

Teaching Premodern Japanese Violence:  
History and Heritage in the Classroom

CHRISTOPHER M. MAYO

# Teaching Premodern Japanese Violence: History and Heritage in the Classroom

CHRISTOPHER M. MAYO

THIS ESSAY EXPLORES the vocabulary of premodern Japanese violence and its modern-day expression in text and images. In a recent example of such violence in educational entertainment, the hegemon Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) targeted Christian missionaries for punishment in NHK’s 2016 *Sanadamaru* historical fiction drama, saying, “lop off their ears...Yes, we ought to lop off their noses and crucify them after they have been dragged around.”<sup>1)</sup> As a pretext to confiscate the cargo of a Spanish vessel, this fictionalized version of Hideyoshi claimed that the presence of the missionaries violated his edicts calling for their expulsion. However, the drama’s creators made it clear that this violent punishment was also an example of Hideyoshi’s increasingly cruel and capricious decisions. They conveyed this criticism through one of his retainers, the protagonist Sanada Yukimura (1567–1615), who suppressed indignation at his lord’s behavior while expressing sympathy for the plight of the victims. The implication was that Hideyoshi’s mental health issues led him to order the punishments and that an ethical individual (the protagonist) at the time would have seen the disfigurements and execution as abhorrent. Would Hideyoshi’s contemporaries have thought this way about it, and what lessons does premodern violence hold for us today?

This paper suggests that we frame these questions using two terms: “heritage,” which asks how we ought to evoke and preserve the past, and “history,” which asks how we ought to analyze and explain it. The first part of

the paper adopts the “heritage” framework to examine incidents of premodern violence that educators have focused on, the lessons that have been drawn from them, and the ways in which violence in the past has been used as a lens to understand the present-day Japanese nation and its people. The second part of the paper employs a “history” framework to suggest ways educators can provide context for examples of premodern violence that they introduce in class. Focusing on violence that was meant to disfigure and stigmatize the victim, it explains how the application of such violence intersected with concerns over status, gender, and religion. This paper concludes by arguing that one way past violence remains relevant in the classroom is through “virtue signaling,” which reinforces modern-day social values, norms, and misconceptions.

## Teaching Premodern Violence from a “Heritage” Perspective

Violence often carries culturally constructed meanings, and by distinguishing between “history” and “heritage,” we can better understand why and how premodern violence is introduced to students today. Historian Richard Holt has suggested that history, at least as an academic discipline, tends to analyze and explain the past for a small readership of specialists. However, because of the limitations of history, which is based on the available surviving documents (texts) or archaeological finds (objects), it often ends up being a complex and unorganized account that lends itself to multiple interpretations—examining and reflecting on what happened in the past without explicitly elucidating moral lessons. In contrast, heritage evokes, records, and preserves the past for a wider audience, bringing history to life through memory and material culture. Consequently, the heritage approach has more influence on popular understandings of the past.<sup>2)</sup> History is not the same thing as historical heritage, and we must be careful not to confuse the two, but this paper argues that both

approaches have their merits, and the classroom setting provides a potentially fruitful venue for sharing them with students.

Hartley's prologue to his 1953 novel *The Go-Between* began with the memorable phrase "[t]he past is a foreign country: they do things differently there," and if we treat the past in this manner, modern ethical standards will be of little use, especially when we place historical analysis ahead of moral judgments in our research.<sup>3)</sup> With Hartley's metaphor in mind, there is an argument to be made for not only carefully distinguishing between history and heritage but also for eschewing heritage entirely. Re-phrasing Hartley for the history and heritage debate, historian David Lowenthal has claimed that the public at large cannot bear an alien past that grows ever more foreign through the work of historians, so they domesticate it in popular media until "[t]he past ceases to be a foreign country, instead becoming our sanitised own." He has suggested that the problem is not necessarily one of historical ignorance—it is an acceptance of such a state together with an exaltation of "emphatic feeling."<sup>4)</sup> It is a powerful indictment of the heritage approach, particularly in popular media, but treating the classroom as a polyphonous space, even to the point of combining heritage and history, cannot necessarily be equated with a sanitization of the past. Literary and cultural scholar Ann Rigney has argued that the heritage or popular history approach is not necessarily a failed version of academically disciplined history but can be "something of a different order." In a summary of the benefits that scholarship has found in historical fiction, she has written that "[p]roviding information and interpretation is only one part of the story, along with stimulating interest, experimenting with different representational forms, sharpening people's historical consciousness, and reflecting critically on historical practice itself."<sup>5)</sup> This paper adds "virtue signaling" to her list of roles that heritage can play in the classroom.

### *The Case for Making Moral Judgments: Tsujigiri*

Educators have incorporated premodern Japanese violence into contemporary educational curricula in classrooms around the world. While there is often an element of “history” involved, some of the materials used emphasize lessons that can be drawn from the Japanese past—a “heritage” approach. Although Hideyoshi’s persecution of foreign missionaries to the point of martyrdom has long been condemned as an atrocity by Western observers, another kind of premodern Japanese violence has recently come to be used as a teaching tool outside of Japan. In her 1981 article on the samurai “custom” of *tsujigiri* (literally “crossroads-cut”), which she defined as “trying out one’s sword on a chance wayfarer,” the philosopher Mary Midgley questioned the idea that we ought to avoid making moral judgments about other cultures.<sup>6)</sup> *Tsujigiri* is quite different from the disfiguring and stigmatizing physical violence that is the main focus of much of this essay. However, it directs our attention to how premodern violence, introduced as an exotic custom that is repugnant to us today, has been interpreted as an object of study.

Midgley’s research specialization was not Japanese history, and it is thus unsurprising that she drew upon a simplified version of Japan’s violent heritage, embodied by the act of *tsujigiri*, to achieve her primary aim of critiquing the philosophical position that she termed “moral isolationism.” She coined the term as a label to describe the thinking of someone who argues that moral judgments can only be made about our own culture because that is supposedly the only one we can fully understand. Accordingly, out of respect or tolerance for others, such a position leads to the conclusion that we ought to isolate ourselves morally. In essence, it is the notion that we lack the moral standing to criticize or reject alien cultures and avoid judgments. According to Midgley, if someone today criticizes the behavior of a samurai engaging in *tsujigiri* as brutal, a moral isolationist could defend the samurai’s legitimacy in several ways. They might

argue, for example, that ancient Japanese placed a lower value on life generally or that a sudden bisection was considered acceptable if it occurred between consenting adults. In response to this reasoning, Midgley, from a so-called “Western” point of view, encouraged readers to question whether there is enough evidence to suggest that people walking on the roads of premodern Japan truly had such a surprising preference for bisection. She added that we should ask it even if the question might have seemed as foreign to the individuals in premodern Japan as the practice of *tsujigiri* appears to us today. According to Midgley, it is possible to transcend ignorance, laziness, prejudice, and other impediments to cross-cultural understanding to arrive at a point from which we can know enough about other cultures to make moral judgments about them. She concluded that we should morally condemn an act such as *tsujigiri*, regardless of what the samurai at the time or those who would defend their actions today may think. Her essay can be seen on university syllabi and in ethics textbooks in the U.S.A. and the U.K. more than 40 years after it was first published, perhaps because she provocatively juxtaposed the idealized image of the honorable samurai with an abhorrent act of violence to expose troubling aspects of the moral isolationist position. As a by-product of her critique, this kind of premodern Japanese violence has become embedded in academia for the lessons it supposedly has to teach us.

### ***A Narrative Thread in Japanese History: Cruel Violence***

How would someone with expertise in Japanese history make the kind of moral judgment on premodern violence that Midgley advocated? On some university syllabi, we can find Kenneth Henshall’s textbook, which straddles the categories of academic and popular history. He argues that modern Japanese have inherited a heritage of cruelty has endured from the origins of Japanese history to the present. Henshall noted that the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Things, 712) and the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan, 720) are unreliable as records of

historical fact but claimed a cautious observer could nevertheless use them as a valuable means of understanding Japan's ancient past. He explained that the myths describe "a world of violence and sudden death, a world where brutality and raw emotion prevail over finer feelings, and where parents kill or abandon their children and brother slays brother. Cruelty seems to have been commonplace."<sup>7)</sup> Anticipating criticism that such cruelty can be found in myths and early histories elsewhere (on the aforementioned filicide, the story of Abraham and Isaac, and for fratricide, Cain and Abel come to mind), the author admitted that such cruel acts are not unknown outside of Japan, "[b]ut what is quite distinctive about the Japanese myths is an avoidance of moral judgment as to good and evil... Behaviour is accepted or rejected depending on the situation, not according to any obvious set of universal principles. This is exactly what many commentators remark upon in present-day Japanese behaviour. The roots of such behaviour clearly run deep."<sup>8)</sup> Although his interpretations are provocative, they seem to feed into a narrative that begins in WWII rather than the ancient past, looking for historical and cultural precedents for wartime atrocities.

After identifying the origins of Japanese cruelty in the nation's founding myths, Henshall traced its lineage through the rest of Japanese history. According to his textbook, during the medieval period (12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries), Nobunaga in the 16<sup>th</sup> century showed brutality, self-interest, cruelty, and ruthlessness as evidenced by fratricide (killing his younger brother). Henshall emphasized that this behavior was "nothing special." What was unique about him was his habit of having his defeated enemies burned alive, including civilians caught up in the massacres. He also had a penchant for massacring Buddhist priests. A few years later, Hideyoshi demonstrated "Nobunaga-like cruelty" by obliging family members, their retainers, and his tea master to commit suicide. During the early modern period (17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), even though "[p]unishments in Europe at the time were also severe by modern

standards, the severity of those in Japan was enough to shock many European visitors of the day.” After quoting sources that condemned the violence as “extremely cruel, barbarous, and inhuman,” Henshall introduced the practice of “*tameshigiri* (‘trial cut’), [in which] samurai tested the efficiency of their swords on the corpses of executed criminals... [but] testing was not confined to corpses.” For the modern period (19<sup>th</sup> century to the present), Japan’s “gross cruelty towards prisoners of war” is also mentioned.<sup>9)</sup> The text cited sources for all these incidents, but the question is not whether violence was documented—it is whether researchers should extract these from the historical record, highlight the most egregious behavior that can be found in them, and then use it as an interpretive lens through which to view a nation or a people, concluding that their brand of violence and cruelty is uniquely worthy of condemnation.

The significance of the condemnation that often accompanies the inclusion in textbooks of premodern violence is that it can be understood as a performance of “virtue signaling.” The terminology was popularized in a well-known, scathing rebuke of politically correct English (PCE) by David Foster Wallace in 2001. He argued that PCE “functions primarily to signal and congratulate certain virtues in the speaker...and so serves the selfish interests of the PC [politically correct] far more than it serves any of the persons or groups renamed.”<sup>10)</sup> His characterization of signaling, and the negative connotation applied to it, was more akin to “what economists call ‘cheap talk:’ signals that are cheap, quick, and easy to fake, and that aren’t accurate cues of underlying traits or values,” though.<sup>11)</sup> In a more charitable interpretation of what is occurring when premodern violence is introduced into the classroom, where we can suppose that instructors are generally sincere about their careers as educators, this kind of virtue signaling could be considered one that’s “costly, long-term, and hard to fake, and that can serve as a very reliable indicator of underlying traits and values.”<sup>12)</sup> For educators, this signal is a principled call for making moral judgments based on a stable set of moral standards that align with values

promoted in a modern, Western tradition. When using Japanese-language sources, the signaling might manifest itself as an interpretation of the nation's past that argues for the merits of a modern, liberal, and humanitarian society. In the two examples that follow, such an approach condemns the mistreatment of the weak by the strong or ridicules those who foolishly put themselves at risk for the sake of entertaining others.

By positioning readers against behavior that is so egregious, students and teachers can demonstrate that they are ethical, thereby fixing and internalizing values appropriate to the present day. This use of the past is similar, in some ways, to the argument Midgley made for making moral judgments (in the case of the Japanese classroom, treating one's own past as a kind of foreign culture), because there is more weight placed on learning lessons from the violence than understanding the historical socio-cultural context. It is not that virtue signaling and heritage are superior or inferior to suspending judgment and engaging in historical inquiry. Instead, it is a question of emphasis and objectives. In the process of condemning the eccentricities of the past, we can help to shape the values and social norms that we believe are appropriate for present-day society, perhaps resulting in a constructive application of Midgley's stance against moral isolationism.

### ***The Ategawa Estate Peasant Petition of 1275: Oppressive Violence***

In the Japanese classroom, acts of violence such as *tsujigiri* and *tameshigiri* are unlikely to be covered at any length. Students are probably more familiar with two other premodern disfigurements that are generally included in junior and senior-high-school textbooks.<sup>13)</sup> Besides focusing on different examples, Japanese students are studying their own nation's heritage, and by extension, their own identities as citizens, so the lessons they draw from it have understandably differed from those suggested by Midgley or Henshall. The first one comes from a petition that was submitted to the owner of Ategawa estate (*Ategawa no*

*shō*) by its peasants (*hyakushō*) in 1275. It is a valuable source for historians because it was likely authored by the peasants themselves, giving us a rare opportunity to hear the voices of non-elites. However, its fame comes from how it vividly detailed the difficult conditions experienced under the military government's (*bakufu*) land steward (*jitō*) there. It is sometimes directly quoted and included in textbooks for these reasons, making it one of the best-known examples of medieval disfigurement.<sup>14)</sup> The petition's fourth item reads:

Item on the timber, in the capital as well as in the nearby region, we have to serve the steward unrelentingly. Just when the few remaining workmen set off to the mountains to transport the timber, the steward calls them back: "Sow wheat on the fields of the peasants who have fled," and he threatens further: "If you do not sow this wheat, I will lock up your wives, cut off their ears, shear off their noses, cut off their hair, make them look like nuns and tie them with ropes. That is how I will treat them." Therefore, the delivery of timber is behind the schedule. Moreover, the steward pulled down one of the houses belonging to the peasants who have fled.<sup>15)</sup>

The content of the document is gruesome, and historians have understandably tended to judge the land steward harshly — one prominent Japanese scholar has even characterized his behavior as a "cruel lynching" (*zankoku na rinchi*) and "brutal behavior" (*zangyaku na kōi*).<sup>16)</sup> The teacher's manual of one textbook adds several lessons to be drawn from this incident. Firstly, it points out that "we can read about the enormity of the violence of the landowners and the suffering of the peasants who are oppressed by it." However, such phrases as "the violence of the landowners," "the suffering of the oppressed peasants," and "the outrageousness of the law" are judgments being made by the textbook manual's editors and not the words used by the peasants themselves, who were

more restrained in their criticism. The textbook editors framed the power struggle as one between a morally repugnant individual in a position of power and those in a weaker position below him, making it relatively easy for anyone to condemn him. In contrast to Henshall's depictions of Japan's violent past, the emphasis in Japanese classrooms is not that the Japanese were a cruel people — they were a people mistreated by the military authorities.

The teacher's edition of the textbook explains that the Ategawa peasants had a two-pronged strategy in their presentation of the document to authorities. They wrote it in their own hand to gain a favorable ruling in the courts and placed the cruel behavior within the context of excessive labor obligations so as to put some responsibility for the land steward's behavior on his superiors in an appeal for their benevolent intervention. In fact, the phrase about locking up wives, cutting off their ears, shearing off their noses, cutting off their hair, making them look like nuns, and tying them with ropes is only a small part of one document in the entire legal process. When viewed in this manner, we can recognize that the mistreatment of women was probably not the main issue, as it might appear if we only focus on the excerpt presented in the textbook without more context. It was, instead, a symptom of the underlying structural problem the peasants wanted to have addressed, suggesting that the petitioners were more focused on the excessive labor obligations than the threats of violence that resulted from them.

### ***The Ninnaji Priest and the Pot: Comedic Violence***

A second incident of disfigurement that students are likely to encounter in classrooms is introduced to them by Japanese literature textbooks, which present it as an example of the country's medieval comedic heritage. The anecdote they read comes from *Tsurezuregusa* (Essays in Idleness), a text written by a priest known as Kenkō sometime in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The content concerns the monks at Ninnaji, an impressive Buddhist

temple founded in the ninth century in Kyoto. It is notable in modern times as a site proposed for the emperor to live in retirement as its abbot after the country's defeat in WWII, where he would have "pray[ed] for the repose of the souls of all those who had given their lives in his service."<sup>17</sup>) Although the plan did not come to fruition, it suggests the prestige the temple has retained since Kenkō's time. His work portrays it much less reverently, and perhaps he was partly drawn to the story for its juxtaposition of an absurd situation on such an esteemed location.

This story too is about a priest at the Ninnaji. A farewell party was being offered for an acolyte about to become a priest, and the guests were all making merry when one of the priests, drunk and carried away by high spirits, picked up a three-legged cauldron nearby, and clamped it over his head. It caught on his nose, but he flattened it down, pulled the pot over his face, and danced out among the others, to the great amusement of everyone.

After the priest had been dancing for a while he tried to pull the pot off, but it refused to be budged. A pall fell over the gathering, and people wondered blankly what to do. They tried one thing and another, only succeeding in bruising the skin around his neck. The blood streamed down, and the priest's neck became so swollen that he had trouble breathing. The others tried to split the pot, but it was not easily broken and the reverberations inside were unbearable. Finally, when all else had failed, they threw a thin garment over the legs of the pot, which stuck up like horns, and, giving the priest a stick to lean on, led him off by the hand to a doctor in Kyoto. People they met on the way stared at this apparition with unconstrained astonishment.

The priest presented a most extraordinary sight as he sat inside the doctor's office facing him. Whatever he said came out as an unintelligible,

muffled roar. “I can’t find any similar case in my medical books,” said the doctor, “and there aren’t any oral traditions either.” The priest had no choice but to return to the Ninnaji, where his close friends and his aged mother gathered at his bedside, weeping with grief, though the priest himself probably could not hear them.

At this point somebody suggested, “Wouldn’t it be better at least to save his life, even if he loses his nose and ears? Let’s try pulling the pot off with all our strength.” They stuffed straw around the priest’s neck to protect it from the metal, then pulled hard enough to tear off his head. Only holes were left to show where his ears and nose had been, but the pot was removed. They barely managed to save the priest’s life, and for a long time afterwards he was gravely ill.<sup>18)</sup>

The entire anecdote can be divided into three parts. The beginning is comical, with an inebriated monk putting a pot on his head and dancing for the amusement of others. In the middle part, pleasure turns to panic as the partygoers fail to remove the pot. Their efforts cause the poor priest to bleed profusely, and the situation becomes so dire that he begins to have trouble breathing. His fellow monks manage to lead him to a physician, at which point we learn the man has also lost the ability to communicate because his words are muffled and incomprehensible. In the last part, panic turns to desperation, with the situation becoming so dire that the priest’s friends and family weep for what appears to be a death sentence. Even worse, as the text emphasizes, the man cannot hear their laments. As a final resort, they pull on the pot so hard that they rip the flesh from his body, tearing off his nose and ears. The event is so traumatic for the priest that he barely survives and is seriously ill for a time afterward.

Unlike the Ategawa peasant petition, which would have been unknown to all but a handful of people until it was included in Japanese history textbooks,

Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness* became a part of Japanese popular culture in the premodern period, so we can ask how it has been understood in the centuries that have passed since it was originally written. According to Kawahira Toshifumi, a scholar of Japanese language and literature, the anecdote was read together with related ones around it during the early modern period, and any lessons drawn from it were taken from the composite image that emerged.

The violence done to the priest that left him disfigured in the anecdote was not the focus of attention in the early modern period. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, print culture flourished, and illustrations of the priest dancing with the pot on his head began to accompany the text. There appear to have been fewer illustrations of later parts of the story, and I have yet to find any of the horrific disfigurement depicted at the end. The general impression of the material that remains from the period is that more weight was placed on the comical dancing. The violence remained in the story, of course, but tempered by the lighthearted illustrations accompanying it. Something similar occurs in the most widely available English translation by Donald Keene, which also provides a depiction of the dancing monk, with the image even appearing on the cover of some editions.

While it is widely understood as a comical story, students may encounter other interpretations in the classroom. Some scholars have drawn more attention to the monk's life being at stake by commenting on its similarity to the grim, absurdly "black" humor of *Grimms' Fairy Tales* or *Mother Goose*.<sup>19)</sup> Perhaps one student's reported response to the story is representative of the kind of lessons being drawn from it in the classroom today: "A rash or thoughtless action can change the course of your life."<sup>20)</sup> The story may be read now as a grisly reminder of what happens when someone is careless. Indeed, it is possible that Kenkō meant this to be a cautionary tale, but of a slightly different sort, because in the following paragraph about another case of monks entertaining themselves (albeit in a less life-threatening manner), he concludes

that “[a]ny excessively ingenious scheme is sure to end in a fiasco.”<sup>21)</sup> Within the context of the entire collection of essays, we could understand the priest to be one of the several unfortunate people who appear throughout the work. Similarly, within the context of premodern Japanese history, instead of considering violence such as Hideyoshi’s punishments, *tsujigiri*, the threats in the Ategawa estate petition, and the Ninnaji monk’s misfortune as discrete incidents that contain unrelated lessons for students in the present-day classroom, by reading them together we can detect a shared vocabulary of violence involving stigmatizing disfigurements.

## Combining a “Heritage” and “Historical” Perspective on Violence

One of the appeals of a heritage approach to premodern violence is that concise lessons can be drawn from the past and applied to the present. In contrast, a historical approach will almost certainly be more complex without clear resolutions. Heritage interpretations suited to a modern audience may be entirely appropriate in educational settings, but what if we want to introduce students to the historical context? Students may receive almost no guidance about interpreting *tsujigiri* historically, only a small amount for the Ategawa peasant petition, and for the anecdote about the Ninnaji priest, they are more likely to approach it from a literary perspective. The latter half of this paper attempts to demonstrate what can be gained by suspending moral judgments when dealing with premodern violence to explore the “foreign” perspective of historical actors working within an entirely different worldview. Specifically, it demonstrates how gender, status, and religious concerns were expressed through a vocabulary of violence that employed physical disfigurements.

*The Past is a Foreign Country: Gender at the Crossroads*

In the case of *tsujigiri*, when we go beyond a superficial dictionary-level treatment of the word and look historically at how contemporaries viewed it, we cannot find anyone promoting the practice, and it turns out that there is no need to step outside of the Japanese tradition to criticize it from a Western perspective after all. Midgley's provocative point about the absurdity of moral relativism may have merit, but the example she used to make her case does not stand up under scrutiny. In a word, it is ahistorical. Historian Jordan Sand has explained this fundamental problem in Midgley's work together with an insightful analysis of the state of the field and the problematic conflation of the terms *tsujigiri* and *tameshigiri*, which were introduced earlier in this paper (the first used by Midgley and the second by Henshall). In fact, by employing the term in an uncritical manner and exoticizing premodern Japan, Sand suggests that Midgley's essay introduced an element of "Orientalism," a stereotypical representation of Asia emphasizing the backwardness, passiveness, and eccentricity of a non-Western civilization.<sup>22)</sup>

Accounts from medieval Japanese history precede Midgley's condemnation by several centuries, regarding *tsujigiri* in much the same way we view modern killings. A criticism of the practice, for example, appeared in the *Taiheiki* (Chronicle of Great Peace), a military narrative describing Japan's civil wars of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

[T]hese fellows found no amusement save with weapons of war, but went around in the capital and Shirakawa by night, fell upon men at crossroads, and in this place and that cut down passersby: youths, monks, women, and children. Truly there was no end to their murdering!<sup>23)</sup>

Although we often cannot confirm how closely specific incidents in such literary

sources corresponded with actual historical events, they expressed views on customs and culture that likely had some verisimilitude in the sense that they depicted events contemporary readers and listeners thought were within the realm of possibility. In this essay, literary sources like this are used primarily to provide insight into a widely shared worldview. We cannot know whether the *Taiheiki*'s incidents of violence at the crossroads actually happened as depicted, but the passage was clearly a contemporary criticism of *tsujigiri*, and we can thus infer from it that the behavior was not condoned in the medieval period. Midgley's essay mentions "ancient" Japan, but the period she probably had in mind was the early modern one. However, there was nothing customary or normative about *tsujigiri* in this period either. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, one legal prohibition read as follows: "ITEM: For those who commit *tsujigiri*, they shall be paraded through the streets and then executed."<sup>24)</sup> Instead of focusing on whether an act of violence was in accordance with social norms in a society at a particular point in time, though, we can better understand the violence by considering the historical background, which helps to illuminate why and under what conditions behavior was deemed legitimate. A cursory glance would correctly conclude that even in the midst of a civil war (the example from the *Taiheiki*), the moral stand of contemporaries towards random homicides like *tsujigiri* generally aligned with the one we hold today in modern society, though the rationale may have differed.

*Tsujigiri* was condemned in premodern Japan just as it would be in the present day, and behaviors like kidnapping were also considered unacceptable, though the reasons for taking a stand against the behavior rested on an expectation of government that would be unfamiliar to us today. Until the end of the early modern period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the premodern conception of benevolence in governance remained a potent one.<sup>25)</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Kamakura warrior regime promulgated the *Goseibai shikimoku* legal code, which stated that the seizure of family and property was illegal.

42. — Of inflicting loss and ruin on absconding farmers under the pretext of smashing runaways.

When people living in the provinces run away and escape, the lord of the fief and others, proclaiming that runaways must be smashed up, detain their wives and children, and confiscate their property. Such a mode of procedure is quite the reverse of benevolent government. Henceforth such must be referred (to Kamakura) for adjudication, and if it is found that the farmer is in arrear as regards payment of his land tax and levies, he shall be compelled to make go the deficiency. If he is found not to be so in arrear, the property seized from him shall be forthwith restored to him. And it shall be entirely at the option of the farmer himself whether he shall continue to live in the fief or go elsewhere.<sup>26)</sup>

A historical analysis of the premodern socio-cultural context highlights the slippage between medieval and modern thinking, even when the vocabulary of violence seems familiar to us.

The aforementioned *Goseibai shikimoku* includes another mistreatment of women at the crossroads that sheds light on contemporary attitudes. In the crime of *tsujitori* or *tsujidori* (literally “crossroads-capturing”), a woman passing by was sometimes abducted by a man, and the text of the law explicitly forbade this act, just as we would expect in modern times.

34. — Of illicit intercourse with another person's wife.

Whoever embraces another person's wife is to be deprived of half of his fief, and to be inhibited from rendering service anymore, regardless of whether it was a case of rape or adultery. If he have no investiture he must be sent into banishment. The woman shall in like manner be deprived of her fief, and if she have none she must be sent into banishment. Concerning the abduction of women at crossroads, in the

case of a warrior of the bakufu (*gokenin*), he shall be dispensed from service for one-hundred days. In the case of a follower (*rōjū*) or less, he shall in accordance with the time of the great general [Minamoto no Yoritomo] be shaved at one side of the temples. In the case of a priest, he shall be punished according to the circumstances.<sup>27)</sup>

This law may have been more aspirational than operational, and the thinking that informed it might seem quite alien to us now, even if we would agree with the conclusion that women should not be abducted from someplace like the Shibuya Scramble Crossing. Regardless of whether it was a case of rape or adultery, women were to be deprived of their wealth or banished in the same manner as the men. There is no explanation here about why the victim of a crime would be punished. Nor is there one for why a man who abducted a woman would have received a significantly lighter punishment than an adulterer. Surprisingly, perhaps, we see a haircut used as a punishment, seemingly incommensurate with the seriousness of the offense. There was a logic underpinning this that diverges from what we might be more familiar with in modern society, and this slippage was most apparent in the bodies of women, especially at the crossroads, perhaps because these were locations found throughout the country that brought together men and women.

Historians have drawn attention to the social and political context for the legal codes to explore how sexuality, violence, and gender came together at the crossroads. According to Hitomi Tonomura, the bakufu punished a woman “for being penetrated by a man other than her husband, whether or not it took place against her will,” because the bakufu considered the offense as a threat against its authority to maintain order. This logic resulted in a situation in which “women could both *have* and *be* property,” with the sexual side of a woman alienated from the rest of herself, holding a “propertied woman responsible for protecting the human property in herself that belonged to her husband.”<sup>28)</sup>

Judith Fröhlich has categorized the cutting of hair as a stigmatizing penalty in the same conceptual framework as branding and cutting off extremities, sharing a common purpose “to change someone’s features, stigmatize them, and reduce them to the status of an outcast.”<sup>29)</sup> Katsuura Noriko has further argued that the loss of hair was tied to both status and sexuality, and that cutting hair could signal a release from female sexuality when an act of Buddhist renunciation was undertaken voluntarily. However, there was also a stigma associated with the hair-cutting, and “[s]hort hair came to signify low social standing and accompanied a woman’s loss of status.” Regarding the peasant wives in Ategawa, she has suggested that a wife’s voluntary renunciation was seen as a “unilateral declaration of divorce from her husband.” Therefore, “the kind of penalty imposed by the [Ategawa estate land] steward effectively deprived women of their secular freedom, abrogated their sexual rights, and severed their marital relations” by making them appear as nuns, even if they had not actually joined a Buddhist order.<sup>30)</sup> Modern morality in many cultures would find a legal system repugnant if it blamed women for the violence they suffer; not so for medieval lawmakers. As educators, if we follow Midgley’s advice to pass judgment and simply present *tsujigiri* or other punishments as violence out of its historical context, we miss an opportunity to see events from a different perspective and lose the nuances that Tonomura, Fröhlich, and Katsuura elucidated in their research.

### ***Status***

Although gender, status, and religious concerns were physically expressed in women’s bodies at the crossroads in premodern Japan, when we view the vocabulary of violence in a broader context, we see that this was not simply violent misogyny or behavior limited to these physical locations. As historian Shimizu Katsuyuki’s exhaustive study on ear and nose mutilations in Japanese history has shown, violence that appears abhorrent to us in the present day was

justified as an act of mercy in certain contexts. He has argued for the possibility that these acts employed a vocabulary of violence that was meant to express compassion rather than cruelty. Perhaps we could consider them as a premodern form of “virtue signaling.” Amidst the physical, mental, sexual, and economic violence during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hideyoshi’s violence stood out from other examples, not so much for how it was expressed but for the context in which it was used and the messages it conveyed to contemporaries. Such disfiguring and stigmatizing violence was not necessarily seen as a “cruel” punishment—it was often a lesser punishment adopted in lieu of the death penalty.<sup>31)</sup> In some cases, it was a gendered punishment, applied to women as a lighter sentence of symbolic rather than actual death. According to Shimizu, another consideration was religion; monks were similarly subjected to ear and nose mutilations, avoiding the death penalty because they were regarded as “holy beings.” As for the “26 Japanese saints” addressed in NHK’s *Sanadamaru*, he argued that by adding the mutilations to the primary punishment of death, Hideyoshi’s decision gave the punishment an additional or cruel element, marking a turning point in the legal tradition.<sup>32)</sup> While Shimizu makes an important point, we should also remember that Hideyoshi was not inventing a new form of cruelty on his own—he was redefining an already existing vocabulary of violence.<sup>33)</sup>

Until this point in the paper, we have treated men and women in a monolithic manner, but when we consider examples of violence at a more granular level, we can better understand a broader range of meaning for the acts. Although undoubtedly less common than violence done by men against women, there was at least the possibility of women visiting disfiguring or stigmatizing violence upon others. The Zen monk Unzen Taikyoku (1421–?) recorded in a diary entry from 1468 that a woman cut off the noses of children in a village and used them as medicine to try and grow back a new nose for herself. The outraged villagers captured her and drowned her in a bog.<sup>34)</sup> Although only

a single anecdote, and hardly conclusive, putting her to death could have expressed a shared understanding that there were limits to how such violence ought to be employed, suggesting that childhood was a status to be spared from such acts.

Unzen Taikyoku did not mention what was wrong with her original nose, but we can speculate about the conditions that led the woman to engage in this horrific behavior. It may be that she had already lost her nose as a result of being punished with leniency in the past, and there was no measure available any longer to commute her sentence, so she was executed by the villagers. Perhaps her physical appearance was due to disease or some other reason beyond her control, and that stigmatized her in the eyes of others, so she wanted to avoid being associated with crime, punishment, and outcast status. Another disturbing possibility is that this incident shows a kind of mob justice, with the woman being dealt with in a particularly harsh manner not only because she was preying on children but also because she dared to arrogate the right of men to inflict this kind of violence on others. These interpretations are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. They involve issues of violence, gender, and justice that, even in their complexity, would be more satisfying than a simple, straightforward “virtue signaling”-style modern condemnation of this woman’s behavior. After all, the disfigurement and stigmatization of children in an attempt at cosmetic enhancement is hardly a normative practice in cultures anywhere at any time. On the other hand, what we would now see as deep-rooted misogynistic attitudes and policies are similar to actual problems students will face in their own lives. Uncovering the underlying logic of this premodern violence could be an exercise in holding up a historical mirror to expose similar conditions in the present day.

In terms of status, what kind of norms were there for the use of disfiguring and stigmatizing violence? We might expect upper-class women at the court, who moved in the circles of powerful men, to be exempt from it. Surprisingly,

though, the literary and historical sources show otherwise. Commenting on a woman leaving her husband, the narrator of the *Ōkagami*, an anonymous work of historical fiction from the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century, said that he “would probably shave (*soru*) my wife’s gray head and also lop off (*kakiotosu*) the end of her nose,” if his wife did such a thing to him.<sup>35)</sup> According to the *Azuma kagami*, a historical account of the Kamakura military government, in 1190 the warrior Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199) exhibited mercy when he wounded (*kizu*) a woman’s face and expelled her for lying about her identity, instead of killing her as he had planned to do.<sup>36)</sup> It is noteworthy that the sources do not suggest any criticism of the punishments. In contrast to the apparent acceptance of disfiguring punishments for upper-class women, the ones for upper-class men could be heavily criticized. The *Genpei jōsuiki*, a war tale from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, censured the Taira clan for an 1170 attack on the Regent in which they cut off (*kiru*) the topknots (*motodori*) of the Regent’s men for showing disrespect towards a young member of the clan.<sup>37)</sup> Later in the text, Taira Tokitada (1127?–1189) was criticized for mutilating the face of an imperial messenger in 1182 by branding (*yakitsukeru*) his cheek (*hō*) with a wave pattern, cutting off his topknot, and slicing off (*sogu*) his nose.<sup>38)</sup>

One type of acceptable mutilation for men of any social class occurred to warriors after their deaths. While members of other social groups might suffer stigmatizing violence in life, prominent warriors, in particular, faced the prospect of post-mortem mutilations. Their decapitated heads were valuable, for example, because they were proof of battlefield service and could later be exchanged for rewards.<sup>39)</sup> When it was impractical or impossible to take an enemy’s head, ears and noses were acceptable substitutes. A warrior nearing defeat sometimes went to great lengths in order to prevent an enemy from capturing these body parts. According to the *Taiheiki*, when Prince Morinaga (1308–1335) was pitted against an overwhelming enemy force in 1332 and survival seemed unlikely, he told his men:

After shooting defensive arrows while our stores endure, let us tranquilly take our lives, that our names may survive for a [*sic*] myriad generations. But take care not to rip open your bellies before me. You must strip the skin from my face (*tsura no kawa wo hagi*) after I have killed myself, cut off my ears and nose (*mimi hana wo kitte*) so that none may know me, and throw away my head. If my head is hung up to be exposed at a prison gate, those in the realm who think to support our cause will lose heart, and the defiant spirit of the military will increase.<sup>40)</sup>

This fictional account valorized Prince Morinaga, and we can understand from it that suicides like this were seen as neither cowardly nor irrational. They fulfilled a need to protect parts of the body that were associated with one's identity. The connection between the stigmatizing punishments and identity in the examples in this paper might explain why mutilation of the eyes, tongue, eyebrows, and other less-distinct parts of the face was not documented more often. The purpose was not necessarily to be cruel or to cause physical pain—it could be used to signal the virtue of the person employing stigmatizing violence in place of death.

As with upper-class men and women, we can also detect some status distinctions in practice and policy among lower-class men and women—disfiguring punishments for men generally targeted hair, faces, and hands while those for women generally focused on hair, noses, and ears.<sup>41)</sup> For many crimes, lower-class men were simply punished with a haircut. A record from 1332 stipulated the punishment of cutting off topknots for gambling or cutting, beating, or assaulting others.<sup>42)</sup> Katsumata Shizuo has posited that the agony or pain intended by the punishment came from having one's appearance changed in this way.<sup>43)</sup> The loss of hair marked one as a criminal outside of society, which would have been challenging enough for lower-class men to bear, but for an upper-class man like the imperial messenger mentioned earlier, we can only

imagine his shame when he reported back to the retired emperor. In addition to cutting hair, facial branding and disfigurement of the hands were associated with lower-class men. Judith Fröhlich has contended that the removal of fingers was both a mirroring and a stigmatizing punishment. For example, the *Meigetsuki*, a court diary from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, recorded an incident from 1226 in which gamblers had their noses sheared off (*kezuru*) and two of their fingers cut off.<sup>44)</sup> A supplementary law from 1303 for the *Goseibai shikimoku* called for cutting off a finger if a gambler was caught twice.<sup>45)</sup> Facial disfigurement was stipulated as a punishment for some crimes. According to Article 15 of the *Goseibai shikimoku*, “if one of the lower class commits it [forgery], he shall be branded (*osu*) on the face (*omote*) by burning (*kain*).”<sup>46)</sup> Facial branding was also later stipulated in supplementary laws—as punishment for human trafficking in 1290 and theft in 1303.<sup>47)</sup> As for lower-class women, four examples from the Warring States Period (c. 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) provide some evidence for its application as a lenient alternative to more severe punishments. In 1486 the monks of Kōfukuji had the ears and nose of a female thief cut off.<sup>48)</sup> And, in 1531 the monks of Yakushiji were planning to execute a woman for an extramarital affair that had led to the murder of one monk by another, but relented by slicing off (*sogu*) her nose and shaving off (*soru*) half of her hair instead.<sup>49)</sup> In 1554, a woman in the imperial residence was caught stealing and was taken out of the residence to have her nose cut off (*sogu*), but a priest’s pleadings saved her from that fate.<sup>50)</sup> In 1555, the monks of Yakushiji reduced a woman’s punishment from execution to cutting off her ears and nose (*hana mimi seibai*).<sup>51)</sup>

How can we connect this bewildering array of historical examples to the heritage approach, with its focus on explicit lessons that can be learned for the present day? For the lower-class men, except in cases of excessive punishment, such as when Taira Tokitada reportedly cut off the right hands of 28 thieves during his tenure as head of the Imperial police, both the mutilation of men’s fingers and the branding of their faces went unchallenged in the sources, and

the violence against women appears to have been accepted as well.<sup>52)</sup> As Shimizu has argued, the mutilation of ears and the nose was considered a lenient alternative to execution,<sup>53)</sup> but we can also detect a possible connection here with the “virtue signaling” discussed in the first half of this paper. Judging from the four examples from the Warring States Period involving priests, it may have been that they sought to portray themselves this way as examples of their compassion. After all, they were able to reduce the punishments for the women, resulting in a kind of “virtue signaling” that was inscribed on the bodies of those they “helped.” The Ategawa land steward has understandably been judged harshly by modern historians for how he mistreated the peasants under him, but the disfigurement of the lower-class women by priests demonstrates that they had their faces threatened by all manner of men, not only land stewards. As we saw earlier in this paper, textbook editors have framed the Ategawa incident as a kind of power struggle between the emerging strength of warriors and the exploitation of commoners, suggesting an oblique criticism of military governments in general. Yet, even priests were complicit in disfigurements, and it was, thus, not simply a matter of status or the militarization of society.

We could alternatively frame the Ategawa incident in terms of gender, with the men taking up opposing positions and the women becoming the targets of violence. In fact, if we survey other historical sources that have received less attention for the violence they documented, we can see that commoners also mutilated one another—or, more specifically, that lower-class men sought to disfigure lower-class women. A chronicle called the *Yamashina keraiki* contains an account of a young woman who was apprehended by villagers in 1489 for stealing some crops from a field. Although her captors wanted to slice off (*sogu*) her nose, she was spared by the intervention of local priests.<sup>54)</sup> Significantly, the villagers were calling for the stigmatizing punishment, indicating that the peasants of Ategawa estate would have considered the land

steward's punishments justified under different circumstances. Admittedly, the explanation grows more complex when we contextualize the Ategawa incident with other historical records from the medieval period. However, the additional complexity also enables us to go beyond conventional textbook explanations to understand better the subtle nuances expressed in the premodern vocabulary of violence.

### *Violence as Mercy for Members of the Priesthood*

As we have seen in previous examples, in addition to gender and status, religious factors were involved in the application of stigmatizing and disfiguring punishments. It was not unheard of for monks to mutilate themselves. A biography recorded that the monk Myōe's (1173–1232) desire to leave the secular world motivated him to disfigure himself in 1196 and that he pondered which body part would be best to remove:

But if I gouge out my eye, it would make it difficult for me to study the scriptures. If I cut off my nose, I was afraid that water from my nose would taint the sacred texts. If I cut off my hand, I would not be able to make the *mudrā* gestures. But then I thought: if I cut off my ear, without impairing my hearing, I would be able to deform myself. Thereupon, pledging a great vow, with my mind resolute, I sat before Tathāgata Buddhālocanā. Raising my ear, tying it to the altar's leg, holding a sword in my hand, I cut off my right ear.<sup>55)</sup>

In a curious twist of fate, the land steward in Ategawa estate was related to Myōe. Based on this, Koyama Yasunori has suggested that Myōe's act of religious devotion influenced the land steward to commit the same act of violence against the peasants' wives. Shimizu has reasoned, however, that this was unlikely for two reasons. If that were the case, then the land steward

would not have also cut off their ears and hair, but more importantly, there were numerous other examples of this act besides Myōe's.<sup>56)</sup> Rather than serving as a precedent for the Ategawa incident, Myōe's behavior illustrates how gender, status, and religious concerns could transform a physical disfigurement into an expression of virtue—in Myōe's case, religious devotion. Ryūichi Abe has connected Myōe's self-mutilation with the punishment of criminals, interpreting the principle behind the facial disfigurement of criminals to be "that the punished had committed crimes that go against the essential values of humanity."<sup>57)</sup> What was also crucial in Myōe's case was that "the punished became 'less than human' and lost their appropriate membership in society. They were thus called *hinin*, which literally means 'non-human,' which in the medieval Japanese context referred to outcasts."<sup>58)</sup> The general consensus among scholars is that there was a connection between disfigurement, outcasts, and a symbolic "death" by disfigurement in society.

Elite men were generally spared from such violence, perhaps to avoid this symbolic death, but what about men with religious occupations? In an anecdote in the *Genpei jōsuiki*, the villainous Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181) discovered in 1177 that the monk Saikō (?–1177) was involved in a plot to overthrow him. During his interrogation of Saikō, Kiyomori flew into a fit of rage and jumped off the veranda into the garden where Saikō was being held to "kick (*keru*) and stomp (*fumu*) on his cheeks (*hō*)." Moreover, after torturing him and receiving his confession, one of Kiyomori's men "stomped on his head (*fumu*) and split open (*waru*) his mouth."<sup>59)</sup> The details of the event were probably apocryphal, and the connection of this punishment with Kiyomori suggests criticism of his unusual behavior in much the same way that the NHK episode that we saw at the beginning of this paper attributed it to the hegemon at that time, Hideyoshi.

There was an additional complication for Kiyomori that Hideyoshi did not face from his Christian victims because the angry spirit of the Buddhist priest Saikō invaded the pregnant body of Kiyomori's daughter and endangered the

child's birth. Kiyomori's mistreatment of Saikō put his daughter and grandson at risk because, in the medieval world, supernatural forces could commit acts of violence. Katsumata Shizuo argued that monks were part of a sacred realm. He suggested that ordinary people could obtain the same protection when they went on pilgrimages in the medieval world because "the assumption of a pilgrim's appearance was a sign that the person in question had moved from the secular realm to the realm of the sacred, and any attempt to fetch the pilgrim back would have violated the order of the sacred realm and was avoided for its potential to offend the gods." As evidence, he cited a 1391 episode from the *Meitokuki* in which defeated warriors fled to nearby temples, shaved their heads, and, while enduring ridicule, attempted to appear as monks in the hopes of evading pursuit.<sup>60)</sup>

Despite the danger of supernatural retribution, restrained violence against monks could be tolerated. An incident involving Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–1189) in the *Chronicle of Yoshitsune (Gikeiki)*, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century narrative, suggested not only gradations in punishments for warriors and commoners, but that cutting off the ears and nose of a religious figure was a lenient alternative to beheading.<sup>61)</sup> Concealed at a temple in Nara, the tragic hero Yoshitsune was accosted by several monks who wanted to steal his sword. Hoping that he would choose shame over a fight, they yelled out "if he's a warrior, cut off his topknot and chase him outside the temple grounds. If he is a commoner, shear off (*kezuru*) his ears and nose and chase him away." Their comments illustrated a status distinction for stigmatizing punishments, namely that cutting off the hair of warriors was equivalent to shearing off the ears and noses of lower-class men. The story continued, with Yoshitsune handily dispatching most of them and putting the remaining ones to flight with their injuries. After he had pursued and captured the leader, Tajima, he said,

"I would like to chop off (*kiru*) your head and throw it away. However, you

are a monk, and I am a layman. It would be like killing the Buddha for a layman to kill a monk. Therefore, I will let you live. You must not commit such violence again. Tomorrow announce to the people in Nara that you fought with Gen Kurō Hōgan [Yoshitsune], and they will think of you as a tough man. If someone asks, ‘where is your proof?’ and you say ‘I have none,’ then they will not believe you, so I will give you this as proof.” He grabbed the big monk and held him down. Then, he stood on the middle of his chest, took out his sword, sheared off (*kezuru*) his ears and nose, and released him. Tajima said, “Death would have been better,” but his complaint came to nothing.<sup>62)</sup>

Shimizu has claimed that typically a warrior would have cut off an assailant’s head, yet Yoshitsune spared the monk’s life and mutilated him instead. He concluded from this that the act of cutting off the ears and nose was used as reduced punishment substituted for execution. Although we might understand Yoshitsune’s behavior as bizarre or gruesome, Shimizu believed that within the context of medieval society, it would have been interpreted as an act of leniency akin to the facial disfigurement of women.<sup>63)</sup> Indeed, the tone of the anecdote supports Shimizu’s interpretation, and the authors of the text might have intended to portray Yoshitsune as signaling virtue, but was it really leniency if the recipient considered it to be worse than death? The victim did not seem to think so. Rather than a flaw in the internal consistency of the narrative, this could have been an understated criticism of the hero’s violent behavior, suggesting that the worst monk did not deserve such treatment. Even if the violence was considered to be a form of leniency, Yoshitsune did not explain his actions that way.

It is no easy task to include this kind of historical contextualization in the classroom, and instructors would need to judge how much detail is appropriate, but perhaps the complexity itself is a lesson worth learning. The didactic tone

of the anecdotes about Kiyomori and Yoshitsune are premodern versions of a heritage approach that favors concise lessons drawn from the past and applied to the present. The “virtue” signaled by Yoshitsune might not resonate with students today because it is based on an unfamiliar historical context. However, by exposing students to the complex historical vocabulary of violence from multiple perspectives, even ones we deem abhorrent, we may be able to explain it better to students. In addition, taking a heritage approach, we can suggest how its logic eerily resonates with incidents and conditions we see today in many places around the world, where violent acts are condemned by some and praised by others amidst strikingly similar concerns about gender, status, religion.

## Conclusion

Violence, particularly disfigurements and stigmatization involving the ears, nose, and other areas on and around a person’s face, is a gruesome and unseemly aspect of any culture. Nevertheless, as evidenced by its appearance within the classroom and popular culture, it is a subject of widespread interest and one worthy of study. This type of violence often served a purpose, and we should be attentive to how people rationalized it in the past, even when we condemn it in the present. The 16<sup>th</sup> century was a period when Japan was increasingly cosmopolitan, with a dangerously combustible mix of different cultures, religious beliefs, and violent solutions to problems. The violence visited upon foreign missionaries by Hideyoshi was expressed using a pre-existing vocabulary of violence, not simply a clash of cultures or an aberration unique to him. The entire country was highly militarized, and it often found itself in a state of war, so we can suppose that there was a higher threshold for violence in general. More specifically, as we have seen, there was widespread acceptance of its use for the purpose of disfigurement and stigmatization.

We can draw lessons for the present from premodern violence, such as that which the character of Hideyoshi employed in the NHK television drama. We can also sympathize with the protagonist who signaled his virtue to others by expressing opposition to it. However, certain nuances are lost when violence is presented as part of Japan's "heritage" in this manner. When violence was meant to disfigure and stigmatize, it involved concerns over gender, religion, and status that the television dramas and textbooks typically do not address. Historically, within a patriarchal society, women were often the target of violence that was meant to both send a warning to other women through mutilations while also signaling the virtue of the men who were employing it out of supposed leniency. After all, even though the term "virtue signaling" is a relatively recent coinage, the concept and its practice have existed throughout recorded history, even if the men expressed it in a different manner than we would expect today.

In the case of the Ategawa peasants' petition from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, they may have agreed with historians who have called the land steward's behavior cruel, while arriving at this conclusion by an entirely different logic—notably, without categorically rejecting violence against women. We can see that the threats of violence were not necessarily the main focus of the text, even if those have become the defining characteristic in textbooks. Importantly, the acts performed by the Ategawa land steward were inflicted *by* warriors, but the same violence was not inflicted *on* them while they were alive. Men in positions of power like the land steward in Ategawa were the ones who wrote the vocabulary of stigmatizing violence into the laws and onto the faces of others below them in society. Violent behavior was conditioned by circumstance, and while there might have been complaints about how violence was used, whom it was used against, and on what occasions it occurred, people in premodern Japan generally did not contest the vocabulary itself.

## Acknowledgments

An earlier Japanese version of this paper appeared in *Kōsaku suru shūkyō to minzoku: Kōryū to shōtotsu no hikakushi*, edited by Kage Toshio and published by Bensei Shuppan, and I am grateful to the editor and publisher for their kind permission to publish a modified English-language version of it here.<sup>64)</sup> This paper was first presented at a 2008 conference at Columbia University, where I received helpful advice from the audience and the mediator Max Moerman. During the intervening years, I have also received suggestions for improvement from Kage Toshio, Kuroko Maki, Jürgen Paul Melzer, Seiji Shirane, Toyozumi Makoto, and W. Evan Young that have informed its revision.

## References

- 1) NHK, *Taiga drama Sanadamaru*, Episode 30, “Tasogare,” 5:53–6:00. According to the episode, the *San Felipe* carrying cargo worth 700,000 *koku* was caught in a storm and sent to Urado Bay under the orders of the Chōsogabe in Tosa province, and this was based on an actual incident that occurred in 1596. For more on the *San Felipe* and other significant shipwrecks during the period, see Luke S. Roberts, “Shipwrecks and Flotsam: The Foreign World in Edo-Period Tosa,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 70, no. 1 (2015): 83–122.
- 2) Richard Holt, “Afterword: History and Heritage in Sport,” in *Sport, History, and Heritage: Studies in Public Representation*, edited by Jeff Hill, Kevin Moore, and Jason Wood, 263–266 (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2012), 263.
- 3) L[eslie]. P[oles]. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (New York: New York Review Books, 1953 [2002]), 17.
- 4) David Lowenthal, “The Past of the Future: From the Foreign to the Undiscovered Country,” in *Manifestos for History*, edited by Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow, 205–219 (New York: Routledge, 2007), 211.

- 5) Ann Rigney, "Being an Improper Historian," in *Manifestos for History*, edited by Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow, 149–159 (New York: Routledge, 2007), 155–156.
- 6) Midgley proposes this definition of *tsujigiri* in her essay, though it is unclear which dictionary or book she was using as a source. See "Trying Out One's New Sword," in *Heart and Mind*, 69–75 (London: Methuen, 1981), 69.
- 7) Kenneth G. Henshall, *A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Superpower*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 7. While this book may not be representative of popular history about premodern violence, it has appeared on university syllabi and is currently in its third printing, suggesting that it is relatively widely read.
- 8) *Ibid.*, 7.
- 9) *Ibid.*, 44, 47, 56, and 143.
- 10) David Foster Wallace, "Tense Present: Democracy, English, and the Wars over Usage," in *Harper's Magazine* (April, 2001): 39–58, esp. 55.
- 11) Geoffrey Miller, ed. "Preface," in *Virtue Signaling: Essays on Darwinian Politics and Free Speech* (Cambrian Moon, 2019), i–xii.
- 12) *Ibid.*, ix.
- 13) A third incident students might encounter is that of "Hoichi the Earless" from Lafcadio Hearn, "The Story of Mimi-Nashi-Hōichi," in *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1904), 3–20. Although its use in the classroom does not appear to be as common as the two mentioned in this essay, it is easily accessible for free online, and there are readers targeted at junior high school students that contain this story. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when students were forced to stay home from school and educators posted many materials online, this story (in translation) was recommended to third-year students at one junior high school.
- 14) An excerpt from the petition appears, for example, in one of the most widely used Japanese high school textbooks. See Ishii Susumu, Gomi Fumihiko, Sasayama Haruo, Takano Toshihiko, eds., *Shōsetsu Nihonshi* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppan, 2005), 103.

- 15) This translation was done by Judith Fröhlich. See *Rulers, Peasants and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Japan: Ategawa no shō 1004, 1304* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 155.
- 16) Katsumata Shizuo “Mimi wo kiri, hana wo sogu,” in *Chūsei no tsumi to batsu*, edited by Amino Yoshihiko, Ishii Susumu, Kasamatsu Hiroshi, and Katsumata Shizuo, 27–42 (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppansha, 1983), 29. In this case, “lynching” seems to be used in the legal sense of a private punishment without due process of law.
- 17) Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen War Stories* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 195–196.
- 18) Donald Keene, tr., *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 46–47.
- 19) Shimizu Katsuyuki, *Mimi hana sogi no Nihonshi* (Tokyo: Yōsensha, 2015), 90.
- 20) Inoue Hiroshi, “Chūgakkō kokugoka no koten gakushū ni okeru kaiga tekisuto no katsuyō: *Tsurezuregusa-e* wo yomitoku,” *Chūtō kyōiku kenkyū kiyō, Hiroshima Daigaku Fuzoku Fukuyama Chūkōtō gakkō* 54 (March 2014): 133–138, esp. 134.
- 21) Keene, *Essays in Idleness*, 50.
- 22) Jordan Sand, “Mary Midgley’s Misleading Essay, “Trying Out One’s New Sword”” (Unpublished, 2019), 1–6, esp. 2.
- 23) Helen Craig McCullough, tr., *The Taiheiki* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 380.
- 24) Ishii Ryōsuke, ed. *Tokugawa kinrei kō, goshū III* (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1960), 426–427.
- 25) The remainder of this essay will focus on the medieval period, but for a lucid explanation for the logic of benevolence, punishments, and power in the early modern period, see Daniel V[ernon]. Botsman, *Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. 28–33 and 41–61.
- 26) John Carey Hall, *Japanese Feudal Law* (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1979), 39. The translation was originally published in 1906.
- 27) The translation is based on Hall, who only has a partial translation of the article, and Fröhlich, who has a partial translation of the remainder. See Hall, *Japanese Feudal Law*, 35 and Fröhlich, *Rulers, Peasants and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Japan*, 186.

- 28) Hitomi Tonomura, "Sexual Violence Against Women: Legal and Extralegal Treatment in Premodern Societies," in *Women and Class in Japanese History*, edited by Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walthall, and Wakita Haruko, 135–152 (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1999), 140–141.
- 29) Fröhlich, *Rulers, Peasants and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Japan*, 187.
- 30) Katsuura Noriko, "Tonsure Forms for Nuns: Classification of Nuns according to Hairstyle," in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, edited by Barbara Ruch, 109–129 (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002), 124–125.
- 31) Shimizu, *Mimi hana sogi no Nihonshi*, 85–87.
- 32) Ibid., 144–145.
- 33) In fact, we can see a parallel to his behavior in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181) mutilated a Buddhist monk's face and had him executed (addressed in more detail later in the paper).
- 34) *Hekizan nichiroku*, in *Zōho zoku shiryō taisei*, Vol. 20, edited by Takeuchi Rizō (Tokyo: Rinsen Shoten, 1982), 1468 (Ōnin 2)/4/22, 200.
- 35) Tachibana Kenji and Katō Shizuko, eds. *Ōkagami*, in *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 34 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1996), 270. McCullough has translated this passage as "I'd shave my wife's gray head and claw off her nose." See Helen Craig McCullough, trans., *Ōkagami: the Great Mirror: Fujiwara Michinaga (966–1027) and His Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 175.
- 36) *Azuma kagami*, in *Shintei zōho kokushi taikei*, Vols. 32–33 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1964), 1190 (Kenkyū 1)/6/23, 32: 387. Although the source does not tell us her true identity, her claim to have been a member of the royal family suggests that she was of a high enough rank to make the lie believable.
- 37) *Genpei jōsuiki*, 6 vols., edited by Atsumi Kaoru (Tokyo: Benseisha, 1978), 1: 137 (Chapter 3). For a printed version, see *Shintei genpei jōsuiki*, 6 vols, edited by Mizuhara Hajime (Tokyo: Shin Jinbutsu Ōraisha, 1991), 1: 158. I am assuming that the foreriders and escorts were neither warriors nor lower class men, but have not yet

been able to confirm this. Even if we consider them in another category, the fact remains that the disfigurement of upper-class men was discouraged and likely uncommon.

- 38) *Genpei jōsuiki*, 5: 457. (Chapter 38). For a printed version, see *Shintei genpei jōsuiki*, 5: 129. We need to read this with some skepticism, though. Not only was the account different than that found in other variants of the tale, such as the Kakuichi *Heike*, it was internally inconsistent within the *Genpei jōsuiki* itself. The messenger's story appeared three times in it: once in Chapter 38 when he delivered the retired emperor's message to Tokitada (introduced above) and again in Chapters 44 and 46 when the story of his mistreatment was being retold. In the first retelling, only the cutting off of the hair and nose were mentioned. In the second retelling, only the branding was mentioned. See Helen Craig McCullough, *Tale of the Heike* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 332 and *Genpei jōsuiki*, 6: 235 or *Shintei genpei jōsuiki*, 6: 73; *Genpei jōsuiki*, 6: 330 or *Shintei genpei jōsuiki*, 6: 121.
- 39) Thomas Donald Conlan, *State of War: The Violent Order of Fourteenth-Century Japan* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2003), 21.
- 40) McCullough, *The Taiheiki*, 147 (Chapter 5).
- 41) Shimizu has argued that women seem to have had their ears and noses mutilated more than men, but he does not distinguish between upper- and lower-class women. See Shimizu Katsuyuki, *Muromachi shakai no sōjō to chitsujō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2004), 277.
- 42) *Kōyasan monjo: Iewake 1*, in *Dai Nihon komonjo* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo, 1903-1907), 6: 486-490 (no. 1546).
- 43) Katsumata, "Mimi wo kiri, hana wo sogu," 36.
- 44) *Kunchū Meigetsuki*, 8 vols, edited by Inamura Ei'ichi (Matsue: Matsue Imai Shoten, 2002), 1226 (Karoku 2)/2/14, 4: 163.
- 45) *Tsuika hō*, in *Chūsei hōsei shiryōshū*, vol. 1, edited by Satō Shin'ichi and Ikeuchi Yoshisuke (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1955), 309-310 (no. 707, Kengen 2).

- 46) *Goseibai shikimoku*, in *Chūsei hōsei shiryōshū*, vol. 1, edited by Satō Shin'ichi and Ikeuchi Yoshisuke (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1955), 10–11. In English, see John Carey Hall, *Japanese Feudal Law*, 25.
- 47) *Tsuika hō*, 284 (no. 625, Shōō 3) and 309 (no. 706, Kengen 2).
- 48) *Daijōin jisha zōjiki*, 12 vols., edited by Tsuji Zennosuke (Tokyo: Sankyō Shoten, 1931–1937), 1486 (Bunmei 18)/1/26, 8: 413.
- 49) Cited in Shimizu, *Muromachi shakai no sōjō to chitsujō*, 274–275 (Kyōroku 4) 1531/7/26.
- 50) *Tokitsugukyōki*, 3 vols., edited by Kokusho kankōkai (Tokyo: Heibunsha, 1998), 1554 (Tenbun 23)/11/7 and 11/9, 423–424. Her identity is unclear. From the context, I take her to be a woman who served in some capacity at court, but not part of the aristocracy.
- 51) Cited in Shimizu, *Muromachi shakai no sōjō to chitsujō*, 274–275 1555 (Tenbun 24)/6. I follow Shimizu's interpretation of this as cutting off the ears and nose.
- 52) *Genpei jōsuiki*, 5: 457 (Chapter 38). For a printed version, see *Shintei genpei jōsuiki*, 5: 129. Tales about the Heike were heavily influenced by Buddhist thought, and may well have been authored by Buddhist priests, so this criticism of Taira no Tokitada could be read as “virtue signaling” by the priests as well.
- 53) Shimizu, *Muromachi shakai no sōjō to chitsujō*, 280.
- 54) *Yamashina keraiki*, in *Shiryō sanshū*, 6 vols, edited by Toyoda Takeshi and Iikura Harutake (Tokyo: Zokugunsho ruijū kanseikai, 1967–1973), 1489 (Chōkyō 3)/7/13 and 7/14, 5: 34–36.
- 55) Translated and cited in Ryūichi Abe, “Swords, Words, and Deformity: On Myōe's Eccentricity,” in *Discourse and Ideology in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, edited by Richard K. Payne and Taigen Dan Leighton, 148–159 (New York: Routledge, 2006), 152.
- 56) Shimizu, *Muromachi shakai no sōjō to chitsujō*, 291–292.
- 57) *Ibid.*, 153.

- 58) Ibid., 153. Applying this insight to the Ategawa peasant petition, Fröhlich and Katsuura have convincingly argued that the wives would have become outcasts, and “the peasants of Ategawa no shō thus accused the steward of potentially depriving the community of its women.” See Fröhlich, *Rulers, Peasants and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Japan*, 187.
- 59) *Genpei jōsuiki*, 1: 261. For the Kakuichi *Heike*’s version of the story in English, see McCullough, *Tale of the Heike*, 65.
- 60) Katsumata Shizuo, “The Structure of the *Sekkyō* ‘Sanshō dayū’: Time and Space Sacred and Profane,” in *Acta Asiatica* 81 (September 2001): 20–30, esp. 28. The *Meitokuki* is a record of a rebellion that occurred in 1391.
- 61) See Shimizu, *Muromachi shakai no sōjō to chitsujō*, 278.
- 62) *Gikeiki*, in *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 62, edited by Kajihara Masaaki (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 2000), 315–316. For the English translation, see Helen Craig McCullough, *Yoshitsune: A Fifteenth-Century Chronicle* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1966), 209–210.
- 63) Shimizu, *Muromachi shakai no sōjō to chitsujō*, 278.
- 64) Christopher M. Mayo, “Nihon chūsei no ‘bōryoku’ to gendai no ‘kyōiku,’” in *Kōsaku suru shūkyō to minzoku: Kōryū to shōtotsu no hikakushi*, edited by Kage Toshio (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2021), 161–180.