

8 Excerpts from **Lamentations of Female Factory Workers, 1925**¹⁰ Hiring of textile workers is divided into two categories of “enlisted workers” and “recruited workers.” Eighty percent of female workers are recruited workers. In contrast, 80 percent of male workers are enlisted workers. . . . There is not a company that has ever recruited male workers. At the same time, there is not a case in which female workers have not been recruited. It is clear that there is not much room for men [to work in textile mills] as machines are fast replacing men.

For more than a decade, textile mills have experienced difficulty in recruiting female workers. . . . Recruitment of female workers is just as important a task for a textile mill as actually operating the machines. If textile companies are forbidden to recruit female workers, their machines will have to be shut down within a month.

[Recruitment of female factory workers can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, or before 1894, things went smoothly as girls looked for opportunities to go to big cities. The second phase, the interwar years of 1895 through 1904, became a difficult phase. More factories were built, and demands for female workers intensified; at the same time, horror stories of factory conditions became known in the areas frequently recruited. The third phase saw companies raiding each other’s factories for experienced female workers.]

One of the characteristics of the second phase is the literal observation of “forced remittance of money home,” and “serving a specific term.” . . . There is also established a system of ransom if the full term is not served.

Regardless of whether one has received an advance, at the time first hired, an employee must sign a contract to work for a set period of time. The term usually runs for three years, sometimes two, and in other instances three years and three months. . . .

At the first textile mill of the Naigai Cotton Co. Ltd., regardless of reason, anyone who leaves the company's employ before completing the three-year term of employment contract is denied payment from an escrow account set up in her name. The factory in question withholds from each employee's monthly pay a sum equal to one day's wages and places it in an escrow account without interest. Anyone who leaves the company, even only one month short of the full term, is denied payment from it. . . . That factory has about five hundred workers. Each year 15 percent of its workforce leave the company after working an average of eighteen months. The company has been in existence for thirty years. Assuming that an average worker receives 50 sen a day, the company has effectively stolen 20,250 yen from its employees.

. . . One cannot separate labor from the body of the laborer. However, when a worker enters into a contract with a capitalist to offer his labor in return for pay, he is bound to his employer for a specific number of hours. After these hours are completed, he is freed from his obligations. If he has sold his labor for twelve hours to a certain factory, the remaining twelve hours are his to enjoy. The purchaser of his labor cannot invade these twelve hours.

All workers, men and women alike, whether they are in steel, chemical industry, or in outdoor employment enjoy free hours after work. However, female workers who live in company dormitories do not enjoy the same freedom. . . . Once they return to their dormitories, they are subjected to a host of cumbersome regulations. . . .

First there is a restriction on going out. . . . If a worker is certified a good worker, she can receive a pass once a month, which must bear the signatures of the dormitory warden, counselor, and room supervisor. . . . The curfew is set at 10 P.M. If she is late for more than five minutes, she forfeits her next month's pass.

If she stays overnight away from her dormitory for whatever reason, all her roommates will be denied next month's pass. . . .

When there are festivals and shops are set up nearby, or when special events are held inside the dormitory, the entire dormitory is denied the privilege of going out. . . .

If she buys food from an outside source, the guard opens the package and inspects each item. . . . If her parents include any food item in a package sent from home, the package is confiscated.

Tokyo Muslin's Kameido factory had a man named Matsunaga, serving as its education director. When he found out that one of the workers was reading women's magazines, such as *Josei Kaizō* and *Fujin Kōron*, he forced her to cancel her subscription. . . . Most factories do not like their workers to read publications other than their own. . . .

Now a few words about facilities and working conditions. . . . Exits and other emergency evacuation facilities are extremely inadequate. There may be only two or three fire escapes in a factory with five to six hundred workers. And these exits are not only bolted but also padlocked.

Adding moisture to cotton fiber adds strength to it. It makes work on the fiber easier and contributes to the efficiency of the work process. So it is normal for a cotton spinning mill to maintain a high degree of moisture without considering the health of its workers. This practice is even worse in a textile mill where one's vision is hindered by the mist created because of moisture.

A sprayer is installed at ten feet above the floor for each thirty-two square yards of floor space. From its nozzle, called the ball duct, water comes through openings, which are either one thirty-second or one-sixteenth inch, at the high-water pressure of one hundred pounds. The water is sprayed constantly and becomes like mist saturating the air. It creates an insufferable condition for workers.

Female workers in textile-weaving divisions whose work stations are placed under a sprayer get the worst from the excessive moisture. If the machine is operating constantly, the situation can be tolerable. But if it stops even for an hour, it begins to rust. Their hair and clothing are constantly wet as rusty water drips on them.

Female workers have a saying: "Winter is heaven and summer is hell." This exaggerates the warmth of winter months in their factory just a bit. Whichever factory one visits, one will find an average winter temperature of over sixty five degrees, and even on the coldest day, the temperature seldom goes under fifty degrees. When one works hard it is still easy to sweat. So a single layer of work clothing will suffice. Of course, when one steps outside, the cold is difficult to bear.

They can work during the winter months without experiencing cold thanks to the heat maintained. But in the summer months, temperatures rise to an extreme level. There is body heat from the people who are working in close quarters. There is heat from the machines, to which heat from the sun is added. It is literally hell with heat. Cotton fibers like goose feathers fly around and stick to workers' faces. It is terribly uncomfortable. At starch stations steam heat is applied, and at gas drying stations, open flame gas is used. There is no word adequate enough to describe the suffering of these workers. At the starch stations, temperatures rise above one hundred and ten degrees. It is so hot [and dehydrating] that hardly anyone has to use the bathroom. . . .