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Modern Japan

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Pantheon Books • New York 1982



PEASANTS

REBELS AND

OUTCASTES

The Underside of Modern Japan



Life in the Suwa Silk Filatures

The work that most of the girls performed in the silk filatutes involved locating rhe ends of the thread of several cocoons which had been steamed so that they could be unraveled, and reeling the threads onto a spinning frame. This required a delicate touch to prevent the threads from breaking inro bits and pieces, and the number of threads wound together on the frame had to be just right so that the raw-silk fibers would be of uniform size. The workers alsd had to be careful not to let rhe cocoons get oversteamed; otherwise the raw silk would loose its luster and be unmarketable as high-grade silk.[41] Consequently, the work of the silk reelers was closely supervised, with the plants introducing a system of grading the employees' work that became a nightmarish experience for most workers.

Because the steam from the hot water in which the cocoons were soaking permeated the entire plant, its interior was smelly, wet, and hot. It was also noisy. Working conditions in cotton textile plants were even worse. Moisture was needed to strengthen the cotton fibers, so the interior of the factory was kept moist with sprays of mist. As a result, the workers were constantly exposed to damp air, heat, and noise. In addition, the air was filled with lint. It was estimated that in a ten-hour period a textile worker inhaled o. 12 gram of lint. These conditions accounted for the high incidence of tuberculosis in these factories.[42]

A woman who had worked in a plant in ***Suwa*** recalled:

> From morning, while it was still dark, we worked in the lamplit factory till ten at night. After work, we hardly had the strength to stand on our feet. When we worked late into the night, they occasionally gave us a yam. We then had to do our washing, fix our hair, and so on. By then it would be eleven o'clock. There was no heat even in the winter, and so we had to sleep huddled together. Several of the girls ran back to Hida. I was told that girls who went to work before my time had a harder time. We were not paid the first year. In the second year I got 35 yen, and rhe following year, 50 yen. I felt that it was not a place for a weak-willed person like me. If we didn't do the job right we were scolded, and, if we did better than others, the others resented it. The life of a woman is really awful.[43]

A study conducted by the government in 1900 revealed that a normal work day in a plant in Okaya was thirteen to fourteen hours. During the busy season, the workers were roused from their beds at 4:05 A.M., sent to work from 4:30 to 6, given fifteen minutes for breakfast, and sent back to work by 6: 15. They were allowed fifteen minutes for lunch, between 10:30 and 10:45, and a ten-minute break from 3:30 to 3:40. Otherwise they were kept on the job till 7:30 for a total of fourteen hours and twenty minutes. When the plant was particularly busy, the workers were kept until 10 P.M.[44] Workers in the cotton-spinning plants also put in long workdays. Before the factory act went into effect in 1916, their workday averaged twelve hours, and those in cotton-textile plants worked a fourteen-hour day.[45]

The Factory Act of 1911 (see p. 181) placed a twelve-hour limit—including a one-hour rest period-per workday on women and on youngsters under the age of fifteen, and fixed the minimum employment age at twelve. For light work, however, the minimum age was fixed at ten.[46] Employers were allowed to exceed the twelve-hour limit by two hours, when necessary. The law also allowed an additional hour's extension in the busy season, which covered one hundred twenty days a year. So the workday in busy periods still remained fourteen to fifteen hours. As for the one-hour rest period that the law mandated, many employers counted the three meal periods as rest periods.[47]

While the silk-filature workers were on the job, they were under intense pressure to produce quality work at a fast pace. In order to compel the workers to produce faster and better work, the companies devised various ways to prod them. One company divided the workers into teams and made them compete for recognition as superior teams. The foreman of the winning team was given a bonus made up of money collected from a penalty imposed on teams performing poorly. This caused the foremen to apply immense pressure on the workers on their teams, in some cases abusing and beating those who did not comply with their demands.[48]

As the competition among the silk-filature companies got stiffer, the owners drove the workers ever more relentlessly. Absence from work because of sickness was looked upon as "malingering" and workers were not allowed to take time off for any other reason.

The part of their work that the workers found most onerous was quality control. At the end of each day, the performance of each worker was checked, and the silk's sheen, denier, and texture were evaluated. Workers were particularly fearful the cocoon fiber would snap into small bits, in which case they would he reprimanded severely

for wastefulness. One veteran silk reeler explained the difficulty facing the workers:

> The end of the cocoon fiber is visible, but inexperienced workers and those with poor eyesight had difficulty finding it. So they would use a small brush to scratch the cocoon [to find the end], which often shredded the cocoon fibers, however. If this happened, the workers were bawled out. Also we were instructed to entwine the fibers evenly, but an inexperienced worker would carelessly twine several fibers together, causing the silk thread to be uneven and have knotted spots. Also, when the cocoons were steamed too long, they lost their luster and the fibers tended to break. It really was a difficult task.[49]

A worker's pay was determined according to the rating given by the inspector. It was said, "A dagger is not needed to kill a girl worker. Just choke her to death with the texture and fineness of the fiber."[50]

The same kind of stringent quality control was enforced in the cotton-textile plants. Usually workers' performances fell into one of four categories. Those whose work was graded A received their full wages, but those with B ratings suffered a 20 percent reduction; those with C ratings a 50 percent reduction; and those at the bottom, a 100 percent reduction.[51]

The long hours and the pressure to work fast and still produce high-quality work, coupled with the absence of safety measures led to frequent accidents in the factories, particularly in the textile plants. The employers ascribed the accidents to carelessness on the part of their workers. The Factory Act of 1911 was passed under this assumption, and, consequently, no provisions were included to ensure the safety of the workers.[52]

The high accident rate is seen in the records of factory after factory. For example, in a textile plant employing 400 workers in the 1920s, 224 minor and major accidents occurred in a single year. Another plant, employing about 8,000 workers, reported 1,572 accidents in a rwenty-three-month period.[53]

RESTRICTIONS, CONTROLS, AND ABUSES

In the early years of the silk and cotton industries, restrictions on the personal lives of the workers were not as stringent as they later became. But when competition for skilled workers got stiffer and strenuous conditions led some workers to run away from the plants, tight controls were imposed on the workers. Since they had come from afar, most of the girl workers were housed in company-run dormitories. The companies preferred such resident workers to commuters because they could maintain closer control over them.

Strict hours were maintained in the dormitories and the girls were not allowed to come and go as they pleased. This was done, the employers claimed, to protect the girls and also to keep them safe from exposure to diseases prevalent on the outside.[54] Like women college students of yore, those who were late returning to the dorms or broke other rules were deprived of the right to leave the dorms at all for weeks, even on special occasions, while those with good records might be allowed to step out of the dorm a number of times a month. Many did not get out of the dorms until the end of the year when they were allowed to visit their homes for New Year's. In order to keep the girls confined, factories built tall fences around the compounds-much like those of a prison camp. In fact, factory girls used to sing:

> Working in a factory is like working in a prison,
> The only difference is the absence of iron chains."

Nor were the girls allowed to have visitors whenever they wished. Some employers even censored the letters the girls sent home, to make certain that unfavorable remarks that might adversely affect the recruitment of additional workers were not contained in them. To ensure that contaminated food did not enter the dorms, it was also a common practice to check the packages the girls received. Material from rival companies that might lure workers away was anxiously ferreted out. Books, magazines, and newspapers were also censored to make sure that subversive ideas did not filter in. This became, for the employers, a matter of urgent concern, especially after efforts to organize unions commenced in the 1920s.[56]

This kind of "benevolent" paternalism by plant owners extended into the the girls' private lives. No doubt to some extent because they felt responsible to the parents of the girls, employers were anxious to prevent the young workers from having relations with members of the opposite sex, and condemned any display of affection between young men and women as foul and obscene behavior. One unfortunate girl was punished by her employer for having fallen in love and used up her savings on her lover. This policy seems to have been motivated in part by a practical wish on the part of the companies to keep female

workers from getting married and thus leaving them.[57]

Slackening the work pace or inattentiveness on the job often resulted in severe punishment by the foremen. A former textile-plant worker reported one such story of a girl who was punished for having fallen asleep on the job. As punishment, the foreman made the girl hold up bales of cotton while standing at attention. He then left for his rest period and didn't return for some time. When the foreman returned. he saw that the girl had been unable to hold up the bales properly, as he had ordered, and slapped her. The girl was staggered by this and dropped the bales on the floor, one of which hit the foreman's foot. He lost his temper and gave her a shove. The girl fell upon the teeth of the spinning wheels and was ground to death. The company reported her death as an accident caused by her carelessness.[58] It was commonplace for foremen to slap girl workers, and any foreman or supervisor who was too kind-hearted to punish the girls was seen as being unfit for his job.[59]

A 1906 government report by investigators looking into conditions in the factories includes the following dialogue between the investigators and women factory workers:

Q: Do you get scolded?
A: We are taken to a room nexr to the office and are reprimanded there. We are also beaten. And, until we show a change of heart, we are kept there in the dark for several days.
Q: Are you fed?
A: No.
Q: Are there other forms of punishment?
A: If anyone steals something she is stripped naked and marched around the factory with a flag attached to her shoulders. They then take her to rhe dining hall and report her misdeed to everybody. . , . This spring a girl in the next room rook *geta* [wooden clogs], which her roommate purchased for 70 scn. She was stripped naked, had the *geta* and a red flag bearing rhe words "*geta* thief' strapped to her shoulders, and was then marched around the factory.
Q: Do youngsters of seven and eight work only during the day or do they work at night, too?
A: They work at night, too. Since the supervisors are strict during the day, the children clean up the plant. But at night things are less closely supervised, so they don't do much cleaning. Even in the winter we wear only one unlined kimono.
Q: Do young workers work through the night?
A: They do but sometimes they say they will not go to work unless they are given some candy, So the officials give them some. But if they ask for candy often, they are not given any. They go to work crying.
Q: Do they fall asleep in the factory?
A: If they fall asleep they are scolded and beaten.
Q: Do they get paid?
A: They are paid 8 sen. Then 7 sen is deducted for food, so they get only 1 sen.
Q: Are children charged 7 sen, too?
A: They are charged the same amount [for food as the adults].
Q: Are there many young children:
A: There are about ten workers who are seven or eight. There are many who are ten years old.[60]

The more serious abuses occurred in the small plants operated by grasping entrepreneurs who treated their employees like slaves. The 1901 government report mentioned earlier included an account of a man who operated a small textile plant in a village in a secluded area of Saitama prefecture. He employed twenty-four female workers ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-five. The workers were locked inside the plant and were forced to work until they finished producing a fixed quota, often from 5 A.M. well into the night. Those who failed to meet their quotas were deprived of their meals. One worker, who was finally blinded by the abuses inflicted on her, reported that she tried to run away twice but was caught each time and, as punishment, was stripped naked, tied up, and beaten with an iron rod. After she was released and sent back to work, she was punished over and over for failing to meet her quota. Each time she was stripped naked, tied up, and beaten. She was even stripped naked and shoved into the excrement pot. When she tried to hide from her employer, she was dragged through the snow by her hair and then made to stand in the snow for an hour. She was also burned with moksa weed, deprived of food, and her frostbitten feet were jabbed with an iron rod. In the course of these abuses her eyes got infected, but she was locked, untreated, in a small shack until she lost her eyesight completely.[61]

RUNAWAYS AND SUICIDE

There was a saying in Suwa, "There are days when the crows do not cry, but there's not a single day when female factory workers do not

runaway."[62] Whenever a worker ran away, the employer sent out a team of men to recapture her. The companies often used male workers to help recapture the runaway girls. In Okaya men were sent out on horseback to key passes to waylay the girls trying to return to their home villages. One male worker recalled:

Come to think of it, it was ironical, because we young boys also felt like running away, bur we had co go chasing after the girl workers who were trying to run away. When I caught two girls-Fumi [eighteen] and Ise [eighteen], both of whom had come from Hida near Nomugi Pass-at the Shiojiri station, they cried and begged me to let them go. I was nineteen and naive then, so I rotd rhem I would lose face if I let them go, and asked them to please return to the plant for my sake, but they said they would not go back even if rhey were killed. I told them that if I let them go I'd be fired, but they wouldn't listen to me. So I told them I'd let them go but to please come back in two or three days . . . but the girls did not come back. I heard later that rhe company garnisheed the girls' families' entire summer cocoon harvest.[63]

Around the turn of the century a Nagano newspaper reported that three sisters-aged sixteen, nineteen, and twenty-one-had been employed in a silk filature in Okaya but because of their inexperience their performance was not satisfactory, so the foremen constantly harassed them. The youngest and most timid of the sisters was cowed by the foreman and her performance got worse, so the foreman beat her up. "As a result, the girl appeared to have become emotionally unbalanced and she cried hysterically and fell into convulsions. . . . The doctor recommended that she rest for a couple of days, but she was forced to go back to work before she had fully recovered. The foreman continued to harass her, so the sisters decided to run away. They then reported the abuses to the Kamisuwa police."[64] Such accounts appeared frequently in connection with cotton-textile workers also. At least those who tried to run away had the will to fight an oppressive system, but many others lost all hope and committed suicide.

In the silk plants in the Suwa region, despairing girls often committed suicide by jumping onto the giant waterwheels in the Tenryū River. These were used to operate the machines in the plants. One young worker, who had been beaten by the foreman for taking off from work because of illness, committed suicide in this fashion, leaving a note to her parents saying, "I am sorry that I have not yet been able to repay the debt owed the company. Please forgive me for being a disloyal daughter, but my body is no longer of any use. Good-bye." She was then sixteen years old and had been working in the plant for four years. Her father had borrowed 200 yen in advance and had hired her out on a five-year contract.[65]

The authorities were placed in an embarrassing position when, in the fall of 1906, a member of the imperial family visited the Suwa region. While some fishermen were demonstrating their skill with a net, they caught the corpse of a girl who had committed suicide in Lake Suwa. They quickly lowered the body and later hid it, but they were reprimanded by the authorities for allowing such an inauspicious incident to occur on that special occasion, even though the prince was not aware of what had happened.[66] The steady increase in the number of workers committing suicide in Lake Suwa led one early Taishd scholar to say sarcastically that the lake was getting shallow because the water was being drained away by the bloated bodies of the suicide victims.

HOUSING AND HEALTH

In both the Meiji and Taishō eras, about 70 percent of the female workers in the silk and cotton industry lived in factory-run dormitories. In 1913, a medical specialist working for the Ministry of the Interior, Ishiwara Osamu, reported:

From what I have heard, in the West the owners try to employ people living in the area where the factory is built. In Japan the opposite is true. The owners show no interest in the people living in the area. They bring in women and children from distant places and put them in dormitories. This has a profound relationship to the prevalence of tuberculosis in the country.

Many factories-in fact, the Japanese industrial world in general-prefer to use female workers who are housed in company dormitories. It is difficult to ensure the regular attendance of commuting workers, and this hampers the operation of the machines, which must function at a regular pace. Commutors may decide to take time off from the plant because of work at home, laziness, a desire to attend local festivals, or sickness. The dormitory system is a system of detention. It restricts the free will of the workers.[67]

The female workers were lodged in spacious rooms accommodating twenty to fifty of their number. Each worker was allotted about 1 *tatami* of space (about 3 feet by 6 feet). With so many people crowded into dormitories where washing and sanitary facilities were inade-

quate, the rooms were often infested with bedbugs and lice. Disease spread very rapidly among the dorm residents. Usually two people were required to use the same bedding, and newcomers were allocated bedding thar had been used by others. So the bedding itself contributed to the spread of disease,[68] the most prevalent of which was tuberculosis. Female workers in these plants were especially susceptible to tuberculosis because they were still quite young. Most were between fifteen and twenty years old, and the next highest age group was twenty to twenty-five. Thirty-eight percent of the silk-filature workers in Nagano prefecture were in the seventeen-to-twenty age group.[69]

In 1913, Ishiwara, the medical specialist from the Ministry of the Interior spoke of the high incidence of tuberculosis among the silk-filature and cotton-textile workers. He pointed out that, of the then 190,000 workers in silk filatures, 80,000 in cotton-spinning mills, and 130,000 in textile-manufacturing plants, nearly half failed to stay on their jobs for more than one year. Though they left for numerous reasons, 24 percent quit specifically because of illness, and another 5 percent due to other physical difficulties. "One out of six or seven of those who return to the villages do so in ill health. . . . This comes to about 13,000 people. Of these, one-fourth, or 3,000, have tuberculosis," reported Ishiwara.[70] He estimated that, out of 1,000 female silk- and cotton-plant workers housed in dormitories, 13 died there of sickness and another 10 after they returned home. This mortality rate of 23 out of every 1,000 is significantly higher than the ratio of 7 out of 1,000 for girts and women in the same age group (twelve to thirty-five) in the general populace.[71] Tuberculosis was responsible for the deaths of 40 percent of those who died while working at the plants, and of 70 percent of those who died after returning to their villages.[72] In one village, of the 304 girls and women who went into the silk plants, 22 died in a single five-and-half-year period. Of these, 17 died of tuberculosis.[73]

Tuberculosis almost always ended in death, and the factory owners did little to help the victims. Their solution was to send them home; that is, to abandon them, since they were no longer usable. The story of these victims was always tragic.

In the fall of 1907, several sick girls were sent back from Okaya to Hida over Nomugi Pass. One old woman recalled:

Soon after I went to work in the Yamaichi silk factory in Shinshū [Nagano prefecture], my younger sister Aki came to work there, too. I think she worked for about two years. Then she rook to bed because of peritonitis. At that time there were about thirty sick people. Those who clearly had lung trouble were sent home right away. . . . Everybody feared tuberculosis and no one would come near such patients. My sister Aki was also sent home before long, and she died soon after. She was in her thirteenth year. She had come to the factory determined to become a 100 yen worker and make our morher happy. I can never forget her sad eyes as she left the factory wan and pale. . , . It would be impossible, I felt, for a person as sick as she was to travel over 30 *ri* or more and cross Nomugi Pass. But they would not let her stay in the factory. There was no money to send her to the hospital. There was nothing for her to do but go home.[74]

A man who was sent to fetch his sick younger sister gave this account:

I hurried to the factory and found my younger sister Shige was in bed and very pale. The people at the factory told me she would get well soon if she returned home and rested. But as soon as I saw Shige's face I realized that her condition was serious. She had peritonitis and her stomach was bloated; she seemed to be in agony. I believe the factory gave us a bit of money before we set out for home, but I can't remember for certain. The railroad ran part of the way, but from the end of the line we walked home slowly, taking about ten days. When we came to the mountain passes, I carried her on my back. We finally arrived in Takayama. From there I hired a rickshaw and made it home. Her condition did not improve. We caught some leeches in the rice field and placed them on her stomach to let them suck out the poison, but she didn't recover. There was no cure in those days.[75]

A former foreman remarked, "Even if female factory workers got sick, they seldom saw a doctor unless their condition was grave. Doctors' fees were comparatively high in those days, so the little money the workers had earned would have vanished in a minute. . . . The only medication the girls got was the medicine their folks had purchased from the medicine peddlers."[76]

Workers who contracted tuberculosis and returned to their villages were the carriers through which tuberculosis became the major killer in rural Japan. The villages were particularly vulnerable to its spread because it had previously been a relatively rare disease and people had not built up any resistance to it. Their poor living conditions and diet only increased their susceptibility to the disease.[77] Ishiwara reports, "In one village of fifty households, a young man who had gone to work in a spinning factory returned home with tuberculosis and died.

In five years' time, thirty people in the village had also died of tuberculosis. My friend made a study of an inland village in Miyagi prefecture. According to his study, in one short time span, thirty female factory workers returned to the village; of these, twenty-one had come back because they were sick, and fifteen or sixteen had tuberculosis."[78]

Speaking of the spread of tuberculosis from the silk and cotton mills, one man in Nagano prefecture commented: "Regardless of which hamlet one visited, one would find several people afflicted with 'lung disease,' and they were cooped up in shacks. When we were youngsters we would pass such places holding our noses. Now, I realize what pathetic victims they were."[79] A woman born in 1904 recollected:

I wanted to go to Nagano to become a silk reeler, but my father objected and I wasn't able to go. I can't forget how envious I was of my friends who returned on New Year's dressed in colorful kimonos, but many also returned as victims of tuberculosis. That was the reason my father had opposed my going to work in the silk factories. My cousin . . . came back from Okaya and died. Several of my friends died one after another with TB. . . . Tuberculosis was known as an incurable disease, and they all seemed resigned to the fact that they were going to die.[80]

People feared tuberculosis "and would not go near the sick. Every family tried to hide the fact that a family member had TB. . . . People used to worry that Hida would be destroyed by tuberculosis."[81] One recruiter went to visit a girl who had fallen victim to tuberculosis and found her "in a storeroom without windows. When I opened the door I was shocked by what I saw. Only a dim light came in from a small hole in the wall. Mizu was lying down as if she were dead. An awful odor permeated the room and a frightful atmosphere saturated the place. In those days, when a member of a family got tuberculosis no one would marry anyone else in the family. So everybody tried their hest to hide the fact."[82]

Of course, the silk- and cotton-plant workers contracted other ailments as well. Beriberi was prevalent among them, a symptom of the poor nutritional balance in their diet. A general survey taken of female workers in the silk and cotton industry in 1910 revealed that 28.3 percent of the deaths in the cotton-spinning industry, 22.1 percent in the cotton-textile industry, and 11.5 percent in the silk filatures were due to beriberi.[83] No doubt because of intense work pressures and insufficient time allotted for meals, deaths resulting from gastrointestinal troubles were also prevalent (25.9 percent of the deaths among silk filature workers, and 24.6 percent among textile workers).[84] When epidemics of cholera broke out, they too spread very swiftly among the workers.

The Reform Movement

Because the vast majority of female workers in the silk and cotton industries came from impoverished peasant families located in remote villages, they were provincial in their outlook, unsophisticated, and poorly educated. In fact, in the early Meiji years most of the girls had no schooling at all. An 1898 Okaya City survey showed that, of the 1,221 silk-plant workers in that area, 840 had never attended school, 104 had one year of schooling, and only 42 had completed the four years of compulsory elementary education. Only 112 could read the simplest phonetic script. As a result, those who were literate were in great demand as letter writers for their co-workers.[85]

With the swift growth of the silk and cotton industries, however, employers began to make enticing offers to attract workers to their plants. "The recruiter promised us that once we got to the factory we would be taught how to perform the tea ceremony, flower arranging, sewing, and other arts that a girl should know, but in fact they did not teach us anything," recalled one woman.[86] Though in the twentieth century the better-established companies did provide some schooling for their workers, the focus was on practical education and the inculcation of "proper values", such as loyalty to the company.[87] Classes were usually held after work, between seven and nine at night.

Because of their poor education, as well as their tradition of bowing to authority and accepting one's place at the bottom of the social hierarchy, female factory workers were on the whole docile, submissive, and obedient, Not only did they lack the kind of aggressive individualism needed to challenge the existing order of things, they were imbued with a strong work ethic and a belief that "people are born into this world to work." They also had a strong sense of filial piety that led them, for the sake of their parents and family to enter willingly what was in effect indentured service and often to endure otherwise intolerable difficulties.[88]

Not all female workers, however, remained docile and submissive. Some did begin to believe that they had rights, and to challenge their

POVERTY AND PROSTITUTION

Public Stigma, Public Sanction

Among the most pitiful victims of agrarian as well as urban poverty in prewar Japan were the young farm girls who were sold to brothels. Their number increased markedly in years of crop failure and ensuing famine; but even in normal years a steady flow of young girls was being channeled into brothels at home and abroad.

The stigma attached to prostitution led the public to assume that prostitutes chose their way of life. A student of this subject notes that Meiji newspaper accounts of girls being shipped to Korea, China, and Southeast Asia refer to them as "stowaways," as if they were leaving Japan of their own accord. The fact that they had been sold into slavery or tricked into their situation through their sense of responsibility toward their poverty-stricken parents and siblings was invariably ignored.

The papers treat the prostitutes as if they were graspy vixen who bilk innocent men of their money. For example, an article about the dissection of a prostitute who died of syphilis, which afflicted her brain, states, "Whore who, when alive, sold her body, and dead still sells her body. . . ." Those who buy and sell the girls to enrich themselves are allowed to do so in the open. The girls, sold over and over to brothels in order to fatten the wallets of white-slavers, get buried under with debt, and die. But rhe dealers in white-slavery are not condemned; the girls are seen as having brought their misfortune upon themselves because of their vulgar greed.'

In the rural areas, and well into the early Shōwa period, prostitutes were considered less than human. For instance, a story was circulated in some villages that in order to be turned into a prostitute "a girl had to be put in a cage and be raped by a beast. In other words she must become a beast herself. Then she must have relations with men of all sorts. After one or two months even a backwoods girl will be endowed with the soft white skin of a prostitute. She also becomes frigid, ceasing to have any feelings about men."[2]

Even more sophisticated urban dwellers assumed prostitutes had freely chosen their profession. One female writer commented in 1916 that many girls who went overseas as prostitutes came from Amakusa and Shimabara (in Kyushu), "where, when a person returns with an enormous fortune after having sold her flesh, not just the ordinary

village people but the village officials, people who are pillars of the community, treat them with respect. Consequently, when girls reach a certain age they enter this sordid profession of their own free will. It appears that, rather than eat yam and do hard physical work, they prefer this life because they can eat good food, wear soft kimonos, and make money while leading a sedate life."[3]

Although people were at least dimly aware of the fact that prostitutes were victims of poverty, they found it easier to blame the victims rather than their society.

However, these women were not simply victims of modern capitalism, as some social critics claim. When Japan opened its doors to the West in the mid-nineteenth century, officially sanctioned public brothels were already in existence, and the red-light district had long flourished under Tokugawa rule.[4] People took brothels and prostitution for granted. Even in the modern period, no government official's conscience seems to have been pricked by the sordid spectacle that the brothels presented.

Only in 1872, when the existence of prostitution resulted in an embarrassing diplomatic incident, did the government act. A Peruvian vessel, the *Maria Luz,* engaged in transporting kidnapped Chinese coolies to South America, had docked for repairs in Yokohama. Some of the coolies jumped ship and asked the Japanese authorities for help. The Japanese complied and condemned the Peruvians for running what was, in effect, a slave trade. The Peruvians countered by pointing out that slavery, in the form of girls sold to brothels, was practiced in Japan, too. This forced the Japanese government to ban the buying and selling of girls and women, but it did not prohibit "voluntary" service in the brothels.'

In all major cities there were sections given over to houses of prostitution, where the women were on display as if in a slave market. A Swiss official observed that the women were "publically exposed like animals on display to be freely scrutinized by all comers. After first being examined as merchandise, they are purchased and used by the first man who meets the price. The impression I got of these unfortunate creatures was one of utmost misery."[6]

In Tokyo there were six districts where brothels were licensed to operate. The most renown of these was the Yoshiwara, which had flourished since the Tokugawa era. In 1883, there were 3,156 prostitutes in about 400 houses in these six districts; in 1887, there were 4,747; and, in 1909, 6,834.[7] One mid-nineteenth-century traveler, Clement Scott, wrote:

> Do they [the missionaries] not know that it is a recognized custom for parents in Japan to sell their children to a life of shame? Is it not an admitted fact that in every Yoshiwara in Japan, there are hundreds of girls who were sold originally by their parents to the keepers of these infamous places for so many hundred dollars, and [that] here they must stay until their ransom can be provided by some charitable person? . . . Girls are to them [the parents] a permanent source of income. [The girls'] savings are not put by to pay off the original deposit, but are sent home to the whining old parents who are always hat in hand, and never intend that their children shall be released at all.[8]

The root cause of this system was agrarian poverty. In the Tokugawa period, peasants had practiced infanticide when they could not afford to feed another child. A social critic writing toward the end of the Tokugawa era claimed that in the northern provinces-the area where agrarian poverty remained most extreme even in modern times -the number of children killed annually exceeded sixty or seventy thousand.[9] However, infanticide and abortion were made capital crimes in the Meiji period, while even the dissemination of information about birth control was banned. Partially as a result, the birth rate rose beyond the peasants' capacity to support new arrivals.[10] Where outright infanticide was now illegal, and birth-control information unavailable to the masses, almost as dismal a fate often awaited the children of the poor.

Child Abandonment and the Brothel Trade

One Tokugawa practice that persisted in the Meiji period was child abandonment. In the city of Tokyo alone, hundreds of babies were abandoned in public places where they were likely to be noticed and picked up. In rural areas they were commonly abandoned in front of the homes of wealthy farmers who, it was hoped, would take them in and raise them. In some areas traffickers in young children went about buying young boys in order to sell them to families in need of additional hands to work on the farms or in other occupations. For instance, in the middle Meiji period in northern Japan, an old woman known as "the hag of Mogami" bought twelve- and thirteen-year-old boys and girls for 5 to 6 yen and resold them for 7 to 8 yen or more.

Isolated fishing villages, especially on small islands, often needed additional workers, so they bought such youngsters and used them until they attained rhe age when they became eligible for the draft."

The most common practice in the modern period, however, was the selling of daughters to brothels, a practice that continued to increase as, with the industrialization of the national economy, the cities grew in size. The defenders of the brothel system argued that in major urban centers like Tokyo, where there was a concentration of single men who had come to work in industrial and commercial institutions, such facilities were a necessity. There were, it was pointed out, 130,000 more men than women in the prefecture of Tokyo in 1891 Since Japan had a long tradition of permitting public brothels as "necessary" outlets for lustful men, the defenders of the system contended that, if public brothels were abolished, unlicensed prostitution would increase, and the wives and daughters of "refined families" would be victimized by frustrated men. They also responded to Western critics by asserting that similar practices existed among the ancient Greeks, rhe founders of Western culture. "There," they pointed out, "the hiring of women as sexual companions was one of the innovations of city life. Solon himself established brothels throughout Athens."[12]

As the cities grew, the number of inmates in their brothels grew, too. This was particularly noticeable after the first Sino-Japanese war, when the Japanese economy experienced rapid expansion. By 1704, there were 43,134 prostitutes in the public brothels; by 1909, 47,541; by 1912, 50,410; and by 1924, 52,325.[13]

In years of crop failure and famine the number of girls sold to brothels vaulted. For example, following the crop failures that beset the six northern prefectures in 1705, the number of girls sent into Tokyo brothels increased dramatically. Whereas 128 women from these prefectures worked in Tokyo brothels in 1902, there were 1,161 in 1907, and 1,785 in 1912. Observing this phenomenon, a British newspaper commented: "The famine that beset Hokkaido and northeastern Japan is the greatest tragedy since 1869. The peasants had no way out to cope with their families crying of hunger but to sell their daughters. The nation that officially recognizes this odious practice of publicly licensed brothels is Great Britain's ally, the land known for its *bushido*, Japan."[14]

During the famine of 1734, too, large numbers of northern girls were sent into the cities to serve as indentured workers in various entertainment facilities. By September of that year, 2,196 geishas,

4,521 servitors in brothels, and 5,952 waitresses employed to serve *sake* in Japanese-style restaurants (where they were often expected to sleep with the customers) had come into the cities from the same six prefectures. In addition, 3,271 "waitresses" to serve in bars and cafés, as well as 10,244 maids and nursemaids, were recruited from these prefectures.[15] From Yamagata prefecture alone, by November 1734, 3,298 girls had been sold into indentured service as: geishas (249), prostitutes in brothels (1,420), and &e-serving waitresses (1,629).[16]

Brokers who dealt in the business of buying girls for city brothels openly advertised their trade, putting up huge signs in front of their offices saying THOSE WISHING TO SELL THEIR DAUGHTERS, PLEASE CONSULT US.[17] The sum of money the parents received for a contract calling for six years' indentured service was about 600 yen. But zoo yen was deducted by the brothel keeper for the girl's kimonos, and 50 yen was retained by the middleman; so the parents received only 350 yen, or 60 yen per year. At this time, 1 *koku* of rice cost 24 yen 91 sen. On the average, the brothel keeper charged his customers 70 sen a visit. He kept 60 percent for himself and credited the remaining 40 percent, or 28 sen, to the girl. In order to repay her debt of 600 yen she would have had to accommodate 2,143 customers in those six years.[18]

The need to survive by selling their daughters to the brothels was ordinarily a tragic experience for the family members and even for those who were merely acquainted with the girls. A poet who was a teacher in a northern village wrote in her diary:

I saw with my two eyes and heard with my ears something very sad. I heard that one of my former pupils was sold to a "restaurant." The owner, it is said, asserted that "200 yen is toq much; the price of everything has come down. I'll give you 150 yen." The seller complained, "That's too little." I wonder what the final price was? I hear the girl is now at the "restaurant." She was a pretty child, with a thin, sad face. I turned my face away from the person who cold me the story as if it was an amusing tale, and I looked down. I have been distressed all day today. I wonder who will purge me of this gloomy mood, and when?[19]

In late 1734, a reporter from Tokyo visited a family in a village in Aomori prefecture.

As I entered the house, an old woman past seventy, the parents of the girl who was sold, and a little girl of about five were huddled around a smoky

the place. The little girl seemed to have a cold and was wailing away. After her older sister was sold and left home, the child had turned into a crybaby, they said.

"Why did you sell your daughter," I asked.

The old woman blinked her eyes, which had been damaged by the charcoal smoke and afflicted with trachoma, and said, "Sumie has been sold and is leading a hard life. I don't care if I die. I would like to see my grandchildren have an easy life." Tears poured out of her red, festering eyes.

This family had lost their house because of debts that they had incurred, and had been living with neighbors. They then sold their fourreen-year-old daughter Sumie to a brothel in Nagoya and used the money to buy this house. They got 450 yen on a five-year contract. [After deducting commissions and expenses] they got 150 yen. Seventy yen was used to pay off the debts, 40 yen was used to build this house, and the remaining 40 yen quickly vanished.

The iather did not sell his daughter willingly. But the family had no rice to ear because of the crop failure. On rop of that his wife was pregnant and was afflicted with beriberi, and the moneylenders pestered him every day.

So he finally sold his daughter. Now all he has left is one tiny thatched hut. His daughter wrote: "My boss says that I must start taking customers airer New Year's, I don't want to become a prostitute. I am so miserable!" A fourteen-year-old girl from Tsugaru is waiting for the arrival of New Year's Day with terror.[20]

Some parents may have grown callous to the imperative of selling their daughters in order to survive. One woman in her forties, who had sent her twenty-three-year-old daughter to a brothel, justified her action by explaining:

In order to pay our debts and reduce the size of our family, even by one, we sold our oldest daughter. The money we got for her was 800 yen for six years' service. Twenty percent was taken by the middleman. In addition, the cost of getting her ready [clothing] and other expenses were deducted, so we received in hand 500 yen. I don't think it's wrong to sell our own daughter, whom we raised ourselves. Other people'use the money they get to go on excursions to famous sites. Some even go to hot springs to enjoy themselves. On the other hand, we sold her in order to pay our debts, so we feel we needn't be ashamed.[21]

The most atrocious aspect of the brothel experience was the fact that girls barely into puberty-some at ages twelve and thirteen-were compelled to take customers and have their bodies and spirits brutalized.[22] Many, of course, did not know whar would happen to them when they went to the brothels. One woman who was sold abroad exclaimed, "If I had been given a choice between becoming a prostitute and death, I would have chosen death. I didn't know . . . what was involved when I was sold. . . ."[23]

To justify this practice, the society played up the sacrifice of the daughters as an exemplary manifestation of filial piety. The ethos of the society conditioned the girls into believing that it was their duty as daughters to become prostitutes to aid their families.[24] National political leaders did nothing to change this situation. A few advocates of Westernization, like Tsuda Mamichi (1829–1902), were early critics of publically sanctioned brothels, but they got little support from the main body of Westernizers or even from the champions of "popular rights." At the prefectural level, advocates of brothel reform did achieve some measure of success. The prefectural assembly members of Gunma prefecture initiated a reform movement in 1879 and succeeded in banning public brothels in that prefecture in 1893. Several other prefectures followed Gunma's example, but the central government failed to take any action until the end of World War II.

The Reform Movement at Home

Among the influential exponents of brothel reform was Shimada Saburō (1852–1923), a prominent political party member and newspa&r editor, but the most vocal and active opponents of public brothels were Christian reformers,[25] among them a missionary from the United States, U.G. Murphy. The most persistent and dedicated of the reformers were the members of the Salvation Army, led by Yamamuro Gunpei (1872–1940), whose efforts (however little noticed at the time) kept prewar Japan from being a land wholly without conscience or compassion about this inhumane practice. Under Yamamuro, the Salvation Army set out to abolish the institution of officially sanctioned brothels and endeavored to arouse public opinion against it by sponsoring speeches and publishing tracts. In 1911, Yamamuro explained why he took up the cause. He had been spending so much of his time helping the poor that he had had little left for

instantly. Then his own child, a baby, got sick and died. As he was nursing the child, the thought suddenly struck Yamamuro that "there are people in this world, just like this baby, on the edge of death, racked with pain but unable to tell people about it. So they move swiftly to their death. Since this is true, I shall devote my life to helping my fellow beings who are unable to cry out for help. Such people can be found among the prostitutes, who are imprisoned because of the vicious institution of public brothels. They are forced to lead pathetic, ignoble lives in which they are being degraded by other people."[26]

Yamamuro found out that the law gave the girls who wished to leave the brothels the right to do so. But this law was hardly known, and the brothel keepers quite naturally did their best to prevent the law from being invoked. Yamamuro and other Salvation Army members soughr to spread the word among the inmates of the brothels about this legal provision and intervened on behalf of those who wished to take advantage of it.[27] The problem was that, even if the girls managed to leave the brothels, they still had to repay the debts their parents had incurred. The courts refused to allow them to leave if they were unable to repay the brothel keepers.** The contracts that the parents signed usually contained provisions calling for the immediate repayment of the advance payment as well as other debts incurred by the girls if they left the brothels or failed to fulfill the terms of the contract.[29]

One of the ironies of the movement to liberate the girls from the brothels was that, once driven into a profession scorned by others, they frequently found no way to rebuild their lives. Many ended up taking jobs on the fringes of the red-fight district and eventually sinking back into the life from which they had escaped. A social activist who helped to liberate women in one red-light district in Tokyo during the prewar period found that, of the 400 he helped to free, only 2 managed to find employment that was not linked to the world of alcohol and sex. He was also shocked to find that many of the peasants whose daughters he had helped to return to their homes were displeased with what he had done. They said they were grateful for his good intentions, but behind his back complained that "our daughters would have been able to continue sending us money. Now, we just have an extra mouth to feed when times are so hard."[30]

Personal Accounts

In a survey of a hundred prostitutes who came to the Salvation Army for help around 1910, forty-two had no schooling at all; five had one year of elementary education; nine had two years; seventeen had three years; and fourteen had four ***years.***[31] Few could write and even fewer had access to anyone who might record their personal stories for posterity. They were, in any event, reticent to discuss their lives because of their shame that they had been reduced, in effect, to the status of outcastes. Naturally enough, then, personal accounts by victims of the brothel system are not numerous. The following are remarks by a girl whose parents sold her sister to a brothel during the Taishō era:

When my older sister fell into the pathetic world of prostitutes, I was too young to know what had happened. When I woke up one morning, my gentle sister was gone. When I asked my mother where she was, my mother told me: "Your sister has gone to a far-off place in order to save all of you. Poor thing! When you grow up you must be kind to her. You must not forget the debt you owe her." In the spring of my seventeenth year, I was invited to stay with ***my*** sister. I used to hide behind the stairway, where my sister was on display in a shameful fashion, and weep. I felt tremendous hatred toward the men who came and made lewd, insulting remarks to her. . . . I wished I could pour a pot of boiling water on these ignoble people. When my sister had to entertain a customer, I would get so angry that I had the urge to kill him. . . . My sister sacrificed her life to save our family from poverty. During the course of ten years of slavery, she surely committed many sins. If only this kind of system did not exist; if only the government would ban it, then no one could enter this way of life even if she wanted to. Since the system exists and the government permits it . . . human flesh is sold and people sink into the pit.[32]

A woman lodged in a brothel wrote in a magazine in 1921:

It is now five years since I was sold by my father and came to Kōfu City in Yamanashi prefecture. I have spent these long years behind latticed windows. . . . I must make known to the public that we are living like animals with only the veneer of human beings. In reality we are cut off from the world of humanity. We would like to ask our fellow women to think seriously about the reality of a Japan where such a system of public brothels is recognized and protected by law. My companions are writhing in the ugly sewer

of life all over Japan. How do you think we feel when we, who have fallen into the pir of the society, think about our parents, brothers, sweethearts, and friends? I cannot help but curse the flaws of contemporary society. We who are weak and frail are deprived of all our rights and are forced to sell our flesh and to make indescribable sacrifices. How do you think the brothel owners treat us? They are bloodsuckers who . . . drive many of us to death. Does our society today need this kind of system, which is so clearly against the principles of morality? . . . When will rhe day come when people like us, who are engaged in such a shameful profession, disappear from the world? I wish to escape from this miserable, shameful abyss as soon as possible and join the community of normal human beings.[33]

A tubercular inmate of one of the brothels wrote to the Kyoto prefectural office in 19 10:

Recently I went to the police to get permission to leave the brothel. For some reason the police did not allow me to leave. The reason I want to leave the brothel is my poor health. For this reason, I cannot please the customers or satisfy my master. I am thirty-three and am alone in this world. I do not have any parents or brothers. I am all alone, so my master treats me brutally. Kecenrty one of my co-workers, Yuki, was kicked downstairs from the second floor. She died as a result of that fall. Because of this I have come to fear my master even more than before. So please, please allow me to quit the brothel. You can verify the rruth about my master's cruelty by asking around.[34]

The following are excerpts from the diary of a young woman who went into a brothel in the Yoshiwara section of Tokyo in the 1920s to save her impoverished family.

What a fool I've been! I can cry and wail about what has happened to me, but there is nothing that I can do to undo what has happened. Whose fault is it that I am in this despicable state? It is the broker's fault! He took advantage of my naïveté and slyly talked me into this situation. But I am also disgusted at my own stupidity. I hare myself!

After I came to this place and, as the true state of things became clear to mc, I realized that what I had feared . . . was in fact a reality. I then tried to leave, but it was no longer possible. I had already accepted a loan from rhem. And rhe money disappeared as quickly as water thrown on burning stone. So I can't leave. I can't run away. It's impossible. I'd be arrested by the police. I rried to resign myself to the situation by telling myself that this was my fate. But I couldn't resign myself to my plight. I became desperate. I cried to kill myself. But I held back because I had to think about my feeble mother and young sister. . . .

All during this pasr week, I have been in a state of despair. My mind has been so full of desperate thoughts that I nearly collapsed several times. I kepr telling myself, "I must kill myself, I must kill myself," and wrote endless numbers of suicide notes. But I decided against suicide for it would do me no good. All it would accomplish would be a spread in the scandal columns of the newspapers. The proprietor and the old woman boss would heap unspeakable atrocities on my corpse. The *only* reality would be the heart-break of my mother and younger sister.

And I can't die without avenging myself on the broker, the proprietor, and the men who have plunged me into this dark abyss. I can't die, after having been brutalized by these people, without doing battle against them. I will not die! It may take years but I will leave this place and then I will do what has to be done. I will not cry anymore. I will not bewail my fate any longer. I must first kill my old self before I can do the work that I must do here. I am now reborn. I will [forget my past] and from now on deal with the proprietor, the old woman, and the men as the prostitute Harukoma. Years from now Harukoma will, by whatever means possible, take revenge on these people. As the first step on my road to vengeance, I shall keep this secret diary. This is my only consolation and it is also a declaration of my war of revenge against these people. Oh, diary! You are my friend, my master, my God! You shall keep my life pure and refined.[35]

Karayu ki

Terrible as was the fate of the girls and women who were sold into prostitution in the brothels of Japan, they were still better off than those who were sold overseas. Those who served in Japan were at least in familiar cultural surroundings; but, sometimes cut off from their families and friends forever, the so-called *karayuki* found themselves in places where the language, culture, mores, and ambience were wholly alien.[36]

It was indeed an insensitive reporter who wrote, during the early years of this century:

[The *karayuki*] go abroad to engage in their sordid business with the same kind of attitude as a person who is out to earn some money to pay for her wedding expenses. When they earn a little money, they spend it on fancy

THE COAL MINERS

Coal played a crucial role in Japan's modernization, since throughout the nineteenth century it was Japan's chief source of energy and one of the few minerals in which the country was self-sufficient. In fact, Japan was able to export a considerable amount of coal in the Meiji period. One of its largest mine complexes, the Miike coal mines in Kyushu, sent 82 percent of its yield abroad in 1883.[1]

Coal production burgeoned very swiftly because of coal's importance as an export commodity as well as the rapidly increasing domestic need for it. In the Miike mines alone, production rose from *60,000* tons in 1877 to 599,000 tons in 1893. The total national yield was 208,000 tons in 1874. By 1883, it topped the million-ton mark; by 1888, the a-million mark, and it increased by another million tons every year or two. By 1919, it had hit 3 million tons.*

During the Tokugawa period, mining had been a government monopoly. The Meiji government continued this practice for a few years but soon adopted a policy of turning over the mines to favored entrepreneurs, such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi.

Early Meiji Mines

Mining had always been a hazardous occupation, and miners in many countries had been treated as virtual slaves. Roman prisoners of war and Russian political prisoners were sent into the mines, in many cases to labor away until they dropped dead. When Japan launched its program for industrialization, the Meiji leaders sent prisoners, *burakumin,* impoverished peasants,[3] and, later, colonized Koreans into the mines. By relying on prisoners to work in the mines, the government may, in effect, have established a precedent for the future abusive treatment of miners.

When the government began operating the Miike coal mines in 1873, it started out by using fifty convicts. Even though the mines were sold to the Mitsui interests in 1888, the practice of using prisoners was continued until 1933. In 1884, 53 percent of the 2,340 miners who did the actual digging in Miike were convicts. In 1896, the number had increased to 1,457 out of a total of 1,932 miners-or 75 percent. Soon afterward, the number of convicts in the mines began to decline, and in 1908 only 138 out of 2,138 miners were convicts, the drop occuring in part because more convicts began to be sent to the Hokkaido mines.[4]

The convicts used in the mines were usually those who had been sentenced to prison for ten years or more. They were bound together by heavy chains and marched into the bowels of the earth. Because lighting was poor and safety measures were worse than inadequate, accidents and deaths among the miners, particularly among the convicts, were extremely high.

The low labor cost resulting from the use of convicts gave the government-operated mines an advantage over those privately run mines that did not have ready access to convict labor. The government's position regarding the use of convict labor was stated by Kaneko Kentarō, a high official, who said in 1885,

Convicts must be used to work on these necessary [Hokkaido] construction projects. Even if they are unable to endure the hard labor, collapse, and die it can be regarded as an unavoidable policy at present, when we are having difficulty defraying prison expenses. Moreover, when we compare the wages of ordinary workers and convicts in Hokkaido, the ordinary workers are paid no less than 40 sen a day while the convicts are paid only 18 sen a clay. Thus, when we use convicts we can reduce the wages by more than half in these construction projects. This is like killing two birds with one stone. . . We must drive these convicts and make them work at difficult tasks that ordinary workers are unable to undertake.[5]

In order to compete with government-operated mines using convicts, the Takashima Mining Company (which Mitsubishi had acquired from the government in 187 5) was particularly ruthless in exploiting its miners who were housed in barracks as virtual prisoners and worked twelve hours a day for 30 sen. The atrocious treatment of these nonconvict miners caused them to stage several major riots against the operators between 1882 and 1888. In 1888, following one such riot, a magazine reporter was sent into the Takashima mines to look into working conditions. He found that:

The temperature got horter the farther down in the mine I went. At the most extreme point it reached 120° to 130° F. The miners have to labor under this hear. Their bodies are constantly covered with pouring sweat. The air is stifling and it is difficult to breathe. The smell of coal makes it almost unbearable. Despite such appalling working conditions, the company rules do not allow even one second of rest. The deputy crew boss patrols the work area, and if he sees a miner slackening his pace even for an instant he beats him with his club. These deputy crew bosses are like monsters and demons. If a miner asks permission to rest because of fatigue, or if he disobeys the crew boss, he is punished as an example to others. His hands are tied behind him and he is strung up by the beam, with his feet slightly above ground. Then he is clubbed while the other miners are forced to watch the bearing. If a miner, unable to bear the harsh conditions, tries to escape and is caught and brought back he is then kicked, beaten, strung up, and generally treated in a brutal and cruel fashion by the guards. No human being could behave as atrociously [as these guards]. There is no other way to identify them except to call them devils. I heard that when a cholera epidemic struck this island mine in 1844, half of the 3,000 miners, over 1,500, were struck by the epidemic and died. Whether the victims were dead or not, the day after the) contracted cholera they were taken to the beach, and five to ten of them at a time were placed on an iron platform and burned.[6]

The aim of this reporter and others who revealed the atrocious conditions in the mines was to effect reforms, but the treatment of miners did not improve appreciably until the end of World War II. The mine companies denied that conditions were as bad as they were reported, and journalists friendly to the companies held that the critics' accounts were exaggerated. Among the second group of reporters was Inukai Tsuyoshi, who later became a leading parliamentary figure and eventually, in 1931, prime minister.'

Aside from accidents involving relatively few individuals, there were explosions, fires, cave-ins, and flooding that often caused mass deaths. Major mining accidents were almost an annual occurrence. A gas explosion in a Kyushu mine in 1914 took the lives of 669 persons, the highest toll of any disaster in Japanese mining history. As the scale of mining operations in Japan grew and the number of miners increased, the number of accidents and deaths rose also. During the Shōwa era (beginning in 1926), the number of deaths in the mines each year ranged from the 600s to a high of 1,868 in 1944. From 193 5 to the end of the war, the number topped 1,000 every year but one. Even in the immediate postwar period the number of deaths remained well above 600 annually. As for injuries, about 5 percent of all miners suffered serious injuries each year.*

The mine companies provided only minimal compensation for the families of miners who were killed or injured on the job. In 1902, Miike paid a fixed rate of 100 yen for a death in which the miner was not at fault, and 50 yen for a death caused, in the company's opinion, by the miner's own carelessness. For major injuries, such as loss of eyesight, hearing, or limbs, the company paid 100 yen in the

absence of contributory negligence; otherwise, the company paid 40 yen for damage to eyesight or hearing, and 20 yen for loss of limb.[9]

Even miners who escaped serious injury worked under extremely difficult conditions. Typically, one old woman miner recalled her days in the mines as "a living hell."[10] An account of working conditions in the early Meiji period states:

> The miners work several hundred feet underground . . . with only the dim light of a hand-held lamp. . . . If by some good fortune the coal bed is thick and the passage is as much as 6 feet high, the miner can walk upright, but if rhe coal bed is shallow and the ceiling is less than 4 feet high, the miner has to crawl to the pit face, and dig the coal from a squatting position. In extreme cases he has to swing the pick and dig the coal lying on his back.
>
> For those who transport the coal out of the mine, the situation is even more difficult. We had to grab a short wooden cane in both hands and crawl on our hands and knees to drag the coal basket out to the bin located in the main tunnel. . . The miners were either covered with a piece of rag or were naked.[11]

The job of transporting the coal basket to the bin was usually a woman's task. In many instances, a husband and wife made up a team of digger and hod carrier.

THE CREW-BOSS SYSTEM

To keep the miners working under adverse conditions, the mine companies usually used crew or barracks bosses not only to recruit and then oversee the miners in the mines but also to act as wardens and guards in the compounds where they were housed. These crew bosses frequently came out of the underworld, many having been petty gangsters, hoodlums, or ex-convicts. The mine operators, who believed that such tough-minded thugs were needed to keep the miners (regarded as roughnecks and ne'er-do-wells) under control, endorsed the crew bosses use of regular beatings and torture to keep the miners in line and, above all, to prevent them from running away.

In return for their efforts, the crew bosses were either allowed to collect a percentage of the miners' pay or were paid company commissions based on the amount of coal their crews produced. They were also given the exclusive right to sell the miners' their daily necessities. They were, in effect, a combination of middleman, goon, slave driver, warden, and concessionnaire.

The desperate miners often revolted against these bosses. As a result, the Takashima Mining Company abandoned the crew-boss system in 1897 and established a direct employer-employee relationship with its miners.[12] But most other companies, particularly the smaller ones, retained the crew-boss system into the twentieth century. As late as 1923, fifty of the eighty-one mines in Fukuoka prefecture still employed the crew-boss system.[13]

Run by the crew bosses, the living quarters of the miners were wretched shanties. A newspaper article from 1900 described the huts of one of the Hokkaido mines as follows:

> The shacks of the miners have leaky roofs. The wooden walls are about to fall apart and the floors are rotting. Each unit is about 4 *tsubo* [about 16 square yards] and contains a kitchen, closet, [and living quarters]. It is barely large enough for the dwellers to crowd in. The entrails of fish and chickens are strewn about in the vicinity of the shacks. There is only one latrine for twenty households. When it snows, it is impossible for people to get to rhe latrine. The children urinate in front of their shacks. The area is afloar with excrement and urine; the filth is indescribable. Because of these conditions there is currently an outbreak of dysentery.[14]

The convicts in the Hokkaido mines were housed in what was called *tako-beya* ("octopus rooms"), which in effect were prison cells.[15] Later, the free miners too came to be housed in similar cells and were treated just like the convicts. They were denied the right to come and go as they pleased, and even their letters were censored.

Despite their strenuous and dangerous work, the miners were compensated very little. In the 1890s, in one of the major mines in northern Kyushu, the average pay was 35 sen a day, while a skilled, productive coal digger earned between 40 and 70 sen a day.[16] In a major mine in Hokkaido, a coal digger earned 95 sen for a twelve-hour day in 1903. This compared favorably with a blacksmith's earnings of 50 sen a day; but, of course, the miner was engaged in much more arduous and dangerous labor.[17] Three decades later, in 1936, the pay in the major mines in Fukuoka still came to less than 40 yen a month.

Naturally, the mine companies had difficulty recruiting workers and keeping them on the job. A woman miner, relating her life in the early decades of the twentieth century, recalled that every morning the

crew boss's helper would come around the shacks with a club to get the miners out to work. If someone claimed to be ill, the enforcer would yell,

"What! You have a headache? Jackass. You had too much whiskey last night. Go to work. No?" Then he would hit the sick man.

The boss took a cut from the miners' pay. When we ran out of money the only person we could turn to was the crew boss. Then he deducted what we owed him from our earnings, and we would have to borrow again till the next payday. So we were short of money the year round. . . . Even if we got hurt they would not take care of us properly. . . . In desperation some would try to run away. Those who got away were lucky, but if you got caught that was the end. . . . The captive, with his hands tied behind his back, would be brought to the guards and crew boss, who had clubs in their hands. They then beat the victim up with all their might. When he passed out they poured water on him, revived him, and beat him again. We were all made to watch the beatings. . . Some of the victims became crazy, some became dumb. Some were turned into cripples. But no one could do or say anything about this. The police paid no attention.[18]

One Meiji miner remembered that, in the mines of Nagasaki, he saw a man and a woman tied naked on a cross, and the other miners were required to hit them in their vital parts everytime they passed them. They were being punished for adultery.[19] Accounts of miners who were trussed up and had their feet burned with red-hot pokers,[20] and of attempted escapees who were tied and hung upside down over a tire while being clubbed*' are not uncommon.

Despite the fact that the runaway miners knew they would be tortured in this fashion if they got caught, the number of attempted escapes remained high. A survey taken in the late 1920s by a major mining company showed that 41 percent of their 8,366 mine workers had fled or tried to flee their mines.[22]

Needless to say, not all crew bosses were sadistic monsters, and in times of need the miners could go to some of them for help. Some even cooperated with those who were planning to run away. From the crew bosses's point of view, they themselves were victims since the runaways often owed them money; and frequently the runaway miners were simply moving about to try to find mines that paid more.[23] The supervisors, foremen, and crew bosses were simply doing their dirty work for the mine operators who paid their wages and whose only goal was to increase production to fatten profits.

Personal Accounts: Women in the Mines

Having started its process of industrialization almost a century after England, Meiji Japan followed in the footsteps of the British even in the practice of using women and children in the mines. Not until 1928 did the Japanese government ban women from the mines and even then this applied only to major mining companies, not small and middle-sized ones. Moreover, the law was relaxed in 1933 to permit the use of married women in the mines, and, in 1938, the ban on women miners was revoked completely. Finally, in 1946, under the occupation authorities, a total ban on the employment of women in the mines was effected.[24]

Male miners did not regard the ban on women as a beneficial measure, for it often meant a loss of needed income. One miner went directly to the company to complain: "Why do you make my wife quit work? If you're going to fire her, fire me, too. We'll hang ourselves together at the entrance to the mine!"[25]

Children below the age of ten were also regularly brought into the mines. One woman recalled that her grandmother, who had been widowed at forty, took her children of seven, nine, eleven, and sixteen into the mines to work with her. "In those days the entire family would work as a unit to mine the coal."[26] According to another woman, as a child she couldn't wait to join her older brothers and sisters in the mines. "I wanted to be among the eleven- and twelve-year-olds. My older sister was thirteen or fourteen. She would tell me, 'I'm lonely in the mines, so why don't you come with me?' I wanted very badly to join her in the mines. The night before I was to do so, I couldn't sleep for the excitement. . . . My mother told me not to go, that it was dangerous, but I ran ahead of the others and went in."[27]

A seventy-year-old woman interviewed in the postwar years recalled that she entered the mines when she was nine, and, after working in numerous mines, finally quit at the age of sixty. "I used to think that I would go mad whenever I went down into the mines."[28] Another old woman miner related:

I was born in this mining community. The entire region along the Onga River [in Fukuoka] is mountainous, so most of the girls went into the mines to work. The mines were full of twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls. My father died in the mines when I was ten. . , . I went into the mines to work when I was thirteen. They used to say that the god of the mines was a dog. When

a dog barked loud, or when it barked in the direction of the mines, it meant trouble, they would tell me. . . . But I used to hide my puppy in my lunch basket and bring him into the mines with me. . . . The mines were a dangerous place. You were in constant danger of losing your life. A cave-in might occur at any momcnr. There were times when gas came out. Then a blue ball of fire would shoot through the mines. The sound was loud enough to burst your eardrums. Somerimes the beams and shafts would snap. The ground was rough, and you couldn't stand up straight and walk. The passages were narrow, too. Sometimes we had to crawl around, and water was always seeping in. The mine passages were steep . . and it was hot.

The women's job was to transport the coal that had been mined. The coal was loaded into a d-foot-square wooden box. The bottom of the box had metal runners. Wc had to pull this box with a sash over our shoulders. It was hard work. Where it was uphill, there were wooden logs to serve as rails to make it easier to pull the box. Going downhill, when the angle of the slope was over thirty degrees, we would get on our hands and knees, grab the log railings firmly, hold back the box with our heads, and slowly crawl down backward. With a lamp in our mouths and with our heads holding back the box full of coal, we would feel our way down, inch by inch, with the tip of our straw sandals. If you slipped, it wouldn't be only you who got hurt, because there were others ahead of you. Some of the women had babies on their backs while hauling coal. Since water was dripping all the time, it was slippery. [After they hauled the coal to the coal cart, they had to push a cart full of empty boxes back to where the digging was taking place.] We were really slaves. Lots of people died when the boxes fell off the cart. That was the scariest parr of our work. Once a friend of mine was coming down the slope with her daughter. We were going up. All of a sudden the boxes began to tumble down and her daughter was killed. . . . That friend had been a very religious person. She said, "I was a devout believer, but my daughter died. It does no good to have faith! . . ."

It was really hard to get a loaded coal box moving. We'd push it with our heads and our rears. After struggling hard and pushing the box for hundreds of yards, we were paid 8.5 sen. , . . With both my husband and me working, we made 30 to 40 sen a day. One *shō* [.48 U.S. gallons] of rice cost 12 to 13 sen then. We used to work twelve or thirteen hours [at a time]. Sometimes they would arbitrarily deduct one box from our work. . . . But we had to accept that. If we uttered a single word of complaint we would be beaten within an inch of death. There used to be a saying that went, "Complain and you'll get a club on your back. Your towel will be dyed with blood." . . .

My first husband was killed by a runaway coal cart. . . . That was in 1923. They gave me 200 yen as compensation. That was more than what most mines paid. At another mine, five of my cousins from the same family went in the mines, and all five were killed. . . . At that time the family got 50 yen per person. Capitalists are really ruthless people. My father died [in the mines] at the time of the Russo-Japanese War. We got 5 yen then. . . .

I raised my children while working in the mines. It was really rough going into the mines then. I would get up at two in the morning and quietly prepare breakfast. . . . I would then wake my child up when it was still dark. The child would rub his eyes and complain. I would yell at him and take him to the nursery. . . . They used to take care of him for 8 sen a day. I would leave him there, wondering if I would ever see him again. . . . "Will today be the day he is going to lose his parents?" I would wonder. So I was able to see my children only at night. . . . We didn't have any *futon* for bedding. Three out of ten families had no *futon*. The shack consisted of one 4½-mat room and a 6-mat room. There were no sliding doors or screens. There was a j-foot-wide dirt-floor opening by the entrance. A straw mat served as a curtain. It was really a pathetic place. But when my father was young, he told us, not only was there no straw mat by the entrance, the shack had no walls at all. There were only four poles holding up a grass roof. Of course, there were no mats on the floor. They burned firewood and cut a hole in the roof to let the smoke out. . . and slept on the dirt floor. . . . When we fell heavily in debt, we would sneak away at night, taking our children by their hands. . . . Even when we didn't want any more children, they kept coming. There was nothing we could do about that. Even if we spent nothing on the baby, we at least had to pay the midwife. So we fell into debt. They didn't give us any compensation worth speaking of, even if we got injured. So we would quietly get ready and sneak away.[29]

Because women miners worked as hard and produced as much as men, they had a strong sense of equal worth. According to one woman miner, "Women and men did the same kind of work. . . . It's not true that women were weaker physically. We did the same work. . . . There was a woman who used to lift up huge chunks of coal that men could not carry." Some mines paid women the same wages as men, but usually they were paid less. '*My happiest time as a miner was when we went to the Nishitan mines. There, if a man was paid 1 yen, a woman was paid 1 yen, too. That's because we did the same kind of work. In fact, the women worked harder than the men." However, these mines were exceptions. "Even if women did more work than men, we were paid only 80 percent of what the men got. It really was dumb. . . . I worked very hard because I didn't want my children to have to do this kind of work. but when

the war came, my youngest son had to go into the mines. I was sorry about that." When the employment of women in the mines was banned in 1928, the women who continued to go into the mines (because of the lax enforcement of the law) were paid only 50 percent of what the men got.[30]

Personal Accounts: Koreans in the Mines

In 1910, Japan annexed Korea. Soon afterward, Koreans, many of whom had had their land confiscated by the Japanese colonial authorities, began to emigrate to Japan looking for work. They usually ended up doing hard labor on road gangs or in the mines.[31] Later, the mining companies began actively to recruit Korean workers. Eventually, they were simply conscripted into the labor force by the government and forced into the mines and construction work.

The Hokkaido Mining Company got its first group of thirty-five Korean laborers in 1916. By 1328, 1,505 Koreans were employed by the company. This number declined in the early 1930s because high unemployment led the government to restrict Korean immigration to Japan. However, as Japan went onto its war footing, massive numbers of Koreans were recruited or conscripted to replace Japanese workers both in Japan and overseas in the war zones.[32] It is estimated that in 1944 there were 35,209 Korean miners in the Hokkaido mines; 74,736 in the Kyushu mines; 10,995 in the mines of Yamaguchi prefecture; and 7,250 in other mines. In all, 31.9 percent of the miners in Japan were Koreans at this time.[33]

From 1939 on, the Coal Production Board recruited Korean workers with the aid of the Korean governor-general's office. A quota was established for each county, and recruiters went into the villages to enlist Korean peasants. Because Korean farmers had suffered a serious drought and crop failure in 1939, the recruiters were initially able to meet their quotas easily.[34] But as the need for manpower grew, particularly after the outbreak of the Pacific War, the recruiters began to dragoon Koreans into the labor force. The help of government officials, Japanese police, and military gendarmes was enlisted in this effort. Often ruthless means were used to coerce the unwilling peasants into the labor force. Many were kidnapped while they were working out in the fields or asleep at home, and then taken off to Japan without even being granted the opportunity to bid their families farewell.

Between 1940 and 1945, about a million Koreans were brought to Japan to work as virtual slaves. When the war ended, there were 2,365,000 Koreans in Japan proper.[35]

Koreans dragooned into the labor force recalled with bitterness their experiences. As Choi Chun Su remembered the experience,

> On October 20, 1942, I was working with some fishermen on rhe coast of Pusan. I was walking in front of the station with a pack on my back, when a stranger came up to me and said he wanted to talk to me and dragged me off to the inn. There were about one hundred people at rhe inn already. At that time I was twenty-six years old and married, wirh sons who were three and six, but I was not allowed to let them know where I was. I was told that I was to be taken to the Hokkaido mines. If I refused I would be sent to Taiwan [in the war zone]. I wanted to run away bur I was not able to. The next day we were put on a ship and left the port of Pusan. I don't know how they found out, but before the ship left port I saw my wife and children on the dock. We were not able to exchange any words.[36]

Theoretically, these workers were on a two-year contract, but this was a meaningless formality, as their contracts were unilaterally renewed by the company officials.[37] In addition, Korean miners, who were officially paid much less than their Japanese counterparts-in many cases less than half the wage-saw all sorts of expenses deducted from their pay. This left them with very little cash, which in turn they were compelled to put in savings accounts-a means of preventing them from running away.

Korean miners were also treated with particular brutality because of racial prejudice. Their workday in the mines was supposed to be twelve hours long, but a quota was set for each day and the miners were not allowed to leave the pits until they met that quota, no matter how long it took. As one Korean miner noted, "In extreme cases we had to work from seven in the morning until three the next morning. Our meal normally consisted of bean dregs. Not even pigs would have eaten what was served us. We were so hungry that we had no strength. When we were forced to work extra hours, we were given one rice ball. . . .[38]

All the Korean miners interviewed in a postwar study complained of the poor quality and meager portions of the food they had received. One remarked, "I really had a hard time with the food. We

were just given one bowl of a mixture of Chinese rice, soybeans, and broken bits of noodles. To go with it, we got some *daikon* [radishes] and bean-paste soup with *daikon* leaves. We had fish only once a month."[39]

In the mines, the Koreans were given rhe most difficult assignments and were constantly goaded by the club-wielding overseers. A Korean miner brought to the mines in 1942 recollected,

When I arrived at the "octopus room," the foreman told me in his dialect, "Sit down." I didn't understand what he said, so he hit me with his club. We worked in IWO shifts from six to six. , . . We were given an hour for lunch.

When we returned to our living quarters after work, the place was usually full of injured workers. They had been hurt not in the natural completion of their work but by beatings inflicted on them. The manager of the kitchen would pull out his Japanese sword and threaten us by saying, "It's nothing at all for me to cut down five or six of you peninsula men." Once a week a policeman came around and asked if we had any complaints but, since he was accompanied by the foreman, no one dared say anything. The policeman would then be treated to a feast and go home.[40]

As might be expected, the malnutrition and harsh working conditions caused the physical condition of the Korean miners to deteriorate badly. For example, there were forty-one deaths among 640 Korean miners in one Hokkaido mine in 1943. The doctor assigned to the mine was convinced that the actual figure was higher.[41]

A Korean who observed the treatment of his fellow countrymen in the mines of Fukushima prefecture recalled:

The average workday was fourteen hours. Because of the strain, even a healthy person could not sustain the pace. If a person tried to rest when he gnt sick, he would be charged with faking and would be brought to the office and tortured. J know a worker who was thrown in jail for eight months for complaining that he did not get enough to eat. Also, for three months following our arrival at the mines, we were forced to undergo military drills after work. Those who had been on night shift would collapse with exhaustion. Those who did not march around as sharply as they were ordered to do were beaten with whips by the officials. . . . In desperation, some would try to run away. Those who were recaptured were beaten half to death. Then they were turned over to the police, where they were tortured and jailed. After they were let out of jail, they were put in the company's lock-up before they were released and sent back to the mines.[42]

These stories of brutal treatment were not exaggerations. They were corroborated not only by Japanese newspaper accounts and studies made by non-Korean groups, but also by the observations of Japanese who were themselves biased against Koreans. One old Japanese woman miner held that "Koreans were a mess. . . . They didn't obey people at ail. They were self-indulgent and threw things about and never cleaned up." Yet she noted: "They were beaten up all the time by the guards. They [the guards] would beat Japanese, too, but they beat up the Koreans much more severely. They were treated really brutally. [The overseers] would beat them with their rods until they bled. , . . Because they were hardly fed any food, they would stagger about. Then they would be scolded severely and be beaten up. During the war, the Koreans had practically nothing to eat . . . about two raw cucumbers. That's all. For breakfast they were given rice gruel, and so they were barely able to walk around."[43]

Choi Chun Su's story sums up much of the Korean miners' experience. Constantly abused, partly because of his inability to understand Japanese, he tried to run away. He was quickly caught and thrown in the back room of the "octopus shack." Then:

I was tied up with a rope and beaten. I fainted but was revived with a bucket of water. This happened three times. They then placed two iron rods in the stove, heated them up, and burned my back with them. When the heated rod was applied to my back the first time, I smelled my burning flesh, hut after that I felt nothing because I passed out. When I regained consciousness the next morning, I asked for some water. The supervisor brought me some water and warned me, "I'll kill you if you say anything about this." For three days he watched over me and brought me my meals himself. He was afraid that rhe police might find out about me. Three days later he ordered me back into the mines. Yellow Auid oozed out from the blisters on my back. . . .[44]

Choi Chun Su tried again to run away. After wandering about in the snow, he was helped by some kindly peasants and managed to get on the ferry from Hokkaido to Aomori. In Aomori he was caught by the police. There he was beaten with a bamboo rod and leather strap because he refused to tell them where he had run away from. The police found out, however, and sent him back to Hokkaido. Convinced that he would be killed if he went back to the mines, he managed to escape from the train by wiggling out of the lavatory window. Again he was helped by some peasants, who got him a job with a construction crew, and again he was caught by the police.

Beaten and tortured once more, he still refused to identify his old mining company. Consequently, the police sent him to another mine where the conditions were even worse.

My head was full of lice. The burn on my back had got infected and was full of puss. If anyone spoke Korean he was not fed. . . . When we got thirsty we had to drink the polluted water found in the mines. This would be followed by diarrhea. We had to work from 6 A.M. to 11 P.M. I was paid 2 yen 15 sen but was charged 1 yen 50 sen for meals. Because our canvas shoes fell apart, we were forced to buy a new pair every day. One pair cost 3 yen 50 sen, and so our debt grew with each passing day. They knew we would try to run away if we had the money.

Many miners died. In my former mine, when the workers died, they used to call out the names of their family members just before they died. . . In the second mine, a well-educated young man who came from a good family in Seoul tried to escape but he was recaptured and beaten brutally. He ended up going mad.[45]

Choi Chun Su was then sent to the Kuriles to work on a project to build an airfield. The end of the war saw him working in another mine as a kitchen worker.

It is interesting to note that poor peasants as *well* as *burakumin* were the most likely to extend a helping hand to the abused Korean workers; the wielders of power, the wealthy owners and their henchmen, were the ones who brutalized them. As another example of the weak helping the weak, there is the story of a twenty-one-year-old woman in Yamagata prefecture. When she was working in a labor-camp mess hall in 1944, the police came to her camp and instructed her to inform them if she saw any sign of runaway Korean miners. Later a young man in rags crawled out from under her house and asked for help. He explained to her:

I came to Japan to study but needed money, so in order to earn my tuition I fell for the clever tale of the recruiter and joined the miners in Hokkaido. But they paid me nothing except 2 yen for cigarette money. I had no way of saving any money for my education. Since they do not feed us Koreans adequately, my co-workers began to die, one after another, of malnutrition and hard work. Even if a person gets sick, he is forced to work or is beaten with the whip and club until he drops dead. If a person tries to resist, he is likely to be tortured to death. I have parents and brothers and sisters in my home country. I don't want to die in a foreign land.

The woman decided to help the young Korean miner and hid him for a few days. She also helped two other Koreans, who were being held by the police, to escape.[46]

It appears that, among the exploited miners themselves, the Koreans and Japanese worked together more harmoniously than one might have expected, given the atmosphere of racial mistrust on both sides. As one old woman miner said, "The biggest problem was the language barrier. But, unlike the Japanese miners, the Korean miners never made lewd remarks to the women who were assigned to them to haul out the coal. They were really principled about this. As a result, when I was a young girl, I used to like to work with Korean diggers. I could work without fear [of being molested]."[47] "The foremen made no distinction in his [harsh] treatment of Japanese and Koreans," recalled another old miner. "The miners themselves not only did not discriminate against the Koreans but we helped each other." When the war ended, a Korean miner came to say good-bye to him. " 'I'm going back to Korea, but please come and visit me there,' he said. And we departed in tears. I don't know where he got it, but he brought a sack of sugar and left it for me, saying it was a farewell gift. It was unexpected. Other young Koreans used to come and visit me often. Pak, Kim, and others. When they left, they all shed tears. They were all good young men."[48]

It is believed that Koreans and *burakumin* got along well because both were victims of prejudice. An example of cooperation between the two groups is seen in the miners' strike that took place in the Asō mines in Kyushu. Asō Mines employed about 1,000 Korean miners in conditions far worse than those of other mines. In 1932, the company found it necessary to curtail its activities and began to let Korean workers go without compensation. This led the Korean miners, with the help of union organizers, to stage a strike asking for better working conditions and higher pay. They also asked for an end to brutal treatment and for better care for the sick and injured.[49] During the course of the strike, the Suiheisha supported the Korean miners by collecting rice from *burakumin,* who themselves were in dire need because of the Depression, and donating it to the strikers.[50] While the miners got the support of other outside groups, like the right-wing socialists, in the end they failed to gain their objectives.

The *burakumin* had a reputation for being helpful to runaway miners regardless of their nationality or background. In northern Kyushu, *buraku* villages were some of the few havens for the runaways Min

ers, it was said, felt as if they had reached friendly territory once they managed to hide in the outcaste community."

Many *burakumin* also entered the mines, and the harsh discrimination that beset them in the society at large followed them. Until the middle of the Meiji era, some mining companies refused to employ *burakumin* at all, because, they claimed, they would pollute the mines. Those that did employ them used segregated housing, baths, and latrines.[52] Until the middle years of the Meiji era, when the *burakumin* came out of some of the northern mines, they were forced to wash off the coal dust and dirt in the same water that was used to wash the horses. In some instances, they were not even allowed to use the water until after the horses had been washed.[53]

The Reform Movement in the Mining Industry

Around the turn of the century, Christian reformers and socialists began to go among the miners to organize unions. The pioneer effort in the mining industry took place in Hokkaido in 1902 when two miners formed a self-help association designed primarily to foster a sense of self-improvement among the miners. The stated objectives of the association, known as the Rōdō Shiseikai (Association for Sincerity in Labor) included enhancement of the miners' dignity, development of a spirit of self-reliance and independence, encouragement of frugality and mutual help. But the founders also declared their aim to be the acquisition of "equal rights and freedom in our relationship with the capitalist employers."[54] A pioneer socialist and labor organizer, Katayama Sen (1859–1933), was among the supporters of the Shiseikai.[55]

In 1907, the miners of Hokkaido, led by the Shiseikai, staged a series of strikes. One of the organizers, Nagaoka Tsuruzō, wrote Katayama Sen:

I am determined to serve the interests of tens of thousands of Japanese miners by sacrificing my life and my family for the cause. I plan to turn the seven members of my family out into the snowfields of Hokkaido, sell all my household belongings and depart [to organize the Ashio copper mines in Tochigi]. I feel this is the price that I must pay if I am to live up to my convictions. This is what I plan for my family members: (1) I shall put our four-year-old daughter up for adoption; (2) the eight-year-old will be the baby-sitter for the two-year-old; (3) the ten-year-old child will sell candy after school; (4) the thirteen-year-old will do the cooking and go to school; (5) the fifteen-year-old will work in a machine shop during the day and sell sweet *sake* at night; (6) my wife will work as a baggage bearer at the railroad station during the day and sell sweet *sake* at night.[56]

The Shiseikai organizers expected to negotiate with the mining company without resorting to violence. However, in early February 1907, the Ashio miners, protesting the low wages, long hours, and abuses by the foremen, took to violence, using dynamite to blow up company facilities, and indiscriminately setting fire to company buildings. The company record states that "chaos reigned in Ashio. The fire fighters failed to prevent the fire from spreading, and the police failed to protect the people. Finally the word spread that the army was coming. This gave the 30,000 residents hope. Earlier, the prefectural governor, realizing the gravity of the situation, had called on the commanding general of the First Division to send in his troops to restore order. Once the troops arrived [on February 6], our community, which had been without law and order, finally saw order restored."[57]

The next big series of violent actions by the miners broke out during the 1918 rice riots (see p. 160). The riots were triggered by the housewives of Toyama and spread rapidly to other areas and other segments of the society. The extensive involvement of the masses in these riots, the bitter feelings that were engendered by the inflation of the World War I period, and the violence led Katayama Sen to conclude that the class struggle in Japan got its true beginning during this period.[58]

Miners also joined the protest against the high price of rice and demanded higher wages. When the mining companies failed to comply with their demands, the miners in many areas also turned to violence, destroying public and company facilities, stores, and the houses of the rich. The first of these miners' riots erupted in Ube, in Yamaguchi perfecture, where the miners demanded a 30 percent increase in pay. When this was not forthcoming, the miners went on a rampage. Because the police were unable to control the rioters, the army was called in and the demonstrators were dispersed by troops, which fired into a crowd, killing thirteen persons and injuring a number of others. Hundreds of demonstrators were arrested and close to

[illegible] of them were indicted and sentenced to prison or fined. The judge of the court of appeals commented that "the incident seems not to have any political cast, nor is there any scent of socialism. The rioters appear to have been aroused by existing conditions, and [to have] committed these crimes in a senseless manner. It may seem harsh to impose heavy sentences, but today, when the spirit of the people is turbulent, it is necessary to impose stiff sentences in order to preserve the nation's security even though we may pity those convicted."[59]

The fact that these activities lacked a "political cast" and remained merely violent outbursts of pent-up frustrations made them basically ineffective in improving the miners' conditions. On the other hand, had they possessed a "political cast," the leaders would have been charged with subversive activities and with harboring "dangerous thoughts," and would have been punished more severely-as happened to many socialist and communist labor organizers in the mass arrests of April 16, 1929. Among the victims was Yamashiro Yoshimune, rhe husband of the author of "The Bog Rhubarb Shoots (see p.85)," who had led a miners' strike in 1927. After he was released irorn prison in 1936, he continued his "subversive" activities and persisted in harboring "dangerous thoughts," and was thus imprisoned again in 1940. He refused to renounce his Marxist views and convert to "Japanism," despite continuous pressure by the authorities. In January 1945, the authorities reported his death of "unknown causes."[60]

Following the riots of 1918, mine organizers sought to influence the miners to pursue their objectives in a more disciplined fashion. For instance, in the Miike miners' strike of 1924, the miners rigidly abstained from violence so as not to give the owners an excuse to call in police or army troops. When the owners told the strikers that their family members would be reduced to starvation if they persisted in the strike, the strikers responded, "We don't care if our family members do starve to death. We knew from the outset that we might have to accept such a development. Unless we are prepared to endure such a situation, we cannot engage the Mitsui people in a battle in which everything is at stake." The company finally succeeded in breaking the strike by bribing some of the strike leaders, but working conditions did subsequently improve in the mines.[61]

In the 1930s, as Japan went onto a semi-wartime footing, labor movements in the mines were subordinated to the imperatives of the national emergency. During the war, as noted above, miners served as virtual slave laborers.

The end of the w a r meant the freeing of the Korean miners. For the Japanese miners who worked for major mining companies, working conditions and p a y improved as labor leaders, now free from government restrictions, were able to organize them into unions and negotiated with the mining companies on a more equitable basis. However, miners employed by small-mine operators continued to work in circumstances not much better than those that existed during the prewar years, if only because union organizers concentrated on the large mines and neglected smaller ones. Small-mine owners tried to prevent unions from penetrating their mines and fired any worker who got involved in union activities. Moreover, in the 1950s, as Japan turned to oil for its source of energy and mining became less profitable, the smaller coal mines began to shut down. The chief problem for the miners then became unemployment.[62] However, as the economy began to boom in the 1960s, former miners found employment elsewhere, and complaints of worker shortages, rather than unemployment, began to appear in the newspaper columns.