In the popular consciousness, the Japanese are believed to enjoy a privileged, harmonious coexistence with nature, in contrast to the ostensibly antagonistic relationship with nature that abounds in the West. (Other Asian cultures are usually ignored in this comparison.) Of course, this view has been thoroughly debunked, as modern Japan has proved as adept as Europe, the United States, Russia, and others in damaging its natural environment. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that representations of the natural world do occupy an extraordinarily prominent role in Japanese cultural discourse. This apparent paradox has been convincingly reconciled by two interrelated conceptual frameworks: the positing of a “pet” relationship with the natural world, in which only “tame” nature (e.g., a river with dams that never floods), as opposed to “wild” nature (an undammed river that occasionally floods with loss of human life), is valued and tolerated; and a differentiation between “real” nature and the “created” nature depicted in art and literature. 

Needless to say, these relationships occur over time and in ever-shifting spaces, and therefore exhibit change and variation. While broad theories are indispensable, they must be supplemented by closer work that provides detail and examines historical, regional, and other types of differences. In order to attain this level of detail, we must limit our scope of inquiry and probe deeply into individual cases. In this article, I propose using the single classical Japanese adjective monosugoshi as an index for gauging human attitudes toward the natural environment in medieval Japan. Using examples from a range of genres and periods, I will attempt to demonstrate that this word was used in literary and dramatic works exclusively to depict natural scenes associated with a sense of benign, forlorn melancholy until about the year 1500, when
monosugoshi began to be used also in descriptions of frightening, threatening landscapes. This shift is not reflected in modern dictionary definitions, which emphasize the latter connotations of monosugoshi, displacing and, at times, effacing its earlier meaning. In the conclusion, I propose a number of possible reasons for this semantic shift, including political, environmental, and literary-historical factors.

**Dictionary Definitions of Monosugoshi Past and Present**

In contemporary colloquial usage, the modern adjective monosugoi (derived in the Muromachi period from monosugoki) often serves simply as an intensifier, a stronger form of the adjective sugoi (sugoshi) from which it is derived. Here is a recent example: “Monosugoi gōkai de jōnetsu no hito.” (“[He was] a very vigorous and passionate person.”)

Many users of the language, however, are likely aware that the word has a wider, and older, range of meaning. What are the parameters of that range?

The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (second edition), the most comprehensive dictionary of the Japanese language, provides two definitions for monosugoi:

1. Very frightening; very eerie (Hijō ni osoroshii. Hijō ni kimi ga warui).
2. Extreme in degree; extreme(ly) (Hodo ga hageshii. Hanahadashii).

In the second definition, we recognize what the word has become for the most part in contemporary times; in the first, we encounter other meanings, which, I will attempt to demonstrate, do not appear until around the turn of the sixteenth century. Absent from this list is what the word monosugoshi connoted for the first few centuries of its existence: a sense of forlorn desolation that was not necessarily frightening.

The *Jidai-betsu kokugo daijiten* (Muromachi-hen) (Chronological dictionary of the Japanese language, Muromachi volumes) also offers two definitions of monosugoshi, both ostensibly from the Muromachi period:

1. A scene that causes one to feel a chilly sense of loneliness, such that it gives people an eerie feeling (zoku-zoku saseru). Or, for one’s heart to feel a chill, with such a scene before one’s eyes.
2. A situation that is so horrible that one cannot bear to watch it.
Unfortunately, these definitions are incomplete; for example, none of them can accommodate the sense of the word *monosugoshi* as used in the following poem, which dates from the 14th century:

*yamagiwa ni / tanabiku kumo ni / kari nakite / aki monosugoki / yūgure no iro*

Geese cry
in trailing clouds
above the mountain's rim—
in *monosugoki* autumn,
the colors of dusk.\(^6\) (Appendix, no. 6b.)

This verse, which is by Fujiwara no Takaie (979–1044) from the poetry contest *Kōgon-in sanjūroku-ban utaawase* (Poetry contest in thirty-six rounds sponsored by Retired Emperor Kōgon, 1349), demonstrates the somber, but unthreatening, character of the term as used by early medieval writers. (Takaie was affiliated with the Kyōgoku school of poets, who were known for their innovation; it is not altogether surprising that his poem is not only among the earliest, but one of a very few examples of the usage of *monosugoshi* in medieval waka.) I have left the word *monosugoki*, the adnominal form (*rentaikei*) of *monosugoshi*, untranslated in order to allow the reader to deduce what it might mean here. It should be clear—both from the other words used in the poem itself and from the context in which it was presented (disturbing or frightening imagery was forbidden in Japanese court poetry)—that there is no hint of terror, dread, or horror.\(^7\)

In fact, some of the passages cited along with these dictionary definitions do not even conform to the sense of the word that they are adduced to illustrate. For example, to exemplify its second definition (something which is so awful one cannot bear to look at it), *Jidai-betsu kokugo daijiten* cites this passage from *Shiga jikkai* (Four rivers emptying into the sea, 1534), a compendium of four Japanese commentaries on the poetry of Su Shi (also Su Dongpo, 1036–1101):

[These lines] say that [the speaker] is bored and has no medicine; is there something that can relieve his boredom? After saying this, he sees fires lit by fishermen, and realizes that they will relieve his boredom. There is a sense of lament in this statement. It is saying that, long ago, [the speaker] was in the capital amid the hustle and bustle … but now he is in Huizhou, and feeling *monosugoshi*.\(^8\) (Appendix, no. 27h.)
In a similar way, *Nihon kokugo daijiten* inexplicably attempts to demonstrate the eerie, frightening sense of *monosugoshi* with this undeniably benign passage from *Giya do pekadoru*, (Guide for the sinner, 1599) a Christian text: “Even hearing the faint, *monosugoki* chirping of insects living in a stand of grass cleansed one’s heart…” (Appendix, no. 42.)

Much of the confusion can probably be attributed to excessive emphasis on the first but relatively late definition of *monosugoshi* in a dictionary, the *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Japam* (Lexicon of the Japanese language). Also known as *Nippo jisho*, this Japanese-Portuguese dictionary was compiled by Jesuit friars residing in Japan and published in 1603. *Monosugoshi* appears as *monosugoi*, according to contemporary pronunciation and usage—during the Muromachi period, the final form *monosugoshi* had been replaced by the adnominial *monosugoki*, which underwent sound change to *monosugoi*. *Monosugoi* is defined as “Something solitary, and which makes one afraid, like a vast and solitary forest” (*Cousa solitaria, & que faz medo, como hum mato grande, & solitario*). No examples of usage are given. It was apparent to the Portuguese Jesuits and their Japanese colleagues that the concept expressed by the word *monosugoi* implied not merely a generic sense of fear, but a feeling of uneasy desolation that was most closely associated with a forbidding or haunted landscape. *Nippo jisho* describes what *monosugoi* meant at the time, and is probably accurate in that sense. It might also have exerted a disproportionate influence upon the compilers of *Jidai-betsu kokugo daijiten* and *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, thereby obscuring what *monosugoshi* meant in earlier eras, and its shift in meaning. In order to capture this shift, we will have to examine the history of the word’s formation and study its usage in a variety of textual examples pre-dating the early-modern period.

**Origins of Monosugoshi in Sugoshi**

*Monosugoshi* is clearly a combination of the prefix *mono-* and the adjective *sugoshi*. In order to understand *monosugoshi* we must understand both of its constituent parts, but especially its relationship to the earlier word *sugoshi*. How do *monosugoshi* and *sugoshi* differ in meaning and usage? And why was it necessary for *monosugoshi* to emerge as a separate word?

Extensive studies on *sugoshi* have been conducted by Umeno Kimiko. Synthesizing Umeno’s results, a history of the word *sugoshi*...
might proceed as follows. There are no known examples of it before the Heian period (795–1185). Before ca. 1000, it appears that the form *kokorosugoshi* was used more frequently than *sugoshi*. *Sugoshi* is a -ku conjugation adjective; such adjectives generally, but not exclusively, describe objective physical states as opposed to feelings or states of mind. Thus, *sugoshi* may have originally denoted some kind of physical quality, and the word *kokorosugoshi* was possibly coined in order to indicate that the word was being used in an emotional context. From *Genji monogatari* (The Tale of Genji, ca. 1008) onward, *sugoshi* eclipsed *kokorosugoshi* as the more common form. What was described as *sugoshi* varied over time, but some referents remained constant: the sound of the wind, the appearance of the sky, the season of autumn. *Sugoshi* did not connote fear. In fact, it was often used in conjunction with the adjective *aware-nari* (moving, touching). It frequently appeared in references to settings that were located outside or away from the capital, and at specific seasons (autumn) and times of day (dusk). *Sugoshi* in the Heian period was a positive aesthetic quality, connoting a not unpleasant sense of forlorn melancholy.

Up until the Muromachi period, commentators on *Genji monogatari* shared this understanding of *sugoshi*, but in the Edo period, *sugoshi* began to be associated with feelings of fear. It may have been erroneously associated with the adjective *susamaji* (often written with the characters 寒 and 冷; its early connotations including cold, whiteness, and desolation). Umeno says that *susamaji* was used by nō playwrights as if it had frightening connotations. In his Sinological study *Kiga* (The pursuit of elegance, 1816), Suzuki Akira (1764–1837) glossed the character 凄 with three readings: *samushi* (cold), *sabishi* (lonely), and *monosugoshi*. At about the same time, Tanikawa Kotosuga (1709–76) claimed in his dictionary *Wakun no shiori* (Guide to Japanese glosses, 1777–1887) that the Heian *sugoshi* was equivalent to the Edo word *monosugoshi* (which clearly connoted fear). In the dictionary *Gagen shiran* (Compilation of views on elegant language, 1826–87), the association between *sugoshi* and the character 凄, with its cold and fearful connotations, was complete; since then, *sugoshi* (and *sugoi*) have been most commonly written with the 凄 character. The main point of Umeno’s work is that this usage is anachronistic and improperly distorts our understanding of what *sugoshi* means in Heian and later texts.
The Prefix Mono-
Monosugoshi first emerged in the early fourteenth century; the earliest example that can be dated with confidence comes from the Engyō-bon Heike monogatari (The Tale of the Heike, Engyō edition). Why not earlier or later? Assuming this is not merely a matter of chance, the question can be approached in two ways. First, we can try to deduce how adding the prefix mono- might have changed the meaning of sugoshi, by analyzing what mono- means and, especially, by comparing monosugoshi with other adjectives that contain the prefix mono-. Second, we can examine examples of usage of monosugoshi paying attention to how the meaning intended differs from the meaning of sugoshi proposed in Umeno’s study. The second method is the central focus of this essay and will be applied later. For now, let us consider theoretically how adding the prefix mono- might have changed the meaning of sugoshi.

The Nihon kokugo daijiten describes the prefix mono- as typically appearing before adjectives, adjectival verbs, and verbs that indicate a state. It means that a given state “somehow” (nan to naku, soko wa ka to naku) exists. Examples given are monoui (gloomy), monosabishii (lonely), monoguruoshii (maddening), monokezayaka (prominent, apparent), monoshizuka na (quiet), and monofuru (old).12 On its face, this definition seems vague and therefore unsatisfactory, and this suspicion is reinforced by the dictionary’s inadequate definition of monosugoshi.

The most common meaning of the noun mono in Japanese is “thing” or “object.” It takes on a variety of other meanings, however, such as “matter” or “affair” (overlapping with functions typically fulfilled by the noun koto). Mono can be used to refer to supernatural beings, such as monsters and ghosts; the term mononoke (supernatural spirit) is well known. But this is not necessarily because of some perceived connection between objects and supernatural beings. According to the entry on mono from the Nihon kokugo daijiten cited above, the use of mono to refer to such beings is a euphemistic circumlocution. Such usage is enabled not by the materiality of mono but rather by its vast range of meanings. It covers such a broad expanse of semantic territory that it can mean almost anything, and therefore almost nothing. Such a word is the perfect substitute for words that cannot be uttered. Therefore, the assertion that mono- as prefix serves to “blur” the word it precedes is not implausible on its face. The question remains, however, what exactly is it blurring?

Shinagawa Michiaki has studied the use of mono- as a prefix in the works of Murasaki Shikibu (Genji monogatari and Murasaki Shikibu
He found that when mono- precedes a verb, it is usually functioning as a noun with an omitted object marker; thus the phrase “mono iu koto” is really an abbreviated form of “mono o iu koto,” and therefore mono- is not really functioning as a prefix. But mono- does act as a prefix when it precedes adjectives. Shinagawa argues that when mono- precedes a “subjective” adjective (e.g. kanashi, “sad”), it indicates that the adjective refers to the subject’s state of mind or feelings (as opposed to those of someone else). When it precedes an “objective” adjective (e.g., kiyoshi “clear”) it creates an “emotional ambience” (jōchoteki fun’iki). Once again, we find ourselves facing a dead end created by an imprecise explanation.

The reader will recall Umeno’s view that kokoro- originally preceded the adjective sugoshi because sugoshi was originally an “objective” adjective (suggested by its -ku conjugation, although no early examples are extant). As sugoshi became established as a “subjective” rather than “objective” term, there was less need to stress its subjective aspect, and therefore the need to preface it with kokoro- receded. Why did mono- then emerge in the medieval period as a new prefix for sugoshi? If we extend Shinagawa’s thesis to monosugoshi (he never addresses the word, since it postdates Murasaki), we should first determine whether sugoshi bore a subjective or objective aspect when mono- was added to it. Based on what we know about sugoshi, it was a purely subjective word in the early thirteenth century. Therefore, mono- would indicate that the sense of sugoshi is personal, that it is being felt by the enunciating subject. Shinagawa’s most telling examples are of citations from Murasaki’s works in which she uses emotional adjectives, such as ushi and osoroshi, with and without the prefix mono-. He concludes that mono- functions in a manner equivalent to that of the prefix kokoro-. Is monosugoshi, then, a return of kokorosugoshi in a different guise? If mono- is more or less equivalent to kokoro-, then the answer is yes. The questions then remain, why was it necessary to emphasize the emotional aspect of sugoshi, when it had already been established; and why did writers not simply revive the old form kokorosugoshi, if this was the goal?

In answer to the first question, I hypothesize that sugoshi had perhaps been “tamed” by virtue of its inclusion in the fixed poetic vocabulary and that its impact had diminished over time. Also, as Umeno went to great lengths to show, in the Heian period, sugoshi had an emotionally and aesthetically pleasing aspect that was subsequently lost. The landscapes that are described by most medieval writers are not
frightening, but they are not pleasant either; they are forlorn and desolate. It is in this regard that monosugoshi differs from sugoshi.

In response to the second question (why not simply resurrect kokorosugoshi?) I suggest that the mono- of monosugoshi indeed functions as a form of circumlocution, but what is being avoided is not god, demon, or ghost, but the word kokoro itself. Late medieval Japanese aesthetics is distinctive for its oblique or repressed expression of emotion, as crystallized in the performance traditions of nō theater. But this was the product of a process that took several centuries. In his Mumyōshō (Untitled commentaries, ca. 1211), for example, Kamo no Chōmei (1155–1216) cites a poem by Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204):

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yū sareba / nobe no akikaze / mi ni shimite / uzura nakunari / fukakusa no sato
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When evening comes
the autumn wind off the fields
sinks into me
and I hear the quails cry
in the village of Fukakusa.15

This poem is followed by the critique of another poet, the monk Shun’e (b. 1113): “I think that poem is very weak in the third verse’s mi ni shimite [“sinks into me”]. A poem of that kind would sound subtle and graceful if it depicted the atmosphere with fluency, just suggesting the feeling of the penetrating autumn wind. When everything is stated bluntly and the feeling which is the major point of the poem appears in actual words, it gives an extremely shallow impression.”16 Shun’e’s criticism suggests that a preference for the oblique statement of personal emotions and feelings was not universal, and emerged out of a process of aesthetic regulation. It brings us back to the question of why monosugoshi emerged for the first time in the early medieval period. I suggest that the prefix mono- is a euphemism for the earlier prefix kokoro-. As Shinagawa observed in his study of mono- in the works of Murasaki Shikibu, it serves to emphasize that the aspect of landscape manifested by the adjective sugoshi does not serve merely to describe the scene at hand, but rather the feelings of the enunciating subject as a perceiver of that scene. However, unlike the earlier kokorosugoshi, monosugoshi accomplishes this effect by avoiding explicit mention of kokoro, the affective faculty. This creates the sense that the emotions in
question are not subjectively generated, but naturally arise in the
enunciating subject on perceiving a scene that qualifies as sugoshi.

Examples from Early Medieval Texts
The dictionary definitions of monosugoshi cited earlier collectively and
even individually reveal uncertainty regarding the meaning of
monosugoshi. Does it connote fear, loneliness, a combination of both, or
something altogether different? Even if the definitions were consistent
internally and with one another, they cannot help us understand
monosugoshi better than a study of the textual examples upon which they
are ostensibly based. With that in mind, let us examine a representative
selection from the ninety or so examples that I have collected in which
monosugoshi or its conjugated forms appear in medieval Japanese texts.
(See the Appendix for a list and full bibliographic information.)

It is often impossible to date pre-Edo texts with satisfactory precision,
so broad periodizations are necessary. For the sake of convenience, I
divide the examples into three chronological groups: pre-Muromachi (i.e.,
before 1392); Muromachi (1392–1573); and post-Muromachi (1573–).
The Muromachi examples are so numerous that they must be further
divided by genre.

The earliest example of monosugoshi that I have found appears in
Shōgu mondō shō (Conversation between a sage and an unenlightened
person), which is attributed to the monk Nichiren (1222–82), founder of
the eponymous Buddhist sect, who is said to have written it in 1265. In
the passage in question, a sage is demonstrating to his interlocutor the
superiority of the Lotus School to other forms of Buddhism, and relates
how the father of the historical Buddha contrived to show his son the
wonders of the four seasons: “In the west there were the autumn
reddened leaves mingling with the evergreens to weave a pattern of
brocade, the breezes blowing gently over the reed flowers, or the stormy
winds that swept monosugoku through the pines.”17 (Appendix, no. 4.)

The authenticity of this text has been questioned, and from the
limited point of view of the history of monosugoshi, the appearance of
the word in a text decades before any other known citation is indeed
suspicious. Also, the trope of the “room that miraculously contains
scenes of the four seasons,” which appears in classical Chinese works,
figures most prominently in Japanese literature in the short narrative
fictional works of the Muromachi period (the so-called otogi zōshi). 18
Both points suggest that the text was written a century or more later than 1265 and therefore was not composed by Nichiren, who died in 1282.

Although the text may not have been written by Nichiren in 1265, it is interesting to note that monosugoshi is not used here to suggest a threatening or forbidding landscape; far from it. In this regard, the use of monosugoshi accords with other examples from the pre-Muromachi period. It functions much like the word sugoshi did in the Heian period and later.

Three examples appear in waka compiled in Kōgon-in sanjūroku-ban utaawase; one has already been quoted. Here is another verse from that event, by the Daughter of Lord (Saionji) Kinmune:

\[
\text{muramura ni / tanabiku kumo ni / kari nakite / sora monosugoki / akikaze no kure}
\]

Geese cry among the clouds
that spread in drifts
over the villages,
dusk in the autumn wind,
with a monosugoki sky.  
(Appendix, no. 6c.)

Monosugoshi also appears in a waka included in the tale Matsukage chūnagon monogatari (The Tale of Counselor Matsukage, late Kamakura–early Nanbokuchō; Appendix, no. 5). In all these examples, the imagery is gentle: autumn evenings, drifting clouds, crying geese, smoke from a village.

Another potential pre-Muromachi example appears in the Engyō-bon version of Heike monogatari. The most commonly used edition, the Daitōkyū kinen bunko manuscript, dates from 1419–20 and includes a colophon that indicates it is a copy of an earlier manuscript dated 1309–10. At two points in the texts, the word monosugoshi appears. One instance occurs in a scene in which a Taira courtier travels from Fukuhara (to which Taira no Kiyomori has recently ordered the capital moved) to the “old capital” (Kyoto) with some ladies-in-waiting to view the full moon, play music, and reminisce. “. . . Then, since the night had grown late and even the moon had declined toward the western hills, the sound of the mountain wind was monosugoshi, and the dew crowded the blades of grass. . . .” (Appendix, no. 7b.)

Two other appearances of the word monosugoshi in versions of Heike monogatari are found at different places in the same chapter, the final “Initiate’s Chapter” (Kanjō no maki). They describe a visit by
Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127–92) to his daughter-in-law, the former Empress Kenreimon’in (1155–1213), daughter of Kiyomori (1118–81) and widow of Emperor Takakura (1161–81), now a nun living in a simple convent amidst the woods at Ōhara north of Kyoto. The purpose of the chapter is to illustrate once again the principle of impermanence by showing how the once wealthy and beautiful empress and her attendants eke out a meager existence in the aftermath of the war. One passage reads, “At the temple in the meadows, the sound of the evening bell was monosugoshi, and the sad belling of the stags and the chirping of the insects was wondrous.” (Appendix, no. 3.) The other says, “The first month of the year had passed, and it was already around the twentieth day of the second month, so the branchtips of the trees deep in the mountains appeared, and the sakura showed themselves in blossoms; there was not a single mountain without white clouds on it, and it was all the more extremely monosugoshi.” (Appendix, no. 2.)

All of these examples of monosugoshi in Heike monogatari—the visit to Ohara, Munemori’s stop at Fuwa Barrier, the return to the abandoned capital—have one thing in common; they are variations on the literary trope, “Look what has become of X.” This vanitas-type gesture has a long history in Japanese literature, dating as far back to an elegy by Hitomaro (n.d.) on the ruined capital at Ōmi, included in the Man’yōshū (Collection for ten thousand generations, mid-8th c.).20 The important point is that these are not frightening landscapes; rather, they evoke feelings of nostalgia and sadness.

Examples from Muromachi-era Renga Sessions
There are so many instances in which monosugoshi or forms thereof appear in texts of the Muromachi period (1392–1573) that it is necessary to subdivide them by genre. These examples fall into three distinct genres: renga poetry, commentaries on kanshi (typically by monks associated with elite Rinzai Zen monasteries), and nō plays.

Using the renga database developed by the International Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken), I was able to find eighteen appearances of monosugoshi and its derivative forms in renga sessions held between 1425 and 1670; one example was undated (Appendix, nos. 7–21). The first few examples exhibit the familiar understanding of monosugoshi as connoting a sense of forlorn desolation that is not unpleasant. Then, in Bunmei manku (Ten thousand verses composed during the Bunmei era),
a renga session held in 1482, something interesting happens; monosugoshi is used to create a forbidding atmosphere:

(098)  *kitsune atsumaru / furutsuka no moto*

Base of the old burial mound
where foxes gather.

(099)  *monosugoku / ana osoroshi no / michisugara*

It is monosugoshi
and frightening
along the trail.  
(Appendix, no. 12a.)

It is clear from the reference to the foxes and burial mound in the earlier verse that the supernatural is suggested. The latter verse associates monosugoshi with this atmosphere, and even adds osoroshi (frightening), an explicit sign of how the connotations of monosugoshi have changed. As mentioned above, Umeno found that sugoshi often appeared in combination with the adjectival verb aware-nari (“moving,” “touching,” “pathetic”), which illustrated how users of sugoshi regarded it. In a similar way, we can approximate the meaning of monosugoshi by examining other adjectives that are used with it in a descriptive string. By 1482, at the latest, monosugoshi is keeping company with osoroshi.

This is not to say that, all of a sudden, the meaning of monosugoshi changed. In fact, monosugoshi appears twice in other verses of the 1482 session, carrying the overtones of quiet desolation that it always had. Another poet uses the word in its old sense:

(071)  *kasumitsutsu / hana chiru yama no / yūmagure*

Twilight in the hills,
where blossoms fall among the mist

(072)  *monosugoku furu / harusame no oto*

The sound of the spring rain
falling monosugoku  
(Appendix, no. 12b.)

Moreover, later renga sessions return to the old understanding of monosugoshi. Nevertheless, the new meaning endures alongside the old. We can see further examples of the threatening sense of monosugoshi in a series of three links from a thousand-verse sequence, Tenbun nijūyonen
ume senku (One thousand verses composed for the plum blossoms in the twenty-fourth year of the Tenbun era, 1555):

(072)  ko\(\text{t}ae\) o kiku wa / kodama amabiko
   When I listen for a reply,
   echoes and echoes

(073)  kaze kayou / kure monosugoku / hi mo kieu
   Crossed by winds,
   the dusk is monosugoku,
   and the light vanishes

(074)  tora no usobuku / toki mo koso are
   There are times when
   a tiger roars.  \(\text{Appendix, no. 16.}\)

Another example appears in a hundred-verse sequence, Tenbun nenkan hyakuin (Sequence of one hundred renga verses composed during the Tenbun era, 1550):

(095)  monosugoki / y\(\text{u}be\) no tsuki no / izayoi ni
   Underneath the waning moon,
   on a monosugoki evening

(096)  yami no mayoi no / inazuma no kage
   a flash of lightning
   in the confusion of the dark  \(\text{Appendix, no. 15.}\)

These verses and other examples show that, by the mid-sixteenth century, monosugoshi was appearing in or adjacent to renga verses that included frightening images, such as a tiger, lightning, and echoes (amabiko and kodama were, in folklore, believed to be the voices of mountain spirits).

**Examples from Monastic Commentaries on Poetry in Chinese (kanshi)**
The most avid users of the word monosugoshi during the medieval era, by a wide margin, were the authors of commentaries on Chinese poetry during the 14th–16th centuries, who were for the most part monks in monasteries belonging to Rinzai Zen temples of the official Gozan (Five
Mountains) hierarchy. In my view, they inherited the classical understanding of monosugoshi that appears in Heike monogatari and other early medieval texts, and invested it with an indescribable spiritual quality that did not really connote a sense of fear or dread. The Gozan commentators were poets, too, and their poetry is intensely metaphorical. Any object of the intellect—whether it be a landscape or a love story—could be converted into a metaphor for enlightenment, delusion, or the passage between these states.

Many Gozan monks were also deeply steeped in the art, history, thought, and literature of what is now China (they typically referred to it by dynastic names, such as Ming, Tang, or Song). Some of them actually went to China to study; some studied with Chinese masters who had come to Japan. Some monks compiled anthologies of Chinese poetry written by Chinese and Japanese poets, and annotated them in Japanese. Monosugoshi appears again and again, in kana, in these glosses.

The largest number of examples of monosugoshi from the premodern era that may be attributed to any single author appears in the pages of Shiga nikai, edited by the Rinzai monk Shōun Seisan (n.d), the commentary on Su Shi’s poetry that was cited above. Of the sixteen examples, the one that most concisely illustrates what we might call the Gozan understanding of monosugoshi occurs in a discussion of an ostensibly autobiographical poem in which the speaker, alone at the home of his son, who has been called away for official service, recollects a happier past. The line is 揪首凄凉十年事 (“I scratch my head—The sad desolation of the past ten years”). The connotations of qiliang 凄凉 are clearly ones of loneliness and cold. The Shiga jikkai commentary on this poem says that “the two characters qiliang mean monosugoshi (Seiryō no niji wa monosugoki o iu nari; Appendix, no. 27i). Shiga jikkai uses monosugoshi consistently in this way; it describes scenes in which the speaker is listening to the sound of the rain, with a sense of sadness but not fear.

The experience of listening to the sound of rain in autumn is addressed directly in another text, Chūka jakuboku shishō (Commentaries on Chinese and Japanese poems), a sixteenth-century anthology of some two hundred kanshi, half by Japanese and half by Chinese poets. Commenting on a poem by the Gozan monk Gidō Shūshin (1325–88), the author writes, “When one listens to the rain even without feeling a sense of grief, it is monosugoshi; but when one listens to it with that sense of grief, it is all the more sad.” (Appendix, no. 26a.)
It is clear that for this writer as well, monosugoshi indicated sadness, not fear.

These are not the only Muromachi kanshi commentaries in which monosugoshi appears; a full list would also include Toshi zoku suishō (ca. 1439), a commentary by the Rinzai monk Kōsei Ryūha (1375?–1446) on poems by Du Fu (712–70); Mōgyūshō (1529–34), a commentary on Meng qiu, a Tang-period textbook, by the Confucian scholar Kiyohara no Nobukata (1475–1550); Shigaku taisei shō (ca. 1558–70), a lexicon for kanshi poets; Kajō shūshō (after 1489), a commentary on a collection of kanshi written by Japanese monks; Chōgonka shō (1542) a commentary on the “Song of Everlasting Sorrow” (Chang hen ge 長恨歌) by Bo Juyi (772–846); and Kobun shinpō genryūshō (ca. 1490, a commentary by the Rinzai monk Genryū Shūkō [1458–91] on the late Song/early Yuan-dynasty poetry anthology Guwen zhenbao). Such a survey exceeds the scope of this article, but it appears that the sense of monosugoshi remains consistently unthreatening throughout this genre.

Examples from Nō Plays

Monosugoshi appears in no fewer than twelve nō plays, including works outside as well as in the current repertory. It is especially common in plays attributed to Komparu Zenchiku (1405–ca. 1470). All of the plays attributed to Zenchiku and almost all of the other plays in which monosugoshi appear share the usual understanding of monosugoshi as inspiring feelings of loneliness, sadness, and desolation, but without a sense of fear. A representative example appears in the play Yashima, which is believed to date from no later than 1430. In the play, some traveling Buddhist monks encounter an aged fisherman at Yashima (located in present-day Kagawa Prefecture), the site of a famous battle during the Genpei War (1180–85); the old man later reveals himself as the ghost of the brilliant general Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–89). In the first act, the old man and a companion sing of the autumn moon shining over the sea

“An old fisherman takes shelter for the night by the western bank,
At dawn he gathers water from the Xiang River and lights a fire of Chu bamboo.”

Now at last I can picture that scene, as I begin to catch sight
Of the reed fires burning in the desolation [monosugosa] here.

(Appendix, no. 31.)
As the punctuation indicates, the first two lines are a quotation; the source is a poem by the Tang poet Liu Zongyuan (773–819) that is included in *Guwen zhenbao*, the collection of Chinese poetry mentioned above that enjoyed considerable popularity among literate elites in Muromachi Japan, and which was annotated by Gozan monks.\(^{28}\) In libretti used by shimogakari schools of nō (i.e., the Komparu, Kongo, and Kita), in place of the word *monosugosa* (desolation), the word *omoshirosa* (charm) is used.\(^ {29}\) That substitution and the tone and context of the lines confirm that, for the author of *Yashima* (possibly Zeami), *monosugoshi* lacked any attributes of fear.

But, just as in the case of later renga, later nō plays exhibit a new understanding of *monosugoshi*. In the play *Sesshōseki* (The Killing Rock, written by 1503), a Taoist adept en route to the capital from the northern provinces stops at the Nasuno meadow (in present-day Tochigi Prefecture) and encounters a famous rock that is said to kill everything that touches it. A woman tells him that the rock’s powers are the realization of the attachments (*shūshin*) of Lady Tamamo, a mysteriously talented and beautiful woman from the time of Retired Emperor Toba (1103–56; r. 1107–23) who was expelled from court because she was really a fox in disguise. The woman eventually confesses that she herself is the ghost of Tamamo and the spirit of the rock. In the second act, the rock splits open and it and Tamamo are led by the efforts of the Taoist to enlightenment.

In the first act, before the woman tells the story of Tamamo, the chorus sings lines that describe the landscape:

...fukurō shōkei no
eda ni nakitsure kitsune
rangiku no kusa ni kakuresumu
kono hara no toki shi mo
monosugoki aki no yūbe ka na.

Owls hoot on the branches
of the pines and cypresses, and foxes
dwell hidden among the grasses
of the orchids and chrysanthemums.
At this moment in the meadow
it is a *monosugoki* autumn evening.  \hspace{1cm} (Appendix, no. 36.)

Like the example from *Yashima* cited above, this passage incorporates a Chinese poem—in this case, a verse by the Tang poet Bo
Juyi—but the forbidding atmosphere, created by the hidden foxes and otherworldly owls, lends it a much different tone. Although the traveler is a holy man who fears nothing, the setting is remote, a deadly rock stands nearby, and the woman is the ghost of a woman who was herself the apparition of a fox. This is the world of fantastic setuwa narratives, or of Chinese tales of the supernatural, not the elegant and serene realm of waka poetry, the Heian court classics, or even of the elite Gozan monasteries and the poetry they produced and revered. The earliest extant record of a performance of Sesshōseki dates from 1503, making it most likely much later than any of the other Muromachi-era plays that include the word monosugoshi. (See Appendix for a full list of the plays.) Therefore, it may have been written around the same time as the 1482 renga session that contains the earliest known example of a renga verse in which monosugoshi connotes a sense of fear.

Post-Muromachi Examples
While some writers continued to use the word monosugoshi in its older sense, others reserved monosugoshi for descriptions of scenes that were truly eerie or frightening. This dual usage underpins the definition of monosugoshi in the Nippo jisho of 1599 as something both lonely and frightening, “like a vast, deserted forest.”

Later examples do show that the expansion in the range of meaning of monosugoshi was permanent. These include an appearance in the nō play Yūrei Shuten dōji (Ghost of the sake-swilling boy), an Edo-period piece about the legendary drunken demon; after a traveling priest describes the deep windswept mountains at night as monosugoshi, he exclaims, “How frightening!” (osoroshi ya) and observes a figure walking toward him out of the shadows. In the 1698 haihai collection Zoku saru no mino (Monkey’s raincoat, continued), a boy contributed this verse:

\[
\text{hitori ite / rusu monosugoshi / ine no tono}
\]

Home alone:
how monosugoshi!
Lord Lightning

Ihara Saikaku uses monosugoshi in both senses, in different works. Kōshoku ichidai otoko (The life of a playboy, 1682) includes a description of a journey by the hero to the shore at Suma (present-day
Hyōgo Prefecture), where he enjoys the moonlight: “gradually even the moon became monosugoshi, and he wondered ‘Was that the cry of the ‘bird without a mate’?” and felt even more lonely. ‘It’s going to be impossible to spend the night here. Maybe there are some fisher girls around?’” In this context, as the annotator indicates, monosugoshi means “joyless” (kyō ga usurete). Just four years later, in Honchō nijū fūkō (Twenty unfilial sons from this realm, 1686), Saikaku describes a scene in which a ship runs aground and is surrounded by an assortment of odd monsters and beasts: “And there was also one in the form of a human, with wings; and there was one with the voice of a dog and ears over ten feet long; none of them looked familiar. They were monosugoshi, and when they approached [the men on the ship] cringed.” Both of these usages of monosugoshi are emblematic of two facets of the Edo mentality: the first appropriates it to the epicurean; the second, to the grotesque. In Saikaku, nonetheless, we still see in miniature the broader shift in the meaning of monosugoshi, from loneliness to fear.

Conclusions
To summarize, the word monosugoshi first appeared in depictions of landscapes in early medieval Japanese texts, in which it connoted a desolate but benign sense of loneliness, and therefore differed little from the traditional meaning of sugoshi in poetic and other literary texts. This originary meaning is largely missing from modern dictionaries and, consequently, the word is often mistranslated when it appears in earlier texts because it is interpreted anachronistically. Beginning around the year 1500, however, we can see monosugoshi appearing in close proximity to words that express fear or describe things that are usually regarded as frightening. Yet monosugoshi still continues to be used by other writers in its older sense. In specific genres, we see this shift occur in nō plays and renga poetry; the shift does not seem to occur in commentaries on Chinese poetry written by Japanese Zen monks.

I propose that the shift was not random or coincidental. It is very difficult to conclusively prove influence, to move from correlation into causality; nonetheless, the shift, in my view, is caused by at least two factors. First, this shift is related to changing perceptions of the natural landscape and attitudes toward the environment that were occurring during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As Nagahara Keiji has observed, although natural disasters and anomalies have occurred
regularly over the span of Japanese history, in the middle of the fifteenth
century we see a remarkable increase in floods, droughts, famines, and
epidemics. The meteorologist Yamamoto Takeo suggested the existence
of a “mini Ice Age” around this time that might account for these
events. In turn, the meteorological irregularities exacerbated and
accelerated growing social and political dislocations that culminated in
the Ōnin War of 1467–77, which left Kyoto in ruins and effectively
dismantled the Muromachi shogunate. Japan had no ruling central
authority until the ascension of Oda Nobunaga a century later.

Describing the context of a village uprising that occurred after the war in
a village not far from Kyoto, Pierre Souryi notes, “The rural landscape
was changing. . . . Villagers deserted the insecure countryside, leaving it
to outlaws and the armies that roamed the area, and banded together
behind fortified works.” When the social and political order breaks
down, individuals lose the ability to move safely alone or in small groups,
and the deserted mountains that once might have seemed inviting refuges
or bucolic poetic locales now become sites of danger and dread.

The second relevant factor is intrinsic to the production of literature
itself. It is the early modern, or Edo, period (1600–1868) that is most
closely associated with a rapid increase in literacy and a surge of literary
production by commoners, but this is only the resumption of a trend that
began in the Muromachi era. The production of renga was a popular
pastime that necessitated the creation of handbooks to allow, for example,
poets who had never read The Tale of Genji to allude to it. And the
foremost nō playwrights—Zeami, his son Motomasa, and his son-in-law
Zenchiku—were highly literate and socialized with high-ranking
political and religious figures, but did not themselves belong to the elite
courtier, warrior, or clerical classes. It does not seem to be coincidental
that both of these genres registered a shift in the meaning of monosugoshi
around the same time (1483 for a renga poem cited above,
and before 1503 for the nō play Sesshōseki). Furthermore, we observed
that Gozan monks writing during this period never abandoned the
traditional meaning of monosugoshi. We can attribute this in turn to two
reasons. First, it is unseemly for monks of any creed to express fear of
supernatural beings or events. Second, and perhaps more importantly,
Gozan monks came largely from warrior families and required social or
financial capital in order to advance in the hierarchy. Although the
Kyoto Gozan temples were destroyed in the Ōnin War, both spiritually

and materially, the monks who lived in them were of the least vulnerable section of the population.

Perhaps monosugoshi’s semantic expansion was part of a broader movement in Muromachi Japan toward a culture of fear. In studies of the adjective kowashi, Kobayashi Kenji has observed a similar tendency in the scripts of kyōgen plays and other texts of the late Muromachi and early Edo eras. Originally synonymous with tsuyoshi (“strong”) and written with the same graph (強), kowashi eventually took on the meaning of “fearsome” (i.e., osoroshi) and came to be written with a different graph (怖).

It is not that courtiers and other elites did not use the word monosugoshi; they did. But when they used it, they had in mind a natural order in which landscapes and the natural environments upon which they were based served as prompts for poignant but not unpleasant emotions. This is perhaps an understandable tendency for writers who rarely leave the capital, or do so only surrounded by an armed entourage, or express themselves only through the linguistic filters of Japanese court poetry, which held its own canon of proper word usage. But the popular understanding of the word monosugoshi, which came to dominate usage of the word for the reasons I have proposed above, gives us a rare glimpse into another aspect of Japanese perceptions of nature, which have been largely construed (in my view, accurately) as expressing a preference for “tamed” nature, for nature as “pet.”

This movement toward fear of the landscape has been observed in the medieval West as well. The Italian medievalist Vito Fumagalli notes:

In the early Middle Ages anything unusual, however much it departed from the norm, was still regarded as a product of nature. Though it might be of strange appearance, it was undisputedly part of the natural order. Later, however, any oddities of the human, animal or vegetable world came to be regarded as unnatural. The shift in thinking coincided with the gradual physical separation from the natural world as over the centuries many natural features were destroyed when the forests were cleared for cultivation. Those forests which survived the long campaign of clearance gradually came to be perceived as alien, even frightening places, and it is significant that it was there that the spirits of the dead began to be seen.

The difference between the case of medieval Europe and medieval Japan seems to be that, in Japan, the change in thinking (if what we have observed in the history of the word monosugoshi is representative of
broader trends) preceded forest depletion, rather than following it (as in the case of Europe). As Conrad Totman observes, in medieval Japan “[s]ome Kinai areas deteriorated biologically; elsewhere forest composition changed, but serious biosphere decline appears to have been negligible.” It was the “early modern predation” of 1570–1670 that “stripped the archipelago of nearly all its high forest.” 41 In the present study we have seen how a single word used to describe the natural environment shifted in meaning for some writers and speakers in Japan beginning ca. 1500, taking on malevolent connotations. Did the striking changes in attitudes toward landscapes and the environment that we tend to associate with the early modern and modern eras actually originate in the late medieval period?

Notes

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1 I am aware that “nature” and “environment” are deeply problematic terms—the latter, for example, implicitly enacts a conceptual separation between humans and the rest of the planet that does not obtain in the physical world. Nevertheless, I have not been able to find adequate replacements for these words.


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made by the former baseball player and coach Ō Sadaharu (now a company director) regarding the late kabuki actor Nakamura Kanzaburō (1955–2012). Strictly speaking, the use of monosugoi to modify another adjective (here, gōkai na) would require the adverbial form monosugoku, but Ō’s use of the adjectival form instead is quite typical.

4 Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai, Dainihon Henshū Iinkai, eds. Nihon kokugo daijiten, 2nd ed. (Shōgakukan, 2000–02), s.v. “monosugoi.” The entry gives a number of textual examples from medieval texts, which correspond to nos. 1b, 22b, and 42 in the Appendix.

5 Muromachi Jidaigo Jiten Henshū Iinkai, eds., Jidaibetsu kokugo daijiten, Muromachi jidai hen (Sanseidō, 1985) 5: 459, s.v. “monosugoshi.” This entry also includes some textual examples, which appear as nos. 26a, 29b, 27h, 23, and 41 in the Appendix.

6 Fujiwara (Aburanokōji) no Takaie (1338–67) later became a senior noble; he was quite young at the time he wrote this. The sponsor, Retired Emperor Kōgon (1313–1364; r. 1331–1364) had been dethroned after the Kemmu Restoration, but returned to power as retired emperor after Ashikaga Takauji displaced Retired Emperor Go-Daigo.

7 Monosugoshi or forms thereof also appears in poems 35 and 61 of the same contest, in similar contexts and with similar connotations.

8 The lines in question are 猶堪慰寂寞、漁火亂黃昏 (“And the only thing that can relieve this loneliness / is the fishermen’s fires flickering in the dusk”). The title of the poem is 新年五首 其一 (Five Poems on the New Year: No. 1).


11 The above summary is based on Umeno, En to sono shāhen, 219–99.

12 Nihon kokugo daijiten, 2nd ed., s.v. “mono.”


Translation adapted from Gosho Translation Committee, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* (Tokyo: Soka gakkai, 2003), 123. I have replaced the English equivalent “wildly” with the original monosugoku. For background on the text, including the question of its authenticity, see the commentary by Watanabe Yasumichi in Nichiren Shōnin Roppyakugōu Onki Hōon Kinenkai, eds. *Nichiren shōnin goibun kōgi* (Nichiren shōnin ibun kenkyūkai, 1958), 9:1–4.


Umeno, *En to sono shōhen*, 234.


In addition to the three attributed to Zenchiku, they are Yashima, Yūgao, Yamanba, Kazu, Hajitomi, and Tomoe.

A play titled Yoshitsune, which is believed to be the same play as Yashima, appears in Sarugaku dangi, a record of remarks on no by Zeami, which was completed in this year. See Omote Akira and Katō Shūichi, eds., Zeami, Zenchiku (Iwanami shoten, 1974), 286.

Translation from Thomas Blenman Hare, Zeami’s Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986), 212.

Yokomichi and Omote, eds., Yōkyokushū ge (Iwanami shoten, 1963), 266 n. 10. The quotation is discussed in Hare, Zeami’s Style, 287 n. 36. For the poem, see Hoshikawa Kiyotaka, ed., Kobun shinpō zenshū (jō). Vol. 9 of Shinshaku kanbun taikei (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1967), 249–51.

Yokomichi and Omote, eds., Yōkyokushū ge, 267, textual note 10.


Shiraishi Teizō and Ueno Yōzō, eds., Bashō shichibu shū (Iwanami shoten, 1990), 534.

See Ihara, Saikaku, Saikaku shū jō, ed. Asao Isoji, Itasaka Gen, and Tsutsumi Seiji (Iwanami shoten, 1957), 53. Translated by Kengi Hamada as “As the night wore on, even the moon seemed ghastly. Then the lonely cry of a sea bird suggested to Yonosuke that perhaps the creature had lost its mate. This provoked the further thought that traveling alone was much too solitary. ‘Isn’t there a young fisher wench around,’ he asked.” Ihara Saikaku, The Life of An Amorous Man, trans. Kengi Hamada (Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo: Tuttle, 1964), 29. Emphasis added.

Ihara, Saikaku shū jō, 53, n. 31.


Nagahara Keiji, Nairan to minshū no seiki (Shōgakukan, 1992), 385–86.


39 In addition to the volume by Haruo Shirane mentioned above, see also Watanabe Kenji, Noda Ken’ichi, Komine Kazuaki, and Haruo Shirane, eds., Kankyō to iu shiza: Nihon bungaku to ekokuritishizumu, Ajia yūgaku 143 (July, 2011), in particular Jakku Stoneman (Jack Stoneman), “Chūsei waka ni okeru niji-teki shizen to yasei-teki shizen: Saigyō, Jakunen no ‘yamazato’ zōōka o chūshin ni,” 53–59.


Appendix

Citations of monosugoshi and related forms in medieval Japanese texts.

Heike monogatari

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<td>1309–10</td>
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<td>(Tokyo: Koton kenkyūkai, 1964), vol. 1, p. 865; (b) vol. 3, p. 461.</td>
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### Other early texts

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**Commentaries on Chinese poetry (shōmono)**

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<td>1558–70 (ca.)</td>
<td>Shigaku taiseishō</td>
<td>(a) Chūkō zenrin fūgetushūshō, Shigaku taiseishō, Chūkō zenrin fūgetushū, Tsukumono kishō, ed. Ōtsuka Mitsunobu, vol. 1 of Shin shōmono shiryō shūsei (Osaka: Seibundō, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>1430 (ca.)</td>
<td>Bashō</td>
<td>(a) Yōkyokushō 1, p. 312; (b) p. 320; (c) p. 323.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>1450 (ca.)</td>
<td>Ohara gokō</td>
<td>Yōkyokushō 1, p. 425 (3x)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nō plays (14th–15th c.)

35. 1470  (by)  Teika  (a) Yōkyokushū 1, p. 329; (b) p. 335.


38. n.d.  Hajitomi  Yōkyokushū 1, p. 345 (2x).


35. 1470  (by)  Teika  (a) Yōkyokushū 1, p. 329; (b) p. 335.


38. n.d.  Hajitomi  Yōkyokushū 1, p. 345 (2x).


Christian texts (late 16th c.)


Bibliography


