China. Of the other dozen or so surviving instructional books for women, none focuses on the practice of writing by women as a means of instruction. Nor do they posit poetry by women as a reservoir of feminine experience and sensibility from which women could derive a model of female moral behavior. Moreover, the feminine sensibility constructed in the text is something essential and universal: what an elite court woman in China or Japan wrote centuries ago is presented as a useful model for urban women of Kigin’s day to emulate, despite the huge gaps in status and experience.

Writers of these instructional books were generally scholars or courtiers in the capital who, from poverty or aristocratic largesse, were willing to write down their cultural and moral wisdom for a popular audience. Since the task involved a figurative writing “down” as well, instructional books generally share a tone of sincere condescension. The condescension is especially apparent in jokun sho, where male Confucianists are writing for an audience of women. Ironically, this male act of writing “down” was crucial to achieving the conceptual shift that brought the gender-based category of “woman writer” into being, for it made the woman poet visible for the first time as a woman.

Briefly, the controversy revolves around whether Kigin authored the compilation, or simply had a hand in revising an existing work. Scholarly opinion seems divided: Kigin is cited as author [chosakusha] in the entry for “Kigin” in the authoritative Nihon koten bungaku daijiten (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1984), vol. 2, p. 113; but the entry for “Ominaeshi monogatari,” in the same encyclopedia dates the work from the Bunroku-Keicho eras (1592-1615), and cites the author as unknown (vol. 1, p. 517); the entry then describes Kigin’s role as that of editor/compiler [hensha] of the 1661 woodblock print edition.


9. The others are Kana retsujo den (1655) and Iwatsutsuji (1676). They are included in supplementary volumes to a multi-volume facsimile collection of Kigin’s classical commentaries, Kitamura Kigin kōchūshaku shūsei—betsu (Tokyo: Shintensha, 1980).
The Maidenflower is made up of approximately 55 discrete episodes, depending on the version of the text. Consistent with the sincere condescension and Confucian didacticism that typifies instructional books, the compiler selected poems that illustrated the moral points he wanted to make. That meant ignoring vast numbers of poems that contradicted those points. The opening episode, for example, is a call for sexual chastity. It quotes two poems, one by the lady Shinzaemon and another by the lady Shimotsuke, in which the women reject the romantic advances of men. Episode 1 then concludes: “These two ladies are exemplary for their spirit of chastity [kokoro yasashiku]; all women should seek to carry themselves [mi o motsu beki] in this manner” (16). The many poems in the waka corpus expressing a woman’s assent are conveniently ignored.

Episode 37 tells the well-known story of Lady Wang, consort to emperor Han Yüan-ti, who was so confident of her beauty that she failed to pay a bribe to the court painter commissioned to do portraits of the emperor’s Ladies. His portrait depicted her as quite plain, and the unfortunate result was that she was selected from among the emperor’s numerous concubines as a good-will gift to be sent to a barbarian king. The text makes of Lady Wang a model of female arrogance, and contains a poem that expresses how she was made to suffer for it. The episode then concludes: “It has been said, ‘A woman’s obedience to a man is like water in a container.’ If the container is small, she is small. If it is round, she is round. Therefore, if a woman is clearly not obedient [sunao], she should work to cultivate that trait [tashinamu beki nari]” (87).

Episode 53 is somewhat less dogmatic. The episode begins with the statement: “For a woman to drink liquor is undesirable,” and lists several ways in which a woman’s drunken display is thought to be especially unseemly, but the text then moves to modify the earlier statement: “Women should drink in moderation [yoki hodo ni].” The idea of moderation is illustrated by a poem. The text then elaborates: “It is not acceptable [for a woman] to avoid liquor completely and shirk social interaction just because drunkenness is bad; when drinking, do so in moderation so as to avoid intoxication.” The episode then concludes, “Taken in moderation, liquor is medicinal; but it loses its effect if you drink until you are sobbing drunk [shikushiku to yoinaki suru hodo]. Women ought therefore to make allowances and drink only in moderation” (113-115). Not exactly a model of consistency, but the episode conveys its point.

Not every episode in Tales of the Maidenflower attempts to put limits on women’s behavior, however. On the contrary, there are several episodes in which historical discursive practice by women presents liberating possibilities for contemporary women. Episode 42 is one such example. The episode begins: “One never hears lately of women who compose linked verse [renga]. It does not require as much practice as writing poems, and there is nothing wrong with composing impromptu linked verse for one’s own pleasure.” The text next describes three examples of female poets (Izumi Shikibu, Sagami no haha, and Shigeno no naishi) who extemporaneously capped men’s verses. The episode then concludes, “Since these precedents exist, is it not acceptable [kurushikaranu koto ka] for women to compose linked verse?” The rhetorical question with which this episode concludes is unusual in its unassertiveness, and its use may indicate that the compiler was aware that this sort of liberating use of poetic precedent might not sit well with a strictly orthodox Confucian view of women’s discursive role. The fact that the text constructs a model for the present on the basis of past discursive practice in ways that are both confining and liberating—reveals complexity and even ambivalence about the role of women.

Interestingly, the compiler of The Maidenflower signs himself as “a woman of the Fujiwara clan” (Fujiwarashi no onna], as if the anecdotes were being compiled not only for women, but by a woman as well. We can only speculate what he had in mind when


11. Compare The Maidenflower to a text such as Onna daigaku (1716; The Greater Learning for Women), which is more dogmatic and authoritarian in its formulation of what women ought and ought not to do discursively.
he adopted a female authorial persona. In my reading of it, the text neither maintains the female persona nor particularly reflects a female voice. Certainly the emphatic beshis and nakares with which the episodes are peppered have an authoritative quality usually associated with masculine discourse. The phenomenon of literary transvestism is observable in Japan as early as Ki no Tsurayuki’s Tosa nikki (c. 935; Tosa Diary). In that case, the male writer’s decision to identify himself as a woman was primarily a product of “kana envy.” Since the vernacular script was gendered as female, men who wanted to write in Japanese had no choice but to abandon Chinese and adopt kana; this meant taking on the femininity (or perhaps simply non-masculinity) that was associated with the vernacular script. In the case of The Maidenflower, the compiler’s signature as “a woman of the Fujiwara clan” may have been an acknowledgement of both the gendered nature of vernacular script and of the legacy of Fujiwara women’s discursive power associated with that script.

Kigin’s project in The Maidenflower, where the poetry of women was divided from the overall waka poetic corpus into a discrete category based on gender, parallels his project 15 years later in another vernacular text, Iwatsutsuji (1676; Wild Azaleas), where love poems exchanged between Buddhist priests and their young male acolytes were divided from the overall waka corpus to produce a collection of male homoerotic love poetry. It, too, essentializes and universalizes the love of man for youth simply on the basis of the genders of the writer and recipient of the love poem. In that sense, The Maidenflower and Wild Azaleas represent complementary projects, for, in each, Kigin constructs a gender-based category where none had existed before: one was the category of “poems by women,” the other was the category of “poems inspired by homoerotic desire.” In The Maidenflower, the effect of implicitly distinguishing the category “woman poet” was, almost inadvertently, to make women’s discursive practice visible for the first time as distinct from men’s. The act of distinguishing a writer as a “man” or “woman” has certain pitfalls, which include the potential for using such a distinction to segregate women’s writing from the larger literary discourse, but “women’s writing” as a category also has the positive potential to promote the status and visibility of women’s writing. And the history of that category in Japan seems to have begun with a modest conceptual shift that occurred somewhere in the divide separating “early modern” from “medieval” Japan.


The Prehistory of the Japanese Nation-State:
Status, Ethnicity, and Boundaries

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My contribution to our examination of early modernity and Japaneseness in early-modern Japan will focus on the boundaries
of the Tokugawa polity—not only the physical boundaries, although they will figure importantly in my discussion, but the boundaries
of ethnicity and status as well. As I shall argue, these superficially disparate markers of separation were in essence diverse expressions
of the same phenomenon: political and ethnic boundaries reinforced one another, while the language of status provided the idiom in
which difference was expressed and understood. Sketching the outlines of the Tokugawa polity in this manner will illustrate how
different the “Japan” of the Tokugawa period was from its modern counterpart, while also suggesting how so differently conceived an
entity could translate itself with such apparent ease into a modern nation-state.

The linchpin of my inquiry will be a conceptualization of Tokugawa society in terms of the status system (mibunsei). Because status is rarely mentioned in Western scholarship on early-modern Japan, I should like to begin by explaining what I mean by “status.” I shall then turn to the principal concerns of the paper: first, the nature of boundaries of status and ethnicity; and second, how
the drawing of such boundaries affected the formation of the nation-state in Japan.

Status (mibun) in Tokugawa Japan referred both to membership in a group (usually based on the occupation of the head of
the household) and to the duties (yaku) that accompanied such membership. Duties included the payment of taxes, the performance of
various types of labor, and military service to a lord. Thus a peasant household was part of a village community, with which it shared
an obligation to pay taxes and perform corvee labor; similarly, a samurai served in battle and bureaucracy alongside other members of
his lord’s retainer band. Self-governing status groups (or their constituent units) mediated relations between their members and higher
authorities. The autonomous peasant village is the classic example of this, but samurai retainer bands and indeed the domains
themselves similarly served to ensure the daimyo’s ability to fulfill his military duties to the shogun.

As a rule group membership and the performance of duties went together, but exceptions were common. Sometimes group
members could not fulfill their assigned duties, while other people performed various duties without belonging unambiguously to an
appropriate group. A landless peasant, for example, could not participate directly in the business of paying land taxes and therefore did
not merit full membership in the village community, while a masterless samurai who freelanced as a political consultant might serve a
lord without being included in his retainer band. Such people occupied a vulnerable position in society, yet they retained a status
identity nonetheless: a landless peasant was still a peasant, a masterless samurai still a samurai.

Status as an expression of group membership and duty encompassed all members of society, albeit often incompletely or
indirectly. Indeed, the status system even incorporated people who neither belonged to an occupational group nor performed clear
duties and were therefore without regular status. Efforts were made to gather such people together and assign them duties to perform
on the margins of society and thereby ascribe to them the attributes of a status group. In effect, being without status itself became a
type of status.

1. See, for example, Tsukada Takashi, Mibunsei shakai to shimin shakai: Kinsei Nihon no shakai to hō (Tokyo: Kashiwa
shobō, 1992); Asao Naohiro, “Kinsei no mibun to sono hen’yō,” in Mibun to kakushiki (Nihon no kinsei, vol. 7), ed. Asao Naohiro
(Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1992), pp. 7-40; Yamamoto Naotomo, “Kinsei shakai to sono mibun: Jo ni kaete,” in Kinsei no minshū to
A brief example will illustrate this paradoxical point. The *hinin*, or “non-persons,” were one of the two major outcaste groups in Tokugawa Japan (the other being the *eta*). A heterogeneous collection of beggars, entertainers, fortune tellers, and other marginal people, the *hinin* existed beyond the boundaries of commoner society, yet they comprised a status group with an internal organization and explicit duties. Among the duties of urban *hinin* was the regulation of homeless transients, called *nobinin* or *mushuku*. The homeless were peasants or townspeople who had fallen on hard times; by dropping out of society they had effectively forfeited their commoner status, at least temporarily. *Hinin* were charged with removing the homeless from urban areas by sending them back to their native communities, or at least running them out of town; failing that, the *hinin* might incorporate the homeless within their own ranks as “official” *hinin* (*kakae hinin*), in which case they would continue to live by begging, but now within a community of beggars obligated to perform a variety of mostly unsavory tasks for the political authorities.

The image of status in Tokugawa society that I have sketched thus far is a political one insofar as it takes for granted the power of political authorities to sort people into social groups on the basis of their utility to the shogun or daimyo, and because it assumes a rough equivalence between utility to political authority and utility to society at large. Not surprisingly, status was much more than a political construct, but it is worthwhile to pause here to consider its political dimensions more fully, as doing so will help clarify the relationship between status and ethnicity and, ultimately, the origins of the modern nation-state in Japan.

Status as a legal institution originated in the national unification of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Well-known policies like the separation of the samurai from the peasantry (*heinō bunri*), sword hunts (*katanagan*), land surveys, the founding of large castle towns with their merchant and artisan populations, and the compilation of registers of religious affiliation (*shūmon aratamecho*) all contributed to the formal delineation of the samurai and commoner populations as status groups. Furthermore, over the course of the seventeenth century the bakufu and domains institutionalized various other extant social groups, including the court nobility, the Buddhist clergy, and the outcastes as legal statuses. Incidentally, for almost all legal and practical purposes, peasants, artisans, and merchants comprised a single status group of commoners; as Asao Naohiro has demonstrated, the familiar *shi-nō-kō-shō* hierarchy of textbook accounts was a prescriptive rather than a descriptive taxonomy that had no real basis in Tokugawa law.

The formalization of legal status, even of groups that had long existed organically, fixed internal social and political boundaries within the early-modern polity. An examination of the position of *eta* in agricultural districts reveals the complex nature of such boundaries. Although the *eta*, as outcastes, are stereotypically associated with professions entailing contact with defilement and death, in fact many if not most Tokugawa-period *eta* lived mainly by farming and engaged in outcaste activities primarily as by-employments or to fulfill their obligations to the authorities. *Eta* farming communities were subject to the same obligations as commoner peasant villages, particularly the payment of land taxes (*nengu*), but they were not considered to be independent, self-governing.
entities. Rather, they were subordinated as branches (edamura) of neighboring villages, and as such were subject to the authority of
the parent village leadership—without, however, being accorded the privileges of membership in the peasant community. In addition
to their land-tax obligations as farmers, rural eta were also responsible for the performance of duties as outcasts. Some of these
duties—such as the disposal of animal carcasses, from which valuable leather and other products could be obtained—were lucrative,
but others—such as guarding prisoners and executing criminals—were not. In either case, because these outcaste duties were
unconnected to the eta’s identity as farmers, the commoner parent villages had no control over them. Instead, they were overseen by
regional eta leaders, such as the elders of Amabe and Rokujō villages for residents of the vicinity of Kyoto.6

This example is particularly interesting because it reveals the overlapping geographies of status in the early-modern period.
Rural eta communities were part of the familiar scenery of peasant villages, daimyo domains, and bakufu territory that comprised the
political landscape of Tokugawa Japan; but at the same time they were also situated on a very different map—largely invisible except
to outcasts—that allocated rights to animal carcasses and distributed obligations to perform prison duty without regard to boundaries
of village or domain. Other marginal status groups subscribed to their own geographies, such as the calendar makers, fortune tellers
and manzai performers tied to the noble (kuge) Tsuchimikado house, or the house-boat people (ebune) of the Inland Sea region, whose
movements and social relations were unconstrained by political borders.7

The religious dimensions of status further complicated the drawing of boundaries in early-modern Japan and helped to shape
the construction of Japanese ethnicity as well. The institutionalization of outcaste status in the seventeenth century formalized an
earlier distinction between the “base” people (senmin) and the “good” or “common” people (ryōmin or heimin). Although the exact
nature of the connection between the medieval base people and the early-modern outcasts is still a topic of spirited debate, without
question medieval attitudes about the pollution of death and the nature of people not bound to the land (Amino Yoshihiko’s so-called
free people [jīyūmin]) affected early-modern attitudes toward status in general and the outcasts in particular.8 At the very least, status
as an expression of religious understandings of social relations helps to account for the caste element in outcaste status: the pollution
that devolved upon outcasts by virtue of their status transcended the putative cleanliness or defilement of their actual livelihoods,
which is why eta farmers were not treated as commoners even when they fulfilled the nominal criteria for inclusion in the peasantry.

Moreover, the institutionalization of outcaste status by the early-modern regime politicized the religious bifurcation of
Tokugawa society, and rendered the base realm of the outcasts autonomous yet clearly and in multiple ways subordinated to the
quotidian world of samurai and commoners. The autonomy of the outcasts represented the drawing of a significant political
boundary, for it rendered their largely invisible map of carrion and condemned prisoners exogenous to the visible map of bakufu,8

6. See Kinsei no minshū to geinō, pp. 196-97. In this example the power of political authorities to dictate status disadvantaged
the eta doubly, first by denying their communities the autonomy enjoyed by peasants of commoner status and second by perpetuating
discrimination against them by forcing them to maintain ties to activities considered to be unclean. On the other hand, their status-based
monopoly over outcaste occupations (particularly leather-working) appears in at least some cases to have fostered a measure of
economic prosperity, reflected in part in an eta population that rose steadily throughout the Tokugawa period. See Hatanaka, “Kinsei
‘senmin’ mibunron no kadai,” p. 176-83. However, the village examined by Morris and Smith, “Fertility and Mortality in an Outcaste
Village,” was marked by extreme poverty despite a heavy reliance on outcaste occupations.

7. On groups bound to the Tsuchimikado house, see Yamamoto Naotomo, “Innai: Koyomi o uri, uranai ya kitō o suru,” and
Yamagata Kōzō, “Manzai: Danna o tayori, teritorii o kakuritsu,” in Kinsei no minshū to geinō, pp. 30-34, 65-71; on the ebune, see

8. Amino Yoshihiko, Muen, kugai, raku: Nihon chūsei no jiyū to heiwa (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1978); Amino Yoshihiko, Chūsei
domains, and peasant villages, and explains the regime’s readiness to defer to the outcaste authorities’ judgment on matters pertaining to the status of outcastes.9

The duality engendered by the institutionalization of outcaste status resonated with yet another sort of boundary, that separating the “civilized” (ka) and “barbarian” (i) realms of the Confucian world view. As Arano Yasunori, Ronald Toby, and others have argued, the Tokugawa regime created for itself a naturalized version of the sinocentric world order of a civilized core surrounded by barbarian or at best imperfectly civilized peripheries.10 It largely supplanted—and partially subsumed within itself—an earlier bifurcation of the world into “human” and “demon” realms, replacing it with a tripartite division, in which previously demonized aliens on Japan’s peripheries were humanized as barbarians and the realm of demons was displaced farther afield.11

The Tokugawa world order not only situated Japan within the greater East Asian region, it delineated civilized and barbarian realms within the Japanese archipelago itself. This gave rise to a paradox, for according to the logic of this world view, if Japan was to be the civilized core of the world order, it followed that civilization was the essence of Japaneseness. Civilization thus became a political question and an ethnic one: the boundary that separated the civilized from the barbarian was the boundary that separated the Japanese state from its subordinated peripheries and the Japanese people from their non-Japanese neighbors.

This paradox was resolved only over time and in response to political and diplomatic exigencies. “Civilization,” as it was first conceived was, as Bob Wakabayashi has put it, “where Confucian ritual obtain[ed]”—the exclusive realm of a mere handful of men, well-versed in the classics.12 According to Tsukamoto Manabu, intellectuals looked upon the countryside as a particularly benighted repository of barbarian elements.13 But however gratifying this intellectual construct may have been to neo-Confucian thinkers as individuals, as a geopolitical strategy it made no sense to equate Japanese identity with an impossibly high standard of civilization. As a result, the nature of civilization itself changed once Japanese identity became a pressing geopolitical as well as an ideological issue in the latter part of the Tokugawa period. Far from requiring ordinary folk to immerse themselves in the neo-Confucian canon, the new standards of civilization focused on a cluster of culturally significant elements of outward appearance and demeanor, such as clothing, hairstyle, names, and language. For example, Kikuchi Isao has described the efforts of Nanbu authorities in the early nineteenth century to eradicate barbarian customs in their domain, particularly the failure of local women to shave their eyebrows as Edo women did. At one point, officials took their civilizing mission door-to-door with razor and whetstone, but peasant women resisted their tonsorial overtures because naked brows offered no protection for the eyes against sweat during farm work.14

The ethnic and geopolitical dimensions of the identification of civilization with Japan were particularly evident on the dependent peripheries of the Tokugawa state, such as in dealings with the Ainu people of Hokkaido. As I have argued at length

9. See, for example, the case of the eta doctor who was denied elevation to commoner status by the head of the Kantō eta, Danzaemon, cited in Asao, “Kinsei no mibun to sono hen’yō,” pp. 7-10.
elsewhere, officials of both the Matsumae domain (which oversaw relations with the Ainu) and the bakufu itself focused on the same criteria of civilization *qua* Japaneseness in their respective policies of dissimilation and assimilation toward the Ainu. An important aspect of asserting Japanese sovereignty over Hokkaido and adjacent territories was the imposition upon the Ainu of Japanese hairstyles, names, and other ethnic markers of civilization and hence Japaneseness.¹⁵

The realm of civilization did not exist independently of the realm of status. When bakufu officials set forth to assimilate the Ainu, they could not make them into generic “Japanese,” for a generic Japanese identity did not yet exist. Instead, they had to categorize the Ainu in terms of the status system. As barbarians, the Ainu had lacked status, which suggested to many Japanese observers a link to the outcastes—a link reinforced by many of the attributes that had marked the Ainu as barbarians in the first place, such as their unbound hair and dietary predilections.¹⁶ As civilized Japanese, however, the Ainu were made into commoners; for example, the Ainu community on the island of Etorofu in the southern Kurils, which lay at the northern extreme of territory claimed by the Tokugawa state, was designated a “village” (mura) with an appropriate roster of officials with Japanese-style names.¹⁷

To summarize my argument thus far, early-modern Japan can be conceived in terms of a series of three overlapping geographies. The first was a geography of power, which defined the physical limits of the Japanese state. It was this geography that gave form and meaning to the other two, for the Tokugawa regime was the first in Japanese history to draw and maintain clear physical boundaries for itself. The second was a geography of civilization, which separated the civilized from the barbarian, both within the Japanese archipelago and within East Asia. Linked to the geography of power, notions of civilization assumed the properties of ethnicity. The third was a geography of death, which distinguished the quotidian world of samurai and commoners from the base world of outcastes. The subordinated autonomy of the outcastes’ realm was analogous to that of the barbarian peripheries of the Tokugawa state.

Yet it was out of this tangled mass of overlapping geographies that the modern Japanese nation-state emerged. Earlier understandings of society and polity were translated into a new idiom, in which feudal duty (*yaku*) was reconceived as a subject’s loyalty to the emperor, and ethnicity became indistinguishable from national identity. The intermediate autonomies—of village community, of status group, of alien ethnicity—that had ordered relations between the early-modern state and individual Japanese, were, replaced by a single geography that directly tied subjects to the state without the encumbrance of mediating groups and identities. How can we explain this transformation—what makes my story “the prehistory of the Japanese nation-state”? I would like to suggest that because none of these overlapping geographies was ever static or unambiguous, a variety of factors—including the crises, economic change, and intellectual foment usually credited with causing the Meiji Restoration—disrupted their boundaries, so that rather than merely overlapping, the geographies intermingled and eventually became undifferentiated.

Thus, in response to threats to its sovereignty, the Japanese state expanded its borders to incorporate Hokkaido and (in the early Meiji period) the Ryukyu kingdom. The civilized overcame the barbarian within the confines of the expanded state—thanks in part to a re-conception of civilization, so thorough that a trip to the barber shop could now turn a previously barbarian Ainu into a


¹⁶. Ibid.

¹⁷. “Bunsei roku hitsujidoshi irai Ezojin omemie kenjōhin narabi ni kudasaremono shirabegaki” [c. 1833], Hakodate Municipal Library
civilized Japanese peasant. Identification with the state transformed a contextual notion of civilization into an essential concept of Japanese ethnicity: the geographies of power and civilization fused into one.

The boundaries of status likewise came under pressure and served through their transformation as a catalyst for the ideological justification of a unitary nation-state. Evidence of this pressure can be found at a number of levels, from the social and political tension fostered by the relative weakening of the samurai’s economic position, to concerns that the distinction between outcastes and commoners was breaking down. The author of the Seji kenmonroku, for example, focused his denunciation of the outcastes upon their supposed distaste for labor, love of wasteful luxury, and flagrant disregard for status-based rules of propriety. Similarly, the widespread sale of samurai status in the late Tokugawa period, usually dismissed as a desperate fiscal maneuver, may be seen as an attempt to redress imbalances in the status system, in a manner analogous to the way that civilization was made more easily attained or imposed. Finally, and perhaps most suggestively, the valorization of the quotidian by thinkers from Hirata Atsutane to Ninomiya Sontoku made work a devotional act, thus simultaneously denying the validity of the outcastes’ base realm and suggesting a unity between power and status as the quotidian was identified with loyalty and duty to the emperor.

18. Many restrictive policies toward the outcastes were imposed only late in the Tokugawa period, such as rules requiring outcastes to tie their hair with straw or wear leather patches on their kimono. Hatanaka, “Kinsei ‘senmin’ mibunron no kadai,” pp. 181-83.


A Transgressive Life: The Diary of a Genroku Samurai

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Readings of laws, such as the bakufu law collection, Ofüregaki shüsei 『御歳書集成』, or of moral treatises, such as Onna daigaku 『女大学』 (A Greater Learning for Women, written by Kaibara Ekken) have provided us with influential images of Edo period society. However, even the creators of these documents knew that people did not always follow the rules. Indeed, many historians have pointed out that if a law was issued and reissued many times, it is probably a sign that the law was not being obeyed. We can learn the intentions of the creators of these documents when we read them, but what can we know about society by looking at prescriptions? Diaries can provide some perspective on the issue because they are records of how people actually lived and behaved. The activities of people can be compared with laws and moral prescriptions current in the society of the diarist. What I wish to look at in this essay is the disjuncture between actual behavior and prescribed behavior, as it is revealed in the personal diary of a samurai who lived at the beginning of the eighteenth century. I will look at instances where the author knowingly broke laws and moral prescriptions (this I will call “transgressions”), and explore the limits of his “misbehavior”. By doing this I hope to reach some preliminary conclusions about how prescriptions and values actually operated in his society. I say preliminary, because a full consideration of this issue would have to include exploration of the many prescriptions which the author obeyed without reflection.

This diary was authored by a middle-ranking samurai of Owari domain—his family had a fief worth 100 koku—who lived in the castle town of Nagoya. The author’s name was Asahi Monzaemon 朝日文左衛門, and he kept this diary for 34 years, from the year 1684 until the year 1717. In terms of his own life this meant from when he was a seventeen-year-old boy until the year before his death at age 45—by which time he had become a grandparent. The wonderful detailed entries include description of the daily life of Monzaemon and his friends, the gossip of all Japan as it raced down highways into Monzaemon’s own world of Nagoya (I am amazed to find frequently in his diary stories about common peasants from as far away as Musashi province.), and copies of proclamations sent out by his own domain government.

It is clear from the contents that this was a personal diary, and that Monzaemon did not intend it to be read easily by others. His writing not only contains many casually abbreviated phrases, which are sometimes difficult to interpret, but also at times (concerning his gambling and visits to brothels) he deliberately encoded his language in obscure, incorrectly used or invented kanji, and in a dense pseudo-kanbun style. Even in his more lucid prose he often criticized the rulers. In like manner, he sometimes

1. In Nagoya sōsho zokuhen 名古屋叢書続編, Vols. 9-12, Ōmurōchüki 鵯鶴抄集中(1-4), with an index in the Sakuin volume (unnumbered) and useful descriptive comments in the Sōmokuroku volume (unnumbered) (Nagoya-shi kyōikuinkai, Nagoya 1967-70). A slightly modernized set of selections from the diary is published with useful annotation in Genroku kakyū bushi no seikatsu 元禄下級武士の生活, Kaga Kishirō 加賀枝良 comp. and ed. (Yūzankaku, Tokyo, 1968). These selections represent less than a thirtieth of the original. The only extensive treatment of the diary is the entertaining Genroku otatami bugyō no niki 元禄御堂奉行の日記 (Chūkōronsha, Chūkōshinsho no 740, 1985) by Kōsaka Jirō 神坂次郎.

EDITORS NOTE: Since this presentation was given some 700 pages of the Ōmurōchüki were published. See 朝日本誌 塚本学編注、『（摘録）鵙鶴抄中記－元禄武士の日記－』上・下、岩波文庫、膏463-1, 463-2.
described the transgressions of himself, his friends, and others whom he knew only through gossip. What makes this diary especially useful for the purpose of this essay is that Monzaemon recorded many opinions and prescriptions which highlight for us his own awareness of the dialogue between his own moral universe and that of the domain law-makers and of his parents.

Although Monzaemon did not always obey the law, he was by no means a rascal. Indeed, he was a timid person; heavily dependent upon the affirmation of family and friends. Most of his “transgressions” he carried out in companionship with other people. It is because of this that I find his values representative of the Nagoya samurai of his day. Monzaemon entitled his diary Ōmurōchāki 『鶴語錄中記』 which means “Record From a Parrot’s Cage”. Presumably, he saw himself as a parrot, a passive recorder of true events. Furthermore, the parrot in this title is caged. The cage he lived in was the secure and comfortable setting of home and of the values of society around him.

Let me begin with gambling. The police strictly punished gambling, albeit sporadically. Monzaemon’s diary is filled with stories of people being banished or even publicly executed for gambling. He also dutifully recorded domain directives against gambling in his diary. However, from time to time he laid down his brush and went to friends’ houses to put money on the line. He wrote in the first month of 1693, “I went to Aiwara Fujizo’s place. Miyake Kurōsaburō and I teamed up as “house” in a game of card gambling and we each lost 200 mon [of copper coins].” Monzaemon’s mother, however, raked it in; five days later he went with his parents to Maruyama Kazaemon’s place for an evening meal, and he notes, “There was hōbiki 宝引 gambling. Mother won 3 kan [of copper coins].”

Monzaemon received a shock during the ninth month of 1693: the retainer, Gotō Kiemon, who used his house as a gambling center was arrested. A week later Monzaemon records, “Gotō Kiemon was crucified. However he was not paraded through the streets of the town. He was led walking on his own. They say that when he was crucified he was laughing wildly.” Monzaemon had actually observed similar punishments before, but this time he was especially shocked because he already well knew that punishment would come his way. His own cousin, Jūemon, was implicated and banished from the domain. Because of the system of family responsibility Monzaemon and all of the relatives were forced to stay indoors for a period as a sign of penance. The event frightened him enough that for two years following one cannot find references to his gambling. In early 1696 however he started gambling heavily (ten times over the next three months) twice at his place but usually at the house of a friend named Sezaemon, in the company of five or six close friends. Perhaps he feared punishment from his parents, or the domain; these entries in his diary are encoded and are difficult to decipher. It is clear however that the sums were quite large: Monzaemon counted his wins and losses in gold coins. Around this same

3. Vol. 9, p. 133-34, p. 136, for example, 1693.1.4,5,9, 14. The phrase “teamed up as house in a game of card gambling” is a tentative translation for と三宅九郎三郎と乘合迦字の頭をし, noriai means going together, splitting costs, and kau means kabu which is the nine card of mekuri karuta, and is the name of a game where the object is to get a hand closest to 9, 19, 29 etc. See p.368, 1696.6.30 for a domain directive.
5. Vol 9. p. 304, 1695.3.23, reference to his gambling at sugoroku, at which time a friend insulted him, “I got very angry, stood up and threw my coins into the garden and went home.” And soon after (p. 318, 1695.7.4) he gambles with friends at a game of go. There might be one earlier reference to gambling: Vol. 9. pp. 252, 1694.8.28. (予: 加藤平左と大曾根へ天目伏に行。) may be a reference to gambling. Tenmoku is tea bowl, and fuse is slang for gambling, but I am still unsure of the meaning.
6. Vol. 9. p. 344, 345, 346,347,352,353,354,355, 356 1696. 1-4.n.d. An example of such a “coded” entry is 方贖予俸一黄 (played cards and happily I won one gold [oban])or 予動金輪為之宗二黃七佰. (I "moved some money"[gambled] and gained 2 golds and 700 [mon])黑表予二黃二佰投廢 (Black face ?[a card game? used paper money?] I threw away [lost] two golds and two hundred [mon]).
time he sold one of his swords, and then a suit of armor, to get money; an event many contemporaries would have seen as symbolic of the decline of the samurai ethic.  

What does this say about the relations between domain prescription and actual behavior? Domain policing was not thorough. Perhaps this is why the occasional punishments were so public and so violent, in order to discourage people from crime. As we can see, punishments had the intended effect if they hit close to home, but even then only for a while. More important to Monzaemon’s code of behavior in the long run was the support of his friends.

The domain frequently prohibited samurai from attending popular theater. Monzaemon once received a direct order from his captain that neither he nor members of his family should attend the theater. Attendance was considered unbecoming to a samurai’s dignity, and a threat to his values. Yet no one seems actually to have been sentenced for mere attendance. I can only find records of samurai being punished when they got into fights at a theater, or actually performed themselves. For example, near the beginning of Monzaemon’s diary he reports the story of two young retainers who were disenfeoffed in 1686 because they went around the countryside performing marionette puppetry. Almost from the first time Monzaemon saw a puppet show he wrote, “Words cannot express the fascination and beauty!” Monzaemon knew it was wrong but often went out with friends under various acceptable pretexts, in order to watch theater. When the famed reciter of Osaka, Takemoto Gidayū, performed in a village near Nagoya in 1695, a youthful Monzaemon and a friend grabbed fishing poles and told their parents they were going to the river. Once out of sight they stashed their gear and ran to Sugi village where the show was being held. When he returned, he informs us, “Both of my parents asked accusingly, ‘Did you go to Sugi village?’ Although I apologized, it is a great sin to deceive one’s parents, and I felt so alone and ashamed.” Monzaemon’s parents tried to discourage him from viewing theater, but Monzaemon soon forgot his remorse, and his passion only increased. He remained a hopeless addict to the end of his days. Once he was so engrossed in watching a comedy performance on a street corner that when it had finished he noticed his short sword had been stolen right out of its sheath!

I would like to shift the perspective from his vices, to his criticisms of one of the rulers. This is the shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi 徳川綱吉 (r. 1680-1709), who reigned over the period of the first half of this diary. Tsunayoshi has come down to us as the Dog Shogun 犬公方, because of his extreme interest in protecting the lives of dogs. His laws of mercy and compassion (生類縁之令) forbade many kinds of violence against animals— all save humans, that is, who were punished very severely for transgressing these laws of mercy. Monzaemon’s diary is replete with references to the anomalies of the reign of the Dog Shogun. In the 10th month of 1693 a wild boar ran into Takadanobaba village near the outskirts of Edo, killing two passersby. It fought a third who killed the boar but died soon afterward. The shogun heard of this and sent an inspector. With no concern at all for the people, a burial for the boar was ordered. Later, upon hearing that the burial given was lacking in quality, the order was given for a more lavish funeral, but when the boar’s body was exhumed it was found to be missing its hind legs. A strict investigation followed, and it was discovered that

11. Vol. 9, p. 314, 1695.5.28.
apparently a beggar had secretly stolen the hind legs and sold them as a remedy for intestinal problems. The shogun was greatly angered and had the beggar taken and punished.\textsuperscript{13}

Although bizarrely humorous in retrospect, it must have been a terrible day for those involved. Monzaemon records that in the second month of 1695 there was a great fire in Edo. Forty women and 350 men perished in the flames of the Edo compound of the lord of Kii domain. The shogun however sent a request to find out if any dogs had died, and it was discovered that three had perished. The shogun then sent palanquins to receive their bodies, but two of the bodies had been lost. The Kii officials told the shogunal officials they would have them the next day. So that night they went out and found two dog bodies and had them ready for the palanquins the next day. That day however shogunal officials complained that these bodies did not fit the descriptions found in the report made two days earlier. What happened next is not recorded.\textsuperscript{14} Monzaemon seems to have recorded this entry for its shock value, but here he did not give any explicit commentary. Soon after, however he records that in the same year someone crucified two dogs in the public execution grounds of Edo with a placard stating, “These dogs have borrowed the authority of the shogun to persecute the people.” Five months later the man, a samurai, was caught, and was ordered to commit seppuku. Monzaemon himself wrote, “If these laws were quickly repealed, the poor would be well again.”\textsuperscript{15} Like most people in Japan, Monzaemon could not take the law to heart, and it was fortunate that the domain was lax in enforcement. He went fishing almost weekly with friends, which he cynically describes as going to “destroy life” 殺生, using the Buddhist terminology of the shogunal law, but he did not refrain from giving offerings at temples and shrines as he did once when he practiced with his sword on the body of an executed criminal.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, he relished a pot of boiled goose in the kitchen with five friends, and wondered in his diary what the domain police would do if they heard of it.\textsuperscript{17} It seems that he felt no guilt in breaking shogunal law, but merely was afraid of punishment. When the shogun died, the order went around for no parties or singing, as a means of showing respect, but Monzaemon immediately invited friends over, and served sake and whale meat. There was also an order for no construction, but he began repairs on his storehouse and garden walls at this time.\textsuperscript{18} These minor acts of protest reveal that Monzaemon had little internalized respect for the shogun.

The shogun was not the only object of Monzaemon’s critical judgement. He also confided to his diary criticisms of domainal rulers as well. In an entry made in 1693 he described his own lord, Tokugawa Tsunanari 徳川綱誠, in the following way, “Our lord was born with a desire to increase his own wealth. Ever since he was five he has been greedy. Now that he is older he is only more skillful at it. I think that although the lord is the governor of the realm, he brings poverty upon his people.”\textsuperscript{19} Monzaemon also described the lord’s mother as “sexually depraved” (貞姪絶倫) for inviting Edo townsmen to her residence and having sexual

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Vol. 9, p. 190, 1693.10.n.d.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Vol.9, p. 290, 1695.2.8.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Vol. 9, p. 292, 1695.2.10 and Vol. 9, p. 194, 1693.10.21. also see Vol. 9, p. 334 1695.10.n.d.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Kōsaka, pp. 9-10, Kaga, pp. 60-61, Vol. 9, pp. 126-127, 1692.12.14 and Vol. 9, p. 136, 1693. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Vol. 9, p. 212, 1694.2.3, and Kōsaka, pp. 49-56.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Vol. 11, pp. 420-421, 1709.1.13-15. and pp. 430-2 for warehouse repairs.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Vol. 9, p. 193, 1693.10.21 gorohi
\end{itemize}
relations with those whom she liked. Monzaemon also recorded verse poking fun at elites, or mildly critical of domain actions. However, Monzaemon was not brave enough to criticize the laws and characters of the rulers beyond the privacy of his diary.

Drinking saké was a common samurai pastime which was often carried to excess. Time and again young Monzaemon saw friends, relatives and strangers become sick or lose their senses because of sake, and he frequently closed such an entry in his diary with the caution, "I must take this to heart." In the fourth month of 1693, during a dinner at a friend’s house, two friends got very drunk and went to lay down together in the next room. One of them asked the other to quit his master and become his own retainer, to which the other became very angry and yelled, "Everyone knows that I have sworn fealty to Shinpachi!" He then charged out of the room to get his sword, at which time the guests calmed him down and hustled the other man out of the house. The angry one, named Kūrōzaburō, sat down in a funk and started crying ("as usual!" Monzaemon notes.). Then suddenly he jumped up and ran around the house, vomiting on the floor. Monzaemon and friends finally got Kūrōzaburō to sleep in the entranceway of the house. But soon he threw up again and crawled right through it. Then he took off all of his soiled and stinking clothes and ran around the house stark naked, until he tried to run into a closet and banged his head on a pillar, falling backwards onto the floor. After that he started "howling like a cat, bellowing like a cow." Monzaemon ended this entry by quoting both Confucius and Mencius on the danger of drinking too much.

Monzaemon also recorded in his diary stories of samurai and even daimyo who were disenfeoffed because of incidents arising from excessive alcohol consumption. The domain frequently issued proclamations against excessive drinking, but the fourth lord of Nagoya himself was an extraordinary drinker who challenged his retainers to drinking bouts. He was fond of one drinking contest in which he lined up 53 small sake cups in a row. Each cup had a painting of one of the 53 post stations between Kyoto and Edo on the Tōkaidō highway. The lord drank his way from Edo to Kyoto and then had a challenger drink the whole way back. Hardier challengers could make the trip by "Express Post", hayabikyaku, a lacquered cup holding two liters, with pictures of all fifty-three stations inside. Samurai had much time on their hands and a steady income. Despite domain proclamations they had a role model for excessive drinking in their lord. Therefore it is little wonder that many retainers spent many of their evenings drinking.

Monzaemon’s parents worried, and frequently confronted him about excessive drinking, but Monzaemon did not quit. Indeed, as he became older he drank more and more, largely because this was a standard element of social interaction between samurai men. Guilt over his excessive drinking gnawed at Monzaemon, and entries like the following are common, "I got terribly drunk. On the road home I vomited greatly. . . I should take this to heart. Ah! From now on, if I disobey the orders of my mother and father, I hope a hundred years of my life be shortened to one hour. How it hurts! How stupid I am!" In 1715, Monzaemon’s mother died, and her deathbed wish was that he quit sake. He writes, “Throughout my whole life I have been unfilial and have done nothing but go against her heart. Now I feel as if I will split. I fear the stupidity and sin of a character which merely feels remorse and sadness. Ashamedly, there is nothing that I can do now. Ah, Ah!” Thereafter, he occasionally saw his mother in dreams, and on one of these

21. For example Vol. 10, p. 116, 1698.11.27-30 for description of an ema critical of suptuary laws. Vol. 11, pp. 432 1709.2.9 for a verse poking fun at the body of an elite. Vol. 11 p. 441 1709.3.4 for what seems to be his own verse critical the domain’s punishment of a number of retainers.
22. Vol. 10, p. 72, 1698.1.27 and Vol. 12, p. 651, 1717.2.17--Vol. 12 p. ‘20 1711-4.4 he cannot eat because of a hangover and says “How stupid am I, and how lacking in filial piety! I should take this to heart while I still escape punishment.” 不酗可慎向来
25. Vol. 9, p. 381, 1696.9.6. On the same day as he records this law in his diary he goes drinking!
occasions he woke up crying, promising to quit drinking. Unsuccessfully, I might add. He continued to drink, his eyes became yellow, and he died of liver disease in the following year.

I have given above a number of examples of Monzaemon’s transgressions against his parents’ wishes and domainal and shogunal laws. They suggest that the beliefs and behavior of Monzaemon’s circle of friends were very important in determining his behavior and moral attitudes. Not surprising, perhaps, but this serves as a reminder that we must look at the actual communities in which people live in order to understand their values.

Furthermore, there was great variation in the implementation of laws, and it was the implementation of the law rather than the letter of the law to which Monzaemon responded. Some laws, such as those against excessive drinking, were not enforced. I can find no example of a samurai being punished for excessive drinking per se. Laws against gambling were enforced sporadically with great severity, and occasionally frightened Monzaemon into good behavior, but in the long run the power of friends’ behavior was far more important to Monzaemon. As for political independence, Monzaemon allowed himself privately to criticize the persons and behavior of his lords in his diary, but he never questioned the system. He was of course a major beneficiary—a domesticated samurai, trapped in a cage of small luxuries and good friends.

27. Vol. 11, p. 446, 1709.3.23-24. 28. Vol. 11, p. 446 1709.3.24. Vol. 12, pp. 548 and 550, 1716.1.13 and 22. And for a case where he remembers his mother’s wish, Vol. 12, p. 651, 1717.2.17. "Yashiro came many times and said my eyes were yellow. I have disobeyed the warnings of my departed mother, and beating my chest I only wail up at the blue sky. Ah, Ah! Anyhow I must try to quit sake.”
Cosmology of Kyoto: Tales of the Millennium—Visual Mindscape of Old Japan

Published and Distributed by Yano Electric Co., Ltd., Japan

Manufacturer’s suggested retail price: $98; available for $79 from Stone Bridge Press
(PO Box 8208, Berkeley, CA 94707; 1-800-947-7271)

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Requirements: Macintosh (68030 or faster CPU recommended); System 6.0.7 or later; QuickTime 1.5 or later; 256-color 13” monitor; 4 Mb available RAM; DC-ROM drive (dual-speed or faster). KanjiTalk or Japanese Language Kit is required for Japanese mode. Power Macintosh compatible. Reviewed on a Performa 475 with 8 Mb of RAM, Apple dual-speed external CD-ROM drive, and 14” color monitor.

Having selected English or Japanese mode, then a gender and appropriate facial and body type, you find yourself in a wasteland to the south of Kyoto’s Rajōmon. In this most recent of your endless reincarnations in the Six Realms of Existence (current karma score conveniently shown in a small box), your goal, as always, is to make your way through the perils of this shaba world, in the form of the city of Heiankyō, to paradise; the hazards, as always, are those awaiting the denizens of that spirit-ridden city: poverty, starvation, and disease; robbers, footpads, and cutthroats; sword-happy warriors and turf-conscious diviners; demons disguised as beautiful women; and a wide variety of other citizens anxious to relieve you of your clothes, your money, and your life.

Luckily, however, as a more modern karmic traveler, you have at your command a facsimile of the sort of information that might have been possessed by a well-informed denizen of Heiankyō, in the form of a marvellously stocked reference database containing some 400 informational screens on tenth- and eleventh-century Heian period history, literature, society, and religion (there is also an even more immediately useful pocket guide to the various perils and opportunities lying in wait for you in life and what to do when you encounter them). One of the snazziest features of this info-game is not even software, but rather a heavy-duty folding paper grid-map of Heiankyō, with every street and the locations of many official buildings and residences carefully labelled. It may come in handy for teaching future Genji courses. And there are other helpful interactive software maps that zoom in successive views from all of Asia to Japan, Heiankyō, the Imperial Palace, and finally the Dairi (Imperial Palace Residences). Like all male residents of the Palace an inveterate nozoki, I tried to get a peek inside the buildings reserved for the Emperor’s consorts, but entry to those is apparently forbidden by the Heian equivalent of the Imperial Household Agency). And in reference mode, one has immediate access not only to maps, but also to topics keyed to any given point in the game, with access as well to any other topic by alphabetical or topical search (illustrated when possible with appropriate artworks whose sources are identified). Also accessible in this mode are a chronological timeline and a substantial bibliography indicating which works were used in constructing the game.

Cosmology of Kyoto is an absorbing and informational game. It is not, however, without a few minor drawbacks. On the setup I used (see above), for example, the Japanese fonts failed to load properly even with extensions disabled (System 7.5 notoriously conflicts with several extension programs, notably Ram Doubler and who knows what else; players using System 7.5 may have to restart with the shift key depressed to disable extensions). Also, with the dual-speed external CD-ROM I used, too much time was spent waiting for the next step to load; triple- or quad-speed may make a considerable difference. More problematically for the
interactively-challenged duffer, most wrong moves result in one’s having to wander the same hells over and over; once you fall into
them, you are forced to passively experience repetitious and boring scenes for a full five minutes before you are finally reborn and
able to get on with your karma. This may indeed represent the closest the living can come to knowing hell in modern times, but once
that point is granted, it is after all a bit of a bore.

The Japanese mode differs from the English in that all reference text is in Japanese and the subtitles for speech (which can be
toggled on or off) are in Japanese instead of English. Since the characters populating the game speak a lively but rather fantastical
Heian jidaigekigo, it may be difficult without subtitles to figure out exactly what is being said, whether by the highest ranking court
lady’s version of asobasekotoba or by the lowest gutter-rat’s version of whatever nasty argot Heian gutter-rats are imagined to have
spoken in (lots of these here -- see Kurosawa’s film Rashômon for examples of similar speech). Still, in Japanese mode the nesshin
student of intermediate to advanced accomplishments can learn a lot of language of the sort used in TV historical dramas, not to
mention a lot of vocabulary and kanji, and can learn as well quite a bit about every aspect of Heian culture, whether in English or in
Japanese. This is the first attempt I have seen to provide one with an experience of a Heian life built upon a complex and unsystematic
web of religion, superstition, philosophy, metaphysics, geomancy, folklore and narrative, and certainly represents the sort of
phenomenological experience rarely available in the usual university course on premodern Japanese history. As one instructional sheet
states, “This game is not based on the the sort of history which accords perfectly with a progressive, chronological flow of time. It
seeks instead to convey the reality of the Heian period through a totality of many different images, arranged in sequences and
combinations which unfold like dreams.” And, amazingly, that is exactly the experience one gets. The interesting musical effects only
add to that experience.

This game has real breadth and depth, and, in spite of the occasional problem, is long on the educational side of edutainment,
which cannot be said for much of this sort of software. Highly recommended.
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