

It was initially difficult for the Tomioka Silk Mill to find workers because of an unusual rumor that the French director Paul Brunat (1840–1908) and the other French employees drank blood. This rumor started when the locals saw the French workers drinking red wine, which was not common in Japan at the time. Overcoming this cultural understanding, Odaka Junchu's (1830–1901) 14-year-old daughter Odaka Yu (1859–1923) bravely volunteered to be the first female mill worker, and her example led others to follow. Silk reeling was generally done by young women because it requires good eyesight and dexterity, and the mill hired many unmarried women between the ages of 15 and 25. Women from all over Japan found work at the mill, and at one point over 400 “factory girls” were employed there.