

African Samurai: True Story of a Legendary Black Warrior in Feudal Japan

Welcome! The meeting will start momentarily....

- ❖ All attendee mics will be muted during the meeting.
- ❖ Q/A will take place after the talk, please send questions along “to everyone” in the Q&A chat box!

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Yasuke: An African Warrior in Japan

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Today's Line Up

- Background
- 1581 – Meeting with Nobunaga
- 1581 – Investiture
- 1581/2 – On Campaign
- 1582 – Last Battle
- Yasuke Today
- Multicultural Pioneer

Yasuke - Background

- Until 20th century – 11 million plus Africans sold in the Indian Ocean
- 16th century – Japan embroiled in civil war
- 1549 – First Jesuit missionaries arrive in Japan
- c1577 – Yasuke employed by Alessandro Valignano in India as bodyguard
- 1579 – Yasuke and Valignano arrive in Japan
- 1579 – 1581 Yasuke in Kyushu

African bodyguards and porters arriving in Japan in a Jesuit entourage



Extract from a *Nanban* (southern barbarian) folding screen, Kano School c. 1590-1600. Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

African bodyguards and servants attend a Portuguese dignitary



Extract from a *Nanban* (southern barbarian) folding screen, Kano School c. 1590-1600. Courtesy of The Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, Porto, Portugal.

1581 – Journey to Kyoto

- Valignano goes to Kyoto to ask permission to leave Japan
- In Sakai and then Kyoto, crowds of thousands gawp at Yasuke
- Property is damaged, people crushed in crowds
- Nobunaga demands to see who disturbs his peace

1581 - Meeting with Nobunaga

- Conversed in Japanese, Nobunaga impressed
- Did not believe skin colour – stripped to waist and scrubbed
- Truth realised, Nobunaga sends for sons
- Throws a party for his guest
- Gifts a large sum of money
- Asks Valignano to allow Yasuke into his service

Oda Nobunaga, posthumous portrait



Giovanni Nicolao, c. 1585. Courtesy of Sanpu Temple, Yamagata Prefecture, Japan.

Why so interesting?

- 188cms, a giant in this age
- Good looking
- Intelligent
- Entertaining
- Strength of ten men
- Buddha often portrayed as black skinned
- Many saw Yasuke as a divine visitor gracing them with his presence

1581 – Investiture

- Appointed weapon bearer
- Confidant on overseas matters
- Given residence in Azuchi Castle
- Stipend
- Servants
- SWORD – formal recognition of samurai rank
- First documented non-Japanese samurai

An African sumo wrestler wrestles while Nobunaga adjudicates. The court gaze on.



Sumoyurakuzu (A sumo match) folding screen. Author unknown c. 1600. Katsuragi Museum of History, Katsuragi City, Nara Prefecture, Japan.

A wealthy African talks with a Portuguese merchant



Detail from a lacquer ware writing case, probably Rin school, c. 1615. Courtesy of Paulo de Cunha donation, Fundacao Abel e Joao de Lacerda, Museu do Caramulo, Caramulo, Portugal.

Azuchi Castle, where Yasuke lived



Artist unknown, 19th century. Drawn after an original, now lost. Courtesy of Osaka Castle Museum, Osaka, Japan.

1581/2 – On Campaign

- Yasuke was likely a fad at first
- But soon won his lord's trust
- Accompanied Nobunaga on campaign once definitely, probably twice

- June 1582 – Nobunaga sets out for western front with close entourage
- Stays the night in Kyoto

1582 – Last Battle

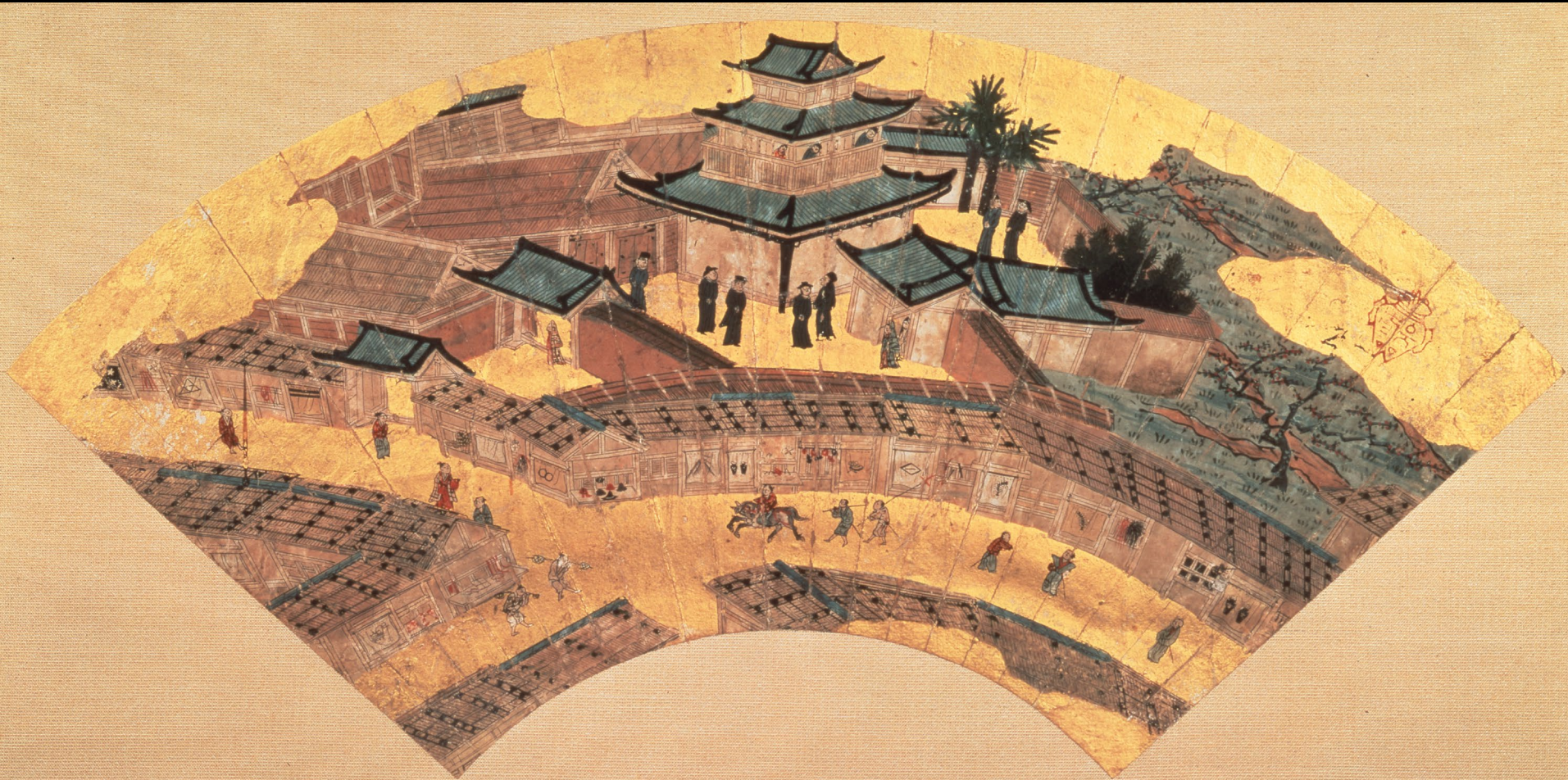
- Akechi Mitsuhide, trusted general betrays Nobunaga
- 13,000 against 30
- Nobunaga performs *seppuku*
- Last order, “Yasuke save my head”
- Yasuke takes head to heir
- Heir also defeated
- Yasuke returned to Jesuit church

The Honnoji Incident – Yasuke's last battle



Artist unknown, 19th century. Courtesy of The Nagoya Hideyoshi Kiyomasa Memorial Hall, Nagoya, Japan.

The Jesuit mission in Kyoto – Yasuke's last known abode



Kano Soshu, c. 1578-87. Courtesy of Kobe City Museum, Kobe, Japan.

Yasuke Today

- 20th century, anti-imperialist symbol
- 21st century - reborn as a modern-day idol
- Computer games
- Anime
- Manga
- Movies
- Books
- Theatre
- A source of inspiration to people around the world

Yasuke as portrayed in *Nioh*, 2017



Yasuke as portrayed in *Nobunaga's Ambition*, 2013



Yasuke portrayed in *Momoyama Beat* *Tribe* theatre production, 2017



Multicultural Pioneer

- Japan rapidly becoming more diverse
- Massive increase in foreign residents
- Successful naturalisation applications c99%
- Massive increase in visibly foreign workforce
- Visa and immigration liberalisation
- Mixed heritage citizens
- Tourism and economic importance

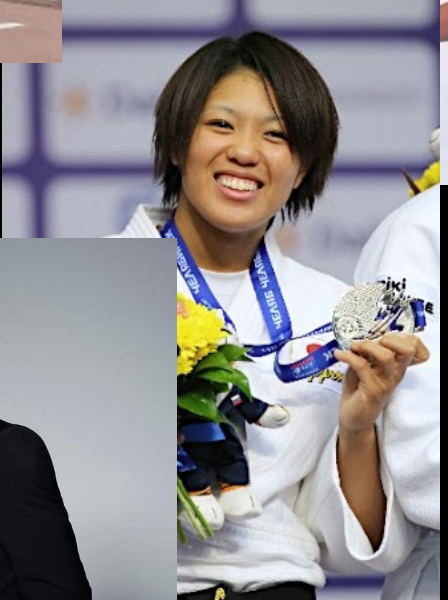
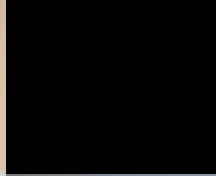
- Debates raging

Osaka Naomi



Prominent Black Citizens

- Tochigi Aisha Harumi, Miss Universe Japan 2020
- Miyamoto Ariana, Miss Universe Japan 2015
- Sekiguchi Mandy, singer
- Konda Bobby, entertainer
- Hachimura Rui, professional basketball
- Matsushima Kotaro, rugby player
- Nun Ira Karen, judoka
- Sani Brown Abdul Hakim, 100m sprint record 9.97



African Samurai

THOMAS LOCKLEY and GEOFFREY GIRARD

AFRICAN SAMURAI

The True Story of Yasuke, a Legendary
Black Warrior in Feudal Japan

"A readable,
compassionate account
of an extraordinary life."
—*The Washington Post*



Thank You For Listening



My FaceBook page



Q&A

- Please send questions along "to everyone" in the Q&A chat box!
 - Please provide your name and affiliation when submitting questions
 - Submitting a question enters you into in the book giveaway
-

Survey

Please scan the QR code or use the URL below to complete the survey!



go.gwu.edu/YasukeSurvey

Thank You

Please scan the Q&R code or use the URL below to complete the survey!



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