

"SONGS THAT REBOUND WHEN BEATEN"
THE JAPANESE PROLETARIAN LITERARY MOVEMENT:
HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT, AND LITERATURE

by
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Dr. Alan Wolfe

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This is a study of the proletarian literary movement in Japan, centering on the 1921 to 1934 period. This paper begins with brief history of Japan from 1869 to 1945 as a way of explaining the reasons for the development of Socialist activity in Japan. The second section follows the development of the movement itself. Analyses of the following works are included: *The Factory Ship*, by Kobayashi Takiji; "Letter Found in a Cement-Barrel," Hayama Yoshiki; "Song" and "Farewell Before Dawn," Nakano Shigeharu; *Town Without Sun*, Tokunaga Sunao; "A House in the Village," Nakano Shigeharu; *Nobuko*, Miyamoto Yuriko; "Downtown," Hayashi Fumiko.

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INTRODUCTION

Proletarian Literature was a world-wide phenomenon, reaching from the late 1800s to the present. German, Russian, American, and French authors, as well as Soviet and Chinese authors, participated in the movement. Between 1921 and 1934, Japanese "proletarian writers," though tormented by the government, were very active. Theoretical writings on ideology and artistic method had their place among the intellectuals of the movement, but the intended audience of their fiction was the working class. Japanese proletarian artists built upon a foundation of European Marxism, as a way of presenting Marx's theories to the laboring class in free-form poems, stories, and novels, often about workers or party members. Among the best remembered authors today are Kobayashi Takiji, Tokunaga Sunao, Hayama Yoshiki and Nakano Shigeharu.

Whereas Japanese literature remained almost unknown in the West, Western literature had a tremendous impact on Japanese artists and writers. For centuries, little change had occurred in Japanese art and literature, but with the sudden opening of Japan to the West in the 1860s came a rapid influx of western thought, which forced artists to rethink their roles in society and their methods of artistic expression. Vital notions imported into Japan were French naturalism, German romanticism, and Marxism itself.

The traditional aesthetic in Japan, as evidenced today by the paintings, architecture, sculpture, poems and fiction of earlier eras, idealized that which was gentle, serene, and removed from the daily world of commercial and social concerns. Although art idealized warrior virtues during the feudal Kamakura and

Muromachi periods (1185-1603), the traditional aesthetic stayed intact; the perfect warrior was fierce in battle and loyal to his master, but also loved poetry and could weep at the beauty of falling cherry blossoms. The intent of the Japanese socialists was to break away from the idealization of withdrawal from worldly affairs that had characterized the past, and create a new aesthetic based in "socialist reality." The new proletarian works acknowledged the power of capital, the oppression of the worker, and the relationship between the two.

Proletarian writers produced works in various styles and genres, but they held in common certain fundamental ideological beliefs, which united them under the banner of Marxism-Leninism, and opposed to fascism.

The Japanese proletarian literary movement developed in three stages, each of which was represented by a different organization; these were the *Tanemaku Hito* phase, the *Bungei Sensen* phase, and the NAPF/KOPF phase. Many prominent writers and theorists were also active Communists, and as such used party channels to communicate with the Soviet Communist International and other organizations in the West. The Japanese Communist party, like those in other countries, received instructions from the Comintern, which V. I. Lenin established in 1919.

In Russia and China, where Communist parties eventually took control of the governments (Russia in 1921, China in 1949), proletarian literature supported the government; didactic stories encouraged workers to follow party directives and raise productivity. In Japan, on the other hand, except for the first year of its existence, the Communist party operated under ground. Under a regime they could see developing fascist tendencies and engaging itself in imperialistic warfare on the Asian mainland, the Japanese Communists were anti-nationalistic,

pacifistic rebels. They wrote to undercut the patriotism and blind loyalty preached by the government, to expose the inequities of traditional Japanese society, to teach artists of their social responsibility, and to awaken revolutionary consciousness in the working class.

Because the proletarian writers were insurgents, they faced severe governmental repression. Censorship severely restricted the circulation of their works. Many authors were imprisoned; some killed--all were in danger. Leading theorist and poet Nakano Shigeharu's poem "Farewell Before Dawn" begins,

We must do our work
And for it we must talk,
But if when talk
The police come and batter in our faces.

The commitment of the authors to their beliefs in the face of violent opposition lent to their writing a sense of urgency, and proved that theirs stood apart from bourgeois art as the art of protest, resistance, and a new proletarian truth.

Marxist-Leninist writers used several different forms. Their materialist history texts were the first, in the Japanese context, to examine history in terms of the development of capitalism. Their theoretical writings were also unique in that instead of creating an ideal, they were a means of imbuing art with a social conscience and political ideals. The third and most widely read form consisted of creative writings--poetry, drama, and fiction.

The reasons for the rise and decline of proletarian literature must be derived from a study both of literature and of history. The social and economic structure of Tokugawa Era Japan (1603-1853), the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and the rapid industrialization and imperialistic expansion of the 1890s through the 1930s can be seen as forming a chain of events leading from feudalism through a

stage of bourgeoisie rule, into conditions suitable for the rise of capitalism and, finally, for the implementation of Marxism-Leninism. The writers of the proletarian literary movement certainly held this perspective; this paper will therefore be structured in this fashion. The first chapter is a brief history of modern Japan which indicates how and why industrialization and westernization occurred, and how the conditions for the rise of socialist activity developed. The second chapter outlines the development of Socialist and Communist parties and affiliated art and culture societies. The third and fourth chapters center on examples of proletarian literature; they include biographies of important authors and analyses of several key works. The fifth chapter recounts the demise of the organized Japanese proletarian literary movement and concludes by examining the legacy of the literary innovations developed within the movement as they appeared in another non-socialist genre, and after World War II.

CHAPTER 1

FEUDALISM TO FASCISM: CONDITIONS FOR THE RISE OF SOCIALIST ACTIVITY IN JAPAN

Historical conditions paving the way for the growth of capitalism in Japan began before Admiral Perry used battleships to force open Japan's markets to American trade in 1853¹. Even under a system of "centralized feudalism," accumulation of capital and social stratification had become a problem that would lead to civil strife and, eventually, revolution. An early and important conflict between economic changes and the social structure began in the Edo period, the era from 1603 to 1853 when the Tokugawa Shogunate held the central government and *daimyo* warlords controlled individual provinces.

During this period, ostensibly to maintain social harmony and stability (and, clearly, to keep itself in power), the Shogunate instituted a social system called the *bakuhau*. Based on Confucian principles, this system created classes based on social function, giving warriors the highest place and merchants the lowest. In practice, this system separated the respectable and the rich into two discreet groups. Although the samurai had the advantage of high social station, they depended on government stipends for their income. Merchants, on the other hand, while looked down upon socially, accumulated large amounts of capital through their businesses, becoming the creditors of the higher classes.

¹ On July 8, 1853, Commodore Perry led a battalion of American warships into Edo Bay, bringing a letter from President Millard Fillmore requesting Japan to open its ports to American trade, to assist ships in need of supplies, and to be hospitable to shipwrecked sailors.

Tiedemann, Arthur. *Modern Japan*. (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1962), p. 18-19.

In 1868, the disappointment with which many daimyo felt toward the Shogunate, which they felt had been weak and had acted against the good of the nation in granting permission to the United States Navy to use several Japanese ports, compounded their bad feelings about their financial situations. The powerful Satsuma and Choshu *daimyo* led their troops against the Tokugawa Shogunate in a successful coup, known as the *Meiji Restoration* after the title of Emperor Mutsuhito's reign, *Meiji* (shining peace). In doing so, they accomplished several things. They did away with the semi-feudal government and the *bakuhan* code. They also renamed Edo, the seat of the Tokugawa government, *Tokyo* (Eastern Capital). During the Tokugawa era, the emperor had resided in Kyoto, where he signed laws but had no power. The rebels "restored" Emperor Mutsuhito to power (as symbolic head of state, rather than as a leader of government).

The Seeds of Socialism

The social, economic, and moral upheaval of the early Meiji Period had a strong effect on the "Meiji generation." Many, especially the intellectuals, felt lost; their world had changed. Confucian values, which had been drilled into them through their formal education, no longer played the vital role they had, and now they needed something to take their place. During this confused era, the goods, technology, and thought of the West poured into Japan. Japan changed very quickly from an agrarian to an industrial society, and the people were forced consciously to choose either the familiar and traditional, or the new and foreign.²

² Natsume Soseki's novels express this confusion and changing of attitudes quite clearly. In *Sanshiro*, a university student sneers on the traditional, in things or people, as coming from "before Meiji fifteen (1883)."

As was the pattern in the West, light industries such as textiles, especially silk in the case of Japan, preceded heavy industry. In many farming families, poverty made it impossible for the parents to provide for all of their children, so they would send one or more to work in the factories, hoping thereby to insure the survival of as many children as possible. Impecunious members of the former samurai class (formally abolished after the Restoration) also sent their unmarried children to work in the factories to help earn the income their families needed. Many samurai still felt that it was beneath them to engage in commerce, or to place themselves at a merchant's command. Also present in the factories were farmers who sought to supplement their farm incomes with factory wages during the off-season. Because the young workers were kept in dormitories, and the farm workers had outside sources of income, their "living wage" (the amount of wages they needed to earn in order to stay alive) was low. Consequently, Japanese laborers were paid far less than were their Western counterparts.³

The dangerous conditions and low wages the workers faced in the factories forced them to look for relief in another import from the West: socialist organization. The first Socialist Party in Japan began in Kyushu in 1882. It was immediately suppressed by the police, however, under the 1880 Public Meeting Act.⁴ This was just one of many laws to be passed by the government at this time, ostensibly to protect the "public morals," but actually to shield itself from opposition movements.

Throughout the period of Socialist activity, Japan was involved in a string of wars and international conflicts. Quarrels with China over the development of

³ Crump, John. *The Origins of Socialist Thought in Japan*. (London and Canaberra: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 12-17.

⁴ Shea, George Tyson. *Leftwing Literature in Japan*. (Tokyo: The Hosei Press, 1964), p. 4.

Korea began in the early 1880s. Japan wanted Korea to develop using Western technology, free of Chinese control, whereas the Chinese wanted to hold on to Korea. In 1882, Korean conservatives rebelled against the Japanese; Chinese troops restored peace, at the cost of a few Japanese officers' lives. China already had treaty rights to station troops in Korea, and Japan demanded the same right after the 1882 incident. In June, 1884, Korean leftists, supported by the Japanese, set up a new government, which China stepped in to overthrow. More troops were sent, both army and navy; battleships began shooting at each other, and soon war was declared. By 1885, to the world's surprise, Japan's superior training and equipment proved its value. The Japanese navy captured China's fleet, and China had to recognize an independent Korea, cede Taiwan and other territories, as well a trading rights, to Japan, and pay a fine. Germany, France, and Russia threatened in 1885 that they would go to war with Japan if it did not return to China part of the ceded territory, the Liaotung Peninsula; unable to face three strong military forces, Japan complied.⁵ Concern that the western powers would interfere in Japanese expansionist efforts was to persist through the beginning of World War II. The Japanese government's bad feelings toward the west over this matter may have contributed to its encouragement of ultranationalism in coming decades.

In 1889 the emperor handed down a constitution as a "gift" to the people. The Meiji Constitution disappointed liberals, who had hoped for a greater degree of democracy than was actually granted. The Meiji constitution provided a European-style two-house parliament, which was established as the central government. The former *daimyo* warlords had to surrender their lands to the

⁵ Tiedemann, p. 41-43.

state, but most were then given legal governorships over the same provinces, receiving salaries equal to about half of their former incomes.⁶

Although the nation's influence grew stronger during this period, the domestic situation, especially as viewed by the farmers and urban workers, was getting worse. When agricultural products such as rice could be imported from Manchuria and Korea, prices for domestic products fell and farmers suffered. And although the wealth that came into Japan from its new colonies was substantial, it went to the industrialists; the common people, those who had fought for it, gained none of the benefits. Throughout the 1890-1931 period of prewar aggressions, the people's discontent grew. The workers could do little to influence the government's policies; only male propertyholders had the right to vote. The only avenue left to workers was to organize themselves illegally and demand what they needed: food, housing, and freedom.

In 1901, with Abe Iso, Katayama Sen, and Kotoku Shusui at the lead, a Social Democratic Party was formed. Its 1901 Declaration stated, "Our party places its full emphasis on economic matters as solutions to political matters." It claimed that both houses of parliament represented only the rich, leaving the people to fight for themselves. The party platform included: nationalization of railroads, municipality control of utilities; no sales of public lands; rent limitations; compulsory education to the eighth grade level; an end to child labor and limits on women's labor; destruction of the death penalty; disarmament; dismissal of the upper house of parliament; and repeal of the Peace Preservation Law of 1900 (under the auspices of which the police could crush socialist activities).⁷

⁶ Tiedemann, p. 23.

⁷ Lu, David John. *Sources of Japanese History, II*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), p. 91-2.

Shea, p. 10.

The organizers had very different reasons for starting the party: Katayama hoped to establish unions resembling the American AFL in Japan; Abe, a Christian, felt that a more fair and equal system than that of the capitalists must be established, and Kotoku, a militant radical, wanted to overthrow the government through a Marxian revolution.⁸ The police forced the party to dissolve on the very day it announced its platform. However, the Socialist newspaper Kotoku started, the *Heimin Shimbun* (Common People's Newspaper), was to survive for several years more.

The populace did not entirely support governmental suppression of Socialists and, in fact, began to express feelings contrary to the values and actions of the government. Japan went to war against Russia in 1904, again over the question of who would control Korea and its resources. But this war was quite unpopular. The farmers were reluctant to give up their sons to conscription, both because they needed their help, and because they still felt that war ought to be the business of the warrior class, not of the common people. Also, the human cost of the Russo-Japanese war was high; even the victorious General Nogi admitted that far too many lives had been lost. Japanese Socialists were appalled when their government attacked the country of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. They published an open letter to the Russian Socialists in the *Heimin Shimbun*, which read:

Your government and our government have been plunged into fighting at last in order to satisfy their imperialistic desires, but to the socialists of both countries there is no barrier of race, territory or nationality. We are all comrades, brothers and sisters, and have no reason to fight each other. Your enemy is not the Japanese people but our militarism and so-called patriotism. Nor is our enemy the Russian people, but your militarism and so-called patriotism.

⁸ Lu, p. 90.

Patriotism and militarism are our common enemies; nay, all socialists in the world look upon them as common enemies. We socialists must fight a brave battle against them.

Someone, possibly Lenin himself, wrote an encouraging response to this letter and published it in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party's publication *Iskra* (*Spark*).

Amid the jingoistic chorus of both countries, their voice sounds as a herald from that better world, which, though it exists today only in the mind of the class-conscious proletariat, will become a reality tomorrow. We do not know when that "tomorrow" will come. But we, the Social Democrats the world over, are all working to bring it nearer and nearer. We are digging a grave for the miserable today--the present social order. We are organizing the forces which will finally bury it.

The letter was eventually translated into Japanese and printed in *Heimin Shimbun*.⁹

In 1905, after the Russo-Japanese war, the Japanese government was disappointed with the terms of peace, favorable to Russia, which American president Theodore Roosevelt had helped to negotiate.¹⁰ This did not help to soothe Japan's brewing hostilities. In 1906, the Japan Socialist Party formed, and it lasted for a year before radical factions led by Kotoku became too visible. The government, angered by the party's role in major rice riots in Tokyo, dissolved it.¹¹

Labor organizations, as well as political parties, sprang up during this time. In 1912, the *Yuaikai* (Friendship Association) labor union began, with the forging of better relations between labor and owners as its goal. It became more radical

⁹ Berton, Langer & Totten. *The Russian Impact on Japan: Literature and Social Thought*. (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1981), p. 95.

¹⁰ At the same time, the Russian government, having suffered severe losses in its war with Japan, felt it necessary to encourage the pacifistic elements existing in Japan, best represented by the socialists.

¹¹ Swearingen, Rodger & Langer, Paul. *Red Flag in Japan*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 5.

in response to changing conditions, however, and by 1924, then known as *Sodomei*, it took a more militant stance, justifying whatever tactics labor might need to use in order to liberate itself from capitalist domination. *Sodomei's* goals, as expressed in the 1924 declaration, included increased education for the working class and warfare between the oppressed and oppressing classes, which would end only with the establishment of a new classless society.¹²

Early militant labor and socialist organizations built their ideologies on theories of Socialism, Anarchism and Communism brought into Japan from various sources in the West. Developing clear concepts of these ideas was difficult because the Japanese could not get the documents they needed, because of linguistic difficulties, which derived from linguistic differences, and as a result of socio-cultural differences. *The Communist Manifesto* was probably the first of Marx's writings to arrive in Japan. Kotoku Shusui and Sakei Toshihiki translated and published it for the first time in 1904, working from the English version because neither could read German.¹³

The translation of Marx and other European Socialists' works from German or English into Japanese was far more difficult than translation between two Western languages. Perhaps the most difficult problem the translators faced was that of vocabulary. Many of the words required to express Marx's ideas simply did not exist in the Japanese lexicon. Among these were the two most important terms, "proletariat" and "bourgeoisie." The translators wrote these words, using the Japanese *katakana* phonetic alphabet, as *puroretaria* and *burejōa*. They then explained them, but the most similar words in Japanese were *heimin*, a general

¹² Lu, p. 113-116.

¹³ Crump, p. 78-9.

term meaning "the common people," and *shinshi batsu*, meaning "gentlemen's clique."¹⁴

After the *Manifesto*, it was several years before other of Marx and Engles' works became available to the Japanese Socialists. Marx's *Capital* appeared in 1920, Lenin's *What is to be Done?* in 1925. *The German Ideology*, *The Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts of 1844*, and *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* were unknown until the late '20s to mid-'30s. Thus, the movement had been active for a number of years before Japanese party members could distinguish effectively between Anarchism, Socialism, Social Democratism and Communism.¹⁵

Escalation of Aggressions in China

From 1913 to 1915, with Sun Yat-sen in control of the Chinese Republic, Japanese businesses gained influence on the mainland. Knowing that the Western powers were engaged in a major war at the time (World War I), the Japanese government moved to take advantage of that opportunity to get its way in China without Western interference (although Japan had been generally quite successful in its imperialistic endeavors there since the 1890s). In 1915, Japan presented the Chinese government with *The Twenty-One Demands*, a document that would force China, among other things, to build railroads for Japanese use, not cede territory to a third state, and to open ports in Shantung. It extended Japan's lease on Manchuria, increased Japanese nationals' rights to own land and open mines in China, and gave Japan the exclusive right to make some

¹⁴ Crump, p. 79

¹⁵ This was also true to some extent in Europe. For a more detailed discussion, see Hoston, Germaine A. *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in prewar Japan*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 44.

decisions. Japan also gained the right to establish its own institutions, which could hold property, locked China into buying only Japanese munitions, and allowed for the propagation of Japanese versions of Buddhism among the Chinese population of Manchuria.¹⁶

During World War I, Japanese industries grew as they helped to provide munitions, clothing, and other supplies to their own troops and those of the allies. More and more workers were employed in factories. Naturally, this rapid increase in productivity led to inflation, and although workers' wages rose quickly, they lagged far behind the cost of living.¹⁷ Furthermore, with the end of the war came a severe industrial recession. Socialist and labor organizations tried to combat the workers' increasing hardship by banding together on behalf of the working class, but not until 1918 were they strong enough to have significant impact.¹⁸

The Interwar Period

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia had been a tremendous victory for world socialism, and a great encouragement to the Japanese socialists. By 1918, however, action, not admiration, became essential. Although wages had risen quickly, inflation had driven prices up faster, and had outpaced wages to the point that workers could no longer afford to feed their families. Women in a fishing village in Toyama prefecture began rioting for lower rice prices, and the riots spread across the country within days. Troops were used to quiet the protestors, and martial law was declared in some areas, including Osaka. Prime Minister Terauchi resigned and was replaced by Hara Takashi, the first non-noble

¹⁶ The text of the *Twenty-One Demands* can be found in Tiedemann, p. 124-127, or in Lu, p. 107-109.

¹⁷ These points are illustrated in Tables I and II, Appendix A.

¹⁸ Shea, p. 108.

prime minister who, with a comfortable majority in the lower house, was able to implement necessary education, communication, and industrial programs.¹⁹

Comintern (The Communist International), which was established in 1919, first contacted Japanese leftists in 1920; the Japan Communist Party organized in secret in 1922, with about forty registered members.²⁰ The platform at this point was inclined toward theory rather than toward building organic ties with the workers.²¹ The reasons for this seem to be that the party emphasized the adoption of Comintern's ideology, which party workers had to learn, and that any activities involving large numbers of workers would be too visible, and would endanger the very existence of the fledgling organization.

During the 1920s, the authorities gained a great deal of power. The police were given more and more autonomy, and many resources were diverted into the military to support activities in Manchuria, and in Siberia. Troops had been sent to Siberia in 1918 and remained into the '20s, in order "to take over eastern Siberia or at least to set up a friendly buffer state there" in spite of popular disapproval.²²

However, September 1, 1923 brought tragic devastation to the Tokyo-Yokohama industrial region. The Great Kanto Earthquake leveled 91% of the factories in Tokyo, 81% in Yokohama, and killed over 100,000 people, leaving hundreds of thousands more injured, homeless, and unemployed. The psychological impact of the quake was also intense; with the factories, the earthquake destroyed the modernization and westernization of the past decades, which had required so much work and sacrifice on the part of the people.

¹⁹ Tiedemann, p. 54; Lu, p.110.

²⁰ Tsurumi Shunsuke. *An Intellectual History of Wartime Japan*. (London and New York: KPI Limited, 1986), p. 62.

²¹ Swearingen, p. 14-15.

²² Tiedemann, p. 55.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, police made the chaotic situation created by the disaster an excuse to restrain or "liquidate" any person or group they perceived as a threat. An assassination attempt was made upon Hirohito, then Prince Regent. Whether or not the attacker was a Communist is uncertain, but he was labeled a Communist, and the party's reputation suffered because of it. Under the pretext of preventing riots and looting, the police cracked down on the Korean population of Tokyo, in what was clearly racial persecution. Eleven Japanese union leaders were also killed, one at the hands of a police chief, largely out of fear that they would organize Japanese and Korean workers and lead them against the government.²³

In 1925, The government instituted a new Peace Preservation Law. This was a five-article list of crimes and penalties, which "outlawed thought that threatened private property and the *kokutai*"²⁴; in order to implement it, a special police force of the Home Ministry was empowered to search out "thought criminals."²⁵ Loose definitions of what makes thought "dangerous to private property and to the state" left much to the discretion of the "thought police," who had a free rein to decide whom to observe, arrest, torture, and even "eliminate." They had only to declare some person or group to have the potential to be "dangerous." There can be little doubt but that the purpose of this law was to enable the police to abolish Communism and other leftist movements that threatened the security of the government.

²³ Swearingen, p. 19.

²⁴ Literally, "national body;" the state as a political entity.

²⁵ Fletcher, William Miles III. *The Search for a New Order: Intellectuals and Fascism in Prewar Japan*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 10.

Text of Law in Lu, p. 117-118.

The atmosphere in Japan during the late '20s and into the '30s was thus characterized by ultranationalism and increasing tendencies toward fascism. Royama Masamichi calls the '30s a "dark valley."²⁶ Among the most important happenings during this period was the Manchurian Incident of 1931, the beginning of Japan's plunge into the fifteen-year Pacific War. The Chinese government had allowed Japanese investment, and even settlement, in Manchuria for quite some time (in accordance with the Twenty-One Demands, above), but with the expansion of Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist movement came the strengthening of anti-Japanese feelings. Japan was growing reliant upon Manchuria's natural resources for its domestic industries, and at the same time watched the rise of fascism and international conflicts in Europe, whose influence it saw would soon extend to eastern Asia. In China, the Manchurian Kwangtung army clashed with Japanese troops, who won victory after victory, feeding domestic nationalism. On September 19, 1931, a group of Japanese officers bombed the Japanese-owned South Manchuria Railroad and blamed the attack on the Chinese. Their intent was to get more Japanese troops stationed on the Chinese mainland in preparation for a war with the Western powers in the Pacific. Their plan worked--and it led Japan into fifteen years of war, culminating in Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945.²⁷

During the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, Japan was caught up in a whirlwind of imperialism and ultranationalism; but not all of society agreed to be swept along. Marxist-Leninist societies all over Japan opposed the fascistic tendencies of their nation's government. Early attempts at forming resistance political parties had only very limited success; most Socialist groups were disbanded by police using

²⁶ Fletcher, p. 33.

²⁷ Tsurumi, p. 76; Fletcher, p. 28-33.

the 1925 Peace Preservation Law, and the Japan Communist Party, although it remained in existence, was forced underground after only a year, where it remained until its final legalization in 1945.

Because political organizations could not exist under the watchful eyes of the Home Ministry's thought police, many Japanese Socialists and Communists concentrated their energies in cultural and literary activities. By no means had political activities ended; however, it was clear to the activists that to conduct mass political activities was so dangerous as to be pointless. They emphasized opposition through cultural media in order to build proletarian awareness among the working class, and to build a base of support strong enough eventually to be able to overthrow the repressive state institutions.

CHAPTER II

REBELS, UNITE! THE PROLETARIAN LITERARY AND CULTURAL MOVEMENT

Literature with a socialist slant began before the formation of proletarian literary organizations. Around 1898, Yano Fumio wrote *The New Society*, in which he constructed a socialistic Utopia and explained how it could be accomplished.¹ Kotoku Shusui's socialist newspaper *Heimin Shimbun* ran from November, 1903 for several years, sometimes illegally or under different names.² Various small groups published a few issues of their journals before being shut down by the police. In 1904, during the Russo-Japanese war, Yosano Akiko's poetry criticized the role of the Emperor and the nationalistic attitude that made people support the war without thinking.³ Tayama Katai's "One Soldier" (*Ippeisotsu*), published in 1907, was revolutionary as a naturalistic first-person description of the miserable death of a soldier of disease in Russia.

The Tanemaku Hito Period

The publication of the literary magazine *Tanemaku Hito* (The Sower) from February 1921 to August 1923, represents the first organized stage of the proletarian literary movement. Komaki Omi, Kaneko Yobun, and a group of their friends began printing *Tanemaku Hito* as a pamphlet in their native Akita prefecture. In October of 1920, they moved to Tokyo and reorganized their group and its publication. Aono Suekichi, Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, and Arashima

¹ *The Socialist and Labour Movement in Japan*. (Kobe: "The Japan Chronicle," 1921), p. 3.

² Shea, p. 14.

³ See Appendix B for text of "I beg you brother: do not die."

Taeko joined the group, and they began printing *Tanemaku Hito* as a literary magazine.⁴

Tanemaku Hito had a concern for international affairs that was unusual in the Japanese context, although it was common in world proletarian writing. It would focus on, for example, European literary debates or Soviet politics. It was through *Tanemaku Hito* that Japanese readers got their first news of the Third International; *Tanemaku Hito* actively supported the Bolshevik Revolution. The authorities levied a fine of 500 yen (then a substantial amount) on the *Tanemaku Hito* group, with payment required for permission to print stories on current political matters. This was standard practice at the time, but nonetheless harassment; it limited the amount of current news in circulation, which was much to the government's advantage. Publication stopped briefly, then resumed after the group was able to raise the money and pay.⁵

Theory and Method of Tanemaku Hito

The value of the fiction printed in *Tanemaku Hito* seems to have been immediate and political rather than enduring and artistic. Only one work that appeared originally in *Tanemaku Hito* was later reprinted, which implies that the individual works were not extremely important.⁶ However, bourgeoisie critics who downplayed proletarian stories and the *Tanemaku Hito* group authors had in mind two very different sets of standards. The *Tanemaku Hito* group introduced many new, young writers from the working class, and they looked more for correct

⁴ Nakamura Mitsuo. *Contemporary Japanese Fiction 1926-1968*. (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1969), p. 32.

⁵ Shea, p. 73; Nakamura, p. 32.

⁶ Shea, p. 78.

*tendency*⁷ in literary works than for craftsmanship. Although earlier writers had applied theory in their writing, the *Tanemaku Hito* authors were the first group to use a socioeconomic theory.

The writers of the previous generation were the *naturalists*. Naturalism had been imported into Japan through the works of Western authors such as Henrik Ibsen, Emile Zola and Fyodor Dostoyevski. Japanese authors, however, interpreted naturalism in a different way. Shimura Hogetsu wrote in his preface to *Studies in the Modern Arts of Literature*,

What is required of me is that I confess my confusions and my uncertainties as they really are. Therein lies the truth; beyond that is the danger of falsehood...It may well be that mankind can never go beyond the confession, never surpass it."⁸

The naturalists felt that the kind of writing that would be *truest*, or closest to nature, must be the exposition of self presented as a personal confession; they wrote about the dark sides of their own lives in a genre they called the "I-novel" (*shi-shosetsu*). In their writing, the naturalists developed new methods that the proletarian writers would later use.

Probably the most important new innovation was the use of informal language. The *genbun'ichi* movement of the 1870's had been the first concerted effort on the part of the young artists of the *Ken'yusha* (Friends of the Inkpot) society to bring about a fundamental change in literary language. They felt that the language of the dialogue (vernacular) and narrative (formal) parts of the novel should match, and attempted to increase the correspondence between the two.⁹

⁷ "*Tendency*" is a common term in world proletarian literature. It means the political sympathy or theoretical inclination with which the work is imbued.

⁸ Keene, Dennis. *Yokomitsu Riichi: Modernist*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 12-13.

⁹ Miyoshi Masao. *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 3-17.

This movement continued, albeit slowly. The anti-war poetry of woman writer Yosano Akiko, which the government banned, was also written in spoken style, and in free verse. Because the "I-novel" of the Meiji Period was a very personal form, and a confession of the writer's own failings or "sins," the language tended to be less formal than was usual in earlier works. Yosano's poetry and some I-novels also espouse a non-traditional morality. Protagonists break out of their social status (Shimazaki Tozon, *The Broken Commandment*) or lose their faith in the national destiny (Yosano, "I beg you: do not die," Toson, "One Soldier.")

The writing of the socialists rejects "bourgeoisie morality." Although it owes a great deal to previous generations' literary developments, the socialists' artistic method differs substantially from the method espoused by the authors of the *bundan*.¹⁰ An important area of conflict was the question of the supremacy of art. *Bundan* authors believed that art was all; it should be elevated above social and economic quarrels. The socialists believed just the opposite. For them, everything began with the economic problems of the working class; they felt that capitalism polarized society into poor workers and rich non-working owners, and they felt that "good" literature must be a part of the effort to change the class system. Another of the responses of the proletarian writers to the *bundan* was that bourgeois critics could not judge proletarian works fairly because they had no understanding of the workers' experience; they knew nothing of the urgency of day-to-day life, the constant need for money, the threat of prison, or the monotony and danger of factory work.¹¹

¹⁰ The "literary establishment;" mainstream authors and the cannon they produce and seek to maintain. See Powell, Irena. *Writers and Society in Modern Japan*. (Tokyo: Kodansha International LTD., 1983).

¹¹ Shea, p. 48.

Factionalization within the *Tanemaku Hito* group separated members by their ideologies. Marxist-Leninist members, thinking that their magazine would do the most good if it was read by the intelligentsia, wanted to structure it for intellectual readers. The anarchists, in contrast, felt that the workers themselves must read, learn, and eventually lead their own revolution.¹² In fact, *Tanemaku Hito* was quite popular among both working class and intellectual readers. The literature of the proletarian movement appealed to a diverse audience because it was entirely new and untried, and because it was, if unpolished, full of enthusiasm. However, in spite of the newness of *Tanemaku Hito* literature, the magazine was not to continue for long.

Aono Suekichi claimed that the *Tanemaku Hito* group had already decided to cease publishing by 1923, but the Great Kanto Earthquake (of September 1, 1923) sealed *Tanemaku Hito*'s fate by disrupting society, causing increased repression by police and censors and, more fundamentally, by destroying the *Tanemaku Hito* group's printing press. The *Tanemaku Hito* group published an extra number in January, 1924, *Tanemaki Zakki*, in which they commemorated the anniversary of Lenin's death and protested police atrocities against Koreans and laborers in the days after the earthquake. The *Tanemaku Hito* writers were the only ones in Japan who dared to speak out in this manner.¹³

The Bungei Sensen Period

The end of *Tanemaku Hito* was a slight setback for the Japan proletarian literature movement, but it was by no means an insurmountable obstacle. The *Tanemaku Hito* group had been hurt far more by the increase in police repression

¹² Shea, p. 86-87.

¹³ Shea, p. 125-126.

than by internal weakness. By June 1924, the former members of *Tanemaku Hito*, gaining a number of new members, began a new journal, *Bungei Sensen* (*Literary Battlefront*). The members of the new group claimed that *Bungei Sensen* was different from *Tanemaku Hito*, but Shea implies that the difference was slight.¹⁴ Important members of the *Bungei Sensen* group were Aono Suekichi, Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, Hayashi Fusao, Hirabayashi Taiko, and Kurahara Korehito from among the intelligentsia and Hayama Yoshiki and Kuroshima Denji from the working class.

In July 1924, when the Fifth Comintern met with Soviet writers, *Bungei Sensen* printed articles on it, some translated from Russian, as part of the Japanese proletarian writers' effort to unite with Soviet writers. *Bungei Sensen* also tried to recruit articles, criticism, and stories from a variety of sources within Japan,¹⁵ as a way of uniting domestic socialist groups.

The relationship between artists and politics was one the most important issues addressed in *Bungei Sensen*, who like the *Tanemaku Hito* group believed that art should not be elevated above economic, political, and social problems. Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke wrote in *Bungei Sensen*, "the fact that the artist is indifferent toward politics is no reason for his holy view of art."¹⁶ In other words, there is no excuse for bourgeois art that serves only its own ends. Even artists who do not intentionally involve themselves in politics must not forget as they write that their art is a product of a social structure based on the exploitation of the working class and thus cannot be separated completely from political problems. Aono Suekichi wrote, "Art which calls for hatred, indignation, resistance, and

¹⁴ Shea, p. 127.

¹⁵ Shea, p. 131.

¹⁶ Shea, p. 131-132.

crucifixion--that I am waiting for."¹⁷ To Aono, art need not be intrinsically pleasing, or beautiful, as the traditional Japanese aesthetic dictated. Rather, he felt that art must be functional; it must serve to awaken the consciousness of the worker to his exploited condition and move him to action. Likewise it must appeal to intellectuals and force them to take a stand against the oppressive capitalistic system.

In their attempts to find the proper place for literature in the socialist movement, and the relationship of proletarian art to the Communist party, Japanese intellectuals looked to the Soviet Union. Lenin's 1905 article "Party Organization and Party Literature" was very helpful in this regard. Lenin confirmed that even literature that is published in the legal press can be "nine-tenths party literature" if it has the right *tendency*. The principle behind proletarian writing must be to make literature

*part of the common cause of the proletariat, "a cog and a screw" of one great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class.*¹⁸

Lenin emphasized the necessity of binding literature to all other aspects of party work. One of the goals of proletarian literature, then, was to awaken people to the tragedy of their own oppression, and to make bourgeois artists realize that their perceived "artistic freedom" was a fallacy.

Are you free in relation to your bourgeois publisher, Mr. Writer, in relation to your bourgeois public, which demands that you provide it with pornography in novels and paintings, and prostitution as a "supplement" to "sacred" scenic art? This absolute freedom is a bourgeois anarchist phrase...And we socialists expose this hypocrisy and rip off the false labels, not in order to arrive at non-class literature and art, but to contrast this hypocritically free

¹⁷ Shea, p. 132.

¹⁸ Lenin, I. V. *Collected Works*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), vol. 10, p. 45.

literature, which is in reality linked to the bourgeois, with a really free one that will be *openly* linked to the proletariat.¹⁹

In this article, Lenin debates the "freeness" of the bourgeois writer; he points out the slavery of the bourgeois author to his bourgeois readers, which essentially reduces his art to a product for capitalistic exchange and forces him to cater to market demands. The Japanese proletarian writers' beliefs were much the same; they, too, disputed the quality of the "freedom" (i.e., from ideology) afforded to bourgeois writers by their own fascist government. Lenin's and the Japanese proletarian artists' writings both encourage honest exposition of the prostitution into which they feel bourgeois art had fallen, and of the facts of bourgeois exploitation of the proletariat as the basis of both commodity and intellectual production.

The Japan Proletarian Literary Arts League

In December 1925, the Japan Proletarian Literary Arts League (JPLAL) was begun. This was to be a unified organization consisting of the *Bungei Sensen* group, plus the members of a number of other, smaller socialist culture groups, including writers, artists, and dramatists, among others. The JPLAL's ideology was Marxist-Bolshevist; however, at the second general meeting of the League, radical and revisionist factions polarized, causing internal disruption and, eventually, a split.²⁰ The name of the League was changed to the Japan Proletarian Arts League (JPAL), and it was divided into four subgroups dealing with different branches of the arts (which it had been the intent of the original organizers of JPLAL to unite). The League soon suffered more extreme internal

¹⁹ Lenin, p. 48.

²⁰ For a discussion of Fukomotoism, see Beckmann, George M. and Okubo Genji. *The Japanese Communist Party, 1922-1945*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 108-114, etc.

factionalization. One group felt that art and politics should be brought closer together, that theory should be given greater emphasis. The members of this group, which included a number of young intellectuals from Tokyo University including, Nakano Shigeharu, were the *Fukumotoists*, named after the originator of their radical philosophy. The other faction, which included *Tanemaku Hito* veterans Aono Suekichi and Hayashi Fusao, felt that art should be developed independent of politics. The rift soon became a split; the *Fukumotoist* group, with sixteen members, pulled out of the JPAL and established a new organization, *Ro-No Ha* (the Labor-Farmer Artists League) in June, 1927, and kept *Bungei Sensen* as its magazine.²¹

This was only the beginning of a larger restructuring within the movement. Within the *Ro-No Ha*, rivalry between the left and ultra-left continued for five months, until finally the left departed and renamed itself the League of Avant-garde Artists. This group was not far removed from the JPAL in its ideology, and the two groups merged in March, 1928, to form the *Nippona Proleta Artista Federacio*, known by its Esperanto acronym, NAPF.²²

The NAPF Period

The NAPF period was the most artistically memorable time for the proletarian literary movement; many of the best fictional and theoretical works the movement produced were written during this period. NAPF's official publication was the literary journal *Senki* (*Battle Flag*).

The theory of the NAPF artists closely resembled that of western Marxists, probably due to the increased availability of Marxist documents in Japan, the

²¹ Nakamura, p. 44.

²² Nakamura, p. 45.

maturity of the authors themselves, and increasing direction by Comintern. Kurahara Korehito stressed the importance of teaching writers through writing, and of the importance in literature of *form* as well as *content*. An author who writes about working class characters but does not take the correct perspective would not be a "realist" according to Kurahara, whereas one could write on almost any topic while maintaining the correct proletarian *tendency*, and produce "realistic" writing. Kurahara's 1928 essay "The Road to Proletarian Realism" (Puroretaria Rearizumu e no Michi) became the foundation for Japanese socialist literature. It stressed the importance of "the problem of class nature in art:"

For us the important thing is to discover in the midst of reality that reality is neither distorted nor embellished by our subjectivity--the proletarian class subjectivity. Thus only will we be able to make our literature for the first time truly useful in the class struggle of the proletariat. That is to say, first, we must look at the world with the eyes of the proletarian vanguard, and, second, describe it with an exact realist's attitude--this is the only path to proletarian realism.²³

Not only the intention and theoretical basis of Socialist writing, but also the fact that their writing was intended for a working-class audience influenced the style of proletarian novels and stories. By this time, six years of education were compulsory for both girls and boys, with almost universal compliance, so the rate of literacy in Japan was quite high. Still, the language used in proletarian works had to be kept reasonably simple, so that workers could read it comfortably. Furthermore, writers had to use colloquial language that would appeal to common people. In their works, authors made use of the ugliness and violence of the laborers' everyday lives to substantiate the themes of their stories: alienation, reification,²⁴ the dominance of capital, and the unavoidability of class warfare.²⁵

²³ Shea, p. 236.

²⁴ Literally, "thingification," or the incorporation of the consciousness of the worker into a commodity, which is then lost to him.

In short, the NAPF writers believed that in their writing they had to base everything on concrete social and economic conditions, maintain the correct perspective (*tendency*) in their works, present working-class characters in straightforward, unembellished language, and teach others the necessity of joining the movement.

From NAPF to KOPF

NAPF's magazine *Senki* and *Ro-No Ha's Bungei Sensen* (which was renamed *Bunsen* in 1930) continued as rival publications, although *Senki* had a larger audience in the beginning. *Senki* became less a literary journal, and more a tool for agitation and propaganda on behalf of the underground labor unions and Japan Communist Party. In 1930, *Senki* became independent of NAPF.

Within NAPF, much reorganization had occurred in 1929. NAPF members joined various proletarian study groups. The Japan Proletarian Writers League came into being, and at the same time, the literature, drama, music, art and cinema groups within NAPF separated into five semi-autonomous units. These five groups then elected a Central Council to direct activities. However, this dispersal of NAPF members into different sub-organizations caused a loss of strength in the network. In 1929, ultra-nationalist fascism all over Japan led to an increased threat from the police, and in its decentralized condition, the group found it difficult to withstand and oppose this pressure.

NAPF, at this point, tried to unite with other domestic and international organizations. Still, its position was precarious. At NAPF's second general

²⁵ Kobayashi Takiji's story "The Factory Ship" and Hamaya Yoshiki's "Letter Found in a Cement Barrel" provide excellent examples. See chapters 3 and 4 for analyses.

meeting in April, 1930, police held up the beginning of the meeting to censor the outline of topics for discussion, eliminating some from the program. In 1931, *Ro-No Ha*'s criticism of KOPF in its magazine, *Bunsen*, became quite intense. This led to internal divisions in *Ro-No Ha*, and a group of eleven left it to join NAPF in protest.²⁶

NAPF members realized that circumstances did not allow them to engage in political party activities as did western Communist parties. Literature was difficult to distribute, and the thought police cracked down on any visible displays of dissatisfaction with the government or its policies. It was through cultural and educational activities that the movement could have the most effect. NAPF dissolved in late 1931, and the members reunited two weeks later in a new league, called the Japan Proletarian Culture Federation, or KOPF, the acronym of its Esperanto name, *Federacio de Proletaj Kultur-organizoj Japanaj*.

KOPF had three major goals: opposition to fascism, political and economic education for the workers, and the establishment of a new proletarian culture based on the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism.²⁷ Not surprisingly, this was done in complete agreement with the directives of Comintern. In the 1928 *Programme and Theses Adopted by the VIth World Congress of the Communist International*, the Soviet Communist Party specified the following *Means of Ideological Influence*:

- a) The nationalization of printing plants.
- b) The monopoly of newspaper and book-publishing.
- c) The nationalization of big cinema enterprises, theaters, etc.
- d) The utilization of the nationalized means of "intellectual production" for the most extensive political and general education of

²⁶ Shea, p. 222-223.

²⁷ Shea, p. 198-206.

the toilers and for the building up of a new Socialist culture on a proletarian class basis.²⁸

Needless to say, the nationalization of the means of production was far out of reach for the Japanese Communists. However, they were determined to use their capacity for "intellectual production" to the fullest extent possible. However, in the wake of the 1931 Manchurian Incident, the police and the general tone of patriotic fervor kept this capacity strictly limited.

All members arriving at the site of KOPF's fifth general meeting in May, 1932, were questioned by police; the chairman was arrested as he stepped onto the stage. The police instructed members to disperse, sparking general chaos and leading to the arrest of many members. Hundreds more members of KOPF, affiliated cultural organizations, and the underground Communist Party, were arrested in the 1932-33 period. In March of 1933, KOPF fell apart.²⁹ The higher-ranking members claimed that dissolution was voluntary, done so that members would be free of the limitations and theoretical stagnation imposed by its structure. Actually, it is more likely that police pressure was the real cause. NAPF Central Council member Kaji Wataru denied receiving a message from the Tokyo police demanding the organization to dissolve, but Shea suggests that he may have.³⁰ Besides, involvement in an organization as visible as KOPF had become quite dangerous, as evidenced by the number of members arrested. Furthermore, the murder by torture of Kobayashi Takiji on February 20, 1933, created a martyr for the movement, and made the danger of Communist activity very real. By the end of 1934, the Japanese proletarian literary movement came to a close.

²⁸ *Programme and Theses Adopted by the VIth World Congress of the Communist International*. (Montreal: International Correspondence, 1980), p. 79.

²⁹ Shea, p. 228-232.

³⁰ Shea, p. 272-273.

The termination of KOPF marked the end of the proletarian literary organization, but it was not the end of socialist-oriented literature. In 1934 came the advent of Soviet *socialist realism*, which was transmitted through the Comintern to international Communist parties. It is evident that Japanese proletarian works had tended to fit the socialist realist model even before it was codified by the Soviet Communist Party in 1934. In the late '30s and early '40s, the proletarian authors could accomplish little, due to the war and the atmosphere inside Japan, and because many authors had been imprisoned or killed, or had undergone *tenko* ideological conversion.³¹ But after the end of the war in 1945, when Communism was legalized, debates on socialist realism raged in literary spheres.

"Realism" is generally defined as an attempt to use literature or art to present life as it is in reality. Realistic writing tends especially to capture the "real" lives of unexceptional people. To this basic goal, the Socialist Realists added Marxist materialist analysis. This caused the intent of their writing to broaden in scope; they strove to present not just individuals, but society as a whole, in a "realistic" manner. Characters in socialist realist writings had therefore to be representative of the whole working class. This necessarily shifted the focus of the story or poem away from the individual to the "big picture," to society as an entity. Personality and psychology were thus subordinated, and "typed" characters--characters who could be labeled "worker," "capitalist," or "vanguard" came to prominence. The plot, too, is shaped by socialist realism; the eventual triumph of the proletariat over its capitalist oppressors is the only conclusion

³¹ For explanation, see page 65.

(although the revolution does not necessarily occur within the scope of the proletarian story).

Socialist realism is somewhat simplistic in that the reader is given a cast of roughly allegorical characters who act out a drama, the essence of which is familiar to the audience. The classic example of socialist realism in art is the propaganda poster twenty feet tall depicting strong, smiling workers, with vanquished capitalists cowering in the corner. However, while most socialist realist art and literature left no doubt as to its ideological orientation, not all works are as blatant as the propaganda poster. The proletarian writers considered their works to be lessons in social reality rather than Communist propaganda. Certainly they hoped to convert workers and fellow intellectuals to their cause, but they felt it necessary to expose the realities of working class life and the evils of capitalistic exploitation. The truth would speak for itself, once people were made fully aware of it, and readers would thus be awakened to the need for Marxian revolution. Thus, their literature was meant to be functional rather than purely artistic. The reason for the differences between Soviet (later, Chinese) and Japanese socialist realism is simple: in the Soviet Union, socialist realism was the official artistic standard of the Soviet government; in Japan, it was a means of resisting both the fascist government and the bourgeois artistic mainstream (*bundan*).

Although socialist realism as such was not formalized until after the 1921 to 1934 Japanese proletarian period, it becomes clear when reading Japanese proletarian works of the '20s that the same values were already firmly in place. In the means of characterization, description, plot structure, as well as in the attitudes they express, the works examined in the following chapters, though the

earliest cited examples were written in the '20s, incorporate variations on the socialist realist theme.

CHAPTER III

A MARTYR AND HIS MASTERWORK

Kobayashi Takiji was among the leaders of the Japan proletarian literary movement. Though his activity spanned only a few years, the intensity and productivity of those years, and his complete devotion to his cause, make him perhaps the single most valuable person in the movement. After his murder by the police in 1933, Kobayashi became a symbol of conviction to many. *The Factory Ship* is a vivid example of the literary ideals of the Communist party and NAPF in the late 1920s.

Kobayashi Takiji

Kobayashi Takiji was born in 1902 in Akita prefecture, to a farming family whose poverty was severe. He later wrote in his autobiographical story *Party Life*,

My mother was a poor farmworker--she could not even go to grade school. Her early years...led her to a life of dumb, unrewarding poverty.¹

When Japan began its imperialistic aggressions in Korea and Manchuria in 1904, the Kobayashi family moved to the town of Otaru, on the island of Hokkaido, to join relatives who were more financially secure.

Although he grew up in dire hardship, Kobayashi managed, with the help of an uncle who ran a successful pastry shop, to graduate from Otaru First Higher Commercial School, after which he began working at Takushoku Bank.²

¹ Iwakami Junichi. "Kobayashi Takiji: The Legacy of a Revolutionary Life." *Sengo Bunaku Ronso*. p. 183.

² Kobayashi Takiji. *The Factory Ship and The Absentee Landlord*. Motofuji, Frank, trans. and ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), p. xi.

Kobayashi's experiences in the progressive environment of Otaru, plus his exposure to workers' issues, awakened him to the problems of capitalistic exploitation and oppression. He read Marx's *Capital* in 1927, and before long he was helping to organize strikes. In September, 1928, he published a short story, "March 15, 1928," in the proletarian magazine *Senki*. In October 1929, he published *The Factory Ship*, his masterwork. When Kobayashi's Communist activities became impossible to ignore, the bank fired him.

Free of his job, Kobayashi left Hokkaido and travelled to Tokyo, where he had established contacts while on an earlier business trip. Before long, he had become a leader in the proletarian movement. In 1930 he was elected general secretary of the International Revolutionary League (begun in 1928 as an affiliate of KOPF).³ In spite of the danger of being identified and capture, he continued publishing his fiction. In 1932 as the thought police infiltrated the underground Communist party, he wrote the autobiographical novel *Party Life*. On February 21, 1933, the thought police lured Kobayashi into a trap, captured him, and took him to the Tsukiji police station, where he died after three hours of brutal torture. Although the cause of death was officially listed as "heart failure," Kobayashi's brother's description of the body makes it clear that he was murdered.⁴

Among Kobayashi's goals was the presentation of the real life of the Japanese working class in the interwar period. Earlier works, including those of Shiga Naoya and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, contained social criticism insofar as they dealt with the way society can restrict the individual, or their perceptions of the sheer ridiculousness of religion and traditional morality. These writers, however, were not concerned with the living and working conditions of the

³ Shea, p. 203.

⁴ Shea, p. 338.

common people. Their writings challenged traditional modes of thought, but were intended for bourgeoisie readers and as such did not stray far from traditional Japanese aesthetics. Kobayashi, on the other hand, presented the ugliness, hardship and utter brutality of the proletarian world in his writings, then sought to interpret it through his use of Marxist social theory.

The Factory Ship is based on a real incident, which Kobayashi read of in the newspaper and researched, even searching out and interviewing some of the actual participants.⁵ Kobayashi uses this incident to present the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism in fiction, a form both working-class and intellectual readers could read with interest and understanding. His subject matter, the grim lives of workers and party members, is a departure from the *bundan* literary tradition in which Marxist thought, or any type of social doctrine other than perhaps Confucianism, was excluded.

The Factory Ship (Kani Kosen)

The story begins aboard the *Hakko Maru*, a crab and fish processing ship docked in an Hokkaido port, preparing to leave for a five-month-plus fishing season in the Kamchatka Sea. Among the workers are students tricked by hiring agents into signing on, displaced agricultural workers, coal miners, construction workers, young boys whose poor families sent them away to work, and long-time sailors and fishermen. All are forced by poverty to sell themselves to the company that owns the boats, even though they dread the danger, isolation, and uncertainty of their new jobs.

⁵ Shea, p. 320.

Superintendent Asakawa, the company official on board, takes charge of the ship, much to the captain's surprise, shortly after the voyage begins. He preaches nationalism to inspire the crew to work harder. The men soon find that Asakawa is not only power hungry, arrogant and stingy, but also a cruel and sadistic disciplinarian.

Bad from the beginning, conditions get worse and worse for the workers. After the first weeks, they are limited to two baths per month, and they are forced to work longer and longer hours. Those who fall behind are subject to beatings, then to brandings, which become daily occurrences. Many become ill due to the cold and dampness, crowded and filthy living and working conditions, and lack of sleep and food. Asakawa's abuse of the crew escalates; he starves to death a boy who hides out of fear of torture; he hangs another boy from a winch.

One day while the boats from the mother ship are out fishing, a storm begins. One of the boats, with several fishermen in it, does not return. When it comes back a few days later, the men have an exciting story to tell.

Their boat had washed up on the shore in Siberia. A Russian family had taken them in and, although they could not speak to them, they had been treated well. On the fishermen's last day ashore, the Russians brought a Chinese man to meet them. Using broken Japanese and comic acting, he transmitted to them a basic Marxian message: You are the proletariat. You, the many who work, can rise up against the few who rule you without working, and when you do, you will win. With this message, they then returned to the ship. The ideas the fishermen bring back excite the younger workers, but the older ones resist and discourage them.

As the workers' physical, mental and sexual frustrations escalate, more and more of them independently reach the conclusion that the fishermen's message must be correct. Reaching the limits of their endurance, they draw together, united by their proletarian awareness. Their first protest occurs when they join together in slowing the pace of their work, which Asakawa has kept dangerously fast with his club and pistol.

Finally, after the death of one worker by disease, four men step forward as a revolutionary vanguard. The work slowdowns escalate into an all-out strike. This strike collapses when Asakawa calls a navy ship, which to the surprise of the workers, takes away the "vanguard" leaders. After this defeat, however, the workers realize that they can triumph only if they all stand firm, united, relying on no one but themselves. Kobayashi tells the reader in a postscript:

- 1) The second strike occurred on the *Hakko Maru*, and was successful.
- 2) Strikes had occurred and Communist literature had been found on other ships as well.
- 3) Asakawa and the officers were fired without compensation for having "permitted the inconceivable--a strike during the season and a drop in production."
- 4) Having learned the value of organization, the workers spread their newly acquired knowledge throughout Japan.⁶

The company's firing of Asakawa, who had forced the workers in the name of the company and the state to work themselves nearly to death, shows that although one individual can control others for a time, this alone is not the source of the subjection of the proletariat. "Rather, in Kobayashi's view, it is the vast,

⁶ Kobayashi, p. 82-3.

unseen capitalist machine itself, allied to the militaristic government, which must take the ultimate blame."⁷ Throughout the story, the workings of the capitalistic machine form the base of general capitalist exploitation of the proletariat that supports the events in this story.

The style of *The Factory Ship* is somewhat inconsistent. Perhaps this is because of the pressure under which Kobayashi lived at the time he wrote it (which he did in only a few months); whatever the reason, Kobayashi lets his style change as this work progresses. In the beginning, his method of description is much richer than it is later, more lyrical, realistic if not pretty:

Red, bell-shaped bouys bobbed on cold, dark waves covered with swirls of black, oily soot, scraps of bread, and rotten fruit that formed a fabric-like pattern, while launches darted busily in and out among the large ships like water bugs.⁸

As the story progresses, Kobayashi abandons this lyricism for a starker and more straightforward, more journalistic style, as in the above cited postscript.

Kobayashi's writing, in keeping with the philosophy of the socialist realists, is simple, yet far from simplistic. Dialogue makes up a large percentage of Kobayashi's text, bringing the story closer to the working-class readers, because people like themselves tell it in their own colloquial language. The trend against formal "bourgeois style" language in literature had started in the Meiji Era (with the *genbun'ichi* movement), but it was the proletarian writers who completed the transition. This use of street (or gutter) language makes their prose appeal to a less educated working-class audience, and adds impact for readers from the intelligentsia. Kobayashi uses this language to explain complex concepts like alienation and objectification to the the less educated proletarian reader.

⁷ Rimer, J. Thomas. *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature*. (Tokyo & New York: Kodansha International, 1983), p. 163.

⁸ Kobayashi, p. 3.

Kobayashi's method of characterization in *The Factory Ship* is both rare and well suited to his revolutionary material. Kobayashi himself wrote in a note submitted along with the manuscript,

There are no heroes in this work--no leading characters or persons such as you would find in works dealing with the lives of individuals. The collective hero is a group of laborers.⁹

Similar to Stephen Crane's characterization in *The Red Badge of Courage*, although to a greater extent, Kobayashi unites his characters in anonymity. The only character with a name is the antagonistic Superintendent Asakawa. The rest he calls by titles like "the Shibaura man," or "the stutterer," if he identifies them at all. Although the "mass character" is made up of individuals, all are equal; when four stand out as a revolutionary vanguard, the navy removes them. The remaining workers learn that although the leadership of a revolutionary vanguard is helpful, when the revolutionary moment comes, they must rely only on their own united strength. In choosing this method of characterization, Kobayashi avoided focusing on distinct individuals. This, too, supported the principals of socialist realism. "Typed" characters, without personality but representing the good proletariat or the bad capitalist were the norm; Kobayashi's use of characters is slightly different, yet works the same way to teach the working-class reader a lesson in organization and revolution. How can one better expose the plight of the proletariat and appeal to its members than by making the proletariat one's hero?

Kobayashi was more concerned with propagating Marxism and awakening revolutionary awareness among the oppressed than with flowing prose or vivid imagery. Also, he was far more interested in the darker side of real human beings

⁹ Kobayashi, p. xvii.

and the society in which they live than in idealized "paragons of virtue." Thus, in order to teach his readers the concept of alienation, Kobayashi did not hesitate to use sex, violence and ugliness far more graphic (he would say "honest") than had occurred previously in literature, especially in "serious" Japanese literature (that is, non-pornographic literature that attempted to compete with the mainstream). For example, after five months at sea the fishermen experience severe psychological frustration, which manifests itself as sexual tension. Kobayashi presents a homosexual rape through the eyes of a character identified as "a fisherman with a bad heart" who accidentally witnesses it. In spite of the fisherman's shock, this is not a judgmental scene. That the fisherman gags and sodomizes a fourteen or fifteen year old boy is startling and horrible to the witness, and would have a strong impact on most readers; but it is by no means gratuitous. This scene functions as an expression of the alienation of the workers. The fisherman, forced to work too hard for too long in unnatural conditions, is removed from *himself* to the point that he can only express himself physically, and feels an overpowering need to control someone, somehow--a need superimposed on him by the capitalistic system.

A scene similar in purpose takes place shortly afterward. Several of the men stand around the stove in their quarters belowdecks and try to remove the vermin from their clothing and bodies. Their task is impossible, because they have no chance to clean their quarters, and may neither bathe nor wash their clothes. They pick bugs out of their clothes and hair and break the swollen bodies with their fingernails or teeth; their hands are sticky with their own half-digested blood. "You look like a dead louse," says one man to another, who responds, laughing, "That's just about what I am."

And yet Kobayashi makes clear that the "filthiness" or "depravity" of the workers is not their fault. It is the result of conditions forced upon them by their "superiors" (by extension, the capitalistic system). In both of these scenes is the idea that the goodness or badness of the worker are immaterial, because they are judged by the ruling class. Symbolically, the capitalists are to the fishermen like the lice that bite them and live on their blood; to survive, the workers must get rid of their parasites.

Reification appears in this text in various ways. Marx explained reification as the process of the workers' consciousness becoming a *thing* as their labor flows from them and into the things they produce.

In *The Factory Ship* and many other Japanese proletarian works, reification is presented in terms of *the worker becoming his work*. This becomes a physical process in some stories. In *The Factory Ship*, the workers' bodies are covered with crab juice that they cannot wash off; the filth forms a crabshell-like layer over their skins; they live under the deck like cargo; Asakawa knows their physical limits as if they were machines--not even human extensions of machines--definitely not human beings.

Kobayashi uses the workers' conversation as a means of introducing a long digression in which he extends this theme in an examination of other industries.

In Hokkaido, each railway tie literally represented the clay-colored corpse of one worker. And in harbor reclamation work, each piling was the body of a worker claimed by beri-beri.

It was the same at the mines...sometimes a crushed thumb or little finger would be seen among the lumps of coal being trundled out in a handcar, but the women and children who saw it were trained not to make a fuss over that sort of thing. Their faces

expressionless, they would merely push the car on to the next station."¹⁰

Social prejudice against the working class is also a part of the laborers' burden. At a celebration near the end of the canning season, the workers see several silent movies. One is an American film, the protagonist of which is a boy who starts out poor and works his way to the top. Intertwined with this plot is a love story. At the end, the hero is a rich gentleman who gets his girl. The narrator comments, "Truly, if diligence is not the mother of success, what is?"¹¹ The message of this scene is that to the capitalists there is no such thing as a successful worker; a worker who is "good" raises himself out of the working class. There are only gentlemen and failures.

Besides objectification, alienation and class antagonism, anti-nationalism was an important rallying point of the proletarian writers. Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, "The worker has no nation;" proletarian writers opposed the aggressive nationalism and emperor-worship they saw developing around them. Asakawa, the sadistic Superintendent, disguises the capitalistic enterprise, in which the workers are unwilling players, as a life-or-death battle between the Japanese and the Russians. The first time Asakawa lectures the men, he says:

Some of you may know this, so I don't have to tell you. But the rest of you...don't get the idea that this is just a money-making operation run by the corporation. We're involved in a serious international problem. It boils down to this: who's stronger--we, the people of the Japanese empire, or the Russkies...¹²

Along with their feelings of patriotism, the workers find their conditioned reverence for the emperor negated as they develop their new proletarian perspective. Near the end of the season, they must prepare a case of crab for

¹⁰ Kobayashi, p. 40.

¹¹ Kobayashi, p. 52-3.

¹² Kobayashi, p. 10.

presentation to the emperor. But after their experiences and the knowledge they have gained, the workers find it impossible to continue seeing him in the traditional light as the son of heaven (*tenno heika*)

"We sweat blood to pack this stuff. I hope the emperor enjoys it. I hope he gets cramps on it!" These thoughts ran through the men's minds as they filled the cans.

"Put some gravel in the cans. What have we to lose?"

"Nobody's on our side. There's only us."

This last thought seeped deeper and deeper into the men's consciousness.¹³

In Japanese society, there was little place for emperor criticism. The 1921-34 proletarian period was a very aggressive stage in Japan's history and, although parliament rather than the emperor held power, the emperor was revered as the symbol of the state, the people, and the state religion, Shinto. Kobayashi spent six months in prison expressly for the above quoted paragraph after the initial publication of *The Factory Ship*. Authorities banned the book edition--although not before readers had bought fifteen thousand copies, many through the underground distribution network.¹⁴

In the 1920's and 30's, one of the goals of world Marxist literature was the opposition of fascism. Western Marxists opposed fascism almost as actively as they advocated Communism. Kobayashi used his character Superintendent Asakawa as a representative of the capitalistic system, and as a symbol of the Japanese government's growth into fascism. From the beginning, Asakawa inundates the crew with patriotism and characterizes their jobs as a fierce competition against Russia in defense of the Japanese fatherland. Many of the workers believe Asakawa at first, but as they gain revolutionary consciousness,

¹³ Kobayashi, p. 81.

¹⁴ Kobayashi, p. xx.

they are able to see his rhetoric as a ruse to raise their production level and generate more capital for the company.

After Asakawa's attempts at torturing the crew into raising their production level all fail, he tries a new tactic. He makes each day's work a competition between the factory workers and the fishermen. This strategy divides the men and provides them with an incentive to work harder--perfect for Asakawa. But the laborers eventually realize how Asakawa is using them. He tells the workers that their efforts are for a higher cause, and they believe it; however, they find that this cause is not the glorification of the Japanese state, as Asakawa tells them, but the liberation of the proletariat. They find that while they are still caught up in a "machine" bigger and more powerful than themselves, they have the power to turn it to the advantage of themselves and their class.

Another realization that startles the workers is their discovery of the degree of control capital has over their lives. In *Capital* (*Das Kapital*), Marx describes the stages through which capitalism grows. In the first stage, commodities are traded for others of comparable value (barter). In the second stage, money serves as an intermediate device in commodity-oriented exchange. In the third stage, it is the commodity that is the transitional item; the goal is to increase capital. The final stage involves no commodity; invested capital grows without goods actually changing hands.¹⁵ The crew is appalled when Asakawa lets the *Chichibu Maru*, another factory ship, sink with all hands. But Asakawa's justification is that the company can make more money by collecting the *Chichibu Maru*'s insurance than by paying workers to can crab and then risking it on the market.

¹⁵ Tucker, Robert C., ed. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1972), p. 225-232.

Asakawa, the symbol of capitalism, always chooses profit over honor. When he sees the skiff of another ship anchored at sea, he orders the men to steal it. He forces them to rob the nets of other vessels. Both actions are completely against the code of honor on the seas, but when all relationships become money relations, morality ceases to influence decisions.

Further, the men realize, as they talk one night, that the root of the enormous power of capital is--themselves. The navy destroyers that accompany the factory ships are there to claim control over the Russian territory in which they illegally fish. A territorial war with Russia could occur, with rights to the capital produced by the workers who process that area's fish and crab at stake. The men reason that the recent wars in Manchuria and Korea, in which many of the crewmen had fought, were waged not *even* for the glory of the emperor, but for capital. The steward remarks,

Every one of our wars, when you come right down to it, was maneuvered by two or three rich men (I mean very rich men) and anything served for an excuse. The way I hear it, they're itching to get their hands on any place that shows even the smallest promise of a profit. They're playing with fire.¹⁶

But even if the richest class has all of this power, and can build and govern a ship (or a society), it cannot move without a crew. On the *Hakko Maru* alone, the holding company is certain to make a huge profit, but the executives have nothing to do with the work that generates the capital. Who does? "It doesn't grow out of nothing. Get this now--it comes from *our* sweat and labor." So, says the character identified as "the Shibaura man," "hold your heads up high. When you come right down to it, they're afraid of us...The rich couldn't earn one measly cent without us laborers."¹⁷ The labor of the proletariat is the force that drives

¹⁶ Kobayashi, p. 58.

¹⁷ Kobayashi, p. 71-2.

everything, they discover, and if the proletariat could just throw off the rule of the rich and control itself, then anything would be possible. And the means by which they can accomplish this goal is to strike. Their first strike fails when its leaders are taken away, but the second, a mass-based strike, succeeds.

Kobayashi's *Factory Ship* is one of the most famous examples of Japanese proletarian realism, but of course many others exist, and were influential in the movement. Among these works is a great deal of variation, but most have in common the socialist-realist perspective, characterization, and conclusion. They emphasize the realistic and *directed* description of working class life, and teach the reader how the system will be changed by the eventual victory of the proletariat in a proletarian revolution.

CHAPTER IV

SONGS OF REVOLUTION

Perhaps the best way to explain the nature and significance of the Japanese proletarian literary movement is to examine the stories that were "concealed deep in the pockets of revolutionary workers and students,"¹ and which represent especially well the aspirations of the proletarian writers. This chapter contains Hayama Yoshiki's short story "Letter Found in a Cement Barrel," poems "Song" and "Farewell Before Dawn" by Nakano Shigeharu, and Tokunaga Sunao's novel *The Street Without Sun*. The lives of these authors as in their works are all very different, but they were all inspired by and maintained ultimate confidence in the strength of the working class.

Hayama Yoshiki

Hayama Yoshiki was one of the small number of proletarian writers actually to come from the working class. He was born in 1894 to a poor family in northern Kyushu. Hayama gained admission to Waseda University, but he seldom attended classes and did not complete his studies. He left the university to become a sailor on a merchant vessel; his experiences serving on many different kinds of ships over the next several years led him to write *People who Live on the Sea* (*Umi ni Ikiru Hitobito*). This work, his best-known, exposes the terrible conditions under which he and his fellow sailors lived and worked.

After 1919, Hayama put his Marxist beliefs to work in the labor movement. He drifted among many different jobs, from pressman to miner, often agitating

¹ Shea, p. 282.

among workers or assisting in organizing and conducting strikes. These experiences, too, would serve as subject matter for stories. Hayama joined NAPF's Avant-Garde Theatre Group (*Zen'ei za*) in the early 1920's. This group, which included the critics Aono Suekichi and Hayashi Fusao, advocated the presentation of "healthy" plays "that would guide the people toward a brighter future."² Hayama lived in Tokyo from 1926 to 1933, a time during which he was often in prison. Ironically, this was a very productive time for him as an author, as he did most of his writing in jail cells.³ In 1943, Hayama traveled to Manchuria to do reclamation work, and he died on his way back to Japan in October, 1945.⁴

Like Kobayashi, Hayama insisted that the plight of the proletarian class should be the subject of proletarian stories; the individual was unimportant unless he or she represented the entire working class. Consequently, although the main character in *Letter Found in a Cement Barrel* has a name, he is not *only* Matsudo Yoshizo--he is a "typed" character, a symbol of the proletariat. The reader is not moved to admire Matsudo as a hero, in part because he is too much an "everyman," too common and familiar. But he is a realistic character, and is as such revolutionary.

"Letter Found in a Cement-Barrel" (Semento Daru no Naka no Tegami)

"Letter Found in a Cement-Barrel" is a brief but memorable story, and its purpose is clearly to teach the reader a lesson in reification. The story opens with Matsudo Yoshizo emptying dry cement into mixing frames. Cement dust has

² Nakamura, p. 39-44.

³ Keene, Donald. *Dawn to the West*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), p. 455.

⁴ Morris, Ivan, ed. *Modern Japanese Stories*. (Rutland, Vermont; Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962), p. 204-5.

drifted up to cover his face, and all he wants to do is pick his nose. But he cannot, because if he stops for even a moment, he will fall behind the rapid pace set by the cement mixing machine.

Matsudo finds a small wooden box in one of the cement barrels, but since he has no time to open it, he stuffs it into his pocket. On his way home at the end of the day, thinking mostly of drinking brandy when he gets there, Matsudo remembers the box. Hoping it might contain money, breaks it open and finds inside a letter wrapped in a scrap of cloth.

The letter is the centerpiece of the story, having the greatest impact on the both the senses and the sensibilities. The author of the letter is a girl who sews cement bags for "N" company. Her boyfriend had slipped the day before and fallen into the stone crusher. His smashed body had been carried on through the machines and become incorporated into the cement. The letter writer recounts the gruesome accident, and asks, "How much cement did he become? And by what kind of people is it being used?" She concludes,

I beg this of you: please, please let me know when this cement was used; tell me exactly what place and what kind of buliding he has become. If it is no trouble, please tell me your name, too. And please be careful. *Sayonara!*⁵

Back home, Matsudo roars, "I'm going to get roaring drunk! And I'm going to break every thing I can find with my bare hands!"⁶ His wife asks Matsudo if he thinks he can afford to get drunk. She is pregnant with their seventh child.

The theme of reification is explained in Marx's writings as the incorporation of the worker's consciousness, through the sale of his labor for money, into the

⁵ Horiuchi Matsuo, ed. *Nihon Bungaku Zenshu*. vol. #44. Hayama Yoshiki, *Kuroshima Denji*, Ito Naganosuke. (Tokyo: Shueisha, 1974), p. 194.

⁶ Hayama Yoshiki..., p. 194.

product the worker produces, and the subsequent loss to the worker of part of himself. In this story, the young cement worker actually becomes what his labor produces; his body becomes cement. The incorporation of the worker's body into a building symbolizes the fundamental role of the worker in the creation of any product; the laborer is always the foundation. Labor creates capital, so laborers make all the commodities, buildings, building materials--everything--out of themselves.

The machines in this story play an important role. They are used to drive the workers unnaturally quickly, but they are also extremely dangerous. An early proletarian movement in England, the Luddites, took sledge hammers into factories and smashed the machines because they blamed their problems on mechanization. Later, socialists realized that it was not the fact of machines, but rather the way in which they were used that dehumanized their workplaces. Machines, such as the cement-mixer and the stone-crusher, could be used to make the workmen's job easier. In this story as was common in reality, machines are used not as labor-savers but as labor-intensifiers and, like the capitalist system itself, they are monsters that sometimes rage out of control.

The proletarian writers emphasized the human costs of mechanization and bad working conditions. It may seem strange that a letter written by a grieving girlfriend whose boyfriend died miserably the day before should not convey an overwhelming sense of grief. But rather than grief or even resignation one can see in the letter a desire to overcome the loss and go on living and working. The Japanese socialists emphasized that the death of an individual is unimportant when the whole class system is at stake. The girl writes, "If he became the lobby

of a theater or the wall of some huge mansion, I just couldn't bear it."⁷ She wants him to be something she considers necessary--a tenement, perhaps, or a meeting hall--a place she will be able to go. But, she writes, "No, use him anywhere. In whatever place--or places--my boyfriend is buried, he will do well. He won't mind. He was so strong...he will work well."⁸

Although the main theme of the story is reification, the secondary theme is the resilience of the working class. Matsudo serves to point out the impossible conditions under which the workman is forced to work--without even the leisure to pick his nose all day--and live.

Hayama's characters are thus trapped in inescapable situations by their economic status. They cannot earn enough money to change their status, because of inflated prices. Matsudo reasons as he walks home:

Out of one *yen* ninety *sen* daily wages, every day we eat two measures of rice at fifty *sen* each, and ninety *sen* goes to dress us and keep a roof over our heads...it's absurd! How am I supposed to be able to drink?⁹

Yet even though no doors seem to be open to them, they do not surrender. The workers grind stones to dust, then make buildings of the powder. One person dies, and another is born. If Matsudo's seventh child survives, it will replace the dead worker. In any case, the working class is not going to disappear; the act of production may weaken or even destroy individuals, but the strength of the class remains. Matsudo hopes to find money in the box; the girl hopes to find the building in which her lover's body is enshrined. In this story, desperation and

⁷ Hayama Yoshiki..., p. 194.

⁸ Hayama Yoshiki..., p. 194.

⁹ Hayama Yoshiki..., p. 193.

hope go hand in hand--and how else, Hayama would ask, can the proletariat proceed?

Nakano Shigeharu

Nakano Shigeharu was born in 1902 in the village of Takaboku in Fukui prefecture. His father was a small farmer and minor government official. Nakano began his career as a writer of traditional Japanese poetry (*tanka*), but after exposure to new ideas and non-traditional forms of writing after entering the German department of Tokyo University in 1924, he changed from traditional poetic forms to free verse and essays. In 1925, Nakano joined several other leftist students in the *New Man Society* (*Shinjinkai*), Japan's first Marxist student organization. The famous writer Akutagawa Ryunosuke noticed Nakano's work in the group's magazine *Donkey* (*Roba*) and met with Nakano in 1927 to encourage him in his literary career.

After the death of Nakano's older brother, his father pressed him to return to the country and take over the family farm; as a Tokyo University graduate, Nakano also had the option of taking a job in the bureaucracy. In the end, he refused both, opting instead to put his energy into the socialist literary and political movement. Nakano formally joined the Communist party in 1931. In October of that same year, the police broke into the *Senki* press and confiscated many papers, including a manuscript of Nakano's first poetry anthology. He was later imprisoned and held for two years without a sentence. He gained his freedom by submitting to *tenko* "ideological conversion;" under pressure, he confessed and renounced his belief in Communism, and promised not to participate in leftist

activities again. He published a number of stories and poems after the war dealing with his feelings about his *tenko* and others' reactions to it.¹⁰

After he published an essay critical of the military in 1936, Nakano's works were temporarily banned, and he remained under close police supervision until 1945. Because of his restriction and as a protest against the war, he published very little during this period. In 1945, with the approval of the allied occupation government, Nakano, Miyamoto Yuriko and others revived the Japan Communist Party. He wrote several important novels in the 1950s and '60s, and served for a time in the House of Councillors. In 1964, however, the party expelled Nakano for refusing to support Soviet nuclear testing.¹¹

SONG (*Uta*)

Before, there were songs

Songs of red flowers and dragonflies' wings
of bamboo in the breeze and the scent
of the strands of a woman's hair

all the weak things

all the false things

all the languid things; reject and leave behind

all the elegance, see with contempt

Sing of that which is honest

of that which fills the stomach

of that which rushes forth from the heart

Songs that rebound when beaten

Songs of courage drawn out from the depths of shame

These songs

Raise songs that swell from the throat with their intense rhythms

These songs

Hammer them into the hearts of all the people

In the retreat of the "big man" before the honest man

Is the promise of comfort.¹²

¹⁰ For an explanation of *tenko*, see page 66.

¹¹ deBary, Brett. *Three Works by Nakano Shigeharu*. (Ithaca: Cornell University China-Japan Program, 1979), p. 1-18.

¹² Horiuchi Matsuo, ed. *Nihon Bungei Zenshu* vol.#42. Nakano Shigeharu (Tokyo: Shueisha, 1974), p. 23.

This poem encapsulates the essence of the proletarian realism that formed the theoretical basis of *Bungei Sensen* and NAPF group literature. The goal of their work, as exemplified by this poem, was the establishment of a new *proletarian aesthetic*.

Nakano begins by representing the traditional Japanese aesthetic, as the idealization of withdrawal from the realm of social and commercial affairs and, to some extent, the standardization of what constitutes beauty. Nakano then encourages modern artists to "Sing of that which is honest," to abandon past notions of beauty and write instead of the realities of working-class life. Nakano predicts the eventual liberation of the working class and the rejection of the bourgeois aesthetic.

Nakano shares with western Marxists the conviction that artists must teach both readers *and* other artists. The propagation of the old aesthetic in the modern world is a lie, Nakano says, and proletarian writers must expose the lie and construct upon the socioeconomic base a new system of morality and artistic values, which will be instrumental to the emancipation of the workers.

Nakano also establishes as the reader's (or the *author's*) duty the dissemination of knowledge of Marxian concepts--to "Hammer them into the hearts of all the people" so that they can be employed for the emancipation of the working class. This idea of the author's role in the means of production and propagation of revolutionary consciousness shows a great deal of Comintern influence. Nakano uses his art to remind socialists and workers that they will inevitably achieve victory in the aesthetic realm *and* in the workplace, and to encourage them to proceed. The songs of the proletarian writers must "rebound when beaten," standing up to attacks on their artistic and ideological qualities.

Not the gentleness of the "gentle people" but the strength and raw emotions of laborers are Nakano's inspiration.

Farewell Before Dawn (Yoake Mae no Sayonara)

We must do our work,
And for it we must talk.
But when we talk
The police come and batter in our faces.
So we have rented a second-story room,
With consideration to the back alley and way to escape.

Here, six young men are sleeping
Below, a couple and their baby are sleeping.
I don't know the past of these six young men
I only know they think as I do.
I don't know the name of the couple below
I only know they gladly rented this room.

Dawn will come soon
and we will again move on.
Our bags are packed.
We will have secret meetings
Steadily, we will continue our work.
Tonight we will sleep in different rented beds.

Dawn will come soon.
To this tiny room,
To the diapers hung to dry,
To the sooty naked lightbulb,
To the celluloid toys,
To the rented beds,
To the bugs,
We say, Sayonara!
That flowers may be allowed to bloom
Our flowers,
The couple's flowers,
The baby's flowers,
All the flowers may bloom,
All at once, and fiercely.¹³

A departure from "Song," which centers on the artistic aspects of the movement, this poem presents Communist party members who have been forced

¹³ Nakano, p. 20-21.

"underground" by the thought police, and are trying to work for a freer, more equal future in which thoughts can "bloom" like "flowers." The narrator's voice is very colloquial; he uses the informal form of "I" (*boku*) for himself, and uses the speech level of a worker, rather than that of a traditional poet. The urgency, immediacy, and violence of the underground life comes through in the first few lines. But in the author's wish that the baby's dreams be realized, there is both commitment and optimism.

Nakano's "description" of the room in which the Communists sleep is actually a simple list of its contents--the bare light bulb, the clutter, the rented beds, the vermin. And yet the shabbiness the list suggests explains why it is that the six men must do their work. Endangered as they are, they can assume nothing. They only know what is concretely before them: that the couple has rented them the room, that they share a belief, and that someday, the revolution will materialize and the poor will be freed.

The speaker knows that the fear and oppression under which he works can be eliminated only through class warfare. But, as Marx wrote in the *Manifesto*, and as Nakano illustrates in his description, the workers should not hesitate, as they have "nothing to lose but their chains." It is this generation's responsibility to rebuild the world today so that the thoughts of the next "may be allowed to bloom" tomorrow.

Tokunaga Sunao

Tokunaga Sunao (sometimes called Tokunaga Naoshi) was born into a working-class family in Kumamoto prefecture in 1899. Because his family was constantly involved in labor disputes, he learned about socialism early in life. After working his way through middle school, Tokunaga moved to Tokyo where,

apparently through his work as a typesetter, he became involved in the proletarian literary movement. His own participation in the Kyodo Printing Company strike in 1926 became the basis for his masterwork, *The Town Without Sun*, which was published as a serial in 1929. In 1930, enthusiastic audiences flocked to a dramatized version.¹⁴ Nakano Shigeharu was thrilled by the appearance of Tokunaga's work, and wrote to him in a letter, "The bride has come. The remarkable proletarian bride has come. The bride we have waited and waited for has now come to us."¹⁵

The government suppressed Tokunaga's writing during World War II, but after 1945 he joined the Communist Party and resurfaced as a leftist author. The death of his wife during the war caused him a great deal of emotional stress and depression, however, and critic Nakamura Mitsuo suggests that perhaps his later works were adversely effected by this personal tragedy. Tokunaga died in 1958.¹⁶

Because he was so familiar with labor strikes in his own life, Tokunaga knew that unity of thought and action, plus pragmatism, were vital for success. Again and again he stresses the importance and difficulty of achieving these ends. The hero of *Town Without Sun*, Hagimura, is horrified when another character says, "The greater the unemployment, the sooner the revolution." Such simplistic slogans, he insists, can only mislead the workers; far from being helpful, they are very dangerous because they give people the false idea that change is

¹⁴ Tokunaga Sunao, trans. K. Itow & A. Raddatz. *Die StraBe ohne Sonne*. (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeiter-Verlag, 1930).

¹⁵ Shea, p. 282.

¹⁶ Nakamura, p. 51-2.

easy, and ignore the hard work needed to make it happen. What the workers really need is knowledge and cohesion.¹⁷

Town Without Sun (Taiyo no nai Machi)

Town Without Sun begins with a forward that summarizes the story:

Three thousand workers at the Daido Printing Company struggled ninety days against the Japanese financial establishment and the Imperial Police. They were driven apart, and many were imprisoned. But the battlefield did not budge. Their leaders were captured. They were tortured and beaten. The masses fought on without their leaders. Not until hunger came did the strike collapse. The old ones make way, and the young raise the flags for the new battles.¹⁸

Although this story is not devoid of Marxian doctrine, it does not contain the weight of theory found in Kobayashi's *Factory Ship*, or Nakano's *Song*. It is a novel that presents to the reader the victories and defeats for both sides an actual strike.

The "town without sun" is the area in which the Daido Printing Company's workers live. Their barracks stand along the banks of a dirty little river full of broken glass, paper and garbage, in a valley into which the sun does not reach.

The story begins on the fiftieth day of the strike of three thousand workers of the Daido Printing Company against its owner, Okawa who, as the strikeleaders write in a statement, "...has basely fired 38 type-founders, to negate the best strength of the workplace and leave empty the mouths of 15,000 family members."¹⁹

¹⁷ Tokunaga, p. 122.

¹⁸ Tokunaga, p. 5.

¹⁹ Tokunaga, p. 14.

The company tries various strategies to break the strike, including violence against the strikers and the arrest and detention of the strike leaders. It even enlists ladies from the Tokyo Buddhist Women's Club to try to persuade the strikers' wives and children to convince the men to end the strike peacefully. The working women see through the condescending kindness of the well-dressed Tokyoites, however, refuse their overtures, and chase them across the river.

The printing company reopens with strikebreaker labor; they smuggle workers tired of the strike into the factory gates hidden in a ragpicker's cart. The police capture and take away enough of the strikeleaders that the former minority right-wing can take nominal control of the strikers. Through all of this, most of the workers stay loyal to their cause, and to their symbol--the red flag. It is only when starvation, aggravated by the cold of winter and the loss of many homes in a fire, becomes unbearable that the workers will end their struggle. Still, the red flag remains the symbol of the hardship they have endured together.

The Town Without Sun is like *The Factory Ship* in that, rather than only teaching the reader the underlying reasons for rebellion, it gives an example of an actual rebellion; it is the biography of a strike in which the author was an active participant. *Town Without Sun* is different from Kobayashi's, Hayama's, and Nakano's works in that it does contain characters with individual personalities. This may be due to the fact that Tokunaga wrote the book in 1926, before joining the movement and learning about Communist social theory in a formal manner. The novel includes many very strong characters, both men and women, whose personalities are important to the development of the action. But the vital role of the individuals does not undermine the importance of the group. Three thousand strikers of the Daido Printing Company carry on the strike, and they do not fight

alone. Not only their internal organization and their family members, but also the printworkers from all over Tokyo share the strikers' suffering. Printing industry workers all over the city have a weekly "day without rice;" they water down their soup and use pods and peelings for vegetables, then send what they save to the strikers, who have no money left. The pain of three thousand is easier to bear when spread among several hundred thousand--and their united strength is harder to ignore.

One of Tokunaga's priorities in this work is to reveal the actual living conditions of the Tokyo working class in the 1920's. His descriptions are not detailed, but they are effective in presenting, if not a picture, then the *flavor* of the living conditions of the proletariat. Of the "town without sun" in which the workers live Tokunaga writes:

...in this valley, barely a quarter mile wide, lay the worst, poorest district of Tokyo...this, earlier the beautiful Senkawa Canal, was today a filthy swamp which with the summer and autumn rains overflowed its banks and reached up to the houses, so that during these times the 40,000 inhabitants had to hang up their beds and covers. Under them ran the stinking water.²⁰

The Senkawa was the centerpoint of the valley town, and thus its symbol. The farther one lived from it..the richer he was; at the same time, the farther one moved from the river, the nearer one came to the sun. This was the barometer that differentiated the classes in this society.²¹

The canal, in its decayed condition, symbolizes the status of the working class; although the workers were respected and could support themselves in former days, they have been forced down by the capitalist system, to the point that they are despised and live in poverty.

²⁰ Tokunaga, p. 18.

²¹ Tokunaga, p. 19.

Because of the difference in their social and economic positions, Tokunaga suggests, the fundamental realities of the workers and the owners are different. This difference becomes an issue when the Women's Assembly refuses to allow one of its members, Okimi, to become a functionary because she works as a prostitute. The heroine, Takae, speaks for her in a moving scene. Takae, defending Okimi, excuses her actions on the grounds that there was no other way for her to feed her large family. Second, she asks what value "bourgeoisie" chastity really has for proletarians. Takae responds to a woman's sneers,

Naturally, you are a Phillistine. And shall I explain why? This whole discussion of chastity has no further purpose than to sell the sexual act to a man as expensively as possible. You say, "I am a virgin" or "I am a lady" while you'd rather be sold to an executive than a working man. This is your theory of chastity, and it is practically nothing but the bourgeoisie opinion of the matter."²²

The women decide that Takae is right; technically, the capitalist system makes all workers into prostitutes. The women accept Okimi, and Takae embraces her, then tells her to explain to the "ladies" that if they are to free the proletariat, their feminine virtue is the least of the sacrifices they will have to make.²³

Tokunaga turns his biting humor against the owners of the company. His juxtaposition of a meeting of the board members forms a grotesque contrast with the Women's Assembly meeting.

On the wall behind the football-faced one hung an enormous banner with the inscription "Loyalty and Duty;" his many cargo and delivery vans, which bore the slogan "Serve the Fatherland with Magazines" written in huge advertisement letters, were climbing up the percentages for traffic accidents in Tokyo.²⁴

Tokunaga also deals with society's low opinion of the workers. Three members of the Tokyo Buddhist Women's Club visit the "town without sun,"

²² Tokunaga, p. 65.

²³ Tokunaga, p. 67.

²⁴ Tokunaga, p. 111.

thinking that by appealing to their religious values they can easily convince the wives of the workers to talk their husbands into ending the strike. But the women are not about to believe anyone who comes to them to preach brotherhood and equality dressed "like actresses."²⁵ The poor women call them "foxes," and "poison gas."²⁶

Although Tokunaga favors the working class in his writing, he does not try to make it seem perfect. Rather, he presents it as a strong, uncompromising force. The police capture and imprison Okayo, a young, pregnant girl who works with her sister, Takae, to lead the striking women. She remains imprisoned for a long time, and contracts beri-beri, due to which she loses her child; then she herself dies. Blaming the owner Okawa himself for her sister's death, Takae finds his seven-year-old granddaughter Etsuko, Okawa's only pleasure, and poisons her. The child dies miserably. Although this episode may actually have occurred during the 1926 strike upon which this book is based, in the context of the novel, this revenge scene functions to express the ruthlessness that makes the two sides equal. It is eye-for-an-eye justice; the proletariat responds to the antagonism of the owners. But the "equality" this creates is, like that of the Buddhist Women's Club ladies, false. As long as the class system exists, there can be no other equality. Okawa refuses the doctor permission to perform an autopsy on Etsuko. "Stupidity! Would that make her live again?" Okawa cries. Tokunaga seems to ask the reader, "can examination of the problems of the proletariat and a few concessions on either side bring the working class back into the light of the sun?" No, he answers, it is only through endurance and unity that there can be triumph.

²⁵ Tokunaga, p. 152.

²⁶ Tokunaga, p. 155-6.

Commonalities: Art and Designs of Proletarian Writers

The Factory Ship, "Letter Found in a Cement Barrel," "Song," "Farewell Before Dawn," and *Town Without Sun* have several points in common. The first, and perhaps the most obvious, is their confidence in the enduring strength and eventual victory of the proletariat. Although all of these works deal with the difficulties faced by the workers and union or Communist party organizers, they express--and encourage in the reader--admiration for and faith in the inevitability of a proletarian revolution.

These works all attempt, through their subject matter and style, to educate the reader. By exposing the squalid living conditions and financial incapacity of the workers, as well as the dangers of the workplace and the iron-fisted domination of the authorities, these authors make the world of the proletarians as real as possible for the intellectual reader. At the same time, they appeal to the daily experience of the laborer. All are concerned with the price humans pay, which is to say the diminishment of the workers' humanity, to produce the goods that drive the capitalistic system. They depict not only the direct suffering of the workmen, but also that of workers' wives, working women, children and professional party members. And it is not only working class incendiaries, but also bystanders like Etsuko who are destroyed by the voracious capitalistic system.

Marxism-Leninism is another subject taught in these works. Kobayashi does this in a rather blatant manner by having the Chinese man explain it to the Japanese fishermen. Hayama deals with the element of objectification; in "Song," Nakano handles Marxism in the form of socialist realist standards for evaluating

art. Tokunaga takes the reader inside a real strike and explains why it must happen, how it works, and what is needed to make it succeed.

These works are also similar in their use of characters. Kobayashi uses a mass character rather than individuals; Hayama uses symbolic characters, and the speaker in Nakano's poems identifies himself only (in "Farewell") as one of several party members. Tokunaga's characterization is different, but still is unlike that of the bourgeois writers. One of the greatest differences in this respect is in his depiction of women. Writers like Tanizaki, Akutagawa, and Ogai generally portrayed female characters as "classical women," beautiful, uneducated, emotional, objects of a male protagonist's sexual desire. In *Town Without Sun*, Tokunaga's female characters are at least as strong as the men. The plot structure is androgynous; the female character Takae and the male Hagimura are both protagonists. They develop as individuals, and they complementarily lead the strike; they are not always together, but Takae's work helps to advance Hagimura's, and vice versa. Although they remain in masculine and feminine roles--Hagimura leads attacks, whereas Takae convinces the women not to fall for the company's tricks; he is educated, she intuitive--neither is made subordinate to the other.

Tenko

The proletarian writers and their stories constituted a direct threat to the Japanese government, which hunted them down individually or through mass arrests. From 1928 to 1934 especially, many proletarian authors found themselves in jail without charges. It was common for them to be held as "suspects" for up to two or three years before sentencing. Many were mistreated

or tortured, or knew someone who was. Prisoners lived in complete uncertainty and grave danger. There was, however, one avenue open by which those arrested as Communists could gain their release: *tenko*.

Tenko is, simply put, the renunciation (recantation) by an individual of his or her Communist ideology. Those who underwent *tenko* had, at minimum, to admit to their former participation in an illegal Communist organization and to promise to abstain from such activities in the future.²⁷ *Tenko* was an extremely personal--and painful--decision for the captive proletarian artists, and was different for each. Only a few of those arrested remained in prison without submitting to *tenko*, and these were released in 1945. For some, *tenko* was only a formality; they made the required statement, but did not actually change their beliefs, and resumed their Communist activities after the war ended. At the other extreme were those who really did repudiate their former Communist beliefs, converted to the right wing, and aided in the government's war effort by writing propaganda.

As different people left prison under different conditions, likewise they found different means of coming to terms with their experiences. For Nakano Shigeharu, *tenko* was a trauma that led to new kinds of writing, partially to justify his moral choice, but also to continue criticizing society without overtly applying socialist dogma. Indeed, although his *tenko* may have seemed to some to be the end of his artistic career, it was in some ways a new beginning.

Nakano's *tenko* occurred in 1934, after he had been in prison without a sentence for two years. He finally agreed to the minimal conditions for *tenko*, seeing it as his only alternative to indefinite bondage. But he realized that his

²⁷ de Bary, p. 4.

choice had implications beyond himself. Although he had not really lost his faith in Communism, his supposed conversion was disheartening to the many who had looked up to him during the better days of the movement, and appeared to be a rejection of all that he had done for the past thirteen years.

Nakano Shigeharu
A House in the Village (Mura no Ie)

In 1935, Nakano published his first work after his *tenko*, the short story "A House in the Village." The main character in this semi-autobiographical story is Benji, a young writer and Communist party member who has only days before returned to his parents' country home from Tokyo after being released from prison. He has been in prison for two and a half years without a sentence, during which time he has suffered from syphilis and tuberculosis. Much of the guilt that plagues him comes from within himself, because he is ashamed that he did not hold out longer; he still believes as he did before. He feels that he has betrayed the movement; he is uncomfortable with his parents, from whom he feels strangely separated.

Benji's father, although he has had little formal education, forces further guilt on Benji by accusing him of wasting all his accomplishments, as well as the sacrifices of his family. In a long conversation between the father and son, Benji's father enumerates the family's sufferings: Benji's father is in debt, his sister dead, his mother half insane. Still, when his father advises him, "throw away your writing and save yourself," Benji refuses. He feels that to give up work would be a mistake; he must continue his activities, now working within the system to change it.

At the end of the story, Benji's father forces him into an acute awareness of how his "egotism and greed" have destroyed the family. Then, just as Benji feels the strongest shame, his mother rushes into the room with a message for his father--that he should keep the money a neighbor gave him as a "gift" for quickly paying off his dead son's life insurance policy.

"A House in the Village" is different from Nakano's earlier works "Song" and "Farewell Before Dawn" in that in it he develops individuals as characters; the reader sees their psychology, emotions, and thought processes to an extent not allowed by the standards of socialist realism. Here it is not doctrine, but justification of an individual's moral choice upon which the story is based. Benji still thinks as a Communist at times, but he questions such thoughts. Benji sees names written in an old record book and a thesis begins to formulate in his mind: "The social phenomenon reflected in the change in farm women's names..." But he realizes that to generalize about society from one point as he is doing is "somehow irrelevant."²⁸

Although *tenko* and other factors caused the demise of the organized proletarian literary movement by 1934, to say that proletarian literature *died* with Kobayashi, as does Keene²⁹, is inaccurate. The *movement* ended, but the influence of proletarian and *tenko* literature on literary form and style was to live much longer.

²⁸ de Bary, p. 22.

²⁹ Keene, Donald. p. 342. "The death in prison of the Communist novelist Kobayashi Takiji in 1933 was also the death of the movement;..."

CHAPTER V

"SONGS OF COURAGE DRAWN OUT OF THE DEPTHS OF SHAME;"
THE EXPIRATION AND REDEMPTION OF PROLETARIAN LITERARY
ACHIEVEMENTS

Many different causes arose in the late 1920s and early '30s that contributed to the decline of the proletarian literary movement; of these, pressure from the authorities and the rise of ultranationalism were especially overwhelming. However, in spite of the government's opposition, socialist realism did not disappear as a topic of debate among intellectuals. After World War II, earlier proletarian works--including the uncut edition of Kobayashi Takiji's *The Factory Ship*--became available. The force of the political and artistic movement dissappeared before it could seriously challenge mainstream literature, yet proletarian literature was not a "failure," as critics Keene and Shea suggest.

The changing nature of censorship made the proletarian genre more and more difficult to sustain. Before the time of the Sino-Japanese War, censorship had been a means of preserving artistic standards. Censors removed sexually explicit illustrations or passages in texts, for example, in the interests of protecting the "public morals." Censors also worked to maintain traditional values within the mainstream literary and artistic canon.

However, censorship metamorphasized in such a way that by the 1920's, it was not so much an instrument of artistic control as a political tool. Censors removed not only *risque* scenes in texts, but also any parts that criticized or in any way discredited the establishment. Censors ensured the sacredness in literature and art of the emperor and the imperial system. A derogatory remark about the emperor could get a publication blacklisted or shut down. For example, a magazine could be suppressed on charges of "desecration of the dignity of the

Imperial House" if a typesetter substituted one of two nearly identical characters for another when spelling the emperor's title.¹

Since the goal of the proletarian writers was to write precisely what the censors were out to intercept, less and less of their work reached the reading public through legal channels. During the escalation of the Pacific War (World War II) through the 1930s and 40s, only writings that actively supported the war gained approval. Even popular writers such as Nagai Kafu and Tanizaki Jun'ichiro were barred from publishing at this time.

Innovations from Proletarian Literature

The proletarian movement was the birthplace of various theoretical and stylistic developments necessary to the creation of modern Japanese literature. From the Meiji-era authors, the proletarian writers adopted the trends toward colloquialization of language, free form, unconventional characterization, and rejection of traditional morality that the first Japanese naturalists had begun. The proletarian artists then extended these trends; whereas the *genbun'ichi* proponents and I-novelists of the Meiji period had striven to find a balance between formal and colloquial linguistic styles, proletarian writers had had no compunctions against using the vulgate.

The form of the proletarian writers' works, as well as the language used to construct them, differed from previous literature. Until the Meiji era, tradition had limited the form shape of Japanese poetry. Tan'ka, five-line poems with 5-7-5-7-7 syllable patterns and haiku with 5-7-5 syllable patterns were the only standard styles. Around the turn of the century, artists including Yosano Akiko adopted

¹ Rubin, Jay. *Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1984), p. 256.

free verse. Proletarian poetry, as exemplified by the works of Nakano Shigeharu, also included many works written in free verse; instead of attempting primarily to create sensory images, it is functional in teaching and stirring to action the proletarian (or sympathetic activist) reader. Plot structure also changed in the hands of the proletarian writers. In Western stories and novels, the author generally develops a problem, builds it up to a climax, and then resolves it. In Japanese literature, the resolution had not been especially important and, in fact, very seldom occurred, at least not in a way satisfactory to Western readers. Even the works of literary giants like Jun'ichiro Tanizaki and Natsume Soseki end without a real resolution. In the case of the proletarian writers, however, the resolution was obvious: revolution. Even when the book ends with a disappointment for the laborers, as in *Town Without Sun*, the rebellious spirit is not lost, and revolution remains inevitable; the reader knows that the ultimate goal of the writers and their characters is the creation of a new society free of classes and economic inequities. The proletarian movement also caused a change in attitudes about art. The naturalists of the Meiji era believed strongly in the supremacy of art over social and economic issues. As is clear in Akutagawa Ryunosuke's "Hell Screen" ("Jigoku Hen") and Tanizaki's "Tattoo" ("Iresumi"), it was their firm belief that art is superior to daily life, and artists are above average human beings. The proletarian writers believed just the opposite: art should be a reflection of real life, and a means of improving it, and artists are producers located, like the proletarians who produce commodities, in the means of production.

Shadows of Proletarian Literature in Feminist Literature

Although the Japan proletarian literary movement officially ended in 1934, this does not mean that 1934 marks the termination of proletarian literature. Works from the days of the proletarian organizations resurfaced and were published legally after 1945. Of the proletarian activist and Communist authors who survived through the war, some continued to write. Communist feminists Miyamoto (Chujo) Yuriko and Hirabayashi Taiko, along with non-Communists including Hiyashi Fumiko, a woman who began in poverty and became the most popular female writer in Japan, developed a new women's literature. They wrote about women protagonists, for the most part, from a feminine point of view. This had not been done in modern Japanese literature, with the notable exception of the *Seito* (Blue Stocking) group, which formed in 1911 under the leadership of Hiratsuka Raicho.²

Miyamoto (Chujo) Yuriko

From an early age, Chujo Yuriko demonstrated social concern and literary skill. Yuriko's father was an architect, and her mother came from a wealthy family. Born in 1899, she was from her early childhood encouraged to develop her creative talents. Her mother was especially helpful, helping her to publish her first novel, *A Flock of Poor People* (*Mazushii Hitobito no Mure*), when she was seventeen.

Yuriko read a great deal, and was profoundly influenced by English and Russian novels. After travelling with her father to New York in 1921, she remained there for a time to attend Columbia University, where she met Araki Shigeru, a graduate student in Near Eastern Languages. Yuriko's parents did not approve

² Shea, p. 30.

of him because they knew nothing about him beyond the fact that he was of lower social rank than she. She married him anyway, as a means of escape from the confinement of her family, and as a way of asserting her independence. The marriage turned out to be restrictive and depressing, and ended in divorce after five years. Yuriko's best known novel, *Nobuko*, written in 1924, describes this experience.

The next major influence on Yuriko's life was Yuasa Yoshiko. Yoshiko was a scholar of Russian and a lesbian, who avoided the traditional and encouraged Yuriko to find her own way. The two lived together for seven years. In 1927 they went to the Soviet Union, where they traveled for three years, making excursions to several Western cities. Yuriko wrote of these years in the continuation of *Nobuko*, *The Two Gardens* (*Futatsu no Niwa*). During this time, Yuriko confirmed her commitment to Marxism-Leninism--a conviction she would never abandon.

On her return to Japan in 1930, Yuriko joined NAPF. She was instrumental in establishing a Women's Committee within the organization, and became its leader and the editor of its publication, *Working Women* (*Hataraki Fujin*). Yuriko quietly joined the Communist party in 1931; that she was a Communist party member was not made public until much later. While thus active in NAPF and other activities she met Miyamoto Kenji, an active writer and Communist party member. She soon married Kenji, keeping her own name. Only a few months later, Kenji was forced to go underground. Yuriko was arrested several times, and bad treatment and sunstroke incurred during her imprisonment permanently weakened her health. In 1933, Kenji was captured again and given a life sentence; shortly thereafter, Yuriko's parents died. Left with no means of support, she moved in with and cared for Kenji's parents. On one of Kenji's

birthdays during his imprisonment, she changed her name to Miyamoto as a present to him.

Yuriko was forced into silence by the police during the war years, but she maintained her beliefs. She did not undergo *tenko*, and did not cease her work. Among other projects, she recorded the experiences of her activist friends during wartime repression in a volume later published as *The Banshu Plain*. In 1945, when political prisoners were liberated, Kenji and Yuriko were reunited, and lived together until Yuriko's death of cerebro-spinal meningitis in 1951.³

Although Yuriko came from a bourgeois background and wrote her most famous work using the form associated with bourgeois literature, the I-novel, her writing was intensely revolutionary. She felt that her beliefs and her life were tied together, and she resisted giving up either; Yuriko felt that the three most important issues in her work were "consciousness and practice, women's happiness and creativity, and politics and literature."⁴ Among her works are autobiographical novels and stories about party members and proletarian awakening, such as "The Family of Koiwai."⁵ *Nobuko* is the story of her failed first marriage, but it reaches beyond autobiography to reflect the era of its writing and its author's beliefs.

³ Tanaka Yukiko, ed. *To Live and to Write Selections by Japanese Women Writers 1913-1938*. (Seattle: The Seal Press, 1987), p. 41-45.

Nee, Brett. "Translator's Note." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 7 (1971): 44-46.

⁴ Lippit, Noriko Mizuta. *Reality and Fiction in Modern Japanese Literature*. White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1980), p. 147.

⁵ Lippit, Noriko Mizuta and Selden, Kyoko Iriye, trans, and eds. *Stories by Contemporary Japanese Women Writers*. (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1982), p. 3-21.

Nobuko

The issues in the failing marriage of Nobuko (Yuriko) and Tsukuda (Araki), as Nobuko sees them, are her right to make choices independently, and her need for freedom to pursue her art. Although she at first believes that through Tsukuda she can find a way of asserting her own personality, she soon learns that she has made a mistake. Tsukuda's bitterness, insincerity, and materialism disgust her. They buy seedlings (instead of the books Nobuko would prefer), which Tsukuda plants outside of their fence. Local children, unfamiliar with pines and cedars, break off a few branches.

"Such a nuisance," she said. "Trees are rare around here, that's why. We'd better transplant them inside the fence."

"It's inexcusable. Picking the branches of other people's trees. But I won't transplant them. Never." Nobuko sensed in her husband's words a stubborn attachment to possessions.

Tsukuda's possessiveness also applies to Nobuko herself. When she asks for a trial separation he refuses, crying and tearing out his hair when he realizes she is serious. But this display only makes Nobuko more certain she is right. He leaves on a business trip, and she moves out of their house.

Years after writing *Nobuko*, Yuriko criticized it as "not based on a class analysis." When she wrote it she was clearly aware of proletarian issues, but they are not the major point of this work.

"Her later essays stress the economic and social basis of woman's oppression, and that the only genuine liberation can come from collective action for the revolutionary transformation of society as a whole."⁶

In *Nobuko*, Yuriko handled important social problems, although not in a clearly Marxist manner. However, this work has more in common with proletarian than

⁶ Nee, p. 45.

bundan writing. She indicates that Nobuko's problems with both her family and her marriage are the result of limitations imposed on people--especially women--by the Japanese social structure. Not lashing out directly against this structure but using her own story to demonstrate its flaws, Yuriko vividly describes her struggles against it.

In the afterword to a postwar edition of *Nobuko*, Yuriko wrote,

We live now under a constitution laden with the word "human rights." Why is it, then, that more people are reading *Nobuko* than even before the war? It is because the theme of *Nobuko* presents a problem still unsolved for Japanese women...The social conditions in which every Japanese woman may live as a democratic citizen are still to a large degree lacking.⁷

Hayashi Fumiko

Hayashi Fumiko's vivid descriptions of the harsh realities of the life of the poor come from her own experiences. Fumiko's mother was an unconventional woman who had had several children, all by different lovers. Her stepfather was a peddler who travelled all over Japan. After Fumiko was born in 1904, they had little to offer her, but kept her with them as they roamed; however, this made her early education very difficult, as she was forced to change schools a number of times. At fifteen, she decided to put herself through high school, which she accomplished by working nights in a factory and holidays as a maid. During high school she read many Western authors, and showed a talent for writing.

In Spring of 1922, Fumiko moved to Tokyo. She briefly moved in with a former lover who left suddenly, abandoning her with nothing. After that she was thrown into dire poverty. She worked many different jobs, just trying to feed herself, and attempted suicide at least once.⁸ Finally, with a small cash gift from

⁷ Nee, p. 46.

⁸ Morris, p. 349.

an anarchist friend, she and another woman began publishing a small literary journal called *Futari (The Two of Us)*. For a while during this period Fumiko lived with a rich man who abused her; she then left him for a poor art student, who soon became her loving and supportive husband. After the publication of her autobiographical work *Horoki* (translated in part as *Vagabond's Song*) in 1928, Fumiko began finding profitable outlets for her work. After her stories began appearing in the magazine *Women and the Arts*, more publishers noticed her. Fumiko's prolific writing soon led her from nameless poverty to wealth and fame. She toured Europe from 1931 to 1932, then went to China as a war correspondent from 1937 to 1945. By the time of her sudden death in 1951, she was a hero of sorts to literary intellectuals and to women of all classes and ages.⁹ Although Fumiko did not join the Communist party, she was engaged in left-wing activities for a time.¹⁰ She was undeniably familiar with the proletarian world--especially with the problems of women left alone in it.

"Downtown" (Shitamachi)

"Downtown" is a story about a woman named Ryo, whose husband has not returned from Siberia, where he was sent as a soldier six years before. Left with only their six-year old son, Ryo moves to Tokyo to live with a cousin. She tries to earn her living by selling packets of tea in the streets, but does badly. One day she meet a workman, Tsuruishi Yoshio, in a poor district who is kind to her and invites her to share his lunch. She returns to see him several times, and a bond grows between her and the man. One day, trapped in the rain after an outing, Tsuru, Ryo and the boy end up staying in an inn. The boy remains sound asleep;

⁹ Tanaka, p. 99-104.

¹⁰ Morris, p. 349.

near morning, Ryo and Tsuru make love. The next day when Ryo and her son return to meet Tsuru, he is gone--she finds that he is dead, killed in a freak accident. The next day, trying to sell her tea alone in the cold, she comes to the door of a rickety hut. The woman who comes to the door welcomes her in.

Ryo went in and put down her rucksack. In the small room four sewing-women were sitting on the floor around an oil stove, working on a mass of shirts and socks. They were women like herself, thought Ryo, as she watched their busy needles moving in and out of the material. A feeling of warmth came over her.¹¹

The intensity of Hayashi Fumiko's writing is reminiscent of that of Kobayashi Takiji or Hayama Yoshiki. She does not turn away from the hideousness of poverty and the ends to which it drives people. The atmosphere she creates in her works recreates for the reader the destitution and uncertainty of women characters in the lowest class of Tokyo society. Her characters include working women, prostitutes, day laborers--women (and men) living on the edge of despair but holding on to their last bits of hope.

Similarities in Nobuko and "Downtown"

Primary values of both Yuriko and Fumiko are the place of women in society. Entrapment in social conventions and financial straits were especially difficult for Japanese women, especially during Japan's belligerent period, when many young women lost their husbands and were left alone. These two women knew enough about the West--through their reading and their travels--to know that changes could be made. Also, both took action on behalf of the poorest members of society, Fumiko through writing of her own experiences and those of

¹¹ Morris, p. 364.

people she knew, Yuriko, from an intellectual perspective, through her Communist party and NAPF activities. Moreover, Yuriko and Fumiko both shared with the proletarian writers a strong opposition to war.

Both Yuriko and Fumiko write simply and clearly while maintaining a high level of intensity. The form of their works is generally quite simple, but as they tell their stories, drawing on their own experiences, their works reflect the women's own rebelliousness and commitment to women like themselves. In a manner reminiscent of Japanese socialist realism, in which writers describe the lives of characters who stand for the proletariat, feminist writers depict the lives of Japanese women, forcing the reader to understand the plight of the woman in a stiflingly traditional and sexist society.

While many of Yuriko's works do incorporate Marxist doctrine, the story of Nobuko does not, although Nobuko herself is a leftist intellectual; on the other hand, whereas Fumiko's works are not Marxist, they are oriented toward the proletariat. Both authors are concerned specifically with women driven to the edge by physical or spiritual poverty, war, unemployment, and family pressures.

Yuriko's and Fumiko's subject matter, like that of the proletarian writers, was drawn from the social and political situation of its time, and from the intimate memories of the writers. Again like the proletarian writers, they strive to create in their works a world as real as the one they live in; they skillfully capture familiar emotions and give full impact to the ugliness of the people and places that affect them. The feminists differed from the proletarian authors, however, in that they felt it important to develop characters as individuals. This contrasted sharply with the NAPF socialist-realist idea that characters should be "typed" to represent the whole working class--which necessarily prevented them from developing

individuals. The characterization in Yuriko's first-person, autobiographical novel *Nobuko*, for example, shared nothing with Kobashi's creation of a "mass character" in *The Factory Ship*. The feminists were also different from mainstream proletarian writers in that although they wanted to see the liberation of the proletariat, their primary goal was intellectual, sexual, financial and spiritual liberation for women.

Conclusion

Japanese Proletarian Literature was more than a radical movement that sprang up in 1921 and disappeared in 1934. It constituted a fundamental shift from self-centeredness to social consciousness in art, literature, and critical theory. Proletarian writers dared to extend the range of their subject matter to include all the ugliness, cruelty, and greed imposed on the higher and lower classes under capitalism. The proletarian writers' socialist realism also caused a rethinking of the manner in which language should be used, what it ought to say, who would speak it, and to whom it could most effectively be directed.

Proletarian literature, while essentially forced out of existence along with the socialist and proletarian organizations in 1934, constituted an important step in the development of Japanese literature. It was a genre of protest literature which showed resiliency in the face of extreme opposition. Japanese proletarian literature broke violently from literary and social traditions, pointing out the illness of the traditional system and attempting to lead the movement to replace it.

APPENDIX A

TIMELINE

1868	Meiji Restoration
1882-5	Sino-Japanese War
1889	Meiji Constitution
1901	First Social Democratic party formed
1904	Beginning of Russo-Japanese war Communist Manifesto translated
1905	Annexation of Taiwan, Korea
1906	Japan Socialist Party formed
1910	Second Social Democratic Party formed
1912	<i>Yuaikai</i> labor union formed Meiji Emperor dies; Taisho era begins.
1914-1918	World War I
1917	Bolshevik revolution in Russia
1918	Rice riots Siberian Expedition
1920	<i>Tanemaku Hito</i> magazine begins in Tokyo
1922	Japan Communist Party established
1923	Great Kanto Earthquake
1925	Public Peace Law passed Ro-no ha established
1926	<i>Bungei Sensen</i> Taisho emperor dies; Hirohito becomes emperor; Showa era begins
1928	NAPF established First vote with universal male suffrage
1929	Great Depression
1931	Manchurian Incident--beginning of 15 years' war NAPF becomes KOPF
1933	Death of Kobayashi Takiji
1934	KOPF disbanded; end of Japan proletarian literary organizations.
1945	End of World War II
1946	Japan Communist Party legalized Women's suffrage

APPENDIX B

"I beg you: do not die"¹
Yosano Akiko, 1904

Oh my little brother, I weep for you
And beg you: do not die--
You, last-born and most beloved.
Did our parents
Put a blade into your hand
And teach you to kill men?
"Kill men and die in battle," did they say
And raise you so 'til twenty-four?

It is you who are to carry on the name
You who are to be master of
This proud, old merchant house.
I beg you: do not die.
What concern is it of yours
If the Russian fortress falls or stands?
Of this, the merchant household code
Says nothing.

I beg you: do not die.
His Imperial Majesty--he himself--
Enters not the field of battle.
So vast and deep his sacred heart:
He cannot wish for you to spill
Your own blood and another's,
To die the death of beasts,
To think such death is glory!

Oh my little brother
I beg you: do not die in battle.
To add to mother's grief
When she lost father this autumn past,
They took her son
And left her to protect the house.
I hear of "peace" in this great Emperor's reign,
And yet your mother's hair grows ever whiter.

Your pliant, young bride crouches weeping
In the shadows of the shop curtains.
Do you think of her, or have you forgotten?
Imagine the heart of this sweet girl--
Not ten months were you together!

¹ Rubin, Jay. *Injurious to the Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), p. 56-57.

Who else has she in all the world
To care for her but you?
I beg you, brother: do not die.

APPENDIX C

Table I
SPEED OF INDUSTRIALIZATION²

	A	B	C	D
1909	32,390	9155	1,012,000	47.5
1914	31,859	14,578	1,187,000	50.6
1919	44,087	26,947	2,025,000	54.0
1924	48,394	37,141	1,977,000	57.6
1929	60,275	48,555	2,384,000	61.3
1934	80,880	68,806	2,580,000	66.3
1938	113,205	98,723	3,718,000	71.2

Column A Total number of factories (5+ workers)

Column B Number of mechanized factories

Column C Number of industrial workers

Column D Population, in millions

TABLE II
PRICES AND WAGES, 1906-1918³

	A	B	C	D
1906	100.0			
1907	107.8			
1908	103.9			
1909	99.1			
1910	101.3			
1911	104.1			
1912	110.2		100	100
1913	110.4		102	101
1914	105.5	100.0	102	101
1915	106.7	92.5	101	94
1916	129.0	100.6	104	109
1917	162.3	123.7	120	145
1918	212.6	174.3	157	200

Column A Tokyo Wholesale Price Index, 1906 = 100.

Column B Tokyo Cost of Living Index, 1914 = 100.

Column C Wages, aggregate of major cities, 1912 = 100.

Column D Prices, 1912 = 100.

² Lockwood, William W. *The Economic Development of Japan Growth and Structural Change 1868-1938*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 86, 120.

³ Crump, p. 170, 180.

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