

# The Portrayal of Working Class People in Japanese Novel: A Study of Kobayashi Takiji's *The Crab Cannery Ship*

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**Abstract:** This essay investigates the depiction of the condition of working class people in Japanese novel with particular reference to *The Crab Cannery Ship* by Kobayashi Takiji. The paper exposes how the working class people are presented in the novel as those people who are always in the process of asserting their existence through struggling for survival by selling their labour to the capitalists in order to earn a living. The paper blames this act of suffering of modern capitalistic society imposed on the Japanese working class people.

**Key Words:** Proletarian Literature, Japanese Culture, Twentieth Century Literature, Class Struggle.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

*The Crab Cannery Ship* is proletarian novel by Takiji Kobayashi, written from a communist point of view. It concerns the crew of a crab fishing ships hardships as they struggle under what they view as capitalist exploitation. Proletarian Literature refers here to the literature created by working class writers mainly for the class conscious proletariat. The proletariat are citizens of the working class. The proletarian comment on political events, systems and theories and is frequently seen as an instrument to promote social reform or political revolution among the working classes. Literature is created especially by communist, socialist and anarchist authors. The intention of the writers of proletarian literature is to lift the workers from the slums, by inspiring them to embrace the possibility of social change or a political revolution. The proletarian literature movement in Japan emerged from a trend in the latter half of the in 1910s of literature about working conditions by authors who had experienced them, later called Taisho workers literature.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Examine how Japanese culture is represented through fictional narratives.
- To explore the conflict of class and culture in Kobayashi Takiji's *Crab Cannery Ship*
- To explore how the capitalist society exploited the proletarian.

*The Crab Cannery Ship* is a story about a crew of fisher men who rebel against the wretched working conditions on Japanese crabbing ships by going on strike and attempting to take over their ship. The novel has no central protagonist, instead following a group of largely nameless, unorganised workers. In the story the crabbing ship is fishing closed to Soviet territorial waters where the normal rule of law has been suspended. People are forced to sell their labour power to the capitalist in order to survive. They are employed, mostly on daily basis, so there is no job security. Thus , the working class people have to undertake often inhuman tasks to regain crumbs of surplus values which they themselves created.

Moreover, the organized violence of the state is depicted in the novel. Workers are threatened with violence if they press on with their case for an increase in their daily wages. Kobayashi describes in excruciating detail the working condition on the ship which is run by a giant company interested only in profits and imperial expansion rather than the lives of the crew, comprised of students and nameless formers. The ship is a reflection of the class war that grips society. The pursuit of profit and the glory of the emperor are so important that the company foreman that is the real authority on the ship refuses to suspend operations to rescue another ship in distress, allowing the ship to sink. He consoles the captain that at least the other ship was insured, and when some crew members are lost at sea, he is equally unperturbed. However, the lost crew members do not die. They are rescued by a Soviet ship. They proceed to explain the nature of capitalism exploitation and the need to organise against it.

The crew members eventually return to the Japanese crabbing ship, where they convince their fellow workers to go on strike. Although the work stoppage is initially successful, the Imperial in a Navy arrives and much to the dismay of the fisherman, the strike leaders are arrested and taken away. The novel ends with the crew vowing to fight on in the face of impossible odds. Despite its unfinished nature it ends just as the second strike begins. Even though the novel was banned by the Empire until after world war second, Kobayashi's experimental style was widely embraced and *The Crab Cannery Ship* translated into Russian, English and German. Technological advances have led

to profound changes in the nature of work, transportation, and communication. And have profoundly shaped modern Japans relations with the outside world.

### 3. CONCLUSION:

During 1920s, Japan witnessed radical changes in both the mechanisms and contours of culture. The working class novel doesn't focus on individuality. These people live in harsh conditions and know themselves to be individually powerless, working class culture, as a result does not celebrate individuality. In modern Japanese culture, the symbolism of canning is particularly dark. In this story, Kobayashi portrayal of Showa era Japan's totalitarian, ultra- nationalistic and fascist government.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Takiji Kobayashi was a Japanese Author of proletarian literature. He is best known for his short novel *Kanikosen*, or *Crab Cannery Ship*, novel published in 1929. Kobayashi's work touched a nerve in contemporary Japan plagued by growing inequality, insecurity and the effects of a two decade economic slump. It laid bare not only the gruelling reality of capitalism, but also the possibility of united resistance by workers. It also depicts the lives of Japanese crab fisherman. It is concerned with the hardships that the crew face and how they are exploited by the owners. *The Crab Cannery Ship* has been translated in English by Zeljko Cipris. Kobayashi's stories contain the best qualities of proletarian literature that is engrossing narratives, sharp imaginary and memorable characters both individual and collective. His works illuminate the lives of ordinary workers, peasants, women and party cadre from a fascinating period of Japanese history characterised by intense class struggle. Kobayashi orchestrates a gripping tale exposing the unrelenting suffocation of Japanese working class citizens by an oppressive government solely focused on rapid industrial development at the expense of human life. He depicts the marginalization of crew in the characters.