

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, January 2023

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

January Traditions

The other day an American friend of mine remarked that he had nodded off while watching "noh", a classical dance-drama that's been performed since the 14th century. After dozing for a while, he woke to find the performer still plodding along the stage in the same direction. Well, yes, noh is like that. In general traditional Japanese art forms tend to be calm and tasteful. They settle our nerves.

Japanese literature and entertainment include subtle sensitive expressions which perfectly describe how we think it's good for us to be as a people: patient, modest, mindful of other's feelings especially when dealing with elderly people, teachers and our superiors.

Tea ceremony cultivates our minds, and flower arrangement soothes our souls. Traditional craftwork harmonizes with nature and our environment. All embody an important essence and spirit, something our busy society of nowadays has forgotten. Unfortunately some traditions are fading away. Old industries and shops suffer from a lack of successors willing to continue producing traditional items. Disposable goods will substitute for traditional craftworks after these techniques disappear. I am concerned that Japan will one day end up losing its unique sense of values and indigenous knowledge as our culture disappears.

Going against the flow of the times, how can we pass on our traditions so they can be carried on by future generations? It's not hard for Japanese to keep up with the times, so it shouldn't be difficult to pass on our culture either. In order for this to happen, most importantly we should know deeply our culture and history.

Museums can play an important role in this, and of course, we can support groups and organizations which train craftspeople or maintain historical buildings. But I also think all of us can preserve regional culture conveyed through family and tradition in many ways.

For one, we can easily write down recipes in order to recreate Grandma's "osechi" New Year's dishes, which are not only aesthetically pleasing and healthy, but also reflect our family's history and stories. If Grandpa knows how to twist "shimenawa" New Year's sacred rice straw garlands, we can learn how to make this eco-friendly decoration from him. Thus we can carry on these traditions on a very personal level. My grandparents used to set aside a day for mochi tsuki. I vaguely remember they used a mallet to pound the mochi when I was really little. Even now, every year end, we join my mother to make mochi rice cakes. Done traditionally, this would mean taking turns pounding the sticky mochi while a brave family member turned the dough between blows. My mother had a rice pounding machine that we had used for decades, but one year it suddenly stopped working. We had to go buy a new one right away because the rice was already soaking in water.

An appliance store had several of the latest multi-function pounding machines, so we brought one home to ensure we would continue our tradition as long as possible.

While acknowledging both the importance of cultural diversity and the reality of our busy lives, we should make efforts to preserve Japanese traditions. After all, good things that have endured for Japanese people must be good for the world to enjoy as well. Perhaps people overseas would like

things and special events that we have long cherished and treasured.

(Miwa N.)

The other day I went to hear a guitar recital by Shomura Kiyoshi. We're about the same age, and I have admired him ever since I was young. I had always wanted to see him in concert if I had the chance. That wish came true, and I went out for the evening feeling very happy.

The concert was held at Matsuyama Civic Hall. I wanted to sit as close as possible, so I got a seat in the fourth row from the front. In the center of the stage, they'd set up a display of a few seasonal flowers. Next to that there was a guitar, a chair, a music stand and a footstool. There were no microphones.

The buzzer sounded to start the concert and Shomura Kiyoshi appeared on stage. This tall man with beautiful posture, his long gray hair tied back in a bun, walked to the center of the stage. My heart skipped a beat. "What a cool guy!" There was no ceremony before his performance began. He just bowed, sat down in his chair, and tuned his guitar. Then he started to play. In an instant, the audience was drawn into the sound of his guitar.

Every time he finished playing a song, he lightly turned the pegs on his guitar. I was amazed at how he did this, depending entirely on his own ears, as if he had a tuning fork in his head. In my case, I use a tuning machine or the tuner app on my phone, as do most guitarists.

When he'd played everything on his set list, naturally we clapped in anticipation of an encore. He answered our request twice. The final encore was "Romance of Love," the theme song from the classic French film "Forbidden Play". It was the song that inspired me to take up the guitar when I was around 20 years old.

Not only me, but the whole audience was excited. I was greatly impressed by his wonderful performance.

I have been in charge of WGO Performances for more than 10 years now. When I was gathering information for the performance listings, I found "Guitar Recital by Shomura Kiyoshi," promoted by a membership-based music appreciation group called "Matsuyama Shimin Concert," which plans and organizes concerts by artists that fellow music lovers want to hear.

I was lucky to find out about this show by chance. Perhaps it was a reward for me being in charge of WGO Performances.

(Hiroko.T)

A great haiku poet in his high school days once belonged to the same literary club as Oe Kenzaburo, who would go on to become a Nobel Prize Winner in Literature.

As a businessman, this haiku poet took part in the spectacular economic growth and bubble economy of Japan, and, after retirement, he worked as an English/Japanese language volunteer tour guide and translator. Moreover, he generously shared his knowledge with anyone who wanted to take his English lessons free of charge.

Over a decade ago, even though I was very ill, I joined the tour guide workshop to learn a bit about Matsuyama, the city where I would be living. In the spacious classroom, this walking dictionary always sat in the back. In possession of an incredibly rich vocabulary, he was one of the most impressive students I met there. Never answered, "I'm not quite sure" whenever I asked about some or the other lord of Matsuyama, a movie theater showing classic films downtown, or anything for that matter.

It was sad to read about his decision to retire from contributing staff and I still feel rather sad reading his very last contribution to Outloud, in the December 2022 edition.

Both of our girls used to read his essays, and one of my British friends told me she was a faithful reader of his. I appreciated his delegation of responsibilities and leadership in publishing the book *Matsuyama Outloud* in 2015.

Once again, a load of thanks to this gentleman for being the sophisticated face of Matsuyama Outloud for many, many years. Wishing him and his wife a year filled with peace, good health, and contentedness.

His haiku, messages, and thoughts attracted readers with the several pen names he used like Old Soldier, Copernican, or just simply **H. Tarumi**.

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)