

Creating a Feminist Transnational Drama: Oyako-Shinju (Parent-Child Suicide) in Velina Hasu Houston's Kokoro (True Heart)

Masami USUI

I INTRODUCTION

Velina Hasu Houston's play *Kokoro* examines the Japanese traditional practice of *oyako-shinju*, or parent-child suicide, in a transnational context. A 1985 *oyako-shinju* case in Santa Monica motivated Houston to do further research and ultimately complete *Kokoro* as a drama. On January 29, 1985, a 32-year-old Japanese woman attempted *oyako-shinju* with her 4-year-old son and her 6-month-old daughter at the Santa Monica seashore. Only the mother survived. Her 40-year-old husband, an artist and restaurateur in Chatsworth, had kept a Japanese mistress for three years. The couple had been married about eight years and had lived in the States for about six years when this incident occurred. *Kokoro* uses key facts from newspaper articles, such as the out-of-fashion Japanese practice of the wife's bathing the husband's legs, the wife's insomnia whose symptom is a loss of hair, the wife's journal and poetry written during her imprisonment in the Los Angeles County Jail, and a neighbor's assistance with childcare. The 1985 *oyako-shinju* incident certainly makes us consider how the Japanese culture can be judged in the States and also how deeply the frequency of *oyako-shinju* is related

Copyright © 2000 Masami Usui. All rights reserved. This work may be used, with this notice included, for noncommercial purposes. No copies of this work may be distributed, electronically or otherwise, in whole or in part, without permission from the author.



to the unique practice of mass suicide in the Japanese culture and tradition.”² *Kokoro* is set in 1985, in “San Diego, California, Japan, and Netherworlds” (89) where the Yamashitas undergo hardships similar to the Santa Monica case within their household that result in the 33-year-old wife’s suicide attempt with her 7-year-old daughter.³ The wife’s survival and their daughter’s death are magnified in the mass media, creating controversy and conflict which influence the public and the courts.

In *Kokoro*, the prologue connotes Yasako Yamashita’s departure from Japan and her separation from her mother, Fuyo, in a poetic space introduced by the Japanese legend of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, and a Japanese *waka*, a 31-syllable Japanese poem. In Act I, the internal conflict between Yasako and her husband, Hiro Yamashita, is ultimately disclosed after their six-year-stay in the States. As a couple, they face the collapse because Hiro’s secret of having kept a mistress for three years is revealed; and as parents of their seven-year-old daughter, Kuniko, they differ in their opinions about a daughter’s education and home training. This strife leads Yasako to carry out *oyako-shinju* by jumping into the sea in another poetic space created by Fuyo’s spirit, *Bon*, and women’s writing. In Act II, a great disparity between Yasako as a prisoner and Angela Rossetti as her attorney is gradually diminished as they incorporate the characteristics of Japanese *oyako-shinju* with U.S. legal procedures for cases of child homicide. This conflict which is diminished within the prison is also eliminated outside of it by Hiro and a neighbor, Evelyn Lauderdale, who contribute to the public’s gradual recognition of *oyako-shinju* as an accepted Japanese cultural practice and as a case of immigrant strife in the States. The play ends with a lighter sentence on Yasako which the court handed down in order to give her a chance to live and regain her will to live.

Houston’s personal background motivated her to explore the *oyako-shinju* theme. *Oyako-shinju* is a concept which is not well understood by Americans; therefore, both the public and the courts found the incident reprehensible because it opposed all American ideals of parenthood.⁴ Houston is an Amerasian whose mother is a Japanese who immigrated to the States in 1959 with her African-Native American husband after he served in both World War II and the Korean War.⁵ Houston is concerned about Japanese women who were called “war brides” because they had married American GIs, and has constructed their neglected and lost stories in her trilogy, *Asa Ga Kimashita (Morning Has Broken)*,

American Dreams, and *Tea*. According to Houston, there were two crucial moments when *oyako-shinju* became the subject at home in Junction City, Kansas.⁶ It was Houston's mother who told Houston at age 12 or 13 about a case of *oyako-shinju* in Japan where a mother set fire to her house. Not only was the image of her mother's story very vivid to Houston, but it was crucially related to her mother's own story. In Houston's late teens, her mother confessed that she had thought of carrying out *oyako-shinju* after Houston's father's death in 1969, when Houston was 11. Since Japan lost the war and its dignity during the U.S. Occupation, such women's emigration to the States reflects a series of conflicts such as a strong sense of shame, prejudice and discrimination because of racial and political reasons, and an inescapable sense of loss of home. As an Amerasian, Houston knows the stories of the Japanese women who immigrated to the States as permanent residents before Japan gained economic and social stability. In *Kokoro*, Houston entrusts Evelyn—the Yamashita's neighbor and an Amerasian offspring—with the role of a cultural interpreter through her mother.

The Yamashitas' background illustrates a postwar phenomenon, an emerging *shin issei* paradigm in the States. The *shin issei* paradigm emerged as a result of Japanese migration during the nation's postwar economic development, and during the bubble economy. In the early 1980's, Houston was again informed of several *oyako shinju* cases by Asian women in California. It coincided exactly with the period in which Japan garnered remarkable economic success in the global market. In 1970, Japanese transnational corporations emerged to compete with their U.S. counterparts and Japan's currency value rose 100 percent by 1985. During these years, the number of both resident and non-resident Japanese in the U. S., ranging from elite businessmen to *sushi* chefs, increased rapidly. They were named *shin issei*. The *shin-issei*'s Japanese community is different from those of Japanese Americans and Japanese "war brides." At the same time, however, the *shin-issei* who were born after World War II belong to the same generation as Japanese American *sansei* and Amerasian children of Japanese "war brides." At 39, Hiro owns a Japanese restaurant in the States. In his six years stay in the States, he has established an ideal private life, living in a seaside apartment with his college-educated wife, Yasako, and his Japan-born but Americanized bilingual daughter, Kuniko. Hiro's fulfilment of his American dream signifies the peak of Japan's postwar economic development and its social

changes. *Kokoro* reflects the *shin issei*'s internal strife in contemporary America, which continually appears to welcome new groups of both resident and non-resident Japanese. It was the *shin issei*, or *zaibei nihonjin* (literally, Japanese living in the States) who actually led a mitigation of penalty campaign when the surviving Japanese mother of the Santa Monica *oyako-shinju* case was first prosecuted for murder and child-abuse.⁷ Houston interlocks an Amerasian role with the role of *shin issei* in society, thus offering insights into the transnational crux in the tragedy. Houston's desire to examine the women's transnational conflicts as persons in a foreign land led her to writing *Kokoro* in a frame which contextualizes women of her mother's and her own generations.

According to one review, *Kokoro* not only focuses on a "domestic crisis, but also provides multicultural illumination on the age-old struggle between an immigrant's native culture and the expectations of American society."⁸ In *Kokoro*, the female immigrant's cultural conflict and her lone struggle within a domestic space in a foreign land is ultimately rearticulated in a unique transnational scheme.⁹ Houston translates the transnational conflicts of nation, community, family, and self into gender-imposed conflicts because they determine the role(s) of self within nation, community, and family.¹⁰ Such transnational feminism examines the "'relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies' throughout the globe based on various economic, legal, cultural, political, and sexual structures of power."¹¹ Houston's transnational feminism explores one embodiment and consequence of gender-related conflicts which are deeply rooted in a native country yet are transplanted to a foreign country. The *oyako-shinju* practice is examined and articulated from a transnational feminist perspective and is ultimately recreated as a transnational feminist space in *Kokoro*.

In creating her drama, Houston transforms the traditionally inherited and still-extant practice of *oyako-shinju* into a poetic space in which to examine and explore Japanese psychology. In order to establish a timeless and borderless space on stage, it is necessary to create a poetic space which transcends all barriers between the dead and the living, the past and the present, and reality and illusion. According to Houston, her poetic space is largely equivalent to a domestic space, yet her poetic space connotes two worlds, the natural and supernatural worlds. It is effective because her play does not bring in just one layer of reality.¹² Compared to her play *Tea*, *Kokoro* "deals with similar themes of suicide, ethnic

displacement and female subjugation, couched in an atmosphere of magical realism and the supernatural.”¹³ In creating *Kokoro*, Houston challenges both realism and supernaturalism within the frame of a domestic space. Houston manipulates the multi-layered narrative codes and poetic spaces of home, prison, and a room of one’s own.

II THE NARRATIVE CODES OF *OYAKO-SHINJU*

Houston presents the double-layered *oyako-shinju* which has been primarily shrouded in Japanese ideology and its rationalized practice since the eighteenth century. The practice of *oyako-shinju*, furthermore, connotes a multilayered ideology in Japan. The term, *oyako-shinju*, began to be used frequently in 1923 and 1924 in Japan, and the use increased rapidly in the late 1920’s because of enormous economic difficulties during the Great Depression. Since then, the Japanese have idealized and rationalized *oyako-shinju* in society.¹⁴ Similar to “war brides” and their Amerasian children, *oyako-shinju* in postwar Japan is considered, partly, the product of Japan’s defeat in World War II and the U.S. occupation of Japan. *Oyako-shinju* during the U.S. occupation resulted from both economic difficulties and the failure to construct the nuclear family after G.H.Q. (General Headquarters) banned the Japanese patriarchal *ie* or household system.¹⁵ Despite the legal banning of the *ie*, *oyako-shinju* in postwar Japan stems from a lack of mutual communication between husbands and wives in the nuclear family, because there still existed traditional patriarchal and Confucian values in the Japanese family.¹⁶ Especially around 1953, during the depression after the outbreak of the Korean War, a remarkable number of *oyako-shinju* incidents happened because of financial difficulties. It is noted that mother-child suicide or *oyako-shinju* cases were 75 to 77 % of all *oyako-shinju* cases.¹⁷

The Japanese women who dated and/or married American GIs underwent such economic and social hardships both in Japan and in the U.S. that they were vulnerable to the practice of *oyako-shinju*. As for Japanese single mothers in Japan and their Amerasian children born during the U.S. occupation, some were confronted with such poverty and discrimination that they left their children at the Elizabeth Saunders’ Home, the most famous orphanage for Amerasian children, as an alternative to *oyako-shinju*.¹⁸ The *oyako-shinju* epidemic in postwar Japan was partially transported to the U.S. as the number of female immigrants from

Japan increased during the same period, and, as a result, *oyako-shinju* began to be recognized as a Japanese cultural norm.

The contemporary nuclear patriarchal household is rooted in the post-war counterpart in which especially the wife has no friends with whom to consult, thereby paradoxically strengthening the traditional belief in the mother-child union and increasing the potential for *oyako-shinju* should conflict and crisis arise.¹⁹ The point is that *oyako-shinju* or *muri-shinju* (committing murder and suicide) has been frequently reported in the mass media, implying the “mythological narrative” code that justifies it as an ongoing Japanese cultural and social phenomenon. The mass media does not simply convey the fact but informs its audience of the meaning of *oyako-shinju*. Therefore, as James W. Carey advances, it turns the “mythological narrative” and provides its readers with a model of cultural values and even the definition of moral values just as mythology and folklore do.²⁰

As the title, “Kokoro,” implies, *shinju* has multilayered meanings. Its original meaning is “showing the inside of the heart,” since the Chinese ideograph “*shin*” can be also read as “*kokoro*,” which means “heart,” and “*ju*” means “inside.” “*Shinju*,” as a Buddhist term, also expresses “doing one’s duty.”²¹ The former literary meaning of *shinju* “implies a self-sacrificing action to show *magokoro*,” which means “true heart.”²² Yasako preaches to Kuniko: “a soul is . . . everything a person feels or dreams, an essence that cannot be touched unless you use your heart, your true heart. Kokoro. Mind, heart, spirit” (91–92). In the title of the play, *Kokoro* (True Heart), Houston notes the origin of *shinju* whose meanings reflect deeply-rooted Japanese cultural idiosyncrasies.

In *oyako-shinju*, the death of parent(s) and child/ren, as one of Houston’s reviewers points out, is considered “not an ending, but a spiritual journey that reunites” parent and child/ren.²³ Yasako’s *oyako-shinju* is supported by the strong sense of honor and belief that she will be united with Kuniko by dying together. In the early eighteenth century when Monzaemon Chikamatsu (1653–1724) wrote around fifteen *shinju* stories for *bunraku*, a Japanese puppet play, *shinju* became acknowledged as a practice where a couple who cannot get married commits suicide with the wish that they will be united in the next life. It was Confucianism, as the official Japanese doctrine in the Edo feudal period (1600–1867), that increased the number of *shinju* as a means of voluntary death to solve conflicts within the family.²⁴ The roots of *shinju* can be also traced back to the Japanese “*samurai* spirit” and practice of *sep-*

puku as a respectable behavior to finalize one's life rather than continuing to live in dishonor.²⁵ *Shin-ju* grounds itself on a strong sense of Japanese honor and a desire to unite in the next life, with which Yasako is obsessed.

Yasako's belief that her child is her *bunshin*, or her branch, also originates from Confucianism. *Oyako-shinju* is also based on the Japanese psychology that the child/ren belong to their parents so that they will have a hard time as orphans if they are left alone.²⁶ Since Tokugawa feudalism in the Edo period, the Confucian belief that children are considered as mere extensions of their parents or are "parental property" has been deeply embedded in Japan. "If a mother and/or father feel compelled to take their lives, it is only 'natural' for their children to die with them."²⁷ In modernized and urbanized Japan, the biological parents are responsible for raising their children; as a result, parental suicide leaving the children behind is considered the most cruel and irresponsible behavior, an act of abandoning children that troubles others.²⁸

Houston's unique myth-making is grounded upon a paradigm of this justified practice which was already encoded into a Japanese "mythological narrative" structure. She shifts the paradigm and its encoding into a concentrated, deepened, and entwined space and time by way of presenting the intertwined mythologies. If it had happened in Japan, Yasako would have been pitied, her act given "the 'beautiful' name of a love suicide, and the child-*murder* part would be forgiven."²⁹ It is Japanese newspapers that named the parent-child suicide *oyako-shinju* and it is Japanese journalists who even now use that term in spite of the fact that it connotes "a carry-over feudalism, and a total disregard of the child's human rights."³⁰ A paradox exists between the narrative code of the Japanese mass media and its American counterpart which labels Yasako as "a cold-blooded baby-killer" (122).³¹ After salvation activities by Hiro and Evelyn, Yasako is transformed into another myth which the American media favorably creates by comparing her with Medea. Yasako gains sympathy and becomes "a celebrity" when the media compares her to the Greek mythological figure who was brought from the East by Jason, and who sacrificed herself for him so that he could obtain the Golden Fleece, yet was abandoned, and therefore killed their children in revenge. Angela analyzes this newly-created myth: "the attorney argued a Medea-like compulsion exists among Japanese women to react to infidelity by killing their children," and opines that although "Medea is despised in the West, I believe she killed because she knew Jason's

new wife would enslave her children” (123). Using sound bites of news media reporters and references to them via other characters, Houston recreates the mythological narrative voice of the American media, a powerful voice which alters Yasako’s fate and ultimately reconstructs the moral code and context for considering her actions from an American perspective, eventually allowing the U.S. society to regard *oyako-shinju* as a family/community tragedy in a cross/inter-cultural environment. Houston presents Yasako as an *oyako-shinju* survivor—a Japanese mother who embodies the Japanese ideological codes yet who challenges the mythological narrative codes in a foreign land.

III THE CONFLICTING SPACES OF *OYAKO-SHINJU*

A. The Home Space

The tragedy in *Kokoro* is caused by the paradox of the home space. As if there were a foreign land outside their home, Yasako is convinced that “America is outside, a place to visit when I take Kuniko to school” (91). Yasako’s repeated complaints about their unexpectedly prolonged stay in the States is what Hiro consistently attempts to avoid. Yasako’s intense sense of the loss of home results from her multilayered agony over her sense of dislocation, isolation, and being an orphan, both outside and inside of her home. By referring to an ancient legend about the origin of Japan, the “Sun Goddess Amaterasu,” Yasako remarks that she is rooted in Japan. Sun Goddess Amaterasu, or *Amaterasu no Oomikami*, is known as the founder of Japan and thus an ancestor of the Japanese Imperial Family, according to Japan’s oldest historical documents, the *Kojiki* (712 A.D.) and *Nihonshoki* (720 A.D.).³² Yet, Yasako regrets that she is “transplanted” in the U.S. by the gardener/husband as a wife, mother, and orphan (90). Yasako’s departure from her home country and her mother deprives Yasako of her own sense of home as the physical and psychological core space of her life.

Yasako’s activities outside the household are strictly controlled by Hiro who, in a sense, imprisons Yasako inside of their house and requires her to be engaged only in housekeeping and child-rearing tasks. Hiro’s opposition to her wish to assist him at his restaurant robs her of promising opportunities outside of the house. While Hiro further domesticates and attempts to acculturate Yasako by bringing her a recipe book and asking her to learn “how to make apple pie” instead of *omanju* (Japanese cakes), Yasako asks him to “teach me how to write checks, how to use

the ‘ATM,’” and “how to talk to her [Kuniko’s] teachers,” requests that show a desire for greater cross-cultural proficiency, even as she holds on tightly to her Japanese cultural idiosyncrasies (92). It is very important to note that Yasako has no right to use money freely. She does not possess a driver’s licence, nor does she have any knowledge of how to take a public bus in an automobile-based society. Without any means to travel in the external society by herself, Yasako loses opportunities to adjust to her new American life and to continue to cultivate her intellectual and cultural pursuits as she did in Japan. Her college-educated background ironically intensifies the difficulty of communicating in English due to her frustration with Americans’ common inability to understand or tolerate foreign accents. This happens especially in matters relating to Kuniko, such as when Yasako calls a hospital when Kuniko has her broken arm, buys a book for Kuniko at a local bookstore, and complains to Kuniko’s teacher about the teacher’s misinterpretations of Kuniko’s behavior at school. These three episodes are subsequently narrated by Yasako through her monologues. In spite of her struggle against displacement, Yasako’s endeavors result in frustration, oppression, disappointment, the loss of self-confidence, and even her child’s loss of respect for her.

Yasako’s sense of being orphaned is determined when Fuyo, Yasako’s mother, dies after Yasako’s departure from Japan. Fuyo’s spirit follows Yasako in a manner that suggests a Japanese Buddhist practice, the ritual of *Bon* in mid-summer, and in the Japanese *waka*. *Kokoro* embraces the supernatural and transcendent moment of dead souls returning to visit the earth. *Bon* is one of the most important events in the Buddhist calendar, and it is held in mid-August in order to soothe the spirits of the dead. In her attempt to have a *Bon* festival and mourn for Fuyo in San Diego, Yasako explains to Kuniko: “Festival of the Dead, Kuniko; a happy time to visit with our ancestors and then light lanterns to guide them back to their worlds” (92). Yasako also explains its spiritual importance to Kuniko in her innovative story-telling of “a world beneath the sea” where the mermaids “guide lost souls to the next world” (91). Moreover, Yasako’s possession of Fuyo’s ashes in her home, rather than returning the urn to the grave, reveals her strong attachment to Fuyo. Within a domestic sphere, time and space are expanded into the supernatural and transcendent elements of *Bon*, which ultimately leads Yasako to embrace her wish to reunite with Fuyo’s spirit.

Yasako’s wish to reunite with Fuyo is also expressed in a Japanese

waka by *Sutoku-in* (1119–1164), “Our lives like the river’s foam split asunder by boulders . . . In the end, . . . in this world . . . or some other . . . we will find each other again” (90). A popular poem which is included in *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* [Ogura Anthology of Japanese Waka], it is a love poem where a poet wishes that the lovers who were once regretfully separated be reunited with each other in the future just as the rapid current of a river is dammed up by the rocks and separated into two streams yet ultimately reunites as one. Like the separation within the same river expressed in the *waka*, Yasako and Fuyo are alienated across the ocean, and later, the *sanzuno kawa*, or the River Styx. Yasako’s departure from Japan determines the fate of this mother-daughter relationship because of Fuyo’s death. *Sutoku-in*’s passionate love poem, moreover, reflects his tragic life: he was born as the first prince of Emperor *Toba*, yet was in reality considered to be an illegitimate child of Emperor *Toba*’s grandfather, *Shirakawa-hoo*, so that he was, at age 5, enthroned as Emperor *Sutoku* by *Shirakawa-hoo*’s support but dethroned by *Toba-in* (former Emperor *Toba*). This caused the civil war against *Toba-in*, and the poet was ultimately expelled to Sanuki on a remote island hundreds of miles away from Kyoto, and died there.³³ Segregated from her motherland and her own mother, Yasako is displaced in the States as *Sutoku-in* was expelled from the court and displaced, exiled to Sanuki, against his will. When Yasako walks into the sea with Kuniko, this *waka* is again recited by Fuyo, Yasako, and Voice as if Fuyo as a ghost pulls their legs from the bottom of the sea. Yasako, in unresolved agony over the loss of her psychological home and her being orphaned in a foreign land, is guided by Fuyo’s spirit to the haunted sea which enables the domestic sphere to be expanded into the core of home and home country.

Yasako’s feelings of dislocation and becoming orphanlike are not resolved because of her isolation in her pseudo home in a foreign land. Hiro’s frequent absences, his patriarchal views, his rejection of Japanese traditions and rituals, the sexless relationship between Hiro and Yasako, and a difference in their opinions regarding Kuniko’s home-training and education, leave Yasako no tie to her husband and corrupt their home space as a spiritual refuge.

Her husband’s household constrains Yasako, reducing her to little more than a slave, thus positioning Hiro as an Americanized tycoon who has the freedom to visit his mistress three times a week. Yasako is not rewarded in her effort to become a model Japanese wife and mother in

order to satisfy her husband's demands. Though Hiro enforces his patriarchal view on Yasako within their house, he rejects their Japanese cultural heritage and traditions which Yasako admires, such as bowing, observing *Bon*, wearing *yukata*, making home-made *omanju*, and drinking green tea. The most crucial incident is when Hiro insults Fuyo's ashes in the urn and his joking that they should "get out the vacuum cleaner" when Kuniko spills the ashes on the floor (94). Outside of their household, the conflict between a Japanese way of life and an American way of life is inevitable; it is more intolerable because the same conflicts exist within the private household. The disparity between Yasako and Hiro in appreciation and respect of their culture, ancestors, and their spiritual space and time is so large and deep that it cannot be remedied. Within the home, the conflict between two opposing cultures and forces is exacerbated by a deeply-rooted conflict between a patriarchal Japanese husband and a well-educated, well-trained, submissive Japanese wife.

The loss of a physical relationship between Hiro and Yasako is a crucial factor in their "corrupted" marital life. Hiro refuses to let Yasako wash his feet, an out-of-date Japanese practice, yet desires an open, aggressive manifestation of love inspired by American popular culture. The bedroom—which symbolizes the most private and closed space—is transformed into a conflicting space which lacks love, sex, and unity between husband and wife. The bed which has been unoccupied by the couple represents both the disparity between their cultural values and Hiro's infidelity. Yasako's consistent adoption of the Japanese practice of sleeping with Kuniko in the same futon "to protect" their "souls" embodies the psychological separation between Yasako and Hiro:

HIRO: Real life, Yasako. Real life. It just isn't right for me to sleep with Kuniko, especially as she gets older.

YASAKO: Why not?

HIRO: Because Americans would think something else was going on. They don't understand about the Japanese way. They don't understand that our presence protects Kuniko, or even that we leave the room when it is time for us to be together as man and wife.

YASAKO: We are Japanese. If this country is so free, why do we have to give up being who we are to live here? Some things I can change, like learning to shake hands instead of bowing, or going to the bathroom differently than I did in Japan. But you are asking me to change the unchangeable.

HIRO: Yasako, here we can wake up late, sing in the street without being thought a lunatic, challenge the system, speak our minds.

YASAKO: No. You have that freedom.

HIRO: You have it, too. If you want it. Just like all the other Japanese.

YASAKO: Like the ones who work in your restaurant?

HIRO: Come to bed.

YASAKO: For a long time now, I come to bed and you act like you don't want to touch me, but you want me to be there. For what? To keep you warm? Go to bed by yourself. (103)

Yasako's entire refusal to share the bed with Hiro is caused by Hiro's refusal to have sex with Yasako. The hidden agenda of Hiro's infidelity is cunningly suggested by way of Yasako's manipulating the concept of "freedom," the male freedom to possess his mistress, in this case—Shizuko Mizoguchi. The above conversation depicts the lack of understanding owing to Hiro's blindness to Yasako's insinuations and concealed anger. The sexless relationship between Yasako and Hiro which is interrelated with Hiro's infidelity is the most horrible corruption and the apogee of all the discord within their home.

The conflict in their husband/wife relationship is related to another cultural conflict over the home-training and education of their only child. Yasako's clinging to Kuniko paradoxically mirrors the conflict which exists in women of different generations and cultural backgrounds. Against Yasako's preference of a Japanese children's song, "Haruga Kita (Spring Has Come)," Kuniko's favorite song, "Down the River," embodies Kuniko's outgoing personality, Americanized manners, and good command of English. Kuniko who "hugs like people in American movie" and gives Hiro "a great big television kiss" has already been Americanized as Hiro expects (93). Kuniko as "a California original" represents the disparity between Hiro's pleasure in and Yasako's anxieties over Kuniko's Americanized behaviors and her possible loss of a Japanese cultural heritage. In addition to home-training, Kuniko's schooling brings out two differing opinions. Yasako's wish to send her to a regular Japanese school rather than a Japanese Saturday school in the States is entirely in opposition to Hiro's desire to create an Americanized daughter. Hiro's optimistic view is based on his superficial understanding of cultures and his lack of responsibility and opportunities to care for Kuniko. On the other hand, Yasako is too obsessed with a sense of responsibility for rearing her daughter to ignore the advantages of the bilingual and bicultural training and education. This difference between Yasako and Hiro regarding their only child leads to the loss of joy, hope, and a sense of future within the family.

The loss of Yasako's sense of home within her nuclear family, caused by all of the cultural/sexual conflicts in husband/wife and parent/child relationships that besiege her, is encoded by a sequence of imprisonment, segregation, and isolation and causes her lunatic syndrome, depression, and, finally, suicide attempt.

B. The Prison Space

The prison which restrains Yasako from almost all the regular activities of a citizen ironically liberates her from all burdens and allows her to begin real communication with others. The prison is, as Yi-Fu Tuan summarizes, "a corruption-free environment" which called for "almost total isolation and the strict discipline."³⁴ The prison accommodates Yasako as a criminal and at the same time protects her from possible public violence toward a "baby-killer." The prison space in *Kokoro* is gradually turned into the enclosed space of Yasako's self. Within this prison space, paradoxically, Yasako can first liberate herself from all psychological restrictions. The others outside the prison, on the contrary, bring out all their powers to fight against the complete absence of Yasako. To help Yasako in prison means not only to rescue her from legal misjudgement but from her long-trapped and imprisoned self. Besides Hiro, Yasako's neighbor Evelyn and her attorney Angela attempt to understand and endeavor to communicate with Yasako in prison, since Yasako has no close female friends and relatives.³⁵ Evelyn and Angela have opposing perspectives, but both challenge this boundary so that their conflicting yet combined force modulates the esoteric *oyako-shinju* issue and rescues Yasako from her misjudged public reputation. The prison embodies the most difficult site of her guilt, shame, and dishonor, and her obsession with death.

Of an older generation, Evelyn is a neighbor of the Yamashitas' San Diego apartment and an Amerasian offspring of a Japanese mother, a fact she reveals after a one-year silence. When she introduces herself as "Japanese and American," Evelyn distinguishes herself from other Japanese Americans, criticizes the Japanese Americans' lack of understanding of Japanese culture, and nurtures and upholds her strong bond with her Japanese mother. Evelyn's compassion towards Yasako originates from her once-forgotten sense of identity, inherited from her mother and from her awakening to her unique cross/inter-cultural heritage when she struggles to understand the profound meaning of Yasako's *oyako-shinju*. Evelyn plays an important role as a messenger/coun-

selor/social worker connecting two opposed societies, as an elder “sister” for both Yasako and Hiro.

It is Evelyn who has the first contact with Hiro after Yasako’s *oyako-shinju* incident, and, moreover, uses the term *oyako-shinju* in the play. Evelyn is a messenger whose swift cognizance of the complicated circumstances provides Hiro with both exhortation and vindication. It is a sense of guilt that traps Evelyn when she fails to prevent Yasako from carrying out *oyako-shinju*, because Evelyn recognized Yasako’s unusual behaviors before her *oyako-shinju* attempt.³⁶ Evelyn’s deep attachment to the dead, both her mother and Kuniko, motivates her to counsel Yasako. Further, Evelyn’s western way of thinking about life contributes toward preventing Yasako from her second suicide attempt. Yasako’s strong rejection of Evelyn in her first visit to the jail is altered. When Evelyn secretly brings the “special tea” which Yasako preserved at home for a suicide attempt, Evelyn expresses her firm opposition to suicide: “Yasako-san, is suicide so honorable—when it really isn’t about shame, but about running away from facing life . . . without Kuniko?” (127). Evelyn’s strong will to rescue Yasako makes Yasako reconsider what honor means for a surviving mother of a dead child. Furthermore, Evelyn’s lucidity and her sister-like-affection crucially transform Hiro from a selfish patriarchal husband into a most compassionate and active supporter of Yasako, and ultimately a great influence upon his wife. In an argument with Angela, Evelyn not only shows her knowledge about traditionally-trained Japanese women, but also presents the result of her research on the comparative suicide rates between Japan and the States. She insists on Yasako’s innocence, and even persuades Angela to plead no contest at court. Evelyn constructs a bridge between Yasako, Hiro, and Angela in order to establish a foundation for emancipating Yasako from her imprisoned self.

Angela plays two roles: an attorney fighting against the American public and courts while advising self-imprisoned Yasako; and a woman of the same generation and mother of a 5-year-old daughter. A Catholic Italian American attorney originally from the Midwest, she represents the collective cultural American ignorance and intolerance prominent in small towns, and also reflects a woman’s perspective in a multi-racial American society whose values are controlled by the white male public.

ANGLELA: I plan to fight for a lesser conviction of voluntary manslaughter. [*a beat*] Problem is, Americans don’t take too kindly to people killing children, and it’ll be Americans staring out at you from the jury. And prob-

ably not the kind who eat steamed white rice with their meals. This is a conservative town, full of retired Navy guys whose buddies were killed in World War II. [*a beat*] So we've got a fight on our hands. (114)

The force outside the prison is the enormous opposing and threatening force of the public and its administration and legislature, as well as the political power of the American military presence, retired or otherwise. Recalling another case of a mother who survived, Angela crucially remarks that "the American public wouldn't've even flinched if she'd been burned at the stake" (118). As is reported in Japan, the hostile reaction of Americans to the Santa Monica incident and its possible judgment, either the death sentence or life-long imprisonment, are what challenges Angela.³⁷

In Angela's second role, her experience as a woman and mother, must help her decide between two possible trial pleas, "cultural defense" and "temporary insanity," that could reduce the murder sentence. A parent's psychological condition in *oyako-shinju* is mostly based on a pattern of the parent internalizing the problem, becoming anxious about it in depression or suffering from psychoneurosis, and thereby relinquishing his or her hope to continue living and facing the problem.³⁸ What Yasako desires is either "the death sentence" or to "pretend hysteria," then go through "special tests," and "to a hospital," and finally to be secretly taken to the ocean to make a second suicide attempt (121, 123). What Angela has to compete with is Yasako's internalized agony as a surviving mother of *oyako-shinju* and her visualization of her own suicide either in court via a murder charge or by her own hands.

The conversation between Yasako and Angela reveals Yasako's intelligence and deep insight as well as her love for Kuniko, which moderate Angela's extreme and negative directions and conclusions. The gradual, firmly built-up communication between Yasako and Angela proves Yasako's "incredible bond" with Kuniko and a Japanese parent's strong sense of affection and attachment to their children: "We honor, no, we *worship* our children," "We have *Children's Day*" (123). Children's Day was established in 1948, when the Japanese government aimed to create new national holidays under the new Constitution with a wish that Japan would become "a cultural nation" through the example of setting up a holiday just for children.³⁹ Yasako gave her daughter the name "Kuniko" because it means "child of the country." She hoped Kuniko would "feel like a child of Japan" even while in America (119). Yasako's sense of obligation is too strong to yield to separation by death.

Angela manipulates the mother's instinct by giving Kuniko's photo to Yasako, hoping to affect Yasako's will to live: Kuniko has "already gone, so you can't have that. Let's concentrate on what you can have," that is, life (123). Using their mothers' perspectives, Yasako and Angela cross the abyss between them and their two countries. The prison creates ultimately a shared space rich with compassion and respect .

The most radically changed yet powerful force that challenges Yasako's self-imprisonment issues from Hiro who is also liberated from patriarchal values and nourished by others' caring. Hiro realizes his fault and plays an active role in rescuing Yasako from public condemnation. Hiro's first visit to Yasako before the initial court trial is another trial of sorts where he confesses his faults as a failed husband and father, admits that he forced Yasako to take all responsibility for their lives (his, hers, and Kuniko's), and persuades Yasako to "sleep and dream again," to "learn to live a new way," and "go on, learn, and repair" (124, 125). Yasako's hostile and cynical reaction reflects her harsh criticism of Hiro's egoism and betrayal, and her opposition to his desire to gain comfort and possibly assuage guilt by sleeping in Kuniko's room, which she wants to prevent from being tainted by his presence. Within the confined and isolated space of prison, the trial between the jailed Yasako and Hiro as a betrayer/survivor is concluded in Yasako's victory over her husband's freedom from responsibility.

Hiro's awakening is embodied in his transformation into "the driving force to get signatures on petitions that he's giving to the media and to the court to show that Americans understand your [Yasako's] dilemma" (127). Hiro's intense sense of loss of Kuniko, his inescapable sense of guilt, and his courageous challenges against the American public and its mass media influence the public. Hiro's public speech also contributes to bringing out the cross/inter-cultural conflict in America. Hiro points out that the cultural conflict is a shared experience in such an immigrant country as America (119). Hiro's consistent public activities of redemption establish deeper psychological understanding among the public and the court, making them aware of Yasako's double dilemma of being in a Japanese household and in a foreign land.

Both the court's sentence and Yasako's psychological recovery accomplish the rebirth of home and self within Yasako. Angela decides not to "plead no contest" because its hypothesis is tantamount to "a guilty plea to the prosecution," and also because it contains unpredictable legal possibilities beyond a nation's guidelines. The possible "first-degree

murder” sentence is diminished to a charge of “guilty of one count of voluntary manslaughter,” and the predicted life sentence is altered to “five years’ probation with psychiatric treatment and a year in County Jail.”⁴⁰ This compassionate and determined support enables Yasako to regain her sense of dignity and self-confidence. Yasako’s death wish after failing in *oyako-shinju* is transformed into a positive attitude toward life, the choice that she comes to believe Kuniko would have wanted her to make. Yasako’s gradually healed self overcomes the haunted sea occupied by Fuyo’s and Kuniko’s spirits. When Yasako sings, “Down the River,” she can embrace a recovered positive attitude toward life like the song’s lively force embodied by the effervescent Kuniko.

The enclosed space of prison, which forces Yasako to face the reality of being labelled a baby killer, makes her wish her own voluntary death is transmuted into the shared and resolved space of an inner power by way of reconstructing the once-corrupted and trapped self.

C. A Room of Her Own

Among various spaces, a room of her own is the most important space for Yasako in her search for self. The tragedy in *Kokoro* is anchored to undercurrents of a room of one’s own where women can express themselves in journal, poetry, and letters. Women’s private poetic space is adroitly developed into a sophisticated means of exploring women’s inner-most psychologies, through Yasako’s journal/poetry and the letters of Shizuko, Hiro’s mistress, to Yasako. This “poetic space,” where “the two immensities” of intimacy and world are blended “when human solitude deepens,” is originally born in an entirely opposed and conflicting stage, yet is gradually nourished and improved as a shared common space.⁴¹

Within the Japanese community in the U.S., Yasako and Shizuko represent two different types of women. Shizuko’s marriage to an American, her naturalization, divorce, and three years as a waitress and mistress prove that she is a loner and survivor in a foreign land. Her good command of English and her bold, vulgar, and aggressive behaviors are molded into a seemingly Americanized Japanese woman.

SHIZUKO: Know what I’ve got waiting for me at home? A VCR, a color TV, a history worth less than toilet paper. But you, nomi-san, you’ve had the good life, haven’t you? Good and clean. [YASAKO *just stares at her.* SHIZUKO *laughs.*] My bathroom’s all cluttered with lipsticks and lotions and eye shadows. But yours is tidy, isn’t it? Although you could use a little

lipstick. No offense, but you look like you don't have a mouth. And a woman needs it to speak her mind.

YASAKO: I'd better be going now.

SHIZUKO: I've survived America, Mrs. Yamashita. I'm a pioneer. I'm not afraid of the dark. Are you? I think you are. I can tell by the tilt of your chin when you look at me. (100)

Shizuko's eloquence which is cultivated by a hard life seems opposed to Yasako's semi-silence which is nourished by a well-protected life. Shizuko's status as a "pioneer" contrasts with Yasako's status as a prisoner. Shizuko's straightforward, short-tempered reaction to Yasako and even to Hiro, and her practical survival strategies, express her Americanized personality. Shizuko's bathroom, however, illustrates her loneliness and female subjectivity which is shared with Yasako. Shizuko is, at first, a victim of the "Madame Butterfly" stereotype which appears to have caused the failure of her former marriage.⁴² Shizuko is destined to be victimized again, a woman whose sexuality and vulgarity are desired by a man who cannot be satisfied with his genteel wife. Shizuko's long-suppressed anger which is directed toward Yasako as "Mrs. Yamashita" in front of Hiro, and ends with her confession of her love affair with Hiro, originates from the same emotional core as Yasako's in her manic depressive state.

Both women share the same sense of shame caused by one man. As Shizuko remarks in her letter, "What other choice is there because of this shame Hiro has brought into your life. Into our lives" (104). Women who are deserted by men suffer a strong sense of disgrace, shame, and guilt which both Shizuko and Yasako recognize because of their shared cultural background within a woman's poetic space. In spite of their difference in family, social, and educational background—and the difference in how they function in the U.S. society—Yasako and Shizuko emerge as Japanese women opposed to Hiro as the symbol of Japanese patriarchy.

The two women's writing space, which parallels Hiro's absence, encloses the women's innermost selves, or "kokoro," and indirectly and directly questions the meaning of honor. When Yasako receives the first letter from Shizuko, the women's poetic space is born. It is during the night just before Yasako's *oyako-shinju* attempt. Hiro's comings and goings throughout one night embody his ambivalent position between Yasako and Shizuko. Their long-term conflict is compressed within a one-night metaphorical space, a kind of "long day's journey into night."

There, all Yasako's oppressed emotions while enclosed in her seven-year marriage are silently vibrating, curiously shared, and simultaneously recited by Shizuko, then violently exposed to Hiro who returns home one night, leaves home to visit Shizuko, to return home again at 3:00 a.m., only to storm away in the morning. This long journey into their trapped selves is a prelude to the turning point, when Yasako's suicide attempt is triggered by Hiro's final and entire refusal. He shirks his parental and marital responsibility, blaming Yasako and escaping all the consequences of his infidelity.

Shizuko's two letters overlap with Yasako's journal and poetry. Readings by Yasako and Shizuko create another supernatural space and invite them to confront the most intricate circumstances between them. Shizuko's first letter questions the belonging, who will belong to the States/Hiro and who will belong to Japan. From a woman's perspective, it also anticipates the possibility of Yasako's suicide attempt. The first letter's recitation in unison guides both Yasako and Shizuko through compassionate conflict, from Kuniko's injury which intensifies Yasako's sense of responsibility and fault, to Yasako's memory of insults from insensitive Americans, and finally to Yasako's poetry writing, and her stormy rebellion against Hiro. In Shizuko's second letter, however, the conflict between Yasako and Hiro is more ironically interlinked with poetic space shared by Yasako and Shizuko. Thus even in conflict, compassion arises between Shizuko, who has been informed of Yasako's manic depressive illness by Hiro, and Yasako, to whom Shizuko confesses her three-month pregnancy of a boy-baby, a pregnancy which is not told to Hiro. The two women reach the same conclusion expressed by Shizuko, "We Japanese are funny, aren't we? Each struggling to be the one who ends up with the most honor, but the fight gets so ugly that it's all blown to smithereens and nobody ends up with anything" (110-11).

The most horrifying episode, which occurs between Shizuko's two letters and between Hiro's disappearances, is when Yasako displays symptoms of manic depressive illness. Yasako's manic depressive illness and rebellion emerge as reversals of her submissive manner, seen in her distinct words, aggressive attitude toward Hiro, and her hair loss.

HIRO: Go to sleep, Yasako. What's bothering you every single night, walking the floors like a ghost? [*a beat*] It's Japan, right? We'll go back to visit, okay?

YASAKO: We will?

HIRO: [*casually*] Yeah. Maybe for Christmas.

YASAKO: [*devastated*] Christmas? Not Christmas.

HIRO: Yes. A nice present for you. Five months away. Plenty of time to plan.

[*She nervously pulls at her hair. A tuft comes out.*]

HIRO: What—what’s the matter with your hair?

YASAKO: . . . everything is falling apart. So much noise.

HIRO: Yasako. Please. Sit down. Let me see your hair. Let me see.

[*She pulls at her hair again and more comes out.*]

HIRO: [*restraining her*] Stop that!

[*She yanks away with a force that surprises him. She grabs the suitcase.*]

YASAKO: [*thrusting suitcase at him*] Here.

HIRO: What is this?

YASAKO: Your necessary things. [*a quick beat*] Go. Please.

HIRO: Come here. Let me hold you.

YASAKO: I SAID TO GO.

HIRO: Yasako, I am not having an affair, okay? I am just trying to manage some problems at the restaurant. Can’t you understand?

YASAKO: What I understand is that we have no honor. (108)

Yasako’s somnambulism and hair loss represent her unresolved psychological agony over her strong sense of guilt and obsession with women’s duties, which have already destroyed her inner self. There is irony and cruelty in Hiro’s five-months-in-advance suggestion of a separation or a possible divorce as his Christmas present, which Shizuko predicted before and which consequently upsets Yasako’s equilibrium. The incongruous undercurrent of the conversation between Yasako and Hiro embodies Yasako’s aversion to Hiro. Yasako’s insurrection makes her forge ahead in her newfound boldness. Yasako’s conflict between being an obedient angelic wife and a rebellious demonlike wife is prompted by Hiro’s thorough and insensitive denial of his infidelity. The suggestive language that Yasako uses expresses her conflicted self. Yasako insists that, according to how Hiro has behaved, “Honor is what we flush down the toilet,” and that the alternative is divorce or firing Shizuko. The wildest language is produced at this point: “And then kill you in your sleep,” “Poison your drink or—,” “Or wait until you were in the deepest sleep and then cut off your penis” (109).⁴³ Yasako’s manic depressive illness caused by her long-term unresolved and unarticulated negative emotions of depression, sorrow, and anger is inscribed between the shared space of women’s letters.

These two women’s creative writings, expressing their innermost selves, are symbolized by the sea, as Yasako recites in her poem: “the

sea is a bridge of light, leading back into the warmth of honor, away from its scant reflections in this life, the mere images of honor, those masks of paint and clay” (107). In contrast to Yasako’s journal which exactly yet monotonously records everyday housekeeping and child-rearing matters, her poetry frees her and deepens her changing emotional core. The first poem written before *oyako-shinju* describes a trapped sense of honor and anticipates Yasako’s later attitude toward accepting death as a honorable solution, with the sea as a place where human souls can be drowned yet celebrated. The second poem recited in jail before the trial depicts the agony of “a mother in exile” in the sea (125). The third poem, recited close to the end of the play, manifests life’s victory over Yasako’s death wish. Yasako’s three poems are emblems of Yasako’s inescapable agony, changing inner struggles, and sense of resolution and redemption in a metaphorical space.

A binary relation, created by two women’s common agony over one man, encapsulates their most inconsolable inner selves. These muted selves, however, evolve into intricate selves of emotions filled with compassion and depression. The vulnerable psyches are not confined to themselves, but attached to each other. The tie between Yasako and Shizuko is, while never resolved, enlarged into two opposing fates: Yasako’s suicide and survival without her daughter, and Shizuko’s departure alone with her unborn illegitimate baby boy. Yasako’s resolution and redemption in her poems testify to the power retrieved from the bottom of a woman’s heart. The sense of commitment in Shizuko’s letter-writing narrative voice expresses an ironic, new-born sisterhood and ultimate separation between Yasako and Shizuko because both of them decide not to depend on patriarchal values. The two women’s secret writings reveal all the facts and truths relevant to the tragic consequences of their conflicts and, as a result, establish their shared poetic space of compassion, comprehension, and empowerment.

III CONCLUSION

Houston attempts to examine one tragic consequence of the cultural conflicts of Japanese female immigrants transplanted to America, because the notion of *oyako-shinju* has haunted her for years. Through her examination, Houston herself plays a role as a counselor between two cultures and two countries, and guides us to the most profound side of human psychology. As Houston remarks, Yasako “embodies the spir-

it, courage, intelligence, loneliness and confusion of many Japanese female immigrants,” including “women who arrived right after World War II and younger women who came to the U.S. to attend the college, married and stayed.”⁴⁴ *Kokoro* was cultivated by Houston in her endeavors to evaluate the misjudged characteristics of female immigrants, to articulate their voices in a poetic space, and to present to us a transnational feminist drama.

NOTES

¹ See Wataru Sawamura, “Hito: Velina Hasu Houston” [Profile: Velina Hasu Houston], *Asahi Shimbun*, 5 June 1994, 3. Compared to the brief coverage of the Santa Monica *oyako-shinju* in Japan (cf. *Asahi Shimbun*, 31 January 1985, 23), the *Los Angeles Times* paid much attention to it. See also Maura Dolan, “Two Cultures Collide Over Act of Despair: Mother Facing Charges in Ceremonial Drowning,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1985, Part 1, 3; “Mother Placed on Probation in 2 Drownings,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 1985, Part 1, 1; Janet Rae-Dupree and Jack Jones, “Children in Arms: Mothers’s Trek Into Sea Stuns Her Neighbors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 January 1985, Part 2, 6; and David Reyes, “Officers Are Baffled by Murder-Suicide,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 July 1985, Part 2, 4.

² Tadayoshi Shimamura, “Oyako-shinju no ‘nihonteki tokucho’ ni kansuru kensho no kokoromi” [An Attempting [*sic*] to Study about ‘Japanese Features’ in Cases of So-Called ‘Parent-Child Murder-Suicide’ in which Children are Killed by a Parent Who Commits Suicide], *Bulletin of Japan Red-Cross Nursing College* 1 (1987): 42.

³ Velina Hasu Houston, “Kokoro,” in *But Still, Like Air, I’ll Rise: New Asian American Plays*, ed. Velina Hasu Houston (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

⁴ Cynthia M. Wetzler, “Survival and off-off Broadway,” Rev. of *Kokoro*, by Velina Hasu Houston, *Pound Ridge Review*, 16 March 1995, n.p.n.; and Yoshiko Yamaguchi, “Nihonjin hahako shinju jiken” [The Japanese Mother-Child Suicide Incident], in *‘Zaigai’ Nihonjin* [The Japanese ‘Abroad’], ed. Kazuko Yanagihara (Tokyo: Shobunsha, 1994), 107.

⁵ As for Houston’s Amerasian background and conflicts, see Houston’s essays: “The Challenge of Diversity for African Americans and Asian Americans,” *Multiracial Asian Times*, 16 November 1991, 1–2; “The Past Meets the Future: A Cultural Essay,” *Amerasia Journal* 17, no. 1 (1991): 53–56; “To the Colonizer Goes the Spoils: Amerasian Progeny in Vietnam War Films and Owning Up to the Gaze,” *Amerasia Journal* 23, no. 1 (1997): 69–85; and “Uphill Fight for Asian American Plays,” *Los Angeles Times Calender*, 15 September 1997, F3.

⁶ Houston, Interview by the author, 13 August 1999, Kyoto; also see Houston, “Japanese American/American Japanese: On Being Multi-racial Japanese in Modern Times,” *Multiracial Asian Times*, 1990, 7.

⁷ Naoki Sato, “Oyagoroshi/Kogoroshi” [Parent Murder/Child Murder], *Jiten Kazoku* [The Encyclopedia of the Family], ed. Hikaku Kazoku-shi Gakkai [Association of Comparative Family History] (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1996), 96.

⁸ “Velina Hasu Houston’s Latest Work Wins Award,” *Rafu Shimpo*, 3 May 1994, n.p.n.

⁹ Houston remarks that she intends to bring out an Asian female immigrant’s cultur-

al conflict and that racial issues are not important in *Kokoro* (Houston, Interview by the author, 13 August 1999, Kyoto).

¹⁰ As for transnationalism, see Bob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, "Introduction: Tracking the Global/Local," in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, eds. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

¹¹ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 17, quoted in Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mapping: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 112.

¹² Houston, Interview by the author, 13 August 1999, Kyoto.

¹³ Kathleen Foley F., "'Kokoro' Goes to Heart of Mother's Woes," Rev. of *Kokoro*, by Velina Hasu Houston, *Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 1996, 10.

¹⁴ Michiya Iwamoto, "Oyako-shinju" [Parent-Child Suicide], 95; Michiya Iwamoto, "Oyako-shinju o meguru shochoteki shisutemu no nikkon hikaku (1): Shinwatekina katari toshite no 'jisatsu jiken' no minzokugakuteki bunseki" [A Comparison of Symbolic Systems regarding 'Parent-Child Suicides' in Japan and Korea: A Folkloristic Analysis of the 'Suicide Case' as Mythological Narrative], *Bulletin of the National Museum of Japanese History* 54 (1993): 76; Maurice Pinguet, *Jishi no Nihonshi [La Mort Volontaire au Japon]*, 1984, trans. Nobuo Takeuchi (Tokyo: Chikuma-shobo, 1986), 79. As for the prewar *oyako-shinju* issue, see Shigeyuki Omine, "Showa-nenkan ni okeru oyako-shinju no igakuteki kansatsu [Medical Observations over *Oyako-Shinju* in the Showa Period]," ed. Yasuko Ichibangase, *Nihon fujin mondai shiryō shusei* [Collected References of Japanese Women's Problems], vol. 6: *Hoken to Fukushi* [Hygienics and Social Welfare] (Tokyo: Domesu-shuppan, 1978), 274–82; and Tsuyoshi Takashima, "Saikin ni okeru oyako-shinju no jokyo to bosei hogo ho seitei undo no keiki [The Recent Conditions of *Oyako-Shinju* and the Turning Point of Enacting the Maternity Protection Law]," ed. Yasuko Ichibangase, 171–74. The reasons for *oyako-shinju* are consistently the same before and after the Second World War: in pre-war Japan, financial difficulties (extreme poverty), family crisis, family illness, and in post-war Japan, illness, depression stemming from childbirth and childcare, and financial difficulties (caused by gambling and loans). See Susumu Iizuka, "Michizure jisatsu, konjaku" [The Double Suicide, Past and Present], *Bulletin of Momoyama Gakuin University* 15, no. 2 (1982): 207–8.

¹⁵ As for the frequency of *oyako shinju* in the 1950's, that is, during the U.S. occupation of Japan, see Mamoru Iga, *The Thorn in the Chrysanthemum: Suicide and Economic Success in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 18.

¹⁶ Shigehiro Takahashi, *Boshi-shinju no jittai to kazoku-kankei no kenkoka: Hoken fukushi-gaku teki apurochi niyoru kenkyu* [The Investigations of Mother-Child Suicides and the Construction of the Wholesome Family Relationships: From a Hygienic Welfare Approach] (Tokyo: Kawashima, 1987), 30. Even though the new type of Western family was adopted after the Second World War, "that spirit of dependency on a group or on others continued to flow deep down in the hearts of the Japanese" who "found it difficult to operate as individuals." As a result, instead of "the husband and wife turning to each other and working together as the core of the family, as was the style of life in the West, a strange new style of life developed in which the mother turned to the child in a strong mutual life and death relationship, creating the incongruous situation in which they live together with the husband/father, but in total isolation from him." See Shigehiro Takahashi in "Child-Murder/Mother-Suicides in Japan," *PHP*, May 1977: 76.

¹⁷ Sumiko Tanaka, "Oyako-shinju" [Parent-Child Suicide], *Koza gendai rinri* 2 [Seminar Modern Ethics 2] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1958), 200. In another examination, the rate of mother-child suicide cases is five to six times higher than father-child suicide cases because mothers are often much closer to their children than fathers (Akihiro Ando, "Oyagoroshi/Kogoroshi 1 (Shinrigaku)" [Parent Murder/Child Murder 1 (Psychology)], *Jiten Kazoku*, 96.

¹⁸ "Sawada Miki," *Kyoto Shimbun*, 10 August 1999, 7.

¹⁹ The short article on *oyako-shinju* was published in the States one year before the Santa Monica *oyako-shinju* incident: see Lloyd Garrison, "The Puzzle of Oyako-Shinju," *Time*, 11 June 1984, 41. The large extended family in prewar Japan had a support system, whereas "six out of ten married couples" now live without relatives and those post-war nuclear families have to deal with all troubles by themselves. Young mothers under the social conditions of the nuclear family have no elder family members to consult with and isolate themselves within the restricted mother-child relationship; thus, these mothers who cannot become independent and consequently cannot definitely separate themselves from their children are convinced that their children are part of themselves. See Ken Rin, "Seishin choko no tsubunka hikaku kara mita oyako-shinju" [*Oyako-shinju* from the Psychiatric/Transcultural Comparative Perspective] *Koza kazoku seishin igaku* Vol. 2: *Seishin shogai to kazoku—bunka to kazoku* [Seminar Psychiatry of the Family Vol. 2, Mental Illness and the Family: Culture and the Family], eds. Masaaki Kato, Akira Fujinawa, and Keigo Kohiki (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1982), 324.

²⁰ Iwamoto, "A Comparison and Korea," 74.

²¹ This original meaning of "showing the inside of the heart" was described in *Shikido Ookagami* by Hatayama [sic] Kizan in 1678, before Chikamatsu's *shinju* literature was born, as examined in Iwamoto, "A Comparison and Korea," 76. As for its Buddhist origin, see *Kojien* [*Japanese Dictionary*], 4th ed., CD-ROM, s.v. "Shinju."

²² Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976; rpt. 1982), 195.

²³ Foley, "'Kokoro' Goes to Heart," 10.

²⁴ Pinguet, *Jishi no Nihonshi*, 233.

²⁵ Tanaka, "Oyako-shinju," 197.

²⁶ See Sato, "Oyagoroshi," 96. Iga also remarks that "it is more merciful to kill children than to leave them in the cruel world without parental protection" and the "mother who commits suicide without taking her child with her is blamed as an *oni no yo na hito* (demonlike person)," *The Thorn*, 8.

²⁷ Garrison, "The Puzzle of Oyako-Shinju," 41.

²⁸ Iwamoto, "A Comparison and Korea," 139.

²⁹ Takahashi, "Child-Murder," 64.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

³¹ Interestingly, the "*kogoroshi* (baby killer)" label on a Japanese wife who was sentenced to a nine-year-prison term is described in Reiko Mori's "Mokkingu bado no iru machi" [Desert Song], an 82nd Akutagawa-prize fiction about the Japanese "war brides" in Lawton near Fort Sill, Oklahoma, another large military base town in the Midwest like Junction City. See Reiko Mori, "Mokkingu bado no iru machi," *Mokkingu bado no iru machi* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1980), 5–83 or "Desert Song" (Mokkingu bado no iru machi), trans. N. Brannen, *The Japan Christian Quarterly*, Fall 1985: 232–44 and Winter 1986: 25–44. According to Mori, it is based on a true incident where a Japanese "war bride" bound her step-child to a chair and beat him to death with a baseball bat because he concealed his school report (Letter to the author, 27 August 1999).

³² Edwin R. Reischauer, *Japan: The Story of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,

1970; rpt. 1981), 12–16 and Motoo Endo, ed., *Nihon Kodaishi Jiten* [*Dictionary of Ancient Japanese History*] (Tokyo: Asakura-shoten, 1974), 1.

³³ Shin Ota, “Sutoku-in. 77: “Se o hayami iwa ni sakaruru takigawa no warete mo sue ni awanto zo omou,” *Hyakunin Isshu* [*One Hundred Wakas*] (Tokyo: Kawade shobo shinsha, 1979), 90–91.

³⁴ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979; rpt. 1980), 198.

³⁵ In a 1996 production at the Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, Evelyn is played as “a strong voice of reason” and Angela is “passionate” as an attorney. See Amy Schaumburg, Rev. of *Kokoro*, by Velina Hasu Houston, *Drama-Logue*, 2–8 May 1996, n.p.n.. In a 1994 production by Yuriko Doi, there is one more supporter, a psychiatrist. See “Kokoro: Noh Space,” Rev. of *Kokoro*, by Velina Hasu Houston, *Drama-Logue*, 30 June - 6 July 1994, n.p.n..

³⁶ One of the causes of *oyako-shinju* is the Japanese social standard where there is a distinction between the inside and the outside of the family and, therefore, family problems and troubles should not be brought outside the family, but rather should be solved only within the family. See Rin, “Seishin choko,” 324.

³⁷ *Asahi Shimbun*, 20 April 1985, 23.

³⁸ Rin, “Seishin choko,” 334.

³⁹ To set up Children’s Day, the Japanese traditional holiday, May 5, called “Tango no Sekku” or Boys’ Festival, was chosen: “Congress members described their strong wish at the committee meeting on July 4, 1948 that ‘Children’s Day which focuses on children might be very rare as a national holiday all over the world. It is significant that Japan as a cultural nation become the leading country to set up this holiday for children’” (“‘Bunka-kokka’ no negai o komete” [With a Wish to Become ‘A Cultural Nation’], *Kyoto Shimbun*, 4 May 1998, 9.)

⁴⁰ Garrison remarks in 1984 that “a mother who fails in suicide after killing her children will probably be given a three-to-five year prison term, but even that is sometimes suspended” (“The Puzzle of Oyako-Shinju,” 41). Sato’s analysis explains that the surviving mother of *oyako-shinju* is expected to be sentenced to less than three years in prison with an extension of time in most cases because not only the mother, but also the other people around her, should be responsible for it, according to Japanese psychology and ethics (“Oyagoroshi” 96). Among some *oyako-shinju* cases from 1992 through 1998 in Japan, surviving mothers were primarily prosecuted for murder, yet the sentences vary according to their motivations and reasons: for example, a surviving mother (age 35) in Tokyo was accused of egotism and sentenced to a six-year-prison term (*Mainichi Shimbun*, 11 August 1993); a surviving mother (age 28) in Hiroshima was sentenced to a three-year-prison term and a five-year probation because her sincere attitude toward her children was recognized (*Chugoku Shimbun*, 6 March 1993); a surviving mother (age 37) in Nagano was sentenced to a four-year-prison term (*Shinano Mainichi Shimbun*, 23 November 1998); a surviving mother (age 38) in Nagano had a mental problem so she was not prosecuted (*Shinano Mainichi Shimbun*, 29 February 1992). The 1985 *oyako-shinju* case in Santa Monica, on the contrary, concluded in a one-year-prison term and a five-year probation, as mentioned in Sato’s “Oyagoroshi,” 96.

⁴¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958; rpt. 1974), 203.

⁴² For more on the history of this stereotype, see James S. Moy, *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 84.

⁴³ Houston culled her idea from the 1993 Lorena Bobbitt incident in Virginia, as she

noted in an e-mail, 5 June 1998. Lorena Bobbitt ‘an Ecuadorean-born woman from Venezuela married to a former U.S. Marine officer’ cut off her 26-year-old husband’s penis with a kitchen knife after having suffered a series of marital sexual assaults and attacks from her husband at the end of their four-year marriage. See also Rudy Abramson, “Has the Bobbitt Case Escalated the War Between the Sexes?” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 November 1993, E-1 and Michael Ross, “Lorena Bobbitt’s Trial for Cutting Penis Begins,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 January 1994, A-14.

⁴⁴ Houston, “Playwright’s Notes,” in *Kokoro* (New York: Japan Society, 1994), n.p.n.