

The Interconnected Corporeality of Imperialism

Disciplining Equine and Human Bodies in Early Meiji Japan (1868–1912)

SESE MA

Kyoto University

This paper delves into the ways in which the subjugation of the equine body was closely intertwined with the disciplining of the human body in early Meiji Japan (1868–1912). Horse racing, together with emerging notions of modern corporeality, played a crucial role in Japan's efforts to establish itself as an imperial power following the imposition of unequal treaties. The violence of colonial encroachment accelerated a process of modernization modelled on Western standards of governance and military strength, requiring the transformation of both human and equine bodies. This transformation aimed to produce subjects capable of participating effectively in modern enterprises, particularly warfare. Within this context, horse racing functioned as an instrument of imperial nation-building. It provided financial resources and served as a training ground for cavalry horses, while also operating as part of a broader Westernization project that facilitated Japan's emergence as an imperial power. The discipline of the equine body in racing depended fundamentally on the rider's capacity for bodily regulation and self-control; thus, the training of horse and rider constituted a mutually reinforcing regime of discipline central to the imperial project. By foregrounding this interdependence, the paper argues that a comprehensive understanding of imperialism requires attention to the interconnected forms of violence enacted upon both human and nonhuman bodies, a perspective that is equally vital to any meaningful pursuit of liberation.

Keywords:

Imperialism; colonialism; intersectionality; warfare; horse racing; discipline

INTRODUCTION

On March 10, 1923, the Keibahō (Horse Racing Bill) was presented to the Japanese House of Peers as a government-initiated proposal. The proposal immediately provoked controversy, particularly over provisions authorizing the sale of betting tickets, which had previously been prohibited under anti-gambling regulations. Central to the debate was whether legalized wagering could be justified as serving national interests. Minister of the Army Hanzo Yamanashi defended the bill, arguing that the promotion of horse racing would contribute to national development, especially through the improvement of military horse breeding. In sharp opposition, legal scholar Yasushi Hijikata retorted with irony. He argued that if betting on horses were to be permitted in the name of breed improvement, then amateur sumō should

likewise be promoted to strengthen the physiques of Japanese youth, who were often characterized as physically inferior to Westerners. By extension, he suggested, the state should also authorize wagering on human competitors in amateur sumō (Sugimoto, 2022, p. 136, author's translation). Despite his remarkable statement, the legislation ultimately passed, inaugurating a new era of institutionalized horse racing in 1923.

This seemingly isolated legal shift, however, marks more than just the legalization of betting and institutionalization of horse racing. It reflects broader socio-political transformations tied to the disciplining of bodies in Meiji Japan. Following a robust literature on the interconnection of oppression between human and non-human animals (Belcourt, 2015; Chrulaw & Wadiwel, 2017; Montford & Taylor, 2020; Jenkins, Montford, &

Taylor, 2021), this paper delves into the ways in which the subjugation of the equine bodies in early Meiji Japan (1868–1912) was deeply entwined with the discipline of human bodies. Following the imposition of unequal treaties by Western powers, the push to modernize through practices such as horse racing was part of Japan's response to imperial pressure, as it sought to cultivate a "modern" army aligned with Western standards of power. This process required transforming both human and non-human bodies—preparing them for military service and imperial expansion. Horse racing, in this context, was a tool of imperial nation-building. The military violence of colonialism instigated a modernization process aligned with Western standards on corporeality and governance. Japan transformed from a nation facing the threat of colonization to one actively pursuing its own imperial ambitions, inflicting modern military violence on fellow East Asian and later Southeast Asian countries, with modernization and colonial expansion advancing in tandem within four decades. Horse racing, providing both a financial base and a training ground for cavalry horses, formed part of the modernization initiative that directly contributed to Japan's transformation into an imperial power. The discipline of the equine body in horse racing relied fundamentally on the rider's ability to regulate and control their own body; thus, this interlinked discipline of human and horse was integral to the broader project of imperialism.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of discipline and body, this paper explores how the processes of modernization in Meiji Japan necessitated the construction of a standardized corporeal norm for both humans and horses in response to the pressures of Western colonial powers in the nineteenth century. At the time, the bodies of both were constructed as "deviant": characterized as weak, inefficient, and uncivilized, and thus in need of reform (Ishizaka, 2002). Training methodologies functioned as political technologies designed to instill in both Japanese humans and equines a new form of corporeality—one framed as "modern" and "progressive." This perceived inferiority was made legible through comparative performances on racetracks, athletic fields, and eventually, the imperial battlefield. The production of this reformed corporeality was facilitated not only by the introduction of Western technologies—such as the modern racing system, selective breeding programs, organized sports, and the Western-style school system—but also through the very creation of a new category of "delinquency." Japanese bodies—both human and equine—that failed to match the physical standards of

Western garrison soldiers and their horses were thus categorized as inferior, legitimizing their subjection to disciplinary reform.

By examining the transformation of corporeal discipline in early modern Europe, Michel Foucault draws on the concept of *dressage* to illuminate how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century institutions systematically trained human bodies to maximize their utility within emerging capitalist systems of labour (Foucault, 1977, p.136). Foucault identifies this period as a decisive moment when the body became a direct target of power: something to be regulated, observed, disciplined, and optimized. Through mechanisms of surveillance, comparison, documentation, and repetitive exercise, bodies were standardized and rendered calculable, transformed into productive instruments whose movements could be measured and improved. Once consolidated in Europe as an ideal model of productive corporeality, this disciplined body was projected outward through imperial expansion and presented as a naturalised and universal norm, rather than a culturally specific construct. Notably, upon Japan's confrontation with Western imperial powers in the nineteenth century, Japanese bodies were perceived as unfamiliar with—and thus resistant to—this regimented corporeal model. Japanese philosopher Taki Kōji attributes this phenomenon to the historical absence of structural demands for such bodily discipline prior to the Meiji period (Taki, 1988). Through this lens, the encounter between Japan and the West was not merely political or technological but corporeal. The Western model of disciplined physicality functioned as a hegemonic standard against which other bodies were measured and frequently deemed deficient. Taki further argues that this colonization of the body—manifest in the imposition of hegemonic standards of bodily superiority and, by extension, the construction of bodily inferiority—continues to be propagated globally through modern institutions, in a manner analogous to imperial domination.

Testimonies from Western visitors during the early Meiji period highlighted the ways in which Japanese people ran with a distinct style named Nanba-bashiri, involving the simultaneous movement of the hand and foot on the same side (Morse, 1917). Notably, Japanese horses also adopted a lateral gait, where the right foreleg and right hind leg moved synchronously (Saitō & Furumura, 2017). Furthermore, horses were shod with straw sandals instead of metal horseshoes, mirroring the footwear of Japanese people. Although small in size (with an average height of 127 to 130 centimeters com-

pared to the Thoroughbred height of 160 to 167 centimeters), they remained uncastrated and often acted aggressively. In addition, track and field sports were unprecedented (Miyamoto, 1976). This absence was accompanied by the nonexistence of structured horse racing activities. This “deficiency” led to Western observers expressing astonishment. Horses began to engage in structured training routines aimed at enhancing their strength, endurance, and proficiency based on a western standard. Track and field sports were introduced by the garrison concurrently with horse racing, necessitating persistent measurement, training, and a cycle of selection (Hirano & Misawa, 1970). In essence, in both human and equine realms, a new structured hierarchy was established.

By providing a historical example of how domesticated animals experience similar types of violence as their human counterparts, this paper illustrates the intertwined process of subjugating humans and non-human animals under the force of colonialism and imperialism in the Meiji era. Horse racing was fundamentally structured around the regulation and discipline of both equine and human bodies. The ability to compel the horse to respond to the rider’s directives was contingent upon the rider’s control over their own physicality. Accordingly, a comprehensive understanding of the interrelated nature of all forms of violence is imperative to the study of imperialism and any meaningful pursuit of liberation.

I. A PRE-MEIJI HISTORY OF JAPANESE EQUESTRIAN CULTURE

Equestrianism has long been one of the six noble arts in Japan, referred to as *kyūba-no-michi* (the way of archery and horsemanship). Since the Yamato period (approximately 250–710), terms such as *kyūjutsu* (archery) and *bajyutsu* (horsemanship) have been used in regard to military equestrianism, with titles like *shiba* (military officer) playing an important role. As a martial skill, equestrianism was regarded as an essential component of land warfare. Horses were also widely used in various aspects of society, especially in grand ceremonies and events. Given Japan’s longstanding identity as a Shinto nation, where governance and religious rites were intertwined, horses were prominently featured in court rituals and other official functions for religious ceremonies (Yamamoto, 2014).

During the Yamato period, Japanese equestrianism underwent significant transformations (Endō, 1995). Initially, before cultural influences from the Korean Peninsula and China, equestrian techniques were inherited

from the Ainu and Tungus indigenous population (Jin’ōkenshōkai, 1963). However, with increased interactions with the Korean Peninsula (Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla) and China (Qin, and later Wei and Jin periods in the Northern and Southern Dynasties), diplomatic missions and ceremonial processions frequently incorporated horses. As a result, Japanese horsemen began to observe and adopt Chinese and Korean riding techniques (Nihon Jōba Kyōkai, 1941). By the latter half of the Yamato period, horses were used not only in warfare but also in transportation and agriculture, with a significantly increased population. Historical records stated in *Engishiki* (a historical legal code published in 927 AD) indicate that Japan exported horses to Baekje during military campaigns and trade exchanges (Kokushitaikei henshūkai, 1974). By the late sixth century, horse riding was no longer limited to the warrior class; it had also become fashionable among the nobility. This growing enthusiasm gradually extended beyond aristocrats to include their attendants, leading to a widespread appreciation for horseback riding. Consequently, horses’ presence became increasingly prominent in national festivals and religious ceremonies.

The final phase of the Yamato period was marked by significant reforms, including the Taika Reform in 645 and the introduction of the Taihō Code in 701 (Yoshino, 2005). These reforms encompassed policies on horse breeding, military organization, horse management, riding techniques, and ceremonial equestrian practices (Kobayashi, 1996). This is particularly noteworthy in the history of Japanese equestrianism, as it established fundamental regulations and institutions that would endure until the Meiji Restoration (Hanaoka, 2019). Serving as the first foundational legal code, the Taihō Code established a bureaucratic government system centered on the emperor, organized into two departments and eight ministries. Many public systems were established to strengthen court authority, such as public land ownership, which involved confiscating all land previously owned by the aristocrats and turning it into public land to be rented out by the court for cultivation, namely the *kubunden* system (Watanabe, 1953). This code also envisioned the structure of a centralized militaristic state with a large-scale military system capable of swift wartime response. The first national conscription was initiated, and *heidan* (army corps with garrisons) were formed across Japan (Yamauchi, 1967). *Shokoku-no-maki* (state-managed pastures), intended solely for supplying horses to these garrisons, were uniformly established nationwide. The production quota

required 60 horses to be born for every 100 female horses (Sekiguchi, 1986). The terrain previously utilized for free-range grazing was now enclosed within official pastures.

The establishment of the hyoumashi (Bureau of War Horses) and samaryō/umeryō (Left and Right Cavalry Offices) further strengthened the now centralized state's equestrian policies. By the late seventh century, the centralized state had developed a well-equipped cavalry force, reportedly numbering in the thousands. However, despite these developments, equestrian training during this era remained relatively unstructured. Riders did not undergo specialized training, nor were horses subjected to conditioning. Instead, a natural affinity or match between humans and horses was emphasized, and riding skills were considered something to be gained through personal experience. The Heian period (794–1185) was another crucial era in the history of horsemanship, characterized as an era of progress in ceremonial equestrianism (Suzuki, 1968). While umayumi (equestrian archery) had traditionally been encouraged for military training, over time, it became more of a ritualistic practice, performed during courtly events such as Tango no Sekku. Additionally, horses were dedicated to the Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in times of natural disasters such as floods, droughts, or earthquakes, and horse-riding performances were held to seek divine favour in shrines (Yamamoto, 2014). Concurrently, diplomatic missions from Tang China also used equestrian displays to demonstrate the grandeur and organize formal ceremonies (Mitsuhashi, 2000). As a result, equestrian techniques evolved primarily for ritualistic purposes. While historical records of this period rarely deploy the term bajutsu (horsemanship) specifically, horse-riding skills were included in military inspections. However, among the aristocracy, equestrianism became more of a leisure activity. Consequently, in the capital Heian-kyō, equestrian archery gained popularity, which led to a focus on graceful riding techniques rather than speed or efficiency (Nihon Chūō Keibakai, 1976). As equestrian culture flourished, it became not only a test of skill but also a display of status. This resulted in a trend of highly ornate horse equipment. During the Enryaku (782–806) and Jōwa (834–848) eras, regulations were imposed to prohibit elaborate horse saddles and to restrict gold and silver decorations due to concerns over excessive luxury. Distinct from later period, horsemanship of this era did not develop in a way that responded to wartime emergencies.

During the Muromachi period (1336–1467) and the following Sengoku period (approximately 1467–1568), Ōtsubo Sukehide emerged as a significant figure in Japanese equestrian history (Koizumi, 2008). After learning ancient archery texts extensively and combining these with practical battlefield experiences, he compiled them into a formalized sixteen-volume equestrian manual, Ōtsubo-ryū bajutsu sho, and founded the Ohira-ryū school of horsemanship. His contribution to the standardization of military equestrian techniques significantly influenced later generations (Ueno et al., 1978). The Ohira-ryū school flourished, and alongside it, Katori-ryū, Kashima-ryū, Ogasawara-ryū, and Takeda-ryū emerged. Eventually, Ohira-ryū, Ogasawara-ryū, Hachijō-ryū, and Naitō-ryū emerged as the four dominant schools of horsemanship (Nihon Keibashi Hensai Iinkai, 1967). Each school taught specialized techniques, but inter-school rivalries were fierce. Practitioners strictly adhered to their own traditions, often rejecting other styles. Particularly, differences in riding posture, reins handling, and rider attire led to heated disputes between schools (Nagatsuka, 1996).

The following Edo period marked an era of prolonged peace under the Tokugawa shogunate. After his victory at the Battle of Sekigahara (1600), Tokugawa Ieyasu solidified the feudal system and established a stable regime, making military discipline a cornerstone of governance. During the early Edo period, equestrian training retained a strong military focus, as the warlords of the Sengoku period still held influence. Recognizing the strategic importance of cavalry in warfare, the Tokugawa government actively promoted horse training and maintenance (Kokushitaikei henshūkai, 1974). However, in the later Edo period (from the 11th shogun, Tokugawa Ienari, to the 15th and final shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu), the prolonged peace led to the decline of practical combat-oriented horsemanship. Instead, equestrian practices once again became more ceremonial and aesthetic. However, the arrival of Commodore Perry's Black Ships in 1853 shattered this sense of security, prompting heated debates over national defense and foreign relations, alongside the introduction of foreign equestrian culture and horses of foreign breeds. Later, the arrival of Western imperialists in Japan through the unequal treaties of 1858 introduced horse racing and new perspectives on corporeality.

II. CONFRONTING A DIFFERENT CORPOREALITY

The United States launched the Perry expedition to Japan in 1853, coercing Japan to sign the Treaty of Peace and Amity the following year. This paved the way for opening trade relations with exploitative obligations that secured economic advantages. Subsequently, in July 1858, Japan entered the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the United States under threats of force. Within the same year, similar agreements were established with the Netherlands, Russia, Britain, and France. Taking advantage of Japan's limited diplomatic exposure during its 215 years of seclusion, the unequal terms included fixed tariff rates, concessions, tax exemptions, settlements, and inland travel rights. Japan's later desire for treaty revision mirrored the sentiments of many nations compelled to sign similar unequal treaties. For the Meiji government, which succeeded the Tokugawa shogunate, treaty revision was a central objective and a matter of utmost importance (Kasatani, 2021). The sentiment was that such revisions would mark Japan's transition into a "powerful" country with modern sovereignty for the first time.

One key provision in the Treaty of Amity and Commerce entailed the establishment of foreign settlements in Japan with extraterritorial privileges, allowing for the presence of foreign traders and commissioners. These settlements were strategically positioned in key cities such as Nagasaki, Yokohama, Kobe, Osaka, and Tokyo. In these settlements, Japanese commoners encountered Western horses brought by foreign residents. Businessman and diplomats were, for the first time, observed exploring the city on horseback, introducing a novel form of recreation (Kikuen, 1862). Sir Rutherford Alcock, the inaugural Consul-General of the British Empire, noted that horses in Japan were rarely driven beyond a trot, as faster movements were considered undignified in everyday contexts (Alcock, 1863). Consequently, foreign residents often compelled horses to gallop in locations and at speeds regarded as disrespectful, thereby giving rise to misunderstandings and social tension. Resentment toward foreigners riding horses culminated in the tragic Namamugi Incident on September 14, 1862, when four British nationals on a leisurely horseback ride crossed paths in front of the procession of Satsuma domain (modern-day Kagoshima Prefecture)'s hanshu (feudal lord), Shimazu Hisamitsu, and were attacked by Satsuma samurai. The British travelers, en route to the Kawasaki Daishi Temple, ignored the samurai's command to stop. Disrupting a procession on

horseback was regarded as highly disrespectful, and the violent act was seen as a form of resistance against the colonial intimidation it symbolized. As a result, one of the travelers was killed, and two others were severely injured. On December 24, the British government demanded a compensation of £100,000 from the Tokugawa Shogunate. In addition, the Satsuma domain was required to execute the perpetrators and pay £25,000 in reparations. While the Shogunate made a concession, the Satsuma domain rejected the demand. This led to the escalation of the conflict, eventually causing the Anglo-Satsuma War (Bombardment of Kagoshima) in 1863. The tragic Namamugi Incident serves as a poignant example of the ways in which horses and equestrian culture were deeply intertwined with the political tensions between Japan and Western imperial powers during that era.

The absence of recreational horse riding in Japan stemmed from significant cultural reasons. Activities focused on "exercise" were unprecedented. The Japanese term *taiso*, meaning "body exercises," also originated in the same era upon confrontation with Western imperialists (Shimizu, 2007). Coined by philosopher Nishi Amane with a commission from the Ministry of the Army, it was intended as a translation of Western terms for gymnastics, reflecting Japan's efforts to modernize its army and citizenry. Initially used in military contexts, *taiso* appeared in official training manuals and early educational texts in 1872, and was institutionalized through school curricula from 1873 (Ōba, 1991). With Nishi serving in both the Ministry of the Army and the Ministry of Education, *taiso* became a key part of national efforts to build physical strength and discipline among the youth, blending military and educational aims in the pursuit of "modern" nationhood.

Similar to their human counterparts, Japanese horses, characterized by thick necks, short legs, and occasionally erect manes, were often regarded by Westerners observers as inferior, particularly in the absence of an established horse racing culture. This judgement reflected comparison with Western equestrian practices that had themselves only developed a century earlier. For example, Sir Rutherford Alcock (1863) noted that although the head, neck, and forequarters of the horses he examined were satisfactory, their hindquarters were consistently weak and their hooves disproportionately narrow. While these horses could trot, pace, and gallop, they were unable to execute a proper canter. Similarly, British Chargé d'Affaires Power Henry Le Poer Trench reported in 1883 that none of roughly 3,400 horses in Japanese

Army stables met acceptable standards, concluding that quality mounts were unobtainable and urging systematic breed improvement (Suzuki, 1970). This perception extended beyond foreign observations within Japan. At the Paris Universal Exposition (1878), two relatively tall Japanese horses, “Iwate Gamo” and “Tashiro Ao” (4 shaku 5 sun, approximately 136 centimeters), initially attracted European interest, which officials took as validation of native breeds (Sanbadoukukai, 1911). This interest, however, reflected their perceived value as pre-selective breeding relics rather than as high-quality stock; European observers dismissed them as “museum specimens,” prompting official embarrassment (Takechi, 1999).

III. A SYMBOL OF MODERNIZATION

Against this background, horses became key symbols in Japan’s modernization (Tachikawa, 2008). Responding to Western militaristic pressure and an instilled urge to become “powerful,” the overarching policy of Ōkaseisaku (Westernization policy) was implemented. The Emperor’s involvement initiated a broader “westernization of the body” (Kunaishō Rinji Teishitsu Henshūkyoku, 1969). In 1872, the ban on meat consumption for the Emperor (though restricted to particular species), in place for 1200 years following Emperor Tenmu’s 675 decree rooted in Buddhist beliefs against killing (*fusesshokai*), was lifted to accommodate Western diplomatic gatherings. To showcase cultural transformation, banquets and mixed-gender social events were strategically organized. Horse racing formed part of this program: officials and military personnel actively engaged in horse racing events arranged by foreign residents, while the Kunaishō (Emperor’s Imperial Household Agency) and Rikugunshō (Ministry of War) initiated their own horse racing events to support this initiative (Sugimoto, 2022). For instance, a reception horse race attended by Emperor Meiji was held for former U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant on August 20, 1879, featuring champagne, sweets, cigarettes, and fireworks as markers of Western-style modernity (Jiji Shinpō, 1879). The event specifically adopted regulations modelled on Newmarket, standardizing eligibility, registration, weights, judging, and fouls (Ōtomo, 1985). Comparable races, such as the 30 November reception for Prince Zeno of Italy at the Toyama Racecourse, demonstrated similar endeavor to present Japan’s modernization (Tōkyō Nichinichi Shinbun, 1879). These events functioned not only as diplomatic display and political strategies but also as groundwork for organized horse racing

and breeding, which were deemed essential to develop a modernized army.

IV. A NEW CORPOREALITY

Western-style horse racing in Japan began on 1 May 1862 at a land reclamation in the Yokohama settlement (Oku & Haneda, 2004). Japanese horses, generally pony-sized by Western standards, were ineligible to compete against Thoroughbred and larger breeds (Honda, 2004). On February 22, 1865, British garrison troops arranged another horse race, with a subsequent race on April 6. Notably, Japanese samurais were invited to take part in the event. Despite a long tradition of horsemanship, these practices differed from Western racing (Kanei, 1974). With the surge in Western-style horse racing in Yokohama during the 1860s, Japanese horses were judged inferior—temperamental, disobedient, untrained for straight running and turning, and lacking stamina (Takeichi, 1999). Their uncastrated status and lateral “nanba” gait, in which same-side limbs move together, reinforced perceptions of low utility, leading Western observers to regard them as deficient in speed, endurance, and draft capacity.

However, lateral gait was in fact considered suitable for carrying heavy loads and traveling long distances for both humans and horses in the Edo Period, in contrast to the diagonal gait (Uchiyama, 2012). In the lateral version of the trot, the movement follows a right-left-right-left rhythm. However, when the horse slows down to a walk, the leg movements become more complex: left front + left hind, left front, left front + right hind, right hind, right front + right hind. This particular gait is called *han-sokutaiho* or “half-lateral gait.” Historical documents suggest that there were training methods to teach horses the lateral gait (Matsunami, 2012). In the military, this gait was historically adopted to reduce vertical bounce and maintain stability for tasks like bugling or shooting guns from horseback. For riders, lateral gait is extremely smooth with minimal vertical bounce. This makes it less physically taxing, even over long distances or extended periods of riding. Japanese breeds such as the Hokkaido native *Dosanko* and Nagano native *Kiso* are well-known for their natural ability to perform lateral gaits without training (Matsui et al., 2011). Today, while breeds like Thoroughbreds and Arabians also participate in traditional rituals involving archery on horsebacks, such as *yabusame*, Japanese native breeds like *Kiso* that perform the lateral gait are considered more stable for handling tools on horseback.

Interestingly, the human version of lateral gait, *nanba bashiri*, was also considered to put less strain on the body (Yamada, 2022). It was famously used as the running method by Edo-period *hikyaku*, the couriers of the time, known for their speed and endurance (Hirokawa, 2012). The *hikyaku* were people (or the delivery system itself) who transported goods in relay style. The system's roots trace back to the ancient *ekidensei* courier system from the Ritsuryō period (late 7th century), where waystations were set up at regular intervals on main roads, stocked with horses and people to maintain communication routes. Under the Tokugawa Shogunate, national road systems were further developed, and the *shukueki-denba-sei* (stationed horse courier system) was established. Each station was assigned a specific number of personnel and horses, formalizing the *hikyaku* as a mode of communication. There were various grades of *hikyaku*, and those who delivered official documents at top speed could travel from Edo to Osaka in just three days. During the Edo period, roads were unpaved and frequently hazardous, characterized by steep gradients and uneven terrain. Courier relay systems further complicated travel, as a single journey typically required twelve to fifteen *hikyaku*. The adoption of a lateral gait by *hikyaku* indicates that it was regarded as an efficient and expedient mode of movement at the time.

Nevertheless, efforts were directed toward physical conditioning for both horses and humans to transition to a Western standard of “efficient physicality.” Alongside the implementation of horse racing, western style modern sports were promoted among the Japanese population during the same period (Yokohama Kaikō Shiryōkan, 2000). By 1872, residents in Yokohama were encouraged to participate in horse racing, shooting, boating competitions, track and field events, and cricket, with each sport actively supported by dedicated clubs securing permanent facilities (Yamamoto & Tanada, 1977). Initially joining these activities under foreign invitation, during the *Rokumeikan* era (1883–1890), these sporting endeavors began to take on a structured approach, hosted by Japanese personnel. Horse racing centered on the regulation of both equine and human bodies. A horse could be made to respond to a rider's commands only insofar as the rider maintained precise bodily control. Moreover, the cultivation of an “efficient physicality” in horses depended on systematic cycles of selection and breeding initiated through racing. Thus, horse racing regulated not only individual bodies but also institutionalized standardized systems of selective breeding and registry practices.

V. MEASUREMENT, COMPARISON, AND HIERARCHY

Breed registries emerged in 16th-century Europe as a form of “disciplinary writing”, linking bodily management with its systematic documentation and accompanying the proliferation of training and husbandry manuals (Renton, 2019). By standardizing breeding records, individual data was integrated into a collective system, enabling each horse to be identified and evaluated within a broader calculative framework. A defining feature of modern horse racing by the 1880s was this sustained accumulation and preservation of detailed records, embodying an ideology that utilizes racing to improve horse breeds (Princée, 2016). In early Japan, however, such documentation lacked pedigree data, particularly parental lineage. This absence indicates that the Western concept of pedigree had not yet been adopted, paralleling the organization of Japanese families around the concept of *ie* rather than genealogical descent (Mito, 1985). In premodern times, the *ie* functioned like a corporate body with significant rights and obligations. Under the rigidly fixed social status, *ie* were structured as patrilineal kinship groups with long-term continuity, organized through relationships between the *honke* (main family) and *bunke* (branch families). The *katoku*, household head, was charged with preserving the family estate and occupation. These relationships and shared surnames were highly valued within the samurai class. However, this model began to collapse following the Meiji Restoration, which granted individuals the freedom to choose their occupation. The decline of the *ie* system was inevitable. Therefore, a transitional legal framework was introduced in 1948, replacing the *ie* system with the current system of *koseki*, resembling a nuclear family structure.

Despite the lack of familiarity with pedigree, there were efforts to introduce parentage details into racing records and establish a Japanese stud book (Sugimoto, 2003). This challenge in pedigree re-cording persisted within Japanese horse race politics until the 1920s, before significant changes were made through legislation toward documenting pedigrees, exemplified by the *Bassekihō* (Legislation on Horse Register) of 1922, in which all horses in the nation were obligated to be registered, akin to the prevalence of human nuclear families at the same period. From 1948 on-ward, *koseki* (family registers) were limited to nuclear families—just parents and their children—unlike the earlier multi-generational format (Horiike, 2023). This change reflected a move away from the traditional *ie* (household) system. While

traditional family structures persisted, legal reforms gradually redefined the household as centered on individuals rather than family lines, limiting the authority of the household head and abolishing collective family property (Furuguchi, 2012).

Racing was intended to serve as a central method for breed improvements. The intended purpose of race documentation was to establish rankings and select horses as stallions and broodmares based on performance. This core ideology of modern horse racing and the vision for organized practices of selective breeding materialized in November 1879 with the foundation of Kyōdō keiba gaisha (Union Race Club) and the official formation of the Nippon rēsukurabu (The Nippon Race Club) in May 1880, followed by the subsequent foundation of Kōnō keiba kaisha (Agricultural Racing Club) in June. Horse racing events were held twice a year, in spring and autumn, by each horse racing organization. The Union Race Club was established by nobles, high-ranking government officials, and army personnel, with its biannual race held at the Toyama Racecourse owned by the army. The Agricultural Racing Club was primarily established by the army and its affiliates, conducting races at the Mita Racecourse under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Nippon Race Club, unlike its predecessor that was exclusive to foreign residents in Yokohama, included Japanese members, with half of the initial members being core government elites and the other half consisting of European ambassadors and residents in concession areas, with imperial family members included as patrons. Horse racing took place at the Negishi Racecourse, established at the request of foreign residents to the shogunate in 1866. These racecourses functioned as both social venues and institutions for breed enhancement. Racing horses were bred on military-owned ranches, Ministry of Home Affairs facilities, Imperial Household Agency establishments, and private ranches. Horses that excelled in racing were therefore selected as breeding stallions and assigned to breeding ranches.

In addition, hybrid horses from selective breeding programs with Western bloodlines showed enhanced speed and stamina (Ōtaki, 2016). This transformation of horse corporeality, engendered by racing and selective breeding, was perceived as a validation of the comparative inferiority of Japanese breeds. Moreover, this shift toward a new corporeality extended beyond horses to encompass humans, aligning both with Western ideals of bodily efficiency and superiority. Competitive sports programs were systematically introduced across educa-

tional institutions, from elementary school to universities. In effect, the training of horses came to parallel that of human bodies, emphasizing the application of anatomical knowledge to optimize performance and utility. A structured hierarchy emerged in both domains, reflected in the organization of records and training regimes that required standardized bodies. This development of modern sports depended on the continual measurement, comparison, and training of such bodies. By demanding new forms of corporeality for both humans and horses, horse racing institutionalized persistent practices of evaluation and comparison, which became central to modern systems of bodily standardization.

VI. JŌBASHIYŌREI (HORSE KEEPING REGULATION) AND A “MODERN” MILITARY

As part of the Westernization policy, the Jōbashi-yōrei (Horse Keeping Regulation) was issued in 1884. The regulation mandated that government personnel with a salary of 100 yen (equivalent to 140,000 yen today) or above to keep horses in proportion to their salary levels. This was to ensure the availability of cavalry horses, requiring civilian officials' horses to be available for military use during war or emergencies. Besides military procurement, the regulation aimed to westernize officials' appearances for court ceremonies and official visits. Horse-drawn carriages, introduced by foreign diplomats, played essential symbolic roles in various social contexts, including national ceremonies, government visits, and social gatherings like balls. This underscored the necessity for senior officials to keep horses and practice riding while avoiding transportation like rickshaws, which were associated with backwardness. The promotion of horseback riding was considered crucial in realizing the desired Westernized image as part of the groundwork for preparing treaty reforms (Takahashi, 2018).

Following the signing of the unequal Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1858, Japan transitioned toward capitalism, significantly increasing productivity and independently developing warships and weapons, leading to a robust “modern” military. Japan's involvement in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1900) marked its evolution into an imperialist nation engaged in expansionist activities. A decade after the Jōbashi-yōrei, as the First Sino-Japanese War erupted, a considerable number of civilian horses were conscripted and sent to the battlefield (Kikuchi, 1910). The following Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905)

was a turning point as Japan emerged as a world imperial power, clashing with Russia, another imperial force. However, as conflicts extended to the Boxer Rebellion and the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese horses drew increasing criticism for failing to meet military requirements.

During the Boxer Rebellion, in which Japan participated alongside Britain, France, Russia, the United States, Germany, Italy, and the Austria-Hungary in joint operations against Qing China, comparisons with Western cavalry intensified perceptions of equine inferiority and heightened the army's sense of urgency to "improve" horse quality (Takechi, 1999). Juxtaposition with Western warhorses exposed perceived deficiencies in the corporeality of Japanese horses, reinforcing calls to enhance this crucial aspect of "military capability." Military personnel, including Shousuke Kikuchi, criticized domestic breeding practices relative to those of Europe (Horiuchi, 2020). Military accounts suggest that, although Japanese forces demonstrated strategic competence, effective weaponry, and operational success comparable to allied troops, humiliation was felt concerning the military horses. Many were described as difficult to control, and the prevalence of uncastrated animals constrained battlefield flexibility and invited ridicule from allied forces (Bokuchiku Zasshi, 1900). This situation prompted calls within the military to address castration practices as part of broader reforms in horse management for a modern army.

VII. NATIONAL-SCALE INITIATIVE ON CASTRATION AND SELECTIVE BREEDING

In response to disparaging comparisons by Western military personnel during the Boxer Rebellion—who characterized Japanese horses as "untamed beasts in horse attire"—a proposal was advanced to implement a nationwide castration program as a corrective measure. Subsequently, in 1901, the *Bahitsukyoseihō* (Regulation of Horse Castration) was passed, mandating the castration of all stallions aged between 3 and 15. However, implementation was delayed in order to train castration specialists, a practice previously known but not practiced in Japan (Brecher, 2022).

During the Tokugawa period, military preparedness extended to maintaining a population of strong, healthy horses. In 1725, Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune imported five Arabian horses from the Dutch. Accompanying them was Hans Jurgen Keijser (1696–1736), an expert in Western equine medicine, who became the first figure through whom the shogunate could access Western

equestrian knowledge firsthand. Yoshimune tasked interpreter Imamura Eisei (1671–1736), a third-generation Dutch-Japanese translator from Nagasaki, with gathering information from Keijser regarding horse breeding, care, and medical treatment. Over the next decade, Eisei worked closely with Keijser, interpreting his responses to the Nagasaki magistrate's inquiries. One subject introduced by Keijser was castration, a practice used in China since the Zhou dynasty to manage livestock behavior. Though described in Chinese veterinary texts, castration never gained popularity in Japan due to the high value of livestock, preference for non-invasive breeding control, and cultural aversion to drawing blood. Keijser emphasized the military benefits of calmer, more compliant horses, yet his performance of castration—and those of later Dutch veterinarians during the Tenpō era (1830–1844)—failed to shift local attitudes. Although isolated cases of successful castration occurred in places like Kawagoe (1656), Sendai (1809), and Sakura (1855), these had little impact on Japanese veterinary practice until this specific time in the Meiji period (Yanagisawa, 1924).

However, due to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, enforcement was further postponed, with the law finally taking effect in 1917. Following this, the annual number of castrations rose significantly, exceeding 30,000 each year from 1917 onward (Kishimoto, 1930). Additionally, on April 7, 1904, Emperor Meiji issued an imperial decree focused on improving the quality of horses nationwide. The decree acknowledged previous attempts to introduce superior horse breeds from Western countries for selective breeding but noted that these efforts had fallen short. Significant concern was expressed over the inferiority of Japanese horses for military purposes. To address these pressing issues within the context of ongoing imperial conflicts with Russia, Emperor Meiji instructed the establishment of a specialized bureau dedicated to breed improvement, emphasizing the urgent implementation of a nationwide selective breeding initiative (Yamaoka, 1968).

On May 31, 1905, the Baseikyoku (Equine Administration Bureau) was established directly under the Cabinet, concurrent with the inception of the Baseiinkai (Equine Administration Commission) serving as an independent advisory body alongside the Bureau. Commencing in 1906, the *Bahitsu Kairyō 30 Kanen Keikaku* (30-Year Plan for Horse Improvement), also referred to as the *Basei Daiichiji Keikaku* (First Equine Administration Plan), was initiated to augment both the quantity and quality of horses over a span of three decades. This

all-encompassing plan was designed to unfold through two distinct phases: an initial 18-year period from 1906 to 1923 and a subsequent 12-year phase from 1924 to 1935 (Kanzaki, 1994).

The primary focus during the plan's initial phase was to improve one-third of the domestic horse population through selective breeding. Key components included importing horses from overseas to "improve" the quality of government-owned stallions, and promoting castration and training specialists (Takeichi, 1999). The first-phase plan was completed as scheduled by the end of 1923, with two-thirds of domestic horses undergoing breed improvement through crossbreeding with Western breeds, surpassing the intended goal. The second phase aimed to enhance one-third of the remaining domestic horses by crossbreeding with Western breeds to create horses with improved endurance and versatility. Key aspects included targeting systematic selective breeding with a distribution of 10–20% light breeds, 75–85% intermediate breeds, and 5–10% heavy breeds, while limiting imports to specific breeds (Arabian, Thoroughbred, Anglo-Arab for light breeds; Anglo-Norman, Hackney for intermediate breeds; Percheron for heavy breeds) (Katō, 2017). This strategy led to the standardization of domestic brood mare types, with light breeds transitioning to Arabian and Thoroughbred, intermediate breeds to Anglo-Norman, and heavy breeds to Percheron. It thus marked the turning point of which the nation had officially entered the age of selective breeding and a modernized army.

VIII. CHAIN OF VIOLENCE

The enactment of nationwide selective breeding laws exemplified Japan's broader shift toward Westernization as it emerged as an imperial power aligned with Western nations during military expansion. Concurrently, Meiji government undertook legal and judicial reforms to meet Western expectations, thereby laying the groundwork for the revision of unequal treaties. The abolition of extraterritorial rights occurred shortly before the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894. Subsequent events included the announcement of the abolition of foreign settlements in 1899 and the restoration of tariff autonomy after the Russo-Japanese War in 1911. These achievements were perceived as successful outcomes of modernization as well as skillful diplomatic negotiations that capitalized on international relations amidst warfare. However, the chain of violence did not end there.

The 1876 Treaty of Peace and Amity between Japan and Korea marked another historic example of unequal

treaties. In February 1876, Japanese diplomats, led by Ambassador Kuroda Kiyotaka and Deputy Ambassador Inoue Kaoru, arrived at Ganghwa Island with six warships and 200 soldiers. Minister of the Army Yamagata Aritomo had two battalions stationed in Shimonoseki, ready for potential conflict with Korea. Japan was well-prepared for military confrontation and had made necessary arrangements. Although the Korean Min clan appointed delegates for negotiations, the intimidating presence of Japan's military led Korea to accept the treaty terms almost as presented. This negotiation tactic, coupled with Japan's military force, mirrored the negotiations between Commodore Perry and the Tokugawa shogunate at Uraga in 1854. Similarly, after the First Sino-Japanese War in 1896, Japan coerced Qing China into signing the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, an unequal agreement reminiscent of the 1858 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Japan and the United States. With the financial advantage secured by the unequal treaty, Japan emerged as an imperial force in Asia.

Although the unequal treaties were eventually abolished in Japan, the mindset they fostered had already become deeply ingrained. The belief that violent domination signifies superiority—serving as a marker of strength and progress—is a particular construct of knowledge rooted in a violent form of modernity. This history reveals a recurring cycle in which military force is used to confront violence, yet its effects persist long after the immediate conflict has ended. The idea that violence lingers, and that there is no clear "post-violence" era, highlights its enduring consequences and continued presence. This dynamic is evident in Japan's process of modernization, which began under the threat of force and evolved into the exercise of force itself. That ideology continues through participation in World War II, the post-war era, and into the present day, manifesting through discourses of strength and delinquency, exerting a pervasive influence on the lives of both humans and horses.

CONCLUSION

By examining shifting conceptions of corporeality in both humans and horses, this paper explores the ways in which Meiji Japan underwent "modernization" through its encounter with standardized Western bodily norms under the framework of nineteenth-century unequal treaties. In the early Meiji era, both human and equine bodies were required to adapt to new forms of corporeality, as horse racing and competitive sports were

introduced as components of Westernization policies under the effort of treaty revision. Essentially, these developments were closely tied to broader imperialistic agendas. The Meiji period marked a departure from earlier practices in which horses were typically uncastrated and systems such as selective breeding, organized racing, and formalized competitive sports were absent. In both human and equine realms, structured hierarchies emerged, as evident in the organization of records, training manuals, physical conditioning, and competitive frameworks that demanded standardized bodies for both species. This transformation signaled a shift in reconceptualizing the body as both an object and instrument of power—one to be disciplined, trained, and optimized. Emphasis was placed on standardization and modernization through continual documentation and regimented training within emerging institutional frameworks.

By introducing horse racing as a modern institution, the Meiji government established a framework for the competitive measurement of corporeal ability. Hierarchies were established according to performance, accompanied by practices such as castration, selective breeding, and the continual refinement of bloodlines. This shift toward a new corporeality was not confined to horses; it also necessitated the reconfiguration of human corporeality in accordance with Western ideals of superiority and efficiency. Competitive sports programs were systematically implemented across educational institutions, from elementary school to universities, extending similar evaluative mechanisms to human subjects as well. Although initially implemented as a political strategy, within this broader pursuit of “Westernization” and “modernity,” individuals increasingly internalize hierarchical modes of assessment, evaluating themselves according to standards of progress, physical strength, civility, and related dichotomies. At the core of this paradigm was the assumption that higher status within a ranked order signified greater strength, even when such status depended upon the exercise of power over others.

As Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel stated in the foreword of *Colonialism and Animality*, the ideology of the colonizers persists as the predominant perspective, shaping what is considered rational and comprehensible on a seemingly universal scale:

We are reminded again and again that the colonial project did not just seek to materially remake the world through social, economic, and political violence, but simultaneously wrought an epistemic violence that shaped how

we saw the world; and impressed upon us values that shaped how we saw ourselves. (Wadiwel, 2020, xix)

On an ending note, it is tempting to reflect again on legal scholar Yasushi Hijikata’s parliamentary speech in 1923. Making a parallel between the training of horses and humans, he stated: “If betting on horses were to be permitted for the enhancement of breeds, then amateur sumō wrestling should be promoted to improve the physique of Japanese youth, who are also perceived as clearly inferior compared to Westerners.” (Sugimoto, 2022, p.136, author’s translation). Hijikata’s argument offers a productive lens for reexamining horse racing, advancing the possibility of extending ethical consideration to both horses and humans. Although his proposal was ridiculed in parliament, it remains relevant even a century later. His perspective could serve as a powerful addition to the ongoing political debates on sovereignty, citizenship and the rights of non-human animals. His satire that equine practices may be applied to humans is not merely theoretical; in many ways, analogous forms of disciplines already exist. Even as legislators dismissed his ideas, those who laughed in the parliament had themselves embraced Western comportment, internalizing disciplinary regimes shaped by a colonialist framework that informed their self-perception and worldview. Hierarchies were constructed across both human and equine domains, subjecting bodies to regimes of training, classification, and selection aligned with the imperatives of imperialism and capitalism. In this sense, comparable forms of structural violence operate upon both humans and horses. As Hijikata’s critique implies, violence directed towards animals reflects and reinforces forms of violence humans impose upon themselves. Therefore, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all forms of violence is essential to the pursuit of liberation.

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