

Try, try again: training in noh drama

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Regimes of training and its theorization in the traditions of noh drama have long been the exclusive and esoteric preserve of professional acting families and have remained, until the twentieth century, generally unknown outside this restricted group. Even after the textual materials relating to such regimes were made more generally available, however, much of the insight they contained was hidden behind a curtain of technical knowledge about stage performance, dramatic convention, and the sociological hierarchy of the noh troupes. Although I am wary of the dehistoricization and decontextualization that can so easily result when we try to look at modern Japan on the basis of traditional, especially textual, materials, I nonetheless regard this as a welcome opportunity to make some observations about training in noh and to speculate on its implications and possibilities outside the world of the theater proper. In the following discussion, then, I will examine the role of training in the arts of noh, with occasional reference to my own modest experience as an amateur who once studied the performance of noh a little in the process of writing my dissertation.

Training and learning

In the context of noh, "training" presents many seeming paradoxes. The devotion to training that is everywhere exhorted in the texts with which we will be concerned could not be effected without a personal, individual commitment, and it would necessarily engage the individual intellect with the highest rigor and intensity; yet the individual must be willing to sacrifice personal judgment, not to mention personal impulse, to a teacher who

functions as the embodiment of past mastery in the artistic line. The process of training is not the same as learning about the art, and a comprehensive intellectual understanding of training is not necessarily a goal in the art; indeed, in the first stages of training, such an intellectual understanding might be considered an obstruction. The tools used come from the body, and in a concrete sense it is the body rather than the mind that is being trained, but the tools of the body are abstract forms, not concrete deployments of mimetic technique.

If this is paradoxical, then the value of the paradox lies in its irresolvability, in the tension that forces certain logical or intellectual assumptions to come head to head over a reality that must remain, at best, translucent. It is not the business of this essay to resolve this tension, but rather to ask how we might characterize training and its paradoxes given the evidence in texts on noh training. What features of training might we identify as central, and what social and theoretical contexts do they assume? What activities does training entail, when does it take place, who directs it, and what are its aims, both practical and aesthetic or spiritual? How have social, political, and economic change altered training, and what constants can still be discerned between the training of the past and that of the present?

The word “training” could be said many ways in Japanese. *Kunren*, *renshu*, *kyōren*, *shikomi*, and even *torēningu* are acceptable, depending on the context. In noh, however, two words are definitely applicable. One, *shūdō*, is an old word, hard to find without specialized classical dictionaries. It means “learning the way,” and it can be used in the context of religious as well as artistic training. Another word one hears often is *keiko*, also an old word but still in common use today. It is often given a polite (or formal) prefix, becoming *okeiko*.

Okeiko often means “lessons,” and it is now applied with equal frequency to piano lessons and lessons in the traditional arts, such as the tea ceremony. But full-fledged professionals, even eminent masters, use the term with regard to their own practice as well, and it doesn’t necessarily convey the sense of a beginner’s or intermediate’s attempts to learn the art. It means, rather, engagement in an artistic activity outside the context of an actual full performance. The philology of the word remains important. It is, in its earliest form, a Chinese two-character,

verb-object construction with the sense “think [upon] the past” or “study ancient ways” (*J. inishie o kangau*).

The focus on the past that lies behind the characterization of “training” as *keiko* may seem ironic if we consider noh at the end of the fourteenth century, as it underwent its most dynamic and definitive transition. It was then an upstart art that made its fame and fortune by breaking with the past, yet it is in this context that “training” in noh takes on its most salient characteristics, and it is perhaps here that one may find a broader relevance for training in what has today become a highly cultivated taste, at best, to many, a moribund performing art living a museum existence.

Context

The social and political instability of Japan’s medieval era (by which I mean the Kamakura, Muromachi, and Momoyama periods) provided a rich ground for the development, refinement, and elaboration of critical thought and intellectual innovation. In the field of poetics, the end of the Heian period (and the economic hardship it imposed on many aristocratic households) brought a sharply heightened sense of professionalization to the vocation of poet. In the sphere of religious discourse, new or newly prominent conceptions of time and the potential for human action gave rise to the Zen and Pure Land sects, as well as the revivification and reform of earlier sects (such as the Kegon, under Myōe). Political entities with a strong provincial base vied for power with the central authorities who manipulated the imperial throne, creating first (in the Kamakura shogunate) a bipolar power structure and then unequivocally subordinating the imperial court and its *eminences grises* to the political domination of shogunal authority in the first part of the Muromachi shogunate (especially under Yoshimitsu, Yoshimochi, and Yoshinori.)

When, in the late fourteenth century, the authority of the Muromachi shogunate was firmly established in the political sphere, new cultural opportunities arose for classes of society that had been on the margins of cultural production earlier. Yoshimitsu, the third Muromachi shogun, is often depicted as a politically successful leader with a deep sense of cultural inferi-

ority, which he sought to overcome through patronage of new arts that could be seen to rival the grand old traditions of the imperial court. Although such a personalization of the new artistic climate invites skepticism, it is abundantly clear that the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries brought a new range of aesthetic possibilities and new groups of artists into prominence. The tea cult came into being and developed a varied practice; linked verse poetry (*renga*) was transformed from a diversion to a high art; and noh drama emerged from the energetic diversity of *sarugaku*, *dengaku*, *kusemai*, and other provincial entertainments and rituals. Each of these new representative arts of Japan's middle ages offered new opportunities for artistic careers to members of social classes that had previously been excluded from central participation in the arts of classical Japan (such as *waka* poetry, *gagaku* and *bugaku*, and narrative fiction). With this new social possibility came a new awareness of the role of training in the mastery of an art.

The primary documents for an examination of training in early noh are the treatises of Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443). Zeami is the central figure in the transformation of *sarugaku* into noh, and his writings on performance, playwriting, and the training of actors provide the earliest and most intimate view of the noh in Muromachi Japan. I am particularly interested in parts of Zeami's first treatise, *Fūshi kaden* (sometimes known as the *Kadensho*), and in another treatise from late in his life, *Kyūi*. Most of the former was written between 1400 and 1402 to record what Zeami learned from his father, Kannami, as well as to distill his own experience from youth through his successful midcareer. The latter is a highly allusive and schematic reflection on artistic achievement written by 1428, when Zeami was sixty-five. In addition to providing a perspective on much of Zeami's career, these two texts maintain an explicit and conscious concern with issues of training and artistic development. And the fact that training and artistic development (rather than, say, aesthetic and metaphysical ideals) occupy a dominant role is itself a commentary on the inseparability of noh from training in noh.

No training to noh training

Fūshi kaden devotes part of its first "book" to the issue of the actor's training at seven stages in his life. This is a good place

to begin a discussion of training in noh because of its methodical and clearly staged presentation of the regime of training, but also because it reveals a basic and paradoxical fissure running through the aesthetics and pragmatics of the art. Zeami posits the age of six¹ as the beginning of training, the first attempt of the child to learn about the art to which he is to succeed for his livelihood:

In training at this age, there is always something a child does on his own that shows where his talents lie, and he should be allowed to follow such natural inclinations whether they be toward dance, . . . song, or even the direct display of energy. You should not be too quick to say what is good and what is bad, because if you demand too much, the child will lose interest in noh and weary of it, and make no progress.²

This statement presents a form of training that is no training. It proposes merely to exhibit the child on stage, to notice the natural and intuitive basis of performance at this inception of his life as an actor, and to take advantage of his beauty (my choice of the male pronoun is conscious, but it leaves open the underlying sexist assumption that only males are fit for the stage, an assumption rarely challenged in the history of noh). The child, by virtue of being a child, creates interest in what he does. That interest is used most effectively when undiluted by any pretension to imitate or present something other than simply a beautiful child dancing and singing. This may reflect a basic faith in the original nature of the child as good and uncorrupted. This is native to the thought of Mencius and to Buddhist notions of "original enlightenment" (*J. hongaku*), that is, the Buddha nature inherent in all sentient beings (Kojima, 1986:41-42).

This attitude toward children on stage persists today, and informs the "acting" of children on the Kabuki stage as well as that of the noh. No attempt at dramatic subtlety or refinement is expected of a child. One might go further, suggesting a link between such a pattern in the training of an actor and the frequent observation by Americans that Japanese children, before school age, are often given great freedom to behave as they will, and that attempts at discipline come systematically only after the children have entered school, at which time the strictures of social control become, contrastingly, much more apparent than in American society.

Zeami proceeds next to the training of an eleven- or twelve-year-old, and little seems to have changed in the general attitude toward training. Still, it is the natural capabilities of the child that are central to his performance, and the teacher's task is to show these natural capabilities to best advantage:

About this time, the child will begin to be able to carry a tune, and he will start to understand a bit about the *noh*, so he should be taught various sorts of *noh*. First of all, since he is a child, anything he does will be pretty (*yūgen*). Furthermore, his childhood voice will be at its peak during this period. With these two advantages, his bad points will disappear and his good ones blossom.

For the most part, you should not have children do too much dramatic imitation. It neither looks good nor increases the child's ability. However, as the child becomes really skillful, he may be permitted to perform almost anything. A pretty little boy with a good voice who is talented besides can hardly go wrong. (Hare, 1986:18)

Zeami expresses his consciousness of the child actor's future in denying that his present level of accomplishment is any guide to future potential, and while training has become more explicit in terms of proper movement and enunciation, Zeami expects little from the young actor in terms of artistic consciousness or self-awareness. The devotion to training for its own sake is important:

Such skill is not true skill. It is merely temporary. . . . Consequently, it does not provide any means by which to judge the boy's potential. At this stage, those things the child can do easily should be made the high points of his performance, and major emphasis should be given to his technique. His movements should be exact and his singing understandable syllable by syllable. His basic gestures in the dance should be strictly correct, and he should be resolute in his training. (Hare, 1986:18)

It is only with the transformations wrought by puberty on the body and mind of the actor, before the next stage of his training, that the regularized and systematic training regimen begins, and it is at this point that the young actor's mettle is first put to its strictest test (with a characteristic paradox):

This period [of age sixteen to seventeen] is of such great importance that you must not practice too much. First, since your voice will be changing, you will have lost one of your dramatic charms. Your body will have gotten much taller, and you will have lost the charm of figure

you had before. The time when you could, with your pretty voice, perform with effortless flair will have passed, and with this transformation, the essential strategy of performance will have changed, leaving you at a loss. You will find yourself in positions that the audience thinks comical, and you will be embarrassed. With one thing and another, all this can be quite disheartening.

In training at this time, even if people point and laugh, pay them no heed. Practice, instead, in private at a pitch our voice will allow and train hard, using your voice in a manner appropriate to the time of day. Be resolute and realize that this is the turning point; commit yourself to noh for life with complete devotion – no other means of training exists. If you give up at this point, your noh is finished. (Hare, 1986:21)

The encouragement to embrace hard work, discipline, and devotion to the art we find here is hardly surprising or unusual to readers familiar with Japan. A self-conscious, formalist, artistic continuity would, in any cultural context, require commitment and the subordination of individual impulse to the authority and conventions of the community. What may be more idiosyncratic here is the clear contrast between the artistic value of a child and that of a postpubescent student of the art.

This can, to some extent, be accounted for by reference to the sexual tastes of the medieval (especially samurai class) aristocracy. The definition of sexuality in medieval Japan did not divide along the lines of heterosexual–homosexual (as it is often seen to do in contemporary America) but more tellingly along lines of age and social hierarchy. The child (especially a beautiful child from a low social class) was one target of sexual interest for older boys and young men (and even older men occasionally) of a higher class, and the resulting relationship could be interpreted to have positive social and educational value, like the institutions of pederasty in classical Greece.

There are significant indications that Zeami himself, in his first appearances in the capital, was the object of more than simply aesthetic interest on the part of his patrons, most importantly the Shogun Yoshimitsu and an important poet and statesman from the imperial court, Nigō Yoshimoto. The biographical details of these relationships are of little immediate relevance here. What is important, however, is the aesthetic idealization of the child as an un-self-conscious locus of beauty. That beauty is, moreover, identified specifically as *yūgen*, a

term of great weight and lofty pedigree in the context of medieval Japanese aesthetics.

Yūgen is one of the supreme artistic virtues in medieval Japan, and its embodiment in the child is referred to elsewhere in Zeami's writing as well.³ The presence of an un-self-conscious and originary beauty, *yūgen*, in the prepubescent child enables the possibility of the loss of that beauty with the onset of puberty and makes necessary a strategy for regaining it. This is the *raison d'être* for training in *noh*, the fissure between a state of nature and a fall away from it, an un-self-conscious and poignantly ephemeral beauty that must be recaptured or replaced by a long, intensely disciplined, and regimented process of the reconstitution of beauty.

This pedagogical structure is echoed in the dramaturgical theory Zeami posits for the creation of a successful play. It is to unfold in a tripartite process of beginning, break, and fast climax – *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*, in Japanese. We have just come upon the break. The actor's career has begun, but until the first transformations of his body in puberty have happened, the actor's potential is uncertain and his training is limited in scope. Then, with the break, the training regimen becomes relatively predictable. By the time a talented young actor is twenty-three or twenty-four, the regimen will have begun to bear fruit:

About this time a man's artistic potential for his entire life begins to be fixed. Consequently, this is an extremely important time for training. Your voice will have changed already, and your body will have reached maturity. This provides two advantages. . . . Performances worthy of a man in the prime of his youth are possible now. People will begin to take notice and say, "Ah, he's gotten quite good." On occasion you may even win in competitions against famous actors because of the novelty of your dramatic achievement at this particular time. (Hare, 1986:21)

But these first successes of the actor's career are undercut immediately by a cautionary note:

People will be generous with praise, and you may come to think of yourself as a really accomplished actor. This is very dangerous. . . . Your achievement at this time is not true artistic excellence. It is born of youth and the novelty the spectators see in you. Anyone with a discriminating eye will recognize this fact.

Your achievement at this time is a beginner's achievement, and it is

a great shame if you mistake it for true artistic excellence and give free rein to your personal eccentricities on stage, thinking yourself a great actor. Even though you are highly praised and win in competition with famous actors, you should realize this is merely [a] temporary achievement born of novelty. You should work at mastering the traditional forms of dramatic imitation and train all the more diligently, inquiring very carefully of truly accomplished actors concerning the fine points. . . . Nearly everyone becomes enthralled with this temporary achievement and fails to realize it will disappear. . . . Ponder this long and hard. If you really have a grasp of your level of achievement at this stage, that achievement will not disappear throughout your life. If you overestimate your level of achievement, even the level once attained will fade away. Think this over carefully. (Hare, 1986:21f)

The reservations apparent in this passage prefigure later developments in a more theoretical and abstract paradigm of artistic achievement, but their experiential base is already clear (and has led to scholarly speculation about the course of Zeami's own career). For our present purposes, it should suffice to note the ambivalence about success in its reliance on the judgment of an audience in what is ostensibly a kind of popularity contest. Zeami is concerned with identifying a stable and reliable foundation for dramatic success, but his choice of metaphor for the successes he has himself experienced is anything but stable and reliable. He chooses *hana*, the flower, and its very ephemerality is the source of its aptness in his metaphorical deployments.

Performance in flower

One of the most ingratiating things about reading Zeami is the (illusory?) sense of a person inside, responding with practicality and intelligence to his own circumstances, even though the things he is talking about are often highly technical or parochial or simply incomprehensible. In the next passage from his account of an actor's training, as we have been following it in *Fūshi kaden*, we come upon the apogee of the actor's career at the age of thirty-three or thirty-four. Or, at least, that is what the text would lead you to believe:

[An actor's] noh around this time is at its highest peak. He who fully understands and masters the various articles in this manuscript and attains true expertise in acting will most certainly gain fame and security in his position. He who does not gain sufficient fame and security,

no matter how skillful he may be, should realize that he has not yet brought about the full flowering of his art. If you do not achieve this, your *noh* will decline after age forty. This will become obvious later. . . . Now is the time for you to take full account of what you have learned in the past to be fully aware of your direction in the future. (Hare, 1986:22)

The heyday of an actor's career, again compared with the flowering of a plant or tree, is the natural consequence of practice and the careful observance of a technical regime, and it virtually guarantees the thirty-something actor success and recognition. The latter is the ratification of a method pursued with exactness and devotion and is the indispensable foundation for later achievement. Consciousness of one's position within the regimen of training is a central feature of Consciousness itself.

There is, moreover, a sense of urgency to what is said here because, like a flower in the natural world, the flower of artistic achievement will inescapably wilt, dry up, and wither away. Already, indeed, in Zeami's remarks on the forty-three- or forty-four-year-old actor, we see an awareness of this:

From this point on, your method in *noh* should change fundamentally. Even if you've achieved universal praise, and come to the most profound understanding of the art, all the same, you'd better find yourself a good *waki* [i.e., assistant, secondary actor]. Your skill may not deteriorate, but you will unavoidably get older, and you'll lose both the flower of physical power and the flower of your appearance. I don't know about the exceptionally handsome, but for the basically attractive person, it becomes quite unacceptable to perform without a mask when you're old. So you'll have to do without this side of things.

. . . Whatever flower you haven't lost by this point must be the authentic flower of your talent. Any actor who hasn't lost this flower by the time he is about fifty must surely have made his name before he was forty. No matter how famous an actor may become, he must be the sort of person who thoroughly understands his own capabilities, and consequently, he will take great care to find a good *waki*, and he won't break his back trying to do this or that, performing some play where his faults are sure to be exposed. The kind of mind which understands its own body's capabilities, that's the mind of a master. (Omote and Kato, 1974:18ff)

At fifty, the irrevocability of change is all the more apparent, and yet an important paradox has appeared in the example of Zeami's own father, Kannami (1333-84):

There's probably no better plan at around this age than to do nothing. "Once grown old, a magic steed's no better than a nag, indeed," so they say. All the same, an actor of true attainment, even though his repertory has dwindled away and, for better or for worse, he has nothing to show off, his flower should still be there. My late father passed away on the nineteenth day of the fifth month when he was fifty-two years old, but on the fourth of that month he had performed before the god of Sengen in the province of Suruga. His noh that day was particularly beautiful and was praised by exalted and humble alike. By that time, I gather, he had already relinquished most roles to the beginners, and he would himself just add a little something here or there where it was easy, but his flower seemed to grow more and more. Because he had attained the authentic flower, that flower remained in his noh without scattering, even until the tree was old and the branches few. (Omote and Kato, 1974:19)

The metaphorical inconsistency here – the flower that does not wilt and fade – stems from the exceptional character of the man who provides the example. Kannami, from all evidence, and certainly from the testimony of his son, was not only an extraordinarily talented and successful individual, but also a teacher of remarkable and lasting success. And yet, what seems an anomaly here may not in fact turn out to be so exceptional after all. Here we turn to the second of the treatises I mentioned earlier, the *Kyūi*, where we find a much richer deployment of metaphor in the description of artistic training and achievement, and a far more egregious transgression of natural reality.

The *Kyūi*, or "Nine Ranks," is a brief text, less than four pages in a modern printed version, schematic, highly allusive, syntactically fragmented, and written partly in a puzzlingly idiosyncratic attempt at Chinese. It opens with a series of notes on the characteristics of nine stages of artistic achievement. The nine stages are divided into three sets of three, marked "the top three flowers," "the middle three ranks," and "the bottom three ranks." For each level, Zeami gives a terse metaphorical characterization in Chinese and a slightly longer Sino-Japanese explanation. We will not quote the latter here, but the former provides a sketch of the treatise that will be useful for us to refer to later:

The Top Three Flowers:

The Stratum of the Miraculous Flower. Silla [the fourth- to ninth-century Korean Kingdom], midnight: the sun is bright.

The Stratum of the Profoundly Cherished Flower. Snow blankets a thousand mountains. Why is that single peak not white?

The Stratum of the Tranquil Flower. Piling snow in a silver bowl.

The Middle Three Ranks

The Stratum of the Correct Flower. The mist is bright, the sun sets, ten thousand mountains are crimson.

The Stratum of Broad Vitality. The mind of the mountain clouds and the moon upon the sea, exhausted in the re-counting.

The Stratum of Shallow Patterns. What makes a path a path is not the eternal path.

The Bottom Three Ranks

The Stratum of the Strong and Thin. Shadows flash across the metal hammer, light is cold on the precious sword.

The Stratum of the Strong and Coarse. Three days after birth, a tiger cub would eat an ox.

The Stratum of the Coarse and Leaden. A Tree Rat with Five [Accomplishments]. (Omote and Kato, 1974:174ff)

Zeami now turns to a discussion of the way training in *noh* relates to this schematic system of artistic accomplishment. Here the extravagant metaphors are given a more comprehensible, though not transparent, interpretation. It is of particular significance that the beginner is required to begin not at the bottom of the latter but at the sixth level, the lowest of the middle three ranks:

Middle first, top second, bottom last, which is to say, in embarking upon the introduction to the performing arts, mastering the articles of training [*keiko*] with regard to the two arts of song and dance comprises the Stratum of Shallow Patterns. The level one gradually arrives at on this path, by thoroughly mastering this and adding patterns to the shallow stratum, is the Stratum of Broad Vitality. Exhausting the matters relevant to this level, and following the path for broad and expansive experience, to arrive at its full fruition is the Stratum of the Correct Flower. This is the rank where one attains the Three Modes [of dramatic imitation] from the Two Arts [of song and dance]. This is the place where it becomes apparent to audiences whether one has grasped the true nature of the flower of this vocation, having attained a secure competence in each [of the technical skills] and become proficient at moving an audience. This is the Stratum of the Tranquil Flower, where, in looking down at one's artistic accomplishments up

to this point, one transcends them to the secure attainment of the greatest consequence. Above this is the Stratum of the Profoundly Cherished Flower, where one attains the most wondrous visible effects and performs on the differential between being and nothingness. Hereabove, words no longer avail and one has come to express the internal landscape of the miraculous epiphany of non-duality, the Stratum of the Miraculous Flower. (Omote and Kato, 1974:176)

Despite the extravagant mystical rhetoric of the latter half of this explanation, there is a certain basic logic to the progression of artistic accomplishment Zeami has outlined. In particular, in the middle three levels of training and accomplishment, one masters a body of techniques, explores and expands one's capabilities within their sphere, and proceeds on this basis to the next level. In reaching the top three ranks (or "flowers," as Zeami calls them), this logic holds, even if the artistic accomplishments pointed to are of an overtly religious wonder that may seem remote from our experience. The garnering of artistic success through a measured and gradual mastery of technique underlies the full course of attainment from the Stratum of Shallow Patterns through the Stratum of the Miraculous Flower. Now, however, something surprising occurs:

As for the lowest three ranks, they are the swift undercurrents of artistic performance and are graduated accordingly, but are not of great importance in training. However, once one has gone through the middle three ranks and attained the upper three flowers to attain the secure rank of the miraculous flower, then one may double back and play freely in the bottom three ranks, whereupon the activities one pursues at these levels, too, are harmonized aesthetically. In the past, accomplished performers, though they had mastered the top three flowers, declined to resort to the three bottom levels. This is like the saying "the Majestic Pachyderm disdains the paths of rabbits." In this, nowhere else than in the performance of my late father, have I seen one who followed from the middle three ranks to the top three flowers, and thereupon descended to the bottom three ranks, mastering all. Many others have come to the Stratum of Broad Vitality, and before they have attained the Stratum of the Correct Flower, they have made the descent to the bottom three ranks; in the end, they do not succeed as performers. Moreover, these days there are people in the art who take the bottom three ranks as their introduction to the art. This is not the proper order. Consequently, there are many who do not enter upon any of the levels of artistic accomplishment. (Omote and Kato, 1974:176ff)

Starting at the bottom gets you nowhere in Zeami's way of looking at things. The problem here is one of constraints upon human action. It is important to note that Zeami, like certain Zen masters of his day and of more recent times, posits a certain minimum standard for the pursuit of artistic activity if any improvement is to be made. If that minimum standard is not adhered to in training, then progress is impossible. If the standard is observed and the training regimen is followed regularly and consistently, progress to basic competence is virtually guaranteed. Thereafter, the achievement of artistic virtuosity is a more complicated matter. Much of Zeami's critical vocabulary comes from Buddhism, Tendai, Shingon, and Zen, and as his ideal performer comes to the top three flowers, the increase in this vocabulary is evident. The transition between the Middle Three Ranks and the Top Three Flowers is characterized by a word taken from Zen, *zadan*, and it suggests a break from the gradual and incremental improvement of earlier training into a transcendent and stable virtuosity. More interesting still is the ability of the true virtuoso to descend from his lofty attainments to levels of activity that are not in themselves artistic at all and that have previously been out of bounds. These are the Bottom Three Ranks, and they represent mere action without artistic value.⁴

Zeami's understanding of the sequence of training has antecedents in both religious thought and poetics. In the former sphere, it recalls the system of ten stages of religious consciousness adumbrated by Kūkai.⁵ A system more explicitly oriented to training can be found in the "Ten Styles of Poetic Composition" of Fujiwara Teika, the great poet and critic of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. In this case, the styles enumerated are not rigidly hierarchical, but the training regimen is informative for understanding Zeami's view. Teika requires the poet first to master four fundamental styles, the "style of mystery and depth" (*yūgen'yō*), the "style of universally acceptable statement" (*koto shikarubeki yō*), the "style of elegant beauty" (*uruwashiki yō*), and the "style of intense feeling" (*ushintei*). Thereafter, the poet is free to compose in four other styles with which he should have little difficulty, and only after all the previous styles have been mastered is he permitted to go on to the "style of demon-quelling force" (*onihishigitei*) (Brower and Miner, 1963:246–247).

These three traditional approaches share several features rele-

vant to training, whether it be religious or artistic (and the distinction, particularly in Japan's middle ages, is not usually a very meaningful one). Training is to be undertaken following a strict regimen. Specific and discrete fields of activity are to be mastered before proceeding to the next stage; the gradual approach consistently applied will produce good results; and once one has mastered the basic course of training, one will achieve liberation. This liberation is made explicit in Zeami's scheme by the consummate master's ability to descend to levels of activity that would not have been acceptable in a less accomplished artist.⁶ All three systems are totalizing systems and give the practitioner a transcendent freedom: "training makes you free." But the seeming similarity to common Western notions of education making the individual free may be deceptive. Training must be differentiated from education because it is not primarily a rational, intellectual process but rather a mastery of forms with a strongly kinetic, physical, bodily orientation. Moreover, the freedom attained is not, as most often intended by the Western formulation, political freedom, but rather a spiritual or aesthetic freedom, a freedom that is always enmeshed in a web of obligations within the institutions of noh. That freedom maintains, moreover, an ethical significance that hearkens back to the *Analects* of Confucius. Recall specifically Master Kong's first article:

At fifteen, I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities. At fifty I knew what were the biddings of Heaven. At sixty, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right.⁷

The boys from the men

Many of the spiritual concerns of noh have been subordinated to the economic structures of patronage and amateur practice over the centuries. It would certainly have been impossible for noh to survive for the six centuries since it developed its identity were it not for the sense of respect, indeed veneration, that has stemmed from the "reflection on ancient ways" so characteristic of noh. It is important to realize that this is not, or at least not exclusively, the intrusion of a crass (Western) modernity on a pristine (Japanese) tradition, but that for centuries the tradition

itself has been able to survive only in reliance on this and related structures of patronage.⁸ How does this system of patronage interact with and influence notions of training in *noh*, and what does it suggest about traditional Japanese attitudes toward training in general?

The ready availability of other kinds of performance art has vastly increased competition for an audience, and in the face of this competition, *noh* has managed to create and maintain a relatively wealthy and generous audience and patronage base, but that base is far removed from what could, in even the loosest sense, be considered “popular.” Most patrons of *noh* are also amateur practitioners who pay professional teachers monthly tuition for lessons and (high) fees for amateur recitals (usually held once a year).

In my own experience in lessons with generous and patient actors and musicians, the sense of the past was never without paradox. In those lessons intended for amateurs, almost all of the students had seen a good deal more of the past with their own eyes than had the teachers. The majority of my fellow students were women of a certain age. Occasionally a businessman (also a fairly older individual) would attend. The ladies were beautifully dressed in *kimonos* with an immaculate white *tabi* for use in their dance lessons on the expensive cypress stage. They spoke slowly in exceptionally polite Japanese – “*zāmasu-kotoba*,” as my home-staying mother used to call it. They were much like my grandmother’s friends – rather well-to-do, well preserved, and well intentioned. There was virtually no expectation that any of us would attain professional rank. Indeed, the time and place for professional training are generally altogether separate from those for amateur training.

The bifurcation of professional and amateur has many practical consequences for training in *noh*. One concrete example relates to such basic components of *noh* as its musical rhythm and how this is conveyed to students of the art.

The rhythmic structures of *noh* are rather complex and, in a majority of cases in a given play, require the marriage of a twelve-syllable line of verse with a basic musical unit counted in eight beats.⁹ In effect, certain syllables in a given verse are allotted a full beat of the musical unit, whereas others are given only a half-beat. There is a stereotypical pattern that is referred to for general reference, but in any given performance the actual

verse will vary from that pattern, depending upon the vocal embellishments of certain syllables, the particular combination of "schools" of acting, drumming, flute playing, and so on, as well as the individual actor's interpretation of the piece.

In amateur training, however, these fine (but crucial) rhythmic details are for the most part ignored, and students are urged simply to try their best to imitate the teacher. In advanced stages of training, when the amateur is allowed (for a price) to perform a full play or a significant portion of a play, such instruction as may be necessary for that particular play is given, but even in these cases, the responsibility for understanding and articulating the underlying rhythmic structure is held back from the amateur student. This is illustrated perhaps most acutely in the double fee structure used in noh for professional versus amateur performances. Professionals pay far less to their instrumentalists for the performance of any particular play than do amateurs because, in the words of one instrumentalist, "we expect the professionals to understand how the music works and sing accordingly, whereas with amateurs, *we* have to do all the work to keep up with the way they chant."

There are historical and sociological reasons for this discrepancy. The instrumentalists of noh were traditionally considered of lower social class than the actors, and the actors were themselves often of lower social class than their amateur patrons. The chanting of noh texts was considered perfectly appropriate even for high-ranking members of the shogunal court, but the instrumental music was considered fit only for the professionals. This attitude has persisted well into the twentieth century and is one reason for the serious shortage of professional instrumentalists in the world of noh today.

In more general terms, the result is a kind of infantilization of the amateur. Expectations for amateur performances are low, and it is exceedingly rare for an amateur to break through into professional ranks. As a consequence, there is a high degree of exclusiveness and nepotism in professional noh circles.

Some would suggest that this is one of the corruptions of modern life, but already in Zeami's separation of the child actor from the adolescent and postadolescent actor, the seed of this dualism exists. A kind of "natural" beauty exists in the world and is exemplified by the beauty of a child, but it is highly perishable, like the flower so prevalent in Zeami's aesthetic

theory. The creation of a more controllable and long-lasting beauty depends on a strict, long-term regimen of training, which must, moreover, follow along the lines of one's seniors in the art. The *transmission* from generation to generation not only of techniques and conventions but also a "spirit" of *noh* is the lifeblood of the art. In this context, one learns by imitation and strict attention to the way one's superiors perform. Training is a recursive, iterative process, experientially based. The body learns the art first, and in mastering its kinetic structures enables the "spirit" or the "heart" to come to an understanding. Getting the outward behavioral form correct may eventually lead to cognitive understanding, but a comprehensive, intellectually based understanding of the art is considered neither necessary nor desirable. An understanding of even the basics of the plot of a given play is not always considered necessary. Consider, for instance, the anecdote about a venerable old actor who was reported to have figured out the story of a play he had performed many times only by listening to an account of it given by another actor during the intermission, while he himself waited inside a prop for his second-act appearance. This is, no doubt, an extreme case, but it is repeated frequently in discussions of *noh*, only partly for comic effect.

Horse before the cart

There are many possible pitfalls in trying to characterize the pedagogical strengths of Japan from a perspective that grows out of the gnawing awareness that American educational institutions seem to be failing in many areas. Among them one might mention the unquestioned assumption that national identity is a more important factor in such an enterprise than, say, the discipline being taught, the particular individuals involved, the broader historical context in which the instruction or training and the criticism of it occur, the definition of success or failure in the enterprise, and so on. Aware as I am of these pitfalls, I would suggest, all the same, that the traditional arts, specifically *noh*, offer several possible areas of inquiry that might provide us with a surer and more effective understanding of the differences between American and Japanese pedagogical ideologies and, consequently, possibilities for rethinking what is done in contemporary American education. In conclusion, then, I would

offer the following summary of the pedagogical characteristics of training in noh, not because I think they are necessarily ideal or appropriate for all other educational and training contexts, but because they may provide a useful ground for further discussion and elaboration.

1. Training defers and subordinates a comprehensive intellectual grasp of the subject to a mastery of specific, practical details necessary for various tasks associated with performance.
2. Training is centered on the body. The body is the ground from which intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual understanding grows, and the first order of business is to achieve mastery of the body within the conventions of noh – its sounds, movements, and visual and spatial vocabulary.
3. The pattern for training exists in the example of past masters. The student must try to bury or forget individual impulses and opinions in favor of the insights and instructions of the teacher. The teacher must be trusted and obeyed until one has achieved a comprehensive competence of the physical skills necessary to the art.
4. The tools of the actor are the abstract tools of form, not conscious, intellectually communicable tools of content. The mastery of forms enables the actor to communicate content in the end, but form must be privileged over content in the process of training.
5. Creativity, although manifest in any fine performance, is not a conscious aim of the actor. It is the result of a complete technical mastery and an un-self-conscious response to the specifics of any performance.
6. Serious training is an activity that demands full vocational commitment. Amateur involvement is purely for enjoyment and carries neither the responsibility nor the potential for professional engagement on the art.
7. Training is an unnatural activity that frequently runs counter to individual impulse. With complete mastery, however, it carries the potential of a reunification with nature, which allows unrestrained artistic freedom.
8. Training is different from learning. The latter centers on the intellectual ratification of propositions and the development of a capacity to understand or process more and more complex propositions, many of them unique to one's individual experience. Training is the internalization of technique, allowing one a more and more accurate realization of the conventions and ideals of a traditional body of knowledge.

In conclusion, I would like to consider a certain break with tradition that is central to Zeami's philosophy of training. The tradition in question is that of the practice and poetics of *waka* poetry, the preeminent classical form of thirty-one syllables (5/7/5/7/7). The founding statement of classical poetics in Japan is the preface to *Kokin wakashū*, a collection of *waka* commissioned by the imperial court and eventually completed in 905 C.E. The preface opens with the following sentence: "The poetry of Japan has its roots in the human heart and flourishes in the countless leaves of words."¹⁰

This statement operates at one level through a sort of pun. The word for "word" is written with graphs meaning "word leaves," and this natural image is made yet more explicit in the notion that intention and affect, rooted in the heart, can "leaf out" in language. The idea can be traced to earlier Chinese poetic theory, but it became in time the central pillar of traditional Japanese aesthetics.

Zeami, however, turns the idea around, substituting "flowers" for "leaves" and transforming the whole to *hana wa kokoro, tane wa waza nari*, "the flower is the mind, the seed is technique" (Omote and Kato, 1974:37). The affectively centered tradition of Japanese poetics is topsy-turvy here. It's not the mind (or heart) that produces the words or art, but the artistic forms and techniques that ultimately cultivate the mind. "Training," then, "is the basis of identity," a statement that might well have been revolutionary in its time but that has now settled into the foundational orthodoxy of Japanese thought.

Notes

1. I have converted Zeami's *kazoedoshi* renderings into Western ages, but it should be remembered that these are all approximate.
2. All translations from Zeami are mine. Some have appeared previously in Hare (1986), as is the case here. This quote is taken from Hare (1986:15ff.). The others were done for this occasion. I base my translations on Omote and Kato (1974).
3. Most importantly in a treatise entitled *Nikyoku santai ningyōzu, Zeami Zenchiku*, 124.
4. At the very bottom, for example, is the Stratum of the Coarse and Leaden, characterized by the somewhat puzzling "tree rat with five [accomplishments]." This makes more sense when glossed via

allusion to Xunzi: "The flying squirrel has five talents, but it is reduced to extremity." This was further annotated by one Guo Pu: The five talents of the flying squirrel are its abilities to fly, climb, swim, dig, and run. They are deficient in that though it can fly, it cannot fly well enough to get over a roof; though it can climb, it cannot get to the top of a tree; though it can swim, it cannot cross a gorge; though it can dig, it cannot build a safe shelter; and though it can run, it cannot outdistance a man. Thus, none of its talents amounts to real ability. *Xunzi*, I (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 139, 270.

5. In that system, all human thought and activity is parceled out among ten hierarchical levels:
 10. Shingon Sect
 9. Kegon Sect
 8. Tendai Sect
 7. Sanron (Madhyamika) Sect
 6. Hossō Sect
 5. Pratyekabuddha Vehicle of Hīnayāna Buddhism
 4. Śrāvaka Vehicle of Hīnayāna Buddhism
 3. Brāhmanism or popular Taoism
 2. Confucianism
 1. The Person with no moral or philosophical constraints.

Kūkai, *The Recapitulation of the Ten Stages of Religious Consciousness*, quoted in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 150–1. Kūkai's concern is not explicitly with training in this scheme, but rather with establishing the hierarchy of wisdom and spiritual attainment. He does not, however, exclude progress up the ladder of understanding within the life of the single individual, and it is noteworthy that the first level of Buddhist undertaking in this scheme is about one-third of the way up from the bottom.

6. In Teika's scheme, the *onihishigitei*, or "style of demon-quelling force," which is taboo for less accomplished poets, becomes acceptable and effective. In Kūkai's version, although the hierarchy is not explicitly a course of training, the attainment of Shingon wisdom gives one Buddhahood in this life, and one can posit, given the fundamentals of Mahāyāna soteriology, that the said Buddha can descend as a Bodhisattva to the aid of beings in the lower levels of the hierarchy.
7. Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 88. The Confucian system is perhaps different, however, in its explicit training of the individual mind to desire only within the "boundaries of right." Zeami's, Kūkai's, and Teika's understanding suggests that the true master of the field knows no boundaries, and indeed, the notion of boundaries itself is highly problematic in a nondualistic system such as Mahāyāna. We can see here a clear rationale for Tantric Buddhism, which, though never fully developed in Japan, comes from the same

religious roots as Kūkai's Shingon to its exfoliation in Tibetan Buddhism.

8. In the Tokugawa period, a structure of shogunal economic patronage and control was far more important than the patronage by students that supports noh today, but the seed for patronage, and its bifurcated system of expectations and training methods, existed then as well, especially in the professional–amateur relations of a noh actor and his daimyo patron.
9. A brief account of the rhythmic structure of noh can be found in Hare (1986:3–6).
10. Translation by Brower and Miner (1963:3).

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