LOVE SONGS?

Don’t fall in love with male workers.

You’ll end up discarded like tea dregs.

At parting one is like a fan,

Discarded when a breeze is no longer needed.

Meet him often and the factory gets upset.

Don’t meet him and the master gets upset.

This company is like a brothel;

We are whores who live by selling our faces.

-Yamamoto Shigemi, *Aa nomugi tôge* (Ah, Nomugi Pass), pp. 197-8, reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan,* p. 89.

If you’re taken in by sweet talk

Your money will be swiped and you’ll be abandoned.

In the end you’ll suffer undreamt-of hardships,

Blown hither and thither like a drifting weed.

Don’t become infatuated.

The male workers in this company

Will throw you out afterward

Like used tea leaves.

It’s no good to fall in love.

The winding boss only

Cares about wound thread.

He’s heartless.

- Excerpts from Hosoi Wakizô, *Jôko aishi* (The Pitiful History of Factory Girls), 331, reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, pp. 144-5.

FACTORY LIFE AND WORK

**The Prison Lament**

Factory work is prison work

All it lacks is iron chains.

More than a caged bird, more than a prison,

Dormitory life is hateful.

Like a horse or a cow,

The reeler is fenced in.

Like the money in my employment contract,

I remain sealed away.

How I wish the dormitory would be washed away,

The factory burn down,

And the gatekeeper die of cholera!

Neither silk-reeling maids nor slops

Are promoted or kept for long.

- Excerpts from Yamamoto Shigemi, *Aa nomugi tôge*, 391, reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, p. 98-9.

**My Factory**

At other companies there are Buddhas and gods.

At mine only demons and serpents.

When I hear the manager talking,

His words say only, “money, money, and time.”

The demon overseer, the devil accountant,

The good-for-nothing chrysalis.

If you look through the factory’s regulations,

You see that not one in a thousand lies unused.

We must follow regulations;

We must look at the foreman’s nasty face.

- Ôkochi Kazuo, *Labor in Modern Japan,* 2, reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, p. 98

COMPANY SONGS

Raw silk,

Reel, reel the thread.

Thread is the treasure of the empire!

More than a hundred million yen worth of exports,

What can be better than silk thread?

Factory girls,

We are the soldiers of peace

The service of women is a credit

To the empire and to yourselves.

There are trials and hardships, yes,

But what do they matter?

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

We don’t cross Nomugi Pass for nothing

We do it for ourselves and for our parents.

Boys to the army,

Girls to the factory.

Reeling thread is for the country too.

- Yamamoto Shigemi, *Aa nomugi tôge*, 16, reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, p. 92.

SONGS ABOUT HOME

**My Two Parents**

When I left home my parents

Told me always to behave myself.

On days when the rain falls,

On nights when the wind blows

I remember my parents.

Listen folks, because I want

To be filial to my parents

I crossed Miyama and came

All this way to suffer in Shinshû.

How bitter, how bitter I think, but

When I remember my parents it’s not bitter.

Because I am poor, at age twelve

I was sold to this factory.

When my parents told me, “Now it is time to go”

My very heart wept tears of blood.

Let the year end, let the year end,

I want to fly to my parents’ side.

Mother! I hate the season in the silk plant;

It’s from 4:00 P.M. to 4:00 A.M….

I wish I could give my parents rice wine to drink,

And see their happy tears fall into the cup.

In this troubled world

I am just a silk-reeling lass,

But this lass wants to see

The parents who gave her birth.

Their letter says they are waiting for year’s end.

Are they waiting more for the money than for me?

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

SONGS ABOUT SOCIAL STATUS

If a woman working in an office is a willow,

A poetess is a violet,

And a female teacher is an orchid,

Then a factory woman is a vegetable gourd.

Don’t sneer at us

Calling us “Factory girls, factory girls!”

Factory girls are

Treasure chests for the company.

- Yamamoto Shigemi, *Aa nomugi tôge*, 395, 396; reprinted in Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*, p. 97.

Don’t scornfully say,

“Factory girl, factory girl.”

Iwataru Kikusa\* is

A real factory girl.

Who dares to say that

Factory girls are weak?

Factory girls are the

Only ones who create wealth.

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

\*Iwataru Kikusa was a female factory worker who fought off a murderer and later identified him to the police.