

What We Talk About When We Talk About *Basara*

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Abstract

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The word *basara* is frequently used in discussing Japan's fourteenth century. Indeed, the period itself is often casually referred to as the "age of *basara*," and the fourteenth century military chronicle *Taiheiki* is its primary text. *Basara* is often taken to mean excess in dress, behavior, and consumption. However, this loose understanding is not born out by the extant references in fourteenth-century documents. Recent scholarship has pointed to a more specific descriptive meaning in this period: movement like the fluttering of loose clothing. Yet, particularly in *Taiheiki*'s Sasaki Dōyo, there is an active "maximalist" aesthetic at work. I hope to show *basara*'s precise meaning in context, and propose another term to describe the aesthetic phenomenon: "transgressive excess." That is, excessive in the common sense, and "transgressing" in four categories: appropriate taste, class structure, public order, and political borders. This terminological realignment allows a clearer understanding of the aesthetics of excess.

Introduction

He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them, one by one before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel which lost their folds as they fell and covered the table in many-colored disarray. While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher--shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange with monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily. "They're such beautiful shirts," she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds." "It makes me sad because I've never seen such--such beautiful shirts before."¹

When confronted with conspicuous superabundance, *Gatsby's* Daisy breaks down and weeps. Her senses are overwhelmed by material opulence she sees a pile of her erstwhile lover's shirts. Little can be said in the face of such number, such beauty, such variety. The same effects of the irresistible force of excess are clearly evident in the fourteenth century Japanese *gunki monogatari*, *Taiheiki*.² Describing the turbulent years of the 1333 Kenmu Restoration and Northern and Southern Courts period, it has typically been disregarded in favor of its generic

¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 93f.

² *Gunki monogatari* is a genre usually translated into English as "military chronicle." However, rather than being concerned presenting a litany of dates and events, they are narrative accounts of martial conflict which, while for the large part conforming to the broad facts of history, are often marked by considerable literary embellishment.

predecessor *Heike monogatari*.³ Yet, there is one quality particular to *Taiheiki* which continually attracts scholars and readers both in Japan and abroad: *basara*. Indeed, many Japanese articles on *Taiheiki* or even tangentially related subjects refer to the period as the “age of *basara*.”

Minimalism in art is well-known and might be defined as a reduction of elements for increased effect, but in *basara* quite this opposite is at work: more is more. What could be called a “maximalist” aesthetic in modern Japanese art has been much discussed as of late, in the works of popular artists such as Murakami Takashi and Aida Makoto, but it is equally present in the aesthetics of medieval Japan: it is present in the shocking enthusiasm for frenetic *dengaku* dancing, in the flamboyant attire described in *Taiheiki* and declaimed in legal codes, in tea

³ Its own translator, Hellen Craig McCullough, says quite plainly that, at the death of a character in a military chronicle, “we feel no particular sense of tragedy or personal involvement, as we do when we read of the death of Hector. In short, the *gunki monogatari* are not great literature.” *The Taiheiki: A Chronicle of Medieval Japan* (New York: Columbia UP, 1959) xvi. This statement would apply to *Heike monogatari* as well, but when he *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten* goes to some length to argue for *Taiheiki*’s value as a literary work that strives to portray the totality of a society in conflict, it casts this paean as a defense against claims that it “lacks consistency,” and that “compared to *Heike monogatari*, which is taken to be the magnum opus of the *gunki monogatari* genre, *Taiheiki* has been taken to be inferior in terms of both epic fervor and traditional courtly artistic effect.” Masuda Motomu, *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten*, s.v. “*Taiheiki*” (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1984) 4.109.

ceremonies that explode beyond the *chashitsu* of later periods.⁴ All these phenomena have in the modern period been labelled *basara*.

Particularly in English language scholarship—though also with Japanese—*basara* is taken to mean broadly such maximalism or excess in dress, behavior, and consumption. However, examining the word in context, this loose understanding is not born out by the term’s few contemporary occurrences. Indeed, in the context of the fourteenth century, the meaning is much more specific. What little English language scholarship that exists on *basara* reflects an outdated understanding of the term and looks at the period through the aesthetic lens of a later era, at least a century removed from the period in question. It isn’t so much that scholars misunderstand medieval *basara*, it’s that there is no medieval *basara*, or at least that the few extant instances of the word *basara* do not bear the weight of all the approximate meanings that have been attributed it. Yet, particularly associated with the military governor⁵ Sasaki Dōyo, there is a “maximalist” aesthetic clearly active in the pages of *Taiheiki*. In this project, I attempt two separate but related tasks: first, I hope to show *basara*’s precise meaning in context, thereby clarifying the limits of the fourteenth-century use of the word. There is, however, clearly a cultural phenomenon to be described, to which later writers anachronistically apply the word *basara*. Having established that *basara* itself is not the most apt term to use, the second task of this project is to propose a new vocabulary with which to describe the aesthetic-cultural nexus of

⁴ See particularly the work of Aida Makoto, especially the exhibition *Monument for Nothing*, which the curator of the hosting Mori Art Museum, Kataoka Mami, described as having “the depth and opacity of a bottomless swamp.” Kataoka Mami, “Japan, the Chaotic, and Aida Makoto,” in *Monument for Nothing* (Tokyo: Seigensha, 2013) 45.

⁵ *Shugo daimyō*, often translated as constable.

which Dōyo is patron saint. The phrase I propose is “transgressive excess.” Once I have introduced the term, I will examine what I identify as the four major points of transgression represented by the “transgressive excess” phenomenon. By using this new vocabulary, connections between what is called “*basara*” and things not commonly viewed as being under its descriptive umbrella come into view, and in the final section of this paper I will apply the rubric of “transgressive excess” to one of Dōyo’s most memorable actions, his hosting of a laving tea gathering at Ōharano. By illuminating new aspects of the phenomenon described later as “*basara*,” I hope to work towards a more robust understanding of cultural life in fourteenth century Japan. The words we use in discourse inevitably shape the conclusions reached, and both precision and intentionality in wording is necessary in scholarship.

Basara in English

How then is *basara* discussed in what little English language scholarship there is? Kenneth Grossberg in his translation of the *Kenmu shikimoku* (Kenmu Code, 1335, discussed in greater detail below), a legal code promulgated by the ascendant Ashikaga Takauji, defines *basara* as “ostentatious display, indicative of pride, self-indulgence, and luxurious living. The term had the connotations of both novel and eccentric or frivolous and senseless behavior.”⁶ This is a common enough definition. Even Japanese scholars such as Imai Masaharu are satisfied with defining the term as “intentionally being ostentatious, out of line with what was common. In music, *basara* might be likened to surprising others by changing the tempo.”⁷ Here too at first blush, this is not altogether inappropriate for what is seen in *Taiheiki*, particularly those scenes

⁶ Grossberg, *The Laws of the Muromachi Bakufu*, 16.

⁷ Imai, “Sasaki Dōyo: Jiyū Honpō No Basara Daimyō,” 264.

describing the lavish lifestyle of the daimyō Sasaki Dōyo. Dōyo's person, historicity, and several incidents concerning him are discussed in detail in the course of this paper.

H. Paul Varley claims that the word “*basara*” appears frequently in fourteenth-century documents “describing warrior elites, including Sasaki Dōyo, Kō no Moronao, and others.”⁸ Though in *Taiheiki* when “*basara*” does appear it is often as a characterization of Dōyo or his cadre, use of the word itself is anything but frequent. On the one hand, depending on the manuscript, as many as a third or even all of the occurrences of the word *basara* in the text are either directly or indirectly connected to Sasaki Dōyo. Certainly, from this one might assume that even in *Taiheiki* the term and Dōyo are firmly linked. One might even speculate that his sobriquet of the ‘*basara* daimyō’ could have been applied from a very early date, perhaps even during his lifetime. However, on closer inspection, the association becomes much more obscure. Though between a third and each one of the instances refer to Dōyo, the figures are not impressive: counts differ between manuscript lineages, but in the Seigen'inbon text there are three instances,⁹ in the Tenshōbon only one.¹⁰

Manuscript Lineages

It is relevant at this point to make a brief digression to say a word about the several lines of textual transmission through which *Taiheiki* has come down to the present, in one form or another. Of the three major scholarly editions of the text, Iwanami Shoten's *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* edition, the *Iwanami bunko* imprint edition edited by Hyōdo Hiromi, and Shōgakukan's *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* edition, I have elected to use the third for a

⁸ Varley, “Cultural Life of the Warrior Elite in the Fourteenth Century,” 194.

⁹ Mori, *Sasaki Dōyo*, 57.

¹⁰ Hasegawa, et al, ed. 3:21.

number of reasons. First and most importantly, it takes as its base edition the aforementioned Tenshōbon text of *Taiheiki*, specifically that held by the Suifu Meitoku-kai Shōkōkan—the Tokugawa Museum—library. The Tenshōbon is not the most ancient lineage of *Taiheiki* manuscript: of the most-often studied texts, that laurel goes to the stratum that contains the Seigen'inbon line. The Tenshōbon family belongs rather to a middle group of texts, though recent research suggests hints that it is likely older than often assumed.¹¹ Second, this edition is available in a fully-searchable format through the website “Japan Knowledge,” an indispensable tool. The *Iwanami bunko* edition is the first complete annotation of the Seigen'inbon text, but as it is not searchable, it ultimately is not as accessible for a project such as this. The other standard annotated edition of the text, Iwanami's, is compiled from a typeset edition of the Rufubon, or “circulated text,” dating from 1603. The Rufubon line of texts reached a stable form relatively late in the history of *Taiheiki* circulation, and this particular text is set in an early—and swiftly abandoned—iteration of movable type technology. Though the Tenshōbon line is not currently thought to be the oldest *Taiheiki* manuscript tradition, it is nonetheless the older of the two widely available annotated editions.

Another aspect of the Tenshōbon line beyond its relative age that makes it of particularly relevance to this study is that evidence suggests that members of the Sasaki family had a hand in its compilation. This is not unusual in the case of *Taiheiki*. Unlike other works in the *gunki monogatari* genre, such as *Heike monogatari*, that took shape as written texts more than a century after the events they describe, long past the living memory of the events and personages depicted, several *Taiheiki* figures or their near descendants still lived when *Taiheiki* began to be

¹¹ Jeremy Sather, “The Myth of Peace: *Taiheiki* and the Rhetoric of War” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012), 301.

codified and circulated in the fifteenth century. As just one example, the afore-mentioned Seigen'inbon text is seen to portray members of the powerful Hosokawa family in a particularly flattering light.¹² All this means that using the Tenshōbon text to examine the figure of Sasaki Dōyo forces one to acknowledge the fact that no manuscript lineage is neutral. Specific agendas shape the received text, and while precisely what those agendas are is often far from clear—Dōyo, in all his ostentation, does not escape unscathed in the Tenshōbon—but if nothing else making use of the Tenshōbon ensures that Dōyo received particular attention from whatever editors there may have been.

Defining Basara

As Endō Motoo notes, “if one looks beyond the *Kenmu shikimoku* and *Taiheiki*, there are practically no references to *basara* in the Nanbokuchō and Muromachi periods. Rather, the term begins to appear frequently in the late Warring States and Edo periods.”¹³ That is, beyond a few high-profile and oft cited instances, the word in fact appears extremely *infrequently* in documents from the time so often called “the age of *basara*.” Given that this is the case, the question then becomes two-fold: what does *basara* in fact mean in the word’s extant fourteenth-century instances, and if it’s not *basara*, just what is it that we see in the *Taiheiki*? There is clearly present a nexus of socio-aesthetic phenomena that in later times come under the moniker of *basara*—however much an anachronistic malapropism that might be—and there ought to be vocabulary with which to discuss it. It is no accident that so many scholars have identified such an aesthetic, and understandable that in searching for a descriptor they settled upon *basara*. In place of *basara*, the phrase that I propose to describe the “maximalist” aesthetic of Dōyo and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Endō, “Basara no gogen,” 21.

dengaku is “transgressive excess.” The second half of this paper explores the character of “transgressive excess,” but first, if the *basara* of the fourteenth century does not precisely equate to “transgressive excess,” what exactly does it mean?

Again, Endō has performed the most recent and probing philological scholarship on the precise coordinates of *basara* in fourteenth century documents. First, orthographically, there are three common ways of representing *basara*: 跋折羅, 婆娑羅, and simply in *kana*, ハサラ, each having several small variations in character use. It should be said that these are all words attested in the corpus, all predate *Taiheiki* and all have specific meanings. This is important to note so as not to fall into the distraction of defining the words themselves in their broadest meanings in all texts rather than homing in with the greatest possible precision on what *basara* means when it is used in *Taiheiki*. Nonetheless, understanding the meanings of these words as they appear in their original and primarily Buddhist context is important for understanding why *basara* later expanded to envelope the Nanbokuchō “maximalist” aesthetic. The first set of characters comes down through the most common etymology: from Sanskrit *vājra*, meaning at the most fundamental level ‘the hard or mighty one’ and practically used to signify a lightning bolt or sometimes a diamond.¹⁴ For this set of characters this meaning is certainly correct. It occurs 855 times in the Taishō Daizōkyō recension of the Buddhist *tripitaka*.¹⁵ This being the most common definition of *basara* independent of the meaning of its constituent characters, many have read a sort of “religious destructiveness” into the Nanbokuchō occurrence of the term.¹⁶ That is, it is

¹⁴ Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Springfield: Nataraj Books, 2010), 913.

¹⁵ “The SAT Daizōkyō Database,” <http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/>, accessed October 15, 2016.

¹⁶Endō, “Basara no gogen,” 19.

often read as either describing actions that in some way disrupt the cosmic order, or actions so brash as to have eschatological implications. This etymology is first attested in the *Genkai* dictionary and perpetuated in its successor the *Daigenkai*. The *Genkai*, edited by Ōtsuki Fumihiko, first published 1891, and being the dictionary to which many modern dictionaries of Japanese trace their lineage, gives the progression as being first a phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit *vájra*, then, in the Kamakura period, taking on the meaning “to break apart” and referring mostly to new, non-traditional forms dancing. From this, in the Nanbokuchō it begins to be used to refer to anything non-traditional, and later still it acquires a somewhat negative flavor and comes to be used to describe moral dissipation and reckless action.¹⁷

The idea that the medieval *basara* comes from *vájra* has put down firm roots in the Japanese etymological community. Most Japanese language articles and studies of the *basara* phenomenon begin by recapitulating this view regardless of what other academic merit they certainly have. Endō, however, bucking this trend, outlines an alternative etymology based on extensive reading of period documents. In the late Kamakura and Nanbokuchō periods, there was a word, *basa* 婆娑, that described the fluttering *movement* of dancers’ clothing. Indeed, the ancient Chinese glossary the *Erya* defines the character combination simply as *wǔ*, to dance, or *wǔzhě zhī róng* 舞者之容, the appearance of a dancer.¹⁸ This use was not unknown in Japan. *Gokokuji kuyō ki*¹⁹ describes an alms raising dance performance at which Go Daigo himself was present:

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Morohashi, *Dai kan-wa jiten*, 3:720.

¹⁹ A record of the preparations for state-protecting ritual conducted at the Iwashimizu Hachimangū shrine-temple complex and commissioned by Go-Daigo and held on the twenty-

At that hour the imperial procession arrived at the western curtained entrance. The dancers and musicians processed in. The musicians played: played drums at their necks and at their hips—two on each instrument. They came forward, and performed *basa*. The attendants brought the imperial palanquin before the altar and the emperor payed obeisance to the Buddha.²⁰

Given the nature of the text—that it is a temple record describing a religious ceremony at the temple itself—and that not only was Go Daigo himself in august attendance, but Ashikaga Takauji, who would later establish the Ashikaga Shogunate and was at the time a high-ranking general, was also recorded as being in the audience, it can be fairly assumed that the term here does not describe any quality of moral laxity or propensity for excess in the dancers themselves. Rather, *basa* describes their performance, and it is precisely this that is the key to understanding *basara* in context. One can easily imagine the dancers in thickly draped costumes, beating the drum as they turned and spun, the sleeves of their robes flying as they jumped and danced. The term *basa* occurs several times in the same document, each time connected with the forward motion of a dancing figure. The phrase “they stepped forward in a *basa* way” 婆娑于砌前 or 婆娑前砌 occurs twice. The “forwardness” of the motion can be assumed not to be a component of *basara*’s core meaning, as the author of the text specifies the direction with a separate character. Again, it is precisely this that *basa* means: the fluttering of cloth, as of dancers’ sleeves. Endō argues that this *basa* acquired the adjectival suffix “*ra*.” The *ra* suffix causes adjectives that do not otherwise do so to describe the visual, physical element of things. It is attested in other words

second day of the ninth month in the first year of Kenmu, 1334—just one year before the promulgation of the *Kenmu shikimoku*.

²⁰ ZGSRJ 782.190.

such as *kiyora*—meaning pure and beautiful in appearance or manner, derived from the more common adjective *kiyoshi*—and *sakashira*—meaning wise or sagacious likewise in appearance or manner and derived from *sakashi*—therefore *basara* is a descriptive form of *basa*. This being the case, *basa-ra* would mean in the appearance or manner of a dancer: fluttering, flowing, dynamic.

Another of the most often cited contemporary instances of *basara* is in the *Nijō Kawara rakusho* or Second-Avenue Riverbed Graffito. This long graffito, presumably found at the intersection of Nijō avenue and the riverbed of the Kamo River, is attested in the *Kenmu nenkan ki* (1336), a chronicle of the years of Go-Daigo’s Kenmu Restoration which lasted from 1333 to 1336, though nowhere else. *Taiheiki* provides at least one example of criticism of the government being written on a placard and hoisted in the street,²¹ but at eighty-six lines in length, *Nijō Kawara rakusho* would have required a substantial piece of wall to contain it. As for content, the *rakusho* is acidly critical of recent trends of both fashion and habit in the turbulent capital. It is an enumeration of complaints concerned first and foremost with the behavior of the ruling elites and those who sought to emulate them, both in terms of consumption and self-presentation. It opens with a litany of the worst behaviors seen on the streets: “Things recently popular in the capital: murders in the night; muggings; false Imperial edicts.”²² The text itself seems agnostic on which of the crimes is the worst sin. They are all beyond the pale. In the *rakusho*, the word *basara* appears in a satirical description of the impractical clothing and accessories popular at the time: “They wear huge leaden swords, outfitted and made to look

²¹ One example occurs after the collapse of the *dengaku* stands, described below.

²² Kasamatsu, “Nijō Kawara rakusho,” 344.

larger than battlefield sabers,²³ thrust pridefully before them; the five ribs of the *basara* fan; a large saddle on a bony horse; thin robes.”²⁴ Each item described is impractical and purely for show: heavy swords forged from metal that cannot hold an edge, useless in battle and instantly recognizable as cheap imitations when drawn from their sumptuously decorated scabbards; an ostentatious saddle on an underfed horse, again a piece of visually striking war equipment that would be all but useless when actually put to the test; robes so thin as to provide no warmth, but from the context perhaps printed with gaudy patterns. The people of the capital, eager to put on a peacock display for others and keep with the fashion of the moment, expend what meager income they might have on adorning their bodies in extravagant ways. The *Kenmu shikimoku* speaks directly against this sort of damaging consumption. Importantly, when the *rakusho* discusses dogfighting, *dengaku*, and riotous behavior (*jiyū rōzeki*)—all things often associated with *basara*—they are not mentioned until several lines later. Returning to the three items here, the common definition of *basara* could potentially be applied to the whole ensemble, but here the five-ribbed fan is singled out. What precisely is *basara* here?

More than the word *basara* itself, it is the five ribs that provide the key. In the fourteenth century, the fixed fan commonly had either seven or ten ribs. Constructing a fan with only five ribs may have been cheaper, but it left a large amount of material unsupported. Endō argues that such a fan moves air much less efficiently and would require the user to flap his or her arms

²³ *Tachi*, the most common form of sword in the medieval period, usually around two *shaku* in length (60cm) and designed to be suspended from the waist by cords, as opposed to later weapons which were tucked into one’s sash. For more information, see Karl Friday, *Samurai, Warfare, and the State in Early Medieval Japan*, 84.

²⁴ Kasamatsu, 346.

about wildly to produce any wind, forcing them to move in a *basa* way much like a dancer.²⁵

Still, there is another possibility. In the case of the dancers, the adjective *basa* describes the motion of the cloth rather than the dancers themselves, and this is equally possibly here. With half the number of ribs, the material, paper or cloth, would certainly move about more in the wind than a more sturdily constructed fan, and taking it this way allows for the sense of fluttering cloth to stand.

This is not the only way that the *basara* fan has been historically understood. Indeed, the notion of the *basara* fan forms an important part of some scholars' understanding of *basara*. While I am reasonably persuaded by Endō's argument, others take the *basara* fan to be one with some sort of extremely gaudy design, which is a possible reading of the *rakusho* description. This connection is made by understanding the above quotation in tandem with a description in the twenty-ninth book of the *Rufubon Taiheiki* of painted fans with graphic battle scenes. These fans are described as having "*basara-e*," or *basara* pictures.²⁶ However, when one takes into account that the word *basara* does *not* occur in the older *Tenshōbon* edition, which is the basis for the current study, then it is possible not only to maintain the argument that in the early fourteenth century *basara* had not yet acquired the broad meaning of gaudy ostentation, but also to begin to track the evolution of the word towards a point at which it does acquire that connotation.

²⁵ Endō, "Basara saikō," 7.

²⁶ The argument is made most succinctly in Shirakawa Sōgen, "Kissa bunka-shi ni okeru tōcha no igi—basara no kentō wo tōshite" *Kamakura ibun kenkyū* 25 (2010), 109. For the *Rufubon* version of this scene, see Gotō Tanji et al., ed., *Taiheiki*, 3 vols, *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* vols. 34–36, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958).

Returning to the notion of the adjective *basara* describing the fluttering motion of cloth, this sense *is* born out in the solitary occurrence of *basara* in the Tenshōbon lineage of *Taiheiki*. It occurs in a passage at the beginning of the chapter describing the Myōhōin incident. Naturally, this involves *basara*'s patron saint Sasaki Dōyo, and some background is useful before proceeding.

Dōyō and Basara

Sasaki Dōyo (born Takauji, 1306–1373), is the person by far most closely tied to the word *basara*, and represents in himself the pinnacle of transgressive excess. Famous still for his extravagance, the lavish gatherings he hosted and his taste for luxury are described in vivid detail in *Taiheiki*, later earning him the popular sobriquet “*basara daimyō*.” It would seem that his place in the canon of Japanese maximalist aesthetics would be assured. Yet, the seven centuries that have passed since his death prove to be a considerable obstacle in knowing the historical Dōyo. While the validity of *Taiheiki* as a historical document has been strongly questioned—most famously and vigorously by Kume Kunitake in his 1890 article “*Taiheiki wa shigaku ni eki nashi*,” that is “*Taiheiki is of No Use for History*”—the extravagant Dōyo described therein may not be entirely a work of fiction. Yet, unfortunately, the documents do not provide any corroboration. While nothing directly contradicts the *Taiheiki* account of Dōyo, neither does anything confirm it. The records that have come down show Dōyo as a participant or commander at numerous battles, first as a partisan for Emperor Go-Daigo and afterwards loyally for the Northern Court under Ashikaga Takauji.²⁷ Famous now for his tea gatherings, no firmly-

²⁷ For a survey of the documentary evidence for Sasaki Dōyo's service during the Nanbokuchō period, see Mori Shigeaki, “Sasaki Dōyo no hakkyū monjo ni tsuite (Chūsei ni okeru buke to kōshitsu),” *Seiji keizai shigaku* 321, 1993.

attributable tea implements have survived: only names recorded in disparate documents. His interest in incense is attested in several renga in the *Tsukubashū* anthology (c. 1356), but as with the tea implements, no primary corroborating documents remain.²⁸ There exists a treatise on flower arrangement called *Rikka kuden daiji*, or *Orally Transmitted Essential Aspects of Flower Arrangement*, that is popularly attributed to Dōyo. While such a document might give insight into the medieval aesthete's purportedly exquisite²⁹ taste, the attribution is likely spurious even if many take his authorship at face value³⁰. Documentary attestation aside, Dōyo remains among the most memorable characters from a work with many names but few personalities, and it is not impossible that he lived something like the lifestyle with which *Taiheiki* burdens him. Further, when speaking of *Taiheiki*'s role in establishing aesthetic norms, to what degree the image of Dōyo therein reflected aligns with the historical Dōyo is at most a secondary concern. The person of Dōyo and his use here being established, we can turn to the infamous incident itself.

In the tenth month of 1340, Sasaki Dōyo became embroiled in a scandal that led eventually to his exile, though the aggrieved party sought execution. It is of particular interest because it represents one of Dōyo's few political miscalculations.³¹ This affair is known as the "Myōhōin incident."

²⁸ Mori, *Sasaki Dōyo*, 212.

²⁹ One might say "excessive."

³⁰ Such as Oyama Michiko. "'Rikka kuden daiji' ni mieru Dōyo no yūgen—Zeami densho to no hikaku yori.," *Ronkyū Nihon bungaku* 43, 1983.

³¹ Dōyo's political savvy, particularly with regards to his relation to the central government, is discussed in brief later in this essay, and is also well documented in Satō, "Basara daimō no kyo to jitsu to—Sasaki Dōyo no baai."

A group of young Dōyo clients, led by eldest son Hidetsuna (d. 1353),³² are making their way back from a hunting expedition, which, like many contemporary social gatherings, was an occasion for imbibing. The season being very early winter, the autumn foliage is still on beautiful display and, as the partygoers walk through the Higashiyama hills, the party sees a particularly enchanting branch of colored maple poking over the wall of the Myōhōin temple, a Tendai *monzeki* temple, that is, one with a mandate to house aristocrats and members of the imperial family.³³ This branch is so very tempting that one young member tries to break it off to take home, but the abbot sees this and has a monk warn the young man off. Being young, drunk, and now provoked, he tries to break off a yet bigger branch. The conflict devolves into a brawl, but the party manages to retreat with their prized branch, but pride damaged. When Dōyo hears that he and his affiliates have been so rudely affronted by the monks, he is so incensed that he sends a group of warriors to burn down the temple. It being not only led by an imperial prince but also under the administrative umbrella of the powerful Enryakuji, this of course causes political problems for Dōyo. The clergy cease to perform prayers and rituals on behalf of the government and request execution for all offending parties, but in the end the sentence is commuted to exile in Dewa for Dōyo and Mutsu for his son.

³² Underlining Dōyo's own success in navigating the conflict-ridden fourteenth century, he survives his eldest son by more than a decade. Hidetsuna died defending the shōgun Ashikaga Yoshiakira and Emperor Go Kōgon from Southern Court forces during an invasion of the capital in 1353.

³³ At the time, Myōhōin was headed by Cloistered Prince Ryōshō (1318–1363), a son of Emperor Go Fushimi, and later head of the Tendai order.

In context, the word *basara* appears at the very beginning of the passage. There are small textual differences between the Tenshōbon and Seigen'inbon versions, and both help to girder the meaning of *basara* in *Taiheiki*. Translations of both passages are presented here, as well as the Japanese to illustrate specific usage. Though other passages from *Taiheiki* cited here refer to the Tenshōbon version, the Seigen'inbon is quite useful in that it is an older textual lineage and considered by many to be the closest to whatever “original” there may have been, and is one of the more commonly cited versions in the Japanese scholarship.³⁴ It is possible that in the years it took to standardize the various lineages the meaning of *basara* shifted, but the various textual traditions became more or less fixed at roughly the same time, and the examples here do not show signs of having taken on the more modern meaning.

| Tenshōbon | 天正本 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| At that time [Dōyo] flourished, and in extravagance none could compare. His followers devoted themselves to <i>basara</i> and fashion. Having finished their merrymaking at the outing, and thinking that it was just the season to appreciate [the autumn leaves]. . . | 頃比時を得て榮耀肩を双ぶるものなし。その手の物どもは、 <u>ばさら</u> ・風流を事として、遊宴の興を尽くしけるが、当季賞翫なればとて、 ³⁵ |
| Seigen'inbon | 西源院本 |
| At that time [Dōyo] especially flourished: a group of young retainers of the lay monk Sasaki Dōyo, adjutant | 頃比殊ニ時ヲ得テ、榮耀人ノ目ヲ驚シケル佐々木佐渡判官入 |

³⁴ Endō, “Basara Saikō” 11.

³⁵ Hasegawa et al. ed., 3:21.

of Sado—whose extravagance astonished the eyes of others—exhausting the limits of fashion in their usual *basara* manner, saw the autumn leaves by the road in Nishiyama and Higashiyama. . .

道々誉之一族若党共、例ノハサ
 二風流ヲ尽テ、西山・東山ノ
 路之紅葉を見テ、、、³⁶

It is most productive to understand *basara* here in light of the previous examples, from the *Nijō-Kawara rakusho* and the dancers' clothing, in which the word meant fluttering cloth. In both these passages, it is not difficult to imagine the scene. There is a cadre of young, drunk, fashionable *enfants terribles* strolling through the hills on the edge of the capital, just returning from a social gathering. How they act, particularly how they walk, is *basara*. Importantly, in the second quotation from the Seigen'inbon text, *basara* is not a noun but an adverb, describing the manner of the young men's actions. The grammatical shift from adjective/adverb in the Seigen'inbon to the noun seen in the text of the Tenshōbon may indicate, again, an early stage of *basara's* slide into its later meanings. Here the movements of these *wakatō* are as dynamic and volatile as the dancers' sleeves, "exhausting the limits of fashion." In both examples, *basara* is equated clearly with fashion, and importantly, elegant fashion. In this sense it is similar to the *miyabi*, "impetuous elegance," of the hero of *Ise monogatari* which Joshua Mostow defines as including both courtliness and "a kind of violent ardor that refuses to be constrained by political calculation."³⁷ *Basara* is not simple gaudiness: as an aesthetic mode it holds its place next to the height of refinement, that is, *furyū*. Indeed, in the first example above, from the Tenshōbon, it is something that these young people actively cultivate. They not only wear their clothes or move about in a *basara* way, but they think of little else. It is an object, a goal. In the Seigen'inbon,

³⁶ Qtd. in Mori, *Sasaki Dōyo*, 199.

³⁷ Mostow and Tyler, *The Ise Stories*, 16.

basara describes the action. Any group of young drunkards can meander their way down the road in the most up-to-date of manners, but this group adds an edge of *basara*. That is, it's not so much what you do as how you do it.

To review in brief, the three descriptive instances of *basara* discussed here are: the *basa* movement of dancers' clothing, the five ribs of the *basara* fan from the *Nijo Kawara rakusho*, and the young Dōyo devotees *basara*-ing on their return from an outing. Taking the last example, that from the text of the *Taiheiki*, in light of the first two, it can be reasonably argued that in the context of the early fourteenth century, *basara* means something close to “strutting,” particularly as the word is used less literally in modern slang—though already shadows of later, less neutral connotations are beginning to appear. As Grossberg says, it *is* ostentatious display, but on the small scale, on the level of the physical body. One's over-the-top clothing may be considered *basara*, and one may “*basara*” one's way back from a party thrown by the ever-extravagant Sasaki Dōyo, but importantly the *gathering itself* isn't strictly *basara*, as, for example, Varley would have it. *Basara* is only a feature of the party that contributes to its the overall effect. Of course, it is this particular maximal aesthetic that Dōyo propagates, documented primarily in *Taiheiki* if not elsewhere, that continues to draw interest to his person and earns him the moniker of *basara daimyō*. Even if *basara* is not the most appropriate descriptor, there is without a doubt a phenomenon to be described. What then should it be called? As stated above, I propose the phrase “transgressive excess.”

Transgressive Excess

If we are to call this Dōyo aesthetic “transgressive excess,” why, and what does it transgress? The phrase is my own creation, but I take inspiration from a word that does appear in

Nanbokuchō documents, *kasa* 過差. *Kasa* by itself is usually rendered as “excess” and is defined by the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* as “to exceed in degree for the sake of splendor or luxury.”³⁸ It the first character of the word, however, that prompts the additional descriptor “transgressive,” as it neatly reflects the different—and simultaneous—meanings of the character. In most cases it means to do something in an inappropriate way, either too much or simply incorrectly. Hence, a transgression. It is related etymologically to 禍, disaster, something wrong spiritually or supernaturally rather than a wrong action.³⁹ Yet, at a more basic level, the first character of *kasa* means simply to move across, that is, to trans-gress. As I hope to show, the maximalist aesthetic of *Taiheiki* does both of these things in ways that exceed the boundaries of the received definition of *basara*. I should stress that “transgressive excess” is not strictly the same as *kasa*. As stated above it is my own coinage, but I find some validity in a similarity with this attested Japanese word. By using “transgressive excess” as the heuristic through which I view the cultural-aesthetic phenomena that others call *basara*,

In “transgressive excess,” then, what exactly is transgressed? Briefly I see four points of transgression: this aesthetic transgresses appropriate taste, class distinction, public order, and political borders. All of these are tightly intertwined, but I will address each individually, and in the order presented above.

Four Transgressions

First, *basara* transgresses public standards of appropriate taste. This much is clear from the way in which the popular theatrical form *dengaku* is discussed in the fifth chapter. In the

³⁸ *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, s. v., “kasa,” accessed July 7, 2015, <http://japanknowledge.com/lib/display/?lid=200200cd0904Ftc5h5Pe>

³⁹ Morohashi, *Dai kan-wa jiten*, 11:113.

early 1330s, shortly before the fall of the Hōjō in Kamakura at the hands of imperialist forces, *dengaku* sweeps the capital. Little is known about the origins of *dengaku*, but it seems to have begun as sort of ritual dance that accompanied the rice planting season, and by the Heian period it was often performed in conjunction with or under the auspices of shrines and temples.⁴⁰ By the fourteenth century, however, it had become separated from agriculture and was enjoyed as an independent spectacle, and became something of an epidemic in the capital: “At this time, in the capital, *dengaku* flourished and both high and low indulged in it excessively. It was truly a rare thing to see. *Dengaku* was on the lips of all, both in the capital and the countryside, and so news of it reached even Kantō.”⁴¹ The fact that a cultural phenomenon was enjoyed by both those of high and low station in the rigidly stratified society of fourteenth-century Kyoto suggests a sense of cross-class unity. This in turn suggests that in such an intractably stratified society, all is not well for the powers that be, as they maintain their position of power by preserving the social status quo. There are suggestions in the text that popularity of *dengaku* was probably supernatural and possibly malicious, that it could have led in a direct way to the destruction of the regime.⁴² At the time, along with *dengaku* came the sport of dogfighting, and indeed the anonymous author of the *Nijo-Kawara rakusho* lumps dogfighting and *dengaku* together as activities that led to the fall of the Kamakura shogunate in Kantō, the political capital.⁴³ That is,

⁴⁰ Yamaji, “Dengaku,” 27.

⁴¹ Hasegawa et al., ed., *Taiheiki* 1:254.

⁴² Though one could take the *dengaku* craze to be symptomatic of the social instability that did indeed contribute to the fall of the Kamakura Shogunate, it would be difficult to argue that the collapse of the Hōjō could be placed at the feet of dancing alone.

⁴³ Kasamatsu, “Nijō Kawara rakusho,” 346.

in some the author saw them as being possessed of a kernel of the same antisocial power. From the standpoint of governance, it is not difficult to see why. Lavish sums were spent on keeping these dogs, and good combatants were sought throughout the state. The aristocrat Sanjō Kintada, in his *kanbun* diary comments disparagingly on this trend saying, “the daimyō compete and give awards for this, and the expenditure reaches an extraordinarily enormous amount.”⁴⁴

Commenting on this, Ishiguro Kichijirō notes that Sanjō’s reflexive negativity is “in contrast to the way he treats the traditional *kangen* music of the aristocracy.”⁴⁵ *Dengaku* and dogfighting transgress the traditional aristocratic taste-makers’ sense of propriety, and thus the expenditure is not only poor economics: it shows a lack of refinement. This is reflected in the text of the *Taiheiki* as well. Observing one of these lavish dogfights, “those without taste felt, ‘How amusing! It doesn’t differ at all from a skirmish fought on a battlefield!’ Those with wisdom, even hearing this, lamented, ‘How disgusting! It’s just as if they were fighting over corpses in the fields outside of the city.’”⁴⁶ Though the excesses of *dengaku* and dogfighting have captured the interest of a broad cross-section of society, again the elite tastemakers want nothing to do with it.

In addition to what might be said about taste, here there is more than a hint of classist, conservative disdain, and indeed class is transgressive excess’ second point of transgression. Though it is aristocratic taste that is being violated, and like Sanjō Kintada there were many offended by the new maximalist standard, the *Taiheiki* is quite explicit in stating that both high and low, warrior and noble were caught in *dengaku*’s hypnotic sphere. Of course, this class

⁴⁴ The diary is known as the *Gogumaiki*. Qtd. in Ishiguro, *Chūsei no engeki to bungei*, 157.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴⁶ Hasegawa et al., ed., *Taiheiki*, 1:257.

transgression does not begin and end amongst the denizens of the capital. In speaking of transgressive excess and class, it would next to impossible not to bring the *akutō* into the discussion.

Both the Japanese scholars Matsuoka Shimpei and Hyōdō Hiromi, particularly Hyōdō, have explicitly linked the rise of what they call *basara* to the phenomenon of the *akutō*. Defining just what the *akutō* were is a revisionist project already well underway with these scholars and much beyond the scope of the current study, and I will therefore rely solely on their judgment. Hyōdō's understanding of *akutō* is informed heavily by a document known as the *Mineaiki* or *Hōsōki*. A chorographical document, describing the topography and history of Harima Province, modern Hyōgo Prefecture, it discusses the explosive rise of the *akutō* in on of the regions with which they are most closely associated. The *Mineaiki* goes into great detail about the appearance of these *akutō*: “they wore persimmon-colored robes with six-cornered hats, or *eboshi* with *hakama*. . . for weapons they wore swords and carried only bamboo spears and wooden staves.”⁴⁷ Though compared with costumes of those such as *dengaku* actors described elsewhere in period documents this wardrobe may seem tame, it is in fact a perfect representation of the class-transgressing qualities we see elsewhere. As Hyōdō notes, the six-cornered hat (*roppōgasa*) was usually worn by women. Gender is a topic for a larger project, but it is telling that it is worn with a persimmon-colored robe. These orange garments were, at the time, part of the uniform of *hinin*, for whom the orange color “functioned as a sort of status symbol, with a special meaning for those living in a value system that differed from standard, every day values.”⁴⁸ The wooden staff (*saibō*) was, further, a weapon used almost exclusively by *hinin*. Writing of the same

⁴⁷ Qtd. in Hyōdō, “Basara to geinō-min,” 58.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

Mineaiki, though he acknowledges the affinity for *hinin* accoutrements, Matsuoka more strongly links their finely furnished swords and expensive silks, that is, their extravagant display to what he calls *basara*.⁴⁹ While the term *akutō* is a word describing a social position and not a fashion and I find the connection between *akutō* and the broader aesthetic less clear, the *akutō* of *Mineaiki* most certainly display the class-transgressing qualities of transgressive excess. In the larger context, not only is the taste for strange and ostentatious clothing trickling upwards in society from the *akutō*, but even at the very base of this phenomenon, the *akutō* themselves wear the badges of *hinin*, in direct opposition to the taste-class constellation that had dominated in the Kamakura period.

This connection to *akutō* leads into the third transgressive aspect: public order. If there ever was a perceived threat to state control in the medieval period—beyond nearly a century of constant war—legal edicts make clear that it was the *akutō*, both they *and* the dangers of transgressive excess concerned the powers that be to no small degree. Indeed, this was so much an affront to order that it is the very first item denounced in the *Kenmu shikimoku*, before theft, land redistribution, before anything else. The *Kenmu shikimoku* was promulgated in 1335, on the seventh day of the eleventh month, just five days after Takauji drove Go Daigo out of the capital to Mt. Hiei. Whether or not it had the force of law—which is debated amongst Japanese historians—it represents the highest prioritized concerns of the newly formed government.⁵⁰ Given that land grabs, theft, and the complete vacuum of governmental power were arguably more pressing concerns, one would assume that they would be addressed firstly and firmly in a document like the *Kenmu shikimoku*, but it isn't until the fourth article that they are mentioned at

⁴⁹ Matsuoka, “Basara No Jidai,” 26.

⁵⁰ Ishii, “Kenmu shikimoku,” 492.

all. Rather, it is fancy clothes and drinking parties that have the dubious privilege of being listed in the first two articles.

Displays of excess, both personal and public, were seen as the prime obstacle to the reassertion of public order. Indeed, Matsuoka argues that “the forbidding of *basara* in the opening of the *Kenmu shikimoku* is not a mere warning against luxury and excess in clothing. Certainly, they also included strictures against the transformation of members of the warrior class into *akutō*, that is to say, strictures against dissipation that would not bend to authority.”⁵¹ Again, I find Matsuoka’s full conflation of *basara* with the *akutō* to be not entirely convincing, but otherwise I think the observation is astute. The text of the *Kenmu shikimoku* regarding this reads: “In recent days, there are those who prefer exclusively excess (*kasa*), calling it *basara*.”⁵² Before continuing, I would like to refer back to Endō, the *Shiryō hensanjō* scholar whose work provides the basis for . Though it would appear from the usage here that *basara* can in fact be simply conflated with excess, this usage of *basara* is the only instance that could be taken to mean “excess” until much later. In sumptuary laws of the Kamakura Shogunate with nearly identical wording, *basara* is not used, nor is it used afterwards.⁵³ Just as the *Kenmu shikimoku* says, it was only in recent days that people had referred to his aesthetic as *basara*, and that meaning fell away as quickly as it was acquired.

The *Kenmu shikimoku* warns against focusing solely on excess, and indeed it is what we might call excessive excess that truly transgresses public order. In the *Taiheiki* this can be clearly seen in the events surrounding the collapse of the *dengaku* stands in chapter twenty-six. In this

⁵¹ Matsuoka, “Basara no jidai,” 27.

⁵² Ishii, “Kenmu shikimoku,” 147.

⁵³ Endō, “Basara saikō,” 10.

passage, obsession with excess leads quite literally to infrastructure collapse and panic, bearing out the shogunate's concerns:

Changing the rhythm of the flutes and drums the musicians played, [a dancer] jumped onto a high banister, spun left, turned right, and threw up his hands as he spun round again. Truly, their fine and graceful appearance did not seem to be of this world. . . . So, in the stands of over one hundred *ken*,⁵⁴ cries of joy rang out as the spectators shouted, unable to bear the excitement and incapable of staying in their seats. “Oh, it’s so wonderful I can’t stand it!” . . . [But soon,] as they said “Oh no, what’s this?” the stands collapsed all at once, just like *shōgi* pieces falling one on another.⁵⁵

Though the word *basara* does not appear, the dancers move in a *basara* way as *basara* has been defined in this project—dynamic, flowing—and the crowd becomes so wrapped up in the spectacle that they cannot even remain seated. In all of the excitement the spectators move around so much that they bring down the viewing stands that hold them. The injuries are great in both number and variety and looting is rampant in the ensuing chaos. Class transgression is present here too, in the presence in the same stands of the aristocrat and patron saint of renga Nijō Yoshimoto, Prince Moroyoshi, Go-Daigo's son and then head of the Tendai order, and Takauji himself. It is only the *dengaku* performance and the aesthetic sensibilities that accompany it that make possible this mixing of social classes, heretofore unheard of. Again, Matsuoka suggests that this mixing is possible because the personal expression of transgressive

⁵⁴ A unit of measure usually between 1.82 and 1.97 meters.

⁵⁵ That is, like dominos lined up in a row. Hasegawa et al., ed., *Taiheiki*, 3:326.

maximalism (or *basara* as he has it) represented freedom from public or official constraint, and given what is seen in *Taiheiki*, that seems to be essentially correct.

The last point of transgression is also something beyond the sphere of the government, and that is the transgression of political borders, specifically in connection to Sasaki Dōyo. Above I discussed the historicity of Dōyo and for purposes here there is little choice but to treat Dōyo only as he appears in the *Taiheiki*, but in the text he is a perfect sample as all the elements of transgressive excess are present in his person: with regards to common taste, Dōyo does everything in double measure, clearly exceeding the more subdued norms of aristocratic taste. As taste and class are inseparably linked especially within aesthetic realm of transgressive excess, he is likewise implicated on this count. For public order, though an Ashikaga loyalist, he dexterously manipulates political opponents without regard for the greater betterment of the government. He does this on more than one occasion through hosting strategically lavish social gatherings.⁵⁶ Further, the gathering described in chapter thirty-nine drives partygoers into fits of ecstasy very much akin to viewers of *dengaku*, “as if each person within the walls had been driven mad.”⁵⁷

The last issue is border crossing, and in the case of Dōyo it is relatively straightforward. Simply put, he surrounds himself with a vastly large—perhaps excessive—number of Chinese goods, and these goods are integral in the aesthetic he illustrates. This in turn loops back to the first point of transgression of traditional or courtly taste. Writing only a decade or so earlier, close to the beginning of the Kenmu Restoration, Yoshida Kenkō (1284–1350) decries exactly this sort of acquisitiveness of Chinese things in the tenth section of *Essays in Idleness*:

⁵⁶ Varley, “Cultural Life of the Warrior Elite in the Fourteenth Century,” 200; 202.

⁵⁷ Hasegawa et al., ed., *Taiheiki*, 4:359.

A house which multitudes of workmen have polished with every care, where strange and rare Chinese and Japanese furnishings are displayed, and even the grasses and trees of the garden have been trained unnaturally, is ugly to look at and most depressing. How could anyone live for long in such a place?⁵⁸

This must have been enough of a phenomenon to draw first Kenkō's eye and then his scorn as an arbiter of good taste. Of course, using and appreciating Chinese goods is nothing new in Japan. But as stated above, Dōyo does nothing by half. In chapter thirty-six, forces from the Southern Court are about to enter the capital, and as Dōyo prepares his residence for these "guests," his possessions are itemized:

Putting up the tatami mats in the guest quarters, he spread out a tiger skin, hung an icon of Kannon by Zhang Sengyou and with it an ink landscape by Wang Yangyuan. On a pterocarpus wood table he placed an ancient bronze tripod and with it a brass kettle and silver pitcher. . . In the wooden alcove there was a grass script epigram by Wang Xizhi and a copy of the Diamond Sutra by Zhang Jizhi, and by his bed he placed damask silk sleeping clothes with his aloeswood pillow.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Yoshida Kenkō, Donald Keene, trans., *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1967), 10.

⁵⁹ Zhang Sengyou (fl. early 6th c.) was a Liang Dynasty painter famous for Buddhist images. Wang Yangyuan is unidentifiable. Wang Shizhi (303–361) was an official in the Eastern Jin Dynasty and is held to be the greatest calligrapher in history. Zhang Jizhi (1186–1263) was a calligrapher of the Southern Song Dynasty, known for his calligraphy in large characters.

Hasegawa et al., ed., *Taiheiki*, 4:256.

His cloth, his books, his art, his incense, his pillow, his tea implements, even his pajamas are all imported. Attempts had been made to manufacture similar products in Japan, but whether because of lack of the raw materials or lack of craft, these ventures ended in failure.⁶⁰ Japan, for its part, exported sulphur and crafted items such as swords to China.⁶¹ What's more, exchange between the two countries went beyond physical, mercantile goods. Intellectual exchange, particularly between Zen/Chan monks, was truly rich during this period, and not under the auspices of any particular government.⁶² Both in Japan and abroad, political instability prevented diplomatic missions of any consistency. Indeed, in China the Yuan dynasty would be superseded by the Ming in 1364. How then was this exchange possible? There being no—or no enforceable—governmental limitations on trade, small privately-owned vessels carried goods back and forth between Japan and China with great frequency. Moreover, the international dialogue that gave medieval Japanese Zen so much of its vitality was only possible because the monks were ferried on the same merchant vessels that brought damask brocade and chairs.⁶³ The Chinese lens of Dōyo's particular brand of transgressive excess allows him to vicariously participate in contemporary border transgressing exchange and forces us to consider the foreign origin of these objects with which he surrounds himself. Foreign goods in such sheer number overwhelm the senses and cause a reaction in the viewer or reader in the same manner of the

⁶⁰ Sansom, *A History of Japan*, 2:171.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² A particularly good description may be found in Matsuoka, "Zen no keiki." Matsuoka links Zen to the aesthetics of both *wabi* and *basara*, but on the second count he is somewhat less convincing. While Zen is often transgressive, it is rarely excessive.

⁶³ Murai, *Higashi ajia ōkan: kanshi to gaikō*, 47.

other facets of transgressive maximalism, and as with the other facets, Dōyo is the supreme example.

Transgressive Excess in Practice: The Gathering at Ōharano

Now that four points of “transgressive excess” in *Taiheiki*, centered around the figure of Sasaki Dōyo, have been established, let us turn to a passage referenced in nearly every discussion of either Dōyo himself, or indeed *basara*. I myself have already referenced several times the fame of Dōyo’s tea gatherings and the precedent they set for defining *basara* in terms of baroque gaudiness. Virtually all of this discourse stems from a section in the thirty-ninth book of *Taiheiki*, titled in the Tenshōbon as “Grandee Lay Monk Dōchō Done-In by Slander.” In this episode the full flowering of fourteenth-century transgressive excess can be seen. Below I have translated the section relevant to Sasaki Dōyō in full, with annotations and commentary bringing it in line with the defined boundaries of transgressive excess.

After the destruction of the Myōhōin complex, no scene associated with Sasaki Dōyo is better known than the flower-viewing at Ōharano, in the thirty-ninth book of *Taiheiki*. Paul Varley aptly describes it as a “striking example of Sasaki Dōyo’s *basara*⁶⁴ conduct—but also of his essential refinement and taste.”⁶⁵ In the seventh month of 1366, the general Shiba Takatsune

⁶⁴ Though earlier in this project I quibble with the specificities of Varley’s definition of *basara*, the flower-viewing at Ōharano is a magnificent example that fits both his and my own sense of the word.

⁶⁵ H. Paul Varley, “Cultural Life of the Warrior Elite in the Fourteenth Century,” *The Origins of Japan’s Medieval World* (1997), 199. Note that while both the Tenshōbon and Rufubon lineages of *Taiheiki* unambiguously attribute the festivities undercut by Dōyo to Shiba Dōchō, in Varley’s article he states that it is Hosokawa Kiyouji (d. 1362) who first tries to curry favor with the

(1305–1367), known in the text by his religious name Dōchō, invited the shogun Ashikaga Yoshiakira (1330–1367; r. 1358–1367) to an affair at his residence to be held on the evening of the seventh day, that of the *Tanabata* festivities. Dōyo and Dōchō, were political rivals within the Ashikaga government, and *Taiheiki* is clear that Dōchō “made a particular point of inviting Dōyo,” so that he might gain the spoils of a hard-won social coup.⁶⁶ Dōyo, however, proved to be not such an easy mark. Political animal that Dōyo was, he at first agreed to attend, but at the same time began making arrangements for an event of his own on the very same day, so glittering and opulent that the shōgun wouldn’t even consider missing it. In so doing, not only would Dōyo himself snub Dōchō, but he would cause the shōgun to as well. He summoned all the best artisans in the capital and set about the creation of a pleasure site so magnificent it would be “without parallel in this world.”⁶⁷ The craftsmen did not disappoint.

When the day finally came, Dōyo set off for the hills of Ōhara and Oshio⁶⁸ along with members of houses that dress their members in light furs and have them ride fattened horses.⁶⁹ They stopped their carriages in the foothills, and climbed,

shōgun by hosting a party. While Kiyouji was certainly an earlier victim of Dōyo’s politicking, Varley’s article clearly asserts that it is he undone by Ōharano, and I cannot account for this discrepancy.

⁶⁶ Hasegawa, et al., ed., 4:393

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ A possible reference to the seventy-sixth section of *Ise monogatari*. More on this below.

⁶⁹ A reference to the *Analects*. The Song dynasty Ruist scholar Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 commentary on the four books notes that “riding fat horses and wearing light furs speaks of their wealth.” *Sishu zhangju jizhu* (Chizaotang *Siku quanshu huiyao* 摘藻堂

clambering up green vines, passing through twists and hidden places. The flowers and trees grew thickly around the meditation hall.⁷⁰ Crossing over a stream that ran through a deep and turning valley near the temple gate, the path became as narrow and tangled as a sheep's entrails and the grade became steep. The railings were covered in gold brocade and the ornamental post-knobs in silver leaf. With woolen carpets from the continent and brocade from Chengdu⁷¹ spread over the bridges and fallen flowers piling up on top of them, even though it lay in a shadowy vale not touched by the morning sun, the bridge planks shone as if covered in snow. When the revelers stepped on them, their feet were cool; when they tread on it their boots were fragrant.⁷²

At this point the revelers have crossed a threshold. As they disembark from their carriages at the foothills of the mountain, they begin a quasi-religious ascent from the mundane world. I say quasi-religious because though it may have many of the hallmarks of ascetic reverie—steep ascent along a narrow path, feelings of coolness, and sweet fragrances—it is not in any way explicitly religious. Rather, it *skirts* religion. The partygoers pass *near* a temple, but

四庫全書薈要 edition), reprinted in Sturgeon (2016),

<http://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=8747&page=129>

⁷⁰ In the passage, there are clearly both Shintō and Buddhist religious complexes at Ōharano, but they are not identified specifically in the text.

⁷¹ The woolen ground cover is said to be from Daitō 大唐, or the Great Tang, an epithet for the China writ large, but the brocade is specifically from Shokuto 蜀都, that is, the Captiol of Shu. Called Chengdu even then, this city in western China has long been famous for its brocade.

⁷² Hasegawa et al., ed., 4:393f.

do not enter. As seen below, drinking the tea that Dōyo has prepared in lavish volume, they feel *like* heavenly immortals, but there is no indication that their bodies have been transmuted, nor that such is even their goal. This, too, is connected to or perhaps an aspect of transgressive excess: the use of what might be called the religious mode in distinctly irreligious circumstances.⁷³ Even when one allows for the fact the line between the religious and the secular was much less clear in pre-modern Japan than it is in the modern day, the degree to which this gathering, marked by transgressive excess, borrows only the surface aspects of religious ritual is remarkable. This is further related to the fourth point of transgressive excess, border crossing. Brocade from China has already been mentioned, and as the passage progresses the laundry list of continental goods will only grow longer. The skirting of religion is also, in an oblique way, related to the issue of border-crossing. As noted above, during this period, trade with China was inextricably linked with the mass importation of Zen. Zen's role as a conduit for Chinese culture—both material and intellectual—was just as important as its role as a new stage in transmission of the Dharma.

Crossing the windy stone bridge, they found water running through open bamboo pipes, and water boiling for tea in a stone tripod. The water rushed with a sound like wind through the pines, and was so full of the sweet scent of spring that drinking just one cup would instantly make you feel like a heavenly immortal.⁷⁴

⁷³ In later Japanese history, borrowing of a religious mode for secular aesthetics is relatively common. Take, for example, the Edo period haikai poet Bashō—though never himself taking religious vows— dressing as a monk as he makes his travels from Edo northward.

⁷⁴ These are both common tropes for describing tea drinking in Tang tea-related poetry. See James Benn, *Tea in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), esp. 72-96. Lu Tong's

They had tied celadon incense burners to each curling branch of the wisteria with *Pinghong* sashes⁷⁵ and an incense of rare aloeswood burned on a table decorated with gold wire. The spring breeze was so filled with warm scents that, without realizing it, the partygoers felt as if they had entered a forest of fragrant chinaberries.

As the manifest of luxury items grows to an improbable length, Dōyo's guests are overwhelmed by the splendor of it all. Each sense is addressed: the boiling tea is heard through the poetic filter of wind and pines; the air is filled with clouds of pungent incense; the incense sits on a table glittering with golden ornamentation; as they taste the tea, the guests feel as if they have been lifted to an undying plane; the breeze is warm and the ground coverings underfoot are soft and cool. This is the logic of the aesthetic of transgressive excess. Any one of these items, alone and lesser in degree, could have passed muster as the height of taste in earlier times or amongst different guests. The loveliness of a single scent or sound elicits sighs of admiration in the world of *The Tale of Genji*. Not so under Dōyo's curation. Not only are there whole carpets of brocade and billowing clouds of incense, either of which being impressive on their own, but indeed both at once. Each bodily sense is addressed directly and overthrown, and when all senses are undone,

(795-835) "Seven Cups of Tea" is of particular interest. It was (and is still) widely read in China, and in the third stanza the poet declares that after six bowls of tea, he can "communicate with immortals," and thereafter finds himself on the legendary paradisiacal island of Penglai (Benn 92).

⁷⁵ *Pinghongdai* 平紅帶 also known as *pingjiangdai* 平江帶 were sashes of woven thread, named for Pingjiang in Zhejiang Province. Zen monks wrapped them around their waists as part of their habit.

the partygoers enter a world colored by the unreal. They become untethered from their physical surroundings. The world they see is no longer even Japan, but leaping over the sea, China:

They cast their gaze a thousand *li* away and twisted their necks to see the mountains in all four directions. Amid the thickly layered mist, the mountains and streams soared up together. Without taking up brushes with red and green pigments, but with all the concentration of spending ten days painting a single stream, they could see the four oceans and five lakes right where they stood,⁷⁶ without moving an inch. Sighing three times with each step, they climbed higher and higher until they reached the court yard of the main temple building. In the courtyard, ten arm-spans wide, there were four blossoming trees. Around each tree the craftsmen had cast flowerpots of fine bronze, each fully one *jō* high,⁷⁷ turning them into a pair of flower arrangements. Between them there were two incense burners two arm-spans around placed on tables. As the partygoers burned

⁷⁶ A reference to famous sites throughout the whole of China, hence the whole world.

Specifically, the five lakes are Dongting in Hunan, Poyang in Jiangxi, Tai in Zhejiang, Chao in Anhui, and Hongze in Jiangsu; while the four seas are the East China Sea, the Yellow Sea, the South China Sea, and the Bohai sea.

⁷⁷ One *jō* 丈 is ten *shaku* 尺, roughly three meters in modern measurement, though the precise lengths of these units varied over time. In this particular case they are likely not being used with any precision anyhow.

rare scents by the fistful, the fragrant breeze scattered to the four directions and all present felt as if they were in the world of the Many Fragrances.⁷⁸

Incense and Excess

One can say, at the very least, that the use of incense as seen in the Ōharano episode would not have been as unheard of as it may at first blush seem—lavish though it certainly was. Honma Yōko notes in her important study *Chūsei kōki no kō bunka* that appreciation of incense as an art in and of itself did not come into its own for nearly another hundred years, under the tutelage and institutional support of the eighth Ashikaga shōgun Yoshimasa (1436–1490; r. 1449–1473), the aristocrat Sanjōnishi Sanetaka (1455–1537) and Shino Sōshin (fl. late 15th c.), progenitor of the Shino line of tea and incense appreciation.⁷⁹ While Honma takes great care to note that the notion of these three titans fostering the systematized appreciation of incense out of the ether is merely the standard explanation, and the historical documents paint a picture that is both richer and possessed of less clarity, she does not place the crystallization of the art any earlier.

Still, incense appreciation in a form resembling the final product must have been practiced in the environs of Kyoto at least as early as the first half of the fourteenth century. The

⁷⁸ The Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū edition of *Taiheiki* has “fukō sekai” 浮香世界, the World of Floating Fragrances. The editors, however, note that this is likely a mistake for “shūkō” 衆香, the name of a land mentioned in the *Vimalakīrti nirdeśa sūtra*. In my translation I have followed their editorial suggestion, as well as Burton Watson’s translation of the realm. See Burton Watson, trans., *The Vimalakīrti Sutra* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997).

⁷⁹ Honma Yōko, *Chūsei kōki no kō bunka: kōdō no reimei*, (Tokyo: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2014)

afore mentioned *Nijō-Kawara rakusho* castigates the citizens of the capital for over-fondness for incense competitions, even associating them with the deleterious practices of dogfighting and *dengaku* dancing, which were widely acknowledged to be ill portents: “Though all say that dog fighting and *dengaku* brought the downfall of the Kantō,⁸⁰ *dengaku* is still as popular as ever; gatherings for tea and incense in ten varieties have been popular in Kamakura for some time, but now they grow prodigiously in the capital.”⁸¹ I will turn to tea gatherings below, but the overt citation of the ten kinds of incense in the competitive salon environment of the *yoriai* closely resembles the later Muromachi practice of *jusshu kō*, meaning ten burners or ten varieties of incense, which was to become the “main stream” of incense practice. In a *jusshu kō* competition, a number (usually three) of scents were divided between ten burners, and participants vied to correctly identify each one. Of the twenty-two incense appreciation gatherings held at the imperial palace recorded in Sanetaka’s diary *Sanetaka-kō ki*, between 1475 and 1532, all but one are listed as being in the *jusshu kō* format.⁸²

What then were these incense gatherings like? As with tea, the primary difference between the incense contests of Dōyo’s day and those of Yoshimasa and Sanetaka was likely more one of spirit than of substance. Though I have not been able to locate any records of specific incense gatherings from the mid-fourteenth century, some idea of their character can be triangulated from what is available. In the *rakusho*, incense closely follows tea. Indeed, it is the very next character, forming a “tea and incense” category, indicating that in the mind of at least the author of that particular graffiti, they were to some degree linked activities. Tea gatherings

⁸⁰ That is, the Kamakura *bakufu*.

⁸¹ Kasamatsu, 346.

⁸² Honma, 28ff.

themselves were raucous occasions for gambling where the normal structures of social order are bent to the point of breaking.

Were incense gatherings also the same? Was incense even appreciated independently, unmoored from any other social pretense? It is difficult to offer anything beyond conjecture given the paucity of documentation, but it is well within reason to speculate that incense developed a culture similar to contemporaneous tea consumption. If that is that case, the tossing of rare incense into the censer by the fistful is one of the first indications that—beyond being merely sumptuous—the gathering Dōyo had sponsored was situated obliquely to the standard social order, despite the presence of the shogun himself, in his person an incarnate avatar of the powers that be. Before addressing the importance of tea, the conclusion of the passage:

Afterwards, they raised curtains, set up *kyokuroku*⁸³ chairs, prepared marvelous dishes of a hundred flavors, and had a tea contest in one hundred rounds.⁸⁴ prizes for the winners were piled as high as a mountain. All at once the dancers danced like spinning simurghs flapping their wings, the musicians played as finely as spring warblers sticking out their tongues in song, and all gathered there took off

⁸³ Wooden chairs with a backrest and often armrests. They were associated with Zen monks.

⁸⁴ Tea contests, similar to the incense contests described above, involved tasting a variety of teas and attempting to identify them. Though one hundred rounds may sound like a wild exaggeration, an example is recorded in *Gion shugyō nikki*, an administrative record from the complex that is now Yasaka Shrine. An entry from the ninth month of 1343 records the results of a contest of just this size. See Hasegawa et al., ed., 4:395 n.25.

their short-sleeved robes, *hitatare* suits,⁸⁵ and under-*hakama*⁸⁶ all of various colors and patterns, and flung them to the performers. As the excitement reached its peak, and the drunkenness along with it, as there was no moon to light their returning path, with torches glittering to heaven, the axles of their mother-of-pearl-inlayed carriages thundered, and their fine, small horses⁸⁷ jingled their mouthpieces as they galloped away. One could say that the commotion did not differ from the three worms⁸⁸ and hundred demons passing through town late at night. During those twenty days between the blossoms' flowering and fading, everyone in the city acted as if crazed. Bo Juyi wrote of the bewitching color of the peonies,⁸⁹ and truly one finds that that scene must have been just like that: the ears and eyes of all who heard and saw of it were amazed.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Modelled after, but different from, court dress, *hitatare* were colored robes often paired with similarly patterned *hakama* trousers and was the preferred mode of dress for military men.

⁸⁶ Wide-legged underwear often of fine silk, worn between the loin wrappings and the top layer of *hakama*.

⁸⁷ Small here does not mean that they are underfed, as suggested by the “*Nijō-Kawara rakusho*,” but simply that they are small in stature in a way that was considered elegant.

⁸⁸ The three worms, *sanshi* in both Japanese and Chinese orthography, were insects believed in certain strains of Daoism to live inside the body and, every sixty days, leave at night to report their hosts' misdeeds to the King of Heaven.

⁸⁹ A reference to the poem “The Scent of the Peony,” particularly the couplet, “I wish I could, for a moment, seek the power of the Fashioner / That I might extinguish the bewitching color of the peony.” Qtd in. Hasegawa et al., ed., 4:396 n. 35.

The Tea Drinkers

In the discussion of incense, I noted that the consumption of tea as it is shown described in *Taiheiki's* Ōharano episode fits well with the aesthetic of transgressive excess as I have described it, and with tea having finally made an appearance in the text it is now appropriate to turn to precisely how. The consumption of tea seems to have entered Japan with Zen Buddhism in late Heian or early medieval period, and, as in China, first gained popularity in centers of Buddhist learning as both an aid to practice and as one of a number of decoctions thought to aid one's health.⁹¹ The Japanese discourse surrounding tea consumption begins in the early thirteenth century with the Myōan Eisai's (1141–1215) treatise *Kissa yōjōki*, or *Drinking Tea for Nourishing life*.⁹² Eisai presents tea primarily as a medicine particularly useful in balancing the five viscera,⁹³ which in Eisai's scheme correspond to the five different flavors. Tea is bitter and thus good for the heart. Indeed, its flavor is of the utmost medical importance since Eisai can find no other bitter foods regularly consumed in Japan, and thus tea is a patient's only hope for strengthening the heart viscus.⁹⁴ Over the course of the following century, tea begins to move out

⁹⁰ Hasegawa et al., ed., 4:395f

⁹¹ For more on the history of tea in China, see Erling Hoh and Victor Mair, *The True History of Tea* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2009); and Benn. Hoh and Mair's volume, in which the authors make the case for a rather late date of the inception of popular tea culture in China, has not been received without controversy.

⁹² See Benn, 145–171, translated in full from 157.

⁹³ That is, the *gozō* or *wǔzàng*: the liver, the lungs, the heart, the spleen, and the kidneys.

⁹⁴ Benn, 150.

of the monasteries and into the parlors of elites and aesthetes, again describing a historical arc similar to that of tea in China.

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, the consumption of tea had taken on a very different flavor, so to speak. No longer consumed only as a meditation aid and less still as a medicinal decoction, the center of tea consumption had fallen firmly into the hands of connoisseurs. An entry from the diary⁹⁵ of Emperor Hanazono (1297–1348; r. 1308–1318) contains the following entry from the eleventh month of 1324: “Recently, a certain person said that Suketomo,⁹⁶ Toshimoto, and others have brought a group together and meet to go wild in pursuit of pleasures. Some wear neither clothes nor hats, and, nearly naked, they hold tea drinking gatherings. Perhaps this is in study of the style of connoisseurs.”⁹⁷ This is the infamous *bureikō*, a space where the niceties of social order are foregone for the sake of both free

⁹⁵ Called *Hanazono tennō shinki*, it is preserved largely in his own hand and covers the years 1310 to 1332

⁹⁶ Hino Suketomo (1290–1332) and Hino Toshimoto (unk.–1332), unrelated, were both aristocrats who later participated in the early stages of Go Daigo’s coup plot, for which they were found out and eventually executed. Their capture is described in the first book of *Taiheiki*, and their respective deaths in the second.

⁹⁷ Qtd. in Kumakura Isao, “*Taiheiki* to tōcha,” *Sadō sasshi* 70.1 As Shirakawa observes, what is meant by “connoisseur” is a recluse in the Daoist style, that is, one who acts spontaneously in accordance with nature and is untrammelled in behavior, not being constrained by societal norms. It is not difficult to see how those who sip tea in states of flagrant undress would fall into this mode, and this further underscores the importance of continental textual traditions for tea culture at this point in Japanese history. Shirakawa, 105.

exchange of ideals and dissipation. Hino Suketomo and Hino Toshimoto—unrelated despite their shared surname—were both aristocrats closely involved with Emperor Go Daigo’s early anti-*bakufu* machinations. Both were captured, and both were executed in 1332. The text of *Taiheiki* itself makes a link between this sort of behavior and socially damaging, anti-government activity. Early in the narrative, Suketomo’s *bureikō* is described thus:

The style of this drinking social astonished the ears and eyes of those who heard of and saw it. As the cups made their rounds, none paid mind to high or low station. The men cast off their court-caps and undid their topknots; [monks] wore only white under-robos without vestments over them.⁹⁸

This was not only the style of those plotting political insurrection, but also the expected atmosphere of contemporary tea competitions. Though neither Emperor Hanazono’s diary nor the description of Suketomo’s *bureikō* in *Taiheiki* specifically mention any sort of contest, curator and scholar of the history of tea in Japan Kumakura Isao argues they must both be tea competitions because of the riotous nature of which they partook.⁹⁹ This position is strengthened by the Ōharano episode. As the revelers reward the dancers for capping the evening with fine entertainment, they toss them silken robes from their own person as payment. This practice in itself is not unusual, but in accordance with the aesthetics of transgressive excess, the members of Dōyo’s cadre take things a step further, stripping themselves down all the way to their underwear in order to give the dancers their due. By describing the partygoers as going to this length in disrobement, the text of *Taiheiki* activates associations with the wild tea-drinkers of the

⁹⁸ Hasegawa et al., ed., 1:34.

⁹⁹ Kumakura, 39.

day, and the perceived anti-social tendencies thereof, another facet of broadly defined transgressive excess.

Dōyo and Ise monogatari

Yet beyond notions of transgressive excess, Dōyo's acts of taste paint a more detailed picture of a mind that pays great attention to the political uses of the traditional court-centered culture to which transgressive excess is in large part opposed. The greatest indication of this is the selection of the site of their party at Ōharano, and nearby Oshio. Both Ōharano and Oshio are places of deep significance in the literary-aesthetic world of pre-modern Japan and had been so since the early Heian period. The seventy-sixth section of *Ise monogatari*, one of the shorter, consists of little more than a brief prose passage describing Narihira's erstwhile-lover Takaiko, the Nijō Empress, making a pilgrimage to a religious site at Ōhara, and a poem composed by a member of the Palace Guards—presumed to be Narihira himself—on the occasion. The poem praises the place and the occasion, obliquely directing praises towards the deity itself making the poem function as something of a hymn.¹⁰⁰ Though Ōharano does not function as a poetic toponym the way other sites mentioned in *Ise* come to do, *Ise monogatari* was canonized early, thoroughly digested, and no section of it can be considered minor. As such even so short an episode is enough to justify the poetic apotheosis of a place.

Ōharano's possible significance to Dōyo and his revelers, however, does not only lie in its distant connection to *Ise*. Though the text of *Taiheiki* privileges the Buddhist institution that existed there at the time, the site had long been known for a shrine there dedicated to the deity Amenokoyane no Mikoto, the godly ancestor of the Fujiwara family.¹⁰¹ By holding his revelry in

¹⁰⁰ Tyler and Mostow, 162f.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*.

a locale sacred to one of the most powerful aristocratic dynasties to come to power in Japanese history up to Dōyo's time and filling it with a raucous crowd of the wealthy and senior governing officials currently residing in Kyoto—including the shōgun himself—and so impressing them with his all-sense-assaulting display, the Dōyo of the text of *Taiheiki* is able to lay claim to and even supersede the grand literary-historical traditions of the Heian aristocracy. It demonstrates his ascendancy beyond any possible gainsay.

Counter-point: The Excesses of Kō no Moronao

Despite Dōyo's violent action against the Myōhōin compound, his tact and skillful political maneuvering can be classified as the high register of transgressive excess. But, as with many aesthetic modes, transgressive excess was likewise available to those with poorer taste and markedly reduced political acumen. In many analyses of what *basara* means, the figure of Kō no Moronao (unk.–1351) is generally held up alongside Dōyo as being the second pillar of *basara*.¹⁰² However, as argued above, documentary evidence shows that *basara* is not the proper term for discussing the maximalist aesthetic of the first half of the fourteenth century, which I have dubbed transgressive excess. Though throughout this project I have established the boundaries of an aesthetic more capacious than *basara*, as a coda I would like to use the case of Kō no Moronao to explore the possibility of *failure* in transgressive excess, and in so doing more firmly establish its boundaries.

Kō no Moronao is one of the great bugbears of the Nanbokuchō. When the classic of the puppet and kabuki theater *Chūshingura* borrows the world of *Taiheiki* to escape the censure of the latter *bakufu*, the antagonist Kira Yoshinaka is cloaked in the person of Kō no Moronao. His appointment to high office by Ashikaga Takauji was one of the greatest points of friction

¹⁰² See Sather, esp. 151–159.

between Takauji and his brother Tadayoshi, leading ultimately to the Kannō Disturbance in 1351, a civil war within a civil war. Still, it his actions and ambition that earn him the *basara* label in later historiography rather than his medieval *realpolitik*. The crimes with which he is associated can, like Dōyo, generally be labelled as ones of ostentation and aggrandizement, though they differ both in kind and degree.

Indeed, they are in large part sexual, or at least concerned with marriage politics. The first instance occurs in the twenty-first book when he spies and becomes desirous of the wife of a fellow warrior, Enya Takasada.¹⁰³ He enlists the help of Yoshida Kenkō, but is ultimately unsuccessful. His wrath is so great that he seeks Yoshida's execution and pursues Enya himself to an early grave. Moronao is of course a figure that approaches the boundaries of transgressive excess, but in character his actions, as described in *Taiheiki*, are of a different character if similar in kind. In Moronao is characterized by *excessive* excess.

Just one section of *Taiheiki* focusses specifically on the extravagance of Moronao, in the twenty sixth book titled handily enough “The Extravagance of Moronao and Moroyasu.”¹⁰⁴ Moroyasu's extravagance is like Dōyo's: sacrilegious and in pursuit of leisure. His great crime is appropriating the bonze finial of a temple and having it melted down and recast as a teapot, which, though it scandalized the populace of the capital, sparked a craze amongst connoisseurs of a class for metallic teaware cast from Buddhist objects.¹⁰⁵ Though Moroyasu's actions are, from a religious standpoint, beyond the pale, they are done with a certain style that increases his

¹⁰³ The arc climaxes in the section “Enya hōgan zanshi no koto,” Hasegawa et al., ed., 3:40.

¹⁰⁴ Moronao Moroyasu shashi no koto.” Ibid., 3:290

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 3:296f.

cultural capital even if it damages his karmic merit. Moronao, on the other hand, is more darkly rapacious.

His lust after the wife of another has already been cited, but that was far from the end of his sexual campaigning. In addition to engorging himself on the wealth of the capital, once he was installed as *shitsuji*¹⁰⁶ he begins to assemble a harem of high-born women and see them nightly: “Thus, here and there he secreted away the daughters of nobles, courtiers, and empresses without number and would visit them nightly. Around that time, the children of the capital laughed and poked fun, saying, ‘On the *shitsuji*’s rounds of pilgrimage, no gods refuse his offering.’”¹⁰⁷ His acquisitiveness grows quickly over time. As he continues to assemble his private stock of sexually available women, he hears tell of an aristocrat, Ōinomikado Fuyunobu, whose escapades rival his own, but inexplicably went about without censure, or even the details of his affairs becoming widely known. Moronao is keenly interested: “With eyes behind him and ears in the walls, how could he still be hidden?”¹⁰⁸ Moronao simply will not be outdone. He spreads slander, attempts to have the offender arrested, and that having no effect, he has several of his followers use general disorder in the capital as cover for launching an attack on Fuyunobu’s residence. Fires are set and Fuyunobu’s men and women scatter east and west, but ultimately he survives and Moronao gains nothing, not even the satisfaction of having triumphed over a rival. This is the fundamental difference between his style of self-aggrandizement and that

¹⁰⁶ A position akin to Chief of Staff in the Ashikaga regime. See Thomas Conlan, *State of War: The Violent Order of Fourteenth-Century Japan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2003), 407.

¹⁰⁷ Hasegawa et al., ed., 3:291.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 3: 292.

of Dōyo. Whereas Dōyo surely enriched himself and those in his employ, securing both his and their positions, he did so with such style that even his enemies were forced into a kind of admiration. Recall how he left his residence in the capital so immaculately curated that the occupying force was compelled to leave more treasure than Dōyo already had. Moronao, on the other hand, only consumes. Like an amoeba with a single instinct, there is no guiding principle behind his acquisition except “more.” For this reason, his brazen manner and gaudy lifestyle are not marked by what for lack of a better word I would call the subtleties of transgressive excess, if excess can be described in shades of subtlety. His mode is in the all-too-well-known pattern of blunt greed.

Conclusion

There is a power in the aesthetics of maximalism that is difficult to deny. In the face of overpowering number, overpowering movement, overpowering sensory experience, there is very little that can be said in the moment, only reflected upon in tranquility. Though in popular thought medieval Japanese aesthetics are often characterized by austere minimalism, alongside the ink-wash paintings in the style of the Song dynasty there existed another aesthetic, contemporary but polarly dissimilar. More often than not, this aesthetic is given the name *basara*. Indeed, many go so far as to call the fourteenth century—marked by warfare and social upheaval—“the age of *basara*.” Yet, when one carefully examines contemporary documents, both legal and literary, the result is that not only are there very few instances of the term *basara* at all, but when it is used, its use is much more specific, referring to the fluttering movement of cloth or the dynamic turning of a dancer. Only in later centuries did it acquire the broad and generally derisive meaning of excess in manner. Yet, even if the term *basara* is a misnomer, being anachronistic, *Taiheiki*’s Sasaki Dōyo’s flagrant flouting of aesthetic norms is undeniable,

begging to be labelled. How then should it be called? In this project I proposed the term “transgressive excess,” transgressive both in the sense of being in violation of accepted boundaries, but also simply moving across, crossing the physical space of the sea-strait between China and Japan in the early fourteenth century. The points of transgression are taste, class, public order, and political borders. In the text of *Taiheiki*, Dōyo, again, is the avatar of each of these points of crossing, inextricable from any discussion of either *basara* or transgressive excess. Though these points are in all cases intertwined, no single incident is more illustrative of them all than the excursion Dōyo arranges to Ōharano, outside of the capital. The attendees are so overwhelmed by the material objects with which they are presented that it is as if they have been transported to an imagined China, inhabited by immortals amongst whom they can almost count themselves. More than a party, this is a political coup for Dōyo. Dōyo, however, is not alone in *Taiheiki* in being given over to extravagance in both behavior and decorating. The warlord Kō no Moronao is also often held up as a practitioner of *basara*, but under the rubric of transgressive excess, he falls short of the mark. Whereas Dōyo racks up accomplishments both political and artistic, Moronao’s instincts are simpler: he is greedy.

Given that this project has argued for a modest revision of our conception of the medieval use of *basara*, the logical next step would be to track the term through documents in the later Sengoku and even Edo periods, to examine how it evolves and when the meaning shifted towards how it is understood today. Even in this project, comparing different transmissions of the text of *Taiheiki* hinted that this process might have been occurring as early as the late fourteenth century. Following the term into the Edo period, it would be further production to take up the practice of Edo *Taiheiki yomi*, the popular public dramatic reading of sections of *Taiheiki*,

popular well into the nineteenth century, to examine how transgressive excess was understood and appreciated as it continued to evolve throughout time.

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