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Author	富田, 裕子(Tomida, Hiroko)
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# The Legacy of the Japanese Bluestocking Society: its influence upon literature, culture and women's status

Hiroko Tomida

## Introduction

2011 was the centennial of the founding of the Japanese Bluestocking Society, known as the Seitōsha, and the foundation of the society's magazine '*Bluestocking*' (*Seitō*). To commemorate these anniversaries an international symposium, public lectures, seminars and exhibitions were all held in Japan. Although the Seitōsha and *Seitō* have been well researched in Japan, publications on them have tended to focus on their influence upon female literature, and have overlooked their social and historical aspects. Existing studies have lacked interdisciplinary and comparative international approaches. Until 2000 publications on these topics in English were very limited and mainly analysed the contributions which *Seitō* made as a women's literary magazine or as the first feminist magazine, consulting mainly English secondary sources. Later a small number of books on *Seitō*, the founder of the Seitōsha, Hiratsuka Raichō who was also *Seitō*'s first editor, and an English translation of her autobiography *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun* were published. These significantly expanded English language studies on these fields.<sup>1</sup> Less attention has been given to the history of *Seitō* itself, its inauguration and its reception. A more contextualised treatment of the Seitōsha and *Seitō* is still required.

This article covers four major areas. First the background of Hiratsuka Raichō is provided. Secondly the founding of the Seitōsha and the inauguration of its magazine are put into context. Thirdly the Seitōsha is examined. Fourthly special attention is drawn to *Seitō*: its establishment, aims, editorial board, contributors, change of editor – from Hiratsuka Raichō to Itō Noe and its demise. Some comparisons are made between *Seitō* and Japanese women's magazines of the time. How far was *Seitō* influenced by Western literary genres? What impact did it have on Japanese society at that time? How did it promote women's status, and what contributions did it make to the Japanese women's movement? Finally this article investigates the

reasons for its long popularity and its legacy.

#### Background information about Hiratsuka Raichō

The Seitōsha was founded in spring 1911 by Hiratsuka Raichō, the daughter of a government official. She was exceptionally well-educated compared with most of the women who were her contemporaries in Japan. She studied at Japan Women's University, founded in 1901 by Naruse Jinzō, a pioneering educationalist. He had researched women's education in America and had also been inspired by women's higher educational institutions in Britain which he had observed when he visited the country.<sup>2</sup> Due to this strong Western influence, he valued academic education and laid emphasis on English language teaching. Indeed he employed Glynis Phillips, a graduate from Newnham College, a women's college in Cambridge, as a lecturer. He also offered a visiting professorship to Elizabeth Hughes, the first Principal of the Cambridge Training College of Female Teachers in 1901 when she stayed in Japan for 18 months after her retirement.<sup>3</sup> Hughes gave lectures on English poetry and novels. Such training in English given by experienced native speakers was extremely beneficial to Hiratsuka and deepened her appreciation of Western literature, especially when she later translated many English works into Japanese for her literary magazine *Seitō*.

Hiratsuka also joined the Keishū Literary Society (Keishū Bungakukai) which provided classes on Japanese and Western literature and aimed to produce outstanding female writers. She was taught by the eminent female poet, Yosano Akiko as well as enlightened literary men including Ikuta Chōkō. Hiratsuka began to compose *tanka* and *haiku* poems and to write a novel. The Society made a great impression on her, and provided a stimulating apprenticeship in literature and writing skills. Active membership of the society was a significant experience which was valuable for the future Seitōsha and *Seitō*. The Keishū Literary Society itself had real potential to develop into a successful women's literary society. However, it came to an abrupt end because of a highly public scandal known as the Shiobara Incident in 1908, an attempted double suicide involving Hiratsuka and a lecturer of the Society, Morita Sōhei who was married with a child. Although they were not well-known, the incident received much public attention. In particular, the press made concentrated attacks on Hiratsuka. The incident transformed her life, reducing her social status. Formerly perceived as an innocent, well-brought-up daughter from a respectable family with good marital prospects, she was castigated as a notorious young woman who had tried to destroy Morita's marriage and who had disgraced her family.

Three years after the incident, Hiratsuka's mentor Ikuta Chōkō, a writer and

literary critic who was distressed by the scarcity of female writers in Japanese literary circles, became convinced of the need for a women's literary society to unite existing female authors who were isolated in the literary fields, and to recruit talented female writers. As he had previously taught Hiratsuka at Keishū Literary Society and discerned her literary talent, he pinned his hopes on her and strongly recommended her to found a women's literary society and launch its magazine.<sup>4</sup> Hiratsuka's involvement in the Shiobara Incident further commended her, as the scandal showed her independence of spirit.

#### Historical background

Although considerable new legislation was promulgated after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, none of it significantly upgraded women's status, and Japanese women continued to be deprived of political, legal, economic and marital rights. Some legislation even downgraded women's position. Indeed, the Meiji Civil Code, which was promulgated in 1898 and stemmed from the warrior family system in the Edo period, was most detrimental to Japanese women since the Code's main objective was to codify family lineage and a patriarchal family system. The ideal woman then was considered to be one who had strong loyalty and patriotism, womanly virtues based on Confucian teaching and served as a faithful servant to husband or head of family. However, a few improvements were made to promote women's status. The increase in the literacy rates for women due to the Fundamental Education Law (*Gakusei*) in 1872, which introduced compulsory elementary education regardless of sex, was a good example. The availability of expanded higher education for girls, slightly broadened job prospects for girls, spreading urbanization in Tokyo, the advancement of print journalism, and the global exchange of ideas in art, philosophy and sociology all contributed to the *Seitōsha* and the creation of *Seitō*. The only field open to educated women to challenge the conditions of their subordination and to promote their rights was through writing. It was from this context that the *Seitōsha* and *Seitō* emerged.

The birth of the *Seitōsha* in 1911 was closely connected with the social and political conditions of the time. The Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) had an impact not only on Japan's industrializing economy and its international power base, but also on increased nationalist sentiment and indeed militarism. The government enacted the Press Law in 1909, whose major objective was 'thought control'. Thought Police (*Tokkō*) were also established in 1912 to suppress socialist and labour movements. The government adopted a ruthless attitude towards socialists and anarchists. A chilling example of this was the High Treason Incident (*Taigyaku Jiken*) in 1910, an

alleged plot to assassinate the emperor, which led to twelve socialists and anarchists being arrested and sentenced to death. The government introduced an educational policy to create strong armed forces and to exercise absolute power. In a reaction to this repressive social and political climate there emerged reforming initiatives led by white-collar workers and the intelligentsia including teachers and journalists, whose number had increased as a result of economic growth. They objected to such government control and wished to promote democracy, taking the initiative in organizing public demonstrations throughout Japan to object to the government's repression. During the Taishō period democratic or pluralistic ideas proved increasingly influential. Such ideas were imported partly through Western literature and drama, and exerted a powerful hold particularly on young people. Many wished to escape from 'feudalistic' ideas and emancipate themselves from convention, and movements dedicated to such ends emerged. The liberal and radical mood of the period was labelled 'Taishō Democracy'.

Comparable developments emerged in literature. The Naturalist (shizenshugi) Literary Movement produced novelists such as Shimazaki Tōson and Tayama Katai. Although this movement peaked in 1906–1910, it was central to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese literature. Shimazaki's *House (Ie)* and Tayama's *A Country Teacher (Inaka Kyōshi)* were most significant because their main theme was self-development. They reflected the mood of the times, which aimed to break down conventionalism, to escape from family and social ties, and pursue ideas of freedom. Such male writers' advocacy of emancipation had an enormous influence on would-be women writers.

The literary magazine *White Birch (Shirakaba)*, launched in 1910, openly criticized established authority, and introduced important works of Western authors such as Tolstoy and Romain Rolland. *Shirakaba* created a sensation in the world of literature and gave its readers courage to live more freely. For the majority of women, opportunities for higher education were lacking as they were very much absorbed in the consuming physical labour of domesticity. As a result, they did not see significant historical events such as the High Treason Incident and the death of the Emperor Meiji as relevant to them. However, both the Naturalist Literary Movement and *Shirakaba* had an influential effect upon middle-class women who had received higher education. They learned ideas of self-awakening and self-development, and became more aware of the severe sexual discrimination and constraints they faced. The founding of the Seitōsha and the inauguration of *Seitō* are indicative of the atmosphere of liberalism and democracy in early 1910s Japan.

## The Seitōsha

The Seitōsha was named after the British women's literary and intellectual circle, the Bluestocking Society established in the early 1750s by Lady Elizabeth Montagu. The name was deliberately chosen for Hiratsuka's new women's literary society. According to her autobiography, it was Ikuta Chōkō, who had extensive knowledge of Western literature and was particularly impressed with the writing of Western women, who first broached the idea.<sup>5</sup> The Seitōsha expected to receive criticism because it was a literary project run only by women. Adopting the name 'The Bluestocking Society' anticipated this criticism with some bravado.

Although many people believe that the Seitōsha was a feminist society from the beginning, this idea is incorrect. As Article 1 of the general regulations of the Seitōsha demonstrated, its main objectives were to advance the level of women's literature, and allow women to manifest their talents, and to recruit female literary genius.<sup>6</sup> Hiratsuka placed high hopes in contemporary women, wanting to redress prejudices claiming that women were incompetent, and to stimulate young women of literary talent. She wished the Seitōsha to become a women's literary society.

The members of the Seitōsha were divided into three categories: supporting members, founding members and ordinary members.<sup>7</sup> Its regulations stated that female literary authorities who consented to the objectives of the Seitōsha were eligible to become supporting members.<sup>8</sup> Five founding members, including Hiratsuka, were all unmarried, well-educated upper-middle class women in their early twenties. Their fathers were professionals who appreciated women's education. All except one were graduates of Japan Women's University.

Article 5 of the regulations of the Seitōsha stated that any woman who consented to its objectives and was a recognized literary figure or a literature enthusiast was entitled to become an ordinary member.<sup>9</sup> The Seitōsha during Hiratsuka's period was a 'bourgeois' society in which working women, including school teachers and journalists, were a minority.<sup>10</sup> Men were generally excluded, and only a handful of men, who agreed with its intentions, were sympathetic to its activities and were respected by the Seitōsha women, were permitted to become visiting members.<sup>11</sup> In this regard the Seitōsha was different from the English Bluestocking Society which welcomed many eminent men including Samuel Johnson as regular members who helped young female members develop their literary talents and gain inspiration.

The major activities that the Seitōsha organised were regular meetings, publication of its magazine *Seitō* and public lectures. The first lecture meeting on 'new women' was held on 15 February 1913 at the YWCA Hall in Kanda, Tokyo.<sup>12</sup> Its main objective was to discuss women's subjects openly with a female audience.

Although it was well attended, contrary to Hiratsuka's expectations, about two-thirds of the audience were men who were curious about the Seitōsha women.<sup>13</sup> As a result, Seitōsha members could not be fully engaged in serious discussion about women's causes with an exclusively female audience because they were heckled by men and felt intimidated.

However, the lecture meeting provoked the foundation of another women's society, the Real New Women's Association (Shin Shin Fujinkai) in March 1913, which became the Seitōsha's rival. It was founded by Nishikawa Fumiko who had been involved with the early socialist and other women's political movements.<sup>14</sup> Nishikawa disapproved of the Seitōsha women being called 'new women', and in competition called herself and other members of the Association 'real new women', wanting to retain the favourable implications of the term 'new women'.<sup>15</sup> Although journalists paid great attention to these rival contemporary women's societies, they reported them rather superficially and did not take either very seriously. The Association, which had many working-class members, had the more serious objective of elevating the position of women. This involved (among other things) the promotion of female job opportunities, the realization of gender equality and women's suffrage. It was more concerned with these issues than the Seitōsha, and had much potential to develop into an equivalent of a Western women's organization such as the Women's Social and Political Union.<sup>16</sup> Hiratsuka criticized the Real New Women's Association on the grounds that it had been founded to attack the Seitōsha, rather than having its own serious goals.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, many people have readily accepted her verdict on the Association, contributing to its obscurity in the history of the Japanese women's movement.

The achievements of the Seitōsha were mainly literary, uniting women with literary interests who had previously been isolated in male-controlled circles, and providing women with an ideal place to discuss literature, to exchange views and ideas, and to comment on each other's work. Members of the Seitōsha became an intimate, self-supporting women's literary network. It is uncertain to what extent Hiratsuka was aware of the record of the British Bluestocking Society, but the Seitōsha's accomplishments resembled those of the British society, which successfully recruited female novelists. The latter did not publish a magazine, but the Japanese equivalent did.

#### The inauguration of *Seitō* and its development

Soon after the foundation of the Seitōsha, its key members realized the need to provide members with space to publish their works and launched the literary



magazine *Seitō*. One thousand copies of the inaugural issue of *Seitō* were printed on 1 September 1911.<sup>18</sup> According to the women's historian Miki Hiroko, about 150 women's magazines had predated *Seitō*. So how was *Seitō* different?<sup>19</sup> Almost all such publications hitherto were edited by men. Although *Women of the World* (*Sekai Fujin*) and *Women's Companions* (*Fujin no Tomo*) were edited by women, the editorial advisors were men.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, *Seitō* was edited and controlled entirely by women, which destroyed the widely accepted view that women were incapable of running a magazine. Apart from a few male writers whose works appeared in special issues, almost all the contributors to *Seitō* were women. This became one of the most notable characteristics of *Seitō*. While the majority of these earlier women's magazines folded after the first few issues, *Seitō* lasted more than five years.<sup>21</sup>

Most issues of *Seitō* comprised articles, translations, book reviews, messages from the editorial members, a notice of the next issue, the general regulations of the Seitōsha, a list of its members, the guidelines for potential contributors, information for subscribers, and many advertisements which helped to finance the running cost.

*Seitō* was greatly influenced by the Naturalist Literary Movement and the literary magazine *Shirakaba*. Although this was edited by a man and mainly published the work of prominent male writers, the magazines shared an interest in personal fiction, cosmopolitanism and art.

However, it was one thing for men to write from a male perspective, which was, after all, what audiences were accustomed to. In contrast, it was very rare to read articles written from a female perspective. The barriers women faced as artists brought them face-to-face with gender politics in ways that men were not accustomed to.

Among all *Seitō* issues, the most influential one was the inaugural issue, which was composed of articles and translations by women, with the front cover drawn by Naganuma Chieko. In particular, Yosano Akiko's opening poem 'A rambling talk' ('Sozorogoto') and Hiratsuka's manifesto 'In the beginning woman was the sun' ('Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta') had much influence. Yosano, who broke new ground in the field of *tanka*, expressed her admiration for the Seitōsha women's resolution to express their opinions, to claim their own identities and to exhibit their potential. She advocated women's emancipation in 'Sozorogoto' which began:

The day has arrived when the mountains are about to become active. People do not believe me when I say this. The mountains have simply been dormant for a while. In those times long ago the mountains all erupted with fire, and were alive. Even so, you need not hold such views. O people believe only this, now all



the women who lay dormant are rousing themselves.<sup>22</sup>

The mountains are of course a metaphor for women, appropriate for a country such as Japan. The poem evokes the belief that in ancient times Japan had a matrilineal society in which women, being as dynamic and active as the volcanic mountains, exercised considerable influence. By the time of Shōgunate warrior rule which began in 1192, the position of women had fallen and declined even further as social status became dependent upon military structures. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century virilocal marriage and patrilineal systems were reinforced. Even in the early modern Edo period women's status continued to fall, and women resigned themselves to subservient roles. After a long period of submission, women were finally awakening. They were about to speak their minds and seek emancipation, like dormant volcanic mountains erupting. This poem and its metaphoric language certainly inspired young women. Similarly Hiratsuka wrote her manifesto 'Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta' which begins:

In the beginning, woman was truly the sun. An authentic person. Now, woman is the moon. Living dependent on others, reflecting their brilliance. She has the moon's face, and its unhealthy pallor. And now, *Seitō* cries, newly born. Created by the brains and hands of today's Japanese women. *Seitō* cries, newly born. Women's undertaking is only sneered at, but I am convinced that there is hidden potential there...Make us continue ceaselessly with our ardent prayer and spiritual concentration. Make us do these to the best of our ability until the day when we will bring hidden female talent into the open, until the day when the hidden sun begins to shine again. On that day we will rule everything, the entire world will fall into our hands. On that day woman will no longer be the moon. On that day she will become the sun, as in the beginning. She will become an authentic person.<sup>23</sup>

The manifesto called up ancient times when women had authority, as in Yosano's poem. Instead of volcanic mountains used as metaphors for women, Hiratsuka took the sun and moon. Contemporary women, who were underprivileged, virtual slaves to male autocracy, treated as second-rate and powerless under the patriarchal system, were described as the moon. The women in ancient times, who were said to have had more power, were portrayed as akin to the sun, in line with the Amaterasu myth, emerging to irradiate the world. Hiratsuka, who believed in women's potentiality and wanted to encourage their talent and capability, celebrated an image of future

womankind as full of promise and aspiration with her sun symbolism.

Hiratsuka's call for women's self-awakening was augmented by another graduate from Japan Women's University, Naganuma Chieko's front cover illustration.<sup>24</sup> The illustration, a full-length woman's figure wearing sleeveless Western dress and facing upwards, looked more like a classical or Egyptian goddess sent to liberate helpless Japanese women. It was indeed different from the conventional and predictable covers of other women's magazines which predated *Seitō*. This image also encapsulated ideas circulating about the modern, Western-influenced 'new woman' who was imagined as being well-educated, confident and advanced, and was about to challenge old customs and conventions which tied Japanese women down. The illustration was certainly eye-catching and appealed to young women.

The initial issue was greeted with enthusiasm by women with literary interests.<sup>25</sup> The press coverage of the inaugural issue of *Seitō* was also favourable and helped to legitimize and publicize the women's literary initiative. A review in *Akita Sakigake Shimpō*, a local liberal newspaper, was most complimentary and stated that 'If *Seitō* has truly been produced in all regards only by women, as it claims, it deserves much compliment. We look forward to its promising future, which may give new scope to the advancement of women's literature.'<sup>26</sup>

The inaugural issue of *Seitō* coincided with the first production in Japan of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The play was performed by the Literary Society (Bungei Kyōkai) founded by Tsubouchi Shōyō, a professor of Waseda University and an authority on Western literature, who gave a series of lectures on Western 'new women' including Nora, the heroine of *A Doll's House*. The play was widely discussed by literary people and reviewed in eminent literary magazines, and the women associated with *Seitō* wanted to see and discuss it. They published a special issue on *A Doll's House* in January 1912. Almost all the responses of *Seitō* contributors to its heroine Nora, who left her husband and children, resembled those of Western female readers and audiences. They saw Nora's decision as inevitable and respected her. They also felt that Nora's self-awakening was a women's problem common to them. The Japanese public was soon associating the *Seitō* women with the new woman images of Nora and other real and fictional women whose stories were communicated from the West.<sup>27</sup> Women connected with *Seitō* took pride in being called 'new women' and even adopted the name.

The literary and favourable responses *Seitō* received were damaged by two seemingly trivial 'scandals'. The first was known as 'the five coloured liquor incident' ('Goshiki no sake Jiken'). Both were caused by Otake Kōkichi, one of the youngest members in the group.<sup>28</sup> In the column called 'From the editorial room' in *Seitō* she

introduced an exotic cocktail with five colours, which was in fashion in France.<sup>29</sup> Although she had never tasted it, she wrote as if she had. On another occasion in *Seitō* she reported a drinking party attended by women associated with *Seitō*, giving the impression that they were heavy drinkers.<sup>30</sup> As drinking was still a male prerogative, most Japanese people were scandalised and objected that *Seitō* members were well-educated young women, not geisha.<sup>31</sup>

This incident was followed by an even worse scandal, when the *Seitōsha* women visited the Yoshiwara (the licensed red-light district near Tokyo).<sup>32</sup> Otake's uncle, a *Seitō* supporter, invited women associated with *Seitō* to visit the Yoshiwara because he felt that they could not discuss women's issues without understanding the lives of women in brothels. Three *Seitō* members including Hiratsuka went to a brothel, and talked to a courtesan. Although this visit should have been kept secret, Otake Kōkichi thoughtlessly mentioned it to journalists. The Yoshiwara was a male pleasure realm, an inappropriate place for respectable women. Many misleading and gossipy articles about *Seitō* members appeared, even in leading newspapers.<sup>33</sup> The readers of these misinterpreted *Seitō* women as untrustworthy and promiscuous. The good reputation which *Seitō* had garnered was completely ruined.<sup>34</sup> It lost many contributors and subscribers, especially in provincial areas.<sup>35</sup> Some *Seitō* contributors began to write under pseudonyms to hide their identities.<sup>36</sup>

Women connected with *Seitō* remained a constant target of media and public criticism. Although Hiratsuka kept silent for a while, and did not attempt to defend their actions, the journalistic interest in them continued to escalate. She came to realize that drastic action needed to be taken to overcome the crisis, and wrote a powerful essay announcing herself to be 'a new woman' for the distinguished magazine *Chūō Kōron*. Her declaration went as follows:

I am a new woman. Day by day I seek and make every effort to be the true new woman I want to be. The only thing which is truly and eternally renewed is the Sun. I am the Sun. Day by day I seek and make every effort to be the Sun I want to be... A new woman places a curse on 'yesterday'. She can no longer endure silently and obediently to walk the path which an oppressed old-fashioned woman walked. A new woman is not satisfied with the life of an oppressed old woman, who was made ignorant, made a man's slave and was treated as nothing but a lump of meat by male selfishness. A new woman wishes to destroy old morals and laws, which were created for men's convenience...A new woman not only attempts to destroy old morals and laws which were built out of male selfishness, but day by day she attempts to create a new kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

There is little to compare with this declaration in international feminist literature. Equating herself again with the Sun goddess, Amaterasu, Hiratsuka proclaimed herself a 'new woman'. The essay reveals her vigour and overwhelming determination to protest against male-dominated Japanese society and to transform it into a better place for women. She tried in this very personal and sympathetic way to protect *Seitō* from public condemnation, and to redeem its reputation.

Apart from her essay Hiratsuka also published two special issues on 'new women' in *Seitō* to overcome the enmity. The first one entitled 'New women and other women's issues' ('Atarashii onna sonota fujin mondai ni tsuite') published in January 1913, gave women connected to *Seitō* an ideal opportunity to rectify twisted images of themselves and discuss 'What is a "new woman"?' and 'How does a true "new woman" need to behave?'<sup>38</sup>

The second one published in February 1913 included articles by well-known male writers such as Abe Jirō and Iwano Hōmei, and the female socialist, Fukuda Hideko, since Hiratsuka wanted to air male viewpoints as well as socialist women's opinions. In her article 'The solution to the woman question' ('Fujin mondai no kaiketsu') Fukuda argued that women's emancipation in a real sense would only be achieved in a socialist society.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of Hiratsuka's efforts, the special issues failed to meet her expectations. The first issue was unsuccessful mainly because most contributors made imprecise remarks about 'new women'. The second issue was promptly banned by the Ministry of the Interior on the grounds that Fukuda's article proclaimed socialist views and that these disturbed public security and order.<sup>40</sup> However, the special issues marked a significant change in the direction of *Seitō*, transforming it from a women's literary magazine into a women's magazine with a feminist inclination, addressing serious questions concerning women. It began to publish more articles on women's issues such as education, jobs, health and the like. It also discussed women's marital and family problems, and later its topics extended to more radical women's issues such as abortion and infanticide.

These special issues prompted much controversy among authors and educationalists. There was a journalistic boom in 'new women' in 1913. Active discussion of a wide range of women's issues began to develop, not only in women's magazines but also in more general and renowned magazines, such as *Chūō Kōron* and *Taiyō*, which had much larger circulations.<sup>41</sup> Women's causes had finally become a major public concern.

Many female readers of *Seitō* began to send letters expressing doubts about their lives to Hiratsuka, asking her advice. Some readers, notably those who suffered

from serious domestic problems, appeared on the Seitōsha's doorstep, pleading with Hiratsuka for assistance.<sup>42</sup>

Hiratsuka, who wanted to help vulnerable women, began to write articles in *Seitō* from 1913 criticizing the existing marriage system.<sup>43</sup> She described the lives of many wives as 'being no more than their husbands' slaves during the daytime and their prostitutes at night'.<sup>44</sup> Hiratsuka, who was opposed to the old 'feudal' marriage system, declined legal marriage and cohabited with her partner Okumura Hiroshi. When she had children, she registered them as illegitimate. She even published a very personal letter to her parents in *Seitō*, giving her reasons for declining legal marriage.<sup>45</sup> In her article 'At a locked window' ('Tozashi aru mado nite') Hiratsuka made a hostile attack on the public, press and government. In particular she criticized the government for trying to control women's thought, speech, and freedom of expression.

I felt as if the government was saying 'Close your eyes, new women. Go to sleep. Or if not, keep your mouths shut.'...People with old-fashioned or conservative ideas regard those with progressive views as dangerous, and treat them as devils who disturb public morals and order. This is inexcusable...The people with old-fashioned ideas are those who hold fossils in their arms and make useless efforts to give them heat, hoping to bring them back to life. They are possessed with a wrong idea that women's virtues are unchanging and will stay the same forever.<sup>46</sup>

Hiratsuka, who became eager to develop discussion about aspects of women's emancipation, also published translations of the works of Western feminists such as Ellen Key and Olive Schreiner in *Seitō*, and introduced their ideas and feminist theories.

*Seitō's* decline and Itō Noe's takeover of *Seitō*

Although *Seitō* initially caused much consternation, this began to decline from 1914, and it is important to consider why this happened. There can be no doubt that the outbreak of World War I adversely affected *Seitō*. The women's historian Horiba Kiyoko claimed that the war was responsible for the rapid decrease in *Seitō's* sales and its popularity.<sup>47</sup> Although many newspapers had extensively reported women's causes since 1910, they lost interest when war was declared. Many magazines focused upon war topics while *Seitō* barely discussed them. The only work published in *Seitō*, which dealt with the First World War, was Saiga Koto's article 'The

devastations of war' ('Senka') which manifested her pacifist viewpoint.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the decline in *Seitō*'s circulation seems inevitable. Murakami Nobuhiko, a male historian, stated that *Seitō* was commonly apolitical (at least as conventionally understood) and that women connected with *Seitō* were largely apathetic about general political matters and apparently paid little attention to the war.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, Yasumochi Yoshiko, one of the founding members of the Seitōsha and Hiratsuka's right-hand woman, left the Seitōsha. Consequently Hiratsuka had to run *Seitō* single-handedly since other key women then married, had children and were preoccupied with childcare and domestic duties.<sup>50</sup> Hiratsuka became mentally and physically exhausted and the quality of *Seitō* soon began to decline. The September 1914 issue was never published because of her ill health, and the October 1914 issue became the last edited by Hiratsuka. She needed to convalesce, so she asked Itō Noe, a relatively new and young member to edit the November and December issues of *Seitō*. From January 1915 Itō entirely took over the editorship.<sup>51</sup>

#### The termination of *Seitō*

*Seitō*'s handover to Itō was probably inevitable. She excelled Hiratsuka in vigour and in social understanding. Itō undertook her new duty with enthusiasm and optimism, and proposed changes of plan regarding *Seitō*.

First of all, I will remove all existing regulations from *Seitō*. From now on it will have no regulations, no policies, no convictions and no principles...I would like to continue to reserve *Seitō* mainly for women. Anybody who would like to use *Seitō* as a stepping-stone to her social success is welcome to do so.<sup>52</sup>

She put this strategy into practice. During Itō's period, *Seitō* had new contributors. The contents had been divided into literary pieces and articles on women's issues, and this structure stayed practically the same. New women's topics - chastity, sexuality, abortion and prostitution - began to be aired. Despite her visit to the Yoshiwara, Hiratsuka was more concerned with issues relating to her own class and did not pay attention to women such as prostitutes. On the other hand, Itō, of humble birth, dealt with prostitution. Moreover, whereas social and political problems were hardly discussed in *Seitō* during Hiratsuka's time, this improved under Itō, and she brought an anarchist perspective to *Seitō*, introducing news about Ōsugi Sakae, a leading anarchist to whom she became romantically attached in 1915. She also translated the eminent anarchist Emma Goldman's works.

Although *Seitō* did not decline in quality under Itō's editorship, it became less

appealing because of its deteriorating finances. It survived 13 months after Itō's takeover, but came to an unexpected end in February 1916, mainly because of her personal situation. She deserted her husband and children to live with her lover Ōsugi Sakae. She never restarted *Seitō* as she was absorbed in her new political life with Ōsugi. A generally held view regarding Itō's decision now was that she treated *Seitō* as her private possession, and neither sought advice from Hiratsuka nor consulted anybody else hitherto connected with *Seitō*, even though it was a magazine contributed to and run by members of the Seitōsha.

#### Literary purposes of *Seitō*

What literary characteristics did *Seitō* have? *Seitō*'s short stories revealed women's dispirited feelings resulting from rigid social convention, and dealt with everyday incidents or problems common to middle or upper-middle-class women. These included quarrels between husband and wife, childbirth, childcare, a husband's adultery or mistress, discord between wife and mother-in-law, divorce, a married woman's difficulty in finding employment or in combining her work with domestic work and childcare, and the distress of an unmarried woman who had passed her marriageable age. As these stories were predominantly based on the authors' experiences, seemed to be autobiographical, and were written from women's angles, they were highly successful in attracting female readers' attention. Such accounts appealed to women even though they sometimes lacked dramatic effect or imagination. The writing was generally unpolished and may have been of a lower standard than the work of some accomplished male writers. They certainly differed greatly from the short stories with similar themes written by men, which had fewer realistic descriptions of women and normally lacked complex exposition of women's feelings.

In almost every issue a Japanese translation of Western literature from English and Russian appeared. Most of the translations from English were accurate and of a high standard, which demonstrated the fact that female translators of *Seitō*, many of whom were educated at women's higher educational institutions, had an excellent understanding of English just like many male graduates. Hiratsuka's translations of Ellen Key's works were especially competent. Her extensive knowledge of Western literature was revealed in her long reading list on *A Doll's House*. The contributors measured up to her high expectations. Women associated with *Seitō* took much interest in translations, and were influenced by Western writers, particularly those who wrote in ways relevant to the new woman and new ideas about love and life. They were particularly interested in modern plays such as Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's*



*House* and *Hedda Gabler* and George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, and writers like Ellen Key, Emma Goldman and Sonya Kovalevsky. *Seitō* offered its readers an opportunity to discuss the 'new woman' who was the product of the development in the West, and to learn theories and works of Western feminists. Through translating and studying these, women associated with *Seitō* found new ways of exploring their own identities, expressing their ideas, and developing their own feminist thought.

*Seitō* advanced women's writing, and helped to recruit more gifted female writers. Many contributors showed dissatisfaction at being women in a chauvinistic society and leading circumscribed lives. The most influential aspect of *Seitō* in the 1910s was that women were speaking frankly about their lives and hopes, with the insistence that they had the right to express themselves. *Seitō* promoted female confidence and personal expression, and provided an expressive opportunity for women, albeit a literary one. It gave significant ideas to later feminists, and according to some definitions may be viewed as a 'feminist' development which laid the foundation for the Japanese feminist movements.

Although Western writers were not at all influenced by *Seitō*, it made much of an impression on Korean and Chinese women, who were deeply interested in Japanese women's ideas in the 1910s. Female students from Korea and China, who studied in Japan at that time, read *Seitō*, were inspired by it, and translated some of the works from it. Among them Kim Wŏn-ju, a Korean woman who had studied in Japan, founded a women's society called the Seitōkai, which was named after the Japanese Seitōsha in Korea and launched its magazine *Sinyōja* (*New Women*) in 1920. Its readers learned about Western new women through translations in *Seitō*. Kim called Hiratsuka 'an ideal ingenious new woman in Japan', and indeed *Seitō* made significant contributions to the formation of feminist thought in Korea.<sup>53</sup> Similarly the Chinese women who studied in Japan inaugurated a few women's magazines on their return to China.

### The Politics of *Seitō*

Although *Seitō* women discussed a wide range of women's issues, they never dealt with female suffrage. When the Japan-British Exhibition was held in London from May to August 1910, many male Japanese journalists, sent to London to cover the event, observed women's suffrage demonstrations led by the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union.<sup>54</sup> Fascinated by the British women's campaigning, which was alien to them, they wrote a series of articles outlining women's suffrage demonstrations, which were published in Japanese newspapers in 1910.<sup>55</sup> *Seitō*'s rival

magazine *Real New Women*, which was launched by the Real New Women's Association, published a report about the Women's Social and Political Union written by Makino Yoshio, a Japanese painter who was then resident in London, and friendly with Christabel Pankhurst.<sup>56</sup>

Women associated with *Seitō* must have read this article and other newspaper articles on British women's suffrage, but they never remarked on the subject in *Seitō*. According to Hiratsuka, a group of progressive men attempted to persuade her to tackle female suffrage in *Seitō*.<sup>57</sup> However, she refused on the grounds that her chief concerns were to help other women disregard 'feudalistic' ideas in their minds, find new identities and emancipate themselves before considering female suffrage. Moreover, the discussion of women's issues in *Seitō* never developed into defined political deeds, such as presenting petitions to Parliament, organizing demonstrations, or demanding women's suffrage and other legal reform.

Nevertheless, as Vera Mackie states, women associated with *Seitō* went on to contribute to all areas of Japanese society as writers, activists, social reformers, bureaucrats and Parliamentarians.<sup>58</sup> Nogami Yaeko and Tamura Toshiko became eminent writers. Some of them became active in political movements including campaigns demanding revision of the sexually discriminatory laws against women and the enactment of new legislation to upgrade women's political rights. Among them Hiratsuka's contributions were most noteworthy. She subsequently conducted political movements, demanding the amendment of Article 5 of the Peace Police Law (Chian Keisatsu Hō) and initiated the first campaign for women's suffrage in Japan through her activities for the Association of New Women (Shin Fujin Kyōkai), which she founded in 1920 after the *Seitōsha*.<sup>59</sup> She also became the leader of the women's peace movement in Japan after World War II.<sup>60</sup>

### The legacy of *Seitō*

After World War II the Allied Occupation under Douglas MacArthur encouraged the study of the history of Japanese women, and *Women's Review (Fujin Kōron)*, a leading women's magazine with a large circulation, sponsored a forum for younger women to learn from people such as Hiratsuka. The legacy of *Seitō* was most visible in the 1970s when the Women's Liberation Movement in Japan led to a search for the foremothers of Japanese feminism and rediscovered the women of the *Seitōsha* and *Seitō*.<sup>61</sup>

Haneda Sumiko, an eminent female film director, made a documentary film about Hiratsuka's life, covering her activities in the *Seitōsha* and *Seitō*.<sup>62</sup> It was appreciated by a large audience, and made a huge profit, which was used to create

Hiratsuka Raichō Prizes to award distinguished female scholars in the field of women's studies.<sup>63</sup> Hiratsuka Raichō's Memorial Hall, called 'Raichō no Ie', was built in Nagano Prefecture in 2007, and exhibits important archival sources relating to *Seitō* and Hiratsuka's life.<sup>64</sup> It regularly organizes seminars and workshops, which attract a wide range of Japanese women.

When an international symposium to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inauguration of *Seitō* was held at Japan Women's University in September 2011, more than 500 people, mainly women, attended, which indicates *Seitō*'s lasting popularity. One of the greatest legacies of *Seitō* is to be seen in the continuing debate of the women's issues it raised, which are still of great interest to women in Japan. In spite of the gradual development of equal rights in education and employment after 1945, many issues of childcare and other gendered domestic duties remain unresolved. Hiratsuka's manifesto 'In the beginning woman was the sun' had such memorable poetic language that it made a strong impression on Japanese women – it survived time and space, and continues to stimulate and inspire Japanese women today. In many people's eyes her manifesto has become inseparable from the history of the Japanese feminist movement, and is often seen as the spiritual origin of Japanese feminism.

## Endnotes

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63 The Hiratsuka Raichō prizes were started by Japan Women's University in 2005 to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hiratsuka's graduation from the university. The prizes have been financed by the donation made by the *Hiratsuka Raichō no Kiroku Eiga o Jōeisuru Kai* (a society which aimed to use the medium of cinema to inform the public on the life of Hiratsuka Raichō). The prizes have been awarded to both groups and individuals researching topics such as Hiratsuka Raichō, or world peace via the women's liberation movement, or the promotion of sexual equality in society.

64 For more information about *Raichō no Ie* (Raichō's House), see <http://homepage3.nifty.com/raichou/raichounoie.html>.

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