

Envisioning the 'New Woman': *Seitō* Magazine and Feminist Aesthetics in Modern Japan

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Abstract

The visual and textual content of women's magazines from the late Meiji (1868-1912) through the early Taishō (1912-1926) periods constructed a public space in which female artists, intellectuals, and even housewives had the opportunity to express themselves and further a new definition of modern Japanese womanhood. This paper analyzes the content and development of the all-female literary magazine *Seitō* ('Bluestockings', published 1911-1916) in relationship to the magazine's publisher and founder Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971). Through an analysis of *Seitō's* visual and literary content, I argue that Hiratsuka, and, by extension, *Seitō's* portrayal of the 'New woman' not only challenged traditional models of Japanese womanhood but engaged in a number of critical issues regarding modernity and modernism, particularly the complex negotiation around the idea of what it meant to be a woman: on a personal level, as a member of a literary collective, and as a citizen of the Japanese nation. By constructing an image of the "New woman" that represented her as both a singular person and as a universal symbol of womanhood, *Seitō* promoted a new feminist aesthetic within modern Japanese culture.

Introduction

The formation of the modern Japanese woman was intricately connected with the rise of Japanese print media and consumer culture in Meiji and Taishō era Japan. Not surprisingly, this constructed "feminine" identity was in a state of flux as it morphed from the Meiji state model of "good wife, wise mother"¹ into a self-motivated, intellectually, and professionally inclined "New woman," ultimately embodied in the flamboyant lifestyle and imagery of the Taishō "Modern girl." Literary and feminist leader Hiratsuka Raichō² was at the center of this transformation, shaping the role of the modern Japanese woman living and working within the rubric of intellectual, artistic, and personal exploration. In her role as a journalist and women's liberation activist Hiratsuka harnessed the visual and textual content of print media to create an opportunity for women to express themselves in a forum that fostered creativity, individuality, and self-sufficiency – aspects that until the late Meiji period remained outside the traditional definition of "modern."

Recent scholarship regarding Hiratsuka and the rise of the modern Japanese woman has drawn substantial attention to the subversive potential of "New woman" discourse. For instance, Richard Reitan has argued that the perceived danger of new women like Hiratsuka was in her claim

to “personality” (*jinkaku*) or “personhood.” By appropriating the concept of “personality” Reitan contends that new women were able to assert their status as individual persons over their status as women.³ Using Reitan’s argument as a point of departure, I propose an alternative frame for understanding Hiratsuka by suggesting that the emergence of the new woman was not mutually exclusive. That is to say the image of the new woman was predicated upon singular self-discovery and a universal realization of womanhood. Through a visual and textual analysis of the all-women’s literary magazine *Seitō* I will reconsider the formation and development of the new woman on a personal level and as representative of a larger female group. I will argue that Hiratsuka and her colleagues used the format of *Seitō* as a performative space in which to question gender roles and to complicate traditional models of Japanese womanhood.

To establish a context in which to understand the societal issues against which many female artists, intellectuals, and other professional working women were reacting, the life and career of Hiratsuka Raichō will serve as my narrative thread. Beginning with the Japanese government’s state ideology of “good wife, wise mother,” I will discuss the content and development of *Seitō* in relationship to Hiratsuka – the magazine’s publisher and founder – and a figure whose artistic pursuits both mirrored and shaped the dramatic transformations of the modern Japanese woman. Through an analysis of *Seitō*’s and literary content, I will show that Hiratsuka’s realization of the new woman was dually comprised of an autonomous self and a universal conception of womanhood.

A Student has Gone Missing

At about nine o’clock on the evening of March 21, 1908 twenty-three year old Hiratsuka Raichō ran away from home. Her family searched the Tokyo metropolitan area as well as the neighboring prefectures but no trace of her was found. Three days later, on the morning of March 24th, Hiratsuka’s parents received news that she had been found by a policeman; she was seen walking hand in hand with a man at the Obana Pass, an area located in the mountains of Shiobara and covered in deep snow.

The following day Hiratsuka made headlines in the *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo Daily Newspaper) for attempting to carry out a double suicide with the writer Morita Sōhei (1881-1949). While double suicides were not rare during the time in which this scandal occurred, most were reported without much attention. Yet this attempted double suicide, known as the “Shiobara Incident,” was considered sensational for a variety of reasons. One reason was the fact that Sōhei was married and had a young child. Another was the level of education acquired by both participants. There were very few University educated students (men or women) during the late Meiji and most were treated with

great respect. With this level of higher education came the expectation to act as responsible leaders within the community and Hiratsuka, though from an elite family and well educated, had yet failed to fulfill her expected role within society. The *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* commented:

Although double suicide has been fairly common for a long time, the Shiobara Incident is a most unusual case. It is well-known that double suicide itself is an absurd and foolish action, in many cases committed by commoners who do not have much education or common sense. However, the man and woman who were involved in this attempted double suicide belong to an entirely different class. In spite of their high standard of education, they surprisingly imitated commoners' folly and attempted a double suicide, and this is unheard of.⁴

Most significant was that Hiratsuka's attempted double suicide appeared to be a conscious rebellion against the 'good wife, wise mother' system.

For those who supported the "good wife, wise mother" ideology, the Incident and Hiratsuka came to represent the potential danger of women whose higher education, social behavior, and moral attitude went unchecked. The "New woman" Hiratsuka's behavior – running away from home with a married man and attempted double suicide – was viewed by many as a challenge to the established family system. After the Shiobara Incident Hiratsuka became a social outcast and was labeled by the press as a "bad girl, immoral, unmarriageable, and socially poisonous."⁵ One commentator wrote the following in the *Jiji Shinpō*:

In the future even ordinary people must pay close attention to their daughters and must take great care that their daughters do not turn into peculiar women like Hiratsuka Haru [Raichō]. If the worst comes to the worst, and you find that your daughter starts to develop signs of becoming a mad woman like Hiratsuka, you must send her to a juvenile reformatory immediately. If you think she has no hope of recovering, you must send her to a nunnery and force her to become a nun.⁶

Good Wife, Wise Mother

During the Meiji, in an effort to improve the cultural and intellectual development of women, the Japanese government instituted the *ryōsai kenbo* or "good wife, wise mother" ideology of womanhood in 1898. With its "emphasis on moral education and homemaking skills, and seeking to guide young women toward a domestic destiny rather than wage employment, cultural and

intellectual pursuits, or political activities in the public sphere,”⁷ *ryōsai kenbo* promoted a specific societal model for Japanese women. Kathleen Uno writes, “The education of girls to become wise mothers would ensure their future role as positive agents of national change. This re-evaluation of womanhood was part of the new regime’s proposal for sweeping reforms to defend the country against the threat of Western imperialism.”⁸

The ‘good wife, wise mother’ ideology marked the beginning of the establishment of specified gender roles in modern Japan, and with it came a new approach to both educating and containing women.⁹ Despite the fact that this re-evaluation of Japanese womanhood was implemented in an effort to defend the country against the “threat of Western imperialism”¹⁰ this very notion of containment was promoted through a Western-family model, which revolved around the emergence of the modern housewife within a nuclear family setting – consisting of father, mother, and child(ren). Thus, in the case of the Japanese woman, her new identity was defined specifically through her position within the home. By extension, therefore, her role within society was largely recognized by the responsibility she was accorded as the woman of the house. The sphere of domesticity was demarcated as hers, and hers alone, and this allocation of physical and social space within a patriarchal framework was considered by the government as not only progressive but also “modern.” While the notion of a modern “democratic” home life in which husband and wife were equals was seemingly supported by the government’s encouragement of love and the nuclear family,¹¹ this gendered division of labor was promoted in an effort to strengthen emerging State ideologies regarding the role of women. To that end, many of the early women’s magazines emerging during the mid to late Meiji catered to the model of womanhood that had been instituted through the ‘good wife, wise mother’ ideology and promoted by the Empress of Japan. On a practical level these magazines offered advice regarding household management, as well as articles which promoted separate gender roles – as the basis for the ideal home – with a strong emphasis on new definitions of domestic science and higher education.¹²

Hiratsuka as Schoolgirl

During the mid to late Meiji most women’s magazines catered to the *jogakusei* or “school girl” model of womanhood. Subscribers of these magazines were mostly women from the Meiji upper-class who could afford higher education.¹³ But these magazines did not serve all women equally, as Barbara Satō has stated:

These magazines were heavy into fiction and refined articles and out of tune with the young women who entered the labor force after graduation from elementary school. Nor could these

publications have held the interest of urban figures like the modern girl or the professional working woman whose objectives and ideals were displaying a marked difference from the upper-class schoolgirl.¹⁴

As a type presented in these magazines, the schoolgirl symbolized the “positive assets of ‘good wife, wise mother’ – the training that would shape their lives as modern women based on the Confucian feminine virtues.”¹⁵ Magazine illustrations of the schoolgirl attempted to portray this “modern” young woman. One such example is of the schoolgirl type depicts a young woman dressed in traditional attire (kimono and hakama), riding a bicycle with her hair and clothes blowing in the breeze. Mariko Inoue has noted that, despite modern (Western) visual cues like the bicycle, the girl’s features remain distinctly traditional (Japanese) with her physiognomic portrayal rooted in more conventional representations of Japanese women.¹⁶

For Hiratsuka, this schoolgirl type must have seemed the ideal. Indeed, in her early years she was a prime example of the highly educated upper-class schoolgirl whose access to and achievements in academia were a direct result of the Meiji government’s educational reforms for women. In a photograph of Hiratsuka taken during her first year at Ochanomizu Girls’ High School she seems the very embodiment of the visual ideal of the Japanese schoolgirl. Like the illustration, Hiratsuka is dressed in kimono with her long hair is partially pulled back from her face and secured with a ribbon. Standing within a contrived outdoor setting Hiratsuka holds a basket of flowers in her left hand and an umbrella in her right. The photographic portrait in which she poses replaces the bicycle as the marker of modernity.



Kajita Hanko, *Hatsuno*, in *Makaze Koikaze*, 1903.



Hiratsuka in the first year of Ochanomizu Girls High School, photographed c1898.

Despite Hiratsuka’s Meiji edification she did not embrace the “good wife, wise mother” ideology. Although Hiratsuka majored in Domestic Science at the Japan Women’s College,¹⁷ she also attended many classes on English and Japanese literature, as well as Western history, art history and

literature.¹⁸ Hiratsuka continued to study English after her graduation from college, by joining the *Keishū Bungakukai* (Women's Literary Society) in 1907. As a member of this literary society, she attended lectures on German literature, analyzed Shakespeare, and read Ibsen, Turgenev, Poe, and Maupassant.¹⁹ Hiratsuka's attitudes and opinions seem to have been in tune with a broader shift among educated women away from the government's conservative educational reforms.

The Foundation of *Seitō*

By the late Meiji and early Taishō period (1912 – 1926), women's magazines became the standard as a modern form of mass media production, and, in the process, continued to provide new resources for redefining the lives of middle class Japanese women.²⁰ In 1911 Hiratsuka founded the all-female literary magazine *Seitō*. The focus and content of *Seitō* was not on the liberation of Japanese women through social change, but through artistic excellence and spiritual growth. Over the course of *Seitō*'s publication (1911-1916) the goals and content of the magazine shifted more towards liberation from without and not from within. Noriko Lippit writes:

Although the journal began as a literary journal – its manifesto declared it would serve as the medium for training women, providing them the means for self-expression and creating women geniuses – it quickly became the central intellectual medium for Japanese feminism; a place where social and political issues of feminism were fervently debated.²¹

Through its literary format *Seitō* both a forum and a voice for these Japanese women by serving as a vehicle that promoted female talent and self-awareness. Moreover, *Seitō* sought to raise the awareness of its readership with regard to social and political issues affecting women, as well as create an opportunity to debate and discuss the status of women within Japanese society. Hiratsuka did not intend to found an all women's literary magazine. After the Shiobara Incident she behaved in a manner that suggested her immediate goals were self-development and self-awakening. She spent the next two years of her life practicing Zen meditation and developing her literary skills through the continued reading and translating of Western literature. Hiratsuka's mentor and founder of the Keishū Literary Society, Ikuta Chōkō (1888-1936), was the first to propose the idea of an all women's literary magazine. Ikuta believed in the importance of providing women writers with the opportunity to publish their work in a forum that allowed for the exchange and praise of ideas. A women's literary society with a magazine as its mouthpiece would thus, he argued, unite women writers. In July of 1910 the *Seitō* found a publisher and printer for their magazine, and with the financial assistance of Hiratsuka's mother *Seitō* was published.²²

Seitō was modeled after the progressive art and literary magazine *Shirakaba* (White Birch 1910-1923), which sought to introduce Japanese readers to modern European art and aesthetics. Subverting established hierarchies of production and exhibition, *Shirakaba* served as a platform to advocate new styles in art and literature that valued individuality and emphasized subjective expression. Surprisingly, the founding members – Mushanokōji Saneatsu, Shiga Naoya, and Yanagi Sōetsu – were writers who had never traveled to Europe. *Shirakaba* magazine offered a platform through which to question government authority and influenced the newly educated class of young people in Japan, particularly the women involved in *Seitō*, who were looking for a new sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.²³

In a similar vein Hiratsuka and the members of *Seitō*, most of them upper middle class, attempted to use their magazine as a vehicle for self-awakening and personal development. The contents of *Seitō* initially consisted of short novels, haiku and tanka poetry as well as translations of Western publications. The main objectives of *Seitō* were to break from the constraints of “good wife, wise mother” and encourage the cultivation of women’s talents and abilities.²⁴ In essence, through literary expression, *Seitō* sought to provide a voice for Japanese women by encouraging its readers and contributors to articulate their feelings and opinions regarding the changing social status of women.

Instead of drawing on contemporary images of Japanese women, as did mainstream women’s magazines where images of Japanese women sporting bobbed haircuts, fur coats, and flapper-style dresses reigned supreme, the cover illustrations of *Seitō* depict the physical characteristics and dress of women who could not necessarily be associated with any specific Japanese artistic sources or social types. Hiratsuka’s initial intention to draw on examples of female strength from earlier periods in Japanese history,²⁵ the images in *Seitō* tended to appear explicitly non-Japanese in form and content.

In the Beginning Woman was the Sun

In the inaugural issue of *Seitō* (September 1911), Hiratsuka’s essay *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta* (In the Beginning Woman was the Sun) challenges the reader to discover her inner strength in an effort to break free from the societal constraints forced upon her. The essay’s introductory paragraph reads:

In the beginning, woman was the true sun. She was an authentic person. Now she is the moon. Living dependently through other people, a reflection of other people –

she has the face of a sick person, it is the face of the moon. Yet, now *Seitō* cries newly born. From the brains and hands of modern Japanese women who have begun to create, *Seitō* cries newly born. These women who bore [*Seitō*] are now free to laugh. We know very well what it feels like to be concealed under the laughter. Let us reveal our hidden sun, our true genius!²⁶

Using the metaphor of birth, Hiratsuka implies not only the birth of *Seitō* magazine, but also a (re-)birth of Japanese womanhood in the form of the new woman. The opening sentence of her essay evokes a strong visual connection with the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, whose brilliance, according to the ancient *Kojiki*,²⁷ “Had the ability to restore light to the universe.”²⁸ This reference to ancient Japanese mythology, wherein the supreme Shintō deity was the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and female rulers were the first to take the throne, asserts the fall of early matriarchy within Japan society and its replacement by patriarchy. Stressing that the modern women of *Seitō* are free from the societal expectations and obligations placed upon them by traditional views of womanhood, Hiratsuka asserts female freedom to communicate openly and publicly outside the domestic sphere.

Hiratsuka’s new woman is made manifest on the cover page of the inaugural issue. Super-imposed onto a background in the shape of a short sleeved kimono (*kosode*) the new woman stands in profile with her face looking toward the first character of the word *Seitō*. Her figure is encapsulated within a large vertical rectangle flanked on either side by squares of text that represent the kimono shape, with magazine’s name on the sleeves. With hair flowing down the front of her body in a long braid, and wearing a crown upon her head and a dress that hugs the contours of her voluptuous body, this image of the new woman suggests something god-like.

The tension between traditional and modern is not limited to the visual play of the new woman emerging from the kimono. Traditional Japanese painting conventions and modern (arguably Western) visual content is also evident in this design. The gold color of the magazine’s cover, combined with the flatness in which the illustration of the woman is



Naganuma Chieko (1886-1938), cover illustration to *Seitō*, September, 1911.

rendered, imitates that of a standing screen (*byōbū*), and thus appropriates for the illustration a connection with a Japanese artistic past. Yet the illustration of the new woman appears nothing like the images of women found in traditional Japanese painting. Using only black contour lines and negative space to delineate the details of her appearance and body, the rendering of the new woman looks more like a stone relief carving from an ancient Egyptian or classical Greek tomb than a painting.

The author of this image, Naganuma Chieko (1886-1938), was a member of *Seitō* and had studied Western art and oil painting. Like Hiratsuka, Naganuma came from an upper middle class family and attended Japan Women's College. Upon graduation, however, Naganuma chose to pursue a career in the arts rather than settle down and start a family, although she eventually married the eminent poet and sculptor Takamura Kōtarō (1883-1956). Naganuma's knowledge of Western art is evident in her Klimt-like rendering of the new woman. By creating an image with no specific analogy to Japanese visual culture, and super-imposing this figure onto traditional Japanese dress, the visualization of the new woman becomes a symbol of liberation from current social reality. Naganuma's new woman represented the abandonment of preconceived notions of what the modern Japanese woman should be.²⁹

The So-called "New Women"

The portrayal of the new woman on the cover of *Seitō's* inaugural issue was in sharp contrast to the satirical and somewhat critical images of the new woman found in illustrations from *Ketsuketsu Manga*, such as *Blue Stockings* and *Longing to Be a New Woman*. In these images, women are dressed more conservatively in traditional kimono, their long hair pulled back into a bun, and are located within a recognizable interior setting such as a café or study in the midst of thoughtful contemplation. While these images describe a sense of (or search for) independence that comes from challenging the established social codes for women during this period, these caricatures seem to render the new woman type as an object of humor and even ridicule, rather than admiration.

The new woman's changing views on love, sex, and education were often mocked by the press. These images played off the reputation that *Seitō* women, and Hiratsuka in particular, had for their unconventional lives, writings, and beliefs. In the illustration *Blue Stockings*, for example, the woman in the picture is shown sitting in a chair reading a book. The surface this image does not seem unconventional, but the fact that the women of *Seitō* derided for the way in which they sought to use their education – for self-awareness and personal growth – and not to strengthen the Japanese home is evident. The woman in the picture had chosen to focus her energy on intellectual pursuits

rather than domestic chores. Her tools are her book and reading glasses, not her husband and child.

Similarly, the illustration *Longing to Be a New Woman* emphasizes the activities of the new woman that transgressed the traditional setting of the home, such as living economically independent lives, frequenting cafes and dance halls, and voicing their opinions about modern life. The woman in this image sits alone at a café with an ashtray and a glass of wine placed in front of her on the table. She is dressed in kimono but her hair is pulled back from her face and fastened with a ribbon. Her appearance and conduct is meant to mimic that of *Seitō*. “Scandalous” activities associated with *Seitō* members, such as the supposed consumption of alcohol when patronizing cafes, visiting the Yoshiwara brothel districts, and living with men out of wedlock, were consistently publicized in the press. The *Kokumin Shinbun* even devoted an entire column to these women titled, “atarashii onna” (So-called New Women) which was not only sensational, but attempted to make these women appear both absurd and frivolous:³⁰



Hattori Ryōhei, *Longing to Be a New Woman*, in *Ketsuketsu Manga*, 1914.

Some key members of the *Seitō* Society, which is now considered to be a group of so-called ‘new women,’ have absurdly and outrageously been to the Yoshiwara. They have gone so much on the loose that even men would have been put to shame. They also write about iconoclastic and unconventional things.³¹

Thus, images of these women – women who could not be taken seriously and signified all that was wrong with modern society – contrasted with the woman on the cover of *Seitō*’s inaugural issue, whose voluptuous goddess-like figure announces her arrival by aligning herself with the sun, and proclaiming herself the giver of light.

As mainstream media images of the new woman – or the public’s impression of what the new

woman stood for – continued to stand in sharp contrast with those found on the covers of *Seitō*, *Seitō*'s new woman continued to manifest herself in other non-Japanese forms. For instance, in the May, 1912 issue the new woman is presented kneeling in the foreground of a field with the sun rising behind her in the distance. Her hair is pulled back into a knot and she is dressed in a long white robe. In her hand she holds a quill feather, no doubt a reference to the literary content of the magazine. Here, the entire image of the new woman is encapsulated in a white circle, which is then layered over the orange color of the cover. The compositional layout and use of color in the cover illustration suggests a variety of possible meanings. Most obvious is the visual link between the new woman and the Sun Goddess Amaterasu (recalling Hiratsuka's opening statements). The female figure's placement within this circular setting suggests a clear connection to



Cover illustration, *Seitō*, May, 1912.

the natural world, yet this natural world does not reference one specific locale. The circle in which the new woman is framed acts as a physical signifier for the literal shape of the sun. Thus, the image of the new woman is not only framed by the sun, but becomes the white heat of the sun, with her orange rays emanating outward. The image could also be interpreted as an inversion of the Japanese flag whose red circle, which symbolizes the sun, is super-imposed on a white background. In this magazine cover, however, the colors are reversed, with a white sun super-imposed over an orange background. The color reversal of symbolic imagery on the Japanese flag might signify the opposition to tradition as voiced by the women of *Seitō*. The image visually questions established modes of representation through a reinterpretation of the Japanese flag.

This inversion also negates any specific reference to Japan, thus acknowledging that the rise

of the new woman stretches beyond the island nation to the rest of the world. While *Seitō* was a magazine created for and published by Japanese women, the ideology and outlook of its contributors and readers was meant to represent the universal discourse on womanhood and the new woman in this period. Hiratsuka and the other members of the magazine were clearly aware of the distinctions of self and gender being made by women in both the United States and Europe during this moment in history. In both the United States and Europe the new woman was articulated by women's groups. *Seitō* was inspired by the eighteenth-century British "Bluestockings Society," a group of female writers and thinkers that resisted the gender and class-specific discourse of their time. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women around the world began embracing the goals of the original "Bluestockings Society" as they attempted to navigate and redefine their status within modern society.

Dear Nora

During the winter and late spring of 1912 Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Hermann Sudermann's *Magda* were performed in Tokyo. Not only were these plays exemplary of the emerging new woman discourse in Europe, but their performance in Tokyo also sparked a social debate regarding the definition and status of the new woman within Japanese society. Unsurprisingly, the members and contributors of *Seitō* responded both to *A Doll's House* and *Magda* in issues published between January and June 1912. Hiratsuka's reaction to Ibsen's heroine, Nora, as a wife and mother whose spiritual awakening made her into a new woman, was extremely critical. In her essay, "*Norasan ni*" ("Dear Nora") published in the January 1912 issue, Hiratsuka faults Nora for being impulsive and immature. Treating Nora as though she were an actual living person, Hiratsuka argues that Nora had not actually awakened to her true-self, and thus did not represent or embody *Seitō's* definition of the "new woman":

Dear Nora, you said, "...For eight years I felt like I have been living with a stranger, and I even gave birth to three children with that stranger – I cannot stand to think about it. I want to tear myself apart!" I understand your resentment and many women must have cried listening to your words, however, any woman who has fallen in love has experienced these feelings at least once. Your awakening is somewhat late...

Dear Nora, your true awakening will be from this point onward. As you continue onward with your life a second tragedy awaits. It is the tragedy of abandoning your illusory inner-self. It is the spiritual tragedy that comes from deep within your heart as a more miserable, depressive, sad individual, not as the happy person you were when you abandoned your husband and children. You will experience a spiritual tragedy

that you have never dreamt of.³²

In Hiratsuka's opinion, Nora's awakening was not one based on a rational development and evolution of her being. Instead, it was instinctive and emotionally charged, and it lacked the level of maturity and foresight necessary to self-knowledge. Hiratsuka believed that the path to spiritual awakening and re-birth was not instantaneous but rather required a devotion to self-improvement and self-reflection that happened over time. For Hiratsuka, *Seitō* was both a vehicle and a platform by which to elevate the status of women beyond the domestic realm through autobiographical and confessional literature and to promote this spiritual awakening. She argued that the awakening was catalyzed by a spiritual liberation from within, and not by external forces such as social and legal equality.

This representation of spiritual liberation and freedom from within was embodied in images of women associated with fundamental elements of the natural world. This emphasis on the natural world stemmed from Hiratsuka's study of Buddhism as well as her initial attempt at self-realization in the wake of the Shiobara incident. Hiratsuka's manifesto "In the Beginning Woman was the Sun" references this conception as part of the natural female self. Just as the sun rises and sheds light on the world, so does the new woman shed light on the future of Japanese womanhood, the image seems to suggest. *Seitō's* visual representations of the new woman were not meant to be evocative of Japanese womanhood per se, but of a universal womanhood, that had the ability to realize itself within the modern age.

In the October issue of that same year, however, the image of the woman is much more abstract. Here, the head is drawn using a simple black line against a white background. The profile of her face, with a large nose, rounded eyes, full chin, and a mountain of hair piled on top of her head, is by no means analogous to contemporary images of Japanese women during this period. In fact this figure appears much older than most *Seitō* members who were at this time in their early to mid-twenties. Rendered like a marble bust, the emphasis of the image is on the woman's face and head, not on her body. There is no indication of background or setting, and, instead, the face of the woman appears to be floating in mid-air. It would seem that the emphasis is on the woman's intellect, or perhaps her capacity for independent thought like that of the new woman. The image bears a striking resemblance to the photographic portraits of the Western actresses Paula Somary and Agnes Sorma, who both performed the role of Nora in *A Doll's House*, that were published in the January 1912 issue of *Seitō*. Like the magazine cover from the October 1912 issue, the photograph of Somary in the role of Nora focuses almost entirely her face. In three-quarter pose, Somary stares off into the distance in a moment of contemplative thought, shown at the pivotal moment when Nora transforms from a vulnerable sheltered girl into a strong independent woman. Her white skin

contrasts sharply with the black background, making a simple yet decisive contour line on the left side of her face, in a manner similar to the cover image. Her dark hair is pulled back and her mouth is slightly open as if about to speak. The portrait of Sorma in the role of Nora shows her in the same pivotal moment in the play. Sorma is pictured in three-quarter pose staring off into the distance. Her long brown curls, held together with a patterned scarf, frame the white skin of her face. Her lips are pursed and her head is tilted slightly to the right. It is clear that as in the photograph of Somary, Sorma is caught in a moment of contemplation or perhaps even revelation with regard to role as a woman within modern society. The simple contour line of the woman's face on the cover of the October 1912 issue clearly engages the photographic depictions of the actresses playing Nora, and suggests an alternative conception of the modern woman. Through the simplicity of an image without reference to time or place the universal quality of the new woman is evoked. This figure, the image suggests, is a model for all societies and cultures where women are valued for their intellect, independent thought, and creativity.

Love and Marriage

In January 1913 Hiratsuka used the magazine to express her interest in tackling a broader set of women's issues and womanhood, moving beyond the development of the new woman. In particular, Hiratsuka was interested in addressing the distorted public image of *Seitō* women in relation to understanding of the new woman.³³ Perhaps from her familiarity with Western literature, Hiratsuka began to pay particular attention to American and European female authors and she came to focus upon Ellen Key's (1849-1926) writings. Born in Sundsholm, Sweden, Key was educated at home and later became a teacher. While working at a school in Stockholm she began lecturing on social issues such as women's sexual emancipation, and wrote more than thirty books including *Love and Marriage*.³⁴ For Hiratsuka, *Love and Marriage* was the most important of Key's works; she later translated the text into Japanese and published it in its entirety in a special January 1913 issue of *Seitō*.³⁵ *Love and Marriage* argued for relationships based upon love. Within these love-based relationships, the roles and status of male and female partners were considered equal. Hiratsuka advocated for this approach, and although they clearly opposed the Japanese government's state-sponsored model of "good wife, wise mother," Hiratsuka used *Seitō* to make available new ideas regarding social roles and relationships between men and women available to a broader readership. In her preface to her translation Hiratsuka commented on how she viewed herself within the context of social roles for Japanese women.

Indeed I am a woman. I am totally different from what the public refers to as a "New woman," but, in a sense, I still regard myself as a "New woman." In reality, however,

I don't think about myself as a woman...
When I think, when I write, when I fall in
love, my awareness as a woman hardly ever
affects me. The only consciousness that I
have is of self.³⁶

Hiratsuka's attempt to address broader
scope of issues pertaining to Japanese women
by simultaneously distancing herself from and
reshaping the definition of the new woman into a
more positive force is illustrated in the cover image
of the January 1913 issue. In this image the new
woman indirectly references the Biblical story of
Adam and Eve and seems to represent a spiritual
association with Key's text. Here, a man and a
woman stand almost completely naked in front of
a large tree. The woman, positioned to right of the
tree, holds an apple in her hand. She gazes at the
apple as if pondering its potential symbolic meaning.
The man, on the opposite side of the tree, stares at
the flower he holds in his hand. Above, a flock of
birds sit on the tree branches. Although this image
lacks the serpent typically found in images of
Adam and Eve the association is clear. Yet the
allusion to eating the apple and to their downfall
once more references the Biblical story that places
the woman at blame.



Cover illustration to *Seitō*, January 1913.

Although this image lacks the serpent typically found in images of Adam and Eve the association is clear. Yet the allusion to eating the apple and to their downfall once more references the Biblical story that places the woman at blame.

The question here, however, is how to interpret this image within the space of the magazine. What would be the purpose of using an allusion to Judeo-Christian tradition that marks the downfall of humanity? Within the context of debates concerning the negative image of the new woman I would argue that Hiratsuka and *Seitō* magazine are using this image to renegotiate a more positive and perhaps more productive image of women. While maintaining a clear visual thread of the new woman's connection to the natural world, the figure of the woman holding the apple and pondering her decision is a reference to the potential power of the modern woman. It is the woman who will determine her own future and social status within modern society – not the serpent or the man. Perhaps a connection to Hiratsuka's theory of self-awakening, in which women must seek a level of spiritual revolution in order to free themselves from the suppression and social pressures of modern Japanese society, may also be read from the image.³⁷

On the April cover from 1915 – the last year of the magazine’s publication – a woman is shown sitting naked in a field with her back facing the viewer. The sun glows bright in the sky, illuminating the woman’s figure within the dark landscape. There is a solid and somewhat earthly quality to the woman’s appearance. She looks physically strong yet emotionally vulnerable with her face hidden from view. Her long hair flows freely down her back and she leans forward as if straining to see something far off in the distance. A sense of foreboding is cast by the atmospheric setting, created by the white sun silhouetted against the shadowy swirls of the cloudy sky. Here, the message seems to be that female self-awakening, while admirable, may also be both primitive and dangerous. In opposition to the modern world around her this naked woman’s return to nature represents the re-birth of all Japanese women.

Articles appearing in the April issue seem to support such a reading. In one, “Fujin mondai ni tai suru kagaku no taidō” (Scientific Attitudes towards Women’s Issues) issues regarding the status of motherhood as well as family dynamics, within and outside Japan, are explored through the lens of sociology.³⁸ In this and in other articles, it becomes clear that for Hiratsuka, women were not only attempting to challenge the established definition of motherhood within modern Japanese society, but were also interested in understanding the ways in which motherhood was understood and interpreted in other modern societies throughout the world.

I Have Fulfilled My Duty to *Seitō*...

Hiratsuka left the editorship of *Seitō* in January of 1915 and handed the reins over to fellow member Itō Noe (1895-1923). She continued to write about the role of the new woman within Japanese society and spoke openly about her views on the family system and motherhood. The next two years her personal experience as a mother and as primary breadwinner for her family helped Hiratsuka mature beyond *Seitō* become more focused upon the protection of motherhood,³⁹ leading to a series of debates on motherhood (*bosei hogo ronsō*) with fellow *Seitō* colleagues Yosano Akiko (1878-1942), Yamada Waka (1879-1957), and Yamakawa Kikue (1890-1980) in 1918.⁴⁰ This period marked Hiratsuka’s departure (or transition) from the inward self-improvement and development that she advocated during her *Seitō* days towards a view that was more outwardly aware of the day to day issues affecting Japanese women from all classes of society.

Seitō’s run ended in February of 1916. Throughout its publication the visual and literary contents of the magazine successfully worked together to promote an image of the new woman that ultimately represented a strong, independent, and modern definition of womanhood. Instead of drawing on contemporary and/or traditional imagery of Japanese women, the covers of *Seitō* used

representations of women with no specific prototype in an effort to reflect a universal message of spiritual liberation and freedom from within. Similarly, through non-specific outdoor settings, the juxtapositioning of female figures with the sun and moon, and the minimal use of clothing, this model of the new woman suggested a clear association not only with fundamental elements of the natural, but also with those of the international world.

Conclusion

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women's magazines, whether literary or mainstream, created a space in which Japanese women of all levels could become informed about the social, cultural, political, and philosophical aspects of modern society. The visual and textual content of these magazines offered Japanese women a forum in which to question the definition of "modern." In a journal like *Seitō*, where those goals were clearly articulated, new women like Hiratsuka used their social and literary activities to create a visual and textual representation of what it meant to be modern. For Hiratsuka and the women of *Seitō* term "New woman" connoted a progressive group of educated young intellectuals who found solace in self-cultivation through reading, writing, and meditation. In association with their literary contributions, which comprised of essays, poems, and short stories that emphasized personal and spiritual growth, the visual portrayal of the new woman on *Seitō's* magazine covers – in an effort to promote a universal symbol of womanhood – provoked a re-evaluation of the traditional definition of modern through the use of Western sources of femininity.

The "New woman" that Hiratsuka envisioned sought to overturn one dominant notion of femininity for another, and her "(re)awakening" was contingent upon a sense of self-within the public *as well as* the private spheres. *Seitō's* features of replication and circulation allowed Hiratsuka to access the widest possible audience in her effort to establish an alternate discourse regarding the status of women in early twentieth-century Japan. Moreover, using *Seitō* as a platform to encourage women to search for their independence through individual and authentic expression, Hiratsuka created a space for artists and intellectuals to use their literary and artistic prowess to question the social conventions and boundaries by which Japanese women were fixed. The visual and textual content of *Seitō* promoted both a personal and a communal space in which female artists, writers, intellectuals, and even housewives had the opportunity to express themselves and further a new definition of the modern woman. As a result, Japanese women were able to directly participate in some of the social and philosophical aspects of the budding Japanese avant-garde movement, creating the potential for all women to access and embrace the new woman model as her own.

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Notes

- 1 *Ryōsai kenbo* – “good wife, wise mother.” See Hirota Masaki, “Notes on the ‘Process of Creating Women’ in the Meiji Period,” pp. 197 – 219, *Gender and Japanese History*, vol. 2, eds. Wakita Haruko, Anne Bouchy, and Ueno Chizuko (Osaka: Osaka University Press, 1999), 216.
- 2 Hiratsuka Raichō was the pen name of Hiratsuka Haruko.
- 3 Richard Reitan, “Claiming Personality: Reassessing the Dangers of the ‘New Woman’ in Early Taishō Japan” *Positions*, 19:1 (2011): 83-107.
- 4 “Morita Sōhei to Shiobara e shinjūkō, sekichū de hakken,” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun (March 25, 1908). Translation by Hiroko Tomida, 118.
- 5 Noriko Lippit, “Seitō and the Literary Roots of Japanese Feminism” *International Journal of Women’s Studies*, 2 no. 2 (1979): 156.
- 6 *Jiji Shinpō* (March 29, 1908). Translation by Hiroko Tomida, 133.
- 7 Kathleen Uno, “Womanhood, War, and Empire: Transmutations of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ before 1931,” *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, eds. Barbara Maloney and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 493.
- 8 *Ibid*, 497.
- 9 Yoko Iwahori, “Jogaku Zasshi and the Construction of the Ideal Wife in the Mid-Meiji Era,” *Gender and Japanese History*, vol. 2, eds. Wakita Haruko, Anne Bouchy, and Ueno Chizuko (Osaka: Osaka University Press, 1999), 396.
- 10 Uno, 493.
- 11 Jan Bardsley, “Women, Marriage, and the State in Modern Japan: Introduction,” *Women’s Studies*, vol. 33, 4 (2004): 354.
- 12 Uno, 406.
- 13 Barbara Satō, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 90.
- 14 Satō, 91.
- 15 Mariko Inuoe, “Kiyokata’s *Asasuzu*: The Emergence of the Jogakusei Image” *Monumenta Nipponica*, 51:4 (2002): 432.
- 16 *Ibid*, 441.
- 17 Japan Women’s College was the only women’s college in Japan at the time.
- 18 Hiratsuka Raichō, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de Atta: Hiratsuka Raichō jiden*, 1-4 vols, (1971-1974) (Tokyo: Ōtsuki Shuten, 1992 ed.), 165-166.
- 19 *Ibid*, 110.
- 20 Barbara Satō and Ulrike Wöhr, eds. *Gender and Modernity: Rereading Japanese Women’s Magazines* (International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 1998), 27.
- 21 Noriko Mizuta Lippit, “Seitō and the Literary Roots of Japanese Feminism.” *International Journal of Women’s Studies*, 2 no. 2 (1979): 155.
- 22 Hiratsuka’s mother regularly provided her with small sums of money, which was spent on miscellaneous

expenses for the magazine. Her mother also paid the deficit whenever a monthly issue of the magazine ran at a loss.

23 Kyoko Horiba, *Seitō no jidai – Hiratsuka Raichō to atarashii onna tachi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988), pp19-21.

24 Masaki, 214.

25 Ibid.

26 Hiratsuka Raichō, “Genshi josei wa taiyōde atta,” *Seitō*, :1 (September, 1911): 37. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

27 The *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) is considered the earliest historical record of Japan. It was completed in 712 and records the events dating back to 660 BCE and the creation of the Japanese Imperial line.

28 *Kojiki*, Book 1, Chapter 17, line 24.

29 Interestingly, however, after the publication of *Seitō*'s inaugural issue attributions to the subsequent cover designs were not listed in the magazine's table of contents. Thus, it is unclear who the artists of the proceeding cover images were. One can only hypothesize that perhaps the lack of an attribution was part of a collective acknowledgement and/or association of the art work by all members of the magazine. Yet, it is puzzling that subsequent artistic portrayals of the “New woman” go unattributed.

30 Dina Lowy, *The Japanese “New Woman”: Contending Images of Gender and Modernity, 1910-1920* (Ph.D. diss., New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2000), 105.

31 *Kokumin Shinbun* (July 12, 1912). Translation by Hiroko Tomida, *Hiratsuka Raichō and Early Japanese Feminism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2004), 173.

32 Hiratsuka Raichō, “Nora-san ni,” *Seitō*, :1 (January, 1912): 134 – 138.

33 Tomida, 182.

34 Horiba, 152.

35 Akiko Shimada, *Nihon no feminizumu: genryū to shite no Akiko, Raichō, Kikue, Kanoko* (Tokyo: Hokuju Shuppan, 1996), 51.

36 Hiratsuka Raichō, “Ren'ai to kekkon (Ellen Key),” *Seitō*, :1 (January, 1913): 2-3.

37 Tomida, 145.

38 Waka Yamada, “Fujin mondai ni tai suru kagaku no taidō,” *Seitō*, 5:4 (April, 1915): 1-7.

39 Hideaki Sasaki, “Hiratsuka Raichō,” *Nihon josei bungaku daijiten* (Tokyo: Nihon Sentā, 2006), 255-256.

40 Noboru Haga, *Nihon josei jinmei jiten* (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Sentā, 1993), 873-874.