MANAGING WOMEN
DISCIPLINING LABOR IN MODERN JAPAN

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Contents

List of Illustrations ix
Acknowledgments xi

Introduction: Women or Workers? 1
1. From Home Work to Corporate Paternalism: Women’s Work in Japan’s Early Industrial Age 8
2. Keeping “Idle Youngsters” Out of Trouble: Japan’s 1929 Abolition of Night Work and the Problem of Free Time 27
3. Cultivation Groups and the Japanese Factory: Producing Workers, Gendering Subjects 51
4. Sex, Strikes, and Solidarity: Tōyō Muslin and the Labor Unrest of 1930 81
   Epilogue: Managing Women in Wartime and Beyond 137

Notes 163
Bibliography 203
Index 221
When the Meiji state oversaw the opening of Japan’s first government-run textile mill in 1872, its leaders had already decided that female labor would propel the early stages of Japan’s industrial revolution. The government’s part in initiating industrial development by funding and operating the Tomioka Silk Filature in Gunma Prefecture, and the strong role the state would play throughout the Meiji period (1868–1912) in directing the growth of capitalist institutions, ensured that the growth of industry could never be separated from the fortunes of the nation. If the industrial technologies of the Meiji period reflected the goals of a nation aspiring toward “civilization and enlightenment,” it followed that industrial labor should similarly reflect the patriotic nature of the project of industrialization.

In the textile factories that fueled Japan’s earliest and arguably most intense drive for industrialization, the vast majority of factory operatives were Japanese women and girls, ranging in age from approximately thirteen to twenty-five years old. In the silk-reeling factories women accounted for roughly 85 percent of all workers while in cotton spinning and weaving they made up 70 percent of the workforce, making Japan’s early industrialization and capital accumulation dependent on the labor of rural women and girls. Their participation in the industrial project coincided precisely with the Meiji state’s attempt to reenvision the parameters of Japanese womanhood and the place of women within the imperial state. As Japanese women’s historian Koyama
Shizuko has demonstrated, the womanly ideal of “good wife, wise mother” (ryōsai kenbo) took hold as an organizing principle of female gender immediately after the Meiji Restoration (1868). “Good wife, wise mother” grew out of debates over women’s education that began with the institution of compulsory elementary education for both males and females. With this ideology as its anchor, the modern family emerged as a primary site for the mobilization of national citizens by a new, modern nation-state undergoing large-scale urbanization, industrialization, and militarization. For female industrial labor especially, the family became the site first of recruitment efforts and then of corporate control, as companies invoked the authority of male family members (who in most cases had signed the employment contracts on behalf of their daughters) to induce desired behaviors in their workers. In some cases this invocation came in the form of admonishments to work hard so as to fulfill their filial duty to their parents, but in more extreme cases (as we will see in chapter 4) fathers and brothers were asked to come to the factory to take in hand daughters and sisters who had decided to participate in strike activities.

Because middle-class assumptions underlay the feminine ideal predicated on the “good wife, wise mother” ideology, wage-earning women and girls working in factories (and thus cut off from the domestic sphere) embodied the tensions inhering in classed understandings of female gender throughout the early twentieth century. This became particularly true once the “good wife, wise mother” ideology was supplemented by the birth of the shufu, or “housewife,” ideal. The housewife ideal emerged from the confluence of new configurations of family life and domestic space and the appearance of a bourgeois middle class around the time of the First World War. The housewife embodied the modern and scientific rationalism found in the study of home economics, which she practiced with single-minded dedication. But as part of the acquisition of her specialized knowledge of domestic management, she was most frequently a graduate of a girls’ higher school, which Jordan Sand has described as the “true hatcheries of professional housewives.”

Thus, the education and middle-class status required to attain the status of housewife and to be considered a true “good wife, wise mother” remained elusive for working-class women and for girls from poorer farming families.

Factory managers, concerned with disciplining Japan’s first generation of industrial laborers to be productive workers, attempted to resolve tensions between gender and class by designating female textile labor a tem-
porary condition and promoting the womanly values of motherhood and domesticity within the factory itself. This allowed them to offer to employees educational and cultural amenities that they framed as opportunities to become ideal (and presumably middle-class) housewives and mothers. A poor farming family might not be able to afford to send their daughter to the local elementary school, much less the girls’ higher school that might make her into a “lady.” But they could send her to work in a cotton-spinning mill that offered not only an attractive advance to the family, but also the hope that she might receive some basic education and training in the womanly arts. Such amenities were rarely offered during the Meiji period, but by the 1920s they had become a primary means of recruitment and retention for companies hungry for a stable workforce.

But in fact, many female workers did not leave the factory for marriage and a life of domesticity, but rather moved to positions in other better paying textile companies or else to new jobs in the service industry. A survey conducted in 1936 found that of 204 female workers who had quit work at large cotton mills to return home, 46 percent said they planned to go out and find employment in another cotton mill, and only 23 percent had gotten married.\(^5\) In other words, the standard narrative propounded by contemporary commentators that viewed female factory work as a temporary form of employment overlooked large segments of the wage-earning female population. While many female workers may have worked only temporarily (for a few years) in any given company, they often moved to similar employment at another textile company rather than abandoning wage work altogether. There are no comprehensive statistics to indicate the number of women who did return home to their villages to marry after a few years of textile factory work. But the scattered surveys and oral histories that do exist suggest a wide range of paths chosen by former textile operatives. Some returned to the countryside and took up agricultural work, some moved from company to company for a number of years, and others settled in towns and cities nearby the factories they had quit to marry or to take up work as maids, shop hands, bar hostesses, waitresses, or prostitutes.\(^6\)

Since before the Meiji Restoration, women from a variety of classes had engaged in home work (naishoku), or cash-paying “side jobs” that could be performed in the home in addition to unremunerated domestic work. Such work, which often involved sewing, embroidering, and other crafts associated with domestic life and identified as women’s work, be-
came commonplace after World War I among women of the middle classes as well. In fact, as increasing numbers of women entered the paid labor force in the 1920s, naishoku was encouraged by some social commentators as the form of “employment” most consistent with the “good wife, wise mother” philosophy that circumscribed women’s roles within the home.

Work in the form of naishoku did not challenge ideals of women as primarily mothers and household managers and had become acceptable for urban middle-class women as well as those from rural agriculturalist families. Industrial labor for women and girls in textile factories, however, took women out of the domestic sphere and simultaneously marked them as part of what journalist Yokoyama Gennosuke called the “lower strata society” (kasō shakai). Yokoyama coined the term kasō shakai to describe the working poor whose livelihoods (as well as their dire poverty) were a product of Meiji urbanization and industrialization. Those who fell into this lower strata included rag pickers, tenant farmers, male iron and steel workers, and female cotton and silk spinners in the newly mechanized textile industry (figure 1).
FACTORY WORK FOR THE NATION

With Japan’s rapid industrialization after the Meiji Restoration, the textile industry was responsible for bringing in large amounts of the foreign cash so desperately coveted by the Meiji leaders. Women and girls who customarily engaged in naishoku were recruited as low-wage laborers in silk and cotton—spinning and —weaving factories. Even before the turn of the century, the government had created a flourishing environment for industrial capital by selling to industry many enterprises that had been established and supported at public expense. From 1910 through the 1920s, textiles accounted for roughly 50 percent of industrial revenue. The dying and weaving industries boasted a share of the industrial workforce equal to its share of revenue, with the majority of these workers being women (table 1).

The women who went to work in Meiji-era textile factories were exhorted by recruiting advertisements and employer-distributed educational handbooks to “work for the nation” and for the sake of their families. In a formulation that would become commonplace throughout Japan’s imperial period—from shortly after the Meiji Restoration to the end of the Pacific War in 1945, marked by colonial expansion and an emperor-centered state—nation and family, civic duty and filial piety, merged in a series of substitutions. Employers stood in for parents, so that respecting their will meant honoring one’s natal family, and spinning silk or cotton for the nation meant honoring the emperor, patriarch of the national family. “Factory owners and managers think of you all as their own daughters” and “can be depended on even more than your real parents,” promised one didactic tract for female factory workers. Another reminded that “the reason you all work so hard from morning until night is in order to serve your country.” Publication of such works—many of them produced by industry associations—aimed to convince female textile workers of the importance of their contributions to the national polity (kokutai) and to simultaneously remind them that excelling at their work offered the sincerest expression of filial piety and reverence for their families.

As with many such works of the time, Kōjo kun (Instructions for Factory Girls, 1910) began with a preface explaining that simple language and furigana—the practice of including phonetic markers next to Chinese characters to make them more easily readable—had been used to make the book more accessible to the few female factory workers possessing the modest education needed to attempt reading it at all. Scores
of texts from this period employed such stylistic modes as a form of pedagogy. Some included annotations at the top of the page with vocabulary words used in the text that girls might want to learn for use in writing letters home to their families.\textsuperscript{14} Essentially a primer on nationalist history, civic duty, and the importance of the textile industry to Japan’s future glory, this text employed a strategy of literally imaging female factory workers onto its narrative of military might and industrial triumph. Each of its forty-eight pages included separate photographs of three female workers lined up across its top, titled with their names, the names of the factories where they worked, and their locations. These factory workers, along with another 224 whose names and place of employment appear on the first pages of the book, had all received special commendations from the Japan Silk Association (Nippon Sanshikai).

The written text further emphasized this connection of the individual and the local with the fate of the national community, clearly articulating the official Meiji ideology of “rich nation, strong army”:

Until the Sino-Japanese War, Westerners treated Japan as a small country of barbarians; but since the Sino- and Russo-Japanese Wars, Japan has leaped in one bound to the ranks of the first-class nations of the world. . . . But if we consider it closely, simply being strong does not win the final battle. Together with strength, a country must have wealth. . . . In looking at the actual state of Japan, it is clear that despite the fact of an unbroken imperial line with the emperor at its head and with loyal servants below and strong soldiers who are the pride of their country, next to the leading nations of England, France, Russia, Germany, Italy and America, Japan is regretfully still a very poor country.\textsuperscript{15}
The lucrative silk industry played a major role, the argument continued, in combating Japan’s debt-heavy poverty by creating wealth for the nation by exporting to foreign countries. Dubbing the silk industry the “flower of the country” (kuni no hana) and the female workers within it the “flowers of the people” (hito no hana), this text linked female labor directly to those issues of greatest concern to the Meiji state: Japan’s status within the international community, patriotic wars, national wealth, and the emperor system. In so doing, it also clearly identified the workers as ethnic nationals—a point that would become important for the development of labor-relations discourses with the influx of colonial labor in the 1920s.

**GENDERED PATERNALISM IN THE MODERN FACTORY**

Female textile workers generally lived in dormitories within factory complexes, which were often located long distances from their natal villages. The dormitory system circumscribed women’s movements and in most cases involved elaborate systems of surveillance, including the employment of vigilant dormitory supervisors and a highly monitored pass system that restricted workers’ freedom to leave the factory compound. The physical space of the compound itself was surrounded by high walls to mark off the industrial space from the outside world and to prevent escapes. Textile company owners and managers claimed to act as surrogate parents for the young women and girls under their charge. They provided (and often enforced) moral, civic and educational instruction for their “daughters” in keeping with these girls’ and women’s future roles as wives and mothers. And they insisted that any disagreements or discontent that arose between employers and employees be handled “within the family,” with all parties respecting the hierarchies implicit in that structure. Similarly, disagreements among employees would be arbitrated by a benevolent company owner or manager as patriarch.

Companies readily took on this role as benevolent protector and increasingly adopted paternalistic recruitment policies and welfare institutions for employees. Amenities and other aspects of employer benevolence directed toward female workers emerged in the 1920s in response to a shrinking pool of labor from the countryside after the First World War and the intensification of competition among recruiters and employers in contracting and retaining workers. Their reasons for working within contemporary discourses on Japanese womanhood rather than insisting on treating female operatives as generic workers were fourfold. First, companies found they could be more successful recruiting
girls from rural families if they convinced workers’ parents (who were often the ones making the final decisions about employment) not only that the girls would be well treated, but that they would be treated like daughters. The assumption of parental responsibility by the company (or its representative) suggested an understanding among company, parents, and the worker herself that female textile laborers were not only workers, but also future wives and mothers. As such, they would need to receive in the factory context the kinds of training in domestic arts (especially things like sewing and needlework) that they might otherwise have gotten at home. In fact, as the larger cotton-spinning companies expanded the scope of their educational amenities, they sometimes argued to rural parents that the training in womanly skills their daughters could receive in the factories was superior to what families would be able to provide on their own.

Second, creating a consensus that female labor was by definition temporary labor (that is, not a life career, but a short-term stop on the way to marriage and motherhood), companies could justify paying lower wages to women than men. Third, by using rhetoric consistent with dominant popular and state discourses on Japanese womanhood, companies tried to hold at bay accusations (made by Japanese social reformers as well as by international observers) of exploitation and maltreatment of their workers—accusations that became increasingly frequent as the twentieth century wore on. And fourth, company managers discovered that rhetorics of sexual morality tied to the dominant ideal of chaste womanhood served as a potent weapon against unions and labor organizing. By depicting female workers as susceptible to sexual corruption and simultaneously branding unions as evil outside influences, textile companies not only adapted to contemporary discourses of Japanese womanhood, but in fact used those very discourses to their advantage.

What I am referring to as “paternalism” is actually a concept derived from two closely related terms used by companies and by the state during the interwar period. Japanese policies of compassionism (onjōshugi—most often translated as “paternalism”) and familism (kazokushugi—a term often used in conjunction with onjōshugi) focused on the management of female textile workers. Compassionism was from the beginning part of what Andrew Gordon has referred to as the “invented tradition” of Japanese labor relations, in which a timeless tradition of master-servant reciprocity was invoked as a blueprint for maintaining harmonious labor relations in a new age of industrialism. Oka Minoru, a Home Ministry
bureaucrat and champion of Japan’s Factory Law, summed up this philosophy of compassionism circa 1910, proclaiming that “in the future, our capitalists . . . will be steeped in the generous spirit of kindness and benevolence, guided by thoughts of fairness and strength. The factory will become one big family: the factory chief as the eldest brother and the foreman as the next oldest. The factory owner himself will act as a parent. Strikes will become unthinkable, and we can look forward to the increased productivity of capital—the basis for advances in the nation’s wealth and power.”

Paternalist policies became more common among larger companies by the 1920s. A more competitive labor market and a series of economic recessions felt keenly among textile companies prompted changes in labor-management strategies, encouraging company owners to create incentives for workers to stay with them rather than move to another company or run away from the factory because of ill treatment. Further, female workers influenced by Taishō-era (1912–26) democratic trends that included a vigorous women’s movement and an active labor-union
movement prompted demands for greater recognition of workers’ individuality and personhood (jinkaku). This decade also saw the emergence of a new form of what William Tsutsui calls “revised Taylorism” in Japan, marked off from its earlier incarnation by a dedicated attention to the “human elements” involved in making workplaces more efficient. By “human elements,” Tsutsui refers to the policies of paternalism that were characterized by a “warm, familial and cooperative” relationship between employer and employee and the establishment of worker welfare facilities.

Among the companies engaged in fostering such “warm, familial and cooperative” paternalist policies, none was more prominent than the Kanegafuchi Cotton Spinning Company. Founded in 1887 as a cotton-trading company, by 1889 the company had begun cotton-spinning production and by 1908 had entered the silk-spinning market. It was one of prewar Japan’s largest and most successful textile companies, boasting 139,576 spindles and a capitalization of four million yen in 1902—twice the size of its nearest competitor. With its first factory built in Tokyo, the company quickly expanded nationally by building additional factories and acquiring preexisting ones through mergers and acquisitions of smaller textile firms. By the time paternalist practices started to be developed in earnest in the industry, Kanegafuchi Spinning was positioned to be a leader in these new forms of labor relations. Indeed, one of the company’s most important prewar leaders authored many of the key features of prewar paternalist practice.

Mutō Sanji (1867–1934) guided the helm of Kanegafuchi Spinning (hereafter Kanebō, as it was known for short) for nearly twenty-three years, from 1908 until his retirement in 1930. He put into place a set of labor-management practices that became legendary throughout Japan’s textile industry, and he was chosen to be part of Japan’s first delegation to the International Labour Organization in 1919. Company labor practices during this time of sustained industrial growth assumed an ample supply of disposable labor and emphasized aggressive and increasingly far-reaching recruitment efforts over policies of retention. Runaways and worker attrition due to accidental death or illness had been treated by companies as a matter of course in the second decade of the twentieth century, but by the mid-1920s tactics had changed, spearheaded by this new policy of paternalism launched by Kanebō and imitated by other cotton-spinning companies that offered new amenities to attract and retain workers.

In official histories of the company, Mutō’s interest in paternalist poli-
cies are often attributed to the great wellsprings of compassion and humanist impulses of the man himself. His son, who eventually followed in his father’s footsteps to become president of Kanebō in 1947, has written of his father’s tendency to valorize the underdog, offering as an example of his humanism the elder Mutō’s insistence on calling the family’s servant “Miss Maid” rather than simply “Maid,” presumably restoring to her some of the dignity otherwise lost as a result of her position. 24

In the year Mutō became company president (1921), Kanebō boasted a wide range of amenities for its over 2,800 female and close to 640 male employees. Educational facilities were the highlight of the offerings, with male workers at the main factory in Tokyo able to take advantage of up to two year’s worth of supplemental education in the form of classes in ethics (shūshin, a kind of civics instruction), Japanese language, basic mathematics, and English. Kanebō’s more numerous female employees could attend the Kanegafuchi School for Girls, which was designed to take young workers up through the six-year compulsory elementary education. Or, for those who had already finished their required elementary education and showed promise in their studies, the company offered courses through its School of Practical Learning for Girls in a wider range of subjects, including ethics, Japanese language, mathematics, geography, history, science, and home economics. In addition, girls could opt to take a three-year special course that taught them the modalities of proper Japanese womanhood. Subject offerings included sewing, housework, and etiquette and promised students the skills that would enable them to make good marriage matches and successfully manage their future households.

The supplementary educational opportunities offered to girls and young women working in the textile industry served several important purposes. In addition to providing an incentive in the form of educational opportunities and bridal training that these poor rural girls who endured low-paid and difficult factory work might not receive by staying in their villages, these curricula served two additional purposes. One of them was to manage worker free time, a management concern that grew after the abolition of night work for women and children went into effect in 1929. Such time management, it was believed, might effectively preempt labor organizing and the possibility of labor unrest. The second purpose was to promote a newly imagined middle-class vision of Japanese womanhood among female employees who were expected to marry and leave the company within a few years of their initial employment.
Part of the reason for the difference in educational facilities for males and females—in addition to the company emphasis on treating female employees more as women and future mothers than as labor—has to do with their relative ages and educational background upon entering the company. While girls as young as fourteen commonly came to work as operatives for the larger textile mills, and just under half of the girls employed by Kanebō had not finished their elementary education, males who were concentrated in the dyeing sections of Kanebō’s operations tended to be somewhat older and to have at a minimum completed their elementary studies. Age, of course, was not the only factor involved in the lower educational level of females: despite the laws that since the turn of the century had required an equal elementary education for both boys and girls throughout Japan, many of the poorer farming families that sent their daughters to work at the mills could ill afford to do without their daughters’ family labor, much less pay the fees required to send a girl child to school. Boys, on whose future earning power the families relied, were at any rate more likely to be in compliance with the law than their sisters.

The gender-specific nature of Mutō’s efforts to formulate a new system of labor relations based on the concept of compassionism at Kanebō is evident not only in the specific educational opportunities offered female workers, but also in the architecture of the factory itself. The gates and high walls surrounding working, living, educational, and entertainment facilities acted as spaces of containment designed to offer protection and safety together with surveillance and control. Parents deciding to take a cash advance and sign a contract handing over their daughters for a period of indentured servitude were often convinced to do so after hearing descriptions of the factory’s many amenities, and the precautions taken by the company to keep their charges safely locked away from the many dangers—often presumed to be sexual—that lurked just outside the factory gates. Employees at Kanebō were encouraged to purchase color postcards from the company store to be sent home to anxious relatives and neighbors. These postcards depicted the newness of the factory buildings, smokestacks signaling the modern nature of the important work undertaken by the sender. The dormitories, dining halls, nursing facilities, lecture halls, and factory shop floors all were part of Mutō’s paternalist policies that took women and girls as their primary object.

Among those profoundly influenced by Mutō’s formulation of paternalism was the labor consultant, author, and publisher Uno Riemon
From Home Work to Corporate Paternalism

(1875–1934). The founder of the Industrial Education Association (Kōgyō Kyōikuikai), Uno gained prominence as a consultant and labor-management theorist first in his hometown of Osaka and then nationally. The series of pamphlets and books published by the Industrial Education Association—many of them authored by Uno—circulated among factory managers at all levels, in nearly all parts of the country. Uno is perhaps best known for the nationalism inhering in his insistence on recognizing the “beautiful customs” of paternalist labor practices as evidence of “Japanese uniqueness.”

In his 1915 Shokkō yūgu ron (On the Good Treatment of Factory Workers), Uno argued that as a late-developing nation Japan had mostly factory workers who were single, young girls from the countryside and who were forced by their circumstances to live a collective, unfamily-like life in factory dormitories. But these potential negatives were related for Uno to two major advantages in the Japanese system. First, he argued that even amid industrialization and development, the loyalty and pliability inherent in the Japanese national essence (kokuminsei) had remained unchanged. And second, the factory dormitory system offered the possibility of harnessing this preexisting national essence in the service of harmonious industrial relations. To do this, Uno believed that companies needed to re-create the elements of family life their employees had given up in coming to work in the factories. This re-creation meant the cultivation of good womanly virtues such as chastity, filial piety, and obedience—all qualities that could be used in the promotion of harmonious industrial relations. Or, as Oka Minoru put it in the passage cited earlier, “The factory will become one big family . . . [and] strikes will become unthinkable.”

As part of his efforts to promote the cultivation of devoted daughters/workers in Japan’s textile factories, Uno published a volume titled Kōjo risshindan (Stories of Factory Girls Getting Ahead, 1910). More of a hagiography of women workers who demonstrated filial piety and persistence in the face of adversity than a primer on industrial relations, Kōjo risshindan offered examples of “model factory girls” who Uno believed possessed those qualities most desirable in a female factory worker. The easy-to-read personal histories probably appealed to young readers, many of whom may have recognized something of the hardships of their own lives in these “true stories.”

Shimazaki Takiko from Fukui Prefecture, Uno’s “model factory girl #1,” worked for the Teikoku Seima Company at their Ōtsu Seihin factory. Readers learned by looking at the description under Takiko’s pho-
tographic portrait that her primary traits included “obedience, an admirable depth of filial piety, trustworthiness, and a willingness to help new hires.” They would learn also that Takiko had displayed in her room the Chinese characters for the word *kannin* (endurance); that she regularly sent money home to her family (including her sick mother); and that she had also managed to save up an admirable sum of money for herself in preparation for becoming a bride.

Another model factory girl described by Uno, Watanabe Makie, decided not long after the death of her father to find work at a factory and hired on with Kanebō. Her two sisters, mother, and younger brother joined the company too. She was eleven years old at the time. Soon Makie’s mother, who was getting old, and her young brother returned to the countryside so as not to leave their village home empty, and Makie and her two sisters continued to send money to them from their earnings. Makie’s eldest sister became ill and died at age eighteen, leaving the two remaining sisters to work even harder to provide for their old mother. Upon the engagement of her younger sister, Makie bestowed upon her everything she owned, including precious hair decorations, as a parting gift. Finally, still working at Kanebō, Makie decided to pursue an education and eventually graduated from the higher elementary school at the factory.

This tale of an exemplary Japanese woman worker depended on the exemplary conditions Uno believed existed at factories like Kanebō, even before such companies had implemented the more extensive welfare programs that would appear in the 1920s. These were places where workers could earn enough money to send home to ailing parents if they worked diligently, and where they could take advantage of company schools to better themselves through education. In fact, after publishing *Kōjo risshindan*, Uno undertook the writing of a five-volume series on model factories. As he put it in the preface to one of the volumes, “just as people need role models, so do factories.” Four of the five model companies featured in his series were textile companies employing mostly women—one of them was Kanebō.

These stories of self-sacrifice and filial piety—deeds made possible thanks to the benevolence and opportunities bestowed by the textile companies—present examples of *risshin shusse*, or “getting ahead,” for women. Indeed, the very title of Uno’s *Kōjo risshindan* (Stories of Factory Girls Getting Ahead) made the connection explicit. *Risshin* (also read as *mi o tateru*) referred to “raising oneself in the world,” while *shusse* (or *yo ni deru*) referred to “going out into the world” to seek one’s
fortune. The combined term *risshin shusse* gained wide currency immediately after the Meiji Restoration as a new generation of young men (with encouragement from the government) took up the slogan in their quest for advancement in the new society. While *risshin shusse* for men emphasized education and personal achievement, in these texts aimed at female factory workers, “getting ahead” for working-class and rural women took selfless dedication to natal and national family as its measure.

The elements that went into the development of labor paternalism in Japan emerged in the early twentieth century in response to the first phase of Japanese industrialization and the specific conditions of Japan’s labor market. Many scholars have pointed to these elements of prewar labor paternalism as the precursor to the systems of lifetime employment and seniority-based wages that emerged after the war, policies that have only recently begun to be abandoned by Japanese corporations plagued by the recession in force since the economic bubble burst in the early 1990s. But the idea and practice of labor paternalism has always been highly gendered, applying to women in the prewar period and men in the postwar. Further, the term “compassionism” meant something vastly different in 1920 than it did in 1970. Compassionism for Mutō Sanji and for Uno Riemon referred to a set of practices targeting temporary female labor in Japan’s textile mills. By 1970 Japan’s textile industry had all but been abandoned, and the predominantly male industries such as auto and steel forced a reconfiguration of paternalist practices to emphasize the cultivation not of filial daughters, but of family wage-earning male heads of households.

**THE FACTORY LAW**

At the same time that didactic texts admonished female factory workers to work selflessly for the nation and for their families, a fierce battle was being fought among government bureaucrats, textile industry leaders, and social reformers over what measures the state should take to safeguard workers from the excesses of industrial capital and to protect the nation from the kinds of social conflict that had plagued England after industrialization. The debates over how to construct and implement factory legislation in Japan that would allow industry to develop at a rapid pace, but that would also address domestic and international concerns for the welfare of workers, often focused on the textile industry and the conditions of the women who worked in it.
Textiles remained crucial to the Japanese economy even after the post-1895 growth of heavy industry, and as the number of female factory workers increased through the 1930s, policy makers, bureaucrats, journalists, and social critics came to see female workers not only as necessary contributors to the national economy, but also as potential vehicles for social unrest, disease, and the corruption of public morals. R. P. Dore has succinctly summarized the arguments of Soeda Jūichi, at the time a senior civil administrator in the Ministry of Finance, who articulated the concerns of a generation of bureaucrats and politicians as he spoke out in 1896 in favor of factory legislation: “The advanced countries have recognized the need for legislation for four reasons: bad conditions weaken the health of children and potential mothers, hence of a country’s soldiers and hence of her defensive power; bad conditions breed epidemic diseases; the promiscuous mixing of the young of both sexes leads to moral deterioration; resentment against maltreatment leads to labour problems, and generalized social conflict.” For Soeda then, national interests lay in the protection of motherhood (which he linked through a series of relations to the defense of the nation), the physical health of the national body, the sexual/moral constitution of the populace, and the containment of labor. Female gender, sexuality, bodies, and labor unrestrained and unprotected, he asserted, could—and perhaps would—inevitably lead to the downfall of the nation. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, Soeda’s concern for the sexual integrity of factory workers motivated many of the labor-management policies that would be adopted by textile companies in the interwar period.

The preparations for drafting a factory bill, a process that spanned thirty years and more than a generation of bureaucrats, included the commissioning of studies to address just such issues of public health, public morals, and public unrest. And female factory workers, deemed most at risk of physical and psychological disease, became the central objects of official and scientific investigation. As part of their research efforts the government commissioned several major studies, including the three-volume report Shōkō jijō (Conditions of Factory Workers). Published in 1901, this report derived much of its methodology from Yokoyama Gennosuke’s book-length exposé of conditions among Japan’s “lower strata.” Dr. Ishihara Osamu’s studies of tuberculosis among women factory workers, also commissioned by the government, warned that rates of infection among female operatives were reaching epidemic proportions and threatened to decimate the countryside where many of these girls returned home to die. And following the lead of the
ministries, local governments of the cities where migrant workers (from various parts of Japan) and immigrant laborers (especially from Korea) settled surveyed their living and working conditions meticulously as part of public-policy efforts to minimize the social unrest believed likely to follow such significant demographic changes.

The many surveying efforts of the 1920s and 1930s generally followed the model established by the Social Bureau—set up by the Home Ministry in 1922 to oversee labor and welfare matters—which documented factory conditions, strikes, immigrant labor, and unemployment compensation. Very quickly, major metropolitan governments such as those in Tokyo and Osaka moved to create their own Social Bureaus, which conducted scores of surveys and issued similar reports at the local level. These reports and the surveying techniques with which they were associated attest to the ways in which the female factory worker and her fate were, right from the time of her appearance in the industrial workplace, a national concern of grave proportions.

The thirty years of parliamentary and bureaucratic debate that went into producing and later implementing the Factory Law have been treated extensively as labor and political history in a variety of sources. But the mass of national and local government studies and surveys, industry reports and recommendations, and commentaries across the political spectrum debating the law in the print media can also be read as part of the process of reifying and universalizing newly established middle-class values that had strictly coded normative categories of gender and sexuality as their linchpin. The product of competing discourses that went far beyond debates over industrial management, labor relations, and worker protection, the Factory Law and the tortuous route of its passage and implementation testify to the degree to which the “labor problem” was infused with the rhetoric of gender.

The Factory Law had its beginnings as early as the 1880s, when it was conceived as a manufacturers’ rather than a workers’ protection law, with provisions that would guarantee industry a steady flow of labor power. It developed out of an industrial policy aimed at reproducing a sound labor force in a society where the threat of tuberculosis remained a significant public health crisis. Despite its passage in 1911 after decades of wrangling between politicians and industry leaders, and among the various bureaucratic factions charged with drawing up the bill, the law did not go into effect until 1916. And because its passage came only as a result of concessions made to big business, the regulations included exceptions that in some cases seemed to go against the
very spirit of the law. For example, the new law set maximum working
hours at twelve per day, but the silk industry was exempted from the
twelve-hour rule and allowed to have operatives work fourteen-hour
shifts. The cotton industry was permitted to continue using two alter-
nating twelve-hour day and night shifts despite earlier legislative at-
ttempts to abolish night work that had inspired many of the arguments
for protective factory legislation in the first place. In 1909 the Japan
Spinners Association had strongly opposed a provision in an earlier ver-
sion of the law that would have abolished night work beginning ten
years after its passage as submitted to the 26th Diet in 1908, and their
opposition effectively forced the government to withdraw the bill. The
government rewrote the offending language to allow night work to con-
tinue for fifteen years after passage of the Factory Law and finally won
the cotton industry’s support.\textsuperscript{39}

But even after enforcement of the law began in 1916, many believed
it was not enough. Pressured by the International Labour Organization,
the government revised the Factory Law in 1923, with the revisions not
going into effect until an imperial edict ordered them implemented on
June 5, 1926. These revisions tightened a number of provisions and re-
stricted some of the exemptions from the previous version. As a result,
as of July 1, 1929, the textile industry was finally prohibited from al-
lowing women and children under the age of sixteen to engage in night
work between the hours of 10:00 P.M. and 5:00 A.M.\textsuperscript{40} But once again the
powerful cotton lobby successfully negotiated a less rigid standard for it-
self, and the cotton industry was granted a special extension to allow
night work to continue one hour later than the 10:00 P.M. stipulated in
the law.

The history of the prohibition of night work can be read as the story
of Japanese labor-management relations, wherein the weakness of pre-
war organized labor made it dependent on international pressure, the
good will of so-called liberal bureaucrats, and the rise of party politics
to effect real change for workers in the form of protective factory legis-
lation.\textsuperscript{41} But the rhetoric used by those party to the law’s passage points
to another story involving more than just a struggle over competing eco-
nomic interests. While factory workers themselves had for years decried
mandatory fourteen- and sixteen- hour workdays as unhealthful at best
and inhumane at worst, for factory owners and managers, shortening
work hours for female factory workers raised questions about how they
would spend their nonworking hours and what the implications would
be for public morals. As we shall see, arguments in favor of a law pro-
hibiting night work begat counterarguments that increased free time generated by the decrease in work hours would result in a further decline in the moral standards of young women factory workers. These women workers, so the counterarguments went, were particularly susceptible (because of their supposed low educational level, immaturity, youthful lusts, and putative predisposition towards sexual adventurism) to the overtures of young men whom they might encounter outside the protective walls of the factory dormitories. Such a position went hand in hand with the paternalism that offered educational and welfare facilities for the betterment of employees and sought to cultivate them as proper wives and mothers of the future.