

# Who Speaks for Workers? Japan and the 1919 ILO Debates Over Rights and Global Labor Standards

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## *Abstract*

Contrary to conventional wisdom, some of the most contentious disputes over international labor standards and worker rights occurred not between Western nations and the “rest” but within single nations. To explore the deep fissures in Japanese society over the rights of women and workers, I offer the first scholarly account of Japan’s only woman representative to the ILO’s inaugural 1919 Washington conference, elite social feminist Tanaka Taka, grandniece of renowned Japanese capitalist Shibusawa Eiichi. I recount her efforts in Japan and in Washington to secure free speech and economic rights for Japan’s workers, men and women, and detail the hostilities she encountered from employers and organized labor. In addition, I reconstruct the parallel tale of factory supervisor Masumoto Uhei whose appointment as Japan’s labor delegate led to widespread labor protests and a power struggle between trade unions and the state in Japan. The debate over who would speak for Japan’s workers at the ILO and whether Japan would accept the labor standards being proposed by Western nations captured worldwide attention. It changed ideas in the East and the West about what Japan’s workers deserved and desired and had lasting consequences for global politics and social policy.

In a crowded committee room in Washington’s Pan American Union building on a November Saturday in 1919, reporters from around the world leaned forward to catch every word of the angry exchange between Mrs. Tanaka Taka<sup>2</sup> and Mr. Mutō Sanji over whether Japan should ban night work for women in Japan’s textile industry. Japan was one of the “Big-Five” powers, along with the United States, Great Britain, France, and Italy at the recently concluded peace talks in Paris. Like forty other nations, Japan had sent a delegation, including Tanaka and Mutō, to Washington for the inaugural International Labor Conference (ILC) of the International Labor Organization (ILO), the new body charged by the Versailles Peace Treaty with formulating global labor rights and standards.<sup>3</sup>

As the only Asian nation accorded the status of a global power by the West in 1919, Japan was in a delicate and somewhat paradoxical position. Due to the wartime demand for its exports and its imperial expansion into China and the Pacific, it had moved to the front ranks of nations in military and industrial might.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, despite being among the world’s leading producers of silk and cotton, its economy was predominantly agricultural and its mills dependent on a labor force of rural farm girls, many between the ages of ten and sixteen, working long hours late into the night.<sup>5</sup> In Paris that spring Japan achieved some of its territorial ambitions, including its claims to China’s

Shandong peninsula. But it lost its bid to insert in the League of Nations covenant a “racial equality” clause that, some thought, would help end discrimination against Japan and Japanese people in a global system dominated by Anglo-European nations.<sup>6</sup>

Now the question before the world was how Japan would navigate the unfolding Washington debates over international labor standards. Would Japan accede to the higher minimums being pushed by the Western powers or seek, along with Asian countries like China and India, “special” exemptions allowing lower standards?<sup>7</sup> And if the latter, how would it reconcile its call for equality at the Paris peace talks with its pursuit of a “special” status at the Washington labor negotiations? Would the social unrest sweeping Japan, including the 1918 rice riots and the continuing large-scale strikes and “slow-downs” among shipyard, mine, and textile workers, affect deliberations in Washington?<sup>8</sup> Would the Japanese government and business community make concessions in the face of mounting domestic pressure for improved working conditions and greater industrial and political democracy?<sup>9</sup>

The ILO’s unusual tripartite representational system added another layer of complexity to the situation. According to the ILO Constitution, each nation appointed four voting delegates to the ILC: two “government” representatives and one each from “employers” and “labor.” To accompany the voting delegates, nations selected nonvoting advisers, including “at least” one woman “when questions specially affecting women” were to be considered.<sup>10</sup> In its inclusion of non-governmental or civil society representatives as voting delegates and its encouragement of women advisers on questions affecting women, the ILO Constitution signaled its commitment to furthering greater democracy in international decision making. Yet, as we shall see, who could legitimately claim to represent “labor” and who had the right to speak and to vote on international labor standards were far from settled issues in 1919.

Selected as Japan’s “employer” delegate to the ILC, Mutō was the managing director of the Kanegafuchi Spinning Company, one of the largest spinning enterprises in the world. Kanegafuchi prided itself as a benevolent employer that “cared” for its workers and met their needs through employee welfare programs.<sup>11</sup> A professor of social work at Japan Women’s University and the grandniece of Shibusawa Eiichi, one of Japan’s earliest and most influential capitalist entrepreneurs, Tanaka was the sole female appointee in the large sixty-person Japanese delegation. She came as a nonvoting adviser, as did all of the 23 women sent by nations to accompany the 269 male voting delegates. Although the Japanese press frequently called her “Japan’s woman representative,” Tanaka’s official appointment was as adviser to Japan’s chief government delegate, Kamada Eikichi, president of Keio University and member of the House of Peers.<sup>12</sup>

The confrontation between Mutō and Tanaka erupted at the November 8 meeting of the Commission on Women’s Employment as it formulated night work standards to recommend to the larger assembly for a vote.<sup>13</sup> Mutō spoke first and urged the Commission to exempt Japan’s textile and mining

industries from the 1906 Berne Convention banning women's night work. In Japan, Mutō's opposition to regulatory labor legislation and his defense of Japanese paternalism (*onjōshugi*), or family-like attention to employee needs, as the best solution to labor problems was well known.<sup>14</sup> But on this occasion, faced with a Commission on which sat an unusually large number of women advisers and labor delegates, he advanced a somewhat different defense: female operatives themselves desired night work.

Tanaka spoke next. Perhaps because of Tanaka's flawless English, Kamada had asked her to read his prepared statement on why the introduction of night work laws in Japan should be delayed. That she faithfully did, at least for the first few minutes. Then, in a surprising defiance of norms and procedure, Tanaka pulled out her own notes, carefully hidden beneath Kamada's typed pages, and, at a rapid-fire pace, delivered an impassioned speech about the harsh conditions for female operatives in the Japanese textile factories and the need for *immediate* abolition of night work.

Caught off guard, at first neither Mutō nor Kamada grasped what was transpiring. As reporters frantically took notes, they sat, nodding approvingly as Tanaka pointed out the evils of long hours from a "social, economic, technical, and hygienic point of view" and the "misuse of women, physically and mentally, to swell the capitalist's purse."<sup>15</sup> Japanese employers, she announced, speak of affectionate relations and of mutual obligation, but women textile workers were dying young. "The conference should ban night work for women in Japan and rescue the girl operatives from their present state of horror," she concluded. With that assertion ringing in their ears, many in the Japanese delegation jumped to their feet to have her stopped only "to be informed that the essence of the whole conference was that speeches of that kind should not be stopped." Mutō and others loudly disavowed her report as the committee chair gavelled the meeting to a close.<sup>16</sup>

Mutō's reaction to Tanaka's speech was the most virulent. No doubt, Mutō was infuriated by Tanaka's pointed challenge to employer claims of benevolence, her disregard of norms and procedure, and her very public rejection of his credibility and authority. His first response, however, was to question her patriotism. She had shamed Japan, he claimed, by publicly "exposing" its "disgraceful conditions" to the world. Then, he tried to discredit her by pointing to her years studying in the United States and her supposed lack of knowledge about Japan's textile industry. Finally, he played his gender trump card and questioned her right to speak and her judgment in doing so. To bolster this argument, he could have cited Japan's own domestic laws, in force since 1890, expressly prohibiting women from organizing, attending, or speaking at political meetings or joining political parties.<sup>17</sup> But instead, he drew on a more universal discourse of female bodily inferiority. He demanded "a committee of inquiry" into Tanaka's "mental condition," which, he announced triumphantly, was "deranged by her being in a family way."<sup>18</sup>

Tanaka, for her part, ignored the reference to her pregnancy, a fact well publicized in Japan in the months leading up to the Washington ILO conference, and defended her decision to expose the realities of worker lives in the Japanese

textile industry. “Unrepentant,” in the opinion of the scribbling reporters, she replied “no less angrily” than Mutō. “I spoke,” she declared, about “the real condition of Japanese workers.” She might have added that she seized this particular moment to speak because, as Japan’s prominent daily *Asahi Shimbun* reported, she had been denied “the opportunity” to attend or speak at any other meeting at the conference.<sup>19</sup>

The turmoil provoked by this “outrageous happening” did not subside quickly. The question of who spoke for Japan’s workers and whether Japan should conform to the international labor standards being proposed in 1919 captured news headlines for the rest of the conference. Indeed, as this article recounts, this “dramatic scandal” as well as other confrontations over rights and representation connected to the ILO’s first labor conference, reverberated around the world in 1919 and deeply affected social and political reform in Japan and other nations.<sup>20</sup>

### *Why Study the ILO Debates*

Scholars who analyze international labor standards often disagree over the economic effects of particular labor standard statutes, including those that protected only women, like night work. Researchers also divide over whether efforts to raise and universalize labor standards are even desirable, especially for newly industrializing regions. In this article I do not directly engage these contentious and, at times, frustratingly abstract economic debates. Nor is it my primary purpose to expose the economic self-interestedness or double standards that no doubt lay behind the labor standard proposals of many ILO member nations.<sup>21</sup> Rather, I use the ILO and its efforts to formulate international labor standards in 1919 to explore a different set of questions.

First, I pay close attention to the ILO as a site for debates over democratic rights and representation. The ILO’s founding and first conference in 1919 came at a moment of rising global movements by women and workers for democracy and full citizenship. It should come as no surprise that these issues would surface in Washington as large delegations of workers, employers, and government officials from some forty nations gathered to formulate the first set of international labor standards. Some of the deepest global divides in 1919 were over political and civil rights, and the outcome of these struggles arguably proved as consequential to the lives and living standards of women and workers in Japan and elsewhere as the specific provisions of international labor legislation.

Second, I am as concerned with the tensions *within* nations, economic and otherwise, as *between* nations and regions. Scholars of internationalism and of cross-cultural exchange rightly point to “Orientalist,” imperial, and racial presumptions of Anglo-European superiority as crucial obstacles to raising labor standards in Asia and other less industrialized regions, for example. Such ideologies undeniably structured encounters between Anglo-Europeans and Asians at the Washington ILC and affected the positions Anglo-Europeans adopted on international labor legislation.

Yet Japan had its own imperial and racial presumptions in 1919 and found itself divided over whether it should be categorized along with other Asian nations as “special” or less developed. Indeed, some of the most contentious disputes in 1919 over raising labor standards occurred not between Western nations and the “rest” but within single nations. As I demonstrate more fully in what follows, the fight over Japanese worker rights and labor standards was as much a struggle among groups *within* Japan as a contest *between* Japan and other nations or regions. Focusing on Japan’s relation to the ILO and its actions before, during, and after the first ILO conference, an arena of international policy-making unusual for its inclusion of non-Western nations, reveals the centrality of fissures within nations in 1919 and suggests the need to move beyond East-West binaries. The notion of a united Asia confronting a united West is and was as much fiction as reality.

To explore these issues in more detail, I offer the first scholarly account of Tanaka Taka’s efforts to secure rights and representation for Japanese women workers at the Washington conference. I also reconstruct the parallel tale of Masumoto Uhei, Japan’s labor delegate to the ILC, whose appointment led to widespread protests in Japan and a power struggle between Japan’s labor movement and the Japanese state with lasting consequences.

A study of Japan’s relationship to the early ILO and of the controversies swirling around its “woman” and its “labor” representatives to the 1919 ILC is long overdue. The literature on the ILO, as Jasmien Van Daele observes, remains “largely Euro-centric, as the ILO itself was.”<sup>22</sup> Yet Japan and other Asian nations, including India, China, Persia, and Siam, attended the 1919 ILC, and Japan, like India, joined the ILO’s Governing Board in 1922 and played an active and prominent role in the ILO’s early years.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as this essay contends, both Japan’s “woman” representative, though excluded from voting privileges at the 1919 ILC, as well as Japan’s “labor” delegate influenced worldwide opinion about what global labor standards should be and who should have the right to determine those standards.

### *The Long Road to Washington*

In the months preceding the ILO conference, a national debate erupted in Japan over who should represent Japanese workers and what role Japan’s largest trade union, the *Yūaikai* (Friendly Society), would have in the selection process. Suzuki Bunji, often called *Wa-sei* Gompers (Japan-made Gompers) by the Japanese press for his close ties with the American Federation of Labor and its president, Samuel Gompers, had founded the *Yūaikai* in 1912, and he remained its leader until his resignation in 1930. Imbued with the democratic reform spirit of the Taishō era (1912–1926),<sup>24</sup> the *Yūaikai*, under Suzuki’s leadership, rejected both class warfare and employer paternalism. A student of Christian humanism and Western social work reform traditions, Suzuki organized *Yūaikai* with the help of the American Unitarian minister for whom he worked after graduating from Tokyo Imperial University. Suzuki eventually

moved away from his early advocacy of labor-management harmony: By 1919 he came to defend strikes and labor conflict as necessary and incorporated aspects of democratic socialism into his worldview. Still, he remained highly critical of revolutionary socialist theories such as anarcho-syndicalism and Bolshevism throughout his life.<sup>25</sup>

By the summer of 1919 the *Yūaikai* had grown from a small worker benefit and uplift society to a 30,000-member labor federation demanding trade union recognition and greater political and economic rights for workers.<sup>26</sup> Reorganized at its August 1919 convention as the *Dai Nihon Rōdō Sōdōmei Yūaikai* (The Greater Japan General Federation of Labor and Friendly Society), and in 1921 as the *Sōdōmei*, its founding declaration revealed a global consciousness and an embrace of ILO principles. “We workers declare to the world that the workers of Japan, with the League of Nations, will struggle like martyrs, in the spirit of the Labor Covenant, in order that peace, freedom, and equality may rule the earth.”<sup>27</sup> The declaration continued, embracing the common Western trade union dictum, “Labor is not a commodity.” “Workers are people with personalities. They are not to be bought and sold.” The 1919 *Yūaikai* affirmed its support for the eight-hour day, prohibition of night work, equal pay for men and women, and universal suffrage.<sup>28</sup>

Suzuki knew the ILO charter intimately, having served as a government-appointed labor adviser to Japan’s negotiators in Paris.<sup>29</sup> He and the other *Yūaikai* leaders knew, for example, that ILC labor and employer delegates, according to the ILO constitution, should be chosen “in agreement with the industrial organizations, if any exist, most representative of employers and workpeople.”<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, the *Yūaikai* nominated Suzuki for the ILO worker delegate position with every expectation the government would honor its choice. Prime Minister Hara Kei and his cabinet, however, had other ideas.<sup>31</sup> Wary of giving too much legitimacy to independent worker organizations, the government orchestrated its own elaborate selection process in which the major trade unions, including the *Yūaikai*, were only minimally represented. The government’s marginalization of the trade unions occurred despite—or perhaps because of—the soaring numbers of union members and the massive “sit-down” strikes at the Kawasaki docks and elsewhere.<sup>32</sup>

Suzuki and a handful of other union leaders walked out in protest from the government-called meetings and declared the process illegitimate. Those who remained, an employer-dominated group in the eyes of the *Yūaikai*, agreed upon three possible nominees for the labor post after a week of wrangling. The first two on the list declined, in part because the *Yūaikai* threatened to call on Gompers and other labor leaders around the world to challenge the labor delegate’s credentials in Washington. But the third nominee, Masumoto Uhei, chief engineer of Toba Shipyard, accepted, enraging a large swath of the Japanese labor movement.<sup>33</sup>

One of the most dramatic labor gatherings to denounce Masumoto’s appointment occurred the evening of October 5 in Tokyo’s Meijiza Theater. Masumoto had proclaimed himself “a most earnest friend of labor” and insisted

he accepted the ILO appointment only after assurances from the government of his right to speak out in favor of worker rights. But his declarations did little to deflect the growing clamor against him.<sup>34</sup> Three thousand workers packed the theater as thousands more milled around outside. Rapt silence greeted the leader of the Ashio miners union as he, “ghostly pallid” and wearing the “toil stained garments of his trade,” slowly made his way to the podium. (Ashio, one of the world’s largest copper mines and refineries, had a long turbulent history of labor disputes and militant trade unionism.) “At last,” he said, speaking in low, deep tones, “the time has come and I am called to crawl from the hole at Ashio as from the bottom of a well. Matsumoto’s spirit may be stout, but his neck is slender. Does he know the effect of the explosion of dynamite?” The mine leader’s speech concluded amidst great tumult as he vowed not to return to Ashio unless Masumoto’s departure was prevented.<sup>35</sup>

Five days later, as threats on his life continued, Masumoto, under heavy police protection, secretly made his way late at night to the steamer waiting to carry the ILO delegates to Seattle. The next morning, furious crowds surrounded the Tokyo train station and surged onto the Yokohama docks, condemning Masumoto and railing against the government’s labor policies. Wearing shrouds and black armbands, protesters held aloft Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian funeral tablets and placards inscribed with “Bury Masumoto” and “Respect the Popular Will.”<sup>36</sup> Labor’s anger followed Masumoto across the Pacific. When the ship’s head stoker threatened a slowdown in the middle of the ocean, Masumoto pledged his loyalty to workers once again, barely averting the disaster.<sup>37</sup>

Much less commented upon by historians, although covered by the newspapers of the time, was the parallel controversy among *Yūaikai*’s women workers over Tanaka’s appointment as the “woman adviser.” Collective protest by Japanese women workers extended back to the textile strikes of the 1880s. In the Meiji era (1868–1912), such efforts did not result in permanent labor organizations.<sup>38</sup> *Yūaikai* did not explicitly bar women in its founding 1912 bylaws, but few joined initially. In 1916, however, with worker protest on the rise, women in textiles as well as in food-processing and other industries unionized. *Yūaikai* set up a separate “women’s division” to provide a home for its new female recruits and to spur further organization. A year later, *Yūaikai* changed its policies restricting women to “associate” membership and allowed women to come in as full voting members. By 1919, two thousand new wage-earning women had signed up along with a small but influential group of college-educated women reformers.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, the government completely ignored the *Yūaikai* women’s division in the ILO selection process.<sup>40</sup> In late September, with the battle over the labor delegates unresolved, the government announced its appointment of “Mrs. Tanaka” as an “advisor on feminine matters” assigned to Kamada, the lead government delegate.<sup>41</sup> The *Yūaikai* women’s division denounced the government’s decision and pressed for the appointment of one of its members—if not as a government adviser like Tanaka, at least as a labor adviser.<sup>42</sup>

As the labor men convened at the Meijiza Theater, *Yūaikai* women held their own meeting and invited Tanaka and other distinguished women as guests. To the amazement of many, she came, along with an estimated fifteen hundred others, mainly men and women workers in the textile industry. From the podium, *Yūaikai* board member Yamanouchi Mina “spoke with great vehemence on the abolition of night work, the adoption of an eight-hour day, and the rights of women” as did Kikuchi Hatsu, a Tōyō Muslin Company worker, who lectured with her sleeping baby strapped to her back.<sup>43</sup> The third speaker, however, directing her remarks to Tanaka, who was seated in the audience, objected to having a female adviser selected “from ladies who know labor only as onlookers.” She questioned Tanaka’s right to speak for women workers and insisted, “None but a true laborer could understand the meaning of labor.”<sup>44</sup>

The chair of the meeting, Ichikawa Fusae, secretary of *Yūaikai*’s Women’s Division and Japan’s leading interwar suffragist, tried to quiet the hostile crowd as Tanaka ascended to the podium. This was no ordinary gathering. Not only were *Yūaikai*’s factory women the featured speakers, but many of Japan’s most prominent women intellectuals and activists also attended. Behind Ichikawa, on the stage, sat Hiratsuka Raichō, infamous for her advocacy of women’s right to sexual and creative freedom and for founding the Bluestockings, a feminist literary society, in 1911; Itō Noe, an anarchist-leaning Bluestocking who in 1923 would be arrested and murdered while in police custody; and Oku Mumeo, who, after the Second World War, served in the House of Councilors and led the Japan Housewives Association.<sup>45</sup> After some initial heckling and laughter, Tanaka reminded the crowd of her longtime commitment to women’s labor reform and fervently promised to convey the demands of *Yūaikai* women—no night work, shorter hours, equal pay, and greater respect for wage-earning women—to the ILO conference. Yet despite “speaking beautifully” and making an “unexpectedly positive impression,” one newspaper concluded, “she failed to get the support of the audience.”<sup>46</sup>

Although *Yūaikai* women remained distrustful of Tanaka’s commitment to their cause and some continued to attack her for not being a “real worker,” their anger, like that of their brother unionists, was fueled primarily by the government’s refusal to acknowledge the right of their union to participate in the selection process. At the heart of the dispute was not the background or beliefs of Masumoto and Tanaka but who—the trade unions or the government—had the right to select labor’s spokesperson.

Tellingly, Japanese workers judged trade union leader Suzuki an authentic spokesman even though he grew up in a prosperous household and was college educated. Indeed, in some ways Masumoto was more of a “real” worker than Suzuki. Masumoto, like Suzuki, graduated from Tokyo Imperial University, but unlike Suzuki, he came from an impoverished background and had many years of experience as a manual laborer. For some twenty years, Masumoto worked “as a hammerer” in shipyards in the United States, Britain, and Japan before moving into his supervisory position as chief engineer. Masumoto had longstanding sympathies with

worker rights as well. *Yūaikai* was hardly pleased that a supervisor in a non-union enterprise had emerged as the labor delegate, but its principal complaint was that Masumoto had been selected through a process that failed to acknowledge the legitimacy of trade unions.<sup>47</sup>

Tanaka could not claim industrial work experience like Masumoto. Indeed, her background was one of privilege and wealth. Nevertheless, like other elite social feminists around the world who turned their energies to ameliorating the human costs of industrial capitalism, Tanaka brought to her ILO appointment a passionate commitment to social and labor reform.<sup>48</sup> She also had considerable skills as an English speaker, social science researcher, and US-schooled cosmopolitan.

Born Takanashi Taka in 1888, she grew up in a prosperous household and graduated from Japan Woman's College before securing her first job teaching English. In 1909, however, in an unusual move for a young single woman, she decided to accompany her great uncle, Shibusawa Eiichi, on a fifty-person, three-month, multiple-city trade and friendship mission to America.<sup>49</sup> In another bold move, Tanaka decided not to return to Japan at the end of the mission: She stayed in the United States for the next nine years, perfecting her English in a Palo Alto (California) high school, earning a B.A. in English at Stanford University in 1917, and, a year later, a M.A. in sociology from the University of Chicago.

Tanaka later credited an American evangelist who lectured at Stanford with opening her eyes to the plight of poor women and motivating her to study social problems. Her M.A. thesis offered a social psychological analysis of the forces subordinating Japanese women, which included, in her view, the late Meiji norms of female self-sacrifice, reticence, and obedience. She judged the actions of Japan's Bluestocking feminists extreme though understandable. But "no such ambivalence clouded [her] indictment of factory conditions," according to one biographer. In 1918, Tanaka, now thirty years old, returned to Japan and secured a faculty position at Japan Women's University, where she taught sociology and social work from the applied perspective she had learned in graduate school.<sup>50</sup>

Tanaka's wealth and family ties to Shibusawa did not win her friends among labor's left wing in 1919. The renowned and powerful Shibusawa had helped found hundreds of leading banks and other businesses including, in 1883, the Osaka Spinning Company, a major textile enterprise. Ironically, given the immediate night work ban his grandniece advocated, many of these companies, like the rest of the Japanese textile industry, continued to employ women night workers in 1919. Yet unlike many other Japanese businessmen and government officials, Shibusawa believed in worker rights and trade union recognition and, at times, strongly backed Suzuki and the *Yūaikai*. Still, he remained suspect in some labor circles for the labor practices at his own companies and for his participation in the government-sponsored *Kyōchōkai* (Harmonization Society), which stressed the shared goals of labor and capital and the need for labor peace for the industrial advance of the nation. Some

workers also recalled with displeasure Shibusawa's chairmanship of the Government Commission that recommended the 1911 Factory Act, which postponed the night work ban for women until 1931.<sup>51</sup>

Other factors, however, made Tanaka's appointment more palatable to labor. For one, she was the "woman adviser" to the government delegate not, like Masumoto, Japan's labor delegate, and many expected, as did Tanaka, that a second woman would be appointed, most likely to advise the labor delegation.<sup>52</sup> Equally significant, after accepting the appointment, Tanaka embarked on a tour of Japan's factories, visiting textile factories in Osaka, eating lunch at company cafeterias, and inspecting the living and working conditions of female operatives. One popular newspaper reported Tanaka telling her luncheon table: "I am to attend a meeting of workpeople to be held in America. As the meeting is to discuss means of increasing your happiness, you can tell me whatever you wish me to do at the meeting for your good."<sup>53</sup>

Tanaka's friendly ties with some of the college-educated women reformers in *Yūaikai* may have helped her too. Oku, for example, an activist and a serious student of democratic theory, was a friend of Tanaka's husband Tanaka Ōdō, a leading philosophy professor at Waseda University and outspoken defender of civil liberties and worker rights, women's suffrage, and egalitarian marriage.<sup>54</sup> They had married in February 1919 shortly after meeting at a dinner party honoring American pragmatist John Dewey, with whom Tanaka Ōdō had studied in the 1890s. Oku visited the newlyweds frequently in the summer and fall of 1919.<sup>55</sup> Tanaka spent time as well with Ichikawa and Hiratsuka at a 1919 summer lecture series in Nagoya, an industrial center where Ichikawa had worked as a teacher and journalist. Tanaka lectured on "Tasks for Social Progress" and joined the others in strategizing about how they could organize a multiclass women's movement with a dual dedication to securing women's political rights and raising the living standards of women wage earners.<sup>56</sup>

Despite all Tanaka did and said on behalf of women workers, *Yūaikai* persisted in its official policy of noncooperation. When the government failed to appoint a woman adviser to the labor delegation, Tanaka offered to bring Yamanouchi, the 17-year-old *Yūaikai* leader who had spoken so eloquently at the tumultuous meeting of the Women's Division, with her to Washington. But *Yūaikai* pressured Yamanouchi to refuse, which she did despite strenuous objections from Ichikawa who had arranged for Yamanouchi to stay in the United States and go to school. Tanaka then asked Ogata Setsu, a young woman once employed at Mutō's Kanegafuchi Spinning Company but now without formal ties to the company or to a union, to accompany her to Washington and speak firsthand of the lives of textile operators.<sup>57</sup>

The virulent and continuing protests of Japanese labor men and women against the government's appointment of Tanaka and Masumoto, two representatives who repeatedly avowed their commitment to improving the lives of workers and speaking on behalf of workers in Washington, suggest just how strong the desire for state recognition of collective bargaining and independent trade unionism was among Japanese wage-earners in 1919.

*On the World Stage at the 1919 ILC*

Once in Washington, both Masumoto and Tanaka defended the political and economic rights of Japanese workers and pushed for Japanese compliance with international labor norms. Masumoto's November 27 speech to the ILC's three hundred participants urging Japan to accept the eight-hour day captured headlines around the globe. When the ILC's "Oriental Committee,"<sup>58</sup> which included the three other Japanese delegates, recommended approval of a "special" clause allowing the nine-hour day in Japan, Masumoto objected in no uncertain terms. Special treatment "protects autocracy," not workers, he declared. Pointing to the Japanese flag, he characterized his government as "an autocracy which is an enemy to social justice" and condemned its interference with workers' right to organize.<sup>59</sup> To loud applause from the labor delegates, he declared: "If long hours are physically bad for European workers they are equally bad for Japanese." Japan was not a tropical country, he argued, but a first-class power on the same level as the other great Western powers.<sup>60</sup>

Despite winning the vote of every labor delegate at the ILC except one, Masumoto lost his bid for an eight-hour day for Japanese workers because most employer and government delegates remained unconvinced.<sup>61</sup> His message, however, carried far beyond the conference, reinforcing the agitation for improved working conditions already underway in Japan and elsewhere. As Arthur Morgan Young observed in 1921, Japanese labor had its say in Washington, despite government efforts to muzzle it, and the world listened.<sup>62</sup>

Yet Masumoto's intervention into the eight-hour-day debate was not the first public challenge at the ILC to those defending Japan's lower labor standards, employer paternalism, and autocratic government. Tanaka's startling speech on behalf of Japanese women textile workers had occurred weeks earlier, and its consequences, domestic and international, were equally dramatic. After the heated words between Tanaka and Mutō at the Commission on Women's Employment, the Japanese delegation was in an uproar. *The Japan Weekly Chronicle* wrote of "decidedly belligerent" exchanges between Japanese delegates at late night dinners and continuing tensions at committee meetings. Tanaka's assertions "are lies," Mutō told the press a few days after the initial blowup. She "has spent the last ten years of her life abroad and has little knowledge of Japanese factory life."<sup>63</sup> Tanaka, who continued, by one account, "ably fighting the women's night work question," fainted at the next meeting of the Commission, falling from her chair to the floor, and spent the rest of the day recuperating. The meeting continued without her, with testimony from Mutō and Kamada defending night work in Japan's textile sector.<sup>64</sup> A few days later, the Japanese government publicly announced Tanaka's dismissal from the delegation.

Confident in the truth of what she had said and the flimsiness of the grounds upon which her dismissal rested, Tanaka sought reinstatement. She turned for help to Mary Anderson, the Swedish-born American leader of the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, whom President Wilson would soon name as

the first Director of the US Women's Bureau. Tanaka first met Anderson at the recently adjourned International Congress of Working Women (ICWW), a ten-day conference of over two hundred women labor reformers from nineteen nations who met to devise their own set of global labor standards and demand greater female representation in ILO affairs.<sup>65</sup> Tanaka sought help, Anderson recalled in her memoirs, because she "had been put off the delegation and prohibited from going to any of the meetings." The "excuse" they give, Tanaka reportedly told Anderson, is "that I am pregnant. I am, but I know it is just an excuse. I suppose it is because I exposed the working conditions of women in Japan." Tanaka then asked Anderson to call on the Japanese delegation and explain that, in contrast to what they had alleged, Tanaka's appearance in public as a pregnant woman did not violate American etiquette.<sup>66</sup>

Anderson called on the Japanese delegation, accompanied by wealthy American social reformer Margaret Dreier Robins, national president of the Women's Trade Union League of America and chair of the ICWW. The two American women explained American customs relating to pregnancy to the Japanese men and urged them to reinstate Tanaka. "Our pleading was successful," Anderson wrote, "and about a day later Tanaka was back as an adviser." Tanaka's unwillingness to back down "broke the ice in the Japanese delegation," Anderson judged, and spurred others like Masumoto to take a stronger stand for worker rights and Japanese adherence to international labor standards.<sup>67</sup>

Anderson may have exaggerated her role in securing Tanaka's reinstatement, unaware of the larger geopolitical context and the growing outcry in the press. As word of Tanaka's speech and dismissal traveled to Japan, prominent newspapers took Tanaka's side, praising her "moral courage" and her willingness to make "a stand for truth." One even mocked Mutō for his lack of "manners and self-control." By overreacting, it was Mutō who had made Japan look foolish in the eyes of the world. Moreover, how would it look if the Japanese government shut down dissent at an international conference dedicated to reaching consensus through the expression of distinct viewpoints? The editors of the *Japan Weekly Chronicle* concluded that "the conduct of the Labour and Women's delegates has done more to impress the Labour bodies in other countries with Japan's capacity for equal terms with Western labour" than any official government pronouncement.<sup>68</sup>

In the end, Mutō retracted his call for an inquiry into Tanaka's mental competence and even signified "his readiness to accept Japan's eventual conformity" to the Berne Convention ban on night work.<sup>69</sup> He may have decided, as one account mused, "that the best way to avoid Japan's national disgrace from being publicized was to take away the reproach." He also may have been influenced by the efforts of Kamada, Japan's chief government delegate, to mend the situation. For one, Kamada took steps to protect Mutō's reputation, assuring him that what had transpired—Tanaka's speech criticizing Japanese capitalists as well as the debate that followed—would *not* appear in the official report of the Commission on Women's Employment. These assurances had their impact: there is no indication in any of the official ILO conference records of

Tanaka's speech or of the angry exchange it provoked.<sup>70</sup> Kamada also publicly disavowed Tanaka's speech and reiterated his compromise position that Japan move *gradually* toward ending night work. The compromise position, now backed by Mutō and Kamada, gained the approval of the full ILC assembly.

Thus, Tanaka, like Masumoto, did not achieve all she sought. Yet her willingness to expose the abysmal conditions of Japanese textile workers and her outspoken attack on employer paternalism—what one observer described as Tanaka knocking Japan's "family fable" on its head—made a difference. Her call for an immediate ban on women's night work and for Japan's acceptance of international labor norms emboldened those with similar views, including those representing labor at the conference. Her dismissal and reinstatement also helped shift Japanese opinion on global labor standards and move Mutō toward a compromise position. The need for stronger protective labor laws and for Japanese adherence to world standards, albeit gradually, had been accepted.

The 1919 ILC Washington conventions, the *Japan Times and Mail* proclaimed, were the first set of "general agreements ever made between Occidental and Oriental representatives regarding labour standards."<sup>71</sup> To achieve these breakthroughs, Japan, "more than any other country," "accepted a number of big concessions" in the opinion of Oka, Japan's conservative government delegate.<sup>72</sup> Yet the Japanese people "welcomed" these new ILO conventions, Tanaka wrote in 1920, and even the employers, she noted, "came to understand the inevitability of the change." The main criticism the returning Japanese delegation faced, she said, was from those, mainly labor, who objected to Japan entering "the circle of 'special countries.'"<sup>73</sup> Japan ratified its first ILO conventions in 1922, the same year it became a permanent member of the ILO's Governing Board. In 1923, Japan passed a revised Factory Act banning night work for women and youth three years after the law would come into effect; it also brought its maternity protections more in line with ILO recommendations. In 1929, the clause in the new Factory Act prohibiting night work was finally enforced.<sup>74</sup>

After 1919, the Japanese ILO delegation moved away from asking and accepting special treatment for Japan. Instead, by the 1930s Japan pushed for more general and flexible labor conventions that allowed each nation the option of "partial ratification." The practice of granting special provisions for Asian countries died out soon thereafter.<sup>75</sup>

### *Barriers to Fair International Labor Standards*

Orientalist and Western imperialist presumptions undeniably marred encounters between Anglo-Europeans and Asians at early ILO gatherings, dividing people into hostile camps and affecting whether and what kind of labor standards delegates favored. Yet gender and class ideologies also were crucial in legitimating and sustaining lower labor standards in Asia as well as elsewhere, and at times such allegiances transcended those based on race, nation, or region.

As feminist historians have demonstrated, the social, political, and legal disenfranchisement and devaluing of women undergirded industrial development.<sup>76</sup> Japan, like many other countries, relied on a gender ideology emphasizing patriarchal subservience and family duty to boost economic growth and global trade. By questioning on the world stage whether poor women should sacrifice their life and youth for Japan's industrial development, Tanaka challenged a central underpinning of her nation's capitalist system.

She also proclaimed women's right to political speech and participation, raising issues that resonated with women across the globe. In 1919, the majority of the countries around the world, including the United States, Japan, France, Italy, and many others, denied women the right to vote. Not surprisingly, no nation sent a woman as a voting delegate to the 1919 ILC, and although labor women gathered in protest in Washington and conveyed to the ILC a set of proposals from the ICWW reflecting their collective concerns, the assembled ILC delegates did not debate or vote on them.<sup>77</sup>

Still, as Tanaka's story illustrates, the barriers to participation for some women were higher than for others. The Japanese government removed Tanaka as an adviser after her public riff with Mutō. No other such indignity was visited upon any of the other twenty-two women advisers. Mutō's use of Tanaka's pregnancy to discredit her also points to the hurdles motherhood and family created for women's political participation in 1919. International standards for maternity leave as well as income supports for pregnant women were central concerns at the ILC, but how to ensure that pregnant women and mothers could participate fully in that debate was not yet on the agenda. Being in "a family way" at the 1919 ILC mattered for Tanaka. It heightened her marginalization and almost resulted in her complete exclusion.

Class hierarchies impeded the emergence of equitable global labor standards in 1919 as well. Worker voices were muted in 1919, and elitist antidemocratic ideologies prevented the full participation of workers in determining international labor standards. Japanese workers, men and women, were sidelined in the ILO selection process and although Masumoto and Tanaka defended worker interests as they determined them, Japanese workers did not elect their own representatives in 1919. Their disenfranchisement in the ILO selection process paralleled their lack of political rights more generally. In 1917, only 3 percent of the population had voting rights in Japan.<sup>78</sup>

Ensuring equal access to politics and voting rights for all peoples was not an explicit goal of the 1919 ILC. Nevertheless, questions of democracy and representation were inescapable. The conference debates over these questions proved just as important in raising labor standards worldwide as the specific language of the Washington labor conventions that emerged.

### *After 1919*

The 1919 ILO debates left their impact on movements for worker and women's rights just as they did on international labor standards. After the Second World

War, as Gerry Rodgers observes, the ILO became a “site for debate about decolonization and an important platform for independence movements.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, after the First World War, the ILO served as an arena for debate about democracy and an international stage for advocacy of labor and women’s right to organize, speak, and vote.

The ILO’s far-reaching effects on Japan’s labor movement have long been noted.<sup>80</sup> The ILO, Arthur Morgan Young concluded, “brought home to the Japanese workers, more forcibly than anything else could, the consciousness of their position and its inferiority to western workers.”<sup>81</sup> Why should Japanese workers be denied rights enjoyed by workers elsewhere? *Yūaikai*’s bitter conflict with the Japanese government over the ILO labor delegate served both to energize and radicalize the Japanese labor movement. As hopes for union recognition from the state and parliamentary labor reform waned, anarchist “direct action” theories and Bolshevism gained ground among workers. Left opposition to Suzuki’s leadership grew, but he remained at the helm as he, too, condemned capitalists and demanded full industrial and political citizenship for workers. In 1920 and 1921, the Japanese labor movement initiated a series of explosive strikes and protests. Led by *Sōdōmei*, thousands of shipyard strikers and others marched, demanding the right to organize and bargain.<sup>82</sup>

As labor protests swelled in the early 1920s, the Japanese government repressed the most radical wing of the labor movement, arresting hundreds in violent clashes between police and strikers. At the same time, it moved to win over and strengthen labor moderates by acknowledging the right of labor to organize and to protest peacefully, thus inaugurating a period of rapid union expansion that continued into the early 1930s. The Japanese government also amended its ILO selection process and in 1924 appointed Suzuki as the ILC labor representative, a potent symbol of the new legitimacy of independent worker organization. *Sōdōmei*, for its part, still under Suzuki’s leadership, returned to a more moderate “realistic socialism” and once again endorsed universal male suffrage and parliamentary reform. In 1925, Japan enacted the Universal Manhood Suffrage Act, enfranchising a majority of the male working classes.<sup>83</sup>

Business leaders gave less ground in 1920s Japan. They begrudgingly accepted the basic ILO principle of labor legislation but largely rejected Shibusawa’s call for recognizing the “constructive role” of unions, the “basic equality of management and labor,” and the “just rights” of each. Business maintained its commitment to top-down cooperative enterprises adhering to traditional ideals of paternalism, group cohesion, and respect for hierarchy.<sup>84</sup>

Yet the ILO and the debates it provoked in 1919 did not just effect Japan’s labor movement, nor were only worker rights at stake. The fight over who should represent working women at the 1919 ILC involved the leading Japanese women’s rights activists of the period and influenced the direction of the women’s movement at a pivotal moment in its history. Ichikawa left the *Yūaikai* even before Tanaka returned from Washington, still smarting from

her conflict with Suzuki and other male *Yūaikai* leaders over whether Yamanouchi would accompany Tanaka to Washington. As Ichikawa told Yamanouchi in early 1920, “I must work first for feminism and for gender equality before I work for a women’s labor movement.”<sup>85</sup> Soon after leaving *Yūaikai*, Ichikawa, along with Oku and Hiratsuka, started the Association of New Women (*Shin Fujin Kyōkai*) to “attain our rights as women and mothers,” raise the social value of the domestic sphere, and, as Ichikawa put it, ensure that “those who run the kitchens, namely the women,” also “participate in politics.”<sup>86</sup>

The Association disbanded in 1922 shortly after it achieved one of its principal goals: the amendment of the 1900 Police Law to allow women the right to join, sponsor, and attend political meetings. Yet despite the demise of the Association, Japanese feminists, now emboldened by their ability to organize legally, increased their efforts on behalf of women’s rights. Ichikawa, for example, soon joined with others to found the Women’s Suffrage League, the most influential interwar suffrage group in Japan. In 1924, while working for the ILO’s newly opened Tokyo office, she added her voice to the small but hardy global chorus calling for equal pay.<sup>87</sup> As historian Vera Mackie recently wrote, the 1925 Universal Male Suffrage Act ranks as among the “important turning points” in the history of Japanese men but, she adds, the 1922 lifting of political restrictions on women surely deserves a similar place in the history of Japanese women.<sup>88</sup>

Much to Tanaka’s regret, she was unable to contribute to the labor and women’s movements in the early 1920s as she had hoped. Upon her return to Japan, she attended the founding meeting of the Association of New Women in January 1920 and was elected as one of the Association’s ten officers.<sup>89</sup> Soon after, however, she gave birth to a child, a boy, who died after four months. Over the next five years, Tanaka had three more children, two of whom, like her first-born, died in infancy.<sup>90</sup> These tragedies, combined with her duties caring for her daughter and an ailing and elderly husband, made it impossible for her to fulfill her dream of devoting herself to the wage-earning women of Japan. She later poignantly described her “agony at being immobilized” in the early 1920s as “like the knight in the novel by [Sir Walter] Scott who lies wounded, hearing the battle nearby, and lamenting his own body can not rise.” She felt the “pain sharply,” she remembered, “each time women’s suffrage was discussed in the media or newspapers told of movements on behalf of women workers.” Only in 1932, after her husband’s death, did Tanaka return to public affairs, taking a job as the director of a marriage bureau and writing for women’s magazines.<sup>91</sup>

Japan historian Sharon Nolte argues that it would be a mistake and all too easy to trivialize Tanaka as merely an “upper-class young lady traumatized by workers’ sufferings” or a “self-abnegating wife of the scholar.” Rather, she rightly concludes, despite “the burdens” female subordination placed on her, she was “key” to improvements in women’s political rights and women’s welfare in Taishō and Shōwa Japan.<sup>92</sup> Certainly, Tanaka’s actions in 1919, not

part of Nolte's biographical portrait, only reinforce her conclusions. Indeed, Tanaka, like many other daughters of privilege who pressed for women's rights and labor reform around the world in this era, was part of a multiclass social justice feminist movement whose transnational history has yet to be fully told.<sup>93</sup>

In the late 1920s and into the 1930s, Japanese wage-earning women persisted in their efforts to change their working conditions. In 1926, for example, working women in the newly founded Kantō Textile Workers Union and in *Sōdōmei* gathered some fifty thousand signatures on a petition to the Diet demanding the immediate abolition of women's night work. Textile operators at Tōyō Muslin struck in 1927 for the right to come and go from their dormitories without interference, and after 1929, as depression and layoffs hit the industry, strikes spread, including to the Kanegafuchi factories in Osaka and Kōbe. In 1929, the Tōyō Muslin workers successfully struck again to prevent the wage cuts the company threatened after the night work laws took effect. However, the famed sixty-day Tōyō Muslin uprising of 1930, which involved more than two thousand women strikers supported by *Musan Fujin Dōmei* (Proletarian Women's League), ended in violence and defeat.<sup>94</sup>

Still, despite such actions, the number of women trade union members remained small in the 1920s, even as the overall labor movement expanded. In Japan, as elsewhere, in addition to contending with employer and state hostility, as well as constraining gender ideologies and other barriers, wage-earning women's organizing often lacked the full support of the male-led labor movement. Working women's concerns remained peripheral to the broader Japanese women's movement as well.<sup>95</sup>

The lack of organization among working women proved particularly "costly" in Japan in human and social terms, Sharon Siever concluded, "given the numbers of women involved and their overriding importance to the economy."<sup>96</sup> Indeed, failure to make the problems of wage-earning women central to the agenda of the Taishō and Shōwa reform movements lessened the power of these movements and their ability to advance the interests of the majority of Japan's citizens. After 1932, with the collapse of the constitutional monarchy following the assassination of the prime minister and the ascendancy of a militarized, repressive, and nationalist Japan, reform movements faced an even more uphill battle. Suffrage for Japanese women workers, for example, would not be achieved until 1945.<sup>97</sup>

Sociologist Gay Seidman argued forcefully in her 2009 book, *Beyond the Boycott*, that international labor standards, or top-down labor regulations, have a limited impact on the conditions of most workers without what she called "trans-nationalism from below," or grassroots movements within nations to raise living and working standards.<sup>98</sup> Her point is well taken. Democracy internationally is only possible with democracy at the state and local level. But equally important, as this article maintains, effective and fair international labor standards are unlikely unless those doing the negotiating represent the full range of the world's peoples. In 1919, the ILO had not yet fully

democratized but the debate over whether women and workers would be accorded full rights and representation in industry, in the governments of nations, and on the global stage had been engaged.

## NOTES

1. I thank Kayo Denda, Sheldon Garon, Laura Hein, Dorothea Hoechtger, Jill Jensen, Izumi Koide, Nelson Lichtenstein, Valerie Matsumoto, Michael Merrill, Barbara Molony, Susan Zimmermann, and the three anonymous reviewers for *ILWCH* for their helpful advice. Dr. Martin Hejdra, Chinese and East Asian Studies Bibliographer, Princeton University, provided indispensable assistance with locating Japanese language sources. Renée Berthon and Remo Becci offered expert guidance in the ILO archives. My greatest debts are to Yurika Tamura for her superb research assistance and translation of Japanese texts into English and to Yoshiko Uzawa for encouraging me when I visited Japan and for sending me primary sources from Japan.

2. In accordance with Japanese custom, family names precede given names except where the individual is authoring an English-language text. Macrons are used sparingly.

3. Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations* (Honolulu, 2008), 57–103; ILO, *Record of Proceedings, International Labour Conference*, 1st session, Washington, 1919 (hereafter *ILC*, 1st session), 5–10.

4. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations*, 1–28.

5. E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton, 1900); Sharon Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* (Stanford, CA, 1983), chapter 4; Janet Hunter, *Women and the Labour Market in Japan's Industrializing Economy* (London, 2003), 1–9; Janet Hunter, "Factory Legislation and Employer Resistance: The Abolition of Night Work in the Cotton-Spinning Industry," in *Japanese Management in Historical Perspective*, ed. Tsunehiko Yue and Keiichirō Nakagawa (Tokyo, 1989), 246–48; Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations*, 88–90. Japan's Factory Act of 1911, in effect September 1916, set a minimum age of ten for "light work" and twelve otherwise. It limited work to twelve hours a day for women and for children under fifteen, but permitted 14-hour days and other "special exemptions" for business necessity. The Act specified that enforcement of its night work provisions, which banned wage work between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. for women under age twenty, would not commence for fifteen years, or until 1931.

6. Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (London, 1998); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge, 2008), 284–305.

7. Article 19 of the ILO Charter allowed the modification of labor standards for countries "in which climatic conditions, imperfect development of industrial organization or other special circumstances make industrial conditions substantially different." H. J. W. Hetherington, *International Labor Legislation* (London, 1920), appendix.

8. On the 1918 rice riots and other upheavals in Japan in this period, Arthur Morgan Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan* (Kobe, Japan, 1921; Reprint, Washington, DC, 1979), 16–38; Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley, CA, 1991), part 1.

9. On the wartime surge of labor movements in the West, Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York, 2002); on Japan's rising worker movements, among others, Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*, 92–109; Vera Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900–1937* (Cambridge, UK, 1997); Stephen S. Large, *The Rise of Labor in Japan: The Yūaikai, 1912–1919* (Tokyo, 1972); Iwao F. Ayusawa, *A History of Labor in Modern Japan* (Honolulu, 1966).

10. Hetherington, *International Labor Legislation*, appendix; Carol Riegelman Lubin and Anne Winslow, *Social Justice for Women: The International Labor Organization and Women* (Durham, NC, 1990), 20–24.

11. Anon, *The Kanegafuchi Spinning Company Limited: Its Constitution, How It Cares for Its Employees and Workers* (Osaka, Japan, 1919); Bryon K. Marshall, *Capitalism and*

*Nationalism in Prewar Japan: The Ideology of the Business Elite, 1868–1941* (Stanford, CA, 1967), 62.

12. “Japan at the Labor Conference,” *NYT*, November 9, 1919. For a list of delegates and advisers attending the first ILO conference, *ILC*, 1st session, 5–10.

13. In reconstructing this event, I draw from “The International Labor Conference,” *The Japan Weekly Chronicle* (hereafter *JWC*), November 27, 1919, 831–33; “Tanaka daikien [Great Flame Tanaka],” *Asahi Shimbun* (hereafter *AS*), November 20, 1919, 2; A.M. Allen, *Sophy Sanger: A Pioneer in Internationalism* (Glasgow, 1958), 152; S. Nolte, *Liberalism in Modern Japan: Ishibashi Tanzan and His Teachers, 1905–1960* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), 122–23; and Kerstin Hesselgren Diary, “Washington Konferensen 1919” (Washington Conference 1919), Kerstin Hesselgren Papers, 1872–1962, Collection L-55, File 61, Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden. I am grateful to Karin Carlsson for translating Hesselgren’s diary from Swedish into English. All translations from the Japanese into English are by Yurika Tamura, except where otherwise noted.

14. “International Labor Conference,” *JWC*, September 18, 1919, 463; Marshall, *Capitalism and Nationalism in Prewar Japan*, 62, 82–84.

15. Allen, *Sophy Sanger*, 152; Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 93.

16. “International Labor Conference,” *JWC*, November 27, 1919, 831–33. Although newspaper reports and other extant documents do not identify the speaker, most likely it was the Committee chair, Constance Smith, a British factory inspector and social reformer serving as a governmental adviser at the ILC, who reprimanded the Japanese delegates for cutting short Tanaka’s remarks.

17. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 52; Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, “The Meiji State’s Policy toward Women, 1890–1910,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley, CA, 1991), 151–74.

18. “Japan and the Labour Question,” *JWC*, November 27, 1919, 797–98, 831. Interestingly, Janet Hunter (“Factory Legislation and Employer Resistance,” 258–66) notes that Japanese employers, “caught in a dilemma,” often avoided discussions of women’s supposed biological weaknesses because it might suggest the need for more protective measures.

19. “Japan and the Labour Question;” “Great Flame Tanaka.”

20. For quotes, “Great Flame Tanaka” and “Ôdôshi no shashin to naranda kagaminomae no Takako san,” [Takako in the picture] *AS*, December 9, 1919, 5.

21. For two astute recent contributions to this literature, Ashwini Sukthanker and Kevin Kolben, “Indian Labor Legislation and Cross-Border Solidarity in Historical Context,” in *Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital through Cross-Border Campaigns*, ed. Kate Bronfenbrenner (Ithaca, NY, 2007), 57–77, and Susan Zimmermann, “Special Circumstances in Geneva: The ILO and the World of Non-Metropolitan Labour in the Interwar Years,” in *ILO Histories: Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jasmien Van Daele et al. (Bern, 2010), 221–50.

22. Jasmien Van Daele, “Writing ILO Histories: A State of the Art,” in *ILO Histories*, 18. Van Daele does not cite, however, the Japanese language literature on the ILO. See, for example, Kudô Yukio, *Nihon to ILO: Kuroko to shite no hanseiki* (Japan and the ILO: A Half Century as a Backstage Supporter) (Kyokai, 1999). For an introduction to Japanese language materials on Japanese labor, see, among others, the bibliographies in Sheldon Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), 295–310 and Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan*, 236–37.

23. Francis G. Wilson, “The Pacific and the ILO;” *Pacific Affairs* 5 (1932): 497–511; Aamir Ali, “Fifty Years of the ILO and Asia;” *International Labour Review* 99 (1969): 347–61; Yukio, *Nihon to ILO: Kuroko to shite no hanseiki*; “ILO and Japan—Short History,” [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org) (accessed October 30, 2012); Gerry Rodgers, “India, the ILO and the Quest for Social Justice since 1919;” *Economic and Political Weekly* 46 (2011), 45–52.

24. After the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600–1868), Japanese historical eras reflect reign names—Meiji (1868–1912), Taishô (1912–1926), and Shôwa (1926–1989)—assigned by and corresponding to the ruling Emperors.

25. Robert A. Scalapino, *The Early Japanese Labor Movement: Labor and Politics in a Developing Society* (Berkeley, 1983), 38–77; Ayusawa, *A History of Labor in Modern Japan*, 98–99.

26. On Yūaikai and Sōdōmei, among others, Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy*, 92–109, part 2; Scalapino, *The Early Japanese Labor Movement*, chapters 2–4; Large, *The Rise of Labor in Japan*, chapters 4, 9; Stephen S. Large, *Organized Workers and Socialist Politics in Interwar Japan* (Cambridge, 1981), chapter 1; and Young, *The Socialist and the Labor Movement in Japan*, 16–50.
27. Large, *The Rise of Labor in Japan*, 182.
28. Large, *Organized Workers and Socialist Politics in Interwar Japan*, 55–58; Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan*, 108–11.
29. Ayusawa, *A History of Labor in Modern Japan*, 120–24; Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations*, 87–91.
30. Hetherington, *International Labour Legislation*, appendix.
31. In 1919, Japan was a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral legislature called the Diet. In *Labor and Imperial Democracy*, Gordon traces the increasing power of Japanese political parties after 1905 and characterizes the Japanese political system from 1918 to 1932 as an “imperial democracy.”
32. Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy*, 127–29; Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 55–58; Large, *The Rise of Labor in Japan*, 186–89.
33. “Election of Laborers’ Delegate Causes Excitement in Japan,” *NYT*, November 9, 1919; Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 55–60; *Japan Times and Mail* (hereafter *JTM*), September 12, 1919; “The International Labor Conference,” *JWC*, September 11, 1919, September 18, 1919, October 2, 1919, and October 16, 1919; “Japan’s Labour Conference,” *JWC*, September 25, 1919, 496.
34. “Labour Holds Anti-Masumoto Meeting at Meijiza Theatre,” *JTM*, October 7, 1919; “International Labour Conference,” *JWC*, October 2, 1919.
35. “Labour Holds Anti-Masumoto Meeting at Meijiza Theatre.” See also *JTM*, September 22, 1919; “Japan’s Labour Conference;” “The Awakening of Japanese Labour,” *JWC*, October 2, 1919, 510 and October 9, 1919, 541–42.
36. Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 58–60; “Yūaikai warned by Police,” *JTM*, October 10, 1919, 1; “Labour Delegates Left Yesterday,” *JTM*, October 11, 1919; “Japanese Labor Ferment,” *NYT*, October 14, 1919, 6; *JWC*, October 9, 1919, and October 16, 1919, 589.
37. *JWC*, November 27, 1919, 822; “Nihon rōdōkaini shinkigen o kakusura (Opening a new era)” *AS*, October 11, 1919.
38. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 50–52; 79–83; Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton, 1997), 12–18; Stephen E. Marsland, *The Birth of the Japanese Labor Movement: Takano Fusataro and the Rōdō Kumiai Kiseikai* (Honolulu, 1989), 31–32; Susan Buckley, *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), 306–8; Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*, introduction.
39. Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 88–91; Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy*, 92–109; Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan*, 108–11. See also Suzuki Yūko, *Josei to Rōdō Kumiai* (Women and Labor Unions) (Toyko, 1991), 25–100.
40. Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 91–93.
41. “Mrs. Tanaka to be woman advisor,” *JTM*, September 27, 1919; “Mrs. Tanaka, Inouye to Join Labor Delegation,” *JTM*, September 30, 1919.
42. Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 92.
43. “Labour Holds Anti-Masumoto Meeting at Meijiza Theatre.”
44. “Awakening of Japanese Women,” *JWC*, October 16, 1919; “Yūaikai hujinbu taikai ni mezametaru jokō (Worker’s union Yūaikai women’s meeting),” *AS*, October 6, 1919; Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan*, 109.
45. On Ichikawa, Barbara Molony, “Ichikawa Fusae and Japan’s Prewar Women’s Suffrage Movement,” in *Women in Japanese History*, ed. Hiroko Tomida and Gordon Daniels (London, 2005), 57–92; on Hiratsuka, Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, chapter 8; on Oku, Ronald P. Loftus, *Telling Lives: Women’s Self-Writing in Japan* (Honolulu, 2004), chapter 2, and Akiko Tokuzaki, *The Rise of the Feminist Movement in Japan* (Tokyo, 1999), 204, 212–19.
46. “Labour Holds Anti-Masumoto Meeting at Meijiza Theatre;” Nolte, *Liberalism in Modern Japan*, 122–23; Tokuzaki, *The Rise of the Feminist Movement in Japan*, 115–18.
47. On Masumoto, “The Representation of Japanese Labour,” *JWC*, October 2, 1919, 510 and October 9, 1919, 542–42, 551.
48. For examples from the United States and Germany, Kathryn Kish Sklar et al., eds., *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 1998).

49. On Shibusawa and the 1909 mission to the United States, [www.shibusawa.or.jp](http://www.shibusawa.or.jp) (accessed August 20, 2012).

50. Tanaka Taka, *Tōyō* (Blossoming Season) (Toyko, 1943); Taka Takanashi, "The Change in the Status of Women under the Modern Conditions of Japanese Life" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1918); Ichiyama Morio, *Noda no rekishi* (History of Noda) (Tokyo, 1979), 266–69; Nolte, *Liberalism in Modern Japan*, 90–94, 118–28.

51. Large, *The Rise of Labor in Japan*, 172–73; Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan*, 51–53; Hunter, *Factory Legislation and Employer Resistance*, 245–48; Ehud Harari, *The Politics of Labor Legislation in Japan: National-International Interaction* (Berkeley, CA, 1973), 20–22; Ayusawa, *A History of Labor in Modern Japan*, 107–10.

52. "Seihu gawano rōdō komon toshite Tanaka fujin tsuini shōdaku (At last Tanaka accepts the position of government-appointed adviser)," *Yomiuri Shimbun* (hereafter *YS*), September 29, 1919, 5.

53. "The Women's Representative," *JWC*, October 16, 1919.

54. On Tanaka Ōdō's philosophy and his role in the Taishō democracy movement, Sharon H. Nolte, "Industrial Democracy For Japan: Tanaka Ōdō and John Dewey," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984): 277–94.

55. Oku Mumeo, *Nobi aka akani: Oku Mumeo jiden* (Wild Fire Burning Fiercely: Autobiography) (Tokyo, 1988), 38; Tokuzo, *The Rise of the Feminist Movement in Japan*, 101; Loftus, *Telling Lives*, chapter 2; Nolte, *Liberalism in Modern Japan*, 118–23.

56. Molony, *Ichikawa Fusae and Japan's Prewar Women's Suffrage Movement*, 57–63; Orii Miyake and Hiroko Tomida, "Shin Fujin Kyōkai (The Association of New Women) and the women who aimed to change society," in *Women in Japanese History*, 232–57, quote, 234; Tokuzo, *The Rise of the Feminist Movement in Japan*, 115–16; Hanako Watanabe, "Feminismus und Sozialismus in Japan," in *Sozialistische Frauen-internationale und Feminismus*, ed. Irntraut Leirer et al. (Berlin, 1984), 103–4. I thank Tobias Schulze-Cleven for translating German to English.

57. "Massakini kicho surunowa Tanaka fujin ka (Mrs. Tanaka Taka first to come back)," *YS*, November 29, 1919, 4. Yamanouchi Mina, *Jiden: Jūnisai no bōseki jokō kara no shōgai* (Autobiography of Yamanouchi Mina: Path After Becoming a 12-Year-Old Woman Textile Worker) (Tokyo, 1975), 57–66; Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan*, 108–10.

58. The ILC's Committee to consider labor standard exemptions was quickly dubbed the "Oriental Committee" since only Asian nations were thought in need of such exceptions.

59. "Masumoto Asks for 8 Hour Day," *JTM*, December 3, 1919.

60. "Japanese Discord," *JTM*, December 2, 1919; "Masumoto Asks for 8 Hour Day;" "Delegate Attacks Japan's Labor Law," *NYT*, November 28, 1919, 8; "The International Labour Conference," *JWC*, November 27, 1919, 831–32.

61. Hetherington, *The International Labour Conference*, 14–15.

62. Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 62.

63. *The International Labour Conference*, 831–32.

64. *Ibid.*, 832.

65. Dorothy Sue Cobble, "U.S. Labor Women's Internationalism in the World War I Era," *Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines* 122 (2009): 44–57 and "A Higher 'Standard of Life' for the World: U.S. Labor Women's Reform Internationalism and the Legacies of 1919," *Journal of American History* 100 (2014): 1052–85.

66. Mary Anderson, *Women at Work: The Autobiography of Mary Anderson as told to Mary Winslow* (Minneapolis, 1951), 128–29.

67. *Ibid.*

68. "Japan and the Labour Question," *JWC*, November 27, 1919, 797–98.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Oddly, unlike the other Commissions at the first session of the ILC, there are no minutes from the Commission on Women's Employment in the ILO archives in Geneva. These minutes have been missing for at least fifty years and may not have been preserved initially.

71. "First Labour Pact Reached," *JTM*, November 25, 1919.

72. "Japan Makes Concessions in Labor Conference," *JTM*, December 8, 1919, 5; December 11, 1919, 906.

73. Tanaka Taka letter, November 12, 1920, published in *ICWW Bulletin* 8, January 25, 1921, Box 72, File 4, Mary Van Kleeck Papers, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, USA.
74. Ayusawa, *A History of Labor in Modern Japan*, 194–95; Barbara Molony, “Equality versus Difference: The Japanese Debate over ‘Motherhood Protection’, 1915–1950,” in *Japanese Women Working*, ed. Janet Hunter (London, 1993), 122–48.
75. Wilson, *The Pacific and the ILO*, 504–5; Ali, *Fifty Years of the ILO and Asia*, 354.
76. For example, Christine Stansell, “The Origins of the Sweatshop,” in *Working-Class America*, ed. Michael Frisch and Daniel Walkowitz (Urbana, IL, 1983), 78–103.
77. Cobble, *A Higher “Standard of Life” for the World*, 1052–85.
78. Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan*, 48.
79. Gerry Rodgers, “India, the ILO and the Quest for Social Justice since 1919,” *Economic and Political Weekly* XLVI (2011): 45–52.
80. For examples, Ayusawa, *A History of Labor in Modern Japan*, viii and Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations*, 138–40. Ali (“Fifty Years of the ILO and Asia,” 356) extends the claim beyond Japan, noting that the “influence of ILO standards on legislation in Asia is far more marked than it is on that of Europe.”
81. Young, *The Socialist and Labor Movement in Japan*, 48.
82. Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy*, 123–234; Large, *The Rise of Labor in Japan*, chap 9.
83. Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan*, chapters 2, 3; Scalapino, *The Early Japanese Labor Movement*, chapter 5.
84. Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan*, 52 and Marshall, *Capitalism and Nationalism in Prewar Japan*, 83.
85. Yamanouchi Mina, *Jiden [Autobiography]*, 66.
86. Miyake and Tomida, Shin Fujin Kyōkai (*The Association of New Women*) and the Women Who Aimed to Change Society, 232–57; Molony, *Ichikawa Fusae and Japan’s Prewar Women’s Suffrage Movement*, 62–63; Loftus, *Telling Lives*, chapter 2.
87. Tachi, *Women’s Suffrage and the State*, 21–24; Barbara Molony, “Women’s Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870–1925,” in *Globalizing Feminisms before 1945*, ed. Karen Offen (London, 2010), 53–56; Molony, *Equality versus Difference*; Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan*, 109–10.
88. Vera Mackie, “Gender and Modernity in Japan’s ‘Long Twentieth Century,’” *Journal of Women’s History* 25 (2013): 63.
89. Tokuzo, *The Rise of the Feminist Movement in Japan*, 115–18.
90. Nolte, *Liberalism in Modern Japan*, 126.
91. Tanaka, *Tōyō* (Blossoming Season), 261–62.
92. Nolte, *Liberalism in Modern Japan*, 337–38.
93. For some contributions to this effort, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Anja Schüler, and Susan Strasser, eds., *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany: A Dialogue in Documents, 1885–1933* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); Pernilla Jonsson, Silke Neunsinger, and Joan Sangster, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Women’s Organizing in Europe and the Americas, 1880–1940s* (Uppsala, 2007) and Cobble, *A Higher “Standard of Life” for the World*, 1052–85.
94. Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan*, 110–11; 124–27.
95. Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy*, 220–30; Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds*, 236.
96. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 194.
97. Kaoru Tachi, “Women’s Suffrage and the State: Gender and Politics in Pre-War Japan,” in *Feminism and the State in Modern Japan*, ed. Vera Mackie (Melbourne, Australia, 1995), 16–30. December 12, 1945, the date commemorated as suffrage day in Japan, is when women officially gained the vote for the House of Representatives. Women voted in the national election for parliamentary representation for the first time in 1946 but did not gain the vote for the House of Councilors until 1947.
98. Gay Seidman, *Beyond the Boycott: Labor Rights, Human Rights, and Transnational Activism* (New York, 2009), chapter 6.