

**SOCIALISM IS A MISSION:
MAX BICKERTON'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE JAPANESE
COMMUNIST PARTY AND TRANSLATION OF JAPANESE
PROLETARIAN LITERATURE IN THE 1930S**

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Introduction

The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) was founded on 15 July 1922 as a branch of the Comintern by a group of socialist activists. Until it was legalized after the Second World War, the party remained a small, secretive organization, subjected to frequent suppression by government authorities who opposed its aim of creating a workers' state.¹ In the 1920s and 1930s, the party sought to extend its influence through publications such as the newspaper *Sekki* (Red Flag) and the leftist literary journal *Senki* (Battle Flag).² Many bright students from prestigious schools, such as *Tōkyō Teikoku Daigaku* (Tōkyō Imperial University, now Tōkyō University) and *Dai-ichi Kōtō Gakkō* (Dai-ichi High School, now Tōkyō University), joined the party.

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- 1 The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) was founded as an underground political association. Outlawed under the Preservation of Peace and Order Act in 1925, the JCP was subjected to repression and persecution by the imperial government's police and military. The JCP was the only political party that opposed Japan's involvement in the Second World War. The Party was legalized during the US occupation of Japan in 1945, and since then it has been a legal political party and has contested both national government and local body elections. The party didn't take sides during the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s. It reached the peak of its electoral strength in the 1970s. In 2010, the JCP had fifteen Members of the Diet (nine members in the Lower House and six members in the Upper House), which gives it two per cent of both Houses. Japanese Communist Party, <http://www.jcp.or.jp> (accessed 1 February 2011).
 - 2 *Sekki* was first published in February 1928 as an illegal publication, and its publication ended in 1935. In 1945, publication resumed under the name *Akahata*, the other reading of the same kanji character. During the Korean War, it was temporarily banned by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Power, Douglas MacArthur. It is now a daily newspaper.

Senki was published by NAPF (*Nippona Artista Proleta Federacio*, which is the Esperanto translation of *Nippon Musansha Geijutsu Renmei*, the Japanese Federation of Proletarian Artists). It was first published in May 1928, and its publication ended in December 1931.

A New Zealand high school teacher, William Maxwell Bickerton arrived in Japan in August 1924, and, while teaching English at various schools, he became involved with left-wing activities and, before long, became a communist sympathizer. He eventually applied for membership of the Japanese Communist Party. He was arrested by the special police in March 1934 under the Peace Preservation Law and deported to England in June of the same year before his trial took place. This article traces his life in Tōkyō, focusing on his involvement with the Japanese Communist Party as well as his translation of Japanese proletarian literature into English.

Bickerton's Life up to His Departure for Japan in 1924

William Maxwell Bickerton was born in Wainoni, an eastern suburb of Christchurch, in 1901. His father, William Henry Bickerton, was a professional photographer. He went to New Brighton School and Christchurch Boys' High School. During this time, his closest friend was C.E. Beeby, who later became an eminent educationist, and at New Brighton School they competed for the first and second places in standards five and six. They were the only two students from New Brighton School who went to Christchurch Boys' High School. Christchurch Boys' High School was already renowned for its high standard of education.

Bickerton studied in the Faculty of Arts, Victoria College, Wellington. At Victoria College, he was secretary of a left-wing debating group and active in the movement against the military training of students. John C. Beaglehole, who later became a prominent historian, was a friend of Bickerton's at Victoria College. In *A Life of J.C. Beaglehole*, Tim Beaglehole wrote:

John met two students in his class in his first year with whom he became good friends. Max Bickerton was a grandson of A.W. Bickerton, the eccentric foundation professor at Canterbury College. He had been at school in Christchurch with C.E. Beedy who describes their relationship as one of bickering intimacy, a stimulating relationship for the young. Intellectual, quirky and, like John, from a home with books, Bickerton was also skeptical of all accepted dogma and an unshakable atheist. He became a student of Hunter's,³ interested in psychology and graduated with an M.A. in 1923. John clearly found him interesting and admired his outspokenness.⁴

Bickerton's left-wing ideology was influenced by his paternal grandfather, Alexander William Bickerton, who was said to be an eccentric anarchist and a friend of Chropotokin. Alexander Bickerton was born in Hampshire, England, in 1842. He

3 Hunter is the name of the original building of the Victoria University of Wellington campus. It was opened in 1904.

4 Tim Beaglehole, *A Life of J.C. Beaglehole: New Zealand Scholar* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006), 64–65.

was a furniture maker who later became a chemist. He taught Chemistry at the Hartley Institute in Southampton, but he was not satisfied with the job and applied for a position as the founding professor of Chemistry at Canterbury College. His application was successful, and he immigrated to New Zealand in 1874. His teaching was unique, easy to understand, and popular among students as well as school children and adults. He taught Ernest Rutherford and became his mentor. Rutherford became a prominent chemist and physicist and won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1908.

Alexander Bickerton established a commune, Federative Home, at Wainoni near New Brighton, Christchurch, hoping to create a new form of society based on his socialist beliefs. However, the commune was disestablished in 1902 and turned into a pleasure park with a zoo, amphitheatre, conservatory, aquarium, cinema, and medicine and firework factories, and mock naval battles were held on a man-made lake. It became popular as a weekend destination for the citizens of the town. In the end, Pleasure Gardens, as they were called, started running at a loss and closed in 1914.

Alexander Bickerton died in 1929 at eighty-seven years of age, holding the title of Professor Emeritus of Canterbury College. Bickerton Street in Wainoni is named after him. He was the author of a number of books, including *The Romance of the Heavens*, *The Romance of the Earth*, and *The Perils of a Pioneer*. Alexander Bickerton had five sons and two daughters, and Max was a son of his third son, William. Max's mother, Elizabeth, died in 1906 when Max was six years old.

Max Bickerton was born in the commune, and, after his mother's death, his father remarried three times. Although his mother died when he was young, his childhood was a happy one. Between the ages of fourteen and fifteen, under the influence of his grandfather, he started reading left-wing books, such as *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The State and the Revolution* (1917) by Vladimir Lenin, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) by Engels, and, later, *Das Kapital* (1867) by Marx.

After graduating from Victoria College with a MA, he taught at a secondary school in Wairoa, in the North Island, for a few years. During this time he was engaged to marry a girl living in the same town, but their marriage never took place. He could find neither satisfaction in being a secondary school teacher nor happiness living in a small town. Rewi Alley helped him find a teaching position in Japan. Alley's younger brother Phillip had been Max's classmate at Christchurch Boys' High School. Rewi Alley went to China in 1927 and stayed there for over sixty years, devoting his life to China's industrial revolution.⁵ Max left New Zealand for Japan and arrived in Yokohama in August 1924. Sometime later in 1938, Max was reunited with Alley in China and assisted his work there.

5 Rewi Alley (1897–1987) was born in Springfield, in the South Island. When he went to China, he worked in various jobs, such as in the fire brigade and as a factory technician, before devoting himself to contributing to China's industrial revolution. He is one of the most famous westerners in China.

Life in Tōkyō from August 1924 till June 1934

After arriving in Tōkyō in 1924, Bickerton studied Japanese at Tōkyō Imperial University. At the same time, he started teaching English at Dai-ichi High School and *Tōkyō Shōka Daigaku* (Tōkyō Commercial College, now Hitotsubashi University). He soon became proficient in the language, immersing himself in Japanese literature, particularly that with a leftist thread. He also enjoyed learning Japanese culture, such as Ikebana, tea ceremony, and Noh singing. In a letter to his grandmother Wilson, he wrote about his Ikebana lesson: “We try to harmonize masses of colours whereas in the Japanese style colour is not so important and lines are everything.”⁶

In 1929 he taught at Dai-ichi High School as well as *Furitsu Kōtō Gakkō* (Prefectural High School), and his annual salary was approximately 600 yen. Later he also taught English at Nihon University. During this time he observed many intelligent students becoming active in communist movements. He became interested in Japanese left-wing activities and started associating with young activists, such as Yoshishige Kozai, who went on to become a left-wing philosopher,⁷ Yoshimichi Iwata, a communist who was murdered by the police,⁸ and Shin’ichi Matsumoto, a communist to whom Bickerton handed money,⁹ Masao Maruyama, who became a well-known left-wing political scientist, was one of his pupils.¹⁰ At this time Bickerton began translating Japanese proletarian literature into English. An article, which appeared in the daily newspaper *Asahi shinbun* on 22 May 1934, reporting his arrest explained this:

6 Max Bickerton to Mrs Wilson, 29 October 1925, private collection.

7 Yoshishige Kozai (1901–90) was a well-known philosopher, who was born into an intellectual family. His father was an agricultural chemist who served as president of Tōkyō Imperial University from 1920 to 1928, and his mother was an author. His older brother became a historian. After graduating from Tōkyō Imperial University majoring in philosophy, he was associated with left-wing intellectuals and became a member of the Communist Party. He was arrested under the Preservation of Peace and Order Act in 1933 and 1938. After being released from jail, he concentrated on the translation of Catholic materials into Japanese at Sophia University. After the Second World War, he became a professor at Nagoya University and published numerous books on philosophy.

8 Yoshimichi Iwata (1898–1932) was born in Aichi Prefecture and went to Kyōto Imperial University, where he was a student of Professor Hajime Kawakami, a well-known Marxist economist. He was active in the left-wing student movement at Kyōto Imperial University, and his arrest was followed by ten months in jail. He joined the Communist Party in 1927 and became a central committee member in charge of the party’s journal, *Sekki*. He went underground in 1931 but was rearrested on 30 October 1932 and tortured to death on 3 November.

9 Shin’ichi Matsumoto (1901–47) was a graduate of Tōkyō Imperial University. He was a close friend of Hotsumi Ozaki, who was involved in the Sorge espionage incident in 1941. Matsumoto became involved with communist activities around 1930, and, after the Second World War, he became a critic of politics. He translated Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography into Japanese.

10 Masao Maruyama (1914–96) was a graduate of Tōkyō Imperial University majoring in law. He was a political science scholar, who specialized in the Japanese intellectual history of politics. He was influenced by Max Webber’s economic theory.

Bickerton changed his colleges often, starting at Tōkyō Commercial College. At each institution, he noticed that many bright students joined the Communist Party which rekindled his interest in communism. He started reading major Japanese proletarian literature as well as left-wing journals such as *Senki* [Battle Flag], *Puroretaria Bungaku* [Proletarian Literature], *Puroretaria Kagaku* [Proletarian Science]. He eventually became a sympathizer of the Japanese proletarian movement.

On his sabbatical from June to October 1933, Bickerton went to London via Moscow and Berlin. In London, he gave the English Communist Party articles from the Japanese left-wing journal *Senki* that he had translated into English. He brought back European communist journals to Japan.

Bickerton also took manuscripts of his English translations of Japanese proletarian stories to a London agent for the American publisher, International Publisher. “The Cannery Boat by Takiji Kobayashi and other Japanese short stories” was published by International Publisher in 1934.¹¹

He was arrested by the police on 13 March 1934 under the *Chian Iji Hō* (Peace Preservation Law) and indicted, but escaped to England while on bail in June of the same year. The length of his stay in Japan was less than ten years.

Bickerton’s Arrest on 13 March 1934 under the Peace Preservation Law

After returning from his sabbatical in Europe, he was arrested by the *Tokkō Keisatsu* (Japanese Special Police) under the *Chian Iji Hō* on suspicion of giving money to the Japanese Communist Party. He was the first westerner to be arrested under this act. This law was enacted on 12 May 1925 to control communists and anarchists. It set ideological limits for individuals and organizations and served as a framework for the creation of special techniques for handling *shisōhan* (thought criminals), persons holding ideological positions deemed by the government to be criminal. A total of 736 people were arrested that March under this Act, among them 134 women. Fifty-three people were indicted, including Bickerton on 6 April. The charge against him was that he contributed 500 yen to the Japanese Communist Party and assisted in the exchange of literature between English and Japanese communists.

The police alleged that before departing overseas in April 1933 on sabbatical, Bickerton had offered to contribute to the communist funds 300 yen from his travelling expenses, which had been supplied by the schools. He had intended to give the money to his communist friend Yoshishige Kozai, but Kozai was arrested so he could not. While on sabbatical, Bickerton proceeded to Moscow, then spent several months in London, where he obtained and sent to Japanese communists sixty copies of various European communist magazines, including forty copies of *Inprecall* and *Communist*

11 Translated from Japanese by the author Kano.

International. He also translated and gave to English communists articles from the Japanese journal *Senki*.

Returning to Japan in September, Bickerton gave 100 yen to a communist named Shin'ichi Matsumoto, whom he secretly met on a beach near his residence in Chigasaki, 50 km west of Tōkyō. After this, Bickerton contributed 100 yen a month from October 1933 until January 1934, when Matsumoto was arrested. The total amount was 500 yen. The Communist Party was in financial difficulties, so Bickerton's contribution assisted them considerably. At Matsumoto's suggestion, Bickerton applied for membership of the interdicted Japanese Communist Party in October, but, while debating whether or not to admit a foreigner, the organization's leaders were arrested. Bickerton's contacts were arrested one by one, and eventually he himself was arrested on 13 March 1934.

The police imposed a media ban on the incident for two months, then, on 22 May in Tōkyō, the daily newspaper *Tōkyō Nichinichi shinbun* (now called *Mainichi shinbun*) published an article under the headings, "Contact with Left-Wing Activists Overseas, an Englishman Involved, Ex-Dai-Ichi High School Teacher, Intellectual Affiliation, First Foreign Party Member."¹² On the same day, another newspaper, *Asahi shinbun*, published a similar article on Bickerton's arrest.

His arrest created a stir among British residents in Japan, and the British Embassy protested against it, an action that eventually resulted in his deportation before trial. Major New Zealand papers reported his arrest. However, he was held incommunicado in prison from 13 till 23 March. The House of Lords in England as well as the New Zealand Parliament discussed his arrest.¹³ The most serious accusation against him was that he had applied for membership of the Communist Party, which had been interdicted.

Tokkō Geppō (The Monthly Report of the Special Police), published in March 1940, reported his criminal record as follows:

12 "Kaigai sayoku to renraku, ejin no sankaku, moto ichi-kō kyōshi, Chiteki kanyū, Saisho no gaijin tōin" (translated from Japanese by the author Kano).

13 An article in the *Dominion*, dated 30 April, said:

Question in Commons;

In the House of Commons, Mr J.C. Wilmot (Lab.), in the course of a series of questions, pointed out that Mr Bickerton had been imprisoned on March 13, and not allowed to see the British Consul till March 23, and was still in gaol, though not charged.

Sir John Simon, Foreign Secretary, replied that according to the Japanese authorities, Mr Bickerton was suspected of an offence in connection with his alleged Communist activities.

The British Consul and Ambassador, as soon as they knew of his arrest, requested that B should either be released or publicly tried without delay. It was understood that the Japanese police inquiry had now been concluded, and the case was going to the examining judge. Adequate funds were available for the defence, and the Ambassador was doing everything possible in Bickerton's interest.

A Tokyo message states that the communist organization is stringently prohibited in Japan. For that reason Bickerton's alleged preparations to join the party constitute one of the greatest charges against him.

Period of Imprisonment:	13 March–15 April 1934
Reasons for Indictment:	1. In April 1933, Bickerton gave 300 yen and 200 yen hereafter over a period up to the end of January 1934, a total of 500 yen to the Communist Party through the communist, Yoshishige Kozai. 2. Brought into Japan over ten communist journals from overseas countries including <i>Communist International</i> and gave them to the Japanese Communist Party.
Place of Birth:	England [<i>sic</i>], New Zealand
Affiliation:	Communist sympathizer
Academic Background:	Graduate of Faculty of Arts, Victoria College
Occupation:	Dai-ichi High School teacher ¹⁴

He was tortured in prison but disclosed nothing to his captor. The British Consul in Tōkyō acted energetically on Bickerton's behalf and in due course managed to obtain his release on bail. After a month in prison, he was temporarily released with a bail bond of 200 yen, which was paid by the British Embassy, and deported to England. The trial had been fixed for 30 June, but it soon became apparent that the police wished him to escape, therefore he boarded a ship, the *Empress of Japan*, almost openly. The vessel was bound for England via Vancouver, where Bickerton was given an entry permit for England.

According to John Haffenden's *William Empson: Among the Mandarins*, William Empson, an English literary critic who was living in Tōkyō and teaching at Bunri University, assisted in Bickerton's escape:

It was then that Empson became involved in the affair—not for ideological reasons but because he realized that imprisonment would be horrific in the terror state that Japan had become—in order to smuggle Bickerton out of the country. According to Ronald Boffrall (Empson himself must have told him the story), he took away Bickerton's clothes and provided him with an entirely different outfit, complete with dark glasses and a false moustache. Then he booked a passage for Bickerton, obviously in an assumed name, on a foreign freighter; and finally, keeping Bickerton out of sight as much as he could, he led him towards the ship. At this point, however, the story assumes what would seem to be a quality of apocryphal absurdity: as the pair approached the gangway, a number of the Secret Police appeared—only to present Bickerton with all of his old clothes cleaned and pressed. Yet that final detail of the furtive flight might not be so farcical as it would seem. (Hetta Empson, whom Empson married in 1941, was also given to understand that Empson had somehow made a mistake in arranging delivery of the clothes.) It just might have been the case that Tokyo authorities

14 Naimushō Keihōkyoku Hoanka, *Tokkō Geppō* (Tōkyō: Naimushō Keihōkyoku Hoanka, 1940) (translated from Japanese by the author Kano).

preferred to turn a blind eye to Bickerton's escape—if not actually to assist him to abscond—than to have the matter blow up into anything more of an international incident. Whatever the truth of that detail, Bickerton certainly jumped bail and left Japan on the *Empress of India* [*sic*] on 8 June, bound for Victoria and Vancouver.

There is no suggestion that Empson also arranged for Bickerton to get out of the country by subterfuge. In fact, we cannot even know if he was placed under suspicion for aiding and abetting the escape, or questioned about it.¹⁵

The friendship between Bickerton and William Empson and his wife Hetta resumed when they met in Beijing in 1949 and lasted until Bickerton's death in London in 1966.

Interrogation and Torture in Prison

Interrogation by the Special Police began on 14 March, a day after Bickerton's arrest, and lasted until 24 March. He was often tortured during the process. Two articles written by him on his interrogation and torture were published in the *Christchurch Times* on 6 and 7 September 1934. The first article said:

JAPAN'S PRISONER.
BEATEN AND INSULTED.
NEW ZEALANDER'S PERSONAL STORY OF ORDEAL.

Published below is the first of two articles in which Mr William Maxwell Bickerton, a former Christchurch school teacher, who was imprisoned by the Japanese Government on the suspicion that he was concerned in Communist activity, relates his experience at the hands of the police and the manner in which he was treated in gaol. After a long detention Mr Bickerton was diplomatically allowed to escape by the Japanese police, and he is now in England.

"I, William Maxwell Bickerton, do solemnly and sincerely affirm that the police examination was conducted by two plain-clothes police officers named Ogasawara and Suga, for the most part in Japanese. It took place at police headquarters. During the second day's examination, on March 14, Ogasawara remarked that I had probably heard tales of police torture from my left-wing friends, but that I would see for myself they were untrue, as I would never be forced to say anything. About 6 p.m. that evening the Assistant Chief of the Foreign Section came into the room and sent the other two officers out.

15 John Haffenden, *William Empson, Volume 1: Among the Mandarins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 350.

Treated as an Animal

“He asked me some questions, and when my answers were not satisfactory to him he became angry. He said that thinking me a gentleman, they had accorded me special treatment, letting me see the chief, etc., but that now they concluded I was not one. I did not respond to decent treatment. I was not even a human being, only an animal (*dobutsu*), and in the future would be treated like one. He challenged me to say whether his statement was right or wrong, and when I maintained silence he shouted again and again, ‘Are you an animal? Am I right?’ until finally I replied, ‘You are right,’ and he concluded: ‘Then you know what sort of treatment to expect from tomorrow.’...

“The fourth examination was on Monday, March 19. It began about 11 a.m. At about 6 p.m. Ogasawara said that if I would admit giving the money to Matsumoto, we could then go on to investigate my motive for giving it. He went on talking for about half an hour, citing cases in which people had given money out of personal friendship, or because they were under some obligation to the person who asked for the money, and he said that inevitably in such cases they were soon released. Not feeling it my business to direct the course of conversation, I let him talk. Suddenly he said, ‘Now what was your motive?’ I realized the trap, and said vehemently, ‘As I never gave the money, how can I have had a motive.’ He exchanged incredulous glances with Suga and said, ‘Half an hour ago, you admitted giving it. We both saw you nodded your head. How could we be discussing motive otherwise.’...

“When finally they saw that I maintained my denial they went on to another point and worked out with me how I spent my monthly salary of 565 yen. After writing down all items, there was still a surplus of about two hundred yen which I did not know how I spent. ‘If you say you spent it in such and such a café we will go and investigate there for you,’ they offered, but I said, ‘I do not know how I spent it; I just spent it. I never keep account.’ Ogasawara wrote down the figures 200 yen on paper, telling me to stare at them until I remembered. For some minutes I stared at the figures in silence, in spite of their demands for an answer. Then Suga lost his temper and stamped on my toes. When I winced, he said, ‘Oh! So you are a human being after all, you can feel pain. Then answer.’

Hit With Baseball Bat

“My continued silence caused him to start kicking me on the leg, smacking my face and punching me on the ear. Finally turning to Ogasawara, he said, ‘It’s no use being gentle with this beast’ (*chikusho*), and going out of the room soon returned with a baseball bat. ‘It’s six years since I used this. I am a bit out of practice,’ he smiled. He made me sit up straight on the chair, asked the question once more, and when I did not answer gave me a crack

across both legs above the knee with the bat. The question was repeated again and again, each time with a blow on the legs or thigh, but they did not even make me remove my overcoat. It was not very painful, but I had sudden stomach ache. (The weather was cold and for seven days the only food I had been given was cold milk and bread and jam. My stomach was out of order and earlier in the day I had vomited twice.)

“Suga explained to me on the way that he hated to beat me; it hurt him more than it hurt me, but that there was no other way. They had their job to consider, and felt ashamed each day when Chief asked how the examination had proceeded and they could report no progress. After this interval Suga continued to hit me half-heartedly for some time, until finally they finished up the day’s examination at about 8:30 p.m.

“The next examination started at 11 a.m. on the next day (March 20) in the large smoking-room on the fifth floor of the Metropolitan Police headquarters. Ogasawara asked me questions and took down the answers in Japanese as police evidence. About 9 p.m. Suga discovered among papers seized from my house a translation from *Sekki* (The Red Flag) in my handwriting of the confession of an agent provocateur. ‘Is this *tsushin*?’ asked Ogasawara. Not realising for the moment how strong the word ‘*tsushin*’ (a report dispatched, especially one sent by a correspondent or reporter) was, I answered ‘Yes.’ He wrote that down and then followed a storm of questions. ‘Whom did I send these reports to?’... ‘What papers were they published in?’... ‘Did I get paid for the work?’... ‘How many times had I sent these reports since September...twenty, fifteen, ten, nine, eight, seven, six?’

Some “Massage”

“I was so tired and weak I could hardly speak. I begged them to stop the examination for that night, but they repeated their threats of keeping me all night... of giving me some ‘massage’...of calling in stronger men. At last I answered at random ‘Six times,’ and he gave me a pencil to write down details of each ‘report’. I said I could not remember the details, so Suga kicked me, smacked my face, punched me many times to help my memory, so he said, ‘No bed for you tonight,’ they threatened again and again, but the fact that such a course would mean no bed for them too comforted me somewhat...

“They then began pressing me as to who had given me ‘*Sekki*’ (The Red Flag). About this time the Assistant Chief, in kimono, came back. They reported satisfactory progress. He gave them permission to finish up for the night when I had answered who had given me the paper. He said to me ‘Come on, don’t waste time, anything will do as long as it’s an answer. Where did you get *Sekki* from? Man, woman, boy, girl, dog, cat...picked up in the street?’ Like a hypnotised person I answered, ‘man’... ‘A Japanese man?’ ...

‘yes’... ‘his name?’... ‘I can’t tell’... ‘all right write that down; that will do for to-night.’ He then came over to me and half-affectionately, half-threateningly curled his arm round my neck, saying, ‘You are a decent chap in many ways. I wonder when you’ll say the name. It was Masumoto, wasn’t it?’

“I did not answer, and he continued: ‘I am afraid these methods alone won’t get it out of you. We’ll have to get someone to give you some of this,’ and playfully he pretended to throttle me, uttering a strange sound of ‘Gurr, gurr’, each time he jerked his arm. Then, he took some paper from his kimono sleeve and kindly wiped my greasy face, as he said to the other, ‘We’ll have to get that other fellow (*aitau* [*sic*]) to string him up from the roof and give him something, and then perhaps he’ll talk. The only trouble is that I do not like that chap, so I don’t like to ask him.’ The others showed signs of appreciation of the jest. (Frequently afterwards Ogasawara used to say ‘Come on, answer, or we will give you some ‘gurr, gurr.’ I asked him to explain what ‘Gurr, gurr’ meant, but he did not.) The Assistant Chief then read out to me all the evidence taken down that day. I listened half-dazed, and then signed it.”

The second article appeared on 7 September. It said:

JAPAN’S PRISONER.
TEACHER’S ORDEAL.
STORY OF POLICE BEATING.

Published below is the second of two articles in which Mr William Maxwell Bickerton, a former Christchurch school teacher, who was imprisoned by the Japanese Government on the suspicion that he was concerned in Communist activity, has related his experiences at the hands of the police and the manner in which he was treated in goal. After a long detention Mr Bickerton was diplomatically allowed to escape by the Japanese police, and he is now in England.

“On Thursday, March 22, when I was brought to headquarters, I told Ogasawara that I wanted to retract what I had said at the last examination, as my brain had been so confused that I had let myself be persuaded into saying anything. Next day, after the British Consul had seen me, Suga looked extremely uncomfortable. He said I was the most selfish person he had ever known, always considering myself, never considering them, and talking a lot of rubbish to the Consul. But the atmosphere was noticeably changed. Ogasawara and Suga had a whispered conversation to decide, I gathered, what course to take in regard to my accusation made to the Consul, that Suga had beaten me. Ogasawara said to me that his own position was an extremely difficult one, and he asked for my sympathy. He had liked English people ever since he had guarded the Prince of Wales on his visit to Japan, but at the same time he had to do his duty as a police officer.

Hit With Bamboo Stick

“The Examination was discontinued at 5 p.m. but was resumed at noon next day. They asked who had given me *Sekki*, but I said I could never tell because that would be betraying a friend, so the atmosphere soon became tense. Suga went out of the room and came back with a bamboo fencing stick (*shinai*). Ogasawara locked the door and pulled down the blinds. Suga made me sit up straight in the chair while he stood on the right side and Ogasawara sat facing me. Then he started whacking me with the stick across both legs above the knees. ‘From whom did you get them?’ The question was repeated without any variations by both of them so many times that I thought something would snap in my mind. When Suga spoke they made me turn my head to the right to face him when I answered, and when Ogasawara spoke, I had to face him. Each time they asked the question Suga beat me.

“I appealed to Ogasawara to stop Suga, but he gave no answer. As the blows were renewed my voice gave out and I just sat silent. Finally, Ogasawara went out of the room and Suga became almost apologetic, saying he was forced to do this. His eyes were bloodshot and he was trembling. I said, ‘I realize that, and I bear no grudge personally but can’t you see for yourself that hitting gets you nowhere? Even if you kill me, I’ll never tell the name.’ When Ogasawara came back, Suga repeated the conversation to him, but the next minute the beating started again. Finally at 5.15 p.m. on the clock in the room, Suga sat down almost in a state of collapse. He shouted almost incoherently, ‘It’s no good, it’s no good. I can’t get anything out of this brute.’

Legs Sore and Bruised

“Eventually the pair received permission to go home and I was taken back to the police station. Next day both my legs were sore and bruised. On Monday I asked to see the Consul and Ogasawara promised to convey my wishes to the assistant-chief. I was questioned about a man whose photograph was shown to me and at intervals was kicked and had hot tea poured over my head. Next day I denied knowing a witness named Toshi Otsu, who said she knew me. As the Assistant-Chief let her out of the room he gave me two ringing smacks across the face. I do not wish to exaggerate but really it hurt, a little later when I was left alone with Ogasawara and Suga, they were both almost in a frenzy of rage.

“All the old threats and abuse were hurled at me again. Suga almost danced on my toes. He got his baseball bat and just hammered me on the right leg and thigh. He got me by the hair and banged my head again and again against a cupboard. They shouted again and again. ‘You do know her’ as Suga beat me. The pain in the leg was intense as he kept hitting in the same place as he had hit me on Saturday, but I remained silent. Finally he threw himself on a chair exhausted and said, ‘He is too much for me, the

beast. If he won't admit it in front of the girl, it's no good calling in the men witnesses. He's got no conscience, no shame, no honour. You'll have to get someone stronger than I to deal with him.'

Chief's Alternatives

"Later I saw the chief and he then put before me two alternatives; if I admitted everything probably I could get off with deportation, but if I admitted nothing I would have to be indicted and spend at least a year in prison awaiting trial, during which time I would not be permitted to communicate with anyone. I asked for the day to consider my decision and was given my first shave and taken back to my cell at 2 p.m. The various bruises were painful, especially the one above the right knee, where there was internal bleeding. Cell mates who had had similar experiences were very sympathetic and said that if left that leg would get stiff. So even if it hurt it must be massaged at once. I let one of them pound and pummel the bruises for me.

"Next day the question of beatings was raised when the chief at length said he would give me permission to hit back the next time one of his officers hit me. I thanked him. The chief then asked me how justice was done in England and the guilty brought to book unless the police had power to make suspected people confess. When I finally met the Consul at the Court it was exactly two weeks after the last beating, and the bruises had gone.

Inhuman Treatment

"This is all I have to say about the police examination itself. The inhuman treatment in the police cells, while of course not aimed specifically at me, nevertheless is calculated to break the spirit of any prisoner. I was confined in a four mat cell, measuring 12ft by 5.5ft, in which there were never less than nine, and sometimes as many as fourteen other prisoners. Among my cell-mates were three insane persons at different times, all of them raving. The brutality of the gaolers is beyond imagination. I was not beaten by them but the almost daily sight of other prisoners being stripped and beaten with sticks till their backs were a row of weals or kicked till they could not stand up, and all for very minor infringements of discipline, was hard to bear. One gaoler, Terao, took a special delight in tormenting me with petty censure every time he could.

"In prison conditions as I experienced them were very different and I have no complaints to make, except, of course, to say that the food is not suitable for Europeans. The gaolers were all decent to me, and the one especially in charge of me, Io, could not have been more kind. In the preliminary hearing of my case Judge Tokuda afforded me every kindness and I have no complaints to make, except to say that when I told him how the police had beaten me he displayed not the slightest interest."

The names of the policemen in charge of the interrogation of Bickerton were Ogasawara and Suga. The questions they asked focused on whether he had handed over money to Matsumoto or not and who gave him the *Sekki*. He denied both accusations. They summoned a female witness named Otsu Toshi who said that she had met Max; however, he denied this as well.

After he escaped to England, Bickerton published a trilogy of articles in the *Manchester Guardian* entitled "Third Degree in Japan," describing the torture he received during the interrogation. Later he wrote to a Japanese friend that he was proud of his silence during the arrest as this showed his comradeship and solidarity with his associates, Matsumoto and Kozai.

He also published an article about his experience in the Tōkyō police cell in an English journal *Political Quarterly*. In the article, he admires the communist prisoners' attitude and their strong discipline:

Up to the time of my own arrest I had little or no knowledge of the morale of the Japanese communists. Imprisonment among them gave me an inside knowledge of their calibre which would otherwise have been unattainable. Therefore I count my imprisonment as one of the most important experiences of my life. In the police cells, where I was detained, about forty per cent of the prisoners were communists. These political prisoners were mixed discriminately with petty thieves, dope peddlers, confidence men, and rogues and vagabonds generally.

I observed that always the communist prisoners had great personal prestige, and no matter how young they are the ordinary prisoners did not dare to bully them, but rather hung on their lips anxious to hear something of this new philosophy which kept its holders cheerful even in surroundings of filth and degradation. The invisible but none the less strong discipline existing among the communists I was soon to experience. On the second morning at wash-time, feeling disgusted with the lack of soap, toothbrush, etc., I gave myself only a perfunctory toilet, and went back to mope in the cell. One communist, aged twenty-one, in the same cell came over to me disapprovingly, and said: "You will never last out if you behave like that. You should wet your towel like we do, and then come back to the cell, and have a thorough rub-down all over; and while the jailer is busy supervising the others you get the chance to do a few physical exercises as well." I took the hint, and certainly found that this procedure enabled me to endure prison conditions much better. The communists are the only ones who thus discipline themselves.

Again when ordinary prisoners are beaten by the jailers for alleged infringements of discipline, they grovel and whine, begging for mercy. The communists on the other hand endure all such punishment with contempt. It so happened that most of the communists in our group of cells had already finished their police examination, and were therefore having a respite from

torture and third degree methods. “The first month is the worst: if you stick that you are right,” they impressed on me. Thus every morning when I was called out for examination the communists in the different cells (including seven women) would creep up to the bars and whisper as I passed: “*Doshi, gambare!*” (“Comrade, carry on,” is perhaps the nearest translation; but this Japanese *nil desperandum* has become a flaming inspiration, the watchword of the Communist Party in Japan.) As I returned at night from the ordeal, I felt the eyes of all the communists were upon me; and even if I was very late those in my cell would still be awake and awaiting my report.¹⁶

His Association and Friendship with Yoshishige Kozai

In 1967, Yoshishige Kozai wrote about his association and friendship with Max Bickerton during the 1930s in his article “Max Bickerton Kaisō” (Memory of Max Bickerton), published in the Japanese communist magazine *Bunka Hyōron* (Culture Review). One of Bickerton’s closest friends in Japan, Kozai wrote:

I was a member of the Plato and Aristotle Association, and, at one meeting in the autumn of 1931, I told one of the members that I was impressed by a book *Ten Days that Shook the World* by John Reed.¹⁷ Then he said that he knew an English man who was so impressed by the same book that he could not sleep for three days. A few days later, I was introduced to Bickerton by him at Bickerton’s lodging, which was above a sake shop near Surugadai. Bickerton was a handsome man with fair skin who had a sense of humour and wit. He was the same age as me. From the moment we met, there was a sense of instant rapport between us. I was also very impressed by his fluency in Japanese. We talked about American proletarian authors, such as John Reed and Michael Gold.¹⁸ There were copies of the journal *Senki* piled up in the corner of his room. A few days later I visited Bickerton’s apartment alone. He told me that he had donated money several times to *Senkisha* [publisher of the journal *Senki*] anonymously and asked me what else he could do for the activities. I was impressed with his knowledge of Japanese literature. He read the classics, including work of the haiku poet

16 Max Bickerton, “The Revolutionary Movement in Japan,” *Political Quarterly* 6 (1) (January–March 1935): 81–89.

17 John Reed (1887–1920) was an American journalist, poet, and communist activist. He was best known for his book *Ten Days that Shook the World*, which was his first-hand account of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1918.

18 Michael Gold (1893–1967) was a communist, proletarian novelist, and literary critic. He was a Jew, and his autobiographical novel *Jews without Money* was a best-seller in the 1930s.

Issa Kobayasi, and proletarian authors, such as Takiji Kobayashi,¹⁹ Yuriko Miyamoto,²⁰ and Sunao Tokunaga.²¹ His interest in Japanese culture included *Ikebana*, tea ceremony, and *Noh* theatre.

Bickerton and I read *Das capital* and *Shihon Shugi Hattenshi Kōza* (Lectures on the History of the Development of Capitalism) together ...

After I introduced him to Yoshimichi Iwata, Bickerton became a supporter of his activities. Bickerton later spoke of Iwata, in a letter to a Japanese friend, as the greatest person he had met during his time in Japan. In 1932, Iwata was arrested after he left Bickerton's apartment and was executed subsequently. The police never discovered that Bickerton had given refuge to Iwata. Bickerton and I enjoyed cycling, barbecuing, and swimming together. He was always calm and never lost his sense of humour even when he faced difficulties. The only occasion I saw Bickerton crying was when he heard the news that Iwata had been executed by the police.

I myself was arrested in June 1933 by the secret police under the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act but released later. Bickerton gave me some photos which he took during his sabbatical from April till September 1933. Our association was discontinued when Bickerton was arrested in 1934 and deported to England. In 1938, I was told that Bickerton had had his leg amputated.²² After that, I decided not to contact him in order to protect others around me ...

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- 19 Takiji Kobayashi (1903–33) was the most famous writer of proletarian literature in Japan. His work consists of short stories and novellas, all of which were expurgated when printed or banned outright until after the Second World War. On 20 February 1933, Kobayashi was exposed by an undercover policeman and arrested. He was tortured during interrogation and died in the process. His *Kanikōsen* (The Cannery Boat) is the most celebrated work in Japanese proletarian literature.
- 20 Yuriko Miyamoto (1899–1951) was born in Tōkyō to privileged parents. At an early age she was aware of the differences between her own circumstances and those of the farmers who worked on her family's land. While in her teens, she published a short story "Mazushiki Hito no Mure" (A Crowd of Poor People) in 1916 that dealt with this issue. She spent a number of years in Europe and the Soviet Union, and in 1934 she married a communist Kenji Miyamoto, who was imprisoned for twelve years from 1933 to 1945 and was a leader of the JCP from 1958 to 1970. She was a prominent writer of Japanese proletarian literature. Her work includes *Nobuko* and *Banshu Heiya* (The Banshu Plain).
- 21 Sunao Tokunaga (1899–1958) was born in Kumamoto, Kyūshū, to a peasant farmer. He worked various jobs from an early age to support his family and himself. He joined a trade union at the age of twenty-one and started writing proletarian novels. In 1929 his autobiographical novel *Taiyō no nai Machi* (The Town without the Sun) was published. After that he continued writing novels on proletarian themes. *Shizuka na Yamayama* (The Quiet Mountains) was translated into various languages and was popular among Russian readers in the 1950s.
- 22 This is not true.

After the Second World War, I could not find information on Bickerton. My only knowledge of him was that his translation of Japanese proletarian literature was published by Martin Lawrence of London. I asked a Japanese friend who was living in London to contact its publisher. This friend met a friend of Bickerton by chance in London and was able to meet Bickerton. After my friend returned to Japan, he received a letter from Bickerton, who wrote, “When I heard about my dear old friend Kozai, I was so surprised and joyful to know that Kozai had survived his years of hardship and is safe now. I was so grateful to you that you tried so hard to find my address for Kozai.” ...

In 1966, I was interviewed by Masao Maruyama for a piece that was published under the title of “Marukusu-shugi Tetsugakusha no Ayumi” (History of a Marxist Philosopher) in a monthly magazine called *Ekonomisuto* (Economist). Maruyama, one of Bickerton’s pupils, was a prominent political scientist and educationist.

A student of Bickerton sent this article from *Ekonomisuto* to him in London. After reading it, Bickerton wrote to him, saying, “Yoshimichi Iwata was the bravest and greatest Japanese man I met in Japan. I was also hugely impressed with Kozai, who talked about things which were secret thirty years ago in a matter-of-fact and calm manner. He did not mention it in the interview but did just before my escape from Japan. I secretly visited him while he was temporarily released from jail due to his TB. We talked all night long, staying away from the police.”

That night Bickerton disguised himself in dark sunglasses and visited me at my sick bed. He did not mention his escape, but he seemed to be impressed with me because I kept our secret. A few days later the newspapers reported his escape from Japan. Late last year I was informed of his sudden death. I would like to know his whole life right up to his death in detail. This task needs to be started immediately, but I wonder how many facts we would be able to gather given that he stayed single. One consolation is that he saw my article in *Ekonomisuto* before he died.²³

Bickerton’s Research on Japanese Literature and Translation of Proletarian Literature

Mastering the language after arriving in Japan in 1924, Bickerton was able to read Japanese, including classical literature. As time went on, he became fond of reading Japanese proletarian literature. He published two articles on Japanese literature in the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*: one in 1930 and the other in 1932. In those years this journal was the most prestigious Japanese academic journal written in

23 Yoshishige Kozai, “Max Bickerton Kaisō,” *Bunka Hyōron*, September 1967, 52–62. The article was translated from Japanese by the author Kano.

English.²⁴ The first article was an English translation of two stories written by Ichiyō Higuchi, who is regarded as the most important female author of the Meiji period.²⁵ One story was called “Wakare Michi” (The Parting of the Way), and the second one was “Takekurabe” (They Compare Heights), which was Ichiyō’s masterpiece. The latter was an abridged translation of the original story. Two years later, his second article appeared; it included an English translation of 149 haiku by Issa Kobayashi, who was a haiku poet of the late-Edo period.²⁶ This is the first English translation of Issa’s work.

Bickerton’s interest in proletarian literature included the journal *Puroretaria Bungaku* (Proletarian Literature) and works by Takiji Kobayashi, Sunao Tokunaga, and Yuriko Miyamoto. He translated several stories by proletarian writers into English, including Kobayashi Takiji’s masterpiece, *Kanikosen* (The Cannery Boat).²⁷ In 1930, he took a manuscript to America, where he met Michael Gold of New Masses, a publishing company specializing in left-wing books in the USA. His manuscript was accepted to

- 24 The Asiatic Society of Japan is Japan’s oldest academic society, founded in 1872, five years after the Meiji restoration, in Yokohama by a group of British and American residents who were mainly missionaries, diplomats, and businessmen. The society’s main aim is to publish an academic journal on Asian themes. Its past members include James Hepburn, Ernest Satow, Harrington Gibbons, Basil Chamberlain, Edwin Reischauer, Inazō Nitobe, Daisetsu Suzuki, and Masaharu Anesaki. It is still active today. Its journal, *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, has been published annually since 1874.
- 25 Max Bickerton, trans., “Two Stories by Ichiyō Higuchi,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 7 (December 1930): 120–31. Ichiyō Higuchi (1872–96) was born in Tōkyō into a well-off family, but, after her father’s death when she was seventeen years old, she was the sole provider of the family and lived in hardship and poverty until her death at the age of twenty-four. She started writing *waka* at the age of fourteen and later wrote novels and journals. She is the first woman to have her image used on Japanese currency. Her work includes *Takekurabe* (They Compare Heights), *Nigorie* (The Cloudy Picture), and *Jūsan-ya* (The Thirteenth Night).
- 26 Max Bickerton, “Issa’s Life and Poety,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 9 (1932): 111–53. Issa Kobayashi (1763–1827) was born in the province of Shinano (now Nagano Prefecture) to a middle-class farmer. His mother died when he was three, and five years later his father remarried. His whole life was a constant struggle with family affairs, such as an antagonistic relationship with his stepmother, his marriages and divorce, and the deaths of his first wife and children. He became a haiku poet as well as a lay Buddhist priest of the Jūdo Sinshū sect. He is well known for his haiku and journals and regarded as one of the four haiku masters in Japan, along with Bashō (by whom he was most influenced), Buson, and Shiki. His name was Yatarō, but he chose Issa (a cup of tea) as his haiku name. He composed over 20,000 haiku, which are characterized by down-to-earth, everyday expressions and animal images, a childlike simplicity, witty conversational phrases, and expressions of poverty.
- 27 When Takiji Kobayashi was twenty-six years old, he wrote *Kanikōsen*, which deals with the brutal conditions under which several hundred men and boys slave aboard a cannery boat in the Okhotsk Sea. The story has been made into a film twice, and the second film was made in 2009, when the book became a best-seller, reflecting the economic depression of the time. The book has been translated into English twice. The first translation was done by Max Bickerton, and the second was done by Frank Motofuji under the title *The Factory Ship: And, The Absentee Landlord*, which was published by University of Washington Press in 1973.

be published by International Publisher in New York with the assistance of Gold. The book, entitled *The Cannery Boat and Other Japanese Short Stories*, was published by a London publisher, Martin Lawrence, in 1933, while Bickerton was still living in Japan. It contained eleven short stories by eight proletarian authors as well as Bickerton's article "Takiji Kobayashi Murdered by Police."²⁸ This was the first book on Japanese proletarian literature to appear in English translation. However, Bickerton's name as a translator was not mentioned in the book. Instead, the Publisher's Note said:

The virile proletarian literary movement in Japan has, for some years now, had connection with other countries, notably China, the U.S.S.R. and Germany. But this is the first representation of it in English. The stories are translated by various hands and give a clear view of its notable character. The movement has had to fight not only against disruptive ideological enemies in the same field, but also against bitter Government oppression, witnessed in the extreme case by the death of Takiji Kobayashi, recorded at the end of this volume.²⁹

Presumably, Bickerton intentionally concealed his name as a translator for fear of being arrested by the Japanese police. The book was reprinted in 1968 by Greenwood Press in New York, and Bickerton's role is acknowledge there.³⁰

Life after Leaving Japan

Max Bickerton arrived in London in early July 1934. There he found a job managing three book shops run by the English Communist Party. He went to China in 1938 to assist Rewi Alley, and in Hong Kong he was connected with the Colonial Secretary's office and was made a prisoner of war in 1939. In *China to Me: A Partial Autobiography*, Emily Hahn, an American journalist and author who was in Hong Kong during the Japanese occupation, wrote:

One of the results of the surrender was that there was a rush on the part of the leftists, Hilda's friends, to save their skins. I suppose I had better

28 Takiji Kobayashi, *The Cannery Boat* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1933) includes the following stories: "The Cannery Boat," by Takiji Kobayashi (chapters one to five and a summary of the remaining five chapters); "Man Who Did Not Applaud," by Seikichi Fujimori; "The Fifteenth of March, 1928," by Takiji Kobayashi; "The Factory in the Sea," by Denji Kuroshima; "For the Sake of Citizens," by Takiji Kobayashi; "The Monument," by Sanji Kishi; "Linesman," by Teppei Takaoka; "The Misleader Goes Abroad," by Sanji Kishi; "The Efficiency Committee," by Naoshi [*sic*] Tokunaga; "Lieutenant Kusama," by Seikichi Fujimori; "Cocoons," by Fusao Hayashi; "Takiji Kobayashi Murdered by Police," by Max Bickerton.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Max Bickerton, *The Cannery Boat by Takiji Kobayashi and Other Japanese Short Stories*, reprint (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

not use names. Except for Jim Bertram,³¹ who simply enlisted with the volunteers and fought, and was captured, and in general behaved well, and Max Bickerton, who did his jobs too and made no attempt to get away.³²

After the Second World War, Bickerton went to China and worked for the Chinese Industrial Co-operation (CIC) in Shanghai, helping Rewi Alley. This organization was set up to support victims of the Sino-Japanese War and received relief from overseas countries. According to an article he wrote for the *New Zealand Listener*, Bickerton helped Rewi Alley transport twenty-five sheep from Shanghai to Shantang. The sheep were donated by CORSO, a New Zealand charitable organization.³³

In a letter sent from Beijing to his half-sister Noni, he mentioned that he wanted to study Chinese and become an English teacher there.³⁴ It seems that his dream was realized for a while. According to John Haffenden's biography of Empson, Bickerton turned up in Beijing in 1949 and took a teaching post at Peita. However, three years later, the communists threw him out of his job at the university and out of his room on the campus.³⁵

After returning to London, he became a tenant of a studio house in Hampstead Hills Garden which was owned by William and Hetta Empson and remained there until his death. In 1952 Bickerton started a private English language school, drawing pupils from among the families of foreign embassies.³⁶ When Kozai Yoshishige managed to trace him in 1956 with the help of one of his friends who was living in London, Bickerton was teaching English at Holborn College and wanted to go back to Japan, where his second home town was. Bickerton retired from Holborn College a few years before his death in 1966 and was teaching English to foreigners at another junior college.³⁷

Towards the end of his life, Bickerton seems to have suffered chest pain. In a letter to Noni, dated a few weeks before his death, he wrote:

My health is very much better now that I only teach 9 hours a week and now that my appetite is so good although my weight obstinately remains at 8 stone 7. I only get the chest pains about once a week now instead of every night.

31 James Bertram (1910–93) was a journalist, writer, relief worker, prisoner of war, and a university professor. He was born in Auckland and was working for the China Defence League in Hong Kong.

32 Emily Hahn, *China to Me: A Partial Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Blackstone Company, 1944), 295.

33 Max Bickerton, "Only a Beginning," *New Zealand Listener*, 20 June 1947, 7.

34 Max Bickerton to Noni Bickerton (given name: Wainoni Gladys Bickerton), 27 June 1948, private collection.

35 John Haffenden, *William Empson, Volume 2: Against the Christians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 185–86.

36 *Ibid.*, 381.

37 Kozai, "Max Bickerton Kaisō," 62.

The reason I did not answer your letters sooner is that I have been going through a period of depression and so I did not write a depressing letter to you. I believe it is something that most people go through when they retire and I have really no reason for it because I am comparatively lucky.

The depression seems to have lifted lately. The arrival of 10 new roses which I had ordered from Harkness with \$10 which an old friend sent me from America made me very happy.³⁸

Bickerton had never married and died suddenly on 20 November 1966 from a heart attack.

Forgotten Japanologist: Max Bickerton

In the 1930s Japan was heading into the imperialism which led to the Second World War, and the communist party's activities were severely repressed. Bickerton could have been the first western Japanese Communist Party member. An article in *Tōkyō Nichinichi Shinbun*, dated 22 May 1934, said:

In October 1933 [Bickerton] accepted the offer to become a member of the Japanese Communist Party and submitted his curriculum vitae to the party. He was the first foreigner to apply for membership, but, before the party had reached a decision, the committee members, including Eitarō Noro, who received the application, were arrested. Thus, his application to become the first foreign Communist Party member was not realized.³⁹

Bickerton published two academic articles on Japanese literature in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*. In these, he introduced Ichiyō's work and Issa's life and haiku to English readers for the first time. He was also a pioneer of English translation of Japanese proletarian literature.

Although his stay in Japan lasted less than ten years, his contribution of introducing Japanese proletarian literature to English readers should be acknowledged. If his translation *The Cannery Boat and Other Japanese Short Stories* is ever to be reprinted in the future, Bickerton's name as the translator should be mentioned.

To conclude this article, here is a haiku by Issa and Bickerton's translation:

Ware to kite
asobe ya oya no
nai suzume

38 Max Bickerton to Noni Bickerton, 5 November 1966, private collection.

39 Translated from Japanese by the author Kano.

Oh, won't some orphan sparrow
Come and play with me⁴⁰

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Biographical Note

Fuji Kano, former Senior Lecturer in Japanese, Victoria University of Wellington, died in 2011. Maurice Ward is a Teaching Advisor (Educational Design) at Lincoln University. The substantive work in researching this article was done by Kano.

40 Bickerton, “Issa’s Life and Poetry,” 112.