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Review of *The Chaos and Cosmos of Kurosawa
Tokiko: One Woman's Transit from Tokugawa to Meiji
Japan* by Laura Nenzi

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The Chaos and Cosmos of Kurosawa Tokiko: One Woman's Transit from Tokugawa to Meiji Japan. By Laura Nenzi. University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. 240 pages. Hardcover \$48.00.

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Laura Nenzi's *The Chaos and Cosmos of Kurosawa Tokiko* is a microhistory of the largely unknown Kurosawa Tokiko, a woman who might have been completely forgotten had she not embarked on a journey from her native Mito domain to Kyoto to deliver a petition to Emperor Kōmei pleading for mercy on behalf of the Mito daimyo, Tokugawa Nariaki. Nariaki had been placed under house arrest for criticizing Ii Naosuke over signing treaties with Western countries. Tokiko was quickly imprisoned and released, banished to her home village, where she died in 1890 at age 85. Like other loyalists, including a handful of women, Tokiko received official recognition for her efforts by receiving posthumous court rank (*zōi*), thus gaining a secure position in loyalist history, at least, among local memory activists.

It is unclear whether the emperor received her petition, and even if he had, Nariaki died during his confinement in 1860, rendering Tokiko's action relatively useless.

From the macrohistory perspective, Tokiko's "impact factor" was low. But as Nenzi argues, in microhistory results are not as important as the process, as the strategies and creativity of ordinary people in their daily lives, some of whom, like Tokiko, embark on extraordinary adventures. Nenzi cares about the nuances that are missing in macrohistory. She offers Tokiko as a lens for looking at a broad range of issues in nineteenth-century Japan, including gender, political activism, religion, and rural commoner life. Tokiko, Nenzi suggests, is a case study for how people fit into the sometimes disparately studied subfields of intellectual, social, and political history, and how Tokiko's story fills in gaps left out of macrohistorical depictions of women, the Meiji Restoration, and penal histories, among others.

Part 1 sets the stage for Tokiko's life. Here, Nenzi invokes the literary symbol of the sparrow, flitting through the chapters from the contextual "nest" of Tokiko's home to the "clipping of her wings" when imprisoned in the infamous Tenmachō prison; Nenzi, much like a biographer, clearly enjoys her subject. Tokiko worked as a peddler and teacher and helped operate the family Shugendō center, occupations that connected her to Mito domain warriors, poets, and travelers through whom she would form opinions about events beyond her village. A significant contribution of Nenzi's work is the way in which she connects Tokiko's religious practice, devotional and occupational, to her developing political consciousness.

Part 2 builds upon this foundation by starting with a "script"—the narrative, possibly written by Tokiko after the fact, of her transition to political activism. Nenzi provides an interesting analysis of the religious work from which Tokiko would draw inspiration and strategies for action. For example, Tokiko ascribed a comet sighting in 1858 as a sign that she should embark on a petition journey to Kyoto. But, as Nenzi carefully points out, even this putative sign appeared in documents only after Tokiko was arrested in Kyoto. In other words, Nenzi keeps one eye on the pitfalls of historical memory while recreating Tokiko's life. Nonetheless, Tokiko's chance encounters, literary knowledge, and poetic practice help explain her decision to advocate for her punished lord Nariaki.

Tokiko finally arrived in Kyoto in 1859 and delivered her petition in long poem form, a style that allowed her to express her feelings about Nariaki, Ii, and Emperor Kōmei without being limited by length or poetic conventions. Moreover, a prose essay would have been deemed inappropriate for a woman. Despite her connections to well-placed Kyoto loyalists, her writing probably did not reach the emperor. Nevertheless, she became one of only two women in the bakumatsu period to be arrested for political activity not connected to a husband's actions. Nenzi weaves together Tokiko's intellectual and occupational influences, formulating a brief analysis of her subject's imprisonment in Tokyo and Kyoto. Aside from an illness, Tokiko is released relatively unscathed, suffering only "medium banishment," and is sent back to her homeland.

The third part of the book covers Tokiko's post-Meiji Restoration life and how her life story changed long after her death. Like much of the book, religion loomed large

as a theme in Tokiko's life as she navigated the creation of state Shinto and its effect on local religious communities. After her death, her reputation was narrated by memory activists, mostly local historians, government officials, and the like, who wanted to promote local contributions to the national historical landscape. With each reappropriation, parts of her gender, background, religious experience, and so on were dropped or changed to suit the prevailing attitudes of the time.

Nenzi has taken great pains to justify this account of Tokiko's life. First, she argues that her subject is worthy of attention because of the large paper trail Tokiko left. This is a nontrivial reason, as Laurel Ulrich demonstrated in her Pulitzer-prize winning microhistory based on an immense diary that was kept daily for twenty-seven years by an American midwife.¹ Imprisonment and religious practice are just two of many themes that historians will find of interest in Nenzi's study, which is based on Tokiko's memoirs and other writings.

Second, Nenzi defends her study against those who might point out that there is already an account of a female commoner who was an imperial loyalist during the Meiji Restoration, Anne Walthall's biography *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*.² Nenzi notes that an anonymous reviewer of an earlier Tokiko-related article she had written argued, "a gendered history of late-Tokugawa loyalism already existed" and, by implication, "the case for gender was closed." She responds that "by the same token, one must assume that the publication of a study of Yoshida Shōin would have made subsequent monographs on Sakamoto Ryōma or Saigō Takamori repetitive and unnecessary, for the history of *male* loyalism had already been written" (p. 3). Popular culture and historical memory have overplayed Sakamoto and Saigō's influence on Japanese history, but those were hardly studies of little-known individuals. Nenzi is right to caution against becoming jaded against gender as a meaningful paradigm, but as in any disciplinary field—memory studies, intellectual history, or social history, for example—the most powerful studies are those that engage, challenge, and revitalize those fields and, at best, answer larger historical problems.

In other words, microhistory can be tricky. One colleague remembered a talk given by Carlo Ginzburg, one of microhistory's most famous practitioners, where the introducer said of his work, "don't try this at home." Ginzburg used the limited materials available about a sixteenth-century Italian miller to make a historiographical argument, unique at that time, regarding popular culture in early modern Europe.³ In other words, his subject was the locus, rather than the focus, of the book. As a locus, the individual acts as a lens for deep analysis that is often accompanied by a sustained argument within a certain methodological, theoretical, or historiographical field. The

¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

² Anne Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³ Carlo Ginzburg, *Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976).

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details are a means to a grander end. Nenzi, too, accomplishes this in places by offering brief alternative perspectives on macrohistory. At times, Tokiko becomes the book's focus, which makes it more difficult to see the historiographical takeaway. But presentation rather than representation is this microhistory's strength. *The Chaos and Cosmos of Kurosawa Tokiko* would be a great text for an undergraduate Japanese history course, providing students with a case study of how different historiographical themes converge in the life of one individual.