



2023-24年度章群教授紀念公開學術講座
Prof. Chang Chuen Memorial Public Lecture Series (2023-24)

歷史系主辦
Presented by the Department of History

CAPTURING PRESTIGE: HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN
TSUSHIMA'S MARITIME BORDERLANDS, c. 1350-1600

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ABSTRACT

From the perspective of the maritime borderlands centered on the island of Tsushima, late medieval Japanese transformations in commercialization, local lordship, and the integration of the archipelago into domestic and East Asian shipping circuits all depended on flows of enslaved peoples. The history of Tsushima's trafficking networks between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries helps explain the persistence of slavery in late medieval Japan by revealing motivations of traffickers. Slaving empowered cooperation among a cross-section of Tsushima society to form piracy enterprises (Ch. wokou, Kn. waegu, Jp. kaizoku). Lords of the island, the Sō family, integrated slavery into the administrative machinery of their territorial domain and incentivized military service with awards tied to trafficking. They shaped medieval discourses of status and ethnicity that facilitated the objectification of captives into commodified "baseborn" (genin) and "exotics" (Tōjin) from China and the Korean peninsula, who Tsushima traffickers dealt locally and across the archipelago, including to the apex of the warrior hierarchy, the Ashikaga shogunate. For retainers, local elites, and commoner mariners, such sanctioned trafficking became a source of prestige and family legacies alongside other commercial and violent enterprises. Incentivized by the promise of tax exemptions and other awards from the Sō, their piratical enterprises raided Korean and Chinese coasts and engaged in military campaigns in Kyushu. Territorial bestowals across northern Kyushu turned sea-lanes into slave roads. This history invites reconsideration of trafficking in medieval Japan as a low-status, opportunistic, and declining trade.



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