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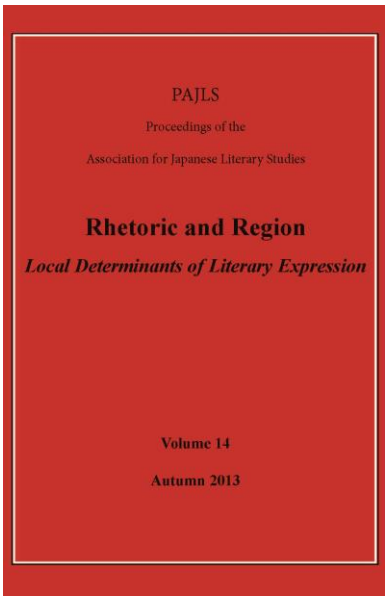

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Hirabayashi Taiko's Proletarian Fiction of the Worksite

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Introduction: From literature of experience to "researched" literature

In 1929 the Japanese proletarian literary movement was at its high point, with numerous works of fiction, drama, and literary theory dealing with the proletarian class struggle appearing in politically-motivated coterie magazines as well as in mainstream publications. For Hirabayashi Taiko (1905-1972), a writer deeply committed to the movement, it was also a year of extraordinary productivity. Aligned with the Marxist Worker Peasant Artists League (WPAL; Rōnō geijutsuka renmei) and its organ *Bungei sensen* (Literary battlefront; published 1925-1930), Hirabayashi sought to create literary works that would authentically depict the oppression of laborers under capitalism and their struggle against it, while contributing to the movement itself by inspiring class-consciousness.

Hirabayashi and other *Bungei sensen* writers, famously, opposed the doctrinaire Communist Party-influenced position of writers like Nakano Shigeharu and the journal *Senki* (Battle flag; published 1928-1931). The *Senki* faction, the All Japan Federation of Proletarian Arts (Zen Nihon Musansha Geijutsu Renmei or NAPF), was inclined to judge literary merit solely on the basis of conformity to party principles. However, while opposing the this group's policy of making literature a tool of politics, Hirabayashi and her colleagues were equally serious about purging literature of any vestigial bourgeois ideology and making it fully of, by, and for the revolutionary proletarian class. The influence of Soviet fiction and literary theory was particularly important during this period.

At age twenty-four, Hirabayashi had lived through intense experiences and suffering in her life as an impoverished activist-writer. She was already an accomplished writer of fiction with well-developed ideas of what it meant to create socialist literature. Her most powerful works had taken the form of "I-novel"-like personal narratives strongly based on her own experience. "In the Charity Ward" (Seryōshitsu nite; 1927), chronicling her experience giving birth to, and losing, a child in a Salvation Army hospital in Manchuria, is the most acclaimed of these.[1] Now, spurred by the demand within the proletarian literary movement for literature that would better express the perspective of the laboring class, she tried her hand at a different type of fiction. Namely, she undertook to portray, in objective fashion, the labor and class struggle within a factory or other sites of labor. Such works would be "art created through research" (*shirabeta geijutsu*) characterized by "consciousness of purpose" (*mokuteki ishiki*), to use phrases popularized by Aono

[1] This essay refers to the standard edition of Hirabayashi's collected works. Hirabayashi Taiko, *Hirabayashi Taiko zenshū*, 12 vols. (Ushio shuppan, 1979). Hereafter cited as HTZ.

Suekichi, the main theorist of *Bungei sensen*. As she explained some years later, in 1935, in an essay entitled "My Early Works" (Shojosaku no koro):

> With the completion of "In the Charity Ward" I realized that there is a limit to how far the "fiction of experience," [*taiken shōsetsu*, i.e., autobiographical fiction], whose material eventually exhausts itself, can function as proletarian fiction. Simultaneously, I also realized that the class-consciousness that had developed from consciousness of my personal experiences was inherently limited and could not take me beyond writing this fiction of experience. This was an agonizing realization. The torment was not mine alone. During this period of general exhaustion for laborer-writers, it was considered essential to expand one's experience-based consciousness to keep in step with social developments.[2]

To demonstrate Hirabayashi's efforts in this direction, this essay will give particular focus to "The Track-Laying Train" (Fusetsu ressha; 1929) and "Comrades in the Soap Factory" (Sekken kōjō no dōshi; 1930), two works written in a ruthlessly objective style intended to expose the mechanics of capitalist oppression and the struggle against it in the workplace itself – the ground zero of the proletarian struggle. There has been little scholarly attention given to these non-autobiographical, conceptual proletarian works, but they are critical parts of her oeuvre. This is not only because they embody the author's own self-proclaimed intent to produce a particular type of literature. They also are among her most skilled creations. More than this, they represent the fullest development of her efforts to create a comprehensive depiction of a work site – a unit of production in the capitalist system.

To do this, Hirabayashi constructed complex literary spaces using a variety of techniques prevalent in modernist fiction of the time. These techniques enabled her to portray the class struggle in a variety of dimensions, without losing the ability to portray the development of class-consciousness as she had done so effectively in her autobiographical narratives. Seen this way, "The Track-Laying Train" and other stories represent, not a rejection of autobiographical narration (to which she would return in postwar works like "This Kind of Woman" [Kō iu onna; 1946]), but an attempt to more fully achieve the same aims that motivated the latter using different, expanded techniques.

Hirabayashi's autobiographical proletarian fiction

Hirabayashi was born to an impoverished, though not destitute, farming family in Nagano prefecture. She encountered Russian literature at an early age and resolved to become a writer. At the Suo Girls' Middle School, in an experience common to students of these institutions, she was exposed to feminist, socialist, and other progressive ideas. As she wrote: "All in all, this school atmosphere was a blessing for us: when we would otherwise have had our feelings imprisoned by

[2] "Shojosaku no koro," HTZ IX: 381-382.

boring, feminine matters, we were able to develop an interest in literature, socialism, and other such things."[3] Hirabayashi moved to Tokyo following her graduation, taking a job as a switchboard operator. That year, she met Yamamoto Torazō, an anarchist, and moved in with him. They soon ran out of money and lived hand-to-mouth doing various jobs; they were detained by police in the aftermath of the Kantō earthquake of 1923. The following year, they went to Manchuria, where Yamamoto was imprisoned for political agitation. Hirabayashi gave birth to a baby girl in a charity hospital ward, but the baby died shortly after of malnutrition. Hirabayashi returned alone to Japan to begin writing fiction in earnest.

"In the Charity Ward," "Self-contempt" (Azakeru), and "Throw it Away!" (Nagesuteyo!), all published in 1927, along with other works, draw from her experiences in the anarchist and socialist movements, and deal graphically and dramatically with poverty, sexual relations, violence, illness, and other aspects of living in activist circles, all with a keen feminist perspective. While condemning the oppression of modern capitalism, Hirabayashi also trains her critical gaze on the contradictions and hypocrisy found within the movement itself, particularly in the treatment of females by their male comrades. The "I-novel"-like unfolding of the thoughts and experiences of her protagonists is conducted with consummate skill.

The three works cited above create a composite picture of a protagonist engaged in a desperate struggle as a proletarian activist. In "Throw it Away!" the protagonist, Mitsuyo, is pregnant and is accompanying her partner, Komura, to stay with his brother, the president of a railway company, in Dalian, Manchuria. Mitsuyo cooks for the Chinese laborers and performs chores for the brother's wife. Eventually, Komura is turned in to police by his brother for the crime of lese-majesty and imprisoned. The penniless Mitsuyo goes to a Salvation Army women's home to prepare to give birth. "Charity Ward" describes this experience, but is far more developed in its use of personal narrative and physical description. Mitsuyo's partner, here, has been imprisoned for a "terrorist" plot, and she too awaits prison once she has given birth. Mitsuyo suffers from severe beriberi and observes with horror the inhumane treatment of the patients. She finally gives birth to a baby girl. She hopes to avoid nursing the baby with her diseased milk, but when she realizes that the hospital does not value its patients' lives at all, she resolves to nurse the baby, who dies shortly after. The story drives home the total hypocrisy of the charity hospital. "Self-Mockery" is based on events following Hirabayashi's return to Japan. Yoshiko, the protagonist, is living with an anarchist poet, Koyama, who has no income. Desperate for money, she sleeps with another radical, Yada, in return for an insignificant "loan" of money. Poverty also leads Yoshiko and her colleagues to do such things as steal bamboo shoots from a neighbor's grove and to extort money from a company. Yoshiko becomes pregnant but has a miscarriage.

These narratives can be identified as proletarian fiction by their commentary placing the female protagonist and her comrades in the proletarian struggle against capitalism. They constitute a literature of struggle – the struggles of the female protagonist to endure poverty, police persecution, unstable relationships, and other hardships of the radical lifestyle, while striving for

[3] Abe Namiko, *Hirabayashi Taiko: hana ni mi o* (Musashino shobō, 1986), 35.

personal growth and liberation from traditional social constraints. The perspective is that of the thoughts and experiences of individual protagonists. However, as suggested by Hirabayashi's own comments, this literature does not fully delve into the lives of actual wage laborers, or show the structural foundations of their oppression. It is also questionable whether the protagonists, who tend to be educated and from reasonably comfortable backgrounds, have fully achieved unity with the proletariat.

Corporeality and ideology

Apart from Hirabayashi's proletarian ideology, two of the main characteristics of her writing that have been noted by critics are the raw corporeality and the shocking imagery of Hirabayashi's writing. Many of her works contain blunt descriptions of sweat, odors, and bodily functions that can be jarring and unpleasant. "Charity Ward" is full of images of illness, breastfeeding, diapers, and the like; while "Self-Mockery" describes the protagonist's fatigue and feeling of physical ugliness associated with her act of prostitution. Bert Scruggs, in his discussion of the Taiwanese proletarian writer Yang Kui (who wrote in Japanese), has referred to a "misery aesthetic" that was derided as "shit-realism" by the Taiwan-based novelist and critic Nishikawa Mitsuru.[4] Hirabayashi, who actually made night soil an important component of her story "Labor" (Rōdō; 1929), certainly had such an aesthetic.

Thematically, Hirabayashi's stories include shocking incidents like rapes, infanticides, and worker deaths. Linda Flores has examined Hirabayashi's early works, and Japanese commentary on them, emphasizing the "corporeality" of her work and focusing on her depictions of maternity and infanticide.[5] Flores surveys the theoretical arguments in the proletarian literary movement that influenced Hirabayashi, but argues that focusing on proletarian ideology has obscured the function of Hirabayashi's depictions of the body. She demonstrates how Hirabayashi constructs the maternal body as "both the site of ideological contest and the locus of expression," using corporeal imagery to disturb the reader and challenge his or her notions of normative female roles.

The popular writer Aramata Hiroshi has noted the physical and disturbing quality of Hirabayashi's fiction. He cites her "erotic" description of the pleasant feeling of breastfeeding – although the passage he quotes un-erotically compares the pressure of the breast milk to that of pus – but also the dreadful image of the hospital mortuary where autopsies are performed.[6] Aramata also cites another story, "Evening Wind" (Yokaze; 1928) which ends with a poor woman in a farming community killing her newborn baby.

Aramata does not, however, do justice to the revolutionary purpose informing all of Hirabayashi's fiction of this period. Literary scholar Ishikawa Naoko, for instance, argues that the

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[4] Bert Scruggs, "Narratives of Discomfort and Ideology: Yang Kui's Short Fiction and Postcolonial Taiwan Orthodox Boundaries," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 14:2 (Fall 2006): 427-447.
[5] Linda Flores, "Reading the Maternal Body in the Works of Hirabayashi Taiko," *Proceedings for the Association of Japanese Literary Studies* 5 (2004): 18-32.
[6] Aramata Hiroshi, *Puroretaria bungaku wa monosugoi* (Heibonsha shinsho, 2000), 126-138.

corporeal sensations and experiences of the protagonist in these stories are necessarily linked to the formation of her revolutionary resolve (*ketsui*):

> Resolve, arrived at through the medium of corporeal sensation: the acquisition by the narrator of "Charity Ward" of the capacity, mediated by her body, to relate to others and to oppose society, was surely what gave her the self-awareness needed to form the resolve appropriate to a proletarian activist. And this process of development itself, from one's physical body, to corporeal sensation, to viewing oneself objectively, to final resolve, was also the path by which Hirabayashi acquired the perspective of a proletarian author.[7]

Another scholar, Nishi Sōho, addressing "Charity Ward" from a different angle, also emphasizes the theme of resolve. He argues against earlier critics that the indirect infanticide (through declining to fight to obtain cow's milk for her baby) does not represent a retreat by the protagonist from her proletarian ideals, but rather a personal "defeat" which becomes, for purposes of the narrative, a foundation for a new determination.[8] Both Ishikawa and Nishi point out the obvious relevance of Aono Suekichi's principle of *mokuteki ishiki*. In short, when Hirabayashi shocks the reader, it is for a purpose. With an awareness of this purpose, the contrast between Hirabayashi's autobiographical works and her "researched" works seems less stark.

Toward a literature of the capitalist workplace

Through her autobiographical narratives, then, Hirabayashi developed an image of the proletarian activist, usually female, using an aesthetic of struggle and suffering and aiming to inspire revolutionary resolve. As suggested above, however, she also aimed to create more universally relevant proletarian works, and this demanded a focus on the workplace. This essay will put special focus on fiction set exclusively at the proletarian workplace, but a number of Hirabayashi's other works dealing with labor lie somewhere between her primarily-autobiographical and her primarily-"researched" stories. That is, they often combine autobiographical elements with labor-centered narratives involving tenement farmers or silk factory workers in Nagano, which would have been familiar subjects for Hirabayashi. A few examples will illustrate this.

"With the Pupas" (Sanagi to issho ni; 1927) tells the tale of the sad death of Okei, a girl of about twelve who works in a silk factory. When a factory inspection takes place, Okei's manager, Ishida, attempts to hide her in a silk drying room, where he tries to molest her and then locks her in. After spending time with the visiting inspectors, who are to spend the night with female factory workers as a bribe, he returns to the room to find that Okei has died from the heat and fumes.

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[7] Ishikawa Naoko, "Puroretaria bungaku ni okeru 'shintai'-sei: Hirabayashi Taiko 'Seryōshitsu nite' ni arawareta 'watashi' no mondai," in *Hirabayashi Taiko kenkyū* (Nagoya: Shinshū shirakaba, 1985), 103.

[8] Nishi Sōho, "Hirabayashi Taiko 'Seryōshitsu nite' ron: sōshitsu sareru kodomo no shiten kara," *Fukuoka Jogakuin Daigaku kiyō* 15 (February 2005): 97-114.

"Pupas" combines themes of sexual exploitation with an indictment of the corruption of the factory system.

"The Beating" (Naguru; 1928) follows the life history of Ginko, the daughter of a poor farming family who grows up watching her father beat her mother. When she comes of age, she travels to Tokyo, works as switchboard operator, and finally moves in with Isokichi, a male laborer. Once they are a couple, Isokichi begins to act like Ginko's father, getting drunk and beating her. At the story's close, Ginko sees Isokichi beaten by his foreman, and when she tries to intervene, is beaten by Isokichi himself. He has internalized his own oppression and directed it toward his partner. It is a brutal portrayal of the persistent cultural reproduction of violence. While the events resemble those in Hirabayashi's life, the degree of poverty and domestic violence suffered by Ginko, and her lack of an intellectual life, mark her as a much more purely "proletarian" character.

"Evening Wind" (Yokaze; 1928) is a relatively loosely organized tale of episodes in the farming community inhabited by Osen, a widow who lives with her brother, Suekichi, and is pregnant with the child of an itinerant farmhand. The local landlord is trying to buy off the farmers' land to expand a silk factory. Her brothers, who struggle against the landlord, transfer their resentment to Osen. Several small-scale revolts by farmers and factory workers take place, but Osen, abused by Suekichi for her unwanted pregnancy, gives birth alone and kills her baby. "The Cart" (Niguruma; 1928), also centered on a silk farm, combines a number of familiar themes – a laboring couple, a spontaneous worker revolt – and recycles the story of Okei's death in "With the Pupas."

In these stories, Hirabayashi presents of number of proletarian motifs in a sometimes-ambiguous way, especially regarding the oppression of women. For instance, Ikeda in "Pupas" is disgusted by the practice of prostituting female workers but himself oppresses Okei and kills her as a result of panicked behavior, not intentionally. In "Beating," a clear distinction is not made between the "feudal" violence against women prevalent in farming communities and that caused directly by capitalism. In "Evening Wind," the brothers' forceful reclaiming of their rice from their landlord is a small proletarian victory that is completely destroyed by Osen's act of infanticide. This ambiguity is not necessarily a weakness, but it may suggest some ideological uncertainty.

Here, I do not wish to impute to Hirabayashi some simplified progression from autobiographical to non-autobiographical fiction. Nevertheless, her increasing interest in portraying worker *communities* rather than individual workers is evident. Moreover, in "The Beating," Hirabayashi employs a modernistic technique of linking together short scenes, with little transitory narration and an objective, defamiliarized tone. She repeats words such as *naguru*, "strike" or "beat," and related expressions several times in the text, creating passages that resemble prose poems. Ginko emerges as a reproduction of her own mother, doomed by her lack of proletarian consciousness to suffer the fate she had struggled to escape. Hirabayashi herself regarded "Beating" as a new phase in her writing. Continuing in the 1935 discussion of her early work cited above:

> Based on my own sense of things, [the year after "Charity Ward"] I wrote "Evening Wind" and "The Cart." They were not terrible failures, but they were not so successful as to fully assure me that I was going in the right direction. I then wrote "The Beating." If "Charity Ward" was the thesis, and "Evening Wind" the antithesis, then "The Beating" was meant as a kind of synthesis, a third type of work that was neither autobiographical nor anti-autobiographical.[9]

With this approach, Hirabayashi would be able to move decisively beyond the limits of autobiographical fiction as proletarian fiction.

Mystery, horror, and a soy sauce factory

To adequately depict the capitalist workplace in a class-conscious matter, Hirabayashi needed to research the process of production and the material organization of the site she wished to depict. This type of "researched fiction" was common in the proletarian movement, with well-known examples like Hayama Yoshiki's "Letter in a Cement Barrel" (Semento daru no naka no tegami; 1926) and Sata Ineko's "From the Caramel Factory" (Kyarameru kōba kara; 1928). Further, it had many precedents in earlier proletarian literature – for instance, Miyajima Sukeo's "The Miner" (Kōfu; 1916) and even an identically titled "researched" narrative by none other than Natsume Sōseki (Kōfu; 1908). It is clear that Hirabayashi did her research. However, there was also the question of how to present the material. Here, Hirabayashi departed from the more flowing, stream-of-experience style of autobiographical fiction, to use tricks from popular fiction and experimental techniques typical of modernist fiction

Hirabayashi's writing of generic fiction, revolving around plot devices, predated her autobiographical writing: following her return from Manchuria she wrote a number of children's stories and mysteries, with the simple aim of making money. "The Spy Incident" (Supai jiken; 1925) is a cleverly constructed tale of Honda, a socialist activist who is accused by his comrades of spying for the police. Honda defends himself by explaining that he has recently discovered that someone who looks exactly like himself was working for the municipal police. Honda took advantage of this fact to spy on the police, only to learn that the police officer, in identical manner, was spying on the socialists! This completely implausible scenario, with a twist at the end, is written mainly to entertain, but it is pro-socialist in its (subtle) depiction of the police as villains.

"The Soy Sauce Factory" (Shōyu kōjō; 1929) builds up to a gruesome surprise ending reminiscent of mystery or horror fiction. However, there had been serious labor disturbances at the Noda Soy Sauce Company only the year before the story's publication, so it was clearly intended

[9] HTZ IX: 382.

as a response to those events.[10] The story opens with a group of bourgeois ladies, whom the narrative mocks for their clothing and plumpness, touring a soy sauce factory in Chōshi, Chiba prefecture – still the site of the Yamasa Soy Sauce Company, which offers factory tours. A perfectly orchestrated tour shows workers in clean uniforms enjoying leisurely breaks, but a few women wander into the wrong building where they witness a ghastly scene of swarms of workmen staggering in darkness under a mold-coated ceiling carrying heavy bags of soy grounds from which the liquid is pressed. Whisked back to the regular tour, and quickly forgetting what they have seen, the women are taken to see a giant vat of soy sauce in the process of aging. The director offers to show them how the sauce is stirred using pressurized air. When a technician pulls the switch, a giant pillar of soy sauce shoots into the air. With it flies up a human body – one of the workers they just saw in the pressing room. One lady after another faints from shock.

While one hesitates to say so, the story is entertaining in its setting up the ignorant, complacent, vain bourgeois ladies (*kifujin*) for their sudden introduction to reality. The plot trick is combined with other themes common in Hirabayashi's fiction: the frivolous bourgeoisie; the managers' comically awkward attempts to cover up unpleasant realities; and the use not just of ugly realism but also of descriptors that give ordinary objects a grotesque quality – notably, the soy sauce is regularly compared to blood. Hirabayashi also alludes to the larger economic pressures that spur the drive for high productivity:

> In a spacious reception room on which hung a framed inscription of the words "Industrial Spirit,"[11] the company president, feeling slightly self-conscious in the presence of the other executives, presented to the visiting group of ladies shipping figures inflated to about two and half times the actual amount.[12]

Further, the story demonstrates a basic tactic that Hirabayashi would use much more subtly in subsequent proletarian narratives: that of describing, in objective detail, the layout of a rationalized capitalist system of production – a factory – and then showing how its ostensibly humane, beneficial façade masks the reality of brutal oppression and the sacrifice of human lives.

"The Track-Laying Train" (1929)

As with "Soy Sauce Factory," "The Track-Laying Train" and related works published by Hirabayashi circa 1929 are obvious products of a literary agenda based on contemporary events.

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[10] Stephen S. Large, *Organized Workers and Socialist Politics in Interwar Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 118-120.

[11] The phrase *sangyō damashii* was the slogan for reforms implemented by Mogi Shichirōemon, president of the Noda Soy Sauce Company (now Kikkōman) following labor disputes of 1928. See http://www.net-ir.ne.jp/ir_magazine/pioneer/vol038_2801.html. This account in the entrepreneurial journal IR Magazine, completely opposite to Hirabayashi's story, credits company policy with instilling better ethics and a working spirit in employees.

[12] HTZ I: 273.

In recent years Japan had been the site of intense labor activism, and there was a surge of strikes, which had been taking place throughout the 1920s, at factories producing food, textiles, and machinery and at docks and other public facilities. Nationwide concern with the labor struggle extended abroad to the struggles of Chinese workers employed by Japanese entities affiliated with the Japanese-controlled South Manchuria Railway Zone. Manchuria supplied subject matter for well-known writers like Yosano Akiko and Yokomitsu Riichi.

Hirabayashi obviously drew on her experience in Manchuria to construct this story of a Japanese track-laying convoy making use of Chinese "coolie" labor, but the materials for the story were the product of research:

> To write the anti-imperialist story "The Track-Laying Train," I went to the Tokyo branch of the South Manchuria Railway Company and borrowed their photograph album, and looking at that and the company yearbooks, I wrote it using my imagination.[13]

The story describes the track-laying convoy, manned by Chinese workers who labor to the point of utter exhaustion. It originated in Taonan and is bound for the heart of Manchuria. The Japanese managers are concerned that the Chinese workers are stealing supplies. One, Samejima, has developed an antipathy to Zhang (Chō in Japanese), who is a subversive hiding from authorities, planning to organize workers. Much of the theft is being carried out by rats, which cause an outbreak of a viral infection that begins to kill workers. One day a Japanese manager trying to flush out the alleged thieves shoots and kills a worker. Unable to tolerate the situation, the workers demand that they be returned to Taonan to be hospitalized. When the company refuses, they decide to commandeer the locomotive to return to Taonan themselves. The story ends with the liberated workers speeding along the track they have built with a new life and energy.

"Track-Laying Train" has an objective, journalistic tone clearly derived, in part, from the researched nature of the material. More important in creating this tone, though, is Hirabayashi's de-emphasis on individual personality and experience in order to portray the workspace as a collective system of production determined by impersonal economic forces. This she does through presenting a series of scenes that cumulatively portray the breakdown of Japanese control over the laborers. As with "Beating," her approach draws on the literary modernism current at the time. Depictions of the landscape of Manchuria itself as a vast, harsh, infinite space accentuate the "frontier"-like tension of the enterprise.

The train is a literal extension of Japanese national capitalism into China. Its nature and function are shown through extensive technical description. In particular, the various cars and spaces are enumerated and described in detail using unfamiliar terminology: scenes take place at the barracks cars (*shukueisha*), the locomotive (*kikansha*), or the mess tent (*shokuryō tenmaku*). The movement of the train expresses the nature of its mission. It moves slowly forward every day to the worksite (*genba*), and periodically backs up to the supply train. The workers proceed in a

[13] Tanaka Masuzō, *Nagaku kiiroi michi: Manshū, josei, sengo* (Serabi shobō, 2006), 34.

series of crews, laying the sleepers, followed by the rails; spikes are then pounded in, and bends straightened out, each step performed by a crew desperate to keep up with the crew ahead and to keep ahead of the crew coming from behind. Workers are regularly beaten and punished for real or imagined infractions. At night, searchlights shine from an armored car manned by armed guards, supposedly to protect the convoy from native bandits, but mainly to prevent workers from running away.

The rationalized system of production, which places productivity above all, is founded on the ruthless exploitation of workers. The depiction of the workspaces highlights the irony, the gap between façade and reality. The food tent, for instance, houses the rats that spread disease. The barracks cars for the workers are really prison cells that lock from the outside (while the Japanese enjoy air vents and tatami mats), and the searchlights and armed guards allegedly protecting the crew from bandits are really there to keep workers from abandoning the project.

In response to worsening conditions, the rebellion instigated by Zhang is accepted collectively by the workers almost immediately. Rebellion spreads like the rat-borne infection, but the diseased entity is the capitalist system of production, with rebellion representing the beginnings of a new, healthy community. As in "Soy Sauce Factory," economic pressures are alluded to: the railway company has a deal with authorities of Dongsan province and stands to profit greatly if they complete the railway in an almost impossibly short period of time.

The project is overseen by Japanese engineers, administrators, and other professionals. They live in intimate contact with the Chinese workers, but their role is to press for productivity and screen out dangerous socialist thought. Consequently, almost every interaction between the Japanese and the Chinese is one of conflict. The Chinese are constantly accused of stealing things. When Samejima asks some workers if they know who might be stealing, "The workers were struck by amazement that Samejima was in good enough physical condition to be concerned about such things." Later, in the incident leading up to the shooting, an older, toothless man defies the Japanese manager:

> "What do you mean, snatching things like rats? It *is* rats who are stealing the things, so of course that's how they do it! Look at me – the other night I removed my dentures to sleep, and they took those. You people are not the only ones having things stolen."

To which the irate manager replies:

> "Listen to your nonsense! All Chinese are thieves – that's the way the world works. I've never met a single Chinese who didn't steal. Beat it, little old man."[14]

[14] HTZ I: 290.

The Japanese managers are depicted as somewhat hapless, acting under pressure from the company, which justifies its abuses on the grounds that entire nation's interest is vested in the railway construction. "Of what consequence are some floods? Of what consequence are the coolies?"[15] Even the supervisor who shot a worker realizes that the act did not come from his individual will, but rather was an expression of the will of the company. The capitalist system, here shown in its international, imperialist iteration, is the ultimate enemy.

"Comrades in the Soap Factory" (1930)

"Comrades in the Soap Factory" takes a similar approach to "Track-Laying Train" in its portrayal of an individual unit of production as a function of the capitalist system. Again, a collective portrait of the work-unit, with little indication of the thoughts and personalities of characters, is presented through a series of short scenes. Technical descriptions lay out the structure and function of the factory. The theme, again, is the organization of labor, though rather than commit outright rebellion the aim of the workers is simply to unionize.

The narrative begins in a factory district in the metropolitan area in early morning. Chiyoko, a young female employee of the Inoue Ōka Soap Factory, picks up a labor newspaper with an insert urging female workers, who work under conditions even worse than male laborers, to contact the union in order to join. Meanwhile, the factory chief is worrying about the possibility of the "reddening" or Communization of his factory. He is frightened by the seemingly superhuman power of the labor movement agitators, and sneaks around the factory trying to observe the workers' reactions to labor agitation.

Later, the female trainees have all become full employees except Yoshiko, who is too young and thus receives lower pay. As labor continues in very dangerous conditions, the management pressures workers to take part in a "productivity week." A worker has his hand crushed in a machine; no treatment is available. Under these circumstances, Chiyoko announces that she will join the union, and as if by previous agreement, one worker after another agrees. The union movement has come to life.

Hirabayashi uses details imaginatively to suggest the workers' lifestyles and recreate the atmosphere of tension in the factory within which revolt is fomenting. For instance:

> "Hey, Miss!"
>
> In her surprise at being called, Chiyoko imagined she had dropped the new diamond hairpin she had bought two days ago. She raised her hand to her hair as she turned around.
>
> She was near what was, in form alone, an emergency exit belonging to Dai Nippon Rubber. However, it had never been opened, with fresh orange paint newly applied to both the iron door and the closed lock.

[15] HTZ I: 298.

> It was a police officer calling. Seeing that Chiyoko had stopped, he ran over to her with his left hand grasping the sword at his side.
>
> "Was there a women here just now handing out some kind of newspaper?"[16]

Here we are presented the main themes of the story in miniature. Workers are wary of the authorities, who for their part fear labor unrest and attempt to forestall it. Chiyoko is not a converted revolutionary but a consumer, as the hairpin indicates. Yet she cannot fail to see how unsatisfactory the conditions are for workers, especially women, in the factory. The painted-over exit shows the lack of attention to safety. Employees work in dangerous conditions and will not be cared for by the company if they become disabled. Young girls such as Yoshiko are exploited as "trainees" with low pay.

The factory itself is portrayed as an organism, or perhaps more accurately an inorganic, malevolent nexus of productive factors with inhuman, harsh qualities:

> The 6:30 siren thudded on the factory roofs like heavy cotton. The eastward concrete walls of the Oriental Slate Company had turned white as the sun rose, and the tide rose in the lattice-like network of drainage ditches that ran throughout the factory district. Under the morning air the water rose like the blue veins in the palm of one's hand. Somewhere a sewage opening gurgled and coughed as it sucked in air, at the same time spewing out dirty water from the Greater Japan Rubber Company.[17]

The guardians of capitalism – the managers – are again portrayed not as evil villains but as, unconsciously perhaps, fearfully working to preserve the status quo. Hirabayashi's description of the factory chief's thoughts, and subsequent prowling around the factory, show the narrowness of his vision, with a touch of humor. Ironically, while the working environment is unhealthy and dangerous, one manager regards "disease" as consisting of worker unrest, which needs to be quelled:

> The labor movement [he thought] was just like the bacteria that caused lung disease. Germs exist inside everybody's lungs, but if one's physical health is good, the disease does not develop. The company president had used that metaphor to him once. The "physical health" referred to in his theory, in this case, certainly did not mean labor conditions or the living conditions of workers. (Capitalists are always passionate spiritualists when they are dealing with laborers.) What he meant by physical health was the thoroughness of the factory manager's supervision.
>
> He wanted to know what the female workers' reaction had been to pamphlets such as the ones from this morning. With the supervisors away at lunch, thinking to check on

[16] HTZ I: 301.
[17] HTZ I: 301.

> their work performance, he took out old khaki colored boot covers from a bamboo basket in the veranda and pulled them over his boots. Cautiously treading on the soles of his feet like a cat, he walked down the hall to the packaging room.[18]

The disease metaphor is fully ironic, of course: the factory, objectively, stands for ill health, while the movement to unionize represents health. The ending shows workers, shocked by the accident they have witnessed, coming together spontaneously, with the youthful, vulnerable Chiyoko appearing empowered for the first time:

> Sighing softly, they all returned to their workplaces. But they did not get back to work immediately. Everyone gathered beneath the bent, sagging belt that had come off. They spoke excitedly.
>
> "We just can't have this kind of thing happening. It's unbelievably dangerous."
>
> "At times like this having a labor union would be a big help. Look, why don't just we in this room agree to join and send a letter to the place in the newspaper?"
>
> Chiyoko boldly spoke her thoughts, which she had been considering saying for a while now.
>
> "Yes, I've had exactly the same thought. But will just us in this room be enough?"[19]

"Soap Factory" is written to fulfill an assignment almost identical to that motivating "Track-Laying Train": to portray oppressive conditions within a work unit and the organization of workers to rebel against them, using technical descriptions, metaphors of disease and health, and an emphasis on collective rather than individual consciousness. Of the two, "Track-Laying Train" is the more interesting to read, with its setting in a transnational, contested colonial space, its dramatic scenes of violence, murder, and rats, and its use of markers of national difference such as fragments of Chinese language. On the other hand, "Soap Factory" may have made for more effective propaganda within Japan, with its less exotic Japanese setting and its clear and feasible call for unionization, intelligently targeted at young female workers. Rather than a murder or a body shooting up in the air, the incident that spurs unionization is a man's mangled hand. Rather than violently confronting the company, the workers quietly organize. Nevertheless, Hirabayashi succeeds in creating a disturbing, defamiliarized space with ominous undertones.

Conclusions

In these worksite-centered works of proletarian fiction, Hirabayashi uses a variety of techniques to create works of revolutionary literature. The content is intended to correctly depict the conditions of class oppression as well as to inspire workers to organize. The portrayal of oppressive

[18] HTZ I: 305.
[19] HTZ I: 308.

conditions, and the awakening of laborers to these conditions, is done on a collective rather than individual basis. While the intolerable working conditions are highlighted with graphic description, an unambiguously positive message of the potential for change is also presented.

Hirabayashi constructs a variety of literary spaces within which class conflict is played out, ranging in scale from the small spaces inhabited by individual characters to the transnational spaces of the capitalist and imperialist systems. If Hirabayashi's autobiographical fiction presented the body as the site of class conflict, her workplace fiction presents that conflict in larger spaces, while retaining the physicality of the struggle. Techniques of shock and defamiliarization alert the reader of the abuses of capitalism, including a misery aesthetic that uses realistic description but manipulates that realism for maximum shock effect. The use of technical jargon and the language of technocratic organization are contrasted with the actual purpose of the capitalist system, which is to exploit human beings for their labor. Innocuous practices like "productivity weeks" are shown to be part of a drive for murderous efficiency.

In contested capitalistic and colonial spaces, things are often the opposite of what they are supposed to be. Just as the women's charity ward is really a place for the unproductive or subversive to die, sleeping barracks are prisons and a mess tent a vector for disease. By contrast, the labor movement, regarded by capitalism as an illness or infection, actually represents health and life, growing organically in opposition to the mechanized system of capitalism. The struggle and suffering of workers leads to their collective revolutionary resolve.

Hirabayashi's fiction of the worksite shows a strong affinity with literary modernism. In particular, the creation of "objective" literary spaces – in contrast with the "subjective" stream of experience that dominates in autobiographical fiction – is achieved through modernist techniques. The use of journalistic facts and figures, or technical jargon, may seem like an impartial, factual technique, but Hirabayashi manipulates these materials to create a sense of distance and objectivity. Suspense and ratiocination, the features of detective fiction, also contribute to the "scientific" effect of the narrative.

Seiji Lippitt has described early Shōwa-period modernism as involving a move from interior spaces to the larger urban or transnational landscape:

> Against the dominant topographies of Taishō-period (1912-1926) fiction, which tended to focus on enclosed, interior spaces, modernism moves out onto the streets, beyond the boundaries of the private and domestic worlds and onto the fluidity of city space. These urban landscapes, situated both in Tokyo and at the borders of the nation-state, stage a certain disturbance or unsettlement in the experience of Japanese modernity.[20]

The development of Hirabayashi's proletarian fiction follows an analogous trajectory, moving from more interior, subjective narrative spaces, out into the chaotic, alienated, public world of the capitalist workspace. The fragmented subjectivity and sense of rootlessness that result

[20] Seiji M. Lippitt, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 7.

ultimately demand some sort of resolution. Hence, as Lippitt suggests, the turning of some modernist writers like Yokomitsu Riichi to new forms of nationalism. For a proletarian writer like Hirabayashi, a solution was already suggested – that of the revolutionary organization of workers. This solution is the necessary resolution of the conflicts that she portrays.

These workplace narratives were not a final resting point for Hirabayashi's proletarian art. She returned to more loosely-organized, plot-based narratives, for instances, in "The Proletarian Star" (Puroretariya no hoshi; 1931) and "The Proletarian Woman" (Puroretariya no onna; 1932). These combine domestic and workplace scenes with a longer drama revolving around a circle of activist men and women and the conflicts they encounter between revolutionary activism, on one hand, and romantic relationships and other private matters on the other. In a sense, she was revisiting the issues of her autobiographical narratives, but on a larger, impersonal scale. These works are notable in their assumption that a popular audience involved in or familiar with the proletarian movement existed to read these stories. This attests to the significant growth of the labor movement in Japan at the time (despite its ultimate suppression by the mid-1930s), but also to the artistic achievements of Hirabayashi and other proletarian writers in preparing an audience to receive their work. As this essay has shown, the creation of an activist literature centered on the workplace was a challenging undertaking, and few succeeded at it like Hirabayashi.