“Seizing/Ceasing Reproduction: Matsuda Tokiko, Birth Control Politics, and Proletarian Solidarity in ‘Chichi o uru’”

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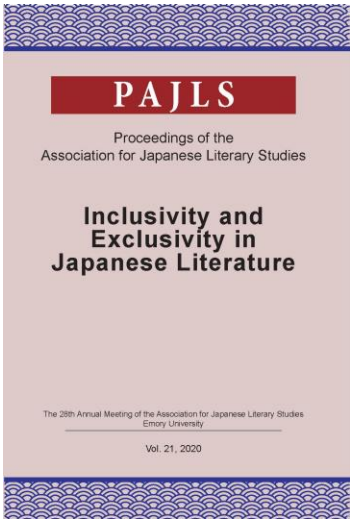

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SEIZING/CEASING REPRODUCTION: MATSUDA TOKIKO, BIRTH CONTROL POLITICS, AND PROLETARIAN SOLIDARITY IN "CHICHI O URU"

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乳房	Breasts
生まれながらにプロ	Born proletariat,
生まれながらに栄養不良	born with malnutrition
生まれながらに父は留置場	born with father in jail
だが、吾子よ！	but, my child,
飢をうつたえるお前の声に	in your voice crying with hunger
私は新らしい力を知る	I discern new strength
お前の運命にしてお前の糧	Your destiny and your food
今こそ	now
復讐の意志にたぎるよ	boiling with a vengeful will,
ひからびた二つの乳房は	these bone-dry breasts.[2]

In 1931, a member of the recently established Proletarian Birth Control Alliance (Musansha sanji seigen dōmei, often abbreviated as ProBC) visited Ōshima, a town located on an island south of Tokyo, to interview Mrs. Yagi about her use of contraceptives. During the interview, Mrs. Yagi praised birth control, saying: "If I get pregnant [again], I would die. Now, it's fine. It [birth control] really saved me."[3] ProBC published the interview in *PuroBC nyūsu taishūban* (ProBC News Mass Edition) titled "Jitsuwa: Tasan jigoku kara sukuwareta Yagi-san ikka no hanashi" (True Story: Account of the Yagi Family saved from Fecund Hell). It presents a rather positive account of birth control performed by Mrs. Yagi (40 years old) and her husband (41), who together have seven children. In the interview, Mrs. Yagi explains that after six children she really wanted to avoid another pregnancy as she believed it would kill her, not to speak of the economic and mental hardships. However, after Mrs. Yagi conceived again the couple grew desperate. Then, they met a member of

[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8828-9205
[2] Matsuda Tokiko, "Chibusa," *Bungei kōron* 2:4 (1928): 76. English translation taken from Hiroaki Sato, *Japanese Women Poets: An Anthology* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 307.
[3] Anonymous, "Jitsuwa: Tasan jigoku kara sukuwareta Yagi-san ikka no hanashi," *PuroBC nyūsu taishūban* 4 (1933): 3.

ProBC, who informed them about various contraceptive methods. Mrs. Yagi chose to purchase a pessary from ProBC, which she had been using for more than a year.[4] While uncomfortable at first, the couple managed to avoid any new pregnancies.

The successful contraception of Mrs. Yagi, however, is quite an exception compared to the parturient suffering millions of proletarian women experienced in the first half of the twentieth century.[5] While abortion was illegal for all women during this time, the plight of proletarian women was extreme because they had no access to contraception and could not afford even back-alley abortions. Thus, they frequently faced a double burden of childrearing and poorly compensated

[4] The article does not mention how Mrs. Yagi was able to afford a pessary as the contraceptive items were expensive and beyond purchase power of proletarians. In his study on birth control in prewar Japan, Ōta Tenrei mentions that the Dutch pessary was among the popular models promoted by birth control activists such as Majima Kan (1893–1969) and Ishimoto Shizue (1897–2004) in the late 1920s and early 1930s, coinciding with the 1930 World Malthusian Birth Control Convention where activists concluded that the Dutch pessary was the most effective contraceptive. Ōta Tenrei, *Nihon sanji chōsetsushi: Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa shoki made* (Tokyo: Nihon Kazoku Keikaku Kyōkai, 1969), 178–181. Advertisements of the Dutch pessary in the Yomiuri Shinbun show a price of 1.5 yen compared to the average wage of 1 to 2.5 yen for Japanese daylaborers. For more on wages of workers in Japan see Ken Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009).

[5] Around the turn of the century, intellectuals in East Asia started to articulate class and class divisions tied to capitalist production. They considered the new class of waged laborers quite different from proletarians in cities since Roman times. However, as historian Hayashi Yūichi writes, it was not until after the Great War (1914–1918) together with many other crucial events, such as the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the various mass demonstrations in Asia in 1919, that the terms 無産 and 階級 came together to mean "proletariat" and 無産者 "proletarian" imbued with a Marxist understanding of class relations. Immediately afterward, the term 無産階級, and various combinations such as 無産芸術 (proletarian art), 無産文学 (proletarian literature), 無産大衆 (proletarian masses), 無産農民 (proletarian peasants), 無産政党 (proletarian political party), filled the pages of numerous essays, newspaper articles, short stories, and scientific studies in the shared logographic scripts of the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese languages. Further, numerous publishers included the term in dictionaries that connected the loanword proletariat (프롤레타리아트, プロレタリアート, 普羅列塔利亞特). to the translation 無産階級 as a general term for all those (un)employed people without property and living in extreme poverty regardless of manual or mental labor. Moreover, (translated) studies were published in great numbers containing detailed accounts of proletarian everyday lives. As a result, the concept proletariat categorized the masses of millions making their lives mutually explicable and comparable. Hayashi Yūichi, *Musan kaikyū no jidai: Kindai nihon no shakai undō* (Tokyo: Aoki shoten, 2000), 13–22.

work. In this paper, I examine Matsuda Tokiko's (1905–2004) short story "Chichi o uru" (Selling Breast Milk, 1929), which narrates such hardships experienced by protagonist Mitsue coping with the double burden of working as a wet nurse while taking care of her own newborn. In order to better understand the (post)natal suffering depicted by proletarian writers like Matsuda, I start with a historical sketch of the rise of reproductive governance across East Asia followed by a brief discussion of birth control politics among leftist activists and the short-lived ProBC movement (1931–1934). While to my knowledge no detailed history of ProBC exists, through an analysis of ProBC's main arguments about the need for birth control for the proletariat I aim to demonstrate a cross-pollination between birth control activism and the emergence of proletarian stories dealing with (post)natal suffering.[6] In other words, I consider the observations by a group of proletarian writers regarding reproduction struggles among lower-class women and the rise of proletarian birth control activism calling for an increased availability of contraception tools and reproduction rights as mutually constitutive. Following this section, I discuss Matsuda's story

[6] I am informed here by scholars of Anglo-American literature who have examined the relationship between birth control politics and literature, such as Beth Widmaier Capo, *Textual Contraception: Birth Control and Modern American fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007) and Layne Parish Craig, *When Sex Changed: Birth Control Politics and Literature between the World Wars* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2013). In their studies of Anglo-American fiction, Widcaimer Capo has shown that literature played an important role in shaping the debates of birth control politics and Layne Parish Craig has argued that "[p]ost-birth control era texts depicting unplanned pregnancy have to account for why contraception was not used or failed in order to be accepted as realistic by their audiences" (Craig, 7). To date scholars of East Asian literatures have paid less attention to the relationship between birth control and literature see. An exception is Saitō Minako, *Ninshin shōsetsu* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1997). However, Saitō focuses on male writers and their fear regarding unwanted pregnancies in their literary works. Besides Saitō, scholarship on postwar literature in East Asia has started to examine the relation between literature and birth control politics. See for example, Amanda C. Seaman, *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), Sharalyn Orbaugh, *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation Vision, Embodiment, Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), especially chapter 8 "Production and Reproduction Women Writing Women," and Julia C. Bullock, *The Other Women's Lib: Gender and Body in Japanese Women's Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 19–21. Atsuko Sakaki has highlighted the relationship of photography and pregnancy as corporeal reproduction in the work of Kanai Mieko. Atsuko Sakaki, *The Rhetoric of Photography in Modern Japanese Literature: Materiality in the Visual Register as Narrated by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Abe Kōbō, Horie Toshiyuki and Kanai Mieko* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 188–207.

to show how she incorporated ideas on reproduction and birth control in her literary works. I do so by elucidating how Mitsue tries to challenge gender norms, especially the relation between reproduction and women's reproductive rights, and by highlighting how she establishes relations of proletarian gender solidarity in her fight against capitalist exploitation of reproduction. More specifically, the trope of breast milk in the story functions as a contesting fluid mediating various disparate interests. Mitsue demonstrates that these tensions surrounding breast milk are a site where proletarian gendered subjectivity is produced, questioned, ruptured, and reconfigured.

By reading this story in conjunction with the discourse of proletarian birth control politics, I illuminate how proletarian writers connected gender exploitation to capitalism and the latter's incessant thirst for labor power; the one commodity it cannot reproduce. Informed by proletarian birth control politics, "Selling Breast Milk" highlights the predicament of proletarian gender solidarity by exposing how capitalism thrives on a gendered hierarchy that drives proletarian women and men apart. As such, writers like Matsuda Tokiko, together with many other proletarian writers both in East Asia and elsewhere, invested in making (post)natal suffering of proletarian bodies visible and mutually compatible, creating an understanding of human bodies different from that supported by the capitalist overlords, that is, the existence of altogether new category, the proletarian body. The challenges to gender roles were attempts to overcome the proletarian gender inequality and to establish new alliances of solidarity within proletarian movements. Such a proletarian body was not rooted in nation-state categories of ethnicity or national language, but rather in international intimacies of gendered and classed (post)natal suffering.

Matsuda's "Selling Breast Milk" was written during a period when proletarian intellectual Yamakawa Kikue (1890–1980) called for "birth strikes" (*shussan sutoraiki*) to advocate legal contraception for the masses.[7] Yamakawa anticipated that these "birth strikes" expanded the struggle against the imperial and capitalist order, attacking the capitalist lifeline by including reproduction. Kikue coined her notion of "birth strikes" to promote birth control in East Asia during a period that witnessed a decrease in birthrates in Europe and America; social policy advocate Ernst Kahn (1884–1959) described this trend of falling birth rates

[7] Yamagawa Kikue, "Sanji chōsetsu to shakai shugi," *Josei no hangyaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1982), 283.

as the "international birth strike" (*der internationale Geburtenstreik*).[8] Yamakawa's colleagues Akita Ujaku (1883–1962) and Kurahara Korehito (1902–1991) highlighted the swift change among topics in proletarian literature during the 1920s and 1930s to cover childbirth, parturient suffering, and contraceptives. Whereas Akita Ujaku wrote in 1919 that "many women give birth but (…) I have not once heard of writings about childbirth,"[9] just a decade later Kurahara Korehito acknowledged a recent diversification of proletarian literary topics and urged writers to continue to expand by writing "birth control stories" (*sanji seigen shōsetsu*).[10] Coinciding with Kurahara and Yamakawa's appeal, proletarian writers strived to account not only for the shifting attitudes toward reproduction like the one illustrated by the story of the Yagi family, but by crafting storylines where proletarian women tried to assemble alliances against sexual violence and reproductive suffering, they also negotiated the harsh and complex realities of rape, unwanted pregnancy, and premature death of newborns these women experienced. Taken together, both proletarian

[8] Ernst Kahn, *Der Internationale Geburtenstreik: Umfang, Ursachen, Wirkungen, Gegenmaßnahmen?* (Frankfurt am Main: Societäts-Verlag, 1930). Ernst Kahn was a banker and journalist and was involved in local politics in Frankfurt am Main, holding an honorary position for the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social-democratic Party Germany). Following the Great War (1914–1918) and a decade of improved contraceptives, the birth rate in Weimar Germany plummeted from 4.5 in the 1870s to 1.9 in 1929. Kahn stated that a similar trend was present in Euro-America, concluding that in the case of Italy, "Malthus is stronger than Mussolini." Regarding the Far-East, Kahn noted that populations in China, Japan, British-India, and Dutch-Indonesia, still increase significantly. The population increase remained a mystery for Kahn unaware of pro-natal policies in East Asia. For a biography of Yamakawa Kikue in English see, Mikiso Hane, *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1988), 160–164; and for a more detailed discussion of Yamakawa's birth control politics see, Sujin Lee, "Differing Conceptions of 'Voluntary Motherhood': Yamakawa Kikue's Birth Strike and Ishimoto Shizue's Eugenic Feminism," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 52: 1 (2017): 3–22. For a brief history of birth control and the population problem in Japan see Elise K. Tipton, "The birth control movement in pre-1945 Japan," *Asian Studies Review* 17: 3 (1994): 95–102; Elise K. Tipton, "Birth Control and the Population Problem," ed. Tipton, *Society and the State in Interwar Japan* (London: Routledge: 1997), 42–62; Sujin Lee, "Technologies of the Population Problem: The Neo-Malthusian Birth Control Movement in Interwar Japan," *The Annual Review of Cultural Studies* 5 (2017): 37–58.

[9] Akita Ujaku, "Fujimori Seikichi-kun no geijutsu," *Zenki puroretaria bungaku hyōronshū* (Tokyo: Shin Nihon Shuppansha, 1985), 105.

[10] Tanimoto Kiyoshi [Kurahara Korehito], "Geijutsuteki hōhō ni tsuite no kansō (zenhen)," *Nappu* 2, no. 9 (1931): 18.

fiction and social commentary revealed how meaningless reproduction was under capitalism and called for "birth strikes" as the ultimate strategy to sever the lifeline of capitalism.

The shifting focus on reproduction among proletarian intellectuals emerged at a moment of unprecedented interest in female reproductive organs and scientific research on contraception.[11] By the 1920s, governments in East Asia had implemented a wide array of laws and policies governing reproduction, prohibiting and criminalizing abortion, and severely limiting contraception.[12] Following the colonization of Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910) and the overthrow of the Qing (1911), the Japanese and Chinese governments continued the disciplining of life, including the expansion of pronatalist policies. Under such slogans as *ryōsai kenbo* (good wives and wise mothers) and *guomin zhi mu* (mothers of national citizens) these governments unfolded biopolitical systems to control the lives of their populations; these systems were deemed necessary to ensure the construction of a strong nation-state and to improve the genetic quality of national subjects through eugenics.[13] These

[11] The brief history of the proletarian birth control outlined here is based on a section from my dissertation, Edwin Michielsen, "Assembling Solidarity: Proletarian Arts and Internationalism in East Asia," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2021), 212–230.

[12] One of the first laws the new Meiji government promulgated was the *Dataizai* (Criminalization of induced abortion) to prohibit induced abortion and midwife medicine in 1868. The Qing empire promulgated the *Daqing xin xinglü* (The New Criminal Code of the Great Qing) of 1910, which was the first legalization to prohibit induced abortion. In colonial Korea, the Government General implemented the Criminal Code of 1912 making abortion a crime. See Fujime Yuki, *Sei no rekishigaku: Kōshō seido, dataizai taisei kara baishun bōshihō, yūsei hogohō taisei e* (Tokyo: Fuji shuppan, 1997), especially chapter 3; Chen Yongsheng, *Zhongguo jindai jiezhi shengyu shiyao* (Suzhou: Suzhou Daxue chubanshe, 2013), 50–80; Sonja Kim, "'Limiting Birth': Birth Control in Colonial Korea (1910–1945)," *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 2:3 (2008): 335–359. Scholarship has also widely examined postwar policies regarding birth planning. See for example, Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949–2005* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Tiana Norgren, *Abortion Before Birth Control: The Politics of Reproduction in Postwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Hiroko Takeda, *The Political Economy of Reproduction in Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Aiko Takeuchi-Demirci, *Contraceptive Diplomacy: Reproductive Politics and Imperial Ambitions in the United States and Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

[13] While eugenics is interlaced in the debates of birth control politics, it is of less

biopolitical systems permeated numerous dimensions of life, including hygiene, medicine, family planning, as well as physical and mental health; they were incorporated into various institutions, such as education, (medical) science, and the military. Ruth Rogaski has described these shifts surrounding hygiene as a process of "hygienic modernity" that "encompass[es] state power, scientific standards of progress, the cleanliness of bodies, and the fitness of races."[14]

The medicalization and scientification of life across East Asia significantly changed the daily lives of its peoples. As Sabine Frühstück has argued in her study of sexual knowledge in Japan, within new heteronormative gender divisions between men and women, medical interest shifted from the male to the female body. Whereas in the late nineteenth century, the individual body as "a miniature of the social, the national, and imperial body" was predominantly a male body, starting in the 1910s, the focus shifted to the female body.[15] This shift translated to a "preoccupation with the womb, the uterus, fertility, and race."[16] In short, she writes, women's reproductive organs were colonized for nation and empire building.[17]

Elsewhere in East Asia, we see a similar preoccupation with female reproductive organs. Sonja Kim has observed in the case of colonial Korea that there was a "[d]isproportionate attention to women's reproductive system" and an "absence of discussion of the male reproductive system in boys' high school textbooks."[18] As a result, women were integrated in

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importance for my discussion. For more on eugenics in East Asia, see besides Ōta and Chen, Yuehtsen Juliette Chung, *Struggle for National Survival: Eugenics in Sino-Japanese Contexts, 1896–1945* (New York: Routledge, 2002), and Eunjung Kim, *Curative Violence: Rehabilitating Disability, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Korea* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017). The influential birth control activist Margaret Sanger is also often linked to eugenics.

[14] Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-port* China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 1.

[15] Sabine Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3. Nicolas Schillinger locates a similar emphasis on governing the physical male body, especially the masculinity of soldiers in late Qing and early Republican China. Nicolas Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Art of Governing Soldiers* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016).

[16] Sabine Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan*, 4.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Sonja M. Kim, *Imperatives of Care: Women and Medicine in Colonial Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 10, 46. See also Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labor, and Health, 1910–*

society "primarily through their reproductive activities as mothers."[19] In addition, Tina Johnson has shown how Republican China in general adapted the *xianqi liangmu* (virtuous wives and good mothers) [20] vocabulary from Japan, particularly during the Nanjing decade (1927–1937) under the Guomindang. Furthermore, pronatalist literature became "imbued with fascist German and Italian pro-motherhood arguments that called for women's reproduction for nationalistic purposes."[21]

In response to the growing repression and control of reproduction and the expanding population across East Asia, the 1920s witnessed a surge in debates about the need for accessible and affordable contraceptives as well as reproductive knowledge among the proletarian masses. Doctors, biologists, sexologists, and activists frequently gathered to discuss contraceptive innovations and lectured to inform the public about reproduction, abortion, and contraception while staying within the parameters of the law. While many of these figures sympathized with the (post)natal suffering among proletarian women, few organized in political organizations to advance reproductive rights. An early exception preceding the aforementioned ProBC was the Ōsaka sanji seigen kenkyūkai (Osaka Birth Control Research Society) led by Yamamoto Senji (1889–1929), a biologist and politician who had translated works by birth control activist Margaret Sanger (1879–1966) and researched sexual reproduction and contraception.[22] Established in 1923 and preceding the

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1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 161–192.

[19] Ibid., 9.

[20] The notion of "good wives, wise mothers" also spread across the Japanese empire, such as colonial Korea translated as *hyŏnmo yangch'ŏ*. For more on the Korean context, see for example Hyaeweol Choi, "'Wise Mother, Good Wife': A Transcultural Discursive Construct in Modern Korea," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 14, no. 1 (2009): 1–33. For more on "good wives, wise mothers" as modern construct see Shizuko Koyama, *Ryōsai Kenbo: The Educational Ideal of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' in Modern Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[21] Tina Philips Johnson, *Childbirth in Republican China: Delivering Modernity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 35. See also Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture, and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (London: Hurst & Co., 1995).

[22] For a discussion of the Osaka Birth Control Research Society and its members see, Sujin Lee, "Problematizing Population: Politics of Birth Control and Eugenics in Interwar Japan," (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2017), 63–73. Scholarship has paid ample attention to Margaret Sanger's visits to Asia, arguing that her visits were an important catalyst for debates on birth control politics in East Asia. For more on Margaret Sanger and her reception in and her trips to East Asia, see for example, Chen Yongsheng, *Zhongguo jindai jiezhi shengyu shiyao*, 83–100; Kaneko Sachiko, "Kindai Nihon ni okeru Seiyō joseiron juyō no hōhō: Māgaretto

zenith of proletarian movements a few years later, the research society had a strong affiliation with the workers communities in the Kansai area. Soon after its founding in Osaka, similar research societies were formed in Kobe, Kyoto, Okayama, Nagoya, and Tokushima.[23] Many of its leading members were doctors who gave lectures on birth control, sold contraceptive tools, distributed pamphlets, and published journals like *Sanji chōsetsu hyōron* (Birth Control Review) and *Sei to shakai* (Sex and Society). The Osaka Birth Control Research Society assured that their pamphlets and membership application forms were also widely distributed across the empire including Manchuria, Korea, and Taiwan.[24] Birth control activists like Yamamoto Senji not only tried to disentangle proletarian bodies from capitalist codification by producing knowledge on contraception, but ironically also often engendered these bodies with similar codes. Put differently, leftist birth control activists tried to undermine the production of bourgeois knowledge while at the same time producing a similar type of knowledge. A crucial difference, however, is that leftist birth control activists strove to create an open-access platform of reproductive knowledge different from the vertical distribution of knowledge by the ruling classes.

Unlike large proletarian cultural movements, proletarian birth control activists either remained unorganized or founded small research groups and alliances such as the birth control research societies discussed above. It was not until June 1931 that ProBC, the first birth control movement affiliated with a proletarian movement, was officially founded in Tokyo as

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Sangā no seiji sangenron o chūshin ni," *Shakai kagaku jānaru* 26: 2 (1988): 61–80. In emphasizing Sanger's contribution, however, scholars have often neglected other networks of feminist solidarity, especially those between Marxist feminist activists, such as Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952), Clara Zetkin (1857–1933), Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), as well as trips to the Soviet Union by proletarian intellectuals like Akita Ujaku and Miyamoto Yuriko (1899–1951), who highlighted communist birth control and natal politics in their travelogues. For a discussion of the reception of Alexandra Kollontai, see Ruth Barraclough, Heather Bowen-Struyk, and Paula Rabinowitz (eds.), *Red Love Across the Pacific: Political and Sexual Revolutions of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), and Sugiyama Hideko, *Korontai to Nihon* (Tokyo: Shinjusha, 2001). For more on Clara Zetkin and her reception in China, see Anup Grewal, "A Revolutionary Women's Culture: Rewriting Femininity and Women's Experience in China, 1926–1949," (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2012).

[23] Miyasaka Yasuko, "Taishōki ni okeru sanji chōsetsu undō no tenkai to fukyū: Sanji chōsetsu sōdanjo no katsudō to sono riyōsha," *Kazoku kankeigaku* 31 (2012): 39.

[24] Ōta, 126–128. Ōta writes that they received tens of applications daily from across the empire.

a sub-branch of the All Japan Federation of Proletarian Arts (NAPF). Through this affiliation, proletarian birth control activists connected with proletarian writers, encouraging reproductive concerns to be addressed in literary production as well. Among the two hundred people present at the inauguration, many proletarian writers were also invited to attend and deliver speeches, such as Akita Ujaku, Eguchi Kan (1887–1975), and Matsuda Tokiko, who would become an official member of ProBC. Soon after, ProBC started publishing several short-lasting magazines, pamphlets, and birth control manuals,[25] as well as setting up proletarian hospitals, obstetrical clinics, and daycares. As a sub-branch of NAPF (and later the Japanese Proletarian Culture Association or KOPF), ProBC utilized the former's extensive networks of activists across Japan to reach factory workers, farmers, and other marginalized groups and inform them about the benefits of contraception. While ProBC was short-lived due to the growing repression of leftist politics by the Japanese state, the movement popularized contraceptive methods and reinforced the idea that birth control was an essential element for the proletarian revolution to succeed.

Reading through the extant pamphlets and news bulletins of ProBC, an argument recurs in proletarian birth control politics that was informed by a mix of Marxist, eugenic, and Neo-Malthusian thought.[26] ProBC urged proletarians to follow the twofold strategy of seizing and ceasing reproduction, which was considered to seriously disrupt the flow of human life essential to the production of surplus value. ProBC not only discussed reproduction as a topic unto itself, but connected it also to war, which required human capital to fight for the imperial cause and resulted in unequal division of labor between genders. ProBC believed that going on a "birth strike" would aid the struggle against capitalism and eventually solve gender issues.[27] The inauguration statement of the journal *Sanji seigen undō* (Birth Control Movement) states that:

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[25] See, for example, Shinkō Ishi Renmei, *Musansha eisei hikkei* (Tokyo: Sōbunkaku, 1932), and Musansha Sanji Seigen Dōmei, *Puroretaria sanji seigenhō* (Tokyo: Kōshinsha, 1933).

[26] Neo-Malthusian thought was a revival of economist Thomas Malthus's (1766–1834) view, which stressed the correlation between population growth and the limits of economic and natural reproduction to maintain poverty and keep proletarians occupied with family affairs. The remaining pamphlets are: Musansha sanji seigen dōmei, *Musansha sanjiseigen to wa nani ka: Donna hinin hōhō ga aru ka*, (PuroBC rifuretto 1, 1932), 3–5. The cover also includes the title in Esperanto, *Ki Estas Proleta Naskiĝ-Kontrolo*.

[27] Musansha sanji seigen dōmei, *Musansha sanjiseigen to wa nani ka: Donna hinin hōhō ga aru ka*, 6–8.

> As long as there is a capitalist society, the proletariat will live a life of anxiety. We cannot liberate ourselves without a full battle against the capitalists in order to escape economic suffering. ...They [capitalists] will encourage birth control as a measure for society. They say that ... the proletariat is responsible for being poor because the proletariat gives birth to many children. Therefore, their bourgeois birth control group will paralyze our fighting spirit against the capitalists. And that group is conspiring with the capitalists to exploit us mercilessly to fill their own pockets. Is birth control necessary for the proletariat? Not really. But to find a way out for our poverty and to conduct our actions more easily in order to build a society for tomorrow it is absolutely necessary. And the wives carry a double burden: the fatal pain of pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and the pain of being a sex slave and exploited in the capitalist society.[28]

In this statement, ProBC demonstrates that it does not reject reproduction per se, instead, it argues that for proletarians procreation within a capitalist society is pointless because capitalism impoverishes and exploits proletarian surplus populations for profits. Thus, ProBC urged proletarians to agitate for reproductive rights and take control over their own bodies.

Through their affiliation and interaction with proletarian cultural movements, ProBC's views on birth control informed a group of proletarian writers to include women's struggles with pregnancy and birth. Their literary narratives often depict women enduring physical constraints due to their (repeated) pregnancies, leading to isolation and mental hardship, or to painful scenes of childbirth, which was not unlikely to end with premature death of both newborn and mother. However, examining the representations of contraception in American literature, Widmaier Capo has observed that "fiction still rarely describes the ritual act of birth control."[29] Proletarian literature was no exception and seldom portrayed the use of contraceptives. Unlike Mrs. Yagi using a pessary, most proletarian women could not afford or access contraceptives. Instead of focusing on the implausibility of how access to contraceptives would change the social realities of proletarian women, writers instead explored "the conditions that necessitate birth control,"[29] in order to reveal the intricacies and ambiguities surrounding proletarian gender struggles.

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[28] Musansha sanji seigen dōmei, "Senden," *Sanji seigen undō* 1 (1931): 2.
[29] Capo, *Textual Contraception: Birth Control and Modern American Fiction,* 7.

During the 1920s and 1930s numerous proletarian literary works focusing on woman's reproductive hardships were written and together constructed a network of readership across East Asia and beyond. In approaching such topics, a significant difference existed between proletarian male and women writers. According to Yamakawa, proletarian male writers often reproduced bourgeois views of gender roles, thereby rendering proletarian female agency invisible, which in turn relegated proletarian gender struggles to domestic and private spaces. The bias among male writers frequently resulted in depicting proletarian women as desperate and powerless victims of capitalist exploitation, neglecting sexist attitudes among proletarian men.[30] Proletarian women writers had to contend with issues related to class and gender solidarity as well as to explore ways to connect the two.

To challenge such narratives by male peers, proletarian women writers could not resort to storylines of bourgeois individualism and romance nor those of proletarian victimization, and had to invent new settings "around the development of collective solidarity and militancy."[31] In her study of women's revolutionary fiction in 1930s America, Paula Rabinowitz points out that "[t]he generic code of class solidarity provided women writers one device with which to undermine the restrictions on

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[30] For example, the story "Nanzan" (Obstructed Labor, 1934–35) written in Japanese by Yang Kui (1905–1985) compares the struggle of a male protagonist writing a literary work with the hardships of child delivery experienced by his wife, exaggerating the former's trivial distress with the latter's physical agony. Others, such as Rou Shi (1902–1931), in a love relation with Feng Keng, had a strong sympathy for proletarian women's struggles, but failed to empower them with agency. His short story "Wei nuli de muqin" (A Slave Mother, 1930), for example, depicts the hardships of a bereaved mother, who is sold by her husband to a rich man in order to provide for their own child as well as to give to birth another child for her new husband. While the narrator sympathizes with the mother's pain, it also reproduces as Sally Lieberman argues, "idealizations of mother love," echoing May Fourth's and the wider ideology of good wives, wise mothers. Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother and Narrative Politics in Modern China* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 208. However, this is not to say that female proletarian writers completely denounced the fixed gender role in their literary works. For example, in Sata (Kubokawa) Ineko's "Tabako kōjo" (Tobacco Female Factory Workers), in her dream a female character rejects the idea that proletarian activists should not reproduce and that "if all left-wing people give birth to children, then left-wing people will increase a lot," encouraging women to conceive more, while neglecting the physical burden of reproduction for women and diametrically opposing proletarian birth control politics. Kubokawa Ineko, "Tabako kōjo," *Senki* 2:2 (1929): 66.

[31] Paula Rabinowitz, *Labor & Desire: Women's Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 70.

female characters imposed by dominant narrative forms, but additional strategies were essential if their work was to inscribe a female, class-conscious subjectivity."[32] Proletarian women writers in East Asia could also not solely rely on class solidarity; they articulated a gendered class-consciousness by turning to female sites of capitalist alienation, such as "the family, maternity, and sexuality in addition to factory or farm."[33] This is not to say that female empowerment only existed in domesticity. In proletarian literary works, the arbitrariness of demarcating space into public and private/domestic shows how flows of capital exploit proletarian life and interlock in the various spaces from which the protagonists try to escape.

Amidst this historical background, Matsuda Tokiko started her writing career. Born in a miner's family in Akita prefecture near the Arakawa mine, the literate Matsuda worked as a typist for a miner's company. After her move to Tokyo in 1926, she found a job in a bicycle factory, joined a labor's movement, participated in the 1926 May Day demonstration, and married activist Ōnuma Wataru (dates unknown). While Matsuda was pregnant, her husband was arrested and jailed for his political activism. Forced to raise her first child alone, Matsuda faced economic hardships and reluctantly accepted a job offer as wet nurse. Selling her breast milk to a bourgeois family while her own newborn faced malnutrition, Matsuda experienced the violence of capitalist commodification of female bodies and breast milk in particular. Soon after, she was arrested and detained for her activism during the notorious March 15 mass arrests in 1928. Upon her release, Matsuda actively participated in proletarian arts and cultural movements as well as labor unions, becoming a household name through the appearance of her works in such proletarian journals as *Senki* (Batteflag, 1928–1931).

Matsuda's proletarian activism also led to her direct involvement in the proletarian birth control movement. As a member of ProBC, she lectured on birth control related topics and helped to establish and organize proletarian daycares and health clinics. Her birth control activism inspired her to write *Joseisen* (Women's Front, 1937) based on the life of proletarian birth control activist Yamamoto Kotoko (dates unknown). In the introduction of the reprint, Matsuda recalls that she wrote this story to foreground the intricate relations of war, poverty, reproduction, and women's natalist struggles that continued to be an important topic in her lifelong activism for reproductive rights.

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[32] Ibid., 71.
[33] Ibid.

Based on her work as wet nurse, "Selling Breast Milk" is one of the first stories Matsuda Tokiko penned and published in the prolific journal *Nyonin geijutsu* (Women's Arts, 1928–1932); a journal founded in 1928 as a platform where women intellectuals could find common ground and articulate shared gender struggles. Until then, Matsuda had written a couple of poems and short stories such as "Umu" (Giving Birth), dealing with the natalist struggles of a proletarian woman. This story won her the first prize of *Yomiuri shinbun*'s short story contest and a publication in this major newspaper.

The poem *Chichi* (Breasts, 1928) quoted as the epigraph of this paper captures succinctly the plot of the third-person narrative "Selling Breast Milk," connecting childrearing, malnutrition, a jailed husband, and the loss of breast milk as a web of hardships in which proletarian women are captured.[34] The plot follows Mitsue, a single mother and labor unionist whose husband is imprisoned for political activism, and her preparations to become a wet nurse for the rich bourgeois Katano family. Selling her breast milk to feed the young baby Shigeru, she risks both her own health and that of her newborn. As she tries to mitigate the double burden, Mitsue's encounters with female servants and wet nurses at the Katano residence and her correspondence with other comrades offer moments of solidarity, leading to new relationships that help Mitsue to articulate strategies to undermine imposed gendered subjectivity and critique the politics of reproduction under capitalism.

The first crisis of the story unfolds when Mitsue observes a wet nurse whose milk is squeezed out her breast at the hospital. The wet nurse is employed by the Katano family, the same one that will hire Mitsue to replace her. Mitsue is allowed to remain together with her newborn granted she passes the blood test proving both her body and milk are healthy. The wet nurse struggles to provide the required 140 grams of milk seven times a day despite the nurse squeezing her breasts like "goods" (*shinamono*). The wet nurse's milk has "dried up," like capitalist production exhausting its resources through overproduction, and making her fearful that she will be fired. Mitsue witnesses the painful process of extracting milk from the

[34] Hirabayashi Taiko is the only one who mentions Matsuda's "Selling Breast Milk" in her review of the latest works by proletarian women writers. She writes that the story has several flaws, but portrays a strong vigor of proletarian women. Hirabayashi Taiko, "Bungei hōmen ni okeru fujin saikin no katsuyaku," *Tokyo Asahi shinbun*, August 27, 1929, Morning edition, 5. For more on Hirabayashi and birth control politics, Edwin Michielsen, "Hirabayashi Taiko 'Seryōshitsu nite': Puroretaria bungaku to sanji seigen to no kakawari o haikei ni," *Kokubungaku kenkyū shiryōkan kiyō bungaku kenkyūhen* 48 (2022), 259–287.

first wet nurse and after being introduced as the new wet nurse with "rich breasts" (*yokei deru*), the hospital staff asks Mitsue to show her breasts to the first wet nurse. While eating the same food from the cafeteria and sharing their struggles of childrearing, Mitsue feels connected with the other wet nurse, initiating a relationship that she describes as "in both our breasts a feeling of belonging to the same family boiled up" (*otagai no mune ni isshu dōzoku no kanjō ga wakihajimeta*).[35] In this shared moment of proletarian suffering, Mitsue realizes that she must be determined that "her own child cannot be killed in this enemy land" (*kono tekikoku de jibun no ko o koroshite wa naranai to iu koto o*).[36]

Mitsue begins her job as a wet nurse and commutes between the hospital and the Katano residence. Lady Katano has ordered her not to eat the cafeteria food in the hospital and instead to eat at the residence in order to protect the milk's quality; moreover, she is not allowed to suckle her own child before preparing milk for Shigeru. Mitsue's movement is confined to the hospital and the residence, leaving her with little spatial mobility. Further, the Katano family keeps her to a strict medical regime. Throughout the story, Mitsue and the other wet nurses are exposed to the latest medical and scientific technology, revealing the medicalization of life mentioned earlier necessary to maintain clean and proper bodies for production. The directors, medical staff, and nurses all guard the patients at the hospital while executing regular medical procedures. Using needles, glass tubes, disinfectants, pumps, and a "breast-squeezer like device" (*chichi shiboriki rashii kigu*), the breasts of the wet nurses are commodified and joined to the assembly lines and production machines of capitalism. Mitsue describes the production process of breast milk as follows:

> The mammary gland appears lushly on the outer layer of the pink breast. When she pressed the painfully and swollen [breast], over ten streaks of milk gushed out like a delicate pump from the nipple that measured no more than half a centimeter in diameter. During that time, there is a strange [feeling of] pleasure. Most likely, this is the happiness of "duty fulfilment" ingrained by bourgeois society. But, when she filled one glass with 50 grams, and another one stopped at 30 grams, her body felt a fatigue like suddenly being sucked into a bottomless cave. She would rather collapse theatrically, yet her consciousness was clear enough to

[35] Matsuda Tokiko, "Chichi o uru," *Nyonin geijutsu* 2:8 (1929): 15.
[36] Ibid., 16.

be able to think so.[37]

Considering the fact that Mitsue is affiliated with proletarian activism, it is unlikely that she is unfamiliar with the workings of capitalism in relation to such corporeal stimuli. Rather, she presents the paradox between "pleasure" and "fatigue" as a cynical observation embedded with a critique of capitalism. She foregrounds a certain torsion in the contradictory nature of the production of subjectivity within industrial capitalism; a torsion capitalism has deeply ingrained into the fabric of the nation-state and its patriarchy. This contraction comes into being when capitalism on the one hand constantly codifies human beings into various categories and thus subjectifies and individuates them, while on the other it also decodifies these categories in order for it to restart the cycle of production and consumption. In other words, the former assigns human beings with an identity, sex, profession, nationality, in short, a body, while the latter dismantles these social markers to de-individuate human beings temporarily into a homogenized and universal money form and mere interchangeable cogwheels of production. While I oversimplify the innumerable processes at play which are far from monolithic for the sake of brevity, this apparent paradox in capitalism is actually its very logic to reinvent itself endlessly to allow its social relations of production to enter and break economic, social, and political flows and thus overcome its own limits. As a result, capitalism throws human beings in a limbo from which it is increasingly difficult to jump out. The "pleasure" and "happiness" Mitsue refers to during the extraction of her breast milk, then, is a corporeal pleasure capitalism provides to individuated subjects during moments of decodification, to have them forget the burden of their social functions, only to be resocialized again; the entire process is like an addiction giving highs and lows.

Mitsue's corporeal "pleasure" is immediately replaced with "fatigue," that is the capitalist limbo. Mitsue knows that if "her breasts [become] useless, Mitsue [becomes] useless" (*chichi ga fuyō ni nari, Mitsue ga fuyō ni natta*). Her breasts are literally sucked dry and milk flows are interrupted meaning social death like the other wet nurse, who was fired by the Katano family. But, if capitalism captures its opponents' movements of constant de- and recodification, then how to articulate a resistance? Mitsue's answer is to cease and seize (re)production, that is, to cease or terminate capitalist production of subjectivity and to seize or overtake the reproduction of labor power.

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[37] Ibid., 18–19.

As a result of her breasts drying up, the nurse scolds Mitsue for being useless. Mitsue is overcome by feelings of anxiety and anger, feeling like her existence is about to disappear. She reflects on her actions and starts looking for solutions. She finds two possible lines. First, she connects with the other female servants and another wet nurse, whom she happens to know from the proletarian hospital where they gave birth and who now works at the Katano residence to supplement Shigeru's milk whenever Mitsue is running out. Having reached the level of intimacy, the women exchange experiences of hardships and complaints about the Katano family, strengthening their collective relationships. Whereas female characters in proletarian literature often lack support from others, Mitsue is able to establish alliances of resistance against her bourgeois exploiters. Through such physical moments of solidarity, Mitsue reconfigures her being on her own terms, and thus regains a degree of agency.

Second, the literate Mitsue writes letters to comrades and in doing so traverses the spatial boundaries of the hospital and the Katano residence. She articulates her hardships not only as her own but also those of "men and women of the exploited class," synthesizing corporeal suffering of the world proletariat. Her letters function as a way to have her voice travel beyond the somatic body, establishing a moment of virtual solidarity. In one of them, addressed to Kinu, the wife of her husband's friend, she unfolds the following strategy:

> First, don't give birth to children. If you conceive, (I believe) there are only two ways: kill it legally, or raise the child thoroughly. I chose the latter, and my current life is nothing but painful. The bourgeois son has started to consume my son. This is no exaggeration. All the proletarian kids are born under these conditions and are prey to their [bourgeois] fangs. "Why not raise them? Let's raise them as our kids." While the pregnant women of Soviet Russia can say so and laugh brightly, our kids are born while even their mother's milk is stolen. They are crammed into the charity of bourgeois second-hand undershorts or dirty daycares. Or worse, they starve to death in jail. I foolishly lined up all reasons, but ultimately, we want a community childrearing center for our comrade kids. Someone is going to protect and raise several kids. By class (not by family). In that way, mothers can return to work as often [as they like].[38]

[38] Matsuda Tokiko, "Chichi o uru," 23.

Mitsue reveals her tactics to attack capitalism and the bourgeois exploiters. Women seize their reproductive rights, deciding whether they reproduce or cease reproduction. In case a pregnancy happens without access to abortion, then proletarians should raise the child together. Mitsue thus undermines the bourgeois ideology of family and replaces it with a proletarian notion of relationality based on symbiotic alliances.

With her breasts dried up, she can no longer continue to work as a wet nurse. Feeling "like waking up from a nightmare" she is confident enough to confront the anxieties of life. She is determined "to raise her child, strongly, even if her family is exposed to the fangs of the bourgeoisie."[39] While, perhaps paradoxically, Mitsue's affirmative stance towards raising children supplies capitalism with future labor power, she is convinced that proletarians can train their children to become strong enough to eventually overcome capitalist exploitation by reconfiguring its production of subjectivity and sabotaging its production processes. Mitsue did not have access to contraceptives or proper medical and family planning facilities. Experiencing numerous hardships, she unfolded strategies regarding an approach toward reproduction by questioning presupposed subjectivities of motherhood and womanhood. Establishing moments of solidarity with other proletarian women allowed her to rethink her social function and created ruptures in the capitalist production of subjectivity. In doing so, Mitsue undermined her imposed subjectivity to contemplate what possibilities life has to offer to her and her comrades.

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