



Against the System: Antiwar Writing of Kuroshima Denji

By Zeljko Cipris

“Slaughter and plunder are inseparable from armies and wars. Whenever war is waged, looting, robbery, and murder are invariably committed. Depending on their merits, such events are either reported with exaggeration or, conversely, passed over in silence.”

In 1930, Japanese writer Kuroshima Denji (1898–1943) published an antiwar novel that “remains startlingly and tragically timely in a world of nationalist-driven military intervention.” Zeljko Cipris introduces Kuroshima and presents excerpts from his novel, *Militarized Streets*, which Cipris [translated](#) for the University of Hawai‘i Press.

The origins of the antimilitarism and anti-imperialism that continue to motivate the opposition of most Japanese people to rearmament, and to participation in 21st-century imperial adventures, precede by several decades the nation’s defeat in World War II, and date back more than a century to a time when Japan was still a rising military and industrial power. In 1901 radical journalist Kotoku Shusui published his prophetic and grimly titled essay *Nijisseiki no kaibutsu teikokushugi* (Imperialism, the Monster of the Twentieth Century). In 1904 a pacifist poem written by Yosano Akiko struck a forceful note of antiwar sentiment at the very height of Japan’s victorious war with Russia. By the 1920s, antimilitarism and antiwar activism in Japan formed a part of vigorous movements for profound social change—among them a labor movement, women’s movement, students’ movement, peasants’ movement, and a movement for the emancipation of social outcasts. Dissident artists and writers of this culturally and politically exuberant era were producing a wealth of posters, paintings, poems, plays, and prose with antimilitarist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist themes. Representative of antiwar literature of the period was Kitagawa Fuyuhiko’s acclaimed 1929 poetry collection *Senso* (War). [1]



Call to action

One of the most dedicated antimilitarist intellectuals active at this time was author Kuroshima Denji (1898–1943), who was born into a poor farming family on Shodo Island (Shodoshima) in the Inland Sea and went to Tokyo to work and study. Conscripted into the army in 1919, he was sent to fight in a doomed antirevolutionary war against the newly formed USSR waged by Japan and its erstwhile World War I allies, including the United States, Canada, Britain, and France. After his return and recovery from an illness, Kuroshima joined a flourishing proletarian literature movement and published in a variety of journals. He researched a passionately anti-imperialist novel in China. Later, as his health began to fail again in the early 1930s, Kuroshima returned to his native island and lived out the remainder of his brief life in the company of his wife and three children.

Kuroshima is best known for his Siberian stories of the late 1920s—vivid descriptions of agonies suffered by Japanese soldiers and Russian civilians during Japan’s invasion of the Soviet Union. Kuroshima also wrote powerful narratives dealing with the hardships, struggles, and rare triumphs of Japanese peasants. His only full-length novel, *Buso seru shigai* (Militarized Streets), is a shocking description of economic and military aggression against China. Kuroshima’s oeuvre forms an integral part of the proletarian literary movement, a major current in modern world literature whose revolutionary aims inspired and engaged many Japanese writers, particularly in the 1920s and early 1930s, including Kobayashi Takiji, Wakasugi Toriko, Miyamoto Yuriko, Sata Ineko, Matsuda Tokiko, and dozens more. The movement produced a literature depicting the harsh lives of women, workers, peasants, and other downtrodden members of society, and their persevering struggles for change. Although the movement was ultimately suppressed by the state in the course of its parallel pursuit of overseas aggression and domestic repression, it continues to be recognized as a significant development in the cultural and political history of modern Japan, and its literary output still retains considerable power to galvanize thought and action.

Kuroshima’s narratives—like those of Anton Chekhov, whom he greatly admired—are unadorned in style, straightforward in storytelling, and rich in detail. Their content conveys a sense of authenticity, grief over the unnecessary suffering, and above all the urgent need for change. Despite occasional flashes of humor and lyricism, the tone is seldom cheerful and felicitous endings are rare: Kuroshima refrains from accomplishing in fiction what is much harder to attain in actuality. Devoid of easy optimism, his stories are open-ended chronicles of abuse and resistance.

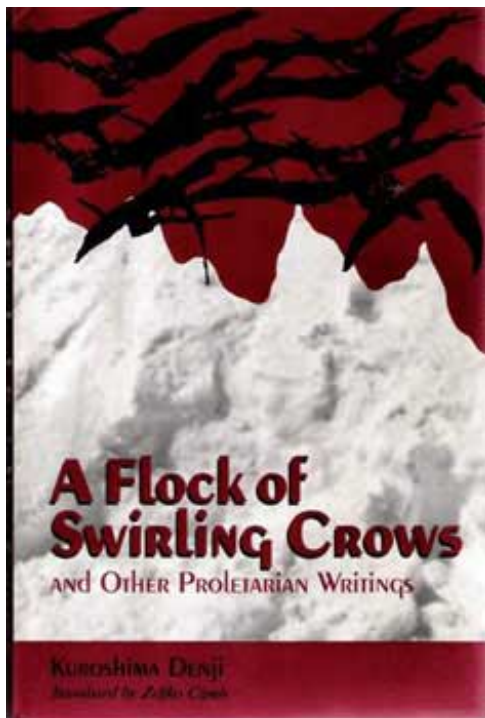
Ultimately, Kuroshima is convinced, only a vast international movement based on grassroots solidarity stands a chance of replacing a heartless status quo with a world of justice and generosity. Meanwhile, faced with the daily tragedies of an irrationally structured world, radical artists everywhere are morally bound to persevere in their oppositional work. In his 1929 essay “On Antiwar Literature,” Kuroshima writes: “So long as the capitalist system exists, proletarian antiwar literature must also exist, and fight against it.”

An Ominous Incident

One of the early “incidents” (*jihen* or *jiken*) that would eventually lead to full-scale war between Japan and China occurred in the spring of 1928 in Jinan, the capital of Shandong province, during a northward advance by Chinese nationalist troops attempting to reunify the

country. Possessing considerable commercial and industrial investments in Jinan, and faced with a collapse of its favored warlord in the area, Japan rushed in its own troops, ostensibly to safeguard the Japanese residents of the city. After a tense standoff, Japanese units clashed with their Chinese counterparts. The Japanese army, needing reinforcements, claimed that hundreds of Japanese residents had been massacred by the Chinese troops. Although the dead actually numbered no more than thirteen or fourteen suspected opium smugglers, Japanese newspapers reacted to their deaths with outrage and demanded armed intervention. Japan's prime minister dispatched an additional division to the region, and the troops launched an attack against Jinan, killing and wounding thousands of Chinese civilians. [2]

Japanese military responses of this kind deepened Chinese hatred of Japan's imperialism and helped to ignite popular resistance to it. Not all Japanese subscribed to the official story: a small but energetic anti-interventionist movement called for an end to Japanese militarism and for solidarity between the people of China and Japan. [3] Kuroshima Denji, who knew war at first hand, traveled to China to view the war up close. His research resulted in the novel *Militarized Streets*, published in November 1930. Kuroshima's novel was instantly banned, censored again fifteen years later by the US occupation authorities, and not reprinted in full until 1970, four decades after its initial publication. The poet and essayist Tsuboi Shigeji, Kuroshima's lifelong friend who was instrumental in publishing the work, has commended its uncompromising anti-imperialism. [4] The novel remains insufficiently known even in present-day Japan, though it is one of the outstanding texts in the annals of proletarian literature. [5]



Militarized Streets unobtrusively offers a penetrating analysis of an exploitative system in action, cautions against an impending imperialist war, and suggests a path to a humane and peaceful world—through forging powerful bonds of international solidarity. Although written decades ago, Kuroshima's book remains startlingly and tragically timely in a world of nationalist-driven military intervention.

A complete English translation of *Militarized Streets* is available in *A Flock of Swirling Crows*

and Other Proletarian Writings by Kuroshima Denji (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005). Reproduced below are most of chapter 28 and all of chapters 29 and 31.

How to Incite a War

Slaughter and plunder are inseparable from armies and wars. Whenever war is waged, looting, robbery, and murder are invariably committed. Depending on their merits, such events are either reported with exaggeration or, conversely, passed over in silence.

On this day, fourteen settlers were massacred, counting the nine disinterred two days later. Japan's bourgeois press gave the number as two hundred and eighty. The newspapers wrote that women had been stripped naked, treated with unspeakable savagery, and subsequently butchered. Young girls had had stakes thrust into their vaginas, arms broken by clubs, and eyes gouged out. This is what the papers wrote. The public was informed about a person whose skull was smashed before the correspondent's very eyes, spilling the brains onto the dusty road.

Similar reports were printed concerning the looting. According to one survivor, not only were valuables and clothing stolen but floorboards, mats, and ceiling planks were ripped away and even elementary school textbooks carried off. Gold chains, gold watches, two hundred forty yuan in coin and three hundred eighty in banknotes were pillaged as well. This victim's story was published.

Reading such accounts, no sane person could fail to detest the [Chinese] Southern Army. No one in his right mind could fail to grow indignant and conclude that such vicious troops deserved to be annihilated. So great was the power of sensational reportage. The nation's public opinion and animosity, the soldiers' reckless courage and fury, are inevitably manufactured out of this sort of information.

[Japanese spy] Yamazaki understood this. And he utilized it. On the third day he discovered mutilated corpses buried in a field northeast of the railway bridge on the Chin-p'u line. The freshly raised mounds of earth had looked suspicious.

They were dug up. A woman and two men lay within, giving off a powerful sour stench. Six more bodies were hidden in the vicinity of a water tank just a short distance away. Their ears had been sliced off and the stomachs of some had been stuffed with stones making them swollen and hard.

Both in Shih-wang-tien and Kuan-i-chieh, many houses had been looted and vandalized beyond all recognition. Attired in Chinese clothing, Yamazaki strolled about inspecting the ruins. This must be made known, he thought. To the soldiers, to the settlers, and to the people back home.

Thanks to his professional sense, he fully understood what would happen when this information was broadcast. This man was well aware of the enormous effects of inflating the number of victims from fourteen to two hundred and eighty. A war cannot be prosecuted without guiding a nation's people into a state of excitement and frenzy. The enemy must be

advertised as fiendishly evil. The public's sympathy must be aroused! This he knew well...

It was essential to inform the soldiers, the refugees, and the public back home about the settlers' pillaged houses, the dead woman with her ears sliced off, the dead men with their stomachs packed with stones. That is what he was thinking. It was essential to tell the entire world!

He emerged before the headquarters.

"Halt!"

The sentry's voice did not enter his ears.

"Halt!"

He walked on absorbed in thought.

Since before the withdrawal of the Northern Army, that checkpoint had been heavily guarded and conducted rigorous body searches. Even the warlord Sun Ch'uan-fang's car had been ordered to stop. Its owner had been dragged out. His pockets had been searched. "I am Sun Ch'uan-fang!" The gold-braided balding old man had stamped on the ground with rage. "I am Sun Ch'uan-fang! How dare you!" He could have been the supreme commander of the Soviet Red Army for all the sentry cared. It made no difference to him. He was only carrying out his duty. "Huh! Sun Ch'uan-fang, is it! All I see is some unknown joker in a fancy gold-braided uniform!"

It was this sentry line Yamazaki was passing. The sentries glared at the man who was dressed Chinese and looked Chinese.

"Halt!"

Forgetting his Chinese clothing, Yamazaki was reveling in the pleasure of being Japanese. Dreamily he was imagining the storm of popular passion whipped up by the reports of atrocities. I will tell them! I will let them know!... He was vaguely aware of a Chinese being challenged by sentries. He assumed it had nothing to do with him.

"Halt!"

Still he noticed nothing.

There was a burst of rifle fire. Yamazaki, five pistols and a bankbook registering eight thousand yen as close to his heart as ever, dropped on the spot. Off to the devil at last!

Massacre of Innocents

The airplanes appeared. Approaching the city airspace, they dropped one black lump after

another, like birds shitting in flight. The objects streaked through the air and shook the ground with detonations. An air raid!

There were three aircraft, flying in a V-formation. They flew in a wide circle over the city as though searching for an old nest. They reached the western suburb. One of the airplanes suddenly burst open like a glass bead. A shower of sparks shot from it. Spitting black smoke, blazing, wings breaking apart, it plummeted to the ground.

The street fighting was over. The exhausted soldiers received two and a half days of rest. They drank *sake* and in two days smoked up the cigarettes they had gone without for a week.

Chinese corpses lay sprawled throughout the streets. A sour stench fouled the air. Countless flies buzzed. Shaggy-haired stray dogs and beggars, both licking their lips, wandered cheerfully among the corpses, the dogs wagging their tails. The sky-piercing antenna of a blown-up radio station was broken in the middle, leaning, about to fall. No one turned to look. No one repaired it. People black as earth were scraping into buckets the brain matter from skulls that lay beneath it.

Suddenly: moving out! It was four in the morning, a time when weariness starts to give way to sensuous desire. The soldiers were awakened roughly.

Kakimoto had scraped his shin jumping into a Chinese factory through its stone window. His sock, pressed by the legging, rubbed against the festering wound he had daubed with iodine. He limped into line. The eastern sky was just starting to grow white. They were to attack ramparts forty feet high, forty feet wide, and seven miles in circumference: orders from a bitterly cold company commander; invisible faces.

Lieutenant Shigefuji walked gripping his military sword. Some of the barbed wire having been shoved aside, the soldiers passed through the narrow opening and marched in a column along the line of telegraph poles.

The road was wet with dew. There was utter silence. Only the rhythmic crunching of the men's shoes broke the stillness and was swallowed up by the dark sky. On the western side of S Hospital, responding to quiet authoritative orders, artillerymen were placing guns into position with a clatter of wheels. The soldiers silently marched on. Bluish clouds dyed purple by the red sunrise were gently drifting. It grew bright.

The house whose roof had been smashed by the downed aircraft crouched like a crab with a crushed shell. There was no one around but soldiers. The house looked devoid of life. The surrounding grass had been trampled out of recognition.

Gradually the faces of Takatori, Kitani, Nasu, and others grew distinct. They were walking like wooden dolls, shouldering rifles, knapsacks and mess tins clinging to their backs. Kakimoto, in addition to dreading the war, felt sick with worry that his aunt Nakanojo might have had her child killed, her house plundered, and been left homeless and hungry. To have come all the way here, and then been unable to help her in any way at all! Takatori and his comrades had a reason for walking like mindless wooden dolls. They were putting up with a great deal.

The company entered a devastated street. Windowpanes, doors, walls, and roofs—all had

been destroyed. A woman's rattan clog struck against a military shoe. The soldiers turned past a tall solid stone house and wall to emerge onto a broad and desolate grassy plain. They cut diagonally across it. Once more they passed through the rubble of what had been houses. They wound along the narrow streets.

Suddenly the sun rose radiant among the jagged ruined roofs. Fragments of cloud that had been scattered throughout the sky vanished without a trace. It would get hot again! The entire wreckage stood out illuminated intensely by the sun.

The company came out onto a main road. This led in a straight line to the outer gate of the stronghold. A Sun in the Blue Sky flag fluttered from a structure beyond the gate.

A signal was heard from somewhere. Far to the rear, from the vicinity of the artillery emplacement, gunfire roared. Shells moaned through the sky and exploded ahead. In response, continuous gunfire commenced from the opposite, eastern direction. Kakimoto's calves twitched and trembled. Then his entire body began to shiver.

This is when it happened. Suddenly the company column was fired upon from the flank. The company commander heard several shots crack just above his head. They came from the second floor of T Hospital. Kakimoto heard them too. The shots ceased.

"Oh, no! What a place to be ambushed from!" the special-duty sergeant major exclaimed morosely, taking cover behind an acacia. The soldiers looked at each other. Wry smiles spontaneously creased their faces. At the same time, the flabbergasted commander's order arrived to spread out.

"Now he'll be ordering us to attack this place too."

Takatori grinned meaningfully at the stocky Tamada. Kakimoto heard him too.

"And what the hell for? No one will be there."

Tamada raised his head and surveyed the two-story hospital. While he was still eyeing it, the right flank, headed by Lieutenant Shigefuji, broke through the doors and with bayonets and rifles thrust out before them charged into the interior, which reeked of disinfectant. Other soldiers poured in after them. Nurses in white flickered before their eyes. Patients were lying in beds. Pleurisy, nephritis, gastric ulcers, cardiac valve disease—there were separate departments for internal medicine and surgery. The doors dividing the many rooms were banged open one after another. Muddy shoes jumped atop beds. The operating table's thick glass shattered into a web of cracks.

In the record written at the time, this incident was described as follows: "Regiment number XXX, steadily approaching fortification gate under cover of darkness, was suddenly subjected to heavy Chinese fire from T hospital to north, placing it in extreme danger. But considering said building's nature as hospital, temporary dilemma ensued concerning appropriate countermeasures. Situation growing acute, however, and cognisant that hesitation would inevitably result in numerous casualties from random fire, Captain N employed section of unit to destroy enemy elements. In view of acute conditions, taken measures were truly

unavoidable.” And so forth.

Thirty minutes later, the soldiers pulled out of the hospital, unpleasant memories seared into their brains. Throughout the following day they could not stop thinking about it. The next day too, they could not stop thinking about it. Kakimoto moved about sluggishly, his heart obviously not in it. He was absorbed in thoughts he himself could hardly understand. “A sick child was stabbed against the wall. And then with the blood gushing out of its chest, the child wobbled and crouched on the floor. Can such things be done! Can such things happen!” He was tormented by something like remorse. “That pale woman was sleeping in bed, mouth open, knowing nothing... A small triangular hole opened up in her blanket. And the woman is sleeping, never to awaken... My hands trembled then. My arms were suddenly drained of strength! Even such things we were made to do!”

Once more they formed a column and proceeded toward the fort. The assault was already at its height. *Bang! Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!* Machine guns inside and outside the fort hailed each other and rattled away in rapid succession. No sooner did the noise stop for an instant than it rang out once more. Howitzer shells were bursting against the walls.

The faces of Takatori, Tamada, Matsushita and the others were looking sullen. Even Kuraya from the training institute was glum and sunk in thought. “That’s right, they’re all weighed down by unpleasant memories!” thought Kakimoto. These members of the lowest class, the ones who held the blades and did the killing directly, were unable to fathom for whose sake it was that they killed. They had been possessed by someone.

Their fellow Japanese had been massacred. Their homes had been stripped down to the last plank. To them, this seemed to be the only issue. And so they felt a passionate anger and thirst for revenge that demanded multiple retaliation for every person killed. It was undeniable that the passionate anger and thirst for revenge were a prominent factor in the killing of the “enemy.” It was this anger that impelled them to kick the corpses of the slain Chinese—slain Chinese whose numbers exceeded those of the Japanese killed in the street fighting by about fifteen to one.

What did they do it for? Whom did they do it for?

A Revolutionary Alliance

Soldiers were falling in quick succession like straw puppets.

Within the fort, Fang Chen-wu was doggedly holding his ground. He demonstrated a fighting spirit that would not rest without pushing north to storm Tientsin and Peking whatever the obstacles. The gates were sturdy and could not be broken through easily. The walls were thick. The Sun in the Blue Sky flag continued to fly vigorously within. The defenders were far from weak, and their weapons were new.

Chiang Kai-shek, willing to accede to any Japanese demand, merely proposed that he be allowed to pass through the area and attack Tientsin and Peking. This proposal was not accepted. The Japanese commanding officer knew that Manchuria would be threatened. Thereupon the Chinese soldiers grew stubborn.

As the other units stormed the various sectors of the fort, the officers of Kakimoto's unit strove desperately to break through the segment assigned to them. The casualties were mounting. The officers' ambition and rivalry weighed heavily upon the soldiers.

Kakimoto and his comrades could see that clearly. There was no time even to untie their leggings. They were dead tired. It was too much. They dozed unawares while aiming their rifles.

Within the confusion, men lost track of their comrades-in-arms. It was so hot in the city it might as well have been raining burning tongs. Torn off by the yellow wind, young acacia leaves mixed with dust flew blindingly through the streets. That evening the gray uniforms ceased firing. The soldiers returned to the factory and stretched their legs. Around two in the morning they were assailed by a fearsome nightmare. Some two hundred warriors simultaneously gasped for breath, groaned, and awoke. Hands clawed at the air in distress.

This same phenomenon had taken place in Japan on a night after a new conscript, roundly rebuked and beaten by an instructor for being unable to keep up with a double-time march, had hanged himself from a pine branch before an old castle. That time too the entire company had gasped for breath. They had groaned. And they had awoken simultaneously. It was inexplicable.

"There's something unlucky going on out there."

"I thought I was being strangled... It was awful, I just couldn't breathe."

"Somebody's getting killed, right now! Unlawfully, for no good reason!"

They were fully awake.

"Is Takatori here? Takatori? Is Takatori here? I have a feeling I saw Takatori with someone!" Kakimoto looked as though he were still staring at a phantom. He felt himself dragged into a deep icy pit.

The next morning they learned that Takatori, Nasu, Okamoto, Matsushita, and Tamada had not come back. Everyone wondered but no one said anything. They spoke to each other with their eyes. Kitani and Kakimoto inquired at the hospital casualty wards and morgues: not there. Evening came. Still they did not return. The following morning came. Still they did not return. Relieved sentries, pale with lack of sleep and with dew, returned to quarters. There was no news.

Takatori's commander, Lieutenant Shigefuji, came back from somewhere looking exceedingly odd. In a corner of the room, Kitani and Kakimoto caught sight of the lieutenant's highly unnatural smile suggesting he was concealing something. Kitani's intuition latched onto that smile. The lieutenant's state of mind was so plain he felt he could touch it.

"How about it, today we're attacking the Le-yuan gate..."

"Is that so." Kitani's response to the lieutenant's shamefaced, ingratiating overture was cool and brusque.

"If you men give it your best shot today, it's sure to fall."

"Is that so... Lieutenant, sir! What happened to Takatori and the others? They've been gone since the day before yesterday. We can't find them anywhere."

"What do you mean by asking me that? Kitani! What do you have to do with Takatori?" Lieutenant Shigefuji, his eyes and voice furious, suddenly closed in on Kitani. It was a fury that seemed prepared to shoot Kitani too.

"We have plenty to do with him. It's only natural to worry about our comrades!"

Kakimoto, who had been watching the exchange from the side, abruptly grabbed his rifle and rose, resolution and anger etched between his eyebrows. The soldiers who up to now had been winding their leggings or smoking grew tense also. Some, taking up their rifles, rose from the opposite corner, breechblocks clicking as they chambered rounds of ammunition.

"Hey, Kakimoto, whaddya think you're doing?" demanded the lieutenant.

"No need to say what I'm doing, is there?"

Lieutenant Shigefuji found himself in a genuine confrontation. The lieutenant had been under the impression that he possessed the power to command the platoon. Yet now, before Private Kakimoto's rifle, he was nothing but a single living creature—just as, the day before yesterday, the disarmed Takatori, Nasu, Okamoto and others had been nothing but frail living creatures. And so all of a sudden, he cunningly played his best remaining card. Falling back from Kakimoto five or six steps, he shouted: "All right, fall in! Fall in! Everyone take your rifle and out!" and rushed out of the dormitory as if fleeing.

"Son of a bitch! Disgraceful shit of an officer!" The enraged soldiers cursed him in unison.

Kakimoto was thinking about the slightly foolish, reckless Takatori. Where had that honest, genial fellow gone? He seemed foolish but was in fact anything but a fool. It had been Takatori who had approached the workers before anyone else. He had made friends with them. Soldiers had thrown away their lives in the Russo-Japanese and Sino-Japanese wars. Now they were risking their lives to protect the settlers and their property. But those were bloody lies. It was Takatori who had pointed this out before anyone else.

"In truth, all they're making us do is kill the Chinese," he had said. And then he had sympathetically asked Kakimoto about his aunt's family. At that time Kakimoto did not yet know that his aunt had barely managed to flee to the S Bank, nor that her five-year-old daughter had been killed. The silver hidden beneath the floorboards had vanished too. He did not know that either.

“The P’u-li-men neighborhood suffered the worst damage.”

“So it seems. I still can’t go to see it.”

“What did we come here for?... We’ve come all this way yet we can’t protect our own flesh and blood or even see them... Let’s hope they’re all right.”

“Hmm, I’m awfully worried about them!”

“They send us all the way over here,” resumed Takatori, “and we wouldn’t even be able to protect our own parents... That’s the truth of it. That’s the true picture of the place they’ve put us in. Only those with a pile of money get protected. And for that, sacrificing us—no matter how much they have to sacrifice us—is something that they don’t give a second thought to.

“While guarding the factories here, we torment the workers. We drive off the Southern Army. This way, they’re thinking, they’ll get their hands on the Manchurian interests. Because for them Manchuria is the grand prize. We get paid about seven yen a month. Our lives get thrown away for free. We get nothing out of it. When we go back, we get nothing unless we go out to work for it. May be we’re their Manchurian bulwark, but they won’t give us any time off or free food for it... If we’re truly here to protect the settlers, why do they put us in this dirty, uncomfortable, bedbug-infested factory dorm? There are plenty of cleaner, bigger buildings like the elementary school, the club, and the like. And they’re much more convenient. What’s the reason for putting us here other than to oppress the workers and guard the factory?”

Kakimoto felt deeply moved, quite out of keeping with the spirit of Takatori’s bold speech.

“We’re being used to beat China down. And the more we stand in the way of the workers’ and peasants’ movement here, the harder our own lives’ll get back home.”

This was something else Takatori had talked about.

“It is only the rich who grin while crushing China. The rich will get even richer from it... They’ll profit, and they’ll use those profits to keep us pinned in our place. In any case, we can never win alone. Unless the Chinese do their damndest, our own task at home will be really tough!”

And now Takatori had vanished. It was only those last words that Kakimoto did not yet understand clearly.

What worried the officers far more than any outlaws or Southern troops holding out in a fort were those ninja leaflets, and the likes of Takatori, as well as the possibility of a revolutionary alliance between the workers and the soldiers. This was what they feared most. That much was for sure.

NOTES

[1] The prestige of the Japanese military during the 1920s was so low that army officers were said to have trouble finding women willing to marry them and wore their uniforms in public as little as possible. See W.G. Beasley, *The Japanese Experience: A Short History of Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 239.

[2] Mikiso Hane, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Boulder: Westview, 1992), 237–238.

[3] Dissident groups included the Alliance Against Intervention in China (Taishi Hikansho Domei) and the National Antiwar Alliance (Zenkoku Hansen Domei). See Kobayashi Shigeo, “Kaisetsu,” in Kuroshima Denji, *Nihon puroretaria bungaku shu 9: Kuroshima Denji shu* (Tokyo: Shin Nihon Shuppansha, 1989), 442.

[4] George T. Shea, *Leftwing Literature in Japan: A Brief History of the Proletarian Literary Movement* (Tokyo: Hosei University Press, 1964), 184. As Shea notes on the same page, the literary historian Odagiri Hideo considers Kuroshima’s novel to be a model in illuminating the essence of war.

[5] Another literary historian, Donald Keene, writes that *Militarized Streets* “may well be the most absorbing work to have been fostered by the proletarian literature movement.” See Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*, vol. 1 (New York: Holt, 1984), 608.

*Zeljko Cipris teaches Japanese language and literature at the University of the Pacific in California. He is co-author with Shoko Hamano of [Making Sense of Japanese Grammar](#), and translator of Ishikawa Tatsuzo’s [Soldiers Alive](#) and of [A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings](#), a collection of works by Kuroshima Denji. This Japan Focus article is adapted from the introduction to *A Flock of Swirling Crows*, and dedicated to Shane Satori and Ljubomir Ryu. Posted on October 12, 2006.*