
The Biography of a Noh Teacher

Tsurumi Reiko, the founder and *sensei* (teacher) of the Sumire Kai Noh group was seventy-eight years old at the time I met her. Our first encounter took place one spring day at a Zen nunnery in the suburb of Musashi Koganei in western Tokyo. Sensei and three of her women students had been invited to the nunnery as special guests to celebrate the abbess's birthday. She was five feet tall, rotund but small-boned, and had silver-grey hair tied in a bun on her head. With her posture upright and gaze focused, Sensei played the shoulder drum (*kotsuzumi*) and accompanied the women as they performed three short dances. To my untrained eye, the dance movements were slow and trancelike, and I began to feel somewhat sleepy. I might have dozed off had it not been for the pins and needles that shot through my feet after two hours of sitting with folded legs on the *tatami* floor. Once the performance ended, Sensei suddenly came forward. Although she had seemed at first glance like a cute grandmotherly figure, the kind of grandmother one might encounter in a Japanese fable or a Miyazaki Hayao animation film, she turned into a commanding presence.

"I shall now give you a lesson on how to chant *Crane and Tortoise*," she declared. A murmur rose in the room as I and the assembled guests, many of whom had never chanted a Noh play, considered this proposition. Before we could respond, she ordered us to arrange ourselves into three rows and directed one of her students to distribute sheets of Noh libretti. The libretti had no musical notation, at least not any that my training in classical piano had prepared me to read. All I could see were

what appeared to resemble columns of ancient Japanese script flowing down the page like gentle waterfalls.

With Sensei's deep and powerful voice leading the way, the assembled guests began tuning up their voices. "Ahhhh~~~~~ Ahhhh~~~~~." Sensei sat up at the front glaring sternly at the guests. I felt fortunate to be sitting in the back row because, at first, I could not stop chuckling. Next to me was a French woman who had been working as a kitchen hand in the temple. She could not stop giggling either. I tried my best to regain seriousness and stop chuckling as Sensei began to talk. She gave us some background on *Crane and Tortoise*, one of the first songs students learn in the Noh repertoire. It is often performed on felicitous occasions such as birthdays and weddings. In the song, the Tang emperor visits his Moon Pavilion to watch two courtiers dance as the spirits of the crane and tortoise. The crane is said to live for a thousand years, and the tortoise for ten thousand; they are traditional symbols of longevity.¹

Sensei instructed some of us to take the role of the emperor and others the role of the courtier and still others the chorus. With Sensei's voice leading the way, we launched into the *Crane and Tortoise* song:

How numerous the examples of things that last a
thousand ages.
How numerous the examples of things that last a
thousand ages.
What should we begin with?
First, the tortoise, green as the small Princess Pine.
When it dances, so does the red-crested crane.
They give one thousand years of long life to our
lord.
As they attend to the sovereign in the garden, the
lord's face spills over with joy.
Their dance is truly delightful

Midway through the song, she boomed, “Breathe from your stomach and sing *LOUDER*.”

Some of the assembled guests who had been singing tentatively were clearly overwhelmed by her zeal. By the time we reached the end of the play, I could feel a sense of relief pervade the room, only to be cut off as Sensei insisted, “One more time.” We launched into the chanting again, this time knowing that we had to infuse the words of the emperor and courtier with more gusto.

Interestingly, I became increasingly immersed in the chanting and found myself enjoying it. When we neared the end of the song for the third time, Sensei declared, “*ONE MORE TIME*.” And so we proceeded in this fashion, for two more rounds of *Crane and Tortoise*.

Once the surprise lesson had ended, we staggered off to the main temple to eat the celebratory meal, a special vegetarian meal served in small lacquerware boxes. The surprise lesson had left us feeling ravenous. Inside the boxes was an assortment of delicious Zen food: creamy “sesame tofu” made of ground sesame seeds, deep-fried eggplant halves spread with citron-flavored white miso, and tiny mountain yams wrapped in crisp seaweed. The other guests and I devoured the lunch.

While I felt relieved when the lesson ended, I could not shake the feeling of curiosity that bubbled up inside of me. I felt intrigued by Sensei’s commitment to impart her own training to strangers. I sensed an immediacy and urgency in her teaching, almost a fury, that made her seem to leap out of her skin. The seriousness with which she sought to impart her craft to the guests captured my interest. She had unrelentingly taught the *Crane and Tortoise* again and again and again. Unperturbed by the giggles and the discomfort of her guests, she continued forth. Through the sheer force of her teaching, the space of the temple had been turned into a Noh classroom. There was a fearlessness about her that drew me in.

At the end of the birthday party, I decided to approach Tsurumi Sensei and explain to her that I was a doctoral student from an American university researching the lifestyles of Japanese men and women as they enter retirement. I asked rather boldly whether she had retirees in her class whom I could meet. Sensei immediately replied that she would welcome my visit and proceeded to write down all of her contact details.

This chapter explores Sensei's life and career as a Noh teacher. I relay stories Tsurumi Sensei shared with me. The stories provide insight into the moral debates about appropriate feminine roles of her time.

To understand the significance of Sensei developing a career as a Noh teacher, it is important to understand the Japanese family system of the postwar decades. It was a time when the life of the professional housewife (*sengyô shufu*), who dedicates herself to managing the home, gained ascendancy as an idealized way of life. Women like her were discouraged from taking up activities that put them in the paid labor force. Many had limited opportunities for public recognition of their personal efforts, and operated with gender norms that encouraged them to aid family members in gaining public recognition rather than seek that recognition themselves (see also Kato 2004). Tsurumi Sensei embraced this role of the professional housewife but also found it confining. By turning to Noh training, she was able to construct an identity independent of her housewife role and become a Noh teacher in late life.

She is a social actor who strategically uses the symbols and social constraints in her life to create a path of mobility over her life course. Like Robert Desjarlais (1996, 882), I posit that agency is not "original" or "foundational" to the individual; there is no agency without a set of practicalities and forums giving rise to the capacity for action.

The first half of this chapter traces Tsurumi Sensei's life. I provide an account of her childhood, the critical teenage years

of initiation into Noh during World War II, her marriage and subsequent training in Noh. Her maternal uncle, who taught her to chant Noh plays in the paddy fields of southern Japan during that war, was a force that ignited her commitment to Noh training and to the transmission of this art form today. The latter half of this chapter analyzes strategic constructions of feminine selfhood. I focus in particular on the hyperbolic performance of womanhood through food. Tsurumi Reiko's capacity to succeed as a Noh pedagogue lies in more than her prodigious skill in performing and teaching chanting and dance. It also relies on the creation of gendered effects offstage, specifically her construction of an identity of a humble housewife. Here I argue that gender attributes are not expressive of a preexisting identity but performative. Gender reality is created through sustained social performances (Butler 1990).

Visiting the Sumire Kai

Two weeks after our first meeting, I visited Tsurumi Sensei's home. Clutching the small sheet of directions that she had given me, I made my way up the steps of the subway station and stepped out onto a busy main road. Buses, taxis, and cars sped by. I walked down the sidewalk, dodging bicycles. The directions said to walk past a convenience store and an Indonesian spices store, and to turn off this busy road into a small side street. Entering the small street, I walked a few steps until I came up to a white eight-story apartment building. The street number matched the address on my sheet, but had I come to the right place? Her home supposedly had a Noh stage in it but from the exterior of the building it was difficult to imagine anything like that inside.

Entering through the glass doors, I made my way into the foyer and up the linoleum-covered steps of the apartment building

to the first landing. From one of the doors wafted the inviting aroma of fried sweet potatoes. I made my way up the next set of stairs to the third floor landing and walked around each of the doors until I found a tiny nameplate reading “Tsurumi.”

Gingerly pulling open the door of the apartment, I found a jumble of maybe ten pairs of women’s shoes in the small entryway. Removing mine, I stepped inside and opened a sliding door consisting of translucent white paper (*washi*) over a wooden frame. In the room was indeed a magnificent Noh practice stage, with gleaming wooden floors. At the rear of the stage was a representation of a large green pine tree, the centerpiece of the Noh stage. The room held an air of deep concentration. The calm interior space of this training center stood in sharp contrast to the hustle and bustle of the street below.

“Moore-san, you are finally here!” called out Tsurumi Sensei. Smartly dressed in a black and white zebra-striped shirt and black cotton slacks, she sprang up from her chair in the corner of the training center and walked toward me, carrying herself with poise and certainty. The women students who were seated in the training center bowed, as if to provide a gesture of acknowledgment, and then continued fine-tuning their drumming sequences or talking quietly among themselves.

Telling the women that she would take me to the common room on the second floor, Tsurumi Sensei led me out of the Noh practice room. We made our way down the staircase to the landing below and walked toward the door from which emanated the aroma of the sweet potatoes. Walking into the apartment, she led me into a large carpeted common room that had been comfortably set up as a place for students to dine together. “Sit down, sit down. Make yourself at home,” she said. I seated myself at one of the low dining tables and gazed at a glass cabinet filled with large plates, teacups and saucers, and various bowls. It looked like enough chinaware to feed a crowd of fifty. Tsurumi Sensei went into the kitchen and

soon reappeared carrying a tray with small bowls of steaming white rice and some blanched green beans, drizzled with a delicious-looking miso sauce. Kneeling onto the floor, she set the tray on the table and offered me the food. As I began to eat, Tsurumi Sensei, who enjoyed telling stories about herself, began to tell me about her life. She invited me to learn Noh chanting with her.

The following account of Sensei's life is based on a series of interviews and conversations I conducted with her over several months. A number of these conversations took place in the presence of other students of the Sumire Kai. Because I refer to Sensei in the days before she became a Noh teacher, I use her first name, Reiko.

Singing Near the Rice Paddy

Reiko's father died when she was five years old. Her father, who had been in poor health, succumbed to a tuberculosis epidemic that was raging through Japan in the 1930s. One month before Reiko's father died, the family doctor called her mother into the hospital room to deliver this warning: "Your husband does not have long to live. He is like an egg cracked open on a rock in the sea. One huge wave will wash over the rock, and the egg will go. You will need to care for your children by yourself."

Reiko's mother did not tell her children that their father was so sick. Instead, she told them that their father's work kept him busy and that he had to live somewhere else. Only in her late twenties, the mother prepared for the day when she would be the sole breadwinner for her small family, and enrolled in a midwifery school where she earned a license to deliver babies.

For the next decade, she raised her two children by herself in Miyazaki; then her husband's brother, Reiko's uncle, who had been living in Tokyo, returned with his wife. Reiko's uncle

had held an illustrious position as a high court judge in Tokyo. But as Japan plunged more heavily into war in 1944, and as constant air raids threatened residents of Tokyo, he and his wife evacuated the city, leaving behind their home and virtually all of their possessions except some clothes and his Noh songbooks.

Meanwhile, at age sixteen, Reiko and her classmates were pulled out of school and worked each day in an ammunition factory, building weapons for the war. While the girls were working, the sirens would ring suddenly, signaling that the air raids had begun. The girls plunged into the nearby fields of wildflowers as the B-25s went roaring overhead. The bombers were apparently not meant to be targeting civilians, but because of the large munitions factory in Miyazaki city, they swooped through her village.

Each day after she finished working at the factory, Reiko and her uncle went to a field near the rice paddies and spread out a straw mat on the ground. He brought an armload of his songbooks, and they sat facing each other on this mat. They started with the most basic of plays, such as *Tsurukame* (Crane and Tortoise) and *Momijigari* (Maple Leaf Picking). Her uncle drilled her again and again on the basics of the rhythm of Noh. He was very severe in his demeanor, but he must have known his young niece found the sessions a chore and wanted instead to be playing with her friends at the beach.

One day, when Reiko's enthusiasm flagged, her uncle stopped teaching and shut the Noh songbooks. The two of them sat on the straw mats facing each other, as the sun beat down on them. "Reiko, people say that Japan will probably not win this war. And I think they are right. Our country is in deeply troubled times. People's sons, fathers, brothers are dying; many have left their homes like me. People everywhere are pawning their jewels and kimonos and anything of value in their homes—just so that they can buy some food to put on the table."

He continued, speaking of the possibility that Japan would lose its sovereignty: "One day soon you too might be forced to

leave your home and to shed all of your possessions. And what will remain then? Possibly nothing. This is sad and frightening, perhaps, but there is something you need to understand. Possessions are ephemeral, they are superficial. Real cultivation is not about what you acquire and attach to yourself, as an adornment. It is the discipline that you imbue into your body. It is what will make you shine. No matter what strife befalls you, polish your voice and dancing. Chant, Reiko! Chant. This art will create a luster from within that nothing and nobody can take away from you. Your art (*get*) will shine from within you.”

Roland Barthes (1984), speaking of the experience of looking at photographs, differentiates between the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *punctum* is the element that “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (1984, 26). It is that “accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).” For me, the prick comes in the form of a story, rather than a photograph. It is the story of Reiko’s uncle that strikes me with its vividness. In this story, I can most clearly feel her stake in teaching Noh. When I heard Tsurumi Sensei tell this story, I was struck by the poignancy of the tale. Here was a man in midlife who had lost his job and been evacuated from his home to return to his natal village. He felt an impending sense of crisis as darkness loomed over the country. All around him the world was changing and people were losing everything they had attained. What was he to hang on to? What would be his compass?

For Reiko’s uncle, it was the practice of Noh chanting and dance that was paramount. He wanted to pass on the one thing that he knew no one would take away. What he shared was what had been important for him personally in riding the waves and vicissitudes of life. Noh chanting was a social identity for him, and it was meaningful to remain involved in Noh chanting and dancing when material circumstances were changing rapidly. He lost other things and discovered they were

ephemeral; meanwhile, Japan was going through a lot of social upheaval and there was a leveling of material differences and circumstances.

The war ended, and at age eighteen Reiko graduated from girls' school (*jogakkô*). Her mother enrolled her in various classes such as cooking and sewing, to groom her for marriage. She also continued to learn Noh chanting and dance. Reiko's mother had found life as a single working woman extremely tough and did not want her daughter to endure what she had. She wanted her to marry and have what she believed would be a comfortable and sheltered life. Reiko took the lessons and also found a job as an assistant instructor in the home economics department of her school in Miyazaki. Through her culinary lessons, she discovered she had a knack for cooking. She taught girls how to make traditional Japanese dishes and newly popular Western dishes, which had been banned during the war.

Early Married Life

When Reiko was twenty-two, her uncle, who had become like a surrogate father, arranged for her to marry a young man called Tsurumi Jiro. Mr. Tsurumi was the second son of a family from Kagoshima, the prefecture neighboring Miyazaki prefecture in southern Japan where Reiko grew up. He had found a position in the Ministry of Law in Tokyo. His family was eager for him to settle into a marriage with a woman from near his natal village, because they feared that as a single man in Tokyo he would be vulnerable to the conniving women of the city. Mr. Tsurumi was part of a cohort of men who became white-collar workers and made up the burgeoning urban middle class. Sons of farmers, they migrated to Tokyo to pursue higher education and to enter jobs in government and corporations. His elder brother, the family's firstborn son, remained in Kagoshima and inherited the family farm.²

Reiko went to see her uncle who had arranged the marriage and declared that she would not marry Mr. Tsurumi. Her uncle did not say a word. He simply rolled out a large piece of calligraphy paper in his sitting room and gave Reiko an ink brush and a big ink tablet and said, "Reiko, write down point by point why Tsurumi is a man you shouldn't marry." Reiko could not come up with a single point about what was wrong with Mr. Tsurumi himself. She had only met him once. All she knew was that she did not want to marry him. She just sat there silent, and glared at her uncle. He stated coolly that not wanting to get married was not a good enough reason to decline the marriage proposal.

The day of her wedding, Reiko cried and cried. Her younger cousins watched her with mouths agape, probably thinking that marriage was a terrible thing. Reiko wanted desperately to remain single for a few more years. Getting married meant that she could not continue her work as a culinary teacher and that she would have to leave her family in Miyazaki and move to Tokyo.

The marriage proceeded, and Reiko and her husband moved to Tokyo where they set up a household in a boarding house. They lived in a tiny five-mat *tatami* room (approximately 26.5 square feet). Each day, her husband went to work in the ministry office in Kasumigaseki while she led the life of a professional housewife.

The late 1940s, when the two started their married life, was a time of major social transformation in Japanese society. Among the many changes that were introduced was a new constitution that declared the fundamental equality of the sexes in marriage and a new civil code that officially abolished the patriarchal household system known as the *ie*. As the *ie* was abolished and people came to live primarily in nuclear families, the role of the wife gradually shifted. Instead of being a subordinate member of the extended family, taking orders from her mother-in-law and the male patriarch, she was now to be an equal partner in a

dyadic relationship with her husband. She was responsible for managing the entire domestic arena so that her husband could devote all his energy to work in the public sphere. Women were entrusted with taking care of various aspects of the household including cleaning, cooking, and the family's health and hygiene.

This model of marriage, in which a husband and wife had separate and distinct spheres of responsibility, had gained the state's support from late in the nineteenth century; Christian intellectuals promoted it as progressive. It drew on the Meiji state's "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kembō*) ideology, which valorized women's careers as "managers of domestic affairs in households and nurturers of children" (Uno 1993, 294). The division of labor and roles between the husband who exerted himself in his work and represented the family to wider society and the wife who managed the home is summarized in the following statement by Sakai Toshihiko, founder of the magazine, *Katei Zasshi*: "[T]he husband was to function as 'prime minister and foreign minister' while the wife was to serve as 'finance minister and home minister' responsible for the household budget, education, and hygiene" (Sakai in Ambaras 1998, 28–29). A unique feature of wives' responsibility in Japanese households was their management of domestic accounting. Women's magazines frequently featured case studies of household budgets and stories of exemplary thrifty women who allocated one-third or more of their household income to savings (Ishii and Jarkey 2002). The husband's role, meanwhile, was to exert himself fully in the workplace and bring home a pay packet. His "noninterference" in domestic matters was framed as a virtue (Fuess 2005, 275).

The early days of her marriage were marked by a series of clashes with her husband. Reiko described her husband as a very patriarchal man. One weekend, a high school friend came to visit the couple. Talking to her friend late at night when she thought her husband was asleep, Reiko said, "You

should have a passionate love affair before you marry.” After her friend went home, Reiko’s husband grabbed her by the neck of her kimono and hurled her to the ground at the door of their apartment. He was furious. He said, “You don’t know why I’m angry?” She replied, “I have no idea.” To which he yelled, “I’m so disappointed to know you are a woman with such thoughts. How dare you tell a young single woman to have a passionate love affair before getting married? I had no idea. Get out of here.” He pushed her into the door, leaving her with bruises all over her body. Her husband said he had never intended to marry “such a salacious woman.” If she wanted to remain living in their apartment, she should lay her hand across her chest and “reflect deeply on what she had said,” and never think such a thing again.

Reiko recollected how she wanted to return to her family in Kyushu, but it was so far from Tokyo, and her baby was only a toddler. Her husband believed that, as his wife, she should stay at home and obey him quietly. The couple clashed over Reiko’s desire to resume Noh training at age twenty-eight after their daughter, Yaeko, had entered kindergarten. Mr. Tsurumi had been strongly opposed to Reiko resuming her training in Noh dancing and chanting, for it would entail a sizeable outlay of funds from the household budget. “None of my colleagues’ wives would dream of asking their husbands to pay for such a hobby,” he protested. “I’m a junior civil servant. How can I possibly afford your Noh training?”

Acquiring Certifications

Reiko took matters into her own hands. To pay for her Noh training, she asked her natal family in Miyazaki to send her money and also did some sewing at home to earn some extra income. She did not tell her husband that her family was

supporting her learning because she knew he would take offense at this. The Noh master she trained with was Hayashi Tadao.³ Twice a week, she went to his house to work as his secretary; in return, she got her training at lower cost. Her uncle, with whom she continued to communicate in writing, supported her training in Noh.

She arranged her life according to a strict schedule so that she could resume her Noh training and fit it into the life of an industrious housewife. Getting up at four each morning, she began with the laundry. Because the apartment walls in the civil servants' apartment block where she now lived were thin and the washing machine was noisy, she washed everything by hand. She then cooked the family's breakfast, prepared lunches for her husband and their daughter Yaeko, served her husband breakfast, took Yaeko to kindergarten, and went grocery shopping. She completed all these tasks by 10 a.m., so she could spend from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at her Noh classes. At 3 p.m. each day, she picked Yaeko up from kindergarten and dashed home, often dragging her by the hand. As soon as they returned home, Yaeko helped Reiko string up her apron and Reiko busied herself preparing the dinner. Sometimes Mr. Tsurumi came home early, and Yaeko would cry out, "Oh Daddy! You're home! We just got home too." Mr. Tsurumi would shoot Reiko a smirk, as if to say, "You can't fool me." He didn't say a word, but he was checking to see when she returned home. If Mr. Tsurumi had his way, he would have had a wife who was always at home.

In her late thirties, Reiko gained a *shokutaku* certification, which qualified her to take students or apprentices (*deshi*) of her own. Hayashi Sensei encouraged her to take students, to further her art. Reiko had begun to give cake-making classes in her neighborhood and asked her students casually if they would like to learn some Noh chanting and dance. They were curious about Noh and wanted to help her advance her training. As

she put it, they said, "Sure. We'll learn a few songs." Eight of these women are still members of the Sumire Kai. Word spread that she was teaching Noh chanting and dance. By then, the Tsurumis were living in a civil servants' housing block in central Tokyo. More and more women in the housing unit came to learn. Some of them had heard the sound of the chanting. They were curious about the deep, resonant tones coming from the apartment. Others heard the sound of the shoulder drum floating through the windows and came to ask what they were doing. "This was how my cooking classes gradually evolved into Noh chanting and dance classes."

Over the next twenty years, Reiko continued to train in Noh and steadily increased her mastery of it, learning to sing and dance more than 150 songs of increasing complexity. Each year, she staged a performance at Hayashi Sensei's recital, which was held at the Hosho Noh Theater in Tokyo. As David Plath (1980, 3) observes, to gain a legitimate place in this world, each individual must enter into "long engagements with the cultural symbols that identify experience, and with others in society who guard the meaning of the symbols." This observation is relevant to Reiko's lifelong training in Noh, which was initiated by her uncle and carried forth through long years of training with Noh actors. In her late fifties, Reiko was awarded the license of the *jun shokubun*, the second-highest level of accreditation, in the Hosho *shite* category and formally opened her own school of Noh. Hayashi Sensei was about to die and was eager for Reiko to attain this license so that she could create a formal group of her own and carry on his legacy. Hayashi Tadao had cultivated a large following of female disciples during his career. Eight of his female students attained the professional status of *jun shokubun*.

That is how the Sumire Kai was officially created in 1986. She then became a student of the acclaimed performer, Matsumoto Shigeo, who was an Intangible Cultural Property in the *shite* category.

Reiko explained to me that her husband had little idea what she was teaching in her Noh classes. But something changed when he was in his late fifties. He went to see her performance of *Dôjôji* at the Hosho Noh Theater.

Noh plays are divided into two parts, and the central character typically appears in different forms in the first and the second part. Often the characters appear at two different periods of their lives, such as youth and old age, or sometimes life and afterlife. The process of metamorphosis is particularly vivid in certain plays, such as *Dôjôji*. The *shite* appears in the first part of the play as a dancing girl who visits *Dôjôji* Temple, where a new bell is being installed. She is looking for a priest who once promised to marry her but escaped to the temple and hid in a large bell. The girl, realizing that she has been spurned, is overcome by wrath and turns into a serpent demon in the second half of the play. The serpent demon enters the temple grounds, coils itself around the temple bell, and melts it with its fury. The play reaches its crescendo with the girl's metamorphosis into the serpent demon. The play *Dôjôji* is often treated as an emblematic piece of Buddhist misogyny that sets up priests as forces of noble, pure spirituality and women (a dancing girl transformed into a serpent) as forces of profane, bestial sexuality (Klein 1991, 291).

I believe this play can also be seen as a work that foregrounds the power of change and metamorphosis. The figure of the snake can be seen in a different, more positive light. The snake, which renews itself by shedding its skin and who gets about by slithering along the ground, is a symbol of the energy of change, and as such is "both scary and inspiring" (Owen 2008, 29). The shedding of the skin is a metaphor for the cycle of birth, life, and death of humankind. The symbolism of the snake can hence be useful for representing the little deaths that people undergo during their lives (*ibid.*). This dramatic metamorphosis of characters between the two acts serves, in

my view, as an allegory for the transformation Mr. Tsurumi witnessed from the woman he married to the one who had grown into a Noh master.

Tsurumi Sensei continued: “My husband had been calling my Noh practice my ‘hobby’ until then, but something changed in his perspective. He said to me, ‘I realized that you were serious about Noh.’” Mr. Tsurumi built her a Noh stage in a new apartment he had purchased with his retirement payment and became increasingly supportive of her career in Noh.

Referring to her husband, she explained:

These days my husband helps me out. When he sees I’m terribly busy preparing the common room for a class, he picks up the vacuum cleaner and cleans the apartment. My husband has changed so dramatically since the early years. I don’t know what did it but he changed after he retired from his civil service post and took on a job as a marriage mediator for the local ward where we lived. He said that attending to the marital disputes of hundreds of couples, he found out that there were women who were far worse than me [chuckles].

Wagamama

Tsurumi Sensei did not have at her fingertips the specific examples of women’s transgressions that made them “far worse” than she. I knew from our multiple conversations that what she described as her transgressions of wifeness were her absorption in her Noh training career, commitment to teaching her students, and frequent absence from the home on teaching trips. These were qualities that would have been venerated in a male income earner, indeed deemed necessary, but they were

factors for which she had to compensate over the years. She was privately concerned about the impact of her teaching career on her family life. She explained that she had, along the way, often felt remorse. One way her family sought to explain this transgressive behavior was to speak of it as her character fault, and they invoked the term *wagamama*. To explain why she was different she said, "They say I am *wagamama*." *Wagamama* translates as selfishness, egoism, willfulness, and disobedience. It has a strong connotation of childishness. A person who is *wagamama* is thought to be pushing her own desires and agendas without consideration for others. She would say this with a tone of repentance, as if to intimate she was going against the accepted grain of adult femininity.

"My daughter and grandchildren say I am *wagamama*," she said. "They feel sorry for my husband and always say to him that it must be hard to be married to a woman like me. Because I have so many students and am often away from the home for days at a stretch, they think I neglect my role as a wife." She had missed crucial family events such as Father's Day celebrations and birthdays. This was a source of some grumbling among her family members. They complained that a real mother, grandmother, and wife would make herself much more available to her family than she did.

Nancy Abelmann (1997) asserts the centrality of personality in accounts of social mobility in South Korea, where her informants explain their mobility stories in terms of personal characteristics. The women she interviewed described traits such as "small-heartedness" and "irresponsibility" as reasons why they did or did not succeed in moving up the socioeconomic ladder. Abelmann remarks upon the irony that the personality traits "of which women were most critical . . . resulted in positive outcomes for their lives" (1997, 805). In the case of Tsurumi Sensei, the quality that may have facilitated her mobility was that of being *wagamama*.

While Sensei sometimes spoke with sadness about the attitudes of her family, she would chuckle about this pejorative label. I got a sneaking sense that she had come to see being *wagamama* as a good thing. “I am *wagamama*!” she would say and then erupt into a loud chuckle. “I do not follow the adage of ‘when old, follow your children.’” In those moments, she seemed to have claimed *wagamama* as one of the secrets of her health in late life. When Tsurumi Sensei laughed heartily in this way, often in front of me and other students in the Noh class, she infused the term with a positive valence.

One day after class, the concept of women doing what they want came up in a discussion of gender relations. Assembled in the training room were Tsurumi Sensei, Uchida Teruyo, a fellow student, and myself. Teruyo, now in her sixties, had been widowed in her thirties and subsequently raised her son by herself while working at a girls’ high school in Tokyo.

Teruyo stated, “I think women should be more assertive. They should put themselves forth as who they are. It’s a pity if women hold back from expressing themselves.”

Tsurumi Sensei nodded in agreement and added, “My mother was a conservative woman who was born in the late Meiji period [1868–1912] but even she used to say to me, ‘Reiko-chan, women can’t always be holding back. Sometimes, they have to put themselves forward and assert themselves.’” Tsurumi Sensei drew an imaginary line across the edge of the Noh stage as she quoted her mother: “‘Depending on the situation, one must step back from the line or step out beyond it. You need to use your wisdom to know when to step forward.’”

She said it had taken her many years to develop this wisdom. In addition to knowing when to step forward, it was also about developing the audacity to speak out, in spite of possible censure. The nature of this censure is real, for a person becomes marked as an anomaly and must deal with that censure. For Tsurumi Sensei, learning Noh was a decision

that she lived with and sustained, in spite of the hostile reaction from her husband, in the hope that, as she said, “someone would eventually understand my position.”

Teruyo, who had heard Reiko recount her story, said, “This might be a little forward of me to say, but your mother lost her husband quite young. I think this allowed her to express a lot of her power. I feel the same about myself. These days, more of my peers are widows and it’s so refreshing to spend time with them. It’s because they are living the way they want.”

I asked whether more women may want to be widows, and Teruyo replied with a chuckle: “Women have become used to having their husbands around so they probably would still rather have them alive.” With a bit of consternation in her voice, Reiko responded to my comment: “Women would prefer that they have their husbands. Even with constraints, I think women would rather have their husbands alive.”

Culinary Competence

Tsurumi Sensei was known among her students as a consummate cook. At each class, she served hearty meals, which she prepared from 4 a.m. on the morning of the class. She rotated the menu regularly and served seasonal delicacies, often from her hometown in Miyazaki. She brought large quantities of pickles and fruit on the plane back from her trips to southern Japan and would jokingly refer to herself as a farmer who carried an enormous basket of vegetables on her back to peddle to her city consumers. She cooked much of this food in her large kitchen.

The multitude of daytime television programs dedicated to explicating culinary techniques and teaching recipes shows that culinary competence is valued and that women, particularly of Sensei’s generation, were expected to be skilled in cooking. She claimed that she loved to cook, but I dare say it was also a