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# More than the “Wife Corps”: Female Tenant Farmer Struggle in 1920s Japan

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## Abstract

Struggles over social reproduction intensified and took on new forms in Japan during the interwar period, as the state found it increasingly difficult to secure the foundations for the continued accumulation of capital. Landlord-tenant disputes that erupted nationwide in the midst of Japan’s post-World War I agricultural recession was one concrete manifestation of these struggles. While the significance of tenant disputes has been analyzed in great detail by scholars, there has been a surprising lack of historical scholarship on the role that female tenant farmers played within them. This absence is a manifestation of two tendencies: First, gendered assumptions surrounding the figure of the tenant farmer have led scholars of agrarian social movements to work from a relatively limited understanding of what constitutes struggle and by extension, who its protagonists have been. Second, the conflation of waged work as productive work and by extension, non-waged work as unproductive has unwittingly relegated many forms of struggle that working women participated in to the realm of the pre-political. This paper contends that far from being mere supporters – the wife corps – of what was ultimately a male-driven movement, female participants in tenant disputes produced their own powerful critiques of the way that the Japanese state and capital undervalued their lives and labor. As such, they should be understood as one link in a rich history of proletarian feminist struggle both within and outside of the Japanese empire.

Actions produce dreams and ideas, and not the reverse.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In the inaugural issue of the short-lived anarchist feminist journal *Fujin Sensen* (The Women’s Front) published in March 1930, one of its founders, Takamure Itsue, critiqued the destruction of conditions that are specific to women’s existence—like pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing—in Japanese capitalist society. She explained, “In such a society, these special characteristics are viewed as private affairs. However, people’s positions are evaluated only in public affairs.”<sup>2</sup> She argued that even if some of these burdens are alleviated through the creation of maternity hospitals and childcare facilities, as long as these tasks are considered to be inversely related to the ability of women to participate in public affairs, meaningful transformation will not take place. Developing her critique further, Takamure explained that capitalists have long used the excuse that these “private affairs” that are tied to the biological

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capacities of women detract from their ability to fully participate in production in order to reject demands for equal wages.

In the May 1930 issue of the same journal, fellow anarchist Yagi Akiko also explored the specific oppression that women faced in capitalist society in the May 1930 issue.<sup>3</sup> Yagi, who also edited a radical women's arts magazine called *Nyonin Geijutsu* (Women's Arts) presented a study called "Shihonshugi Keizai to Rōdō Fujin" ("The Capitalist Economy and Working Women") in which she likened female workers in Japan's textile industry to slaves who picked cotton in the United States without compensation. She further linked their abjection to the exploitation faced by Chinese workers employed in Japanese-owned textile factories in Shanghai and Qingdao. In these ways, she connected low wages paid to female factory workers in Japan to American slavery-based capitalism and Japanese imperialism.

Takamure and Yagi, two anarchist successors of the female socialists who organized around the *Sekirankai* (Red Wave Society) that was founded in April 1921, distinguished themselves by highlighting the need to pay attention to the way that reproduction, rather than simply production, determined the specificity of Japanese women's present oppression.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Takamure, Yagi, and other contributors to the *Fujin Sensen* in the early 1930s highlighted what Marxist feminist scholars and feminist political economists would later call the problem of social reproduction as a key terrain of anticapitalist struggle. As this article will show, these theorizations emerged out of the concrete struggles, waged by women, that erupted in both city and countryside after World War One.

Japanese labor historians consider this moment to be a significant point of departure from the era of bourgeois party-led political struggle called Taishō democracy, which challenged the state's ability to secure the material and ideological foundations for the continued accumulation of capital.<sup>5</sup> One of the outcomes of the new class struggles that accompanied the transformation of Japanese capitalism after World War One was the destabilization of gender and familial relations, which social scientists and policymakers described at the time as the "woman question" (*fujin mondai*).<sup>6</sup> Though quite vague in its articulation, the problematization of women's roles and their place within society, political institutions, and their families was closely tied to concrete struggles over who would bear the burden of reproducing the conditions of capital accumulation.<sup>7</sup>

Not long before the "woman question" emerged as a social problem in Japan, Rosa Luxemburg took up the question of the devaluation of women's work under capitalism in a speech, "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle," that she gave at the Second Social Democratic Women's Rally held in Stuttgart, Germany, on May 12, 1912. She explained that contrary to appearances, working women were productive members of society—they produced surplus value—according to standards that capitalists themselves employed. In a manner echoed by Takamure nineteen years later, Luxemburg explained that under capitalism, which took the wage labor relation as primary, the

hours spent raising children and performing work were not recognized as productive: “[A]s long as capitalism and the wage system rule, only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit.” She acknowledged that “this sounds brutal and insane” but emphasized that it was important to point out because it “corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy.”<sup>8</sup> Luxemburg argued that the most important first step for the proletarian woman was to understand this brutal reality for what it was and to articulate claims to suffrage based on their value-producing capacities as defined by the society in which they lived.<sup>9</sup>

Like Luxemburg, Marxists and anarchist feminists in interwar Japan began to draw attention to the way that capitalist development since the Meiji Restoration had created the conditions that rendered the work that women performed less valuable relative to that of men. Unlike Luxemburg, who made her case for the extension of political rights to proletarian women based on their productivity in the capitalist sense, they concentrated their attacks against institutions and mechanisms like the Meiji Civil Code, the patriarchal family, and unequal labor markets that they believed structurally kept Japanese women in subordinate positions despite their centrality in waged work since the start of the Meiji era.

Reformist state actors pushed back against these critiques, explaining that a reaffirmation, not a denial, of existing capitalist and patriarchal structures was crucial to the country’s ability to withstand the global crisis of capital. This crisis, which manifested itself in fierce competition between capitalist countries, they asserted, could only be managed through a reconfiguration of the empire and by strengthening an already repressive police state apparatus that alternated between periodic purges and daily surveillance of those who were identified as carriers of “dangerous thought” in the metropole.<sup>10</sup> Such thought was defined broadly and could include ideas that challenged assumptions about women’s roles in capitalist society whether they appeared as rejections of the patriarchal extended family system (*ie*), calls for state-sponsored welfare institutions, or demands for the installation of equal educational facilities for girls.<sup>11</sup>

The “woman question” as it emerged after World War One was thus at the center of debates over how crises of capital accumulation in the age of intensifying imperialist competition would be managed. Prewar socialist and anarchist feminists responded by critiquing the configuration of Japanese capitalist society that oppressed women by calling upon them to disproportionately shoulder the burden of social reproduction and simultaneously devalued this work. Strategies were fiercely debated, and these conversations were featured prominently in the pages of journals like the *Fujin Sensen*, as well as in newspapers and pamphlets that circulated in rural and urban spaces throughout the Japanese empire during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Despite the fact that these publications and new discourses on the “woman problem” were fueled by the suffering of, and struggles by, ordinary women, particularly poor female tenant farmers for whom many of these discussions had immediate material consequences, scholarly

writing tends to approach their voices and experiences as the material realities to which Japanese feminists responded rather than as constitutive to the formation of thought itself.<sup>12</sup> This has the consequence of not simply minimizing the contributions of female tenant farmers to Japanese anticapitalist struggles but reinforces the divide between theory and praxis that has dominated analyses of activism in Japan and beyond.

This paper introduces the struggles over social reproduction that working women, particularly in rural areas participated in after World War one that served as precursors to theorizations that feminists like Takamura and Yagi articulated during the early 1930s. In so doing, it aims to complicate existing peasant and labor histories that do credit poor rural women with providing a spark that inaugurated a new era of mass struggle led by proletarian actors but at the same time rely on simplistic narratives that deny their agency. One can see examples of such analyses in depictions of devoted housewives who courageously fought to procure rice for their families and who in so doing sparked the 1918 Rice Riots, almost by accident.<sup>13</sup>

In the last few decades, scholars have complicated this narrative by identifying the women who first protested the steeply rising price of their staple food, rice, in the summer of 1918.<sup>14</sup> Relying upon oral history, they have painstakingly recreated the conditions that first led a small group of women from a fishing community in Toyama prefecture to organize meetings and rallies after being drawn to action by the knowledge that they acquired as loaders of rice barrels onto steamships that transported the precious commodity to faraway lands for high prices that kept consumption out of their reach.<sup>15</sup> The detailed nature of this inquiry has allowed for some consensus as to the identities of the initial participants—many of whom have no subsequent public record—and the location of the community well that they congregated around to commiserate in their shared discontent.<sup>16</sup> The story of female stevedores disrupting an empirewide supply chain by refusing to allow the rice and grains aboard massive steam-powered vessels owned by powerful shipping interests paints a powerful picture of working women who recognized the indispensability of their labor power in global circuits of trade and took action that threatened to bring the entire system to a halt.

While meaningful in their own right, this characterization does not allow us to fully appreciate the ways in which the multiple, often contradictory roles that many of these women performed in their daily lives shaped their recognition of the need to address the question of social reproduction in their struggles. These analyses share an implicit assumption that many labor historians begin with: that revolutionary struggles are fought by “free” waged workers organized on a mass scale, while forms of struggle that women—not fully free because they continued to struggle under multiple forces of extraeconomic compulsion—participated in belong to the realm of the prepolitical.<sup>17</sup> While this approach allows us to recognize the female stevedores as wage-earning, value-producing, productive workers who inaugurated the country’s largest workers’ strike to date, it obscures the full significance of their actions that were informed by much

more than their occupation. By celebrating their resistance as resulting from their class consciousness as workers, these accounts unwittingly replicate the notion criticized by Marxist feminists that meaningful anticapitalist struggle can only take place on the factory floor.<sup>18</sup> This lacuna is linked to the common designation of prewar Japanese agrarian social relations as feudalistic or semifeudalistic, and landlord-tenant disputes that erupted in large numbers during the 1920s and early 1930s as by extension, *almost* revolutionary. These twin assumptions have made it difficult for scholars to take the activism of ordinary women as anything more than a spontaneous reaction to their abjection.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, gendered assumptions surrounding the figure of the tenant farmer who fought against capitalist landlords have often led scholars of agrarian social movements (*nōmin undō*) who take tenant disputes seriously as drivers of historical transformation in Japan to also work from a relatively limited perspective of what constitutes struggle and, by extension, who its protagonists have been.<sup>20</sup> In addition to ascribing an implicitly male subjectivity to tenant farmers, the tendency to assume that working-class women in interwar Japan were either factory girls who worked outside of their natal homes in order to provide supplementary, low-waged income to their ailing farming households *or* nonwage earning members of agricultural households whose primary roles were housework that they performed without compensation and home work that they engaged in to earn “discretionary monies,” has limited the ability of scholars of agrarian struggle to recognize the full significance of many of the demands that women whose daily experiences were marked by the straddling of boundaries between paid and unpaid labor, factory, agricultural, and domestic work, articulated.

In fact, women who worked in the Japanese countryside—even the stevedores of Toyama—wore many hats. In addition to engaging in their main occupation, they were members of broader village communities, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters or in-laws in extended farming households, subjects of an empire that was built upon their exclusion from formal political institutions, and finally, members of national and international female working-class struggles. These multiple subject positions neither tell us little about the dreams they harbored, nor do they give us much indication of the scope of their imaginations. Still, it would be naïve to ignore the way that these positionalities influenced the solidarities they built, the modes of organizing that they utilized and the common visions that they articulated in the course of their struggles. Neglecting the complexity of their lives that traversed the categories of production and reproduction as we consider their activism can only lead us back to the old debates between moral economy and rational choice theorists that ultimately reduce people to either members of a collective or individual agents; feudal remnants or ultra-modern, rational actors.<sup>21</sup>

It is necessary to read the sources that ordinary women who participated in the extraordinary challenges to the Japanese state and capital during and after the 1918 Rice Riots as examples of subjectification—consciousness that develops within the process of capitalist development that are the very openings

from which revolutionary transformation can emerge.<sup>22</sup> In addition to providing us a window into the desires and visions of women whose voices have been erased from much of the historical record, careful analyses of the limited records that exist through the lens of social reproduction allow us to make connections between these struggles and the more dramatic, often celebrated moments in prewar Japanese feminism. For example, such analyses lead us to consider the possibility that the often cited calls for the “rejection of the family (*katei hitei*)” that contributors to the April 1930 issue of *Fujin Sensen* made gained their force and materiality through the hundreds of local disputes that thousands of women participated in at the height of landlord-tenant disputes that erupted in the countryside in the early to mid-1920s.<sup>23</sup> They also allow us to situate these disputes within a broader sphere of proletarian women’s struggle that unfolded in Japan’s agrarian villages, colonial possessions, and beyond, especially after World War One.<sup>24</sup>

This task of reading differently requires a critique of the way that scholars then and now have tended to define the value of women’s modes of existence in interwar Japan. Instead of replicating the data on women that official reports, mainstream media outlets, and even organ papers of radical groups to which women belonged as members accepted at the time, I focus on the way that boundaries between productive and unproductive, waged and unwaged, intimate and public were constantly negotiated—drawn and redrawn by and through women during these tumultuous times.<sup>25</sup> As such, it follows Patricia Tsurumi’s earlier efforts to provide an alternative reading of Meiji era female textile workers as both waged and unwaged workers and to ask different questions.<sup>26</sup> It asks, how did ordinary women whose work straddled the boundaries of waged and unwaged; industrial and agricultural labor; public and private respond to the intensification of work, the reaffirmation of patriarchal family, and the naturalization of gender roles that dominated social policy in Japan after the post-World War One agricultural crisis? How were these collective responses read during that time? What impacts did their activism have upon landlord-tenant relations more broadly?

It is my contention that women in Japan’s countryside did not accept the attempts by capital to intensify their work to cope with the economic crisis without a fight—a fight that we can glimpse through the participation of hundreds of poor farming women in tenant disputes that erupted throughout the countryside at precisely the moment that feminist intellectuals and activists were also making their demands heard in the cities. Further, their specific demands indicate their desire to maintain a degree of organizational autonomy even as they placed themselves squarely within the Japan Farmer’s Union (*Nihon Nōmin Kumiai*, hereafter JFU) and other organizations that were founded after World War One to organize workers and peasants for class struggle.<sup>27</sup> They understood the complexity of their place within rural social relations and the specificity of their collective needs that were linked to, but distinct from those of tenant farmers understood as an undifferentiated class. Their demands require that we treat them as more than mere supporters of an ultimately

male-driven movement. Through their participation in these struggles, they produced their own collective visions and critiqued the way that the state, capital, and their families undervalued their lives and their labor.<sup>28</sup> It was through and in their struggles over who would bear the burdens of social reproduction that their dreams for a radically different world were conjured and new grammars of struggle were articulated.

The rest of this article will focus on an example of one such struggle that erupted in Okayama prefecture against an Osaka-based conglomerate, Fujita-gumi during the first half of the 1920s. While limited in numbers, the imagination that these women held was global in scope and should be understood as one link in a rich history of proletarian feminist struggle outside of Japan, marked by Flora Tristan’s call for a worker’s international in 1844; the establishment of women’s commissions in the Paris Commune in 1871 led by Elisabeth Dmitrieff; Clara Zetkin’s 1910 call for an International Women’s Day; Luxemburg’s argument for the inclusion of women’s suffrage in the political agenda of the SDP in 1912; and the women-led strike in Petrograd in 1917 on International Women’s Day that lit a fuse for the Russian Revolution.<sup>29</sup> The challenges that female tenant farmers and their supporters mounted against the Fujita farm constituted a serious threat to the Japanese state, which was in the midst of articulating a new role for women as managers of the household economy and her ideal place within the family in order to respond to the post-World War One capitalist crisis.<sup>30</sup>

### *Fujita-gumi’s reclamation project in Okayama*

Okayama, a prefecture that lies along the Seto Inland Sea, is well known as one of the nation’s most active sites of tenant organizing during the early 1920s. Many pages of the JFU’s organ paper, *Tochi to jiyū* (Land and Liberty) especially in its early years, were devoted to introducing landlord-tenant disputes in the prefecture. The series of struggles that took place at the Fujita farm in Fujita village in the district of Kojima stands out as some of the largest and most intense of what many historians consider the first phase of modern Japan’s agrarian social movements.<sup>31</sup>

The Fujita farm was a bit of an anomaly in prewar Japan in that it was owned by the Fujita-gumi, a conglomerate that built its fortune in mining by the end of the Meiji period (1868–1912) by taking advantage of its close ties to the Ministry of Finance. In a country known for having its agricultural production dominated by small farming households, the Fujita farm stood out for housing more than 500 families that cultivated over 1,200 *chōbu* of land that the company owned.<sup>32</sup> It was one of the only large plantation-type farms that existed in the metropole outside of Hokkaido.<sup>33</sup>

The formation of the Fujita farm was part of two emblematic projects of the Meiji Restoration. First, it served as compensation to former samurai who had lost the social standing and economic privileges that they had enjoyed during the Tokugawa period. Second, it was part of the so-called primitive accumulation



phase of Japanese capitalism that consolidated large tracts of land in the hands of former elite.<sup>34</sup> Fujita Denjirō, the first head of the Fujita-gumi, was one of 144 former samurai who were initially granted titles to the mudflats of Kojima Bay. Its reclamation began in December of 1884. After some conflicts between rival companies were mediated by Finance Minister Matsukata Masayoshi, Fujita ended up with sole management rights over all of the land in 1887.<sup>35</sup> Construction on the first stage of a three-part project—the very area that came under dispute during the 1920s—began in May 1899 and was completed in March 1905. In contrast to the rather modest 432 *chōbu* that the home ministry approved in the initial stages of the project, by its conclusion, the Fujita-gumi controlled a vast area of land that encompassed both the Kōjo and Fujita villages. In the case of the Fujita village, since the farm comprised the entire area of the village, elected officials, bureaucrats, and the police were almost wholly funded by taxes paid or donations made by the company.<sup>36</sup>

The company experimented with a variety of labor arrangements from the outset. It tested out classical landlord-tenant contracts wherein tenant farmers submitted a set quantity of rent in kind to the farm; arrangements where tenant farmers were granted free rent in exchange for the development of uncultivated lands for up to three years after which sharecropping would begin; a system of direct management (*chokuei nōhō*) where small farming families would cultivate a plot of land in exchange for a monthly salary; various forms of sharecropping done primarily through the farming household unit (*ukeoi*); and, finally, the employment of agricultural day laborers for their testing station.<sup>37</sup> These forms coexisted in varying degrees in different parts of the farm. Despite some optimism that the Fujita farm could be the future of Japanese agriculture, many of the families that resided there were in dire straits since they had accumulated debts to the company in order to settle and, further, required more advances in order to maintain production. They were not able to repay these debts because of the high rents and disadvantageous terms of their contracts.<sup>38</sup>

### *The eruption of tenant disputes at Fujita farm*

The tenant disputes against the Fujita farm that unfolded in the early years of the 1920s were molded by these arrangements that had determined their relationship to the company since the late Meiji period. The first round of disputes, which scholar-activists of the JFU and official narratives understand as *the* Fujita farm dispute of 1922–1923, began in the summer of 1921 when cultivators demanded the right to buy and sell cultivation rights (*kosakuken*), a practice that Japanese tenants had continued to enjoy if only in practice following the completion of the Meiji land tax reforms.<sup>39</sup> These disputes gained national attention because of the heavy involvement of the leadership of the JFU following its own formation in Kobe on April 9, 1922. For our purposes, it is important because it prominently featured organized women's divisions called *fujinbu*. These women's divisions, which were the subject of much dispute in national

labor and farmer organizations at that time, created activists out of ordinary women like Shigei Shigeko, Tajiri Okayo, Yamagami Kimie, and others who went on to inspire and lead other tenant and factory disputes, and help organize local women’s divisions throughout the country.<sup>40</sup>

Shigei, one of the leaders of Okayama’s women’s division, lived on the Fujita farm. According to an interview that she gave in 1974, her father, Okazaki Rinjirō sold his property in nearby Sone during World War One and moved his family to the farm after hearing that they could receive 2.5 *chōbu* there, which was a large plot of land for the time.<sup>41</sup> After selling his landholdings, he moved his family to the farm. Once there, he found that, despite promises of land, the contract that he had signed with the company was much harsher than tenant contracts that governed the majority of landlord-tenant relations at the time.<sup>42</sup> Shigei explained that as a result, her family ended up like serfs because the contract stipulated that they could not freely dispose of the products of their labor even after they had fulfilled their rent obligations.<sup>43</sup> Because they did not receive their distributions of rice (this ranged from twenty-five to thirty-five percent of the total harvest, depending on the type of contract they had with the company) until threshing was completed each March or April, they were never able to pay for their costly New Year’s celebration without cash advances from the company. This kept them in a cycle of indebtedness to the Fujita-gumi that they were unable to break because other aspects of the contract were also disadvantageous to tenants.<sup>44</sup>

As Shigei explained, tenant farmers who participated in the disputes against the farm protested these conditions. They demanded that the company implement the use of new machine-powered threshers that could speed up the harvesting process by months. If the company agreed, the rice would be ready to submit months earlier and households would no longer have to borrow money from the farm to pay for their New Year’s celebrations.<sup>45</sup> Another important point of contention between the Fujita farm and its tenants concerned the use of straw that remained after the chaff had been separated from the rice stalks. Shigei explained that because the lands that they occupied were mud flats that had been newly reclaimed during the early part of the Meiji period, they did not have access to the communal mountain and forest lands that they had been allowed to use in their old village communities. As a result, they did not have any resources to supplement their livelihoods and had to purchase firewood.<sup>46</sup> Selling the straw that remained after the threshing process was completed was one of the only ways that tenant farmers could earn enough money to obtain the firewood that they needed for their daily lives. The company’s refusal to allow their tenants to sell even one stalk of straw without its consent and warning that unauthorized sales would be treated as theft made it quite clear that it saw everything that farmers produced on land as their exclusive property—a point that the tenant farmers vehemently protested during the disputes.

The company also forbade tenants from planting anything for their own use on farm property. Even planting soybeans along the agricultural road in order to supplement their protein-deficient diets was not permitted.<sup>47</sup> Further, they were required to purchase water, fertilizer, the right to use agricultural tools and

livestock owned by the company at prices that the latter unilaterally set.<sup>48</sup> Discontent that stemmed from these and other restrictions that the company placed on the ability of tenant farmers to freely engage in production on their lands and to control the products of their labor formed the basis for the deep-seated resentment that tenant farmers harbored against their parasitic large landlord. The daily experiences of exploitation and expropriation shaped their discursive strategies and their calculations of production expenses (*seisanhi*). These calculations, which were more than simple matters of accounting, but were intimately linked to how the value of one's labor was to be determined and by extension, how needs and desires would be differentiated, became an important tool that tenant farmers used since the early 1920s to counter the untenable calculations that landlords based their rent demands and justifications upon.<sup>49</sup> This calculation was indispensable, for example, to their demand for the "permanent reduction of rent by thirty per cent," which was first expressed in Okayama and quickly became a hallmark of the early phase of JFU-led struggle nationwide. Women's divisions were particularly well-equipped to address these contests over the quality of daily life that tenants were or were not entitled to.

*The formation of women's divisions in Fujita village*

The women's division played a particularly important role in Miyako, one of three agricultural districts in Fujita village. Miyako had ninety-five tenant farming families that cultivated ninety-one *chōbu* and another ninety-five who were either directly managed farmers or sharecroppers who cultivated 321 *chōbu*.<sup>50</sup> They first emerged onto the scene following the intensification of the dispute in the fall of 1922. On October 26, 1922, members of the newly formed Miyako branch of the JFU submitted a complaint to the company, which began with the assertion that their current arrangement made their lives unfree and intolerable. They stated that instead of the present rice distribution ratio of 75:25, they preferred to submit half of their total harvest to the company. They also requested a change to "normal" tenant contracts that farmers lived under nationwide and demanded that the company "recognize our humanity."<sup>51</sup> The company responded two days later with a terse refusal. The signatories to the first complaint filed a second one on the third of December but the two sides could not come to a compromise.<sup>52</sup> The dispute heated up on January 4, 1923, when the police arrested nine leaders of the dispute for theft and embezzlement after they began the threshing process with two of their own machines. The company dissolved the contracts of seven men for being the ringleaders and applied a "no trespassing" (*tachiiri kinshi*) order to their lands twelve days after the arrests.<sup>53</sup>

Miyako's women catapulted onto the national scene following the issuing of this unprecedented no trespassing order. *Tochi to jiyū* provided an account of this turn of events in a January 25, 1923, article titled "Miyako Nōmin Fujin Tatsu" (The Female Peasantry of Miyako Stand Up). According to the paper, after their husbands and children were taken away by the police for

engaging in unlawful threshing, a group of women formed a women’s division. They selected a chairperson and an executive committee and began discussing their next course of action. They called an impromptu meeting in the middle of the paddy fields where stacks of cut and bundled rice stalks lay waiting to be fed into the threshing machine that they had brought in and decided that they would defy police and company orders and would initiate another round of threshing. According to the article, the eighty women who gathered that afternoon reaffirmed their commitment to continuing the fight against the company even if all of their male comrades were jailed. *Tochi to jiyū* celebrated this moment and called upon their readers throughout the country to support this “wife corps” (*nyōboren*) that was willing to bravely carry on the struggle on their own.<sup>54</sup>

Realizing that their demands would not be met locally, the women selected representatives to travel by train to Osaka to register their appeals to the leader of the Fujita-gumi conglomerate in person. Newspapers that had a broad national readership like the *Osaka Asahi* and the *Osaka Mainichi* picked up this part of the story. The image that they painted of the women who travelled from Okayama to Osaka was in stark contrast to the way that *Tochi to jiyū* reported their actions at the time, though they used the same language of the wife corps. In the hands of the sympathetic mainstream dailies, female representatives of Okayama’s tenant farming households emerged as boisterous, unsophisticated, emotional, and, above all, devoted mothers and wives whose sole purpose was to beg for mercy from the wife of the head of the conglomerate. They were depicted sympathetically as supporters and comforters of their husbands, brothers, and sons, who were the real leaders of the dispute.<sup>55</sup>

A whiff of condescension permeated its reporting on the ten women who made the trip. According to a January 23, 1923, article published in the *Osaka Asahi*, they disembarked the overnight train nervously, carrying baskets full of tattered clothes and outfitted in fabulously outdated shawls. They were whisked off to the headquarters of the JFU and were taken by its leadership to the Fujita mansion. It reported that after waiting impatiently for two hours for an audience with the mistress of the Fujita family, they burst into tears after being told that she was not available to meet with them.<sup>56</sup>

Shigei, who by that time had emerged as one of the leaders of the women’s division of Okayama prefecture, tells a slightly different story. While she did not make the trip in 1923, she was part of a group that made a similar visit two years later as part of a reconfigured, more formally organized Miyako women’s division in 1925. Her account makes it clear that she and her comrades understood the economic and political power of the Fujita-gumi in Okayama. When the dispute erupted in 1925, tenants—both men and women—had visited the company’s branch office in Fujita village in order to have their demands heard by their immediate overseers but were sent away after being told that the branch was powerless to change the terms of the contract without approval from the national headquarters. Members of the women’s division immediately understood that they had to return to Osaka, which held the company’s national

headquarters. It was also an important center of national tenant organization. Their repeated visits to Osaka were part and parcel of their efforts to publicize and, in so doing, secure broader support for their struggle.

Shigei, nine other women, and their children stayed in Osaka for twenty days in February 1925. During that time, they met with leaders of the JFU Kagawa Toyohiko, Sugiyama Motojirō, and Suzuki Bunji, a prominent labor activist. At the time, the JFU was the organization charged with organizing tenant farmers into a broader coalition based on the theory of labor-farmer cooperation. According to Kondō Jirō, as deepening factionalization split the labor movement into the *Sōdōmei* (General Federation of Labor) and *Hyōgikai* (Council of Japanese Labor Unions), the JFU was pushed into playing a mediating role between these organizations despite the fact that its own leadership would split the following year over similar ideological divisions.<sup>57</sup> The leadership in 1925 more or less reflected its public stance that humanism and cooperation were key to raising the status of tenant farmers. It should be noted that the encounter between prominent labor and tenant union leadership and Okayama's female activists was not just important for the latter. The JFU, the *Sōdōmei*, and *Hyōgikai* all recognized the importance of organizing the large numbers of female workers in both city and countryside and were debating the method of their incorporation. This boiled down to the



Fig 1. This photo was taken to commemorate the February 1925 visit of the Fujita women to Osaka. Shigei is seated with her son in the front row, to the very right. (Ōhara Institute for Social Research, Hōsei University, reference number S3-02-006 (1/3))

question of the degree of autonomy female activists and union members should hold within the organization at large.<sup>58</sup> Their visit coincided with the Fourth National Congress of the JFU that was held in Tokyo from February 27 to March 1, 1925. While the JFU could not reach a decision about the role that women should play within it, three of Shigei’s comrades, Yamagami, Tajiri, and Kawamoto Konatsu attended the meeting and were seated prominently in the middle section of the hall alongside the close to five hundred male delegates that filled Shiba Park’s Harmonization hall (*Kyōchō kaikan*).<sup>59</sup>

Shigei and her comrades also crossed paths with prominent female activists like Kutsumi Fusako who had been one of the founding members of the *Sekirankai* just a few years prior. They took part in demonstrations and protests against the enactment of the draconian Peace Preservation Law that severely limited dissent and gave speeches at a labor-farmer assembly at Nakanoshima Park.<sup>60</sup> They were far from the hysterical housewives or mothers who prostrated themselves at the front gate of the Fujita-gumi’s mansion, begging for handouts, as they had been depicted in the mainstream press. They were active participants in the exciting flurry of feminist and working-class activism that engulfed Osaka and the nation during this time.

Their decision to take their children with them on this and subsequent trips—noted in the mainstream media with curiosity—was a calculated move. On the one hand, it was an attempt to appeal to the wife of the head of the Fujita-gumi as a fellow woman in order to win better living conditions for their children. Their decision to direct their appeal to her was based on their hope that a common ground as mothers and wives that transcended class oppositions might move the needle in their favor. The work of social reproduction—providing food, medical care, and education to their children and families—that they bore disproportionately was work that was not given a value in the calculation of production expenses, but was something that they felt the bodily repercussions of every day.<sup>61</sup> This method of appeal was not unique to the women fighting against the Fujita farm. It was a method that prominent liberal feminists like Hiratsuka Raichō and Oku Mumeo had incorporated into their arsenal for some time. Despite the existence of intense internal debates over women’s roles as mothers within and between Japanese feminist circles, the need to capture the allegiances of working women as a matter of organizational strategy also made it impossible for feminist groups, irrespective of their stance concerning the state’s involvement in childrearing or the family unit to ignore the concrete needs of women who had to balance their work outside the home to child-rearing obligations in their families.<sup>62</sup> The Fujita women’s form of appeal only highlighted the fact that bringing working women into the political movement for women’s liberation would have to accommodate the responsibilities they shoulder as primary performers of reproductive labor within their households.

Shigei’s assessment of their ventures was mixed. She notes that neither she nor her comrades in Okayama and Tokyo achieved their main articulated goal, which was to revise the central components of the existing tenant contract—the rice distribution rate and the guarantee of cultivating rights—but acknowledges



Fig 2. The caption reads, “Fujita farm wife corps in the waiting room of the Fujita farm after imposing uninvited.” (Ōhara Institute for Social Research, Hōsei University, reference number S3-02-006 (2/3))

the important gains that they did make. First, regarding the issue of the distribution of products, the company agreed to use “appropriate discretion” (*tekagen*) during the threshing period with regard to the ratio of chaff distribution.<sup>63</sup> By 1927, the practice of exercising appropriate discretion had become a normal part of the division of profits, evidenced by the precipitation of a large-scale dispute that year when the company decided to renege on this arrangement.<sup>64</sup> Another victory was a promise they wrested from the company to build a medical clinic and day care on the farm. These facilities were vital, as Fujita did not have a village doctor or medical facilities at the time. The company also agreed to build a public hall and install streetlights. While these items may seem insignificant in comparison to a formal renegotiation of contracts, their success in transferring the burden of these institutions of social welfare should not be underestimated, as the question of who would bear these costs was one of the central issues related to working-class women’s struggle for national organizations like the Japanese Communist Party-affiliated *Hyōgikai*.<sup>65</sup> Fujita’s tenant farmers managed to transfer the burden of medical care and public services to the company. The visibility of members of their women’s divisions on the stages of lecture halls throughout the country, often making speeches with their children at their side, cannot be disconnected



Fig 3. The caption reads, “Fujita farm wife corps member gives impassioned speech at the Osaka Central Public Hall.” (Ōhara Institute for Social Research, Hōsei University, reference number S3-02-006 (3/3))

from the inclusion of these facilities as part of the compromise that the two sides reached. The contributions of Fujita’s women’s divisions established patterns and methods of struggle that women’s organizations in and beyond Okayama emulated.

Shigei, Yamagami, and other female tenant farmers who worked on the Fujita farm also directly challenged the company’s long-standing insistence that it had sole ownership of all products that were produced on farm property. In order to raise funds for their struggle—something that they had to figure out on their own since many of their male counterparts had been jailed—the women’s divisions fried broad beans into a snack called “hajiki-mame” and sold them in nearby towns. They also took these with them to Osaka, packaging them as “tenant dispute beans” as a way to raise money and to advertise their struggle.<sup>66</sup> Their bold act of claiming precisely those fruits of their labor that the company expressly denied them and selling them without its consent should not be underestimated, as it contributed to challenging a major point of dispute in tenant struggles: who the real owners of the products of tenant labor beyond the rent entitled to the landlord were. Further, the fact that



they had been growing the beans all along reminds us of the need to consider the possibility that subtle forms of resistance had been taking place long before the eruption of the disputes in the 1920s.

Most importantly, women's divisions formulated their own agendas. Lest we misunderstand their activities as simple acts of resistance that were disconnected from any theory of revolution, it should be noted that the women's division in Okayama was one of several radical women's organizations that existed in Japan during the 1920s. The aforementioned *Sekirankai* and the women's bureaus in the two major independent national labor unions, the *Sōdōmei* and *Hyōgikai* took inspiration from the struggles of working women internationally.<sup>67</sup> Itō Noe, one of the founding members of the *Sekirankai* explained that they were inspired by the example of the women of Petrograd who were the sparkplugs of the 1917 Revolution.<sup>68</sup>

It is clear from the resolutions that the Okayama women's division issued during their first meeting of the executive committee in January 1925 that they understood the importance of having an autonomous organization within the JFU. In addition to completely rejecting participation in state-sponsored women's associations (*fujinkai*), these resolutions focused on organizational autonomy.<sup>69</sup> They demanded the following: funds from the prefectural branch of the JFU as operating expenses; the ability to collect their own dues; and permission for their elected representatives to sit on the executive committee of the prefectural branch of the JFU.<sup>70</sup> These measures, as well as a declaration that Sugitani Tsumo, a female delegate from Kumamoto prefecture, had made at the Third National Congress of the JFU in March 1924 that women should comprise half the total number of delegates at next year's meeting, signaled the enthusiasm that female activists had for an autonomous women's movement within the organization as a whole. This demand posed a challenge to organizations like the Council of Japanese Labor Unions and the JFU, whose members generally agreed on the need to allow women to participate in working-class struggles but were less enthusiastic about providing them with the independence to set their own agendas.<sup>71</sup> Sugitani's statement was followed by a rebuke from a male delegate from Kagawa prefecture who said that in addition to the absurdity of the goal of achieving an even split between male and female delegates, women had to be "thoroughly educated" before they could join the union.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the tepid response to these calls for greater organizational autonomy at national and local levels of labor organization, the leaders of women's divisions continued to develop their rationalization for these organs and also began the hard work of building broader networks of solidarity. At the First Prefectural Congress of the Okayama branch of the JFU, which was held two weeks after the January 1925 women's executive committee meeting, Yamagami Kimie was selected as the first head of the Okayama JFU's women's division. She, Shigei, and Tajiri continued to travel throughout the prefecture and to other prefectures including Yamanashi and Kagawa in order to conduct meetings, give lectures, and provide assistance in organizing female tenant farmers.<sup>73</sup> A culmination of their efforts at organizing in Okayama was

the First Prefectural Women’s Congress, which they held on April 18, 1926 at the Uchisange Music Hall in Okayama city. This was a public event by design. They managed to rally together 200 women who gathered in response to a call that the women’s division issued in the form of a flier, which expressed their five main demands: (1) that state coffers be opened to maintain day care facilities during the harvest season; (2) that state coffers be opened to provide maternity pay and leave eight weeks before and after childbirth; (3) that voting rights be granted to women; (4) that unequal laws between men and women be abolished; and (5) that the Fujita farm’s despotism be denounced.<sup>74</sup> As these demands indicate, the leadership of the Congress explicitly linked anticapitalist struggles against the Fujita farm to a broader call for a transformation of the modern legal structure that codified gender inequalities. It further demanded that the state recognize and absorb the costs of social reproduction currently burdened disproportionately by women.

At 9 a.m. on April 18, participants first congregated at the Kōrakuen Park and paraded together to the music hall that was approximately one kilometer away. They marched while singing songs of the JFU (*nōminka*) and carrying its flags and banners the entire way. Okayama’s police kept close tabs on the event and stood ready to arrest any speakers who violated the Public Peace Police Law of 1900 that prohibited workers from organizing.<sup>75</sup> The official agenda for the day’s formal meeting, which began just before noon, contained ten items for discussion:

1. Promote the organization of women’s division branches
2. Organize more lectures by members of the women’s division
3. Formulate a consistent message across all women’s divisions
4. Reaffirm their rejection of ties to state-sponsored women’s associations
5. Establish daily consumer cooperatives in each branch
6. Form cooperative relations with other women’s divisions
7. Promote women’s suffrage
8. Establish a woman’s division in the national JFU
9. Celebrate International Women’s Day
10. Take part in May Day activities<sup>76</sup>

This ten-point agenda reconfirms the desire of the leaders of the women’s division to situate themselves within an international struggle for working-class women’s liberation. The last two items place Okayama’s women’s division squarely within efforts that prominent feminist activists like Yamakawa and Tanno Setsu had been engaged in since early 1923 to commemorate International Women’s Day in Japan.<sup>77</sup> It also reflects their intention first expressed at the executive committee meeting in January 1925 to distinguish themselves from state-led efforts to mobilize women’s divisions to promote thrift and savings in the countryside since the late Meiji period.<sup>78</sup> Finally, it

reconfirms their position in support of the organizational autonomy of women's divisions that were being debated in national labor unions at the time.

The declaration that the leaders of Okayama's women's division wrote and signed to conclude the congress made their allegiances crystal clear:

It has been five years since we joined the Japan Farmer's Union. Today we are holding the Okayama Prefecture United Women's Division Congress. We, the proletarian women have for several centuries been defrauded, exploited and placated through various facilities, measures and the ideal of docility. Our history is one of blood and tears. We cannot bring ourselves to talk about it. We must now be steadfast. Our biggest enemy is our own acceptance of our condition. We must not cry ourselves to sleep. Society is changing and the proletariat continues to fight bravely. We, the proletariat women must also awaken from our slumber in which we cry in our sleep and must stand up in order to release ourselves from the shackles of exploitation and submission. Economically and politically, we must move to the center of the struggle and must regain what has been taken from us. When the proletariat have been liberated, the special demands of women will be realized and all proletariat women will be liberated. The future will belong to women and workers. Proletarian women unite.<sup>79</sup>

As the declaration reveals, the women who organized the first congress saw worker and women's interests, as well as worker and tenant farmer interests, as inextricably linked and believed that a global class struggle that placed women's participation at its center was indispensable to the liberation of all women. Their intention to speak about their suffering and to articulate their demands in their own words—to place themselves squarely at the center of all proletarian struggle—challenged depictions of them, even by the JFU as the “wife corps” or a local specialty (*meibutsu*) that simply added flavor and flair to mainstream tenant disputes.<sup>80</sup>

Just one month after the Congress, Shigei articulated her stance on this last point in the May 22, 1926, edition of the organ paper of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), *Musansha shimbun*, in an article titled “Kumiai fujinbu wa hitsuyō ka? Shikari! (Is a Women's Division Necessary? Yes!).” In the piece, she expressed disappointment that national labor organizations did not allow women to form autonomous divisions and added a thinly veiled attack on the national JFU organization for treating its women's division like a “detached force.”<sup>81</sup> The following year, the Okayama JFU women's division under Shigei's leadership renamed itself the Proletarian Women's Alliance (*Musan fujin dōmei*) and continued its activities.<sup>82</sup> Though they did not use the concept social reproduction to critique the specificity of women's oppression in the Japanese countryside in the 1920s, their stance, that neither capitalism nor nationalism nor a reaffirmation of the village unit could liberate them from conditions under which they toiled and lived, reveals their understanding of it long before its theoretical elaboration.

The 1926 declaration cannot be taken to represent the vision of all of the women who enrolled in the division and participated in the tenant disputes, even in Okayama. Still, it is important to take the limited speech acts that are available to us seriously because they allow us to reestablish hidden connections between them and other radical voices whose connections have become less apparent over time.<sup>83</sup> If we dismantle the distinction that dominates the broader historiographical tradition that assumes that there are clearly compartmentalized female and male roles in struggle or distinguishes between theoreticians and practitioners of revolution, it becomes possible to paint a much more vivid, complicated picture of connections, fissures, and the reforging of alliances that were part and parcel of anticapitalist, antipatriarchal struggles in interwar Japan.

*Yamagami Kimie on the bodily consequences of social reproduction*

Yamagami Kimie was one female activist who straddled the boundaries between theory and praxis. It is for this reason that she has emerged as one of the more compelling figures of the female tenant farmers’ movement. As one of the leaders of the Okayama women’s division that fought alongside Shigei against the Fujita farm, she provides us a glimpse into the complex world within which she and her comrades operated and explains how the family structure was a powerful mechanism that enabled their exploitation by the company. An essay that she published a month after the 1926 women’s congress in Okayama city and right after her triumphant appearance at the Fifth National Congress of the JFU reveals a world that could only be changed through struggles that exceeded the boundaries that divided political and cultural; structural and subjective; classed and gendered. She published this piece, “Nōson fujin to kazoku seido (Women of the Agrarian Villages and the Family System)” in the May 1926 edition of the journal *Mirai*.<sup>84</sup> Though she was a midwife, not a tenant farmer, Yamagami’s close involvement with the Fujita farm disputes and her own position as a working woman made her very aware of the obstacles that a capitalist system, which took advantage of and reinforced patriarchal familial relations, posed for women’s liberation.

She begins her essay by introducing her readers to the tyranny of time and family that ravaged women’s bodies. Equating life in the agrarian village to imprisonment, she described the endless parade of tasks that women of farming households were required to complete in the course of a day. She writes:

She cannot remain in her bed for a moment longer once the clock strikes five in the morning ... After lunch, men have their cigarette break for 20–30 minutes and can read the paper. His wife has to take care of the cows and horses and children and has to clean up after the meal. She has no time to sit down ... In the evening, she has to prepare a bath for seven to eight family members and has to finish cleaning up after dinner ... She finally has her own time after 16–17 hours of long work.<sup>85</sup>

Yamagami emphasizes the physical toll that working continuously from early in the morning until late at night has on women and highlights the sacrificial role that she plays to ensure the reproduction of the bodies of male members of the family. Her own deterioration is the price that has to be paid for their reproduction: “[H]er body has not recovered from fatigue even when morning comes. Her shoulders are sore, her arms are dull, the joints all over her body ache.”<sup>86</sup> In addition to physical degradation, she is unable to secure the simple comforts of life for herself. Washing her clothes or her hair regularly is frowned upon by elders who think of these acts as luxuries that waste both time and soap. Yamagami laments, “even people in jail are able to have their underwear and pillowcases washed or changed once a week. We are more unhygienic than criminals.”<sup>87</sup> Finally, her mind is never free from the exhaustion of being under the constant surveillance of her in-laws. Yamagami writes of the piercing glares that are directed toward her if she takes too much time performing her household chores or if she takes a peek at the newspaper after her husband is through with it.

Upon second consideration, Yamagami concludes that life for female tenant farmers is not like prison, but may be even worse than it. These conditions that ravage farming women’s bodies and minds have to be transformed if their unrelenting suffering can be alleviated. She blames the family system, which she calls a feudalistic tradition, for this suffering that enables capitalists and landlords to exploit them. She concludes on an optimistic note, saying that women of the countryside have begun to awaken alongside her sisters in the cities. This awakening, which she believes has taken place socially, now has to be consolidated politically through a class struggle. To this end, she calls upon women to work for the liberation of the proletariat as the only way to achieve their own liberation.<sup>88</sup>

Yamagami’s essay shows that she understood what Melinda Cooper and Angela Mitropoulos have recently written about the household: that it was, and still is, a constantly shifting frontier within which conflicts, negotiations, and conciliations over what and who counts as property, who is allowed to make decisions regarding reproduction, and what kind of work is counted as legitimate labor, are all tenuously contained. The condition of the complete reproduction of their labor power—social reproduction—did not exist for women who straddled factory and paddy, waged and unwaged labor regimes. The specific suffering of women who resided in small farming households during interwar Japan sheds light upon the heavy extraeconomic compulsion that Japanese capitalism and capitalist regimes everywhere relied upon in order to attain great power status in the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> Precisely because of the tensions inherent in this hierarchical space, the family or the household had to be situated as an “intimate sphere of a sentimental and self-managed equivalence.” It was thus, a powerful, “efflorescent machinery of that sentiment’s limits and their multiplication.”<sup>90</sup> The familial space is where power was and is naturalized, where the unruly and unproductive were and continue to be recaptured. It is in this light that we should evaluate the

establishment of a day care, a hospital, and a civic hall—the very first victories that tenant farmers extracted from the Fujita farm—as more than just minor concessions. While direct connections are impossible to make in light of the sources at our disposal, it seems likely that these were gains that the local women’s divisions were instrumental in wresting from the company.<sup>91</sup>

### Conclusion

Okuda Kamezō, an entrepreneur and then House of Peers member from Tottori prefecture made an extraordinary statement in his 1927 work, *Nōson kyūsai: Tochi seido kaiseiron* (Salvation for the Agrarian Villages: Theory of Land Reforms) that women in Japan’s agrarian villages are nothing more than machines with no existential meaning as human beings.<sup>92</sup> While Okuda problematized this treatment of farming women as machines, the history of the development of Japanese capitalism reveals the heavy burden that women of the countryside paid as the state turned to them soon after its founding to subsidize the costs of its project of the Meiji era, namely the pursuit of *rich nation, strong army*.<sup>93</sup> He was also right, though, when he said that because of their collective productivity, they had the power to destroy Japan’s social and economic systems at their foundations. He pointed to the energy that the women from Toyama prefecture’s fishing communities displayed during the Rice Riots as an example of the damage that they could cause to the well-being of the nation, if it were improperly channeled.<sup>94</sup> Fear of the collective strength of women drove Okuda to advocate the expansion of social welfare policies in the ailing countryside.<sup>95</sup> Despite their fears about what would happen if women refused to present their labor power to the nation, he and other officials downplayed the significance of women’s participation in the landlord-tenant disputes that were taking place as he put pen to paper.<sup>96</sup>

In fact, at the time that he wrote this piece, thousands of women in agrarian village communities in and beyond Okayama had already recognized their collective strength and had articulated their own visions of what a liberated human existence might look like. Unlike Okuda, they did not think of themselves as an undifferentiated mass force that could destroy capital simply by virtue of their sheer numbers, but located their force in their desire for freedom from their specific experiences of oppression. As we have seen, their knowledge that their subordination and exploitation were necessary conditions for capitalist society to reproduce itself was the force that threatened to undermine the very foundations of accumulation. They understood quite clearly that they were expected to fulfill a wide range of roles both inside and outside of their dwellings but were not always granted credit for them as value-producing tasks. In the majority of Japan’s small farming households, women took on many roles during different stages of their lives that are not reflected in official calculations of their value-producing capacity. At times they were factory workers in nearby textile factories, and at others, caretakers of their families, providers of agricultural labor, students, partners to their husbands, mothers, caretakers of other

people's children, or producers in handicraft industries at home. As participants in the often multigenerational farming household (*nōka*), they were trained to compartmentalize each task, stretching or contracting the boundaries of each day as the season and household finances required. They endured unending battles with fatigue, ennui, and the prying, often disapproving gaze of their in-laws. They recognized the double exploitation that they endured as poor women of the countryside and understood as Marx did, that the task of social reproduction placed differential burdens on different groups of people within households and communities.

Even though Okuda did not recognize the significance of these struggles, the state clearly felt the threat and kept a close eye on the movements of the female farmer-activists. Okayama higher police reports include descriptions of women's division activities and records of arrests of key female leaders beginning in late 1925.<sup>97</sup> Records indicate that Kamei Shimoyo, who was an active member of the women's division of Oda district that protested the seizure of crops by the Fujita farm in October 1927, was one of twelve men and eight women who were arrested for setting fire to the residence of a purported traitor to the cause. In addition to arson, she faced charges of blackmail, property damage, and violation of censorship laws for which she received a sentence of fifteen years in jail.<sup>98</sup> The history of the National Farmer's Union Okayama Association's struggle, *Zennō Okayama Tōsōshi*, compiled in 1936, points out that Kamei's fifteen-year sentence was the longest given to any male or female participant in all of Okayama's peasant struggles to date.<sup>99</sup>

Like the women who stormed Paris in the exhilarating spring months of 1871—Louise Michel, Elizabeth Dmitrieff, and many others—pioneers in the women's divisions of the country's first national tenant farmer union, the JFU, Yamagami, Shigei, Sugitani, Tajiri, and many others articulated and fought for their own visions of what a world without capitalism and patriarchy might look like. Their experiences working in factories, in the paddies, as petty merchants, midwives, and as pieceworkers positioned them favorably to forge connections with labor organizers and feminist intellectuals. While underrepresented in narratives of Japanese feminism, labor activism, and agrarian struggle, these women played important roles in the tenant disputes of the tumultuous 1920s. The dreams that they manufactured through their activism—though barely visible in the historical record—were carried on by prolific anarchists like Takamura Itsue and Yagi Akiko, who articulated more explicit and theoretically inflected attacks against the state, capital, and the family in the following decade. Their desires for liberation cannot be easily disentangled from the histories of their active struggles against the conditions that kept much of their work, their speech, and their bodies outside, but essential to the calculations of abstract value by capital mediated by the family form.

The possibilities and limits to action that female tenant farmers faced as members of farming households, which, in the case of modern Japan, attained its sentimental power through its purported unbreakable ties to the imperial household apparatus, makes the organization of antistatist, anticapitalist

women’s divisions all the more impressive. Despite the challenges they faced in making major inroads into the JFU’s national organization, prefectural branches did organize in Yamanashi, Niigata, and Kumamoto in addition to Okayama.<sup>100</sup> Even more significant than the total number of women who participated in these radical organizations were the spaces that their activities, rooted in daily experiences of exploitation, expropriation, oppression, and discrimination, collectively opened up for theory and praxis. These struggles, far from being ancillary, were instrumental not just to agrarian struggle, but to the articulation of critiques against capitalism, patriarchy, and the state that socialist and anarchist Japanese feminist activists developed in the early 1930s.

## NOTES

1. Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (New York, 2015), 7.

2. Takamure Itsue, “Fujin Sensen ni Tatsu,” *Fujin Sensen*, inaugural issue, 9. For more on the establishment of Japanese feminist magazines and their links to women’s and proletarian organizations, see Andrea Germer, “Continuity and Change in Japanese Feminist Magazines: *Fujin Sensen* (1930–1931) and *Onna Erosu* (1973–1982) in *Gender and Modernity: Rereading Japanese Women’s Magazines*, ed. Ulrike Wohr, Barbara Sato, and Sadami Suzuki (Kyoto, 2000).”

3. Further details on Yagi’s life and activism can be found in Hosaka Masayasu, *Noson Seinensha Jiken: Showa Anakisuto no Mita Maboroshi* (Tokyo, 2011).

4. On the formation of the Sekirankai and other radical feminist organizations during the interwar period, see Tajima Hide’s autobiography, *Hitosuji no Michi: Fujin Kaihō no Tatakai 50 nen* (Tokyo, 1968); Vera Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900–1937* (Cambridge, 1997); Ishizuki Shizue, *Senkanki no josei undō* (Osaka, 1996).

5. Katayama Sen argued that the 1918 Rice Riots (*Kome Sōdō*) were the true beginnings of class struggle in Japan. Katayama Sen, “Nihon ni Okeru 1918 no Kome Sōdō,” *Rekishi hyōron* 5 (1951): 10–21. Andrew Gordon concurs that 1918 inaugurated a new period of mass struggle that was characterized by its lack of leadership of political elites. Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley, 1991).

6. The so-called woman question, as it was linked to economic concerns, increased during the Taisho period. For example, Fukuda Tokuzō, a liberal economist wrote an article titled “Keizaijo yori mitaru fujin mondai” in 1915 in which he explained that the crux of the so-called women’s question lay in the confrontation between women as producers and consumers. Sakai Toshihiko wrote about the women’s question with Kōtoku Shūsui before World War One but revived his discussion during the middle of the 1920s in conjunction with renewed debates over the family. See, for example, “Nokoru fujin mondai,” in *Gendai shakai seikatsu no fuan to gimon* (Tokyo, 1925), 163–67.

7. As Massimiliano Tomba notes in *Marx’s Temporalities* (Chicago, 2014), this process of reproduction includes domestic, or unpaid, labor, which does not enter the process of valorization but is nonetheless intimately linked to the creation of value. Rosemary Hennessy calls this an “outlawed set of needs” that is often made invisible as labor by being labeled women’s natural role in capitalist society in *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York, 2000). David Staples also writes about the relationship between paid and unpaid labor in *No Place Like Home: Organizing Home-Based Labor in the Era of Structural Adjustment* (New York, 2013).

8. Rosa Luxemburg, “Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle,” in *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Dick Howard (New York, 1971), 220–21.

9. *Ibid.*, 221. See Heather Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family: A Critical Study* (Leiden, 2012) for an analysis of Marx’s works on domestic labor.

10. This was revealed most devastatingly by the execution of Kōtoku Shūsui and others in 1911, which began Japanese socialism’s “winter” period. On Kōtoku’s critique of Japanese



imperialism, see Robert Thomas Tierney, *Monsters of the Twentieth Century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's First Anti-Imperialist Movement* (Berkeley, 2015). For more on the intrusion of the state into the everyday lives of Japanese subjects after this period, see Sheldon Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 1987) and Sabine Fruhstuck, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 2003). Both also write extensively about the impact that these policies had upon Japanese women and their activism. On “dangerous women” who became the target of surveillance and punishment in the interwar period, see Christine Marran, *Poison Woman: Figuring Female Transgression in Modern Japanese Culture* (Minneapolis, 2007).

11. Ueno Chizuko, Ochiai Emiko, and Nishikawa Yūko are among those who have written extensively about the way that Japan's modern family systems (*ie* and *katei*) inaugurated with the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 were the basis for the formation of an emperor-headed national unity and capitalist development based on the cheap labor power of women. All three situate the emergence of the modern family system within the country's incorporation into the interstate system of the second half of the century. See Ueno, *Kafuchōsei to shihonse: Marukusu shugi feminizumu no chihei* (Tokyo, 1990); Ochiai, *Kindai kazoku no magariado* (Tokyo, 2000); Nishikawa, *Kindai kokka to kazoku moderu* (Tokyo, 2000).

12. This tendency is not as stark in histories of labor activism as Vera Mackie's *Creating Socialist Women* shows. However, studies of female tenant farmer activism rarely take the thought that emerged from within these agrarian village spaces seriously.

13. The representative example of this kind of narrative is Mikiso Hane's passage in *Peasants, Rebels, Women, and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan* (New York, 1982) in which he says that “housewives of Toyama” triggered the Rice Riots.

14. The actual role of women in the Rice Riots has not received much attention. Some early work includes Matsui Chiya, “Suwarikomu Toyama no onna tachi,” *Rōdō Nōmin Undō* 29 (1968): 142–45 and Shindō Toyoo, “Chikuhō no onna kōfu tachi (6),” *Buraku* 25 (1973): 80–88.

15. For an excellent English-language study, see Michael Lewis, *Rioters and Citizens: Mass Protest in Imperial Japan* (Berkeley, 1990).

16. The following authors have utilized oral testimonies in order to gain a clearer view of Toyama's female participants: Imoto Mitsuo, *Mizuhashichō (Toyamaken) no Kome Sōdō* (Toyama, 2010); Saito Masami, “Onna Ikki to shite no Toyama Kome Sōdō: Josei undō to iu kanten kara no yominaoshi,” *Inpakushon* 166 (2008): 38–47; Saito Masami, “Kōjutsu shiryō ga utsusu Kome Sōdō no jōsei rōdōsha: Keisatsu shiryō o koete,” *Rekishi hyōron* 776 (2012): 76–88.

17. Anne Walthall critiques this, as well as the remarginalization of women who did participate in peasant disputes in the context of early modern Japan in “Devoted Wives/Unruly Women: Invisible Presence in the History of Japanese Social Protest,” *Signs* 20 (1994): 106–36.

18. Critiques have come mainly from social reproduction theorists like Isabella Bakker, Stephen Gill, Sue Ferguson, Sebastian Rioux, and many others. See Bakker and Gill, eds., *Power, Production and Social Reproduction* (New York, 2003), Rioux, “Embodied Contradictions: Capitalism, Social Reproduction and Body Formation,” *Women's Studies International Forum* (2014): 1–9, and issue 5 of *Viewpoints Magazine* for recent debates and theorizations. <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/11/02/issue-5-social-reproduction/> (accessed January 4, 2017).

19. For example, Japanese Marxist theoretician Uno Kozo wrote extensively about the difficulty of organizing Japanese farmers who, as half owner-cultivators (*jikosakunō*), desire land ownership. The predominance of small-scale cultivating farming households willing to work themselves to the point of exhaustion and borrow a portion of the land they cultivated at high rents in an attempt to expend all of their surplus household labor and increase their land-holdings was a serious obstacle to the emergence of revolutionary thought and action in the countryside. He explains, “so-called tenant disputes do not have an external, confrontational relationship founded on the separation of ownership and management.” Uno Kōzō, “Nōgyō no kōsei (1947),” *Uno Kōzō chosakushū (bekkan)* (Tokyo, 1974), 458.

20. In these works, the tenant farmer has generally been assumed to be male. Maruoka Hideko, who published a detailed study of the conditions of women in Japan's agrarian villages in 1937 is an exception. While she does not examine women's participation in tenant disputes or other forms of agrarian struggle, her work is extremely valuable for its nuanced treatment of the heavy toll that women engaged in agriculture pay both physically and mentally. Maruoka,

*Nihon nōson fujin mondai: Shufu bōsei-hen* (1937) (Tokyo, 1980). Thanks to Yukiko Hanawa for bringing this work to my attention.

21. For the significance of this debate in the Japanese context, see Nagahara Yutaka, *Rational Peasants and Village Community* (Tokyo, 1991).

22. Jacques Ranciere has written about the concept of subjectification in the context of historical writing in *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, trans. David Fernbach (New York, 2011). Jason Read also defines the concept as a technique of the capitalist mode of production that is absolutely necessary for the continued accumulation process in his *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present* (Albany, 2003). Read explains that capital requires an “abstract subjective potential” or the “capacity to do any work whatsoever,” which it has to “develop, through discipline and cooperation.” Subjectification refers to the techniques beyond discipline that are used to develop this potential.

23. See Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley, 2007), 143–76 for a critique of this issue and of Takamura Itsue.

24. Women’s participation in agrarian struggles in colonial Korea during the interwar period have been analyzed by Kenneth Wells, “The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kunuhoe Movement, 1927–1931,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, 1999); Sunyoung Park, *The Proletarian Wave: Literature and Leftist Culture in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (Cambridge, 2015). Both show that these women took their inspiration from many sources including Marxist-Leninism and Chinese feminism and operated inside and outside of the peninsula including Tokyo.

25. Nancy Folbre and Marjorie Abel addressed the way that government statistics have themselves been plagued with gender biases in “Women’s Work and Women’s Households: Gender Bias in the U.S. Census,” *Social Research* 56 (1989): 545–69. Not only has this led to inaccurate accounting of the quantity of work that women have performed, it has also played an active role in reinforcing gendered assumptions about women’s work through the very categories that it has used in the accounting process. Kate Broadbent and Tessa Morris-Suzuki have addressed similar issues in Japan in “Women’s Work in the ‘Public’ and ‘Private’ Spheres of the Japanese Economy,” *Asian Studies Review*, 24 (2000): 161–73.

26. Tsurumi addresses this question in her essay, “Female Textile Workers and the Failure of Early Trade Unionism in Japan,” *History Workshop* 18 (1984): 3–27.

27. The JFU, a national organization of tenant unions, was formed in April of 1922. For a detailed analysis of the organization as well as its split and formation of the National Farmers’ Union (Zennō), refer to Ann Waswo, “In Search of Equity: Japanese Tenant Unions in the 1920s,” *Farmers and Village Life in Twentieth-Century Japan* (London, 2003).

28. One of the few works that have pointed to this lack of analysis of female activism in tenant disputes is Ōkado Masakatsu, “Kosaku Sōgi no Naka no Musumetachi: Yamanashi Ochiai Sōgi,” *Rekishi hyōron* 467 (1989): 45–63. While this essay is an important starting point for more detailed analyses of female activism in the agrarian sphere, his primary focus is on the link between levels of female participation and membership in other village-level organizations. He mentions the dispute in Okayama’s Fujita village and notes that it and most other struggles that prominently featured farming women were dominated by “wife corps” (*nyōbodan* or *nyōboren*) that played supporting roles to their husbands.

29. Cinzia Arruzza, *Dangerous Liaisons: The Marriages and Divorces of Marxism and Feminism* (Pontypool, 2013).

30. Most studies of women’s new role as household managers of consumption and spending focus on urban areas. For example, Elyssa Faison, *Managing Women: Disciplining Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 2007); Mark Metzler, “Women’s Place in Japan’s Great Depression: Reflections on the Moral Economy of Deflation,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30 (2004): 315–52; Elise Tipton, “How to Manage a Household: Creating Middle Class Housewives in Modern Japan,” *Japanese Studies* 29 (2009): 95–110.

31. Tama Shinnosuke considers the tenant disputes in Okayama as representative of disputes that took place during the Taisho era. See Tama, “Nōminteki shōshōhin seisan no hatten to kosaku sōgi—‘Nōminteki shōshōhin seisan gainen’ saikō,” *Okayama Daigaku keizai gakkai zasshi* 21 (1990): 51–76.

32. A *chōbu* is a unit of measurement. One *chōbu* is approximately one hectare.

33. This is precisely the reason that prewar Japanese Marxist Yamada Moritarō of the Kōza (Lectures) faction and others focused so heavily on it during the post-World War Two land reforms. See Yamada, “Nihon nōgyō seisanryoku dankai to chūkoku nōminso no

gainen,” *Tochi seido shiryō hozonkai hōkoku* 1 (Tokyo, 1954). According to *Honpō rōdō undō chōsa hōkoku* (Tokyo, 1923), 83–108, the Fujita Farm held 1,277 *chōbu* of land that was cultivated by 511 families and 258 commuters or agricultural day laborers who lived outside of the boundaries of the farm as of April 1, 1922.

34. Jamie Allinson and Alexander Anievas, “The Uneven and Combined Development of the Meiji Restoration: A Passive Revolutionary Road to Capitalist Modernity,” *Capital & Class* 34 (2010): 469–90.

35. Hosogai Daijirō, “Kojima wan Fujita kantaku to Fujita nōjō no chokuei yōshiki,” *Kaigai jijō* 20 (1972): 39–40.

36. Aoki Seiichirō provides historical data on the amount of village income that was comprised of company donations in *Okayama ken Kojima wan kantaku no Fujita-gumi reizokuka nōmin no tōsōroku* (Nagano, 1953), 5–6.

37. Maeda Seiichi, *Fujita nōjō keieishi* (Okayama, 1965).

38. They became more heavily indebted because they had to pay for seeds, fertilizer, agricultural tools, etc., which they were forced to purchase or rent from the company. These conditions are described in “Sōgi saichū no Fujita nōjō,” *Osaka Jiji shimpō*, January 19 and 23, 1923. [http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/das/jsp/ja/ContentViewM.jsp?METAID=00490467&TYPE=HTML\\_FILE&POS=1](http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/das/jsp/ja/ContentViewM.jsp?METAID=00490467&TYPE=HTML_FILE&POS=1) (accessed January 4, 2017).

39. The intensity of the disputes and the concrete demands changed dramatically during this time. The fight for permanent tenant rights was a central part of tenant farmer activism. See *Zennō Okayama tōsōshi* (Okayama, 1936). The August 1921 dispute in Miyako was also fought over the rate of the distribution of profits. The company did not acquiesce to these demands but did announce reforms that were designed to provide more stability for the sharecroppers and direct cultivators. *Honpō rōdō undō chōsa hōkoku*, 92.

40. Okayama prefecture’s women’s division repeatedly pushed for the formation of a similar division in the national JFU since the Second National Congress in February 1923. It was established in 1925, but in practice achieved little.

41. Though Shigei does not specify what type of tenant arrangement her family was under during this time, she seems to remember her family as being under the sharecropping arrangement. However, that did not begin in Miyako until 1919. The family may have been converted from a more favorable direct management system where cultivators farmed four or five *chōbu* per family.

42. The company’s official history acknowledges the harshness of these contracts. See Maeda, 117.

43. Makise Kikue, “Fujita nōjō sōgi no koro: Shigei Shigeiko san ni kiku,” *Shisō no Kagaku* 29 (1974): 49–55.

44. *Ibid.*, 50.

45. The company used their own advanced machinery, including threshers. The problem was that the farm was an experimental station so they would use one model for a couple of years and then switch to a different one. They would also remove existing infrastructure like bridges to accommodate these new machines, which made it inconvenient and costly for cultivators. Tenants complained about the damage that they incurred from the oil that leaked from the boats that were used on the aqueducts. This was outlined in the October 26, 1922, document that I discuss in the next section. *Honpō rōdō undō chōsa hōkoku*, 99.

46. Makise, “Fujita nōjō sōgi no koro: Shigei Shigeiko san ni kiku,” 50. For more on the relationship between the dismantling of communal rights after World War One and organized tenant struggle, see Ushiyama Keiji, “Nōson keizai kōsei undōka no ‘mura’ no kinō to kōsei,” *Rekishi hyōron* 435 (1986): 19–31; and Hayashi Yūichi, “Dokusen shihonshugi kakuritsuki—Daiichiji Taisen kara Showa Kyōkō made,” in *Nihon nōgyōshi: Shihonshugi no tenkai to nōgyō mondai*, ed. Teruoka Shūzo (Tokyo, 1981): 113–63.

47. Technically, the company did allow all tenants to cultivate secondary crops that they were allowed to keep for themselves. However, because of the long time that the threshing process took, they did not have time to devote to its production. As Sidney Mintz and other scholars who have studied slavery and postemancipation arrangements in plantations throughout the Caribbean, gardens and other plots of land that cultivators were allowed access to were constant points of contention. See, for example, his chapter “Houses and Yards among Caribbean Peasants” in *Caribbean Transformations* (New York, 1974); Dale Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (New York, 2004).

48. “Sōgi saichū no Fujita nōjō.”

49. Ōnishi Toshio, *Nōmin tōsō no senjutsu. Sono yakushin: Nōmin kumiai nyūmon* (1928), republished as *Shōwa zenki nōsei keizai meichōshū*, vol. 22, ed. Inamura Ryūichi (Tokyo, 1979) writes about the use of these calculations in tenant disputes. Ishiguro Tadaatsu, a powerful agricultural bureaucrat who was in charge of tenant arbitration in the mid-1920s, warned that tenants’ awareness of their production expenses gave them more leverage than their urban counterparts in disputes against capital. Ishiguro, “Kosaku mondai gaiyō,” in *Chihō kosakukan kōshūkai kōenshū*, ed. Nōrinshō Nōmukyoku (Tokyo, 1925), 1–99.

50. These are figures from January 1923 published in “Sōgi saichu no Fujita nōjō.”

51. Ibid. As *Zennō Okayama tōsōshi* emphasizes, nearby Ooku and Jodo districts had already created a resolution earlier that month, which included the socialization of arable land in the interests of creating a flourishing agrarian village culture and the defeat of capitalism.

52. *Zennō Okayama tōsōshi*, 20–21.

53. Ibid., 23. This was the first instance of a “no trespassing” order in the history of modern landlord-tenant disputes in the country.

54. “Miyako nōmin fujin tatsū,” *Tochi to jiyū*, January 25, 1923.

55. “Fujita nōjō sawagi tsui ni haretsu shita,” *Osaka Asahi shimbun*, January 21, 1923, focused on the battle between the JFU faction and the Fujita farm/police. [http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/das/jsp/ja/ContentViewM.jsp?METAID=00490465&TYPE=HTML\\_FILE&POS=1](http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/das/jsp/ja/ContentViewM.jsp?METAID=00490465&TYPE=HTML_FILE&POS=1)

56. “Tsunashima no Fujita-tei ni oshiyoseta onna tachi,” *Osaka Asahi shimbun*, January 23, 1923. [http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/das/jsp/ja/ContentViewM.jsp?METAID=00490469&TYPE=HTML\\_FILE&POS=1](http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/das/jsp/ja/ContentViewM.jsp?METAID=00490469&TYPE=HTML_FILE&POS=1)

57. Kondō Jirō, “Nihon Nōmin Kumiai no Seiritsu to Hirakata no Kosaku Sōgi,” *Nōringyō Mondai Kenkyū* 10 (1967): 90–98.

58. For details of these conversations, refer to Takui Shizue, “Kantō fujin dōmei—Nihon ni okeru saisho no puroretaria-teki taishū-teki tan’itsu fujin soshiki no kokoromi,” *Rekishī hyōron* 280 (1973): 83–94. In English, see Miriam Silverberg, “The Modern Girl as Militant” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley, 1991): 239–66.

59. The total number of delegates was 486. In addition to the three female representatives from Okayama, two other representatives, Kuribayashi Fusae from Kagawa and Sugitani Tsumo from Kumamoto, were women. *Tochi to jiyū* printed a seating chart for its delegates in their February 20, 1925, edition. *Tochi to jiyū*, February 20, 1925, reprinted in *Tochi to jiyū* (fukkōban) 2 (Tokyo, 1975), 56. This was in the midst of debates within the *Hyōgikai* over the role that women’s division should play in the organization.

60. Makise, “Fujita nōjō sōgi no koro: Shigei Shigeko san ni kiku,” 51.

61. Hayashi criticizes these calculations for including wage costs at levels of agricultural day laborers but does not point out that they also do not include the costs of social reproduction that were born disproportionately by women.

62. This was something that the first ILO meeting in 1919 took up for consideration. In addition to debating the problem of night work for women, the protection of maternity rights was also on the agenda. See Maryse Gaudier, “The Development of the Women’s Question at the ILO, 1919–1974: 75 Years of Progress Towards Equality,” ILO Discussion Paper Series, 1996. On the debate in Japan, see Barbara Molony, “Equality versus Difference: The Japanese Debate over ‘Motherhood Protection,’ 1915–1950,” in Janet Hunter, ed. *Japanese Women Working* (London, 1993): 122–29 and Laurel Rasplica Rodd, “Yosano Akiko and the Taishō Debate Over the ‘New Woman,’” in Bernstein, *Recreating Japanese Women*, 175–98. As Kondō (Sakai) Magara, one of the central members of the Sekirankai stated, at the first May Day that women’s organizations participated in (May 1921), demands for an eight-hour working day, equal pay for men and women, and the protection of motherhood were included. “Jyosei to Shite Hajimete May Day ni Sanka Shita Sekirankai no Hitobito: Kondō Magara san ni Kiku,” interview by Suzuki Yūko, *Sōhyō* (May 1979): 49–59.

63. This was also called *tegokoro*, roughly translated as consideration, or thoughtfulness. The company did not want to formally change the contract but agreed to count more leniently so that the tenant farmers received more of the chaff than the strict 72:25 distributions would have allowed. *Zennō Okayama tōsōshi*, 20–21. The language of “appropriate discretion” brings to mind the characterization of women’s wages as “discretionary income” that feminist scholars have critiqued for decades. In addition to reinforcing paternalistic relations between

the company and tenant farmers, the language assumes that the terms agreed upon in the contract were fair and that the distribution was adequate for families to make ends meet.

64. Prior to the harvesting season in 1927, the company announced that it would put an end to this discretion. It sent out flyers announcing, “[W]e will prosecute if even one *go* of chaff is dropped.” This refers to the practice whereby during the division of the chaff between tenant farmers and the company, the part that was “dropped” was granted to the cultivator. Following their announcement, the company kept close watch over its tenants through binoculars. The police also conducted searches of homes several days after the rice stalks had been bundled up. These draconian measures by the company intensified the dispute in Fujita. *Zennō Okayama tōsōshi*, 77.

65. This was articulated in the *Hyōgikai*'s “Theses on the Women’s Divisions,” which Yamakawa Kikue drafted on behalf of Mitamura Shirō in the fall of 1925. For details, refer to Suzuki’s commentary published in *Yamakawa Kikue Shū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo, 2011), 296–97.

66. Makise, “Fujita nōjō sōgi no koro: Shigei Shigeko san ni kiku,” 52.

67. Faison writes about the establishment of women’s divisions in these labor unions in *Managing Women*.

68. Itō made this clear in *Itō Noe Zenshū*, vol. 3, (Tokyo, 1970), 162–69. They also were inspired by the gains women made during the reforms of the early Bolshevik regime.

69. The *fujinkai* referred to patriotic women’s associations that grew in membership and scope from the Taishō period. These were middle-class organizations, often affiliated with religious institutions that assisted with state-driven projects like lifestyle reform, disaster relief, education, and so on. They often received state support for their activities.

70. *Zennō Okayama tōsōshi*, 61.

71. The debate on this issue is reproduced in *Rōdō kumiai fujinbu secchi o meguru ronsō to “fujin dōmei” kankei shiryō (1926–1928)* (Tokyo, 1955).

72. This exchange is recorded in “Dai futsuka,” *Tochi to jiyū*, March 25, 1924, 4. There were other recorded cases of discontent with the radicalism of some of the female activists, even in Okayama, which was known nationally as a place where the women’s division was strong. See, for example, “Okayama ken rengōkai iin taikai,” *Tochi to jiyū*, January 25, 1924.

73. *Tochi to jiyū* has an article that contains reports of the women’s division. Yamagami and Takahashi Fumie gave lectures in May 1925 to over 3,000 people. Of these, 780 were women. “Kagawa ken rengōkai hōkoku,” *Tochi to jiyū*, July 25, 1925.

74. The flier is reproduced as document 15 in *Rōdō kumiai fujinbu secchi o meguru ronsō to “fujin dōmei” kankei shiryō (1926–1928)*, 51.

75. Even though the Peace Preservation Law had already been passed that month, it did not come into effect until May, which meant that the more restrictive Public Peace Police Law of 1900 remained in effect. For more on the changes, see Vera Mackie’s “Picturing Political Space in 1920s and 1930s Japan,” in *Nation and Nationalism in Japan*, ed. Sandra Wilson (New York, 2002). The *nōminka* that they sang is reprinted in *Rōdoka oyobi kumiaika* (Tokyo, 1927), 17–20. It was written by Okayama’s Mitsutomo Mantaro. All eight verses are printed in the April 25, 1923, edition of *Tochi to jiyū*.

76. *Zennō Okayama tōsōshi*, 62.

77. For background on International Women’s Day, see Temma Kaplan, “On the Socialist Origins of International Women’s Day,” *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985): 163–71 and Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, “From West to East: International Women’s Day, the First Decade,” *Aspasia* 6 (2012): 1–24. On its commemoration in Japan and for more on Tanno, see Tajima Hide’s autobiography, *Hitosuji no michi: Fujin kaihō no tatakai 50 nen* (Tokyo, 1968), 77–84.

78. Consumer cooperatives were also being promoted by state actors interested in strengthening welfare programs during this time. See, for example, economist Hon’iden Yoshio’s promotion of these associations in his *Fujin to shōhi kumiai undō* (Kobe, 1925). For detailed figures that the Okayama prefecture compiled on women’s organizations in Kojima as of 1915, see *Okayama ken Kojima gunshi (1915)* (Kyoto, 1986). According to this document, there were already over 6,500 women who were in women’s organizations in 1915. See pp. 433–35 for figures.

79. *Zennō Okayama tōsōshi*, 62–63. The signatories were Shigei, Tajiri, Yamagami, Hiramatsu Masako, Matsuda Okayo, and Sugita Otome.

80. *Tochi to jiyū* describes Okayama’s “wife corps” as a local specialty (*meibutsu*).

81. Shigei Shigeko, “Kumiai fujinbu wa hitsuyō ka? Shikariri!” *Musansha shimbun*, May 22, 1926.

82. This continued until April 5, 1928. While they also participated in the women’s alliance (*fujin dōmei*) that included organizations identified as petty bourgeoisie, Okayama’s female activists clearly saw women’s liberation as inextricably linked to a class struggle. See “Nōmin undō no gaikyō.”

83. If we take Shigei’s example, her dramatic life story takes her to and from Okayama and Hokkaido, where she participated in the largest tenant dispute in the country, the Hachisuka tenant dispute, which was a conflict over 5,000 *chōbu* that involved 1,000 tenant farmers. See Makise, “Fujita nōjō sōgi no koro: Shigei Shigeiko san ni kiku,” 54 for her account of this struggle.

84. Yamagami Kimie, “Nōson fujin to kazoku seido,” *Mirai* 3 (1926), reprinted in *Nihon fujin mondai shiryō shūsei*, vol. 8, ed. Maruoka Hideko (Tokyo, 1976), 578–80. *Mirai* was a journal that Tajima Hide, a feminist activist from Nagoya started when she started the *Fujin rōdō chōsajo* in 1926. She writes about her activism and this journal in *Hitosuji no Michi*.

85. Yamagami, “Nōson fujin to kazoku seido,” 578.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*, 579.

88. *Ibid.*, 580.

89. Tosaka Jun examined the devaluation of the societal position of women through the naturalization of domestic work as women’s work in the home (*katei*) in “Fujin to shakaiteki rōdō,” *Fujin bungei* 4 (1936): 114–21 reprinted in *Nihon fujin mondai shiryō shūsei*, (1978) 367–70.

90. Melinda Cooper and Angela Mitropoulos, “The Household Frontier,” *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 9 (2009): 363–68. The quote is from 364.

91. It is also plausible that this was related to the farm’s proximity to Kurashiki, a town whose main industrialist, Ōhara Magosaburō, was intent on providing female factory workers at his rayon factory with an “enlightened” work experience. He founded the Institute for Social Problems in 1919, which is currently housed at Hōsei University.

92. Okuda Kamezō, *Nōson kyūsai: Tochi seido kaiseiron* (Tokyo, 1927), 17.

93. On women’s early contributions to industrial development, see Janet Hunter, *Women and the Labour Market in Japan’s Industrialising Economy: The Textile Industry before the Pacific War* (New York, 2003).

94. Okuda, *Nōson kyūsai: Tochi seido kaiseiron*, 18.

95. As Harry Harootunian points out in *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, 2000), the woman, even more so than the worker, was the “true other of modernity” that had to be tamed (17). Female tenant farmers-turned-activists were doubly threatening to state authorities because they threatened both gender and class relationships that had more or less coalesced since the enactment of the civil code in 1898.

96. Ishiguro’s aforementioned lecture to regional tenant arbitrators reflected his concern that around seventy percent of farming households were tenant farmers or were half-owner cultivators. We see this figure confirmed by an article by Arimoto Yutaka, Okazaki Tetsuji, and Nakabayashi Masaki, “Agrarian Land Tenancy in Prewar Japan,” *The Developing Economies* 48 (2010): 293–318. They explain that the figure of more than five million farming households remained relatively steady from the late nineteenth century until the end of World War One, and of this figure, nearly seventy percent cultivated some plots as tenants. The proportion of tenanted land in relation to all arable land was approximately forty-five percent, a significant amount.

97. For its report on this and other activities by the women’s division, refer to “Nōmin undō no gaikyō: Tokubetsu kōtō keisatsu shiryō, dai 9 go (March 20, 1929),” in *Senzenki keisatsu kankei shiryōshū*, vol. 5 (Tokyo, 2012), 321–22.

98. Details of this incident as well as the sentencing of the four women in November 1927 are included in an annual report on landlord-tenant disputes compiled by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry’s Agriculture Bureau, *Kosaku Nenpō*, vol. 3, March 1928.

99. *Zennō Okayama Tōsōshi* (Okayama, 1936), 74.

100. According to figures presented by Sone Chūichi, *Shakai undō torishimari kōwa* (Yamagata 1930), 29, there were 1,884 women in 67 divisions nationwide in 1930.