
Maidservants' Tales: Narrating Domestic and Global History in Eurasia, 1600–1900

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SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD, sometime before the twentieth century, a single woman left her home in the countryside. She claimed that she was going to visit a brother who lived in a nearby town. Instead she met up with a young man of her acquaintance and set off for the capital, which was several days' journey away. Along the way, her traveling companion convinced her to pawn the extra clothes in her luggage to finance their trip. When the pair arrived in the city, she wrote her family a defiant letter expressing her desire to work as a maidservant in an urban mansion so that she could "learn the conduct and manners of the upper class." In their response they chastised her for her unfeminine conduct, quoting a famous line from a text she had memorized as a child. Meanwhile, her companion had pressured her into sex and then abandoned her, making off with the money he had received after pawning her clothes. Undeterred, she relied on connections from her home province to find work in domestic service. She spent her days hauling water, washing dishes, and sweeping rooms. But unsatisfied with the working conditions, she soon left for a series of short-term positions scattered around the city. She eventually married a fellow migrant and stayed in the capital for the rest of her life.

As it happens, this is a Japanese story. It belonged to a Buddhist priest's daughter named Tsuneno, who left her home province of Echigo for the shogun's capital of Edo in 1839. But she was not the only woman who lived out a version of this narrative during the centuries between 1600 and 1900. Leave out the details—that the language she spoke was Japanese, the clothes she traded were silk crepe and cotton kimono, the currency she received in return was *ryō*, and the quote in her brother's letter was from the *Classic of Filial Piety*—and she might be English, French, Swedish, or Italian. The story of the young woman who turned to the urban labor market to separate herself from an overbearing family, faced sexual exploitation and penury,

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and then married and stayed in the city would have been familiar to most European and Japanese audiences as both a plausible life story and a powerful cultural narrative. This was not the case at the center of the Eurasian continent, where girls did not often choose to work in urban domestic service, but rather were sold into that position as indentured laborers or slaves. But there, too, the broad outlines of Tsunenno's story were familiar. The life history of a country girl who served in a wealthy household in the capital and then married and settled in the city could have belonged to someone from China or Circassia.

For social historians, particularly those investigating the small rebellions of ordinary people, the details that locate Tsuneno precisely in time and space matter. As Walter Johnson has pointed out, scholars interested in power relations must attend to the specific context of their subjects' lives in order to avoid conflating acts of resistance with the expression of shared "humanity," a nebulous quality that is everywhere and always the same.¹ The methodological approach of microhistory addresses this problem of context. It requires the historian to imagine the world as seen by her subjects, to examine and reexamine the terrain on which they worked, traveled, fought, sued, and rebelled. Insisting on this human scale, microhistory reconstructs the dense social and cultural contexts in which people made decisions, revealing how power relations appear more complex, and social norms more amenable to negotiation, when they are viewed at the scale of the village or household rather than the nation or region.² Narrating Tsuneno's story as a microhistory, situated in the space between her village and the capital, would illuminate an exceptional case, one in which a woman defied her family and scandalized her neighbors. It would invite us to imagine how other Japanese women, whose lives were not recorded, might have done the same.

On the other hand, a broader perspective is necessary to investigate the other side of Tsuneno's "exceptional" experience: that it was also a relatively common story lived by and told to women across Eurasia over three hundred years. This large scale is the specialty of global historians, who employ various approaches to cover vast expanses of space and, often, long spans of time. Some emphasize flows and networks, explaining how trade, migration, ecological change, epidemics, intellectual ferment, and technological innovation connected far-flung areas of the world well before the twentieth century.³ Others rely on assertions of comparability to capture diverse ter-

¹ Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 113–124. Cornelia Hughes Dayton makes a similar point about early modern women's lives in "Rethinking Agency, Recovering Voices," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (June 2004): 827–843, here 839. For another take on the same issue, focusing on the importance of the historian's manipulation of context, see Sean Hanretta, "Gender and Agency in the History of a West African Sufi Community: The Followers of Yacouba Sylla," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 2 (2008): 478–508.

² The ability to perceive individual agency, and particularly women's agency, on this small scale is one reason why women's/gender history shares an affinity with microhistory. Joan W. Scott, "Storytelling," *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (2011): 203–209, here 208. Microhistory also rewards the feminist insight that political struggles play out in intimate relationships. See Sarah Maza, "Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 5 (December 1996): 1493–1515. See also Natalie Zemon Davis, "Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World," *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (2011): 188–202, here 190.

³ Sanjay Subrahmanyam provides a clear statement of this approach, which has been especially influential in Indian Ocean history. See his pioneering article "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–762. In Pacific history, see Kären Wigen, Introduction to "AHR Forum: Oceans of History," *American Historical Review* 111, no.

ritories within a single analytical frame.⁴ This comparative style of global history has been particularly popular among economic historians, who focus on quantifiable phenomena and thus have little trouble establishing common denominators that can work in different cultural spheres: calories, acres, tons, etc.⁵

These two methods—the microhistorical and the global—work on such different scales that they seem to be incompatible strategies of historical inquiry. As many scholars have noted, global historians' panoramic frame tends to render human agency invisible, and comparative economic histories, in particular, tend to lose sight of individuals entirely.⁶ This is not only a problem of scale, but also a problem of sources. Since global histories often proceed from a survey rather than from an archival excavation, they are unlikely to uncover the social networks, imaginative worlds, and small acts of resistance of ordinary people, and more likely to foreground actors who are already prominent in histories written at the level of the nation-state. In other words, women such as Tsuneno, whose stories are found in local archival collections, rarely appear.

Nevertheless, several scholars have attempted to reconcile the two approaches.⁷ The most common solution has been to make use of the paradigm that is concerned more with interconnection and long-distance flows than with large-scale comparisons. That usually entails focusing on a highly mobile individual or group of people who crossed regional and cultural boundaries.⁸ This strategy has the advantage of

3 (June 2006): 717–721; Matt K. Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (New York, 2012); David Armitage and Alison Bashford, eds., *Pacific Histories: Oceans, Land, and People* (New York, 2013); Ryan Tucker Jones, "Running into Whales: The History of the North Pacific from below the Waves," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (April 2012): 349–377.

⁴ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997); Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and R. Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011). Some work bridges both paradigms, drawing parallels and then looking for common causes. Prominent examples of the first approach in the early modern world include Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, vol. 1: *Integration on the Mainland* (New York, 2003) and vol. 2: *Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands* (New York, 2007); and Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, Conn., 2013).

⁵ Kenneth Pomeranz, "Social History and World History: From Daily Life to Patterns of Change," *Journal of World History* 18, no. 1 (2007): 69–98, here 69.

⁶ For example, emphasizing the importance of geographical scale and political structure to economic development, Rosenthal and Wong argue that "economic change in China and Europe was not driven mainly by differences in individual intentions, abilities, or personal circumstances (however much these factors matter at the individual or local level)"; *Before and Beyond Divergence*, 8. Giancarlo Casale makes a similar point about the absence of humans in this literature. Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York, 2010), 10.

⁷ On conflicts between the "micro" and "macro" scales and attempts to overcome them, see Sebouh David Aslanian, Joyce E. Chaplin, Ann McGrath, and Kristin Mann, "How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History," *AHR Conversation*, *American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (December 2013): 1431–1472; and Francesca Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?," *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>. Lynn Hunt discusses a similar, but not identical, problem of "top-down" versus "bottom-up" global history. Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York, 2014), 62–77.

⁸ I am borrowing Trivellato's taxonomy in "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?" Examples of the former approach include Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York, 2007); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York, 2006); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Question of Hu* (New York, 1988); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and*

bringing individual agency into focus, and in places where women traveled or were the linchpins of diasporic communities, it can bring female actors into a larger story that has often excluded them.⁹ Yet this style of global microhistory has limitations. It is not a problem for the microhistorian if her subject is an unusual person or group; that is part of the approach. But it is a challenge for social history writ large when entire populations of more sedentary people, those who did not engage in international trade and travel, are left unaddressed. As Kenneth Pomeranz points out, “it would be absurd to claim that the vast majority of humans, who have lived and still live their lives within fairly narrow geographic bounds, do not count in world history.”¹⁰

Tsuneno was one of those people. Like all of her countrywomen at the time, she never traveled beyond the shogun’s realm. Even more problematic for those who would seek traces of global exchange in her everyday life, she never manufactured a product for export, conversed with a foreign person, or wore imported cloth.¹¹ She had almost no contact with foreign people and relatively little direct involvement with foreign markets.¹² This was a common story for East Asian women, and one that makes them particularly difficult to engage using the strategies of the new global microhistory. Because both free and enslaved women moved across the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds, global histories with female protagonists tend to cluster in

the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (Boston, 2000). For the latter, see Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, Conn., 2009); and Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, N.J., 2011).

⁹ Otherwise, the relative absence of women in global history is a much-discussed problem. See Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “World History and the History of Women, Gender, and Sexuality,” *Journal of World History* 18, no. 1 (2007): 53–67. Attempts to articulate a global gender (as opposed to women’s) history have been most successful when applied to the modern era, when ideas and people circulated more easily, and Japan often figures in these accounts only after the 1870s. Recent surveys have attempted to address the problem of missing women in early modern global history. See, for example, Bonnie G. Smith, *Women’s History in Global Perspective*, 3 vols. (Urbana, Ill., 2004); and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History: Global Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass., 2011). These tend to treat early modern East Asian and European women as separate cultural groups, an approach that I challenge in this essay.

¹⁰ Pomeranz, “Social History and World History,” 72.

¹¹ Looking at markets, consumption, and fashion is one of the solutions proposed by Pomeranz, *ibid.* Other examples include Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* (New Haven, Conn., 2008); and Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi, eds., *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850* (New York, 2011). Tsuneno’s family made many inventories of hundreds of items of her clothing. As far as I can tell, none used imported cloth. However, the tortoiseshell in her hair ornaments might have been imported from Ryūkyū, a theoretically independent kingdom dominated by a Japanese domain. See Martha Chaiklin, “Up in the Hair: Strands of Meaning in Women’s Ornamental Hair Accessories in Early Modern Japan,” in Marianne Hulsbosch, Elizabeth Bedford, and Martha Chaiklin, eds., *Asian Material Culture* (Amsterdam, 2009), 39–64, here 52–54.

¹² This is not to say that she had no contact with products that had been introduced to Japan from other areas of the world. As Mary Elizabeth Berry points out, one can easily imagine an early modern Japanese farmer who “grew cotton, raised her children on Confucian primers [of Chinese origin], and wore spectacles to refill her pipe,” making use of commodities, ideas, and products that had originated elsewhere. But most of these items were of domestic manufacture. Mary Elizabeth Berry, “Was Early Modern Japan Culturally Integrated?,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 547–581, here 567. On the other hand, as Timon Screech notes, certain European trade goods, such as telescopes, were culturally prominent, but they were not “ordinary” things; rather, they were popular partly because they were considered exotic. Screech, *The Lens within the Heart: The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery* (New York, 1996), chap. 1.

these regions.¹³ But East Asian women rarely moved across oceans, because large polities pursued policies of “maritime prohibition” (*kaikin* or *haijin*). Beginning in 1635, for example, the Japanese shogun forbade his subjects to travel beyond Ryūkyū to the south, Ezochi (now Hokkaidō) to the north, and Korea to the west. Even after such restrictions were relaxed, as they were in China after the mid-eighteenth century, men were far more likely than women to migrate permanently or to sojourn overseas.¹⁴ It is difficult to see how East Asian women fit into global history at all, much less how they might be subjects of the new style of border-crossing micro-history.¹⁵

An alternative approach juxtaposes microhistorical and broadly comparative narratives to situate Tsuneno's story within both local and global frames. This entails both excavating, to understand the social and economic landscape within which she pursued her own interests, and surveying, to find similar patterns on a larger scale. Pursuing both of these strategies at once forces the traditional subject matter of women's history into a more expansive territory. It also provides a new perspective on the problem of the relationship between historical context and the abstract capacity of agency, not by zooming in on the particularities of a local situation, but by panning out to ponder the commonalities between the strategies employed by rural women in different parts of the continent who confronted growing urban labor markets that demanded their services. Seen through the eyes of these women, the “early modern” world looks more continuous—and lingers longer—than we might previously have imagined.

FIRST, AN EXCAVATION. Tsuneno was born in 1805 in a village called Ishigami in Echigo Province on the Japan Sea coast. Her corner of the province, Kubiki County, was known for heavy snows, sudden avalanches, and icicles the size and shape of the daikon radishes that people pickled and ate all winter. Even when it was nowhere in

¹³ For example, Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*; Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York, 2011); and Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires*. For a discussion of the sex ratios among slave and free migrants to the Americas, see David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York, 1999), 90, 95–99. By the nineteenth century, almost half of European migrants to the Americas were women. Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Ind., 2003), 153.

¹⁴ Melissa Macauley, “Entangled Encounters: The Transnational Repercussions of Rural Pacification in China, 1869–1873” (paper presented at the Chabreja Center for Historical Studies, Evanston, Ill., October 23, 2013). In the fourteenth century, traders reserved suites on their ships for wives and concubines (Stewart Gordon, *When Asia Was the World* [New York, 2008], 119), but they may have left primary wives at home. Later, the imbalance in Chinese overseas migration may have stemmed from practices of infanticide that created a shortage of women in the Chinese countryside. Large numbers of single men were free to migrate, while women universally married young. Leslie Page Moch, “Connecting Migration and World History: Demographic Patterns, Family Systems and Gender,” *International Review of Social History* 52, no. 1 (2007): 97–104, here 102–103.

¹⁵ Literature on East Asia and the northern Pacific before the late nineteenth century mentions very few women in the aggregate and takes little notice of individual women's lives. Matsuda's excellent *Pacific Worlds*, for example, concentrates primarily on male navigators, pirates, warlords, and rulers in the period before 1850. One notable exception, an account of an early modern Asian woman's transnational life story, is Leonard Blussé, *Bitter Bonds: A Colonial Divorce Drama of the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Diane Webb (Princeton, N.J., 2002). There is slightly more literature about women in the premodern South Pacific. See the discussion in Patricia O'Brien, “Gender,” in Armitage and Bashford, *Pacific Histories*, 282–304.

sight, snow shaped the contours of everyday life in Kubiki. Summer and early autumn were spent in a frenzy of preparation. Peasants harvested as much rice as they could, and then they reinforced their houses, repaired their roofs, wrapped plants with straw mats, strengthened trees with wooden beams, built huts to cover their wells, and mended their straw boots and snow shoes and coats. And then they waited. Winter announced its arrival with a grumbling sound behind the mountains. By October, the first flakes began to fall, and by December, the streets of the snow country's castle towns were impassable. Thus began months of hardship for Echigo's residents, who huddled in dim rooms during the day and shoveled their overburdened roofs every night. Suzuki Bokushi, an avid chronicler of snow country life, wrote in 1837, "What enjoyment is there of snow for us in Echigo, where foot after foot falls year after year? We exhaust ourselves and our purses, undergo a thousand pains and discomforts, all because of the snow."¹⁶

Tsuneno, whose father was a Shin Buddhist priest, was not destined for the life of hard labor that awaited most girls born in rural Echigo. Her family was well-off, and since temples were centers of learning, her parents invested in her education. Female literacy in Tokugawa Japan varied widely according to geography and social status, and farming women in Kubiki were often kept far too busy to learn to read and write; in fact, a Kubiki peasant of Tsuneno's grandmother's generation was forced to apologize to her husband and in-laws for wasting time on the endeavor.¹⁷ Even in well-educated families such as Tsuneno's, women's instruction tended to be more haphazard and circumstance-dependent than men's.¹⁸ While Tsuneno's three brothers could formulate complex sentences strewn with Chinese characters, Tsuneno and her sister wrote plainly in the phonetic script, as was typical for women. A wealthy peasant's daughter in a more prosperous region might have laughed at Tsuneno's odd spelling (for example, she wrote "Ido" for "Edo," rendering the word as it sounded in her native dialect). But this was an adequate level of literacy for Echigo, and it did not diminish Tsuneno's family's prospects of settling her as a bride in a prosperous household in a nearby village.

That was precisely what happened. In 1833, when she was about twenty-eight, Tsuneno's older brother married her to a wealthy peasant who lived a few miles away. Her new in-laws lent her family fifteen *ryō*, a considerable sum, to offset the expense of her trousseau, which included a few large pieces of furniture and more than a hundred items of clothing.¹⁹ Initially the marriage seemed to be going smoothly.

¹⁶ Suzuki Bokushi, *Snow Country Tales: Life in the Other Japan*, trans. Jeffrey Hunter with Rose Lesser (New York, 1986), 9.

¹⁷ Yoshikawa-chō, ed., *Yoshikawa chōshi*, cited in P. F. Kornicki, "Women, Education, and Literacy," in P. F. Kornicki, Mara Patessio, and G. G. Rowley, eds., *The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2010), 7–37, here 12.

¹⁸ On "happenstance" in female literacy, see Anne Walthall, "Women and Literacy from Edo to Meiji," *ibid.*, 215–235.

¹⁹ "Tsuneno tadaima made shochi no mono aishirabe sōrō koto," n.d., Rinsenji monjo #1680, Niigata Prefectural Archives, Niigata-ken, Niigata-shi; "Tenpō yon idoshi shigatsu nijū-san nichi kichijitsu Tsuneno Ōshima Koide nyūka shitakuchō," Tenpō 4.4.23, Rinsenji monjo #1678, Niigata Prefectural Archives. The Rinsenji monjo is a collection of documents that originally belonged to the Izawa family, the hereditary priests at Rinsenji temple in Ishigami village (now Jōetsu City). The collection, which encompasses nearly three thousand items, was donated to Niigata Prefecture sometime after the temple closed in the 1920s. In addition to preserving letters that the temple received, Rinsenji also kept drafts of outgoing correspondence and collected letters that concerned the family from their friends and relatives.

Over the next four years, Tsuneno returned to Ishigami at regular intervals to socialize and receive spending money, and her family's records betray no hint of trouble. But in 1837, her husband surprised everyone by announcing their divorce. According to an apology he wrote to Tsuneno's older brother, nothing particularly bad had happened (*nan to mōsu ashiki koto mo kore naku*), but his family did not have an heir—and thus, by implication, a different, more fertile wife would be necessary.²⁰ Initially shocked by this turn of events, Tsuneno's family rebounded quickly. Within a year, they managed to marry her off yet again, in suitable style. But this marriage, to another wealthy peasant from the same region, collapsed within nine months, and Tsuneno returned home.²¹

About a year later, she disappeared. She told her older brother at the temple that she was going to visit her other brother, Kōtoku, in the castle town of Takada. But she never made it there. Instead, as she recalled in a later letter, she met up with an acquaintance who claimed to be affiliated with a nearby Shin temple. He convinced her that he was on his way to Edo and had relatives waiting there, so it would be no trouble at all if she accompanied him.²² But Tsuneno needed money for the journey, so he accompanied her to a pawn shop, where she received three *ryō* in exchange for six lined and unlined kimono, three under-robos, a boxed set of tortoiseshell hair ornaments, some handkerchiefs, and a hand mirror.²³ Then, at the end of the ninth month, just ahead of the winter snowfall, they left for Edo.

Tsuneno soon realized that her traveling companion was not the man she had thought he was. As she later told her uncle in Edo, he began pestering her about getting married. She was reluctant, but he threatened to leave her alone on the road, so she had no choice but to go along (and, presumably, have sex with him).²⁴ This surprised her, she wrote, since she had been inclined to trust one of her countrymen, who was not, after all, “a strange person from a strange province.” “He spoke so nicely,” she later confided in Kōtoku, “as if he had no impure intentions, and I had no reason to think he was lying.”²⁵ She was further disillusioned when the pair arrived in the city and his relatives proved less accommodating than expected: “He brought me to a three-mat [*sanjōshiki*] room. I didn't have any bedding, or even a pillow, and all the money from the things I had pawned had already been spent. When I said I needed spending money for Edo, he finally handed me one *bu*. Then he went to [the neighboring province of] Shimotsuke and left me all alone, and I struggled so much—I can't even tell you how much.”²⁶

About 130 documents in the collection, most of them letters, have to do with Tsuneno and her immediate family. For more on the collection, see <http://www.archives.pref.niigata.jp/shozo-bunsho-annai/E9806.pdf>. Twenty-eight was old for a first marriage, and inconclusive evidence suggests that Tsuneno may have been married before. Gotō Kazuo, *Komonjo de yomu Essa josei no Edo jidai* (Niigata, 2016), 397–398.

²⁰ Koide Yasōemon to Rinsenji, Tenpō 8.5.27, Rinsenji monjo #1686, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

²¹ “Tenpō hachi teiyūsai jūni-gatsu Tsuneno Inada-chō Katō-shi e engumi manki,” Tenpō 8, Rinsenji monjo #1673, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

²² Tsuneno to Kōtoku, n.d., Rinsenji monjo #1716, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

²³ Tsuneno to Yamazaki Kyūhachirō, Tenpō 10.9.23, Rinsenji monjo #1700, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

²⁴ Bunshichi to Rinsenji, Tenpō 10.11.8, Rinsenji monjo #1697, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

²⁵ Tsuneno to Kōtoku, n.d., Rinsenji monjo #1716, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Still, she kept up a brave front. She managed to write to her brother in Ishigami to let him know that she had arrived safely in the city, explaining that she had pawned her wardrobe in Takada. She asked him to redeem those items, which she would need, and instructed him to make up the balance by pawning the heavy furniture she had left at the temple. This was a clear indication that she did not intend to go home. She added a note at the end of the letter: “When I get a chance, I’d like to go into service in a lord’s household so that I can learn the conduct and manners of the upper class [*odaimyō hōkō itashi kamigami kata no gyōgi, sahō mo minaraitaki sōrō*]. In that case, I’ll need to have a luggage trunk and all of my clothes sent here.”²⁷

If this was Tsuneno’s fantasy of social mobility, her brother was not impressed. He responded angrily: “You’ve cast aside your parents and siblings, which is incredibly selfish, scandalous behavior for a woman. When I explained the situation to our relatives, they all said that if that’s your true character, then we should tell you we’re leaving you to fend for yourself. You should understand that you haven’t just cut off this temple, but also your relatives and your hometown.” He closed by quoting a famous passage from the *Classic of Filial Piety*: “Your entire body—from your hair to your toes—has been received from your parents, so you shouldn’t dare damage it. This is the beginning of filial piety.” “I will not speak further to someone who neglects this,” he wrote.²⁸ True to his word, he did not contact Tsuneno for several months. But, realizing that his sister could not survive in Edo on her own, he sent a letter to one of his parishioners, who was in service there, asking if he could help her find a job.²⁹

Meanwhile, Tsuneno was trying to call on her own connections in Edo. First she tried to find work at a Shin temple in the Tsukiji neighborhood but was turned away. Then she arrived on her aunt and uncle’s doorstep, a bedraggled apparition in a tattered kimono, and explained her predicament. Her uncle was at a loss, especially since it was already the end of the tenth month, and it would be impossible to send Tsuneno home during an Echigo winter. He wrote to her brother in the provinces and explained that his wife, Tsuneno’s aunt, was trying to find her a placement in domestic service.³⁰

Tsuneno had hoped to serve a *daimyō*, one of the domainal lords required to maintain residences in Edo, but those positions were extraordinarily competitive because they were regarded as stepping-stones to a respectable career or an advantageous marriage.³¹ Luckily, *daimyō* were not the only potential employers in the city.

²⁷ Tsuneno to older brother (oniisama), Tenpō 10.10.10, Rinsenji monjo #1708, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

²⁸ Rinsenji to Tsuneno, Tenpō 10.11.9, Rinsenji monjo #1726, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

²⁹ Rinsenji to Yasugorō, Tenpō 10.11.8, Rinsenji monjo #1704, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

³⁰ Bunshichi to Rinsenji, Tenpō 10.11.8, Rinsenji monjo #1687, Niigata Prefectural Archives. <http://www.archives.pref.niigata.jp/internet-komonjo-koza/11to20/12/>.

³¹ On the fierce competition for a place in a *daimyō*’s inner quarters, see Gary P. Leupp, *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, N.J., 1992), 63–64; and Susanne Formanek, “The ‘Spectacle’ of Womanhood: New Types in Texts and Pictures on Pictorial Sugoroku Games of the Late Edo Period,” in Susanne Formanek and Sipp Linhart eds., *Written Texts—Visual Texts: Woodblock-Printed Media in Early Modern Japan* (Amsterdam, 2005), 73–108, here 85. Women who hoped to work in the shogun’s Great Interior, even in relatively lowly positions, had to rely on connections and submit (occasionally embellished) accounts of their origins. Hata Hisako, “Servants of the Inner Quarters: The Women of the Shogun’s Great Interior,” trans. Anne Walthall, in Walthall, ed.,

Throughout Japan, shogunal bannermen, ordinary samurai, wealthy townspeople, and even small businesses employed more and more maidservants (as opposed to manservants) over the course of the late Tokugawa era. The evidence for this shift is clearest in the city of Osaka, where the extant population registers provide the most detail on the composition of the labor force.³² But Saitō Osamu's research on demographic and labor patterns in Edo suggests that similar dynamics may have been in play there. Over the second half of the Tokugawa period, the massive firms that had once dominated the city's labor market were eclipsed by an array of small and medium-sized outfits. While the large-scale wholesalers hired vast armies of male clerks and held them to long terms of service, smaller businesses preferred more flexible arrangements and sought help with the "inside" work of the household. Young women, who tended to be looking for short-term work rather than long-term apprenticeships, were ideal for this type of labor.³³

Since Edo's sex ratio leveled off dramatically in the late eighteenth century, just as more firms were hiring casual, "inside" laborers through employment agencies that recruited from the provinces, it is tempting to assume that Tsuneno was among a large number of women who migrated to the city to work in service and then settled there permanently. Unfortunately, this is a difficult claim to substantiate. Short-term domestic workers were undercounted in ward population registers; householders regarded them as temporary visitors rather than household members, and the employment agencies did not submit counts of the transient people they had gathered under their auspices.³⁴ Hayami Akira points out that female migration from Mino to Osaka increased dramatically, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of total migration, between 1750 and 1850.³⁵ If, as Saitō argues, the shift to casual, short-term labor was more pronounced in Edo, studies of villages near the shogun's capital might reveal similar patterns. In 1842, three years after Tsuneno arrived in Edo, a report to the city magistrate observed that lodging houses for women (*onnayado*) had proliferated, and that they took in "large numbers of women with no relatives."³⁶ The following year, a count of women migrants (*hoka ni dekaseginin*) in Edo, as opposed to townspeople under the auspices of the city magistrate, totaled

Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History (Berkeley, Calif., 2008), 172–190, here 178–179, 182–183.

³² Leupp, *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan*, 61–63.

³³ In fact, some evidence indicates that smaller households were more likely to employ women. Saitō Osamu, *Shōka no sekai, uradana no sekai: Edo to Ōsaka no hikaku toshishi* (Tokyo, 1989), 66–72. Demographic data from the castle town of Matsumoto, too, suggests that smaller households employed a greater proportion of female servants. Leupp, *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan*, 61.

³⁴ Saitō, *Shōka no sekai, uradana no sekai*, 71–72. Moreover, population registers do not capture samurai households, which were more likely than townsman households to employ servants. There are similar problems in counting maidservants relative to male servants in preindustrial European cities. See Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 46–47.

³⁵ Cited in Leupp, *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan*, 62. Comparative evidence from Kansai also suggests that the vast majority of women who migrated to Edo must have worked in domestic service. Mary Louise Nagata and Kiyoshi Hamano's analysis of population registers from mid-nineteenth-century Kyoto determines that 86 percent of the city's migrant women between the ages of 16 and 20 were employed as maidservants. Nagata and Hamano, "Marriage Market in Early Modern Kyoto, 1843–1868," *History of the Family* 14, no. 1 (2009): 36–51, here 41.

³⁶ "Hōkōnin hitoyado no bu" (1842), vol. 69 of *Tenpō sen'yō ruishū* (128 vols.), unpublished manuscript, National Diet Library Digital Collection, <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/2589017/16>.

more than eight thousand.³⁷ But this was likely an undercount, failing to capture women who lived in tenements in ordinary city neighborhoods, and for now the size of the labor market for maidservants in particular is still an open question.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that migrant women could find work in Edo relatively easily, even if they were not blessed with deep pockets or excellent connections. Katakura Hisako cites the example of Riyo, a woman who was awarded five silver pieces by the city magistrate in 1844 for her commendable behavior in supporting her family after her husband's death. Years earlier, Riyo had migrated to Edo with her two-year-old daughter after divorcing a ne'er-do-well (*mimochi warui*) husband in her native Sagami Province. She was able to find work immediately as a wet nurse for a samurai family, and she stayed in that position for four years, until she left to marry a wasabi vendor.³⁸

Tsuneno, too, was able to find work very soon after she arrived, even if it was not precisely the type of position she wanted. At the end of the eleventh month, she began as a maid-of-all-work (*osue*) in a shogunal bannerman's household. Theoretically, this was only one step below a position in a *daimyō*'s residence, but bannermen did not necessarily maintain a lavish standard of living, and her placement did not offer an education in feminine refinement. She started at the end of the eleventh month and received a yearly salary of 2 *ryō* and 2 *bu*, plus room and board.³⁹ But the job was not easy: "I wake up around six [*muttsu*], and then I light the fire in each of five rooms and prepare the bath. Then I clean out several small rooms and tidy up the nine women's sleeping mats, and then I fill the water jugs in five different places. Then I clean up the mistress's tray and arrange the furniture and take care of the personal effects for nine women. The work is hard, and my hands and feet go numb [from the cold]."⁴⁰

Fortunately, there was no need to stay in a difficult placement for very long. As employers often complained, disgruntled maids voted with their feet. Tsuneno explained that six or seven maids had rotated through her position during the eight months before she arrived.⁴¹ This type of mobility was typical. Employers complained that they were paying higher and higher salaries to maidservants who quit without notice. Takizawa Bakin, an Edo fiction writer, complained to Suzuki Bokushi in 1831 that he had gone through seven maids in one year.⁴² Tsuneno, too, planned to leave her present position as soon as the winter was over, and she had little trouble finding other work, this time as a townsman's errand girl. She lived near the theater district, a place both geographically and socially distant from the samurai neighborhood where she had worked for a bannerman. In the early spring, she wrote her mother that her new master, who was busy supervising the construction of a villa for his geisha mistress, treated her kindly and paid her well. She earned enough to treat herself to snacks ("everything in Edo is delicious," she wrote). But this new master would not provide her with a change of

³⁷ As opposed to more than 25,000 men. Fujita Satoru, *Toyama Kinshirō no jidai* (Tokyo, 1992), 149.

³⁸ Katakura Hisako, "Bakumatsu ishinki no toshi kazoku to joshi rōdō," in Sōgō joseishi kenkyūkai, ed., *Nihon joseishi ronshū*, vol. 6: *Josei no kurashi to rōdō* (Tokyo, 1998), 85–110, here 87.

³⁹ This was an ordinary salary for a bannerman's maidservant. See a similar case in Mega Atsuko, *Buke ni totsuida josei no tegami: Binbō hatamoto no Edo-gurashi* (Tokyo, 2011), 50.

⁴⁰ Tsuneno to Kōtoku, n.d., Rinsenji monjo #1716, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Quoted in Saitō, *Shōka no sekai, uradana no sekai*, 71.

clothing or bedding, and she complained repeatedly about the cold.⁴³ This was the first of a series of temporary jobs. Over the next few years, she worked as a maid at a temple, as an acupuncturist's assistant, and as a waitress at a small restaurant.

About a year after she arrived in the city, Tsuneno married Izawa Hanzō, a masterless samurai and fellow migrant from Kubiki, and took the new name Okin. This came as a complete surprise to her brothers in Echigo, who heard about the marriage only when her new father-in-law dropped by the temple to visit.⁴⁴ Since Hanzō was often unemployed, this marriage was not a deliverance from poverty. According to Tsuneno's family's correspondents in the city, there were times when the couple barely had one tattered robe between them. The state of Tsuneno's wardrobe, one wrote, was making it impossible for her to find steady work.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Tsuneno was determined to remain in Edo. When she found herself completely unable to survive in the city, she divorced Hanzō and returned to Echigo, but only temporarily. While she languished at home with her brother, Hanzō was hired by the famous city magistrate Tōyama Kagemoto. After this stroke of good fortune, he invited Tsuneno to join him in the great man's household. Over her family's objections, she remarried him. On her return to Edo, she was no longer the temple daughter, divorcée, and struggling maidservant Tsuneno; she was now the samurai wife Okin, with an impressive address (and, presumably, a suitable wardrobe) to match her new status.

In *Snow Country Tales*, Suzuki Bokushi asserted that Echigo women who migrated to Edo always returned home eventually, because they were loyal to their beloved province. "All the women feel this way," he claimed.⁴⁶ Tsuneno, now Okin, would have laughed. She remained in Edo until her death in 1853.

WHAT MIGHT A GLOBAL HISTORY look like with Tsuneno at its center? It cannot be a story about contact, communication, or consumption. But it can be a story about construction. It can tell us about the kinds of narratives women told themselves, the capitals that they helped to build, and the cultures of mobility that they created.

Look up from the archive, across the Sea of Japan, and over the vast landmass of Eurasia; step back from the 1830s and 1840s and consider a few hundred years. Tsuneno may have shocked her family, but she was not alone. Across the Eurasian continent, a rise in demand for female domestic labor drew women into expanding cities. In Europe, this trend began as early as the late 1500s, when migrant women streamed into Venice in the wake of the 1575–1576 plague, and continued into the next three centuries.⁴⁷ In some cities' hinterlands, most notably London's, the coun-

⁴³ Tsuneno to mother (Rinsenji-sama no haha-sama), Tenpō 11.2.23, Rinsenji monjo #1699, Niigata Prefectural Archives, <http://www.archives.pref.niigata.jp/internet-komonjo-koza/11to20/13/>.

⁴⁴ Denpachi to Izawa Hirosuke, Tenpō 11.10.14, Rinsenji monjo #1721, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

⁴⁵ Fujiwara Yūzō to Rinsenji, Tenpō 15.11.10, Rinsenji monjo #2003, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

⁴⁶ Suzuki, *Snow Country Tales*, 20.

⁴⁷ On Venice, see Monica Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore, 2001), 82. In subsequent centuries, London and Toulouse witnessed similar trends. See Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (New York, 2012), 17–19; and Cissie Fairchild, "Masters and Servants in Eighteenth Century Toulouse," *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 3 (1979): 368–393. In the latter city, less than 5 percent of female domestic servants named in marriage contracts were natives (370).

tryside emptied of women. Meanwhile, as men flowed out of urban areas to serve in the army or set out to sea, major cities became predominantly female.⁴⁸ While there were variations in the timing of these demographic shifts, the general pattern of migration, domestic service work, and urban settlement gradually converged across Europe and then held steady until the early twentieth century. In London, three-quarters of domestic servants surveyed in 1851 came from the counties outside the city, a proportion that had changed little since the period between 1660 and 1750.⁴⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century, the dominance of migrant servants in many cities was even more pronounced. Demographic data collected in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Paris, and Berlin indicated that more than 90 percent of those cities' domestic servants were migrants.⁵⁰ Like Tsuneno, maidservants tended to come from the hinterlands that formed major cities' "demographic basins," places where local men and women had family ties and histories of work in specific urban locales. This pattern of migration distinguished them from male apprentices or servants, who were slightly more likely to come from neighborhoods within the city limits, distant provinces, or even foreign countries.⁵¹

At the center of the continent, in the Ottoman and Chinese empires and throughout Central Asia, maidservants made similar journeys from rural to urban areas, but often they were coerced. In Istanbul, for example, domestic work was a combination of free and unfree labor: the most senior housemaid in a harem was often a freed elderly woman of considerable status, while drudges were local day-laboring women. But most domestic servants in well-off households were slaves who had traveled long distances from the edges of the empire. Those from Circassia did light housework and served as concubines, wet nurses, and entertainers, while those from Africa,

⁴⁸ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 46, 56; Maryanne Kowaleski, "Singlewomen in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Demographic Perspective," in Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, eds., *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800* (Philadelphia, 1999), 38–81, here 53; Lotte van de Pol and Erika Kuijpers, "Poor Women's Migration to the City: The Attraction of Amsterdam Health Care and Social Assistance in Early Modern Times," *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 1 (2005): 44–60, here 47–48. This is in contrast to most East Asian cities, including Edo, which hosted a standing army and until the last decades of the Tokugawa period skewed heavily male. In this regard, Edo and other East Asian metropolises more closely resembled Berlin and Rome, both of which were home to large occupational groups consisting of men (the military and the priesthood).

⁴⁹ Richard Wall, "The Social and Economic Significance of Servant Migration," in Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, ed., *Domestic Service and the Formation of European Identity: Understanding the Globalization of Domestic Work, 16th–21st Centuries* (Bern, 2004), 19–42, here 32.

⁵⁰ Rachel G. Fuchs and Leslie Page Moch, "Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home: Migrant Women in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1990): 1007–1031, here 1019.

⁵¹ Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 86; Fairchild, "Masters and Servants in Eighteenth Century Toulouse," 370–371; Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, N.J., 1983), 30–31, 40–41. Moch observes that in eighteenth-century Bourdeaux, "women came from less far than men"; *Moving Europeans*, 98. London and Amsterdam seem to be exceptions. In London, male and female migrants had similar origins, while in Amsterdam, nearly half of female migrants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were foreigners. Hubbard, *City Women*, 18; Pol and Kuijpers, "Poor Women's Migration to the City," 46. This type of statistical analysis is not possible for Edo, given the paucity of surviving records, but Hamano Kiyoshi's examination of population registers from a Kyoto neighborhood in 1848 suggests that Japanese cities experienced similar sex-specific migration patterns, in which male servants and apprentices were from either very close by or very far away. Hamano, "Kinsei Kyōto no hōkōnin ni tsuite: Chōki sūsei to jinkō purofairu," *Kansai daigaku keizai ronshū* 55, no. 4 (2006): 545–563, here 560–561.

afforded less status, labored as cooks and child-minders.⁵² In contrast, Chinese maidservants did come from “demographic basins,” as urban families sent recruiters into nearby villages to either hire girls or buy them outright. Criminal cases referred to the Qing magistrates suggest that some of the maidservants purchased in this manner were victims of kidnapping. Others were young girls whose parents had put them up for sale (a transaction of dubious legality that was nonetheless very common).⁵³ On the other hand, some older women found work on their own initiative. A woman from Shandong Province named Ning Lao T'ai-t'ai recalled that in the 1870s she presented herself for hire at a village temple market.⁵⁴

Women's motivations for undertaking these migrations were varied, and economic incentives were more pronounced in some regions than others. Across Eurasia, urban domestic service competed with work opportunities in the countryside, usually in textile production and farm labor. In China, women weavers commanded high incomes. Thus middling peasant families were unwilling to part with daughters who could be put to work. This reliance on girls' labor power, combined with a taboo against traveling for single women, meant that women almost never migrated to cities by themselves. Instead, most who made the journey to the cities were married to migrant men, or they were sold into maid service or prostitution as children. But in Japan and Europe, young women were more likely to leave home to work in textile-producing towns.⁵⁵ In Japan, these women, who spun or manufactured cotton batting, provoked many of the same anxieties as urban maidservants. Samurai officials and village headmen complained that they wore fine clothes and hairpins and flaunted their financial independence.⁵⁶

It is difficult to determine whether these opportunities paid as well as work in the big cities. In the English countryside, unmarried women who could accept annual contracts saw their wages rise in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁵⁷ In Japan during the same period, female farmhands also received better and better

⁵² On racialized hierarchy in slaveholding, see Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York, 2010), 136–140. There are reasons to doubt that African women were strictly domestic, as opposed to sexual, servants. In Egypt, sub-Saharan African slave women bore their masters' children without being accorded any status as mothers. George Michael La Rue, “African Slave Women in Egypt, ca. 1820 to the Plague of 1834–35,” in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, eds., *Women and Slavery*, vol. 1: *Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic* (Athens, Ohio, 2007), 169–189, here 183.

⁵³ Joanna Sirera Ransmeier, “‘No Other Choice’: The Sale of People in Late Qing and Republican Beijing, 1870–1935” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2008), 69–73.

⁵⁴ Ning Lao T'ai-t'ai and Ida Pruitt, *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman* (New Haven, Conn., 1945), 74–75.

⁵⁵ Kenneth Pomeranz, “Women's Work, Family, and Economic Development in Europe and East Asia: Long-Term Trajectories and Contemporary Comparisons,” in Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita, and Mark Selden, eds., *The Resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives* (London, 2004), 124–172, here 134–135.

⁵⁶ Yabuta Yutaka, “Kinsei josei no raifusaikuru,” in Joseishi sōgō kenkyūkai, ed., *Nihon josei seikatsu shi*, vol. 3: *Kinsei* (Tokyo, 1990), 237–271, here 265. Another instance of this type of complaining appears in Tokyo Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo, ed., *Shichū torishimari ruishū*, vol. 4 in *Dai Nihon kinsei shiryō*, 24 vols. (Tokyo, 1962), 57.

⁵⁷ This study excludes London, so it pertains mostly to farmhands, dairy maids, and provincial domestic servants. Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf, “The Wages of Women in England, 1260–1850,” *Oxford Economic and Social History Working Papers* 127 (2014), <http://www.economics.ox.ac.uk/Oxford-Economic-and-Social-History-Working-Papers/the-wages-of-women-in-england-1260-1850>.

remuneration, both in absolute terms and in comparison to men.⁵⁸ Judging from the comments about their hair ornaments, skilled textile workers in the countryside must have been paid even more. But for the unskilled, cities throughout Eurasia must have offered a more favorable market, because an escalating demand for domestic servants was concentrated in those areas. In eighteenth-century London, employers echoed their counterparts in Edo, complaining of a crisis in which pay for both male and female servants was spiraling upward.⁵⁹ In France, this was a gendered phenomenon; as male servants became more expensive to retain, demand for unskilled female servants rose and their wages increased.⁶⁰ Even where domestic service was supplied through slave labor, maidservants were more and more expensive. In eighteenth-century Korea, female slaves were traded at a far brisker pace than their male counterparts, and women began to command comparatively higher prices on the market. By the nineteenth century, the much-diminished slave trade was exclusively a traffic in women.⁶¹

In places where women could choose their employment, part of the attraction of work in domestic service might have been the romance of the cities themselves. Throughout Eurasia, young, never-married women were blocked from most other urban trades (with the notable exception of prostitution), so domestic work was the only plausible, respectable option for single women who wanted to leave the countryside. Katakura Hisako found that Edo women worked as laundresses, wet nurses, seamstresses, tea servers, music teachers, hairdressers, and masseuses, in addition to taking in piecework, making sandal straps, digging for fish bait, and peddling everything from candy to pickles to tinder. But most of them were widows and married women, not single young newcomers.⁶² According to population records from one neighborhood in late Tokugawa-era Kyoto, nearly every single woman who migrated to the city ended up in domestic service.⁶³ The same was true in European cities, where widows could take over their former husbands' occupations, but never-married women's options were constrained. Domestic service, which safely contained women within households and could be construed as preparation for marriage, was relatively unthreatening.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Sugano Noriko, "Nōson josei no rōdō to seikatsu," in Sōgō joseishi kenkyūkai, ed., *Nihon joseishi*, 5 vols. (Tokyo, 1982), 4: 63–94.

⁵⁹ R. C. Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2010), 80–82.

⁶⁰ Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 278–282.

⁶¹ Bok Rae Kim, "Nobi: A Korean System of Slavery," in Gwyn Campbell, ed., *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Portland, Ore., 2004), 155–168, here 161. Milan Hejtmanek, "Devalued Bodies, Revalued Status: Confucianism and the Plight of Female Slaves in Late Chosŏn Korea," in Youngmin Kim and Michael J. Pettid, eds., *Women and Confucianism in Chosŏn Korea: New Perspectives* (Albany, N.Y., 2011), 137–150, here 145–146.

⁶² Katakura, "Bakumatsu ishinki no toshi kazoku to joshi rōdō," 88–89.

⁶³ Nagata and Hamano, "Marriage Market in Early Modern Kyoto," 40–41. This neighborhood was not an entertainment district, which is why no prostitutes were counted in the study.

⁶⁴ On age at migration, see Hubbard, *City Women*, 21–22; on age while in service, see Merry E. Wiesner, "Having Her Own Smoke: Employment and Independence for Singlewomen in Germany, 1400–1750," in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, 192–216, here 200; Tim Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender, 1660–1750: Life and Work in the London Household* (London, 2000), 17. On never-married women blocked from pursuing other occupations, see Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), 30–31; Hubbard, *City Women*, 24; Pol and Kuijpers, "Poor Women's Migration to the City," 48–49.

Almost everywhere, marriage followed service.⁶⁵ In London, a wedding typically marked the end of a woman's career as a maid.⁶⁶ In Germany, this was considered a desirable outcome; some municipalities even set up special funds to provide dowries for loyal maidservants so that they would be able to find husbands and retire.⁶⁷ The idea of domestic service as a stage in the lifecycle before marriage applied even in situations where maidservants were bought and sold rather than hired. In China, contracts providing for the sale of young girls as maidservants stipulated that their masters were obligated to find husbands for them when they reached the appropriate age.⁶⁸ And even in places where domestic service and concubinage were linked, such as Istanbul, emancipation at or before marriage was common.⁶⁹ Tsuneno's history as a double divorcée would have made her a demographic impossibility in Europe, and even an outlier in Japan. She was also older than most single women migrants. But her pattern of migration, domestic service, and marriage would have put her squarely within the mainstream throughout Eurasia.⁷⁰

Maidservants who retired at marriage usually remained in the city, where their husbands were local men or, as in Tsuneno's case, fellow migrants from the same region.⁷¹ City marriage often represented social mobility for women who had come from difficult circumstances in the countryside. In France, whether former maids married fellow migrants (as was common) or city natives, they tended to marry above their original station in life.⁷² The situation in early-twentieth-century Hong Kong suggests that Chinese maidservants in earlier eras might have followed a similar pattern: trafficked girls called *mui jai* were not married off in style, but they could end up as mistresses of their own small households, and often they remained in the city.⁷³ According to Mary Adelaide Walker, a British painter who wrote of her long residence in Istanbul in the late nineteenth century, Circassian slaves in that city could rise much higher in the social hierarchy. Married to prominent men, they ended up

⁶⁵ This was not true in some places in Japan, notably the northeast, where women left for service after they were married, but this was almost always rural-rural migration, not migration to the capital.

⁶⁶ Hubbard finds that "adult status and service were considered to be incompatible"; *City Women*, 25. Meldrum's study of a later period finds that a small percentage of London maidservants were married; *Domestic Service and Gender*, 18.

⁶⁷ Wiesner, "Having Her Own Smoke," 202.

⁶⁸ Ransmeier cites one example of this provision included in an 1835 contract; "No Other Choice," 64–65. This was also a common feature of early-twentieth-century agreements in Hong Kong. Rubie S. Watson, "Wives, Concubines, and Maids: Servitude and Kinship in the Hong Kong Region, 1900–1940," in Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991), 231–255, here 240.

⁶⁹ Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 126–127, 134–135.

⁷⁰ Divorce was quite common in Japan, and young divorced women usually remarried. Harald Fuess, *Divorce in Japan: Family, Gender, and the State, 1600–2000* (Stanford, Calif., 2004); Kurosu, "Divorce in Early Modern Rural Japan."

⁷¹ For breakdowns in the proportion of migrant/migrant versus migrant/native-born marriages, see the following: for Aix, see Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 57; for Stockholm, see Beatrice Moring, "Migration, Servanthood, and Assimilation in a New Environment," in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service and the Formation of European Identity*, 43–70, here 51; for Kyoto, see Nagata and Hamano, "Marriage Market in Early Modern Kyoto," 47; for Edo, see Saitō, *Shōka no sekai, uradana no sekai*, 142–143.

⁷² Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 83–84; Fairchilds, "Masters and Servants in Eighteenth Century Toulouse," 384–385; Hubbard, *City Women*, 48–49.

⁷³ Watson, "Wives, Concubines, and Maids," 242.

“as ladylike and well-mannered as the most undeniable ‘city-born’ dames.”⁷⁴ Tsuneno was well-off to begin with, but her journey from temple daughter to samurai status represented a variation on this theme of social promotion, even if her actual economic circumstances likely changed for the worse.

If she ended up in the same place as most of her counterparts across the continent (married and living in the city), her experience while in service diverged from that of most East Asian women outside Japan. Unlike young girls who were sold into service contracts, or older women who presented themselves to be hired at a central market, Tsuneno had to find her own place. Here she followed a strategy that closely resembled those of European women who found themselves in similar situations. While she soon realized the folly of trusting a young man solely because he was not “a strange person from a different province,” she relied on Echigo connections, including her aunt and uncle and her brothers’ acquaintances in Edo, to cushion her bumpy landing in the city. Later, as her third marriage began to fall apart, she found a position as a live-in companion to an acupuncturist who came from a far northern province and sympathized with Tsuneno as a fellow migrant.⁷⁵ Aspiring maidservants in Europe, too, tended to follow patterns of chained migration, in which they sought out the assistance of previous migrants in order to settle and find work. Hubbard cites an array of anecdotal evidence suggesting that young women in London found their first positions in service with the help of blood relatives and personal connections from home.⁷⁶ The pattern was similar in mid-eighteenth-century France, where servants of both sexes “secured their first job with the help of a friend or relative already established in town.”⁷⁷ Such connections were crucial, since without them it could be nearly impossible to find a place, and a girl with no friends in the city was in danger.⁷⁸

This initial placement was typically followed by a period of extreme mobility, and masters in Europe echoed Takizawa Bakin’s lament about the difficulty of keeping household help. Whether in Edo, Kyoto, London, or Paris, most maidservants did not serve in great houses with large, long-term staffs; instead, they were likely to serve in less prosperous households employing only one or two maids who turned over frequently. In France, low-ranking servants rarely stayed in a placement longer than a year. While those in London lasted longer, typically one or two years, they also tended to switch parishes when they changed households.⁷⁹ In Germany, laws that punished women who left service after less than six months were issued repeatedly, indicating that employers there faced a similar problem with retaining maidservants.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Mary Adelaide Walker, *Eastern Life and Scenery: With Excursions in Asia Minor, Mytilene, Crete, and Roumania*, 2 vols. (London, 1886), 1: 72.

⁷⁵ Gisen to Rinsenji, Tenpō 14.9.29, Rinsenji monjo #2041, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

⁷⁶ Hubbard, *City Women*, 28–30.

⁷⁷ In other cities, where maidservants did not necessarily reside with their employers, migrants tended to live near their own countrymen and -women. In seventeenth-century Stockholm, Finnish women streamed into areas where their compatriots had already settled, while migrant women arriving in Venice also clustered together, whether in groups of people from the same area or in more diverse immigrant neighborhoods. Moring, “Migration, Servanthood, and Assimilation in a New Environment,” 63; Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, 97.

⁷⁸ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe* (New York, 1995), 79–80; van de Pol and Kuijpers, “Poor Women’s Migration to the City,” 48–49.

⁷⁹ Hubbard, *City Women*, 30, 35–36.

⁸⁰ Wiesner, “Having Her Own Smoke,” 201.

What were these women searching for as they moved across cities? Some sought higher wages, but many were looking to add to their collections of material effects, typically household goods and clothing. Tsuneno recited the litany of her pawned items in several of her letters home, constantly rehearsing what she had lost and calculating how much it might cost to buy it all back. This tedious account-keeping—in kimono or in petticoats, translated into various currencies—was a common feature of the maidservant's existence. Servant girls in London and Lyon and Amsterdam also knew precisely the value of the clothing they wore on their backs, and they were constantly adding to their wardrobes. Some viewed items of clothing as assets, easily converted into cash, which were held in that form because they were easily portable and because they signified preparation for marriage.⁸¹ But clothing also conferred respectability. As printed cotton cloth became available throughout Eurasia, standards for the dress of working women rose. In 1689, Ihara Saikaku described an unemployed Osaka maidservant who would rather starve and die than relinquish her “fashionably printed kimono, her wide silk sash, her one pair of split-toed socks, and her silk floss veil and ornamental comb.”⁸² By the eighteenth century, European maidservants were similarly consumed with amassing wardrobes, and that was how they spent the majority of their wages.⁸³

On the other hand, many maidservants were compensated in clothing, in addition to or in place of cash. Sometimes this was the result of their employers' relative poverty. A Bengali woman, reminiscing about her maidservants in early-twentieth-century Calcutta, reported that “we were not able to give them anything beyond two pieces of clothing and napkins every year.”⁸⁴ Conversely, giving a maidservant clothing could also be a strategy of expressing the employer's status. In eighteenth-century England, “perquisites” in the form of clothing accounted for part of a maid's overall compensation, and upper-class mistresses tended to dress their servants as well as possible to signify their own personal taste and social standing.⁸⁵ However, since the possession of a wardrobe made it easier for a woman to transition to a different job, or (in cases where trousseaus were a prerequisite for marriage) to retire, employers could strategically withhold clothing to limit servants' mobility. In London and Paris, maidservants complained that their masters locked up their wardrobes and denied them access.⁸⁶ In Edo, Tsuneno found that her employers were freer with cash than with clothing; some were willing to loan nightclothes or extra robes, but others paid coins and withheld clothing.⁸⁷ In China, Ning Lao T'ai-t'ai had a similar experience,

⁸¹ Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 65–68.

⁸² Ihara Saikaku, “Spending a Day at the Employment Agency” (ca. 1689), trans. Peter Nosco, quoted in Chaiklin, “Up in the Hair,” 45.

⁸³ This was true of working women in general. Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (New York, 2008), 142–144.

⁸⁴ Swapna M. Banerjee, “Down Memory Lane: Representations of Domestic Workers in Middle Class Personal Narratives of Colonial Bengal,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 3 (2004): 681–708, here 689.

⁸⁵ Chloe Wigston Smith, “Callico Madams': Servants, Consumption, and the Calico Crisis,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 31, no. 2 (2007): 29–55, here 42–43. On a similar dynamic in Moscow, see Alexander M. Martin, *Enlightened Metropolis: Constructing Imperial Moscow, 1762–1855* (New York, 2013), 164–165.

⁸⁶ Hubbard, *City Women*, 33; Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 66.

⁸⁷ Other masters, particularly in rural areas, compensated female employees with clothing. For an example, see Mary Louise Nagata, “One of the Family: Domestic Service in Early Modern Japan,” *History of the Family* 10, no. 4 (2005): 355–365, here 359.

even though there was little danger that she would leave her employer. She reported that her mistress, a military official's wife, had loaned her a coat to wear because she had no clothes, but did not provide her with anything of her own.⁸⁸

Some of these similarities in the conditions of labor seem to be resemblances that appear on the surface of fundamentally different experiences. A five-year-old sold by her parents in rural China in 1870 and an eighteen-year-old who hitched a ride to London on a cart in 1620 both swept rooms, hauled water, worried over their wardrobes, and struggled with city accents, but one was paid and one was not, and one could leave while the other was trapped. On the other hand, to look at these situations as manifestations of "free" versus "slave" labor systems can also be misleading. First, "slavery" in Central, South, and East Asia encompassed a number of situations that were not at all alike, and which also did not resemble Atlantic world chattel slavery. Unfree women ranged from the powerful concubine and mistress of a ruler to the seven-year-old girl scrubbing the floor.⁸⁹ Moreover, in China, Korea, and the Ottoman Empire, systems of involuntary indenture and (in Korea's case) hereditary slavery functioned alongside labor markets in which domestic workers were hired, whether they were Korean seamstresses (*ch'immo*) who worked on contract, older Chinese maids like Ning Lao Ta'i-ta'i, or the day laborers who served as harem drudges.⁹⁰ And everywhere, including in Europe and Japan, the specter of unfreedom haunted the urban labor market, where the dark side of opportunity was the ever-present danger of sliding into prostitution, where women were coerced and even enslaved. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, the "woman brokers" who placed country girls in domestic work were often accused of being procurers who trapped their naïve prey in brothels.⁹¹ Tsuneno's brother in Edo admitted to a similar fear. He wrote home, "there are so many bad men around here; I worry that Tsuneno is going to end up as some kind of prostitute [*tsutome onna*]."⁹²

Nevertheless, in situations where women did set out on their own initiative to migrate from the countryside to the city, the question of agency is unavoidable. Did the pattern of urban migration among aspiring maidservants represent an accumulation of individual choices by women who desired an urban lifestyle? Did the possibility of this work provide an opportunity for them to resist the demands of their fathers and brothers? Or was domestic service a last resort for women fleeing bad conditions in the countryside? In local contexts, and even in individual cases, historians have proposed different answers to these questions.⁹³ In Tsuneno's situation, it is clear that she left home of her own volition, that she aspired to a lifestyle that was unavailable in the countryside, and that she understood this decision as an act of resistance to her family's expectations. Even as she pleaded for her brothers' understanding, she reaffirmed this choice at every opportunity. It would be impossible to make a similar statement about a large number of women scattered across the globe.

⁸⁸ Pruitt, *A Daughter of Han*, 76.

⁸⁹ B. D. Hopkins, "Race, Sex and Slavery: 'Forced Labour' in Central Asia and Afghanistan in the Early 19th Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no. 4 (2008): 629–671.

⁹⁰ Thanks to Jooyeon Hahm for information on Korean seamstresses.

⁹¹ Hubbard, *City Women*, 26–27.

⁹² Gisen to Rinsenji, Tenpō 14.9.29, Rinsenji monjo #2041, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

⁹³ For example, see Maza's discussion of historians' approach to this issue in *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 44–45.

But when the problem of agency is approached as a problem of context, of which opportunities for resistance were imaginable at a given place and time, then large-scale comparisons are easier. So, for example, what kinds of cultural narratives about service were available to young women? In Japan, board games (*sugoroku*) for women invited players to roll dice and move through various stations in life. If the winning square on the board was a luxurious retirement in a wealthy household and the losing square was a dire fate as a streetwalker or beggar, then the stations for housekeepers, chambermaids, and ladies-in-waiting were among the more desirable places to land. The experience of playing these games suggested that domestic service, especially as a lady-in-waiting in a samurai or noble household, could lead to better things: such women had a good chance of becoming brides or upper-class wives with the next roll of the dice.⁹⁴ This was probably the venue through which Tsuneno came to imagine that she might go into service for a lord and “learn the conduct and manners of the upper class.”

Other representations of maid service in print culture suggested that it provided the opportunity to experience the freedom of the city. Several decades after Saikaku's description of well-dressed Edo maids, Dōmyaku Sensei wrote a comic poem, “Hijo kō” (The Housemaid's Ballad), in the voice of a country girl working as a maid in a Kyoto townsman's household. Although her father in the province was poor, and she received only about one *ryō* per year in wages, she quickly discovered the wonders of “eight-penny powder,” scented hair pomade, platform clogs, pongee and crepe kimono, and hairpins with tortoiseshell inlay. Like Tsuneno, after experiencing the city, she had completely lost her taste for the countryside, both literally and figuratively: “It's been some time now since I've had ‘wheat-rice’ or miso stews; / Whenever I spot tea-porridge, it gives me the blues.”⁹⁵ This was satire, but it was a beguiling representation nonetheless.

These printed materials were available only to those who were literate or had someone to read to them. But word of mouth was also important. Tsuneno's desire to see Edo can probably be traced to her childhood, when she would have heard her male relatives talking about their adventures in the city. Her father had made at least one trip there, which he recounted in a diary kept in the temple collection, and her younger brother was sent to study at one of the capital's many Shin temples.⁹⁶ This type of secondhand experience of Edo was common in Echigo Province, which sent sons and daughters across the mountains to Edo and eventually welcomed them back. In *Snow Country Tales*, Bokushi described several instances in which Echigo natives (including the author himself) traveled to Edo, and others in which visitors from the city shared their observations. In one scene, men who had spent time in the capital thrilled local peasants with a tall tale about catching an Edo demon.⁹⁷ Most who returned to the countryside from the capital probably told more plausible stories

⁹⁴ Formanek, “The ‘Spectacle’ of Womanhood,” 80, 84–85. Spaces for concubines and high-ranking prostitutes had even better odds, but they were also fraught with peril—there was a significant chance of ending up in the gutter.

⁹⁵ Andrew Markus, “Dōmyaku sensei and ‘The Housemaid's Ballad’ (1767),” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 58, no. 1 (1998): 5–57.

⁹⁶ “Seiu nikki,” n.d., Rinsenji monjo #891, Niigata Prefectural Archives. Rinsenji also kept a pocket map of Edo from the late 1840s or 1850s, which probably belonged to Tsuneno or her younger brother. Okada Shuntōsai, “Edo annai zu,” n.d., Rinsenji monjo #2532, Niigata Prefectural Archives.

⁹⁷ Suzuki, *Snow Country Tales*, 150–155.

about the city's prosperity.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, returning maidservants themselves provided the best publicity for life in big cities. The poet Yosano Buson recalled that during his childhood in the early eighteenth century, he used to see girls who worked as Osaka maidservants returning home along the river bank, showing off the latest city fashions to envious country girls.⁹⁹

In many parts of Europe, young women heard and read similar stories that depicted work in service as an aspiration for rural women. Eleanor Hubbard quotes a ditty published in London in 1622: "When country Nan the milkmaid-lasses left / She came to London very neat and deft, / To seek preferment and her fortunes raise / Being indeed (as all the parish says) / A handsome wench and likely to do well / If with a London Mistress she might dwell."¹⁰⁰ Other fictional accounts suggested that young women went to London to "learn city fashions," an aspiration shared by Dōmyaku Sensei's fictional Kyoto maidservant. These provincial girls probably also heard attractive stories about life in the city that filtered back from their sisters and neighbors, particularly when former maidservants ended up marrying well. This was true even at the edges of the Ottoman Empire, where Circassian girls began to see slavery in Istanbul as an opportunity to rise in the world, particularly since the slave trade had already destabilized their native communities. According to a visitor to that city in the 1830s, "almost all the youth of both sexes in Circassia insist upon being conveyed by their parents to Constantinople [Istanbul], where the road to honour and advancement is open to every one."¹⁰¹

Of course, there were also darker narratives about the pitfalls of work in domestic service, many of which emphasized sexual predation and confinement. In Japan, the frequent inclusion of maid service alongside prostitution in board games and lists of occupations for women suggests that there was a troubling slippage between these categories of work.¹⁰² In China, too, this was a common suggestion, and late imperial fiction aimed at male readers related tales of migrant girls who were kidnapped and forced into prostitution.¹⁰³ European literature offered similar stories featuring naïve migrant women who "fell" into prostitution, often after an experience of seduction and abandonment. In London, advice manuals for servants bluntly warned of abusive masters who would take advantage of their employees.¹⁰⁴ And women did indeed live

⁹⁸ For a discussion of this phenomenon in a different part of the countryside, see Tsukamoto Manabu, *Chiisa na rekishi to ooki na rekishi* (Tokyo, 1993), 142–147.

⁹⁹ Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (New York, 2005), 283.

¹⁰⁰ Hubbard, *City Women*, 21–22.

¹⁰¹ Of course, this was also a self-serving justification from people living in Istanbul. Julia Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan, and Domestic Manners of the Turks, in 1836*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London, 1838), 1: 99, quoted in Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 127. See also Walker, *Eastern Life and Scenery*, 1: 61–62.

¹⁰² Yokota Fuyuhiko, "Imagining Working Women in Early Modern Japan," trans. Mariko Asano Tamanoi, in Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walthall, and Wakita Haruko, eds., *Women and Class in Japanese History* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999), 153–167.

¹⁰³ Paola Zamperini, *Lost Bodies: Prostitution and Masculinity in Chinese Fiction* (Leiden, 2010), 46–48.

¹⁰⁴ Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender*, 104–107. For European women, part of the danger was ending up pregnant and alone, while Edoites rarely told this version of the fallen servant girl narrative, not only because unwed motherhood was less stigmatized, but also because abortion and infanticide were so widely practiced. Posters in Edo advertised the services of abortionists. Fabian Drixler, *Mabiki: Infanticide and Population Growth in Eastern Japan, 1660–1950* (Berkeley, Calif., 2013), 57. Infanticide was prosecuted in Europe, and many of the perpetrators were servant girls; Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender*, 110–111.

out these tragic stories of seduction or coercion and abandonment. Or, at the very least, they seized upon these cultural narratives to explain themselves when they ended up “ruined.”¹⁰⁵

But sexual coercion was also a regular feature of life in the countryside, and these narratives at least offered the possibility of a different future.¹⁰⁶ When an Echigo peasant woman named Miyo ran away from her detested fiancé in 1798, she begged her friends, who were hiding her temporarily, to find her work “in service in a distant province.”¹⁰⁷ Hatsu, a post station prostitute from Echigo who made a failed attempt to escape her brothel in 1842, tried to intimidate her master with a farfetched story of how she had traveled to Edo and come under the protection of the shogun’s senior councilor, Mizuno Tadakuni, presumably by entering his service. It is possible to read her story as a kind of wishful thinking.¹⁰⁸ These women shared with Tsuneno not only a home province and an experience of sexual coercion, but also a hope that life as a city maidservant might offer a chance at escape. Of the three, however, only well-connected Tsuneno managed to realize that hope.

Across Europe, too, there were scattered accounts of migrant maidservants who left home over their parents’, brothers’ or fiancés’ objections, whether they were Finnish runaway brides in seventeenth-century Stockholm or fashion-crazed Lancashire girls in seventeenth-century London.¹⁰⁹ Even in places where most domestic labor was supplied through slavery or indentured servitude, there are indications that a market for urban maidservants provided opportunities for women fleeing difficult situations in the countryside. Ning Lao T’ai-t’ai left an abusive, opium-addicted husband behind when she went to work as a maidservant. She knew where the market was because he had previously attempted to sell their daughter in the same temple square.¹¹⁰ Suzanne Volinquin, a Frenchwoman who lived in Moscow in the 1840s, noted that both of her maidservants—sisters who were able to migrate because their father had been drafted into the military and liberated from serf status—had come to Moscow to escape romantic complications, a faithless lover in one case and an abusive husband in the other.¹¹¹ In Korea, female slaves ran away from their masters with increasing frequency during the eighteenth century, and many vanished into growing cities, where they found jobs as maids as well as entertainers and prostitutes.¹¹² The idea of leaving rural misery for urban service resonated even where most domestic servants were enslaved, and even when cultural narratives about maid service were as likely to warn of ruination as to celebrate social promotion.

¹⁰⁵ Fuchs and Moch, “Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home”; Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France*, 69–72; Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender*, 100–102, 107–109.

¹⁰⁶ Meldrum suggests that they may even have had positive implications for women who hoped to end up married into the households of their employers; *Domestic Service and Gender*, 105.

¹⁰⁷ “Aiwatase mōsu issatsu no koto,” Kansei 10.7, Hasegawa-ke monjo, Niigata Prefectural Archives, <http://www.archives.pref.niigata.jp/internet-komonjo-koza/11to20/11/>.

¹⁰⁸ Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 2012), 115–117.

¹⁰⁹ Moring, “Migration, Servanthood, and Assimilation in a New Environment,” 43, 49–50; Hubbard, *City Women*, 23.

¹¹⁰ Pruitt, *A Daughter of Han*, 74.

¹¹¹ Martin, *Enlightened Metropolis*, 249–250.

¹¹² At the same time, abandoned masters often found it cheaper to hire replacements than to search for runaways, accelerating the growth of a market for hired, rather than purchased, domestic labor. Eugene Park, personal communication, July 25, 2014.

NONE OF THIS MATTERED to Tsuneno. The snow mattered to her, and so did the mountains and the winters of eating radishes; the resented brothers, the two ex-husbands, and the young friend on his way to Edo; the early mornings at the well, the noise and press of the city, the cold coins in her hand, the scribbled letters, the lost hairpins, and the longed-for cotton padded robes. She could not have imagined the young women across Eurasia who made similar journeys across different landscapes. Why, then, should they appear in her history? Why tell Tsuneno's story on a global (or at least continental) scale?

One answer is that a focus on ordinary women such as Tsuneno applies one of the traditional strengths of women's history—its challenge to conventional periodization—to global history, a field that has struggled with how to divide time.¹¹³ While some global historians use “early modern” as a heuristic device to locate themselves in a universally recognizable period, others have cast doubt on the conventional European definition of early modernity (usually 1500 to ca. 1750), pointing out that the mid-nineteenth century is a more important economic and political turning point outside of Western Europe.¹¹⁴ In an attempt to reconcile these factions, Jürgen Osterhammel has proposed a long nineteenth century spanning roughly 1780–1915, taking up this transitional period that begins in the age of revolutions and encompasses the rush of global industrialization.¹¹⁵ But maidservants' stories challenge all these chronologies: the Eurocentric mid-eighteenth-century break, the mid-nineteenth-century turning point favored by some global historians, and the idea of a long nineteenth century dividing the early modern and modern. If we take these lower-class women's experiences seriously, we do not see major breaks, but rather a slow convergence over time and space that began in the early seventeenth century and faded out only in the late nineteenth century, when a new form of rapid urbanization and industrialization changed the possibilities available for young migrant women across the continent. From the maidservant's point of view, London in 1620, Paris in 1750, and Edo in 1840 were surprisingly alike. The major discontinuity was geographical—between places where women could change employers freely and the places where they could not. But even here, a basic story of urban migration, service, and settlement was shared.

Maidservants' stories also displace the global history narrative that shows us an interconnected world system that emerged from the age of discovery. It is possible to catch glimpses of global connections in maidservants' lives, most notably in the striped cotton and calico that formed their wardrobes. After all, these were textiles

¹¹³ This challenge was first articulated by Joan Kelly-Gadol, “The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 4 (1976): 809–823. For a more recent development of the same theme, stressing continuity over change, see Judith M. Bennett's concept of “patriarchal equilibrium” in *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia, 2006).

¹¹⁴ Jack A. Goldstone, “The Problem of the ‘Early Modern’ World,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 3 (1998): 249–284. Moreover, global economic historians assert that industrialization did not begin to transform the world outside England until the middle decades of the nineteenth century; Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*, 16. Thus, even in discussions of European economic history, it has become common to eschew the usual “early modern” formula and reach into the nineteenth century. For example, de Vries's discussion of the “industrious revolution” spans a long eighteenth century, encompassing the years 1650–1850.

¹¹⁵ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, N.J., 2014).

that emerged in India and became global commodities by the seventeenth century.¹¹⁶ To the extent that the desire for fashionable clothes motivated women to seek work in cities, this global trade network did change maidservants' lives. But what maidservants' tales show us much more clearly are the conditions that made these connections possible, as women migrants constructed households and cities that became nodes in new trade networks. They also show us convergence across the Eurasian continent during the centuries between 1600 and 1900, as big cities shared more and more in common.¹¹⁷

This is not a story of "modernization" in the classic sense, as the stories of "early modern" maidservants do not connect neatly to the histories of the women who migrated to work in factories later. When Japanese textile companies recruited laborers, for example, their arrangements resembled "unfree" brothel contracts more than the flexible agreements of city maidservants.¹¹⁸ Moreover, just as free and slave labor coexisted in many parts of the premodern world, factory labor and servitude shadowed one another throughout the nineteenth century. Even as industrialization transformed the economy, the demand for domestic labor in urban areas skyrocketed, outstripping factory work as a form of employment for young women.¹¹⁹ Finally, a straightforward story of progress from "free" domestic labor to factory labor would elide the brutal but crucial contributions of Atlantic world slavery to the development of capitalism, and obscure the point that African enslaved women were systematically excluded from the narrative of migration, service, and marriage that was shared across Eurasia. The history of maidservants is not a narrative of progress toward industrialization; instead, it shows us how urbanization happened slowly and unevenly across a continent, fueled by the very similar stories that people told themselves and others about how life in the city was an alluring, though dangerous, possibility for single women.

The global mode of narration offers challenges for microhistorians, too. Intimate, local details give accounts of agency and resistance their texture; they propel narratives and explain the constraints and opportunities that shaped ordinary lives. But they can also provide an illusion of specificity, obscuring broader patterns that can be seen more easily by employing a wider geographical frame. If Tsuneno's story is presented as a conflict between a woman and her family, situated within the space of Ishigami village, the dynamics of the household and the community are of paramount importance: the engine of the story is the conflict between the individual's desire to leave and the household head's need to maintain his status in the community, either by settling his wayward sister in a stable marriage or by keeping her safely at home. If we expand the frame, we can see the province, in which stories about female mi-

¹¹⁶ Riello and Parthasarathi, *The Spinning World*.

¹¹⁷ For a recent discussion of Japan and global convergence, see *Japan's Convergence with the West: How Similar Approaches to Nature Created Parallel Developments*, ed. Julia Adeney Thomas, Special Issue, *Japanese Studies* 34, no. 3 (2014).

¹¹⁸ E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton, N.J., 1992). Japanese recruiters employed similar coercive contract labor strategies in China, and in the early twentieth century recruitment was taken over by violent gangs. Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919–49* (Stanford, Calif., 1996), chap. 5.

¹¹⁹ Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, 696; Geoff Eley, "Historicizing the Global, Politicizing Capital: Giving the Present a Name," *History Workshop Journal* 63, no. 1 (2007): 154–188, here 165–166. Even in the twentieth century, the job description of a Chinese factory girl could include domestic labor; Honig, *Sisters and Strangers*, 107–108.

gration circulated in village gossip; the region, in which the Edo labor market drew an increasing number of single women into the city; and the realm of Japanese print culture, in which work in domestic service was presented as an aspiration. In this wider Japanese context, it is possible to argue that Tsuneno's departure was a leap of faith as well as an act of rebellion, one supported by an economic transformation that enabled women to imagine that they could support themselves in cities. But expanding the frame once again, to encompass the entire continent of Eurasia, alters the meaning of Tsuneno's story even further. She no longer looks like an iconoclastic heroine; instead, she appears to be part of a wider trend in which women in various rural hinterlands left to work in the urban service economy, sometimes without their families' permission, sometimes at their families' behest.

If the exercise of individual agency is considered as a problem of place and context, if certain grooves worn into the social or economic landscape made some avenues of resistance or rebellion not only more possible but more thinkable than others, then the topographies of Japan and Europe were remarkably similar: single women at both edges of Eurasia were able to use the prospect of migration and domestic service in ways that usually eluded their counterparts in other places. On the other hand, even where maidservants were more often bought than hired, and where the ability to move through a city in search of higher wages was curtailed by law or custom, the idea of urban service work as a path to a different (and perhaps better) life for girls had begun to expand the territory people traversed in their own imaginations. If we gaze across the continent, Tsuneno's story becomes a Japanese variation on a common theme, one in which work in domestic service inspired a wider array of women to tell new kinds of stories about themselves, to imagine the possibility of disappearance and reinvention, even if these stories remained dreams, or threats, or outright lies.

These small and idiosyncratic stories, real and invented, show us that the global economy was made up not only of calories and acres, populations and bolts of cloth, but of individuals and their choices: the runaway who set out for the city, the family who relinquished a daughter, and the shopkeeper who ran the numbers and hired a girl to sweep the floors. These obscure people lived out relatively mundane lives that, in their very ordinariness, were surprisingly similar. When their small histories come into focus, they produce chronologies and geographies that confound expectations. They smooth out breaks in time and leap over continental divides. They show us that global history is not only the possession of the sovereign at his court, the mariner at his star charts, the scientist at his study, and the merchant at his accounts. It also belongs to the maidservant at the city well, singing a tune from the countryside, calculating the value of the clothes on her back, and planning her next move.

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