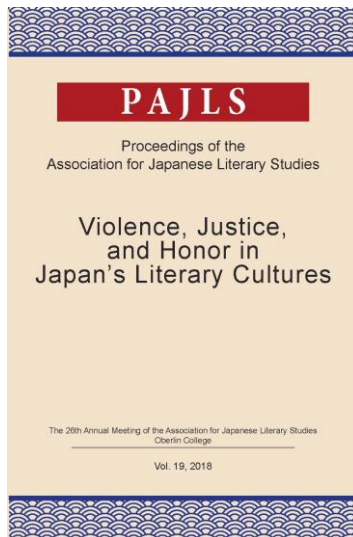


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BODIES AND VIOLENCE IN THE MUSHA INCIDENT

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At a sporting event in the model district of Musha in the mountains of central Taiwan, an alliance of Ataiyal aborigine groups indiscriminately attacked Japanese men, women, and children on October 27, 1930, murdering 134 people.² This so-called Musha Incident was the bloodiest indigenous uprising against the colonial order during the five decades that Japan ruled Taiwan. It led to a heated debate about Japan's colonial policies in the national Diet and to the resignation of the top two colonial officials in Taipei. Over the subsequent months, the Japanese military launched a counterattack and crushed the uprising with air power, modern weaponry and poison gas, killing an estimated 1000 men, women, and children.

While the Musha Incident is often seen as an example of violent resistance to Japan's colonial rule, I am primarily concerned in this paper with the symbolic violence of Japanese fictional narratives that tell of the event. This bloodless violence, a product of language, consists of tropes and metaphors of primitivism that are occasionally derogatory and discriminatory but more often positive and even attractive on the surface. To give a negative example of colonial language, the Japanese routinely referred to the aborigines of the highlands by the term *seiban* (raw savage) throughout most of the colonial period. Derived from Qing terminology, the term distinguished aborigines who had assimilated to Chinese norms ("cooked") and resided mainly in the plains from the non-assimilated ("raw") groups that lived mainly in the highlands; until 1945, this was by far the most commonly used appellation to refer to aborigines in Japan's colonial archive.

More broadly, however, the discourse of primitivism that many Japanese employed when speaking of the aborigines is appealing and aestheticizing. Officials of the colonial state considered the rebels of Musha as bloodthirsty enemies to be eradicated, but many others inside and outside the government paradoxically saw them as paragons of health and innocence. In 1931 the Bureau of Aboriginal Affairs, established *Riban no Tomo* (friends of savage management) to promote colonial policy reform after the Musha Incident. In the columns of this journal, police officials,

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² This total includes 2 Han Taiwanese who were mistaken as Japanese.

who lived in closest proximity with the aborigines, often described them as “innocent and pure children” and “truly loveable creatures” inhabiting a primitive paradise. One officer writes of the Ataiyal: “The evil influences of the world have passed them by. They lived without deceit or trickery and were brought up to be simple and innocent. I couldn’t help but feel that we were the ones who were hateful and pitiable.”³ As I will show, this discourse continued well past the Musha Incident, across the great divide of 1945, and arguably lives on to the present day.

Japanese writers in the imperial period often used a discourse of primitivism in their works. They viewed “primitiveness” as a feature that inhered in colonized bodies rather than to their cultures to the extent that one can distinguish body from culture. In contrast with the neurasthenic physiques of the colonizers, “primitives” had healthy and vibrant bodies that were impelled by powerful instincts. In writing about the aborigines, colonial writers had recourse to a rhetoric of blood and irresistible biological destiny. This rhetoric finds its way into the numerous Japanese literary works inspired by the 1930 Musha Incident. Notwithstanding their adoption of this rhetoric, writers sometime expressed skepticism about the notion of biology as destiny, particularly when they focused on clothing and skin as the locus of primitiveness. Even as they deploy a rhetoric of blood, they often use competing tropes of facade and clothing, suggesting that primitiveness is a disguise or thin veneer covering a lack of substance.

Among these colonizer writers, Nakamura Chihei (1908–1963) attended high school in Taiwan and subsequently returned to live in Taiwan in the late 1930s. In 1939, he wrote several stories set in aboriginal Taiwan including “Kiri no bansha” (The Misty Barbarian Village) the first fictionalized narrative to deal with the causes of the Musha Incident. A member of the Japanese romantic school (*Nihon rōmanha*), Nakamura contributed transcriptions of aboriginal legends to the Governor General Survey of Aboriginal Societies (*Sōtokufu banzoku chōsa hōkokusho densetsuhen*).⁴ In his account of the causes, both direct and distant, of the

³ Yamaji Katsuhiko, *Taiwan no shokuminchi tōchi: Mushu no yabanjin to iu gensetsu no tenkai* (Colonial rule of Taiwan: The development of the discourse of barbarians without sovereignty), (Tokyo: Nihon tosho 2004), 100–101.

⁴ Two of the transcriptions, *Jinrui zōsei* (The Creation of the Human Race) and *Taiyō seibatsu* (Conquest of the Sun), were reprinted in Nakamura’s *Taiwan shōsetsushū*. Influenced by German romanticists, the author believed that myth was the highest form of literature since it best reflected the ethnic and regional identity of a given culture. Okabayashi Minoru, “Atogaki” (Afterword), in Nakamura Chihei, *Taiwan shōsetsushū* (A collection of Taiwan stories) (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 2000), 4.

Musha Incident, Nakamura hewed closely to the official investigations of the Incident but he differed from the government in his clear expression of sympathy toward the aborigines. He sought to explore the psychological motivations of the individual leaders of the rebellion and to put “a human face” on the uprising by explaining the life incidents that caused the aborigines to attack the Japanese.⁵ In this respect, his work contrasts with most accounts of the incident that gave greater weight to the structural causes of the rebellion such as discrimination, *corvée* labor, and the desertion of aboriginal wives by their Japanese husbands. By contrast, Nakamura overlooks the collective grievances and political motives for the rebellion and concentrates instead on the bodies of the rebels.

In general, he treated the Musha Incident as a regression to “the childhood of humanity.” Ordinarily, one might expect the aborigines to grow younger as they returned to childhood but Nakamura describes their rebellion as a process of aging and decline. “Much like a middle-aged woman who is on the verge of losing her biological functions as a woman, the ferocity and primitiveness of these people had already passed its peak... Similarly, these savages were driven by their lingering savagery and violent nature to undertake one last, desperate battle with civilization, a form of life that did not suit their natures.”⁶ While nearly all writers saw the rebels as fierce warriors, Nakamura paradoxically feminized them by comparing their rebellion to menopause. By “feminizing” the aborigines and treating their rebellion as a physical symptom, he also rationalized the Musha Incident as an eruption of instinct and a catharsis of affect. Stripping it of any political significance, he treated it as a natural phenomenon much as one might describe a hurricane or a volcanic eruption.

Nevertheless, Nakamura was perfectly aware that his explanation failed to account for the fact that the rebellion was led by well assimilated aboriginal groups and that it took place in the model village of Musha. The rebels, he concedes at one point, showed “incredible ability in cooperation, detailed planning, and keeping secrets” to carry out a complicated military operation. As a result, “the Japanese cannot help but lament this ironic consequence of bestowing upon them the blessings of civilization.”⁷ In this analysis the rebellion was the unintended but logical consequence of Japan’s policies rather than an eruption of pent-up and backward

⁵ Faye Yuan Kleeman, *Under an Imperial Sun: Japanese Colonial Literature of Taiwan and the South* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 30.

⁶ Nakamura, *Taiwan shōsetsushū* (A collection of Taiwan Stories) (Tokyo: Yumani Shobo 2000), 39. All translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 42–43.

“instincts.” Nakamura pursues this line of reasoning when he describes the demise of Hanaoka Ichirō and Hanaoka Jirō, two Ataiyal youth who were models of assimilation to the Japanese colonial order. The Hanaokas were not biologically related to one another, but they were both “sons” of the same Japanese colonial order, educated by the Japanese and employed in the colonial police. After the Musha Incident, Japanese wondered what role these “brothers” had played in the uprising. In his novel Nakamura depicts the two young men as pulled in opposing directions by their love of their own people (*ninjō*) and the social obligation (*giri*) they felt toward the colonizer. They gave expression to this division by the manner in which they committed suicide. Both Hanaokas shed their aboriginal clothing and donned Japanese clothes right before killing themselves, but they chose contrasting methods of suicide that enacted and performed the duality of their identity—Ichirō committed *seppuku* in Japanese ceremonial dress while Jirō hanged himself from a tree, in accordance with aboriginal tradition. Ichirō’s death was seen as the product of his education, but *seppuku* was also a rite that belonged to Japan’s samurai history and was considered anachronistic in the modern period. Ichirō’s choice of *seppuku* represents his transformation from “raw savage” to noble savage who follows Japan’s older warrior culture rather than to a modern Japanese subject.⁸ In Nakamura’s story, however, we often find that the rhetoric of blood and irresistible biological destiny is contradicted by a rhetoric of clothing as the mark or emblem of primitive identity, notably in his account of the death of the Hanaokas. Primitivism, apparently, was skin deep and found its most appropriate signifier in clothing.

In contrast with Nakamura, Ōshika Taku (1898–1959) made no effort to explain the Musha Incident in his 1935 novella “Yabanjin” (The Savage). Ostensibly, this work is set during the Slamao rebellion, an uprising that occurred ten years before the Musha Incident, although the story is clearly also a reaction to Musha. Furthermore, the “savage” of the title is not the aboriginal “other” but rather a Japanese protagonist in search of his inner “savage.” Kawamura Minato notes that Japanese colonial writers sought “savagery” within themselves after the incorporation of “savages” into the Japanese empire.⁹ Ōshika’s discovery of his inner

⁸ The *mise en scène* of the death of the Hanaokas serves to downplay their more pragmatic motives for taking part in the Musha Incident. The Hanaokas graduated from the Taizhong Normal School, a teacher training college, but were passed over in promotion because they were not Japanese by birth. They therefore had a motive to betray the Japanese colonial state because it discriminated against the colonized in employment.

⁹ Kawamura Minato, *Nan'yō to Karafuto no bungaku* (The Literature of Nan'yō

“savage” can also be read as an individual response to Japan’s expanding empire and its rhetoric on savagery.

The same year that he wrote “Yabanjin,” Ōshika published a short essay in the journal *Kōdō* titled “The Life of the Ataiyal Tribe,” which sheds some light on his fictional work. He writes:

The presence of these people who live in the same country as we do yet retain their primitive lifestyle, was truly a precious boon for those of us who have had our hearts corroded by civilization... We civilized people should not feel ashamed of the presence of these barbarians. Nor do we have any reason to educate them to be ashamed of themselves. As far as this basic spiritual attitude is concerned, have the colonial authorities not perpetrated a fatal mistake in their policies toward the aborigines, notwithstanding the sacrifice of so many precious lives?

Following this line of reasoning, the bloody Musha Incident resulted primarily from Japan’s mistaken policies of education and civilization that taught the Ataiyal people to feel ashamed of themselves and to abandon their customs.¹⁰

Tazawa, the Japanese hero of the novella, is described as a deeply troubled, “challenged” Japanese youth.¹¹ A college dropout, he returns to his father’s home in northeast Japan and becomes involved in a labor dispute at the coal mine owned by his father. He incites a group of miners to flood one of the mines, whereupon he is “betrayed” by a union organizer to his father. The latter then banishes him to Taiwan where he works as a frontier policeman at the White Dog police station in the Taiwan highlands. He thus finds himself in a paradoxical situation: as a policeman, he occupies a position of paramount authority in the highlands but, as a rebel, he feels instinctively drawn to the “primitive” lifestyle of those he is charged to discipline. His rebellion against patriarchy and capitalism thereupon morphs into a search for a new morality of blood and manliness.

and *Karafuto*) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1994): 35.

¹⁰ Ōshika Taku, “Taiyaru no seikatsu (The Life of the Ataiyal),” *Kōdō*, 8/1935, 60–63.

¹¹ I use this term advisedly to relate the case of this colonial subject to the violent white men responsible for most mass firearm killings and acts of terror in the US. A young man arrested in February 2018 for launching a campaign of terror in Austin, Texas was recently described by the FBI as an “extremely challenged young man.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/03/22/austin-bomber-challenged-young-man-or-terrorist/?noredirect=on>.

In this search for a new virility, the trope of the primitive other becomes a catalyst for Tazawa's makeover of his identity. In effect, he internalizes the savagery that Japanese colonial discourse had projected onto the aborigines in order to effect his own liberation.

Shortly after reaching White Dog village, he is admonished by the friendly police chief Inō: "It becomes surprisingly easy to live here and put up with this savage place when you get used to the savagery around you or you yourself become a savage."¹² In the final part of this sentence, Inō hands the protagonist the menu for his self-transformation: Tazawa will "become a savage." The protagonist's descent to savagery involves a *spatial displacement* from the home islands to the colonial periphery. In Taiwan, the protagonist is free to indulge in behaviors that would not be countenanced in the Metropole. This displacement is also a *temporal regression* from the modern present to an archaic past. When he crosses to Taiwan, Tazawa discovers archaic savages living in the Japanese empire. Early in the work, he joins a punitive mission launched against a rebellious tribe and cuts off the head of an enemy warrior: "He was thrilled that he would be able to temper himself in the midst of this primitive human struggle... As he skipped over many intervening generations, the violent blood of his ancestors came back to life inside him."¹³ In this passage, taking a head is a rite of passage through which the protagonist time travels to the ancient past and reconnects with his Japanese racial ancestors.¹⁴

To become a savage, Tazawa must join the tribe and marry an aboriginal woman. From the start of the story, he is attracted to a young aboriginal woman named Taimorikaru, in whom he discovers "something animal-like and simple which sets her apart from the women of Japan" but also a "purity of heart" that Japanese observers associated with the aborigines. While he feels separated from Taimorikaru by an unbridgeable gap, he crosses over this gulf in a violent rape scene, much as he discovers that his ancestors continue to live on within him by taking a man's head. Tazawa recovers a sense of physical wholeness and health through such acts of sexual transgression and violence. After the rape, he moves to her village, puts on aboriginal clothes, daubs his face with ash and dreams of taking part in a hunting expedition with the aboriginal men. Yet, in the end his quest leads him not to a liberation but to new a form of confinement.

¹² Ōshika Taku, "Yabanjin," *Yabanjin* (1935), Kawahara Isao, ed. (Tokyo: Yumani Shuppan, 2000), 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

The savages clapped their hands and shouted when they recognized him. In the end, they barked out orders to him: “Turn on your side.” “Show us your back.” “See what it’s like walking.” He did as he was told, impressed that the passions of the conquered people had been suppressed to this point... Overcome by their power, he collapsed onto the grass; the aborigines gradually formed a ring around him. Bathing in the pale light of dawn, Tazawa rose to his feet inside this human fence. And then he began to pace restlessly like a wild animal imprisoned in a cage.¹⁵

This scene offers an inverted image of the aboriginal village itself, a gigantic cage in which the “conquered” aborigines were surrounded by Japanese guard lines and placed under the surveillance of the colonial police, a fitting ending to a story about savagery. This was, after all, the specific form of savagery that Japanese colonialism generated and nurtured. At the same time, Tazawa becomes the potential target of the violence of the men who surround him and bark out orders at him. In the end, Tazawa is fenced in by the aboriginal men and feels threatened by their gaze, a hint at the violence of the aboriginal resistance to Japanese rule that the Musha Incident manifested.

While I have stressed the prevalence of biological rhetoric of bodies and blood heretofore, I would add that the primary visible marker separating civilization and savagery is changes of clothing. By donning the outfit of the savage, Tazawa becomes a savage just as he makes himself a colonialist by putting on a policeman’s uniform. Tazawa renounces his own stable identity as colonizer by wearing aboriginal clothes, but he nevertheless treats such cross-dressing as the privilege of the male colonizer. When his wife wears a kimono and powders her face, he harshly orders her “to change back into aboriginal dress.”¹⁶

Tazawa’s cross-dressing expresses his gendered and ethnic power as a male Japanese colonial subject, whereas his denial of any such right to his wife expresses his power to define her identity: she must conform to the fixed model that he alone has the right to determine, be a *banfu* (savage wife) and nothing else.¹⁷ “Savagery” is an immutable, indelible property

¹⁵ Ibid, 58.

¹⁶ Ibid, 53.

¹⁷ Anne McClintock coins the term “ethnic cross-dressing” in *Imperial Leather*, her study of race, gender and class in British imperialism. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York:

affixed only to certain bodies whereas for Tazawa it is a performance and choice of lifestyle. When he first encounters Taimorikaru, she wears “a dark blue cotton dress fastened with a red Satsuma obi, but it did not cover at all the animal gloss of her skin and rather made it even more apparent that she was an aboriginal woman.” The animal gloss of Taimorikaru’s skin rejects the disguise she wears and highlights the body that it masks, “which makes one think of the bearing of the trees of the forests or the wild beasts.”¹⁸ While Tazawa freed his inner “savage,” he left unchanged the asymmetrical power relationship between colonizer and colonized, between husband and wife.

In 1960, some 30 years after the Musha Incident, Yoshiya Nobuko (1896–1973) wrote a story called “Bansha no Rakujitsu” (Setting Sun over the Savage Village) based on the 1930 massacre.¹⁹ In her choice of title, she evokes the catastrophic end of the Japanese empire that had taken place fifteen years before her story was published. In “Setting Sun,” she offers an account of the Musha Incident from the perspective of a disillusioned, single woman in Tokyo recollecting her early life moving across the vast spaces of the Japanese empire thanks to her father’s career working for colonial railroads. Narrated in the first-person, “Setting Sun” describes the protagonist’s spiritual development (*seishin keisei*) as a young girl growing up in Manchuria and later as a Christian missionary in the Musha region in the late 1920s. In Manchuria, she is first drawn to Christianity by a story that she reads in a magazine about an English missionary doctor named Jackson who died in 1911 treating patients during a plague in Manchuria. Later moving to Taiwan, she attends a mission school in which the vast majority of students are Han Taiwanese (*hontōjin*). While a student in Taiwan, she conceives the idea of working in the *banchi*: the villages deep in the mountainous region where the *seiban*, the natives of Taiwan, lived their primitive lives. “I had for a long time cherished the dream of spreading the good tidings of the Gospels there, an aspiration that resembled my longing for the young Jackson.” Implicit in her dream of spreading the gospels among the *seiban* is a desire for martyrdom and self-sacrifice. “Serving them, I would serve god. When they suffered from malaria, I hoped to devote myself body and soul to taking care of them

Routledge, 1995), 69–70.

¹⁸ Ōshika, “Yabanjin,” 6.

¹⁹ “Bansha no Rakujitsu,” *Bessatsu bungei shunjū* 71 (March 1960); published in book form the following year by Bungeishunjū shinsha under the title *Seitaigo no tsubo*. In *Yoshiya Nobuko zenshū* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha 1975), Vol 10, 329–342.

until I myself was infected and collapsed. This was my ideal.”²⁰ Her father initially opposed her plan because “the *seiban* are violent head hunters,” but he agreed on condition that she serve in Musha, a model town where tourists were free to go and the natives were acculturated (*kyōka*). From the outset, Musha is depicted as a safe and pacified space in the aboriginal lands, close to civilization and a popular travel destination.

The narrator takes pains to distance herself from the pre-war imperialism as well as from its supporters: “that was the time when we Japanese were arrogant (*ibatte iru*). Indeed, through her missionary work, she discovers a kind of third space that allows her to escape an identification as a colonizer or any direct relationship to the Japanese empire. Rather than a colonizer, she is a Christian missionary and teacher, as the aborigines acknowledge when they bow to her as she walks along the path to Musha singing Christian hymns.²¹ Within that space, she encounters an aboriginal man named Hayun who is fluent in Japanese and fond of Japanese popular songs. Hayun befriends her, serves as her interpreter, and becomes her native informant on aboriginal beliefs. She is fascinated by the body of this *bishōnen* (handsome young man), who “has the features of someone from the Filipino race.” In a scene where the two are climbing a steep mountain path, Hayun lifts her up “with his strong arms, as though I was light as a feather, and carried me to the level path. Through my thin one-piece dress, I felt my body grow numb, overcome by his bodily warmth and sweaty odor.”²² In this passage, Yoshiya Nobuko draws on a sexualized rhetoric of desire for the primitive that is different in type from that used by male writers. If Nakamura feminized the primitive, Yoshiya restores to the aborigines their virility. In addition, unlike the rhetoric of clothing that contradicts and undermines the rhetoric of male colonial writers, she is actually interested in the physical body of the man who lifts her up and makes her swoon.

Hayun distinguishes the narrator from the other Japanese when he confides to her his dissatisfaction with colonial rule, and when he warns her against staying in Musha to attend the sports festival. After the Musha Incident occurs, the narrator first falls into a state of shock but she seeks to determine the fate of Hayun after she recovers. She eventually learns that Hayun had been wounded while fighting in a unit led by Mona Rudao’s son and then perished in the conflagration of an aboriginal village. Years later, in Tokyo, she writes that the “ghost of Hayun will continue to

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 332–33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 334.

²² *Ibid.*, 337.

accompany her to her death.” Just as the narrator remains troubled by the spirit of the young aboriginal man, Yoshiya Nobuko’s text is also haunted by the specter of colonial discourse on the primitive bodies.

In this paper, I examine a common trope for primitivism found in works of Japanese literature inspired by the 1930 Musha Incident written between 1935 and 1960. Following general trends in colonial discourse, Japanese writers embraced a rhetoric of blood and biological destiny in depictions of aborigines rebelling against Japanese rule, but at times they also expressed skepticism toward this rhetoric. Indeed, the rhetoric of blood is countered by a competing rhetoric of facade and clothing, suggesting that primitiveness is merely a disguise or veneer covering a lack of substance. As the example of Yoshiya Nobuko’s work of 1960 shows, echoes of this colonial rhetoric of the primitive survived the collapse of the empire and are still audible in post-colonial works on the Musha Incident.

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