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WORKING GIRLS AND WORKINGWOMEN IN SATA INEKO'S PROLETARIAN STORIES[1]

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ABSTRACT. ***Working Girls and Workingwomen in Sata Ineko's Proletarian Stories.*** Sata Ineko (1904-1998) is one of the Japanese female writers who, throughout her long literary career, experienced crucial moments of Japan's modern history. After coming into artistic consciousness as a proletarian writer in the late 1920s, just as her country was slipping into authoritarianism, military dictatorship and imperialism, Sata was forced by the political environment to renounce her political adherence to communism, "convert" and join forces with Japan's imperial war machine, as a propaganda writer. Then, in the wake of Japan's defeat in World War II, she tried twice to rejoin the ranks of the Japan Communist Party, only to be expelled each time. She spent the last third of her relatively long life reflecting on her literature and life in memoirs and continuing to write semi-autobiographical fiction and leading feminist organizations, as well as a peace activist. The present research aims to provide an analysis of the evolution of Sata's female protagonists in some of her main proletarian literature

[1] The present research is partially based on research pursued for and included in my doctoral dissertation, *The Literature of Political Conversion (*Tenkō*) of Japan*, University of Chicago, 2013, and it has not been published elsewhere.

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stories, and their evolution from characters based largely on the author's own experience to fictional personas struggling to deal with the challenges of political commitment and renunciation, while questioning the category of gender and its place in Sata's prewar proletarian works.

Keywords: *gender, political conversion, proletarian literature, Sata Ineko,* tenkō

REZUMAT. ***Fete şi femei din clasa muncitoare în povestirile proletare ale lui Sata Ineko.*** Sata Ineko (1904–1998) este una dintre scriitoarele japoneze care, de-a lungul îndelungatei sale cariere literare, a traversat momente cruciale ale istoriei moderne a Japoniei. După ce s-a afirmat ca scriitoare proletară la sfârşitul anilor 1920, în perioada în care Japonia aluneca spre autoritarism, dictatură militară şi imperialism, Sata a fost constrânsă de mediul politic să renunţe la adeziunea sa la comunism, să se „convertească" şi să se alăture maşinii de război imperiale a Japoniei, ca scriitoare de propagandă. Apoi, în urma înfrângerii Japoniei în cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial, a încercat de două ori să reintre în rândurile Partidului Comunist Japonez, însă de fiecare dată a fost exclusă. Ultima parte a vieţii sale relativ lungi şi-a petrecut-o reflectând asupra literaturii şi vieţii sale în memorii, continuând totodată să scrie ficţiune semi-autobiografică şi să conducă organizaţii feministe, precum şi implicându-se ca activistă pentru pace. Prezenta cercetare îşi propune să ofere o analiză a evoluţiei protagonistelor feminine ale lui Sata în câteva dintre principalele sale povestiri de literatură proletară, urmărind transformarea acestora din personaje bazate în mare măsură pe propria experienţă a autoarei în personaje ficţionale care se confruntă cu provocările angajamentului politic şi ale renunţării la acesta, punând totodată sub semnul întrebării categoria de gender şi locul acesteia în operele proletare antebelice ale lui Sata.

Cuvinte-cheie: *convertire politică, gender, literatură proletară, Sata Ineko,* tenkō

1. Introduction: The Arrest

When they arrested Sata Ineko (1904-1998) on May 11, 1935, the detectives from the Tokubetsu Kōtō Keisatsu (Special Higher Police), Japan's prewar secret police, had no information about her membership in the Japan Communist Party. As such, they did not see much reason to keep her imprisoned for too long. She was, however, charged with being the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Hataraku fujin* (Workingwomen) and a member of several revolutionary organizations.

(Satsuma 1998, 137 fn.)[3] She also did not seem to them as important an actor in the movement as male proletarian writers, who were also leaders of the communist party. Kobayashi Takiji (1903-1933), Nakano Shigeharu (1902-1979), Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-1977), Kubokawa Tsurujirō (1903-1974), among others, were considered dangerous and were the ones who had to be made to commit *tenkō* (coerced political conversion)[4] publicly. Besides, once Sata's husband, Kubokawa, had already committed *tenkō*, the expectation of the interrogators was that she would follow suit. They were not wrong, but Sata's reasons for *tenkō* were not those that they had envisioned.

Moreover, according to her memoir, *Nenpu no gyōkan* (Between the Lines of My Chronology, 1983), the police at the Totsuka station where she was held were very sympathetic toward her plight. Sata was not physically abused during her incarceration, except for one slap on the face from the detective assigned to her case, Kimura. (Sata 1983, 172). Even the prison guard was apparently calling Sata "a model Japanese woman." It might have helped that she made a point of invoking her children and the hardships she endured to be with them. (In one of the most touching scenes of the novella *Kurenai* (Crimson) (Sata 1977-79, 2:7-104), written in the semi-autobiographical literary convention of the *shishōsetsu*[5]. Later retold in *Between the Lines*…, the protagonist, Akiko, pretended

[3] The full list of trial summons included the following charges: membership in *Nihon puroretaria geijutsu renmei* (Japan Proletarian Arts League), *Kaihō undo giseisha kyūenkai* (Relief Organization for the Victims of the Movement), *Zen-Nihon musansha geijutsu dantai kyōgikai* (All-Japan Council of Proletarian Arts Associations), *Nihon puroretaria sakka dōmei* (Japan Proletarian Writers League), and *Nihon puroretaria bunka renmei* (Japan Proletarian Culture League); leadership in *Fujin iinkai* (Women's Committee); editorship of *Hatarаku fujin* (Workingwomen), together with fellow female writer and friend Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951); membership in the editorial committee of *Senki* (Battle Flag), the official publication of the All-Japan Proletarian Arts League.

[4] *Tenkō* (lit. "change of direction"), often rendered as "conversion", albeit the proper translation would be "coerced political conversion", is a defining moment of Japan's prewar intellectual history and has been often analyzed within the context of the failure of modern ideology. It describes the coerced political conversion of Japanese leftist and democratic activists who were imprisoned and forced to publicly renounce their political beliefs. The *tenkō* phenomenon has been widely studied, although it remains largely misunderstood. For more recent research on *tenkō* in English, see Max M. Ward, *Thought Crime: Ideology & State Power in Interwar Japan* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2019) and Irena Hayter, George T. Sipos, and Mark Williams, eds., Tenkō*: Cultures of Political Conversion in Transwar Japan* (London & New York: Routledge, 2021).

[5] *Shishōsetsu* (lit. "I-fiction"), often rendered as "I-novel", with the additional comment that it ought not be confused with the German *Ich Roman,* is a Japanese literary category that originated at the dawn of the 20th century from a naturalist tradition. The convention is that the narrator or protagonist is identified by readers as the author's alter ego, and that the story is a verisimilar account of the author's personal life. In reality, significant parts of the text are fictional. Major

to be very strong and to show no emotions toward her children when they visited her in prison. (Sata 1977-79, 2:27-30; Sata 1983, 172-3) During her short incarceration (she was released after 38 days on June 17), Sata could even focus on writing and finished the story *Hashira* (Pillar), which was published in the July issue of the magazine *Fujin no tomo* (Women's Friend). (Sata 1977-79, 2:201-224)

Little did detective Kimura and the other investigators in Sata's case know that, for about a year, in 1932-1933, when most of the male leaders of the JCP and the proletarian literary movement were in prison, Sata was one of the key liaisons between underground activists, such as writer and activist Kobayashi Takiji, and the outside world, and that she was at the same time a writer, a propagandist, a party activist, a carrier of secret documents, an agitator, mother of one, expecting another, and a wife whose husband was in prison. For brief moments during the long agony of the leftist and communist movement in Japan between 1928 and 1935, the survival of the organization rested on her shoulders, as well as those of other female communists and sympathizers.

By 1934, however, after the major wave of *tenkō* (see Sipos 2013, 22-102; Ward 2019; Hayter, Sipos, and Williams 2021) among proletarian writers, Sata saw her role diminished as organization after organization ceased activity. Faced with the decision to return to a domestic life of subservience to her husband and to raising children, Sata realized she could no longer do so. Her most important declaration of *tenkō* was done through the protagonist of the novella *Kurenai* (Crimson, 1936) and the *shishōsetsu* literary conventions. Sata thus used her own literature to state her estrangement from communist ideals, unlike most male writers, who were required to issue *tenkō seimei* (political conversion declarations) from prison. In *Crimson*, Akiko, the protagonist, reflected on the issue of the return to domesticity: "While he was away [in prison] for those two years, she had savored to the full the freedom of living alone. That was the true tragedy: this contradiction of loving one's husband yet wanting the freedom to live alone" (Sata 1977-79, 2:22; Satsuma 1998, 137).

The present research focuses on Sata Ineko and her political development and literary output as a proletarian artist with the aim of exploring the way in which class rather than gender defined the protagonists of her early work. Gender will only become a relevant category in Sata's work with her texts announcing in fictional form her separation from the proletarian literary ideals and the communist activism, in the second half of the 1930s.

writers who employed the *shishōsestsu* conventions in prewar Japan are Shimazaki Tōson, Shiga Naoya, Kasai Zenzō and Dazai Osamu. Several former proletarian writers who were forced to convert in the 1930s also relied on shishōsestsu to convey either adherence to or resistance to the prescribed official militarist/imperialist discourse.

2. Sata Ineko, Proletarian and "Converted" Writer

During her long literary career, Sata reflected on her life on numerous occasions. Her most important truly autobiographical works are *Aru onna no koseki* (A Woman's Family Register, 1946-1947), *Watashi no Nagasaki chizu* (My Map of Nagasaki, 1948), (Sata 1977-79, 4:155-212) *Watashi no Tōkyō chizu* (My Map of Tōkyō, 1949), *Toki ni tatsu* (Standing in Time, 1975), and *Between the Lines*... As with *Crimson*, Sata employed either biographical elements or *shishōsetsu* conventions in her fiction, and some of her proletarian works were, in fact, based on her own experience as a working child and woman.

Born on June 1, 1904, in Nagasaki, where her parents found refuge from their families' wrath over their illicit love affair, Sata was adopted by her paternal grandmother's younger brother, Tanaka Umetarō, and renamed Tanaka. Thus, her legal name was Tanaka Ine, which she occasionally used as her pen name (Tanaka Ineko), before settling on Kubokawa Ineko after her second husband, the proletarian writer Kubokawa Tsurujirō, and ultimately choosing Sata Ineko. After her natural parents were legally married, Sata was adopted into their family in 1908 and grew up in Nagasaki until 1915 (Sata 1983, 9-10).

In 1911, her mother died of tuberculosis, which led to a series of disastrous relations for her father. Young Ine was raised mostly by her paternal grandmother. In 1915, the father moved the family to Tōkyō but was unable to secure employment, and they were forced to live in dire poverty. Since no one in the family had a full-time job, the responsibility to provide for the family fell on young Ine, only a fifth grader at the time. She had to take a job at a caramel factory in Kanda, where she started working in December 1915. These events would later inspire her first major contribution to proletarian literature, the story *Kyarameru kōba kara* (From the Caramel Factory, 1928). Later in life, she remembered that time as one full of suffering due to her father's lack of responsibility. (Sata 1983, 36)

Over the following years, Sata held various jobs, which later inspired some of her proletarian literary works. Around the time she became a store clerk at Maruzen, in 1921, she started writing poetry and published a few works. Through one of her co-workers, she was introduced to leftist ideas and socialism. In one of her later stories, *Mohan ten'in* (Model Store Clerk, 1930), she fictionalized that time in her life:

> Asae began to realize that the prestige of being the model store clerk held no meaning for her.
> She stared at the rattling ceiling boards of the corner tenement house where both she and her mother lived and started to think about socialism. She did not understand anything. She thought about socialism as a swirl of confusion. She thought about the system of class distinctions. (Sata 1977-79, 1:196; Satsuma 1998, 32)

In 1924, she entered an arranged marriage and gave birth to a girl the following year. The husband, one Kobori Enzō, turned out to be a weak and jealous character. Torn by pessimism and despair, and without a clear direction in life, Sata attempted suicide in 1925 during her first pregnancy. Another attempt at a double suicide with Kobori followed, but both survived. Their marriage, however, fell apart soon after, and Sata and her parents returned to Tōkyō.

In 1926, she started working as a waitress in a small coffee shop, where the young editorial team of the literary coterie magazine *Roba* (Donkey) was among the regulars. The core editorial group of *Donkey* consisted of four young writers, Nakano Shigeharu, Kubokawa Tsurujirō, Hori Tatsuo (1904-1953), and Nishizawa Ryūji (1903-1976), under the artistic and financial patronage of established and respected writer Murō Saisei (1889-1962). Young and beautiful Sata became the protégée of the all-male team, and they took care of her education and encouraged her to write and publish. She felt most attracted to Kubokawa, who would later become her lover and husband, while Nakano stayed a close friend of the couple. Under their influence and encouragement, Sata began writing and publishing more consistently. Between 1927 and 1928, she published short prose and poetry works in *Donkey*. (Tsukamoto 1987, 151-155)

The 1928 *From the Caramel Factory* was followed by other stories inspired by the author's experiences as a member of the working class. Some of the most representative works from this period are *Kyūkanchō* (The Mynah Bird, 1928), *Omemie* (Live-In Servant, 1928), *Tsutomejin* (Office Clerk, 1929), *Jiko shōkai* (Self Introduction, 1929), *Hankō* (Resistance, 1930), *Model Store Clerk*, *Rōdōsha no ie* (The Worker's House, 1930), *Kitō* (The Prayer, 1931), *Kanbu jokō no namida* (Tears of the Female Factory Cadre, 1931), *Hajimete no keiken kara* (From Her First Experience, 1931), *Shōkanbu* (Lower Union Cadre, 1931), to name a few.

As Sata Ineko was enhancing her abilities as a proletarian writer, the couple Sata-Kubokawa was undergoing a period of extreme financial and political hardship. Around the time of Kubokawa's first arrest in 1928, Sata decided to submit a short story to the most influential commercial cultural magazine of the time, *Bungei shunjū* (The Annals of Arts and Culture), edited by the influential writer Kikuchi Kan (1888-1948), and one that, naturally, paid much better. In 1929, *Resutoran Rakuyō* (Restaurant Rakuyō) was published and received a lot of attention from major literary names, with Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972) and Uno Chiyo (1897-1996) publishing praising reviews (Satsuma 1998, 88-9). The proletarian camp, however, including Nakano Shigeharu and Kobayashi Takiji, was not at all pleased with the work, and accused it of lacking in proletarian consciousness despite the fact that the main character was a *jokyū,* a coffee shop hostess, hence a member of the working class.

That was not the first time for Kobayashi Takiji to dismiss the relevance of Sata's work, calling it non-political, fragmented, thematically narrow and trivial

in content. (Kobayashi 1958, 8:278; Kusakabe 2011, 75 et passim). Sata engaged in debates with Kobayashi and Nakano, mostly over the role of women in the proletarian literary movement (Sata 1977-79, 16:45-6), [6] but she continued to respect and admire Kobayashi and she might have even been one of the last people to see him alive, since they met only three days before his arrest and ensuing murder at the hands of the Special Police (Sata 1977-79, 17:76).[7] After Kobayashi's murder, Sata started a public crusade over the fact that he had been killed by the police, rather than dying from heart failure, as the authorities had declared.[8] Sata and Kobayashi's complicated relationship has been discussed by Madoka Kusakabe in her doctoral dissertation (Kusakabe 2011, 66-7).

Paradoxically, Sata's relationship with *The Annals of Arts and Culture*, a publication rejected by other proletarian writers, allowed her to contribute essays about the theory of proletarian arts, thus introducing it to the larger public. Her 1931 short essay, *Puroretaria bungaku no sekai* (The World of Proletarian Literature) is such an example. Sata expressed her firm belief in the ideas of movement theorist Kurahara Korehito, according to which the movement's arts and literature would develop alongside the proletarian class. Moreover, she rejected the claims that proletarian literature was inflexible and that the author's individual creativity was limited by organizational and ideological pressure. On the contrary, she argued, creativity can only flourish within the precepts of the organization, and the author's artistic freedom is best expressed when writing class-consciousness-driven stories.

Like other comrades, Sata and Kubokawa suffered greatly under the oppression unleashed by the Japanese government against the leftist movement immediately after the February 1928 elections. The massive arrests of March 15, 1928, were followed by the first wave of *tenkō* culminating in Kobayashi Takiji's arrest and murder by torture in February 1933. The second and most damaging *tenkō* wave began in June 1933, with JCP leading cadre Sano Manabu

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6 One of the harshest rebuttals coming from Sata was the article "Puroretaria fujin sakka no mondai" (On the Issue of Female Proletarian Writers), published in 1931 in direct response to Kobayashi Takiji's criticism.

7 This biographical detail appears in Sata's article "Kobayashi Takiji no bungaku" (The Literature of Kobayashi Takiji), published in 1949.

8 Between February and May 1933, in utter disregard of the danger to which they were exposing themselves, Sata and Miyamoto Yuriko published several articles about Kobayashi's death, describing in detail the condition of his body when it had been returned to his mother's house. Some of Sata's most provocative articles were: "Nigatsu hatsuka no koto" (What Happened on February 20th, in *Taishū no tomo*, February 1933); "Shikabane no ue ni" (Over the Corpse, in *Taishū no tomo*, March 1933); "Aru hi no dōshi Kobayashi Takiji" (One day, Comrade Kobayashi Takiji, in *Mita shinbun*, March 28, 1933); "Kobayashi Takiji no shi wa gyakusatsu de atta" (Kobayashi Takiji's Death was an Atrocity, in *Hataraku fujin*, April 1933).

(1892-1953) and Nabeyama Sadachika (1901-1979). Kubokawa was first arrested shortly after March 15 and released at the end of the year on account of his weak constitution and health problems.

When Kubokawa was arrested again in March 1932 and incarcerated for eighteen months, Sata took over many of the activities that could no longer be managed by the imprisoned communist leaders. She secretly joined the Japan Communist Party, became the editor-in-chief, together with Miyamoto Yuriko, of both *Workingwomen* and *Women's Friend*, and maintained communication with the underground members of the Japan Proletarian Culture League and of the party (Kobayashi 1994, 242). Moreover, by that time she and Kubokawa already had one child, and she was pregnant with their second at the time of his arrest.

Upon her husband's release from prison after committing *tenkō*, their relationship started to deteriorate, leading to separation in 1938 and a final legal divorce in 1945. Sata would, in turn, be arrested in 1935, and although her JCP membership remained a secret, she was still detained for about two months. She was released from prison only after she promised to cease all political activities and focus on her children, thus technically committing *tenkō* for personal reasons, but without issuing a public declaration. As opposed to Kubokawa or Nakano, who committed *tenkō* and were released from prison, only to keep acting upon their political ideas, Sata truly ceased all political involvement in 1935 and continued to write and publish semi-autobiographical pieces, in *shishōsetsu* vein, until 1940, when she went the extra mile and joined the ranks of the Japanese writers who were sent to Japan's newly-acquired colonies in Asia and the Pacific to send back reportage and dispatches for newspapers at home.

Albeit understated and literary rather than public through a declaration, Sata Ineko's *tenkō* was not atypical. Overall, women's *tenkō* was not considered of equal importance with that of men. Most women *tenkōsha* (converted) were considered secondary targets by the authorities. Even in the 1950s, a groundbreaking study on the phenomenon, the view that women's *tenkō* was determined by "domestic forces" was prevalent, as exemplified by the study's leader, Tsurumi Shunsuke.

> It is a failing that we have done almost no research on women. For women, *tenkō* took a feminine course, involving problems unique to women. To be a history of the people's thought, *tenkō* research must of course consider female *tenkō,* not as something done under the direct compulsion of the state authorities but as a process within the confrontation of various domestic forces. (Shisō no Kagaku 1978, 1:25; Cullen 2010, 67)

Paradoxically, the statement above both validates female *tenkō* and dismisses it in the same paragraph. In Jennifer Cullen's opinion, "Tsurumi seems to swallow whole the logic behind the methods of the Ministry of Justice when it comes to women but takes a more nuanced approach when studying male *tenkō*." (Cullen 2010, 67-8).

In her 2010 comparative study of Miyamoto Yuriko and Sata Ineko's *tenkō* processes,[9] Jennifer Cullen challenged the idea that women's *tenkō* is to be dismissed with one overarching sweep under a generalizing definition and showed how two of the most influential female writers of the Japanese proletarian literary movement took completely different paths in dealing with the coercion of the authorities: on one hand, Miyamoto Yuriko, who had only committed to communism after almost three years spent in the Soviet Union (1927-1930), and who was driven to demonstrate her dedication to the cause, and on the other, Sata Ineko, whose husband's *tenkō* and ensuing writing dry spell left her the sole breadwinner of the family.

Miyamoto Kenji, Miyamoto Yuriko's husband, was one of the very few JCP leaders who remained a staunch *hitenkōsha* (non-converted) and resisted in prison for 12 years until the end of World War II, while Kubokawa committed *tenkō* within a year, although he maintained his political views. Comparing the two cases, Cullen concludes: "For Miyamoto, class identity seems to have played a primary role and largely determined how gender and authorial identities were lived out, while Sata struggled with an unresolvable tension between public and private identities." (Cullen 2010, 68).

Sata's initial attitude toward *tenkō* was rejection and criticism of those who had caved under the pressure of the authorities. In a 1932 article about fellow proletarian writer Kataoka Teppei (1894-1944)'s *tenkō* after one year spent in prison, she showed herself intransigent and unsympathetic: "It is unimaginable at least to us that Teppei, who believed in the advancement in history of the proletariat as an artist and author, could abandon his belief within a single year" (Sata, 1977-79, 16:49; Cullen 2010, 78).

One year later, Kubokawa was in the same situation, and Sata's conviction in the priority of class identity over individual convictions was beginning to shake. Two years after her husband's *tenkō*, and after two months spent in prison, she too renounced communism and pursued an entirely different path. Looking back on that period of her life in 1977, Sata dated her first doubts about the proletarian movement to 1934, around the time of the KOPF's dissolution, so one year before her own *tenkō*.

[9] Miyamoto Yuriko did not, in fact, commit *tenkō*. Cullen compared the two cases, one of *tenkō*, the other of *hitenkō*.

> I consciously untied what had been binding me to my material until then. . . From around that time I began to grope painfully for my own position through my relation to everyday life. Having lost the organization, the site of conflict disappeared aside from my own writing and my days flowed along as a so-called petit bourgeois. (Sata 1977-79, 2:417; Cullen 2010, 79)

After the war and official divorce from Kubokawa, Sata rejoined the Japan Communist Party in 1946, only to be expelled in 1951 for her wartime collaboration with the imperial authorities. Between 1941 and 1943 (for more see Sipos 2010), she had indeed been traveling on numerous occasions to China, Manchuria, or Southeast Asia as a member of the *Shōsetsuka imon butai* (Pen Squadrons), writers dispatched to Japan's colonies to keep up the soldiers' spirits on the battlefront and write uplifting articles for the public back home. (Keene 1998, 1156). Her writings from that period were gathered in the volume *Kō ni niou* (The Scent of Incense, 1942).

She was also one of the co-founders of the *Fujin minshu kurabu* (Women's Democratic Club), alongside other leaders of the postwar feminist movement, such as her longtime friend, Miyamoto Yuriko and feminist activist Katō Shizue (1897-2001), who would become one of the first women to be elected in both chambers of the Japanese Diet.

Sata was later unconditionally reinstated to the JCP in 1955, only to be expelled again in 1964 for criticism of party policies (Keene 1998, 1158). During the 1960s, she started her activism on behalf of the victims of the atomic bombings, and generated several literary works focused on the topic, including the novel *Juei* (The Shade of Trees, 1972) whose characters are Japanese and Chinese residents of Nagasaki in the post-bomb period. *The Shade of Trees* earned Sata the prestigious Noma Literary Prize. In fact, she was awarded several other literary distinctions, such as Women's Literature Award for the story *Onna no yado* (Women's Lodgings, 1963), Kawabata Yasunari Literature Prize in 1976, and the Asahi Prize and the Mainichi Art Award for her entire career and her memoir about her old friend Nakano Shigeharu, *Natsu no shiori: Nakano Shigeharu o okuru* (Summer Bookmark: Sending Nakano Shigeharu, 1983).

Until her death in 1998, Sata enjoyed a long artistic career and remained a well-known, prolific, and respected writer, constantly surrounded by readers and admirers. She wrote consistently about her prewar activities, trying to make sense, in retrospect, of the role of her writing and her struggle for the proletarian movement. Upon her death, she was hailed as a pioneer of women's liberation in Japan.

3. Proletarian and "Converted" Protagonists

Sata's female protagonists evolved almost alongside her, and while *shishōsetsu* conventions won't be fully evident in her work until the writing of *Crimson*, a text outside the scope of the current research, the autobiographical and semi-autobiographical tendencies are evident throughout her work.

Around the time when they worked together at *Donkey*, Kubokawa introduced Sata to the works of Engels and Lenin, with the latter's influence evident in her poems of the period (Tsukamoto 1987, 155). In *Between the Lines…*, the writer recalled her coming into political and class consciousness:

> My view of society changed, and I recognized it as a construction of capitalist society.
> There was a sandal craftsman who lived on the second floor. Although he worked day after day from morning to night pounding on clog thongs, why wasn't he able to eat? Why was he poor? I [finally] could understand why. It felt as if a veil, which had been covering my eyes until then, had been taken away. (Sata 1983, 138-9; Satsuma 1998, 58-9)

Under Nakano and Kubokawa's guidance, Sata wrote an essay about her experience working in the caramel factory, which was later reworked into the proletarian story *From the Caramel Factory*, mentioned above. Published in the magazine *Puroretaria geijutsu* (Proletarian Arts) in February 1928, it marked her official debut as a proletarian writer.

Looking back at that time and her beginnings as a proletarian writer under the guidance of her friends and mentors from *Roba*, Sata wrote in 1950:

> [...] the motivation to write is directly related to proletarian literary theory. I was surrounded by people such as Nakano Shigeharu, Kubokawa Tsurujirō, [...] and from the time I was a child I liked literature. If these people had not entered the proletarian literary movement, I would have probably spent my life as a housewife. [...] I... did not think that I especially wanted to become a writer. Nakano encouraged me to write. Kubokawa assisted me. [...]
> Nakano encouraged me to write because I had experienced the life of a worker in a factory and in society. [...] (Sata 1977-79, 17:80-81; Satsuma 1998, 67)

She seemed almost genuinely surprised by the fact that she was becoming a writer:

> I, a woman, uneducated and lacking talent, wrote. It was an adventure. I did not think it possible for an uneducated woman to depict and add something new to literature [...]. Proletarian literary theory eliminated this hesitation. A new structure had to be born from among the workers. A new consciousness, a new feeling, a new sense was to be discovered among the workers who are supported by class consciousness. Even though I did not think that my work would be good enough, I was prepared to write. (Sata 1977-79, 17:81; Satsuma 1998, 67)

The quote above is remarkable for its ability to sublimate something Sata captured throughout her literary career without difficulty: the *female* experience without falling into gender stereotypes. For, as the characters analyzed below make evident, Sata's girls and women are neither necessarily defined nor limited by their femaleness. They engage on equal footing as working girls, party cadre, clerks, or laborers, unaware that their gender needs to be stated. It was only with *Crimson* and its *shishōsetsu* conventions that gender makes its appearance declaratively in Sata's work, despite its being present throughout.

Between 1928 and 1932, Sata combined active political involvement in the proletarian artistic and literary movement and, as of 1932, in the Japan Communist Party, with the writing of numerous poems and stories. Most of the stories of this period have a female protagonist who is involved, either directly or indirectly, in the socialist movement or in workers' activities: strikes, party organization, factory boycotts.

From the Caramel Factory is such an example. As seen above, the story is based on Sata's childhood experience as a candy wrapper in a caramel factory in the Kanda neighborhood of Tōkyō. Sata's working background gave credence to the text, a quality that many writers of the proletarian literary movement could not claim. That experience made Nakano trust Sata's writing and encouraged her to make it public.

The main character of the story is Hiroko, a thirteen-year-old girl who is forced by her father to work in a caramel factory to earn money for the family. The father is unemployed and shows poor judgment regarding family finances. The factory is so far from their home that her earnings barely cover the streetcar fare to the other end of the city. She must also quit school to work for the family. While the father figure could easily be perceived as a symbol of patriarchy, Sata's description makes him a rather pathetic character, oppressed by an unequal system rather than an abusive male figure.

> He drank sake, ranted and raved, and pitted himself against his family. His younger brother had been adopted into another household, and the only money he had was for his own schooling. The older brother expropriated

> this money, letting his younger brother fend for himself. Unaccustomed to physical labor, he fell ill and never got up from his bed. (Sata 1977-79, 1:19; Sata 2003, 4)

At the same time, Hiroko, while younger and smaller than other workers, displays a sense of equal belonging to the class: "Hiroko wedged herself between the legs of the adults. Like them, she was a laborer. But she was a weak and small laborer—similar to a blade of grass that a horse would eat", and is recognized as one of them, "All at once the eyes of those around her looked away. Hiroko was one of their own, since she shared the fate of their own children." (Sata 1977-79, 1:18; Sata 2003, 3)

The story details the working conditions in the candy factory. While it seemed that for some older, more experienced workers, caramel wrapping was an easy task, meeting the daily quota was nearly impossible for young Hiroko. Factory policy required that the names of the top and bottom three workers be posted daily for everyone to see. Hiroko's name invariably appeared on the bottom list, which reminded her that she had always been at the top of the list in school.

> Hiroko wanted desperately to quicken her pace. While other girls could complete five cartons, she could only do two and a half. Even when she thought she had done more than usual, by the day's end, she had only filled two and a half cartons.
> Hiroko was eager to succeed. She struggled to remove herself from the bottom list.
> Competition drove everyone to work frenetically. The girls pushed themselves to their limits in order to earn a spot on the top list. (Sata 1977-79, 1:25-26; Sata 2003, 8)

Everyone in the family pitied Hiroko for having to work at her age. The father, however, maintained a callous attitude about it. In the end, the only way to convince him to allow her to quit her job was a sudden change in remuneration that cut Hiroko's already meager earnings in half. Quitting the job at the caramel factory did not mean that Hiroko's troubles were over, or that she could resume her studies. She was still expected to work to provide for the family, and she became an in-house waitress at a Chinese restaurant, which was at least closer to home. The story ends with Hiroko crying in the bathroom over a letter from her former schoolteacher, who is trying to convince her father to send her back to school.

As Sata's narrative abilities develop, her stories move beyond the exclusive realm of her lived experience into literary reportage and fiction. The 1931 story *The Prayer* is such an example. The story follows Tomiyo, a Christian working-

class girl, whose colleagues go on strike to protest the firing of 360 workers. As their church is on the side of management, the Christian workers do not participate in the strike, which brings about the non-Christian workers' antipathy. The story opens with Tomiyo's internal struggle to come to terms with her status as a bystander:

> As Tomiyo prayed, a hushed sadness welled up once more. Tomiyo endured the rising sadness, holding it back with the clenched fist made by her clasped palms. She felt she somehow cut a sorry and pitiful figure. She remembered how, just now, someone had looked into the room, and though she had been sitting right there, the other girl had left without saying a word. Tomiyo, too, had deliberately ignored her. Since the strike began, she had become reluctant to look people in the face other than her fellow churchgoers. (Sata 1977-79, 1:247; Sata 2016, 77)

The workers' ousting of the Christians led the latter to take refuge in a church community. Tomiyo, however, could not relate to the other members of the church community and chose to return to the factory, even if it meant facing their wrath.

> [...] she still prayed to and depended on this God. Tomiyo was in anguish. The anger of those workers involved in the strike toward her and the other Christians: they had been knocked down, hoisted in the air, then dropped in a way that made them feel like all the blood had drained from them. Then there were the accusations ¾ *traitors, company tools*. Tomiyo was trying to determine the right and the wrong of her actions that had made everybody so angry. What was happening with that struggle being carried out by the people who were so angry with her? (Sata 1977-79, 1:258; Sata 2016, 88)

The protagonist's internal struggle is masterfully balanced by powerfully animated group scenes of the strike and the riots, alternating with calm, quiet prayer scenes of the Christian group. The artistry demonstrated in the descriptions of group actions is comparable to that in contemporary works deemed novelistic masterpieces of proletarian literature, such as Tokunaga Sunao's *Taiyō no nai machi* (Sunless Streets, 1929) and Kobayashi Takiji's *Kani kōsen* (The Crab Cannery Ship, 1929).

> They came pushing from behind with a roar. With that momentum the factory girls up front were shoved into the Christian factory girls.
> *Help!*
> [...]
> *Hoist them up!*

> The anonymous shout drove the crowd. The limbs of the Christian girls, lifted into the air, floundered helplessly. The sea of people formed rapid swirls here and there. The cheers of the factory girls muffled the Christians' cries.
> [...] Shoved by those around her, Tomiyo staggered. Tomiyo twisted her body and tried to escape. Suddenly, her feet were lifted up and her body was suspended in the air. [...] (Sata 1977-79, 1:253, Sata 2016, 82)

Tomiyo and the other Christian girls (although she can't quite identify with them), are part of the laborers, members of the same class, although separated by their faith. As such, the crowd of striking workingwomen perceive their faith-based reluctance to join the struggle as an obstacle and treat them like enemies. Once again, there is no gender solidarity or differential treatment in Sata's story, the union workers aiming to punish and eliminate those who don't join their fight.

Together with other stories she wrote inspired by the same event, the 1930 strike of hundreds of Tōyō Muslin Factory workers was her first attempt to write based on participatory investigative research. The ease with which Sata related to the plight of the laborers by going among them became an important element in Sata's literature, and its later loss became a clear indication of her estrangement from the movement and its ideals. The protagonist of *Crimson*, for instance, is depicted trying to find, yet again, that connection with the working class by moving to one of its neighborhoods, only to realize it is no longer there, thereby metaphorically hinting at her political conversion.

Throughout this stream of proletarian stories, the protagonists' gender is assumed rather than stated, and it is neither an obstacle nor an advantage in their character development. It is rather their social class, their poverty, and their oppression at the hands of abusive parents, abusive factory supervisors or owners, and the system itself that is the origin of the characters' hardships. And amidst these hardships, they become aware of their class and of their oppression, as members of the working-class first and foremost rather than as women.

Sata's fears and doubts about the loss of an organized administrative and theoretical structure within which to anchor her creativity in the early 1930s found literary expression in a June 1934 story regarded as Sata's first piece of *tenkō* literature, although *Crimson* is now viewed as her best-known work of the category. *Botan no aru ie* (The House with Peonies) is a bleak description of the gloomy life of poor farmers stuck in perpetual misery materially and emotionally, without an end in sight. The only burst of color in the story is a beautiful peony bush, renowned throughout the region for its luscious flowers, but that is far from enough to counter the prevailing atmosphere of decay and disease.

As a piece of *tenkō* literature, *The House with Peonies* is a narrative experiment coming from a well-known writer of the proletarian literary movement who had not yet undergone the *tenkō* process. Nevertheless, the narration has all the thematic elements of what Honda Shūgo called "the first period of *tenkō* literature" in which the *tenkō* experience is addressed directly and analyzed through psychological realism and *shishōsetsu* convention elements. Nakano Shigeharu's *The House in the Village*, Tokunaga Sunao's *Fuyugare* (Winter Wither, 1934), Murayama Tomoyoshi's *Byakuya* (Midnight Sun, 1934) and others are just some of the works classified by Honda under this category. (Honda 1964, 192 et passim)

Kogiku, the story's protagonist, returns to her native village in an attempt to cure her TB, which is eating her life away from the inside. The movement from urban to rural is shared with *tenkōsha* characters from *The House in the Village* and *Winter Wither*. Sata's character, however, is not identified as a *tenkōsha*. The only metaphor at work here is the disease associated with the urban space and the healing assumed to be available in the traditional space of the village.

Sata is employing here one of the motifs of the *Nihon e no kaiki* (lit. "return to Japan") nationalist discourse, where the tension urban-rural, and, by extension, modernity-tradition, is solved in favor of the latter. Very similar to the characters in *The House in the Village* and *Winter Wither*, Sata's character cannot be cured in the traditional space of the village, but for completely different reasons. Like Nakano's character, Benji, and Tokunaga's Washio, Kogiku, in Sata's story, eventually returns to the city. Kogiku cannot possibly continue to live at the farm where her brother is barely able to make a living, where babies are still born due to malnutrition and lack of basic health and sanitation, and where marriages are doomed to fail in dire poverty. She realizes that the beautiful peonies in front of the house are only a romanticized idea of the *furusato* (native village), of a traditional lifestyle, and that urban, modern life with all its shortcomings is where she belongs now rather than in the traditional setting. The dilemma is expressed through the metaphor of her illness:

> We have a peony bush that is so rare in its beauty that it enjoys a reputation in the neighboring villages. In fact, I used to think of my house solely in terms of this peony plant. [...] I tend to be willful, and try to push away the pain, but I suppose the longer I remain here, the more difficult it will become. [...] What should I do? Thinking it over, I took pride in my home, but I discovered that even here I could not find a place to rest my broken body. (Sata 1977-79, 2:155-6; Satsuma 1998, 116)

Just like in her proletarian stories, Sata's character is not defined by her gender. Her "failure" to find solace in the country is *en par* with that of the male protagonists in Nakano or Tokunaga's stories.

Sata borrowed the mechanics of the "return to Japan" discourse, in part, to demonstrate its futility and ineffectiveness in addressing modern identity crises. *The House with Peonies* announced Sata's engagement with the motifs of family and landscape, which she will invest with political meaning and employ more actively in *Crimson*, and in her postwar autobiographical works *My Nagasaki Map* and *My Tōkyō Map*.

Sata's characters will only assume their gender with her first true *shishōsetsu* piece, the novella *Crimson*. The tension between Akiko and her husband, her desire to put an end to his abusive and dismissive attitude towards her as the wife and the woman of the house, the burden and joys of motherhood are all present and palpable issues there. Moreover, femaleness and motherhood will become central issues in her wartime writings (see Sipos 2010).

Sata later claimed that her *tenkō* was motivated exclusively by personal needs, and not by loss of political conviction. Her literary activity after 1940, however, seems to indicate otherwise. Kitagawa Akio noted that her attitude toward Japan's imperialist war shifted from a clear rejection at the beginning of the 1930s to identification with the colonizer's gaze in her dispatches from Indonesia and other Southeast Asian colonies (Kitagawa 1993, 254; Cullen 2010, 77). Commenting on this period, Cullen pointed out:

> As the structure of the communist party in Japan crumbled under political oppression, Sata was forced to question her own identity and her priorities in life, reflected not only in her subject matter but in her literary style as well. [...] beginning in the 1930s her fiction became much more personal in nature, centering on the internal thoughts of her protagonists. (Cullen 2010, 77-8)

Cullen went on to conclude that the evolution of Sata's thought process was neither the result of a change in her political beliefs and allegiance, nor of practical considerations alone. In her opinion, her *tenkō* and the ensuing collaboration with the imperial project were "both the cause and effect of her gradual liberation from paternalistic relationships within the party and her marriage." (2010, 78)

4. Conclusion

Sata Ineko's prewar proletarian literary work, briefly analyzed above through several of her major stories, reveals a range of protagonists who develop political consciousness and become active participants in the class struggle of the working masses. From the working girl Hiroko in *From the Caramel Factory* to Kogiku in the literary *tenkō* piece *The House with Peonies*, the female characters are driven and defined by their working-class rather than by their gender identity

as women. In other words, for Sata, in her proletarian literature period, the class weighed more heavily than the gender. Her female characters are laborers, and in that, they are equal to their male counterparts. They suffer the same oppression from a system that subjugates all the poor regardless of gender.

Among the other streetcar riders, Hiroko feels almost a sense of pride to be one of the workers, albeit the smallest of them all, while Tomiyo is tormented by her desire to identify where her allegiance should lie (with her faith, or with her comrades), not by gender considerations. Finally, Kogiku is shocked by the utter misery and poverty her brother's family is experiencing in the countryside, where the beauty of the landscape (i.e., the peony bush) cannot possibly compensate for the benefits of modern life in urban areas.

It can be argued that during the years of her work as a proletarian writer, Sata was less inclined to observe the inherent gender inequality that permeated even the proletarian and communist movement—later identified by Hirano Ken in his 1946 article "Seiji to bungaku" (Politics and Literature), and his articulation of the *jochū mondai* (the housemaid problem) as a blind spot in proletarian literature when it comes to female gendered invisibility in Japanese proletarian literature (see Hirano 1946).

From this perspective, Sata's feminism and gender awareness make their presence in her literary work later than in the works of other proletarian female writers such as Hirabayashi Taiko (1905-1972) or Sata's longtime friend Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951), with class awareness taking precedence over gender issues, which makes her a very interesting case in Japan's prewar leftist literary landscape. In essence, her female characters are first workers, and only then working women. As such, it can be argued that her *tenkō* is also expressed through the emergence of the gender category in her literature, starting in 1936.

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