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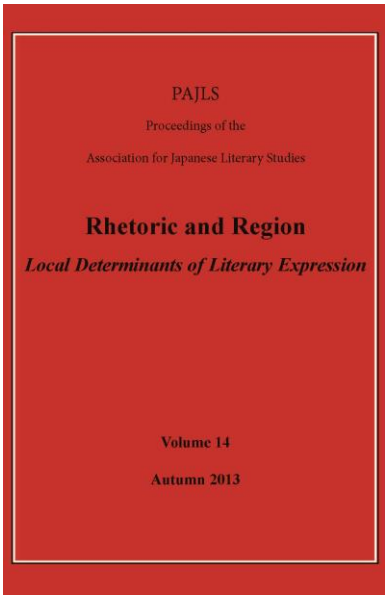

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Against the Storm: The Postwar Japanese Culture through the Real Voices of Working Women, 1946-1950

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Introduction

The immediate postwar period in Japan was devastating and chaotic. Problems severely affecting Japanese people's everyday lives were numerous and serious -- the aftermath of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, destruction of the cities and the industries, starvation due to food shortage, repatriation from the overseas Japanese colonies, persistence of fascism, and the Allied Occupation and its control.[1]

Japanese people's lives after the war were actually severer than in the wartime. During this challenging time, a Japanese women's magazine *Hataraku fujin* (*Working Women)*) was reissued in April 1946 by "Nihon Minshu-shugi Bunka Renmei" (Japanese Democratic CultureFederation) under the directorship of Nakano Shigeharu (1902-1979), a Marxist writer, poet, and critic. This

[1] Hunger was one of the most serious problems Japanese people suffered from at the end of the war. The Ministry of Finance reported that due to a severe food shortage 10 million people starve to death in the fall of 1945. According to a survey, only 1.8% of elementary school children in Tokyo ate rice three times a day; 42.5% once a day; 42.9% no rice at all. Many people survived by eating so-called substitute foods such as potatoes and pumpkins. Between 1946 and 1948, people actually starved to death by living strictly on rationed rice. Almost all people barely managed to survive by means of black markets. On October 11, 1947, Yamaguchi Yoshitada (1913-1947), Tokyo District Court Judge, died of malnutrition at the age of 34 because he refused to survive by black markets. Under the extremely pressing circumstances, the humanitarian effort of GHQ's food supply to Japan was significant. Regarding the immediate postwar period, see John Dower's *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of Defeat* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), Mikiso Hane's "The Postwar Years: Reform and Reconstruction," pp. 241-74 in his *Japanese History: A Historical Survey* (Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), Andrew Gordon's "Occupied Japan: New Departures and Durable Structures," pp. 226-43 in his *A Modern History of Japan: from Tokugawa Times to the Present* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), and Sharalyn Orbaugh's "The Allied Occupation," pp. 26-54 in her *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation: Vision, Embodiment, Identity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill's Japanese Studies Library, 2006).

Nearly 10% (7 million) of Japan's 1945 population of about 70 million needed to be repatriated from overseas Japanese colonies such as Manchuria, China including Hong Kong, Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, Chishima and Karafuto, Southeast/Southwest Asia and elsewhere. Regarding repatriation at the end of WWII, see Lori Watt's *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2009). Watt mentions that 5 million, or 77%, of overseas Japanese were repatriated through 1946 and that 95% were repatriated by 1950, but repatriation still continued till 1995 and beyond. See Watt, p. 39 and p. 77. Many Japanese never returned home.

Though the war criminals were arrested and punished and the conglomerates which supported the nation's war were dismantled by the GHQ, fascism was not completely wiped out from the society because the occupation policy was not carried out thoroughly. For instance, the economic de-concentration program was not implemented successfully. The anti-trust law was often revised after1949, gradually becoming lenient according to the changes of the occupation policy. By the mid-1950s, the war criminals were released, and the government officials who had been purged were de-purged by the early 1950s.

magazine was, in fact, originally published in January 1932 during the 15 Year War, and its editor was Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951), a Marxist-feminist writer, critic, and member of NAPF (All Japanese Federation of Proletarian Arts) and then later KOPF (Japan Proletarian Culture Federation).[2] It was, however, forced to be suspended after only several issues because of the wartime Peace Preservation Law, which systematically oppressed not only the Marxists but also liberals.

In the inaugural issue of *Working Women* in April 1946, the editorial board declares that they are absolutely determined to make it a fine magazine this time by providing knowledge, pleasure, and comfort for those working women, who earnestly wish to improve their lives. Affiliated with the legalized Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the magazine continued to be published until August 1950, when it halted abruptly.[3] This sudden discontinuation was apparently due to a geo-political effect of the Korean War, which broke out on June 25 of the year, and the growing severity of the Red Purge.[4] Thus, the fate of this magazine was historically deeply affected by the imperialisms of Japan and America. Japanese aggression in Asia in the early 1930s led to the failure of this magazine because it was openly critical to the nation's imperial war; in 1949-50

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[2] It was a monthly magazine. The Federation includes the following associations – "Shin Nihon Bungakukai (New Japanese Literature Association); "Shin Nihon Kajin Kyōkai" (New Japanese Poets Association); "Shin Engeki Kyōkai" (New Theater Society); "Jiyū Eigajin Shūdan" (Free Film Directors Society); "Shin Nihon Ishi Renmei" (New Japan Physicians Federation); "Jiyū Hōsōdan" (Free Attorneys Association); "Jidō Bungakusha Kyōkai" (Children's Writers Society); "Kanamojikai" (Katakana Society), and others. Except for above-mentioned physicians and attorneys' associations, the rest of these associations published their own periodicals. Their common aims were to build new Japan and to promote democracy by rejecting feudalism. Nakano Shigeharu was a central literary figure after the establishment of NAPF in 1928. Although temporarily converted from communism after being arrested in 1933, he did not change his basic leftist ideological position.

"The 15 Year War" is designated as the war from the Manchurian Incident in 1931 until the end of WWII. Miyamoto Yuriko was a KOPF's Central Committee member and head of its women's section. She was an editor from January to March 1932. She was actually unwilling to take up the task because she personally felt that editorship would somehow infringe her identity and pride as a novelist. She did her duty, considering it as an experience of a proletarian writer. When she became unable to remain its editor due to her arrest in April 1932 under the Peace Preservation Law, Sata Ineko (1904-1998) replaced her. See Kusabe Kazuko's "Miyamoto Yuriko to Puroretaria Fujin Undō" ("Miyamoto Yuriko and the Proletarian Women's Movement") in *Miyamoto Yuriko dokuhon* (*Miyamoto Yuriko Reader)*) (Tokyo: Awaji Shobō Shinsha, 1957). *Hataraku fujin* (*Working Women)* was established after *Senki* (Battle Banner), the NAPF's major organ then, and *Fujin senki* (Women Battle Banner) were abolished. NAPF is an abbreviation translated from the Esperanto "Nippona Proleta Artista Federatio" of "Zen Nihon Musansha Geijutsu Renmei." It was established in March 1928. KOPF is an abbreviation translated from the Esperanto "Federacio de Proletaj Kulture-onanizoj Japanaj" of "Nihon Puroretaria Bunka Renmei." It was established in October 1931.

[3] The Japanese Communist Party was established illegally in 1922. During the wartime, the communists were almost eradicated because of the Peace Preservation Law. After the war, GHQ released the arrested political dissidents and the JCP became legalized. On October 10, 1945, GHQ released about 3,000 people who were prosecuted by the Peace Preservation Law, of which about 800 were leftist political dissidents (mostly communists). Tokuda Kyūichi (1894-1953) and Miyamoto Kenji (1908-2007) were among them. See Joe Moore's *Japanese Workers and the Struggles for Power, 1945-1947* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 14.

[4] The MacArthur's "Red Purge" of the executive committees of the JCP occurred on June 6, 1950 and on August 30 he ordered dissolution of "Zenrōren" (All Labor Federation). Consequently, the JCP's organ *Akahata* (*Red Flag*) was discontinued. Takemae Eiji states that because of the "Red Purge" approximately 20,000 communists were removed from the civil service, public enterprises, private industry and the media of information in 1950. See his *Inside GHQ*, p. 485.

by putting pressure upon Japan, America was creating a strong capitalistic camp against a the socialist camps of the Soviet Union and China.

The first essay of the magazine's inaugural issue was Miyamoto Yuriko's "Haru tooshi" (Spring Is Not Here Yet).[5] She acutely analyzes the real difficulty of the nation's democracy and happiness of ordinary working women in postwar Japan when viewed from the perspective of the disappointing results of the first general election, which took place in April 1946. This was the first time in history that Japanese women gained universal suffrage.[6] As the title of the essay suggests, it sets the whole tone of the immediate postwar political climate for the working masses that she deeply cares and supports in her capacity as a serious and prudent political activist. Although a surprising number of women were elected, which was seemingly admirable, in her essay Miyamoto severely criticizes that they are not the true representatives of ordinary working women in that their backgrounds are neither closely nor meaningfully related to the masses. Her point is that one must closely examine the result of the election of April 10, 1946, despite the fact that as many as 39 women were successfully elected out of 79 female candidates in the first general election after the war. Five out of those 39 elected candidates even obtained the highest number of votes among all 464 elected members of the House of Representatives, which was a truly surprising result. As a serious problem for the nation's democratization, Miyamoto points out the fact of 140,000 voter registration omissions nationally resulted from the local government officials' irresponsibility. Judging from the occupations of each elected members of the Representatives, she does not define this election as truly "democratic." The Liberal Party gained the largest numbers (141 out of 464), yet the half (57) of them were either company presidents or executives.

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[5] See Miyamoto Yuriko, "Haru tooshi" (Spring Is Not Here Yet), *Working Women* (April, 1946; Issue 1), pp. 2-6.

[6] The US Occupation/GHQ's effort for Japan's democratization granted women's rights and gender equity. See "Document 1: The 1947 Constitution, Chapter 3: Rights and Duties of the People, Article 15: 'Universal adult suffrage is guaranteed with regard to the election of public officials'" in Jeff Kingston's *Japan in Transformation, 1952-2000* (Essex, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), p. 133. Universal male suffrage in Japan was realized in 1925. In comparison to other countries such as France (1945), Italy (1945), Belgium (1946), and East Germany and West Germany (1948), Japanese women's suffrage does not seem very late.

Though it is true that women's suffrage was granted by the US Occupation/GHQ, many politically conscious Japanese women, especially Hiratsuka (Haruko) Raichō (1886-1971) and Ichikawa Fusae (1893-1981) had been actively promoting the women's movement in order to raise their status, including women's suffrage since 1920, when "Shin Fujin Kyōkai" ("New Women's Society") was established as a political movement. As a result of the women's movement, women's participation in political speech became approved in 1922. Until then, women were prohibited from participating in political movements. In 1924, this Society was integrated and developed into "Fujin Sanseiken Kisei Dōmei" ("Women's Suffrage Realization Federation"). Japanese women's movement began with a women's magazine *Seitō* (Bluestocking) published by Hiratsuka (Haruko) Raichō's "Seitō-sha" ("Bluestocking Society") in 1911. Equality for women was the first of the "Five Major Reforms" ordered by GHQ. The other reforms were laborers' right to organize, abolishment of oppressive politics, liberalization of education, and democratization of economy. Uemura Chikako mentions that MacArthur and the GHQ leaders considered it crucial to integrate women into Japan's democratization, and yet that they were not necessarily active supporters of feminism. GHQ's expectation towards Japanese women was that they could play a new and significant role of constructing a democratic Japan. GHQ's general attitude towards women's liberation, according to Uemura, was that it could function as an aspect of Occupation policy in converting the prewar nation-state militaristic totalitarianism into a non-militaristic democratic nation. See Uemura's *Josei kaihō o meguru senryō seisaku* (*The Occupation Policy Regarding Women's Liberation),* (Tokyo: Keiso Shobō, 2007), p. 61.

Additionally 25 members were persons without a regular job, which means, according to Miyamoto, that they were in the privileged class, so that they did not have to work for living. She continues pointing out that even in the Socialist Party more than half of the elected members were such capitalists who do not appear to work for working masses and that even a number of war collaborators were elected. Regarding the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) which became legalized only 6 months before the election, Miyamoto mentions that 5 members were elected and that nearly 2 million people voted for the JCP candidates in the middle of all kinds of slanders cast upon them by other parties' candidates. In order to improve daily problems faced by the masses in postwar Japan, for instance, food supply, she declares that women's civil right should be realized. She states that, all in all, this election was far from democratic and that one should closely observe the elected members' performance. Thus, her criticism towards the contemporary political scene is extremely severe and relentless.

Working Women

The very fact of the reissuance of this magazine itself, nonetheless, indicates the postwar Japanese society's new direction toward democracy. *Working Women* was one of the magazines published during the US Occupation between 1945 and 1952.[7] Since freedom of speech was guaranteed after the war, the press became very lively. During this period, ordinary people, who perhaps had never written for publication before, felt liberated and started writing enthusiastically. Different from the canonical texts written by eminent writers such as Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) and Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972), for instance, ordinary people's writings can be fresh and fascinating with their own unique perspectives and experiences. Even though paper was in short supply, a number of newspapers and magazines were being published during this period. They all actively supported the movement of the nation's democratization initiated by GHQ.

Working Women was intended not only to generally enlighten ordinary working women but also to help them become more politically conscious of their oppressive conditions so as to convince them to unite with other workers to fight capitalism. As is evident from this objective, *Working Women* was a Marxist propaganda magazine. Especially because of its strong affiliation to the JCP, it was on the GHQ's Civil Censorship Detachment's (CCD) special treatment list. The magazine contains a wide variety of genres—philosophy, culture, serialized novels, short stories, round-table discussions, readers' opinions, book and film reviews, politics, economics, fine arts,

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[7] This magazine was directly censored by the US Occupation GHQ/SCAP's Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) until November 1949, when censorship towards the Japanese press formally ended. It is no doubt that censorship directly contradicts the American ideals of freedom of speech and democracy. See Etō Jun, *Tozasareta gengo kūkan: senryō-gun no ken'etsu to sengo Nihon* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1989), p. 108. The Occupation of Japan was strictly the American Occupation as Herbert Passin notes: "Despite the term Allied in the title, the Occupation was an American show. The Allied Powers were represented in essentially powerless advisory commissions: the Far Eastern Commission in Washington, consisting of twelve nations and the Allied Council for Japan in Tokyo, made up of the four main powers." See his "Occupation – Some Reflections," in Carol Gluck and Stephen R. Graubard's *Showa: The Japan of Hirohito* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 108.

history, poetry, and manga cartoons of political satire. [8]

The magazine appears quite fascinating even from a postmodern contemporary perspective in the range of intellectual and emotional subjects covered. Its authors varied widely, from the well-known writers to the unknown. Such renowned novelists and critics as Miyamoto Yuriko, Nakano Shigeharu, Hiratsuka Raichō, Katō Shūichi, Sata Ineko, Murayama Tomoyoshi, Nakamoto Takako, and Noma Hiroshi contributed their works to this magazine.[9] The circulation numbered between 30,000 and 35,000 during 1946-1950.[10]

This paper examines the postwar Japanese cultural situation through the real voices of ordinary working women in this magazine. Particular attention is paid to the selected works by those women that the magazine solicited for a special topic "Arashi ni mukau josei no shuki" ("The Personal Stories of Women Facing the Storm") from September 1949 till August 1950. Approximately forty pieces selected for publication were considered for my analysis. The metaphor of "storm" is rightly applied to describe those women's oppressive living and working conditions. Their stories are all personal ones based on their specific circumstances, yet they were invariably involved with the political climate of those times. Here, the personal is political.

This metaphor of "storm" is also employed in *Hataraku fujin no koe* (Working Women's Voices, 1950), a centrist publication.[11] Regardless of political stance, the postwar social milieu for working women was described as extremely challenging. Though women occupied roughly 40% of the entire working population and played vital roles in developing and shaping democratic society, their status was still very precarious. New Deal policies were favored at the beginning of the US Occupation, when communist dissidents were released and union activities were encouraged; however, this policy quickly became out of favor as early as 1947, symbolized by General Douglas MacArthur's banning a planned general strike on February 1st. This is often recognized to be the beginning of the "reverse course." As American politics became more conservative along with the change in the international political situation, the US started

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[8] Undoubtedly, the JCP's organ *Akahata* (Red Flag) was especially strictly censored. Refer to Yamamoto Taketoshi's essay on CCD's censorship towards *Red Flag*, "`Akahata' no fukkan to hakkō teishi" ("`Redflag's' Reissuance and Its Publication Suspension"), pp. 385-458 in his *Senryōki media bunseki* (The Analysis of Media during the Occupation) (Tokyo: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1993). Though *Working Women* was not censored as strictly as *Red Flag*, it was nonetheless censored with the strongly leftist leaning authors particularly marked. Its publication history is similar to other Marxist ideological publications.

[9] Well-regarded sociologists and economists, such as Tsurumi Kazuko and Kawakami Kanichi, also contributed articles to the magazine.

[10] The circulation increased from 28,000 to 38,000 during those years. The magazine runs approximately 60-100 pages each month, and it cost then 15-60 yen. In comparison to the years in 1932-1934, when the number of circulation was 5,000-6,000, the magazine apparently gained much wider audience in postwar era. The reason for this increase is presumably due to the legalization of the Communist Party and women's liberation after the war. Also, freedom of speech and freedom of press undoubtedly contributed to it. Although the magazine was categorized as politically leftist and many readers were considered to be progressive or Communist Party members or sympathizers, the female readers of this magazine were not always strongly leftist.

[11] *Hataraku fujin no koe* (Tokyo: Ministry of Labor, 1950) published by Fujin Shōnen Rōdōkyoku (Women and the Minors' Bureau), a government office initiated and established by GHQ in order to promote and protect women's status and rights, is a collection of the reports on contemporary working women's conditions presented by the female leaders of the industries' labor unions as well as ordinary women working in various industrial sectors.

demanding Japan to be more independent economically.[12] Consequently, due to enterprise readjustments, unemployment rose precipitously and company bankruptcies sharply increased. Organization of labor was strengthened, the progress of inflation was interrupted, and the foundation for rebuilding capitalistic economy became more solid. At the time of the companies' restructuring, female workers were usually the first to be dismissed, regardless of the quality of their work, apparently due to gender discrimination. In addition to the general hardships of the postwar social environment, politics characterized by this "reverse course" inevitably affected working women. The rationale behind *Working Women*'s special solicitation from the female workers in 1949-50 was to collect their oppressed voices to raise more political consciousness in order to resist capitalism.

The contributors' ages in this women's magazine's special topic range widely between late teens and early 60s, and their occupations too vary, ranging widely – housewives, school teachers, students, nurses, telephone operators, peddlers, union workers, waitresses, hotel maids, heavy industry workers, construction workers, miners, and others. And their literary forms vary, as well, from autobiographical narrative to diary, to letter, and poetry. The noticeable fact is that many of the women are sole breadwinners of their families, and they all work out of necessity. The realistic descriptions and the candid self-expressions of ordinary working women verify the existence of grave social problems that Japan was facing then. Thus their voices have become testimonials of this historical transitional time.

These working women's writings display a keen socio-economic and political awareness and resemble a literary genre of proletarian literature. They can be seen as opening a new dimension of proletarian literature in postwar Japan. Like its prewar predecessor that flourished in

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[12] John R. Scott succinctly describes this shift in American occupation's policy. The original goals were disarmament and demilitarization, reparations, dissolution of the Zaibatsu and demilitarization of industry, labor reform, agrarian reform, and encouragement of political parties. The change in US policy for Japan was to reverse almost all the original goals, resulting in demands for rearmament, failure to implement the reparations program, release of purges, failure to implement the de-concentration program, and restrictions on labor. See his "The Effect of the Cold War upon the Occupation of Japan" (Ph.D. dissertation; University of Illinois, 1952), pp. 125-194.

The new economic policy was known as "The Dodge Line" or "The Economic Nine Principles." Joseph M. Dodge, the orthodox Detroit banker, who had just completed organization of a major currency reform in Germany, came to Tokyo on February 1, 1949 to implement the Economic Stabilization Program (ESP), originally drafted by Under-Secretary of the Army Draper and signed by President Truman and given as an order to MacArthur. MacArthur informed Prime Minister Yoshida, who appointed Ikeda Hayato as his Finance Minister to carry out this economic reform, which Dodge was selected to oversee. Takemae Eiji states that this reform is primarily for the benefit of the US and also for the former Japanese conglomerates: "The stabilization directive sought specifically to cut the costs of occupation, revive the economy and enable Japanese companies to compete again in world markets. Specifically, it called for 1) a balanced budget; 2) a strengthened tax system; 3) tightening of credit: 4) wage stabilization; 5) price controls; 6) a foreign exchange rate pegged at 360 yen to the dollar; 7) the promotion of exports; 8) increased industrial output and 9) more efficient food production and distribution." See his *Inside GHQ*, p. 469. Takemae effectively quotes the former SCAP labor official Theodore Cohen's words to point out the curious US-Japan relation through this Dodge system -- "the first postwar channel [was created] between the conservative Japanese big business elements and their bureaucratic and political allies in Japan and the top level of officials in the US government" (ibid., p. 470). Due to Dodge's perfectly balanced budget, more than one million people lost employment (ibid., p. 470).

the 1920s-30s, the postwar proletarian literature portrays the oppressive working conditions under capitalism and revolutionary political consciousness which motivates workers to write.[13]

Despite their lack of formal or special literary training, these women display some fine rhetorical skills. Rhetorical skill is not antithetical to spontaneity and authenticity. Based on their own experiences, they write from their unique perspectives as working women, not as mere observers. They possess objective perspectives of their positions, not being totally absorbed in their adverse conditions, because self-reflection is necessary before the objectifying experience of portrayal of self. They give unconventional, detailed, and concrete descriptions in order to mirror their newly found realities, no matter how challenging their individual circumstances might be. And they are absolutely devoid of self-pity, maintaining a strong sense of optimism.

The following four pieces exemplify a keen socio-economic and political consciousness as well as the above mentioned qualities. In an autobiographical narrative, Kobayashi Miyoko[14] writes of her becoming a construction worker; Imachi Umeko[15] narrates her challenge as a stall-keeper in the form of diary; in epistolary form Yoshimuta Fumie,[16] a nurse, writes of her resistance to her unreasonable dismissal from the hospital, and Wakatsuki Tsugie[17] reveals the daily struggles of the war-widows, whose existence was generally forgotten by the public in the postwar period.

"Becoming a Construction Worker for the Sake of my Children"

In her story Kobayashi Miyoko not only informs the reader concerning the direct and serious effects of war upon all walks of life, including one of the wealthiest, but also reveals the differences in colonial life of the overseas Japanese people before and after the defeat of the Japanese Empire. She was among the over 6 million overseas Japanese who needed to be repatriated from Japan's former colonies after the war.

Twenty years before the end of the war, in the1930s, she was born into a wealthy merchant family and was married to a successful trading company owner. She was a housewife, living happily. Due to her husband's business, they went to Japan's colony Taiwan, where they continuously accumulated material wealth. According to her account, the war destroyed everything. Both her husband and her eldest son were killed in the war, and she and her other three

[13] Proletarian literature was a major literary current between 1921 and 1933 and its height was 1928-1931. It is for socialism and communism based on the strong class and political consciousness. Under the Peace Preservation Law, the proletarian movement became weak and collapsed in 1933. In 1928 proletarian literature was divided into two sects, "Senki" (battle banner) sect and "Bunsen" (literary battle) sect, and they competed with one another. At that time, proletarian literature camp and modernist literature camp were in sharp conflict to one another in terms of their positions to the politics of nationalism.

[14] Kobayashi Miyoko, "Waga ko no tameni: jiyū rōdōsha no akekure" (For the Sake of My Children: Construction Worker's Everyday Life), *Working Women* (February, 1950; Issue 31), pp. 20-23.

[15] Imachi Umeko, "Onna rotenshō no nikki" (Diary of a Female Stall-keeper), *Working Women* (May, 1950; Issue 34), pp. 28-32.

[16] Yoshimuta Fumie, "Hakui to tomoni" (Along with a White Robe), *Working Women* (December, 1949; Issue 29), pp. 22-26.

[17] Wakatsuki Tsugie, "Mibōjin Kai ga dekiru made" (Until the Foundation of a War-Widows' Association), *Working Women* (June, 1950; Issue 35), pp. 29-33.

children returned to Japan, carrying whatever they could, in the spring of 1948. From then onward, they lived a miserable life. After her repeated requests to the repatriation assistance office, she was finally given a room in the regiment lodgings, where most of the dwellers were either war-widows or repatriates. In order to live, she engaged in all kinds of part-time jobs, for instance, making envelopes and paper flowers, but she is unable to support her family of four people including her. She mentions that social welfare does exist but is inadequate and that middle-aged women over 40 years old like her cannot find decent jobs and are easily dismissed. She often feels despair and even thinks about committing suicide with her whole family, but she says that she cannot do so because of her children.

One day she hears of construction work, by which she could earn nearly ten times as much in comparison to other menial part-time jobs that she has been engaged in. The job, however, requires her to work early morning at 5:30am and to do strenuous physically demanding tasks all day long. She is desperate for money; without it, all her family members would starve to death. Overcoming her hesitation, she finally decides to become a construction worker solely for the sake of her children. She mentions that at her job site in Tokyo there are about 1,500 workers, of which one third are women.

Though she does not wish her children to feel sorry for her, she realizes that they are fully aware of her misery and that they even save their allowances in order to support her efforts. Feeling utterly pathetic about it, she tells them to spend their allowances on themselves. Her narrative demonstrates that she is devoted to her children and that she absolutely does not wish them to share in her misfortune.

"Diary of a Female Stall-keeper"

Imachi Umeko's work in the form of a diary makes the reader keenly aware of the oppressive nature of postwar Japanese society for female workers. Through this piece, entitled "Diary of a Female Stall-keeper," Imachi apparently is making literary allusion to Hayashi Fumiko's (1903-1951) *Hōrōki* (Vagabond's Song, 1930).[18] Hayashi worked as a peddler and was engaged in various menial jobs when young, moving often, which inspired her to write this celebrated semi-autobiographical narrative in a form of diary. Imachi's affinity to Hayashi lies in the fact that she deviated from the mainstream society because of her extreme poverty and yet she makes her marginality the material she writes about. Both Hayashi and Imachi are endowed with a strong sense of optimism despite their impoverished circumstances.

Imachi is a housewife of a family of six people including herself. She becomes a stall-keeper selling her own family members' second-hand clothes and household goods, including her only kimono robe, almost all day long. She moves from place to place in Tokyo, shouting out her wares, but she finds very few people buy her things. She confesses that she does this exclusively for the

[18] Quoting Donald Keene in his *Dawn to the West*, Sharalyn Orbaugh mentioned that the book was very well-received, selling 500,000 copies, and that Hayashi was one of the most popular writer in Japan in the early 1930s. See her *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation*, p. 370.

sake of her children and that she believes in what she does, but she admits to losing her confidence sometimes.

In 1950, five years after the end of the war, staple foods such as rice and flour were still rationed, insufficient, and delivered late. And because of a lack of money, she cannot buy them. She borrows money from other people, but they soon demand repayment. Since she is unable to earn enough money from her peddling, she is consequently neither capable of paying back her debts nor going out anywhere. She feels utterly helpless. Though she never complains in front of her children, she cannot always maintain her strength. One evening she goes to bed, sobbing, while her children cook for her, apparently deeply sympathizing with her. All she can do sometimes is to fantasize their ideal state of existence, in which she easily makes them happy. Even in the middle of her financial desperation, tax-office clerks visit her place in order to demand her delayed payments. All she can tell them is that she owns only five children and two urns of her dead family members. She tells herself: "Resident and income taxes? I live by means of debt." She does barely get by, borrowing money from others. Both she and the tax-office clerks end up simply laughing, which makes her feel as if she were a clown.

In her narrative, the reader comes to learn that her husband, who was not particularly a family man, died several years before, leaving her and her children nothing but poverty. She appears to be blaming his irresponsibility, but she is clearly and strongly criticizing the war, which destroyed everything, including her home and even hope. Due to her dire poverty, she even thinks about pickpocketing or family suicide, but she is fully aware that she has no courage to do so. Though constantly preoccupied with her wretched life, she does not lose a sense of the season. Her buying two branches of peach flower for the "Girl's Festival" of March 3rd indicates at least her optimistic outlook amidst her poverty.

"As a Dedicated Nurse"

In a form of letter addressed to her younger brother, Yoshimuta Fumie describes her struggles to fight against her unreasonable dismissal from the national T.B. hospital. Though she has been working as a dedicated nurse for 11 years since the prewar years, she is among those who are notified that they will be dismissed on the unilateral grounds that their service records are not good enough and that they are not collaborative but rebellious. They all feel this is utterly unjustified. The real reason for their dismissal is that they are all communist party members.

The director of the hospital and its manager demand they return everything belonging to the hospital, including their white robes and that they leave the hospital strictly by the notified date; otherwise, the administrators would bring in 100 police officers. Yoshimuta responds that she is determined to still continue working as a nurse even without her white robe, which symbolizes 11 years of her youth filled with strenuous experiences at the hospital. She endured numerous hardships along with the T.B. patients, including long-hours of labor during the war and the postwar food crisis. She tells her brother how dilapidated the building and the facilities are and how meager its dinners to the patients are. Moreover, she continues to describe the inhumane

aspects of the hospital's management: the employees' salaries are extremely low and overtime wages were left unpaid for several months while more labor is a daily required, with only a few nurses attending to 60 patients. For over one year, nearly 500 patients are still on the waiting list for admittance to the hospital. A hospital staff member, who went to the Ministry of Welfare to negotiate how to accommodate those patients, was instantly dismissed. Among the dismissed eleven communist party members, six were nurses. Yoshimuta writes that they are still courageously working at the hospital without returning their white robes, which all the patients whole-heartedly support. Finally, the director of the hospital, sympathizing with the dismissed nurses' position, now has become a part of their struggle against the government. With support from other hospitals, labor and physicians' unions, and T.B. research institutes, the dismissed staff members, including the nurses, were able to reverse their dismissals.

Yoshimuta's narrative speaks of overcoming ideological differences and persisting in courageous and conscientious resistance against the irrationality that the government (the Ministry of Welfare) was imposing upon these workers. T.B. patients are, in fact, the victims of the miserable nation's war, for which all Japanese were forced to collaborate as "volunteers." They all worked excessively for the nation, being constantly exposed to the endless air raids during the war, and after the war they were exhausted from overwork, which was doubled by starvation and malnutrition. It was, therefore, government's responsibility to look after them.

"Founding a War-Widows' Association"

Wakatsuki Tsugie writes of her experience in supporting the creation of a war-widows' association in a county consisting of about two scores of towns and villages in Nagano Prefecture in 1948. Though she is a physician's wife, not a widow herself, she got actively involved with the war widows of her town in order to help them improve their everyday lives.

At the first preliminary gathering of about forty widows prior to a formal meeting, Wakatsuki was shocked by their sheer desperation. Their husbands were all killed in the nation's war, yet the government did not provide their families with any material assistance. Wakatsuki deeply sympathized with their miseries, and she provides concrete descriptions of the wives' situations. One widow speaks about her menial job at a roof-board manufacture factory and the too meager support for her two children. Public assistance was discontinued because she now was employed. One of her elementary school age children refrains from asking her to buy even required school materials because he understands his mother's feelings. Another widow confesses that, despite her absolute shame, she has inevitably become someone's mistress and also works as a waitress because she cannot support her family of six people, including her four children and her aged mother-in-law. Her demeaning position as a mistress and waitress is, she declares, better than death.

At a formal meeting of about eighty people consisting of fifty some representative widows and about thirty supporting staffs from the local government offices and democratic groups, a war-widows' association was organized for the first time in the prefecture. As the chairperson of the

meeting, Wakatsuki records their demands in preparation for presenting them to the government. The widows' demands are all pressing ones directly impacting their daily lives – guaranteeing a minimum standard of living, prioritizing scholarships for their children, establishing daycare centers, assisting employment, reducing taxes, and others. Until their demands are carried out by the government, the widows at the meeting decided to create the "Blood-Transfusion Society" to help those women who need instant income. With the headline "Widows Selling Their Blood," the local newspapers reported the creation of this society. Thus, gradually widow's actual lives became understood and gained sympathy from the public. In order to help each other, they started peddling, opening clothes-repair shops, or managing eating places. Wakatsuki declares that the association has become a fine women's group managed democratically. She recounts that its representatives went to the Diet in order to demand that a member of the House of Representatives guarantee a minimum standard of living and further demonstrates the association's progressive and decisive attitudes. In response to the member's cruel reply that no funds could be budgeted to provide for war widows' lives because Japan was defeated, one widow, in tears but indignantly, admonished him that hundreds of thousands of war widows are literally on the border between life and death.

Though Wakatsuki's story is seemingly a successful one because the association is established, she does not forget to add a dark aspect surrounding the reality of war-widows' lives. She mentions that solely as a means to live some widows inevitably engage in prostitution and that some cannot even sell their blood because of contracting venereal disease and tuberculosis. Despite her earnest efforts to help those in need, Wakatsuki admits that some widows' situations are beyond her or the association's capacities and that the government's drastic support is absolutely necessary.

The Postwar Political and Economic Climate and Working Women

A common concern of the working women in postwar Japan seen through the personal narratives in *Working Women* is the Liberal Party's inhumane oppressive policy. Except for capitalists, ordinary peoples' lives were seriously threatened because of heavy taxes, inflation, and unemployment. Unionized workers or female workers were easily dismissed. Working women's lives were thus directly affected by politics at that time. In general, the postwar Japanese political climate was as anti-left as prewar or wartime Japan.

As Miyamoto Yuriko repeatedly warned in her postwar political essays, fascism still existed even after the war. This fact is particularly apparent in the anti-union activities by the government and capitalists. Although unionization and leftist activities were legalized after the war, unionization without coercion was short-lived due to the "reverse course" explained earlier. Many unionized female workers were easily dismissed from their workplaces or too frequently became targeted at the time of companies' restructuring. Not only workers in private enterprise but also public school teachers who became members of the teachers' union were often dismissed, despite the quality of their teachings. Although it is true that Japanese unions were never strong during any period of modern Japanese history, unionization is almost the only means to obtain collective

power among workers against capitalism. The "reverse course" in fact contradicted the initial Occupation policy but appeared necessary for America to be more powerfully capitalistic in a new Cold War world order, and America as an occupier demanded Japan to strongly demonstrate this capitalistic ideology as an economic "ally." It was 1952, when Japan finally regained her sovereignty.[19]

The postwar Japanese lives were, as many women mention, economically extremely oppressive because foodstuffs were in short supply even in 1950, five years after the end of the war. Malnutrition was a widespread problem. Many women complained about insufficient rationed rice. Even if they had rice, it was often imported.[20] Sometimes all they could get were potatoes or sweet potatoes.[21] Especially because the effects of war were still strongly lingering, everyday life was extremely challenging. There were serious problems of the war widows, single mothers, teen-age delinquency, and family suicides. Repatriation of Japanese people from the overseas colonies and their reintegration into everyday life in Japan was another problem. Several women write about their comfortable, easy life overseas and extreme difficulties and poverty back home.

As mentioned earlier, these working women were often the sole bread winners for their families. Reasons vary, but in many cases their drafted husbands were killed in the war, and sometimes divorce was the reason. Because many women were engaged in double or triple labor as mothers and workers and sometimes as wives, their daily lives were indeed oppressive. While almost all women demonstrate their strong love for their children, they are all severely critical of their husbands, with whom they often feud and who show little understanding or sympathy for their spouses and their domestic tasks. The conflicts between men and women are often highlighted in their stories. Strongly influenced by an American ideal of democracy and gender equity after the war, women became liberated, progressive, and transformed, whereas men remained unchanged, being old-fashioned or still persistently feudalistic.

Conclusion: Why Bakhtin Now?

Reading ordinary working women's personal or almost confessional narratives in this magazine makes the reader realize the material and spiritual devastation and deprivation caused by Japan's total collapse in 1945. As Richard Minear points out, the horror of the Pacific War and its aftermath seem like "ancient history"[22] without any concrete historical memories, not only because the

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[19] At the time of San Francisco Peace Treaty in April 1952, Japan's military reliance on America became definitive through the "US-Japan Security Treaty," although Japan became independent. Okinawa continued to be directly controlled by the US until 1972 as mentioned earlier.

[20] It seems that some people still disliked eating imported rice, called "gaimai" (foreign rice), even at the time of food shortage. See Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[21] The magazine carries several recipes on how to prepare potatoes. Recipes in this magazine, therefore, become a way to cope with a historic food shortage.

[22] Richard L. Gage and Richard H. Minear, *Women against War* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1986), p. 9.

majority of Japanese people alive today were born after 1945, but also because Japan's rapid economic growth since 1960 has somehow created a kind of historical amnesia. In addition to the necessity of this awareness, these writings by ordinary people, not by the leaders or by prominent writers, urge the reader to ponder on what literature really is. Questions such as "What is literature?" or "Who is an author?" constantly challenge literary scholars, but any narratives which reveal to the reader a new dimension or complexities of human existence in an insightful way could be called "literature."[23] And an author is, as Michel Foucault argues, socially constructed.

Here, revisiting M. M. Bakhtin is meaningful. His literary theory dominated academia in the 1980s-90s, yet it still appears largely relevant to apply his central theoretical argument of dialogism to literature, in this case, the narratives of ordinary working women in postwar Japan, although Bakhtin's theory is primarily on novelistic discourse. Novels are nonetheless indeed produced from cultures, which are readable texts, where plural voices interact with one another dialectically. To take up the real, plural voices of working women and to interpret them in a larger social milieu can be interpreted according to what Bakhtin defined as dialogism.

In his representative essay "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1934), Bakhtin defines the novel as a dialogic genre by arguing that the meanings of the novel are created by the interaction of the plural voices. His theory of the novel is based on his theory of language. He states: "Language – like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives – is never unitary."[24] By theorizing the social aspect of language, Bakhtin applies it to his reading literary texts. In order to articulate one's social, political, and cultural stance and ideas, language becomes a site for hegemonic discourses, displayed as such, and anti-hegemonic discourses.

The ordinary working women's personal and confessional narratives in *Working Women*, which are social productions determined by the social milieu and the particular historical condition, are undoubtedly opposed to authority in the contradictory postwar Japanese society, where freedom was granted yet oppression still persistently continued. They become living records, where life, labor, and the art of writing are intricately interwoven to manifest authentic human existence. There, the reader encounters human beings with real faces, real feelings, and with real voices. The power of literature can transcend time and space, blurring the borders of class, gender, and ethnicity. No matter how uneven narratives might be, they are created out of our irrepressible desires to tell our stories, which become true historical testimonies of the postwar Japan's enormous challenges affected directly on real people.

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[23] For instance, the collection of letters written by the drafted young Japanese university students during the war *Kike wadatsumi no koe* (Listen to the Voices from the Sea, 1949) could be called "literature." Perhaps no one would argue that some of them have true literary value though some may contain rather romanticized nationalistic sentiments.

[24] M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" in his *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryle Emerson and Michael Holoquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 288.

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