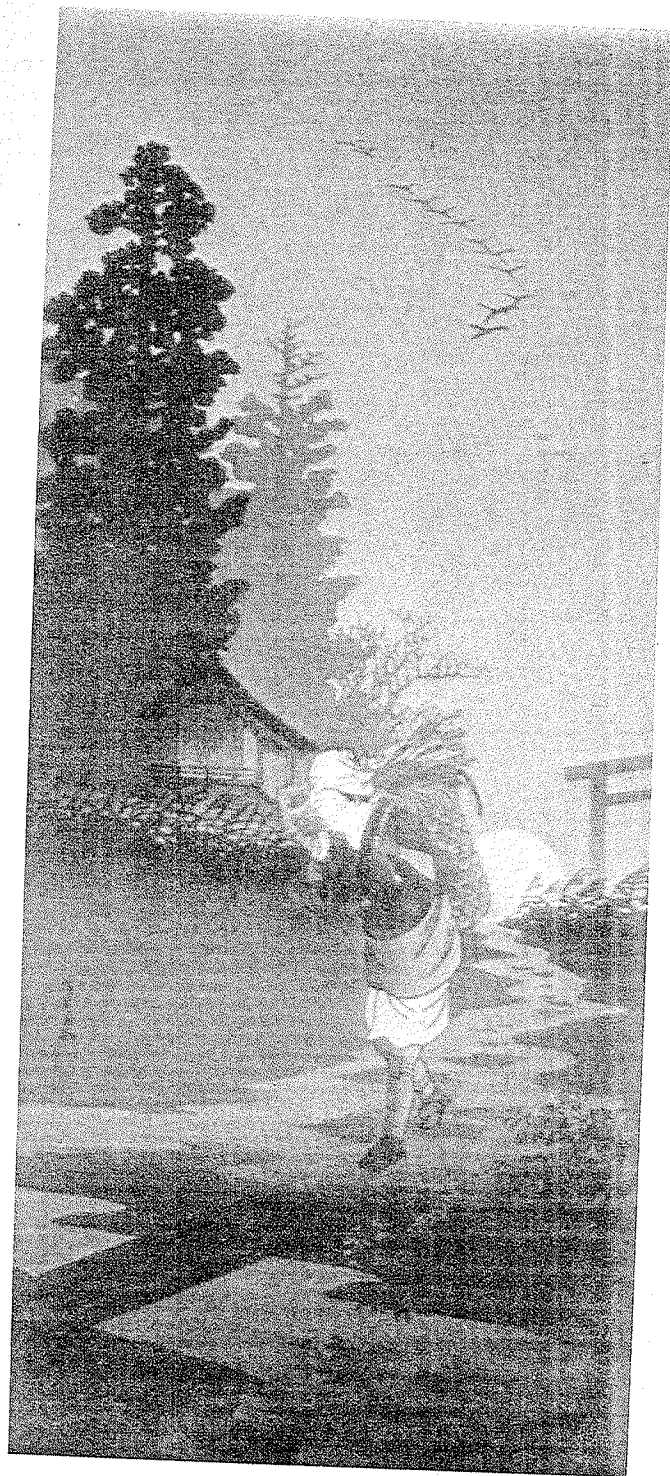




Under the Shadow of Nationalism  
*Politics and Poetics of Rural Japanese Women*

Mariko Asano Tamanoi



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I also see a clear rupture between the "old" and "new" women's groups, for the latter were created exclusively by local women. Furthermore, these "new" groups, which are still community based, are open to any woman. The voices I heard are the voices of the women who are the members of these new groups. The following chapter marks the beginning of my endeavor to listen to the voices of Nagano rural women remembering the days when they were very young and yet already working for the nation.

## Chapter 3

*Komori*

"*komori*" is a generic term that consists of a noun, "*ko*" (child), and a verb, "*moru*" (to protect or to take care of); Japanese use it to refer to any person, male or female, old or young, who takes care of children. In this chapter, however, I focus on the young girls, hired by families in need of child care in the Nagano countryside in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who were called *komori*.

In his *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), Philippe Ariès explains that "the idea of childhood," that is, an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, did not exist in Europe until the seventeenth century, when the "coddling" of children was criticized by moralists and pedagogues; and childhood, which had thus been isolated, was further "prolonged," primarily through the school system. But Ariès notes that, for the working class and for girls, "brief childhood" remained the norm until much later than for the upper and middle classes and for boys. The children of the working class, and particularly girls, were supposed to work just like their parents instead of enjoying their "childhood." This was indeed the case in the Nagano countryside in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the children of farmers, particularly girls, were expected to behave like adults in terms of their *bataraki* (see also Miyamoto 1969, 39).

At a group meeting in the village of Kanae, Chieko, looking back on her childhood in the 1930s, said:

Even though I was then perhaps ten or eleven years old, I worked just like my mother. Silkworms needed our attention for twenty-four hours, so that I too was involved [in the task of taking care of silkworms]. I always ran to school, because I had to work until the last moment before school began. But my parents told me I should be thankful for being able at least to attend school. Many *komori* in my village could not go to school.

Indeed, *komori* was the work available for the rural women in Nagano when they themselves could be described as "children."

Wiswell, describing the everyday life of *komori* in the village of Suye in the 1930s, writes:

[In the summer] children are very active in the *dō* [village shrine compound]. The nursemaids devise all sorts of means to keep their charges out of the way of their games. They tie them to the posts in a sitting or standing positions, like horses, persuading them that it will be fun to be tied up. They play blind-man's bluff or will get a sash and try to catch someone and tie her up, provoking much laughter. The smaller babies carried on the back merely ran the chance of being knocked down, but the older ones in the *dō* are often left to their own devices. If all else fails they put them on their backs and go on with their own games. (Smith and Wiswell 1982, 234)

Like their European counterparts, nursemaids and nannies, *komori* began to appear in the discourse of nationalism in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Their appearance corresponded to the emergence of a subculture among *komori* that is the focus of my analysis in this chapter.

In contrast to the practice of hiring *uba* (wet nurses), which was seen mostly among the elite families in urban areas,<sup>2</sup> *komori* were confined largely to villages and small towns.<sup>3</sup> Unlike European nursemaids and nannies, *komori* were not status symbols but, rather, an economic necessity for the employers, whose own labors left them no time to devote to child rearing. Furthermore, *komori* were not sheltered in the homes of their employers; forming small groups, they spent most of their days with their charges in "public" places such as shrine compounds, playgrounds, river banks, or simply the streets. They had to stay in such places so their employers, who were busy working, would not be bothered. Even when it rained, they often could not stay at home (Miyamoto 1984, 185). Although the majority of *komori* were indentured to their employers for a certain number of years, girls who took care of their own siblings or their neighbors' children at the request of their parents were also called *komori*. All *komori* shared one essential characteristic: they were daughters of poor families (see Figure 1).

In postwar Japan, *komori* have disappeared from the countryside, which is itself rapidly disappearing.<sup>4</sup> But *komori* are still remembered in songs and pictures with a keen sense of nostalgia, and many who grew up in Japan in the 1950s or 1960s recall seeing little wooden figurines (*kokesbi*) of *komori* or drawings of *komori* in school textbooks; she almost always carries her charge on her back, wears a



FIGURE ONE. Photograph of a group of *komori* by French journalist Felicien Challaye, published in his *Le Japon illustré* (1915, 55).

colorful jacket that covers them both, and holds in her hand a balloon or a pinwheel to soothe the baby. Furthermore, those still remembering their days on the back of *komori*, who are somehow almost always men, tend to idolize *komori* and see in them an idealized version of maternal love. For example, the internationally known Japanese writer Dazai Osamu, who was born into an affluent landowning family in Tsugaru (Aomori prefecture) as the sixth son and tenth child, had a *komori* named Také. He writes the following about her when he visits his birthplace: "Také was someone whom I

particularly wanted to meet during this trip to Tsugaru. I think of her as my own mother. It was close to thirty years since I last saw her, but I had not forgotten her face. I might even say that it is because of her that my life has any direction at all" (1987, 152–153; translated by Westerhoven). Dazai was brought up by his aunt Kie, as his own mother was "sickly and worn out with child-bearing." Také went into service as Kie's personal servant and stayed with Dazai for five years beginning when he was three. For her part, Také said that she "had always assumed that Shūji [Dazai] was her mistress' child and thus had taken such special care of him" (Westerhoven 1987, xvi). Although she was only thirteen, Dazai writes, "yet the Také I remember is not a young girl at all, but a mature person in no way different from the Také I now see before me" (1987, 168; translated by Westerhoven).

Také was given an opportunity to speak in Westerhoven's introduction to Dazai's *Tsugaru* because of her relation to an internationally known writer.<sup>5</sup> But Také was a very rare exception. *Komori* are almost always rendered "voiceless" in their representations, the quintessential example of a group without a history who never represented their own pasts, emotions, and presence (cf. Said 1979, 6). I will show, through ethnographic reconstruction of the everyday life of the *komori* in Nagano, that *komori* represented their culture and history in terms very different from the representations of them in postwar nostalgia.

The everyday lives of *komori*, however, were powerfully shaped by the historical development of the nation-state of Japan, especially the state's broad effort to incorporate the masses into a newly articulated "civilized" and "enlightened" Japanese citizenship. *Komori* became one of the objects to be, first described, then examined, and finally reformed to make Japan a respectable nation in the international community. *Komori* were by no means the only group of individuals to become the object of such description, examination, and reformation. Almost every commoner, male or female, was expected to be civilized and enlightened as a new Japanese citizen. However, the state was particularly concerned with the "evil customs of the past" among farmers, who still comprised more than 70 percent of the nation's population in the late nineteenth century. For example, the habits of rural young men who, in the words of official decrees, "acted in groups, made merry, argued with each other, and drank and ate in public," thus "damaging local customs and mores," became the state's target for reformation.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, local people were

expected to get rid of publicly displayed phallic images, abandon the custom of mixed bathing, and wear shoes instead of walking on bare feet (see R. Smith 1983, 77). But as *komori* were one of the most marginalized groups because of their class, gender, location of work, and age, the discourse of nationalism relied on the most radical rhetoric to incorporate them as Japanese citizens.

As I will show later, *komori* did hear and manage to read what was spoken and written about them; they were frustrated by how others represented their lives and often attempted to resist these descriptions. Such resistance, however, did not lead to widespread protest, nor did it bring about any profound change in their situation. Rather, the *komori*'s resistance should be understood as part of everyday practices in which they tried to communicate their conscious rejection of the representation of their culture in the state's discourse on elementary education. Such practices may have served not only "to give shape to resistance" but also "to consolidate existing hegemonies" (Comaroff 1985, 6; see also Willis 1977). Thus, *komori* were further despised by society as marginalized subjects. What were these practices? They were to create songs, to express their thoughts and emotions in the verses of those songs, and to sing them in public.

Folklorist Akamatsu Keisuke argues that there are two distinct kinds of *komori* songs: the first is a lullaby or a cradle song, and the second expresses the emotions as well as the living and working environments of *komori* themselves (1993, 99).<sup>7</sup> Like Akamatsu, I am interested in this second group of *komori* songs. Akamatsu introduces us to the following song, which he heard in the Ise region of western Japan in the early twentieth century:

*The job of komori is to sing.  
We walk from the west to the east  
(carrying our charges),  
always singing.*

*You think we are noisy,  
but unless we sing,  
the day never ends. (1993, 105)*

Scholars have widely reported on songs as weapons of resistance among the illiterate and the powerless, such as antebellum slaves, low castes, peasants, racial and ethnic minority groups, and women. But until social historians began to pay attention to them, songs were

treated as historical sources secondary to written documents. This is because songs are oral and, "in 'the West,' . . . literacy has enormous prestige even when people are not skilled in its uses, and oral skills can be devalued" (Tonkin 1992, 14). Furthermore, singing is performing; each act of singing is a unique performance. An irony here is that oral performances such as singing songs must be written down if they are to be analyzed and preserved (ibid.). Hence, orality and literacy are often hard to discern.

I was interested in the meaning of the verses of ballads sung by *komori*. I therefore tried to collect *komori*'s songs myself. Often, however, those who had once worked as *komori* no longer remembered them or could recall only a portion of each song. Furthermore, the *komori* of the 1930s, unlike the *komori* of the late nineteenth century, were exposed to various other songs through mass media. Thus, I read the verses of the songs collected, written, and analyzed by scholars, the orality of which has been completely removed. As for the contexts of the singing as performance, I can only rely on the memories of former *komori* or on ethnographies about them: they sang in public places so that passersby could hear them. They also sang in company with other *komori*. Songs thus provide me with a weapon to explore the thoughts and emotions of *komori* in rural Nagano. (Note that the state and powerful individuals could also create songs and use them as weapons to disseminate their own dominant ideologies among the illiterate and the powerless; see Chapter 4, page 94.)

Until I began my field research in Nagano, I was unaware that *komori* as "work" had existed in the history of modern Japan. My understanding of the term was purely at the level of its etymology, that is, "to take care of children." When the women of various groups presented it as a kind of work, I understood that the work of *komori* marked the beginning of their consciousness as "working" women (see also Akamatsu 1993, 87, 119). Takayama Sumiko (hereafter Sumiko) told me of her mistress who "kicked her feet every morning at four o'clock to wake her up." She then had to carry her charge on her back and hold the hand of a three-year-old toddler all day long except when she was at school. Her "mistress was always waiting for her impatiently outside her house with her two kids" when she came home from school.<sup>8</sup> Her mistress had to work "until midnight everyday," but so did Sumiko, even though she was then a fourth grader at the elementary school.

## WHO WERE THE *KOMORI*?

It is unclear when widespread employment of *komori* started and when *komori* began to appear in public places. Matsunaga Goichi says that *komori* first appeared on the public scene in the mid-nineteenth century. There is evidence of *komori* in the Tokugawa period (Matsunaga 1964, 111; Uno 1987; Akamatsu 1993, chap. 3; Note-helper, personal communication; Walthall, personal communication), but the identification of full-time child care with young female employees seems to be a later development. Kathleen Uno argues that, in the Tokugawa period, elite families depended on a variety of hired child-care givers such as wet nurses, domestic servants, and *komori*, whereas ordinary families could not afford them and instead had "any" family member of either sex take care of infants and toddlers in turn (1987, 1991). If allowed to speculate boldly, I would say that the custom of hiring caregivers spread from the elite to ordinary families during the Meiji period, while elite families gradually absorbed the idea of the mother as the sole caregiver. The fact that, in the very beginning of the Meiji period, boys also worked as indentured *komori* and that their numbers dropped off sharply in the same period could be understood as a legacy of the pre-Meiji custom.<sup>9</sup> But as the disappearance of boy *komori* seems to have much to do with the emerging notion of "manliness" in Meiji Japan,<sup>10</sup> the appearance of a greater number of girl *komori* would be related to the emerging notion of "womanliness." In this sense, *komori* is sui generis a Meiji phenomenon, a phenomenon that emerged along with the emerging nation-state of Japan.

Tables 2 and 3 are lists of *komori* who attended special educational programs, which I will discuss shortly, in the town of Nagano in 1907 and 1941. Data for both years indicate that the employers and parents of *komori* were engaged in a variety of small family enterprises or combined several different income sources. Table 4 is a list of *komori* who worked in several villages in the southern part of Nagano and were enrolled in similar educational programs in the early twentieth century. The employers and parents of these *komori* were engaged not only in farming, the production of rice and other cash crops, but also in sericulture and various kinds of household employment. Together, these tables suggest that, in the families that depended on the labor of *komori*, everybody, except for the babies and toddlers who had to be taken care of by *komori*, worked.

TABLE 2

## EXAMPLES OF KOMORI WORKING IN THE TOWN OF NAGANO, 1907

| Komori's Identification Number | Year of Birth | Year Entered Education Program <sup>a</sup> | Status <sup>b</sup> | Father's Occupation and His Spouse's Occupation, if Different |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                              | 1897          | 1906                                        | Employed            | Owner of canning business                                     |
| 2                              | 1893          | 1907                                        | Employed            | Owner of restaurant                                           |
| 3                              | 1895          | 1907                                        | Employed            | Merchant                                                      |
| 4                              | 1895          | 1907                                        | Not employed        | Rickshaw man; cart-pusher (spouse) <sup>c</sup>               |
| 5                              | 1895          | 1907                                        | Not employed        | Manual laborer; dressmaker (spouse)                           |
| 6                              | 1897          | 1907                                        | Not employed        | Bricklayer (summer job); rickshaw man (winter job)            |

Source: *Katei bōmon roku: Komori Ji-ai no kumi* (Records of a teacher's visits to the families of *komori* and their employers: The Ji-ai class for *komori*; 1907). My special thanks go to Mr. Takeshima Yoshishige, the principal of Gochō Primary School, Nagano, at the time of my fieldwork in 1988, who kindly let me copy the records used in tables 2 and 3.

<sup>a</sup> The year a *komori* entered the special education program roughly indicates when she began to work as a nursemaid. Special classes were established for *komori* at the Gochō Primary School in the town of Nagano.

<sup>b</sup> "Employed" means the *komori* had a master; "Not employed" means she took care of her own siblings and/or her neighbors' children.

<sup>c</sup> Cart-pusher (*kuruma-oshi* or *tachinbō*) refers to men and women who waited for a client's cart to arrive at the bottom of the hill, pushed the cart from behind, and were given a little money by the cart driver for their help (see also Yokoyama 1949, 39).

This explains why *komori* spent most of their days in public places. The presence of the *komori* and her charge at home was not welcomed by family members who worked hard in the fields or at home. The *komori*'s job was to let the adult members of the family work to make their living. McBride (1978) has argued that the employment of a nursemaid in Victorian and Edwardian England signified two contradictory feelings of the mother of the house: her callousness toward her children as well as her devotion to child rearing. This contradiction, experienced by many middle-class English

TABLE 3

## EXAMPLES OF KOMORI WORKING IN THE TOWN OF NAGANO, 1941

| Komori's Identification Number | Year of Birth | Year Entered Education Program | Status       | Father's Occupation          |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| 1                              | 1926          | 1939                           | Employed     | Innkeeper                    |
| 2                              | 1928          | 1941                           | Employed     | Wholesaler of fish           |
| 3                              | 1923          | 1934                           | Employed     | Manufacturer of roof tile    |
| 4                              | 1927          | 1939                           | Employed     | Owner of confectionery store |
| 5                              | 1925          | 1936                           | Not employed | Secondhand clothes merchant  |
| 6                              | 1924          | 1935                           | Not employed | (Unknown)                    |

Source: *Gakuseki-bo: Ji-ai no Kumi* (School records: The Ji-ai class) (Gochō Primary School, Nagano, 1941).

TABLE 4

## EXAMPLES OF KOMORI WORKING IN THE VILLAGES IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF NAGANO

| Komori's Identification Number | Year of Birth | Year Entered Education Program | Status       | Father's Occupation                       |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 1                              | 1895          | 1907                           | Not employed | Agriculture, sericulture, fruit vendor    |
| 2                              | 1896          | 1907                           | Not employed | Agriculture, sericulture, charcoal vendor |
| 3                              | 1896          | 1907                           | Not employed | Agriculture, sericulture                  |
| 4                              | 1924          | 1934                           | Employed     | Agriculture, papermaking                  |
| 5                              | 1925          | 1931                           | Employed     | Agriculture, sericulture                  |

Sources: Katari-tsugu Ina no Onna Henshu Iinkai, *Katari-tsugu Ina no onna* (The Women in the Ina Valley who impart their memories to subsequent generations; 1983); Masuda Sayo, "Geisha," in Y. Usui, ed., *Gendai kyōyō zenshū* (1957); and Takayama Sumiko, *Nono-san ni narundayo* (You will become a little buddha; 1987).

The juxtaposition of this table and tables 2 and 3 may give the reader the impression that there were more *komori* working in towns than in villages, but this was not the case. Although an almost equal number of special classes for *komori* were established in the towns and villages in Nagano, the school records seem to have been better preserved in the towns.

women, seems not to have been a problem in rural Nagano, because the housewives who depended on the help of *komori* had very little time to devote to child rearing. This also means that, upon entering service, *komori* hardly found "their personal horizons widened," as their English counterparts did, by an exposure to the very different lifestyle of the middle class (McBride 1978, 55).

Indentured *komori* worked for three, five, or even ten years. A *komori* either moved from one house to another, as she was successively hired by several families, or took care of the younger siblings of her first charge.<sup>11</sup> It is unclear for how long a *komori* carried her charge on her back. I was often told in Nagano that *komori* carried "very grown-up" (*zuibun ôkina*) toddlers on their backs. Oki Kiyoshige, a teacher in the town of Ueda, wrote that some *komori* attended school carrying even four- or five-year-old charges on their backs. These charges naturally "did not want to be on their *komori*'s back but wanted to play by themselves" (1893, quoted in Kôzu 1974, 128).<sup>12</sup> In the mid-Meiji period, kindergartens were mostly for the children of upper-class families, however (Uno 1987). They were usually attached to women's normal schools. Oki further wrote: "I therefore asked a teacher to gather them [those older toddlers] in one room and take care of them. I must say this is a kindergarten created out of the necessity [to educate *komori*] and not a luxurious institution" (1893, quoted in Kôzu 1974, 128). In this quote, Oki tries to justify the creation of a kindergarten that is not for upper-class children. As Wiswell has described, *komori* with older charges must have invented ways to free their hands so that they could study and play.

The contracts for *komori*'s services were usually oral agreements through the employers' relatives or friends, and the employers paid the parents of *komori* in either money or rice at the beginning of the contract period. The families who sent their daughters out to work as *komori* found in this practice a way to lessen the number of mouths to feed (*kuchi berashi*), but hardly opportunities for the girls. While employed, *komori* received room and board, and occasionally small gifts such as a kimono, an apron, or wooden clogs, but usually no wages. Only when *komori* were considered to be old enough were they expected to receive wages, in exchange for cleaning the house, cooking, and doing other housework. Older *komori* who received wages could thus be considered domestic servants.

Sumiko began to work as a *komori* in 1933 at age ten for the family of her father's cousin. According to *kimegoto* (oral agreement) between him and her parents, Sumiko could have free room and

board, attend the elementary school for three years, and receive two *tan* of silk after she completed her service.<sup>13</sup> However, she had to quit in the middle of her service owing to illness, which she now believes was caused by "lack of sleep." She received only one *tan* of silk instead of two.

*Komori* began child-care work at a relatively young age, much younger than their counterparts in England (McBride 1978, 49). Tables 2 through 4 suggest that a *komori* could begin service as early as the age of nine. But it is quite possible that these *komori* began child-care work long before they entered special education programs. Masuda Sayo (hereafter Sayo), who worked as a *komori* in the town of Shiojiri in the 1920s, wrote in her autobiography that she began her work as a *komori* at five years of age (1959, 138). Since she was born out of wedlock, Sayo was raised by her uncle and sent out to work as a *komori* for the family of a large landowner. Until she was sold as a *geisha* at the age of twelve, she worked from five in the morning until very late in the evening. Since she was not even given a pair of socks during the cold winter, she had to stand on one leg (with her charge on her back) "in order to warm the other leg." The children in her neighborhood thus began to call her Tsuru (meaning "crane"). Since Sayo did not even know her name, she became convinced that it was Tsuru (p. 139).

Where did the *komori* come from? We must consider two different kinds of movements between socioeconomic classes and between geographical areas. Tables 2 through 4 suggest that the *komori* who worked for their own parents were born into the lower-class families of rickshaw men, cart-pushers, manual laborers, dress-makers, bricklayers, secondhand clothes merchants, and, most probably, landless or small-scale owner-tenant farmers. The indentured *komori* working for masters also came from this specific stratum of society, and some of them had endured a miserable childhood before becoming a *komori*. For example, the housewife employing *komori* number 3 in Table 2 is reported to have told her teacher: "My friend asked me to hire this girl as our *komori*. According to my friend, her parents had already died and she has only one brother, whom her father had with his mistress. When she was brought in here, she indeed looked like a beggar's daughter, so I gave her my children's old clothes that I had washed."<sup>14</sup>

Regions that were economically depressed tended to send out a large number of *komori* to more prosperous regions. Many girls were sent to Nagano from the neighboring regions of Niigata, Gifu, and

Toyama. But the majority of *komori* seem to have worked in their own or neighboring communities, or oscillated between their home villages and small towns within Nagano according to changes in economic cycles. Such a cyclic flow of *komori* is difficult to document, but historian Kōzu Zenzaburō reports that the number of *komori* coming into the town of Nagano from neighboring villages increased substantially when the market price of silk thread fell (1974, 177; see also Aoki 1987, 85–86). In this sense, *komori* were the products of economic hardship.

The increasing number of new middle-class families of bureaucrats, journalists, educators, managers, technicians, and other white-collar workers did not depend on the labor of *komori*: to the contrary, they despised the practice of employing them. *Jogaku zasshi*, the women's magazine that increasingly attracted the readership of the women in this emerging middle class, said the following in an 1887 editorial:

The majority of indentured *komori* were born into poor families and are totally illiterate. We often cannot tell whether they are boys or girls, as they often resort to violence. When they are sent into the street carrying their charges, they do not care a bit about the babies. When they cry, *komori* shake them ruthlessly. If they do not stop crying, *komori* pinch them on their buttocks or put sweets stolen from the store in their mouths.<sup>15</sup>

This editorial is the third in a series of essays published in the same year about the responsibility of the “mother” and the “wet nurse.” In his first and second essays, the author links the tasks of the mother and the wet nurse to the formation of the nation-state. The mother must be an educated and scientifically minded woman to raise children of and for Japan. Because of new economic conditions that permitted upper- and middle-class women to devote greater time to child rearing, they gradually accepted a mother-centered approach to child care. Uno argues: “The new conception of motherhood diffused slowly, gaining acceptance mainly among upper- and middle-class circles, in which conditions of life permitted women to devote greater time and energy to child-rearing” (1987, 183). In order to carry on a social life, upper-class women found the wet nurse to be a necessary evil. The author, however, discourages readers from hiring wet nurses, for some of them behave like *komori*. *Komori*, then, are deemed completely inappropriate to raise children of and for Japan. The author believes that they have no redeeming value, for they do

not know how to raise children properly. People cannot even tell the gender of a *komori* because of her crude language and violent behavior; the author, in the third essay of the series, thus “sincerely hopes that *komori* will cease to exist in our society” (p. 123). Clearly, the author judges the *komori* not as an adolescent girl who needs to be educated, but as a surrogate mother.

Middle-class families of older types, merchants, craftsmen, and large-scale farmers, seem to have favored continued reliance on hired child-care givers. But they seem gradually to have shifted their preference to somewhat older women who could take care of children as well as tend to other domestic chores. If they had to rely on *komori*, they felt they had to justify the practice by trying to reform her language and behavior. The master of *komori* number 1 in Table 2 had a fairly large canning business, and his wife “seemed to have a certain education.”<sup>16</sup> She was reported to have said the following to her *komori*'s teacher: “I hired this *komori* last September, but I really could not put up with her bad manners and language, and thought I should not let her take care of my children. This is why I sent her to school in October, and her manners and language have improved greatly since then.”<sup>17</sup> The special education program for *komori* must be understood in this context. The old middle-class and working-class families in the Japanese countryside still needed the help of *komori*. But a *komori* now had to approximate the figure of the upper- and middle-class educated mother.

## THE NATIONALIST DISCOURSE ON KOMORI

A variety of documents concerning the elementary education issued by the central and local governments in the early Meiji period do not single out *komori*, but include them among the “children of impoverished families.” The term for “children” (*shitei* or *shijo*) is a gender-neutral category that included both boys and girls. For example, the Nagano prefectural government issued a document in 1877 titled “How to Persuade the Children of Impoverished Families to Attend School,” that included in the category “children of impoverished families” those who worked “as apprentices in merchants' houses and craftsmen's shops, day laborers, and indentured servants such as *komori*” (quoted in Kōzu 1974, 16). One of the most important goals of the Meiji state was to make these children into “Japanese” citizens and into sources of productive labor and military power.

As Foucault has suggested in regard to Europe, the quantitative and qualitative control of the human population were essential to the construction of the modern nation-state of Japan (1980). Quantitatively, the goal was to increase the population. The state prohibited all forms of abortion: medicinal, self-induced, and through the aid of an unlicensed midwife (Mitsuda 1985, 103). The Meiji state also introduced a new set of hygienic practices and public health measures at the local level to improve both maternal and children's health. Qualitatively, the state was determined to educate its population and to establish the institution of compulsory education.<sup>18</sup> Thus the Fundamental Code of Education issued in 1872 urged that "every person (*ippan no hitobito*) should pursue learning" and stated specifically that "there should be no gender difference (*danjo no betsu naku*) in receiving education" (Monbushō Kyōiku-shi Hensan-kai 1938, 277).

In order to support the state's new goal to establish compulsory education, the Nagano local newspapers published numerous "fine episodes" (*bidan*) of "poor" peasant women who nevertheless understood the importance of education. For example, *Gekkei shinsbi* published the following story in 1879: "A clever woman as is rarely found in this world: Iwabuchi Jitsu in the village of Nakagawa in Chikuma County became a widow eight years ago at the age of thirty-two. Living in poverty, she took great care of her three children and sent all of them to school. The eldest particularly was absent from school only one day last year."<sup>19</sup> In another story published in *Shinpi shinbun*, a woman surnamed Takahashi, upon attending a local school lecture, realized, "for the first time in her life," the importance of learning and bought books for her children.<sup>20</sup>

Jitsu and Takahashi represented "new" women. In order to demonstrate this, I will cite another "fine episode," about a woman named Katsu from a certain village in Nagano in the eighteenth century.

Katsu's family was very poor. She often found no rice to cook at home. Her mother-in-law had been sick for the past twelve years. Whenever Katsu obtained something good to eat, she offered it to her mother-in-law, while the rest of her family ate "wretched stuff" (*asamashiki mono*) to kill their hunger. In the hot summer, Katsu changed the bedding of her mother-in-law everyday. In the cold winter, she warmed her mother-in-law's bed with her own body, leaving her little children by themselves. In the year of a famine in 1786, she pawned one of the only two kimono she had to buy rice

and rice cakes, which she offered to her mother-in-law. The regional lord, upon hearing Katsu's story, gave her rice and money in 1790.<sup>21</sup> (quoted in Morosawa 1969a, 167)

Katsu conformed to the dominant Confucian ideology of her time, in which a woman's chief duty is to honor her parents-in-law (see Kaibara 1906, 37). To the contrary, Jitsu and Takahashi dedicated their lives to their own children; and, to that end, they tried to educate themselves. Their stories represent a radical transformation of the Confucian discourse on women.

However, despite the massive efforts of the central and local governments to enforce compulsory education among farmers, craftsmen, and merchants and particularly among the poor, school attendance rates remained low overall, and substantially lower among girls, until the turn of the century. For example, in the school district composed of three villages in southern Nagano, an 1883 report stated that 111 children were unable to attend school because of poverty. Among the ninety-six girls, fifty-six worked as *komori* (Kōzu 1974, 41). In view of such a gender discrepancy, the official explanations for the poor record of school attendance became increasingly "genderized," and among the children of impoverished families, girls gradually became the marked category. An editor for a local newspaper commented in 1883: "Because many parents do not believe in the necessity of education for girls, they must work as *komori* or at silk filatures. These are the primary reasons for the poor school attendance record for girls."<sup>22</sup> In this passage, three conditions that had hitherto been only loosely associated were conjoined: being female, being poor, and working as *komori*.

By the late 1880s, the idea that *komori* were daughters of impoverished families who were unable to attend school and therefore ignorant seems to have been firmly established among the new middle-class people. In order to more clearly define themselves as a separate class, the emerging middle class in Nagano scorned both *komori* and their employers. They thus shared the opinion expressed by the editor of *Jogaku zasshi*, who sincerely hoped that *komori* would cease to exist in Japan. Typical of these attitudes are sentiments expressed by a local journalist in 1898: "Whenever I see a group of *komori* wandering about the streets and making noises, I feel sick and nauseous. . . . We must be ashamed of our town because there are *komori*."<sup>23</sup> Schoolteacher Maki Yoshitarō in the town of Yashiro wrote: "*Komori* have nothing to do except to soothe the charges on

their backs so that they will not cry. They sing vulgar songs, damage carts and horses, and make fun of people passing by them. One cannot even mention their behavior, which is too crude, nor their language, which is too rude" (1893, 30). Perhaps, as Challaye's photograph shows (see Figure 1), small groups of *komori* who sang "vulgar songs," engaged in "rowdy behavior," and shouted crude words to each other and to passersby roamed the streets and gathered in open public spaces. For the middle class, the speech and behavior of *komori*, particularly when they were in groups, became intolerable.

Another journalist for a local newspaper concocted the idea that the sexuality of *komori* was outside the control of their parents, masters, and mistresses and that *komori* were therefore by nature promiscuous. Thus, in explaining the causes of venereal diseases among military conscripts in Nagano, he commented: "Entertainers and prostitutes, female servants and *komori*, female factory workers, and widows are all responsible for these diseases."<sup>24</sup> Another newspaper article reported the illegal abortion of a seventeen-year-old *komori*: she worked for a certain master and had had an affair with him for the past five years.<sup>25</sup> Another article reported that an eighteen-year-old *komori* had an illegitimate affair with a young man in the village.<sup>26</sup>

Except for the older *komori* mentioned in the last two newspaper articles (who were exceptions to the general rule in terms of age), the majority of *komori* were elementary-school-age girls. Despite their young age, however, their mature sexuality is cited as a threat to society. In Dazai's description of his *komori*, he recalls that Také was only thirteen and yet the Také he remembered was not a young girl but a mature woman. We must take into account the time gap between "then," when Dazai was taken care of by Také, and "now," when Dazai was remembering the past. References by the middle class to *komori*'s sexuality, then, are less actual descriptions of *komori* than projections of the future for *komori*. They believed *komori* would become sexually promiscuous entertainers, factory workers, domestic servants, or even prostitutes. What made them believe so, I think, are the words of *komori*'s songs, which I will describe later in detail.

A variety of government documents published toward the end of the nineteenth century began to single out *komori* not so much as subjects of education, but as objects to be scrutinized and reformed, emphasizing the rudeness of their behavior and the crudeness of their language. A notable result was the establishment of special classes at a number of local schools in Nagano so that *komori* could attend school at the same time they tended their charges. The Meiji

educational authorities used the carrot and the stick to enforce compulsory education when it was not yet tuition-free (Nagai 1976; see also Tsurumi 1984a, 276–277). The creation of such special classes was the result of a compromise among several institutions and groups of people: the state, which saw the need for increasing school attendance rates; the local government, which saw the same need and yet was aware of local conditions; and the parents and employers of *komori*, some of whom increasingly wanted the language and behavior of *komori* reformed. Kōzu (1974) reports that the officials of several other prefectural governments traveled to Nagano to learn about special educational programs for *komori* with the intent to establish similar programs in their own prefectures. There was, however, yet another group of people who endorsed the idea of special education for *komori*: the school teachers who began to worry about the possible effects of the behavior and language of *komori* on regular school children and sought to separate the *komori* from the latter (Maki 1893, 34).<sup>27</sup>

But how "rowdy" was their behavior and how "vulgar" was their language? To answer this question, we can listen to the discourse produced by *komori*'s teachers, which not only emphasizes the need to reform their language and behavior but also reveals some facets of *komori*'s everyday lives. For example, Oki wrote in his personal diary in 1893: "*Kono ama, kono yarō, gaki, chikushō yarō, teme, una-a*, all these are second-person references. *Komori* do not consider them obscene words." *Komori* used such second-person references to express disdain for and possibly abuse others. Oki wrote that "*komori* belong to the lowest rank of society and their language is indeed unmentionable" and that "it is horrible to think that their language would eventually become their charges' language." Many other school teachers and local journalists also characterized the songs of *komori* as crude, as they were riddled with what these intellectuals thought to be immoral criticisms of *komori*'s masters and neighbors, as well as allusive references to body parts and sexual intercourse. Thus, by the 1890s, the primary goal of education for *komori* became, as one local journalist put it, to "sanitize (*issen suru*)" their rude behavior and obscene language.<sup>28</sup>

I must introduce here the term *kagaku-teki ikuji-hō*, the "scientific method of child rearing," as this became the key notion used to incorporate *komori* as new citizens of Japan (Sawayama 1980). The "scientific method of child rearing" refers to a body of ostensibly "scientific" knowledge that a "good wife and wise mother" should have

in order to raise children appropriate for the modern nation-state. In other words, it refers to the knowledge of public health and hygienic practices. By the end of the nineteenth century, this “scientific method of child rearing” was incorporated into the discourse concerning the education of *komori*: as any “good wife and wise mother” should know the “scientific method of child rearing,” *komori* should know it as well. For example, the prospectus for a special class for *komori* established in the town of Yashiro in 1893 uses a horticultural metaphor to explain the role of *komori*: “*Komori* are gardeners who protect the buds of plants and help them to grow. If the gardeners do not master the art of gardening, they inhibit the budding of plants and suppress their growth. This is why we educate *komori* to reform their child-rearing practices.” This passage clearly downplays the right of *komori* to receive education. Instead, it emphasizes the right of their charges to be raised in the scientific manner. At the same time, this passage points out the role of *komori* in the construction of the Japanese nation. Trying to approximate the role of *komori* to that of *fujin* or mother, who should know the civilized and enlightened way to raise children, the state incorporated the “scientific method of child rearing” into the discourse of *komori*’s education. Thus, efforts to reform *komori*’s language and behavior through general education were increasingly subordinated to efforts at making them *fujin*. *Komori* came to be seen not as children, much less as school-age children, but as surrogate mothers.

Teaching manuals for the educators of *komori*, initially published at the turn of the century, emphasize the need to reform the child-rearing practices of *komori*. One manual published by a local teacher in 1898 advises *komori* not to give toys with small pieces or sticky food to their charges (Maki 1898, 16). Another manual, published by the Nagano prefectural educational committee in 1900, advises *komori* to wear white cotton hair bands so that their charges will not play with their “dirty” hair while on *komori*’s backs (Shinano Kyōiku-kai 1900). This same manual spells out everything *komori* should be careful not to do so as not to inhibit the proper physical and intellectual growth of the infants. Another teaching manual advises *komori* to learn the different kinds of infant cries to better interpret their charges’ needs and includes a long list of different cries for *komori* to remember (Nakamura 1900, 20–21). A manual published in 1903 explains the proper tying of the sash to counter the *komori*’s tendency to move around freely while carrying their charges on their backs (Nakamura 1903, 10; see Figure 2).



FIGURE TWO. Representation of *komori* in a hanging scroll used by teachers in Nagano to teach *komori* how to use a sash properly. Note that, in comparison to the *komori* in Figure 1, they are depicted as more motherlike figures and their class backgrounds are suppressed. (Circa 1900, original in color, courtesy of Shinano Kyōiku-kai, Kyōiku Hakubutsu-kan).

In these manuals, the desirability of educating *komori* is mentioned solely because of their potential to negatively influence their charges. *Komori* thus came to be seen, in the words of a local teacher, as “girls who, if not properly educated, may become ‘ignorant wives and unvirtuous mothers’ (*akusai mōbo*)” (Nakamura 1906, 21; emphasis added). In this phrase, the discourses of *komori* and *fujin* converge.

*Fujin*, as agents of morality, should be “good wives and wise mothers,” but *komori* could also be made into “good wives and wise mothers” through proper education. The proper education of *komori* was not a general education but rather instruction in the scientific method of child rearing. *Fujin* and *komori*, who were in reality quite different in terms of age, physical maturity, and socioeconomic status, were thus grouped together into “good wives and wise mothers.”

The last manual for teachers of *komori*, published in 1920, contains the following twelve chapters (Nagano-shi Jinjō Kōtō Shōgakkō 1920).

1. The role of *komori*
2. How to carry an infant on your back
3. How to feed your charge
4. How to assess your charge's health by examining excretions and discharges
5. How to handle your charge's clothes and diapers
6. How to interpret your charge's cries
7. How to hold your charge
8. How to put down and play with your charge
9. How to get your charge to play with other toddlers
10. How to teach your charge to walk
11. How to clean the body of your charge
12. How to choose appropriate toys for your charge

From the perspective of the state, *komori* had become “mothers,” or more specifically, “Japanese mothers.” But was this merely the stated ideology of the Japanese nation-state? Did *komori* themselves share this vision of all Japanese women as “good wives and wise mothers”?

## THE VOICES OF KOMORI

The women who once worked as *komori* in Nagano ranged in age from their fifties to their nineties in the 1980s. They were the most active members of the women's groups. But because these women were *komori* “a long time ago,” in their own words, their memories of everyday life during that time tended to be vague. One woman commented: “I began to work as a *komori* when, I think, I was thirteen. I worked for two years and learned the ABCs of child rearing.”

Although her narrative helped me to reconstruct the lives of *komori*, it merely exemplified personally decontextualized trends and generalized processes in these women's life courses.

The critical moment for my research on *komori* came at one of the group meetings when I mentioned the verses of a “counting song” (*kazoe uta*) I had found in a book published by a local historian.<sup>29</sup> The author writes that this song was created by one of the teachers for *komori* in the town of Matsumoto around the turn of the century (Kōzu 1974, 276–277). Indeed, teaching “proper and graceful songs” was an important part of the curriculum of special education for *komori* (Nakamura 1906, 28), since “vulgar and obscene songs” sung by *komori* seem to have greatly bothered the middle class, including the school teachers themselves (Maki 1899, 25). The following is one of those supposedly “proper and graceful” songs (Kōzu 1974, 276–277).

*One, childhood is the foundation of personhood; the role of komori is important.*

*Two, play carefully, don't choose dangerous play.*

*Three, you can play, but don't forget your charge on your back.*

*Four, copy good deeds, use polite language.*

*Five, always be cheerful; if you smile, your charge will smile.*

*Six, don't force your charge to wake up or to sleep.*

*Seven, whatever you do, do it for your charge; don't do anything your charge may not like.*

*Eight, a child will soon grow into an adult, treat your charge as an adult.*

*Nine, the role of komori is important; the komori acts in place of the mother to protect the child.*

*Ten, don't give any poisonous food or dangerous toys to your charge.*

This counting song indeed reflects the moral spirit of the manuals published for the educators of *komori*. Kōzu recorded this ballad in an interview with a former teacher of *komori*. She told Kōzu that she “could not sing this song without tears” of pity for the miserable childhoods of *komori*. Akamatsu, however, argues that songs of *komori* (*komori uta*) are always easy to sing, as *komori* themselves were children (1993, 73).<sup>30</sup> Did they really sing this lengthy and moralistic song?

The participants at one group meeting said they had never heard these verses. They also said, laughing, that it would have been impossible for *komori* to sing such a song. Their version, which they tried hard to recall, is as follows:

*One, we are all bullied.  
Two, we are all hated.  
Three, we are all forced to talk.  
Four, we are all scolded.  
Five, we are all forced to carry babies who cry a lot.  
Six, we are all fed terrible food.  
Seven, we are all forced to wash diapers in the cold  
water of the river.  
Eight, we are all impregnated and shed tears.  
Nine, we are all persuaded to leave, and finally,  
Ten, we all must leave.*<sup>31</sup>

While the teacher's version instructs *komori* how best to care for their charges, the women's version protests the cruel realities of their lives. None of the women I met in Nagano attended classes held specifically for *komori*. Some, like Sumiko, attended school, leaving their charges in the hands of mothers or other caregivers, while others went to school carrying their charges. Unlike those *komori* whose language and behavior were bitterly resented by the members of the new middle class, the women I met were already "reformed" *komori*. Even so, what had separated them from other children when they were *komori* was not only that they worked as caretakers of their charges, but that they always sang. In this particular meeting and in others that followed, songs, or more specifically, songs of *komori*, became a topic of lively discussion among the members of a variety of groups. The striking difference between the songs the former *komori* remembered and the one the former teacher remembered provided me with a starting point to begin my inquiry into *komori*'s daily lives.

The following ballad recorded by Matsunaga Goichi reveals the harsh realities of *komori*'s work.

*Komori's work is indeed cruel.  
I came to this town of Chaya,  
when I was seven or eight,  
to work as a komori.  
I find my mistress so mean.*

*She tells me to do this and that,  
all day long.  
I wish New Year would come sooner.  
When New Year comes,  
with my belongings and sandals in my hands,  
I will say,  
"Thank you my mistress for your kindness."  
she will say,  
"Do come back again,"  
but I will never ever return.—(1964, 119–120)*

It is unclear who composed the music and who created the verses of *komori*'s songs, although some songs seem to have originated in pre-Meiji peasant songs. In this sense, *komori*'s songs are "changing songs" (*kae-uta*), as *komori* attached words from their own lives to the melodies of existing folk songs.<sup>32</sup> Because there are usually several "changing songs" for the same melody, it appears that successive generations of *komori* transformed the lyrics to express their own thoughts and emotions. This is why the boundary between the songs of *komori* and other genres of song is often ambiguous. Akamatsu thus argues that there are numerous songs presented to him as *komori*'s songs whose ballads have nothing to do with the work of *komori* (1993, 98). It is interesting that when *komori* quit their jobs and began to work at silk spinning factories, they further changed the verses of their songs to reflect the thoughts and emotions of their entirely new situations at factories and dormitories (see Chapter 4, page 85; see also Akamatsu 1993, 74). Some of the songs apparently express the thoughts and emotions of indentured *komori*, though most of the former *komori* who attended the meetings in Nagano were not indentured. Note that those who were not indentured also expressed the sentiments of the indentured *komori*. Below I discuss songs collectively recalled by the women, along with songs recorded by local historians and folklorists.

First, there are many songs about food. Some describe the kinds of food *komori* were forbidden to eat, thereby expressing their desire for a better material life. There are also songs in which *komori* complain about the meals given to them by their masters.

*You call me komori, komori.  
You always give me pickled radish and rice  
with water.  
Why don't you sometimes give me fish?*

Second, there are songs describing the relationships of *komori* to their charges.

*This baby cries a lot.  
I want to exchange it for someone else's.  
What can we do with a naughty child?  
Let's put him on the drum  
and hit him with green bamboo sticks.  
—(Matsunaga 1964, 129)*

*Sleep, sleep, oh, please go to sleep.  
If you go to sleep,  
you are happy, and  
I am happy too.—(Akamatsu 1993, 81)*

*Sleep!  
Are you not sleeping, stupid baby?  
I do not want to be working as komori  
for this crying baby.  
Master, could you please give me some time off?  
I want to go home.—(Akamatsu 1993, 103)*

In the discourse of special education for *komori*, *komori* were expected to play the role of nurturing and patient mothers. But these songs suggest that *komori* were much less tolerant of crying babies and naughty children than the ideal mother promoted by the “good wife and wise mother” ideology.

Other songs describe the relationships between indentured *komori* and their masters and mistresses:

*I fear my mistress,  
much more than my master.  
She always watches me  
with her white and black eyes.  
—(Akamatsu 1993, 106)*

*Listen my master and mistress.  
If you treat me badly,  
I may have an evil influence on your kid.<sup>33</sup>*

Among employed *komori*, the quality of their relationships to their masters and mistresses was an important dimension of their everyday lives. In the above song, a *komori* confronts her abusive master and mistress.

Mocking the behavior and language of one's master and mistress was another common theme of *komori*'s songs, as is shown in the following:

*My mistress is so ill-mannered.  
She steps on the boiled-rice container to  
reach the shelf.*

It is uncertain whether *komori* could eat white boiled rice. Perhaps they could not and it was therefore precious food for them. In this song, a *komori* depicts a mistress who disregards such a valuable food. Sayo, whose autobiography I have introduced, records in detail her relationship with her master and mistress. She was tied to a tree when scolded; she was confined to a storage house when two *sen* of money disappeared from the house; and she was thrown into a barn when it was discovered that she had eaten fruit from her master's orchard (Masuda 1959, 138–141).

The vast majority of songs, however, express the emotional pain of the *komori*, who were often far away from their own homes.

*I want to go home.  
I want to see my house.  
I want to see my mother's face.  
Even if I cannot see her, I want to talk to somebody  
about my wretched life.*

This is a song about a *komori*'s homesickness. In this genre of songs, the desire to be loved and to love someone is an important theme. The *komori* wanted mutual affection from her parents (usually her mother). The *komori* also wanted to love and to be loved by someone else, usually a young village man. Such songs also express *komori*'s growing curiosity over their own sexuality.

*I stand under the eaves of someone's house  
when it rains,  
not because I find this baby precious,  
but because someone I love lives there.  
  
I am the daughter of a cotton-felt maker.  
If you think I am lying, sleep with me.*

The latter contains a typical example of a double entendre: in this case, “cotton felt” signifies “softness,” that is, the “softness of my body.”

Thus, the language of *komori* differs from the language of the state's elementary education in significant ways. First, the language of *komori* is oral. When the verses of *komori* songs are written down, a key feature has been unintentionally overshadowed: its oral tradition. Furthermore, the "changing song" is possible only because of the orality of *komori*'s songs. Thus, Akamatsu criticizes those scholars who have recorded only one version of each song and named it an "authentic version" (*seichō*). They are content with it simply because they recorded it.

Second, the language of *komori* is also in the local dialect. The fact that several different dialects are used in various versions of a single song suggests a significant movement of *komori* over a wide geographical area. I was told that certain words I could not recognize in the ballads were Echigo (now Niigata prefecture) dialect. Many *komori* were recruited from there to work in Nagano.

Third, although my translation of the songs may not convince the reader, the language of *komori*'s songs is quite crude, despite the efforts of teachers to reform their language. In the songs, *komori* rarely express "maternal" love for their charges and treat them as objects that often annoy them. They rarely express respect for their masters and mistresses, speaking ill of and caricaturing them. Furthermore, allusive and metaphorical references to body parts and sexual intercourse abound in the *komori*'s songs.

Fourth, and most important, the language of *komori* describes what the discourse of the state's elementary education totally ignores: the painful, mundane life of *komori* that is repeated every day from dawn to sunset and that, in its very repetition, generally hides but also occasionally reveals the *komori*'s physical and intellectual growth. *Komori*'s songs tell us when they wake up, what they do and where they go during the day, and when they go to sleep. They reveal *komori* engaged in a variety of activities, not only soothing their charges on their backs, but also walking, running, playing, speaking, eating, crying, and sleeping. They also reveal the moments of surprise, wonder, joy, and anxiety experienced by *komori* in the context of repeating all these activities day after day. In the *komori*'s vernacular, we see their physical, intellectual, and emotional growth. *Komori* thus gain their subjectivity or, using an anthropological term, become agents in their songs.

In the 1940s, folklorist Miyamoto Tsuneichi recorded the following narrative of an old man who as a boy played with *komori*, because he could not attend school owing to his family's poverty:

On rainy days, a small group of *komori* gathered together in a barn somewhere in the village. After the babies fell asleep, they put down their charges on a straw mat and played by themselves. Since there was nothing particular to play with, they jumped into the stack of straw, shouting and laughing, or opened the front of their kimonos to compare the size of their vulvas. (1984, 135)

In comparing the teacher's and the women's versions of the counting song above, we see that *komori* do not have their own subjectivities in the teacher's version. Instead, *komori*'s everyday lives are described entirely in terms of the ideology of the *fujin*, or "good wife and wise mother." In the *komori*'s version, however, *komori* appear with their own voices; the song describes *komori* as they submit their bodies to toil, eating very little. Or, middle-class journalists describe *komori* as promiscuous and emphasize the need to reform their morality. *Komori*, however, sing about their bodies, impregnated by their masters against their wishes.

Furthermore, the language of *komori* demonstrates sentiments of solidarity. Unlike European nursemaids, *komori* were almost always in company with other *komori* and not confined to their master's home. This fostered a sense of solidarity, through which *komori* could acknowledge among themselves their freedom to pursue their material and sexual desires. Of course, *komori* understood that they could pursue this freedom only in the language of songs and that such a freedom would not change the reality of their own lives. The verses of the following song recorded by Matsunaga seem to describe the *komori*'s sense of hopelessness toward changing their fates (1964, 186):

*I like singing songs,  
but I hate reciting sutras.  
When I die,  
let my body become a part of the fields and  
mountains.*

We can interpret the songs of *komori* in the manner in which James Scott interpreted the songs of poor peasants in the post-Green Revolution village of Sedaka in Malaysia. We might then argue that *komori*'s songs represent their "inward" or "ideological" resistance. Like Malaysian peasants, *komori* could not change their own fates "outwardly"; instead, they resisted the power of the rich "ideologically" even though they complied with it "symbolically." This is why, according to Scott, the poor did not resort to rebellions or revolutions but to what he calls "everyday forms of resistance," such as "foot

dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, figured ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth" (1985, 27). Here, Scott conceptualizes power as something that coerces the body and the mind separately: power may coerce the body without coercing the mind. Consequently, Scott understands resistance in terms of the same separation of the body from the mind; people may bodily comply with what powerful individuals tell them to do, but they may be resisting in their own minds. Scott's conceptualization of power and resistance marked a watershed in our anthropological understanding of those notions. In this respect, the language of *komori*'s songs may signify their "ideological" alienation from the values dictated in the nationalist discourse. In the verses of their songs, *komori* could express their feelings of bitterness and sorrow toward their own lives, mock the language and attitudes of their masters and mistresses, caricature the moral teachings they received in the name of special education for *komori*, protest the scornful eyes of their neighbors, and reject the norms of "good wives and wise mothers," all while affirming their identity as human beings with their own wills. Regarding songs of the oppressed, Scott also argues that the more bitter the song and the darker the humor, the more alienated are the singers from elite values. If that is the case, "we can no longer take outward deference at face value" (Scott 1976, 235).

However, the conceptualization of power as well as resistance in terms of the separation of the mind from the body neglects a very important aspect of the mechanism of power: power may work "through actually constructing a seemingly dualistic world" (Mitchell 1990, 547). In other words, Scott's conceptualization of power and resistance carries the risk of endlessly reproducing the dichotomies of body versus mind, actions versus values, consequences versus intentions, and outward conformity versus inward resistance.<sup>34</sup> *Komori* sang in the streets, on river banks, in playgrounds, and in shrine compounds. Many years later, they are attempting to recall in their group meetings what they used to sing. Do they distinguish actions from values or consequences from intentions? When we hear them sing about their own bodies, do we see cleavages between their bodies and their minds?

In this chapter, we have seen how *komori* were forced to become *fujin* or "good wives and wise mothers" in the discourse of the state's elementary education. The illustration of *komori* trying to learn the proper use of a sash indeed represents their motherlike, not childlike, bodily And yet, when *komori* sang about their everyday lives, they

retrieved their subjectivities from the middle-class discourse on their language and behavior. Power, inherent in such discourse, created the separation and therefore the dichotomy of body versus mind. Such a dichotomy is the consequence of power rather than the nature inherent in power. The songs of *komori* have taught me that the dichotomies of body versus mind and actions versus values are our creations as anthropologists. Without the effort on the part of these elderly women to participate in group meetings and to speak about their experiences with their own voices, the *komori*'s songs would have sunken into oblivion and the modern history of Japan would be without the voices of *komori*. If so, we would have had access only to the discourse produced by bureaucrats, journalists, education specialists, and intellectuals who, because of their power, have misrepresented without remorse the culture and history of the *komori*. I admit that the language of the *komori* heard in contemporary group meetings is decontextualized; these women singing their songs are no longer with their charges, oppressed by their masters and mistresses, or scorned by their middle-class neighbors. However, their efforts to speak in their own language cannot be understood without asking at the same time whose history History is.

19. On this issue of enlightenment scholars' refusal to endorse *danjo dōken*, see the following three articles translated into the English language: "Abuses of Equal Rights for Men and Women," by Katō Hiroyuki (1875, in Braisted 1976, 376–377); "Abuses of Equal Rights for Men and Women, Part II," by the same author (1875, in Braisted 1976, 377–379); and "Distinguishing the Equal Rights of Husbands and Wives," by Tsuda Mamichi (1875, in Braisted 1976, 435–436).

20. Despite this historical truism, few books and articles, particularly in English, have been published about rural women in modern Japan. Both Gail Lee Bernstein (1983, 1988) and Patricia E. Tsurumi (1984b, 1990) lament that rural women have been neglected in the American mainstream scholarship on Japanese history. However, the increasing number of feminist scholars have begun to shed new light on the culture and history of rural women in modern Japan. In addition to the works by Bernstein and Tsurumi, the following studies touch on the relationship of rural women and the development of Japanese capitalism: G. R. Saxonhouse, "Country Girls and Communication among Competitors in the Japanese Cotton-Spinning Industry" (1976, 97–125); Yasue Aoki Kidd, *Women Workers in the Japanese Cotton Mills, 1880–1920* (1978); Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan* (1982); Joyce Lebra, "Women in an All-Male Industry: The Case of Sake Brewer Tatsu'uma Kiyo" (1991, 131–148); Kathleen Uno, "Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor" (1991, 17–41); and Anne Walthall, "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan" (1991, 42–70). I may be unaware of many of the increasing number of publications on rural women in modern Japan in Japanese-language

sources, although I cite some of them in this book.

21. Cole and Tominaga argue that Japanese society was still basically agrarian up until 1920 and that "agriculture was perceived in terms of a livelihood (*nariwai*), that is, as life itself, rather than as an occupation in the modern sense with functionally specific roles containing a differentiated set of duties" (1976, 56). This is a rather nostalgic view of rural Japan in the early twentieth century. On the contrary, it was well integrated into the national economy, and its women constituted the major labor force for the textile industry.

22. The term "*ryōsai kenbo*" was coined by another enlightenment scholar, Nakamura Masanao. Despite the popular belief in the West as well as in Japan that the "good wife and wise mother" ideology is a reflection of premodern Confucianism, it is an amalgam of Confucianism and the nineteenth-century Western "cult of domesticity" (see Cherry 1987; Koyama 1986; Mackie 1988; Roberts 1994; Sievers 1983; R. Smith 1983).

23. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, January 20, 1903.

24. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, October 9, 1894.

25. Most of the documents, i.e., the prospectuses and the minutes of regular meetings, of various local groups of the Japan Women's Patriotic Association in Nagano have been compiled and published in *Nagano-ken-shi* (Nagano-ken-shi Kankō-kai 1987, 811–874).

26. For biographical information on Okumura Ioko, see Sievers (1983, 217, chap. 6, n. 1). Sievers describes her as a "Meiji period leader in women's social work . . . whose earliest political interests stemmed from her family's close connections to the *son'nō jōi* (revere the Emperor, throw out the barbarians) fac-

tion in late Tokugawa. Married and widowed, Ioko remarried in 1872 and then was divorced in 1887. At that point she began to devote much of her energy to Japan's interests in Korea and China. When Japanese troops were sent to North China during the Boxer Rebellion, she recognized that the wounded would need proper care and their families would require assistance, and with the backing of Konoe Atsumaro, president of the Upper House of the Diet, founded the Aikoku Fujinkai."

27. An editorial in a Nagano local newspaper, however, criticized the way members were recruited into the Patriotic Association, commenting that illiterate local women were forced to become members. See *Nanshin nichinichi shinbun*, October 13, 1907.

28. *Fujo shinbun*, March 11, 1901.

29. Even by the time of the Manchurian Incident in 1931, the Nagano branch of the Japan Women's Patriotic Association had slightly fewer than fifty thousand members (Aoki 1987, 253). The stagnation in the association's membership could later be contrasted with the swift increase in the membership of another patriotic organization, Dai-Nippon Kokubō Fujin-kai (Great Japan National Defense Women's Association). While its Nagano chapter had only 2,684 members at the time of its founding, the membership had grown to 260,935 by 1941. In the same year, the Nagano branch of the Japan Women's Patriotic Association had only 111,056 members (p. 266).

30. This means that the nature of the boundaries of the Japanese nation-state was also altered. In fact, even before the acquisition of Taiwan, Japan's boundaries as a nation-state were unclear. A case in point is the geographical location and the cultural position of

Okinawa. Though unified under a strong monarchy in the fifteenth century, the kingdom was controlled by the Shimazu clan during the Tokugawa period. Only nine years later, after the Meiji Restoration, was it incorporated into Japan as a prefecture. After Japan's surrender in World War II in 1945, Okinawa was ceded to the U.S. forces for indefinite occupation. It was finally reincorporated into Japan as Okinawa prefecture in 1972. Throughout modern Japanese history, however, its unique culture has made its position vis-à-vis *Yamaton-chū*—those who live on the main four islands of Japan—ambivalent (see Field 1991b, 33–104). See also Yoshimi Yoshiaki's (1987) chapter "Minzoku joretsu" or the "Order of Races," in which he argues that both Okinawans and Ainu were placed at the bottom of the racial hierarchy within Japan.

31. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, January 31, 1942.

32. This letter was sent by the head of the section on internal affairs of the Nagano prefectural government to all the mayors and school principals in Nagano on January 24, 1946 (quoted in Tsujimura 1966, 78).

### CHAPTER 3: KOMORI

1. For the culture and history of European (mainly English) nursemaids and nannies, see, for example, Gathorne-Hardy (1972); McBride (1976, 1978); Branca (1975); Robertson (1975); Gillis (1979); Higgs (1986); and Davidoff and Hall (1986).

2. For example, Fujin Eisei-kai, the Hygienic Organization for Women, which was founded in 1888 in Tokyo, organized a series of lectures by a prominent medical doctor about how to find "good" wet nurses for upper-class

women, who often had to attend social gatherings, leaving their children at home (Miyamoto 1888, 1889). Elite families often hired wet nurses during the Tokugawa period. Uno (1987) mentions Tokugawa child-rearing tracts that include sections on criteria for selecting wet nurses of good character.

3. Merchants' households in the city were exceptions. They needed the help of *komori*, many of whom were recruited from the countryside. Wakita Haruko, a scholar of Japanese medieval history, told me of her childhood memory of growing up as one of eight siblings in a wealthy merchant's household near Kōbe. Each of her siblings, including herself, had her or his own *komori* (Wakita, personal communication).

4. Akamatsu Keisuke argues that *komori* disappeared much earlier than 1945, in and around the 1910s and 1920s. He attributes their disappearance to the fact that those who could hire indentured *komori* were no longer able to do so in the wave of economic recessions, having become impoverished tenants by the early twentieth century (1993, 87). The increasing number of community day-care facilities (see Chapter 6) also explains the *komori*'s decline. But my fieldnotes suggest that there were still a significant number of *komori* in the Nagano countryside in the 1930s and 1940s. Both Sumiko and Sayo, who will appear later in this chapter, worked as indentured *komori* in the 1930s, while others like Chieko were *komori* for their own siblings or neighbors' children.

5. Také, whose complete name is Koshino Také, also appears in the two photographs published in the English version of *Tsugaru* that were taken at the time of the unveiling of the Dazai Memorial in Aomori in 1965 (Westerhoven 1987).

6. Such decrees were issued several times in Nagano, beginning in 1870 (Nagano-ken-shi Kankō-kai 1987, 400, 404). Although similar decrees were issued during the Tokugawa period, they were largely designed to check the excessive independence of rural young men from the Bakufu authorities (see Varner 1977) and hence different from the Meiji decrees.

7. *Onna no rekishi to minzoku* (The history and folklore of women; 1993) was originally published in 1950 with a different title, *Kekkon to ren'ai no rekishi* (The history of marriage and love). I am grateful to Professor Ueno Chizuko of Tokyo University, who alerted me to this important publication.

8. My interview with Takayama Sumiko was conducted in the summer of 1991 at her home. She published a book in 1987 of her memories as the wife of a peasant settler in Manchuria during the 1930s, titled *Nono-san ni narundayo* (You will become a little buddha). I interviewed her to explore Japanese colonialism in China and particularly in Manchuria, but she also provided me with this precious information about her days as a *komori*.

9. *Komori kyōiku kenkyū kiroku* (Reports on the study of *komori*'s education) of Takashima Elementary School mentions "fourteen more *komori* students who came to school for the first time" on February 15, 1899, among whom three were boys. On March 9 of the same year, ten *komori* students graduated from the third grade, among whom three were boys. This is the last record I found that contains evidence of the presence of male *komori* (Nagano-ken Kyōiku-shi Kankō-kai 1976, 619–621; see also Uno 1987, 31).

10. For the notion of "manliness" in the early Meiji period, see Donald

Roden, *Schooldays in Imperial Japan* (1980), and Earl Kinmonth, *The Self-made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought* (1981). According to Roden, the notion of "manliness" in early Meiji was represented by the "values of masculine domination: asceticism, achievement, and public service" (1990, 39). Note that such a notion of "manliness" is possible only if it is complemented by a notion of "womanliness" that signifies the domesticity of women.

11. Most of the households in the Nagano countryside were not able to afford the type of arrangement mentioned by Wakita Haruko (see n. 3). Consequently, either one *komori* took care of all the siblings, or older siblings acted as the *komori* for the younger ones.

12. Itō Chōhichi, a teacher of a class for *komori* at the Takashima Elementary School in Suwa County, also wrote: "An increasing number of four- and five-year-old toddlers came to school with *komori*. The total number is indeed one hundred ten" (Nagano-ken Kyōiku-shi Kankō-kai 1976, 619–621). Itō recorded the number of *komori* who attended the class as sixty. This means that the number of toddlers who came with them was as large as fifty.

13. *Tan* is used to measure the length of cloth for making kimono. One *tan* is about eight meters long and thirty centimeters wide.

14. *Katei hōmon roku: Komori ji-ai no kumi* (1907). This particular *komori*'s teacher visited his students' employers and parents once a year at their homes.

15. *Jōgaku zasshi* 57 (1887): 121–123. The author of the editorial is not given, although one might speculate that the author is Iwamoto Yoshiharu, the founder of *Jōgaku zasshi*.

16. *Katei hōmon roku: Komori ji-ai no kumi* (1907).

17. Ibid.

18. Several scholars of nativism (*koku-gaku*) had advocated these ideas, the quantitative and qualitative control of the population, already in the early nineteenth century to save villages devastated by natural calamities and the peasants living in them. See, for example, Tachibana Yoshio's "song admonishing peasants not to desert their children" (*sutego kyōkai no uta*) (1861) cited by Mitsuda (1985, 104).

19. *Gekkei shinshi*, January 13, 1879.

20. *Shinpi shinbun*, 1873, no. 3.

21. This "fine episode" was published in *Kankoku kōgiroku*, an enormous record of eight thousand "filial," "chaste," "faithful," and "laudable" women and men found among the commoners. It was compiled by Matsudaira Sadanobu in 1787.

22. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, March 17, 1883.

23. *Saku shinpō*, October 7, 1898.

24. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, July 20, 1901.

25. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, June 6, 1901.

26. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, July 3, 1901.

27. Many of my informants, however, told me that there were "quite a few" girls who brought their siblings and charges to school in the 1930s and 1940s. This means that *komori* also attended schools with regular school children, particularly if local schools did not offer them special programs. The Shimo Mizu'uchi county government, for example, issued a decree in 1917 to prohibit *komori* from attending regular schools (Nagano-ken Kyōiku-shi Kankō-kai 1976, 212–213).

28. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, March 5, 1893.

29. The structure of a counting song relies on the progression of the numbers from one to ten through the first ten stanzas. At the same time, the sound of each number forms part of the opening word for each line.

30. As *komori* is a generic term, so is *komori uta*: it could mean any lullaby. Here, I use this term specifically for the songs created and sung by the young girls who worked as *komori* in the early modern history of Japan.

31. In fact, they could recall this song only partially, so I have supplemented it here with the same song (with slight differences in wording) recorded by Watanabe Tomio and Matsuzawa Shunsuke among elderly women in Niigata prefecture (1979). A large number of women in Niigata were sent to Nagano as indentured *komori* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

32. *Kae-uta* could be translated as either "changed songs" or "changing songs." In the sense that *komori*'s songs were constantly being changed, I use the latter translation. Miriam Silverberg also uses this translation, referring to the songs of factory women in the silk and cotton industries in modern Japan. See her *Changing Song: The Marxist Manifestos of Nakano Shigeharu* (1990). I will introduce some of these factory women's songs in the following chapter.

33. Watanabe and Matsuzawa also recorded this song but with somewhat different verses: "Listen my mistress (*amesa*) and you too. If you treat *komori* badly, we can have an evil influence on your children" (1979, 32).

34. For an excellent critique of the use of dichotomies in the study of resistance, see Timothy Mitchell, "Everyday Metaphors of Power" (1990). Mitchell criticizes the use of dichotomies as a misleadingly narrow approach to under-

standing modern methods of domination and argues that such methods of domination themselves work through constructing a dualistic world.

#### CHAPTER 4: FACTORY WOMEN

1. Yokota (Wada) Ei learned the modern method of silk spinning at Tomioka Mill in 1873 and 1874. She described the everyday life of factory women at this mill, from recollections of her youth, when she was about fifty years old. *Tomioka nikki* (Tomioka diary) was published posthumously in 1976.

2. Eguchi Zenji and Hidaka Yasohichi of the Nagano branch of the Greater Japan Silk Spinning Association edited three volumes of the set of books titled *Shinano sanshi-gyō-shi* (The history of silk spinning in Nagano) in 1937. In chapter 9 of the third volume, *The Japanese Imperial Household and the Silk Spinning Industry in Nagano*, they emphasized the important relationship between the silk spinning industry in Nagano and the Japanese imperial household by explaining that the peasants in Nagano had presented silk to the emperor Yūryaku in 1122 (1937, 1350–1365).

3. McDougall argues: "Modernization in one branch of an industry could cause expansion in more traditional branches of the same industry." For example, "as cotton spinning became a factory occupation and thread output rose in early nineteenth-century England, the number of cotton hand-loom weavers increased" (1977, 259). As I will demonstrate shortly, the coexistence of the factory and the family workshop in the early phase of the industrial revolution is also observed in the silk industry in Japan.

4. For various explanations of the motives of rural women to move elsewhere for work in industry in the United

States and Europe, see, for example, Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826–1860* (1981); Philip S. Foner, *The Factory Girls* (1977); Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, *Amoskerg: Life and Work in an American Factory City* (1978). I learned of these works from Molony's article "Activism among Women in the Taishō Cotton Textile Industry" (1991).

5. Teresa McBride argues that nineteenth-century Europe "discovered" the woman worker as an "object of pity, and the Victorian social conscience was aroused as never before by the plight of working women and children" (1977, 282). Japanese social reformers shared this Victorian social conscience with their European counterparts.

6. Miwada Masako (1843–1927) was a specialist on women's education in the Meiji period. After her husband, Miwada Mototsuna, died in 1879, she founded several schools for women in Matsuyama and Tokyo. She also helped in founding Nippon Joshi Daigaku (Japanese Women's College) and became part of its faculty in 1919. She authored numerous books in order to teach Japanese women the ideology of the "good wife and wise mother."

7. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, May 18, 1901.

8. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, June 1, 1901.

9. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, January 26, 1893.

10. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, July 17, 1914.

11. Discourses emphasizing the promiscuous nature of factory women were found not only locally but also in the metropolis. For example, *Kokumin shinbun* reported, specifically commenting on the factory women who came

from Nagano to work in Gunma prefecture: "The behavior of factory women is unmentionable. . . . Those who are only seventeen or eighteen years old earn seven or eight yen in wages every month, but send it to their parents only until they are twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. After that, they keep moving from one factory to another and eventually become (1) the wives of day laborers, (2) the wives or concubines of gamblers, (3) the concubines of ruffians, or (4) prostitutes" (quoted in *Jogaku zasshi*, vol. 355 [October 14, 1893], pp. 406–407).

12. *Shinano nippō*, July 30, 1924 (quoted in Hosokawa 1982, 28).

13. *Shinano nippō*, May 2, 1926 (quoted in Hosokawa 1982, 28).

14. These two employers were Higuchi Ainosuke of the village of Shimosuwa and Takei Kunikichi of the village of Hirano. They presented their recommendation to the representative of the Nagano prefectural governor.

15. *Gekkei shinshi*, March 10, 1879.

16. This curriculum was also proudly made public in an article published in the local newspaper *Shinano mainichi shinbun* (August 26, 1901).

17. Data on the number of factories believed to have offered some sort of education to their employees vary greatly and are hence quite unreliable. In 1915, for example, a Nagano educational committee reported that fifty-one out of approximately six hundred silk industry factories in Nagano offered such education, while Nagano prefectural government reported that as many as 106 factories did (see Kōzu 1974, 458).

18. *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, July 8, 1915.

19. Similarly, Yamazaki Nobukichi, an ideologue of popular agrarianism, commented in 1906: "Sericulture is the most