

Good Wife, Wise Laborer: Controlling Images and Japanese Women's Labor in Meiji Japan

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In 1868, Japan's Tokugawa shogunate was felled by dissatisfied samurai warriors, beginning the era known as the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). With the induction of this new era, the Meiji heads of state began a project of rapid industrialization and state-sanctioned Japanese nationalism, which many historians argue was a product of Japan's new exposure to Western culture.¹ The nascent government's resulting interest in industry and nationalism had two significant effects: first, "the numbers of Japan's first industrial workers rapidly multiplied," and second, the state mobilized Japanese "subjects through their villages and/or patriarchal families, all in the name of the emperor."² This familial and community sanctioning enabled the new leaders to posit "these communities and families as miniature replicas of the nation-state" in an attempt to bolster nationalism.³ Both of the above results of this campaign for nationalism intersected in the burgeoning textile industry, which became central to Meiji industrialization around 1878 as a result of the threat "posed by foreign cotton imports" from Europe.⁴ The Meiji government reacted by opening more federally run mills and subsidizing private spinning ventures: "[b]y 1886, government efforts had helped create the beginning of a modern spinning industry."⁵ Originally, workers in textile mills were both male and female and "predominantly from samurai families"; after the first decade or so, however, the worker population transitioned from samurai and well-to-do peasants⁶ to individuals from rural communities, especially rural women.⁷ This followed a historical precedent because, during the Tokugawa era, "[the] peasant and artisan classes [...] often functioned as a co-operative unit in which women, in

¹ For examples of historical arguments showing the effects of Western imperialism/influence on Japan see Martha Tocco, "Made in Japan: Meiji Women's Education," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, eds. Barbra Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Mikiso Hane, *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); or Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

² E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3.

³ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 11.

⁴ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 35.

⁵ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 34.

⁶ In this era, this class of well-to-do peasants served as a quasi-middle class.

⁷ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 36.

addition to bearing the main domestic burdens, worked in activities of the household.”⁸ These women—samurai girls, rural women, peasant women, and factory girls—became the sites of Japanese industrialization and nationalism in prewar Japan through their labor, and, as a result, their identities became inextricably tied with that labor.

To argue that Japanese women’s labor in the prewar period shaped women’s subjectivities and identities is to place three theorists and historians—Gayle Rubin, Patricia Hill Collins, and Mariko Tamanoi—in conversation. In Rubin’s “rumination on the question of the nature and genesis of women’s oppression and social subordination,” she posits a Marxist binarism that differentiates between productive and reproductive labor as the potential root for the gender-based oppression of women.⁹ Rubin’s iteration of this economic sex/gender system is couched in notions of the wage and surplus value, or “what it takes to keep [a laborer] going—to reproduce him or her from day to day.”¹⁰ Rubin dictates that this theoretic wage, which must environ “what it takes to reproduce [...] labor power,” encompasses everything that is “necessary to maintain the health, life, and strength of a worker.”¹¹ However, the commodities that are utilized in this process of reproduction “must be consumed before they can be sustenance,” which requires additional labor—specifically domestic labor.¹² Thus, the argument proceeds to state, “[s]ince it is usually women who do the housework,” women become one of the “necessities of a worker” and, consequently, are objectified and relegated to being member of an oppressed class based on their gender and reproductive labor.¹³

⁸ Janet Hunter, “Women’s Labour Force Participation in Interwar Japan,” *Japan Forum* 2, no.1 (1990), 106.

⁹ Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review, 1975), 157.

¹⁰ Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” 161.

¹¹ Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” 161-162.

¹² “Food must be cooked, clothes cleaned, beds made, wood chopped.” See Rubin, 162; Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” 162.

¹³ To wholly understand Rubin’s argument, one must understand the notion of surplus value or, “the difference between what the laboring class produces as a whole, and the amount of that total which is recycled into maintaining the laboring class”; Rubin 161. Purportedly, reproductive labor (namely housework) does not, assuming it is being done within the worker’s family, cost the worker additional capital and, thus, “contributes to the ultimate quantity of surplus value realized”; Rubin, 162. Rubin’s argument, then, is that since housework is feminized, this

Collins's text also discusses labor however, it does so from a more intersectional perspective. Collins focuses on the productive and reproductive labor of Black women during slavery and how, "[the] dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of four interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood."¹⁴ Collin's essay goes on to describe how black women to this day are dogged by these "controlling images," essentially stereotypes, born out of Black women's forced labor.¹⁵

Finally, in Mariko Tamanoi's historical study of the Nagano Prefecture, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism: Politics and Poetics of Rural Japanese Women*, she argues that the category of the Japanese Rural Woman "emerged in the discourse of Japanese nationalism at the turn of the century."¹⁶ Tamanoi writes that this discourse regarding the rural women—in conjunction with institutional and pedagogical systems—discursively constructed a notion of *the* rural woman "which eventually [came] to stand for 'Japanese woman' in the in the early twentieth century."¹⁷ From Rubin, Collins and Tamanoi respectively, I lift the notions of productive versus reproductive labor, controlling images born of labor that remain pervasive today, and the notion of a discursive Japanese woman as a national subject shaped by state-apparatuses (particularly labor).

This essay will utilize Collins's notion of controlling images to present and analyze particular representations of Japanese women in prewar (particularly Meiji) Japan: the samurai girl/daughter, the rural woman, the peasant woman, and the factory girl. I will then argue that these images, born of labor, act as controlling images for modern Japanese women. Tracing the historiography, this essay seeks to simultaneously argue—more anachronistically—that it was both women's productive and

sex/gender system values women only insofar as they are reproducing and regards them as only a means to generate capital and more surplus value; Rubin, "The Traffic in Women", 162; 164.

¹⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 71.

¹⁵ For example, Collins describes the figure of the asexual nurturing mammy, an African American female figure who arose out of the stereotype of "the faithful, obedient domestic servant"; Collins, 71.

¹⁶ Mariko Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism: Politics and Poetics of Rural Japanese Women* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 1.

¹⁷ Tamanoi. *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 2.

reproductive labor (as part of a project to posit a female national subject) that drove the formulation of these controlling images. After establishing the “identity of interests” between the women of each discursive image, I will conclude with a Foucauldian argument against Rubin’s Western-centric argument.¹⁸

The rural woman, perhaps the most timeless of all the controlling images of Japanese women, was defined, “described, judged, and if necessary, reformed” in national discourse in relation to her *hataraki*, farm-work (particularly sericulture), and maternal role.¹⁹ Tamanoi argues that Japan’s “late nineteenth-century discourse of nationalism responded to modernity by identifying the countryside as the locus of an authentically Japanese culture,” thus constructing the rural woman as a national subject who came to stand for *the* Japanese woman and the nation.²⁰ While Tamanoi’s argument is historically supported, it is incomplete: the rural woman became both *the* rural woman and a national subject vis-à-vis her labor, which forms the core identity of a rural woman. The term *Hataraki* describes the work of rural women because it rejects the Marxist division of labor: “*Hataraki* includes both a woman’s productive and her reproductive labor.”²¹ One way this amalgamation in the lives of rural women can be seen is in the art of sericulture (raising silkworms). On one hand, this farming work was productive labor. It produced goods (silk threads) and thus the potential for capital: “[t]he breeding of silkworms, classified as an agricultural [rather than reproductive] pursuit, was of particular importance to farm women.”²² Since the Meiji state sought to construct “miniature replicas of the nation-state” comprised of rural families, this productive labor was important to

¹⁸ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 195.

¹⁹ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 20.

²⁰ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 17.

²¹ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 8.

²² Hunter, “Women’s Labour Force Participation in Interwar Japan”, 119.

position her as a contributing member. This is further evinced by an excerpt from the journal *Den'en fujin*:²³

“As rape oil can be found in each tiny rape seed, the oil of a nation can be found in each family. The wealth of a nation is the totality of the wealth of households. There are many ways to increase the wealth of a nation: the introduction and improvement of sericulture and poultry farming, the promotion of stock farming, the rearrangement of rice paddies, [...] All these increase the wealth of a household, thereby increasing the amount of oil of a nation. And all of these, especially sericulture, poultry farming, and side jobs, involve women.”²⁴

Rural women, as national subjects, were expected to contribute to the “wealth of the household”, a metonym for the wealth of the nation. As such, their identities were shaped by the performance of productive labor, required of them for national citizenship.

Equally important to rural women’s *Hataraki*—and their national identity defined by this *Hataraki*—was reproductive labor, which was also present in rural women’s sericulture: “writing in 1906, local teacher Kobayashi Tomojiro claimed that a woman should wake up when ‘silkworm babies’ (*sanji*) wake up and go to sleep when they go to sleep.”²⁵ Rural women, even when performing productive labor, embodied reproductive labor: they are constructed as mothers to the silkworms rather than mere producers or harvesters, illustrating the pervasive normativity of reproductive labor in the lives of Japanese rural women. Rural women were also responsible for other reproductive labor: “women were responsible for domestic tasks” and “caring for the young and incapacitated.”²⁶ This *Hataraki* was integral to the controlling image of the rural woman because; although she needed to be seen as contributing to the nation to encourage youth and illustrate progress, she also needed to be a believable “sacred mother of the nation” who was

²³ “In 1905, a journal called *Den'en fujin* was first published by the Greater Japan Agricultural Association for Women. ‘Den'en’ means ‘rural,’ but in an idyllic sense. It implies the soundness of the rural environment and the abundance of food. Fujin” literally translates as ‘women’; it includes all people of the female sex. Fukuzawa Yukichi, an enlightenment scholar, coined this term in the early Meiji period. Using fujin to emphasize the notion of women as respectable human beings, Fukuzawa attempted to reject the Confucian notion of women as legal incompetents and appendages to men.” See Tamanoi, 18.

²⁴ *Den'en fujin*, (Greater Japan Agriculture Association of Women: 1905), reprinted in Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 19.

²⁵ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 92.

²⁶ Hunter, “Women’s Labour Force Participation in Interwar Japan,” 113.; Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 10.

“exhausted from her labor [...] [but] because of her labor she became a beautiful national subject.”²⁷

Rural women are constructed as national citizens through their labor of sericulture, farming and domestic labor. The importance of reproductive labor to delineating the rural woman’s identity indicates the role labor plays in the formation of the rural Japanese woman’s identity: “they also became ambivalent national subjects precisely because they were poor, rural, and women. This is why they had to be constantly described, judged, and if necessary, reformed to be national subjects whose labor was indispensable for nation formation.”²⁸

In her scholarly monograph *Factory Girls*, Patricia Tsurumi writes that between rural women “were important differences according to the stratum of the peasant class to which a woman belonged.”²⁹ This supposed class difference, however, when looked at through the lens of controlling images was actually couched in labor opportunities. It was labor, not class, that distinguished rural women from those women who had more prospects for work and whom, for this essay, I will call peasant women. Peasant women engaged in all activities of the Japanese rural woman but, being of a slightly higher class, had further labor opportunities and responsibilities. To illustrate this, I will analyze the story of Matsuo Taseko, a peasant woman living during the Meiji restoration, as told by Anne Walthall in her biography of Taseko, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*. Like all rural woman, Taseko practiced *Hataraki*. She was skilled in the art of sericulture: “when Taseko was eleven years old, she was sent to her father’s family” where she learned to raise silkworms.³⁰ As economic historian Janet Hunter tells us, “it was custom on the part of many [rural] families to take in distant relatives” for tutelage.³¹ Taseko also spent “the first twenty-odd years of her married life

²⁷ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 20.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 18.

³⁰ “The Kithara produced 15 *kan* or 131 pounds of silk cocoons in the fifth month of 1822, the year Taseko first spent time there, and sold them for 2,650 silver *momme* [44 *ryō*, 1 *shu*].” See Walthall 95; Anne Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration*. (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 95.

³¹ Hunter, “Women’s Labour Force Participation in Interwar Japan,” 112.

[...] either pregnant or caring for infants.”³² Taseko clearly participated in the *Hataraki* of the national images of the rural woman prescribed by national discourse and perpetuated by societal expectations.

However, because of her class status, Taseko also engaged in other forms of labor, which precluded her from being a rural woman and placed her in the bounds of another controlling image, the peasant woman. Hunter writes that, in the late twentieth century, “[a]lthough in theory all land remained the property of the feudal lords [...] Well-to-do farmers and merchants increasingly employed poor peasants of both sexes [...] in small [...] enterprises such as sake brewing” on their land.³³ Significantly, Taseko’s “family derived a significant portion of its income from sake brewing,” an enterprise unavailable to typical rural women.³⁴ Taseko was also distinguished from rural women by her reproductive labor. Walthall explains, “Taseko’s marriage was arranged to suit the interests of the Takemura and Matsu families. Insofar as the heads of the family were always male, descent was reckoned through the patriline [...] In such a system women played crucial roles as a medium of exchange in linking two families for their mutual prosperity and prestige.”³⁵ During Taseko’s time, “In a samurai [...] family, a bride’s primary function was production of a male heir to carry on the family line; a bride was even referred to as a ‘borrowed womb.’”³⁶ Meanwhile, for rural women, “[if] the occasion demanded, poor peasant women could even take over the bastion of male family authority, the family leadership,” something that would have been unacceptable in higher classes.³⁷ Taseko’s marriage falls somewhere between the two: like a samurai woman, she was a commodity but, she was not a “borrowed womb.” In fact, Walthall argues that it is possible the marriage was arranged because of her advanced skills in sericulture (productive labor). Thus, her

³² Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*, 65.

³³ Hunter, “Women’s Labour Force Participation in Interwar Japan,” 110.

³⁴ Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*, 88.

³⁵ Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*, 60.

³⁶ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

labor situates her between samurai women and rural women—as a peasant women, closely associating her with the “rural entrepreneurs known in Japanese as *gōnō*, a labor identity impossible for either samurai or rural women to achieve (samurai women would have been limited socially and rural women economically).”³⁸

That Taseko’s labor distinguished her from rural women is also evident discursively in the way Walthall chooses to represent Taseko in her biography. Walthall takes issue with the way previous narratives have represented Taseko because they, in an attempt to include her in the (controlling) category of “good wife, wise mother,” portray her as engaging primarily in acts of reproductive labor and being always “hardworking and nurturing.” However, Walthall argues, “[t]hese books simply ignored the contradictions between what she was expected to be and what her own writings, especially her poems, suggest she did. She had a much more multifaceted character than she is usually allowed, and it was created through a variety of activities from household chores to travel and drink.”³⁹ Here, what she was “expected to be” was a rural women. However, these expectations—as Walthall points out—were contradicted by her labor, which extended beyond the bounds of that controlling image.

The ways in which Taseko’s labor excluded her from falling into the controlling category of rural woman is particularly poignant in Walthall’s point about Taseko’s drinking. Taseko’s diaries indicate that she often indulged in two to three cups of sake before bed. Walthall writes, “Samurai women expected to maintain a sense of decorum drank considerably less than peasant women. Coming as she did from a family that brewed sake, it would have been more surprising had Taseko not indulged at all.”⁴⁰ Although it is her drinking and class that exclude her from being a samurai woman, the consumption of sake that she *labored* to produce as a *gōnō* and a peasant woman both

³⁸ Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*, 82.

³⁹ Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*, 59.

⁴⁰ Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*, 74.

elevates her above a rural woman and illustrates the existence of different rules—prompted by the different kinds of labor—for peasant women as and rural women.

With the rise of industry in the Meiji era came the advent of a new controlling image, the factory girl. However, before it became a controlling image, the labor-centric identity of the factory girl came up against class identity in the form of the samurai girls/daughters. “In the very beginning of the Meiji period [...] silk spinners were the daughters of rich families, proud of their contribution to the modern nation-state.”⁴¹ They worked at the government mills “for the sake of the nation”, for “ruling class” aspirations, and “because their families needed their wages to survive”; however, they were not confined by the “factory girl” controlling image because it did not transcend their class identities as “strong samurai women.”⁴² “Samurai girls [who] went to Mie and other mills [...] did not develop a ‘daily-wage mentality.’ A girl’s wage classification gave her a status and income based on her skill and productivity rather than on the old hereditary principle.”⁴³ Having been endowed, for their entire lives, with the notion that their labor was providing “sustenance”⁴⁴ to their fathers and brothers, these factories girls were unable to grasp a labor identity centered in productive labor and, thus, could not be “molded by the unprecedented experiences as a Japanese factory worker.”⁴⁵ Instead, they conformed to their class identity predicated on serving the nation, which preserved them as samurai girls rather than factory girls. It was not until the government privatized mills that rural women, already used to being defined by their labor, joined that the factory girl’s “own goals

⁴¹ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 86.

⁴² Hunter, “Women’s Labour Force Participation in Interwar Japan,” 5; Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 39; Ibid, 5. “Indeed, the physical as well as the intellectual strength of the samurai women depicted by such writers as Nitobe Inazo [...] helped to formulate the image of a Japanese woman as a subject willing to sacrifice herself for the nation.” See Tamanoi, 16; “A woman depicted by Nitobe or Sugimoto was no longer a samurai daughter but the ‘Japanese woman’: intellectual, strong, respected as a mother and wife, and believing in the virtue of the division of labor by gender, she is far superior to the Western woman, who would endlessly assert her equality with men.” See Tamanoi, 16.

⁴³ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 39.

⁴⁴ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 29.

⁴⁵ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 5.

and loyalties [began to help] shape their growing view of themselves as a distinct group with a distinct identity,” which the samurai daughters did not.⁴⁶

After the first “optimistic decade of Meiji,” the samurai girls were replaced by “rural daughters of the poor” who were more willing to *become* factory girls proper through this new form of labor.⁴⁷ Although once rural women, or at least raised by rural women, these girls quickly developed a common identity around a less nationalistic narrative of subverting rural conventions of reproductive labor, excelling in productive labor, and viewing themselves as defenders. Their labor distinguished them from rural women in several ways. Whereas rural communities sought the coupling of men and women for labor and nationalistic purposes, the dormitories system for factory girls kept them separate to “reinforce the general separation of the sexes desired by employers.”⁴⁸ The basic structure of factory girls’ identity, their labor, actively dissuaded women from practicing reproductive labor (they were separated to discourage sexual activity and the women were fed and housed by the factories, rather than practicing reproductive labor to feed themselves). This aversion to reproductive labor is further evinced by the fact that although “[in] the general population at that time “female deaths seem to have been heavily related to reproductive [labor] [...] in the factory population the higher rates of female death were closely connected to diseases like tuberculosis.”⁴⁹ Similarly, although “marriage was the career most adult peasant women pursued [...] it is clear that few female textile workers left the factories to get married.”⁵⁰ This, perhaps, is as a result of their dedication to their productive labor and the freedom factory work provided them that agricultural

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 195.

⁴⁸ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 166.

⁴⁹ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 170.

⁵⁰ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 172.

work would not, and the independence (but also pressure) of the knowledge that their families were relying upon them.⁵¹

The basis of the factory girl identity as emphasizing productive labor over reproductive labor is also evident in the writings of Miwada Masako, who was one of the first advocates of the Tokugawan notion of the “good wife, wise mother.”⁵² In the early twentieth-century, Japanese newspapers often reported on the promiscuity of factory girls (perhaps, in part, because of their aversion to reproductive labor, which was still expected of women at the time). For example, “a factory woman named Fusa was reported by *Shinano mainichi shibun* to have secretly given birth after ‘having a clandestine affair with So-and-So Nakamura.’”⁵³ Masako, however, fought against this image when she wrote, “[as] joko [factory girls] depend upon their own physical labor to make their living, they are more respectable than those [prostitutes, geisha, barmaids-cum-prostitutes] who waste time sucking the wealth of others [...] Thus, joko are not necessarily shameful women.”⁵⁴ In this way, it was their (productive) labor that distinguished factory girls and made them a separate identity category: “these factory women were no longer promiscuous women but respectable national subjects.”⁵⁵ This labor played a prominent role in shaping the identity of the factory girls who “showed little inclination to reel or spin for the nation,” but rather, “saw themselves primarily as defenders of the absent families interests.”⁵⁶ This is especially embodied in their work songs in which they proudly sing “don’t scornfully call us *kōjo*” and proclaim that they are “the creators of profits.”⁵⁷ In “My Two Parents” we also see this identity. The girls sing:

Listen folks, because I want

⁵¹ A cotton employer’s survey published 1889 indicated that “after twelve or thirteen [working hours], an operatives time was her own” for a factory girl, whereas rural women split their time between reproductive and productive labor and, thus had very little freedom. See Tsurumi, 163.

⁵² Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 90.

⁵³ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 90.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 94.

⁵⁶ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 195; *Ibid.*, 194-95.

⁵⁷ Yamamoto Shigemi, *Aa nomugi tōge*, 142-9; reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, 197; Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 194-5.

To be filial to my parents
 I crossed Miyama and came
 All this way to suffer in Shinshû.⁵⁸

This song illustrates Tsurumi's argument that these girls constructed their identity around helping or "defending" their family. However, this identity was also nationally constructed. Consider also this verse from a company song provided by the factory:

Factory girls,
 We are the soldiers of peace
 The service of women is a credit
 To the empire and to yourselves.
 There are trials and hardships, yes.⁵⁹

Just as we saw with the rural woman, for the women in the factory, assuming the identity of "the factory girl" is discursively posited as necessary to becoming a national subject, a recognized subject of "the empire."

E. P. Thompson has theorized that class is constructed when some people, "as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests between themselves or against others."⁶⁰ The latter is the case with the controlling image of the prostitute, against which other controlling images of Japanese women were defined in the prewar period. In 1897 "national records listed 49,108 licensed prostitutes; fifteen years later there were 50,410 registered women in public brothels. Such figures do not, of course, include unlicensed prostitutes, entertainers, or women in eating and drinking establishments who worked the sex trades."⁶¹ In 1930, "it was estimated that nearly one million women were working in establishments providing food, drink or lodging, or as licensed prostitutes."⁶² The controlling images of both rural women and

⁵⁸ Excerpted from Yamamoto Shigemi, *Aa nomugi tôge*, 390-1, reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, 101-2; See the full song in Appendix A.

⁵⁹ *Seishi orimono shinposha* (Silk Reeling and Woven Goods Press), ed., *Shûshin kunwa kôjo no kagami* (Moral Discourses: A Mirror for Factory Girls), 82-3; reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, 93

⁶⁰ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, Gollancz, 1965), 9.

⁶¹ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 181.

⁶² Hunter, "Women's Labour Force Participation in Interwar Japan," 110.

factory girls were defined in national discourse against the image of the prostitute, as a state-sanctioned example of labor that could delegitimize (rather than legitimize) women's identities. Miwada wrote that their clear dedication to not only honest physical labor but and what she deemed "feminine labor" made factory girls superior to prostitutes. However, she also wrote that factory girls "are of humble origins and are away from home—these factors make them vulnerable to 'vice.'"⁶³ These humble beginnings are the residences of the rural women, indicating the discursive rural woman's possible propensity for this "vice." This becomes complicated when one considers the description of the rural woman in a journal (*Noson fujin*) in 1932: she "wears torn work garb [...] and has swollen chapped hands."⁶⁴ Much like the descriptions of prostitutes and loose factory girls as dirty, indecorous, and unseemly, the author describes rural women as undesirable. However, he goes on to illustrate in idyllic terms a scene of the very same woman, "nursing her infant child, while resting in the midst of hard labor on the footpath between rice patties."⁶⁵ This scene provides us with an opportunity to see the potential for vice, only to switch the narrative: she is not a prostitute, she does not "[suck] the wealth of others" but rather does her reproductive and productive duties tirelessly and, like the factory girl, is saved from discursive exclusion by her dedication to her own labor.

While these controlling images are ubiquitous, they are not binding. This is illustrated by the fact that many rural women became factory women after the Meiji industrialization increased: "most of the Meiji factory girls came from rural homes."⁶⁶ This, in turn, shaped both the identities of rural woman and of factory girls. An example of this is the notion of *dekasegi* or "'going out to work' [...] in a place beyond communing distance."⁶⁷ (10). As was evinced by Taskeo's story, leaving one's

⁶³ Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 91.

⁶⁴ *Noson fujin*, 1932; reprinted in Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 20.

⁶⁵ Tamanoi. *Under the Shadow of Nationalism*, 20.

⁶⁶ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 194.

⁶⁷ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 10.

community to work was common, even before the rise of the factory. When the mills moved to more rural areas, the samurai girls could not travel as far and they were unaccustomed to the work and to being away from home. Further, “respectable families with reelers or girls who wanted to learn reeling could not be persuaded to give up their daughters.”⁶⁸ This was not an issue with newly recruited factory girls from rural areas who were accustomed and more than happy to travel, as a result of their previous identities as rural women who often traveled for work. This departure, then, can be posited as a metaphorical one: in taking that trip, they took the first step to reforming their identities from rural women to factory girls. As Tsurumi tells us, “[the] work was not significantly different but the setting in which they did it changed drastically [...] Even when the tasks done in the factory technically resembled handicraft procedures followed earlier, close supervision changed the nature of the work, generally making it harder and more unpleasant.”⁶⁹ When the work changed, so did the labor-based controlling image.⁷⁰ Further, as mentioned earlier, factory women were distinguished from their roots as rural women by their aversion to reproductive labor (another example of women’s identities being shaped by labor). “Barely one quarter of working women abandoned work to devote themselves exclusively to domestic responsibilities.”⁷¹ Although it did happen, it was uncommon. However, like Arimura Junko describes, “I decided to have children and become a housewife,” some women did move from the factory girl to the housewife, but they were in the minority of Japanese women.⁷² As a result, in the interwar years, the identity of “factory girl”

⁶⁸ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 28.

⁶⁹ Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, 164.

⁷⁰ This can also be seen in how gender divisions changed as the labor changed. While rural women’s labor allowed them to do similar work to the men, factory girls labor was constructed in such a way that the gender divide became very pronounced: “[t]he formality of employment relations and the locating of work outside the home which characterized the growth of the modern sector contributed to this sexual division of labour’s becoming more pronounced and ridged than formerly. Even in female-dominated industries such as textiles there were a small number of jobs specifically allocated to males, for reasons of physical strength, chances of promotion, or whatever. In cotton textiles, for example, mechanics and bale-breakers were invariably male, while the majority of spinners and weavers were women.” See Hunter, 113.

⁷¹ Hunter, “Women’s Labour Force Participation in Interwar Japan”, 115.

⁷² *Voices from the Japanese Women's Movement*, ed. AMPO (Armonk, N.Y.: 1996), 190.

became opposed to a new nationally constructed controlling image of a woman inclined to leave work for reproductive labor, the housewife.⁷³

These controlling images did not end with the war, and, although they did become increasingly more complicated as more means of labor were made available to Japanese women, they still exist to this day. Consider, for example, the well-documented Japanese office lady, Kathleen Cannings's Japanese "managerial lady" or the Japanese Ambassador of Cute.⁷⁴ As Jane Caplan theorizes in the afterward of *Recreating Japanese Women 1600-1945*, "[in] Japan, therefore, the ideological and the institutional sources of national legitimacy were soldered to each other far more rigidly than was the case with the more diversely articulated Western polities."⁷⁵ Japanese women, in order to receive state legitimization, were (and still are) forced into these controlling images, which render them national subjects but limit their subjectivity. For example, Fukuma Yuko wrote of her time in an office in the 90s, "At our workplace, *Ochakumi* is done only by women. In other words, female workers are regarded simply as tea-ladies."⁷⁶ Although she is able to work in the corporate sector, something that was not even an option for women before the war, Fukuma is still limited by the controlling images of women in the workplace and what forms of labor they are allowed to perform. This is significant for two reasons: one, it shows us the limitations/controlling images still in place in Japan, but also, it offers a response to Rubin's western-centric notion of female

⁷³ In his essay "Women's Groups and the Japanese State: Contending Approaches to Political Integration, 1890-1945", Sheldon Garon explains how the housewife was constructed by nationalistic discourse during the war. Although at first, "[e]arly modern moral tracts had simply portrayed what Japanese would now call 'the wife' as simply 'the woman'" who was too 'dull-witted and temperamental' to raise the children she bore." See Garon, 12. Later, the discourse changed with wartime mobilization. The government came to see that women were valuable for wartime mobilization, thus, put forth a new idea that "women must be taught to be 'members of the State,' [...] so that they could instill in their children the unselfish 'sense to work for the state.'" In this way, the identity of "housewife" was constructed by the labor of reproducing citizens by educating her children. See Garon, 18.

⁷⁴ See Yuko Ogasawara, "Chapter 5: Acts of Resistance." In *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Companies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 114-138; Kathleen Cannings, "Equal Employment Opportunity and the 'Managerial Woman' in Japan, *Industrial Relations* 33, no. 1 (1994), 44-69; Gabriella Lukas, "The Labor of Cute: Net Idols, Cute Culture, and the Digital Economy in Contemporary Japan," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 23, no. 3 (2015), 587-513.

⁷⁵ *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, 318, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520070172/recreating-japanese-women-1600-1945>.

⁷⁶ *Voices from the Japanese Women's Movement*. (Armonk, N.Y: 1996), 194.

oppression. In his text, *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault establishes that “we must construct an analytics of power that no longer takes law as a model and a code.”⁷⁷ In this way—Foucault argues—we must dismiss the paradigm of juridico-discursive power, which is a purely prohibitive power primarily concerned with legality, and instead introduce a power model that is generative rather than oppressive. The controlling images of Japanese women throughout history provide a Foucauldian intervention into Rubin’s argument that women are oppressed because they are relegated to reproductive labor. Rubin’s argument proves problematic for many women, especially women of color who, like Japanese rural women, have always performed both productive and reproductive labor. For these women, societal and national discourse does not merely limit or subjugate them to the role of “reproductive laborer” but, rather, *creates* different historically and culturally specific roles for them. These roles depend and change based on Japan’s nationalistic needs but also, descriptively, on the labor these women perform and how that labor is portrayed in the media and by the laborers themselves. Thus, the notion of controlling images of Japanese women that stem directly from labor combats Rubin’s argument by showing that the analytics of power that shaped them were not simply operating from top-down but actually originated from a variety of sources, and, thus, that rather than simply oppressing the modern Japanese woman, labor (with its necessary imagery) produced her.

⁷⁷ Michel Foucault and Robert Hurley, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 90.

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APPENDIX A:

My Two Parents

When I left home my parents
Told me always to behave myself.

On days when the rain falls,
On nights when the wind blows
I remember my parents.

Listen folks, because I want
To be filial to my parents
I crossed Miyama and came
All this way to suffer in Shinshû.

How bitter, how bitter I think, but
When I remember my parents it's not bitter.

Because I am poor, at age twelve
I was sold to this factory.
When my parents told me, "Now it is time to go"
My very heart wept tears of blood.

Let the year end, let the year end,
I want to fly to my parents' side.

Mother! I hate the season in the silk plant;
It's from 4:00 P.M. to 4:00 A.M....

I wish I could give my parents rice wine to drink,
And see their happy tears fall into the cup.

In this troubled world
I am just a silk-reeling lass,
But this lass wants to see
The parents who gave her birth.

Their letter says they are waiting for year's end.
Are they waiting more for the money than for me?

- Excerpted from Yamamoto Shigemi, *Aa nomugi tôge*, 390-1, reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, p. 101-2.