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"Rebel Girls: Radical Feminism and Self-Narrative in Early 20th-Century Japan and China"

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Rebel Girls:
Radical Feminism and Self-Narrative in Early 20th-Century Japan and China

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division Languages and Literatures
of Bard College

by
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Introduction

In early 20th-century Japan and China, the role of women in society was rapidly changing. Throughout the 19th century, the ideal of womanhood was represented by the four character phrase “Good Wife, Wise Mother,” known as *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母 in Japanese and *xián qī liáng mù* 賢妻良母 in Chinese respectively. Traditional feudal society expected a woman to value her husband and his family more than her own and act as a dutiful, chaste, loyal wife and as an educator to her children in order to raise successful sons. According to this traditional paradigm, women had no place in the public sector. However, with the rise of Western literature and modernity, the early 1900s marked the beginning of a series of intellectual and reform movements that welcomed new styles of writing and the popularization of social thought for Japan and China. These new intellectual, literary, and social trends provided women with an opportunity to participate in politics and public discourse and gave birth to a feminist movement that called for a reconfiguration women’s role in society.

In the late 19th-century and early 20th-century, despite the prevalence of Western ideas of female liberation, women in Japan and China were exploited and not taken seriously when they tried to participate in politics. The Japanese and Chinese female writer, too, has historically been denied agency. Just like how patriarchal Japanese and Chinese social structures have forced women not to stray from household duties and fulfill the suffocating role of a “Good Wife, Wise Mother” (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母, *xián qī liáng mù* 賢妻良母), the female writer has also faced confinement and isolation:

Symbolic of the status of women in general in a patriarchal society, which Meiji Japan was, women writers then were referred to as *keishū sakka*. *Kei* (from Chinese word *kuei*) means ‘the woman’s chambers,’ a room in the back of the estate where wealthy men kept their women separate; *shu* means ‘beautiful’ and *sakka* means writer; were seen as separate from the mainstream, their male counterparts.¹

These women were not only denied their right to participate in public society, but they were physically removed from it. The metaphorical separation of the female writer from the male domain of the literary mainstream illustrates how female writing is Othered, depicted as beautiful as a form of objectification, and demoted to the lowest tier of literature, all of which mimic the objectification and the low social standing of its female writer. Additionally, although Tanaka describes the *keishū sakka* 閨秀作家 in terms of a Japanese literary tradition, it was also a gendered dynamic present within the Chinese literature, written as a slight variation as *guīxiù pài zuòjiā* 閨秀派作家.

Prior to the social movements of the early 1900s, female authors were generally seen as a distinct literary category in Japan and China. The denigration of women’s literature limited women’s access to writing as an outlet of self expression, self discovery and self exploration. Female writing as a genre was only given credit for being of “high quality” by male critics if it was discernibly different than “male literature” and reinforced women as submissive within the

¹ Tanaka, Yukiko, *Women Writers of Meiji and Taishō Japan* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2000), 7.

gender hierarchy. Acceptable female literature was expected to be “gentle, feminine sentiment conveyed in a highly polished style with flowing language.”² The suppression of women’s writing is directly correlated to women’s oppression in Japan and China. For this reason, it is essential to consider women writing about the female self as an inherently feminist and political action.

In fact, within feminist discourse, writing itself is understood to be a feminist act. Hélène Cixous first coins *écriture féminine* in her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), where she reframes male psychoanalytic theory to argue that the woman has historically been decentered and placed within in a position of otherness. To recenter women within their own narratives, in which they can be free to move and create, Cixous advocates for the development of an *écriture féminine* or a feminine literature:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies because their sexual pleasure has been repressed and denied expression. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement.³

In applying Hélène Cixous’s framework of the *écriture féminine* to discussions of Japanese and Chinese female self-narrative, I emphasize the importance of self-writing to women’s liberation as the medium upon which women rewrite their violent erasure, endow their writing with reclamatory power, and redefine the cultural, social and political understanding of the female self.

² Tanaka, 7.

³ Cixous, Hélène, "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs* 1, no. 4. Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen trans. (Chicago IL: Chicago University Press, 1976), 875.

Female self-writing, simply put, is an expression of the female self. I posit that female self-writing is a movement of female reclamation of selfhood that serves as a political vehicle for female self advocacy and self expression, self discovery and self exploration. Female self-writing challenges the “[male] critics of the time . . . [who] thought that women’s writing ought to appeal to the emotions, not to the intellect.”⁴ As I illustrate in each of the examples in my chapters, women re-appropriate male expectations by turning a gendered “emotional” writing technique into a uniquely female persuasive political tool. I assert that the female self-narrative is both a statement and a declaration of female autonomy made possible through the change in political climate in Japan and China respectively. In this thesis, I examine the writings of Japanese feminists Hiratsuka Raichō (平塚雷鳥 1886-1971), Itō Noe (伊藤野枝 1895-1923), and Chinese feminist Ding Ling (丁玲 1904-1986) to offer a reinterpretation of the historic significance of the female self-narrative, positing that the female self-narrative functions as a fluid realm in which modern women actualize female selfhood, reclaim agency, and explore political identity and radicalization.

It is important to consider the unique social contexts of China in the 1920s and Japan in the early 1900s that allowed for Japan and China to develop parallel yet separate feminist movements. The Japanese social climate during the Taishō era (大正時代 1912 -1926) was considerably liberal, with a popular topic among the intellectuals being the restructuring of

⁴ Tanaka, 6.

Japanese society. The Taishō era also oversaw the formation of radical socialist, communist, and anarchist political groups. These intellectual currents naturally corresponded to and became integrated with Japan's emerging female liberation movement, aided by the introduction of a new social model of womanhood—the Westernized “New Woman” (新しい女 *atarashii onna*, later redefined by feminists as 新婦人 *shin fujin*) around 1910.

China also adopted the concept of the “New Woman” 新女性, but unlike Japan where “New Woman 新しい女” was widely used in magazines as a derogatory word to humiliate women who defied traditional social conventions, the “New Woman 新女性” as a concept was inextricable from nationalist discourse that emerged from the May Fourth Movement (1919-24). The May Fourth Movement, also known as the Chinese Enlightenment or the Chinese Renaissance, refers to the Chinese social and literary revolution prompted by a national protest on May 4, 1919. In China, the “New Woman” was created by male intellectuals as a new symbolic national role for women, interconnected with the New Youth 新青年 and New China 新中国 movements. These new social dynamics created a liberal climate in both Japan and China that allowed the role of women in society to be reevaluated, thus allowing women to elevate their own voices through writing about the female self. To fully understand the social, historical and cultural framework of my discussion of women's reclamation of the term “New Woman” and the promotion of feminism through writing across both Japanese and Chinese contexts, I first begin with a deeper discussion on the term's history, associations, and application in both countries.

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and the “New Woman” of Japan and China

Many of the women who began writing in the Taishō Period were inspired by Western writers. With an influx of Western literature, descriptions of a new breed of liberated women began circulating amongst the intellectual elite of early 20th century Japan. The Japanese woman's self-perception and the way that women were perceived by others began to shift as a result of these “New Women” depicted in and popularized by Western literature. Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House* (1879), in particular, featured a character who came to exemplify what the New Woman is; Nora is a married woman living out the ideal of the 19th-century wife, who, even after making countless sacrifices for her husband, is treated like an object (the titular “doll”) and denied opportunities for autonomy and self-fulfilment in return. The work concludes with Nora leaving her family— a betrayal of traditional morality and an assertion of individual will. Despite this controversy. It has since been translated into various languages, finding unexpected success in rapidly modernizing nations of early 20th-century Japan and China.

Because of the social context of Ibsen's play, Nora immediately became a symbol for this “new breed” of liberated women. In the 1910s and 1920s the concept of the “New Woman” was first introduced to the Chinese and Japanese lexicon as “新女性 *xin nuxing*” and “新しい女 *atarashii onna*” respectively. In fact, the “New Woman” first appears in China and Japan through theatrical productions of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879). Ibsen's protagonist, Nora, comes to represent the quintessential, modern, liberated woman— an example of a self-determined woman who escapes oppression. Japanese playwright Ihara Seiseien (伊原青々園 1870-1941) coined the term “New Woman” when tasked with reviewing a theatrical

production of *A Doll's House*, starring Matsui Sumako (松井須磨子 1886-1919) as Nora; he noted how two women in the audience, Okada Yachiyo (岡田八千代 1883-1962) and Hasegawa Shigure (長谷川時雨 1879-1941) both shed tears while watching the production, which must have inspired them to rethink their lives as women because of how profoundly relatable Nora was⁵. In his review, Ihara compared Okada and Hasegawa to Nora and referred to them as Japan's "New Women."

Like many Japanese and Chinese women, Nora was denied agency by the patriarchal family structure and Nora's bravery to choose herself and shun the male-dominated world that expected to subjugate her arrived at just the right time to cause a social upheaval: "At the time of *A Doll's House's* first performance in Japan, the play represented three concurrent moments for the Japanese: 1) the arrival of a Western modernity and consequently, 2) the beginning of new forms of theatre and 3) changes in the social roles of women."⁶ In mainstream discourse on the position of women in society, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* became the foundation upon which both respective Japanese and Chinese female liberation movements would grow, with "New Woman" types often being referred to simply as "Noras." Indra Levy writes: "By the time Sumako rose to the challenge of playing Nora in 1911, the idea that the new era was most provocatively figured by a new type of woman had long since prepared the way for the spectacular fusion of Japanese female body and Western literary image."⁷ The Western woman, previously, was seen as a romantic literary figure with various male intellectuals like Natsume

⁵ Copeland, Rebecca L., and Melek Ortobasi. *The Modern Murasaki: Writing by Women of Meiji Japan*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 267-292.

⁶ Osenton, Sara. *Differently Equal: Ibsen's Nora, the New Woman and the Evolution of Self Orientalization in Japan*, (Toronto, Web, 2011), 226.

⁷ Levy, Indra. *Sirens of the Western Shore: Westernesque Women and Translation in Modern Japanese Literature*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 198.

Sōseki (夏目漱石 1867-1916), Morita Sohei (森田草平 1881-1949), Tayama Katai (田山花袋 1872-1930) openly admiring the headstrong “New Women of Ibsen and Hauptmann as well as Hermann Sudermann’s Magda (Heimat, 1893) and the defiantly single mother of Grant Allen’s novel *The Woman Who Did*.”⁸ Despite this, perceptions of gender representation were considered to be widely different in Japan than they are in West.

Japanese femininity was believed to be incompatible with the “openness” of these new Western women. In fact, Levy suggests that “the majority of male theater pundits apparently believed that it had yet to take up residence in the body of a Japanese woman or that the bodies of Japanese women were not up to the task of ‘expressing’ it.”⁹ The cultural and social dynamics at play in Matsui Sumako’s performance, therefore, serves as proof that this female independence associated with Western womanhood can exist within the bodies of Japanese women. Levy writes that Matsui Sumako’s “performance of a Norwegian housewife was immediately hailed by critics as the triumph of the modern Japanese actress as a stunning example of natural gender representation.”¹⁰ Matsui Sumako’s performance forces the audience to consider the potential that this new “Western” womanhood can be integrated with Japanese womanhood, as “the striking visual incongruity of a Japanese woman performing the role of a Norwegian housewife serves as a clear reminder that there is no universal ‘woman.’”¹¹

With the new understanding of a universal womanhood, the female self therefore can no longer be understood based on cultural difference, but rather through differences in individuals. Shaun O’Dwyer points to the liberal-individualist conception of the “unencumbered self” to

⁸ Levy, 198.

⁹ Levy, 199.

¹⁰ Levy, 197.

¹¹ Levy, 197.

assert that Nora is best understood as a character in “cross cultural circumstances” where she can reject “social roles that are found to be unjust according to universal, as opposed to particularist, ‘Confucian’ ethical standards.”¹² Nora, therefore, is not meant to be understood on the basis of her individuality; rather, she fits best within the context of being a universal symbol for female social nonconformity and liberation

The first Chinese translation of *A Doll’s House* was released as a special issue of *New Youth* magazine (新青年 *xin qingnien*) in June 1918, which garnered Ibsen significant praise and attention. In the coming years, his plays were performed frequently in all major Chinese cities. Separate from the “New Woman” of Japan, the “New Woman” of China was “transmuted into the Chinese context through certain important ‘intermediaries’ for specific purposes.”¹³ The New Woman in Japan was also connected to modernity, but she was representative of a movement rather than that of a new female social role that she is being subjected to like in China. The two ‘intermediaries’ that Chien centers her discussion on are Lu Xun and Hu Shi, Chinese intellectuals and leaders of the Chinese Enlightenment of the early 1920s. Lu Xun and Hu Shi interpreted the New Woman differently, with Hu Shi introducing the term “Ipsenism,” or “*Yipushengzhuyi* 易卜生主义,” in 1918 as means to emphasize the themes of individualism and free will to discuss women’s liberation in *A Doll’s House*.¹⁴ Lu Xun, however, shows more interest in Nora as symbol in a broader discussion on women’s economic and social issues, engaging in debates on social and political implications of Nora's fate after she leaves.

¹² O'Dwyer, Shaun *Ibsen's Nora and the Confucian Critique of the “Unencumbered Self”* in *Hypatia*, Vol. 31 (Web: 2016), 890-906.

¹³ Chien, Ying-Ying. “*Feminism and China’s New “Nora”: Ibsen, Hu Shi & Lu Xun.*” *The Comparatist*, Vol 19. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 98.

¹⁴ Chien, 98.

However, both Lu Xun and Hu Shi used Nora as a symbol of the immoralities of enforced chastity, arranged marriages, polygamy present in the Chinese social structure. Hu Shi's critique of Ibsen focused "on the evils of traditional society which were harmful to the individual's (both women's and men's) free will. . . Hu's criticism was directed mainly toward toward the feudal family system and social customs."¹⁵ Hu Shi advocated for women's liberation through a specific brand of male feminism. He used a gendered story of liberation to introduce ideas of universal individualism to benefit to men and represent an ideal of national progress. Similarly, Chien writes that Lu Xun "not only affected the intellectual and literary consensus of what Chinese Noras or New Women should be like or how they should 'behave' and be presented (both in real life and in literature), but also influenced the general direction of the Chinese women's movement for years to come."¹⁶ The male feminist movement propagated by intellectuals like Lu Xun and Hu Shi dictated how the "New Chinese Woman" was expected to act and present herself in society, functioning simply as a new social role assigned by powerful male academics:

A critical look at Western influence and the fictional Chinese New Women characters reveals a sort of double oppression/silencing of Chinese women. First, Chinese male intellectuals prescribed a "new" role for Chinese women to passively follow, and secondly, the standards these intellectuals looked to for this role were foreign ones that were subtly adapted for the sake of "modern" China, not for the women per se.¹⁷

The imagining of the New Woman in China was not that of a liberated individual, but rather that of an object and symbol of a nationalist New China. The movement, however, created a liberal political climate that succeeded in elevating female voices. The male-fronted "female liberation

¹⁵ Chien, 99.

¹⁶ Chien, 99.

¹⁷ Chien, 98.

movement's" focus on individualism granted Chinese women the opportunity to engaged in self discovery and exploration through writing, inadvertently allowing these women to reclaim feminism from these male feminists.

Feminist reclamation of the self through self-writing is best understood through the Japanese and Chinese female writer's re-appropriation of the word "New Woman." The female self-narrative functions on many levels as domain of female liberation and self exploration. The female self-narrative not only serves to inspire and advocate for the female reader, but it validates the perspective and experiences of its writer and provides women with a platform to either subvert or participate in the male literary domain and as a platform for self-expression, separate from male influence. As I will demonstrate through Chapter 1, self-writing has allowed feminists to cast a new light on the term and reclaim it by exploring and reimagining the female self, proudly explaining and justifying their values through detailing their struggles against the Japanese and Chinese patriarchal state.

The self-narrative can take the various forms. I discuss the autobiography in Chapter 1, in regards to Hiratsuka Raichō's "*In the Beginning Woman was the Sun*" (元始, 女性は太陽であつた *Genshi, Jōsei wa Taiyō de atta* 1971-3). I also focus on autobiographical fiction like Kishida Toshiko's *Splendid Flowers of the Valley* (山間の銘菓 *Sankan no meika*) in Chapter 1, Ito Noe's "Wagamama" (我儘 Willfulness, 1913) and "Shuppon" (出奔 Flight, 1913) in Chapter 2, Ding Ling's "Miss Sophie's Diary" (沙菲女士的日记 *Shā fēi nǚshì dì rìjì*, 1927) and

“When I was in Xia Village” (我在霞村的时候 Wǒ zài xiá cūn de shíhòu, 1941) in Chapter 3, as well as numerous personal essays like Itō Noe’s *The Path of the New Woman* (新しき女の道 *Atarashiki Onna no Michi*, 1913) in Chapter 2 and Ding Ling’s “Thoughts on March 8th” (三月八有感 *Sān yuè bā yǒu gǎn*, 1942) in Chapter 3. I also discuss feminist manifestos through the example of Raichō’s “*In the Beginning Woman was the Sun*” (元始, 女性は太陽であった *Genshi, Josei wa Taiyō de atta*, 1911) which I expand on at the end of Chapter 1. An additional quality of the female self-narrative is that it gives voice to not only its female protagonist, but to its writer as well; it allows modern women, maybe even for the first time, to attempt to define, explore and assert themselves. The self-narrative, usually first person, can be as emotionally persuasive as it is politically. The unique qualities of female self-narrative writing that allows for it to function in this way are its innate intimacy, centering both reader and writer within in the personal.

In Chapter 1, I posit that feminist reclamation through self-writing is best understood through the Japanese woman’s re-appropriation of the word “New Woman” through the example of pioneering Japanese feminist Hiratsuka Raichō, who leverages her notoriety from scandals to redefine the national narrative on womanhood and establish herself as a advocate for the new liberated Japanese woman. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, Hiratsuka Raichō reshapes and

reimagines the Japanese narrative on female identity through a redirection of her various public scandals, self-writing, and her creation of Japanese feminist society *Seitō* (青鞥 1911-1916).

In Chapter 2, I explore the formation and intersections of female identity and political identity through the evolution of Japanese feminist and anarchist Itō Noe's self-writing. Itō Noe joins the feminist magazine *Seitō* at the formative age of sixteen and views anarchism as an expansion of her feminism. Through analyzing her development and the incorporation of her own narrative into her politics, I assert that women's writing uniquely possesses an emotional appeal, typically ascribed to female writers by the male literary domain, that they can re-appropriate as an effective and personal political tool in self-writing. In Noe's case, political and personal identity is intertwined, demonstrating the power of self discovery and exploration through the political framework of the female self-narrative.

In Chapter 3, Chinese writer and feminist Ding Ling used writing as an expansion of the female self, as a realm in which to ascribe women personal agency, and as a political medium in which to develop her ideological radicalization. I compare her early self-writing that focuses on female sexual liberation to that of her later distinctly communist self-writing in an analysis of the tensions between the political self and the feminist self. I argue that Ding Ling's devotion to the Chinese Communist Party results in a gradual subsumption of her feminism, with her female

narrator's developing collective identities, losing their self-explorative quality of intimate psycho-emotional narration, and instead serving as political subjects.

By using the female self-narrative as a vehicle in which to explore the formation, intersections, and actualization of female identity and political identity, I complicate the assertion that female writing is intrinsically political; I propose that female self-writing is not only a feminist and political action, but, rather, it also functions as a specific reflection and extension of one's identity, in which its writer controls her narrative and self-representation. This dynamic makes it uniquely possible for the self-narrative to allow female writes to reclaim agency, actualize selfhood, explore public and political identities, and undo the historical erasure and alienation of women by writing themselves into history.

Chapter 1: The Original New Woman: Hiratsuka Raichō

Feminist Beginnings in the Liberal Taishō Era

The Taishō Period (大正時代 1912 — 1926) oversaw a continued effort towards modernity, building off of the social, political, cultural, infrastructural and economic reformations of the late Meiji Period (明治時代 1868 — 1912). With the introduction of Western philosophical, political, and literary movements, many intellectuals used these foreign ideas and literature as inspiration to instigate popular discussion on Japan's future as a modern, and potentially democratic, nation. In a new era of public participation, opposed conservative and progressive groups began to voice and circulate gossip to argue their opinions on current events in national magazines and newspapers. The Meiji Period laid the foundations for the Taishō Period to become fertile ground for the female liberation movement to take root.

In order to understand feminism in Japan's Taishō era, we must first look at early Japanese feminism in the Meiji Era. The grassroots political party of the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement (自由民権運動 *Jiyū Minken Undō*) advocated for a democratic nation ruled by an elected legislative body that would promise to revise the Japanese Unequal Treaties made with Western powers and achieve rights for women and men without property. The FPR was the first political movement that had featured female activists and included speakers, and it gained momentum despite the fact that most men in the Popular Rights Movement did not consider women to be their "true partners," nor did they take them seriously.¹⁸ The Popular Rights

¹⁸Tanaka, 24.

Movement had notable successes, including prompting the Meiji government to ratify a national constitution in 1889, and establishing the Diet as Japan's first elected legislative body in 1890. However, the movement failed in part as the government continued to refuse citizenship to all who did not fit within the guidelines of being a landowning man.

Yukiko Tanaka mentions Fukuda Hideko (福田英子, 1865-1927), Miyake Kaho (三宅花圃, 1868-1943), and Kishida Toshiko (岸田 俊子, 1863-1901) as pioneering as female writers of the Meiji Period. Toshiko's *Splendid Flowers* established the framework for subsequent female writers by centering the narrative on a female activist, Yoshiko. Her point of view adds deep emotion to the genre of *seiji shosetsu*, or political fiction.¹⁹ Many prominent feminist writers of the Taishō Period similarly relied on emotional self-narratives in writing *seiji shosetsu*. Toshiko was also an active member in the Popular Rights Movement, giving her famous “*Hakoirimusume*” speech (箱入り娘, "Daughters Kept in Boxes") in Okayama in 1882. Toshiko's speech used the metaphor of a box to describe how Confucian teachings of blind obedience to parents and husbands suffocate women, going as far as to criticize the Meiji government for limiting assemblies. Her position as a public speaker required exceptional bravery, making herself a target for threatened liberals and conservatives alike. She was fined five yen and placed under arrest as a result of her brazen words and actions, amounting to the charge of “insulting officialdom.”²⁰ In Toshiko's later career, she wrote essays on female oppression; “The rhetorical approach that Toshiko took in these articles was to attack men fiercely on the one hand and plead with them on the other — a style employed by other women

¹⁹Tanaka, 21.

²⁰Anderson, Marnie S. "Kishida Toshiko and the Rise of the Female Speaker in Meiji Japan." U.S.-Japan Women's Journal, no. 30/31 (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 36.

polemicists of the Meiji era as well.”²¹ Her prominence made her vulnerable, but enabled her to inspire fellow activists Kageyama Hideko (福田 英子 1865 – 1927) and Shimizu Shikin (Toyoko, 清水紫琴, 1868-1933).²² Toshiko and others introduced political involvement as a female public activity. Their speeches and the self-writing were explicitly feminist and inflammatory, challenging Meiji authority and establishing the necessary framework for Taishō feminism to build upon. Between the growth of mass culture, and the increasing prominence of journalism as a medium, and the continued momentum from early activist movements, the political climate in the Taishō period was both considerably liberal and politically volatile. Unfortunately Japanese society was still unaccepting of pioneers like Toshiko, as she eventually gave into social pressure after her release from prison, married a male activist, and ceased all activities in public speaking, unable to live as an independent activist. Additionally, during her time with the Popular Rights Movement, she allowed men to “exploit her in a way” so as to keep having access to her platform. ²³

Many male intellectuals seized this liberal climate of the early 1900s to argue in favor of Japan developing a tradition of a liberal social democracy, making issues of free love and modern womanhood a particularly hot topic among both the educated elite and popular media. This openness, in many academic circles, made the Taishō era known for its relative liberalism.²⁴ It is worth noting, however that many scholars debate the accuracy of the term of depicting Taishō as a liberal state. Andrew Gordon, in fact, argues in *Labor and Imperial Democracy* that

²¹Tanaka, 25.

²²Tanaka, 23.

²³Tanaka, 23.

²⁴ Byron K. Marshall, *Academic Freedom and the Japanese Imperial University, 1868-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 80.

the post-1912 political climate was actually an “imperial democracy.”²⁵ Activists in this period were, indeed, subjected to government bans and imperial censors, which I discuss in detail later in my second chapter. Despite the heavy government prohibitions of content deemed threatening, “this [comparatively politically relaxed] climate prevailed until the end of the 1920s but was quite diverse in content, ranging from anarcho-syndicalism and communism on the Left through Fabian socialism and contemporary British liberalism and on toward the Center of the political spectrum.”²⁶ Although Taishō Japan cannot and should not be considered a fully democratized state, the specific circumstances of the era did in fact allow for a relatively liberal political climate that allowed radical social participation to flourish for its first ten years.

The Japanese “New Woman” and The Self-Narrative

A Doll's House occupied a controversial position within Japanese discourse on citizenship. As the social role of men began to shift as a result of national modernity, the role of women in society was also bound to be transformed, creating anxiety for men concerned by the threat to their social standing. By the time Nora arrived, it seemed as if many Japanese women had found the opportunity to reimagine their roles as women. Vera Mackie writes that the word “New Woman” began to first catch on in academic circles:

The label ‘New Woman’ gained currency in Japan after Tsubouchi Shoyo, Professor of Literature at Waseda University, lectured on ‘The New Woman in Western Theatre’, using as his examples Ibsen’s Nora . . . The controversy

²⁵Gordon, Andrew. *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*. (California: University of California Press, 1991), 5-10.

²⁶ Marshal, 80.

generated by the characters created by Ibsen . . . was certainly one catalyst for the interest in the New Woman; but this debate only gained currency in Japan because of an anxiety about the activities of women in public space, similar to the anxieties which had prompted debates on New Women and European countries before the turn of the century and in China slightly later.²⁷

While many decried the popularity of Nora and blamed Ibsen and other Western influences for corrupting the “virtuous” Japanese woman, many Japanese women embraced Nora as a model, aspiring to her self-determination and independence. In short, opinions were split and “New Woman” became a divisive term. Magazines weaponized the words “New Woman” to denounce female behaviors they deemed promiscuous or otherwise morally questionable. Often educated women from prominent families became the frequent topic of public and private gossip, often with their images—captioned with “New Woman”—published in magazines as slander, intending to exploit these “loose” women to make a profit.²⁸ By the 1900s, the “New Woman” as a cultural symbol was used frequently across all forms of media. In Japan, the “New Woman” ushers in a new form of womanhood.²⁹ Much of the early interest and musing on the topic, however, was entirely male dominated, much like the “Male Feminism” that emerged and dominated in 1920s China (which I discuss at length in Chapter 3).

On the other hand, in the realm of the arts, the New Woman’s independence was not only lauded, but also romanticized. These women with modern values became frequently represented through reproductions of *A Doll’s House* and other Western plays. The New Woman also enjoyed popularity as a new archetypal romantic interest throughout much of early twentieth century Japanese literature. For example, Yoshiko in Tayama Katai’s *Futon* (Bedding, 1907) or

²⁷ Mackie, Vera. *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality*. Contemporary Japanese Society. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45.

²⁸ Levy, 88.

²⁹ Levy, 86.

Mineko in Natsume Soseki's *Sanshiro* (1908), or Tomoko in Morita Sohei's *Baien* (Smoke 1909). Both Mineko and Tomoko were modelled after a young Hiratsuka Haru (平塚 明 1886-1971), later known publicly by her pen name Raichō— the topic of my first chapter— who leveraged her exposure from public scandals to become one of Japan's first prominent leading feminists. Levy writes that “the new women of *Futon*, *Baien*, and *Sanshiro* are eternally enigmatic, distinguished by a conspicuous form of self-consciousness that not only attracts self-consciously modern men but also confounds them.”³⁰ The Japanese New Woman, therefore, is placed in the symbolic of role as the emblem of modernity and social change, which manifested as either a scapegoat for male anxiety or as a romanticized unattainable ideal.

Yukiko Tanaka, on the topic of women's social roles in 1912, writes that one of the major reasons for feminism to thrive in the Taishō period is because of both the liberal social and political climate domestically and the timing of women's' rights movements internationally:

When this new interest in women was stirred up at the beginning of the Taishō period (1912-1926), it was largely due to the more liberal social and political climate of the time, but it was also a response to the suffrage crusade and other activities in England and the United States. For the first time, Japanese women tried to identify with the West, to learn about women's emancipation and other important issues. This affected women's emancipation and other important issues. This affected women's literary, as well as social and political, activities and initiated more aggressive attempts at self-definition and self-assertion in writing.³¹

Although Japanese male leftists often captured the public's attention with their pleas of liberation for all, women seized this moment for themselves. This was their opportunity to publicize their politics and educate each other; the reclamation of agency and the circulation of these ideas was made possible through the writing of female self-narratives. Female self-writing, simply put, is

³⁰ Levy, 199.

³¹ Tanaka, 7.

an expression of the female self. I posit that female self-writing is a political movement of female reclamation of selfhood that serves as a political vehicle for female self advocacy and self expression, self discovery and self exploration. Female self-writing challenges the male critics of the time by using emotions to appeal to the intellect. As I illustrate in each of the examples in my chapters, women re-appropriate male expectations by turning a gendered “emotional” writing technique into a uniquely female persuasive political tool. Feminist reclaim through self-writing is best understood through the Japanese woman’s re-appropriation of the word “New Woman.” As I will demonstrate through Chapter 1, self-writing has allowed feminists to cast a new light on the term and reclaim it by exploring and reimagining the female self, proudly explaining and justifying their values through detailing their struggles against the Japanese patriarchal state.

Hiratsuka Raichō and the *Baien* Incident

To begin my analysis of women’s reclamation of the self through self-writing, I first turn my attention to Hiratsuka Raichō (平塚 らいちょう 1886-1971), an intellectual and feminist who leveraged her notoriety following a public defamation to become an activist and outspoken critic of the Japanese patriarchy and pioneer the Japanese female liberation movement. She was born Hiratsuka Haru (平塚明) in 1886, later choosing Raichō as her pen name in 1911.

Hiratsuka Raichō made her first public appearance as the topic of gossip in an issue of the *The Tokyo Asahi* (東京朝日新聞) newspaper, published on March 25, 1908 and was first labeled a “New Woman” in a derogatory sense. Raichō, a student at Japan Women's University (日本女子大学 *Nihon Joshi Daigaku*), had become the mistress of novelist Morita Sōhei (森田草平

1867-1916), a disciple of Natsume Sōseki (夏目漱石 1881-1949). The incident in question was a failed love suicide attempt, which resulted in public humiliation for Raichō and recognition and success for Morita Sōhei.

Raichō faced extreme consequences for her perceived role in the event, notably an expulsion from the college alumnae association, pressure for her father to resign from his government position, and lewd proposals from anonymous suitors. *The Tokyo Asahi* newspaper made a spectacle out of what became known as the *Baien* (“smoke”) Incident (named after Morita’s fictionalized recount of the scandal), publishing an article entitled “Unsuccessful Double Suicide by a Gentleman and a Lady. The Man, a University Graduate and Novelist, the Woman a College Graduate,” ridiculing the couple for their esteemed education having led to such foolish delusions, with an equally laughable conclusion.³²

The picture of Raichō featured in *The Tokyo Asahi* newspaper was captioned: “since ancient times, double suicides have not been unheard of, but this is the first time a highly educated gentleman and a lady have imitated the ignorant behavior of illiterate men and women. One can only say that this unprecedented occurrence is the result of Naturalism and free love carried to an extreme.”³³ *The Tokyo Asahi* newspaper used the *Baien* Incident, not only to elicit gossip, but as means to twist the affair to denounce the concept of the New Woman and free love, claiming them to be excessive and potentially dangerous ideas.

Morita eventually went on to profit off of their publicized love-suicide attempt by turning the incident into a novel, entitled *Baien*, ironically serialized in the *Tokyo Asashi* newspaper that

³² Craig, Teruko, *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist* (New York: Columbia Publishing Press, 2006). Translator’s Note, “4. The Years After College,” 6, 320.

³³ Craig, Translator’s Note, “4. The Years After College,” 6, 320.

initially disgraced the couple. When Morita Sohei published *Baien*, he creates a self-serving narrative and uses Raichō's personhood as an object on which to base his own writing. It is worth noting, however, that Soseki suggested that the best way for his disciple to salvage his reputation and the only way he could continue to re-establish himself as a writer was to serialize a retelling of the scandal. At the time, Raichō did attempt to write her version of events, but it was never published. Decades later, however, her autobiography, *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun* (元始, 女性は太陽であった *Genshi, Josei wa Taiyō de atta*, 1971), reveals how Morita engaged in an erasure of her role in their romanticized literary-induced love affair.³⁴ Morita, throughout the course of their fraught relationship, aspires to be like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and Georgio in *The Triumph of Death* (1562), dreaming of experiencing the twisted, artistic impact that spending time in jail and seeing Raichō's final moments would bring. Throughout Raichō's life, the men around her influenced and shaped her public image.

Recalling the trip Morita and Raichō embarked on the trip that would lead her to her death, Raichō notes in her autobiography that the epic story that they planned to write together was not as she expected; "But there was something wrong. [I had asked him to bring all the letters I had sent, but] the packet containing my letters was half the size of his, and my letters always had been much longer."³⁵ These letters implicate Raichō's role in the affair and her true, complex feelings regarding the matter. Considering that they planned to die in a way that would mimic that of their great Western literary idols, the central idea behind this plot was to die in a

³⁴ Hiratsuka, Raichō. *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, Translation by Teruko Craig, (New York, New York: Columbia Publishing Press, 2006), 64-139.

³⁵ Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, 115.

way that held similar meaning and literary significance. However, Morita, evidently, shows little interest in accurately representing Raichō's thoughts or asserting personhood, both in reality and in his fiction. Morita seemingly planned to construct Raichō's narrative through the letters he selected. Raichō, even in her personal relationships, is shown to be at the mercy of others directing her autonomy—an attempt to control her life and her reputation posthumously.

By using autobiography as a medium, Raichō was able to decide what achievements of hers to highlight and think over how best to represent herself and her feelings on her (publicized) private matters. Several chapters in her autobiography are devoted to explaining her side of the *Baien* Incident, highlighting Morita's foolishness in contrast to her cool, calm demeanor. She even uses humor to diminish his work and success: "Woman, he wrote, were the most beautiful at the moment of death, and for this reason, he intended to kill me. As an artist and a disciple of Beauty, He was determined to see me, the fairest of all, and my last moments. His letter read like a student exercise and composition, but I was never the less taken aback. . ." ³⁶ Raichō is able to characterize Morita as an artist, tortured by his unique mix of incompetency and dreams of grandeur.

Although Raichō gave Morita permission to publish *Baien*, she did not expect it to be so one-sided. Reflecting on Raichō and her family's reaction to *Baien*, she asks, "why did Morita have to tell the story according to his own tastes and preferences, and in a most tendentious manner at that? To me at least, another obvious failing was the extensive use of my letters — rewritten though they might be—and the total omission of his own." ³⁷ Raichō was completely

³⁶ Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, 109.

³⁷ Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, 132.

denied her right to exist in this narrative; she was omitted and denied active, mutual participation. Her initial motives were obscured and the supposed “romance” Morita writes of has become one-sided. Instead of describing the real connection that was shared, Raichō became an object to Morita. The depiction of Raichō, whose name was changed to Tomoko in the novel as a transparent way to shield her identity, was important considering that, after the affair, she was the one who suffered and had the most at risk. Raichō’s ability to not only take control of her own narrative, but also to provide platforms for other radical women illustrates how the act of women writing themselves into history is not a singular act; the medium of writing endows female writers with the agency society has stripped from them and grants them the power to redefine the narrative of womanhood on a national scale.

Hiratsuka Raichō: Self-writing and the Reclamation of the New Woman

Despite the fall-out and public humiliations resulting from the *Baien* scandal, Hiratsuka Raichō did not falter personally or professionally. She later went on to famously reclaim the term “New Woman” to establish a framework to advocate for women’s liberation. With incredible haste, Raichō was able to manipulate her infamy as the target of a highly publicized scandal to repurpose the accusation of being a “New Woman.” She uses this allegation to inquire what it means to be an independent, modern Japanese woman and she creates a subjective feminist narrative that justifies, celebrates, and promotes the beliefs and actions of a New Woman like

herself. In fact, it is universally understood that Raichō, by the mid 1900s had “become the champion of the ‘New Woman.’”³⁸

Hiratsuka Raichō had become a public figure, known for embodying the ideals of “the New Woman” in the public eye. Through *Baien* Morita gains control of the narrative of their scandal and strips Raichō’s agency in the affair from her. She was denied the right to tell her own story and to speak to her own experiences. However, this assigned role became advantageous for the pioneering feminist. Raichō used the incident to reclaim and redefine what it means to be a “New Woman,” using her notoriety and public image to advocate for women’s liberation. Raichō’s own definition of the term, according to a 1912 essay in defense of the New Woman, published in the foremost influential literary magazine, *Chūō Kōron* (中央公論), is as follows:

I am a New Woman . . . I am the Sun . . . The New Woman brings down a curse on “yesterday.” She can no longer endure to be someone who silently and obediently to walk the path which an oppressed, old-fashioned woman walked. The 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. The New Woman wishes to destroy the old morals and laws created for the sake of male convenience . . . day by day she attempts to create a new Kingdom.³⁹

To Raichō, life is not submission to husbands, bosses, or children and marriage institutes a system of subjugation in which “wives are treated the same way as minors or cripples.”⁴⁰ Women are treated as subhuman and seen as objects for the consumption of men; therefore, she argues that women must exist beyond the systems of patriarchy and free from subjugation under male

³⁸Tanaka, 132.

³⁹ Hiratsuka, Raichō, “To the Women of the World.” Translation by Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*. (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press: 2007), 102.

⁴⁰ Hiratsuka “To the Women of the World,” 103.

whims. Raichō alludes to the “old woman” as being inauthentic. She explains that women’s positionality is subjective and re-creates a new social dynamic where the old and traditional are representative of emotionally-charged ideas of slavery, forced ignorance, and women’s bodies as lumps of meat. Not only does she present the New Woman in a positive light, but she also defines the phenomenon of social backwardness with distinct contempt.

For all of the times that Raichō is referred to as a “Nora” or a “New Woman” as a form of humiliation, Raichō’s proudly proclaims Nora as an idol of her’s and embraces the “New Woman” label, redefining it through a righteous dismissal of the traditional Japanese woman. Raichō twists the media’s narrative on ideal and expected performances of femininity and womanhood by referring to the “old fashioned, traditional woman” in the same negative light that the “New Women” was subjected to. In doing this, she uses the label that had been designated to her for her own advantage, serving her own radical purpose. She defines the New Woman based on what she is not; the New Woman represents a realm of total female liberation and an unapologetic severing of the past. Aware of their positions as newly democratic citizens, Raichō and other feminist writers not only opted to reclaim the term New Woman (*atarashii onna* 新しい女), but they also began to adopt their own word for New Woman, *shin fujin* 新婦人, to refer to themselves. The *shin fujin* New Woman self-identified as a leading feminist, presented herself through Western fashion choices, socialized freely with men, and practiced free love.

Although it is important to understand Raichō’s process of using self-writing as a tool of reclamation based around her broader role in the feminist liberation movement, her own self-writing also serves as a powerful testament to the formation of a new female identity.

Looking at her writings more closely, we can see how she not only reclaims New Womanhood in her self-writing, but she also establishes the framework of modern Japanese feminism. In doing so, Raichō uses self-writing to contextualize the struggle of the Japanese New Woman and both guide and ground the national narrative on female liberation. Raichō's manifesto *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun* (「元始、女性は太陽であった」 *Genshi Josei wa Taiyō de atta*, 1911), her essay "To the Women of the World" (「世の婦人たちに」 *Se no Fujintachi ni*, 1913), and her autobiography *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun* (「元始、女性は太陽であった」 *Genshi Josei wa Taiyō de atta*, 1973) are all examples of her self-writing that argue for Japanese Womanhood to be reconsidered. Hiratsuka Raichō leverages her reputation in her self-writing to reframe not only how the public sees her, but to redefine the image of all Japanese New Woman and establish a national narrative on women's liberation. I argue that the subjective self-narrative of the New Woman that Raichō curates not only presents the modern female self as a national subject, but it also places this self within current Taishō national political discourse to redefine womanhood in accordance to a unique Japanese social context.

Hiratsuka Raichō and The Legacy and Formation of *Seitō*

Following the *Baien* Incident, Hiratsuka Raichō's mentor, Ikuta Chōkō (生田長江, 1882 -1936) consulted with Raichō about how to cope with the aftermath of the scandal. Raichō rejects the suggestion of marriage to Morita to quell the controversy, not only did she not love him, but she was also intent on pursuing her independent lifestyle. Knowing this, Ikuta Chōkō decided it would be worthwhile create an outlet for her in which to channel her

energies. This materialized in the form of a women's literary magazine, which he fittingly named *Seitō* (青鞵 *The Bluestockings*), after the 1750s English women's literary group, the Blue Stocking Society. The magazine *Seitō* (1911-1916), although initially founded by Ikuta for Raichō, soon became the foremost important part of Raichō's career as a writer, activist, and editor-in-chief. The term *keishū sakka* that I discussed earlier was used much more infrequently by the time of *Seitō*'s first issue in September of 1911.⁴¹

Although, as I have previously noted, the modern feminist movement in Japan is a continuation of the work started by Popular Rights Movement activists like Kusunose Kita, Kishida Toshiko, Fukuda Hideko, Sharon Sievers notes that the women of *Seitō*, nonetheless came to represent “symbols of a new stage, if not a second wave, of Japanese feminism.”⁴² Although I argue that referring to Japanese feminism in waves is not entirely accurate, indicative of a false equivalent to waves of Western feminism, it is worth noting that creation of *Seitō* itself introduced a surge of interest in feminism in Japan. The new magazine *Seitō* was first published in September of 1911. Additionally, the *Seitō* group often “looked outside the country for women with whom they could identify,” translating the work of feminists like Ellen Key (1849-1926), a personal hero of Raichō's, and Emma Goldman (1869-1940).⁴³

Writing for *Seitō* ignited Raichō's passion for political activism and introduced her to issues of women's liberation. Raichō was always independent, but did not necessarily see herself as a feminist political figure until *Seitō* began to occupy a controversial and politically charged position in society. These New Women “who experimented with sexuality outside of marital

⁴¹Tanaka, 7.

⁴²Sievers, Sharon L. *Flowers in Salt: the Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1983), 165.

⁴³Sievers, 164.

home were seen to be threatening the family, which, since the Meiji period, had been seen as the privileged site for the symbolic reproduction of gender and class relations and the physical reproduction of nationalist subjects.”⁴⁴ Because women have historically been essentialized to their bodies and reproductive power, the male anxiety of women expressing themselves — sexually and otherwise— outside of the home was symbolic of what a gender-based social change might do to Japan’s current system of class and gender-based social stratification.

Seitō writers openly expressed themselves, writing controversial essays on a variety of women’s issues, including but not limited to escaping arranged marriages, government control of women’s bodies, female sexual pleasure, and providing government stipends for mothers. *Seitō* quickly caught the attention of other like minded women. In fact, “women sought the magazine as an outlet for their writings. Male critics doubted the quality of the endeavor. And the government expressed concern about such ideas being explored publicly.”⁴⁵ I argue that it is essential to look at *Seitō* as a culmination of Japanese women’s self-writing. The magazine itself is a tribute to women and through its devotion to gendered social issues, female self expression, self discovery and self-writing, it serves as a vital outlet for the female reader and writer alike. The act of writing about the self is an intrinsic expression of social and political emancipation.

Scholars of Japanese feminism like Jan Bardsley, Yukiko Tanaka, and Sharon Sievers concur that the young women who began their careers writing for *Seitō* did not expect their journal to have as great as social impact as it did. Raichō had no way to anticipate that *Seitō* would become her legacy and place her at the forefront of the Japanese female liberation

⁴⁴Mackie, 75.

⁴⁵Meeker, Natania. “Hiratsuka Raicho (1886-1971): Modernity and the ‘Woman of the New Japan,’” in Eugenia C. DeLamotte, Natania Meeker, Jean F. O’Barr, *Women Imagine Change: A Global Anthology of Women's Resistance from 600 B.C*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 269.

movement. Raichō acquired funding from her mother and recruited many of her colleagues from Japan Women's University, notably Yosano Akiko, Yasumochi Yoshiko, Mozume Kazuko, Kiuchi Teiko, and Nakano Hatsuko to begin *Seitō* and complete the magazine's first issue.

Yukiko Tanaka contextualizes the historical climate surrounding *Seitō*'s beginnings:

The first wave of the feminist movement in the West reached Japan shortly afterwards [the formation of *Seitō*]; women's social and literary activities were now a clearly recognizable phenomenon, not merely a rebellion of 'outsiders.' In the more liberal climate of the Taishō era, when an interest in writing as a means of self-exploration went hand in hand with campaigns for social and political emancipation, women were not only encouraged to write and publish, thanks to a growing mass culture and journalism, but also supported each other in their endeavours. During this period, a group of young women would start writing, armed with socialist or other revolutionary ideas.⁴⁶

Seitō coincided with Japanese integration of social and political movements for emancipation, which in turn radicalized the magazine. *Seitō* was culturally significant as a political battleground, where its writers passionately took up the title of "New Woman" to boldly toy with the media and challenge government censors. As the audience of the magazine grew, and the media and government began to see these women and their writings as a threat to the *kokutai* (national polity), the writers of *Seitō* rebelled against them by responding directly to those who tried to delegitimize it. This led the publication to further radicalize. Additionally, many of the most prominent feminists at the time were featured writers, inevitably making *Seitō* central to the development of the Japanese women's liberation movement. *Seitō*, however, was also personally significant to its reader and writers; correspondence often occurred between the editors and their young female readers, who were often trapped by marriage or family obligation, and looked to these New Women for guidance. Within the context of *Seitō*, the writing seen in private letters

⁴⁶Tanaka, 7.

and through the circulated publication demonstrates how the act of women writing for themselves and for each other function as a way to offer support and understanding to women across all backgrounds.

As a self-proclaimed “New Woman,” Raichō saw it as her duty to continue to define the direction of Japanese discourse on women’s liberation, in line with the increasingly political climate of the liberal Taishō era. In doing so, the magazine’s politics became more radical over the course of its five year existence. The concept of reclaiming the “New Woman” was integral to the very fabric of *Seitō*. In fact, the second issue, published in 1912, was dedicated entirely to Henrik Ibsen’s *Nora*. Tomida writes on Raichō’s attempt to combat Japan’s negative image of the New Woman:

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 sonata fuji mondai ni suite’*) 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.’⁴⁷

Seitō’s specific focus on the New Woman centered its issues in important and timely national discussions. By devoting issues specifically to *Nora* and to women’s political issues, *Seitō* served not just as an outlet for, but as a homage to the New Woman— creating a space of support, understanding, exploration, relatability and justification for the women writing for *Seitō* as a form of self-discovery and for the women readers looking for compassion, connection and to see themselves represented.

⁴⁷ Tomida, Hiroko, “The Legacy of the Japanese Bluestocking Society: its Influence upon Literature, Culture and Women’s Status,” (Leiden: Brill 2016), 139.

Seitō Controversies and Scandals

Raichō, following the *Baien* Incident, continued to be viewed by the general public as a figurehead of the New Woman movement, and as the New Women continued to be frequent subject of public ridicule, she continued to embrace it proudly. The media's claims of Raichō's supposed promiscuity and nefarious behavior were exacerbated during the Yoshiwara Visit Incident (吉原保間事件 *Yoshiwara Homon Jiken*) and the Five Colored Liquor Incident (五色の酒事件 *Goshiki no sake jiken*). In both cases, Raichō threatens the male domains of pleasure. When Raichō pays a visit to the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, her very presence disrupts the systems in place that normalizes the man's right to take both a wife and a geisha lover. Raichō, along with fellow *Seitō* members Otake Kokichi (大竹美知子, dates unknown) and Nakano Hatsuko (中野初子 1859-1914), declared herself to be part of the public sphere, boldly entering the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters to visit one of the quarter's highest class

teahouses, Daimonjirō.



吉原登楼 (『東京パック』1912. 8. 1)

This incident emboldened conservatives, who saw this as a direct affront to their masculinity and their social standing to not only publish slanderous gossip about the “masculine” Raichō and her band of ‘predatory women’ with ‘irregular sexual proclivities,’ but also sought to punish them for their perceived overstep by

stoning the houses' of *Seitō* members.⁴⁸ The image to the left depicts Raichō as a masculine figure, meant both to humiliate the New Women and to suggest that Raichō is, in fact, a man in disguise who, although seemingly contradictory, threatens both concepts of idealized femininity and the male claim to public spaces.⁴⁹ In fact, the image of New Women that circulated in print media was inherently contradictory; the New Woman “was alternately a decadent, rapacious *femme fatale*, grotesquely masculine, or a sexless shrew.”⁵⁰ To the conservative public, there is no proper way for a woman to exist as a national citizen without triggering male anxiety of losing their political and socio-economic power. The Yoshiwara incident highlights not just the extent of male anxiety, but also the desperation of men to preserve their social standing.

Bardsley notes that the courtesan, Eizan, who served the *Seitō* women, in fact, had a similar profile to Raichō herself; she was not only similar in age to Raichō, but she too had the prestige of being an Ochanomizu Girls School graduate. Even decades after the encounter Raichō’s “curiosity’ about the Yoshiwara apparently did not extend very far.”⁵¹ In her autobiography, she shows little interest in prostitution. Raichō fails to recognize how society systemically deprives women of social mobility and financial stability, oppressing women on both the axes of class and gender. Although possessing sympathy for Eizan, Raichō completely

⁴⁸ Bardsley, Jan, *The New Woman Meets the Geisha: The Politics of Pleasure in 1910s Japan*, Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific, Issue 29, (The Australian National University: 2012) Web.

⁴⁹ *Dalliance in the Yoshiwara (Yoshiwara tōrō)*, 'Tokyo Puck', 1 August 1912. Courtesy of Bardsley, Jan, *The New Woman Meets the Geisha: The Politics of Pleasure in 1910s Japan*, Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific Issue 29, (The Australian National University: 2012) Web.

⁵⁰ Bardsley, Jan, *The New Woman Meets the Geisha: The Politics of Pleasure in 1910s Japan*, Web.

⁵¹ Bardsley, Jan, *The New Woman Meets the Geisha: The Politics of Pleasure in 1910s Japan*, Web.

ignores the minute factors that have granted her success while forcing Eizan to resort to other *Seitō* members called out Raichō for her tomboyish acts of defiance against social conventions, expresses that by taking up space in the public sphere and specifically inserting themselves into male coded territory, the New Women became symbols for boundary breaking.⁵²

In the public eye, Raichō was still seen as the “*Baien* Woman,” so these incidents only served to further prove that her and her breed of *Seitō* New Women were nothing more than depraved miscreants.⁵³ Raichō was an easy target because of her already tarnished public image, so she most notably was at the center of the public ridicule, being called “masculine,” “virtueless,” and “predatory” by magazines that sought to further provide evidence for the New Woman’s immorality. To depict a woman as a “predatory male” figure is to highlight how she is inhabiting a space that she does not belong to and taking on social roles that do not belong to her, therefore acting as a direct threat to male autonomy and patriarchal hegemony. If women continue to participate in activities designated for men, the male role in the social hierarchy is at risk of being re-interpreted.

In the *Goshiki no Sake Jiken*, the article in question that stirred controversy was written by fellow *Seitō* member Otake Kokichi (also involved in the Yoshiwara Incident), enamored by Raichō, detailed admiringly of her ability in a *Seitō* article to stomach a strong five colored liquor. The issue with the article stemmed from *Seitō* writer Otake using a male voice as a self-insert, which subsequently became widely misinterpreted and used against Raichō by salacious gossip magazines. Raichō is once again viewed as “predatory” for entertaining the

⁵² Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*. 38-39

⁵³ Bardsley, *The New Woman Meets the Geisha: The Politics of Pleasure in 1910s Japan*, Web.

young “male” companion who narrates this piece. This assumed behavior is threatening because Raichō is not only seen as capable of existing publicly within the male sphere in terms of her activities and tastes, but is also appropriate male behaviors and disrupting gendered social boundaries. These two incidents erupted in the media as evidence of Raichō and her *Seitō* members’ plot to corrupt Japanese values and traditional femininity. The violence against these radical women cannot be undermined, as it is important to remember that these controversies resulted in a three day long stoning of Raichō’s home and of *Seitō* headquarters.

Hiratsuka Raichō and her Manifesto “*In the Beginning Woman was the Sun*”

Hiratsuka Raichō wrote the opening essay of *Seitō*’s 1911 debut, a manifesto entitled *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun* (元始、女性は太陽であった *Genshi, Josei was Taiyō de atta*), was the first attempt by a Japanese woman to write an explicitly feminist manifesto. Raichō crafted and consciously designed *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun* to reframe Japanese understanding of womanhood. She uses this opening essay to state the purpose of Japan’s first women’s magazine *Seitō*. For this reason, the way that she writes about women and how she places women within the political and social context of the time had the potential to not only impact the direction of *Seitō*, but also to oversee the direction of the women’s liberation movement. It is important to consider that the essay’s titular opening line “In the beginning woman was the sun” since it was initially published, had become *Seitō*’s slogan and Raichō’s personal mantra, as she refers back to in various of her later essays and even names her autobiography after it. With this in mind, “*In the Beginning woman was the Sun*” should not be

understood simply as a manifesto that Raichō wrote, but rather, a mindset that she carried with her throughout her career.

Raichō opens the essay by declaring that “In the beginning Woman was truly the Sun. An Authentic person. Now Woman is the moon living off of another reflecting another is brilliance she’s the moon, whose face is sickly and wan.”⁵⁴ Raichō uses the metaphor of the sun and moon to represent how women are being forced into the shadows of men. On another level, like in its title, the “sun” in which Raichō is referring to is none other than *Amaterasu*, the sun goddess who, according to Japanese mythology, is considered to be the origin of Japan and of humanity. As Andrew Gordon explains, these Shinto deities, known as *kami*, often “were protectors of powerful political families, chief among them the imperial family. This family claimed descent from a sun goddess, Amaterasu.”⁵⁵ Using spiritual justification, Raichō firmly establishes the necessity for womankind to be recognized not only as equal and complete individuals, but re-asserts the trope of woman-as-life-giver by invoking her as the actual Origin of Japanese and human society.

Although Raichō almost contradictorily assesses that the self is inherently genderless, she clarifies that binary gender categories are merely labels prescribed by those who lack true spiritual understanding:

Categories like man and woman which describes sexual differences belong to a self that has reached only the middle or even the lower stratum in the hierarchy of spiritual concentration. They belong to a false self a mortal self destined to perish.

⁵⁴ Hiratsuka, Raichō, “In the Beginning Woman was the Sun.” Manifesto translated by Jan Bardsley in *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 94.

⁵⁵ Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

It is utterly impossible for such categories to exist as part of the self of the highest stratum, the true self that does not die, that never will perish.⁵⁶

Japanese intellectuals in the early 20th century often focused their writings on themes prevalent in the philosophy of Individualism, placing value in their writing on topics like independence and self-reliance. Raichō makes it apparent that individualism, spiritually speaking, is of the highest order. People who subscribe to belief in social categorization and gendered stratification deny both themselves and others the potential for individualist expression, making it impossible to live as an authentic being. By re-articulating Woman as an authentic person of the highest order, Raichō acknowledges that these social categories are frivolous and argues for Women to exist as individuals, as they originally were intended.

Because Raichō connects “Woman” to the ongoing discussion of spirituality and national identity, the significance of her statement is heightened; Raichō uses this essay as means to disrupt the national narrative. Much like how Raichō would later disrupt social order in her visit to the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, she manipulates nationalist discourse to both partake in and combine the conversations about public participation and Shinto nationalism to renegotiate the forgotten terms of “Woman’s” innate divinity. By suggesting that only “Woman” is authentic and that only women can be the true origin, she claims that women are at least equal to, if not greater than that of the Emperor and the imperial family (Raichō’s argument presents women as the “Origin”— Amaterasu herself, while discourse on the Emperor’s lineage suggests him to merely be a decedent). Using spiritual imagery to convey these messages about women and individualism, Raichō eventually claims that “Our savior is the Genius within us. We no longer

⁵⁶ Hiratsuka, Raichō. “In the Beginning Woman was the Sun.” Translated by Jan Bardsley. *The Bluestockings of Japan*, 95.

seek our savior in temples or churches, in the Buddha or God.”⁵⁷ Raichō radically shifts her Shinto-centric framework to holistically embrace a fierce individualist approach. By using religion as a signifier for women’s historic position as a mythologically powerful and authentic being, she creates a framework for understanding women’s rights based in the national political context. However, by building her discussion up to a declaration of the individual’s intrinsic “Genius,” she subverts the various concepts that she both adapts and introduces, essentially declaring that the Woman of today is no different than the Woman in the beginning (the sun goddess Amaterasu), as all Women inherently possess spiritual “Genius.”⁵⁸

By alluding to Japanese mythology, Raichō chooses to avoid direct references to the Western philosophers with whom she is familiar in order to contextualize the specific oppression Japanese women face. She also makes a statement by suggesting that she does not need any enlightening Western literature to prove her point; her argument is literally ingrained in the spiritual, historical, and physical world of Japan that she lives in. Raichō advocates for a return to Japan’s former matriarch-based society, where women are recognized for their “authenticity” and “genius,” instead of being mocked and forced to serve men in the shadows.

The essay not only establishes Raichō’s discussion of women’s liberation as uniquely Japanese, but it also co-opts nationalist imagery as means to bring female oppression to the forefront of national discourse. Beginning in Meiji and continuing as a undercurrent throughout Taishō, the Japanese government was reappropriating Shinto as a spiritual mandate to assert power over its citizens in what Helen Hardacre refers to as State Shinto.⁵⁹ In the same way that

⁵⁷ Hiratsuka, “In the Beginning Woman was the Sun,” 96.

⁵⁸ Hiratsuka, “In the Beginning Woman was the Sun,” 96.

⁵⁹ Hardacre, Helen. *Shintō and the State, 1868-1988*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1989)

the Emperor's divine lineage functions as justification of his power, Raichō justifies women's oppression as divinely unlawful, declaring that women's right to personhood is, and should only be understood, as a divine mandate. In the same way that the Japanese government manipulates Shinto to re-articulate the role of the Emperor, Raichō uses Shinto to re-articulate and re-negotiate the role of women in society.

Raichō is tasked with the duty of placing the new female self within a particular narrative; by choosing to root the female self in the spiritual (i.e. Shinto), she actually broadens the conversation on women's liberation to compete with nationalist discourse and grounds her argument in the entwined historical, political and social spheres as well. This affirms Raichō's proud declaration of New Womanhood: "I am the Sun" and creates a feminist self-narrative that is urgent, reclamatory, and relevant, and places itself, and by extension Japanese feminism as a whole, in conversation with current topics of spiritualism, nationalism, and Individualism.

Hiratsuka Raichō: "To the Women of the World"

Raichō's attack on traditional values extended not only through her actions, but through her writing as well. She even attracted the attention of government censors with her April 1913 *Seitō* essay, "To the Women of the World" (世の婦人たちに *Se no Fujintachi ni*, 1913), which denounced expectations placed on women to be a "good wife, wise mother" or 良妻賢母 *ryōsai kenbo* (a concept Confucian in origin, imported to China 賢妻良母 *xiánqīliángmǔ*). The Meiji oligarchs, in an effort to "reinforce ultimate imperial authority. . . dealt with fears of gender anarchy and its desire for loyal subjects of both sexes by articulating an important new concept

aimed at women. This was the ideal of the 'good wife and wise mother.'"⁶⁰ The Meiji authorities sought to recreate a resurgence in traditional ideals of gendered citizenship and morality as to circumvent male anxiety over these new social roles also applying to women. In "To the Women of the World," she denounces old fashioned ideologies and "so-called womanly virtues of submission, gentleness, chastity, patience, self-sacrifice, and so on that men, and that our society, have thus far forced on us" that confine women to the role of *ryōsai kenbo*.⁶¹ Raichō continues her fearless condemnation of traditional roles women are forced into and places blame on the men for upholding this archaic, gendered system of social stratification. The act of calling out Japanese patriarchal society for their oppression of women, evidently, amounted to a threat in the eyes of the government. The government, thereby decided that her belief in individualism and her "Western ideas about women" were not compatible with their vision of Japanese society.

In response, Raichō continues to ask rhetorically what exactly society expects the role of women to be: "Is there to be no other business for women than the business of procreation. . . ? Is it women's sole vocation to be a wife and a mother. . . ? I wonder how many women have, for the sake of financial security in their lives, entered into loveless marriages to become one man's lifelong servant and prostitute."⁶² Raichō alludes to women as a historical category to emphasize how these dehumanizing practices have been ingrained and normalized by society.

Raichō suggests that many women subscribe to this role because it is the only way to survive in a society that expects women to serve men and refuses to seriously consider or accommodate the

⁶⁰ Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, (New York, Oxford University Press: 2003), 112.

⁶¹ Hiratsuka, Raichō. "To the Women of the World," Translated by Jan Bardsley in *The Blue Stockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*. (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan: 2007), 105.

⁶² Hiratsuka Raichō, "In the Beginning Woman was the Sun," 104-6.

growing class of working women. She urges women to join her and to separate themselves from the long-standing tradition of being a “good wife, wise mother” by claiming that *ryōsai kenbo* is far from what a “genuine life for women should be.”⁶³ Raichō defines women’s traditional roles through using inflammatory language, equating housewives to servants and prostitutes. In the same way that she radically redefines the derogatory title of “New Woman,” she creates new associations with old words [*ryōsai kenbo*] that she relates to the oppressive traditional values and behaviors, as seen through the old roles of women. This illustrates how normalized systemized violence against women has been historically.

Relating this essay back to the topic of self-writing, although Raichō adopts the form of an essay, without direct “I” statements, her focus is on analyzing the social implications and understanding of the female self. She makes strong distinctions between the “Old Woman” and the “New Woman,” using that as the foundation to question what the new female self should be. By establishing that the female self is in direct conflict with the traditional, she positions herself and other modern woman as vehemently opposed to *ryōsaikenbo* and all other things considered traditional. This application of self-writing allows Raichō to create and redefine new words and reform conversations about female identity. Additionally, through using volatile language she antagonizes society for establishing a system that subjugates women to miserable, unfulfilling lives — putting an often unspoken struggle that most Japanese women can relate to into words.

⁶³ Hiratsuka, “In the Beginning Woman was the Sun,” 104.

**Post-*Seitō*: Hiratsuka Raichō's Actualization of Activism
and the formation of the *Shin Fujin Kyōkai***

Raichō uses self-writing to reclaim and redirect the narrative of women's liberation through recounting her experiences and consciously embracing and redefining the "New Woman." In 1919, Hiratsuka Raichō asked Ichikawa Fusae to form a women's rights organization along with Oku Mumeo. With the *Shin Fujin Kyōkai* (新婦人協会 New Women's Society 1920-1922), Raichō spent the latter part of her career as an activist, and once again, served as the editor-in-chief of the society's journal, *Josei Dōmei* (女性同盟 Women's League 1920-1922). Raichō founded the *Shin Fujin Kyōkai* with feminists and former *Seitō* writers Ichikawa Fusae and Oku Mumeo. Together, the *Shin Fujin Kyōkai* began publishing its *Josei Dōmei* magazine, where Raichō once again took up the role of editor-in-chief. Out of the roughly 500 in attendance at the *Shin Fujin Kyōkai*'s first meeting at the YMCA Hall in Kanda, only 30% reportedly were women. On March 28 1920, the group's aims and agenda were formally published. The *Shin Fujin Kyōkai* sought to raise the "social and political position of women in Japan."⁶⁴ Hiratsuka, Ichikawa and Mumeo's primary goal was to repeal or alter Article 5 of the Public Police Law, which forbade women from participating publically in political activity.

The women aligned with the *Shin Fujin Kyōkai* were broadly considered to be bourgeois feminists, concerned with public reform and working within the established social system, as compared to other feminists who, due to an ideological split, would go on to criticize their

⁶⁴ Hunter, Janet. *Concise Dictionary of Modern Japanese History*. (California: University of California Press 1984), 64-65.

former colleagues. They believed that a failure to acknowledge how the class system oppresses women could never be true feminism.

Some of these former-*Seitō* writers included self-identified feminist communist Yamakawa Kikue (山川菊栄 1890-1980), a frequent *Seitō* contributor, and Raichō's own mentee and the focus of my second chapter, self-identified feminist anarchist Itō Noe (伊藤野枝 1895-1923). These two went on to form the *Sekirankai* (赤瀾会 Red Wave Society), Japan's first socialist women's organization in 1921. Ichikawa's political and personal differences with Raichō eventually led her to withdraw from the group she co-founded in 1920. Thanks to the *Shin Fujin Kyōkai*'s success, changes to Article 5 were eventually passed in 1922, approved by both houses of the Diet.⁶⁵ The *Shin Fujin Kyōkai* later disbanded in 1922.

Self-writing allowed for Raichō's activism and passion for politics to become fully realized. Working with the *Shin Fujin Kyōkai*, Raichō harvested power from her numerous essays, meditations on political theory, and the occasional scandal to create movements to foster female solidarity to implement tangible social change. Raichō's journey into self-actualization and engagement in politics is indicative of the power of the self-narrative; Raichō's scandals demonstrate the influence of print media over social opinion, thus highlighting the power of women to rewrite the stories society that assigns to them. Raichō begins writing to reclaim agency over her life narrative, but she eventually turns an individual goal into a collective goal, restructuring the image of the "New Woman," not just for herself, but for all Japanese modern women.

⁶⁵ Mackie, 58-60.

Chapter 2: Itō Noe: A Political Awakening through Feminist Self-writing

Itō Noe and *Seitō*: Self-writing as a Realm of Solace, Solidarity and Radicalization

Itō Noe (伊藤野枝 1895-1923) joined *Seitō* after writing a letter to Hiratsuka Raichō, asking for advice about how to escape an arranged marriage set up by her uncle in her hometown in the countryside of Kyushu. Hiratsuka Raichō describes her first correspondance with a young Itō Noe, who was no more than fourteen or fifteen at the time living in the countryside in Kyushu. Noe responded to the October 1912 issue of *Seitō* and “described her upbringing, personal character, present situation, and in particular, the marriage forced upon her by her family.”⁶⁶ Raichō recounts Noe’s first letter in her autobiography *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun* (元始、女性は太陽であった *Genshi Josei wa Taiyō de atta*):

The letter literally churned with her inchoate resentment of outmoded morality and convention. Unable to bear the pain a minute longer, she intended to defy her family with the last ounce of her strength and live according to her convictions. In order to achieve this goal, she was coming to Tokyo and hoped to meet us. The tone of the long letter, crammed with her tiny writing, was arrogant and full of her own assumptions, but there was no question that Noe’s letter made a more distinct impression than the hundreds of others that came to the office.⁶⁷

According to Raichō’s recollection, Noe always strived for independence since she was young, possessing a strong sense of self-worth which naturally translated into contempt for the traditional social conventions that threatened her autonomy. *Seitō* had barely been around for a

⁶⁶ Hiratsuka, Raichō. *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun: the Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*. (1971) Translated by Teruko Craig, in *In the Beginning Woman was the Sun*, (New York, NY: Columbia Publishing Press, 2006), (2006), 192-3.

⁶⁷ Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun: the Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, 192-3.

year before Raichō became Noe's primary advocate, helping her through personal struggles in the months that followed their initial correspondence. Noe's example demonstrates how female self-writing of others function to inspire and provide solace for women readers feeling trapped under the traditional Japanese family structure and patriarchal social hierarchy. In this way, *Seitō*, as a collective of female self-writing, fosters an environment of solidarity and political exploration that welcomes all modern Japanese women.

Raichō showed much compassion for the young, impoverished Noe. In her second letter to Raichō, Noe detailed her suicidal thoughts, a consequence of immense mounting pressure from her family to marry: “[Noe] was in poor health, and all she could do was to walk down to the shore and cry and cry. She had made up her mind to run away again, but she was penniless. Would I please send some money?”⁶⁸ Itō Noe had little means to support herself. When she herself was nearly destitute, *Seitō* provided her comfort and refuge. The same magazine that gave her solace would later usher the young Noe's into the world of political activism. Noe's convictions only grew stronger over time, transforming her into one of the ambitious, radical, and tragic women to come out of *Seitō*.

Despite her unwavering commitment to the magazine in the coming years, Itō Noe's brash personality and behavior, largely influenced by her rural upbringing, became a topic of controversy amongst the other *Seitō* writers, most of whom were upper class from major cities, and had received formal educations. An example of such a conflict regarded the repeated occurrence of Noe allowing her young infant son to urinate in the gardens of the *Seitō* headquarters, which the other women judged as inappropriate and unbecoming. Despite these

⁶⁸ Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun: the Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, 193.

issues, Noe proved to be one of the most devoted to the mission of *Seitō*, going on to become editor-in-chief when Raichō stepped down in 1914. Under Noe's leadership, *Seitō* had a greater political bent and the publication saw even more scandals when certain articles altered the censors. Noe, at this time, was also in correspondence with anarchist Osugi Sakae, who initially developed an interest in her after reading her translations of Emma Goldman, and soon she saw her own political beliefs align with his. Between Noe's personality clashes with *Seitō* members, and what she saw as a failed experiment to base a revamped *Seitō* on anarchist principle, Noe eventually made the decision to dissolve the magazine in 1916.

Academia has erased Noe as an individual activist, as she is widely known as the lover of the famed anarchist Osugi Sakae (大杉 栄, 1885-1923). In Noe's short life, she married three times and gave birth to seven children, experiencing a full life of rebellion, passion and persecution that has since made her into the topic of novels and films, such as Setouchi Harumi's (1922-) "Beauty in Disarray" (美は乱調にあり, 1966) and *Eros + Gyakusatsu* (エロス+虐殺, Yoshishige Yoshida and Masahiro Yamada, 1969). Following her time with *Seitō*, Noe became romantically involved with Osugi Sakae, whom she began corresponding with in regards to his interest in her *Seitō* Emma Goldman translations. After being sentenced to prison for his role in the late-1908 political rally, the Red Flag Incident (赤旗事件 *Akahata Jiken*), Osugi gained notoriety as an important political figure of the Taishō era. In a twist of fate, prison saved Osugi from involvement with the High Treason Incident (大逆事件 *Taigyaki Jiken*) of 1910, a plot to build bombs to assassinate the Meiji Emperor (that at the time was more theoretical than actual), that led to the execution of many of his comrades. Japanese ethnonationalism was at its peak when the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 occurred, sending the country into chaos, with

many conservatives believing the earthquake to be divine punishment for Japanese selfish, immoral and extravagant lifestyles. The nationalist government seized the opportunity to order the Japanese military police to commence an extrajudicial execution of leftists. On September 16, 1923, Noe, Osugi and his six year old nephew were captured, tortured, and murdered by Imperial Army lieutenant Amakasu Masahiko (甘粕 正彦, 1891-1945) in what became known as the Amakasu Incident (甘粕事件, September 16, 1923). Before her brutal murder, Noe used *Seitō* as a platform to discover herself and her individual and political identity. Beyond *Seitō*, Noe continued to rely on her lived experiences and her own background as a female political activist from the countryside to inform her anarchism and advocate for female self-reliance and self-awareness.

Itō Noe: “The Path of a New Woman”

While incidents like the *Yoshiwara Homon Jiken* (吉原登楼事件 Yoshiwara Quarters Incident) and the *Goshiki no sake Jiken* (五色の酒事件 Five-Colored Sake Incident) in the summer of 1912 evoked outrage both by female radicals who felt Hiratsuka Raichō, Otake Kokichi (大竹美知子, dates unknown) and Nakano Hatsuko’s (中野初子 1859-1914) actions unfairly exploited the courtesans and demonstrated nothing more than reckless frivolity, the male conservatives’ intense shock stemmed from the realization that their power over the public sector was diminishing. I return to this scandal because it is complex example of what it means for New Women to transcend social and gender boundaries by explicitly infringing on the “forbidden” male domain. When Itō Noe joined *Seitō* in an official capacity in January 1913, *Seitō* had

become the target of numerous scandals in the months prior. Not only was the April 1912 issue banned by reason of being “disruptive of public morality and the family system,” but the character of the magazine and the *Seitō* members themselves, namely that of their leader — the “*Baien* Woman” Raichō, had been called into question through the *Yoshiwara Homon Jiken* (吉原登楼事件 Yoshiwara Quarters Incident) and *Goshiki no Sake Jiken* (五色の酒事件 Five-colored Alcohol) incidents respectively.⁶⁹ Although Noe’s exact inspiration for her essay January 1913 in *Seitō* 3.1, “The Path of a New Woman” (新しき女の道 “Atarashiki Onna no Michi”) or is never explicitly stated, it is important to interpret this text based around the context of the specific scandals that were threatening to thwart the efforts of the New Women at the time it was published. Like her mentor, Noe also defines what the New Woman is first by what she is not; “The New Woman does not trudge in endless search of the dusty footprints left by the women who have walked before her. The New Woman has her own path where so many other women have stopped and, as a pioneer, will dare to tread an entirely new road.”⁷⁰ According to Noe, the essential quality of the New Woman is that of the “pioneer.”⁷¹ Noe privileges the title of New Woman, by attributing only those who are true “pioneers” to be deserving of the brave and aspirational title.

In doing so, Noe denounces women who are complacent and walk in the footsteps of others: “All those who oppose the New Woman are mere “followers” or “stragglers” who cannot

⁶⁹ Bardsley, *The New Woman Meets the Geisha: The Politics of Pleasure in 1910s Japan*, Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific, Issue 29, (The Australian National University: 2012) Web.

⁷⁰ Itō, Noe. “Atarashiki onna no michi,” translation by Jan Bardsley, in *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*. (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press: 2007). 132

⁷¹ Itō, “Atarashiki Onna no Michi.” (1913), 132.

understand where the New Woman is headed much less have the strength to follow in her footsteps.”⁷² To Noe, therefore, Raichō, Otake and Nakano, who were the first women to enter the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters— an area that existed to service men and is closely associated with the male intellectual and literati class— are the very definition of New Women. Her three *Seitō* peers dared to infiltrate one of the last areas of the public sector that men had seen as safe from female influence, and as a result of “treading this new road,” these women faced extreme verbal and physical abuse in the form of public humiliation and the stoning of their private homes all at the cost of their transgression. In fact, Noe’s essay acknowledges how “the way of the New Woman, the way of this pioneer, is . . . one continuous long struggle.”⁷³ Seeing firsthand how her colleagues are treated for living boldly and unapologetically can be met with such violence emboldens Noe. Much like how Noe applauds Toshiko’s bravery in “*Wagamama*” for breaking from social conventions, this essay supports the courage of Raichō and company to occupy traditionally male spaces.

Not only must we understand the framework that all discourse is intrinsically patriarchal, making all the writing, poetry, and debates present in *Seitō* inherently radical by nature of its conception, but Noe uniquely introduces the concept that transgressing social norms is foundational to being a New Woman. Taking a moment to reconsider Noe’s sentiment in context of the Yoshiwara Incident, I argue that Noe is implying that women taking up public space in any form is brave and radical. Women encroaching on male domains, disrupting traditionally male sectors, and engaging in literary and intellectual discourse is essential to embody an

⁷²Bardsley, “Itō Noe” in *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*, 127.

⁷³ Itō, “Atarashiki Onna no Michi,” 133.

aspirational female modernity and “to tread an entirely new road.”⁷⁴ After centuries of women being restrained to the private sphere, all of the Japanese social and intellectual discourse made available to women is intrinsically patriarchal. There is no established precedent for a tradition unique to women; therefore, in order to lay claim to domain within the public sphere, women must resort to either reappropriating patriarchal behavior and discourse, reclaiming male language and space used against women, or submitting oneself to participation within the confines of male dominated discourse and patriarchal society.

To respond to this dilemma, Noe uses her first “New Woman” essay to reappropriate Zen Buddhist imagery (a religion often considered overwhelmingly male) and male language of the self to boldly lay claim to traditionally male domains; “The metaphor of the New Woman’s journey as a “path” or “way” calls to mind the image of the Zen priest who pursues the religious “way” (道 *dao/michi*). Noe’s choice of Chinese characters for describing the self (自己 *jiko* and 己 *onore*) would have struck her readers as bold and rather masculine.”⁷⁵ By using the characters for *jiko* and *onore*, it seems as if Noe is inserting herself into the pre-existing patriarchal system of Japanese democratic discourse to subvert the readers’ expectations. I argue that her writing’s usage of male-coded words functions as means for women to elevate themselves and undermine the power of male authority.

Noe’s writing, however, does not serve as merely a vehicle for radical reclamation, rather, it demands women to build and create for themselves. Noe writes that pushing boundaries at all costs is at the core of the New Woman experience: “Hence it remains for new pioneers to

⁷⁴ Itō, “Atarashiki Onna no Michi,” 132.

⁷⁵ Bardsley. “Itō Noe” in *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press: 2006), 132.

take up where the old pioneers have fallen. They shall walk father on the path. They, too, will suffer grievously as they move on, opening up the way.”⁷⁶ Noe describes how women, on their path to liberation, will inevitably be faced with suffering and failure; for a woman to be a New Woman, she must therefore be able to overcome obstacles and expect to carry on the mantle of those who have fallen. Applying this quote to the Yoshiwara Incident, yet again, I suggest that Noe may also be referring to, and applauding, the situations where her fellow *Seitō* members have persevered through slanderings and stonings by conservative dissenters. Noe illustrates that perseverance is crucial to be a New Woman. In order to live authentically as a New Woman, one must form her own traditions and establish her own space in all aspects of public and private life.

Noe discusses that whenever a woman transgresses social conventions, she suffers personal (family disownment, loss of financial support, banished from the home, interpersonal relationships destroyed) and public humiliation (topic of slander in newspapers, stoning of household, public displays of disrespect) as a result of her decision:

All while the pioneer struggles to open the new way, she denies herself even the smallest of worldly comforts. From beginning to end she is alone, and every second is one of hardship. There is torment, There is fear. At times even she feels overcome with deep despair . . . the only words she utters are ardent, passionate prayers for the strength to believe in herself . . . One who would be a pioneer must be a powerful person, a person who gives life to a sense of self that will not crumble.⁷⁷

Applying Noe’s insight to the highly publicized Yoshiwara Incident (with the subsequent criticisms of the New Women movement being used to sell papers for months after the fact), a likely influence on Noe’s writing of this essay, she suggests that it is necessary for Women to

⁷⁶ Itō, “Atarashiki Onna no Michi,” 132.

⁷⁷ Itō, “Atarashiki Onna no Michi,” 133.

continue pushing boundaries at all costs. Noe later describes how outsiders viewed these boundary-pushing actions:

‘Emancipation’ (*kaihō*) is not changing one’s hairstyle, nor is it walking about with a cloak on, and it is most certainly not drinking ‘five-colored sake.’ I do not think that those who loftily laugh at women’s new clothes and disdain the drinking of alcohol by women as a terrible crime will understand the meaning of liberation. Clothes are a means of individual expression trendy with the masses (*zokushū*), and alcohol is nothing more than a predilection for some.⁷⁸

New hairstyles and Western clothing means nothing without purpose and sentiment behind it. A New Woman is not simply made by walking into Yoshiwara, like in the *Yoshiwara Homon Jiken* (吉原登楼事件 Yoshiwara Quarters Incident) or by drinking ‘five-colored sake,’ like in the *Goshiki no Sake Jiken* (五色の酒事件 Five-colored Alcohol Incident) like her mentor Raichō and colleagues Otake and Nakano. Rather, the New Woman’s fearless infringement on male spaces and her claim to live and act freely as an individual is what sets her apart. Noe argues that those who question the behavior of another woman misunderstand the meaning and social implications behind their actions.

The humiliation and suffering New Women face is expected in its social normalization; therefore, the only medium through which these long suffering Women can proudly substantiate their achievements and efforts and celebrate themselves is through writing. As Noe suggests, systems of happiness and support do not exist naturally for New Women (“one who searches for happiness, for comfort and for sympathy can never become a pioneer”).⁷⁹ However, New Women can create. They can continue to forge new “paths.”⁸⁰ By focusing on the pain and anguish of the New Woman, Noe acknowledges their struggles; this essay thus serves as a

⁷⁸ Itō Noe “Jijo Preface to Goldman,” Unpublished translation by Nate Shockey.

⁷⁹ Itō, “Atarashiki Onna no Michi,” 133.

⁸⁰ Itō, “Atarashiki Onna no Michi,” 132.

cathartic refuge for distraught New Woman to turn to to know that their agony is productive and that their struggles are anything but insignificant and defends the actions of Raichō and company, justifying the necessity of their “transgressions” in Yoshiwara to those who seek to slander *Seitō* members.

The “New Women” were among the first actively creating a society for like minded women to challenge social conventions and backwards traditions. Given its historical context, magazines like *Seitō* were used to establish a modern female literary tradition and set a precedent for female-led intellectual discourse and boundary-pushing activism. Being fully aware of the history-making magazine that is *Seitō* and their public reputations being popular fodder for newspapers, Raichō, Noe, and others naturally spent much of their early career as feminists proudly defining what it meant to be a New Woman and defending and supporting one another amidst threats from the patriarchy. Noe herself is part of this tradition of a suffering modern woman, reacting radically when constraints were placed on her by society; her divorce and escape from Kyushu is the beginning of her path as a New Woman. When society would punish Noe for being unfilial in her defiant marriage to Tsuji Jun or for her “loose morals” when she was caught kissing Osugi in public, she responded by creating a realm within her writing in which she and other brave New Women can inhabit and express themselves freely.

The end of the essay is a question posed at the reader, where Noe practically inserts herself into the narrative, as if to say that being a New Woman is, of course, hard and undesirable — but if for not us, then who would walk this path? This is the beginning of Noe’s call to arms: “The day is coming on which we must at last arise and fight, fight against the

ignorance and conventions that have congealed within us.”⁸¹ Noe’s bold essays and reappropriation of male language establishes her as an early pioneer; using Noe’s own language, I suggest that this essay itself serves as one “road” on her own “path” to becoming a New Woman. Even at the level of writing, Noe plays with the gendered social and cultural dynamics that alienate and oppress women to write herself into history and carve out spaces for herself and other women to participate autonomously in public society

Itō Noe’s Early Self-Writing: Autobiographical Fiction in *Seitō*

Itō Noe published a trilogy of autobiographical fiction short stories in *Seitō*. Her first piece was based on an arranged marriage to a much older man, known as Suematsu, to whom she was promised pending her high school graduation. Noe was unable to refuse the marriage because it meant that her parents would disown her and she would no longer receive the funding necessary to continue her schooling at Ueno Girls' High School in Tokyo. Additionally, Itō Noe had fallen in love with her high school English teacher, Tsuji Jun, a poet and free thinker. In spite of her desire to pursue the budding romance with Tsuji Jun, Noe’s family obligations won out; she briefly returned home to Kyushu after graduation to fulfill her promise to marry Suematsu. However, immediately after the ceremony, Noe decided to flee from the union without word to her family— an action considered illegal at the time. Her first two works, “Wagamama” (我儘 *Willfulness*, 1913), and “Shuppon” (出奔 *Flight*, 1913), are a fictionalized

⁸¹ Itō Noe “Jijo: Preface to Goldman,” unpublished translation by Nate Shockey.

two-part retelling of Noe's escape from Kyushu and subsequent divorce, move to Tokyo and love marriage, which feature Noe's stand-in "Toshiko" as protagonist.⁸²

"Wagamama" focuses on Toshiko's feelings of suffocation and resentment. It serves as an introduction where Toshiko goes home to her family and meets her fiancée after graduation, forced to confront her feelings. The conclusion of Toshiko's experience escaping Kyushu can be found in the banned "Shuppon," which is naturally more controversial as it details Toshiko's decision to live the life she wants by absconding from her marriage to live with her love in Tokyo. Noe's troubled love marriage with Tsuji Jun became the final personal topic of the last of her three short autobiographical *Seitō* stories. This third story, "Mayoi" (矢追 *Perplexity*, 1914), features the character of Makiko as a stand-in for Noe's real life cousin Kimi, with whom Tsuji begins an affair during the course of their marriage. By analyzing Noe's first story, "Wagamama," I will explore in depth how self-writing, by vocalizing the often dismissed female experience, is both a powerful and multifaceted tool for women to reframe how women are seen in, and interact with, social conventions that are working against them. Self-writing allows women to rearticulate authority over their own decisions, their own narratives and their own life.

"Wagamama" offers insight into how Noe's writing provides solace for other women experiencing similar situations. She highlights the ways in which Japanese women feel trapped by familial obligations and the traditional family structure. Noe first refers to Toshiko's familial home as "that wretched house" Although Toshiko longs for the "happiest feelings of belonging" that she used to associate with her home of Kyushu, she notes that those feelings are no longer with her. By firmly grounding this narrative in Toshiko's thoughts, Noe establishes concepts of

⁸² Bardsley, Jan. "'Itō Noe'" in *The Blue Stockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*, "Itō Noe." (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan: 2007), 132.

the “Family,” the “Home,” and the “Countryside”— all of which embody the principles of traditional patriarchal Japanese culture — as restrictive, oppressive structures.⁸³ The late Meiji period and Taishō period provided women with new opportunities to work and educate themselves; as Toshiko grows older, she begins to recognize how the home restricts her, and that fulfilling her duty to her family is not conducive to her happiness or to living an independent lifestyle. In Noe’s first mention of Toshiko’s fiancée, she describes him as her “second enemy” and as “that fellow who everyone forced on her, who was in every way her inferior,” whose very mention makes “her stomach churn.”⁸⁴ Noe is vocalizing her distaste for the traditional marriage system through Toshiko’s thoughts. Although many male writers in Japan and China have written of the revulsion they feel for the uneducated wives that have been forced upon them by these outdated cultural practices, the same cannot be said of women complaining of their uneducated husbands or fiancées in literature.

Noe uses self-writing to explain and justify the choices and sacrifices that Japanese women like Toshiko make to ensure freedom, security, happiness for themselves in a that society would deem their decisions to be selfish, deplorable, irresponsible and inappropriate. Noe concludes her short story by applauding the courage of women like Toshiko. Noe is disowned by her family as a result of her choices and creates Toshiko to articulate the factors responsible for her loss of self-agency; through the radical act of writing about her own experiences, Noe regains a sense of autonomy. Noe recognizes the social structures that limit her choices and opportunities. Through the radical act of telling her own story through her “Toshiko trilogy,” not

⁸³ Itō Noe. “Wagamama,” translation by Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*. (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press: 2007), 133.

⁸⁴ Itō, “Wagamama,” 133.

only does Noe justify her own actions and provide inspiration to others caught in similar situations, but she also creates an outlet for herself to applaud her own bravery and the bravery of all other women who defy traditional expectations of what a women should do and what a women should be.

Self-writing allows women to write freely about topics of their choosing. In a society that constantly strips women of their own agency, self-writing allows women to re-write the narratives forced on them by society. Noe juxtaposes the impossibility of pursuing a free love marriage with Tsuji; by reflecting on how her alter-ego Toshiko “did not know if she would ever see him again. . . she had not harbored any hope that the two of them would be able to hold hands and be alone together,” because she is inevitably doomed to be “carted off to this place [Kyushu]” to fulfill her family obligation in the countryside.⁸⁵ Noe’s Kyushu represents the backwardness of traditional Japanese norms that strictly enforce gender roles and expect women to be nothing more than wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. The dramatics of Noe’s narrative make “Wagamama” a personal and emotional read, depicting her decisions and circumstances in a relatable and deeply sympathetic light. “Wagamama” not only justifies what most would deem irredeemable, but it also promotes understanding. It allows women to respond and partake in the intellectual movements that defined the Taishō Era and writing that appeals to one’s emotions is particularly persuasive.

The self-narrative itself is a piece of literature that is effective in its deeply personal nature. Although viewing Women as “emotional” is inherently a sexist trope and is a designation placed onto women by men, Noe uses emotion as a subversion; her self-narratives function as an

⁸⁵ Itō, “Wagamama,” 134.

informed political statement that makes its argument by employing real events. Noe reclaims and re-appropriates emotion as a way to subvert gendered expectations by turning it into a political tool in the fight for female liberation. Toshiko's main conflict with her family, the topic of "Wagamama," serve as nothing more than a source of agitation; "She was being dragged along in a direction [her arranged marriage] that absolutely repelled her. Yet at the same time she felt as though she were being pulled in quite another direction, too — one that she sought for herself."⁸⁶ Noe's triumph over her family's backwardness is well articulated when Noe ends her short story applauding Toshiko for her courage to live on her own terms. After having lived through public backlash and condemnation of her behavior, it is vital that Noe creates an outlet where independent New Women like herself can be celebrated for their brave choices instead.

"What became of all this happiness I should feel at coming home? The person who has made this so terribly painful for me, who has made everything so hard for me, is my uncle. He is the one who has done this to me. And will this Nagata, this man that I know nothing about, will he steal my freedom? Who allowed this to happen to me? To me? Who gave permission for this to happen? There is no way I will ever throw myself — my precious Self — recklessly down in front of that sort of man, a man that I don't even know. I . . . will never value myself so cheaply. Not I!"⁸⁷

All the men in Noe's life have been working against her; the patriarchy is represented by the family. Marriage in the traditional system is meant only to trap women within the home. Noe demonstrates high sense of self-worth. The premise of Noe's entire narrative is based around her lived experiences, and how her identity is shaped through her yearning to dismantle the social systems that suppress her autonomous desires and self-expression, thereby functioning as feminist reclamation of selfhood and agency.

⁸⁶ Itō, "Wagamama," 134.

⁸⁷ Itō, "Wagamama," 139.

“Wagamama” ends with Toshiko crying herself to sleep after overhearing a conversation with her female relatives discussing her titular willfulness, in which her grandmother, who is similarly headstrong, is established as her ally (the conclusion of the autobiographical fiction narrative is completed in *Shuppon*, published later that year in 1913). To everyone but the women in her life, Toshiko is invisible; she does not yet have the voice or courage to respond to the injustices done to her, instead resorting to tears. When women are erased and ignored in conversations about democracy, politics, and Japan’s future, self-writing allows women to create a space for themselves where they cannot and will not be invisible. Outlets like *Seitō* are so powerful because they make art and politics accessible to and for women, unapologetically addressing women’s perspectives on politics, gender roles, and social conventions. Self-writing therefore becomes a way for many young women like Noe to grant themselves autonomous democratic social participation.

Itō Noe’s “Anti-Manifesto: To My Dear Readers”

Itō Noe ended her career as *Seitō*’s editor-in-chief with what Bardsley refers to as Noe’s “Anti-Manifesto” (読者諸氏に *Dokusha Shoshi ni*, hereafter “Anti-Manifesto”), declaring her project to rebrand *Seitō* within a new, more radical framework a failure.⁸⁸ In “Anti-Manifesto,” Noe laments her inability to produce a magazine with “merit,” referring to *Seitō* as “a virtually worthless magazine.”⁸⁹ Noe’s problems with *Seitō* stem from her desire for it to benefit all

⁸⁸ *The Blue Stockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*. (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press: 2007), 271. “Anti-Manifesto” coined by Jan Bardsley,

⁸⁹ Itō, Noe. “*Anti-Manifesto: To My Dear Readers*” (2007), 271. Translation by Jan Bardsley

women regardless of political alignments or personal beliefs. Although Noe does not explicitly state this in her anti-manifesto, she essentially acknowledges how the fragmented feminist and leftist movements and the continued development of her personal politics thus would make it difficult to continue producing a political magazine that functions without rules. The young Noe, whose greatest inspiration was none other than American anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman, began her tenure as editor-in-chief by re-introducing *Seitō* in accordance to her own anarchist beliefs; *Seitō* became a publication intended to have “no regulations, no policy, no ideology, and no philosophy.”⁹⁰ However, by creating a piece of valuable political literature with no alignment, she found herself in the predicament of creating something with no apparent purpose.

Noe finds that her intention to create a work that promoted freedom of expression across all forms of female written expression essentially led not to a greater sense of community and liberation, but rather to a publication devoid of meaning. She begs the reader: “As for those who have to have rules, why don’t you just make your own? Since I am providing a magazine for all women, a magazine which has no ideology and no philosophy, each of you should feel free to use it any way you wish.”⁹¹ The end of *Seitō* essentially marks the beginning of an ideological split within the Japan’s female liberation movement. Noe concludes her anti-manifesto describing *Seitō*’s position as that of a “seedbed” and cites her unwavering, continued enthusiasm for this volume, in spite of her criticisms and decision to dissolve the magazine.⁹² Noe, like Raichō, recognizes *Seitō*’s history making significance as the first major women’s

⁹⁰ Itō, “*Anti-Manifesto: To My Dear Readers*,” 271.

⁹¹ Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*, 271.

⁹² Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō*, 272.

literary and political publication, recognizing the importance of a “seedbed,” in that it represents the necessary beginnings upon which the fruits of liberation must grow.

Noe’s Later Years: Female Self-reliance and Self-awareness through Anarchism

Tsuji Jun first introduced the young Noe to Emma Goldman, and she became her greatest idol and influence. Noe contributed translations of Emma Goldman’s writings, notably “The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation” to *Seitō* in 1913. Her politics, even in her early years as a teenager *Seitō* writer, had an anarchist-bent. These beliefs were strengthened when Osugi Sakae began a correspondence with Noe after her Emma Goldman essays and translations piqued his interest. Once she disbanded *Seitō*, Noe began to focus her energies on the growing anarchist movement, writing extensively on topics such as the evils of capitalism, the importance of women’s education, the alienation of female workers, and the plausibility of building an anarchist society. Noe’s thoughts on the intersection of gender, class, and labor are best captured in her “Fujin Rôdôsha no Genzai” (藤労働者の現在, “The Current Condition of Female Workers”) essay. Noe acknowledges herself as among the first to address the alienation of female labor within the labor movement: “Until quite recently, women’s labor was coldly dismissed, even at labor alliance meetings, as lacking in value.”⁹³ She leverages her position as a female activist to relate to the female experience and argue for the role of the female worker to be restructured and for her demands to be met. She states that:

⁹³ Itō Noe. “Fujin Rôdôsha no Genzai.” Unpublished translation by Nate Shockey.

Most women dream of a happy married life, a warm home, and the duties of a mother. But almost none of them think about reforming labor conditions so they might be able to work with greater comfort. The capitalists are fully aware of this weak point. No matter how much they suffer, or rather, the more they suffer, the more the capitalists are able to exploit this valuable source of labor that keeps on dreaming.⁹⁴

Noe argues that society is not built around the comfort of women; women are not viewed as a source of labor, largely because they are expected to exist solely in the home to fulfill the role of *ryōsai kenbo* (良妻賢母 good wife, wise mother). This leaves women with a lack of self-awareness. Noe, therefore, suggests that because society teaches women that they are not allowed to think of themselves as laborers, capitalists continue to exploit the woman's lack of experience in the public sphere. When Noe writes of motherhood in regards to labor, it is distinctly different than when male socialists or anarchists tackle similar subjects, as she is able to speak to her own experience as a mother of seven.

Despite that the argument presented in the essay is conveyed in technical terms, the dehumanization Noe describes of women in the workforce continues to present an emotionally charged appeal for the liberation of women and the working class: "Today, a woman is nothing more than an especially valuable automatic machine. Their nerves are stressed and their spirits even more exhausted than those of men, and yet they do not receive an equal level of compensation."⁹⁵ By describing women as a "valuable automatic machine" she describes the double-bind of the Japanese working woman; an "escape" from labor through marriage still manages to "ensnare [her] in even deeper and tighter traps."⁹⁶ All female assigned social roles, no matter if they are within the public or private sector, dehumanize the Japanese woman.

⁹⁴ Itō, "Fujin Rôdôsha no Genzai."

⁹⁵ Itō, "Fujin Rôdôsha no Genzai."

⁹⁶ Itō, "Fujin Rôdôsha no Genzai."

While some women dream of the workforce to escape the suffocation of marriage, others dream of the home and marriage to escape their alienation and devaluation in the workforce. Women thus continue to “dream,” as women are taught not to question their suffering, while the patriarchal capitalist system continues to reap the benefits of their labor. Noe continues: “The reality is that the current economic conditions can provide neither men nor women with an enjoyable married life and home life.”⁹⁷ Noe discusses that capitalism binds both men and women to class and gender based social roles; in essence, they become wage slaves to government owned corporations and factories whom they grow increasingly dependent on. Noe, a mother of seven, understands the struggle of mothers; she capitalizes on her personal identity to advocate for women’s comfort in the workforce. By contrasting the personal and private (the family, the home) with the public (labor), she establishes a political framework uniquely applicable to New Women, many of whom were still adjusting to the role of laborer.

Later, Noe reflects on how her beliefs have changed since *Seitō*: “When I was a bit younger and I still held on to half of my dreams from my schoolgirl days, I held love aloft as the supreme truth of human life. I believed that one should sacrifice one’s self for truly wonderful love, but before long, I realized that we humans can not ever be truly satisfied by living in such a manner.”⁹⁸ She still uses the masculine *jiko* to refer to the Self, however, she recognizes how her emotional narratives advocating for female independence centered around the love of a man; despite that the focus in her writing was on Toshiko’s “willfulness” and path towards freedom, Noe acknowledges that the “supreme truth of human life” and the essence of “self-sacrifice” goes far beyond free love, sexual liberation, and debates on prostitution or abortion that defined

⁹⁷ Itō, “Fujin Rôdôsha no Genzai.”

⁹⁸ Itō, Noe. “Jiko o Ugokasu Koto no Kôfuku.” Unpublished translation by Nate Shockey.

her *Seitō* days.⁹⁹ She acknowledges that these conversations hold little bearing until economic equality is reached. Her focus shifts to how everyday life is controlled by the capitalist patriarchy, eventually leading Noe to call for an anarchism to exist in "everyday practice," namely that people should in various small ways seek routinely to undermine the *kokutai*.

Noe's meditation on happiness continues: "True human happiness is not something that can be bequeathed by another, but something that is gained by living for oneself. This has been my experience, having truly been able to optimistically enjoy an unstable family life who knows how many years."¹⁰⁰ Noe's fierce self-reliance is recurring theme through her career; Noe's early writing calls for women to believe in themselves by applauding the bravery of New Women and creating a space for them within the turbulent, judgmental public sphere, but her later writing demonstrates that perspective, independence and self-awareness, despite all odds, are the only paths to liberation and happiness. Noe links happiness to Individualism and strayed from her previous assertion that all New Women must experience suffering if they intend, as they should, to transgress social conventions.

After time spent away from home and additional education in the realm of political theory, Noe sees her hometown in a new light in her essay "Museifu no Jijitsu" (無政府の事実 "The Truth of Anarchism"). She gains a new understanding that the home in the countryside is not representative of backwardness, rather, Noe herself is simply a woman that has been enlightened enough to realize the systemic social factors at play that dictated her relationships and obligations.¹⁰¹ Noe discusses at length in her other anarchist writings that both men and

⁹⁹ Itō, "Jiko o Ugokasu Koto no Kōfuku."

¹⁰⁰ Itō, "Jiko o Ugokasu Koto no Kōfuku."

¹⁰¹ Itō, Noe. "Museifu no Jijitsu," Unpublished translation by Nate Shockey.

women lack self-awareness, and suggests that a man's lack of Individualism and self-understanding leads him to contribute to women's' oppression. Understanding these dynamics by having lived them grants Noe the ability to boil down the structure of her hometown to its core.

She sees a social structure, birthed by poverty and absence of capitalist greed, that functions as a model for an anarchist society. She writes: "In regions that have yet to receive the blessings of 'culture' (*bunka* 文化), I can see a society of truly free understanding, a society based not on authority, rule, and orders, but the spirit of mutual aid to help each achieve his needs."¹⁰² Noe is able to distinguish the lifestyle itself of those in Fukuoka from her personal feelings of suffocation present in her "Toshiko Trilogy." Although Noe admits that her knowledge is limited to her home of Kyushu, her village functions based on a system of voluntary, reciprocal relationships in which everyone takes part in an unspoken contract to help one another. In writing "about the village in which I was born," Noe establishes rural Fukuoka as a model for an anarchist society, combatting the assumption of the "rational" socialists that anarchism is nothing more than a daydream. Noe writes about the aspirational role of the *kumiai* 組合 (a cooperative), in her hometown village in Fukuoka:

But, when I began looking at the village *kumiai*, I finally understood for the first time. Those who have become used to this kind of village life are unable to live in other villages or live the cold for-profit life of the big city. Even if they dream for success, even if they are poor, these *kumiai* help each other and help people lead warm and comfortable lives. . . . The necessity of getting help from the *kumiai* is nearly absolute. Especially for those who are poor, it is even more so, as the poor are far less free than the rich in various regards. Nearly All these unfreedoms, big and small can be handled by the *kumiai*.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Itō, "Museifu no Jijitsu."

¹⁰³ Itō, "Museifu no Jijitsu."

The *kumiai* are a village guild who dedicate their time to help others through a non-hierarchical system. Although Noe describes her experience in Fukuoka here by focusing on how the community functions as a whole, she continues a pattern of rooting her political theories in her experiences, allowing her offers a certain tangibility and optimism to her anarchist cause. She recognizes what already exists and uses that to imagine how society can continue to exist in a society free from oppressive ideologies. The nostalgic quality captured within her envisioned utopian society employs the imagery of the *furusato* (故郷) or hometown. The *furusato* is understood by Japanese readers as a historical literary concept that is instilled with strong associations of childhood, nostalgia, and belonging. By invoking *furusato* imagery, Noe's blueprint of an realistic anarchist social structure serve her political means that is persuasive, vivid and inherently familiar and emotional.

For Noe, self-writing was both her introduction to the Japanese female liberation movement and the medium upon which her politics became fully realized and eventually radicalized. Her time with *Seitō* influenced her political self-understanding, with her turn to anarchism being an extension of her feminism. Even when Noe's essays become less personal and less distinct, incorporating more political jargon as she gains an understanding of the theory behind the movement, she focused on familiar and accessible concepts like the *furusato* or *kumiai* and advocated for alienated female groups to center her work within the the feminist self-narrative framework; she writes the female self into fabric of her politics, centering even her most technical essays within this new tradition of political, social, and cultural reclamation.

Noe is among many in prewar Japan who looked to socialism, anarchism or communism as an expansion of their feminism. Not long after these leftist social movement shifted Japanese

discourse did these ideologies also begin influencing the neighboring China. While Noe serves as an example of how the female self can both be preserved within and radicalized by feminist self-writing. However, political ideology has the potential to subsume the female self, as seen in the instance of other radical female writers of self-narrative. To explore the tensions between the female self and the female writer's political identification, I turn to the example of Chinese feminist Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986) in Chapter 3. Like Noe, Ding Ling saw communism as a natural extension of her feminism, which in her case, I argue, proved to be incompatible. Although Ding Ling also begins her career with female "I" narrators to center her short stories, the distinct female self becomes less distinct as her communist radicalization progresses.

Chapter 3: Ding Ling: Radical Female Sexuality and the Disappearing Self

The Chinese Enlightenment, New China and the New Woman

The May Fourth Movement (1919-24), also commonly known as the Chinese Enlightenment or the Chinese Renaissance, refers to the social and literary revolution that came as a result of the citizen and student led political protests in Beijing, occurring on the fourth of May 1919. These demonstrations called into question China's unfair treatment in the post-World War I Versailles Conference and the West's concession to Japanese imperial conquest. In spite of China's contribution to the war effort, with Yuan Shikai (袁世凯 1859-1916) offering support to the Allied powers and sending voluntary non-combatant workers from Shandong to serve as laborers in Allied countries. In fact, by the end of the war, Britain had recruited over 94,500 workers and France had recruited 37,000 Chinese workers, making the Chinese laborers the largest and longest-serving non-European party involved in World War I. China's role in participation in World War I went entirely unaccounted for— despite that over sixty delegates were sent to Versailles for post-war negotiations, the Allied powers chose to support Japan's annexation of the Jiaodong Peninsula in Shandong province. Although the 3,000 students protestors marched in opposition of the Treaty of Versailles initially, the movement eventually went on to seek redefinition for China as a modern nation.

The nationalist reaction during the May Fourth Movement led citizens to call for traditional Chinese culture to be dismantled in order to transform China into a modern nation-state. Lousie Edwards writes:

The modern woman featured in an expanding range of public spaces in China. She first emerged in China during the May Fourth Movement as a creature of the intellectual reformers' radical challenge to Confucian China and its "traditional woman" among the pages of magazines such as *New Youth* (Harris, 1995: 64). In this framework, the modern woman was conceived as politically aware, patriotic, independent, and educated.¹⁰⁴

The Chinese New Woman, therefore, came as a result of a nationalist movement towards Chinese independence, modernity by adopting Western education, and anti-traditionalism. Given this historical context, the "New Woman" of China is different from that of the "New Woman" of Japan — in China, the "New Woman" becomes a symbol of an aspirational modernity among May Fourth leaders and intellectuals. Men already held much power and flexibility in terms of representation and participation within the public and private sectors, so the male-led movement towards enlightenment adopted the "Woman" as an object on which to project their ideals of social change. Lu Xun (鲁迅 1881-1936) and Hu Shi (胡适 1891-1962) among others prominently featured New Women in their writing, although their writing did not concern women's liberation as much as it advocated for China to model itself after a perceived progressiveness embodied by Western modernity. This phenomenon allowed for a male feminist movement to flourish, with many prominent writers using the New Woman as both muse and symbol of modernity. The educated male elite who sought to change China found their inspiration in Western literature, including Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Just like in Japan, Ibsen's *A Doll's House* proved incredibly influential, introducing Nora as the archetypal "New Woman," with the New Women of China even being referred to as "China's Noras." Notably, Lu

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, Louise. *Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China, Modern China Vol. 26, No. 2* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 116.

Xun even published an essay on Nora, “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home” (娜拉走後怎樣 *Nà lā zǒu hòu zěnyàng*).

The May Fourth Movement gave birth to smaller, interconnected and interdependent movements advocating for New Women 新女性, New Youth 新青年, New China 新中国. The New Woman movement existed as a method to usher in a New China as both were required to embody new modes of presentation and cultural meaning, where women were the subject of and the symbol for China’s radical change. The symbolic “reinvention” of the woman relates directly to the goal of reinvention for China. The new China and the New Woman paralleled each other, both seeking to redefine themselves through independence, education, and modernity. The writings of these influential May Fourth intellectuals created such a social ripple that female writing was elevated; women were given opportunity to publish their writings, be openly political, and contribute to the national discourse publically for the first time.

Historians of Chinese feminism often make mention of others notable forerunners of modern Chinese women’s liberation movement, among whom is the radical revolutionary Qiu Jin (秋瑾 1875 -1907). However, Qiu Jin is remembered primarily within the context of nationalism, with her writing’s central focus being on national liberation. Although Qiu Jin does describe female liberation in her poetry, it is a secondary topic. One of Qiu Jin’s poems, “Preoccupation,” details the liberation she felt leaving China to study in Japan.

Unbinding my feet, I washed away
 a thousand years of poison.
 My heart fired with excitement, I awoke
 one hundred slumbering flower-spirits.
 But pity my silk handkerchief—
 Half stained with tears
 and half with blood.¹⁰⁵

The poem is about the liberating act of undoing what has been done to her. Qiu Jin's imagery depicts common practices like feet binding as an act of violence against women, and similarly ties together feminized images of flowers and tears with the violence implied by blood and poison. Despite the feminist ferocity of poems like this, Qiu Jin remained better known as a national martyr who sacrificed herself for her country and defied social conventions by wearing pants and participating in revolution and politics. Her best-known poems are expressions of nationalist sentiments, such as the following one:

People say women cannot be heroes,
 But look! I ride the wind across hundreds of miles alone to Japan.
 The sky and the sea move me to write poetry
 The moonlight of Japan is so beautiful that I even dream of it,
 When I think about my country's defeat at the hands of the Manchus I feel deep sadness
 I feel like I am a *Hanma*, preparing for the revolution
 The hatred for the loss of my country greatly depresses me
 And I cannot spend my time in a peaceful place that is not my home¹⁰⁶

Qiu Jin, in a demonstration of her desire for national revolution, separates herself from womanhood. Even though she writes of female oppression and the archaic practice of footbinding, she easily casts aside her female identity to prove herself as a national subject and

¹⁰⁵ Qiu, Jin. "Preoccupation," (1907). *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism*. Saussy, Haun, and Kang-i Sun Chang, trans., (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 928.

¹⁰⁶ Qiu Jin, "Untitled," (1907). Unpublished translation by Corrina Gross and Danhui Chen.

revolutionary. Her references to *hanma*, from the Chinese *chengyu*, or proverb 汗马功劳 *hanmagonglao*, which translates to a “sweaty horse,” referencing the sweat and effort extolled during battle. By including literary references and *chengyu*, Qiu Jin’s places herself within a male narrative of nationalism in her writing, rather than creating a distinct literary tradition that acknowledges her revolutionary ideals in regards to her female identity.

Additionally, when discussing radical feminist writers involved in the Chinese Enlightenment, naturally anarchist and political theorist He Yinzhen (何殷震 1884-1920) or influential female novelists like Xiao Hong (萧红 1911-1942) or Eileen Chang (张爱玲 1920 -1995) may come to mind— however, it is Ding Ling (丁玲 1904-1986) whose focus on female liberation in her writing has made her stand out. Ding Ling is often considered to be one of the most prominent voices to come out of the early post-Chinese Enlightenment literature. In fact, “Ding Ling herself was a typical product of the new culture, one who came from a bankrupt gentry family,” making her into the perfect case study in which to analyze the intersection and evolution of self-writing and the New Woman in the post-Enlightenment period.¹⁰⁷ Ding Ling proves to be the ultimate example of how the female self-narrative can become a powerful and effective political tool. As I discussed earlier, using the framework of Hélène Cixous’s *écriture féminine*, we see how Ding Ling’s writing functions as reclamation of the self and the female sexual body that has been inhibited and silenced. By placing the female self as the subject of lust, rather than the object, Ding Ling’s female self-writing also fulfills the criteria for Hélène Cixous’s *écriture féminine* by functioning as an antithesis to masculine writing, while doubling as an escape and outlet for the female writer.

¹⁰⁷ Alber, Charles J. “Miss Sophie,” in *Enduring the Revolution: Ding Ling and the Politics of Literature in Guomindang China*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 82.

Ding Ling's fiction is explicitly feminist and political and her frequent usage of self-narratives allows her to explore certain themes that separate her from her contemporaries. The self-narrative style allows her to explore the inner workings of the female psyche as means to advocate for female liberation, giving unique insight into how women are treated by traditionalists and modernists alike in Chinese society. Additionally, the self-narrative style lends itself easily to feminist narratives of reclamation, liberation, female appropriation of "masculine" culture, and highlighting double standards, all of which became staple themes throughout Ding Ling's career. Ding Ling's fiction and use of frequent first person narrative presents women as independent, sexual, and emotionally complex beings. Ding Ling's fiction redefines women's roles, creates a radical imagining of women in their complexity. Fiction allows Ding Ling to explore the inner thoughts of men and women, relying on methods of individualism and psychology to better capture the disenfranchisement of women, and connect gendered social issues to revolution and enlightenment in the context of patriarchal Chinese society. Ding Ling's earliest writings were centered on the theme of struggle of men versus women to explore gendered conflicts and contradictory expectations between the sexes.

This focus offered her a means to define a radical new mode of performing womanhood and voicing female needs and desires. Ding Ling herself encountered the hardships of traditional gender roles when she fled to Shanghai from her hometown of Hunan in 1920 to resist an arranged marriage to her cousin, believing that it is unjust for parents to control the bodies of their children. Even for an educated young woman coming from a privileged background, she was still subjected to the oppressive obligations to adhere to an arranged marriage. Much like Raichō and Noe, whose self-writing was highly influenced by their lived experiences, Ding

Ling's personal life overlapped with her writing. In fact, Tani E. Barlow has even noted that Ding Ling's personal experiences in the 1920s greatly influenced her writing, as she had been experiencing depression, impoverishment, great exhaustion, and was embroiled in a love triangle with then-partner Hu Yepin (胡也频, 1903-1931) and writer and poet Feng Xuefeng (冯雪峰, 1903-1976), whom she developed romantic feelings for that were reciprocated but never acted upon.¹⁰⁸ For example, Charles Alber suggests that her complicated love affairs with Feng Xuefeng and Hu Yepin greatly influenced the writing of "Miss Sophie's Diary" (沙菲女士的日记, 1927). Even though both Ding Ling scholars rightfully assume that Ding Ling's personal circumstances affected her writing, there is a clear distinction between Alber and Barlow's biographical detail. While Barlow focuses on Ding Ling's general quality of life in the 1920s, Alber essentializes Ding Ling and her writing by centering a biographical chapter on the writing process for "Miss Sophie's Diary" to her romantic entanglements by making them into the central theme of the chapter.¹⁰⁹

As compared to Noe's "Wagamama," where Noe's Toshiko is a thinly veiled stand-in for its author, Ding Ling constructs Sophie to be her own distinct character, whose mainly commonality with her creator lies in both presenting themselves as proud New Women. Alber details how Ding Ling spent much of her years leading up to the writing of "Miss Sophie's Diary" harboring reciprocated romantic feelings for writer Feng Xuefeng, despite living with her partner Hu Yepin in a small apartment which they shared with Shen Congwen. Ding Ling refused to act on her feelings for Feng Xuefeng, declaring in letters that Hu Yepin would likely

¹⁰⁸ Alber, 82.

¹⁰⁹ Barlow, Tani E. *I Myself Am A Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1989), 25.

commit suicide if she were to betray him like that. Ding Ling then closes the chapter on a possible relationship with Feng Xuefeng, choosing to settle down with her longtime partner in an unofficial ceremony in 1925. However, by including this particular biographical information in a chapter entitled “Miss Sophie,” although important to understanding who Ding Ling was, Alber’s framing takes away much of Ding Ling’s agency in writing; just like how Ding Ling’s characters deal with a loss of power over their own narratives, Alber creates a narrative that frames Ding Ling’s writing process as entirely dependent on the men in her life and “Miss Sophie’s Diary” as a mere reflection of the author’s entanglements with two men.

Radical Female Sexuality in “Miss Sophie’s Diary”

Ding Ling’s “Miss Sophia's Diary” (“Miss Sophie’s Diary” (沙菲女士的日记 Shā fēi nǚshì dì rìjì, 1927) stands out not only as one of Ding Ling’s first significant writing amongst her earlier works, but mainly because it arguably has the most substantial lasting impact. It was first published in the influential literary journal, *Fiction Monthly* (小说月报). At this time, the overwhelming expectation of women was still that of the “good wife, wise mother” (賢妻良母 xián qī liáng mù), and the oppressive Confucian social hierarchy, which emphasized repressive gendered virtues of purity, loyalty, and chastity, remained deeply ingrained in social consciousness. However, the Chinese Enlightenment allowed for the role of women to be re-thought; instead of being seen as either courtesans or wives, daughters, or mothers of citizens, women were now viewed with the potential to be considered full subjects, complete with the potential to participate in the public sector.

Ding Ling was fortunate enough to be a young school girl at a time when women were slowly gaining social and political visibility. If one considers the likes of Lu Xun (鲁迅 1881-1936) or Hu Shi (胡适 1891-1962) to be “male feminists,” then Ding Ling, can be seen as a successor of sorts, entering the male dominated literary scene to reclaim the women’s liberation movement for women. “Miss Sophie’s Diary” was written in 1927, a time when, according to Tani E. Barlow, Ding Ling had left the realm of the girls’ schools to enter the male-dominated literary scene; she was “miserable, drinking heavily, dispirited by the national tragedy of political counterrevolution, and exhausted by her impoverished, often squalid life in boarding-house rooms.”¹¹⁰ Ding Ling, at this time, had been living with her partner Hu Yepin and Shen Congwen, also from Hunan, who offered her much guidance and encouragement.¹¹¹

In “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” Ding Ling reimagines female political, personal and sexual identity and autonomy through a radical work of self-narrative. Although much of Ding Ling’s writing draws from personal experiences as Albert and Barlow assert, Sophie is distinctly her own woman. The fictional Sophie uses her diary as a object to achieve personal self-liberation. The diary functions to not only be a non-prejudicial outlet for Sophie the narrator— providing with her solace, refuge, self-realization and understanding— but it also serves as a testament to the underestimated power and complexities of female personhood while exploring the rescriptive pressure of patriarchal social conventions on women’s individualist self-expression.

In “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” the narrator is a young woman named Sophie, living in isolation due to her tuberculosis diagnosis. The reader, essentially, is placed in a position in which they are reading Sophie’s thoughts; the story is told through a series of diary entries that

¹¹⁰ Barlow, 25.

¹¹¹ Alber, 82.

reveal her most intimate fantasies, interspersed with deep personal introspection, and complicated interpersonal tragedies and relationships. As Nora has since become an archetype of the New Woman in Asia, Ding Ling signals that Sophie is an extension of this cultural narrative, by giving her protagonist a Western name and uses this diary to reveal and normalize the psychology of New Women. “Miss Sophie’s Diary” is, at its core, a commemoration of female sexuality, in which Ding Ling’s narrator, Sophie, openly tackles gendered social taboos; “Readers of *Fiction Monthly*, which published ‘Miss Sophie’s Diary,’ may have been shocked to read about masturbation, bisexuality, and premarital sex in the story. Among the many challenges Miss Sophie confronts in the story is a choice between two men, a choice that maps closely onto political debates facing China.”¹¹² Sophie’s voice as the narrator is striking; she embraces her blatant sexuality, selfish tendencies, and conflicting desires in an incredibly intimate way that would shock readers. Sophie details thoughts that women normally would not dare to voice publically nor would they normally attribute to a woman. Sophie, therefore, represents a nearly picture perfect example of Cixous’s challenge to women “to write themselves out of the world men constructed for women. . . [urging] women to put themselves—the unthinkable unthought— into words.”¹¹³ In a society where violence is committed against women’s bodies, reasserting the autonomy of the self through writing— particularly in terms of social taboos, namely female sexuality— allows women to regain what has been taken from them. Within the text’s radical examination of female desire and sexuality is Ding Ling’s central

¹¹² Carter, James. “The Rise of Nationalism and Revolutionary Parties, 1919-1937” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern China*, edited by Jeffrey Wasserstrom.(Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2016), 124.

¹¹³ Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought, Student Economy Edition: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 196-7.

assertion that Chinese society is not built for liberated women like Sophie. For this reason, Ding Ling's female self is intrinsically political.

Sophie drifts into one of her many fantasies of Ling Jishi: "I raised my eyes. I looked at his soft, red, moist, deeply inset lips, and let out my breath slightly. How could I admit to anyone that I gazed at those provocative lips like a small hungry child eyeing sweets. . . forbidden to take what I need to gratify my desires and frustrations, even when it clearly wouldn't hurt anybody."¹¹⁴ Sophie's description of Ling Jishi's features is poetic in its flowing embrace of sexual frustration, normalizing her desires through metaphors and shallow excuses for her "dirty" innermost thoughts. Lydia Liu describes Sophie's objectification of Ling Jishi as uniquely feminized: "Not only does the narrator objectify the man's 'lips' as if they were pieces of candy, but she ignores the phallus and feminizes male sexuality by associating it with lips (labia). She is empowered by writing that gives full play to her subversive desires and constitutes her as a subject."¹¹⁵ Not only does this example demonstrate a reversal of Sophie from being the subject of male desire, instead of its object, but it also subverts expectations of female desire. Sophie's sexual desire is expressed and expected to be entirely understood based on her own terms. The focus of her sexual fantasies is not in fact Ling Jishi, rather, the focus is on Sophie and how she manipulates these fantasies as performances of the self and power.

Ding Ling is among the first female Chinese writers to discuss female lust. In the first few entries, Sophie describes a young couple whom she is close friends with, noting how strange it is that Yunling and Yufang, despite living together, refrain from sexual relations; she

¹¹⁴ Ding Ling, "Miss Sophie's Diary," 49.

¹¹⁵ Liu, H. Lydia, "Invention and Intervention: The Making of a Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature," in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: a Reader*, edited by Susan brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2008), 155.

concludes that Yunling and Yufang choosing to remain chaste is "just one of those strange, unexplained things in life."¹¹⁶ In a culture that has long been since ruled by Confucian principles of female purity and chastity, Sophie's redefinition of what constitutes "normal" and what constitutes "strange" serves to establish new norms and dismantle social conventions that stifle female agency and discourage female expression of sexuality. As a follow-up question, Sophie asks her diary: "Why shouldn't you embrace your lover's naked body? Why repress this part of love? How can they be so preoccupied with all the details before they've even slept together!"¹¹⁷ Her attitude regarding sex is much different than other female writers from her time; Sophie is sexually liberated and expresses her sexual thoughts freely, inverting the social standard where women are judged based on how "loose" they are perceived to be by, instead, judging her friends for their perceived prudishness. Second wave American feminists widely consider sexual freedom to be a key component of feminism, and thus female liberation. Ding Ling's embrace of female sexuality significantly predates the Western sex-positivity feminist movement, making her narrator's claim that those who adhere to outdated modes of socio-cultural convention are the ones who are "strange" all the more radical, effective, and powerful.

Ding Ling's Re-appropriation of Male Literary Trends

The primary conflict of the short story concerns Sophie's romantic entanglements; she is torn between Ling Jishi, an attractive Singaporean businessman, and the loyal, brotherly Weidi. Most of Sophie's actions are driven by her lust for Ling Jishi: "I want to possess him. I want the

¹¹⁶ Ding Ling. "Miss Sophie's Diary," 56.

¹¹⁷ Ding Ling. "Miss Sophie's Diary", 59.

unconditional surrender of his heart.”¹¹⁸ Sophia, while constantly complaining that Ling Jishi is both foolish and beneath her, still finds herself moving from the luxury of a Beijing hotel room to a hostel that aggravates her illness in order to be closer to him — the object of her sexual fantasies. This is a reversal of the common male literati narrative tropes where the actions of male protagonists are propelled by their lust for a woman, often a courtesan. Bonnie S. McDougall writes that Sophie’s tuberculosis is “a metaphor for suppressed anxiety at a betrayal of traditional morality.”¹¹⁹ Sophie, although she often contradicts herself, is keenly aware of her own “immoral” thoughts and desires and she expresses them unapologetically; McDougall suggests that Sophie is sick because society has made her so, and her rejection of traditional morality has manifested in a sickness that removes her from existing fully in her own reality.

Additionally, Chinese literature has a long tradition of depicting chronic disease as a romantic condition. Lin Diayu in *The Story of the Stone* (红楼梦 *Hónglómèng*, 1791) and Du Linliang in *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭 *Mǔdān tíng*) are two of the most famous women whose illnesses are tied to romantic yearnings and literary sensibility. Of all the “romantic diseases,” tuberculosis in particular is endowed with amorous connotations: “More than any other disease known to man, tuberculosis has been endowed with a romanticized, aesthetic image, despite the horrible agonies suffered by those afflicted.”¹²⁰ There is a male literary tradition that not only relates boredom and frustration to lust and love-sickness, but also associates illness with desirability, femininity, and romance, as depicted in the Chinese classics *The Story of the Stone*

¹¹⁸ Ding Ling, “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” 55.

¹¹⁹ McDougall, Bonnie S. and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (New York 1999), 133.

¹²⁰ Fukuda, Mahito. *The Romantic Images of Tuberculosis: A Cultural History of a Disease* (Nagoya University: 2000), 1.

and The Peony Pavilion. In fact, Fukuda illuminates that the “typical tuberculosis patients were the love-starved daughters from wealthy families or diligent young devotees of Chinese classical studies. Their remedies are also of interest, because they actually reflect the idea that love-sickness can be cured only through love or love-making.”¹²¹ Ding Ling is re-appropriating and inverting this male literary tradition, making the “love-starved,” ailing protagonist into the subject, not object of desire. By using tuberculosis as both a metaphor for Sophie’s transgressions of conventional morality and as an established literary allusion of female love-sickness, Ding Ling’s feminist psycho-emotional narrative that normalizes and re-writes social norms while challenging perceptions of femininity and the female self.

Additionally, the format of “Miss Sophie’s Diary” is another example of Ding Ling inserting herself into the male dominated literary circles to reappropriate formats and themes popularized by male writers, making them explicitly female. The diary format, for instance, was recently popularized by Lu Xun; Lu Xun’s “A Madman’s Diary” (狂人日記 1918) was published not long before in 1918 (which in turn was inspired by Nikolai Gogol). Similarly, not only does Ding Ling reclaim sexuality for women with Sophie’s “unusual” openness, but she also incorporates themes of determination, ostracization of women, and indecisiveness that both Lu Xun incorporates in his 1925 work “Regret for the Past” (伤逝 Shang shi) and Yu Dafu (郁达夫, 1896-1945) in his 1921 work “Sinking” (沉淪 Chénlún) — both of which are similarly considered to be among the pioneering works of Chinese psychological fiction.

¹²¹ Fukuda, 17-8.

Reading “Miss Sophie’s Diary” as a Psycho-sexual, Emotional Self-Narrative

This dynamic is further explored by Sophie’s hesitance to act on her true thoughts and feelings. Sophie immediately regrets her boldness to look Ling Jishi directly in the eyes several times and “size him up.¹²²” After the events of the day, Sophie tells her diary that “I regret all the wrong things I did today, things a decent woman would never do.”¹²³ Sophie expresses herself unabashedly, describing her unyielding desire to “mark every part of his body with my lips,” however, her actions are much more restrained; in fact, the most she is able to do to Ling Jishi is sustain eye contact — which is already enough for her to categorize herself as indecent. This incident demonstrates how even a modern woman like Sophie is still hyperconscious of adhering to these internalized social conventions.

On many occasions, Sophie is cruel to Yunfang, Weidi and others who show genuine care for her. Despite this, Sophie desperately wants to have someone who can understand her: “All I want is to be happy”.¹²⁴ Sophie feels suffocated by social convention, and her physical isolation (as a result of her tuberculosis), is parallel to her emotional isolation. Society is not built in a way that is designed to address her needs and emotions; she is without an intellectual and emotional equal; Ling Jishi turns out to be nothing more than a pretty face— she is in love with the idea of Ling Jishi, not the real person. Similarly, Weidi is incapable of understanding her (amplified when he reads her diary and understands Sophie even less). Sophie also tells her diary that: “I wish I had someone who really understood. Even if he reviled me, I’d be proud and

¹²² Ding Ling, “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” 57.

¹²³ Ding Ling, “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” 58.

¹²⁴ Ding Ling, “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” 56.

happy.”¹²⁵ Sophie needs someone to be with her, she yearns for an equal, for someone she can discuss her most intimate thoughts with, not sacrificing her true feelings for the sake of keeping appearances. Except Yunjie—the woman she is alluded to have been in a relationship with, and for whom the diary is written—it seems as if no one Sophie meets in Beijing can be with her in the capacity that she requires. Ding Ling’s expression of female bisexuality also proves extremely radical, as little other modern Chinese writers even making mention of it. Unfortunately, for this reason, there are few resources available that expand on lesbianism and bisexuality within Ding Ling’s writing beyond the typical aside that merely acknowledges its inclusion.

As an unreliable narrator, whose descriptions of events is admittedly prone to extremes, Sophie could certainly be her own harshest critic; however, this illustrates how Sophie’s inner torment stems from her inability to completely liberate herself from internalized expectations on how women are supposed to act. The story illuminates Sophie’s various flaws, namely her indecisiveness, hypocrisy, self-indulgence, and selfishness. Because these seemingly irreconcilable personality traits are presented as the story’s main conflict without seeking to solve them, it suggests that the problem at hand stems from social factors that have influenced Sophie’s mindset. This problematizes the society that Sophie inhabits instead of problematizing Sophie herself. This is significant because it contextualizes Sophie’s emotions, allowing her to exist as an independent person whose “immoral” actions are reflective of a pressure to conform to social conventions.

¹²⁵ Ding Ling, “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” 52.

Sophie's tuberculosis worsens when her lust leads her to relocate, thus demonstrating how Sophie's sickness relates directly to her continued decision to betray her sense of traditional morality. Ding Ling defines how sexuality is an intrinsic part of one's identity as a modern woman. The self-narrative style is able to evoke emotion in a way that essays or other works that are strictly political cannot; a self-narrative is as powerful as it is personal, it conveys unseen (private) facets of female identity with care, nuance and intimacy. Reading all of Sophie's thoughts in totality provides a view into her psyche and helps to normalize behaviors and forms of self-expression considered taboo for women. By creating something for the masses that challenges the way people perceive women, Ding Ling addresses the modern perspectives women have on sex, men and relationships.

The Personal is Political:

Reading "Miss Sophie's Diary" as a Political Metaphor

Ding Ling, through the Sophie's self-narration, uses the female self to depict the personal as political, not only through transcending gender barriers, but by centering her as an allegory for China's current state of uncertainty. Namely, this is accomplished through using Sophie's relationship to Weidi and Ling Jishi as an allegory. By placing Sophie in the position of the China, choosing between the brotherly Weidi— representing the traditional China, reliable yet unmistakably outdated— and the Westernized, Singaporean foreigner Ling Jishi — representing Westernization in his undeniable attractiveness, well educated background, but remains full of

empty promises. If China cannot support the needs of a complex woman like Sophie, then China cannot fulfill its promise to support its citizens.

Sophie, in this metaphor, therefore comes to represent the indecisive China, not knowing which direction to be led in; either one that, although loyal, is monotonous, domineering, and is unable to move forward, lacking any chance of gaining a deep understanding of Sophie/China's current condition (as found in Weidi), or one that is attractive and enlightened, but turns out to be hollow (as found in Jishi). By making Sophie, a complicated New Woman, a stand-in for China, Ding Ling is asserting that China's "Noras" are not only worthy of being complete, public citizens—but they are also representative of China itself and know best the needs of the reform-minded nation of China

In order to fully comprehend the complexities and implications of China being represented by a woman in Ding Ling's narrative, I must address its parallels to the deeply racist and sexist feminization of Asian nations by Western powers to clear any misunderstandings that Ding Ling might be presenting a subconscious Western perception of China. Edward Said famously asserts in *Orientalism* that:

Orientalism itself, furthermore, was an exclusively male province. Like so many guilds during the modern period, it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially evident in the writings of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.¹²⁶

The perception of Asia as female, thus subservient and object to the West as the male, functions as a method for the white male hegemony to rearticulate both racial and masculine power over China. However, Ding Ling's Sophie writes "herself as a subject rather than as an object of

¹²⁶ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 207.

desire” as means to disrupt and subvert this narrative.¹²⁷ In more simple terms, Ding Ling’s narrator is in total control of this power-fantasy.

Ding Ling accomplishes a reversal of male discourse on desire by using “the narrator’s female gaze” to turn “the man into a sex object.”¹²⁸ This self-narrative that Ding Ling creates, therefore, inverts sexual, gendered, and racial roles, deconstructing and alienating the West’s objectification of Asia. The Western understanding of the “female” Asia is defined by its “separateness, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability.”¹²⁹ Sophie is understood to be a progressive, liberated New Woman, and through her bold words and actions— in particular her rejection of Weidi and Ling Jishi, she proves to be neither silent, penetrable, nor malleable. Therefore, both the China and the woman that Ding Ling redefines are of a new breed,

Additionally, as Lydia Liu proves, Ding Ling’s rewriting of gender reverses subject/object relations and reveals a gender-based power struggle.¹³⁰ This inversion allows Ding Ling to give agency to the female self, centering her narrator Sophie as the antithesis to the trope of the female as the object of male writers. Sophie’s boisterous personality and openness regarding her ‘impure’ thoughts separate her entirely from typical Western or Chinese constructions of a passive, docile “femininity.” Although, as Edward Said illuminates, China and “the Orient” are methodically feminized by Western nations to justify exploitation and present them as weak and subservient. Ding Ling’s reversal of subject/object relations, however dismantles that narrative; I posit that by establishing an inversion of gender dynamics, Ding Ling

¹²⁷ Liu, 155.

¹²⁸ Liu, 155-6.

¹²⁹ Said, 206.

¹³⁰ Liu, 156.

is not only reclaiming a political and personal female self, but she is also redefining the terms and implications of China's feminization.

If New China, in this case, is gendered female, both then Ling Jishi/the West and Weidi/Old China are gendered male and subsequently turned into the objects of the female New China/Sophie. From this perspective, it can be assumed that the traditional and modern societies that proves to be unworthy of meeting the needs of a complex woman like Sophie, are both patriarchal domains, while New China is not. In order for New China to progress, therefore, women should be at the forefront. Similar to the context of the New Culture movement, Ding Ling is making a connection between the two; however, unlike the male writers who tackled this topic before her, her "re-gendering" establishes the New Woman as being vehemently opposed the masculine West and Old China. This means that not only are Women the symbolic bearers of meaning for New China, but these Sophies and Noras, as a matter of fact, are best prepared to understand the contradictions of what China wants and needs.

The Communist Self in Ding Ling's "When I was in Xia Village"

Many prominent writers in Ding Ling's literary circles began involvement in the growing Communist movement. Not long after the birth of their son, the Guomindang executes Hu Yepin in 1931 due to suspicion of communist sympathies. Ding Ling, always with her strong sense of justice, reacted to this tragedy by vehemently opposing the Guomindang government, delving deeper into, and eventually devoting herself to, communism the following year. Ding Ling quickly rose in ranks and became a central member of the League of Left-Wing Writers. The

Kuomintang placed her under house arrest in Nanjing for a three-year period from 1933 to 1936, but Ding Ling managed to escape to the communist base of Yan'an, where she served as director of the Chinese Literature and Arts Association. Although she aligns herself with the Communist Party, for the first two decades of her involvement, she was not afraid to critique party politics. She received much disdain from the party when she publicly disagreed with its stance that revolutionary needs should come before art and called out the party for perpetuating gender-based double standards in “Thoughts on March 8th” (三月八有感 *Sān yuè bā yǒu gǎn*) in 1942. Ding Ling wrote “When I was in Xia Village” (我在霞村的时候 *Wǒ zài xiá cūn de shíhòu*, 1941) while living in Yan'an, inspired by the story of a friend.¹³¹

At this time, the communist movement was in full force. Barlow notes that “When I was in Xia Village” marks a return to “Ding Ling’s earlier preoccupation with sex and justice” which had been becoming increasingly sparse as her writing became more representative of the party’s objectives rather than her own individual goals. The short story’s protagonist, Zhenzhen, confronts the prejudice of her hometown villagers after returning from living amongst the Japanese as a communist spy.¹³² Like “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” “When I was in Xia Village” also largely concerns itself with the problematic expectation of female chastity and purity— this time in the context of rape and sexual abuse.

Zhenzhen is seen as impure because she was sexually assaulted by Japanese, who are understood by the villagers to be “racial invaders.” Not only does Zhenzhen contract venereal disease, with her contamination manifesting itself through physical symptoms, but, in the eyes of those in her hometown of Xia village, her value as a woman (determined by her adherence to the

¹³¹ Barlow, 298.

¹³² Barlow, 298.

Confucian virtues of chastity, loyalty, purity) has also been corrupted. She is considered by the villagers as being physically, emotionally, and mentally contaminated by the enemy upon her return home; this highlights rural communities still uphold the traditional mentality that women should live as the object of a husband who owns her body and her virginity.

The narrator of “When I was in Xia Village” complicates the format of the self-narrative established in “Miss Sophie’s Diary.” While “Miss Sophie’s Diary” uses Sophie as both the protagonist and narrator to illustrate a psychological emotional narrative, the narrator of “When I was in Xia Village,” aside from their apparent position as an educated communist writer travelling from Yan’an, is left entirely ambiguous. The short story is about a young peasant girl named Zhenzhen, whose experiences are being filtered through this “mysterious party comrade.”

¹³³ The central journey in which Ding Ling writes is of Zhenzhen’s reclamation of her own agency, which she regains by telling the story of her life and what happened to her on her own terms.

Zhenzhen’s narrative is told by an outsider, who regards Xia Village with ambivalence and whose only connection and investment in the story is based around her surprisingly intimate friendship with Zhenzhen, which they strike up the moment they meet. The narrator takes note of Zhenzhen for the first time: “At first I thought that they were talking about a new bride, but people said that wasn’t so. Then I thought there was a prisoner present, but that was wrong too”.

¹³⁴ The narrator, not yet even knowing Zhenzhen’s name, feels a connection to the woman being described and possess an acute awareness of Zhenzhen’s positionality among her family and the

¹³³ Barlow, 299.

¹³⁴ Ding Ling, “When I was in Xia Village,” translation by Tani. E. Barlow, in *I Myself Am A Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1989), 301.

greater village. The narrator, and therefore the reader, first hear of how Zhenzhen “worked” for the Japanese, and she is suggested to be a resource for the narrator to collect stories from. The narrator subconsciously intuits how Zhenzhen, in the consciousness of the villagers, exists solely on a spectrum; she is not presented as herself— she is either, at best, a symbol for survival or a tragic heroine, or alternatively, she is traitor or a victim of malicious gossip and trauma at worst. Save for the narrator, Zhenzhen is not treated as an individual and has no agency over how her experiences are perceived or told. This outsider perspective allows for Zhenzhen to reveal her lived experiences and their implications on her life on her own terms. However, Zhenzhen is only able to do so because of the use of the nameless communist journalist whose sole purpose in the village is to champion her. Unlike “Miss Sophie,” whose focus is on Sophie’s emotions and psychological state, the narrator in “Xia Village” has no discernable personality apart from her fascination with Zhenzhen. The lack of individuality relates directly to Ding Ling’s deeper involvement in the Chinese Communist Party, where her writing is subjected to depersonalized leftist criticism and demoted to the role of propaganda.

Without the emotion or the distinctness of individual personality present in Ding Ling’s “self” in her prior work, the female liberation movement itself becomes essentialized— as it is presented with a simple solution, thereby reducing it to a mere work of propaganda. As a work of propaganda, “When I was in Xia Village” is effective by using the emotional stakes of Zhenzhen’s narrative to heighten its message. while further complicating how the story would be interpreted; the narrator’s sympathy to Zhenzhen’s plight forces the reader to question why Zhenzhen is being treated and viewed as a parasite, questioning the cultural and social dynamics that have been denying Zhenzhen of agency. Although Barlow questions that “perhaps Ding

Ling was attempting to reverse, at least metaphorically, an association she found intolerable in Communist Party practice between a man's political loyalty and her sexual chastity," the solution presented at the end of the narrative cheapens its central message.¹³⁵ It makes sense that Ding Ling might be addressing a certain double standard present within party in regards to its treatment of women, especially considering that this was written mere months before her explosive "Thoughts on March 8th" (三月八有感 *Sān yuè bā yǒu gǎn*) essay. However, the short story's format suggests that it serves as a more standardized form of propaganda. Like much communist propaganda at this time, the plot of story revolves around a peasant "Other" who overcomes extreme adversity, who in turn thereby inspires the intellectual Self, represented by the narrator— which thus fulfills the common trope in communist writing as it works to "convey the necessity of intellectuals' re-education by the people."¹³⁶

Despite the fact that there is a clear class dynamic between Zhenzhen as a poor peasant and the narrator as an educated representative of the Party, Zhenzhen is presented as determined, brave and rational and speaks in an erudite manor, with a certain thoughtfulness that is both reflective of and closely associated with depictions of the archetypal educated communist in the leftist literary circles that Ding Ling herself belonged to at the time of its writing. When Zhenzhen finally speaks, her resounding qualities are in her courage, perseverance and rationality. When prompted by the narrator, she firmly states that being a woman is not suffering, as if to correct a common misunderstanding of womanhood, seemingly validating and educating the narrator's own understanding of herself. Zhenzhen radiates strength and discusses her own

¹³⁵ Barlow, 299.

¹³⁶ Fen, Jin. *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-century Chinese Fiction*, (Purdue, 2004), 193.

victories and how she “became less afraid” when witnessing “the Jap devils suffer defeat in battle and the guerillas take action on all sides as a result of the tricks I was playing.”¹³⁷ (308). Zhenzhen’s refusal to focus on trauma or tragedy; when Zhenzhen speaks, her focus is on justice for the nation and for the individual, and, as Barlow notes, “no one expect the narrator allows Zhenzhen the liberty to say for herself what the experience has done to her and how it will shape her life ‘as a woman.’”¹³⁸ By extension, this creates a tension where, yet again, the narrator and Zhenzhen herself can be seen as a single unit. Therefore, in analyzing the progression of Ding Ling’s self-narrative, Zhenzhen must be viewed as both an extension and a projection of the narrator and the narrator’s beliefs, values and selfhood. The progressive, leftist slant of the narrative is therefore indicative of the narrator and her intentions— whose career and position within the growing Chinese Communist Party mirror Ding Ling— which is further epitomized by Zhenzhen and the narrator acting as a collective self.

The effect of this narration style allows for the narrator to experience how Zhenzhen is being denied her own self-introduction, almost as if it is the narrator herself being one ostracized; both the narrator and Zhenzhen are acting as either the target, or as a stand-in for the target, of gendered alienation and stigmatization, illustrating the damaging implications of village gossip. The second time the narrator hears of her, a neighbor is asking her if she’s seen Zhenzhen and speaks of her as if she is a rare jewel encased in glass or a caged animal in a zoo: “Did you get a look at [Liu Erma’s] niece? I hear her disease has even taken her nose.”¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ding Ling, “When I was in Xia Village,” 308.

¹³⁸ Barlow, 298.

¹³⁹ Ding Ling, “When I was in Xia Village,” 303.

The fact that the reader's first impression of Zhenzhen's character is informed by these rumors illustrates firsthand how women are denied agency and stripped of their own personhood and experiences. The initial gossip and traditionalist views of what a woman should be quickly color Zhenzhen's character, demonstrating how she has no control over her own narrative as long as she is to remain in Xia Village. The girls in the village even became "extremely self-righteous, perceiving themselves as saintly and pure," suggesting that her "contaminated" state empowers local girls to cling to a false idealization of femininity enforced by outdated social conventions.¹⁴⁰ The self-image of these women are now dependent upon proving themselves against Zhenzhen's perceived "lack," which further worsens the stigmatization against Zhenzhen and perpetuates sexist social standards applied to women.

This effect allows her gender to become central to the story and central to her journey to reclaim her own narrative and identity. The neighbor continues berating the barely introduced Zhenzhen: "It's said that she slept with at least a hundred men. Humph! I've heard that she even became the wife of a Japanese officer. Such a shameful woman should not be allowed to return" . Chinese women during this time were the subject of great abuse, not just at the hand of the Confucian family system, but by Japanese soldiers, who would uproot their lives and force them into sexual slavery as Comfort Women. Women who lived through sexual abuse and sexual slavery were caught between the constraints of outdated expectations of chastity and the familial pressure to save face (her neighbor asks rhetorically "How can she face people?").¹⁴¹ No longer being "pure" meant that a woman like Zhenzhen would become essentialized as either a trauma victim by sympathetic villagers or as a dishonorable, promiscuous traitor by self-righteous

¹⁴⁰ Ding Ling, "When I was in Xia Village," 309.

¹⁴¹ Ding Ling, "When I was in Xia Village," 303.

villagers. The traditional values of women remaining loyal, submissive and chaste for men are central to Confucian thought, and it further victimizes the Chinese women subjected to sexual slavery by the Japanese invaders. The treatment of Zhenzhen is not only just a historical, contemporary, relatable problem, but it is an entirely gendered phenomenon. Zhenzhen's story, from the very beginning, is one that is not her own. Zhenzhen, the protagonist, has become defined by the tragedies that have befallen her. Zhenzhen is seeking to rectify the wrongs that society has done to her. However, throughout this process, Zhenzhen faces the risk of being reduced to either a victim or a symbol.

Zhenzhen, in essence, was not only seen as a sexual object by Japanese soldiers, but even in her hometown, local villagers continue to treat her as an object— she becomes an object of gossip and rumors, an object of shame and dishonor, an object of betrayal, impurity, and of China's shortcomings. Additionally, when looking at this as self-narrative, the agency that Zhenzhen is awarded is actually a result of the narrator's projection. By describing these accusations and alienations in such detail, the narrator herself is engaging with Zhenzhen as a symbol. Although an additional purpose of the narrator is to dismantle these assumptions, her ambivalent interactions with the villagers and her narration of this gossip, mixed with her almost supernatural-level of understanding she shares with Zhenzhen work to illustrate how narrator internalizes Zhenzhen's circumstances and situations, thereby using Zhenzhen herself as a projection. The narrator's focus, first on her stigmatization, allows for the scene between Zhenzhen and the narrator to hold extra significance, making their intimate first interaction— a moment where Zhenzhen reclaims her agency (normally a personal moment)— into a scene that

illustrates their interdependence and, by Zhenzhen having her transformational moment, grants purpose to the narrator.

The fact that the reader's first impression of Zhenzhen's character is informed by these rumors illustrates firsthand how women are denied agency and stripped of their own personhood and experiences. The initial gossip and traditionalist views of what a woman should be quickly color Zhenzhen's character, demonstrating how she has no control over her own narrative as long as she is to remain in Xia Village. The girls in the village even became "extremely self-righteous, perceiving themselves as saintly and pure," suggesting that her "contaminated" state empowers local girls to cling to a false idealization of femininity enforced by outdated social conventions 309. The self-image of these women are now dependent upon proving themselves against Zhenzhen's perceived "lack," which further worsens the stigmatization against Zhenzhen and perpetuates sexist social standards applied to women.

Even before Zhenzhen is formally introduced, Liu Erma, an ally to the narrator and Zhenzhen, describes Zhenzhen's radical belief in free love; she details Zhenzhen's rebellion against the archaic system of arranged marriage through her attempt to join a nunnery after a marriage to her lover, Xia Dabao, was deemed impossible.¹⁴² Through this characterization, Zhenzhen behavior and personality is aligned with that of the now-familiar trope of the Chinese Nora. Zhenzhen's communist narrative, and therefore the communist movement, function as a natural successor to/extension of the New Culture and New Woman movement. Although one would expect an outside narrator to filter Zhenzhen's lived experiences through her own, the intensity of their relationship and the telekinetic way in which the narrator interprets Zhenzhen's

¹⁴² Ding Ling, "When I was in Xia Village," 304.

thoughts and emotions suggests that they are one in the same. An example of the narrator intuiting Zhenzhen's feelings and state of mind is evidenced when the narrator concludes that Zhenzhen, as a result of her commendable willfulness, causes conflict with her mother; this is related to the fact that Zhenzhen "had no intention whatever of trying to elicit sympathy from others."¹⁴³ The narrator developed such a uniquely intimate understanding of Zhenzhen, almost to the level of reading into her thoughts; this illuminates that, although the "I" narrator is an outsider, the closeness of the "I" narrator to Zhenzhen herself suggests that, throughout the story, they are always united — a collective "I."

Zhenzhen saves herself from being reduced to either a victim, an enemy or a symbol by joining the narrator in her return to Yan'an. Zhenzhen's story is solved by invoking communism as a panacea to the very real oppression that she faces. Ding Ling's move to Yan'an changes her writing in a way that alters how she sees and writes of the Self; Contrary to her previous work, which focused on individual and personal growth— like in the case of Sophie, this story stands out within Ding Ling's cannon, because, although distinctly feminist, adopts a "collective" self as means to present communism as a solution for female oppression.

The story unites the narrator with Zhenzhen instead of focusing on the individual growth of their collective self. Although this work is distinctly feminist and effective in thematically in terms of its exploration of female self agency, by the end, it becomes an essentially static narrative. However, as compared to Sophie, Zhenzhen's narrative is not emotional; her situation may invoke sympathy, but both the narrator and Zhenzhen herself reject sympathy, pity and sorrow for the female condition. In this way, this short story about female empowerment despite

¹⁴³ Ding Ling, "When I was in Xia Village," 309.

its scrutinization of the damaging effects of female oppression in the context of village life, thematically similar to “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” is actually anti-emotional. It features a “collective I” and is anti-emotional, meaning that its narrative approach makes it impossible for Xia Village to deepen the readers’ understanding of the Chinese New Woman or the female self.

The Compatibility of Feminism with Chinese Nationalism and Communism

Looking at the evolution of Ding Ling’s writing, the self begins disintegrating as her career progresses and she delves deeper into the communist movement. Beginning with Miss Sophie Diary, the most notable work in her early career, the self is distinct— she is strong, opinionated, individualistic and complex. However, looking at “When I was in Xia Village,” we see a self that has no distinct qualities; her selfhood blends into that of her subject, Zhenzhen, whom she relates to her on an almost supernatural level. Additionally, the writer is essentially a generic communist writer, with no quirks or discernable personality — definable only through her connection to Zhenzhen. On this level, the narrator functions as both a stand-in for the Communist Party while also becoming, collectively, one Self — united with Zhenzhen. “The Sun Shines over Sanggang River” (太阳照在桑干河上 *Taiyang zhao zai Sangganhe shang*, 1948) Ding Ling’s individualist voice, and her “I” narration is almost entirely undetectable. The novel is her most major work as a Chinese Communist Party writer and it is best known as an award winning example of socialist-realist fiction, debatably becoming her most famous work of her career.

The novel praises the Chinese Communist Party's land reform programs through the example of its effect on a rural village called Nuanshui, where the Communist Party is already in charge. In the novel, peasants work together to overthrow the landlords' oppressing them, achieving the ultimate goal of the Chinese Communist Party by working as a collective. The narration drifts from villager to villager, giving insight into villagers romances, who is betrothed to whom, and who leaves the town to run off to join the Liberation Army. Despite the small side stories, the goal of the piece is clear; everyone of the villagers is clearly and intentional part of a collective; they are all "I," thus suggesting that the radical self that Ding Ling is known for has become completely subsumed by the communist movement.

Ding Ling's adoption of communism began as an extension of her feminism, similar to the case of Itō Noe (伊藤野枝 1895-1923), who turned to anarchism as an expression of her deepening commitment to feminism. However, the Chinese Communist movement proved to be patriarchal and therefore incompatible with her feminism. Even when Ding Ling spoke out against the unfilled promises the Chinese Communist Party made to women in her "Thoughts on March 8th" (三月八有感 *Sān yuè bā yǒu gǎn*) essay in an attempt to rewrite the Communist erasure of female comrades, her voice was silenced by the Party's male majority. Her attempts at female self-expression through self-writing while in Yan'an were unsuccessful; her writing eventually became absorbed into Communist literature, due to social pressure and enforced conformity under the Chinese Communist Party.

Ding Ling, like Qiu Jin, lost the essential quality of female individualism over the course of her self-writing, which demonstrates a pattern where the Chinese female self, on two separate occasions, has become subsumed by two distinct Chinese nationalist movements. Ding Ling, in

the latter half of her career, becomes more like Qiu Jin by prioritizing self-identification as a national subject and revolutionary over self-identification as a liberated, modern woman. Qiu Jin and Ding Ling fall into the trap of passively accepting a new assigned social role declared “liberating” by male revolutionaries. In both cases, the inclusion of feminist themes to subvert traditional revolutionary dialogue remain prominent albeit inconsistent themes in their writings, yet the feminist undertones are overshadowed by their intended purpose to serve as nationalist propaganda. Overall, the example of Ding Ling demonstrates how female self-writing, while a liberated realm of female self-expression that encourages female political thought, is not impervious to outside pressures and susceptible to becoming absorbed by male political ideology.

Conclusion

What defines the female self-narrative is the fluid aspect in which women can use the medium of writing for self discovery and to explore political ideas. Considering the historical context of intellectual currents and leftist movements that expanded and radicalized social and political participation in early 20th-century Japan and China, it is not a surprise that a tradition of female self-writing erupted as a rebellion against oppressive traditional conservatism. By looking at the female self-narrative not as a document of female-writing, but as a political document of female selfhood and female self-expression, I advocate for the female self-narrative to be recognized as a complex domain that should be further explored as a realm of feminist historical analysis, so as to better understand the formation of the female self. Because popular social thought and intellectual movements use writing as the primary tool of ideological circulation, it is vital for women to write themselves into these popular narratives so as to correct the violent narratives of oppression, objectification and erasure that sought to separate them from women and confine them to “the woman’s chambers.”

Female self-writing is a form of political exploration. Hiratsuka Raichō used the literary journal that she was given as a way to introduce herself to politics and frame feminism and self-writing as an essential restructuring of national discourse. Raichō, as a controversial public figure, openly challenged social conventions and wrote herself into Japanese mythology, history, social spheres, and intellectual currents. Itō Noe’s humbling beginnings with *Seitō* serve as the start of her lifelong, yet tragically short career as a political activist. Itō also used her time with the magazine to expose herself to other brilliant female writers and thinkers, defining her

political identity through reading, writing for, and later serving as editor-in-chief of, *Seitō*. As the journal progressed, *Seitō* became widely known in Japanese society as an inflammatory, feminist and highly politicized publication that threaten the national polity, illustrating how female self-narratives intimidate the government and male society.

However, I have also explored the tensions between the preservation of the female self and ideological political frameworks like Communism through the example of Ding Ling. When female self-writing serves a purpose that does not concern either the female self nor does it center on women as a liberated group, rather than supporting the goal of a collective political movement (i.e. Chinese Communism) that separates itself from women's issues, then the female "self" faces the risk of gradual disintegration. Although "Miss Sophie's Diary" corrects the violent erasure of female bodies and female sexuality by intimately delving into the modern woman's psyche, Ding Ling's later writing loses this essential distinction. The tensions within Ding Ling's feminism and her political alignment become all-consuming, illustrating how female self-writing reflects the evolution of the female writer's own sense of self, which in Ding Ling's case results its eventual deterioration.

One of the self-narrative's primary functions is that of a tool of reclamation. In the case of Raichō, Noe, and Ding Ling, they have all used the female self-narrative to write women into politics and into history. Raichō, Noe, and Ding Ling reclaim the "New Woman" in various ways through self-writing. Raichō proposes a restructuring of public associations of what it means to be a New Woman; she redefines the ideal of traditional womanhood as being that of an oppressed old woman, forced into slavery and made ignorant by male selfishness, in contrast to her liberated state as a New Woman. Noe, as a student of Raichō, builds on her example and

defines the New Womanhood further by writing herself into this brave lineage, exploring how to promote and continue this new mode of female modernity while reclaiming and reappropriate male literary norms (i.e. *masculine* “I” *jiko* 自己, *onore* 己) to achieve her goals.

Ding Ling, however, began writing as a result of a male feminist movement that unintentionally allowed for the elevation of female writers in the public sphere. Because “New Woman” was already a nationalist term defined by men, Ding Ling’s reclamation of the “New Woman” served as a major redirection of the term by an actual woman. Her focus on re-appropriating male literary tropes in her literature redefined female subjectivity in Chinese literature. By writing extensively on female sexuality and desire, Ding Ling’s writing best fulfills Hélène Cixous’s criteria of *écriture féminine* by reclaiming the female body, which has historically been erased, violated, and agency stripped, through normalizing and celebrating the sexually liberated woman.

The female self-narrative is not just a piece of writing, it is a realm created by and for women to support and celebrate themselves and each other. It is a testament to female experiences. It is transgressive, subversive, and political. It is a place of self-discovery and personal and political justifications. As seen in the empowering work of Hiratsuka Raichō, Itō Noe, and Ding Ling, the female self-narrative becomes a space where female and personal identity is actualized.

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