

Filial Piety

Among human practices, none is greater than *xiao*
[filial piety].

—Confucius, from the *Shuo Yuan*, Lau and Chen, eds.,
A Concordance to the Shuo Yuan

Father and mother are like heaven and earth,
father-in-law and mother-in-law are like moon and sun.

—Isome Tsuna, *Onna jitsugokyō* (1695)

In the early Tokugawa period, the ideals for women's filial behavior articulated in published texts centered on the image of the devoted wife, often an empress or woman of high rank from the distant past, who served her husband and her lord through her wise counsel and compassionate acts. But by the latter part of the early modern era, popular exemplars of filial piety included two young sisters, daughters of a peasant, who swore vengeance on the murderer of their father and ultimately cut down the perpetrator in public with their swords. What happens when devotion to parents compels a daughter to act in ways that defy convention or violate the laws of the state? Why did the nature of exemplary filial piety—and the status of the “exemplars” themselves—change so dramatically over time? Was filial piety for women a principle or a problem?

This chapter addresses the questions posed by filial piety as they are revealed in two sets of sources: a corpus of biographies of “exemplary women” published between the mid-seventeenth and early nineteenth century, which were meant to serve as models for contemporary women's behavior; and diaries and memoirs written by literate women of varying statuses and places of origin dating from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century. With regard to the first set of sources, I trace

the changes in ideals of filial piety through three collections of biographies of exemplary women, Asai Ryōi's *Honchō jōkan shō* (Mirror of Women of Our Realm, 1661), the anonymously authored *Honchō onna nijūshi kō* (Twenty-Four Tales of Women's Filial Piety in Our Realm, 1713), and Matsudaira Yorinori's *Daitō fujo teiretsu ki* (Record of Exemplary Women in the Great East, 1801). These biographies were intended to function primarily as didactic literature for women. Like most instructional manuals, they most likely were not read by women themselves in the early Tokugawa period, but by the latter part of the era they formed part of a broad range of literature aimed at and read by women. Equally important, the biographies were also meant to be entertaining and therefore were heavily embellished.

The second set of sources serve as a touchstone throughout the book. In this chapter I focus on the writings of Inoue Tsūjo (1660–1738), the literary prodigy who left home in her early twenties to serve as tutor to the mother of the lord of her domain; the diaries of Nakayama Suzuko (b. 1675), wife of a daimyo and daughter of a vassal killed in his prime by his own lord; and the many letters that Itō Maki (1797–1862), a commoner woman who assiduously climbed the social ladder to become the wife of a shogunal retainer, or *hatamoto*, wrote to her parents. These narratives, and others introduced in subsequent chapters, give us insight into women's lives and thoughts in ways instructional texts do not. Here they show how women and their families acted in accordance with filial principle but also, in doing so, reinvented the concept. As both the discursive and narrative sources in this chapter show, contrary to the common equation of filial piety with passivity and obedience to authority, filial behavior for women was defined by action—namely, action undertaken by women in the service of their families and themselves.

DEFINING FILIAL PIETY FOR WOMEN: VARIATIONS ACROSS THE EAST ASIAN REGION

At first glance, filial piety (Ch: *xiao*; J: *kō*), defined as loyalty and obedience to one's elders and superiors, seems an unambiguous concept. But when we examine filial piety more closely, we see that complications and contradictions abound, especially regarding the evolution of norms for filial behavior by women. In early modern Japan and throughout East Asia, filial piety stood at the very core of the Confucian values that fundamentally shaped politics, society, and culture. However, like any concept evolving over two millennia, filial piety was not and is not one easily

definable thing. Even in early Chinese thought, views on the subject diverged, with Confucian thinkers articulating a view of *xiao* as honoring and obeying one's ancestors, one's parents, and one's lord, while Daoist thinkers emphasized a free-spirited and less ritualistic sense of reverence for elders.¹ Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan* (Biographies of Exemplary Women, ca. 77–76 B.C.E.) has long been acknowledged as the locus classicus of the Confucian view on women's filiality, elevating the highly idealized “exemplary woman” (*lienü*) as a model for behavior and comportment.² At the same time, the *Lienü zhuan* and many of the texts that followed in its tradition went beyond concerns with gender roles and proper behavior for women and touched on broader issues relating social order to individual morality.³ Equally important was the Daoist-influenced concept of *xianyuan* (virtuous and talented ladies), learned and free-spirited women who acted on their beliefs and in doing so “transcended the virtues of obedience and submission that the male world had imposed on them.”⁴

Debates over the nature and practice of filial piety in China continued for generations. Its distinctively reciprocal yet hierarchical nature made filial piety the model for the subject-ruler relationship that undergirded the Chinese imperial system as well as the political systems throughout East Asia. In Korea, for example, the imperial court during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) subscribed to a rigorously orthodox form of Neo-Confucianism that institutionalized filial piety by legislating ancestor worship and enforcing the principles of patrilineal descent and male primogeniture, but it did so in great part because such practices had not been widely enforced in preceding eras.⁵ In early modern Japan, although it did not exclusively dominate the ideological field, Neo-Confucian thought flourished under the patronage of the early Tokugawa shoguns; accordingly, scholarly as well as popular texts emphasized the value of filial piety and the importance of the patrilineal family as the embodiment of the social, political, and cosmic order. From the early seventeenth century on, both domainal governments and the shogunate began issuing commendations for filial piety and other “virtuous acts.” On the domainal side, the best-documented case is Okayama, which began issuing commendations for “good deeds” by its people in 1601.⁶ It was not until 1801, however, in the aftermath of yet another attempt to shore up Confucian values, that the shogunate published the *Kankoku kōgiroku* (Official Record of Filial Piety), a list of individuals throughout the country who had been commended for filial piety from the founding of the regime to the time of the record's compilation. The majority of the awards date from after 1680, with a peak

between 1750 and 1797. The awardees were overwhelmingly male, but women were also commended, the vast majority under the category “filial piety,” followed rather distantly by those commended for “chastity.”⁷ In contrast to the situation in late imperial China, women in Tokugawa Japan were commended for filial acts toward both natal parents and in-laws. This may have encouraged not only the types of behavior seen in filial piety tales but also, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, the decisions made by women and their families as they considered the marriage, childbearing, and succession options available to them.⁸

“EXEMPLARY WOMEN” AND THE RHETORIC OF FILIAL PIETY IN EARLY MODERN JAPAN

Norms and ideals of filial behavior for men and women became well established in early modern Japan not only through official policy but also through the dissemination of published texts in the Confucian tradition. Among the most popular texts on filial piety were the collections of biographies of exemplary women (*restsujoden*) modeled on Liu Xiang’s Han dynasty text. The Japanese texts, like their predecessors, sought to inculcate filial behavior by describing the filial actions of exemplary women from the past and present, with the hope of inspiring women in the present to live and act like them. By examining the changes in the content and structure of the tales themselves over time, we can see how filial piety formed part of a broader public discourse on womanhood, one that evolved with the shifting social and political conditions of the times.

The primary way in which official ideals diverged from popular discourse on filial piety can be seen in the *Kankoku kōgiroku*’s position on violence in the service of filiality. Official policy stated specifically that vendettas were not to be considered filial acts, and individuals would not be commended for executing them. The text relegates vendettas to the Appendix, where they are listed as “extraordinary deeds.” This attitude falls in line with the shogunate’s preference for the rule of law over vertical ties of loyalty, as depicted, for example, in the punishment meted out to the loyal but lawbreaking retainers in *Chūshingura*.⁹ By taming the violence of the vendetta while promoting acceptable expressions of filial piety for women, the shogunate tried to temper the emotional excess of otherwise commendable acts of loyalty.¹⁰ However, in spite of this prohibition, popular interest in vendettas remained high, revenge plots fueled by filial devotion continued to be represented in popular discourse, and

the image of the filial child as crusading avenger gained considerable currency in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular culture. Many of the biographies of exemplary women discussed here were loosely based on actual lives, but some were largely invented, and several of these life stories were retold and reshaped in fiction and drama. The blend of the actual and the imaginary, rather than decreasing the authority of exemplary women tales, lent them narrative power and increased their appeal to a growing popular audience.

“*Honchō jōkan shō*” (1661)

In 1661 Asai Ryōi (d. 1691), an up-and-coming writer of vernacular literature, published one of the first collections of tales of virtuous women, *Honchō jōkan shō* (Mirror of Women of Our Realm). Following the Chinese model fairly closely, he grouped short biographical accounts of some twenty-one women into five categories of virtue: wisdom, compassion, righteous principle, chastity, and persuasive skill (*bentsū*). All of these exemplary figures were women of high status—noblewomen, wives of officials or high-ranking warriors, or, in the case of the last category, women writers of some repute—and all had lived (or in the case of legendary or mythological figures, were said to have lived) in Japan in the fairly distant past. As in classical Chinese exemplar literature, these individuals were not “real” people but composites of ideals, and they were meant to function as models for the behavior of contemporary women.

While concerned with the didactic function of their writings, authors of popular fiction like Asai Ryōi also were keenly aware of the need to attract and maintain the reader’s attention. As a result, the tales he recounted do not lack dramatic flair, a touch of the unbelievable, and a healthy dose of the supernatural. “Wise” women, for example, include such figures as Empress Jingu, wife of Emperor Chūai and a legendary sovereign in her own right, whose exploits in the third century C.E. are recorded in Japan’s first written history, the *Nihon shoki* (Records of Japan, 720 C.E.). According to the *Nihon shoki*, Empress Jingu’s sage leadership and understanding of the Heavenly Way allowed her to overcome her husband’s poor judgment and guide Japanese military forces to conquer the kingdoms of the Korean peninsula—a victory that was no less satisfying for being entirely fictional. “Compassionate” women include admirable figures such as Empress Kōmyō (ca. 701–60), a devout Buddhist and savior of the impoverished and the sick, who is said to have established a public bathing house at which she herself

scrubbed the bodies of a thousand poor people. In the ultimate act of compassion, when told by a wandering leper that he would be cured if she sucked the pus from his wounds, the empress willingly did so, whereupon the leper transformed into the bodhisattva of healing, Yakushi Nyōrai, who was liberated by Empress Kōmyō's actions to care for all beings. Women with "persuasive skills" fill a category grounded in the *Lienü zhuan's* model of the value of the learned woman who can reason intelligently and write and speak persuasively. In the *Honchō jōkan*, such women include the great women writers of the Heian period, Murasaki Shikibu (ca. 973–ca. 1025) and Izumi Shikibu (ca. 974–?) and the courtesan of Eguchi, whose exchange of verses with the great poet Saigyō (1118–90) caused her to repent, give up her practice of entertaining men, and embark on the path of Buddhist learning.¹¹ In most of the tales, although women's wisdom and learning are shown to be of great value, it is women's devotion to their men—husbands, fathers, sons, teachers, mentors—and the sacrifices they make for their benefit that constitute the essence of their virtue.

In most of the stories in *Honchō jōkan*, women stop short of suicide or death to demonstrate their filiality. The one exception is Kesa Gozen, a woman of "righteous principle" who gives her life to defend both chastity and loyalty to family.¹² As she is presented in *Honchō jōkan*, Kesa Gozen lived in the late Heian period (ca. twelfth century). She was the daughter of the noblewoman Komorogawa, and from girlhood she possessed such extraordinary beauty that she "led onlookers' hearts astray."¹³ At the age of fourteen she married the warrior Minamoto Wataru (dates unknown). One day Wataru's cousin, a warrior named Endō Moritō, caught a glimpse of Kesa Gozen, and in that moment he became infatuated with her. Driven to extremes by his desire for Kesa Gozen, Endō hatches a plot to threaten the life of Komorogawa, vowing to kill her if Kesa Gozen does not leave Wataru for him. Upon learning of this plot, Kesa Gozen thinks to herself, "One is supposed to be filial to one's parents above all else. But it is the way of a wife to risk her life for her husband."¹⁴ Caught between the demands of filial duty to her mother and to her husband, Kesa Gozen puts into action a plan of her own: she approaches Endō and pretends to collude with him in the murder of her husband. She tells the smitten man that she will return home that very night, wash her husband's hair, get him drunk, and put him to bed: "He will be sleeping next to a window, with his pillow placed toward the east. Find his wet hair and cut off his head."¹⁵ However, upon returning home Kesa Gozen wets her own hair and lies down to feign

sleep next to the window, on the pillow facing east. Endō arrives as planned and kills the sleeping person he believes to be Minamoto Wataru; only upon returning home does he realize he has killed the woman he loves. Overcome by remorse, he informs Wataru of his deed and begs Wataru to kill him as punishment. Wataru, for his part, interprets the occurrences as karmic retribution for his own bad deeds and proposes that he and Endō take Buddhist vows together and become monks. Readers were meant to see that, caught between the two righteous principles of filial piety and chastity or wifely duty, Kesa Gozen expressed the highest virtue in choosing to die in honor of both causes. Her sacrifice enabled the two men who loved her to understand that, as the author Asai Ryōi puts it in the tale's conclusion, "taking principle seriously and death lightly is the way of humanity."¹⁶ While Kesa Gozen's story stands out in the collection of biographies in *Honchō jōkan* as the only one that celebrates female self-sacrifice, in contemporary Chinese texts in the *lienu* tradition female suicide had become the overwhelmingly dominant motif in biographies of exemplary women. However, it was not filial piety but chastity that motivated female self-sacrifice in Chinese tales; over 90 percent of the tales in Ming and Qing collections involved suicide in the name of preserving chastity and the sanctity of the conjugal relationship.¹⁷ These differing motives for women's self-sacrifice highlight the striking divergence in attitudes toward marital and family relations as represented in popular tale literature in early modern Japan and late imperial China. Whereas in the latter it was the conjugal bond that mattered most to women, in the former it was the filial bond that was elemental, and could be breached only by death.

"Honchō onna nijūshi kō" (1713)

While in *Honchō jōkan* female self-sacrifice was rare, the theme of a woman's suicide in the name of filial duty to her own parents came to dominate later Japanese collections of exemplary woman tales. In *Honchō onna nijūshi kō* (Twenty-Four Paragons of Women's Filial Piety in Our Realm), an anonymously authored text published some fifty years after Asai Ryōi's *Honchō jōkan*, all but one of the twenty-four accounts focus on women's filial acts on behalf of their parents.¹⁸ In these tales we also see women and girls driven to extreme and direct action in order to ensure the well-being of their parents and families. But while self-sacrifice remains a recurring theme, in most cases the women survive to see the benefits of their filial piety realized, in their

own time. Also, unlike Kesa Gozen and the exemplary women described in *Honchō jōkan*, over a third of the women whose stories are recorded in *Honchō onna nijūshi kō* are commoners, several of them poor. This shift perhaps reflects a change in the readership of these tales, perceived or actual, by the early eighteenth century.

The stories recorded in *Honchō onna nijūshi kō* are not organized by theme, as were *Honchō jōkan* and classical Chinese tale collections. Instead they follow a rough chronology, beginning with legendary tales from the distant past and continuing to contemporary times. Several of the stories focus on piety toward mothers. For example, Tokiwa Gozen, wife of Minamoto Yoshitomo and mother of Yoritomo and Yoshitsune, agrees to become the consort of the loathsome Taira Kiyomori (1118–81), the man responsible for her husband’s death and the exile of her sons, only when Kiyomori threatens her mother’s life: “In order to save her mother and help her three sons, [Tokiwa Gozen] expressed mercy and filiality together. On the surface she sacrificed her chastity, but in her heart she did not sacrifice her honor.”¹⁹

The most striking tales in *Honchō nijūshi kō*, however, emphasize a daughter’s loyalty to her father. These tales, unlike those regarding devotion to mothers, are set in the seventeenth century and, notably, feature active and even violent female protagonists. One story concerns the daughter of Sasaki Kanryū. Sasaki was an accomplished swordsman who killed his rival Yoshioka Kenpō in a fight. Unfortunately for Sasaki, Yoshioka’s adopted son was none other than the renowned expert in two-sword fighting Miyamoto Musashi (ca. 1584–1645), author of one of the most widely read treatises on martial arts ever written, *The Book of Five Rings* (ca. 1645).²⁰ The tale recounts how, in good filial fashion, Miyamoto swore revenge on Sasaki for the death of his father. Sasaki’s daughter, to counter this threat, disguised herself and gained a position as a servant in Miyamoto Musashi’s house, where she hoped to bide her time until she could attack and kill him before he acted on his vow to kill *her* father. But one day Miyamoto noticed a dagger hidden in the hair of his “servant” and demanded an explanation, at which point the girl broke down and explained her plan to him. Rather than become angry, Miyamoto is moved by her story and tells her, “You have a deeply filial heart and are very brave. But you must listen carefully to this: your father did wrong by killing my father. Because of this, I in turn must kill your father. This expresses filial principle. [But] if we kill each other’s fathers, don’t we fail to emulate Sappō Tenrin?²¹ We should quickly straighten our hearts, turn away from the sins of our fathers,

and turn to the aid of the bodhisattvas.” Upon hearing these words, Sasaki’s daughter realizes the error of her ways, cuts her hair, and takes up the way of *hosshin bōdai*, seeking to awaken her mind and become a bodhisattva.²² The appearance of such a notable figure as Miyamoto Musashi, in a role that undercuts the image of the swaggering swordsman so flagrantly displayed in *The Book of Five Rings*, almost overshadows the valiant act of Sasaki Kanryū’s loyal daughter. At the same time, Miyamoto seems to draw inspiration from this anonymous girl, whose amateurish and failed attempt at violent retribution only emphasizes the sincerity of her filial devotion to her father. And in contrast to the heavy Confucian influence evident in most filial piety tales, this one seems to follow in the tradition of *setsuwa*, popular medieval Buddhist tales, in emphasizing the spiritual benefits that can accrue to those who follow Buddhist teachings.

Buddhist as well as filial principles also drive the last and perhaps most dramatic story recorded in *Honchō nijūshi kō*, that of the daughters of a masterless samurai by the name of Okada, living in a place called Akita in Inaba Province. The daughters serve their father “with great filiality.” The problem, however, is that he owns guns and enjoys hunting, which his daughters—here displaying notable precocity, a feature often seen in both Chinese and Japanese female exemplar tales—fear will incur karmic debt and cause him an unfortunate rebirth. They repeatedly plead with him to stop, but to no avail. The girls’ protests eventually become so alarming that the father realizes the depth of their anxiety and gives up hunting. But his resolve lasts only until some people offer to pay him handsomely if he shoots a pair of cranes for them. Upon hearing this proposition, the father “gave in to his old ways.”²³ One night, after his daughters fall asleep, he leaves the house armed with his rifle, intending to hunt for cranes. The girls awaken and realize his plan, and they begin to despair. The older sister tells the younger one, “No matter what we say he doesn’t listen. He’s throwing his life away—this is tragic! Tonight, once dark falls, I will put on white robes and go out and stand by the riverside. He’ll think I’m a crane and he’ll shoot me.” As if this plan were not enough, the older daughter then underscores the importance of filiality, by declaring that her act of self-sacrifice “will be proof to father of how much filial principle he has taught us!”²⁴ Not to be outdone in terms of concern for displaying filial principles, however, the younger sister cries out through her tears, “Older sister, you are the one that must carry on the family line, and if you survive, you will express filial piety, so I should be the one to die!”²⁵ In a scene that would be comic were it not so

tragically earnest, each sister argues that she should be the one to die, and in the end the older sister dons white robes and runs out of the house, pursued by the younger sister, also dressed in white. The two run to the riverside, where they continue to argue over who should have the privilege of sacrificing herself. In the meantime, the father, on the far side of the river, sees the white figures in the darkness and, thinking they are cranes, aims his gun and unerringly strikes the older sister in the chest. The younger sister runs to her fallen sibling's side and mourns, while the father, not realizing what he has done, "thought it strange that having shot one crane, the other did not fly away," and readies his gun once more, takes aim, and shoots his younger daughter "upon whom he should have had mercy, thus laying her down on the same pillow [as her sister]." ²⁶ The father, pleased at the thought of the profit that shooting the pair of cranes will bring, proceeds to the other side of the river to collect his bounty, but as he clears a path to the riverbank, he is confronted by a horrible sight: instead of fallen cranes, he sees his two dying daughters, mortally wounded by his own gun. In shock, he demands to know what happened, and in their last failing breaths the daughters tell him, "We tried our best, father, to make you stop hunting, but though we kept pleading, it was no use. You must strongly repent for your killing. Take our bodies home and make a funeral pyre. Pray on this and then at the edge of town make a small hut and place in it memorial tablets to us. Then take up the Buddhist life devoutly." The text concludes with an authorial aside to the reader: "Ah, such filial piety is this! To throw away one's life in order to effect a better rebirth [for one's father] is something to be deeply appreciated." ²⁷

The prominence of Buddhist teachings in these stories is notable, but even more compelling is the family dynamic, in particular, what one might call the circulation of filial principle between the daughters and their father. Unlike contemporary Chinese tales of female self-sacrifice in which the point of the sacrifice is to perform filiality in a ritualistic manner that will bring honor to the surviving family members (and, in the case of widow suicide, to the deceased), both Sasaki Kanryū's daughter and the daughters of the hunter Okada sacrifice themselves in order to repent for their fathers' immoral acts. In the latter story, the daughters attempt to compel their father to change his sinful ways so that he may enjoy a favorable rebirth—certainly a filial act. And yet the death of his only children seems to ensure the end of his family line, which, the girls are well aware, is the height of impiety. One must ask, who benefits from this tragedy? The father *may* benefit *if* he mends his

ways and follows his daughters' instructions, but the tale stops short of recounting his behavior after their deaths, and the status of his rebirth would in any case be difficult to predict. It is possible that the daughters would be publicly commended for their piety, but the closing scene seems to imply that their memorializing will be a private affair, accomplished in the hut on the edge of town that they instruct their father to build in their honor, and in any case public acclaim does not seem to be central to their motivations. Okada's daughters also act in order to demonstrate—not to society at large but to the father himself—the success of his filial teachings. In sum, paradoxically, the culmination of a good father's teaching comes in the form of the sacrifice of his beloved daughters on his behalf. It is really only the father himself who bears the burden of having directly and indirectly caused his daughters' deaths, and it is also the father himself who stands to benefit from their filial acts by seeing that it was his wise teachings that led to his daughters' deep filiality in the first place. Ultimately, the tales are ambiguous, especially as regards the role of the “exemplary woman,” who here seems to combine qualities of deep filiality, decisive action, courage, and unwavering conviction but also stubbornness, emotionality, extreme behavior, and filial *impiety* (in the sense of terminating their father's lineage).

While their logic as filial piety tales might be convoluted, the stories of the daughter of Sasaki Kanryū and the Okada sisters clearly share a tendency toward high drama in the service of emphasizing filial piety. In the former story, the reader is encouraged to admire the determination of the daughter of the swordsman Sasaki, who attains her goal in spite of her failure to execute her assassination plot against Miyamoto Musashi; in the latter story, the reader mourns the deaths of the two young daughters, senseless but for their possibly beneficial effect on the living. Although the moral message in these tales is open to interpretation, the appeal to emotion is unquestionable. Indeed, the conflict between duty and human feeling echoes a theme prevalent in popular literature and drama at the time and certainly this would have resonated with readers of filial piety tales.²⁸

“*Daitō fujo teiretsu ki*” (1801)

The theme of tragedy leading to the revelation and celebration of filial ideals in an atmosphere of high drama is amplified in *Daitō fujo teiretsu ki* (Record of Exemplary Women in the Great East), written and published by Matsudaira Yorinori in 1801.²⁹ In this collection, the theme of

violent retribution enacted by women to honor their family members takes center stage: four of the seven lengthy stories in the collection focus on filial piety to the natal family. Unlike previous collections, all but one of the seven stories are set in the early modern period itself (late sixteenth century and after), thus lending a present-day relevance. This immediacy was underscored by the adaptation of the last tale in the collection for the kabuki and puppet theaters, and as a short story by the popular late eighteenth-century fiction writer Santō Kyōden (1761–1816).

Daitō fujo teiretsu ki begins with four shorter stories emphasizing women's devotion to their husbands.³⁰ The remaining three stories, which are longer and more complicated in plot, forcefully promote the ideas of filial piety to a woman's or girl's natal family. To a much greater degree than the stories of the daughters of Sasaki Kanryū and the *rōnin* Okada described in the earlier *Honchō nijūshi kō*, these stories sanction violence and even murderous revenge plots as acceptable modes of action through which to express piety. The theme of revenge takes center stage in the fifth and sixth tales in the collection, which are presented as a pair. "The Daughter of Sasaki Kōemon, a Foot Soldier in the Service of the Kyōgoku Lord of Bitchū" and "The Two Daughters of the Peasant Tarō from Sakato Village in Sendai" both involve young women not yet out of their teens planning and executing vendettas in order to avenge the wrongful deaths of their parents.

The former story focuses on Riya, the daughter of Sasaki Kōemon, a retainer in Marugame domain, Sanuki Province. Iwabuchi Dennai, a retainer in the service of the same lord, is a drunkard who becomes infatuated with Kōemon's wife and makes overtures to her, but "maintaining her chastity," she rebuffs him.³¹ One night when Kōemon is away, Dennai breaks into Kōemon's house and attempts to force himself on the wife, who resists him strenuously. Kōemon returns in time to witness the struggle and attempts to kill Dennai, but Dennai kills him instead and then flees. Kōemon's wife dies from grief shortly thereafter, leaving their only child, three-year-old Riya, an orphan. Kōemon's wife's sister and her husband adopt Riya, but they do not inform her of her parents' fate until she turns thirteen, at which point, in tears, they tell her that her mother often lamented that "if she were a boy, when she came of age she might avenge her father's death through a vendetta, but because she is a girl, she cannot."³² The story implies that Riya takes her mother's words as inspiration, for by the time Riya turns eighteen, she already has decided to avenge her parents' deaths by killing Iwabuchi Dennai. Shocked by Riya's plan, her adoptive parents attempt to dis-

suade her from it. Eventually they recognize that the vendetta is an act of filial piety, and they relent.

Riya departs for Edo to search for Dennai. After arriving in the capital she finds a position in service in the house of Nagai Gensuke, a shogunal retainer and an instructor of swordsmanship. She does not immediately disclose her vendetta plans to her employer, but when she does eventually tell Gensuke and his wife about her past, both are deeply moved by her “filial heart,” and Gensuke vows to teach Riya swordsmanship so that she will be able to “attack the enemy easily.”³³ Riya practices her swordsmanship dutifully for a full year and then, on Gensuke’s advice, goes into service in the homes of many different shogunal retainers (*hatamoto*)—according to the tale she served in seventy households in three years—so that she might find out where Dennai is living. Eventually she discovers his whereabouts, and after consulting with Nagai Gensuke, she meets with a shogunal official and acquires official permission to execute her vendetta. The process involves approval not only by the shogunate but also by the Marugame daimyo, in whose domain the killing of Sazaki Kōemon originally took place. Both the shogunate and the local officials agree that Riya should kill Dennai; the daimyo in particular “appreciated Riya’s deeply filial heart.”³⁴ The shogunate decides that the duel between Riya and Dennai should take place at the daimyo’s lower mansion (*shimo yashiki*), and because Riya’s duel with Dennai represents “an example to all the people of filial womanhood,” the officials declare that every member of the clan, including the women of the inner quarter and even those unrelated to the domain but living in the area, should watch the duel. The swordfight itself is not described in detail, but it takes place in formal circumstances, with a shogunal official attending Riya, who, “with the firm resolution of a woman,” ultimately cuts down Dennai and offers his severed head to the memory of her late father. The tale declares that “there was not a person among the onlookers who was not moved and impressed by Riya’s act,” and she so impressed the daimyo that he offers her the position of lady-in-waiting (*tsubone*) to his daughter. Eventually, the reader is informed, Riya became the head of the daimyo’s women’s quarters, and renamed herself Nagai in honor of her mentor, the swordmaster Nagai Gensuke.

To be sure, Riya’s story stretches the boundaries of credulity, but as we shall see later in the chapter, this unbelievability was perhaps the key to its success as popular lore, as it was told and retold in various forms and with differing details. The tension between reality and invention is perhaps most striking, however, in the sixth tale in *Daitō fujo teiretsu ki*,

about Taka and Haru, two young daughters of a Sendai peasant named Yotarō. The plot is quite similar to that of the tale of Riya, but while Riya was almost certainly a fictional creation, the heroines of the Sendai story often are presented as having actually existed.³⁵ As the tale tells it, one day, when the older sister was sixteen years old and the younger thirteen they were out working in the fields with their father when a retainer to the adviser of the daimyo named Shiga Danshichi passed by. A bunch of grass the younger girl tossed in the air accidentally fell on Danshichi, who flew into a rage and, even though Yotarō and the girls apologized profusely, cut down Yotarō with his sword. The girls ran home and told their mother, who was already ill, of their father's murder; the mother then fell into despair and died. Subsequently, the family's land was sold and the proceeds turned over to the orphaned daughters, who were put in the custody of their aunt in another village. From there, the girls set out to avenge their parents' deaths by waging a vendetta against Shiga Danshichi. They inform their aunt that they want to go into service in Fukushima, but from there they go on to Edo, where they search for a teacher of swordsmanship, eventually finding their way to the house of the renowned swordmaster Yui Shōsetsu (1605–51).³⁶ “With tears streaming down their faces,” the sisters ask Shōsetsu to take them in as servants and to teach them martial arts so that they might avenge their father's death at the hands of Shiga Danshichi. “Moved by the purity of the sisters' wish,” Shōsetsu puts them in the care of the women of his household. At this time, Shōsetsu also bestowed upon the girls new names: the elder becomes Miyagino and the younger Shinobu. While they live in his household, Shōsetsu teaches Miyagino how to wield the fighting sickle (*jingama*) and throwing knives (*shuriken*) and trains Shinobu in using the halberd (*naginata*).

After five years of intense training, Shōsetsu pronounces the girls ready to undertake their vendetta, and with his blessings they journey back to Sendai, where they go straight to Shiroishi Castle, headquarters of Sendai domain. There, as part of a planned ruse, they declare to officials that they wish to be killed by Shiga Danshichi: “With our parents gone, we do not have anything left in this world. Just as our father was killed by Master Danshichi, we would also like to be killed by him.”³⁷ Upon hearing their plea, the daimyo's adviser realizes immediately that the girls' true plan is to avenge their parents, and he is “moved by their filiality.” He takes the girls' appeal to the daimyo, Date Tadamune (1600–58), and Tadamune sanctions a vendetta. The tale describes the duel in great detail, with attention to its formal and ritualized nature. As

in the case of Riya's vendetta in Edo, Miyagino and Shinobu's duel with Danshichi in Shiroishi takes place in an arena marked off by bamboo fences, with both shogunal and domainal officials in attendance. Miyagino and Shinobu enter the battleground dressed in funereal white kimonos, assisted by the three samurai who accompanied them from Yui Shōsetsu's residence in Edo. Before the duel, Danshichi and the girls are given a ritual meal, shattering the ceramic bowls after they finish eating. At the signal of the drum roll, the battle begins. Shinobu goes first, wielding her *naginata*; she fights with Danshichi for some time, and both are wounded. After a break in the action, the duel resumes, with Miyagino this time attacking Danshichi with a sickle with a ball of lead attached to it by a chain. Miyagino succeeds in immobilizing Danshichi's arms with the chain and then calls for Shinobu, who cuts off his arms with the *naginata*. Miyagino delivers the final blow, severing Danshichi's head with her sickle. Finally, "the sisters put their palms together and offered the head to their deceased father's spirit." The audience—like so many observers of such filial acts—was "very much moved."³⁸ Their long-sought goal attained, Miyagino and Shinobu then attempt to commit ritual suicide, but the officials prevent them from doing so. Instead, they cut their hair and declare that they will become Buddhist nuns and "offer prayers for their deceased parents and Danshichi for the rest of their lives." The daimyo rewarded the sisters handsomely, posthumously granting their father stipend lands in excess of 100 *koku*, so that the sisters could support themselves in their religious life. But the sisters' filial acts did not end with the vendetta, for in 1651 their teacher Yui Shōsetsu committed seppuku in the wake of a botched coup attempt against the *bakufu*, and his severed head was put on public exhibition. The tale recalls how the sisters—now nuns—surreptitiously stole their master's head and reinterred it properly at a temple. As in the case of Riya, the tale of Miyagino and Shinobu ends with a just resolution, embodied in the death of the antagonist, the avenging of parents *and* teacher, and the establishment of the female protagonists in suitable new lives. In both cases, the vendettas are "fixed" from the beginning; it is a foregone conclusion that the daughters will kill the offenders and avenge their parents' deaths and their families' honor. And of course in both cases the culmination of the vendetta—the highly ritualized, officially sanctioned, and appropriately violent duel—is an occasion to display to the public the importance of filial piety. The happy endings point to the way in which, by the turn of the century, the simple value of the integrity of the family and the devotion of children to their parents had come to

stand in for, and perhaps to elide, the complicated and crosscutting loyalties that actually pertained in the public, political world.

Filial Piety Tales in Drama and Fiction: “Go Taiheiki Shiroishi banashi” (1780) and “Musume katakiuchi kokyō no nishiki” (1780)

The human drama of the vendetta and its performative potential was not lost on later writers; the story of Miyagino and Shinobu was made into a popular play titled *Go Taiheiki Shiroishi banashi* (The Tale of Shiroishi and the Taihei Chronicles), performed in bunraku and kabuki versions, both of which were first produced in Edo in 1780.³⁹ The play became among the most famous of the many that were made on the vendetta theme (*katakiuchi* or *adauchi*). Like many fictional works seeking to avoid the shogunate’s ban on representations of “current events” or the affairs of the warrior class, the play is nominally set in the distant past (the Nanboku-chō era, 1336–92; hence the Taiheiki reference), and the plot is significantly altered. At the play’s beginning, Miyagino is a high-ranking courtesan (*oiran*) in a large brothel in Edo’s licensed pleasure quarters of Yoshiwara, and she is said to be a descendant of Kusunoki Masashige, her father a loyal retainer of the Kusunoki clan who, after the noble death of his lord, fell to the status of *rōnin* and then of peasant, which was his lowly status at the time of his murder.⁴⁰ Like many *jidaimono*, the play is extravagantly anachronistic, since of course neither Edo nor the Yoshiwara existed in the fourteenth century. However, giving Miyagino—a peasant’s daughter in the original tale—a samurai heritage allows the play to exploit her sense of warrior honor, which undergirds and makes logical her later extreme filial behavior. When Shinobu appears, it is as a newly hired servant at Miyagino’s brothel, a country girl with a comically heavy northeastern accent. Only upon the typically hyperdramatic discovery of an amulet she wears, the twin of which is possessed by Miyagino, do the two women realize they are sisters. Miyagino is unaware of the death of their father and is shocked to hear the news from Shinobu that Shiga Danshichi has killed him. In her country patois, rendered in the original in dialect and in this English translation in a rustic, vaguely Appalachian idiom, the still-grieving Shinobu tells Miyagino about their father’s murder: “Well, the samurai was about ta finish me off as well when our village headman came along. No matter how much ah saw, he says, we hadn’t any real proof o’ the killin’, an’ so there was nothin’ we could do. Pa died . . .

just like a dog! (*Sobs.*) Like a pheasant caught by . . . a hawk! We couldn't get revenge. Ah was so sad an' miserable."⁴¹ Miyagino, in a state of near collapse from grief, then turns to comfort her sister, saying:

I understand what you're feeling. Yet it was your good fortune to have lived so many years with Mother and Father. . . . When father couldn't pay the rice tax and was put into prison, I thought only of helping him, and so sold myself into this brothel district. Thinking back, it's been twelve years already. You were only five, and I hardly knew your face. That I could not be with Father at his death, nor at Mother's bedside when she passed away, fills me with remorse. . . . I have been unfilial! (*She bows and then presses and hand on her chest.*) How pitiful this is.⁴²

When she recovers her composure, Miyagino begins to plot revenge. Inspired by the famous *Soga monogatari* (Soga Tales, ca. 1266), about two brothers who avenge their father's death, she proposes that they take revenge by killing Danshichi. The brothel proprietor, Sōroku, whom the sisters initially think opposes their plan, actually ends up releasing them from service so that they might realize their vendetta.

The puppet theater and kabuki versions of the play conflate the vendetta plot of the sisters with the Yui Shōsetsu incident in order to create a satisfyingly dramatic narrative that was also sufficiently removed (in theory) from actual events of the day to avoid attracting the attention of shogunal censors. Adaptations of the Miyagino-Shinobu story were not limited to the theater, however. In 1780, the same year *Go Taiheiki Shir-oishi banashi* was first produced, Santō Kyōden wrote a short comic novel (*kibyōshi*) titled *Musume katakiuchi kokyō no nishiki* (Hometown Brocade of a Daughter's Vendetta). In this story, the heroine is Oyoshi, the only daughter of Yoshimizu Sawanosuke. Her enemy is an *ashigaru* named Tomosuke. Oyoshi, like Miyagino and Shinobu, practices swordsmanship day and night, until her skills "so exceeded those of all the other students that she was held up as an example of accomplishing the impossible through sheer concentration of effort." In the end, she confronts the evil Tomonosuke, achieves vengeance for her parents, and manages to marry the dashing young son of her swordmaster. As one character comments in the end, "Isn't this all very fortunate!"⁴³

RETHINKING EXEMPLARITY: FILIAL PIETY AS REPRESENTED IN WOMEN'S DIARIES AND MEMOIRS

For all that tales of exemplary women and their later dramatic and fictional interpretations tell us about norms, ideals, and aspirations

regarding filial piety and filial behavior, they are in essence narrative inventions intended to inspire and entertain. As engaging as these tales are, however, they ultimately lead us to question how actual Edo-period women understood their relationships and obligations to their parents, husbands, and siblings. To address this issue, I turn to prose writings by educated women who lived from the late seventeenth through the early nineteenth century. One can see in these memoirs and diaries a high level of awareness of norms of filial duty, largely to the natal family. At the same time, one can also see the many variations in the ways women could, over the course of their lives, fulfill their filial obligations.

Inoue Tsūjo (1660–1738)

For Inoue Tsūjo, a talented young woman from Marugame domain in Sanuki Province on Shikoku, filial duty took many forms. Tsūjo was born in 1660, the eldest child of Inoue Gizaemon Motokata, a scholarly minded domain official who in his youth had studied in Kyoto with teachers of the Hayashi school. The Inoue were descended from Sengoku daimyo stock: Inoue Motokata was the nephew of Katagiri Katsumoto (1556–1615), one of the five generals appointed to look after the interests of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's son Hideyori after Hideyoshi's death. Tsūjo's mother, Watanabe Ei, was from Harima. Soon after Inoue Motokata and Ei married, they moved to Marugame when the daimyo Kyōgoku Takatomo had his domain transferred there from Harima in 1658. Two years later, Tsūjo was born.⁴⁴ Like many Edo-period women writers whose works survive today, Tsūjo was recognized early on as a prodigiously gifted child, and her natural talents were encouraged and cultivated by her father. As we will see in chapter 2, Tsūjo imbibed the teachings of her doting scholar father and acquired an impressive understanding of both the Japanese and the Chinese classics by the time she was a teenager. According to a biography written by her son Sanda Yoshikatsu, Tsūjo wrote twelve books on various subjects, from household precepts (*kakun*) to commentaries on classical poetry, collections of her own poetic compositions, and travel accounts.⁴⁵ Sadly, however, all but a handful of the texts were lost to fire. The mainstays of her extant oeuvre include the travel accounts *Tōkai kikō* (Journey to the Eastern Seas, 1681) and *Kikka kikō* (Journey Home, 1689); an account of her years working in Edo in the daimyo's residence titled *Edo nikki* (Edo Diary, 1682–83); a five-volume poetry collection, *Ōji shū* (Collection of Things Past, 1681–1718); and two short *jokunsho* (ethical texts

for women), one written when Tsūjo was only sixteen years old and the other when she was in her early twenties. Some miscellaneous writings and correspondence also survive.

Most relevant to a discussion of filial piety are Tsūjo's remarkable *jokunsho*. There are few examples of ethical texts written by women, even fewer written by a person so young. Both Tsūjo's *Shojo no fu* (Precepts for Young Girls, 1676), written when she was sixteen, and her later work, *Shinkei ki* (Chronicle of the Inner Chambers, ca. 1681), are redacted in flawless *kanbun*, and both echo the teachings of the great Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (1130–1200), extolling the virtues of a woman maintaining her place within the home while also stressing the importance of learning for girls and women.⁴⁶ *Shojo no fu* consists of twenty-six short admonitory phrases. They include such declarations as the following:

Follow the enlightened teachings of your parents from inside the dark inner [women's] chambers

Take the classics as your teacher and study the Four Virtues, take the family rules as the guiding principle and train yourself to be gentle

Mourn the [solitary] cock's crow heralding the bounty of the day, rejoice in the [mandarin duck] mating happily for life

Look at the collected biographies from times past and in your heart act as an exemplary woman

...

Look out the window and spin, light the oil lamp and take up the needle

...

Gather cloth and heed the teachings of the needle, shun pride and reflect the teachings of women of the past

...

Do not allow yourself to venture outside the garden gate, do not allow your words to travel over the transom

...

There are not a few women teachers, so we should take up the virtues of the ancients and manifest them today⁴⁷

Tsūjo's admonitions about the importance of women remaining in the home and devoting themselves solely to domestic concerns and preparation

for marriage would not be so remarkable if her own life had conformed to her teachings. But in fact Tsūjo's life took a different path. In her late teens Tsūjo's reputation as a poet and scholar had grown, and at twenty-two—when she normally would have been married—she was asked by the Marugame daimyo Kyōgoku Takatoyo to go to Edo to serve as a tutor (*jidoku*) to his mother, Yōjōin. This position was different from that of a lady-in-waiting or a servant, for being appointed as a teacher was a clear acknowledgment of Tsūjo's learning and required her to use her literary skills constantly. In order to take up this post, in the twelfth month of 1681 Tsūjo left Marugame for the first time, accompanied by her father and a retinue of servants, and traveled to Edo. This trip occasioned the writing of Tsūjo's first travel diary, *Tōkai kikō*, a partial account of her journey to the eastern capital, written in prose liberally interspersed with poetic compositions. Tsūjo lived and served Yōjōin in Edo until the older woman's death in 1689. After she returned to Marugame and married a local retainer named Sanda Munehisa, Tsūjo wrote a second *jokunsho*, which she titled *Shinkei ki*. The term *shinkei* in the title is an antique word for the women's chambers within a household, and it expresses Tsūjo's attitudes to a woman's place in the home, an appropriate topic considering her recent marriage. She writes:

Regarding the way for women: spend your days within the household; do not wrong, and follow righteous principle. Express gentleness and make it a virtue, and be sure to have faith in all your actions. Food, drink, and clothing are not things to be discussed outside [the household]. If you violate [this principle], it is at variance with the Way of Heaven and chaos will surely ensue.⁴⁸

In other words, women should shun life in public and remain in the home or risk upsetting the natural order of things.

Tsūjo then briefly describes the fates of several women, all gleaned from the Chinese classics, who did not follow these rules and caused the downfall of their countries. Remonstrance against such women—"castle topplers" (*keisei*), as they were called—was a common refrain in instructional texts for women. Taking up this admonition about the dire effects of "bad" women on public life, she concludes the text:

When you see this, is it not clear that women are the cause of chaos in governance? I will remain until the end of the day within the home with various excellent works of history and women's writings to serve as my teachers; those inclined to do differently should take this as a warning. I hope that they mend their errant ways and turn out well. Expressing my wishes while acknowledging my weaknesses, I commit this to writing.⁴⁹

Again, as in *Shojo no fu*, Tsūjo's praise of a life spent cloistered from the outside world, tending to home and family, stands in contrast to her own journey to Edo to work in the house of another where, as we shall see, she witnessed firsthand significant social and political events of her time and in many ways mediated the communication between her sheltered mistress and the outside world. Still, once married Tsūjo's life conformed more closely to the model of homebound womanhood she describes in her ethical texts. Tsūjo and her husband, Munehisa, eventually had five children, the youngest of whom was born when Tsūjo was forty-four. Her eldest son and youngest daughter died in childhood, but her youngest son, the aforementioned Sanda Yoshikatsu, editor of Tsūjo's collected works, and her eldest daughter, Shige, went on to become writers and scholars of some importance.

Tsūjo was in many ways an exemplary filial daughter. She was extraordinarily bright, a recognized literary talent, and devoted to her parents. And yet there were many ways in which she was *not* filial, by conventional standards—even the standards she articulated herself in her *jokunsho*. She was learned in Chinese, which was usually deemed inappropriate for women, and because of her time in service she spent a long period away from home and family. Also because of her career, she married late. She was still able to have children, and it is a testament to her parenting that her son took it upon himself to preserve her literary legacy. Tsūjo's life shows that for women accomplishment—even in pursuits that took them away from their parents and families and put at risk their ability to bear children—could be filial. For Tsūjo, nothing could have been a better form of expression of filial devotion than to have her family legacy live on for future generations through her writings.

Nakayama Suzuko (b. 1675?)

Nakayama Suzuko's birth and death dates are not certain, but she was probably born around 1675, making her fifteen years younger than Inoue Tsūjo. Her husband, Nakayama Naomichi, was a retainer of the prominent daimyo and nativist scholar Tokugawa Mitsukuni and later a supporter of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi as shogun.⁵⁰ Suzuko would have remained a footnote, an unnamed spouse in the official genealogy of warrior lineages, had she not written two texts that survive to this day. The first, a travel diary that was given the title *Fujii-shi onna no ki* (Account of a Woman of the Fujii Clan, ca. 1694) by a later copyist, chronicles a trip to the Nakayama family's ancestral temple of Nōninji

to observe the anniversary of the death of Suzuko's father-in-law, Nakayama Naoharu.⁵¹ This trip and Suzuko's account of it in many ways represent and re-create the filial ties that bound Suzuko to her husband's family. Suzuko writes that in the spring of 1694, accompanied by her mother-in-law and several others, she left her home in Edo and traveled north to the town of Hannō, in what is now Saitama Prefecture. En route to Nōninji, the group planned to stop at the Chōnenji temple to pay their respects at the grave of Suzuko's younger brother-in-law, Nobusada, who had died four years earlier at the age of seventeen. As Suzuko departed Edo at daybreak, she wrote, "Our hometown disappears into the mist/as does the endless road on which we travel/the plains of Musashino."⁵² As the traveling party began to ascend into the mountains surrounding the temples that are their destination, Suzuko grows anxious. She worries that they will not arrive at Nōninji in time for her father-in-law's memorial service.⁵³ Her anxiety melds with her feelings of loneliness and isolation in the unfamiliar surroundings and her renewed grief for the dead. As she sleeps fitfully she listens to the unfamiliar sound of the wind sighing in the trees, and she is plagued by dreams that she describes as both surprising and painful. She writes, "If it were not for this sadness I could more fully appreciate the wind in the pines in this mountaintop village."⁵⁴ As convention dictated, Suzuko used poetry to convey the sadness and the beauty of the desolate environment. When the group finally arrives at Chōnenji, as they approach Nobusada's grave Suzuko's mother-in-law begins to quietly weep, and gradually all in attendance are overcome with sadness; Suzuko writes that "there are no words" to describe the grief of a mother who has lost her young son, and the party stands in silence listening to the wind whistling around them.

Having paid their respects, they resume their journey to Nōninji. They arrive without incident, the memorial service is held, and then Suzuko and her party visit Naoharu's grave site. Again Suzuko's focus is on her mother-in-law, whose appearance, voice, and presence are described in hushed, magisterial tones as exemplifying the utmost in filial devotion to her late husband. After the services are concluded the party heads home, stopping at places of interest on the way. The roads become more crowded and lively as they get closer to Edo, and finally they arrive home to a joyous welcome from the children of the household. The account ends with a copyist's note stating that the author is "the daughter of the loyal retainer of the lord [Tokugawa] Mitsukuni of Mito, Fujii Mondayū" and that "it was written during the Hōei era, at

about the same time as the *Matsukage nikki* written by the concubine of Yanagisawa Kōshū [Yoshiyasu].” “We should praise this era,” the copyist concludes, “which has produced so many talented women.”⁵⁵

It is highly debatable whether Suzuko’s brief account of a six-day trip to Hannō compares favorably with Ōgimachi Machiko’s (1679–1724) masterful evocation of life at the shogunal court during the reign of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi.⁵⁶ Although Suzuko was related to the Yanagisawa through the winding paths of marriage and adoption, she was not the accomplished writer—in terms of talent or reputation—that Machiko was. Debates about literary quality aside, it is Suzuko’s lineage, and its intertwined paths of filial devotion, that is of interest here. For as the copyist’s note explains, Suzuko was not only a wife and daughter-in-law of the Nakayama family, but the daughter of Fujii Mondayū, also a retainer of Tokugawa Mitsukuni, who was assassinated by Mitsukuni in 1694, later in the same year that Suzuko wrote *Fujii-shi onna no ki*. This event became a sensation of sorts; in retrospect it rivals the hyperdramatic plots of the filial piety tales discussed earlier, and like them, it inspired numerous dramatizations, at least one of which was a kabuki play that continued to be produced well into the Meiji period.⁵⁷ The causes of the incident remain unclear; all that is known is that Mitsukuni organized a *nō* performance at the Mito domainal residence in Edo and invited a number of prominent daimyo to attend, and in the middle of the performance he suddenly drew his sword and killed Mondayū. Although Mito officials tried to keep things quiet, rumors abounded—that Mondayū was plotting to overthrow the domain government in Mito, that he was conniving with Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu to foment rebellion within the Mito Tokugawa house, and so on. The only thing that seems clear is that Mondayū somehow deeply offended Mitsukuni, who had no recourse but to kill him in order to preserve his own honor.

In spite of the gravity of the incident, Mondayū’s family went largely unpunished. Mondayū’s wife (Suzuko’s mother) and his younger son were sent back to Mito from Edo, and the wife was put under the surveillance of her natal family. Mondayū’s two younger daughters (Suzuko’s younger sisters) were sent for by the widow of Mondayū’s older brother, and both subsequently went into service in Edo and married well. One of Mondayū’s sons became a Buddhist priest, and the youngest son stayed with his mother and sisters in Mito. In the wake of the incident, Suzuko found herself caught in the middle: not only was she married to a retainer of Mitsukuni, who had just killed her father, his own loyal retainer, but it fell to her to supervise her siblings’ moves and

make sure they were all taken care of, tasks she seems to have accomplished relatively efficiently.⁵⁸

While the content of *Fujii-shi onna no ki* revolves entirely around the affairs of the Nakayama, the title it was later given suggests that Suzuko's historical significance was due not so much to the prominence of her husband's clan as to the infamous history of her natal family, the Fujii. The nineteenth-century copyist's note suggests that it was Suzuko's status as Fujii Mondayū's daughter, as much as her talent as a writer, that justified the inclusion of her short travel account in a late Edo-period collection of exemplary Japanese prose (*wabun*).⁵⁹ In this way, Suzuko's travel diary became—after the fact and unintentionally—a memorial to the untimely death of her father. Judging from her later writings, this was a development she would have supported wholeheartedly.

In her lifetime, however, what we know of Suzuko through her own writings and those of her family members suggests that her identity and her filial loyalty were primarily centered on her husband's family, the Nakayama. And ironically, no sooner had Suzuko settled affairs in the wake of her father's assassination than her husband of six years, Naomichi, suddenly took ill and died in the second month of 1700. He was only in his late thirties, and upon his death Suzuko became a young widow with no father or other male patron to ensure her welfare. So it was that the day after her husband's funeral Suzuko and her mother-in-law moved in with the family of Naomichi's younger brother, Kuroda Naokuni, who had become a Kuroda through his adoption by his maternal grandparents.

This move, which marked a major transition in her life, was perhaps the reason that Suzuko began writing an account of her early widowhood, later titled simply *Suzuko nikki* (Suzuko's Diary, 1703–4). The text is infused with sadness at the passing of both time and people who are dear to her and begins with a recounting of the changes in her life in the previous decade: her marriage to Naomichi; her father's death “in the service of the country,” as she puts it; Naomichi's death; her move to the Kuroda mansion thereafter; and her loneliness for her mother, confined in Mito after the death of her father. As she remarks, “In the last two or three years we have moved frequently. It has been exhausting, but we have gotten through it.”⁶⁰ Here she is referring to her move in 1694 to Naokuni's house after her husband's death, then again in 1700 to her older brother-in-law Naoyoshi's house in order to avoid a taboo, then once more in 1701, when she went to live with her newly adopted adult son, Naomasa, a descendant of the Mito Nakayama. The

move in 1701 separated her from her mother-in-law, with whom she had been living in Naoyoshi's residence and to whom she was extremely (and atypically) close. Soon after this move came another major disappointment: Naomasa's biological father had arranged a meeting between Suzuko and her mother in Mito, which she was anticipating greatly, but her mother died just before they were supposed to meet. This event and her reflections on it conclude the diary.

In her later life, judging from what can be gleaned from her sister-in-law Kuroda Tosako's diaries, Suzuko became a devout Buddhist.⁶¹ At some point Suzuko must have moved from where she was staying with Naomasa to the Kuroda upper residence in Tokiwabashi, because we know Suzuko and her mother-in-law fled the Tokiwabashi mansion during a fire in 1717. In 1718 Jikkōin died, but Suzuko remained in Ishihara until she had to flee from floods to the family's middle residence (*nakayashiki*) in Mejirodai in 1742. Thereafter, Suzuko's trips to tend the family graves and to visit her younger brother (who was priest at Chōnenji) are recorded by Tosako. The last record of Suzuko is in Tosako's memoir *Koto no hagusa* in 1753. It is a portrait of a lonely and pious woman nearing her eighties. Suzuko is not buried in Nōninji like her husband, her brother-in-law, and her sister-in-law. The location of her grave is not known. The only records of her existence are the two texts discussed above.

It seems natural to see Suzuko as a paradigm of wifely devotion and filial duty to in-laws. Her diaries evince a thoroughgoing dedication to Nakayama family members and their legacies. She remained a "chaste widow" in the home of her late husband's family, even though remarriage for women of her age and status was common in the eighteenth century.⁶² In her diaries Suzuko also deliberately makes note of the sacrifices she endured to be the ideal filial daughter-in-law: separation from her mother; overcoming the stigma attached to her father's death, and undertaking the frequent moves among the Nakayama residences, as befitted the needs of other family members whose status exceeded her own. While Suzuko's story lacks the flamboyant (and likely embellished) drama of exemplary women's tales, we might see in her quiet devotion to her beleaguered natal family an assertion of a sense of filial piety that embraced her own and her husband's families.

Itō Maki (1797–1862)

Inoue Tsūjo and Nakayama Suzuko were both born into the samurai class, and it is tempting to attribute their consciousness of both their

natal and married lineages to this status. But in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century we also see women of commoner birth fashioning their own forms of filial piety in order to actively shape their own and their families' lives and legacies. Like Tsūjo and Suzuko before her, Itō Maki used writing to display filial devotion to her natal family, but in her case this took an epistolary form. Almost everything we know about Maki comes from a recently discovered cache of twenty-two letters written by her to her natal family between 1832 and 1858. In addition, there survives one letter from Maki's eldest daughter, Nao, and five from her younger daughter, Tama.⁶³ Maki was the daughter of Kobayashi Reisuke, a prominent physician in Mimasaka Province (present-day Okayama Prefecture). Although her father was of commoner status, he served Izushi Domain (in present-day Hyogo Prefecture), and he was part of a broad intellectual network of physicians and students of Western science that included such pioneering figures as Sugita Genpaku, the first person to dissect a human cadaver in Japan.⁶⁴ Maki was the eldest daughter and received a good education under her father's supervision.

The Kobayashi were not fortunate when it came to heirs. This fact deeply influenced Maki's life, especially her attitudes toward her parents and her filial attachment to them. Maki was one of four siblings: she had an older brother named Tetsuzō, a younger sister named O-Noe, and a younger brother named Kyōzō (see chart 1). Tetsuzō died at the age of twenty-five, making Kyōzō the family heir. Kyōzō was well educated in medicine as well as the fine and martial arts, but at the age of twenty-five he fell victim to mental illness and died at thirty-nine, sequestered in the family home, without ever having fully recovered. After Kyōzō's death, Fukuda Gunsuke, O-Noe's husband, was adopted as heir, and his and O-Noe's son eventually inherited the family heirship. In fact, because of Kyōzō's long illness, Gunsuke had for some years before the former's death acted as *de facto* family head.

Before her older brother Kyōzō's death, Maki was adopted by her uncle Kōzaemon, her father's childless older brother, and his wife, and she moved from Mimasaka to join her uncle/adoptive father in Edo. Kōzaemon, by dint of his industriousness and skillful cultivation of political connections, had acquired *hatamoto* status. By becoming his adopted daughter, Maki benefited from her uncle's standing, eventually marrying into not one but two *hatamoto* houses (her first husband died young, and she remarried) and bearing four children. Although Maki became thoroughly involved in managing the households into which she married and absorbed by the task of raising her children and seeing to

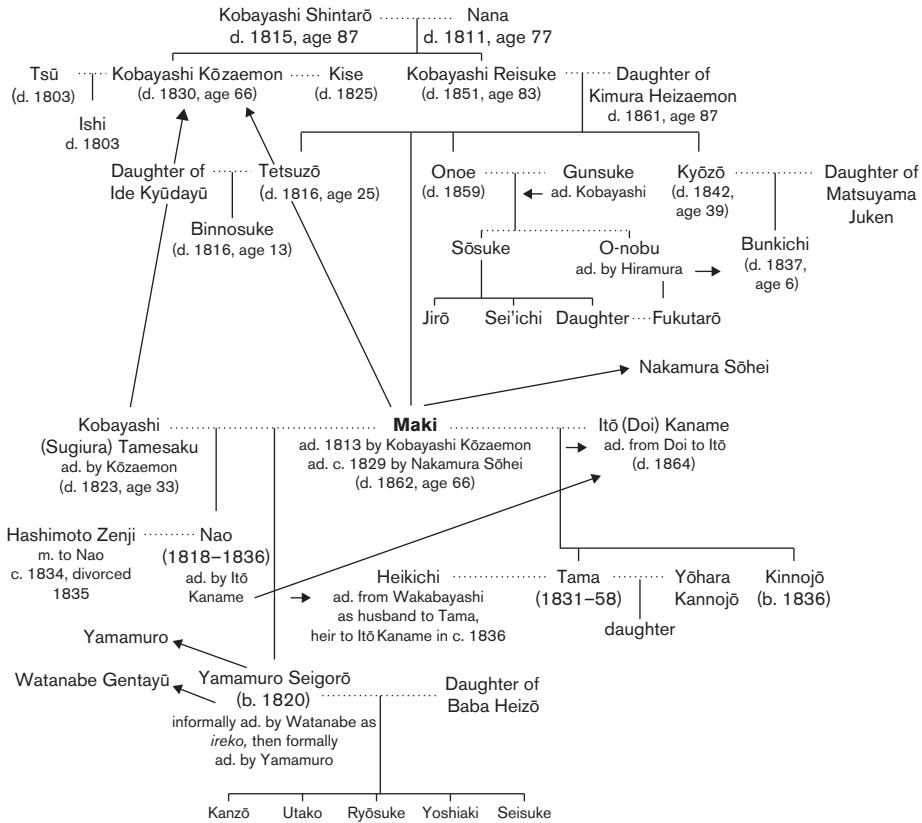


CHART 1. Family of Itō Maki (adapted from Mega Atsuko, *Buke ni totsuida josei no tegami*, p. 20).

their successful transitions into adulthood, she never allowed her ties to her natal family, or her filial duty to them, to languish. She remained deeply concerned about her brother Kyōzō's illness and how it endangered succession to the headship of the Kobayashi house. She worried constantly about the family as Kyōzō's psychological condition worsened and it became necessary to confine him to the house. She lamented frequently that she could be of little help to her parents, because she lived far from them in Edo and, moreover, because she was "only a woman."

Paradoxically, it was precisely Maki's status as a distant daughter that ensured her family's legacy. This occurred in two ways. The first was her ability to improve her family's reputation—if in subtle and indirect ways—through her own strategic marriage, remarriage, and adoption (examined in detail in chapters 3 and 5). The second, and perhaps

more important, way was the vehicle of Maki's filial devotion: the many letters she wrote to her parents over a period of twenty-five years. In them Maki describes in detail the challenges of being wife and mother in a *batamoto* family of low rank and correspondingly meager income; the information is unusually direct and revealing of daily life in this stratum of Tokugawa society.

In terms of assessing filial piety, the important connection to her parents that Maki sustains over the years via her letters is remarkable and, like Nakayama Suzuko's diaries, exemplifies the emotional valence of filial devotion. For example, an 1849 letter by Maki to her parents tells of her joy at looking at a map of Okamura, her hometown, that has been sent to her: "I feel as though it's just like going home." She longs for Okamura, and upon hearing news of old friends declares that she wants to write and get in touch with them. Even more surprising is the way Maki encourages similar feelings in her children, who have never met their grandparents. There are, for example, five letters from Maki's younger daughter, Tama, to her Kobayashi grandparents. In a long missive from 1833, Tama writes of how much Maki talks about the Kobayashis and her hometown, and this makes Tama want to meet them very badly. "But because I am a woman and it is a long trip, I can't go," she writes. She even says she wants to move to be near them, but her father's job will not allow it. She says, touchingly, that she wants to become a bird and fly over their home so that she can at least lay eyes on them.⁶⁵ Both the letter and its contents are evidence of how much and how lovingly Maki spoke of her parents and her home despite the distance that separated them. Filial duty, for Maki, lay not only in maintaining emotional ties across time and space but also in working assiduously to achieve her own and her family's success by inching up the always slippery social and economic ladder in the late Tokugawa period.

CONCLUSION

The divergence between official policy and popular discourse as well as the contradictions evident in women's personal lives cause us to question what exactly constituted normative behavior when it came to filial piety. Based on the sources examined in this chapter, simple schemes of linear development clearly do not suffice, for filial piety did not steadily grow more restrictive or more lax between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth century. Neither can we identify distinct patterns of filiality according to class or status, for although enforcement of filial

obligations and principles tended to be more rigorous in the samurai class, values of female sacrifice and daughterly duty were disseminated widely and were generally consistent across status groups. Regional differences in filial piety discourse may have existed, but they have yet to be systematically studied. Okayama Domain, for example, seems to have rigorously monitored family structure and women's behavior from the early Tokugawa period on, but this does not appear to have been part of a regional phenomenon.⁶⁶

The elusiveness of clear trends and patterns suggests that we are asking the wrong question. The term *normative filial behavior* itself suggests both a singular definition of filial piety and a unidirectional implementation of its principles. An examination of the sources in this chapter, however, shows that filial piety was neither uniform nor authoritatively imposed. Certainly, the values espoused in biographies of exemplary women and those embraced by women writers like Inoue Tsūjo and Nakayama Suzuko were similar in general ways, but they differed considerably in their particular forms of expression. Tsūjo, for example, wrote in her ethical treatises that women belonged in the home, but she left hers for over a decade to work and live independent of her family. Suzuko publicly conducted filial rituals for her husband's relatives while privately mourning the inglorious extinction of her own family. The filial daughters in exemplary women's tales did not passively accept their families' fates but took direct action to right wrongs done to family members and rehabilitate their reputations. And the deeds of many of these women, real and fictional, became the stuff of public discussion. Popular vendetta tales competed with hearsay and rumor, and filial daughters and wives became the subject of public acclaim. In short, filial piety was made and remade on the ground, in the streets, bookstores, and theaters, within families, and according to circumstances. Women as well as men took direct action to satisfy personal or familial interests in the name of filial piety, sometimes conforming to established norms, sometimes not. Debates about the existence of selfhood or subjectivity are not entirely relevant in this context, for early modern women were wholly imbricated in the lives of their families. Filial piety is thus a useful conceptual position from which to study their thoughts and actions. Indeed, the context of family made women's actions—which otherwise might be seen as unacceptable—both appropriate and praiseworthy, for the family's success could be the product of a wife's or daughter's success, and vice versa. In this light, any action taken to further the family's success, to preserve its reputation, or, indeed, to preserve its existence was by

definition filial and therefore laudable. In terms of power and influence, Tokugawa women typically have been seen as losers, as victims of patriarchy. But just as the heroines of exemplary women's tales sacrificed themselves yet survived and even benefited from their experiences, women like Itō Maki, who were able to take action to help their families survive and prosper, were by definition winners.