AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW T.TSUBAKI

Interviewer: Jewell Willhite

Oral History Project

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University of Kansas
ANDREW T. TSUBAKI

B.A.,

M.A.,

Ph.D.

Service at the University of Kansas

First came to the University of Kansas in
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QQ: I am speaking with Andrew T. Tsubaki, who retired in 2000 as professor of theatre and
film and East Asian languages and cultures and director of the International Theatre
Studies Center at the University of Kansas. We are in Lawrence, Kansas, on Dec. 6,
2000. Where were you born and in what year?

AA: I was born in Tokyo, in the area known as Akihabara today in 1931.

QQ: What were your parents’ names?

AA: My father is Ken Tsubaki. By the way, my full middle name is Takasa. That’s how I
got Andrew T. Tsubaki. Andrew was a name given to me by my American professor in
Tokyo, before I left Japan in 1958.

QQ: Oh, I see. Takasa Tsubaki was the name you were born with. Then later you got the
name Andrew.

AA: She was a converted Catholic, so she wanted to give me something relating to Christian
tradition, so people here could remember easier. My birthday is close enough to St.
Andrew’s day, so she gave me the name of Andrew. My father was a wholesale
vegetable merchant. There was a vegetable merchant market near Akihabara. We lived
near by.

QQ: What was your mother’s name?

AA: My mother’s name is Yasu. Her maiden name was Oyama.

QQ: Did you have brothers and sisters?

AA: Yes, I had four sisters and one brother. The last sister who lived died last year. I have
still one brother, Yoshihiro, living in Yokahama. This is the age when she passed away,
the current age of my brother.

QQ: So you grew up in this Tokyo area.

AA: It was downtown.

QQ: Did you attend what would be equivalent to our elementary school?

AA: Yes. I went to kindergarten one year and I went to (unclear) Kyota District Ward in Tokyo. The first elementary school I went to was Rensi Shogako (which means grade school). I went to kindergarten one year before that. That is when my mother died.

QQ: Oh, she died when you were very young.

AA: When I was six years old. After the war began—World War II began in 1940—we moved in 1942 to Sugedami Ward (unclear) area of Tokyo. The school was called the second (unclear) grade school. I was there from 1942 to 1944. Then I proceeded to a private high school in the area, Suginami Chugako (this means middle school). This was still wartime, the old system. We were to go either four years or five years in middle school.

In those days, the fourth year you were in you had a choice of either going into preparatory school at the college, or wait one more year and go to the university directly.

After the war, the whole system changed to the U.S. system. So in 1948, because of this change in systems, I was transferred and it was renamed Kotogato. It was the same school but now it was Kotogato Senior High School. So I finished six years of high school education at the same private school.

QQ: What do you remember about the World War II years? Did you have family members in the service?

AA: Yes, there are abundant memories about it. But going back to the elementary school days in the downtown area. Probably it was 1940 or some of 1941 maybe. I was still
Boy Scout age. We had a pretty famous Shinto shrine nearby called Kondomogi. We were encouraged to do voluntary work. I think it was summertime. A few of us went up early in the morning to sweep the shrine area. I remember vividly doing that. Then the high school I went to was pretty famous. It was a boys’ school. Coeducation was only carried out in the grade school. From middle school up, it was all separated. Ours was a boys school. It was known for good military discipline, like some of the prep schools here. So we did a lot of military drills, etc.

QQ: You mean like a military school here.

AA: Yes. So the first year after we started, probably late spring...The school system begins in April and finishes in March. We were taken to the foot of Mount Fuji and we stayed a couple nights. We were seventh graders in our first year in the school. We were taken with some of the senior students and, of course, teachers. We went through two or three days of strict drill. Another time we did an all-night walk. We got together at one commuting station at nine o’clock at night. Then we started walking to the river. I don’t know how many miles it was, but we walked and walked a good part of the evening. They did that kind of thing and then of course some of the martial arts. We went through two years of that. Toward the end of the second year, 1945, some of the older members of school, instead of coming to school they were sent to factories to participate in building this and that. Finally the time came for us. We were eighth graders. We were to go each class–we had maybe three classes–each class was assigned to different nearby wards. We were assigned to the (unclear) ward. For the first few weeks we were digging. We were afraid there would be bombing. So we had to dig and cover up this hole with protective...
QQ: Were you building bomb shelters?

AA: Yes, for hospitals and stations and things like that. After we finished that, we were working in the ward storage area tidying up. Then the war ended on August 15, 1945. So that stopped and we went back to school. I am writing my recollections, how I got into my theatre activities, so I will leave this with you. I explain how I got interested in English. High School English activities led me to major in English and I became an English teacher. Meanwhile, some of us decided to do an English play to help us to have an opportunity to practice oral English. This was the second year in college. So after that we did two more shows. In my senior year we got to the point of doing *Taming of the Shrew* and I did Petruchio. That certainly helped me a great deal.

QQ: You said something about the martial arts. I have read that you were interested in that. Did you start learning martial arts during this military training?

AA: Yes. When I was a kid in the A— area I remember my father put me in this sort of Saumari style dance. You would dance with sword. I was given a sword and just started that, but I don’t think I got too far with it. My interest in the martial arts came much, much later. In my high school days I was interested in baseball, tennis, and things like that.

QQ: When you were in high school this was during the American occupation. You said the school system changed.

AA: Before we go into that, our family stayed in Tokyo in the suburban area. Our school was right next to one of the very well known airplane manufacturing companies called Nakajima. So in the later days of the war they started bombing this factory. Not all bombs hit the factory. They fell all over. I remember that first just a solitary B-29
came, I think for surveillance, to take pictures, I suppose. Just one, way up, trailing a vapor cloud. Then a few months later they started coming in groups. At first they were just bombing from way up. But toward the end of the war they were coming really low. The famous night of March 14 or 15, 1945 the downtown area of Tokyo was just devastated by incendiary bombs. This was worse than the famous earthquake in Tokyo in 1923. Most of downtown was burnt down. So when that kind of thing happens, you can see in the downtown direction even at night it is so bright you can read the newspaper. The closest it got to us was one time during the air raid when we were standing in the yard. You get so used to it that you don’t go inside the shelter anymore.

You just kind of watch how things were going. Then I looked up and saw something falling. My sister was standing right there where the projectile was falling. I screamed at her and she stepped away. We had a very big plum tree. This piece of metal—the incendiary bomb is covered with metal. As it falls down it spins and the metal cover flies off. One of the pieces fell and came right to this tree. It fell right where my sister had been standing. That was the closest. I lost a couple of cousins due to the war.

They were drafted. One was a pilot and the other one was in the army. We were too young. My brother-in-law, who was married to my oldest sister, was too near-sighted to be drafted. So from the immediate family nobody was drafted to the war.

QQ: Did you go to shelters from your school. You said your school was near to this airplane factory.

AA: Right. But I don’t think we ever built a shelter at the school. By that time we weren’t going to school any more.

QQ: So your schooling stopped at some point during the war.
AA: Maybe the first year students went to school. We were in the second year.

QQ: And that’s when you were digging holes, etc.

AA: That was just the last two months or so. Another interesting experience was that we had very disciplined-minded teacher who taught classical Japanese and Japanese grammar. He was very short-tempered. When he became irate by our inability to answer him properly he would make us stand until somebody could answer properly. This particular day in winter there was snow accumulating all over. The whole class was having trouble conjugating Japanese verbs properly. This was classical Japanese. He got so mad he drove us all out to the school yard and made us run a few times barefoot in the piled up snow. Fortunately, after ten or fifteen minutes the school period finished so he allowed us to come in. We were washing our feet with cold water, but that cold water felt so warm. Then after the war, he was the first one who started talking about Lincoln, government by and for the people, etc. Even in our minds—we were just second year in high school—it was very strange. The fourth-year students went on a strike against him. He was too much. They had sense enough what to do, I guess. I don’t know whether they negotiated with the principal or not, but anyway one day suddenly all the fourth-year students were out in the school yard not going into the classroom. Their demand was that this professor had to quit. So he was fired and he was an old man. But that was such a radical change. Something like that sticks in my mind. Then another time, when we were second-year students in the summertime, we had a swimming pool. In one of the Japanese swordsmanship classes, not our class but the other class was doing something wrong. The teacher got mad. We used bamboo swords in those days, four
pieces of bamboo bound together with leather. The whole class was lined up. They were just going to go in swimming after this class. Most of them were just wearing swim pants. He started hitting them with this bamboo sword. The following day we had a swim contest for the whole school. This whole class had red stripes on their butts. That was quite a sight. That is the time I started studying English, in the third year of high school after the war. This teacher was so good, American trained. I talked a couple of my buddies and the three of us went to see him in the teachers’ room. He agreed to teach us after the class. So we stayed with him about a year. That’s how I developed my ability to handle English. Those were kind of interesting years.

QQ: When did you graduate from high school?
AA: I finished in 1950. Then I went to the university called Tokyo Dygoctu, which means university. This school resulted from the change to the new system. They had two normal schools for men and one normal school for women in Tokyo. So they put all these colleges together and made it into a university. The main purpose of that was to train teachers for grade schools and high schools. I went there. I was in the second group to enter. I decided to major in English. I was there from 1950 to 1954.

QQ: Is it more difficult to get into college, or was it at that time, than it is here?
AA: Even then we had to prepare very intensely. Some students who would aspire to very famous topnotch private universities or topnotch national schools—the tuition was enormously different. Some of the reputable national schools’ entrance examination was very difficult because the competition is so keen. The whole system is different. Here it is S.A.T. scores that determine whether you can get into some of highly qualified schools. Today they are doing that in Japan too. But in those days each school had
their own test. They had a set pattern. The topnotch schools gave their test in the first period of time. Then the less reputable schools would have other time periods. Usually you would take two tests, the desirable school and then in case you don’t make it then you have a safety net to get into the school of secondary choice. My school was secondary but still they gave us a reasonably good education to become a teacher. The tuition was such that I could afford it. By that time my father was retired. In 1939 as a vegetable merchant he had to go to the country to see the farmers and to make sure certain products would come to his shop. On one of those business trips north of Tokyo the train he was riding was hit by a freight train. All the rest of the cars were metal, but the one he was riding in right behind the locomotive was wooden, probably a weaker, older car. Somehow the pressure of the heavy locomotive caused this lighter, weaker car, because the freight train hit a few cars behind. The car he was riding in got jumped up in the air and fell off perpendicular to the railway track. So when it went up, he hit his head and when it came down he hit his butt. He was injured in two places. His lower injury caused him trouble walking around, but it healed reasonably well. I guess he got some compensation for the railway company, the National Railway. So he decided to step down. The whole Japanese government decided to control many of the food-dealing merchants, rice, vegetables, etc. All wholesalers were allowed to send one person from each shop to make up this company that was controlled by the government. My father decided not to go himself but instead he asked my oldest sister’s husband, who used to work with my father, to go to the company representing our shop. So he didn’t have a job and financially we were okay, but my brother couldn’t afford for me to go to an expensive private college. So fortunately I got a government scholarship, which had
to be paid back, just like student loans here. But if you work in a teaching job up to junior high school level for 10 years or something then you don’t have to pay your loan completely back. I taught four and a half years. Then I had a chance to come to the University of Saskatchewan as an exchange student.

QQ: Did you teach in junior high?

AA: I taught in a junior high school in the downtown area fairly close to where I was raised. I taught English. Because my interest in theater had grown by then, I decided to become a drama coach. Just like here, young teachers are encouraged to take care of clubs, so I took care of the drama group. I taught them and did productions. Also some of the drama coaches got together and we made up a group as a laboratory for ourselves with some graduate students and friends. We had a small amateur company and we did a production each year.

QQ: Were they classical Japanese productions?

AA: No, these were modern things. I don’t know how much you know about Japanese history. For Japan, 1868 was a big year. That marked the end of the feudalistic era governed by Samauris. There was a revolution by Saumari who were not controlling the country. Way out farther west they revolted. First they thought they had to knock down the government and then drive away all foreigners, but they soon realized that was too much. It was wrong. They had to learn from foreigners, the Westerners. They realized what happened in China and India later. So rather than fighting against them, they decided to work with them. In 1868 marked the end of that feudalistic time. Then
they restored the reigning leadership to the emperor, sort of as a figurehead. Actually, they incorporated the Western parliamentary system. So that was the first step to democracy in Japan. So that set off the whole chain of enormous revolutionary system for all Japanese. But we got overeager after winning the war against Russia, in which Teddy Roosevelt became a mediator and talked to both sides and worked out the peace treaty between Russia and Japan. Then later in the early 1900s the Japanese military got overanxious to protect their own interest. They went into Manchuria, China, etc. That conflicted with the interests of the British, the Dutch and the Americans. That led to World War II. With that major restoration majies of the imperial system. So some of the dignitaries of the new government were going to France, Germany, and England. When they went they were invited to go to the opera and the theater, beautiful places with everybody dressed up. They were so impressed and they looked back and wondered where could they take these foreign dignitaries when they came to Japan. Ex-president Grant was in Japan at one time. He was taken to this traditional theater. I don’t know how much he understood, but maybe for a diplomatic gesture he said, “This is great. You should preserve this.” He was taken to one of the oldest theater forms called Noh, which goes back to the fourteenth century. So one thing about Japanese traditional theater or Asian traditional theater is the cultural phenomena. They would add new forms to the old, existing theater form. They would have some elements of the old theater and create new. But a lot of time they would bring in new things. That’s how Noh theater, Kabuki, puppet theater and modern theater are coexisting today. The puppet theater goes back to the fourteenth century, the seventeenth century. It is continuously performed. That happened in Bali, Indonesia, Indian dances, Chinese
opera, etc. They don’t throw it out. In the West it is such that Roman theater absorbed some elements of Greek theater and then they forgot about Greek theater. Only later when Shakespeare started using some of the Roman comedies in his stories then we see that as part of Shakespeare, but we don’t do any Roman theater. We know some of the plays, we do some of the plays, but not in the way the Romans or Greeks did them or even Shakespeare did them. Now instead of Romeo and Juliet we do West Side Story. Some people know it is Romeo and Juliet but most people wouldn’t care. That’s the Western system, absorb and change almost completely. But in Asia, we keep old things as old. If you put too much new things in, it is no longer that old form. So we have this sort of preserved tradition. That is part of the reason that today going back to the 1920s people started noticing that in Asia they have these old theater forms which are consistent without disruption. They started learning all sorts of variable things from these forms and practices. And that’s how I fit into Western theater. So they thought about Kabuki, they thought about Noh Theater. Noh Theater was noble and the theater of the high-ranking Samurai. But Kabuki was bloody with lots of murder scenes and ghost scenes. It sort of catered to the taste of commoners. Everything was exaggerated. It was fun but at the same time it was very coarse. So they didn’t feel comfortable taking foreign dignitaries. So they were wondering what they could do. Then eventually they realized that all these traditional theaters were not a good way to culture younger people. Then they studied Shakespeare and the Greek plays and modern theater, Ibsen, Chekhov. Then they imported modern, Western theater tradition and they started doing Western plays in the way Westerners were doing. Unconsciously, they were still using Japanese staging techniques. That is insight. We can tell that but of course they didn’t know.
They were seriously thinking of doing “Western” theater. That’s how the Western theater tradition began in Japan. It goes back to the 1920s. By the time we were doing this kind of thing, rather than doing traditional theater we were functioning in the tradition of Western theater. Most people realized that to do traditional Japanese theater took so much to learn, to study. You can’t just step in and do it. The walk and the posturing is all different. It takes years to train. Besides, they thought it was old-fashioned. Only after I left Japan did I develop an interest in Traditional theater. People started asking me, “What is Kabuki like? What is (unclear) puppet theater.” I had very basic knowledge, but not much.

QQ: So you went to the University of Saskatchewan first. What were you majoring in?
AA: My whole purpose was to study Western theater. I was told, “Whatever you want to do is fine.” I wasn’t a degree candidate. I already had my bachelor’s degree. So I took all the courses they were offering. It was a small school and a small department. Two British professors from England were teaching. I took all the courses they were teaching. I spent hours and hours working in the scene shop learning all the techniques of construction and painting. That helped me when I was given a chance to be an assistant at Texas Christian University. For two hours every afternoon I took care of a stagecraft class. The students would come taking turns. We were building scenery. I was dishing out, “You do this, you do that.” Usually the designer would come and would work out what needed to be done. That sustained my two years at TCU. I finished my master of fine arts degree. In Saskatchewan one of the big things I did was write a 50-page report about traditional theater in Japan. Then my master’s thesis was “The Influence of Western Theater on the Development of Modern Theater in Japan.”
So I used that report as an introduction to describe what the Japanese theater is like and then describing what kind of Western theater was influencing who and how some of the theater companies are developing thanks to these genius people who studied Western theater and tracing it down. At TCU the head of the department was a German, who got out of Germany because of the Nazis. So he was very kind to me and helped me a great deal. I marvel at how I finished everything in two years and writing this 200-page thesis. I was still struggling with my English. A funny thing he said was, “When you are talking or writing your own stuff I can understand your English. But when you start translating I cannot follow your English.” He was kind enough to ask another professor in the English department to be on the committee so that he could pay closer attention to my English than he could be cause English was a foreign language to him too. Anyway, he really took care of me. Thanks to that experience I was able to go to the University of Illinois for my PhD. I had the good fortune of working two years on the Noh Theater and the Kabuki Theater and translating a lot of information into English and making a card file for one of the professors. That experience led me to do a study on one of the top actor-playwrights of the Noh Theater, (unclear). So my dissertation was “Analysis and Interpretation of Tsumai’s concept of Yugin.

QQ: Is this a kind of play?

AA: No, it is a concept, an aesthetic concept. You describe something as this has very much of yugin. It is a quality of very sublime beauty. Even Tsumai’s concepts of yugin changed through time from very colorful beautiful scene to an unusual, supreme aesthetic satisfaction. Tsumai describes yugin as beautifully clad court ladies standing viewing cherry blossoms. That scene is yugin for him, very colorful, vibrant, beautiful. But
later he says this beauty is like when you cut rice you leave some stub (tape ended.
Please continue description.) What Tsumai talks about with an introduction to how this
yugin concept continues to exist today in different words. We don’t say “yugin” as much, but we still use words like “wabbi” and “sabbi,” particularly when you do the tea
ceremony. Are you familiar with the tea ceremony.

QQ: Well, I know there is such a thing. I know that they have exact ways of doing it.

AA: You can do it in the middle of a field. But the most proper way of doing it when you
have your own tearoom, which is a detached little space surrounded by a nice garden, a
typical Japanese garden, very quiet. Then you can hear hot water being boiled in the
metal pot and you dish it out with a small bamboo ladle and swish it out, green tea. You
set up in a precisely worked out traditional manner. You admire the container, you
admire the room, admire the flowers, admire a scroll. It is very simple and simplicity is
called “wabbi.” It is simple but deep. It is not overly decorative. It is the complete
opposite to a Louis XIV palace. That kind of very simple, yet very rich environment is
called having wabbi quality. Then sitting there so quiet you can hear birds chirping
outside, and you can hear hot water boiling. Then you serve, relaxed but so focused.
You are enjoying the quality of sabbi, a quietitude.

QQ: That is very different from modern life, isn’t it?

AA: Oh, yes. One professor traces this whole aesthetic tradition starting from yugin to wabbi
and sabbi. He says this is all the same kind of aesthetic joy we feel in the Japanese
environment. So one chapter traces all this. In another two chapters I traced how
Tsuaimi uses the terms and how this boils down in how we should interpret this. The
first two chapters are about Tsuami and Tusami’s father called Kanami. He is also a
very famous actor. So I talked about Kanami and Tsuami in each chapter tracing the history and background of yugin. Then Tsuami’s wabbi and sabbi are discussed in the last chapters. That was my dissertation. So that kind of experience prepared me to specialize in Japanese traditional theater, not modern theater.

QQ: Were they actually staging these traditional Japanese at this university where you got your Ph.D.?

AA: No, not much was being done in the 1960s. So I went to the University of Illinois in 1961. I think in the late 50s at the University of Hawaii there was an attempt. One of the professors invited a Kabuki actor and did Kabuki production.

QQ: Then you were teaching at Boling green State University.

AA: I taught at Boling Green State University for four years.

QQ: Where is it?

AA: This was before I finished my dissertation. After my comprehensive exams, I didn’t want to stay on campus. By that time I was married.

QQ: When were you married?

AA: 1963. My wife is Canada born, second generation Japanese. During wartime she was raised in Japan, so she knows both Japanese and English and she also understands the way Japanese live.

QQ: What is her name?

AA: Lilly.

QQ: Was she at the university also?

AA: No, she doesn’t have a university education. Also, I became a naturalized citizen in 1973. While I was in Boling Green, one of my colleagues came to KU. After he came
to interview in 1976, he told me they they had a good, vigorous international theater program. People were interested in that. He said that probably I would enjoy working there. So when they had an opening, due to two people taking sabbaticals in the department, they wanted to hire two people. This was temporary employment. I was one of the two who came in 1968. (Unclear) was already teaching here. He came a year ahead of me. The person who was instrumental in hiring me decided to move to Brazil. His wife is a Brazilian. After two years of my stay here, he got out. So I became the director of International Theater Studies. By this time my position was firmed up. I was added after the two sabbatical people came back. I think I became the 13th and that’s how it stayed until three of us retired this May.

QQ: You came at an interesting time to Lawrence, didn’t you?

AA: This was a time when the university was expanding. There was money and lots of departments were adding people, rather than stagnating. In a few years the whole things kind of got stalemated. People tended to stay in one place. Looking back, I enjoyed being here.

QQ: I meant there was a lot going on, such as the protests, that started about that time.

AA: I remember in 1969 the Union was bombed and a lot of hippies, not many here, but still some came.

QQ: Not so much in your department, is that what you are saying?

AA: No, I meant on campus, Lawrence. We had some hippies but not like Madison, Wisconsin, or Boulder, Colorado, not that I was familiar then but looking back, people talked about that. I came with a mind to step into more traditional theater and teaching Asian theater, centering on Japanese theater. The curriculum here was open to that for
me to develop the courses. From 1969 once my appointment became a permanent appointment, I was encouraged to go into it. So there was a series of grants that I got, and I tooled myself up to teach Japanese theater. Later I was able to go to India and study Indian theater. My two big things are Japan and India. Then China I studied myself and Korea and some of the Southeast Asian theater, Indonesia, etc. I combined all of this into my class. So my class is sort of like an accelerated course using a lot of films and related video. Then with my acting experience in India and Japan I started teaching acting classes, one catering to classical Japanese theater, one introductory one and one more advanced. I encouraged the students to use what they learned in my acting class and use that experience in their directing.

QQ: Had you acted yourself at some point?

AA: Not over here, but in Japan. In Boling Green I was a scene designer. But once I came here I emphasized more and trained myself to become a director. So I would go to Japan to study Japanese plays, Noh theater, Kogin, and Kabuki theater and come back here and use that experience to direct.

QQ: So you were directing Americans these kinds of productions.

AA: Right. The whole thrust was, as I was speaking, going back to the 1920s. Are you familiar with W.B. Yeats, the Irish poet?

QQ: I know who he is.

AA: Very symbolic poems and plays. He was one of the earlier ones who was attracted to Noh theater. In those days not many foreigners could talk intelligently about what Noh theater is. There was one person who went to Japan to help the Japanese government to
assess what kinds of artistic treasures they had, particularly in Buddhist temples, the statues and paintings. He helped to teach the Japanese people how to evaluate these treasures. While he was doing that, he got into Noh theater. Some of the plays he translated and on some he had notes or synopsis, things like that. He died and he left all this and his widow asked Ezra Pound, who didn’t know much about Noh theater, to put this into some kind of publishable shape. Pound took it up and he put out a book, not a big book, a collection of (unclear), observations and translations. Yeats had seen this before it was published and he got interested. I think that is the greatness of people of genius. They see the parts of such a great theater form and get inspired. He wrote plays that he thought were in the shape of Noh theater. He used the Irish (unclear) and (unclear) for his own Noh theater type plays. Then a bit later Berterd Brecht, a German, who indirectly got to know stories about Noh theater and plays about Chinese theater. He used these to write (unclear) or Yea Say or Nay Say are from a Noh play. So, again, in his case it is just partial. So in those early days it was playwrights who were inspired. But in the late 1950s and 1960s more about traditional theater was known, not just Japanese but the Indian theater. (Unclear), a Polish director, thought theater had to be simple. Sometimes they called it eliminating any unnecessary decorative element in the theater, going down to ritual. So he explored this possibility. He learned a great deal from Japanese Noh theater and the Indian Katakali dance form. Anyway, then comes the time of directors using this kind of experience, Peter Brook later. So that in the 1960s to early 70s. Then a lot of educators started doing this kind of research and trained themselves, tooled themselves up to direct show. In the late 1960s and 70s we started doing this. There are several people, such as James Branden, who is now at the
University of Hawaii. He used to teach at Michigan State University with one of the earlier ones joined another person who started doing Kabuki plays. James Branden did his own Kabuki play. I’m talking about Kanjinjo. I used his translation to do Kanjinjo here back in 1973. I studied that in Japan in 1969. Then there is another person, (unclear), who teaches at Pomona College, who happened to have a master’s degree in French from KU. He is a very theatrical person, a typical actor, very expressive gestures and facial expressions. He started doing Kabuki at Pomona College. So these three, including myself and a Japanese person who came to the University of Illinois after I left in 1964, Shozo Sato. The four of us did a lot of Japanese traditional theater. The other three tended to emphasize Kabuki more. But I did a lot of Kogin and then some Noh theater later. Part of the reason I emphasized Kogin was partially because not many other people were doing it and partially because it’s fun. It’s comedy. It’s part of Noh theater. Cleverly, the devised—just like in the old Greek theater—they did three tragedies and one comedy in their festival. In Noh theater today it would take 90 minutes to do one play. So they sandwich one Kogin comedy, which takes 20 minutes to 30 minutes, between two Noh plays, so the audience can enjoy the change of pace, instead of just tragedy, tragedy, all the time, they can have this interlude. The story is not directly connected to either one. But it sort of comes in by itself. Today you are working until five o’clock and the theater begins at 6:30. If you go on beyond 9:30, people start leaving, because they have to catch their transportation to go home. So they have to operate within a two-hour frame. If they do one full Noh play, then they have only 20 or 30 minutes to add. So they do one Kogin and let some actors do short dance scenes. That will fill up two hours. Only on the weekend when they have five hours, they would
do two Noh plays and one Kogin.

QQ: That’s still a long time for people to sit and watch them.

AA: On festival occasions, when people have plenty of time, they may even go to five Noh plays and three Kogin plays.

QQ: This is in Japan where they do this.

AA: Yes, it would take all day. You have to eat two meals in the theater. But anyway, partially it is the Japanese’ fault. They tend to give less value to comics. They like serious things. That is more valuable. If it is comedy, well, you can kind of laugh it off. Also, Japanese young people started liking Kogin because the language is easier. There is more straight acting, not so much musical elements like the Noh theater. Even Kabuki, which is supposed to be commoners’ art, by this time—it started in the 17th century and this is the 21st century—the language is so archaic that you can’t just go and understand everything they are talking about.

QQ: Kind of like Shakespeare for us.

AA: That’s right. The Noh theater is much more difficult because they chant. Just like in operatic singing, if you don’t know Rigiletto, it is so difficult to follow the story. Even if you know the story, you can barely follow what is going on. Whereas in Kogin they have a dance scene, which is very brief and they have a story, and although bits and pieces of the dialogue are in archaic language, most of it is very easy to follow. So young people started liking this very much. After World War II they started having just Kogin programs by Kogin families. When a Noh play is done, you have to have eight chorus members from the main character group and then there would be two or three actors participating in the play itself. Then there are two or three actors who are
secondary characters. They all specialize in different roles. That is a tradition. Then you have three to four musicians, who play percussion instruments and flute. So you are talking about 15 to 20 people. Then there are two or three Kogin people who also participate. So to do a Noh play properly, takes a lot of people, whereas Kogin can be done with three or four people. It is much more economical. It is also short. Not only is it fun to do, it is much easier to approach. That is part of the reason I started emphasizing Kogin. I did Kabuki once for KU in 1973 and I did the same thing in 1974 at Carlton College in Minnesota. Then in 1975 I did the same plan at Tel Aviv University in Israel. I have never done a Kabuki play after that. There is a bit of conflict between the world of Kabuki and the professors who are teaching Japanese theater in this country particularly. So I did about seven productions dealing with Kogin plays, about four times on campus, the last time in 1998. I was invited to do it in other places, so I trained other people. The next year one of my former students, Marcia Paludin, who teaches at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, she was the first one of my former students to be doing a Kogin production. I will be going down in February to help her. What we tried to do is to bring in these performing characteristics, particularly the way you handle dialogue and movement. As a said, each theater form has a particular way to do walking, standing, delivering lines, inflections of lines and the way you emphasize certain words by rhythmic pattern and emphasis. Kabuki is the most exaggerated. Noh is very reserved. Kogin is sort of in between. Because of the humor, certain things are punched. To me, when I share all this experience with my students they learn how they have to be disciplined in their presentation. In Western theater, particularly in American theater, you know Marlon Brando and the joke about
him. He can mumble through the whole scene and be a good actor. But plays before
his time it took articulation, very rhetorical, beautifully done, even vocally, not just the
way it looked. The actors stood straight and the ladies were in big dresses, big skirts and
all that. They couldn’t just sit down. They had to carry themselves. Japanese theater
still has that kind of manner too. The costumes force them to be in certain ways.

QQ: Do they speak Japanese when they are doing these plays?

AA: No. They do them in English, but I carefully transpose Japanese language
characteristics to the English lines. So at the very beginning the master comes in and calls
the servant. When he is calling the servant, he would say, “Tarokaja,” which is the
name of the first servant. He would say, “Tarokaja, are you there?” So this comes from
the Japanese. So I transfer Japanese intonation into the English language. Then
Tarokaja in Japanese responds and stands up and comes. So I would say, “Yes, sir.” So
you carry the feeling and the vocal pattern exactly and the manner. The only thing we
cannot do is do it in Japanese, because it would take so much time to train them. One
interesting part that I found doing a Noh play twice was that the first time I copiously
worked on translating all these chanted chorus passages. Then I trained my chorus
members and sung in English. One day during dress rehearsals I was listening and
couldn’t follow them. I couldn’t understand what they were chanting. And I trained
them, so it was my fault too. But in English if you exaggerate and prolong a vowel too
long and give too little emphasis to the consonants, language disintegrates. Just like in
opera, you can’t understand what they are singing.

QQ: Sometimes that is right.

AA: After so much effort from the students and from me, I realized that this was useless. So
the second time I did a Noh play I gave up translating and making them sing in English. I asked them to sing in Japanese. Because it is a limited, very fixed pattern, they can memorize it. You know, sometimes with music you can sing in a foreign language. So they did that. Everything progresses rather slowly in a Noh play. So I had a translation in the program and I would cue the audience by having a certain number of balls. For instance, the first chanting is one. I put one ball on the rack. Then they would look at one. They can read it very quickly. Then they can look back and enjoy the musical element. You don’t have to struggle with what they are singing. So it was my conclusion that you have to do that. Anyway, my students told me frequently that they enjoyed this discipline and articulation of language and also the quality of the movement.

Those things they couldn’t quite get from a Western acting class, because they emphasize too much how you feel. Before you know how to use your body, you start doing things because you feel. The funny part is you watch a rehearsal with the director and actor talking at length and then they go up and do it again. And outwardly we cannot see any change, although the actor and director feel good because they had a discussion. But the actors’ technique is such that they cannot express that understanding in a better way. I thought when I heard something like that from my students, I felt good that I was helping them in some way.

QQ: You have toured with some of these productions in other countries, haven’t you?

AA: I toured three times in this country. There are people in the West like Branko who are doing this, so I didn’t try to go to the West. I went mainly to the north, to New York, to Chicago and in between. The first one was very limited. The second one was a little bigger. And the third one in 1998, the last, we actually toured 10 days plus one extra
weekend. We drove over 5,000 miles.

QQ: Do these plays have a lot of scenery?

AA: Not much scenery. We need just one drop. I use a plastic Christmas tree for one pine tree. But we need lots of costumes, not to change but because each play has a certain amount of costumes, all traditional and made in Japan. I ordered them in three different installments. Each time we spent about $1,500. Every time I bought we could buy less and less because the value of the dollar went down. One time I took a group of Kogin to Japan for about two weeks. That was fun too. But the rest of the time I went by myself and helped my German friend. A lot of times we worked on Greek plans and some ancient Spanish classical plays. Also I helped one time a Hungarian director. So I did a lot of work in Europe. Also I did workshops in South America and India and Europe.

QQ: I read that you were restoring an ancient theater in Greece.

AA: A friend of mine and I were there for the first time in 1986. Until then the rich people knew that there was a theater. This whole hill was called (unclear). This is outside a village called Katohi in the western part of Greece. My German friend had a Greek Cypriot friend and he was in a big city near by Inciniadis. He realized that Inciniadis, which was a fort looking at the (unclear) sea across Italy. In the third century B.C. people were going back and forth. So they watched the traffic from this fort. They say the sea used to come right up to this hill, shallow water. Now it is all dried up. It has been made into a field where cotton and rice are grown. So they had a fort, a theater, shops, lodgings at the base. They even had a bath. It was quite a self-contained operation. So in 1986 we had two weeks of a theater festival. Some American, German, Greek actors got there. Three of us plus one other American director from
Philadelphia, four of us instructors dealt with ancient forms. Mine was Japanese. We introduced what ancient Greek theater was, what ancient Japanese theater was. We did some scenes from the Greek play, *Antigone*. Then we went back in 1987 and did *Antigone* with 12 American actors. We toured to Cyprus. With this connection, for the first time in 1990 the acting chairman and I took 10 KU students and two outside students, which made 12, and we did the play *Hypolitus*, which I did on campus first and then took the concept and some actors to Katohi and did a production. So we showed the villagers how the theater could still be used. It is a remain, but the orchestra is intact. Part of the spectators’ section is intact. The first time we used it there were no toilets, no lights. So we had to do it during the day. In the summertime it gets hot. So we would start off at five o’clock and make sure we are finished before it gets dark. One time we finished kind of late and everybody had to walk down in a hurry as it got dark. There was no light, so it was kind of dangerous. But today we have lights and we have water. I don’t think we have toilets yet. It is much better and they have a regular summer season now, not on their own but by bringing companies in. This past summer we had the third Greek theater program. The person who helped me last year was leading the group this year.

QQ: Then you have been interested in the masked folk dance theater of East India.

AA: Yes, this was the winter of 1980-81. I had a grant to go and spend three months in India. Actually, I spent two months in the village. I went in weighing 165 pounds and I came out weighing 135 pounds.

QQ: Was it the heat?

AA: It was partially what I was eating and you can’t help but get diarrhea. But it was
mostly because of the rigorous training program I would go through with my guru teacher twice a day, dance routines for a couple hours each. That was very taxing. I was in my early fifties but I went back to what I weighed when I was 27 years old and left Japan. So when I came back everybody thought I was sick but I was fit. I looked trimmed down.

QQ: During the time you have been with the Department of Theatre and Film here how has the department changed. Do you have more students now and more productions?

AA: Oh, yes, definitely more students and more productions. But not necessarily more graduate students. The theater area is a bit top heavy. Because of the financial situation of the country, we are not expanding. A lot of programs have kind of stagnated in the number of professors here. So we cannot hire new people, although a lot of people started retiring, so openings are there. It may have a little better chance for new Ph.Ds to get jobs. But there are still too many Ph.Ds, so that is still a bit of a problem. It makes it difficult for our side to offer more and more. And yet there is more demand with students wanting to have their own productions put on stage, etc. So the number goes up but money doesn’t. There is natural limit to where we can go. As I said, I was the 13th member of the department. We didn’t gain on the theater side. On the film side we added two more in the last five to seven years. So the organization clearly has changed. We started as a department speech and drama. We had four different areas all in one department. But now it is divided up. Actually, we broke into four different groups. Ours is theater and film. Film and television got broken into two. Broadcasting went into Journalism. Speech Communication became one. Speech Therapy became one. So we all divided up. We are now Theater and Film. On the
theater side, facultywise, it has not changed much. I think we gained more
internationality by having people who are interested in outside of American theater,
particularly European theater. Theater lost three of us in May (through retirement) and
they only hired one person on a temporary basis for a quick fix. The College, I guess,
has not approved, hiring new people. I don’t know what their plan is. I suppose they
have to come up with some concrete suggestions this coming semester, January and
February. I am concerned and curious about what they are going to do. I have no idea.

QQ: Murphy Hall has changed too during the time you have been here. I has been added to.

AA: Two big things have changed. One, the Lied Center was built. In a way, the overall
picture, has added significant convenience, prestige. It is a huge operation. Because
when they were in Hoch, sometimes they used Murphy Hall theater, but it was too
heavily used to include anything for touring companies. So they had to go to Hoch, and
it was such a terrible place to perform, not only for the audience but for the actors too.
There were no proper dressing rooms, just a dinky basement change room. I think
everybody who came hated it. The Lied center was certainly a nice change. That’s one
big thing. The second thing is they added that new wing to Murphy Hall. When I came
in, I was told there was going to be space for a new theater. But, it is interesting.
Music, in general—I’m not knocking them down—is much more prestigious, in that all
over the country music education is already recognized. You don’t have too much
problem teaching music in high schools. But teaching theater in high schools is still a
struggle. I don’t know how much you are informed about this.

QQ: Not much.

AA: In the state of Kansas it’s not regularly acknowledged curriculum yet. So theater is
taught by an English teacher or it is just a club activity. So we haven’t really got a hold in secondary education yet. This sort of reflects the state of theater education at KU. We have been in the same building, the same number of classrooms, same number of offices, so we are all doubled up, tripled up in our space. Some people in Wescoe Hall complain that their office doesn’t have a window, etc. but at least each professor has one room. Even high-ranking, full professors in theater are still doubled up. We haven’t gained any more theaters. But the music side is gaining more space for practice, more theaters to perform in. I may be griping, but that is the situation. So the change you may see in Murphy is for the music side, not for the theater side.

QQ: You also taught business Japanese, is that right?

AA: Yes. Again, I am not particularly criticizing my colleagues in East Asian Languages and Cultures, but they are people trained in literature, in linguistics. In the beginning when we had to come up with the idea of catering to the new needs...I mean a lot of people thought doing business with Japan is great. And it has been. But training businessmen with language is something totally new to the faculty in East Asian languages and Cultures. So I volunteered myself. A man in theater has to be a jack of all trades. So I am interested in a lot of different things. Otherwise we cannot understand the thought or the way certain characters do things, right? We have to understand the tragedy of The Death of a Salesman as much as Shakespeare’s problems, as much as Greek problems. So we always have our fingers in something. So I volunteered to start off business Japanese. I had some workshops after I started teaching, but I came up with my own ideas and picked the textbook. I guess I did about four rounds of that every other year. Now one of the ladies in the department took over.
QQ: Was this an undergraduate course?

AA: Undergraduate but offered it 509, at the 500 level first and then I added a 600 level we taught at the same time. This is a course to be taken by someone who has finished third year Japanese or at least in the second semester of the third year. So by that time they are mostly seniors or graduate students or seniors who came back after their junior year abroad. In my son’s case, he spent three years in Japan as a senior and came back and did one more year at KU and then graduated with a degree in business and Japan. He spent four years as a senior. Sometimes that happens. So I had 609 as well as 509. I varied the demands and assignments between the lower level and the higher level. It wasn’t a big class. The biggest was seven or eight but it gave a finishing touch to students before they graduated.

QQ: Then you taught marital arts too.

AA: Right. I started in 1987 after I got my black belt in Hi ki do. I approached the Physical Education Department and they welcomed me to do it. Of course, I wasn’t asking for any money, so that made it easier for them to do it. So I started teaching a very basic course, 108. Each semester some students wanted to stay. So I taught 110 and 112. Right now I have three levels of courses all in one. But advanced students will be taught advanced stuff, but they can always help take care of less experienced people. By now I have one person who is helping who started Hi ki do here with me. Another person came up through all these classes. About five years ago we opened up downtown Tojo, a place of practice. We have a group called the Kansas Ki Society. The class, the KU Club and the Kansas Ki Society downtown Tojo, the three of them work together. Students can come and practice for advanced stuff with us and also we send instructors
for the Club. I teach but I get help from senior members who are experienced people.

We are doing okay.

QQ: Why do you think people take it? What is the advantage in taking a course like this? Is it self-defense?

AA: When you look at young kids or college kids even or girls, what they come for, I suppose, is the excitement, a lot of different ways that they see in the films, martial arts, karate and ti kuando, Korean martial arts which uses lots of kicks. Are you familiar with “Charlie’s Angels?”

QQ: I have seen the television show but not the new movie.

AA: All that, dainty, nice looking girls, doing karate and kick boxing, whatever. That gives a certain image of Asian martial arts. What is different in what we do is we emphasize Ki, which in Chinese is called chi. We write it as ki.

QQ: What is that?

AA: That is energy that we all have. That energy is universal because everybody has it. Out there is filled with ki. Ki is in some ways air. But if it is air, we are breathing in and breathing out all the time. It gives us oxygen and the ingredients we need to sustain ourselves. So what we do is to teach this presence of ki in us and outside and how to use this four our own health, breathing. Ki pressure. Have you heard of shiatsu, accupressure?

QQ: I’ve heard of accupuncture.

AA: In a similar way we make contact with a healing person, like a muscle, and press them. We send our ki through contact. This invigorates the ailing part. Usually they are tired, so we need some stimulation. By invigorating breath saturation we carry this worn out,
tired part away and you feel refreshed. So our purpose to understand how ki works and develop ourselves as a much calmer person, a much more controlled person individually.

But at the same time we try to use this in confrontational situations, which could be like walking up to the boss to ask for a raise. You go up not timidly, you go up with confidence. If you present yourself with good forwardness, frankness, then he will be impressed. But if you go there timidly, if you are not sure you can do this, he will sense that. He will say, “Well, maybe a few months later, not now.” Or if it is a fighting situation you could just walk away, or if your enemy persists and starts hitting you, then every time somebody tries to hit you they have the energy coming to you. So use this energy to your advantage. If he wants to (unclear) like this. You grab it and let it go that way. Let him go a little more than he wanted to go. And he loses his balance. And then use that loss of balance and subdue him, mainly by creating the pain in the wrist. So he will scream and fall down. So control your partner using his own ki. A lot of times people don’t understand the presence of ki, so they try to crush the partner. You really don’t have to crush them, you use his own energy. In simple words, ki as a lot of times translated as universal energy. Ours, we think, is the most self-defensive type of martial arts. Because if nobody comes to us, nothing happens. Only when somebody gets aggressive do we do something. It is very different. So we don’t teach how to kick or how to punch.

QQ: You’ve had publications, I suppose. Any books?

AA: Not a book yet but lots of articles, translations of plays. Right now I’m working on my autobiography, which will be in Japanese first. It is kind of interesting looking back at how it all started and where it came.
QQ: Have you had outstanding former students who have gone on to greater things?

AA: There is one student who is teaching English in Japan, In Kyoto. She finished a Ph.D. while she was in Kyoto. I led her to a particular unique form of Kogin in Kyoto. She studied it and described it in her dissertation. Now she is so comfortable and loves being in Japan so she is staying, I’m sure, until she retires. She may come back, but recently she developed an interest in Tibetan Buddhism. So she is enjoying herself very much. Another student who finished in May with me was in Japan and married a Japanese girl, but the marriage didn’t work out. He had been teaching in Japan almost ten years, but he decided to come back and pick up his Ph.D. at UCLA. He just started this spring. There is another lady teacher who is at Greensboro, who is now tenured, who is doing Kogin for the first time. One undergraduate who finished a bachelor’s a good dozen years ago went to New York and became a professional actor and model. A couple years ago she wrote her own story, coming from Lecompton, a rural girl in Kansas, how she made it in New York. Somebody made a movie and this movie went to Cannes this May. It didn’t get any prize. Her name is Laura Kirk. These are some of the ones who are doing well.

QQ: Are you going to have continuing involvement with KU since your retirement?

AA: I’m still teaching a Ki Akido class. Where you are not asking money, you can continue. So I retired from the theater side completely. I do go other places when they ask me to lecture or direct a workshop. I was in Florida doing a couple lectures. I’ll be going back to another part of Florida in March. In February I will be in Greensboro. Also Ki Akido takes me around. I have some places here I go and teach in Brazil and Argentina.

QQ: Anything else you plan to do in retirement?
I have quite a bit of traveling done. Before retiring, I took three years of phased retirement. Beginning in 1997 and in 1998 and 1999 I took the fall off. Then in May I completely retired. So I was working half time. I taught in the spring. In the fall I enjoyed some time for myself. It was a good transitional period because I realized that even if you are not teaching all semester how fast time passes. In the summer of 1997 I took this Greek program for the second time. So the summer was gone with that. Then from September to October my wife and I and my wife’s brother and his wife, four of us, took a cruise through the Mediterranean. I had gone to Greece a number of times. But for the first time I had a week in Italy. I liked it very much. I also went to New York for a conference. That led into May of 1998 and a conference in Munich. I spent a couple of weeks in Munich and Austria. Then that spring we did a tour from March to April and October to November. My second son lives in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

I guess we didn’t mention your children. How many do you have?

Two boys. I talked briefly about the older one, Arthur, who finished. He is a typical American. After a few years he gets itchy. He wants to move and change jobs. He started with Honda International Trade Co. in Marysville. This was a company that was dealing with the import export of Honda. Then he went to Motorola Communications. Now he is working in Michigan for the Steel Case office furniture company. The year and a half younger one went to Case Western Reserve for his undergraduate degree with a university fellowship. Both graduated in high school here. Then the younger one went to Stanford and finished his M.A. in one year and then went to Japan with a government grant from Japan. Then he got hired by Motorola Japan. He worked in Japan about three years. Meanwhile he got married to this Brazilian-Japanese girl he
met when he was in Japan studying. He decided to go to Brazil. He went to Brazil as an expatriate from Motorola. After two years he had to switch to Brazilian Motorola. He is still with Motorola in Sao Paulo.

QQ: What is his name?

AA: Phillip. Both of them produced a boy. Arthur had one in May 23 and Phillip got one on October 28. So suddenly we are the grandparents of two boys.

QQ: What is your assessment of the Department of Theatre of KU, past, present, hopes for the future, that kind of thing. You have talked a little about the department. Any additional comments you’d like to make?

AA: I certainly wish that they will continue with what I started. We have a whole bunch of costumes that could still be used in the tradition I created. But the future is not settled yet. It is kind of interesting. In the last five years we have lost five people who retired. Five out of 13 is a big number. So I am sure in the next three years we will be seeing much difference. I am very curious as to how it will settle. Personally, I started working more community service. For Kansas City I was asked and led the Japan Festival. I was chair of the committee. UMKC stepped in and offered a place for us to use. So for four years we have done the festival in September and one time October. Four times I contributed my Kogin plan, one each. Now I have to stop that. But I have renewed my appointment as executive director of the festival. So I have a different and much more involved function because the Counsel General’s office wants to pull back the work they have done. The Counsel General thinks that the office is doing too much, understandably. So I have to lighten their load. Being executive director is not a paid position. It demands a lot of attention, but I promised to take care of it for three years.
Locally, in Lawrence, I have been one of the committee members for The Friends of Hiratsu, our sister city. We just celebrated the 10th anniversary. The city of Hiratsu has been very good to us and gave us about $5,000 to start something. Five years ago we decided to build a garden. During the last two years we have been working intensely on it. Before the delegation came in early October they gave us another substantial gift, a stone tower. I don’t know if you have been there or not.

QQ: The one down on Massachusetts Street next to the museum.

AA: You see one (unclear) tower and another big stone lantern. These are their gifts. Also they gave us a plan for the garden after we told them where it was going to be. But there has to be somebody who decides what goes where. So I became that person. As a consultant to the city parks and recreation department. The parks people did all the labor, but I was the one who went with them north of Manhattan. There is a stone quarry there. Interestingly, probably when the iceberg was moving maybe it pushed rocks into this quarry. They are digging it up. So we have a lot of different stones. So we got about 50 some stones from there in three trucks. Picking those stones was part of my work. Then telling them what goes where is my work. Until I got involved I didn’t realize, but when you look at the rock, it has a front park and a top part. When you look at the rock you have to judge what is what. You have to tell them. You are not going to face the back side of the stone to the people who are standing. You have to choose the right side. All these decisions were mine. I went with them to get more supplies from a rock shop in Kansas City. A lot of planting of plants was done by the parks people. With Fay Watson, wife of the former city manager, who spent lots and lots of energy and time. We worked on this plan and celebration and everything went well. I am happy to
see that......(tape turned over) has almost a 30 year history in Kansas City last year. As a past president I had to stay with the board this year. I just finished that part yesterday. So I feel great relief.

QQ: I think that is about it. Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

AA: What I didn’t talk about is a bit complicated. This Noh theater and Kogin were patronized by samurai, of course, the governing force in Japan. They rose in the 12th century and went on to the 18th or 19th century. In the 14th or 15th centuries they were a rising power. They controlled the country and the warring time was coming to the end. Japan stopped aggressive fighting among themselves in the early 17th century. But the samurai

AA: