

“My Family Was Poor”
Japanese Workers Song, late 19th century

“My family was poor,
At the tender age of twelve
I was sold to a factory....
I was carried away by sweet-sounding words.
My money was stolen and thrown away.
Unaware of the hardship of the future,
I was duckweed in the wind.
Excited I arrived at the gate, where I bowed to the doorman,
I was taken immediately to the dormitory,
Where I bowed to the room supervisor.
I was taken immediately to the infirmary,
Where I risked my life having a medical examination.
I was taken immediately to the cafeteria,
Where I asked what was for dinner.
I was told it was low-grade rice mixed with sand....
We friends are wretched,
Separated from our homes in a strange place,
Put in a miserable dormitory
Waken up at four-thirty in the morning,
Eating when five o’clock sounds,
Dressing at the third bell,
Glared at by the manager and section head,
Used by the inspector.
How wretched we are!”

Source: E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*.

Found online: <http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/sample-17.html>