

39. Sericulture and silk spinning

39.1 The expanding silk spinning industry and Morita Silk Mill

In 1873 (Meiji 6), the Morita Silk Mill was established by MORITA Namikichi in Kumagawa Village. It was the first silk mill in Tokyo-fu. Namikichi produced silk reels using *zaguri* (spinning machine) and 50 *kama* (50 pots with 50 spinners), shipping the silk reels to Yokohama to directly trade with exporting companies the following year. Through the Meiji 10s and 20s, Japan's silk spinning industry constantly developed, owing to the specific governmental support and the general expansion of exports. The Morita Silk Mill expanded in 1880 (Meiji 13) due to the favorable political and economic climate, to become a principal mechanized silk spinner, boasting 120 pots. Further industry launchings were: the Sasamoto Silk Mill, under SASAMOTO Yasojiro in 1885 (Meiji 18) in Fussa; the Yamahachi Silk Mill, under MORITA Jisaku in 1890 (Meiji 23) and the Yamashu Silk Mill under MORITA Shuzo in Kumagawa.

The Morita Silk Mill further expanded to 200 pot capacity in 1890 (Meiji 23). The satisfactory silk export conditions followed up by domestic sericulture development extended the Morita Silk Mill's achievements. For example, the 1893 (Meiji 26) totals reported were 20,000 yen capital, 32,050 yen expenses, 40,050 yen revenue and 8,000 yen profit. In terms of a female worker's wages (10 to 35 sen per day, 100 sen means 1 yen) in those days, the company's profit was considerable.



Fig.240 Complete view of the Morita Silk Mill (Taisho Period). The Tama River and the Okutama mountains appear behind the factory. In 1914(Taisho 3), the factory was powered by 2 steam engines, 16 hp and water 2hp.

Workers numbered 18 (male) and 271 (female) in 1894 (Meiji 27). Age distribution was 84 (13 to 16 year bracket) and 187 (17 years and older). Most were around 20 years of age and unmarried. Five male worked from home, the rest of the workers lived in factory dormitories. Many workers came from distant locations such as Yamanashi, Kanagawa, Saitama prefectures or other prefectures, so dormitory living was convenient for them. It also suited the company to supervise the workers' life and to prevent personnel loss to rival firms. Work hours were usually 14 hours per day but the maximum reached 15 hours. There was one day's leave per month plus irregular days off.

In 1902 (Meiji 35), Morita Silk Mill further expanded to 400 pot capacity. In those days, a factory of 400 workers overshadowed other factories in the Tama region. In this period its power source changed to steam. An improved power plant increased silk production to 45,000 *kin* (27 ton) per annum. Fussa and Kumagawa villages became the model silk reeling villages.

The World War I, breaking out in 1914 (Taisho 3), brought prosperity to Japan and the market price for raw silk increased. Sericultural farmers rebuilt, or newly constructed silkworm rooms and a large quantity of *kinpi* (manure) was supplied to their mulberry fields to expand their production. But, in 1920 (Taisho 9), raw silk and cocoon prices plummeted. Furthermore, the Kanto Great Earthquake in 1923 (Taisho 12), the Financial Panic of 1927 (Showa 2), then the global depression seriously harmed the sericulture and silk spinning industries causing much bankruptcy.

Silk spinning factories in Fussa closed one after another in the early Showa Period. The Morita Silk Mill could not escape this trend. The



Fig. 241 Silk reeling section in the Morita Silk Mill (1925 (Taisho 14)). In the Taisho Period, female worker numbers became declined and companies tried harder to recruit workers. Rival factories' recruiters strove to secure female workers.

company was reorganized into a stock company capitalized at 200,000 yen in May 1927 (Showa 2). However immediately after that, on June 27, company-issued drafts were dishonored and the company folded. The three generation firm, continuing since the early Meiji Period, came to an end.

39.2 MORITA Michiko, a lady with foresight

MORITA Michiko was born in 1866 (Keio 2) in Nabegayato, Kumagawa Village, the eldest daughter of MORITA Namikichi, Morita Silk Mill founder. She was also known as Tsuya. When young, she liked to hear her father's stories of Yokohama's scenery and foreign people. On graduating from elementary school she wished to study English in Tokyo for continuing study in America. After studying the Chinese classics in Fuchu-machi, Kitatama-gun (Fuchu City), she went to Kanda to study English. At that time it was fashionable to replace one's given name with a stylish new name. So she changed her given name Tsuya to Tsuyako, then again to Michiko.

The time around 1885 (Meiji 18), when Michiko began studying English in Kanda, was known as the Rokumeikan era. The Rokumeikan Hall was built in Hibiya to entertain distinguished foreign guests. Balls were held there almost every night. Ladies visiting the Rokumeikan wore fashionable bustle-style dresses, popular in Europe at that time. Michiko ordered this style right away and dressed accordingly.

Michiko was a new era trendsetter. She was involved in a social movement to abolish licensed prostitution, a controversial topic of those days. During her four years in Tokyo from 1885 (Meiji 18), the above abolition was a key concern of a swelling female rights movement. Her great interest in social problems is evident in her



Fig.242 Cocoon transfer (Morita Silk Mill, Taisho Period).

surviving notes.

While studying in Tokyo, she became emotionally linked to OKUNUKI Taizo, a Tokyo Senmon Gakko (the present Waseda University) student from Kugedo Village, Iruma-gun, Saitama-ken(Kawagoe City). The Okunuki were a venerated family which had endowed the village with headmen for generations. OKUNUKI Yuzan, famous as the man of virtue, was one of his ancestors. Taizo's marriage to Michiko means that he recognizes the adoption arrangements. Taizo was the Okunuki family's second son. For the Morita family, he was the most suitable man who will marry to Michiko. The couple spent fortunate fruitful years basking in parental and broader family approval.

On November 13, 1887 (Meiji 20), the *Yuino* ceremony (an exchange of betrothal gifts) took place. The future Mrs. Morita resided in Kumagawa spending her happy engagement period coming and going from Tokyo. After graduating Tokyo Senmon Gakko School, Taizo learned English from British Doctor Summers in Sanjusanbankan, Tsukiji, Tokyo. In the same period, he also learned poetics from MORI Shunto in Shitaya (Taito-ku, Tokyo). In 1889 (Meiji 22), after Taizo completed his two years' study in Tokyo, they wedded flamboyantly at the Morita residence in Kumagawa Village. The couple then gave their joint support to patriarch Namikichi of the Morita Silk Mill.

In April 1893 (Meiji 26), as three Tama counties were reassigned from Kanagawa-ken to Tokyo-fu, Taizo assisted his father Namikichi managing Morita Silk. In January 1897 (Meiji 30), Taizo gave formal notification to succeed the Morita family's headship. Taizo gained popular confidence, was elected headman of Fussa and Kumagawa



Fig.243 MORITA Michiko in her teens. Picture at the time she gave her name as Tsuya.

villages Union(*Kumiai*) in July that year and involved himself in village administration. In September 1899 (Meiji 32), two years after his election as village headman, he won selection as Tokyo-fu assemblyman, a further advancement in the local political world. Next, after inauguration as Tokyo-fu Agricultural and Industrial Bank Auditor, he strove for a better local financial environment.

Morita Silk Mill thrived mostly the late Meiji Period through the Taisho Period. In 1906 (Meiji 39), the company won the silver cup for its silk yarn at the St. Louis Exhibition in the US. The next year, 1907 (Meiji 40), the company won the first prize at the *Tokyo Kangyo Hakurankai* Exhibition, the company's technology being favorably appraised. Taizo himself won the *Kun-shichito-seishoku-toyo-sho* Medal in 1906 (Meiji 39) for achievement in the development of sericulture industries. Furthermore, in 1916 (Taisho 5), he was inaugurated as Agricultural and Industrial Bank president.

Michiko was employed with Morita Silk Mill from 1889 (Meiji 22). Her key roles were the purchase of raw silk and the training of female employees. The most important element of silk processing was the judging and purchasing of superior cocoons. Michiko selected and purchased cocoons with careful attention. She paid further attention to raw silk refinement by encouraging employee enrollment in a raw silk training center to increase their technical skills. She embarked upon the training of female employees to standards of excellence. She also arranged after-work literacy tuition. It was a rarity consideration among other factories.



Fig. 244 Bustle dress owned by MORITA Michiko (About 1885 (Meiji 18)). Bustle dresses are distinguished by a distinct higher-rearward bulge. The waist is tightly corseted to emphasize the breast.

As her husband Taizo's duties took him to Tokyo, Morita Silk Mill's management fell on her shoulders. In 1918 (Taisho 7) and 1919 (Taisho 8), she spent time in a new residence in Atami and also in Azabu, Tokyo. The number of silk mill employees first exceeded 650. The Morita family seemed to have enjoyed its height then. Michiko lived until November 30, 1926 (Taisho 15), at age 61 without confirmation that the firm she had long managed would soon be bankrupt.

39.3 TAKASAKI Jihei and the sericulture industry

TAKASAKI Jihei, born in Fussa Village in 1855 (Ansei 2), contributed to the development of sericulture during Meiji and Taisho periods. In the Meiji 10s, sericulture developed nationwide with increasing raw silk exportation. Ominously, breeding methods resisted change while recession persisted around 1884 and 1885 (Meiji 17 and 18). Takasaki judged that active sericulture industry support was needed to put things right. He broadened the reach of advanced sericulture technology through visiting and inspecting innovative factories in Fukushima, Nagano and Gunma.

Takasaki undertook silkworm cultivar improvement. He founded the *Kyoseigumi* in Fussa Village to engage in cultivar improvement research as institute head. He gained satisfactory results, supplying improved silkworm breed stock by cost-free to farmers interested in better breed stock. The number of silkworm breeding farmers reached 23 and the number of silkworm raising trays reached 30,000 three years after *Kyoseigumi*'s establishment. His improved silkworm breeds earned a good reputation for Fussa's industry. In 1885 (Meiji 18), he cleared



Fig.245 TAKASAKI Jihei. He was decorated with the Ryokuju-hosho medal in December 1910 (Meiji 43). In 1936 (Showa 11), a stone monument in his honor was erected by Seishinsha members and citizenry in 1300, Fussa.

wasteland along the Tama River for trial mulberry plantings. Mulberry hedge growth exceeded expectations so he recruited interested persons to set up further mulberry fields of several tens of *chobu* (about several thousand ares).

In 1887 (Meiji 20), he organized the Nishitama-gun Tobu Sericulture Union with concerned citizenry of Hamura and Fussa. He also established the Private Pebrine disease Examination Method Training Center in Hamura that year, keenly sponsoring his examination method. Concurrently, he won appointments as; Nishitama-gun Agriculture and Industries Fair Secretary-General, examiner of certain fairs, chairperson of committees and Fussa Village assemblyman.

In 1890 (Meiji 23), Seishinsha was established in Nishitama Village by its new president SHIMODA Izaemon of Hamura for sericulture improvement, TAKASAKI busily travelling as Secretary-General. In 1908 (Meiji 41), Seishinsha split in four: Shimoda Sericulture Training Center in Nishitama Village; Korin in Gochi Village (Akishima City); Ishikawa in Ogami Village (Akishima City) and Takasaki Sericulture Training Center in Fussa Village. Takasaki took broad responsibility as Seishinsha vice president. In 1926 (Taisho 15), he rose to president and devoted himself further to the regional sericulture industry development.

On December 1910 (Meiji 43), his achievements won him the Ryokuju-hosho Medal. His contributions not only in sericulture but in the social sphere went on: donations for school equipment purchase;



Fig. 246 TAKASAKI Jihei inspecting mulberry fields. He toured to inspect innovative sericulture areas in Fukushima, Gunma, Nagano and other places to foster technological dispersion.



Fig. 247 Seishinsha Takasaki Sericulture Training Center (Taisho Period). This center ran a competitive cocoon show. A larger-than-life paper cocoon with emerging moth decorated the roof and building entrance. TAKASAKI Jihei with the Fukujukan improved breed spring silkworm, "Koishimaru" and "Matamukashi" stock and autumnal silkworms; "Seijuku" and "Tama".

monetary gifts to the *Sanriku* Coast Great Tsunami victims; support for the families of those dispatched to the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars; donations toward Daidabashi Bridge construction costs; donations to the Red Cross of Japan, donations toward new elementary school's schoolhouse construction and others.

In 1921 (Taisho 10), he toured the Kansai region to inspect the artificial incubation of silkworms, immediately introducing his findings to Tokyo-fu. This was a pioneering event in the Kanto region. The introduction of artificial incubation made multiple *Hakitate* work possible. He launched the monthly magazine "Sanyu" in 1925 (Taisho 14) to inform the sericulture industry. Looking back, in 1898 (Meiji 31), Takasaki had established the Fussa-*shinyo-kumiai* Credit Union, remaining union head for over 30 years and developing the union's business. His death on February 16, 1937 (Showa 12) preceded a village-supported funeral ceremony.

Kimonos and accessories donated by the Morita family to Fussa City, 157 from 1990 (Heisei 2) to 1993 and 10 more in 1994 (Heisei 6), a total of 167. These articles include all kimonos and accessories worn by three generations of the Morita family through the late Tokugawa shogunate, Meiji and Taisho period.

The Morita family moved residence from Kumagawa (present named Korakuen) to Musashino City in 1943 (Showa 18). Important clothes and utensils had been stored in the Kumagawa storehouse.

The stored articles were eventually transferred to the new residence's storehouse in Musashino City. In 1989 (Heisei 1), numerous clothing items were donated to Fussa

Fig. 248 Kimono worn by three generations of the Morita family.